

## **Experiencing the Art/Craft/Handmade/Studio Furniture Aesthetics in Postmodernism Theoretically (I)** **-Defining the Postmodern furniture aesthetics as Metaphor-**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study explored the theoretical context of postmodern aesthetics in experiencing art/craft/handmade/studio furniture for 'wood culture experience class' or 'wood love experience class', which has been recently carried out by the Korea Forest Service and is apt to focus on making simple wood work just involved in the practical part. Qualitative conceptual analysis as the principal methodology was used to achieve the theoretical context in the experience programs. I developed the lesson for an aesthetics of art and everyday life with wood furniture which expresses the metaphorical aesthetics appeared as New Design furniture in postmodernism. As statement of objective in the lesson, I explored that students in elementary schools personally understand and define the postmodern aesthetics of New Design furniture as metaphor. As a result, the students will be able to define and identify New Design furniture as metaphor in their lives.

**Key words:** Wood, experience, theory, art furniture aesthetics, metaphor, define, identify.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Experiencing furniture aesthetics called as art/craft/handmade/studio object expressed as New Design furniture in Postmodernism intends to teach an aesthetics of art and everyday life from contemporary furniture made by variously colored wood. Recently, educational programs experienced with domestic wood have been developed and carried out among children largely in elementary school through various projects by the Korea Forest Service. The education held under the name of the projects like 'wood culture experience class' or 'wood love experience class' stimulates the children to understand, love and be involved in the wood even more than before in their everyday lives. The programs intend to make the benefit of wood public, make children/people aware the importance of wood, and furthermore stimulate the industry in association with the domestic wood. Thus, the programs have been expanded over all of the country. The wood education is appropriate for today's LOHAS (Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability) era beyond just using eco-friendly materials which can make our lives safe and healthy against contaminated things.

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However, the educational programs mostly apt to focus on the wood practice which makes simple objects or touches just itself literally have not satisfied the participants as not enough to deal with the theoretical content of the wood pieces related to the education. In postmodern era, furniture called as art/craft/handmade/studio object has been created by various wood well-known as one of the best LOHAS materials. The furniture expressed as works of art conveys meaning from the harmony of natural color, carving, shape, and decoration by the elaborated craftsmanship. The meaning to be able to communicate with people by humor or narrative is metaphorical by adapting symbolical subjects in common with our culture and society. The artworks with various colors and patterns are associated with “decorative, crafty, narrative, descriptive, imaginative, and metaphorical elements” (Moon 2007, p. 341). From the use of the symbolical furniture made by wood, people can make themselves happy and enjoyable with the metaphorical meaning conveyed in their daily lives.

Hence, I will explore the art/craft/handmade/studio furniture appeared as New Design furniture in the theoretical or aesthetical context associated with the metaphor and symbol in developing the lesson for the ‘wood culture experience class’ or ‘wood love experience class’, which has tended to concentrate just on the practical part. Thereby, I will mention teaching unit briefly, and then, develop the lesson in terms of the subjects such as contextual information, What is New Design for?, the integration of subject area, What is the postmodern aesthetics of communication in New Design furniture?, the inquiry strategies, procedure, question sheet, resources and materials, transition, and follow-up for the lesson of wood furniture aesthetics from the view of the communicative meaning in postmodernism.

#### Unit: Teaching an Aesthetics of Art and Everyday Life with New Design furniture

##### *General Objective*

The general goal-statement about actual consequences of the instruction of this unit is as follows: The student needs to have an opportunity to develop his or her knowledge of the postmodern aesthetics of New Design furniture for art appreciation in everyday life through daily experience, to other functional arts such as ceramics, textiles, and metal works in the postmodern era.

The development is as the first objective, everyone in the class needs to personally define the postmodern aesthetics of New Design furniture as metaphor. The students should understand and define the context of nature, group, person, and family in postmodern aesthetics expressed as narrative, metaphor, symbolic, and humorous furniture.

##### *Interdisciplinary Connections*

As the students read the books *What Is Art For?* Written by Ellen Dissanayake (1988) and *Art Synectics* written by Nicholas Roukes (1982), students will learn about the functions of art and begin to define art as metaphor. Thus, to help the students identify and define New Design furniture as art, I introduce two questions, which are “what is New Design furniture in terms of postmodern aesthetics of communication?” and “what is the postmodern aesthetics of communication in New Design furniture?”

Though reading “meaning and visual Metaphor” by Hermine Feinstein and *Metaphors we Live By* written by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, students will know how, what, and why designers interpret and transform New Design furniture in terms of linguistic and visual metaphors.

