

Conditional Design

# Ghost in the Machine





# What is Conditional Design

Conditional design prioritizes setting rules and conditions over dictating fixed outcomes. It emphasizes the creative process instead of the final product, welcoming randomness and unpredictability as key drivers of creativity. This approach challenges traditional design norms by sharing control with participants, turning design into an open, evolving dialogue.

# Conditional Design Manifesto

Process over outcome

Constraints are generative

Difference emerges from logic, not randomness

Rules define conditions, not results

Time and collaboration shape form

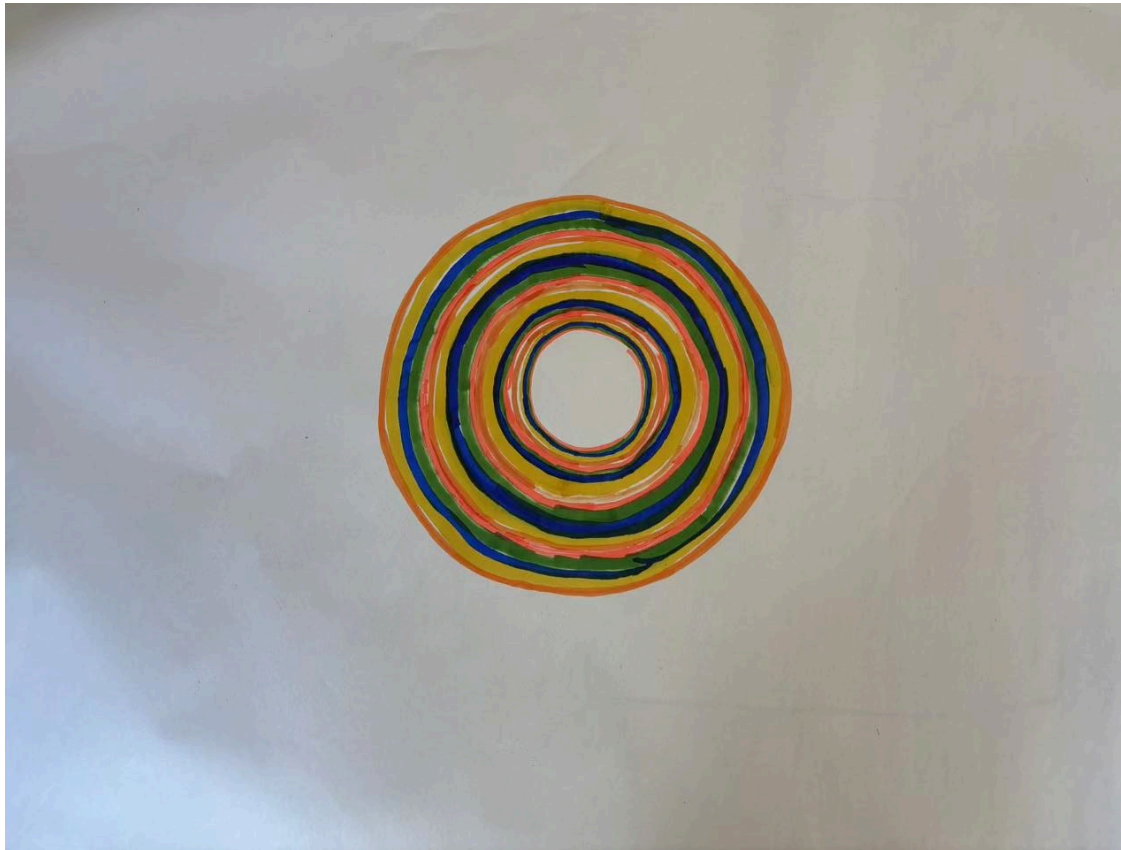
Uncertainty is a source of creativity

## From Control to Uncertainty

Before this project, I saw design as something that should be controlled. I believed a good design process meant having a clear plan and working towards a fixed outcome. Rules, to me, were mainly used to avoid mistakes and keep results consistent.

Through the Conditional Design workshops, this way of thinking began to change. The drawing exercises showed me that once rules are set and shared with others, the outcome can no longer be fully controlled. Time pressure, collaboration, and unexpected actions all influenced the final result.

