we can assume, good art—brings you in “just three beats after the teller gives you the punch line.”

In making this extended metaphor, Bennett demonstrated one of the most important ways that studio furniture began to change as makers engaged with postmodern ideas. Bennett was writing about the creation of meaning and how that process happened from artist to viewer (or, comedian to audience, author to reader). His Nail Cabinet, Mitch Ryerson’s Washboard Children’s Highchair, Ed Zucca’s Shaker Television and John Cederquist’s Le Fleuron Manquant (The Missing Finial) all demonstrate how a furniture artist can participate in this kind of witty conversation. By rejecting the formalist values and functional emphasis of modernism—along with its particular manifestations in craft furniture—and turning towards new materials, colors, ornamentation and historical references, makers initiated such conversations.

Bennett used an oddly placed nail to invite consideration about the field, its rules, and the importance of creativity. Ryerson used coded referents—found household objects—to construct a narrative about parenthood for his viewers to “read.” By similarly using the coded, meaning-laden popular culture and historical references (to television and Shaker furniture), Zucca offered his viewers the opportunity to puzzle what Shaker’s relationship to TV would be (or perhaps what our own should be). Building on the tradition of trompe l’oeil but applying it to physical furniture, John Cederquist encouraged his viewers to question their perceptions and cultural relationship to imagery.

Like the joke building Bennett described, these pieces involve a layering of ideas, with the shared foundation being solid, usable furniture forms. By consciously engaging with the vocabulary available to them, Bennett, Ryerson, Zucca, Cederquist and other
studio furniture makers created meaning and conversation in their functional artwork. This represented a new direction for studio furniture.

With postmodernism in literature came the idea that the reader also created meaning, not only the author. Maker Ed Zucca recognized that artwork is in this way a conversation. In a 1991 catalog for Masterworks at the Peter Joseph Gallery, Zucca wrote: “Communication happens ideally in the SPACE between the object and the viewer’s brain, via their eyeballs.” He cautioned how “WORDS (whether mine or someone else’s) can muddy the terrain in between,” both “confusing” and “limiting” the conversation “and the spontaneity of the object-viewer interaction.” In true postmodern pluralism, his essay’s final words demonstrated how studio furniture audiences, as much as makers, establish a piece’s meaning: “Like the tree that falls in the forest, nothing happens in the gallery until the viewer comes and completes the cycle. You just have to be there.”
Notes

In citing works in the notes, short titles have generally been used. Works and archives frequently cited have been identified by the following abbreviations in order to save space:

AAA Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution
LPMA The Language of Post-Modern Architecture (Jencks 1977)
NAF New American Furniture: The Second Generation of Studio Furnituremakers (Cooke 1989)

Introduction


2 Ibid.


4 See Chapter 1 for a discussion of Bennett’s intentions and subsequent interpretations.


6 Henry Fisher, ibid.


8 Several articles about Garry Knox Bennett begin by talking about the Nail Cabinet, using it as I have here, for narrative introduction (for example, see Michael Stone, "Garry Knox Bennett," American Craft, October/November 1984, 22-26; and Joshua Markel, "Exploring the 'New' Furniture," American Craft, August 1991, 56-62). The story’s narrative appeal both shows what it meant at the time, but also how it has become a widely known story of dissent in the woodworking community. Its repeated retelling expresses and extends its importance, turning the cabinet into something larger.


10 Ibid.


I use the word “work” to describe furniture makers’ creative productions in awareness of theorist Roland Barthes’ distinction between “work” and “text” in which the former conceives of Literature as a fixed entity with definite meaning but the latter understands the concept of literature as open-ended and dynamic in regards to creating and expressing meaning. (For a clear discussion of this distinction, I rely on Barbara Johnson, "Writing," in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 39-49.) I use “work” for clarity of discussion when describing artistic creations, often referred to as “artworks.” While I recognize that their meaning is dynamic and changing—and that I am constructing my own reading of the art (or “text”) in this discussion—to use “text” would be cumbersome, confusing and unnecessary.

For ease of discussion and elucidation, I artificially teased apart these four intertwined aspects into separate categories. The furniture offered as examples bleed from one category to the next, not heeding any futile academic desire for concise, clear structure.


Oscar Fitzgerald, “The Movers and Shakers and How They Got There” (lecture, Furniture Society Conference, Savannah, GA, June 23-26, 2004), accessed in Oscar P.
Because there is no clear definition for what the word “postmodernism” means, and specifically in the context of studio furniture, this comes as no surprise. Had there been a clearer definition and method for asking about influences or ideas related to postmodernism at the time of the survey, the results may have been different. Many makers engage with the thoughts and directions of postmodernism in their work, even if the overall result may not be clearly identifiable according to general lay definitions of postmodernism.

