Spatial Metaphor in Architectural Design and Criticism in the Culture of Consumption:
Learning From Two Retail Shops

SUNG HONG KIM

University of Seoul

INTRODUCTION

The architecture of a shop provides the setting in which commodity objects are stored, displayed, and exchanged. Whether it is located on the street, in the shopping mall, or at a remote location, the primary aim of the shop is to compel the general passerby or the special customer to stop, examine and buy commodity objects. However, we do not necessarily go to the shop for an economical purpose. Sometimes we just take part in the pleasurable activity of wandering, seeing, and being seen. In this sense shop architecture formulates the visual and spatial relationships between shoppers, commodity objects and sellers in particular ways. Sometimes such relationships challenge our general expectations of the shop and might appear as purposely paradoxical. This very paradox enriches architecture in a subtle but striking manner.

Where this occurs we recognize the operation of metaphor. Metaphor is known primarily as a linguistic phenomenon, a sophisticated figurative use of words to convey non-literal meaning.[1] It has been argued, however, that the locus of metaphor is not in language but rather a "cross-domain mapping in the conceptual system;" and that linguistic expression is merely the "surface realization of such a cross-domain mapping."[2] Likewise, the extension of metaphor from the linguistic realm to other realms is based on the premise that a theory of verbal metaphor is a "species of," rather than a "foundation for," a theory of non-verbal metaphor.[3] However, architectural metaphor has often been regarded as a subset of verbal metaphor: architectural metaphor characterizes a conventional association between an object and its referent.[4] Particularly, in postmodern discourse, metaphor is identical with the substitution of one lexical unit for another which is quoted from classical architecture. Discrete architectural elements are thus figurative by themselves and ready to be decoded just by visual recognition.[5]

Architecture does not merely create objects that are to be seen. It creates the space in which we move and experience; it creates our social domain. The visual, the spatial and the social are thus different aspects of the same architectural form and thereby architecture is distinguished from painting and sculpture. Architectural metaphor, then, must be extended from visual recognition of objects to the conceptual operation associated with visual and spatial experience. These interdependent components can be easily overlooked and minimized where the linguistic model is directly employed in architecture. In the course of transportation, the spatial dimension of architectural form disappears, dissolving in the face of the continuing strength of the lexical sign. This view of metaphor fails to maintain the critical distance from the culture of consumption. It seeks a means of visual communication, architectural vocabularies that are comprehensive to a public at large. It endorses a referential or correspondent notion of meaning: that architectural vocabulary can literally be read as words, that buildings can convey specific messages. This is in accord with the reductive tendency of the substitution view[6] of verbal metaphor, which believes that metaphor is a substitution of words.

The aim of this paper is to explore the spatial mode of metaphor by analyzing two retail shops: Gae Aulenti's Adrienne Vittadini (1992) and David Chipperfield's Issey Miyake (1985). These shops best serve this aim in two senses. Aulenti and Chipperfield are aware that high-class consumerist fashion has become one of the remaining clients for the patronage and development of vigorous form. Yet, neither shop uses surface properties of iconographic objects in their search of architecture as communicative power. The shops formulate particular modes of movement, looks, and gazes, thereby allowing us to treat spatial organization as an embodiment of the desire of symbolic participation. As the paper explores the spatial metaphor of shop architecture, it has drawn from three distinct lines of inquiry. The first line of inquiry explores how to reconcile space as an abstract dimension of metaphorical fiction and space as a physically arranged domain accommodating human relationships. The theoretical framework of "the social logic of space" originally developed by Hillier and Hanson (1984)[7] particularly inspired the paper to formulate this hypothesis. The second line of inquiry defines and illuminates metaphor as a literary, or more broadly, an artistic mode of expression. The third line of inquiry is to test whether shop architecture can be constructed, appropriated and interpreted in a critical way.
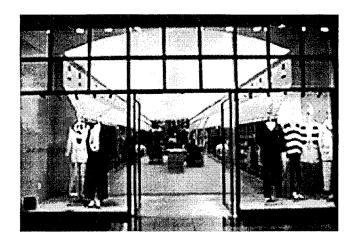
ANALYSIS

