

In the middle eighties I wrote that in the middle sixties someone asked me to design a coffee table. I thought that a work of mine which was essentially a rectangular volume with the upper surface recessed could be altered. This debased the work and produced a bad table which I later threw away. The configuration and the scale of art cannot be transposed into furniture and architecture. The intent of art is different from that of the latter, which must be functional. If a chair or a building is not functional, if it appears to be only art, it is ridiculous. The art of a chair is not its resemblance to art, but is partly its reasonableness, usefulness and scale as a chair. These are proportion, which is visible reasonableness. The art in art is partly the assertion of someone's interest regardless of other considerations. A work of art exists as itself; a chair exists as a chair itself. And the idea of a chair isn't a chair. Due to the inability of art to become furniture, I didn't try again for several years. However I've always been interested in architecture and continued to sketch ideas.

Of course if a person is at once making art and building furniture and architecture there will be similarities. The various interests in form will be consistent. If you like simple forms in art you will not make complicated ones in architecture. Complicated, incidentally, is the opposite of simple, not complex, which both may be. But the difference between art and architecture is fundamental. Furniture and architecture can only be approached as such. Art cannot be imposed upon them. If their nature is seriously considered the art will occur, even art close to art itself. The mistake I made with the table was to try to make something as unusual as I thought a work of art to be. Back of this was the assumption that a good chair was only a good chair, that a chair could only be improved or changed slightly, and that nothing new could be done without a great, strange effort. But the furniture slowly became new as I dealt easily with the reality. A good chair is a good chair. The particulars slowly created the general forms that could not be directly transferred. I can now make a chair or a building that is mine without trying to derive forms from my own works of art. After a few years I designed a pair of sinks for an old building that I bought in New York City and for which I've designed much subsequently. These were designed directly as sinks; they were not a conversion; I didn't confuse them with art. The basin of the sink is an ellipse, which so far I've never used in art, instead of a circle, which I do use. I also designed a large table with chairs, somewhat like benches, to be made of folded 1/8 inch stainless steel, brass or

copper. This was never made because the fourth floor of the building in which it was to be is very open, primarily two planes, floor and ceiling, while the table and chairs are very closed. The latter would ruin the space. I later made some bookshelves for the third floor.

I kept the building but moved to West Texas with my two children where I rented a small house on the edge of town. The house was quartered into eleven by eleven-foot rooms. There was no furniture and none to be bought, either old, since the town had not shrunk or changed much since its beginning in 1883, or new, since the few stores sold only fake antiques or tubular kitchen furniture with plastic surfaces printed with inane geometric patterns or flowers. The two small children played and slept in one of the four rooms. In order to give them each an area of their own notwithstanding the one room, I designed a bed which was a closed platform of one by twelve with a central, free-standing wall, also of one by twelve. The bed was designed so that the lumber yard could cut the few different lengths to size and I could then nail them together in place. I liked the bed a great deal, and in fact the whole house, for which I made other furniture. Later, in a large place in town, I designed desks and chairs for the children using the same method of construction. More furniture developed from this beginning.

It's impossible to go to the store and buy a chair. In North America since the 'Mission' style became unfashionable in the twenties and in England since the similar furniture derived from William Morris also became unfashionable, there has been no furniture which is pleasurable to look at, fairly available and moderate in price. The only exception is the bentwood furniture developed by Thonet, which became less fashionable in the twenties but has continued to be made until now by Thonet and others. This is still not expensive but it is not down the street in the store; the furniture designed in the twenties by the well-known architects that continues to be made is expensive for most people, although not as expensive as the materials and the construction imply, and is hardly near by to purchase. Neither is all of it agreeable. Mies van der Rohe's is still the best and should not be considered as only a worn status symbol. As bad ideas should not be accepted because they are fashionable, good ideas should not be rejected because they are unfashionable. Conventions are not worth reacting to one way or another. Most of the other furniture in production, such as Breuer's Wassily chair and Le Corbusier's furniture, is an early civilized and almost forgivable sentimentalizing of the machine. The chairs of both architects are derived from the better camping and military chairs of the nineteenth century. Old good ideas made new and shiny are now a dismaying precedent. Sentimentalizing the machine is now a malignity of the century. This is present in most available furniture and in most buildings. It is extreme in the Pompidou

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Centre and the Lloyd's building. In furniture this puerility is usually combined with the puerility of domesticity, the societal progress of the machine with personal progress in the society. [...]

