

# The Literature Review for Postmodern Furniture Aesthetics of communication called New Design Furniture

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored the literature review for intending to make contemporary furniture expressed as postmodern aesthetics accessible to the broadest possible public, particularly through an examination and realization of art and everyday life, using qualitative analysis about the related literature as the principal methodology. The postmodern furniture aesthetics of communication expressed through double-coding, which was seen by Charles Jencks as the defining element of Post-Modernism, is characterized by the use of ideas from the traditions of craft. Hence, I dealt with pre-Modern furniture and Modern-furniture aesthetics as the background of postmodern furniture called New design furniture. As a result, contemporary furniture called New design furniture represented the use of ornament, craftsmanship, or beauty from the traditions of craft, which was a main source for communication value in postmodern furniture aesthetics.

***Key words: Communication, Craftsmanship, Postmodern furniture aesthetics, Pre-Modern, Modern, New design furniture***

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## 1. Introduction

When searching for literature that provided for the inclusion of postmodern furniture aesthetics, I encountered the following: (a) pre-Modern furniture aesthetics; (b) Modern furniture aesthetics; and (c) postmodern furniture aesthetics. Although the postmodern means the combination of Modern techniques and usually traditional building, postmodern furniture tends to emphasize decoration or ornament rather than function or comfort in producing pieces in relation to metaphor, narrative, symbol, or humor, which were represented in pre-Modern furniture aesthetics. Hence, I will deal with pre-Modern and Modern furniture briefly as the background of postmodern furniture aesthetics to help furniture designers understand postmodern furniture, especially that which is considered 'one-off' work as is characteristic of painting or sculpture. From the following literature, I will categorize and define areas of research that are necessary for better understanding of the proposed questions. Contemporary furniture in Postmodernism is called New Design furniture, and represents the postmodern furniture aesthetics of communication. I will take issue with the following: (1) the background of New Design furniture, (2) the characteristics of New Design furniture in terms of its communication value, and (3) the critical discourse about the communication value of New Design furniture. In a brief description, I will review the major sources used for understanding each area. These areas are

related to each other in clarifying and identifying the communication value of New Design furniture in Postmodernism.

## 2. Defining Pre-Modern Furniture

Before the machine age, the history of furniture had been characterized by a continuity through development, revival, and eclecticism. However, as the machine age was affected by the Industrial Revolution, furniture in Modernism showed a discontinuity with historicism. The period between the early 1800s and the Great War of 1914 is called the machine age in the history of furniture; Watson observes:

It is also essential to realize that, unlike previous centuries, nineteenth-century a development of continuous progression. The introduction of a style did not immediately cause all those that had previously existed to become unfashionable, and practically all the major nineteenth-century stylistic expressions co-existed to a greater or lesser degree throughout the hundred years.<sup>1)</sup>

In the history of furniture, the style right before the machine age is called the Neo-Classical reaction.

According to the book *The History of Furniture* written by Watson in 1982, Ancient, Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, Rococo, and Neo-Classical furniture styles had been popular before the machine age. Romanesque and Gothic styles are referred to as Medieval furniture. Thus, from Ancient furniture to the Neo-Classical revival, the history of furniture developed continuously. The furniture was free to express decoration with historicism. It is

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1) Watson, F. 1982, *The history of furniture*. New York: Crescent Books, p193

significant for us to understand the Neo-Classical reaction in that postmodern furniture has been referred to as the revival, reintroduction, and reinterpretation of the traditions of craft, a Neo-classical revival, the Arts and Crafts movement, Art Nouveau, and Art Deco. In furniture history, specifically regarding the furniture right before the machine age, the Neo-Classical style with the other art movements, as stated previously, is one of the major styles which impacts Postmodern furniture (Boyce, 1988; Dormer, 1987; Fiell & Fiell, 1991; Watson, 1982). The neo-classical reaction comprises a "European manner of furniture design and decoration characterized by the use of ideas, forms and motifs taken from ancient Greek and Roman art and architecture" (Boyce, 1988, p. 204).

