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My learning this semester was not so much about acquiring design skills as it was about reinterpreting the world through design. I completed four design projects, each of which enabled me to gain new knowledge and broaden my horizons.

The *Ghost in the Machine* project made me profoundly realize that team collaboration is not about reaching a simple consensus, but about integrating diverse perspectives around a core objective. When we encountered disagreements over conditional design, we did not dismiss any ideas outright. Instead, we dissected the strengths and weaknesses of each proposal (e.g., the collaborative aspect of the "drawing relay" was worth retaining, though it lacked innovation; the randomness of "drawing based on specified requirements" was adaptable, yet its time-consuming flaw needed to be avoided). The final approach we adopted—card-drawing combined with abstract conditional constraints—was precisely the integration and optimization of all viewpoints. This experience taught me to break free from the binary "either/or" mindset in collaboration and to screen and integrate ideas with problem-solving as the core focus. Furthermore, I used to believe that creative inspiration could only be sparked by unrestricted free creation, but this project completely changed that perception. The imperfection resulting from "using the non-dominant hand" lent greater tension to the lines, while the constraint of "keeping the pen on the paper without lifting it" forced participants to break free from conventional composition methods. It dawned on me that the essence of conditional design lies in breaking mental stereotypes through rational constraints, rather than restricting creativity; well-designed constraints can guide participants to explore infinite possibilities within a limited framework. Meanwhile, I also recognized the importance of the user perspective: when designing activities, I should not merely formulate rules based on the designer's logic, but also consider whether participants can understand and execute them smoothly—otherwise, even the most innovative ideas will fail to be put into practice.

Given more time for revision, I might continue to refine the condition cards. Building on the existing versions, I would incorporate more principles of art and design (such as "using complementary colors" and "exploring symmetrical composition"), making the activity not only engaging but also conducive to helping participants learn practical skills. Through the design practice of this project, I discovered that I possess strong collaborative integration abilities. Amidst team disagreements, I can quickly grasp core needs and integrate different viewpoints, which has made me feel a strong sense of involvement in teamwork.

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.

The *Making the invisible visible* project shifted the design perspective from deliberate construction to everyday excavation. Honestly, this project was somewhat challenging for me at first, as I was rather deficient in the ability to observe daily life. Fortunately, though, the graffiti tags at Winchester Bus Station, which had accompanied my

daily commute for months, became my core source of inspiration. For me, they were reassuring cues to confirm my destination, yet they are often dismissed as urban visual noise in mainstream discourse. This contradiction sparked a question in me: Do graffiti carry uninterpreted profound meanings? From this point, I launched field observations. I aimed to break the stereotype that "graffiti equals visual pollution" and reconstruct it as a readable social text. Two outcomes were ultimately developed: first, a visualized handbook that draws on the color schemes and typographic styles of graffiti from different regions; second, an interactive interface that allows users to simulate spray-paint graffiti creation, breaking the constraints of physical space.

However, as the project progressed, its most critical flaws gradually emerged. I consistently lacked firsthand data from the perspective of creators, having failed to conduct in-depth exchanges with graffiti writers. This meant my analysis relied heavily on personal observations and theoretical deduction, which prevented me from verifying the creators' original intentions and could have led to overinterpretation or misinterpretation. Meanwhile, my exploration of the matching degree between graffiti characteristics and target audiences remained unclear; I did not conduct an in-depth analysis of the differentiating logic behind graffiti in various regions (e.g., whether graffiti in Winchester town incorporates more local elements, or whether graffiti in East London features more sophisticated techniques).

Through this project, I learned an information interpretation framework based on three questions: Who creates it? For whom is it created? How is the message conveyed? This framework is transferable to all overlooked details of everyday design (such as small advertisements on bulletin boards or informal signs), enabling me to discover new meanings in the familiar routines of daily life. Previously, I believed design was a conscious, planned professional practice exclusive to designers. But graffiti made me realize that design can be a spontaneous, informal social practice without a defined designer identity — graffiti creators may be ordinary people, with motivations ranging from expressing their existence and documenting emotions to establishing dialogue. Although their works do not undergo a formal professional design process, they form a complete information transmission system and cultural symbol. This realization shattered my narrow perception that design = professional output, allowing me to grasp the true implication of the notion that "design is everywhere": any behavior or product that conveys information and influences the relationship between humans and their environment can be regarded as design.

