

Home As Identity

The idea of integrating identity and interior design in this analysis is a result of many people buying IKEA furniture for their homes without really thinking about the appropriateness of the piece. According to my personal experience, most of my students are doing Interior Design as their major study simply because they want to design their dream houses. However, when it comes to practice, many students will flip through catalogs of IKEA and make most use of that instead of putting their personality into their design. In fact, they may not even aware what are their characteristics and how they can project their identity through items outside IKEA. Sadly to say, this also happens among my friends. Many of them are doing the same thing for their “dream house”. The above examples may tell us that people are seriously being affected by TV programmes showing a middle-class family having all kinds of items from IKEA. As Sparke has mentioned that those who buy IKEA furniture are seeking transformation of their lives and positions in the society (Sparke, 2004). I wonder if people create dwelling environments in respond to their individual and collective understanding of the components, characteristics and images which give meanings to the idea of home as suggested by Peter Kellett in his article, “Constructing informal places” (Kellett, 2003). Hence, I would like my students to look into themselves and integrate their personalities/ identities into their design projects, so as to build up their personal styles. I would like to turn this theme into a project for students to work out spatial designs through the exploration of their identities. Home as identity is going to be a combination of Interior Design and the Identity Issue. The students will make a design to reflect their identity at the end of the course after various self-discovery activities. Students are also expected to aware the differences among themselves and appreciate this, so that they can make use of these differences in their designs.

Several books have inspired me in this analysis. I was seriously inspired by the picture book, *Tokyo: a certain style*, written by Kyoichi Tsuzuki, which addresses how the Japanese live in ways they find comfortable (Tsuzuki, 1997). Although it is meant to be a coffee table book, Tsuzuki has taken more than 400 color photos showing various individuals living in Tokyo with their personal style, which Tsuzuki has defined as something we can see among different people. The photos may show rooms seem to be hopelessly chaotic. However, that could be the way how the dwellers find their Macintosh and pizza delivery menu within arm’s reach.

The color photos in the book are so impressive and well organized in showing me how individuals have made their place “comfortable”. Besides, according to Tsuzuki, the art of living well in small spaces might be the style of living in future (Tsuzuki, 1997). So, why not we think of a way to suit our style?

Another book inspires me a lot is *The Weight of Space: Participatory Design Research for Configuring Habitable Space for New Arrival Women in Hong Kong*, written by Dr. Jackie Yan-chi Kwok. This book is looking into the living condition of the new arrival women. These women are facing various difficulties from environmental restriction such as crowding, noise, poor lighting, ventilation and hygiene condition to the stress in the home space, which lead to a lack of privacy (Kwok, 2004, p.140).

The most impressive thing in the book was that the New Arrival Women have come up various strategies in order to make use of the space in their houses. For example, they have all sorts of daily life activities on their beds which consistently changing the function of a bed, from an ordinary device for resting to a study desk. (Kwok, 2004, pp.34-35)

I always believe that a person can find “the creative dialogue essential for self-discovery and growth”. That is why I strongly agree with Peter Kellett in *Constructing Place: Mind and Matter* edited by Sarah Menin, Kellett pointed out that by constructing homes, dwellers find the places become meaningful (Menin, 2003, p. 89)

In the same publication, Sarah Menin reinforces the above idea by telling us how Alvar Aalto viewed architecture. Aalto suggested that “all architecture must reflect the nature of human experience... he believed the ‘psychological needs’” in all dwellings (Menin, 2003, p.239).

Interior design is dealing with the relationship between people (user) and the activities involved in the space. Meanwhile, home is concerning the domestic space and the everyday life activities (Kellett, 2003). If we are looking into interior design, several ideas have strengthened my ideas to integrate identity and spatial design according to *Interior Design and Identity*, edited by Susie McKellar and Penny Sparke. The idea of ‘home office’ leads to a coming back of a linkage between personal identity and the interior since hundreds year ago when people are having their interior design to show their

gender and class differences from others. (McKellar et al, 2004) Therefore, I was trying to fit in home design into this project.

In fact, identity values are largely formed in every home. The connection between identity and interior decoration is very sensitive. So, the design and the language of the domestic interior have provided a topic between class and gender identities, material culture and the languages of interior decoration. (Sparke, 2004) There could be some common languages such as design elements and principles when we talk about interior design. Some of them could possibly affect our perception towards certain types of people. This could also mean to a common ground for people sharing similar roles in the society. It is also this quality connecting people in terms of tribes and groups. We may see some similar designs of arrangements in the students' "ideal" home. The important thing is to let them explore what they really need in their design before they jump into a conclusion that a certain brand name is the answer for everyone.

Indeed, as our cultural identities are changing constantly, our mass media especially plays a very important role in shaping ourselves. Pun Ngai and Yee Lai-man reminded us that our collective memories are easily being highlighted in TV programs (Pun et al, 2003). Whatever we read, we watch can shape ourselves and affect our way of seeing and designing things. That's why those TV programmes showing middle class people having IKEA furniture as their home setting will lead to a massive demand in the same type and brand name of the pieces.

After going through the pilot test till the end of the course, most students found interest in exploring who they are and what makes them themselves. The students were especially excited when getting to the part to "settle" their home and be the only MAN in it. They all got very excited when presenting their works. Some of them have really kept their consistency from the very beginning which was to look for definitions of the space till the "ideal" home making process, we can spot the work straight away. However, some of the students found difficulties when coping with the 7-day diary. It was a bit of trouble when they have to record everything that they came across with the items they have planned to take away with them. After all, they are much interested in drawing the things out, or simply taking photos of the condition. So, I have made some amendments in this project guide book which is asking the students either to write or to draw, or even take photos of the location and the condition when they are dealing with the "essential" items. The main point in this activity is to let students aware that everyone has his/ her own

criteria in using even the same things. So, It is a good opportunity for them to find this out.

The overall result is satisfied due to the students are now all aware that they have some other choices in their designs, rather than flipping catalogues for the solutions. However, a self-discovering process takes time. Only a few activities may not make the students know themselves thoroughly. Through this analysis, I am hoping the students to be more alert about what they are having in their design, as well as how they see the differences in different people. We should learn how to appreciate the differences in various people.

REFERENCES:

Altman, Irwin and Werner, Carol M., (1985), *Home Environments, Human Behavior and Environment series (Vol 8)*, New York: Plenum Press.

McKellar, Susie & Sparke, Penny (ed), (2004), *Interior Design and Identity*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Menin, Sarah (ed), (2003), *Constructing Place: Mind and Matter*, London: Routledge.

Norberg-Schulz, Christian, (1980), *Genius-loci: towards a phenomenology of architecture*, New York: Rizzoli.

Pun, Ngai & Yee, Lai-man (ed), (2003), *Narrating Hong Kong Culture and Identity*, Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.

Tsuzuki, Kyoichi, (1997), *Tokyo: a certain style*, California: Chronicle Books.

郭恩慈 (編), (2004), <空間艱難: 新來港婦女生活環境遷>, 香港: 香港理工大學設計學院都市空間文化女研研究組.