During the 15th-17th centuries, Renaissance furniture reflected ancient Greek and Roman culture. In Renaissance furniture, there are two classical sources, Roman architecture and the sculptural programs of ancient sarcophagi. From the latter, such motifs as the Urn, the Putto, mythological beasts, the Sphinx, and the Chimera were taken by furniture makers for their furniture. The makers were involved in a greater naturalism in carving against the stylization of medieval furniture. The trend in carving stimulated furniture makers to use walnut because the wood is easier to carve than the traditional oak. From simple geometrical outlines to the all-important classical ornament, with a few exceptions such as the tripod stand, the forms of ancient furniture, which were rarely copied before the nineteenth century, were adopted in the

Neo-Classical revival. Walnut and oak have been used by postmodern furniture makers for their carving following the ideas from the traditions of craft.

By the 1770s, the trends of the Neo-Classical revival had become an international style, like the Rococo which preceded it. Different national styles in Italy, Greece and Egypt were united and inevitably developed along similar lines: "a studied eclecticism was adopted after 1800 - leading to a more archaeological approach and creating even closer stylistic links between countries" (Watson, 1982, p. 139).

In the Neo-Classical revival, the ornament could by and large be traced to ancient Rome. For their own traditional revivals, each country in Europe studied the classical furniture. Thus, in the early French Neo-Classical furniture, a nostalgia for the Grand Siecle of Louis XIV is noticeable. As the heavy classical form was lightened, an increasing delicacy and refinement in furniture was seen from 1770 to 1780. Thereafter, a number of Egyptian antiques shown in Rome "excited interest in the eighteenth century, and various advanced pieces of furniture with hieroglyphic ornament bear witness to a certain knowledge of Egyptian design"(Watson, 1982, p. 139). Thus, at that time, Egypt joined Greece and Rome as a major inspiration.

### **3. The machine age**

During the nineteenth century, a rapidly

expanding technology influenced the development of domestic art. Production by means of mechanical methods was pervasive among furniture manufacturers. The technology provided furniture cheaply by reproducing it and easily elaborating workmanship. Thus, according to Watson (1982), although before the machine age good furniture was for the privileged few, during this period furniture was available for many people, and they could buy it cheaply and easily. The erosion of craft or craftsmanship was inevitable as a result, but this was overlooked "by a market which was dominated by a desire for richness, novelty and value for money" (Watson, 1982, p. 191). The appearance of furniture was changed by technological processes. By the invention of the coil-spring, the perfection of methods of laminating and shaping timber, and the introduction of metal parts, new forms and new functions were made possible in the manufacture of furniture (Watson, 1982).

From the development of furniture by technological processes in the nineteenth century, the collectors of antique furniture came to play a major role. Watson explains their role:

Here was a type of person who seems not to have existed before the nineteenth century, for although 'Cabinets of Curiosities' and collections of relics had been put together by rich men throughout Europe since the early Renaissance, it was not until the early 1800s that collectors began to acquire pieces of old furniture and to introduce them into their houses for everyday use. (Watson, 1982, p. 191)

Such a phenomenon probably occurred because people could not commonly see

the furniture that continued to be developed in terms of historicism. The machine age allowed the furniture makers and designers new freedom of design in the use of new technology in their exploration of theory and practice.

As produced through the machine age, the principles of the rationalist design attempted by the Modern movement represent the basis of modern furniture design in the twentieth-century. As the styling in modern furniture is in the opposite direction from design, furniture designers in the modern movement consider styling as inevitably anti-rational (Fiell & Fiell, 1991; Watson, 1982). Aesthetics considers style, but modern furniture design, according to functionalism and the industrial process, first of all is concerned with good design. Thus, a harmonized balance of the furniture characterized by balance of design and style was represented as possessing enduring aesthetics or functionalism and powerfully expressing the spirit of the time through the machine.