In future studies of communication design, I will pay closer attention to the communication logic of minority groups and subcultures, avoiding the tendency to replace the target audience's perspective with a mainstream one. If I were to refine this project, I would conduct a quantitative analysis of graffiti samples from three cities (such as calculating the proportion of certain graffiti elements on the streets of London), using empirical data to support the correlation conclusion between "region and graffiti characteristics".

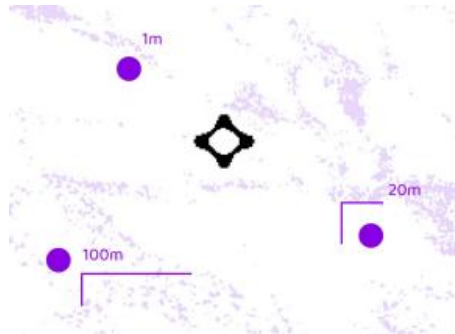
In *The Quantified Self* project, I focused on the correlation between emoji usage behaviors and emotional states, framing it as a practical attempt to decode inner feelings through digital symbols. Through long-term precise documentation, my findings confirmed the original intent of the project: emojis can not only truly reflect most explicit emotions, but also deviate due to factors such as social contexts and expressive habits. This dual characteristic of authenticity and performativity is a typical microcosm of self-expression in the digital age. The project yielded two visualization works: one intuitively presents the corresponding frequency of emotional types and emoji types, and the other demonstrates emotional fluctuations. The core value of this visualization design lies in transforming quantified self from a niche practice among professional enthusiasts into an accessible daily observation for everyone.

In my view, the project has two key limitations. First, the recording of emotions relied on personal subjective judgment. There were instances where dominant emotions during certain periods might have been mixed (e.g.,

feeling happy yet exhausted), but the project only allowed for the documentation of a single dominant emotion, resulting in data that failed to fully reflect the actual state. Second, these 2D static charts lack interactivity and immersion. For the general public, interactive designs are more capable of stimulating a sense of participation, whereas static charts have relatively limited communicative power and memorability.

For me, the practice of Project Four, *Interactions with Non-humans*, has been an immensely rewarding learning experience. Taking birds as the non-anthropocentric focus, I expanded the boundaries of user-centered design through empathic research and speculative design. Admittedly, I may not have executed this project flawlessly, but it explored a direction I had never ventured into before—so much so that even when talking about it with friends, they all remarked that the assignment sounded really interesting. It completely shattered my ingrained mindset that design exists exclusively for humans, teaching me to avoid imposing human perceptions on non-human subjects. Since then, when approaching design problems, I have unconsciously found myself considering the perspectives of non-human entities.

The concept of this project was well-conceived, yet I often felt stretched thin during the execution process. After completing the final output, I realized that what I had created was still a text designed for human reading perspectives. This led me to question: if the birds, which were the original focus of the concept, had a language of their own, would this text even be compatible with their cognition? Thus, if I were to refine the project, I would probably choose to document their sounds instead, incorporating audio encoding into the presentation format to align with avian cognitive patterns. Meanwhile, the guide assumes that birds can interpret symbols such as "circle = safe food". However, birds' visual cognitive systems differ from those of humans, and there is no sufficient scientific evidence to confirm their ability to decode such graphical symbols. If the symbol design fails to align with birds' visual preferences, the guide's comprehensibility would be greatly compromised.



Completing these four projects has led me to realize that the value of design lies in building communication bridges between different subjects:

Project One focused on connecting humans and processes; Project Two on bridging invisibility and visibility; Project Three on linking humans and non-humans; and Project Four on connecting data and meaning. Furthermore, the process and outcome of design are equally important. Each project has documented the feelings, attitudes, attempts, and failures encountered along the way, which has taught me that design is not a perfect outcome achieved overnight, but rather a dynamic process of continuous exploration. Reflections and adjustments made during the process are themselves an important component of design value.