Shop architecture is subject to the whims of fashion; the Adrienne Vittadini and Issey Miyake shops no longer exist. Adrienne Vittadini, one in a chain of the New York-based woman's clothing store, was on the first floor of Atlanta's Phipps Plaza Shopping Center. Issey Miyake, the shop for Japanese designer Issey Miyake, was located on upper Sloane Street in London, which is the heart of Joseph territory. Vittadini and Miyake can be characterized by simplicity and imperceptible detail, without superfluous stylistic touches. The plan of Vittadini is very simple: the stock room, fitting room and office are hidden from the sales hall so that the casual passersby hardly recognizes their existence. In the sales hall are few furnishings, minimal displays, and no internal partition. The resultant simple, longitudinal, undifferentiated space generates a strong perspectival effect. Vittadini is thus conceived as a small passage within a mall. The narrow-shaped stock room is arranged behind the right wall to allow more length longitudinally for the sales hall. The shop front is juxtaposed by two contrasting elements: a glass frame with entrance doors, and the flank of projected display shelves and ceiling. Void of decorative element, the glass frame acts as a viewing
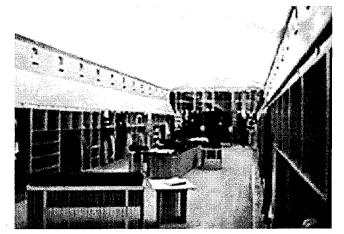
frame for the entire setting inside. Because of the transparent frame, the contour of putting display shelves and the ceiling marks a transitional space between the outside and the inside. Thus one can conceive the frontal view as the section of an arcade. The pattern of glass at the front is reflected on the mirror at the rear of the shop so that it generates an illusion of another entrance rather than simply a surface. The "linearity" is the most prominent morphological characteristic in Vittadini. Conceptually, the shop is viewed as a truncated passageway inserted between two planes: one is virtually transparent; or the other is illusory transparent.

The Issey Miyake shop is also composed of few elements: a reception area, clusters of dressing rooms, a single long metal clothing rack, and a display element of metal and sculpted wood. There is no distinction between the circulation corridor and the merchandise compartment in the sales hall. Nor is there physical demarcation where the shopper crosses from one merchandise category to another.[8] The shop, therefore, can be characterized by the elimination of internal division and minimal displays. However, what produces a deeper paradox is not just density but the ways the sales hall and the reception area are projected towards the street. Entering from the street, one faces the marble panel and then is reoriented towards the main sales hall. Different ceiling heights mark this transition so that the movement appears no longer processional along the longitudinal direction.
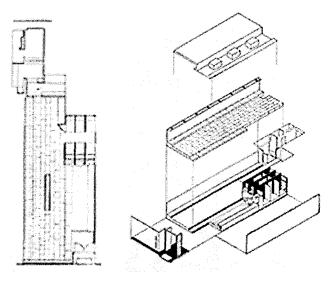
While Vittadini maximizes frontality by conforming all elements to one vanishing point, Miyake equally emphasizes the laterality by exposing the transverse elements, the stepping-down section of the floor. Thus two competing systems of perspective presentation are generated. The result is the change of the shop's frontality and

symmetrical relation of the interior walls. In Vittadini's design, the frontality and symmetrical relationship are preserved and maximized. In Miyake's, these relationships are intentionally transformed. More particularly, it presents the urge to reveal a spatial structure of traverse sectional elements. This configuration presupposes triangle relationship. A passer-by who sees the inside becomes a beholder, while the shopper in the sales hall is transformed into an object – an object of vision. Another shopper, sitting at the reception area, sees the actor and thereby becomes not only another spectator but also another object to be seen by the beholder on the street. The beholder becomes an invisible mediator between an interplay of looks inside, and thereby a participant in the fantasy of the exchange. Devoid of any ordinary merchandise stalls, the space is animated by the exchange of looks. The activity of exchange is not just between the shopper and the seller nor between the shopper and commodity objects. They are open to the general and anonymous passersby, who are compelled to join a game of looks and gazes.
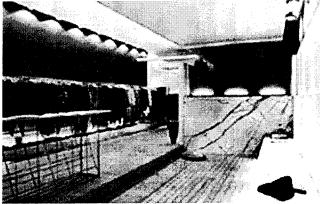
What is the intention of such a deliberate exposition of the "visual relations" occurring in the internal space towards the street? This question reminds us of Diego Velazquez's painting, Las Meninas, which Michel Foucault once described in his book, *The Order of Things*.[9] The painting demonstrates the uncertainty of seeing and being seen. What the painter is looking at is not represented within the space of the painting. The viewer can see only the reverse side of the canvas. It is the only painter who can see both the model and the surface of the canvas at the same time. We, the viewers, do not command a triangular relationship between the painter, the model

