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This is a contribution from *Mixing Metaphor*.

Edited by Raymond W. Gibbs, Jr.

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Mixing in pictorial and multimodal metaphors?

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“Mixed metaphors” in language use two or more different source domains to predicate something about the same target domain in a short stretch of discourse. This often leads to unintendedly humorous results and is usually considered bad style. Given that metaphors may be expressed pictorially or multimodally as well as verbally, one may ask whether non-verbal modalities can also give rise to metaphors of the “mixed” kind. If so, would such instances be considered odd, humorous, or stylistically awkward? And what, if anything, would make such “mixed metaphors” different from metaphoric blends with three input spaces (one target and two sources)? The provisional conclusion is: we should, for the time being, not adopt “mixed pictorial/multimodal metaphor” as a technical term; but the discussion provides leads for further research from which both metaphor theory and multimodal discourse analysis will benefit.

11.1 Introduction

Cognitive Metaphor Theory (CMT) claims that metaphors play a central role in the way human beings conceptualize the world. Metaphorizing therefore is primarily a mental activity and only derivatively a verbal one. Robust evaluation of this trail-blazing idea requires taking into account work on non-verbal and multimodal manifestations of metaphor. After all, an exclusive focus on verbal metaphors may incur the objection that the supposed conceptual metaphors and their verbal surface manifestations differ from one another only in that the former are conventionally written in SMALL CAPITALS of the A IS B type (see Gibbs and Colston 1995, Cienki 1998, Forceville 2006). Even if this criticism should not be considered valid, it remains necessary to study metaphors in other modalities than language. Metaphors wholly or partly recruiting pictorial, gestural, sonic, olfactory and/or tactile modalities after all in some respects behave differently than verbal

ones (e.g., Carroll 1996, Forceville 1996, Forceville and Renckens 2013, Kromhout and Forceville 2013, Koetsier and Forceville 2014, Coëgnarts and Kravanja 2012, Kappelhoff and Müller 2012). There are various reasons for this deviant behaviour. The most important is that, while multimodal discourses have structure, they do not have grammar. Therefore, while any aspect of verbal metaphor deserves to be considered with its potential pertinence to its non-verbal and multimodal sisters in mind, we should always be alert to where the latter may be systematically different on the basis of mode-specific affordances and constraints.

In this chapter I will explore whether it makes sense to postulate that pictorial and multimodal metaphors can be “mixed.” If so, what form would or could such metaphors take? Are they, like many verbal mixed metaphors, unintentionally humorous? Are they stylistically awkward, creatively playful, or unobtrusively normal? Or is it better to reject the notion of pictorial/multimodal mixed metaphors altogether, and find alternative ways to account for metaphors that have, what I will call, “multiple source domains”?

11.2 Characteristics of mixed *verbal* metaphors

Before addressing the question what mixed metaphors in non-verbal modalities could look like, it is necessary to try and formulate more precisely what counts as a mixed metaphor in language. A quick scan of the “mixed metaphors” found on the site at http://therussler.tripod.com/dtps/mixed_metaphors.html (last accessed 22 May 2014; all verbal specimens discussed come from this source) reveals first of all that by no means all examples given here qualify as mixed metaphors. The very first one, “a car comes up behind you, flashing his horn,” surely only features a funnily incorrect collocation: the user conflates “flashing a car’s lights” and “sounding a car’s horn.” But in the absence of further context, this is to be taken as a mistake in a literal, not a metaphorical sentence. The same holds for “a leopard can’t change his stripes” (attributed to Al Gore). Others, such as “a rolling stone is worth two in the bush” and “a stitch in time is worth a pound of cure” conflate two proverbs, and while proverbs are themselves to be understood metaphorically (Lakoff and Turner 1989: 160 *et passim*), these are not what we prototypically think of as mixed metaphors either. By contrast, “a carpenter was the low rung on a totem pole” (attributed to Charles Hodge) is a *bona fide* mixed metaphor, conflating STATUS IS SPATIAL POSITION ON A LADDER and STATUS IS SPATIAL DEPICTION ON A TOTEM POLE. What the two source domains share is that they recruit the VERTICALITY schema in the service of the structural metaphor HIGH STATUS IS UP/LOW STATUS IS DOWN. That the sentence nonetheless sounds odd is due both to the confusion between two vertical (often: wooden) entities, and to the fact that the activity of a

person climbing is conflated with that of the static position of a carved face on a totem pole. Here is another mixed metaphor: “a heart as big as gold” (attributed to Kathy Scott), combining DEGREE OF EMPATHY/GENEROSITY (metonymically located in the heart) IS SIZE and DEGREE OF EMPATHY/GENEROSITY IS QUALITY OF METAL. Other ways of formulating the underlying conceptual metaphors are GOOD IS BIG and GOOD IS GOLD. Both are conventional metaphors, the latter presumably tying in with the “Great Chain of Being” metaphor (Lakoff and Turner 1989: Chapter 3; see also Tillyard 1976).

