

**Critical Discourse of Postmodern Aesthetics in
Contemporary Furniture (III) – Consideration of the
Ecology of Our Environment in New Design Furniture
in terms of the Postmodern Aesthetics of
Communication**

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국 문 초 록

이 논문은 우리 환경의 생태계 보호를 위하여 뉴 디자인 가구가 어떻게 창조되고 있는지를 연구하였다. 즉, 오늘날 포스트 모던 시대에 뉴 디자인 가구 디자이너들이 환경 문제의 해결점의 하나로 새롭고 다른 방향으로 자신들의 가구를 창조할 수 있는가에 관한 담론이다. 우리가 안고 있는 생태계 보호를 위한 가구를 디자인할 때 필요한 재사용 및 재활용이 가능한 재료들, 유행을 초월한 가구, 가구의 견고성, 대량 생산 가구 등이 심각하게 분석되었다. 이 분석에 따르면 뉴 디자인 가구 디자이너들은 재활용된 재료들, 주거 환경 및 지속성, 새로운 가구 미학을 내포한 새로운 가구 디자인 철학을 얻을 수 있었다. 대량 생산된 가구는 경제성 때문에 많은 대중에게 접근되는 좋은 점보다는 우리에게 더 많은 쓰레기 더미를 준다라는 사실이 뉴 디자인 가구 디자이너들에게는 매우 심각한 문제였다. 따라서 가구 디자이너들이 양보다는 질에 중점을 둔 가구를 창조하는 것이 필요하다는 것이다. 결론적으로 환경적 책임을 느낀 뉴 디자인 가구 디자이너들은 튼튼하면서 재활용될 수 있으며 유행을 초월한 기능적이면서도 미적인 가구를 창조할 때만이 뉴 디자인 가구를 구입하는 소비자들이 뉴 디자인 가구를 올바른 방향에서 인식할 수 있을 것이다.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper, current issues in contemporary furniture will be raised and discussed critically in relation to the postmodern aesthetics of communication. New Design furniture designers have rethought, redefined, and redesigned their furniture for accessibility to the greatest number of people rather than to enhance their creativity, which emphasizes their background through beauty, decoration, and craftsmanship. Thereby, they consider durability, recycling, and parsimony for preservation of our ecology and environment at present as well as in the future. Therefore, to New Design furniture designers, the question concerning ecology is how design should respect the natural environment and save our energy potential. The designers have expressed their objects through the design culture of the century with technicalness at the beginning of the century "with the figurative avant-gardes in the '20s, with ideology and politics in the '30s, with sociology in the '60s, with semiotics in the '70s, and with history in the '80s" (Lampugnai, 1995, p. 3). Today, ecological concerns make the designers turn toward our environment. As the energy resources of the world are becoming reduced, conservation strategies should be carried out. Reusing and recycling materials are very significant considerations, and reducing refuse is even more significant.

Among the designers, Philippe Starck has been the best leading designer through the '80s and '90s in creating furniture, products, and architecture for our

lives. With his concept of sustaining our ecology, Starck tries to use craftsmanship and technology in his furniture for the generality of the people, the poor rather than the rich. Thus, based on critical discourse about postmodern aesthetics in contemporary furniture design, Starck's concept in his furniture and related concepts about our ecology and our environment will be raised and analyzed. In terms of the ecological issues of parsimony, energy saving, and pollution, I will explore critical discourse about out of fashion furniture, durability, mass production, furniture by a new design philosophy, and a new aesthetics in which the designers should care about and keep in mind these issues in creating their furniture in relation to postmodern aesthetics. Thereby, their theory and practice in relation to the critical discourse about furniture aesthetics in the postmodern era will be explored.

2. STARCK'S' CONCEPT FOR OUR ECOLOGY

2-1 Philippe Starck

Starck, a French furniture and industrial designer and architect, has tried to come up with rethought designs, surprising and new for mankind. In terms of his design concept, Capella describes Philippe Starck as follows:

Although most other designers cant stand him, Philippe Starck is the most famous designer on the planet... Nobody believes that Starck is going to give up designing in 2000, just as he failed to keep

his promise not to cut down another tree to make a chair.... When Philippe Starck burst onto the design scene in the 80s he was a genuine star. For the beginning of the next century, he has decided to give us a start and do something surprising, something new; he will be setting out on what he sees as a necessary course of action involving the dissolution and disappearance of design to the benefit of mankind. (Capella, 1997, p. 52)

2-2 Starcks' Concept:

