

designers and those who use and experience designed objects. And if one accepts the proposition that design is integral to everyone's experience, then that same territory creates the potential for communication among all of us. I will illustrate some of the range of designers' objects by showing what students have done in a few of the assignments of the course.

Objects of objects

This assignment initiated our quest to understand how we engage worlds through objects and how we engage objects through worlds. We asked the students to find an object to reflect on and to make an object (a designers' object) that expressed their collective understanding of the object they found. We also asked that they keep track of the process by which they achieved that understanding.

A bottle of wine

In addition to their photograph and the text in the caption (Figure 3.2.) there was the important classroom "performance" of the three students who prepared the assignment. In this performance, they brought several different kinds of bottles (some pictured in the photograph), and they also brought glasses to illustrate the proper style of drinking the wine and, by implication, the sorts of circumstances in which the wine would be drunk. Taking all three "objects" into account – the text, the photograph, and the performance – they contextualized the object. Indeed, instead of bringing a single bottle, they brought several, already indicating the degree to which a "bottle of wine" was



Figure 3.2 Bottles of wine. If one tries to engage worlds through objects and understand how these objects actually enable us to understand the world, a bottle could reflect on this idea. We found this engagement in a "simple" bottle of wine for its functional aspects on one hand, as well as its semiotic aspects on the other.

The functional aspects of the bottle go far beyond a simple container of liquid. The particular shape of the bottle defines the quality of the wine, the position in which it should be stored and how it should be poured.

In addition to its functional aspects, the bottle communicates within itself the idea of gathering, tradition and culture. Thus a bottle gathers people together and becomes a vehicle to create an atmosphere. It forces itself from the outside into its own circle and everyone relates to this circle. Outside itself it has a meaning and within itself it has a meaning. From the outside it is a container and within itself it involves all of the senses of the body. All of these senses are utilized during the ritual of holding the glass and drinking the wine – sight, smell, touch, taste. Both the sensual perception and the intellectual perception are engaged. (Rita Saad, Maria Alexandra Sinisterra and Jennifer C.K. Seely¹)

an instance of a class of objects that had considerable currency. The text expands on this idea, helped already by dealing with a group of bottles rather than just one. The performance draws on their own experience and expertise, each giving a slightly different life context within which to see what the wine bottle is and what it means, and creating a narrative account through which it becomes more possible to understand the nature of the wine bottle.

Candle + glass

What were the designers' objects? The text, the reading of the text, the presentation of the merged objects in an atmospheric video and the objects themselves with a real flame on the table in front of us all. It is the combination of the candle and the glass and their new-found association into an object that resonates with a wide variety of human experience, not just those of the student team itself. It is even more provocative because of the unlikely role of the glass as candle-holder and, thus, the surprising new lantern (Figure 3.3). The performance in this case was more weighted toward the object in action – in flame – and toward the atmospheric video of the object in action, rather than the interaction of object-props, as in the last example, with the individuals of the team. The narrative constructions of the rest of us could be more personal, as we thought of such places and times of solitude, distant view, and impending darkness.



Figure 3.3 Candle + glass. We propose to explore a combination of two objects perceived by us as one – a plain candle merged with its holder. What is this object, what does it do for us, humans, and how does it affect the surrounding environment?

It is a minimal three-dimensional entity in the form of an inverted truncated cone made out of glass which lets the photons penetrate its body when the candle, usually made out of wax, is burning. Thus, it gives us light in a moment or a space full of darkness. The colour tones of the space around the candle are affected to reflect the redness of the holder. It gives us heat in a cold or hostile environment. It is also a generator of various smells. All these are purely physical qualities that are easily identifiable.

There is a much broader side to this simple object. It changes its appearance and meanings dramatically when it is affected by the flame. It suggests control as projected light can be manipulated; and lack of control because fire cannot be grabbed or shaped – it moves freely. And its usually pleasant smell and the silence of the burning flame can often touch on some long-forgotten memories. This makes it to some an originator of thoughts or even inspirations.

Its proportions, colour, material, and the effect on the environment, all combined, may be perceived by some as an entity with aesthetic qualities, resulting in feelings of pleasure derived from seeing beauty. Or it can also suggest time, human origins, adaptation and evolution. (Goncalo Ducla Soares, Alejandro Zulas, Victor Gane¹)