

Experiencing the Art/Craft/Handmade/Studio Furniture Aesthetics in Postmodernism Theoretically (II)
-Interpreting the Postmodern Furniture Aesthetics in terms of Symbol and Metaphor-

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ABSTRACT

This study explored interpretation of the symbolical and metaphorical aesthetics in experiencing art/craft/handmade/studio furniture theoretically for ‘wood culture experience class’ or ‘wood love experience class’ by the Korea Forest Service because the class tends to focus on making simple wood works involved just in the practical part. Qualitative conceptual analysis as the principal methodology was used to achieve the theoretical context in the experience programs. After the lesson one on defining the postmodern aesthetics in New Design furniture as metaphor in the previous paper, I developed lesson two for an aesthetics of art and everyday life with wood furniture which expresses the metaphorical and symbolical aesthetics appeared as New Design furniture in postmodernism. As statement of objective in the second lesson, I explored that students in elementary schools personally transform and interpret the postmodern aesthetics of New Design furniture metaphorically with the meanings of symbol. As a result, the students will be able to write about the aesthetics of New Design furniture as metaphor in interpretation transformed by his/her perspective of a piece of selected New Design furniture.

Key words: Interpretation, wood, experience, theory, art furniture, aesthetics, metaphor, identify.

INTRODUCTION

Interpretation of the postmodern furniture aesthetics in terms of symbol and metaphor was explored for the theoretical education of ‘wood culture experience class’ or ‘wood love experience class’ initiated by the Korea Forest Service, which primarily intends to inform the benefit of wood to the public, to make children/people aware of the importance of wood, and furthermore to stimulate the industry in association with the domestic wood. Moon (2006) says that a piece of symbolic furniture is narrative and metaphoric, and may be humorous as well. In designing the art/craft/handmade/studio furniture that is symbolically meaningful, the designers have used the symbols such as flowers, natural things, persons to convey the meaning (Moon, 2006). Base on the previous lesson defining the furniture aesthetics, I will develop the lesson two to help the children attending the wood programs interpret the symbolical furniture metaphorically in learning the theory in relation to wood furniture. Thus, the art/craft/handmade/studio furniture appeared as New Design furniture in the theoretical or aesthetical context will be interpreted by the students

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metaphorically through the lesson two for the ‘wood culture experience class’ or ‘wood love experience class’, which has tended to concentrate just on the practical part.

Thereby, from now I will develop the lesson in terms of the subjects such as objective, contextual information for metaphors and symbols, the inquiry strategies, procedure, question sheet, resources and materials, transition, and follow-up for the lesson of solid wood furniture aesthetics to strike a balance between the theory and the practice in the programs.

LESSON FOR AN AESTHETICS OF ART AND EVERYDAY LIFE WITH WOOD FURNITURE

Objective

Each student will interpret a selected piece of New Design furniture in terms of symbol and metaphor. Interpretation will be written.

Contextual Information

This lesson will involve understanding how New Design furniture functions as metaphor in the students’ own thinking. Students will connect their interpretation with the natural, cultural, personal, group, and familial contexts defined in lesson one. They will explore the visual metaphor in New Design furniture linguistically. Students are more familiar with words than with images; therefore, they are accustomed to expressing themselves not in visual metaphor but in linguistic metaphor.

It is difficult for students to express visual metaphor like postmodern aesthetics of New Design furniture in language. Thus, the students will be involved in meanings literally and nonliterally (i.e. metaphorically), visually and linguistically, and verbally and nonverbally by writing in depth about their aesthetics interpretation.

The students have already become familiar with New Design furniture as metaphor in lesson one. They defined and identified it in their discussion and writing within the context of nature, culture, person, group, and family. In this lesson, the students will transform and interpret New Design furniture as linguistic metaphor rather than visual metaphor.

Symbols and metaphor, narrative, humor, and wit in New Design furniture are related to the postmodern aesthetics communicated by metaphoric meanings through symbolization and transformation in relation to culture. The postmodern aesthetics of New Design furniture involves metaphors for communication with people physically and consciously. The meaning conveyed by the metaphors through symbol making can be interpreted according to each person’s perspective, literally and nonliterally.