Starck sees the last decade as a frenzy of creativity, which is not only enjoyable but very narcissistic as well in terms of the fact that New Design furniture designers emphasize aesthetics like decoration, beauty, and craftsmanship through their creativity. He thinks that the designers tend to design for themselves and for the others in their circle. However, Starck suggests that the designers must design something with more merit than creativity for the user. Performing a service for the user is the designers primary obligation so that an affinity of ideas and methods of design is very significant. Thereby, starck addresses the need for coherence between price and object. Attempting reasonable thought about rare and expensive materials resulting from pointless choices, Starck sees the good market of tomorrow as depending on technology and honesty, including the standards of fine culture. Hence, with the demands of some idealism and historic consciousness, swanky objects, limited editions, and artistic furniture tend to be the fad. Starck considers the creation of a

popular object as a chance to communicate useful concepts to bring about a better life for people at present as well as in the future. He thinks that seeking to remake the present is to seek the future already. Working with coherence at present, Starck wants to produce a single sketch with the right solution rather than writing thirty pages about a problem as some architects do. Thereby, Starck wants to create the most sober and durable objects infused his honesty about design (Zanco, 1994, p. 36).

Therefore, based on the facts, I will analyze the concepts that Starck has insisted on through his furniture to bring a better life for mankind according to the topics love, politics, the beautiful and good, and materials, with an example of a plastic and wooden chair. Starcks understanding of the postmodern aesthetics of communication is expressed in his furniture through these concepts.

2-2-1 Love

Starck identifies his work, which is a sign of friendship, a sign of friendliness, as the "love style," or the 'emotional' or affective style. Starck says, "The aim should be that people feel the object to be their own, something they already carried within themselves" (Capella, 1997, p. 55). Starck claims that love and happiness like Indians and whales are in danger of extinction; one of the problems in our lives is the loss of love, the general rise of hate. Starck mentions, Just as love is an invention, conceived on the basis of the prototype of maternal love, so is it liable to vanish (Chaslin, 1998, p. 88). Starck insists that designers create

the tools to give mankind a better life. That is why their work must not be to design the product for the sake of product alone; it is not to create products only accommodated to high technology. Seeing the goal as driving this furniture industry for human beings, Starck addresses the transfer of value from profit to human; the final target must be love. Thus, Starck, saying a designer who must be ideally motivated, comments:

I hear a phrase like target consumer and I think, What is that? Are we in Sarajevo with snipers? Today a designer has to be generous and not motivated by venality. The more you respect people and the more people love you. And they love you by buying your products. What one needs is not all these objects but just love (quoted in Horsham, 1996, p. 1).

2-2-2 Politics

Starck refers to himself as an anarcho-minimalist, who is not to the left or to the right (Capella, 1997, p. 55). Making a chair, a lamp, or a television set interests Starck more than designing them. He wants to become a politician rather than a designer through political action aimed at improving peoples lives. But in his definition of the political, Starck insists on being to the left of Socialist because according to him, that is the only thing possible in this binary electoral system. Hence, Starck suggests that he wants his ideas to benefit not celebrities or the rich who ask for unusual works only for themselves but the largest number of people possible. In terms of his politics for the

broadest range of people, Starck says:

I want to have time to find a new, more direct means of expression and to help society to solve some of its urgent problems. Like an army reservist, Im on call to serve people honestly. Initially I thought I could do something in politics, I started to mix with people in politics, but the strong stench of something rotten soon got me out of it. (Capella, 1997, p. 55)

2-2-3 'Beautiful' and 'Good'

Starck is not excited by beautiful objects created by the designers called good designers. He suggests that when furniture designers replace aesthetics with semantics, it is not the right direction for design. Starck claims that the concept of beautiful really has become obsolete. "Beautiful" should finally be replaced by "good," which is a more correct and more vital concept (Zanco, 1994, p. 34). Believing that a lot of beautiful objects, by subjective and cultural criteria, are very weak, Starck stresses that good is good forever, like apples, which have been good for over a million years (Zanco, 1994). Along with the change in the strategy and the purpose of design, the form and material of objects are freed. Hence, through the innovative use of technology and the reversal of formal stereotype, Philippe Starck has been able to adapt a different approach to design. Because of his decisive reversal of the categories of beautiful and good, critical reflection and the concept of service are possible for the classic theme of a chair and the more contemporary theme of

television set.

According to Zanco, therefore, based on his concept of good design, Starck considers materials and production systems with ergonomics and pleasurable forms, costs, and an association of ecological awareness to be indispensable parameters. As a result, the good shows not just a sound structural and aesthetic alternative to the beautiful but also, through materials such as plastic, a taste of novelty and a challenge to the performances offered by wood. The industrially made furniture of plastic, such as a stacking chair, is convenient to transport and store, which is strictly linked to the necessities of contemporary living. The plastic chairs, which are separable, recyclable, and durable have a number of advantages for our ecology (Zanco, 1994, p. 56).

