Chenxuan Liu
337288784

CDU Reflection

D — Describe: What happened?

Looking back at the whole module, my biggest learning is that design is not only about making a "final outcome". It is more like a research process. I needed to keep observing, thinking, trying different methods, and improving my projects step by step.

Project 1: Ghost in the Machine (Conditional Design)

Project 1 was the first time I truly understood what Conditional Design is. Conditional design tells us that designers should care about the process, and how people interact with the work, not only the final result. In the workshops, we learned and tried different examples of rules in conditional design. Then we needed to create our own rules and turn them into an activity that other people could experience.

In this process, I learned that making rules is not random. I had to think about what conditions should stay the same and what conditions could change. I also needed to consider how to show my theme in a visual way, how the audience could join the activity, and how the rules could guide them to create results. At the same time, I realised that even with clear rules, the final visual outcomes will change because different people behave differently. I cannot control the results exactly. However, this "uncontrollable part" is not a weakness. It is actually part of the value of conditional design: as a designer, I design the rules, not one single fixed outcome.

Project 2: MITV — Making the Invisible Visible

Project 2 asked us to find and collect overlooked signals in daily life, such as worn surfaces and marks on the ground. We needed to record the discovery process, and then turn our findings into something that people can "read".

I chose tree scars as my theme. Tree scars are evidence of damage during the tree's growth. They also show how the damage happened, how the tree repaired itself, and how time left marks on the surface. In this project, I did not only focus on the appearance. I also tried to understand the mechanism behind the scars, and use this mechanism as the key part of my expression. Through this work, I realised that the world is already "speaking" to us through traces, but I often do not notice it. Paying attention to daily details may can give creators more real and meaningful inspiration.

Project 3: The Quantified Self

Project 3 required us to choose two sets of data, design a way to collect the data, and then visualise it. I recorded “time spent going out” and “amount of leftover food”. This choice came from my daily feeling: I felt that going out might help me consume food faster. To test this idea instead of only trusting my feelings, I recorded the two types of data for a period of time, using “each day” as the time unit. Then I tried to compare them and see if there was a connection.

Project 4: Interactions with Non-humans

Project 4 asked us to choose a non-human user and think about its interaction needs. We needed to do research or observation to understand its behaviour logic, so we could think from its perspective. We were introduced to the PACT model (People, Activities, Contexts, Technologies) to help us build a basic needs model.

In this project, I chose pigeons on London streets. I recorded where pigeon groups appeared, how many people were around, and what the pigeons were doing. I found that pigeons often gather in areas with high pedestrian traffic. This means the pigeons’ staying needs overlap with human walking routes. So I proposed a speculative solution: building a pigeon platform node at the edge of the walkway. It could include tree-like perching structures, a water slot, and sand. The idea is to use an “alternative staying place” to guide the pigeons to another spot, and reduce friction in shared space. This project made me think about a city as a shared environment, and how design could create a more gentle way to negotiate conflicts.

From these four projects, I learned how to organise design thinking in a more systematic way, how to get information from daily traces, how data can show relationships, and why understanding user needs is important, especially for non-human users.

I — Interpret: What does the experience mean?

Project 1 made me realise that the result is not always the most important thing. Designers do not need to control the outcome completely. If we invite the audience into the process, they can create their own results under the rules, and they will feel more involved. I also learned that I do not need to know exactly what the final work will be at the beginning. Exploring and adjusting during the process is also an important part of design.

Project 2 helped me understand that there are many communication signals in the world that we often ignore. Design can help these signals become visible again, and help people remember and read them in a new way.

Project 3 made me understand more clearly that the structure of my work can strongly affect how people understand it. Even if two sets of data are related, the audience may not see the relationship if the presentation does not share the same logic. So visualisation is not only about drawing data. It is also about building a clear story structure, so people can follow my thinking.

Project 4 made me realise that only using observation and personal experience is not enough to truly understand a user’s needs, especially when the user is not human. “Empathy” can easily become my

own imagination. As a designer, I need to be careful about whether my solution is really for the non-human user, or mainly for human convenience. I still need to learn how to reduce my bias and stay humble when I do not have enough evidence.

E — Evaluate: How valuable was the learning experience?

Project 3 gave me the most direct and deep reflection. Collecting data was not very hard, but I got stuck many times when I tried to make the data clear and also attractive. I spent a lot of time choosing chart types and visual styles. I also searched for many references. However, the final result was still not attractive enough. On one side, my control of colour and visual hierarchy was weak, so the image did not have a clear focus. On the other side, my sample size was small. Also, during the recording period, I almost went out every day, so I did not have a "no going out" day as a strong comparison. This made my exploration about the relationship less convincing.

Besides, when I made the second image, I focused too much on "leftover food" and did not clearly show "each day" as the time unit. In fact, my data collection was based on daily comparison, but this structure was not clearly shown in the visual. So the two images did not share the same time frame. As a result, even after seeing both images, the audience may still find it hard to connect them and understand the relationship. From this experience, I learned that the key of data visualisation is to build a consistent logic axis (such as time, unit, or comparison groups). Otherwise, the information will break in the presentation.

In Project 4, I tried to see pigeons as participants in the shared city space. However, I also started to question my own framing: is my solution solving pigeons' needs, or human needs? Am I truly thinking from the pigeons' perspective, or using human logic to guess their needs? Also, my understanding of non-human preferences is still limited. It needs more observation, experiments, and testing.

P — Plan: How will you apply your learning?

In the future, I will learn from these four projects and apply the experience to my next work.

First, I will think more about audience participation and interaction during the making process, not only the final output. I also want to keep training myself to notice small signals in society and daily life, and turn them into meaningful design ideas.

Second, I will learn from Project 3. Before making visualisations, I will organise the logic structure clearly. I will define the "constants" in the project (such as time units, comparison dimensions, and control conditions). I will also make sure different images share the same logic framework, so the relationship can be understood more clearly. At the same time, I will learn more about colour and information hierarchy, so my work can be clearer and more attractive.

Finally, I will continue to expand the meaning of "users". Project 4 made me realise that even if the final output is for humans to read, I can still include non-human, environmental, and system stakeholders in the problem framing stage.

Overall, this module gave me many thoughts. In the future, I will keep using systematic thinking, evidence-based expression, and a co-living perspective as my long-term practice method, not only for class projects.

AI Use Statement

This assignment was written by the student.
AI tools were used only for language support.

ChatGPT was used to help improve grammar, sentence clarity, and overall readability.
DeepL was used to translate parts of the text from Chinese into English.

AI tools were not used to generate original content, arguments, or critical thinking.

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