Figs. 1-2. Adrienne Vittadini shop, Gae Aulenti, Phipps Plaza, Atlanta, 1992, interior views.

Figs. 3-5. Issey Miyake, Davis Chipperfield & Kenneth Armstrong, London, 1985, floor plan, axonometric, and interior view. Source: Fitoussi, Brigitte Ed. Showrooms, (Princeton Architectural Press, 1988): 84-7.
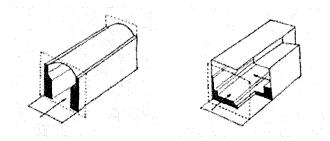
and the canvas; rather we may even be the objects that the painter is looking at. If we are the models, we are a part of the game within the virtual space. If we are not the models, we are just viewers who occupy the real space. Las Meninas demonstrates the possibility and impossibility of connecting the virtual space and the real space. The ambiguity of gazes represented in Las Meninas is converted to the celebration of reciprocity in the Issey Miyake shop. The actor, the spectator, and the beholder are all in the real space, at least conceptually. Everyone sees each other and everyone is seen by others. Unlike Velazquez's painting, no one commands the exchange of looks, and at the same time no one has room for dissociating himself from the exchange of looks. By equalizing the actor, the spectator, and the beholder, the shop resists becoming an object to be consumed from a single point. In fact, only when the relationships among the three positions are conceptualized as a single image does the shop appear a coherent entity.

CONSTRUCTING SPATIAL METAPHOR

Vittadini and Miyake accomplish more than utilitarian purposes but express the theatrical quality of the activity of buying and selling, which cannot be explained merely by the pragmatic of the shop. An attentive passerby will be captured by Vittadini's strong perspectival space and minimal display. If he looks at the architectural motif carefully, he may recognize the projecting shelves from the side walls, the curved ceiling, and the mirror at the rear. The whole arrangement of Vittadini appears coherent when we conceptualize particular modes of experience. This experience can be described as "I am looking at a passageway." In the same way, Miyake's spatial arrangement is more than functional: the spectator is forced to be engaged in the game of looks and gazes. If one is aware of this symbolic game, he would imagine other settings that assimilate such a viewer-viewed relationship, leading to the statement, "I am looking at a theater." Vittadini's and Miyake's paradoxes are finally translated into the ideas, "The shop is a passage," and "The shop is a theater."

This statement can be compared to a verbal metaphor, as in the sentence, "Sam is a fox." This sentence is incorrect if applied literally because if Sam is human, he cannot be a fox or any other animal. The hearer or reader will then try to find out what the sentence really means other than what is stated literally. Finally, he may interpret the sentence to mean "Sam is sly." The words, "Sam" "is" "a" "fox," comprises a metaphorical sentence governed by rules of grammars. Yet behind these observable linguistic forms lie underlying ideas: the idea of "slyness" is presented under the idea of "human nature." These two ideas are connected by a common attribute – slyness – rather than by literal resemblance between Sam – a human being – and a fox – which walks around on four legs. What the reader experiences is the transaction between these two domains. In short, we conceptualize one domain of experience in terms of a very different domain of experience. Metaphor occurs when these two domains are connected "in a sudden and striking fashion" in the mind.[10]

Similarly, architectural metaphor involves an operation which

Figs. 6-7. Axonometric Diagrams, Adrienne Vittadini and Issey Miyake shop.

