Playing Nine to Five
Ways of exploring our present relations with objects through playfulness

Yu-Fen Wang
Master Degree Project, Individual Study Plan in Design 2017
Konstfack, University College of Arts, Crafts, and Design
Professor: Bo Westerlund
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are too many people I have to thank for the accomplishment of my degree work. Without you all, I would not be able to walk this far!

First of all, I would like to give a big thank to my tutors, Bo Westerlund, Anna Holmquist, Martin Avila, Jenny Althoff, Cheryl Akner-Kohler and Loove Broms. Thank you all for the valuable inputs and advice throughout the journey.

I would also like to thank a lot to Sara Teleman for the great help and support with the essay, and Pernilla Glaser for the big encouragement and positive energy before our presentations.

Lots of thanks to Katja Peterson for the great discussions and guidance towards the exhibition. Also thanks to the other tutors, Erik Widmark, Jonas Ahnme, Gunnar Söder, and Inger Bengtsson for the useful inputs and the help in making.

Many thanks to friends who shared your stories about habits to me. I am so grateful to have the chance to hear all of your personal experiences and thoughts around the project.

Thanks to my lovely friends and fellows, Lara Benevides, Dinnis van Dijken, Carolina Crespo Uribe, Chia-Hao Wang, Kyung-Jin Cho, and all of my classmates in IDMA2, for having fika together, sharing emotions, and giving each other support and hugs during the process.

Special thanks to my friends, Yu-Hsiang Liao and Chia-Hao Wang, for filming and being the best models for the videos. Thanks to Elisabeth Magnin Gidholm for the beautiful photos of her daughter Eira. Thanks to my friend Yu-Hsuan Hsu for the company and the great help in building the exhibition together. Also thanks a lot to my boyfriend Kim Bourdette for the fantastic job in film editing and giving me support and encouragement all the time.

And finally thanks to my family in Taiwan, especially my mom and my dad, for lots of love and being my greatest support from the other side of the world. Also thanks to my landlady Annette Arnell for taking care of me and her cat Minus for being my best cuddle buddy.

Thank you all once again for being involved and being part of my unforgettable journey!
ABSTRACT

Playing Nine to Five is a project that aims to raise awareness of the presence of objects in everyday situations. We always surround ourselves with objects, some of them we touch and use everyday, and some of them we barely notice until they stop working. But are we always aware of our relations with them, or have we slightly taken them for granted? While our life quality has moved forward and our living pace has sped up, we tend to lose more of our attentions and sensitivities to things around us.

During the design process, I used office space as a canvas to discuss and challenge our daily norms, where objects exist mainly as tools. I looked into our ‘unconscious behavior’ with objects, such as habits or recurring actions. In our everyday lives, these repetitions and rhythmic movements with objects are often being unnoticed or considered as ‘normal’.

In this project, I worked with two office objects, a pen and a clock. Respectively, they represent different ways of exploring our present relations with objects. Pen is an object we use and carry with almost everyday. It is personal and close to our body. Clock, on the other hand, is an object that we barely touch, but constantly look at or search for. It shows the information of time. Both proposals are designed to bring attention to what we are using, when, and how, to create space for discussion and reflection. The purpose of this project is to tweak the way we interact with objects and explore our relations with objects through playfulness and curiosity. I see this project as an ongoing exploration and a potential development in the future.

Keywords:
Everyday Objects, Relation, Interaction Design, Presence, Habit, Play
# CONTENTS

## Introduction
- Intention  4
- Context  4
- Everyday Normality  5
- From Normal to Supernormal  5
- Unconscious Behavior  6
- Habit  6
- Stories of habits  6

## Design Process
- Empathy  8
- Everyday Objects: Time / Traces / Actions  9
- Workshop: How to make things personal?  12
- Haptic: The memory of the body  16
- The Sense of Touch: Intimacy with objects  17
- Play: being in the present  20
- Defamiliarization: From familiarity to unfamiliarity  21

## Design Proposal
- Object A - pen  22
- Object B - clock  29

## Spring Exhibition

## Discussion

## Reference list & Bibliography
INTRODUCTION

Being in the present matters.

Intention

This is a project about relations. When is the last time you start to think about your relations with things around you? Why do you have them and how do you interact with them? I started to question and dig into our relations with things.

We are living in a fast paced world, a world with many things. Some things we keep nicely with us and some things we tend to easily forget, or even throw away. While everything is moving toward digitalization, is physicality still important to us?

My intention of this project is to shed light on our relations with objects and create possibilities to bring up this subject through playful ways. I hope that through raising awareness of our present relations with things, we will be able to reflect and rethink their values and presence in everyday situations. Moreover, from small to big, to affect and change the way we interact and perceive objects.

