DIGITAL PROTOTYPING AND 3D MODELING TECHNOLOGIES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF INNOVATIVE FURNITURE DESIGN

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Abstract*: The integration of computational systems into object design fundamentally redefines the processes of creating physical artifacts, shifting the focus from manual labor to algorithmic generation. The research problem lies in the insufficient systematization of methods for transitioning from conceptual 3D modeling to the development of comprehensive digital prototypes suitable for simulating physical properties and direct digital manufacturing in the furniture industry. The objective of this article is to conduct a comprehensive analysis and practical validation of parametric modeling technologies, alongside digital prototyping, as key tools for developing innovative furniture. The research methodology is grounded in computational design concepts, encompassing visual programming of forms, integration of finite element analysis, and virtual testing of an object's physico-mechanical characteristics within CAD environments. A design experiment was implemented to create an adaptive furniture item—an ergonomic chair featuring a complex spatial structure—utilizing an algorithmic editor. The results demonstrate that employing detailed digital prototypes enables a significant reduction in the number of physical iterations, enhances the ergonomic performance of the product, and incorporates mass customization principles at the earliest stages of design. The scientific contribution of the article consists in structuring an end-to-end algorithm for transitioning from static 3D modeling to dynamic parametric prototyping, accounting for the technological constraints of CNC equipment. This approach transforms the traditional production cycle by minimizing material costs, reducing environmental impact, and substantially accelerating the market introduction of innovative products.*

Keywords*: digital prototyping, 3D modeling, furniture design, CAD technologies, parametric design, digital manufacturing, computational design, mass customization.*

INTRODUCTION

The transformation of methodological foundations in industrial and product design is directly driven by the rapid advancement of information technologies and the global shift of manufacturing capacities toward the Industry 4.0 paradigm. Historically, furniture development processes were characterized by a high proportion of manual labor during the design phase, relying on extended cycles of sketching, creation of scale models from cardboard or plasticine, and production of full-scale physical prototypes. Although this classical approach offered tactility and visual immediacy, it imposed substantial limitations: each structural modification necessitated a new physical sample, resulting in exponential increases in material and time costs.

The adoption of computer-aided design (CAD) systems and three-dimensional modeling technologies transferred form-generation processes into a virtual environment, marking the initial stage of industry digitalization. Initially, computer programs served merely as electronic equivalents of drafting boards, optimizing the production of working documentation. However, the conceptualization of digital architecture and product design in the early 21st century demonstrates that computational power has evolved beyond a mere tool for two-dimensional representation, becoming a fully generative design environment (Kolarevic, 2003).

The evolution of these technologies traces from early two-dimensional vector drafting software to contemporary algorithmic form-generation complexes that manipulate not only geometry but also metadata. This progression has progressively enhanced the designer's toolkit, extending capabilities beyond human imagination and Euclidean geometry, as illustrated in Figure 1.
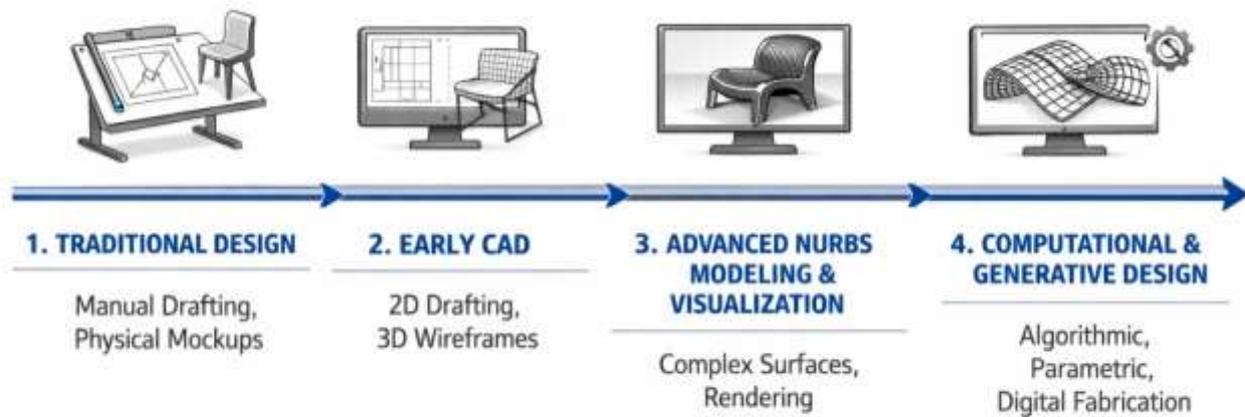

Figure 1. Evolution of digital technologies in furniture design. Source: developed by the author.