extracts from forms and spaces its most striking features and likens the given features to something not present in the perception. If a shop is made to look like a theater, then the viewer is encouraged to construe that shops and theaters share something in common. Neither of the shops, however, shows any overt dramaturgical intent. The individual craftsmanship and stylistic preference of Gae Aulenti and David Chipperfield help to create such theatrical settings. All those are secondary. The essential element is not a facade, a column, or ornaments. The fundamental and crucial departure for such a manipulation is much subtle: a volumetric unit is first dissected, then added, subtracted, truncated and separated. Aulenti and Chipperfield demonstrate architectural metaphor is more than connotation, and references, but instead particular attributes that are related to the socio-cultural function of architecture, and deeply embedded in space and form. They redefine the "morphological structure"[11] of the shop, reshuffling the visual and spatial relationship between shoppers, sellers, and commodity objects. Here, a metaphoric intent is never separated from utilitarian purposes: metaphor and utility are fused and become an irreducible alliance.

RECONSTRUCTING SPATIAL METAPHOR

The investigation allows us to decompose and recompose metaphors. This by no means implies that metaphor is generally understood through such linear interpretative and logical procedures. The aim of this analysis is not to verify the ways in which metaphor is empirically recognized and understood but rather to explicate more rigorously how metaphor is conceptually constituted. This analysis is aimed at establishing a relationship between a metaphor already retrieved through intuition and imagination on the one hand, and the particular configurational and formal properties of a building as these are engaged in the constitution of the metaphor on the other. Thus, analysis serves to provide a "post-rationalization" of the relationship between formal properties and the retrieval of metaphor. This limitation is somewhat necessary. If metaphor could be readily and procedurally recognized, it would no longer entail paradox but would rather rely on convention and thereby constitute an accepted part of the repertoire of architectural language. This analysis, however, serves a secondary purpose over and above post-rationalization. It also helps to understand the transformational principles through which metaphors could be recomposed in different contexts. Finally the analysis can be seen as a way of extending the attention given to form and of prolonging the enjoyment and appreciation of the form from the point of view of a metaphor which is, in most cases, initially recognized purely through intuition. Rather than proceed from an original perception of form to a discussion of metaphorical meanings that may be of interest independently of the form, the analysis retains form at the focus of attention and uses the perception of metaphor in order to deepen our understanding of its cultural constitution. Quietly clearly, these procedures cannot be taken to represent the conscious reactions of the average viewers, even through they may recapture and render explicitly one particular mode of interpretation that may be more familiar to a certain set of viewers more accustomed to dealing with symbolic and abstract transformations. This paper's investigation allows us to argue another point, the complementarity of the acts of architectural construction (conceptual and real) and interpretation. It is difficult to separate "interpretation" from "construction" in the discussion of architectural metaphor. The viewer stands on equal footing with the designer in an effort to make architectural form and space meaningful to both. Metaphoric intents are embodied in the formal relationships. Yet, formal relationships do not generate anything until they are perceived and interpreted. Without the implied existence of a viewer, metaphoric structures remain collections of abstract forms. A purely formal analysis of metaphor as morphological relationships will not do justice to the complexity of these phenomena; nor will a purely individual interpretation, which

in its most extreme form, views metaphor as created by viewer or critics, not by the architectural forms themselves. As the act and form of metaphor are those of incorporation, metaphor involves the entire process of conceptualization, construction, and reconstruction. The convincing strength that this investigation claims does not rest exclusively with the logical exposition of metaphor; rather it is helped by the degree of comprehensibility that metaphors of shop architecture create in the process.

METAPHOR AS CRITICAL INQUIRY

Designing a shop involves the two dilemmas of enhancing architectural quality and of satisfying retailing aims. If the design principle is biased towards one of the two aims, the shop would be either a "purified and aestheticized object" or a "commercialized object." In the first case, retailing is recognized as a practical necessity but it has no influence on architectural form and space. Architectural principles and retailing principles are seen as coexisting in unrelated spheres, each with their own distinct theoretical structures. In the second case, architecture is overpowered by the retailing principles and relegated merely to objects to be consumed. One response to this tension is to embrace both the practical necessity of retailing and the concomitant demands for autonomous architectural exploration. Spatial metaphors employed in our study of designs of two shops attempt to embrace these two aims. They create an awareness of ambivalence and discrepancy and refer to something other than themselves.