The eclecticism and unashamed opulence of the Neo-Classic revival was denied: "While renouncing the use of superfluous ornament as being symptomatic of a decadent society, the arts and crafts movement turned towards a simpler and more rational code of design ethics" (Fiell & Fiell, 1991, p. 8). However, the Arts and Crafts movement, which stressed the historicism of elaborated decoration by labor against the machine age, was initiated by Williams Morris and John Ruskin in 1861 (Boyce, 1992). In practice and theory, the designers associated with the movement

generally attempted elements and motifs derived from the Gothic furniture of the Middle Ages, the "golden age" of crafts,<sup>2)</sup>

After the Arts and Crafts movement against the machine, Art Nouveau and Art Deco tried to express values of modernity such as functionalism, minimalism, and mass-production by using the metals of new technology. Mass-production influenced international furniture design because of the number of pieces that could be produced. Art Nouveau and Art Deco continued to express the furniture design of decoration influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement, while accepting the utility of the machine for economic and minimal design. These three Arts movements have influenced the design of postmodern furniture. They have played a major role in revival, reinterpretation, and reintroduction of the traditions of craft in postmodern furniture. Thus, the major movements which came out of the reaction to the machine age either opposed or adapted ornament and the new technology (Fiell & Fiell, 1991; Spencer, 1991; Watson, 1982).

#### 4. Defining Modern Furniture

What is this modern movement in furniture design? What is modern furniture? According to Amery,

to Williams Morris the advent of modernism meant the arrival of the machine that was to destroy all 'joy in the making'. To the Bauhaus the combination of the advantages of

mass production and the virtual abolition of ornament provided designers with a chance to make things that rejoiced in their function.<sup>3)</sup>

The modern furniture movement was affected by the Industrial Revolution. The first industrial revolution in England, which was challenged by France and overtaken by Germany and America by the end of the century, had a great influence on modern furniture style and design (Dormer, 1987). Germany and America "came to grips with new technologies, such as electricity and electronics".<sup>4)</sup>

In an attempt to simplify things, "the Germans invented industrial design and the Americans invented mass production, and then the two countries copied each other" (Dormer, 1987, p. 9). However, the Germans and Americans, as well as the British, were shocked by the brutalizing side of progress seen in some concepts such as 'Ornament is a Crime' by Adolf Loos.<sup>5)</sup>

As a result, Modernism expressed by the progress of technology differs from the modern movement as an aesthetic expressed through such progress. The Bauhaus, established in Germany in 1919 by Walter Gropius, represented for the first time modernist ideas attempted in a truly academic context. As a German design school, located in Weimar from 1919 to 1928, it was an "aesthetic catalyst of the

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3) Amery, C. 1991. *Pioneers of Modern furniture*. London: Lund Humphries Publishers, p1

4) Dormer, P. 1987. *The new furniture, Trends, and tradition*. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd. p9

5) Fuller, P. 1988. *The search for a Postmodern aesthetic*. John Thakara ed. *Design after Mdermism*, p125

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2) Boyce, C. 1988. *Dictionary of furniture*. New York: Facts on File, Inc. p16

International style of design and the theories of functionalism were its ideas" (Boyce, 1992, p.24). In fact, the concepts of the Bauhaus were related to socialist roots. The furniture designers of the Bauhaus insisted on a 'better' society through the achievement of good design; the Bauhaus prompted "functional and aesthetically pleasing design for the masses through the means of large-scale mass production" (Fiell & Fiell, 1991, p 10). The Bauhaus was influenced by the technical revolution. Reyner Banham, a design historian and philosopher, points out that "at first the modernists at the Bauhaus had technical innovations, such as cantilevers and glass walling in architecture (and metal bending and fabrication techniques in furniture), but no aesthetic discipline to bind everything together" (Dormer, 1987, p. 10).

The public began to recognize the modernist idea, which was simple, with flush surfaces and basic forms and the use of minimal components in creating the furniture. For example, as a geometric abstracted form influenced by the fine art of the De Stijl movement, the Red and Blue chair by Rietveld shows an aesthetic idea derived from functionalism. Many people considered the chair painted with red and blue and made of flat rectilinear pieces of wood to represent the first major modern design of the aesthetic movement. The chair has been described as "the abstract-real sculpture of our future interior" (Fiell & Fiell, 1991, p. 10).