At first, this lack of control felt uncomfortable. However, I gradually realised that uncertainty can be creative rather than problematic. Conditional Design helped me understand design as an open process, where setting conditions is more important than deciding outcomes.



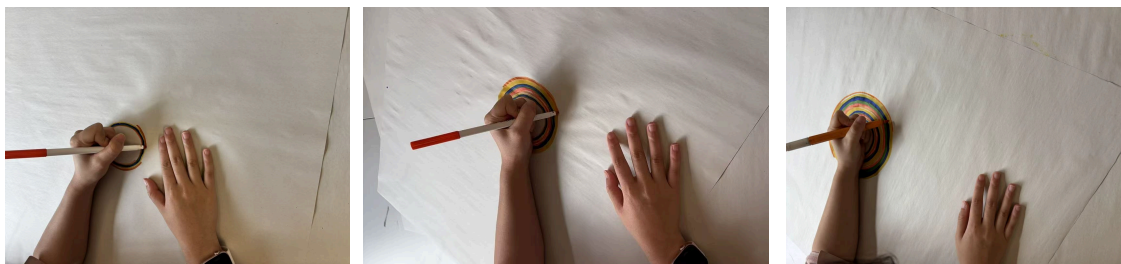
## PERFECT CIRCLE

### Rule

Play with five players.  
Each player has a colored pen.  
The players take clockwise turns lasting 30 seconds.  
Use a stopwatch

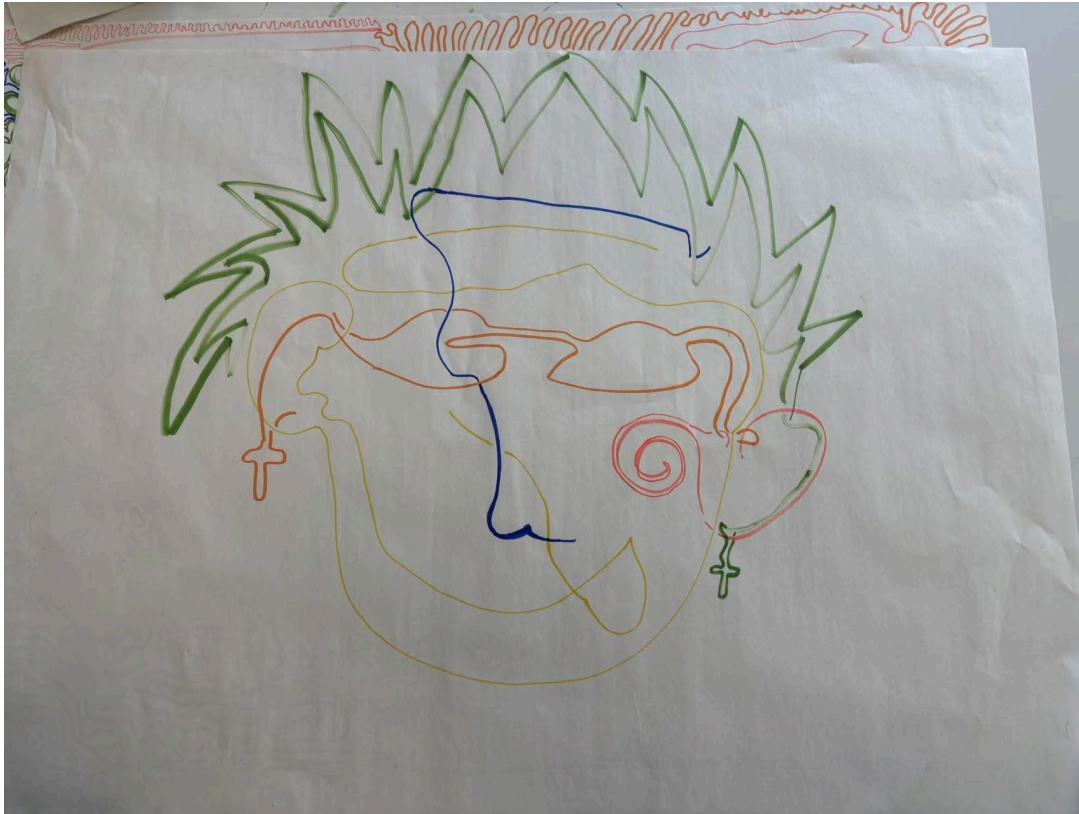
### Personal Feeling

This game seems simple, but it made me realize the balance between "control" and "letting go" in collaboration. The initial circle was the most round and stable, but as more people joined and the time limit approached, the circle gradually deviated from the perfect shape. Each relay brought new uncertainties, although this change made the circle no longer perfect, it made it more vivid and more individualized. This made me reflect that in team creation, there is never absolute control, and the value of design often lies in this "uncontrolled" beauty.