By discussing postmodern aesthetics in New Design furniture for communication with the public, I will explore the human need and ability to create symbols. Langer (1957) argues that “the symbol-making function is one of man’s primary activities. It is the fundamental process of his mind, and goes on all the time” (p. 41). The symbol-making function is a capability to create transformation, which creates symbols for the transfer of experience. The transformation of symbolization ends in a literal meaning and a nonliteral meaning (Feinstein 1982).

A piece of New Design furniture is like an artwork which is able to express its meaning nonliterally, nonverbally or visually. Nonliteral meaning in New Design furniture is expressed through nonverbal or visual metaphors. The symbols used in New Design furniture are significant for visual communication of thought, action, and meaning.

First, according to Feinstein (1982), “making sense of experience and its products comes about as we interact with our environment in our attempts to comprehend, construct, and convey literal and metaphoric meaning. The core of those attempts is the fundamental act of symbolic transformation” (p.

45). As visual images like works of art, New Design furniture communicates its metaphors and conveys its metaphoric meanings by means of symbolic transformation. New Design furniture designers may abstract their experience to understand it and transform their experience into a symbol. An example of symbolic transformation is New Design furniture whose ideas come from the tradition of symbolic architecture. Feinstein (1982) suggests that “the symbol is then subjected to repeated symbolic transformation” (p. 46). To convey their experience within the traditions of symbolic architecture, New Design furniture designers must transform their experience again into a piece of furniture, a visual image which can be re-expressed through words like a poem.

In order to begin the visual transformation, New Design furniture designers interpret what they experience visually rather than linguistically; they have particular skills in transforming furniture according to their interpretive symbolization. Thus, a piece of symbolic, narrative, and humorous New Design furniture conveys a metaphoric meaning. We understand the metaphoric meaning through our experience with New Design furniture. The symbolic furniture actually has meaning because the designers have combined the idea of symbol with meaning of traditional architecture. Thus, symbolic transformation and metaphor needs to be understood within the context of a discussion about signs and symbols, transformation, and meaning.

Second, signs and symbols, by their denotative and connotative functions, are related to transformation and meaning. Feinstein (1982) suggests that “symbols, in contrast to signs, are invented by humans when a group of people agree that one thing (object, event, idea) shall stand for another” (p. 46). Symbols not only denote but also connote the meaning of something explicitly and implicitly. The denotative and connotative symbols “have well-established meanings within a culture” (Feinstein, 1982, p. 46). New Design furniture relates to both denotative and connotative meaning through symbols for communication. The designers express metaphoric meaning in New Design furniture explicitly and implicitly. Thus, through symbolically transformed New Design furniture, the designers intend to understand, construct, and convey metaphoric meaning, which includes the literal and nonliteral. In fact, symbolic New Design furniture, as visual art work, conveys its metaphoric meaning nonliterally rather than literally.

Third, according to Feinstein (1982), meaning is considered to be both literal and nonliteral. The literal and nonliteral meanings are related to understanding the nature of metaphor. Literal meaning may be defined as present when “the meaning a recipient finds in the mediating symbols is the exact meaning its user intended” (Feinstein 1985). While literal meaning communicates denotatively, nonliteral meaning evokes meaning connotatively. In order for people to feel the artist’s intended metaphor, some agreed-upon (literal) referents must be present in the art work so that people can relate to the work on the basis of individual experience. Nonliteral meaning may be defined as “the meaning a recipient finds which may not be the exact meaning its user intended” (Feinstein 1985). Through New Design furniture, literal and nonliteral meaning can be conveyed and communicated denotatively and connotatively. However, as a visual image, New Design furniture conveys nonverbal meaning - nonliteral meaning rather than literal meaning. New Design furniture designers use images for nonliteral meaning in metaphor in New Design furniture as their profile. The images convey the meaning of the metaphor to people through the medium.

In conclusion, New Design furniture designers transform their experience into a piece of symbolic furniture through perception and interpretation. A piece of symbolically transformed New Design furniture conveys metaphoric meaning, which communicates with people literally or nonliterally.