Context

In this project, I used office space as a canvas to discuss and challenge our daily norms. Office is a place that associates with work and structure, a place that is often be considered as dull and repetitious. Instead of working within the office, I used it as a frame to explore our relations with everyday objects. I wish to involve people’s awareness and reflection on the everydayness through objects I created.
Everyday Normality

Everyday is a context that is happening and changing by our routines all the time. It is close to our ways of living and a theme that illustrates and reflects our personal day-to-day stories. That is also the reason I like to work with existing everyday objects and symbols, which is profoundly related to our day-to-day lives. Normality, or normalcy, is a condition of being normal, but what is normal? Does the feeling of normal affects our relations with things? Everyday normality is the starting point of this project. I questioned whether everyday normality is the key that creates unconscious feelings with things around us.

From Normal to Super Normal

Naoto Fukasawa once defined ‘normal’ as a situation where something has blended comfortably into our lives and understand it as a term that indicates an entity that is integrated into our life scape. He also defined ‘Super Normal’ as the normal within the normal, a process of re-realizing something you already knew and re-acknowledging what you naturally thought was good in something (Fukasawa, 2007, p. 100)

“I believe Super Normal is the inevitable form that results from the lengthy use of thing – shall we say, a core of awareness.” – Naoto Fukasawa (Super Normal, 2007, p. 99)

From Naoto Fukasawa’s thoughts, I related the idea of Super Normal as a mean of understanding the normality and the essence of being normal. It happens within a period of time. Therefore, the aspect of time has become an important element for this project in the process of exploring.
Unconscious Behavior
In this project, I described unconscious behavior as actions, such as habits or repetition of movements. It is an acquired behavior followed by regular patterns until it has become almost involuntary. These reoccurring behavior often happen during the time when ‘not thinking’ about the behavior itself, or consider it as ‘normal’.

Habits
Habit is defined from the standpoint of psychology as a more or less fixed way of thinking, willing, or feeling acquired through previous repetition of a mental experience. (American Journal of Psychology, 1903)

The experiences shared by people around me inspired me to look into our relations with objects through habits. From their experiences, the habits they shared are not behavior they have thought through before, but still can be clearly described with details of that specific action in that moment. Habits tend to be our memories that come into physical forms. It is something installed in our body more than our mind.

The aspect of ‘knowing by not knowing’ fascinated me through the process. In this project, habits that happen in office scenarios have become the angle I dig into exploring our relations with objects.

Stories of habits
"I am always fond of the feeling of the touch with my cotton clothes…I think it came from my childhood experience with my sleeping blanket…I never really thought about it so much, but I always remember the feeling…I always fold the edge of my cloth nicely in a small pile of square with a nice surface on top, and I rub it with my thumbs…"

"I do this usually when I am thinking…I didn't realize that I am chewing on the pen again while talking to you…"

"I usually spin my pen when I am thinking during work."
"I remember one of my colleague used to use a stick at work when he is talking and pointing at stuff. And there is one time, he actually broke it because he was so angry…"

"I have a problem with my habit. And I really want to get rid of it… I always found myself pulling my beard while working…I've tried to use the Fidget Cube. It helps, but I wonder is there another way that allows me to work more efficiently?"

"Speaking to this, I do this all the time." (creating beats on one foot)

"I like the smell of post-its, and it has to be newly packed."
DESIGN PROCESS

“The way of thinking about a thing, is to make the relationship with a specific thing from being familiar back to unfamiliar.” – Shozo Fujita (全体主義の時代経験, 1997)

This is a quote from Shozo Fujita, a Japanese political scientist and intellectual historian. He described the process of thinking about a thing as a mean of making the relationship with a specific thing from being familiar back to unfamiliar, which inspired me during my design process.

In the Thing Theory, Bill Brown once defined objects and things. An object becomes a thing when it can no longer serve its common function (broken for example) or when it has another layer of use (genealogy\(^1\) value for instance), that make you stop and become aware of its presence. (Brown, 2001) Both theories illustrate a moment when objects become unfamiliar or something “not normal” that makes us aware of our relations with them.

To begin, creating attention towards objects around our daily lives from being familiar (normal) back to unfamiliar (not normal) has become my starting point during this project. I aimed to find a way to create possibilities for objects to be thought about. Moreover, to change the norms of how we interact with objects.

Empathy

In the beginning of the project, I started to think about how could empathy be created towards objects? The idea was to look into the symbiotic relationship between us as human and everyday objects. In my theory, if we gave more attention and empathy towards objects around us, the better we will take care of them.

