

Note to Reviewer:

This reflective report is a revised version of an earlier submission. The initial draft was submitted via Dropbox on Backboard, and this final version has been further refined for clarity, coherence, and expression.

Design Beyond Control: A Reflection on Four Projects

Looking back at the four projects I did: **Ghost in the Machine**, **MTIV**, **Quantified Self**, and **Non-human Interaction**. I realize they were never really about making a perfect final piece. They were about using design to work through questions I hadn't really stopped to think about before.

I used to think design was all about control, planning everything, polishing it until it was just right. But going through these projects, I started to notice that design can happen even when you let go of control, in the small details we usually ignore, in personal feelings, and even in something as strange as imagining what a zombie might need. It became less about making something perfect, and more about growing a deeper understanding along the way.

Ghost in the Machine

For *Ghost in the Machine*, I wanted to see what would happen if we let the drawing make itself through a set of rules, like letting shapes play together on the page. My first idea was to use real food like fruits or veggies to make prints, but that felt too messy and depended too much on what materials we had. So I designed a simple drawing game called “The Perfect Pie”. Everyone started by drawing a big pie base together, then we took turns adding “ingredients” (like veggies, fruits, meats, or seafood), trying to keep it kind of balanced. When the pie was full, we cut it into slices like a pizza and each took a piece home.

At first, I felt really uncomfortable. I kept wanting to make the drawing look “right” or “nice”, but the rules did not let me control it. Then it hit me, that was the whole point. Once I stopped worrying about every little mark and just followed the game, enjoying the turns and the fun of sharing an imaginary meal, I realized something: what mattered wasn't the final drawing, but what happened while we were making it. That was the first time I really got that the process could be the real work.

MTIV (Making the Invisible Visible)

With **MTIV (Making the Invisible Visible)**, I shifted from playing with rules to

paying attention to stuff we normally overlook. I started noticing those thin, clear soft shells on supermarket fruits. I used to think they were just trash, something you peel off and throw away without a thought. But once I started really looking, taking photos, collecting them, I saw them everywhere, like little silent shells protecting the fruit.

I decided to draw them in a series of illustrations, turning the shells into accessories, funny constraints, or even cute little armors for the fruit. While working on the layout, though, I kept slipping into making it look like a fancy ad, as if I was trying to sell the fruit. That really frustrated me. I had to remind myself: if I'm trying to talk about over-packaging and how we turn everything into a product, my design shouldn't look like an advertisement.

So I simplified everything, used more space, quieter colors, a calmer layout. It took a lot of back and forth, but each change helped the work feel more honest. This project taught me that design isn't just about making something look good. It's about respecting what you're trying to say.

Quantified Self

For Quantified Self, I turned inward. I wondered if data could tell a personal story. I tracked my daily walks with my watch, but I didn't just want a cold, boring map. Instead, I started mixing my GPS routes with what I saw and felt that day.

For example, when I looked back at my trip to Marrakech, I didn't just see a line on a map. I had all these photos from hiking in the Atlas Mountains, and I'd even painted a landscape of Toubkal. So I combined my hiking route with the painting, not as a graffiti, but as a layered visual diary that showed both where I went and how I saw it.

Another day, I visited Hiltonbury Jerseys Farm Shop near Southampton. My watch tracked my path around the farm, and what I remember most was this horse that came right up to the fence to greet us, it felt so welcoming. So I took that GPS line and turned it into a loose, playful drawing of the horse, letting the route shape its form. That's how most of my "data art" turned out: part map, part memory, part sketch, all blended into one.

The hardest part wasn't the tech stuff; it was wondering whether my personal experiences were worth designing about. Did they seem silly or unprofessional? But when I put it all together and saw how a GPS line could hold a whole moment, a place, a feeling, a face, I understood. This wasn't about showing accurate data; it was about giving those fleeting, personal experiences a visual shape. Design became a way to understand myself better.

Non-human Interaction

Interactions with Non-Humans was the wildest one. My partner and I imagined a future where zombies were left with no food after humans were gone. Our “users” were zombies, and their big problem was they were always hungry. We came up with a VR game where they could feast on virtual brains, just to feel spiritually full, even if not physically.

I made storyboards, posters, and even rough ideas for the game interface and a VR pod. At first, it all felt kind of ridiculous, is this even real design? But once I got into it, trying to think from a totally different kind of mind, it started raising real questions: How much of our design today just replaces real needs with virtual satisfaction? Where do we draw the line?

This project didn't solve anything practical, but it pushed me to think way outside the human-centered box. Sometimes design isn't about giving answers, it's about asking interesting questions.

What I'm Taking With Me

My learning wasn't a straight line. It was a messy and confusing process of trying things out, getting stuck, and then figuring something out.

I moved from being afraid of losing control to working with it; from merely making things look nice to thinking about why they work; from regarding feelings as a problem to using them as material; from designing only for people to attempting to design for... well, zombies.

Looking back, I can see how I've grown, but also where I'm still figuring things out. I'm more okay with not knowing now, more likely to see “mistakes” as part of the process. I still overthink layouts, worry if my idea is clear enough, and sometimes doubt if I'm expressing myself well. But now I can admit that, instead of pretending it's all perfect.

In future, I want to hold onto what these projects taught me. I'll start by asking why I'm making something, not just what I'm making. I'll remember that ideas and connections matter more than perfect pixels. And I'll keep looking at the world, at my own feelings, and even at the strange, unexpected places where design might happen.

I hope my future work feels more like an open question than a closed answer. More about wondering than just showing. Because in the end, these projects gave me something better than a finished portfolio, they gave me a new way to see, to think, and to make.