Philosophical Modernity Rooted in Modern Movement with Furniture

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the philosophical Modernity with the Enlightenment in relation to cultural and aesthetic modernism rooted in Modern furniture, which directly reflected modern culture and society with rationality, science, individualism, progressive, universal truths, etc, using qualitative analysis about the related literature as the principal methodology. A fundamental philosophy of the modern furniture influenced by Industrial Revolution is that the dictates of function and industrial technology must be decided by form. The theory and practice of the International Style in modern furniture came from the modern aesthetics in the philosophy of Modernity. As a result, as influenced through the Enlightenment project and the relationship of individual to society in relation to cultural and aesthetic modernism, and the three modern movements with furniture, which are Arts and Crafts movement, Art Nouveau, and Art Deco, represented the beginning style of modern furniture design toward functionalism or minimalism.

Key words: Modernity, The enlightenment, Culture, Aesthetics, Modern furniture, Functionalism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Modern furniture reflects rationalism, science, industrialization, progressive, and universal ideas in modern culture and aesthetics influenced by philosophical Modernity with the Enlightenment (from approximately 1687 to 1789). It is necessary to know the philosophy of Modernity when furniture designers try to understand modern furniture involved in universal ideas, primitive motifs, organic design, etc. The designers have mostly tended to percept furniture in Modernism just as researching the form/design, material, and designers without any understanding of the theory rooted in modern furniture styles. According to the history of furniture, modern furniture has affected contemporary furniture considered as late and neo modernism associated with new technology in postmodern era.

The modernist ideology tried to frame values, provide objectives, and ban doubt, confusion, and skepticism. Functionalism revealed structure not only in furniture but also in architecture because the concepts admitted no dishonesty. Somehow, the modern movement's ideal was acceptable for furniture designers to use in creating furniture. If there had been no rationale, furniture designers might have needed to come up with one as an essential for furniture. As a result, the modern furniture mass-produced by industrial technology explored International Styles. Thus, I intend to let

furniture designers know the theory of Modernity which represents the basis of modern furniture design in the twentieth-century.

Thereby, I will explore the Enlightenment project and the relationship of individual to society in relation to cultural and aesthetic modernism, and the three modern movements with furniture, which are Arts and Crafts movement, Art Nouveau, Art Deco.

2. MODERNITY

In an attempt to differentiate cultural and aesthetic modernism, first of all, I will take a look at the Age of Modernity that began its phase with the development of the Enlightenment (from approximately 1687 to 1789). Barrett and King have explored the concept and implications of Modernity:

Modernity proceeds through the Declaration of Independence, the French Revolution, the first and second World Wars, into our own day. The major movements and events of Modernity are democracy, capitalism, industrialization, science, and urbanization, and its rallying flags are freedom and individual.[2] Modernity was invariably defined only in relation to Europe and the USA, and not within the world system as a whole.[2]

Modernity can be characterized as a phenomenon "denoting those processes of individualization, secularization, industrialization, and cultural differentiation, commodification, urbanization, bureaucratization, and rationalization which together have constituted the modern world".[3] Hence, in reflecting on the characteristics which can be identified in Modernity, I will stress the significant impact of the Enlightenment on the philosophy of cultural and aesthetic modernism.

2-1 Cultural modernism

Modernism has been referred to as a recent way of thinking and contemplating on Western culture that celebrates science, individualism, and progressive thought in an evolutionary sense. The situation as a whole is considered cultural modernism. Within this context, there is "possibility for an aesthetic modernism to emerge within the larger culture that involves contemporary art and criticism".[4] Cultural modernism is rooted in the philosophy of the Enlightenment. Through reasoning, the Enlightenment philosopher established the foundation of a set of universal truths.

2-1-1 Enlightenment Project

The philosophy of the Enlightenment movement (or the so-called Enlightenment Project) has long since become he foundation of Western ideologies and an influence on contemporary western thought. The period is thought to have begun in the year 1690 as a result of the publication of Locke's famous essay *Concerning Human Understanding* and ended in the year 1781 when Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* appeared. With old beliefs and shifting and uncertain, the appearance of these new philosophical development set up new directions for a century in what is set best viewed as one of the major intellectual advancements in human philosophy. In this development, individual judgment is respected and encouraged, as long as reason and rationality are being practiced. And, as a result of this trend of celebrating rational judgment, mysticism or dogmatism became the last thing

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[2]Barrett, T. 1994. Criticizing art: understanding the contemporary. p. 110.

[3]King, A. D. 1995. Global modernities . p. 110.

[4]Best, S., & Kellner, D. 1991. Postmodern theory: Critical interrogations. p. 3.