What turns these into mixed metaphors is that two metaphors are squeezed into a single grammatical expression. It is generally accepted within CMT that there are many different source domains that can be used to help characterize a single, complex target domain (Kövecses discusses this phenomenon as the “range” of metaphor, 2010:215). It is to be noted that using metaphors with different source domains one *after* the other is no problem. For instance, if instead of saying, as above, “my sister has a heart as big as gold,” somebody would say, “my sister has a heart of gold; really, she is such a generous person; her heart is the size of a mountain,” this would already sound far less odd. And if there were many more sentences in between the two metaphorical ones, the oddness would further decrease. The Biblical Solomon’s Song is a true festival of metaphors all celebrating the body parts and attributes of the beloved, and sometimes the same body part is praised using two different source domains: “Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins” (4.5 and 7.3) and a few verses later “This thy stature is like to a palm tree, and thy breasts to clusters of grapes” (7.7). Surely we would not complain here that this a case of mixing metaphors – the ecstatic lover seeks different source domains to do full justice to his enthusiasm about the beloved’s breasts. The metaphorizer thus presents distinct source domains *after* each other rather than mixing them. In the same Bible book we come across an example where the source domains appear even closer together: “A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed” (4.12). Arguably the beloved is described using three source domains: an enclosed garden, a blocked spring, and a sealed fountain. But even here, we would not say that this is a mixed metaphor. It *would* have been if the sentence had contained for instance the phrase “a spring enclosed.” What distinguishes a series of metaphors with shifting source domains from mixed metaphors, I submit, is that the former are part of different metaphor scenarios (Musolf 2006), and are deliberately envisaged as such by the metaphorizer, while the latter are mistakenly presented as belonging to the same metaphor scenario. Usually, these conflated scenarios appear within phrasal units such as sentences or clauses, but this is not *necessarily* true, as a mixed metaphor can straddle two sentences. Consider “The future of the church depends on passing the torch to the next generation. Tonight’s speaker is one who has taken hold

of the baton” (ascribed to Robert Taylor). This praise confuses ENSURING FUTURE SUCCESS IS PASSING ON A TORCH TO A YOUNGER PERSON and ENSURING FUTURE SUCCESS IS PASSING ON A BATON TO THE NEXT RUNNER IN A RELAY RACE. Even without further context we infer that the speaker thinks he remains within the same metaphor scenario, the shared feature being the passing on of an important object to another person. Nonetheless, in many (most?) cases, mixed metaphors’ conflation of source domain scenarios takes place within a clause or sentence.

Here a first problem arises for the question whether it makes sense to postulate the possibility of pictorial or multimodal mixed metaphors: there is no “natural” equivalent in pictorial or multimodal discourse for what counts as a clause or sentence in verbal discourse. Related to this is the issue of semantic incompatibility. In the examples of mixed metaphor discussed above, we have seen that there is a semantic incompatibility between the two metaphor scenarios. But it is doubtful that there is such a thing in pictures. Pictures, at least realistic pictures, have structure in that for instance the location, size, orientation, and/or colour of their salient elements can usually not be randomly varied without affecting their meaning, or simply making the whole incomprehensible. But that is not the same as claiming that there is a set of rules determining how visual elements must be strung together to make an acceptable whole in the way a verbal grammar does this. For this reason the word “grammar” in Kress and Van Leeuwen’s (2006) title *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* is only acceptable when taken non-literally (see Forceville 1999). (Incidentally, there is not only no visual syntax, there is also no equivalent in pictures of a verbal vocabulary. We have *dictionaries* that, at a given moment, more or less exhaustively describe all the words in a language, while we at best can have infinitely incomplete *thesauruses* of pictorial elements.)

11.3 Mixed metaphor in pictures and multimodal discourse: Candidates

Before deciding on the impossibility of mixed pictorial and multimodal metaphor straightaway on the ground that only language has grammar and can thus mix metaphors, let me push matters by considering some cases that might nonetheless qualify as fitting this label. The guiding idea will be that the criterion for considering a metaphor “mixed” is that it conflates two or more source domains predicating something about a single target domain within a stretch of discourse that is experienced as, somehow, an undividable unit.