As the students read the articles “Minimal lamps” by Silvia Suardi (1997), “Design and ecology” by Vittorio Mangnago Lampugnani (1995), “Parsimony and luxury by Vittorio Mangnago Lampugnani (1996), and “Design sustainability” by Francois Burkardt (1997), they will become aware of one way of applying parsimony in relation to our ecology and environment at present and

in the future.

The reading materials in these three parts will help the students understand the social and cultural contexts and gain knowledge from each lesson in defining, interpreting, and creating metaphor in New Design furniture in their own perspectives, expanding their views about works of art in the postmodern era. However, I am going to develop only first stage about defining the postmodern aesthetics as metaphor because it is the most important thing with the wood practice programs that the students need to know.

#### Lesson for an Aesthetics of Art and Everyday Life with wood furniture

##### *Statement of Object*

Everyone in the class needs to personally define the postmodern aesthetics of New Design furniture as metaphor.

##### *Contextual Information*

This lesson will involve the question, “what is New design furniture for?”, which is derived from the book *What is Art for?* Written by Ellen Dissanayake. The understanding of New Design furniture and its function in diverse social-cultural contexts will be constituted through anthropological approaches. The question is powerful, indicating lines of inquiry that lead beyond the appreciation of formal or aesthetic qualities of New Design furniture. New Design furniture is said to function as a metaphor for the relationship between viewer, furniture designer, and New Design furniture. That New Design furniture functions as such a metaphor is a compelling answer to the question, “what is New Design furniture for?,” in relation to natural, cultural, group, personal, and familial contexts (Jeffers 1996).

##### *What is New Design furniture for?*

In terms of the previous statement, I might explore a shared social context involving the postmodern aesthetics of communication through New Design furniture between furniture and teacher or students, between teacher and students, and among students. In fact, New Design furniture designers explore communication between furniture design and beholders or people using the furniture, between the furniture designer and beholders or people using the furniture, and among beholders or people using the furniture through the furniture itself. As a result, interpersonal communication may be prompted through postmodern aesthetics in contemporary furniture design. New Design furniture can be referred to as works of art by emphasizing not function but aesthetics. The aesthetic elements like metaphor, symbol, narrative, and humor are communicated by New Design furniture at a conscious and physical level. These communicative elements all have metaphoric meanings in everyday life through daily use. From this perspective, I therefore see New Design as metaphor enhancing a shared social context in a group context such as an aesthetics class in art education. Through the metaphoric New Design furniture, in the shared group context between teacher and students we experience the significance of communication through the metaphoric meanings transferred for an aesthetics class art education.

As an art educator for aesthetics class, I might find certain attributes or referents (visual or symbolic) to connect metaphoric New Design furniture to my life. This connection might place my life in some particular contexts, such as natural, cultural, and familial contexts. Jeffers (1996) observes that “in looking closely at the relationships that develop between the teachers and their metaphors, it became apparent these teachers not only transferred their attributes to their chosen artworks, they also transferred attributes from the works to themselves” (p. 11). Through the connection and transfer with New Design furniture, I can understand and communicate the

metaphor visually and physically in reciprocal and reflective relationship with New Design furniture. Thus, I intend to share with students in the class the metaphors of certain attributes in New Design furniture. Students will be encouraged and learn to experience, understand, and communicate about the attributes of metaphors in New Design furniture through reciprocal relationship with the metaphoric meaning. As evidence for the reciprocal relationships, Ortony (1975) claims that “richness of detail in communicative potential provides a powerful means of moving from the known to the less well-known or unknown” (p. 51). Thus, according to Ortony’s claim, in terms of my experience, I can at times see the known as New Design furniture and the less well-known as teachers – myself. Jeffers (1996) claims that through newly-gained insight, “at other times, works of art became the less-known and the teachers the known” (p. 11).

The close, reciprocal, and dynamic relationship with New Design furniture develops through the metaphors of postmodern aesthetics functioning as a communication device, as mentioned previously. In the aesthetics class, when sharing the metaphors carried by New Design furniture with students, I may come closer to them intellectually and emotionally, transfer certain attributes to them, and experience something in common with them through the metaphors functioning in a shared social context. As a metaphor, then, a work of art can be contextually understood as a personally and “socially functional product” (Anderson, 1995, p. 200). Hence, New Design furniture may represent an anthropological approach in that its aesthetics express metaphors such as symbol, narrative, humor, and/or wit from the meaning of the message for communication with people.

