

Observing to Understand

by Gaddo Morpurgo

What are the young Koreans of Sdesignunit doing in the rich and industrious Veneto area of Italian production?

While the deafening cultural silence of our universities goes on, and they are now busy with modifying ministerial tables to uphold the presumed legal value of a degree, others, in the case the young designers of XYZ, call from Treviso and the Koreans of Seoul answer.

It's as simple as that.

This is why the Internet is useful.

Scrolling down, observing, comparing, investigating, researching, getting in touch, asking and getting an answer.

In the institutional dullness that surrounds us, the Internet, with all its problems and effects on training and educational processes, remains a window through which we can observe what is going on around us.

It is a place, if not the place (as non-places do not exist - they are just one of the many useless interpretative inventions), where we can understand what is going on, meet others who often have the same problems and, in the design field, discover that the object you are planning is already on sale.

Sdesignunit - an interdisciplinary group, designers, a website...it's not important, you can find them by adding ".com" and as you scroll down you see radio umbrellas, (Music in the Rain), plant pots (Stick pot) with an umbrella handle, to move the vase without having to bend down, torches for events (A Cup of Light /for a Peaceful Citizens' Gathering without Violence), books with glasses to cut out and assemble (Glasses+Skin Book), airline tickets, whose design takes into account the fact that they are usually kept in your passport (Passport+ticket) and much more besides.

Projects, products and researches that reflect some of the most interesting trends in young design in this small, globalised world, highlighting two aspects of a modern approach to creating design (or rather, to design): the invention of work and the career path as a studio.

Perhaps we have been excessively conditioned by our history (the post-war years, re-building, the meeting between designers and manufacturers, artisans who became the industrialists of the future in the economic boom and the birth of the 'Made in Italy' label) and we do not realise that our children need to release their creativity, first and foremost, by trying to create work for themselves. Self-construction, small series, virtual prototypes, a mix of graphics and products and other possible markets, are the signs of a career path that has finally stopped deluding itself that there will be some lucky meeting with an enlightened manufacturer.

This is a path that has been widely experimented in the last decade, in which design, which has become a sub-system of fashion, is almost completely entrusted to tried and tested brands, leaving little space for new ideas and/or designers.

But even all this runs the risk of becoming a thing of the past.

The present, and its economic crises (which are perhaps less cyclic than we had been led to believe) throws open the doors to a future that is poorer and less opulent than the one we are used to imagining for ourselves.

Even here, in the "rich and industrious Italian production area of the Veneto".

The ability to "invent work" may take on less contingent (or youthful) aspects and become more of a structural necessity.

This is why the "career path as a studio" becomes an essential condition for understanding and looking to the future.

The path as a studio involves observing what is really going on.

I mean observing things and the behaviour that surrounds them.

Observing to understand.

Understanding that design is not only found in sector magazines or in the articles written by obliging historians who confuse research with marketing and abdicate from their critical (and ethical) role as researchers.

The capacity for observation is the most interesting aspect of the work of these young Koreans on show in the "rich and industrious Italian production area of the Veneto".

It is one of the countless demonstrations that codified institutional results and how good they are, are not enough to be a designer, and that you also need a modicum of willingness to understand where the real problems lie and how we can use our limited knowledge to try and resolve them.

One of Italy's problems is that we need a cultural plan in order to teach observations.

So what does design mean to Sdesignunit?

A quotation is used as an answer to this question on the website: "Designing means simplifying, not complicating."

Yes, they are the words of Bruno Munari. Who is still studied in Asia, and not only when there is some kind of anniversary.

Observe, Define, Simplify

by Matteo Segna

XYZ inaugurates the programme of the Y section with projects by Sdesignunit, a group of Korean designers who summarise their method in just three words: observe, define and simplify. DESIGN UNDESIGNED, the first exhibition by Y, is also an ideal declaration of intent, in particular the choice of focussing on the design processes rather than the finished product.

For Sdesignunit, the process of design and creation begins with observing the existent, looking at daily life and collecting the concrete evidence of the needs that are at the root of design on the street. Objects that are self-built or modified "at home", with recovered materials, to make them more functional or to meet a specific need that no designer has yet been able to: bicycles with an umbrella, stools with a chair back, rain-proof sockets and extension leads made from pieces of plastic bottles. The photographic documentary of these undesigned objects is similar to that of Vladimir Archipov*, creator of the famous Home-Made, a production studio for objects from the post-Soviet period, when scarcity forced many people to make whatever they needed.

Sdesignunit begins with a documentary work that started three years ago, not to celebrate a folklore phenomenon, but to make this research the basis of the group's manifesto: observing daily life to track down those embryonic ideas that were waiting for a designer to intervene: in other words, those objects that were "waiting to be designed".

Besides the photo exhibition of these surprising, undesigned objects, other projects by the Korean group are also put on display, achieving often amusing and surreal results.

*Vladimir Archipov, *Home-Made: Contemporary Russian Folk Artifacts*, Fuel Publishing, Londra, 2006

Design unknown

By Song Bong Kyu / Director of SDESIGNUNIT

Korea ranks second in the world in terms of the number of designers who are produced every year. Yet in Seoul, which has so many designers, there are as many 'un-designed objects' as the number of designers. Throughout our daily lives we are faced with common objects, 'un-designed' objects. These objects are new, created objects, and are the result of a process by which average people themselves produce objects to suit their own purposes (substitution and combination), with no involvement from a professional 'designer'. When people cannot find the object that they need, they use another that has similar properties as a substitute (substitution), or they combine a few objects that are supposed to be used differently and create a new one (combination).

Under these circumstances, when we are saturated with designs, should we produce or consume design? Quantitatively analyzing the ratio of production vs. consumption, most designers cannot help but be consumer-designers, because consumption exceeds production. As we read this, we live in a situation that someone has designed, and we use something that someone has designed. However, in order for designers to maintain their positions as producers, they must continuously find objects to design. Designers should therefore carefully listen to the breathless objects around them. They should carefully listen to what small objects whisper. For the designers who start designing after an object has been selected, it may be strange to make an object for a design by themselves. However, looking around for a while, they will find objects that can be designed from new perspectives. Our lives are too long and our ideals are too noble and pure to only determine objects in advance and then design. This project is an archive-type project, in which we break each moment that we continuously face in our daily life to as small as an exposure of slide film, and recognize it as an object to design, observe, record, and design. Most designers want to be in the position of "design producers," but in many cases, they are in the position of "design consumers," wherein production and consumption are reversed. Alternately, some designers may insist, due to the saturation of designs, that there is nothing left to design. In order to overcome this crisis, designers should continuously find and re-discover objects to design.

That is, a process of collection is necessary. Through observation, process, collection, prototype, image, and essay, this project will propose the ways in which designers can maintain their position as design producers in the age of 'design saturation'.