[5]Efland, A, Freedman, K, & Stuhr, P. 1996. Postmodern art education: an approach to curriculum. p. 17.

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In his essay *Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke insists that through only sensation and reflection, all knowledge comes close to us. It is essential that all ideas be clear and self-illuminating. Consequently, all human inquiry must be made in relation to problems which arise in fields related to sensation and reflection. By restricting the area of knowledge philosophically, the expected difficulty of making sense out of problems can be reduced. Such a characteristic feature of this age is derived from Decartes, "who had emphatically insisted that clear and distinct ideas are to be regarded as the sole test of truth".[5] Thus, the development of rational thought in the Enlightenment era had found its beginning. In terms of Locke, some philosophers are interested in certain fundamental principles, others are stimulated through critical insight and appreciation. From the influence of the thought of Locke, a great movement of thought has developed, a programme through the processes of expression, contradiction, and, then reconstruction, which every progressive movement of thought tends to follow. The Hegelian procedure is illustrated by the progress of philosophical thought. Hegelian thought differs from Locke's fundamental contention, but it follows the same avenues on the material.

In the Lockian history of knowledge development concerning use of simplicity to minimize difficulty in the content of philosophical thought, both idealistic and materialistic phases were developed. In terms of this development, Berkeley's idealism, Holbach's materialism, and, thereby, Hume's skepticism were developed from Locke's fundamental contention about knowledge. Berkeley represents an idealistic interpretation. His idealism arises from the focus on sensation in Lockian thought. We know merely that the objects of knowledge as sensations appear to us as an experience in the individual. Hence, our experience is formed from idea. The materialism of Holbach flourished in England, and then was transplanted into France. Hume's skepticism was a natural reaction to the extreme position of Berkeley's idealism. According to Hibben (1910), the negative criticism of Hume "shows the inadequacy of half truths, and sweeps the board of all inconsistencies and confusions of thought" (p. 12). Hence, an extreme idealism, extreme materialism, and a point of view of radical skepticism derived from Locke's thought are all

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[5]Hibben, J. G. 1910. The philosophy of the Enlightenment. p. 7.

philosophies of the Enlightenment. These philosophies were reactions based on something that had been overlooked in Locke's thought.

In the philosophy of Germany n the eighteenth century, an opposite stream in philosophical thinking was represented by Locke's Essay and his empirical philosophy. This philosophical thinking was represented as rationalism, and may be traced through Leibnitz to Spinoza and Descartes. Discussion of the nature of reason itself has been regarded as the viewpoint of rationalism, which "insists that there are certain clear and distinct ideas native to the very character of thought which serve as a body of primary truths from which it is possible to develop by logical procedure an entire system of philosophical dogma".[6] At the time of its origin, rationalism was considered a body of knowledge, but needed something more before it took breath in our lives. During the latter half of the century, the philosophical thought was developed.

Hence, through these opposing tendencies of empiricism and rationalism, Immanuel Kant brought a balanced momentum of thought to the extreme expressions. Hume's skepticism first impressed Kant in its constructive interpretation rather than destructive analysis. In fact, in the philosophy of the Enlightenment, skepticism as a significant point expresses not a final objective, "but merely a transition stage in the process of reflective thought" (Hibben, 1910, p. 15). In Kant's effort to examine and complement the extreme positions of empiricism, Kantian synthesis harmonized the antithesis of rationalistic and empirical philosophies, maintaining that "the form which the material is constrained to take in consciousness is the labour of the reason" (Hibben, 1910, p. 15). Kant stresses thought, proposing that "ideas without any perception by the senses are empty, but mere sensations without ideas are blind" (Hibben, 1910, p. 15). Hence, just perceiving experience may not be seen as the beginning of knowledge because the experience without the thought is nothing. In Kant's view, thought makes the components of experience intelligible; in uniting these opposing viewpoints, the empirical and the rational, "the elements of truth n each may be harmoniously conserved and ordered according to their mutual relation and functions" (Hibben, 1910, p. 16). Kant's reasoning was accepted in France and Germany. Kant maintains that by pure reason we come to know the empirical phenomena, the world of appearance where a given stimulus evokes a given response. He also emphasizes the practical reason, that reaction of reason which involves the emotion, will, and behaviors. Kant emphasized that duties as well as rights develop from the concept of personality (Hibben, 1910). Man is not merely a machine-a thing to be used in acquiring a desire, "a means to an end; he is to be regarded always as an end in himself," to be valued as a person simply because he is a part of the human race. In addition, because he is a rational being, the individual is forced "to regard every other person as an end in himself, and never as a means to an end" (Hibben, 1910, p. 22)