Metaphor can be defined as the extension of symbol in terms of our understanding of meaning through experience. It enables our experience to be meaningful. According to Feinstein:

Metaphor, once regarded solely as an ornamental linguistic device, is now considered to be an essential process and product of thought. The power of metaphor lies in its potential to further our understanding of the meaning of experience, which in turn defines reality. In art and in language,

metaphor urges us to look beyond the literal, to generate associations and to tap new, different, deeper levels of meaning. (Feinstein 1982)

A piece of New Design furniture as an art work is metaphor because New Design furniture designers transform their thoughts or ideas through postmodern aesthetics. New Design furniture conveys metaphoric meanings visually rather than linguistically. In fact, New Design furniture is referred to as nonverbal. However in conveying visual meaning, New Design furniture also includes a literal meaning which can be expressed verbally. According to Ortony (1975), “there is fairly wide agreement that metaphor involves, or is, the transfer of meaning. Indeed, etymologically means ‘transfer,’ being derived from the Greek meta (trans) + pherein (to carry)” (p. 45).

Richards (1936) has offered four terms helpful for the understanding of metaphor: topic, vehicle, ground, and tension. Richards’ terms for understanding metaphor might be more appropriate for metaphor in language rather than the metaphor in New Design furniture. However, exploring Richards’ understanding of metaphor, I will adapt the process to New Design furniture. I might hypothesize about the metaphor ‘chair is status’. Chair is the topic. Status is the vehicle. The ground arises from similar attributes of the forms (topic and vehicle). The tension takes place as ‘chair’ and ‘status’ belong to different categories, so that dissimilarity appears. Through the adaptation of terms, the metaphors embodied in New Design furniture may become clear, but the understanding is not always clear. As visual metaphors, New Design furniture is rarely expressed by similarity or dissimilarity in language. However, continuous experience with New Design furniture makes it possible for the metaphors to be understood linguistically and visually. Feinstein (1975) claims that metaphor can convey the primacy and continuity of experience, “but makes broader claims: that metaphor, an essential process and product of thought is central to the construction of meaning, and that art, as a fully developed product of thought, is metaphor” (p. 48).

The aesthetic expression of New Design furniture is both nonliteral and nonverbal; the metaphors it carries are visual metaphors rather than linguistic metaphors. In general, it may be difficult for people to understand and explain linguistically the visual metaphors that New Design furniture designers employ to convey meanings. Davidson (1979) states that “a picture is not worth a thousand words, or any other number. Words are the wrong currency to exchange for a picture” (p. 45). Thus, often, we do not have to use language to express metaphors in New Design furniture because New Design furniture communicates the metaphors of postmodern aesthetics with people through visual and physical sensations. As people experience the metaphors within the whole context of the art work, they understand and communicate about it visually and physically rather than linguistically.

Feinstein (1982) suggests that linguistic metaphor, which is verbal, differs from visual metaphor, which is nonverbal. As visual metaphor, New Design furniture, like art work, has no standard vocabulary for expressing its metaphor. The definition and terms may not be clear but ambiguous and complex. Somehow metaphors expressed in language clearly convey meaning. However, visual metaphor in New Design furniture is “a potent stimulus for generating associations and tapping new, different, or deeper levels of meaning” (Feinstein 1982). Understanding New Design furniture literally and metaphorically in terms of works of art is to construct more meaning from transactions with the environment.

To sum up, metaphoric meanings carried by New Design furniture include literal meaning but differ from literal meaning in the approach to its expression. Through symbolization, metaphoric meaning in postmodern aesthetics of New Design furniture makes itself rich in content and depth, makes us understand and appreciate New Design furniture, and extends and enriches our realities. Thus, to understand, construct, and convey literal and metaphoric meaning in visual forms like New Design furniture might be to communicate the metaphor with the public. Furniture has become an agent of communication between the designer and the viewer or user.

Students will explore their own interpretation of postmodern aesthetics of New Design furniture

in language from the metaphoric meaning as personally understood, constructed, and conveyed both literally and nonliterally.

Integration of Subject Areas

Reading: Through reading of “Meaning and Visual Metaphor” by Hermine Feinstein and *Metaphors We Live By* written by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, students will know how, what, and why designers interpret and transform New Design furniture in terms of linguistic and visual metaphors.