Process





## One Intersection Rule

### Rule

Play with five players.  
Each player has a colored pen.  
It is allowed to intersect with the line of the previous player once. In all other cases, it is prohibited to touch the line of the previous player.

### Personal Feeling

This rule forces everyone to take into account the trajectories of others. As the lines increase, the space is gradually occupied, and personal expression is restricted. This made me reflect on the importance of communication and compromise in actual design collaboration - when everyone insists on their own direction, the overall visual effect may become chaotic; only by understanding the intentions of others can the design maintain harmony.





## Continuous Drawing

### Rule

Play with five players.  
Each player has a colored pen.  
Drawing on paper for ten minutes  
without stopping

### Personal Feeling

The 10-minute continuous drawing practice is more like an exploration of space and rhythm. At first, the paper was blank and full of possibilities; but eventually, the dense lines forced us to search for new paths within the gaps. This continuous process of seeking space allowed me to experience the challenge and joy of maintaining creativity under limited conditions.



Process



# CONDITIONAL RELAY DRAWING

**Number of participants:** 4-6 people  
**Duration:** 15-25 mins (including rules explanation and briefing)

## Game objectives:

- Practice quick thinking and creative expression
- Foster a spirit of cooperation under constraints
- Enjoy the fun and unpredictable results of collective creation

## Materials needed:

- 1 large sheet of white paper
- Colored pens
- 10 condition cards

## Game Introduction:

"Conditional Relay Drawing" is a simple and fun group creation game where players **take turns** drawing on the same piece of paper, each time following a **randomly drawn** condition. In this way, everyone collaborates to complete a painting full of surprises and creativity.

## Game Rules:

1. Sit around the table and **decide the order of play**.
2. Each player takes turns drawing a condition card from the container.
3. Draw one stroke or a simple shape on the paper according to the card's condition
4. After drawing, **return the card to its original position and shuffle the deck** (cards can be drawn repeatedly).
5. Continue with the next player until the paper is mostly filled or time is up.
6. Give the completed artwork a name.

## Notes:

- Be careful not to draw too much at once.
- **Condition cards can be reused** to increase randomness.
- Use your imagination and don't worry about drawing poorly.

## Condition Card Examples:

1. The pen must not leave the paper during the creation process.
2. Draw any shape using your non-dominant hand.
3. Express an emotion using abstract symbols, such as calmness or excitement.
4. Create with your eyes closed, relying only on touch.
5. Respond to another person's work by adding contrasting elements.
6. Exchange pens with the person next to you and draw freely.
7. Have a group member shake the paper while you lightly tap with the pen.
8. Choose a color and draw its "temperature feeling".
9. Draw a shape with your eyes closed, then draw its opposite shape when you open your eyes.
10. The pen must not leave the paper during the creation process.

## Expanded Gameplay:

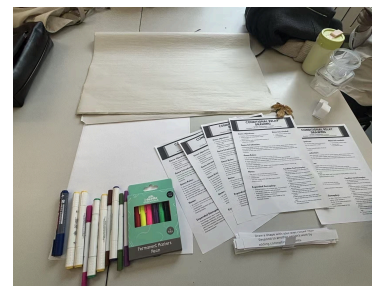
- Themed Version: Set a theme (e.g., "Future City") and design condition cards around it.
- Progressive Difficulty: As the game progresses, add more complex conditions.
- Story Version: Create a story based on the finished artwork.

## Workshop Concept

Conditional Relay Drawing is a collaborative drawing workshop driven by rules rather than planned outcomes. Participants take turns responding to randomly drawn conditions, allowing the image to emerge through chance, time, and group interaction. The workshop explores how constraints and shared authorship can generate unexpected visual results.