Case study 1 Consider Figure 11.1, a car ad for the VW Golf (I owe the example and some of the discussion to Robin van Parera, a former student of mine). The pictorial part of this advertisement features three semantic domains: (1) a motor;

(2) a compressed orchestra; (3) a work of art. Recognition of the domains of course requires background knowledge: not everybody may recognize a motor in this hybrid (although the text “perfectly tuned” may help identification), and one has to have some experience visiting art museums to recognize the set-up of this “thing,” suspended from the ceiling by thin cables and displayed against a white wall, as an art object. And there may even be people who lack any familiarity with the visual appearance of musical instruments, which then prevents them from recognizing this domain. But let us assume that all three scenarios are available to, as well as activated by, the viewer.

Without the pragmatic knowledge that this is an advertisement for VW cars, we would be at a loss whether any of the three domains qualifies for “target domain” status. This knowledge, I submit is cued by the logo, the text, and the place where this picture would typically be accessed: in a marked place in a journal or magazine or as a billboard in an outdoor space designated for advertising. My guess is that in the unlikely case we were to see this picture without the logo and text, and completely decontextualized, say as a result in a google image search, it would be up to us to privilege any of the three domains – a choice (perhaps not even consciously made) that is triggered by whether we are primarily art, music, or car lovers. If we were to privilege the art domain, we might reason, “This is a piece of art resembling a car’s motor and consisting of musical instruments.” We might then construe, and ponder an interpretation

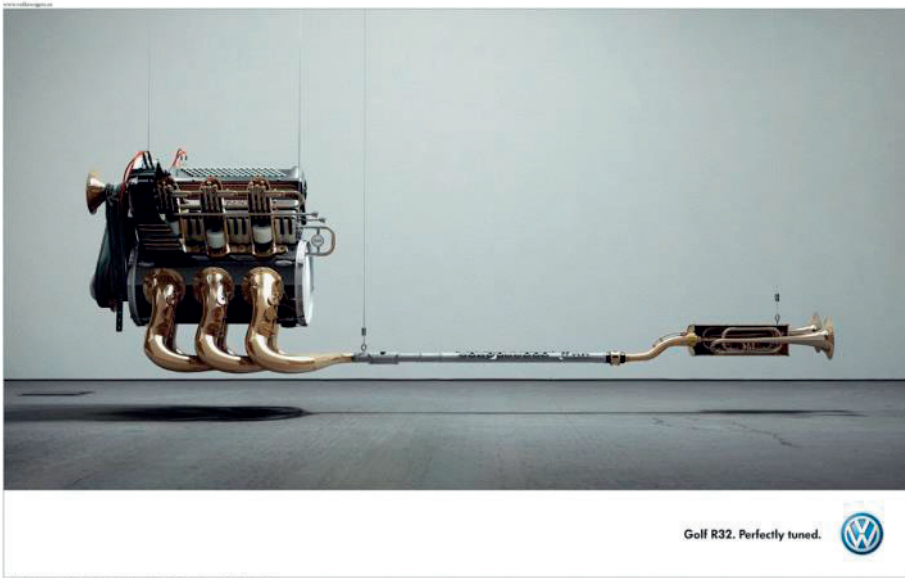


Figure 11.1. Advertisement for VW. Advertising Agency: DDB Stockholm, Sweden

of, for instance, the metaphor *MOTOR IS ORCHESTRA* or of its reverse, *ORCHESTRA IS MOTOR*, without having to choose one over the other. This situation is similar to the one in René Magritte's series of "Le viol" paintings, in which we need not, indeed cannot, choose between *FACE IS TORSO* or *TORSO IS FACE* (see Forceville 1988). But the fact is that we do *not* see this picture without logo and text, and that these latter "anchor" (Barthes 1986) the picture: they help us zoom in on its salient elements. Consequently we realize that this is an ad for a VW car, and that since motors have a more direct metonymical relation to cars than either orchestras or artistic installations we are to construe a metaphor here: *VW'S MOTOR IS ORCHESTRA/ARTISTIC INSTALLATION*. The music domain is further anchored by the pay-off: "Golf R32. Perfectly tuned," which allows for a further mapping onto the target domain.

This ad, then, appears to fit the criterion that (1) a metaphor needs to be construed (2) which draws on two source domains at the same time, and (3) is part of a single "gestalt." It would be quite natural to say that the VW motor is simultaneously an orchestra *and* an art installation, both of which provide mappings to the motor domain, and by extension to the VW Golf R32. I propose, then, that for the time being we consider this a multimodal equivalent of a mixed verbal metaphor (the logo and anchoring text make this into a multimodal rather than a purely pictorial metaphor, see Forceville 2006, Eggertsson and Forceville 2009, Bounegru and Forceville 2011 for discussion). If this is accepted, we have to conclude that there is nothing unintendedly funny, awkward, or clumsy about the mixed metaphor – on the contrary, I submit that it is a very creative one.