2-3 Materials

From his ecological consideration of which materials in our environment are getting increasingly rare, Starck sets his brain in motion for the use of every gram of energy and every minute of human intelligence. In the postmodern era, contemporary furniture designers quite often favor the use of natural wood in their work. Against this practice, according to Fiell & Fiell (1991), Starck argues that cutting down a tree just to put your ass on it is impossible; the tree must be recognized as having a soul over petrol which has no soul. Thus, the only real ecological answer is plastic, which he describes as an "aristocratic material" (p. 149). Starck insists that because of ecological issues, all product and furniture

designers must care about the use of materials. Plastic has the potential for recycling and use in durable products which are ecologically responsible (Fiell & Fiell, 1991).

In terms of the ecological concept, Starck's description of plastic, fur, and wood shows his intelligent brain in motion. First, plastic is not expensive and also pure. As the first product of human intelligence in Starck's concept, plastic is a high-value material which has lots of possibilities in the creation of furniture for our environment. Starck says, "it's better than what God invented" (Capella, 1997, p. 56). Second, arguing against use of materials derived from animals, Starck claims they have a soul which must not be killed by Nazi-like humans. However, in some cases, some pieces of leather in contact with the human skin are tolerable to him. Finally, as for wood, Starck says that he uses "1mm particle wood, a highly intelligent material" against solid timber (Capella, 1997). As a suggestion from his concept about materials, Starck explores a piece of furniture with plastic and wood associated as well matched.

2-4. Example: A Plastic and Wooden Chair

The exuberance of the "all-plastic" actually prevailed in the '70s when plastic had no tradition as a material (Picchi, 1996, p. 70). Today, as a design material reflecting different formal and cultural attitudes, plastic has directly shown the history of industrially manufactured furniture directly. However, Picchi (1996) suggests that the conjunction of plastic and

wood might be referred to as the unexpected' marriage of two materials belonging to very different technological and formal worlds, from which comes a chair that can be disassembled (p. 70). The plastic and wooden chair produced by a collaboration between the French designer and a firm represents the tradition of plastic as a domestic material (Picchi, 1996). In terms of comparable roles, wood traditionally conveys warm qualities from nature, whereas "plastic demonstrates the capacity to welcome those qualities by connecting somehow with the mimetic root of its own history, when it assumed the warm tones of tortoiseshell, horn, ivory" (Picchi, 1996, 70). Coming from different technological worlds, while plastic is an industrial material, which means series, large numbers, color, and repeatable form, wood is referred to as part of the artisan tradition of furniture and indispensable to the precious quality of the carpenters' art. In terms of the comparison played, Picchi describes the plastic and wooden chair that

The formal simplification of the legs, in turned beech, and of the backrest, in bent plywood is achieved through the design of the mould for the plastic which includes the solutions adopted for threading, joints, thickness. Starck declares that he loves forms which have a 'contrasted' aesthetic made of modelled surfaces and bare edges.... In Starcks chair plastic seems to recapture an idea of luxury, of being precious, in absolute harmony with the implicit

connotations of wood. (Picchi, 1996, p. 72)

The color of the plastic wooden chair is in the discreet tones of pastel nuances, while the glossy surfaces are steered back to the "velvet" treatment of the glazed finish more suitable for the social representation of classical French interiors (Picchi, 1996, p. 72).

3. FURNITURE DESIGN FOR OUR ECOLOGY

Currently, some other New Design furniture designers have attempted to create their objects in consideration of the ecology of our environment. In fact, the expression of postmodern aesthetics in New Design furniture tends to lead the designers to waste natural materials for their aesthetic or decorative value. Thus, some designers have tended to simplify their work by minimal concepts and use of materials from recycled resources; the designers also try to make durable objects. They tend to be associated with technology for mass production in creating their furniture like the designers in Modernism rather than the artisan skill in the traditions of craft. Thereby, their theory and practice in relation to the critical discourse about furniture aesthetics in the postmodern era will be explored.