## Rules

Participants draw in turns on the same sheet of paper. Before each turn, one condition card is drawn at random. Each participant draws one simple mark or shape according to the condition. Condition cards are returned and can be reused. The activity ends when time is up or the paper is filled.

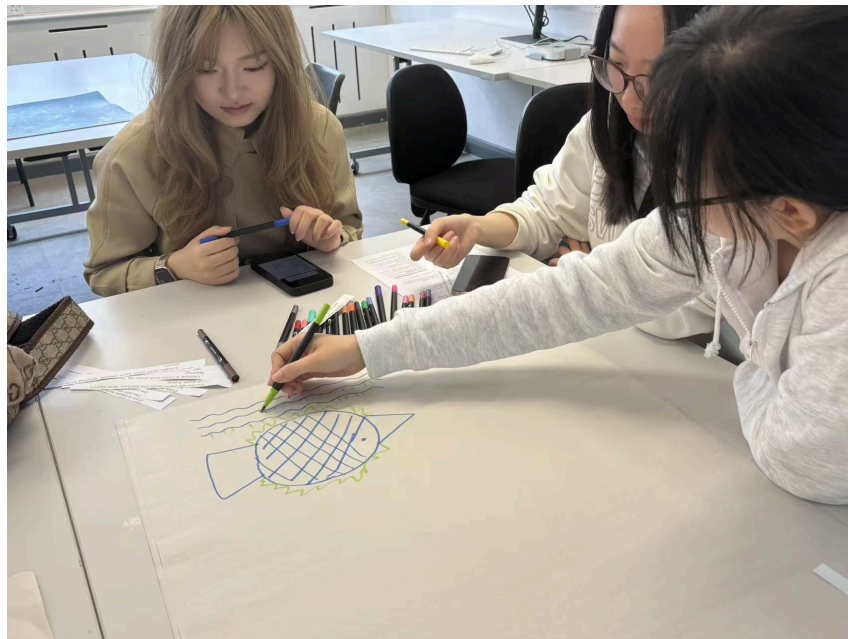
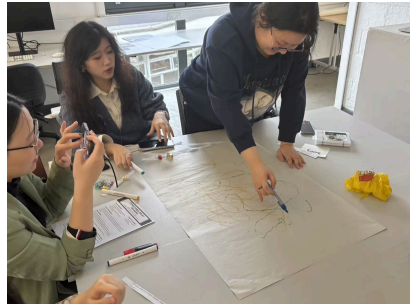


## Structure

Participants: 4–6  
Duration: 15–25 minutes  
Materials: Large paper, coloured pens, condition cards

Create

## In-class Implementation



Create





group1



group2



group3

## Final Outcome

In the course, we implemented our "conditional design game". At the beginning, when explaining the game rules, everyone would have some uncertainties and doubts. But when we brought out the lottery items, everyone gradually understood. Each group's work was successfully completed under our game conditions, and the game achieved the goals of bringing joy and enabling collaborative creation of works.

# My Role in the Group

In this group assignment, I played the role of facilitating the progress of the group tasks, contributing ideas, raising questions, and explaining the game rules.

## My suggestions for improvement

### Condition Card Examples:

1. Must use straight lines
2. Must draw a square
3. Must draw a circle
4. Must cross someone else's line
5. Must draw a curve
6. Draw freely, but must be done in one continuous stroke
7. Must draw a triangle
8. Draw freely, but must be done in one continuous stroke
9. Must draw a wavy line
10. Draw freely, but must be done in one continuous stroke

### Notes on 2 Create

1. In the wk02 workshop you will be in small teams doing some of the Conditional Design exercises from the workbook. As a team, you will then need to work together to create a completely new workshop activity which you will run with the rest of the class on Wed 15/10/25.
2. Initial rules for your exercise are:  
No limit on group size, but small groups of 4 or 6 are common  
Time limit of 25' from start to finish - including a briefing from your team on the activity.  
Bring to the wk03 workshop a brief description of the exercise and a list of simple rules. These will need to be as a .pdf document that we can display on the studio screen.
4. Be imaginative. Do not simply copy or slightly amend the existing exercises. Do some research and try to avoid obvious drawing tasks.
5. If your exercise requires special equipment, your team will need to bring it in on the day.
6. To reiterate, this exercise is created and run by a team. All other activities and deliverables for the project brief are individually based. Assessment at the end of the module is individual.