Case study 2 Figure 11.2 shows another hybrid whose potential qualification as a visual "mixed metaphor" is food for thought. As in case study 1, the picture triggers three semantic domains: *BEAR*, *SHARK*, and *OCTOPUS*, but none of these is "privileged" as target domain. It is only the verbally cued context, namely a site of one Matt Ufford called "Nine badass hybrid monsters that deserve their own syfy [sic; presumably "scifi" is meant, ChF] original movie," which suggests that we should construe a metaphor with "monster" as target domain, and "bear," "shark," and "octopus" as its various source domains. It is relevant to remember here that a metaphor cannot only be used to provide a new perspective on a pre-structured target domain; it can also impose that very structure itself upon a target domain that has little or no structure of its own (Indurkha 1991). Many monsters acquire their identity precisely by mappings from one or more other source domains that trigger negative, awe-inspiring, fearsome etc. connotations. The three source domains chosen suggest that the monster is strong, predatory, with sharp teeth, and can perhaps strangle its victims using its tentacles.



Figure 11.2. “BEARSHARKTOPUS” <http://www.uproxx.com/feature/2010/02/nine-badass-hybrid-monsters-that-deserve-their-own-syfy-original-movie/> (last accessed 22 May 2014)

Of course in the science fiction and fantasy genres, there is far more freedom to create metaphorical hybrids than in other discourses, but this example, however odd, conforms to the criteria of a metaphor with an attestable target domain (“monster”) that is simultaneously to be understood in terms of three different fear-inspiring animals, each of them triggering its own species-specific dangerous mappings, culminating in a single visual “gestalt.” Since the target domain is rendered verbally in the context, namely in the URL’s title, this is a multimodal rather than a purely pictorial mixed metaphor. It is worth commenting upon that none of the three source domains in this examples appear to be privileged; all of them are of equal importance. (This example reminded an anonymous reviewer of an earlier draft of this chapter of the “ManBearPig” instalment of *South Park*, which satirizes Al Gore’s documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* about the dangers of global warming. The Gore character keeps warning against a mythical threat to humanity called “ManBearPig,” and he chides someone for referring to this monster as “PigBearMan.” By insisting on the “right” order of the elements in the mythical creature’s name, Gore seems to suggest a degree of structure in the monster that nobody else in this *South Park* instalment perceives, and this joke thus further helps poke fun at Gore.)

Case study 3 For case study 3 I re-visit a film scene I was alerted to in a paper by Anton Kanis, a former student of mine. It occurs in the film *American Psycho* (Mary Harron, USA 2000). In this justly popular scene Patrick Bateman, the eponymous hero, and his colleagues outbid each other with the stylishness of their business cards in the context of a ruthless alpha-male business environment. It is completely possible to enjoy the scene at face value as a ridiculous fight between

over-paid, empty-headed businessmen, where the metaphor BUSINESSCARD EXCHANGE IS BATTLE is triggered. However, one could on the basis of certain gestures and sounds understand the battle in more precise metaphoric terms. One man brandishes his card as if attacking his interlocutor with a knife, an action accompanied by a “swoosh”-sound, while a close up shows a silver cardholder flicking open as one would open a stiletto. Patrick himself, overpowered by the astonishing elegance of “Paul Allen’s card” that he has been handed, drops it as if wounded. So a viewer that picks up these cues may construe the metaphor BUSINESS CARD IS KNIFE OR COMPARING BUSINESS CARDS IS KNIFING DUEL.

But it is also possible to understand the scene slightly differently, building on the activation of a *different* BATTLE domain: that of a card game (Antonio Barcelona, Rosario Caballero, personal communication at the Researching and Applying Metaphor conference in Leeds, 2006). This interpretation is enabled by the fact that business cards have a rectangular form, just as playing cards; that they are called “cards” too; that the cards are thrown on the table in a manner reminiscent of card-playing, and that card-playing cues the idea of “trumping.” Consciously or subconsciously activating the card-playing (or even more specifically: poker-playing) source domain activates different aspects of the target domain than the KNIFING DUEL scenario: psychological rather than physical warfare. As a matter of fact, the possibilities do not stop there. We can also see the men as young boys getting their things out of their flies to see “who’s got the biggest”