The role of modern CAD technologies in design practice extends far beyond simple photorealistic visualization of objects for marketing purposes. The integration of sophisticated analytical modules into software enables designers to investigate structural integrity, kinematics of moving joints, and material behavior under load prior to physical realization of the concept. The theory of design in the digital era confirms that designers' cognitive processes are now deeply adapted to the enhanced capabilities of digital environments, where parametric data forms the foundation of morphology (Oxman, 2006).

The critical importance of digital prototyping lies in creating a highly accurate information model of the product—a so-called "digital twin." Unlike standard 3D models, digital prototypes incorporate comprehensive physico-mechanical properties of materials (density, modulus of elasticity, yield strength), machine tolerance data, and manufacturing constraints of the selected fabrication method. In the context of additive manufacturing and CNC machinery, digital prototyping serves as the sole reliable link between abstract conceptual ideas and tangible products (Gibson et al., 2015).

The objective of this study is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of digital 3D modeling methods and to empirically demonstrate their effectiveness in innovative furniture development through the implementation of a specific experimental parametric algorithm.

METHODS

The methodology of this study is grounded in the principles of computational design and encompasses the sequential, systematic application of generative modeling tools, structural analysis, and algorithmic optimization. Parametric 3D modeling was selected as the fundamental form-generation method. Unlike traditional direct or polygonal modeling— where designers statically and manually define object geometry through manipulations of vertices, edges, and surfaces—parametric design operates via abstract mathematical algorithms and logical relationships.

The algorithmic approach enables the definition of form-building logic not through fixed coordinates, but through a complex system of interdependent variables, such as overall dimensions, material thickness, plane inclination angles, and variable radii of curvature (Terzidis, 2006). Modifying even a single primary variable (e.g., seat width) automatically regenerates the entire associated geometry according to the predefined algorithm, enabling unprecedented variability in design exploration.

The digital furniture design workflow employed in this study comprises four interconnected stages, each requiring specific software:

1. Parameter Input Definition: Collection and formalization of data, including anthropometric tables, physical properties of wood-based panel materials, and milling equipment constraints;

2. Node Graph Construction: Development of a logical schema in a visual programming environment, where each node represents a mathematical or geometric operation;

3. Three-Dimensional Geometry Generation: Automated computation of NURBS surfaces (non-uniform rational B-splines) based on the graph;

4. Virtual Model Evaluation: Analysis of the stress-strain state and algorithm refinement.

This multi-stage process is illustrated in Figure 2.
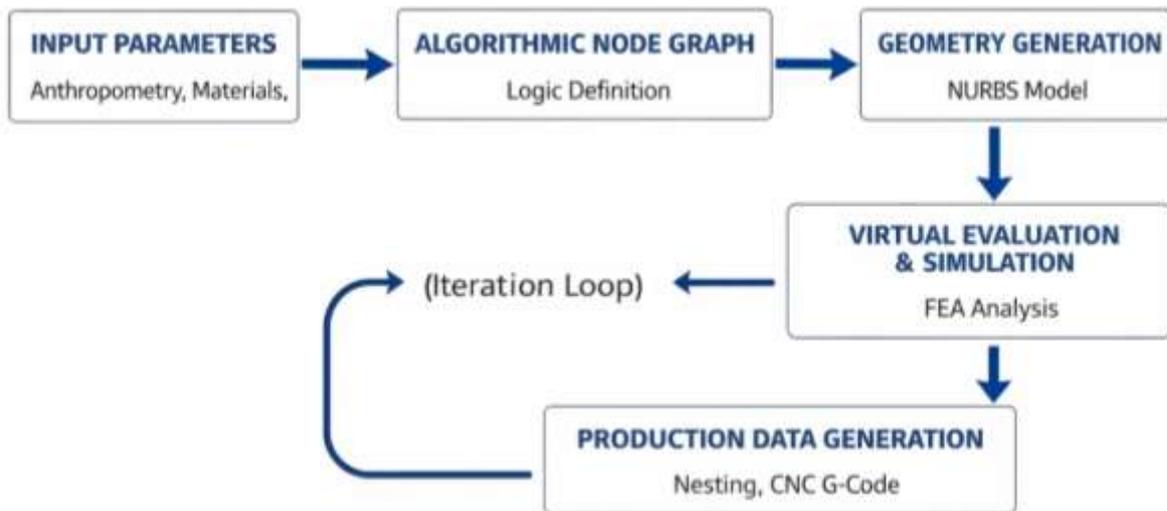

Figure 2. Digital furniture design workflow from input parameters to production data generation. Source: developed by the author.