Hence, several phases of thought were developed in Kant's philosophical system. Early, Kant was influenced by traditional rationalism; subsequently, he reacted to the principles of the empiricism of Locke; and, finally, Hume's skepticism influenced Kant's thought as a transition stage of skepticism "from which he eventually emerged upon that higher plane in which his constructive genius free play and scope". [7]

In France and Germany, Locke's empirical philosophy was widely disseminated and discussed. The empirical philosophy according to Locke's position significantly influenced the religious, moral, and political life of the age as practical developments. In religious development, there was an evident tendency toward deism, which let France gradually drift toward atheism. In ethics, the ideas

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[6]Hibben, J. G. 1910. The philosophy of the Enlightenment. p. 14.
[7]Hibben, J. G. 1910. The philosophy of the Enlightenment. p. 23.

of utilitarianism were pervasive and became a moral creed, which remains dominant. In politics, a tendency toward extreme individualism was "accompanied by an urgent for a return of man to the state of nature, and a protest against all existing institutions, social as well as political" (Hibben, 1910, p. 19). Hence, as an inevitable result of Locke's position, these practical larger comprehensive ideas about fundamental principles of truth whose office might demonstrate constructiveness rather than destructiveness (Hibben, 1910).

Therefore, through the Enlightenment philosophy, these ideals have influenced "the practice of politics, economics, and the arts, as well as the study of social life, such as history and the social sciences".[8] For two centuries, the group consciousness of people alive in Western cultures has been shaped by the structure of the Enlightenment; the medium, possibilities, and limitations of contemporary thought have been provided by the Enlightenment philosophy.

To sum up, the Enlightenment in part "began as a response to the authoritarian control of people in several nation states by aristocracy and church heralded at this time".[9] Thus, political freedom and socioeconomic equality were incorporated as ideals. Before this time, what concerned clergy and aristocracy had its basis in the knowledge of the past. However, with the Enlightenment, the knowledge emphasized was "'discovery' of a 'natural' form of knowledge through disinterested philosophical (and later a scientific) investigations" (Efland, Freedman, & Stuhr, 1996, p. 18). Thereby, the creation of new branches of philosophy, epistemology, and aesthetics were involved. The Enlightenment philosophy implied the awareness of a relationship between knowledge and power (Efland, Freedman, & Stuhr, 1996).

The Enlightenment project influenced the core concepts of cultural modernism, which affected aesthetics modernism. In turn, the major concepts became the mechanism of significant innovation in education.[10] From here, I will explore the relationship between the individual and society as influenced by the Enlightenment project.

2-1-2 The relationship of individual to society

Individualism has been stressed as a Western cultural idea through a prevailing modernist concept based on the idea of the uniqueness of the individual. The society has sought to organize itself on the basis of individual freedom. The modernist conception of individualism is based on "a mythological character called 'the individual,' who at one level is supposed to act freely and independently, and at another is to act the mass as all free and independent individuals" (Efland, Freedman, & Stuhr, 1996, p. 24).

The idea of individualism is at the core of the Enlightenment spirit. In considering the individualism of Kantian philosophy, which is based on the Lockian philosophy, the point of view in reference to the social contract man's rights derives from the fact that the nature of social relations is regarded as determined by reason. In fact, reason is the way to adjust "the free-will of the individual to the free activities of all who are associated with him in society" (Hibben, 1910, p. 290). Therefore, the philosophy by which an individual lives is based on reason, not convenience or the necessities of circumstance. Every right that the individual has acquired is derived from the native right of freedom. Kant holds that equality arises from freedom, for no responsibility can be expected from an individual without that individual, in turn, being able to expect a similar situation.

[8]Efland, A, Freedman, K, & Stuhr, P. 1996. Postmodern theory: Critical interrogations. p. 17.
[9]Efland, A, Freedman, K, & Stuhr, P. 1996, Postmodern theory: Critical interrogations . p. 17-18.
[10]Freedman, K. 1989. Equity in education.

Hence, in order to give all a similar privilege, the native right of every individual to the free play of his activities must by itself be limited by its own justification. As a result, the individual is usually referred to from a universal point of view, without considering the particular situation of the individual or the accidental circumstances such as birth, position, wealth, or distinction. This is essential procedure followed by reason, namely, "to estimate every particular instance in the light of its universal significance. The individual thus universalized is already conceived as a member of society and of an established order of things".[11]

The commitment to individual freedom is essential to all modernity, both its early and late phases. However, in late modernity, the notion of individual freedom becomes extremely problematic. Cahoone (1988) states that "the liberal commitment to freedom seems to require that members of society have no say in what occurs outside of their sphere of privacy, which in effect means that freedom exists only in privacy".[12] Through the viewpoint of individualism, history has been accumulated by the individual acts of expression or power embodied in objects which particular people of certain socioeconomic groups attempt and make. For example, Efland, Freedman, & Stuhr (1996) believe that which is true, universal, and eternal, while showing what is personal." They believe this is because artists are "untouched by social, political, and economic interests" (p. 19).