Anderson (1995) claims that a work of art “should be understood not only for what it is, but for, more fundamentally, what it does in a social context” (p. 200). In New Design furniture, as in an artwork, the metaphor of communication plays a significant role for understanding the meanings in considering a piece in a group context. In the aesthetics class, in sharing and coming to understand New Design furniture in a group context, as well as personal, cultural, and familial contexts, I will understand and value the works for what they do in these various contexts. Thus, the metaphor in New Design furniture, like that in art works, not only makes us cry but also makes us laugh. As a social group, in the aesthetics class students communicate about metaphoric New Design furniture and at the same time they also interact educationally with the art teacher who has initiated this pattern of communication. Furthermore, the students and the art educator can communicate through the metaphors in New Design furniture with each other as well as with the designer. Therefore, New Design furniture may be a metaphor for communication between students and teachers in the aesthetics class in art education. As art criticism and art dialogues are strongly encouraged in current art class, discussing the furniture with students can strengthen our art curriculum for teaching critical thinking and informed judgment about art and life, and the relationship between the two.

### *Integration of Subject Area*

As the students read the books *What Is Art For?* Written by Ellen Dissanayake and *Art Synectics* written by Nicolas Roukes, students will learn about furniture art and begin to define art as metaphor. When the students consider and identify New Design furniture in the context of nature, culture, person, group, and family. In writing about their understanding and definition of New Design furniture as metaphor in the context of nature, culture, and family, students can identify New Design furniture as metaphor in these contexts. Thus, for helping the students identify and define New Design furniture as art, I introduce two questions, which are “what is New Design furniture in terms of postmodern aesthetics of communication? And “what is the postmodern aesthetics of communication in New Design furniture?”

*What is the postmodern aesthetics of communication in New Design furniture?*

Contemporary furniture design in Postmodernism has been called new design, the art/craft/handmade/studio object. Dormer (1987) observes that today there are two areas, new design and art-craft furniture as product design, or industrial design furniture mainly associated with new technology, are developing in opposing directions. In fact, New Design furniture represents Postmodern furniture in reflecting the 20<sup>th</sup>- century traditions of political art, the modern movement, surrealism, expressionism, and the imagery of ethnographic collections. In other words, each designer is following his or her own inspiration, apparently outside the normal principles of design or craft but within the accepted territories of 20<sup>th</sup>-century art (p. 130). Thus, the New Design furniture has been characterized as a product of Postmodern aesthetics which appears communication elements to make the furniture accessible to a broader audience (Moon, 2007).

Postmodern aesthetics through New Design furniture can be defined as the use of symbol, metaphor, narrative, animation, imagination, or humor in New Design furniture through ideas from the traditions of craft and from fine arts. New Design furniture in postmodernism communicates symbol, metaphor, narrative, animation, imagination, or humor at a conscious and physical level with beholders or people encountering it in their everyday lives. These elements convey metaphorical meanings, which bring social and cultural contexts to New Design furniture designer's inventions. Thus, the postmodern aesthetics of these elements are not only communicated but also variously expressed through New Design furniture by the designers. Postmodern aesthetics in New Design furniture resembles the aesthetics of poetry (e.g., symbolic, metaphoric, narrative, imaginative, humorous, etc). Thus, a poetic space is created as the integrity of images of the postmodern aesthetics of communication through New Design furniture.

*Inquiry Strategies (objective)*

The students will:

First, know New Design furniture functions defined in answering the questions “what is New Design furniture for?” adapted from What Is Art For? Written by Ellen Dissanayake and know New Design functions in terms of the social ends of the furniture as stressed in the functionalist's sociological and anthropological interpretation; as evaluation, were the students able to give appropriate answers to the question “what is New Design furniture for?” In class, they will discuss the functions following the teacher's lead. The teacher will note their discussion and respond to the student's ideas.

Second, know New Design furniture functions as metaphor in the relationship between viewer, furniture designer, and the furniture, and between the teacher and the students, and the students with each other in a social-cultural context; as evaluation, were the students able to understand the relationship between viewer, furniture designer, and the furniture, and between the teacher and the students, and the students with each other in the social-cultural context? In class, they will talk about their feelings with the teacher. The teacher will note their discussion and respond to the student's idea.

Third, define and identify New Design furniture as metaphor in natural, cultural, personal, group, and familial contexts, and realize the potential for the metaphor in everyday life in our environment. As evaluation, were the students able to understand the metaphor in the contexts of nature, culture, person, and family according to the teacher's explanation? The teacher will ask the students to discuss the contexts in groups of three or four.