18 John Dunnigan, in conversation with the author, November 11, 2010, recalled that he may have emphasized the influence of postmodernism’s rejection of modernism on his work simply because he felt that this influence and expression had been underestimated in studio furniture scholarship.

19 Garry Knox Bennett, in an oral history interview with Glenn Adamson said, “I don’t know what postmodernism is. Some guy name[d] Graves or Groove or ‘Teapot Joe’ or whatever it is,” Oral history with Garry Knox Bennett, AAA. John Cederquist, in a telephone interview with the author December 9, 2010, noted how he considered the word to really be related to architecture. Ed Zucca said, “I probably didn’t know what it was then and I don’t now” in an interview with the author, November 10, 2010.

20 John Dunnigan, interview with the author, November 11, 2010.


24 Mark Del Vecchio’s Postmodern Ceramics (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2001) offers an extensive look at postmodernism within the ceramic crafts; the only focused exploration I have found of postmodernism in craft furniture is the exhibit “Post-Modern Embellishment” shown at Pritam & Eames Gallery in 1983, for which no catalog exists. See Chapter 1 for a brief discussion of this show.


26 Foster, ed., The Anti-Aesthetic, ix.

27 Angela George, "Modernism" (class lecture, Corcoran College of Art + Design and the Smithsonian Associates, Washington, DC, March 6, 2009); and Bruce Metcalf, "Replacing the Myth of Modernism," American Craft, February/March 1993.


35 Gablik, *Has Modernism Failed?*, 22. While modernists shrouded meaning in their work, postmodern artists and architects also took pleasure in making inside jokes and commentary. However, postmodern creators often sought multiple layers of meanings (often using pop culture references) to speak to various audiences at once.


37 For architects Robert Venturi, Denise Scott-Brown and Steven Izenhour, this meant *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972) and other vernacular architecture, as well as popular culture, to more effectively communicate with their audience.

Fredric Jameson observed that in the postmodern world, parody is no longer possible, only pastiche, as there is no longer a “norm” that parody can point to, Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1983), 111-125. Jean Baudrillard and Guy Debord concerned themselves with the prevalence of simulacra: Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation; Guy Debord, The Society of the Spectacle.


Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973), 6. In the social sciences, structuralism and post-structuralism aimed “to bring about the ‘death of the subject’,” or, “to ‘de-centre’ the subject” in cultural observation, thus “discard[ing] action theory’s conception of the actor/agent/member/subject as the source of meaning and the architect of a consciously created social reality.” Anthropologist and structuralist Claude Lévi-Strauss saw culture and language as the structures that inform and create meaning and action in a human’s life. Post-structuralist theorist Michel Foucault was interested in the way that our discourses—ways of talking, thinking and knowing—exert power over us. For example, the concept of madness became possible with medical discourse. Pip Jones, Introducing Social Theory (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 141-147.

Martin, "Decoding Studio Furniture," 12.


Michael Stone, "Garry Knox Bennett," American Craft, October 1984, 22, accessed in folder Garry Knox Bennett, box 1, Gallery at Workbench Records, AAA.

Michel Foucault’s writings encouraged a heightened consciousness of power dynamics and ways in which one group or idea may be privileged over another; Jones, Introducing Social Theory, 145-147. Drawing on Saussure, Jacques Derrida communicated a hyper-awareness of language and its limitations; Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), originally published as De la Grammatologie (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1967). The “incredulity toward metanarratives” that Jean-François Lyotard proclaimed characterized the postmodern condition also signified a new consciousness, an awareness that “refines our sensitivity to differences;” Jean-François Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN:

Chapter 1


50 Bennett even offered to forward all correspondence he had received regarding the cabinet to whomever purchased it, Workbench Gallery note, “Nail Cabinet by Garry Knox Bennett”, n.d., folder Garry Bennett, box 1, Gallery at Workbench Records, AAA; Oral history with Garry Knox Bennett, AAA (see intro., n. 1); Slesin, "Home Beat: A California Woodsman," C3, (accessed Proquest Historical Newspapers).

51 Press release, “Workbench Opens Craft Gallery,” for 10 September 1980, folder G. K. Bennett, box 4, Gallery at Workbench Records, AAA. Workbench subsidized the gallery allowing furniture makers to sell the pieces without a gallery mark-up, possibly helping make room for some experimentation.


54 See intro., n. 31.

55 American Crafts '76: An Aesthetic View (Chicago, IL: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1976), 8. Some of these ideals even began with the late nineteenth-century Arts and Crafts Movement—an antecedent of the studio crafts. Later, as Europeans immigrated to the United States, the ideas and aesthetic of the Bauhaus also influenced American studio craft. While craftspersons in some fields, like ceramics, broke away from functionalist ideas in the 1950s and 1960s, studio furniture makers maintained these positions and related aesthetics much longer.

