

Abstract

This thesis is a study of the phenomenon *modern furniture classics* in a contemporary Swedish context. Classics have a strong and normative position in the world of design, and what the concept of modern furniture classic entails is often taken for granted and rarely problematised. The main objectives of the study is to investigate what a modern furniture classic is and how it attains the status of a classic and is thereby accorded a more elevated cultural significance, a process termed classicisation [klassikerfiering] in the thesis. The research task consists of identifying and exploring the driving mechanisms, such as actors, structures, practices and factors which are involved in this process.

The thesis shows that a modern furniture classic is something dynamic and mutable that does not only occur as a result of the furniture's qualities in terms of materials, design and aesthetic attractiveness. It is created collectively by power structures within the cultural community. Several parameters such as objectivisation, idealisation, communication, mediation, contextualisation, representativity, selection and primacy of interpretation, are identified as central to the creation of a modern furniture classic. It can be viewed as a strategy consisting of the conscious exposure of specific pieces of furniture (and their designers), which are actively charged with values which provide them with aura in well-thought-through contexts. This is effected via a co-ordinated procedure involving cultural institutions, the media, auctioneers and other parties with a financial interest, such as real estate agents. Together, these actors are meshed together in a network of mutual interest and inter-dependence. The power structures have commercial and cultural interests: companies earn money, people active in the cultural sphere derive status, and museums and other institutions reinforce the foundations of their activities.

The empirical investigations consists of a questionnaire-based survey with "informed members of the public" and an interview study with professionals occupying influential positions in the field of furniture and design in Sweden. The methodological and analytical bases chosen for the study are phenomenography and discourse analysis. With an interest in focusing on breadth and variation rather than to seek generalisations and "objective truths" they have been useful tools. Phenomenography demonstrates qualitative variations in the different ways that different people experience and understand the same phenomenon. Discourse analysis is used to draw together a narrative around different perceptions of what makes a furniture a design classic. The discourses identified in the study have pointed up those elements that have generally been seen as significant aspects of the classicisation process.

By providing an insight into the functioning of the cultural community today, the thesis contributes to an increased awareness of how, and by what, our perceptions and interpretations of cultural phenomena can be affected. And this, in turn, says something about us, about our time, our ideals, our priorities and our doubts.

Key words: modern classic, design classic, furniture, chair, design, icon, aura, classicisation, phenomenography, discourse analysis, mediation, modern möbelklassiker, designklassiker, klassiker, möbler, stol, ikon, aura, klassikerfiering, fenomenografi, diskursanalys, mediering