Fourth, appreciate slides pertaining to New Design furniture as metaphor in the context of nature, culture, group, and family through related furniture-Cerutti's mythical Libabel bookcase (see the picture 1), Jencks' symbolic furniture (see Picture 2, 3), and Moon's narrative wall decorator for cultural contexts (see Picture 4), Moon's humorous and narrative wall decorator and bench for

familial contexts (see the Picture 5, 6), Cherif's bench and stool for natural contexts (see Pictures 7, 8), Moon's flower mirror for personal contexts (see Picture 9), and Moon's Latticed lamp for group contexts (see the Picture 10): As evaluation, were the students able to share the teacher's perspective about the metaphoric contexts in New Design furniture? In number5, the teacher will ask the students to write about feelings.

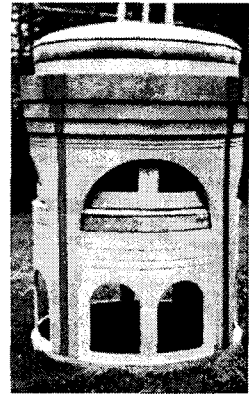
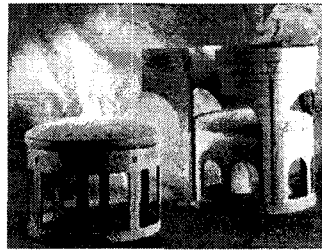


Fig.1. Libabel bookcase, Downey, 1992. Fig.2.3. Colosseum chair and stool, Collins & Papadakis, 1989.

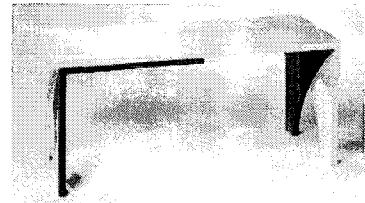
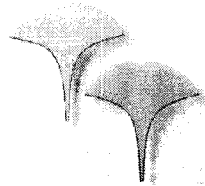
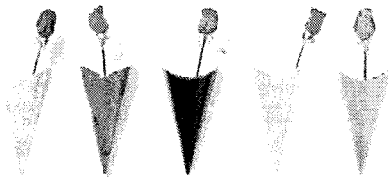


Fig.4. Wall decorator, Moon, 2000. Fig. 5. Wall decorator, Fig. 6. Bench, Moon, 2000. Moon, 2000.

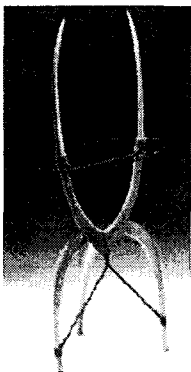


Fig.7. Antinea console, Downey, 1992.

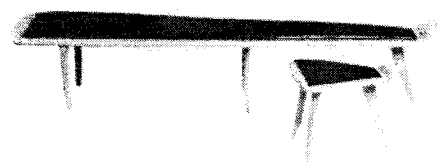


Fig.8. Bench and stool, Downey, 1990.

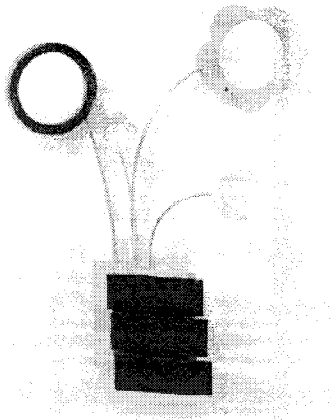


Fig.9. Flower mirror, Moon, 2006.

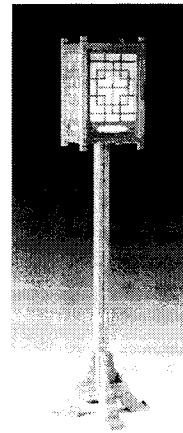


Fig.10. Latticed lamp, Moon, 2000.

Fifth, write about their definition and identification of how New Design furniture function as metaphor from selected New Design furniture in natural, cultural, personal, group, and familial contexts; as evaluation, were the students able to write about the definition of the contexts in New Design furniture? They will answer the questions: What are natural, cultural, personal, group, and familial contexts in New Design furniture according to the teacher's view? The teacher will collect the students' writing and give them comments in relation to the teacher's perspective.

Finally, Talk about their definition and identification of New Design furniture as metaphor in everyday life. As evaluation, were the students able to define and identify New Design furniture as metaphor in their life in their class discussion? They will talk about New Design furniture from their perspective in class. The teacher will make notes and respond to their comments.

#### *Procedure*

Review the topic "what is New Design Furniture for?" Introduce New Design furniture functions from the book *What Is Art For?* Written by Ellen Dissanayake and focus on New Design furniture functions in relations to the social ends of the New Design furniture in order to explore social-cultural contexts in New Design furniture as metaphor.