For full-scale implementation of digital prototyping, a specialized software environment is established, comprising several integrated modules. The digital prototyping system architecture integrates a graphics core for precise mathematical description of curves, an algorithmic generation module for logic construction, and a finite element analysis (FEA) module for verifying structural strength under static and dynamic loads. The architecture of this comprehensive system is depicted in Figure 3.

During the prototype refinement stage, topological algorithms are actively employed to optimize the product's weight while strictly preserving its strength characteristics. The establishment of mathematical dependencies within the model generates an expansive adaptive solution space (state space), transforming the designer from a mere "form draftsman" into a curator of computational processes, analyzing and selecting the most optimal outcomes from thousands of computer-generated variants (Woodbury, 2010).
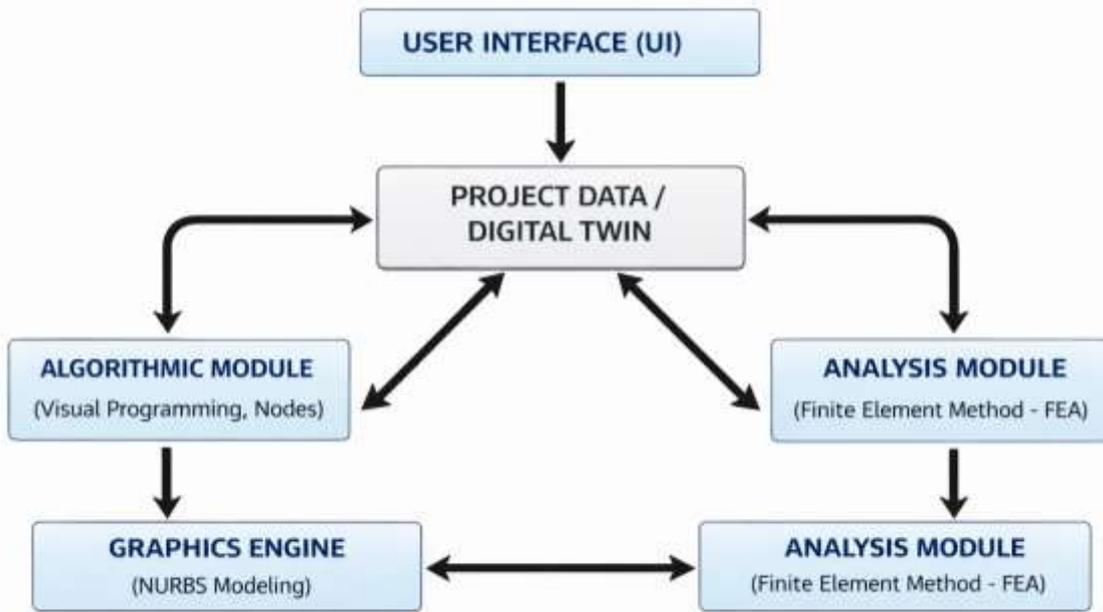
Figure 3. Architecture and structure of the digital prototyping system. Source: developed by the author.

RESULTS

To verify the described methodology and demonstrate the capabilities of digital prototyping, a comprehensive design experiment was conducted. The experiment's objective was to develop an innovative furniture item—an ergonomic chair constructed from flat sheet material (18 mm birch plywood)—utilizing three-axis digital milling technologies. The experiment commenced with conceptual development of a spatial structure based on intersecting sections (so-called waffle structure), enabling the creation of complex, visually lightweight curvilinear volumes solely from flat elements without bending or intricate gluing.

The 3D modeling process was performed within a node-based algorithmic design environment. At the initial conceptual stage, a base double-curved surface (NURBS surface) was created to define the overall ergonomic profile of the future chair. Anthropometric data for various human body percentiles were integrated into this digital prototype. Adjusting a single numerical slider corresponding to "intended user height" automatically adapted the seat curvature, headrest height, and lumbar support angle. Such profound parametric logic transforms the process from producing a single static object to developing an entire family of flexibly configurable products (Jabi, 2013).