Whether three, two, one, or none of these source domains are activated depends on viewers’ familiarity with the source domains as well as on their ability, at the moment of watching the scene, to activate them. Let us assume that there are viewers who cue all three source domains more or less simultaneously: COMPARING BUSINESS CARDS IS (1) KNIFING DUEL; (2) PLAYING POKER; (3) COMPARING DICKS. We could then say that the situation is not really different from the one in the previous case studies: we here have a metaphor that is to be verbalized as A IS B, C and D. Activation of all three source domains enhances the richness of the metaphor rather than make it seem stylistically awkward or inept. What aids this positive assessment is that there is nothing “homospacially non-compossible” (Carroll 1996) about the conflation of the source domains (unlike in Case study no. 2): the audio-visual cues potentially trigger three different mental scenarios that can serve as source domains of a metaphor, but even activating all three of them does not make anything in the scene impossible or even improbable.

Case study 4 The examples discussed in the first three case studies are specimens of creative metaphor in the sense of Black (1979) and Forceville (1996). If we provisionally accept them as examples of “mixed metaphors,” the question now presents itself whether structural metaphors, too, can be of a mixed nature. Kövecses (1986, 2000, 2008) analyses and charts the source domains that are used

to metaphorically structure emotions. The overarching metaphor he identifies is *EMOTIONS ARE PHYSICAL FORCES* (2008: 385). But physical forces come in many forms. In his analyses of *ANGER*, Kövecses (1986) mentions *ANGER IS HOT FLUID IN A PRESSURIZED CONTAINER* as one of the most salient varieties. In one paper I investigated visual manifestations of anger in a comics album, *Asterix and the Roman Agent*, and conclude that my findings are all “at least commensurate” (Forceville 2005: 80) with those of Kövecses. This is particularly true for his *ANGER IS A HOT FLUID IN A PRESSURIZED CONTAINER* metaphor (see also Eerden 2009, Forceville 2011a). But in fact, one could also distinguish in some examples I discussed manifestations of other metaphors Kövecses identified: *ANGER IS A DANGEROUS ANIMAL*, with as one of the correspondences “the aggressive behavior of the dangerous animal is angry behavior” (Kövecses 1986: 25). Indeed Kövecses himself already indicated that a phrase such as “he breathed fire” appears to draw on both the *PRESSURIZED CONTAINER* metaphor (although it is a gaseous rather than a fluid entity that gets out) and the *DANGEROUS ANIMAL* metaphor – specifically pertaining to the behavior of a dragon (Ibidem: 23). Yet another metaphor Kövecses identifies is *ANGER IS A BURDEN* (Ibidem: 27). Now consider Figures 11.3 and 11.4.

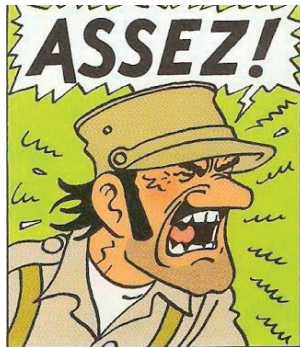


Figure 11.3. Alcazar is angry (panel in Hergé, *Tintin et les Picaros*, Casterman 1974)



Figure 11.4. Kwabbernoot is angry (panel in Franquin & Jidéhem, *Flaterfestijn*, Dupuis 1977)

Clearly in both cases it makes sense to analyze the metaphor in terms of the ANGER IS HOT FLUID IN A PRESSURIZED CONTAINER: the anger that is bottled up inside the container of the body tries to get out. In Alcazar's case it *does* come out in the form of a loud "enough!"; Kwabbernoot succeeds, at least for the time being, in keeping the anger inside. The visual cues for this assessment include facial expressions (and a lobster-red face in Figure 11.4) and various pictorial runes (spirals and droplets), the "smoke" pictogram (Figure 11.4), and the jagged text balloon (Figure 11.3; for more discussion of these issues, see Forceville 2005, 2011a, Forceville et al. 2010). But is it not also possible to understand Alcazar's expression, with open mouth and bared teeth (Figure 11.3) as cueing ANGRY HUMAN BEHAVIOUR IS AGGRESSIVE ANIMAL BEHAVIOUR? And does Kwabbernoot's huddled position (Figure 11.4) not also suggest that ANGER IS A BURDEN? And if these metaphorical interpretations are both acceptable, why should we have to choose? I think that a viewer can well simultaneously (albeit not necessarily consciously) activate, in Figure 11.3, the HOT FLUID metaphor and the ANGRY ANIMAL metaphor, and, in Figure 11.4, the HOT FLUID metaphor and the BURDEN metaphor. If we are ready to accept that in both cases not one, but two domains are activated, here, too, we could speak of mixed metaphors very much as in the previous three case studies.