In the 1920s and 1930s, the social aims of the International Style in architecture and furniture design were to provide housing for

the masses and create better work environments for everyone, but the influence of the social ideals of the International Styles failed to continue into the 1940s and 1950s; "the minimalism of Mies van der Rohe—the famous 'less is more' doctrine of refining buildings to their fundamental elements—was adopted in the 1950s by big business" (Spencer, 1991, p. 94). Mies van der Rohe referred to components minimized in number as encouraging aesthetic purity as well as facilitating mass production by industrial technology not only in modern architecture but in modern furniture as well. Miesian primary aesthetics became the mainstream in modern furniture (Spencer, 1991).

In the 1960s and 1970s, according to Amery (1991), Modern furniture was taken into "a new modular and yet organic world" (p. 2). Moulded plastic and soft materials were used in Modern furniture of this period, which was intended to create "a sense of anthropomorphism" to make it highly real. As a result, Modern furniture in the 1960s and 1970s makes a more emotional appeal and has become more than just a support. In fact, this suggests that Modern furniture was not quite as comfortable as expected "with the purely functional formula" (p. 2).

## 5. Defining Postmodern Furniture

Jencks' double coding, a useful definition of Post-Modernism, means "the continuation of Modernism and its transcendence," with

ideas from Pre-Modernism or traditions like Gothic and Renaissance art and architecture.  
6)

Jencks (1986) mentions that postmodern architects tend to emphasize contextual and cultural additions to their inventions in their architecture. Thus, many Postmodernists, who are involved in allegory and narrative, adapt and invent mythology. Renewed concern for symbolism and meaning is focused on semantic aspects. Jencks's symbolic furniture is usually "designed to be placed in many different contexts" (Collins & Papadakis, 1989, p. 124). Collins & Papadakis (1989) maintain that "a symbolic furniture, still somewhat general but capable of specific meaning and function, might reassert its rightful place and give anonymous space a place and location"(see Fig.1, 2).<sup>7)</sup>

Jencks provides an imaginative look at symbolic architecture in history:

Now imagine another world in which everything has both a public and a private meaning. The leaders and the inhabitants of this world lead a charmed life because everything they do, no matter how insignificant, or even wicked, is part of some larger story... The plot of the world's culture, though rich in variety, is still leading somewhere. And this direction, while it allows for different interpretations, is known and cherished by all. Everyday the inhabitants of Significatus - the land of meaning -awake like children amazed at the discovery of new relation between things... This web of signification also provided a basis for meaning in architecture that continued into the twentieth century with, for instance, the work of the Russian Constructivists... The Greeks, Romans, and Christians (like the Moslems,

Hindus and Buddhists) knew what to ask of their architects. Indeed it is only in our own era that the client has walked off the job and stopped supplying the symbolic intentions and style. Although our fabled land of Significatus may appear strange to us today, it was a norm in the pre-industrial past - a fact which becomes obvious with a look at the meanings of historic architecture. (Jencks, 1985, p. 21)<sup>8)</sup>

In speculating about the source of meaning in architecture, as stated previously by Jencks, there are numerous examples, such as the Egyptian pyramids and temples in various lands. Symbolic architecture in ancient times "took on many precious meanings with all tied in with both daily life and cosmic time" (Jencks, 1985, p. 21). Thus, the meaning of symbolic architecture was a meditation on everyday existence and eternity.

Jencks has shown the same theory on the history and practice of symbolic architecture and furniture in Postmodernism as that presented in his critical views of the symbolic architecture of the past. Jencks (1989) suggests that "the idea of treating furniture as a small building has a long history, since architecture naturally lends its language to constructional forms and various scales".<sup>9)</sup>

Collins & Papadakis (1989) describe Jencks'furniture in Postmodernism as symbolic and metaphoric with meaning intended for communication at various levels. A piece of symbolic furniture is narrative and metaphoric, and may be humorous as well. In designing a kind of furniture that is symbolically meaningful,

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6) Jencks, C. 1986. What is Post-Modernism? Art & Design, p14

7) Collins, M., & Papadakis, A. 1989. Post-Modern design. p124

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8) Jencks, C. 1985. Symbolic architecture. New York: Rizzoli, p21