Language arts: In writing an interpretation about a selected a piece of New Design furniture students can become aware of and understand the differences between linguistic and visual metaphors.

Vocabulary

Metaphor: A metaphor is an idea expressed by language, which in turn functions as an expressive symbol in meaning a visual metaphor (Feinstein 1982).

Symbol: The symbol-making function is one of man’s primary activities. It is the fundamental process of his mind, and goes on all the time” (Langer 1957). The symbol-making function is a capability to create transformation, which creates symbols for the transfer of experience. The transformation of symbolization ends in a literal meaning and a nonliteral meaning (Feinstein 1982).

Inquiry Strategies (objectives)

The students will:

1. See slides of New Design furniture as metaphor in everyday life from our environment in order to explore interpretation transformed by their perspectives through selected New Design furniture such as Venturi’s Collection chair (see Picture 1), Moon’s Wall decorators (see Pictures 2), Moon’s Flower vase (see Picture 3), Moon’s Flower & Chocolate table (see Picture 4), Moon’s Cherry drawer (see Picture 5), Moon’s Green table (see Picture 6), Moon’s Up & Down (see Pictures 7), Moon’s Yellow Flower Mirror (see Picture 8), Orange Flower Mirror (see Picture 9), and Money chair (see Pictures 10),
2. Read teacher’s excerpts from the article “Meaning and Visual Metaphor” and the book *Metaphors We Live By* in order to understand the differences between linguistic and visual metaphor;

Evaluation: Were the students able to summarize and write about their understanding of linguistic and visual metaphor on a handout with questions prepared by the teacher: In terms of the content of the article and the book, what is linguistic metaphor? What is visual metaphor? What is the difference? The teacher will collect the responses and write comments to the students.

3. Develop their own idea of metaphor in New Design furniture from the readings in the contexts of nature, culture, person, group, and family;

Evaluation: Were the students able to make other students understand their own idea of metaphor in group discussion by teams of two or three? The other students will record their understanding according to very well, ok, and not sure with reasons in a handout prepared the teacher, who will collect the students responses.

4. Think about and write about a selected piece of New Design furniture with their own interpretations transformed by their perspectives in natural, cultural, personal, group, and familial contexts;

Evaluation: Were the students able to write about their own interpretations in natural, cultural, personal, group, or familial contexts? The teacher will collect and grade their writing.

5. Talk about their interpretations in order to clarify their understanding of a piece of New Design furniture as metaphor in everyday life;

Evaluation: Were the students able to interpret the visual metaphor of a piece of New Design furniture in literal metaphor? The teacher will read good and inadequate examples in the class, and then the teacher will ask the students to rethink and rewrite their papers based on the examples.

6. Write an interpretation to prepare for creating their own piece of New Design furniture in teams of two or three in the next lesson.

Evaluation: Were the students able to describe an object transformed by their interpretation? The teacher will ask the students to write about the object they will create in terms of color, shape, and materials according to the postmodern aesthetics of their interpretation.

Lesson Preparation

1. Select slides of New Design furniture and set up a slide projector for the class.
2. Research and provide references such as the designer's intention and background, and materials for selected New Design furniture.
3. Prepare question sheets about students' interpretations (see procedure).

Procedure

1. Briefly review the subject "New Design furniture as metaphor" based on lesson one.
2. Introduce New Design furniture as metaphor in everyday life; using a slide projector, show examples of New Design furniture exemplified in everyday life and everyday experience.
3. Ask the students to select a piece of New Design furniture which they want to interpret from among the slides and other furniture presented as metaphor in everyday life;
4. Introduce the article "Meaning and Visual Metaphor" by Mermine Feinstein and the book *Metaphors We Live By* written by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in order to help students understand differences between linguistic and visual metaphor.
5. Introduce some examples of interpretation by critics to explore different strategies of interpretation of the same work to guide the students' writing in interpreting a selected piece of New Design furniture in everyday life.
6. Ask each student to write an interpretation of a selected piece of New Design furniture.
7. Guide students in discussion of their understanding and interpretation of a selected piece of New Design furniture in teams of two or three according to their seating proximity.
8. Ask each student to read individually his/her interpretation in the teams.
9. Ask them to talk about their understanding and to select a best idea or to rethink about and write about their interpretation for creating a piece representing the postmodern aesthetics in New Design furniture.
10. Ask students to read their team's interpretation and add their own opinions because they will create an object based on their writing (interpretation) in teams.
11. Ask the teams to pick one person to read his/her team's idea in the class.
12. Ask the students to criticize other teams' writing (interpretation) to give them better ideas to create an object which conveys metaphoric meaning through the postmodern aesthetics as in New Design furniture.
13. Ask the teams to re-discuss and rewrite their interpretation reflecting the students' comments after the presentation in class.
14. Ask the teams to introduce transformative New Design furniture in relation to their group interpretation by posters expressing decorative and functional objects in terms of color, shape, or materials.