Case studies 5 and 6 Let me end by considering two animation films I have discussed before (in Forceville 2011b), though not from the perspective of possibly mixed metaphors. The first is the wordless *The Life* (Jun-ki Kim, South Korea 2003, 9'45" last accessed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=faArmZxwtT0> on 22 May 2014). We see a middle-aged man with his son, in a basket on his back, climbing up what turns out to be a huge totem pole. This is a very difficult, exhausting activity, which moreover is dangerous: the father is sometimes hampered by unfavourable weather conditions, and he always needs to be careful to maintain his balance. In one shot we see other totem poles in the background, which presumably are also being climbed. As the story develops, the man and his son grow older, and at one stage the son takes the lead. When the father is so old he cannot go on climbing, he remains behind, probably to die. At the end the son, now a grown-up man himself, arrives at the top. There he unpacks a stone that he and his father had carried with them all the time, and fits it in an empty slot at the top of the totem pole. We now understand that the son and his father have been preceded by numerous ancestors that each helped build the family totem pole.

The "climbing" is an instance of purposive activity – in fact it is what the men spend their lives doing. So one metaphor that we are invited to activate is PURPOSIVE ACTIVITY IS SELF-PROPELLED MOVEMENT TOWARD A DESTINATION, which is a specific formulation of the more general LIFE IS A JOURNEY. But there is a second source domain that helps structure the inferences viewers are to make

to interpret this existential film: *PURPOSIVE ACTIVITY IS MAKING AN ARTIFACT*. It is noteworthy that the two source domains interact. Viewers undoubtedly quickly realize they have to activate the *JOURNEY* metaphor in their sense-making activities; but it is not until the very end that they realize the precise nature of the purpose for which the journey has been undertaken. The metaphor *PURPOSIVE ACTIVITY IS MAKING AN ARTIFACT* could well have been used independently, but as it is recruited here, the two source domains seamlessly merge, and their combination makes for an impressive, moving result.

The second example is the (again: wordless) Polish animation film *The Road/Droga* (Miroslaw Kijowicz, Poland 1971, 4'23"). We see a man, from behind, walking on a road. When he comes at a Y-crossing, he hesitates whether to go left or right. Eventually he splits himself into two halves; the left half of his body takes the left turn whereas the right half takes the right turn. When after some time the roads converge again, and the man wants to unite his two halves, he succeeds indeed in doing this, but he finds that there is no longer a perfect match, since his left half has grown while his right half has retained its original size. He walks on as best as he can in his new, ill-matched body.

As in *The Life*, the dominant metaphor is *PURPOSIVE ACTIVITY IS SELF-PROPELLED MOVEMENT TOWARD A DESTINATION*. Even though we never get to know what exactly the destination of the man in *The Road* is, I propose that activating this metaphor is a precondition for finding any interest in this short film. Often, the journey domain is exploited to structure metaphorically a target domain that can variously be described as *SEARCHING FOR MEANING IN LIFE*, or *LOOKING FOR ONE'S ROLE IN LIFE*, or *SEARCHING FOR ONE'S IDENTITY IN LIFE* (see Forceville 2006, 2011b, 2013; Forceville and Jeulink 2011). As in any story, we expect some crisis to befall the protagonist. In this case the protagonist is faced with an either/or choice. This is a problem given the structural metaphor *IDENTITY IS WHOLENESS*. By splitting himself into two, the fragmentation in his body maps metaphorically onto a fragmentation in his identity. When the two halves meet, they cannot merge into the whole that existed before.

My argument here hinges on the assumption that appreciation of the film depends both on the *JOURNEY* and on the *WHOLENESS* metaphor. I submit that it is not mere word play to formulate what is going on as a combination of *FINDING ONE'S IDENTITY IN LIFE IS A JOURNEY* and *FINDING ONE'S IDENTITY IN LIFE IS (MAINTAINING/SEEKING) WHOLENESS* (see also Koetsier and Forceville 2014). If this is accepted, we have the situation in which a given target domain is combined with two source domains. Given the brief of this chapter, the crucial question would be: but are the two source domains simultaneously activated? Is the entirety of the film similar to a stretch of verbal text in which two metaphors are conflated in such a way as to call them "mixed?"

