

Unit 2 Synthesis: Triangulating a Critical Position

The early stages of Unit 2 projects began as an exploration of the procedural system. Initial studio work moved from the manual iteration of Karel Martens' monoprints, where I focused on repeating, layering, and rotating shapes, working manually but intuitively. That iterative process led me to experiment further, cutting up silkscreen prints and recombining the fragments to see what new forms would emerge. This manual exploration of chance and composition transitioned to the systematic randomness of p5.js, driven by a core question: what does it mean to create a design system that is personal yet procedural? This evolved into the Dancheong typeface system, where specific, culturally grounded architectural patterns were translated into modular forms. This process established the foundational interest of the enquiry, revealing a fundamental tension: the conflict between the specific, singular, and culturally-rich form (like Dancheong) and the generalized, abstract, and rigid systems influenced from Western design system.

This line of questioning led to an analysis of the origins of these systems. The foundation of the design system, heavily influenced by institutions like the Ulm school of Design, practiced a rational, objective, and systematic approach. This standardization became the dominant force, famously articulated in the principles of Dieter Rams. The goal was clarity, efficiency, and universality, achieved through the reductive "smoothing" of all non-essential elements. This raises a critical question central to this enquiry: What gets lost in this process of standardization? When all specificity, cultural nuance, and individual experience are erased in favour of a universal average, does this pursuit of "good design" risk sacrificing creativity and meaning for mere efficiency?

The current line of enquiry forms a direct response to this concern: "How can specific cultural forms resist the rigidity of Western design systems?" The methodological response developed for this project is "unsmoothing." This is not a search for randomness, but a resistive act. It is the process of using "friction," "malfunction," and "visual pollution" as critical tools to deliberately re-introduce the specific, singular context that was erased by standardization. It is an attempt to bring back what is lost when design is generalized.

This methodology was applied in several specific contexts. In architectural motifs, the Dancheong system itself became a form of resistance against generic typography. In systems of communication, studio work on the UK Road Signage demonstrated this method's critical necessity, as it challenges the assumption that such universal systems are inherently neutral or superior. By deliberately introducing "malfunction" (such as mixing English and Korean text or breaking the arrow logic), the abstract authority of the universal system collapsed, revealing its fragility and inherent cultural bias. The friction generated by this act forced the viewer to confront the specific context that the "smooth" sign's standardization was designed to erase.

The synthesis of these projects leads to the triangulated position of this paper. Moving forward from this triangulation, the key realization is that all exploration has a recurring focus for individualized experience, not generalized templates for ease. This new position projects the research toward a practice that prioritizes the reclamation of specific, singular reality over the abstract authority of standardization.