56 American Crafts '76, 3.


61 Julie Hall in *Tradition and Change: The New American Craftsman* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1977), 24, 27, 37, placed Nakashima and fellow first-generation maker Sam Maloof in the category of “use craftsmen,” who focus on function and beauty and adhere to the ‘form follows function’ mantra; Adamson in *The Furniture of Sam Maloof*, x, confirmed Maloof’s “functionalist design approach.”


64 Cooke, *NAF*, 10.

65 Ibid.


Cooke, *NAF*, 7. Cooke et al., in *The Maker’s Hand*, also note that the first generation made pieces while “eschewing both alternative materials and the use of decorative embellishments such as inlay and carving,” 28.


*Fine Woodworking* editor John Kelsey had met Bennett in California and when he encountered the *Nail Cabinet*, Kelsey “deliberately used it on the back cover as a provocation to the readership.” As editor, he needed to appeal to professional makers, art makers and amateurs and Bennett’s piece demonstrated a type of work from the first two while stretching the latter. Kelsey recalled that a desk by Wendy Maruyama (that graced the same back cover of the magazine) offered a “natural companion” showing that more than one artist was working in this new vein. John Kelsey, e-mail message to author, June 4, 2010.

Oral history with Garry Knox Bennett, AAA.

Bennett recalled one time when he discovered that he could achieve a nice black color by dyeing rosewood with black shoe dye; when his friend and woodworker Don Braden saw him doing this, Braden was appalled. Oral history with Garry Knox Bennett, AAA.


Ibid. and John Kelsey, e-mail message to author, June 28, 2010. Kelsey explained that the edge band is unconventional but an acceptable solution. In the letter to Danto he pointed out that door frame stiles typically enclose the rails, yet the horizontal rail, or “edge band” on Bennett’s wooden doors extend the full width of the door. The curved door displays the traditional frame position for rails and stiles.

John Kelsey emphasized Bennett’s careful calculation and position as a well-informed artist, e-mail message to the author, June 28, 2010. As Bennett learned new skills to achieve his cabinet design, he would deliberately consider each step and could have made the more technical interlocking dovetails had he wanted to. In Bennett’s oral history twenty-three years later, he says about the cabinet, “I don’t know why I did it. I probably did it—I knew it was going to make a point.” He then acknowledged that technical aspects of the commentary were beyond him, but it was intentional. Oral history with Garry Knox Bennett, AAA.
On March 3, 1979, Bennett drove the nail into the cabinet. On the underside of a
drawer, he wrote “Nail thing witnessed by-/ Neal Wehrlie, Steve Akana/ in Oakland
GKB/ Anno 79.” On the inside of the top door, Bennett wrote “Original nail/ stolen on /
in N.Y.C./ new nail installed/ 3/2/80/ (signature).” Photographs, Isle-Neuman, *Made in
Oakland*, 84-85.

Danto, “Furniture as Art,” 573; Danto, “Philosophizing with a Hammer,” in *Made in
Oakland*, 5-6.


cover.

Newspapers).


Kelsey, as quoted by Danto, in “Philosophizing with a Hammer,” 7.

Kelsey, "How to Be Garry Knox Bennett," 33.

Oral history with Garry Knox Bennett, AAA.

Michael Stone, *Contemporary American Woodworkers* (Layton, UT: Gibbs M. Smith,
Inc., 1986), 140.

In an e-mail message to the author, June 28, 2010, John Kelsey mentioned that Bennett
would even bet Tage Frid a bottle of Johnny Walker that a new technique Bennett was
experimenting would work.

Workbench Gallery note, “Nail Cabinet by Garry Knox Bennett”, n.d., folder Garry
Bennett, box 1, Gallery at Workbench Records, AAA.

Ibid; Oral history with Garry Knox Bennett, AAA; John Kelsey in e-mail message to
author June 24, 2010.

For articles and writings that discuss the *Nail Cabinet*, see *Fine Woodworking*,
Michael Stone, "Garry Knox Bennett," *American Craft*, October/November 1984: 22-26;
Stone, *Contemporary American Woodworkers*; “Garry Knox Bennett,” *Woodworker
Danto, "Furniture as Art"; Carol Olten, "Show of Form: Art Furniture finds voice in New
York City Exhibit," *The San Diego Union*, May 26, 1991, F17 (accessed ProQuest);
Garry Knox Bennett Papers, 1975-2001, AAA; Joshua Markel, "Exploring the 'New'

97 Oral history with Garry Knox Bennett, AAA.

98 *Fine Woodworking*, "Decoration vs. Desecration."


100 John Kelsey, e-mail message to author, June 24, 2010.


107 For more information about the institutions that fostered development in studio furniture, see Cooke et al., *The Makers’ Hand*, 142-153.


109 Oral history interview with Wendy Maruyama, 2010 March 5-6, AAA (hereafter cited as Oral history with Wendy Maruyama, AAA).