This is a difficult question. In the beginning of the film, only the JOURNEY metaphor is active – just as in *The Life*. However, it is the FRAGMENTED IDENTITY metaphor that provides the twist that we expect in a story and that makes it creative and memorable. For a satisfactory interpretation we need to recruit *both* metaphors. So on these grounds, one might say that at least from the moment of the “bodily split” onwards, it would be defensible to label this an instance of mixed metaphor. If we do so, it is crystal clear once more that the result is anything but awkward or odd or the pictorial equivalent of “ungrammatical”; on the contrary, despite (or thanks to) the simplicity of pictorial execution of *The Road*, we here have a very profound, thought-provoking mixed metaphor.

11.4 Mixed metaphors and Blending Theory

In a mixed metaphor what happens is that a certain target domain is understood not in terms of a single source domain, but in terms of two or more (conflated) source domains. It is worth noticing that this peculiarity (more than one source domain is activated) means that mixed metaphors can be nicely modeled in terms of metaphoric blends (Fauconnier and Turner 2002). As I have argued elsewhere (Forceville 2004), Blending Theory (or “conceptual integration theory”) has hitherto insufficiently exploited one very important difference with Conceptual Metaphor Theory: the ability of a blend to accommodate more than two input spaces. While a conventional metaphor has no more and no less than two “input spaces,” namely a target domain and a source domain, the blending model allows for modeling metaphors with three or more input spaces: a target domain/input space and at least two source domains/input spaces.

This holds both for the verbal mixed metaphors discussed in Section 2 and for the creative visual case studies discussed in Section 3 (VW-ad, “Bearsharktopus,” and *American Psycho* scene): all of them require or invite the viewer to construe metaphors with two source domains, each of which imparts unique features to the “blended space” – which in metaphorical blends doubles as the target domain. What turns the verbal mixed metaphors into laughable blunders is that their makers were supposedly not *aware* that they conflated two source domains; they created, one could say, “metaphorical contaminations.” By contrast, the creative visual examples reflect hybrids that were *intentionally* created. But it is worth pointing out that both the unintentionally humorous verbal examples and the emphatically created visual ones result in a richer target domain than if the metaphor would have accommodated mappings from just *one* source domain.

Please note that all examples count as *metaphorical* blends, as this highlights the usefulness of bringing metaphor theory and blending theory together in

discussing these hybrids. What metaphor theory brings to them is that we can clearly distinguish and label a target domain; what blending theory brings to them is that it allows for two (or more) source-domain-input spaces that jointly impose (new) structure upon this target domain. I dwell on this issue because we should never forget that the category of blends is the overarching category, within which metaphors are a subcategory (counterfactuals such as exemplified in “if I were you ...” being another). This point is made more explicitly by Grady et al. (1999) than by Fauconnier and Turner (2002). For instance, Fauconnier and Turner in several publications discuss “landyacht” as a blend between a car and a ship. But while these latter are the input spaces, we can still distinguish a target and a source in this blend, as it presents a car in terms of a yacht, not a yacht in terms of a car. Indeed, in Forceville (2012: 115) I claim that as far as metaphors are concerned, Fauconnier and Turner’s (2002) blending model is a sophisticated formalization of Black’s (1979) “interaction theory” of metaphor.

In short, the creative visual or multimodal examples of mixed metaphor discussed in Section 4 can all be considered as metaphorical blends with three or more input spaces: one target and two or more source domains. There is a difference, though, between the first two and the third examples in that in the first two the various source domains are more emphatically cued than in the third.

Can we say about the *structural* metaphors in case studies 4–6, too, that they could be modeled in a Blending Theory format? In Figures 11.3 and 11.4 we can indeed postulate the PRESSURIZED CONTAINER, ANGRY ANIMAL, and BURDEN source domains as input spaces that, in different combinations, help structure the target domain ANGER. As in their structural verbal counterparts, however, the mixing of source domains is probably not so much an intentional act as a “natural” way of representing this emotion (for which the artists cannot help draw spontaneously on deep-rooted embodied metaphor; cf. Lakoff 1986 for a discussion of everyday *language* usage that draws on conceptual metaphors).

For the two animation films, too, both source domains in each case can be modeled as input spaces structuring the JOURNEY target domains/blends. Nonetheless, the mixing of structural metaphors in the two seems to be of a different nature in that here the two the source domains do not provide mere *enrichments* of the target domain; they *complement* each other. We do not miss any essential information whether we activate ANGER IS HOT FLUID IN A PRESSURIZED CONTAINER OR ANGRY BEHAVIOR IS A WILD ANIMAL’S AGGRESSIVENESS OR ANGER IS A BURDEN in case study 4. But a satisfactory interpretation of the two animation films in case studies 5 and 6 requires the activation of *both* source domains – JOURNEY and BUILDING, and JOURNEY and WHOLENESS, respectively – as well as the Vital Relation of “time compression” presented by Fauconnier and Turner (2002: Chapter 5), since both films present substantial stretches of the protagonists’ lives in mere minutes.