Questions sheet (to be handed out)

- 1) Do you agree or disagree with the interpretation? (give reasons)
- 2) What do you think about your teams' expression of visual metaphor in language? (give reasons)
- 3) Do you feel cultural differences among the interpretations? Are you interested in the differences? Can you write down the feeling?
- 4) Through the transformative process by the interpretive writing, do you think through postmodern aesthetics a piece of New Design furniture can be transformed into a different object representing natural, cultural, personal, group, and family contexts? (give reasons)

Resources and Materials

Slides of selected furniture: Venturi's Collection chair (see Picture 1), Moon's Wall decorators (see Pictures 2), Moon's Flower vase (see Picture 3), Moon's Flower & Chocolate table (see Picture 4), Moon's Cherry drawer (see Picture 5), Moon's Green table (see Picture 6), Moon's Up & Down (see Pictures 7), Moon's Yellow Flower Mirror (see Picture 8), Orange Flower Mirror (see Picture 9), and Money chair (see Pictures 10).

Articles: "Meaning and visual metaphor" written by Hermine Feinstein (1982) and "The psychology of the metaphor" written by Anderson (1964).

Books: *Metaphors We Live By* written by George Lakoff & Mark Johnson (1980), *Metaphor and Thought* written by Ortony (1979), *Symbolic Tonic* written by Langer (1967), and *What metaphors mean* written by Davidson (1979).

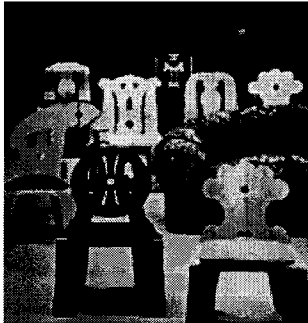


Fig.1. Venturi Collection (Moon, 2000).



Fig.2. Wall decorators (Moon, 2000).

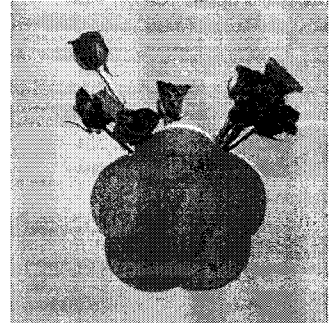


Fig.3. Flower vase (Dormer, 1987).

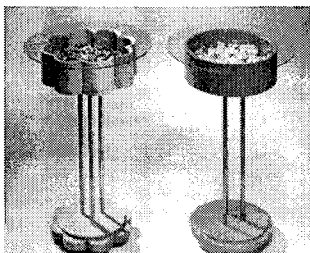


Fig.4. Flower & Chocolate table (Moon, 2000).

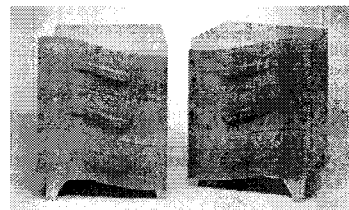


Fig.5. Cherry drawer (Moon, 2000).

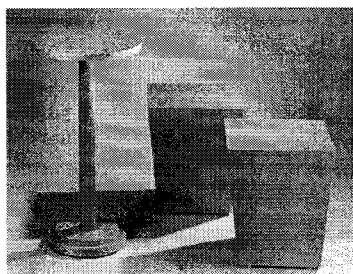


Fig.6. Green table (Moon, 2001).