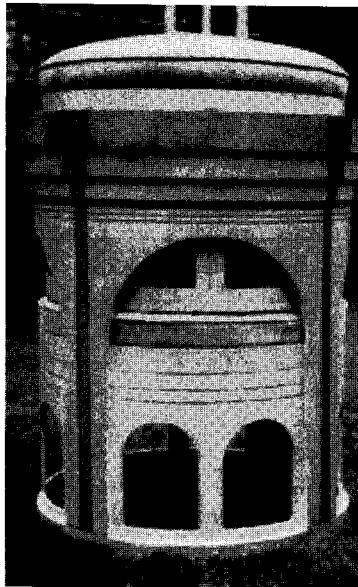
9) Jencks, C. 1989. Symbolic objects, p140



architects have used very simple forms and proportions to resymbolize or retransform architectures of the past, thus conveying meaning.



(Fig. 1) Jencks, 1984, Colosseum



(Fig. 2) Jencks, 1984, Colosseum  
(Collins & Papadakis, 1989)

## 6. New Design Furniture

### 6-1 Background of New Design furniture

New Design furniture represents an eclectic and pluralistic approach based on Postmodern ideas. Collins & Papadakis

(1989) helped to develop my notions about the background of New Design furniture. They defend the legitimacy of the term 'Post-modern,' which Charles Jencks supported in *Modern Movements in Architecture* (1973), *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (1977), and *Post-Modern Classicism* (1980). These works of Jencks provide an excellent overview of the emergence of anti-Modernism and anti-Rationalism from architecture and furniture design of the Modern Architects.

Collins & Papadakis (1989) state that Postmodern architects such as Charles Jencks and Robert Venturi "have re-established eclecticism, pluralism, decoration, and what in America is called 'ornamentalism'" (p. 66). As a result, Postmodernists have emphasized a new dictum against the principle "less is more" of modern furniture. The concept that "less is a bore" by Robert Venturi has been recognized and applied not only by architects but also by furniture designers in Postmodernism. In their work, they explore the idea of ornament from traditions such as Gothic, Renaissance, etc.

The assertion of Collins & Papadakis (1989) that "ornament is no longer a crime" in Post Modernism can be seen as a reaction against the international Modern work of architects such as Mies Vander Rohe, Walter Gropius, and Le Corbusier (p. 66). Peter Fuller (1988) states that ornament reflects "the web of man's thoughts and feelings" (p.117). This recognition of the value of ornamentation led Fuller to view the destruction of ornament within the Modernist movement as an indication of "the underlying emptiness of the aesthetic,

ethical and spiritual life of that age" (p. 117). In Fuller's view, "no arbitrary 'New Ornamentalism'" could compensate for the void created (p. 117). Thus, for example, in comparing modern ideas to Post-Modern ideas, according to Collins & Papadakis,

one of the clichés of the Modern Movement had been the flat roof, which Le Corbusier had suggested was a better use of space than the traditional pitched roof. The responding cliché of Post-Modernism is the return of the pitched roof in architecture, or a reference to it in 'micro-architectural' design. Modernism had mostly relied on one solid, the cube; Post-Modernism reapplies others, such as the cone, pyramid and cylinder. Much Post-Modern design is mimetic of housing typologies which are urban, including the pitched roof house common to many cities before the Modern Movement. (Collins & Papadakis, 1989, p. 79)

Bringing this concept along, most of the Post-Modern architects have turned their attention toward furniture design, and their decoration expressed in Postmodern furniture has reminded people of the traditions.

In reflecting back over the history of furniture, the decorative arts have been closely related to furniture craftsmanship. In Postmodernism, the works of art and craft have been expressed through the adapted reciprocal ideas of artists and furniture designers. According to Manhart and Manhart (1987), to some extent, the arts in the 1980s have "absorbed the materials, techniques, utilitarian forms, and decorative styles once associated only with crafts" (p. 172). Manhart & Manhart (1987) suggest that the blurring of art/craft distinctions today was predicted by Robert Morris when he spoke of current art in 1981. Morris noted, "Refusing to leave its functionalism at the door of the gallery,

such work occupies two places at once and the distinction between fine and applied art gets further breached".<sup>10)</sup>

Dormer (1987) mentions that fine-art or applied-art labels and art-history primers can help us distinguish the art & craft work, but "we can do more by speculating about the work's intention to decide whether it fulfills its purpose (and if the purpose was worth fulfilling)" (p. 131). In considering the work's intention, Dormer (1987) stresses that any person would probably agree about the meaning of a work; people have different perspectives but their mentalities will be similar. Various interpretations may be appropriate for a work (as with different critical readings of a novel), yet area of discourse will be a common ground (p. 131).