11.5 Concluding remarks and further research

I have argued in this chapter that mixed metaphors in the verbal modality exemplify targets that are combined with two or more different source domains *in the same short stretch of discourse*. What makes the few verbal examples discussed unintentionally funny is that their speakers seem to be unaware of drawing on two source domain scenarios, rather than on one. The pictorial examples I have discussed fit the first part of this condition, but not the second part. They are not “unintentionally funny”; they are intended and (more or less) clever or even admirably creative.

So let me come back to the central question of this chapter: does it make sense to postulate the existence of “mixed metaphors” in pictures? For the time being, my answer is “not really.” Language has grammar and conventional ways of combining elements within a single semantic unit – be it phrase, clause, sentence, paragraph, or text – that are too radically different from the “structure” that is its pictorial equivalent to warrant the use of the label “mixed pictorial/multimodal metaphor.” Rather than here introduce such a half-baked concept, I would propose that the examples analysed in Section 4 can well be described using existing terminology. Thus, we could either say that these are metaphorical blends drawing on two or more source-domain input spaces, or alternatively that we sometimes encounter discourse situations in which a given target domain is coupled simultaneously with two or more source domains; for the latter formulation I propose the term “multiple source domain metaphors.”

Even if my suggestion to abandon the notion of “mixed visual/multimodal metaphors” in favour of “multiple source domain metaphors” is accepted, this chapter has hopefully yielded some insights that can spawn further research. In the first place, it is worth considering whether multiple source domain metaphors are somehow typical of certain genres or developments. The metaphor in the VW ad (Figure 11.1) is unusual; I have hitherto rarely seen specimens of the *A IS B and C*. But this may well become a new strand in advertising metaphors. Despite the relatively realistic nature of the *American Psycho* example, I would guess that multiple source domain metaphors are more likely to arise in films that verge toward fantasy than in more realistic genres. Science fiction is full of metaphorical hybrids that can draw on more than one source domain, while the medium of animation easily allows transformations of a given phenomenon in a series of *other* phenomena in such a way that we could see this is a chain of metaphors with the same target (note that we would verbalize this as *A IS B and then A IS C* – or perhaps *B IS C*).

A second pertinent parameter is monomodality versus multimodality. The examples discussed under case studies 4, 5, and 6 are monomodal in the sense that both target and sources are rendered predominantly in the pictorial modality. But

the metaphors in *The Life* and *The Road* both draw on the sonic modality to cue the strong wind (*The Life*) and the protagonist's footsteps (*The Road*) – which are metonymically related to the JOURNEY domain. By contrast, the first example is truly multimodal, at least if we consider the VW logo as verbal rather than pictorial: VW MOTOR IS ORCHESTRA/ART INSTALLATION. But the verbalization MOTOR IS ORCHESTRA/ART INSTALLATION would be monomodal. The BEARSHARKTOPUS in case study 2 hovers between being monomodal and multimodal – depending on whether we need the accompanying text to supply the target domain MONSTER. An overall question here could be: can any patterns be detected in when (if at all) a multiple source domain metaphor has source domains that are rendered in two or more different modalities?

A third issue that invites further research first requires the compilation of a corpus of multiple source metaphors of the subtle creative kind of case studies 1 and 3 and experimentally test which of the source domains is cued (first). One could imagine that (sub)cultural background plays a role in the preferences here. Monitoring which source domain is cued (first) allows insight into the specific background information certain communities of people bring to their interpretation of metaphors.

In the structural type of metaphors with multiple source domains, finally, we might want to examine more systematically which source domains can actually be “mixed,” and which cannot. This may allow us to say something about the conditions under which (or the genres in which) specific source domains are typically clustered. This in turn feeds into theorizing about image schemata (see Hampe 2005).

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to Ray Gibbs for challenging me to reflect on the issue of “mixed metaphors” in pictorial and multimodal discourse, and to two anonymous reviewers for their suggestions and comments. Much of this paper was written on the outdoor terrace of the Carmen de la Victoria, with a view of the Alhambra, during my stay as visiting scholar at the University of Granada, Spain, in March 2012. I warmly thank Belén Soria for hosting this visit.

*Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders of Figure 11.1 and Figure 11.4 to obtain their permission for the use of copyright material. The publisher regrets any unwitting infringements.

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