2-2 Aesthetic Modernism

Compared to philosophical Modernity, artistic Modernism is a more recent development. Artistic Modernism began during the middle or the end of the 19th century, specifically during the 1880s, but this depends on which perspective one holds while speculating about it. Roughly from the 1860s through the 1970s, the term Modernism was used to "identify both the styles and the ideologies of the art produced during those years".[13]

Social and political revolutions such as the Protestant Reformation and industrial Revolution which swept Europe played a key as Modernism emerged. Western European was becoming urbanized and industrialized. The importance of organized religion in people's daily lives was diminishing according to growing secularism. Because the old system of artistic patronage had ended, artists chose their own content freely. Their art work did not need to satisfy the wealthy individuals and powerful institutions of church and state any more. In fact, the institutions had previously commissioned the artists' paintings and sculptures. Barrett (1994) asserts that "the slogan of the era, 'art for the sake of art,' is apt".[14] Efland, Freedom, & Stuhr (1996) Stress the attributes of aesthetic modernism. For example, abstraction is used "in the pursuit of pure formal relationships that can produce aesthetic experience" (p. 42). As a major principle, modernistic style tends to favor organic unity. Ornament is rejected. Artistic form focuses on consistency and pureness. A universal style is involved in modernism, which implies a universal reality beyond local, ethnic, or pervasive styles. Thereby, "'primitive' motifs are redesigned and incorporated to be consistent with formalistic and expressionistic" (p. 42).

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[11]Hibben, J. B. 1910. The philosophy of the Enlightenment. p. 290.

[12]Cahoone, L. E. 1988. The dilemma of Modernity: Philosophy, culture and anti-culture. p. 6.

[13]Barrett, T. 1994. Criticizing art: understanding the contemporary. p. 112.

[14]Barrett, T. 1994. Criticizing art: understanding the contemporary. p. 112.

Therefore, based on the concepts stated previously in aesthetic Modernism, I will explore the earlier furniture styles of modernism that were influenced by the Industrial Revolution, which greatly changed Western society.

3. MODERN MOVEMENT WITH FURNITURE

In considering the modern furniture aesthetics influenced by the Industrial Revolution, I will focus on major issues raised, which are the Arts and Crafts movement, Art Nouveau, and Art Deco which rejected or accepted the machine. The three movements had been started in the beginning of modern furniture toward functionalism or minimalism, which achieved the ultimate in modernism influenced by new technology.

3-1 Arts and Crafts movement

As a "reform style in British applied arts of the late Victorian period" based on the ideas of William Morris and John Ruskin, the Arts and Crafts movement was a response to a "state of complete degradation" in the decorative arts.[15] Morris viewed this state of degradation as produced by the Industrial Revolution and manifested in the shoddy furniture of everyday use. In Morris' perspective, mass manufacturers had mass-produced debased revivalist styles. Prompting artists' return to preindustrial modes of production, Morris insisted on a continuity of decoration in handicraft similar to that of the medieval craft guilds. He thought that this could correct the dissociation of artists and object, of art and use, and reinspire the merits of the preindustrial age. By emphasizing craftsmanship and clean, simple design, and by offering strenuous opposition to revivalism, the Arts and Crafts movement led the decorative arts of the time in a revolutionary manner. The imprint of the Arts and Crafts movement continued until around the first World War. 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 (Boyce, 1988, p. 16).

As the other exponent of the Arts and Crafts movement, John Ruskin is considered the most influential architecture critic of the nineteenth century. Ruskin believed that Gothic architecture and furniture of Classical design were superior. He suggested that asymmetry an irregularity of Gothic architecture and furniture, and the naturalness of Gothic ornamentation allowed the craftsman to express his/her aesthetic concepts in furniture freely. Ruskin denied the advantage of the use of industrial technology. He believed that furniture by mass production had caused a disturbance in the natural rhythms of our lives. Moreover, he felt that once-creative craftsmen were turned into mere cogs in the machinery of industrialization. Like their products, they lost their uniqueness. Ruskin stressed that by the industrial revolution designers had become anonymous laborers. Ruskin believed that only the return to handwork could restore individuality and quality. The arts and Crafts movement emphasized honest design and craftsmanship, and impacted the development of Art Nouveau strongly. However, Morris and Ruskin suffered from "an unfortunate hatred towards modern methods of production and tended to look back to the medieval world, rather than forwards towards the 'progressive' era of complete mechanization".[16]

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[15]Boyce, C. 1988. Dictionary of furniture . p. 16.
[16]Fuller, P. 1988. Design after Modernism. p. 118.