Fiell & Fiell (1991) describe the attempt of Post-modern furniture designers to separate furniture design from industry and involve it more closely with art and craft. Postmodern furniture designers from the UK and USA sought inspiration from historical references during the 1980s, while futuristic subjects attracted Japanese designers and designers from the Continent. Thus, American and British postmodern architect-designers reintroduced and reinterpreted ornament for their works and rational design motifs. The designers turned to the creation of one-off or limited-edition furniture, which emphasized beauty, decoration, and craftsmanship rather than

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10) Manhart, M., & Manhart, T. 1987. The eloquent object: the evolution of American Art in craft media since 1945. Tulsa, The Philbrook Museum of art, p185

function or comfort.

## 6-2 Characteristics of New Design furniture

Downey states that the idea, content, and conclusions of New Design are closely related in subject, time period, and spirit to Neo furniture.

For instance, the New Design manifesto identified recent turn-of-the-century designs as distinct from the experiences of the 1960s and 1970s, giving the following definition of them: New Design breaks the unity of languages to the profit of a simultaneous multiplicity of styles: from neo-primitivism to holidism, from theatrical to brutalism, from abundant eclecticism to severe minimalism. The manifesto writers go on to define the New Design as producing objects which have, above all, a communication value. They speak of a sensory revolution where the object is not as much a reality to understand as a presence to perceive our sensory and corporal impressions. (Downey, 1992, p. 9)<sup>11</sup>

In addition to this definition of New Design furniture, Downey (1992) mentions that the human aspect of the New Design furniture is the communicative element as seen through its combination "of the tree branch with machine-made materials in a single chair, and the animation of furniture with animal or even human attributes" (p. 15). New Design furniture is seen as sensual, fluid, and alive. Such elements as metaphor, symbol, animation, narrative, and fluidity in New Design furniture communicate with the public. Thus, New Design furniture expresses its aesthetics of communication by transcending functionality "to move on to more emotional issues" (Downey, 1992, p. 15).

According to Fiell & Fiell (1991), contemporary furniture designers in Postmodernism intend to create not mass-production but 'one-off' and limited-edition furniture. The designers can express their ideas "more freely through designs that employ a wide variety of forms and materials" (p. 150). They appeal to our emotion by means of their furniture through the tactile and visual qualities of their materials. By exploiting glass, fabric, and sheet steel with lyrical fluency, the furniture designers transform everyday materials into beautiful furniture. However, their furniture is not functional. Fiell & Fiell (1991) stress that "these designers have not transposed furniture into art, but aim specially to create poetic, three-dimensional design which possesses aesthetic characteristics similar to those of painting and sculpture" (p. 150).

Dormer (1987) suggests that contemporary furniture from oppositional chic to restaurant or shop design has shown that mainstream activity does not take commerce into consideration. Some people argue that this is a serious limitation, but others anticipate "a strong commercial future for new design and its independent designers" (p. 136). Dormer mentions Charlotte's expectations:

In 1984 Charlotte said: 'I think we can anticipate a return to a more primitive form of craftsmanship -not in the sense of going back to the techniques of the past, but a return to smaller scales of operation, making use of all the potential offered by present and future technology. There may still be a need for manufacture on a large scale to meet some needs, but more and more items will be produced by individuals, by artisans'. (Dormer, 1987, p. 136)

In this context, each individual designer

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11) Downey, C. 1992. Neo-furniture. New York: Rizzoli, p9

could be influenced enormously by his or her own creativity and diversify the furniture of Postmodernism. Influenced by individual liberty, contemporary furniture in Postmodernism tends to address decoration, beauty, or craftsmanship rather than comfort or function.