It seems that spatial metaphor is a mode of maintaining an irreconcilable ambiguity and tension between "architecture" and "shop." It dramatizes the symbolic aim of exchange by treating the shop as an embodiment of the desire of symbolic participation to overcome the deficiencies of social reality. At the same time, it searches for high intellectual import of critical thinking by testing whether architecture can be constructed, appropriated, and interpreted in a critical way.

What spatial metaphor ultimately seeks can be thus represented in the two statements: "this is a shop" and "this is an architectural statement." Perhaps, metaphor is an indispensable response to the changing nature of a shop. Personal contacts between producer and consumer were typical of a time when the shop was the center for the production, distribution, and exchange of goods. A person could meet, for instance, a tailor face to face and thus reach the authority of knowledge: the "social category" between producer and consumer was embodied in the spatial configuration of the shop. Mass production and distribution took such processes away from the shop to the factory and distribution center. Today shopper no longer interacts with the real producer of an object, say the designers of a Christian Dior skirt or a Gucci bag; instead they meet sellers who are anonymous and unspecified in relation to the objects. The disembodiment of the "real social category" may be the reason that the spatial dimensions of shop meet with limitations as potential carriers of the symbolic charge of shop design. The locus of the symbolic recedes to material things. Given this condition, spatial metaphor attempts to retrieve the symbolic from the material things and return them to the social dimensions of shopping activity. In this way, there is still a significant critical design activity in the culture of consumption.

NOTES

[1] Andrew Ortony, ed., *Metaphor and Thought*, second edition (Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 4.

[2] George Lakoff, "The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor," in Andrew Ortony, ed., *Metaphor and Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 203.

[3] Carl R. Hausman, *Metaphor and Art: Interactionism and Reference in the Verbal and Nonverbal Arts* (Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[4] Colquhoun addresses the concept of metaphor in relation to figure. He defines figure as a configuration which carries conventional meaning given by culture. According to Colquhoun, in modern architecture, there has been a consistent tendency to reduce architecture to pure form, avoiding the figural tradition of architecture and its semantic connotations. Alan Colquhoun, *Essays in Architectural Criticism; Modern Architecture and Historical Change* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981).

[5] Jencks believes modern architects deny the potent metaphorical meaning of iconic form and defends the ambiguity of iconic sign. See Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-modern Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1977).

[6] Max Black distinguishes a substitution theory from an interaction theory. For a substitution theory, metaphor settles into a status of substitution of one term for another, thus substitution is inseparable from the definition of metaphor as a deviation in naming. For an interaction theory, a concept of substitution is considered a reduction of metaphor to an accident of naming. Instead, metaphor is more a discursive concept than a mere substitution of words, names, or nouns. Max Black, *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1962), and Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. by Robert Czerny (University of Toronto Press, 1975), p. 8081.

[7] B. Hillier and J. Hanson, *The Social Logic of Space* (Cambridge University Press, 1984).

[8] Modern retailing studies suggest that the layout reflects the classification of merchandise, and thereby clienteles. Positions of sellers – i.e., cash counters and service desks – is also related to the shop's strategy on security control. W.R. Green, *The Retail Store, Design and Construction* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1986), p. 20-21.

[9] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), p. 3-16.

[10] I.A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 124.

[11] J. Peponis argues that design is about formulation over and above the satisfaction of the programmatic requirements: formulation in design is about "the enhancement of our sense of morphological possibility through a clear grasp of alternative principles of composition and coherence." He asserts, throughout the concept of formulation, that aesthetics and generic functions cannot be sharply distinguished in architecture and that their dialectic relations are the very architectural design itself. John Peponis, "Evaluation and Formulation in Design: The Implication of Morphological Theories of Function," *Nordisk Arkitekturforskning* (1993:2): 53-62.

[12] The two thoughts in metaphor are somehow disrupted that we describe one through the features of the other. In other words, metaphor is to present one idea under the sign of the other. Richards calls the underlying idea tenor and the idea under whose sign the first idea is apprehended vehicle. Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multidisciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. by Robert Czerny (University of Toronto Press, 1975), p. 80-81, and I.A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (Oxford University Press, 1936).

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