The subsequent parametric design logic involved algorithmic decomposition of the complex source surface into a system of intersecting longitudinal and transverse structural ribs. The algorithm was configured to automatically calculate slot depth and width for element joints, accounting for specified material thickness tolerances. The generated spatial structure is presented in Figure 4.

Creating a complete digital prototype required transitioning from pure geometric representation to simulation of the object's physical properties. The model was exported to a structural analysis module (FEA). Material properties were defined in the virtual

environment (specific modulus of elasticity for wood considering its anisotropy, bending and compression strength limits), followed by application of static load vectors to the backrest and seat, simulating the weight and mass distribution of a 100 kg seated person.
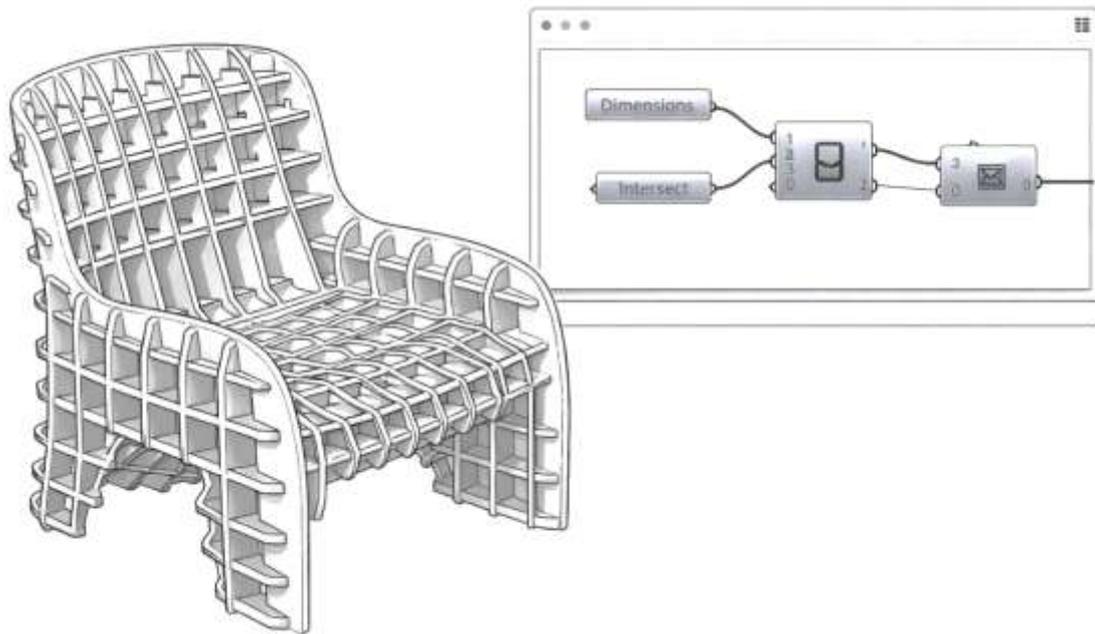

Figure 4. Parametric furniture model developed using algorithmic digital modeling technologies. Source: developed by the author.

The simulation identified zones of critical maximum stress at the backrest-to-rear support joint points. Based on these precise analytical data, the generation algorithm was refined: rib thickness in critical nodes was automatically increased via code, while generative perforation was applied in unloaded areas (upper backrest, seat edges) to reduce overall mass without compromising rigidity.

The final digital twin of the product—fully verified and production-ready in CNC routing file format—is visualized in Figure 5.