Admittedly, New Design furniture has failed to meet comfort or functionality requirements, which differ from those of the aesthetics in art. Why do people want to buy a piece of furniture? What is the intention of furniture designers in creating a piece of furniture? In spite of the blurring of distinctions between art and craft, we can demand an answer to these questions about comfort or functionality from New Design furniture designers. In reference to these questions, according to Donald Judd (1993), an Italian furniture designer and architect, the goal of furniture, which must be functional or comfortable to use, is different from that of art. Judd (1993) suggests that a chair that is not functional and appears to be only art, is ridiculous. In the context of art and chair, Judd stresses that:

The art of a chair is not its resemblance to art, but is partly its reasonableness, usefulness and scale as a chair. These are proportions which comprise its visible reasonableness. The art in art is partly the assertion of someone's interest regardless of other considerations.<sup>12)</sup>

Judd (1993) states that "a work of art exists as itself; a chair exists as a chair itself, and the idea of a chair isn't a chair" (p. 7).

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12) Judd, D. 1993. It's hard to fine a good lamp, Donald Judd furniture. Domus, p7

### 6-3 Critical discourse about New Design furniture

From the previous discussion, in rethinking and redefining New Design furniture, I want to apply Judd's extended concepts more fully. Judd (1993) suggests that "bad ideas should not be accepted because they are fashionable, and good ideas should not be rejected because they are unfashionable" (p. 9). In some ways, good old ideas made new and shiny do not desire a response; they are now "a dismaying precedent" (p. 9). For example, as in politics, Judd sees Victorian furniture not as traditional and conservative but as an imitation of the past style. To him, the imitation of the Victorian style "represents status by invoking a higher class in the past than the purchaser's in the present" (Judd, 1993, p. 11). To be honest, I am uncertain about Judd's concept of the revival of tradition as imitation. Some people prefer Victorian furniture, which is expensive and fashionable. From this perspective, Watson (1982) mentions a wealthy man's comments about his distinctive Neo-Classical furniture collection: "I am not interested in this furniture at all. It is heavy, hard, ugly, and uncomfortable. To be able to lie or sit in comfort, that is all I ask of my bed and my armchair" (p. 8).

Perhaps Judd's and Watson's perspectives leave me with considerations applicable to a critical discourse for rethinking, redefining, and redesigning New Design furniture through revival, reintroduction, and reinterpretation from historical references. In addition, Russell sees in Starck, a French

furniture and industrial designer and architect, "the ability to re-think and re-see things and come up with very surprising solutions".<sup>13)</sup>

Starck dislikes reference to the bizarre in his work, which represents aesthetics in Postmodern furniture. Russell says, "Spinning theatrical fantasy is the stuff of Starck" (p. 38). He looks for "mystical materials" that add layers of meaning. His furniture is frequently referred to as art works. Thus, in spite of the work's communication value, it is difficult for the work to go to mass production. However, recently, Starck may have rethought his concept of furniture design for the consumer according to the requirements of his commissions with manufacturers: "If I am called upon to redesign an object, I ask myself why the current one is unsatisfactory," he has said, "I try to rediscover why an object exists at all, why one should take the trouble to reconsider it" (Russell, 1996, p. 38).

Michael Horsham stresses Starck's concept of politics:

"I'm not interested in architecture or design, says Starck, 'I think they are boring. They can only ever be a tool. In the past my work tried to be symbolic and semantic and human. Now it starts to be political and it will be even more radically political in the next few years'...". "When you are young, says Starck, you work for yourself, you work to exist you work to survive you work to show people how good and how beautiful you are. If you are a little honest, after ten fifteen years of this work you realise that your real duty is to other people. Today, the only subject which is interesting or urgent and in danger is society: where and how we live. We must forget everything else." (quoted in Horsham, 1996, p. 1)<sup>14)</sup>

Through his radical politics, Starck designs and intends to mass-produce chairs, television sets, and toothbrushes that people use every day. Starck sees the commissions of manufacturers only as "an opportunity to communicate his take on humanity to a wider audience through the things of everyday life"(Horsham, 1996, p.1). I believe that this sense of politics expressed through these objects will satisfy the public visually and physically in daily aesthetics and use. However, Starck still feels that it is difficult to mass-produce his designs, which have commonly been produced in one-offs or limited editions. Rather, he creates a poetic space and complements images in restaurants and shops with his bizarre furniture. The interiors make his works of art easily accessible to the public for their appreciation and enjoyment.