Introduce New Design furniture as a metaphor for the relationship between viewer, furniture designer, and furniture through the related articles "Experiencing Art through Metaphor" written by Carol Jeffers, "Why Metaphors Are Necessary and Not Just Nice" written by Andrew Ortony, and the book *Art Synectics* written by Nicholas Roukes. Thus, I will follow Danto's lead in exploring the metaphoric functions of art.

Ask the students to read the teacher's excerpts from the readings in procedure 2.

Introduce metaphors in the contexts of nature, culture, person, group, and family in our lives.

Show slides of New Design furniture which represents natural, cultural, personal, group, and familial contexts using Cerutti's Libabel bookcase, Jencks' symbolic furniture, and Moon's narrative wall decorator for cultural contexts, Moon's humorous and narrative wall decorator and bench for familial contexts, Cherif's bench and stool for natural contexts, Moon's flower mirror for personal contexts, and Moon's Latticed lamp for group contexts.

Explain New Design furniture functions as metaphors in a formal context through abstract or semi-abstract furniture according to the teacher's perspective.

Ask the students to define, identify, and write about the contexts of nature, culture, person,

group, and family in New Design furniture.

Ask the students to talk about New Design furniture functions as metaphor based on 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 in response to specific questions in teams of three or four.

*Question sheet: (to be used as a handout)*

What are the New Design functions defined in *What Is Art For?* Based on the teacher's explanation?

What are the New Design furniture functions related to the social ends of the New Design furniture?

Describe the New Design furniture as metaphor?

Describe the New Design furniture in relation to natural, cultural, personal, group, and familial contexts based on the teacher's definition.

What is your interpretation of New Design furniture as metaphor in everyday life.

*Resources and Materials*

Slides of selected New Design: Cerutti's Libabel bookcase, Jencks' symbolic furniture, Moon's narrative wall, Moon's humorous and narrative wall decorator and bench, Cherif's bench and stool for natural contexts, Moon's flower mirror, and Moon's Latticed lamp.

Resources discussing metaphor in article: "Experiencing Art through Metaphor" by Carol Jeffers (1996) and "Why Metaphors are Necessary and Not just Nice" by Andresw Ortony (1975).

Books: *What Is Art For?* By Elen Dissanajake (1988), *Art Synectics* by Nicholas Roukes (1984), and *Transfiguration of the commonplace: A philosophy of art* by Danto (1981)

*Transition*

Each students is to think about and write about a selected piece of New Design furniture of interest to him/herself in order to explore New Design furniture as metaphor in everyday life according to the students own interpretation transformed by his/her own perspective.

*Follow-up*

The students are to continue to explore how New Design furniture functions as metaphor in their use and appreciation of other functional art works like textile, ceramics, jewelry, and metal work in everyday life through everyday experience. For example, they might discuss their use and appreciation of functional objects such as rings, necklaces, and bracelets in their group meeting. Jewelry offers good material through which the students can demonstrate the expansion of their postmodern aesthetic appreciation with objects in everyday use.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the theoretical context of postmodern aesthetics for 'wood culture experience class' or 'wood love experience class', which has been recently carried out by the Korea Forest Service and is apt to focus on making simple wood object just involved in the practical part. I developed the lesson for an aesthetics of art and everyday life with wood furniture which expresses the metaphorical aesthetics appeared as New Design furniture in postmodernism. As statement of objective in the lesson, I explored that the students personally understand and define the postmodern aesthetics of New Design furniture as metaphor. From the contextual information, the lesson was involves in the question, "what is New Design furniture?", which is derived from the book *What is*



*Art for?* Written by Ellen Dissanayake. And I mentioned New Design furniture in relation to the context of the metaphorical aesthetics which conveys the contextual meaning to the people. In terms of the subjects such as contextual information, What is New Design furniture for?, the integration of subject area, What is the postmodern aesthetics of communication in New Design furniture?, the inquiry strategies, procedure, resources and materials, transition, and follow-up, I attempted the students to understand and define the metaphor in the context of nature, culture, group, and family with the wood pieces.

As a result, the students will be able to understand, define and identify New Design furniture as metaphor in their lives. They will talk about New Design furniture from their perspective and can make their everyday lives be more enjoyable and happier. In the future lesson study, I will explore that as the objective each student should interpret a selected piece of New Design furniture in terms of symbol and metaphor, and create an art/craft/handmade/studio object expressive of the postmodern aesthetics of communication in New Design furniture using with recyclable materials like wood.

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