3-1 Reusing and Recycling Materials

At least since the late 1960s, designers have raised issues in their work about the limited energy resources of the world and the need for parsimony. As long as furniture designers use materials

for creating their works, the pledge to observe a careful use of the resources of the earth, and to protect against pollution and destruction, is seen as a civil duty that no one can deny. Thus, the furniture in our everyday world ought to be the first to take up that pledge for our ecology. If rooms are furnished with furniture and objects that do not have to be periodically thrown away and replaced because they are subject to passing fashions, the pledge can be carried out (Lampugnai, 1995). Thus, in reusing and recycling materials, it is necessary for furniture designers to use sophisticated energy-saving and waste-recycling systems in order to make a good deal of furniture which itself is qualified as 'ecological' in the process of becoming variously 'green' (Lampugnai, 1995, p. 3).

3-2 Out of Fashion Furniture

For the sake of our ecology, it is significant for people "to keep furniture for decades or hundreds of years, maybe mending it and restoring it periodically as our grandparents did; to conserve commodities not until they go out of fashion, but until they no longer perform their function and can no longer be repaired or adapted to perform them anew" (Lampugnai, 1996, p. 3). In fact, contemporary furniture tends to make fashion by one-off or limited-edition which designers can create in a short time. They experiment with and challenge their furniture with a variety of features from postmodern aesthetics in such a way as to be popular. The furniture tends to be fashionable and then, later, goes out of fashion. This kind of furniture tends to

make people fashion-conscious; the furniture that is out of fashion may be thrown away so that it increases refuse. As a result, the out of fashion furniture causes a pile of rubbish and waste of materials. Therefore, furniture designers must consider from the standpoint of their furniture, now to produce less so that less materials are consumed and people will throw away less furniture. When the designers don't squander energy, they don't have to worry about ways of finding 'clean' energy. The designers must keep in mind saving materials for the benefit of society more than the individual can through thrift.

3-3 Durability

Creating durable and lasting furniture is one of the most significant achievements for protecting our ecology. Durability of furniture makes the furniture reusable so that furniture refuse would be largely eliminated. Primary demands for durable furniture may depend upon design culture, which reflects the ideology, technology, marketing, and fashion of the time. The history of design would have to be reconstructed not as separation from tradition but case by case. Furniture designers may produce their furniture with durable materials that respect and protect the natural environment. However, Lampugnai points out the fact that the designers may design their furniture

in such a way as to inveigle or even force their purchaser to throw them away after a couple of seasons, thereby creating the necessity for new products (and hence new energy consumption),

and contributing to the mountains of refuse that afflict the Earth's landscapes. (Lampugnai, 1995, p. 3)

The designers creating postmodern aesthetics in their furniture tend to express their feeling or emotion with any materials from the world. The works that resemble expressionist painting might be among the first of the New Design pieces to be eliminated. The pieces tend never to respect the fact that furniture should be comfortable or functional because the furniture designers may want their works to remain just in the category of art.

3.4 Mass Production

For the maximum energy saving and the least environment pollution, it might be necessary for furniture designers to consider mass production as a waste of resources because the ideal of ecology is to suspend mass production. In the furniture industry, vast quantities of furniture are manufactured, purchased, and then senselessly eliminated, while the idea is focusing on the production of a few, fine and solid pieces made to withstand the passing of time. The designers must not design and mass-produce shoddy products that are almost at once turned into tons of rubbish. The quality of mass-produced furniture must be checked out. In this way, the designers can make manufacturers concentrate on quality products while putting them on the market at a satisfactory price. In creating furniture with quality rather than quantity, they can also make "consumers curb their investments clearly quite considerable to rare occasions

in a lifetime" (Lampugnai, 1997, p. 3). Finally, Arango (1997) suggests that we will "find a way to transform our world from one obsessed with quantity to one that values quality" (p. 85).

4. FURNITURE OF A NEW DESIGN PHILOSOPHY:

4-1 Design from Reused and Recycled Materials

By means of recycling, adapting, and reusing resources become the basis of a new design philosophy for furniture designers. As indicated by more sensitive designers, environmental impact must become an indispensable criterion for sizing up any furnishing. Recyclable plastic is one of the materials which can be recycled and reused together with natural wood and aluminum for mass production. Thus, the transmutation of refuse into reuse, the generation of new furniture from old, will permit furniture designers to achieve this metamorphosis in furniture design. The designers must learn to use less, which contributes "to that newly emerging and fecund definition of design excellence which adds environmental responsibility to the established criteria of function, aesthetics and economics" (Arango, 1997, p. 85). Thus, according to Arango (1997), as impassioned defenders and ardent reformists of the planet, furniture designers "may begin to communicate a coherent vision to the public, combining aesthetic with ethical values to engage the imagination of the ordinary citizen as never before" (p. 85). Through their leadership, our society may

come to see what the designers have done for our ecology.