On the other hand, Field (1998) suggests that, to make the furniture more accessible to the public, Starck has advocated organic designs like furniture mass-produced in Modernism. Starck has recently proclaimed "I am communist, definitely I am communist... I drag people to where I think they can be better".<sup>15)</sup>

Starck concludes that giving service to people and making them happy is simple. "I don't design for the design, I design to speak to people," and "when you want to speak to people you can speak to rich and poor" (p. 25). However, Starck has said:

"But if I have to choose between rich and

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13) Russel, B. 1996. Starck raving genius of design. *Graphis*. January and February. p39

14) Horsham, M. 1996. Love and the argues catalogue. *Blueprint*. June. p1

15) Field, M. 1998. Let them eat(organic) cake... *Blueprint*. p24

poor I will choose poor because the rich can buy what the poor can buy, but not the contrary. When I hear of somebody making a limited edition I say 'voleur!', 'robber!'... "I am no longer a designer, I am a citizen - somebody who tries to be responsible in society. When these people arrive on the market," he concludes, "I will be very happy to leave" (quoted in Field, 1998, p. 25).

## 7. Conclusion

This study intends to make contemporary furniture expressed as postmodern aesthetics accessible to the broadest possible public, particularly through an examination and realization of art and everyday life. The postmodern furniture aesthetics of communication expressed through double-coding, which was seen by Charles Jencks as the defining element of Post-Modernism, is characterized by the use of ideas from the traditions of craft. Thereby, contemporary furniture in postmodernism attempts to communicate with people on various levels through symbol, narrative, metaphor, or humor. Neo-classical reaction, the Arts and Crafts movement, Art Nouveau, and/or Art Deco style from the past, emphasizing ornament, craftsmanship, and/or beauty, have been expressed according to contemporary furniture designers' interpretation from eclectic and pluralistic approaches reestablished by furniture design in Postmodernism. Thus, postmodern furniture designers have stressed the concept 'ornament is no longer a crime,' in response to Modern furniture designers dictum that 'ornament is a crime.' Against the principle 'less is more' in Modern furniture, which

was based on rationalism, functionalism, and/or minimalism, postmodern furniture designers have addressed the new concept 'less is a bore.' Modern furniture as an International style of design, was intended to be mass-produced by manufacturers. As a result, people became bored with it because the same Modern furniture was shown all over the world, anywhere. However, as one of a kind work with aesthetic characteristics similar to those of painting or sculpture, postmodern furniture is not intended to be mass-produced.

Through the use of ornament, craftsmanship, or beauty from the traditions of craft, contemporary furniture called New Design, which I will focus on in my study, represents the postmodern furniture aesthetics of communication, with such elements as metaphor, symbol, narrative, or humor. The designers of New Design furniture attempt to create a poetic space with their poetic furniture. Through New Design furniture, postmodern aesthetics communicates with people, who can appreciate a piece of furniture as a work of art and at the same time use it in their daily lives. However, New Design furniture has shown some problems. Specifically, it is hard for the largest public to have access to New Design furniture in everyday life because of the emphasis on decoration or ornament rather than comfort or function. New Design furniture does not strike a balance between aesthetics and function. The lack of comfort or function can tend to discourage the public from enjoying a piece of furniture in their everyday lives.

Today, designers of New Design furniture

such as Philippe Starck have started rethinking, redefining, and redesigning their furniture for the largest public to make it closer to them in their everyday lives. As a result, Starck, a French architect, furniture, interior, and industrial designer, creates interiors such as restaurants and shops to make his furniture easily accessible to the public for their appreciation and enjoyment. On the other hand, Starck proclaims himself a 'communist' in terms of his commitment of the public and a better society, which may imply his acceptance of the concepts of Bauhaus related to socialist roots in Germany. Further, he is in favor of organic design in Modern furniture, which is intended to be mass-produced by new technology. Starck tries to create furniture to satisfy both rich and poor in order to speak to the public, who can appreciate, use, and enjoy his furniture in everyday life.

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