

8.4 Design exercise: design by metaphors

Objective

This exercise shows how to use the metaphor as a tool to identify a focal element, expressing the critical meaning of a situation, an object, a personality.

Background

A metaphor is a figure of speech that associates two concepts by translating a property of the latter concept to emphasize a property of the former.

For example, when someone states, 'John is a lion', immediately the lion appears before his/her eyes, along with all the attributes of courage, daring, and power that we associate with the brave and ferocious animal. The metaphor transfers all these properties to John. All other aspects of John's personality are momentarily obscured or neglected. John the Lion becomes a distorted character around which one can reconstruct John's personality and predict his future behaviours.

Metaphors are used in poetry and literature to emotionally visualize the content and help readers extract a more engaging meaning from the text. The metaphor is a cognitive tool to stimulate creativity.

Instructions

Exercise 1

The following example from the play *Cyrano de Bergerac*, composed by Edmond Rostand in 1897, provides an excellent example of emphasizing metaphors.

Cyrano, cheeky Gascon, sharp with sword and word, is apostrophized by a careless Viscount with a banal: 'Sir, your nose is... Hmm... it is... very big!'. Unflurried, Cyrano replies: 'That was a trifle short! You might have said at least a hundred things'. So, he suggests a repertoire of much more creative insults:

THE VISCOUNT: No one? But wait! I'll treat him to...one of my quips!
See here! (He goes up to Cyrano, who is watching him, and with a conceited air):
Sir, your nose is... hmm... it is... very big!
CYRANO (gravely): Very!
THE VISCOUNT (laughing): Ha!
CYRANO (imperturbably): Is that all?
THE VISCOUNT: What do you mean?
CYRANO: Ah no! Young blade! That was a trifle short!
You might have said at least a hundred things.
By varying the tone...like this, suppose.
Aggressive: Sir, if I had such a nose I'd amputate it!
Friendly: When you sup it must annoy you, dipping in your cup; you need a drinking-bowl of special shape!
Descriptive: Tis a rock! A peak! A cape! A cape, forsooth! Tis a peninsular!
Curious: How serves that oblong capsular? For scissor-sheath? Or pot to hold your ink?

Gracious: You love the little birds, I think? I see you've managed with a fond research to find their tiny claws a roomy perch!

Truculent: When you smoke your pipe... suppose that the tobacco smoke spouts from your nose. Do not the neighbours, as the fumes rise higher, Cry terror-struck: 'The chimney is afire!'

Considerate: Take care, your head bowed low By such a weight... lest head o'er heels you go!

Tender: Pray get a small umbrella made, lest its bright colour in the sun should fade!

Pedantic: That beast Aristophanes Names Hippocamelelephantoles must have possessed just such a solid lump Of flesh and bone, beneath his forehead's bump!

Cavalier: The last fashion, friend, that hook? To hang your hat on? Tis a useful crook!

Emphatic: No wind, o majestic nose, Can give THEE cold! Save when the mistral blows!

Dramatic: When it bleeds, what a Red Sea!

Admiring: Sign for a perfumery!

Lyric: Is this a conch? A Triton you?

Simple: When is the monument on view?

Rustic: That thing a nose? Marry-come-up! Tis a dwarf pumpkin, or a prize turnip!

Military: Point against cavalry!

Practical: Put it in a lottery! Assuredly 'twould be the biggest prize!

Cyrano invents eighteen different insults to emphasize the size of his nose, all based on ironic and creative visual metaphors. Analyze all the metaphors used by Cyrano through the following table. In the last column identify as many as possible attributes of a big nose suggested by the metaphor:

Image used in the metaphor	Label used by Rostand	Which attributes of the image can also be applied to a big nose
Amputation	Aggressive	A big nose is an anomalous outgrowth of the body
Drink from a cup	Friendly (fake friend giving advice)	
Rock	Descriptive	Hard, tough, cavernous, cold, looming ...
...

Exercise 2

The miniskirt is an icon of the 1960s. The miniskirt's inventor Mary Quant explained that she intended to design a youthful, simple skirt in which a girl could move, run and jump. With a single, decisive shot of scissors, Mary Quant removed at least 30cm of fabric from the skirts of the time to emphasize a single concept: 'I am a woman, and I am free!'.

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Emphasis is the most direct strategy to convey a message through a single element that summarizes both emotionally and rationally the distinctive properties of a product, product line, or project. So, it's only natural that fashion designers use it.

The two images below depict women engaged in a dance. The first image is a painting by Pierre-August Renoir, 'Danse à la ville', 1883. The second image represents Josephine Baker in a Charleston dance.

Pay attention to the scene, movements, and clothes they wear, and answer the following questions:

1. What elements of the dress worn by women catch your attention?
2. What idea of feminine beauty is emphasized by clothing?
3. Looking at dresses, the posture, and the women's movement in the two pictures: what metaphors come to mind?



Fig. 8.4a - Pierre-August Renoir, Danse à la ville, 1883.

https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ballo_in_campagna_e_Ballo_in_citt%C3%A0#/media/File:Pierr e-Auguste_Renoir_019.jpg



Fig. 8.4b - Josephine Baker dancing the Charleston at the Folies Bergère, Paris, in 1926.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charleston_\(dance\)#/media/File:Baker_Charleston.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charleston_(dance)#/media/File:Baker_Charleston.jpg)