A key outcome of the experiment was not only the 3D model itself but also the
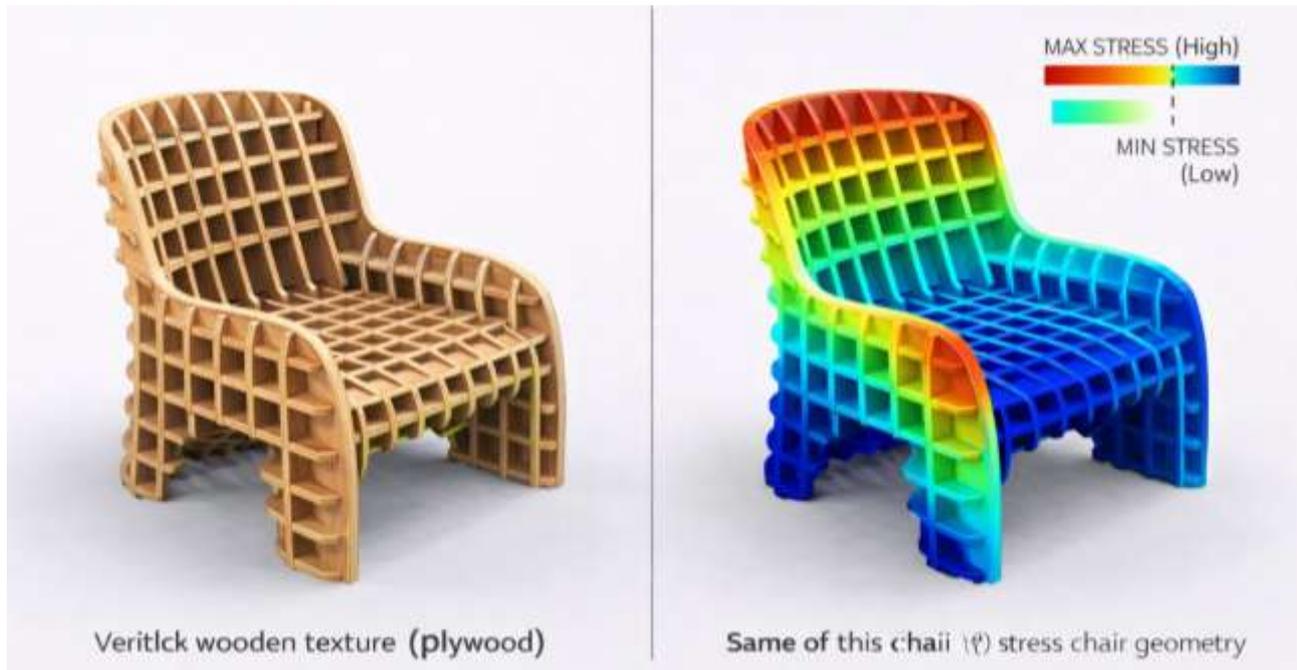

Figure 5. High-fidelity digital furniture prototype demonstrating finite element analysis (FEA) stress simulation. Source: developed by the author.

automation of manufacturing preparation. Production file generation (nesting dozens of curvilinear parts on standard 1525×1525 mm plywood sheets) occurred automatically using nesting algorithms, achieving over 85% material utilization efficiency, thereby minimizing waste and reducing product cost. Furthermore, the algorithm automatically generated technological cutouts (dog-bone fillets) in internal slot corners, compensating for the milling cutter's cylindrical shape and ensuring perfect part assembly without manual finishing.

DISCUSSION

Analysis of the experiment results highlights substantial, paradigm-shifting advantages of digital prototyping over traditional furniture industrial design approaches. The classical iterative process demands significant time (weeks to months) and material investments for fabricating multiple physical mockups to verify ergonomics, proportions, and structural integrity. In contrast, the digital environment enables virtually unlimited form-generation and testing iterations in virtual space, drastically shortening the development cycle from concept to market-ready product (time-to-market). Computational models grant designers unprecedented control over micro- and macrostructures, fostering entirely novel aesthetic and structural solutions unattainable through conventional sketching methods (Oxman, 2008).

A pivotal aspect of digital technologies' profound impact on furniture innovation is the full realization of mass customization. Unlike 20th-century mass production philosophy focused on millions of uniform goods, digital prototyping paired with algorithmic design permits tailoring each item to a specific customer's stringent requirements without halting

production lines. As modern CNC machines are directly controlled by generated G-code, altering one item's geometry in a batch (e.g., increasing chair height by 3 cm) requires no new molds or templates, avoiding cost increases and rendering highly personalized design economically viable for broad consumers (Piller, 2004).

Moreover, end-to-end digital technology integration minimizes critical manufacturing defect risks. The ability to precisely simulate assembly step-by-step, analyze fit tolerances, and test movable joint kinematics at the digital twin stage eliminates spatial collisions during actual factory assembly. The comprehensive interplay of digital technologies and their phased implementation across the product lifecycle is illustrated in Figure 6.