Most of the furniture that I have designed remains fairly expensive, because of its methods of construction, and it is not easily available. We have made a serious effort to lower the prices but the furniture is handmade, basically even the sheet-metal pieces made by Janssen, one by one. These would be cheaper made by hundreds but still there would be considerable handwork. The wooden furniture cannot change. Lower prices require great numbers which require a large distribution. This usually leads to the department store. The distribution of furniture, and of books, probably of most things, are monopolies against diversity, which eliminate exceptions and complications, which have an invariable scheme for production and for costs, and of course for appearance, and for books, subject-matter. For both furniture and books the designer and the author absolutely receive very little. The production cost of furniture is not as fixed as the cost of the designer, but it is low. The cost of the designer must have developed from that of real modern furniture, since the architect was always dead. The producer, not the factory, and the retailer, or both as one, receive the most money, some as profit, some for the expenses of the distribution and the salesroom. This makes an impossible price. And of course it seems that the middleman should get less. The larger the distribution the more to the middleman. Therefore the best method is a small distribution, which is what we do. And, importantly, we are the producers, which combines that profit and my profit into one, leaving only the retailer as extra. Our furniture goes around the world, but only one by one. Most things could be made in the area in which they are consumed, eliminating the big distributor, often one company charging for three functions, instead of two for one as in our case, charging three times as the distributor, the producer and the manufacturer, that is, profiting as corporations. Almost anything they can do anyone can do anywhere. And obviously even cars and TVs could be made by any large city or small country. I have always thought it strange that there are no cars made in Switzerland. I have heard that there was once a company. Why should Texas import cars and trucks from Michigan? The oligarchy of monopolies of distribution prevents innovation, invents only restrictions, and raises blank walls. The flat and boring society is a maze of blank walls just above eye level. This prevents new and real inventions, so obviously there is no chance for only a new chair or a little book. The purpose of big business is to maintain its oligarchy rather than to do anything else, for example, to fulfil two of its biggest claims, competition and innovation. Efficiency is another claim, part of progress, efficiency for profit, not necessarily for production, and not for

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the public. Only in the mythical 'progress' is there a suggestion of benefiting society. Most business people think that such slight altruism is part of their advertising. And 'free enterprise' is a slogan of the Pentagon.

Noam Chomsky writes: 'Free trade is fine for economics departments and newspaper editorials, but nobody in the corporate world or the government takes the doctrines seriously. The parts of the US economy that are able to compete internationally are primarily the state subsidized ones, capital intensive agriculture (agribusiness, as it's called), high-tech industry, pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, etc.

'The same is true of other industrial societies. The US government has the public pay for research and development and provides, largely through the military, a state-guaranteed market for waste production. If something is marketable, the private sector takes it over. That system of public subsidy and private profit is what is called free enterprise.'

My experience is that both furniture distribution and book distribution are impossible. On the other hand the art business is such a one-horse business that something larger seems better. But this is perhaps because the context for art is so weak. The only possible way perhaps to make cheap mass-produced furniture is to start with a construction cost and to design accordingly. At present we would have to debase the construction of the existing furniture for mass production. Beginning from a fixed construction of the existing furniture for mass production. Beginning from a fixed construction cost still leaves the questions of too little to the designer and too much to the producer-organizer-wholesaler and to the retailer. [...]

I am often asked if the furniture is art, since almost ten years ago some artists made art that was also furniture. The furniture is furniture and is only art in that architecture, ceramics, textiles and many things are art. We try to keep the furniture out of art galleries to avoid this confusion, which is far from my thinking. And also to avoid the consequent inflation of the price. I am often told that the furniture is not comfortable, and in that not functional. The source of the question is in the overstuffed bourgeois Victorian furniture, which as I said, never ceased. The furniture is comfortable to me. Rather than making a chair to sleep in or a machine to live it, it is better to make a bed. A straight chair is best for eating or writing. The third position is standing.

Donald Judd, 'It's Hard to Find a Good Lamp', *Donald Judd Furniture Retrospective* (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen/Munich: Villa Stuck, 1993) 7-21.