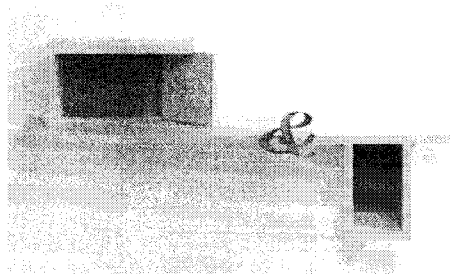


Fig.7. Up & Down (Moon, 2000).

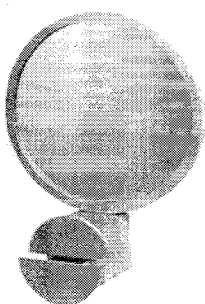


Fig. 8. Yellow Flower mirror (Moon, 2001).

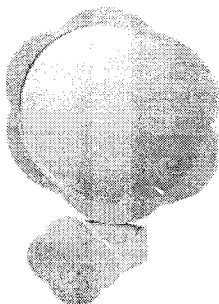


Fig.9. Orange Flower mirror (Moon, 2001).

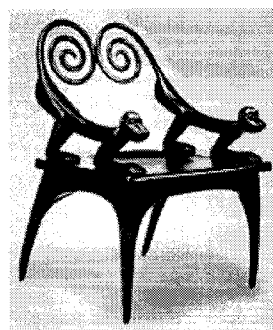


Fig.10. Monkey Chair (Corbin, 1998).

Transition

The students will be asked to research and bring pictures of artworks, especially with functions reflecting transformation of postmodern aesthetics in New Design furniture to create a piece of furniture made of recycled materials and reused objects from our environment as a metaphor for everyday life.

Follow up

The students are to interpret the postmodern aesthetics of New Design furniture and expand their understanding and points of view about interpretation symbolically transformed in objects from abstract arts to ceramic and metal works in practical arts.

Homework

Readings: As the students read and take a look at the pictures in the books *Neo-furniture* by Claire Downey (1992) and *Art Synectics* by Nicholas Roukes (1982), and the articles “Minimal lamps” by Silvia Suardi (1997), “Design and ecology” by Vittorio Mangnago Lampugnani (1995), “Parsimony and luxury by Vittorio Mangnago Lampugnani (1996), and “Designing sustainability” by Francois Burkardt (1997), they can get and develop the idea of a beautiful and functional object expressed as postmodern aesthetics in New Design furniture, considering the preservation of our ecology in creating their object in the next lesson.

CONCLUSION

This study explored interpretation of the symbolical and metaphorical aesthetics in experiencing art/craft/handmade/studio furniture theoretically for 'wood culture experience class' or 'wood love experience class' by the Korea Forest Service, because the class tends to focus on making simple wood works involved just in the practice. After the lesson one on defining the postmodern aesthetics in New Design furniture as metaphor in the previous paper, I developed the lesson two for an aesthetics of art and everyday life with wood furniture which expresses the metaphorical and symbolical aesthetics appeared as New Design furniture in postmodernism. Thus, the lesson was developed in terms of the subjects such as contextual information for metaphors and symbols, the inquiry strategies, procedure, question sheet, resources and materials, transition, follow-up, and homework for the theoretical lesson of solid wood furniture aesthetics to strike a balance between the theory and the practice in the programs. As statement of objective in the second lesson, I explored that students in elementary schools personally transform and interpret the postmodern aesthetics of New Design furniture metaphorically with the meanings of symbol. Students could connect their interpretation with the natural, cultural, personal, group, and familial contexts defined in lesson one. As they would explore the visual metaphor in New Design furniture linguistically, they could interpret the meaning conveyed by the metaphors through symbol making according to each person's perspective, literally and nonliterally.

As a result, the students will be able to write about the aesthetics of New Design furniture as metaphor in interpretation transformed by his/her perspective of a piece of selected New Design furniture. Through the first and second lesson, the children would understand, define, and interpret the aesthetics metaphorically in their point of view. In the future lesson based on the last lesson study, I will explore that as the objective each child should create an object expressive of the postmodern aesthetics of communication in New Design furniture using with recyclable objects or materials. Objects and materials will be transformed through children's interpretation of metaphor in everyday life, with children by teams of two or three working collaboratively.

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