4. Use your non-dominant hand to create.  
(用非惯用手绘制)
5. Represent a feeling (e.g., calm, chaos, excitement) using only abstract marks.  
(仅用抽象符号表达一种情绪, 如平静、混乱或兴奋)
6. React to another person's mark by adding a contrasting response.  
(回应他人作品, 在其基础上加入对比性的元素)
7. Use only dots or dashes to build your composition.  
(只能使用点或短划线进行创作)
8. Close your eyes for part of the activity and continue creating by touch.  
(闭眼创作一段时间, 凭触觉继续创作)
9. You can only draw when someone else is not drawing.  
(只能在别人停止创作时进行绘制)
10. Communicate an idea or story visually without using recognizable objects.  
(用非具象的方式表达一个想法或故事)

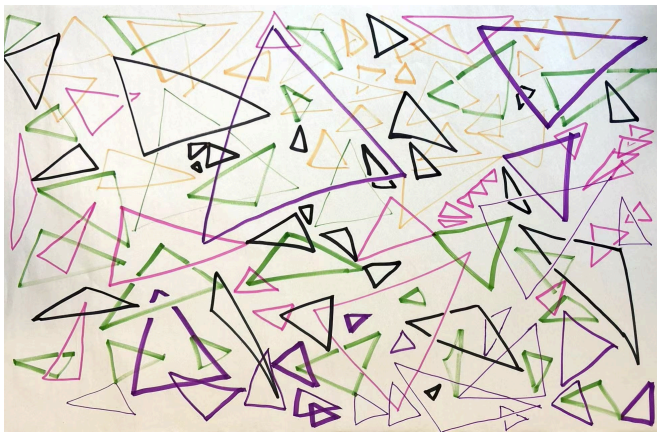
Because it was stated in the introduction that obvious painting tasks should be avoided, and the first version had specific painting requirements, I raised the issue, discussed it with the team members, and then modified some of the game rules.



Explain the rules and advance the game progress

Create

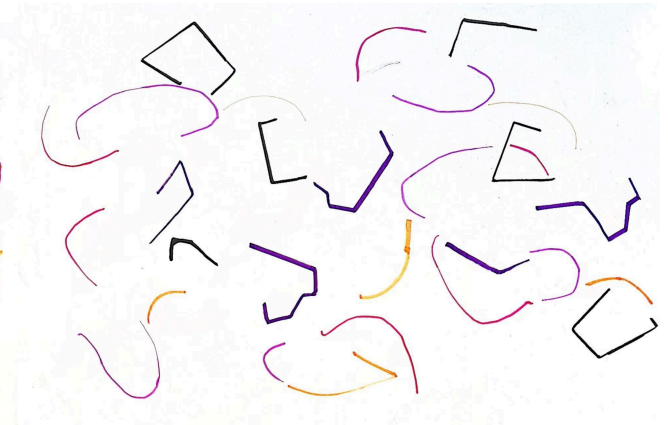




group1



group2



group3

## The gaming experience of the other group

The first group involves rolling the dice and filling the entire canvas with the specified triangles until it is full. The rules are clear, but during the execution, one needs to look at the number on the dice to determine exactly what to draw. But overall, it was still quite interesting.

The second group's task was to roll the paper into a ball to outline the shape. I really like this group of games. The rules are very clear and the ideas are very creative. I also enjoy the feeling of origami, which is very relaxing.

The third group involves removing the lines that form the shapes one wants to draw, leaving only the outlines of the shapes. At the beginning, I didn't fully understand the rules. After the explanation, I felt completely at a loss as to how to proceed. With the help of my classmates, I completed this little game. It was very creative.

# Final Reflection

This project changed how I understand design. Through Conditional Design, I learned to shift my focus from controlling outcomes to designing conditions that allow processes to unfold. Working with rules, time limits, and collaboration revealed how uncertainty and imperfection can become creative forces rather than problems. The drawing exercises and group workshop showed that meaning emerges through interaction and accumulation, not pre-planned results. Moving forward, I aim to continue exploring process-led design approaches that embrace unpredictability, shared authorship, and the productive potential of constraints.

Reflection