The environmental benefits of digital twins warrant separate consideration. Virtual stress tests and dense part layout algorithms (nesting) reduce material consumption by an average of 15–20%. Cutting down on defective physical prototypes—typically landfilled—directly supports sustainable development in the furniture industry.
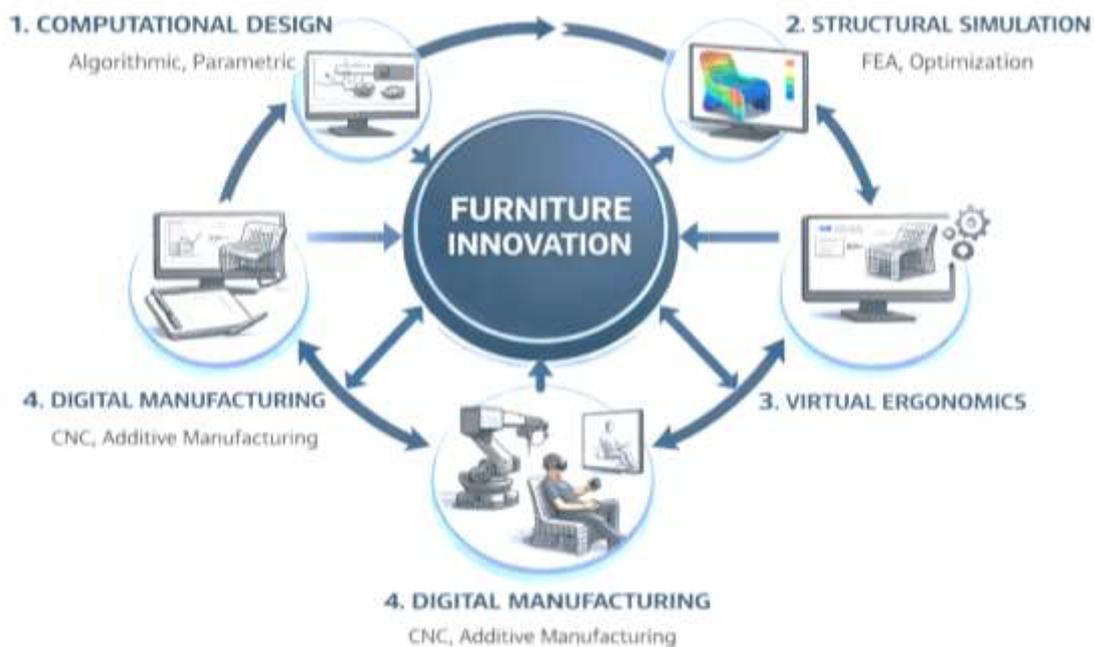

Figure 6. Integration of the digital technologies' ecosystem in modern furniture innovation. Source: developed by the author.

Despite evident economic and creative advantages, widespread adoption of digital prototyping demands profound, structural reorganization of professional design education and practitioner mindsets. Modern industrial designers must master not only 3D aesthetic graphics but also mathematical logic, materials science, strength of materials, and basic CNC programming at a high level. This confirms that innovative furniture design has ceased to be a purely artistic discipline, evolving into a complex science-intensive field at the intersection of engineering, informatics, and applied arts.

CONCLUSION

This academic study thoroughly analyzed and practically validated the contemporary methodology of 3D modeling and digital prototyping in the context of innovative product environment design. Key results from the design experiment confirm that parametric and

algorithmic design environments offer unprecedented capabilities: they enable the creation of complex, highly adaptive, and structurally optimized forms that would be extremely challenging or economically unfeasible using traditional manual design methods.

The parametric digital prototype of the plywood chair developed herein vividly demonstrates the high efficacy of seamless integration among conceptual form exploration, advanced structural analysis, and automated G-code preparation for digital manufacturing. The scientific contribution lies in rigorously systematizing the workflow for creating digital twins of furniture items via node-based logic. This approach enables academic and professional communities to view object geometry not as a static endpoint but as a dynamic, mutable function of technological and ergonomic input variables.

The practical significance for industrial designers and furniture engineers resides in providing a clearly structured action algorithm essential for implementing mass customization and topological optimization principles into real factory production chains.

The fundamental outcome of deep technology integration is the global transformation of the design-to-production cycle. The classical industrial paradigm—decades-long reliance on the costly "design → build → test" sequence (design → construct physical mockup → test and identify errors)—yields to a new, highly efficient computational paradigm: "design → simulate → optimize → manufacture" (design → simulate physics virtually → optimize algorithm → produce finished product). This inevitable technological shift renders modern furniture development far more sustainable, eco-friendly, economically efficient, and open to continuous structural and aesthetic innovations.

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