3-2 Art Nouveau

As the European design reform movement during the 1890s and early 20th century, Art Nouveau developed an elaborate curvilinear design style. The work of the prominent Art Nouveau architect and furniture designer Charles Mackintosh, Art Nouveau furniture design was startlingly avant-garde at the time. Although the Arts and Crafts movement clearly influenced his furniture, he did refuse out-of-date historicism. He insisted on careful use of ornament and genuine craftsmanship. Thus, Mackintosh's furniture includes "the curving organic elements of Art Nouveau, Celtic motifs from his native Scotland and curiously elongated forms".[17] Later on, geometric and abstract forms of ornament appeared in his furniture, "at a time when non-representational art was only just beginning to emerge" (Fiell & Fiell, 1991, p. 8). The Art Nouveau movement influenced furniture design by representing novel ideas at a time when large scale production of furniture was being attempted. Furniture style became relatively simpler, more functional, and less ornamental following the emphasis on modern utility.

3-3 Art Deco

As a French decorative style during the 1920s, Art Deco was also known as "Art Moderne" or "Jezz Moderne".[18] As a reaction against the stylistic excesses of Art Nouveau furniture, a limited, stylized use of ornament and simple design characterized Art Deco furniture, which placed "an emphasis on fine craftsmanship and an opulent use of precious and exotic materials" (Boyce, 1988, p. 13). The design in Art Deco emphasized geometry over asymmetry, and the rectilinear over the curvilinear. The use of the machine and of new materials such as plastics, ferroconcrete, and glass was shown in Art Deco furniture. Thus, the furniture of Art Deco was considered by its proponents to represent Modernism. At this time, using metal in making furniture was innovative. Metal was regarded as allowing a range of wonderful combinations and new aesthetic effects, and creating a harmony between functionalism and aesthetics, making it one of the best-known types of design of the twentieth century. Spencer (1991) suggests that the Art Deco designs can be characterized as a combination of "both early Modernism and standardization of mass production while retaining the use of decoration".[19]

Therefore, as the major movements in modern furniture influenced by the machine age passed, furniture in Modernism evolved its characteristic qualities, which were more involved in new technologies. Modern furniture designers insisted on the modern concepts of their furniture expressed in international styles against the historicism of decoration.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study intended to explore the philosophical Modernity with the Enlightenment (from approximately 1687 to 1789) in relation to cultural and aesthetic modernism rooted in Modern furniture, which directly reflected modern culture and society with rationalism, science, industrialization, progressive, universal ideas, etc. A recent way of thinking and contemplating on

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[17]Fiell, C, & Fiell, P. 1991. Modern furniture classics since 1945. p. 8.

[18]Boyce, C. 1988. Dictionary of furniture. p. 13.

[19]Spencer, D. 1991. Total design. p. 31.

Western culture that celebrates science, individualism, and progressive thought in an evolutionary sense has referred Modernism. With the rationale of the Modernity, the arts and crafts movement, art nouveau, and art deco had been begun as modern movement in furniture influenced by Industrial Revolution. The situation as a whole is considered cultural modernism. 'Ornament is a Crime,' the Bauhaus, and functionalism or minimalism by Industrial Revolution represented the ideas of modern furniture from technology, as affected by the new materials, new methods, and new design of the new technology.

Functionalism played a key role in furniture design after the 1930s, when it gained prominence. Spencer (1991) mentions that in 1922 Peter Behrens wrote in "Die Form": "we have no choice but to make our lives more simple, more practical, more organized and wide-ranging. Only through industry have we any hope of fulfilling our aims" (p. 61). Spencer (1991) observes that "the theory of functionalism – that beauty in useful objects is defined by their utility and by honesty to materials and structure – was rooted in the mid-nineteenth century idea of 'art in industry'" (p. 94). By this idea, pervasive standards could make aesthetic judgments about modern furniture. Also, the aesthetic judgments "could educate the public and bring commercial profit to manufacturers" (Spencer, 1991, p. 94). Thus, the judgments encouraged the modern furniture aesthetics of the International Style. The concept of International Style in architecture influenced the style of modern furniture design.

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