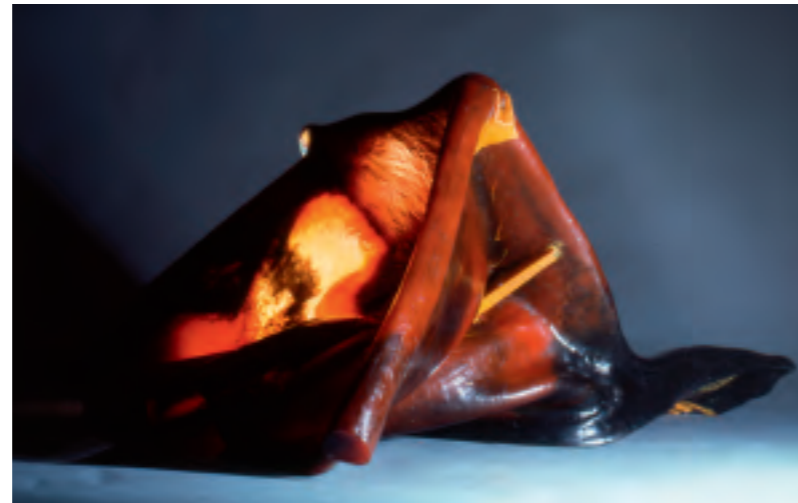


# Formlose Möbel

## Einleitung

„Es war schon recht dunkel in dem vollgestopften Salon.  
Die Ungeheuer der Möbel zerschmolzen zu formlosen Massen.“

Franz Werfel: *Eine blaßblaue Frauenschrift*, Buenos Aires 1941



Gaetano Pesce: *Pratt Chair No. 1*, 1983.  
Polyurethanharz Polyurethane resin

Im Auftrag des New Yorker Pratt Instituts entstand im Jahr 1983 eine Serie von neun Stühlen, deren Gestalt und Funktion sich einer herkömmlichen Bestimmung entziehen. Der italienische Designer und Architekt Gaetano Pesce ließ die Objekte aus farbigem Kunststoff in unterschiedlichen Härtegraden herstellen: Das erste Exemplar der Serie geriet so weich und nachgiebig, dass es seinem eigenen Gewicht nicht standhielt und als formloses Möbel, das kaum noch an einen Gebrauchsgegenstand erinnert, am Boden lag; das letzte Stück dagegen war so hart und starr, dass es seinen Benutzern zwar Stabilität, aber keinerlei Sitzkomfort verschaffte. In graduellen Abstufungen bewegten sich die Gebilde auf diese Weise zwischen zweckmäßiger Struktur und experimenteller Gestaltung und unterliefen tradierte Vorstellungen darüber, wie ein Stuhl auszusehen habe. Zugleich verdeutlichten sie in ihrer tendenziellen Formlosigkeit die Ambivalenz zeitgenössischer Möbelobjekte zwischen eigenständigem Kunstwerk und prototypischem Designmanifest.

Vor solchen in Auflösung befindlichen Udingen, die im Bereich der angewandten Künste und des Designs ungewöhnlich sind, versagen tradierte Begriffe und Analyseinstrumente. Denn obwohl eine lange Geschichte des Nachdenkens über das Formlose existiert, waren und sind diese Überlegungen zumeist von einem Unbehagen gegenüber seinen Erscheinungen getragen – die Angst vor einem Formlos-Werden, vor einem Erweichen, Schmelzen oder Auflösen der Dinge wurde in der ästhetischen Theorie zumeist mit der Angst vor einer

# Formless furniture

## Introduction

“It was already quite dark in the fully packed salon.  
The monstrous furniture melted to formless masses.”

Franz Werfel: *Eine blaßblaue Frauenschrift* (A Woman's Pale Blue Handwriting), Buenos Aires 1941

Nine chairs whose form and function withdrew from common definition were created on commission from the Pratt Institute in New York in 1983. The Italian designer and architect Gaetano Pesce had the objects produced from colorful plastics in various degrees of hardness: the first example in the series turned out to be so soft and pliable that it could not even hold its own weight and lay on the floor as a formless piece of furniture that had little resemblance to a use object; at the other end of the scale, the last piece was so hard and stiff that it offered its user stability but absolutely no comfort. The objects thus moved in a series of slight gradations between purposeful structure and experimental configuration, undermining traditional ideas of what a chair should look like. At the same time, their tendency towards formlessness clearly showed contemporary furniture's ambivalent position between independent artwork and prototypical design manifesto.

Traditional concepts and instruments of analysis fail when faced with such preposterous objects in a state of dissolving, unusual as they are in the area of applied arts and design. Although there is a long history of contemplation of formlessness, these reflections have been and still are commonly borne by a sense of unease with regard to its manifestations—in aesthetic theory, the fear of becoming formless, of a weakening, melting, or dissolution of objects, is, for the most part, associated with a fear of general dehumanization. The art historian Heinrich Wölfflin thus noted in 1886: “We bore loads and discovered what pressure and counter pressure are, we sank to the ground when we had no more power to counter the weight of our own bodies pulling us down, and for that reason we have the proud pleasure of appreciating a column and we comprehend the urge of all material to spread itself formlessly on the ground.”<sup>1</sup>

Only when material had achieved a different status in the modern arts and was able to rank itself as an equal alongside form could formlessness be grasped as an aesthetic category. Since then, formless has no longer been seen as simply a symptom of the decay and ruin of things or of the supposedly no-longer-beaux arts, but has been given subversive, at times utopian dimensions. As the art historian Monika Wagner showed in her inquiry into *Das Material der Kunst* (The Material of Art), for the most part it was artists from the 1960s who brought up the theme of art's physical conditions—which Wölfflin refers to disparagingly in his text—and investigated the autonomous laws and behavior of materials left to their own devices.<sup>2</sup> These material experiments, consciously leading to formlessness, were conceived in opposition to the hitherto dominant art movements, genres, and forms; entirely in line with the intentions of artist Robert Morris, who in 1968 declared in a manifesto-like way in a text entitled “Anti Form”: “The perpetuation of form is functioning



César: *Méridienne Couch*, 1968. Polyurethanschaum, Holz  
Polyurethane foam, wood