4-2 Furniture, Habitat, and Sustainability

For environmental sustainability, today's furniture design can create a transition toward sustainability which is technically practicable and socially acceptable in quality, functionality, and beauty. With an evolved strategic design, contemporary Italian design pieces in the "*Ambiente e Ambienti*" exhibition are remarkable for "their quality, functionality, and beauty, which also offer some insight into new forms of daily behavior" (Capella, 1997, p. 83). These elements suggest to designers and the people that to consume less is to live better. Doing with less is supposed to increase welfare while reducing material consumption; minimizing pieces, making them flexible, and simplifying their components are involved in realizing these objectives. Enhancement of the material must make one learn to love the material, emphasize its dignity, take advantage of its durability, and value its quality. Stackable, transformable, foldable, separable, and transportable furniture will be created for our living spaces.

Therefore, in this early stage of ecological awareness, Capella (1997) suggests that a transition is demanded by re-thinking and re-design of the existing furniture to development of more ecologically efficient systems so that new mixes of products and services meet new demands for the welfare of mankind. Perhaps, for the designers, combining environmental awareness with their creative

and inventive thought may be conducive to a significant stand with fruitful ideas for the future of ecology.

4-3 A New Aesthetics

From careful use, reuse, recycling, and sustainability for our ecology, a new aesthetics will transform New Design furniture and result in a design style with solidity, durability, and sobriety which our society finds acceptable. To create lasting furniture is to keep one's grandparents and one's own furniture; to get furniture repaired is to become appropriate and elegant. As a result, the new aesthetic is not an aesthetic of poverty. It does not mean pretending to be poor, but means instead handling luxury with intelligence, separating the useless luxury from the sensible. As essentiality distilled by complexity and a rich simplicity, the furniture aesthetics would be created with a minimum of machines and appliances and a maximum of simplicity and frugality (Lampugnai, 1995). Thus, the furniture may be minimal, simple, and functional in the future mode.

5. CONCLUSION

Today, New Design furniture, which represents the postmodern aesthetics of communication presented by one-off or limited-edition with quality, is thought to make sense for the future resolving the problems of durable and recyclable materials by taking design beyond fashion for the benefit of our ecology. Seeking to complement a sustainable ecology, designers

may continue to present the postmodern aesthetic of communication in New Design furniture, which lets people enjoy and appreciate the furniture in their everyday lives. Currently, consciously and unconsciously minimal, functional, and simplified mass-produced furniture is demanded to complement quality in beauty, decoration, and craftsmanship rather than quantity, waste of materials, and piled refuse from out of fashion furniture. The functional and solid furniture is modern because it is comfortable to use and opposite to the whims of fashion. However, modern furniture by mass production left people bored and displeased because they could see the furniture anywhere. As a furniture designer or an artist, the New Design furniture designer must create a piece of furniture which is durable, recyclable, beautiful, comfortable, and economic so that people can appreciate and enjoy it in their everyday lives by generation by generation. Therefore, in speculating about the solutions to the problems raised, basically, New Design furniture of high quality is needed for our environment.

The principled quality over quantity may mean New Design furniture is produced with decoration or ornament by craftsmanship. The necessity for compensation through the artisan in production of furniture which can heighten our perception of mass production is necessary for quality in mass production. In fact, a growing number of architects and furniture designers such as Philippe Starck, Ettore Sottsass, and Ron Arad claim the status of craftsperson-designer-architect. In the postmodern era, the interest of their architectural works and furniture design

stems partly from the high quality craftsmanship contained in them. Thus, in spite of the industrial ambitions of the mass manufacturer and the architecture-constructors profession, these creators see furniture and architecture as an artifact, made with still fewer machines and more specialized tools than those used in the production of "design products" (Burkhardt, 1997, p. 3). Thereby, New Design furniture, which brings the postmodern aesthetics of communication to peoples daily lives, may be created with beauty, decoration, and craftsmanship, in durable and recyclable materials, which must be invented, experimented with, and challenged. Natural and artificial materials can be mixed for the harmony of craftsmanship and evolving technology. The furniture produced by the mixed materials can satisfy the largest number of people from one-off or limited-editions; it must be pleasant to touch and to look at and not uselessly increase the waste of energy that people already perpetrate, or the piles of rubbish that people already produce.

Therefore, in leading people toward the designers intention and in making people aware of the designers purpose for our environment, New Design furniture, in complementing the issues for our ecology can bring itself to the largest number of people automatically or spontaneously not only through peoples living spaces but also through galleries or museums. Through the New Design furniture, the designers will be the very leaders in the invention of a new culture, which people need to follow for a better life, for preservation of our ecology and environment at present and in the future.

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