Symbiotic relationship has been mentioned by Ben Highmore, in the book Ordinary lives: Studies in the everyday. He said:

“Things act on us (affect us, entice us, accompany us, extend us, assist us) and we act on things (make them, break them, adjust them, accredit them with meaning, join them together. Discard them). There seems to be a symbiotic relationship between them and us; a mutually constituting interactions between people and things.” – Ben Highmore (Ordinary lives: studies in the everyday, 2011, p. 58)

The thought of symbiotic relationship made me think of our relations with cast-iron pans for instance. The more we take care of them, the better food we get from the cast-iron pans. The idea then shifted to how to make us want to take care of things more? Can we build relations with things? Is there anything to do with personal attachment?

\(^1\) Genealogy, also known as family history, is the study of families and the tracing of their lineages and history. In here, genealogy value refers to the value from family generations and the memories of history.
Everyday Objects: Time / Traces / Actions

I started to think about my relations with everyday objects in my own experience. Starting from my own room, a place where I start and end my day. By using my own memory, I noted down things I interact with, and how, as well as the frequency, and the feeling I have at that moment.

The blue notes refer to the actions. The pink notes show how I feel when I interact with each objects. And the marks with different color represents different frequency I touch them.

The outcome was interesting. (Figure 1) It shows an overview of things surrounded in my daily life and their connections with each other. I also found out that the way I illustrated each objects reflects how I view on them. Some of them only show portion of their figure, depends on how I used to interact with them. There are things I had a lot of contact with everyday (Figure 2), on the other hand, a few of them I only touched once or less within a day. There are also things in my room that I never get to touch or interact with (Figure 3).

Figure 4 is a visualization of traces (pink) that shows how I interact with objects (white) in the office space. The pink color shows the surface I touched while using or holding them. The purpose of visualizing traces is to understand how we use office objects in a tangible way. Moreover, to see how often they had been used through the shade of the color.
Figure 1. Map of objects I interact within a day
Figure 2. Objects I touched a lot in a day
Figure 3. Objects I never touched in a day
Figure 4. Traces of touch with office objects
Workshop: How to make things personal?

While questioning whether personal attachment is the key of building relations with objects, I decided to hold a workshop to understand how people make things personal.

The workshop was designed in two sections, first with an exercise on the paper, and then with materialization in physical forms. Each of the participants worked with different objects chosen between a lamp, a stapler, and a chair. The reason that I chose these three objects is due to their features, representing different dimensions in comparison. (Figure 5)

The result of the workshop allowed me to understand what kind of features people associate with personal things (Figure 6, 7). I can also relate it to the Endowment Effect\(^2\), which describes a circumstance in which an individual values something that they already own more than something that they do not yet own. (Thaler, 1980)

\[\text{Figure 5. Comparison of three office objects}\]

---

\(^2\) The Endowment Effect is a hypothesis that people value a good more once their property right to it has been established. In other words, people place a higher value on objects they own relative to objects they do not.
Keywords that associate 'office' during the workshop:

*school, mechanical, boring*
Keywords that associate with 'personal' during the workshop:

intimacy, warm, home, fun, animal-like, identity, character, friend, memory, habit, comfortable, happy
Haptic: The memory of the body

Haptic has always been an important medium of understanding objects. In the book *Designing Design* by Kenya Hara, Jasper Morrison described haptic as a mean to make senses “drool”, a metaphor of describing haptic as a gustatory response towards an inviting dish that opens all our senses from the moment we see the object. (Hara, 2008, p. 80)

In my opinion, haptic can be compared to instinct or muscle memory in the way that the body knows and can have feelings even when not currently experiencing them, i.e. the memory of the body. Haptic is not only the memories of our senses, but awakes them, and grows them through experiences.
The Sense of Touch: Intimacy with objects

I looked into tactile experiences as a way of understanding how we interact with objects. There seems to be a strong connection with our body and mind while engaging with tangible objects through the sense of touch.

Figure 8 is a prototype I did while exploring how to trigger people to touch and pet on the surface of a lamp. The idea came from my own experience of petting a cat at home as a mean of showing her love. I wish to enhance the need of being taken care of for object by giving it another expression.

The following figures are different surfaces made mainly in clay. I tried to create different tactile experiences for bringing the connection with fur.

The result brought up interesting discussion. The softness and the movement of the feather naturally gave the lamp an animal-like feeling. But it also changed the lamp itself to a living thing, which was not my initial aim for this project.
Play: being in the present

Swiss clinical psychologist Jean Piaget once said, “Play is the answer to how anything new comes about.” (Piaget, 1950) Playing plays a big role in children’s development. The experience of playing is considered an important process of learning for young children while exploring the outside world. Through different sensational experiences and stimulations, children tend to be bodily engaged with a lot of things around them while playing. What about adults? Is playing also essential for us?

On contrast to being as an adult, it seems to be more obvious and intuitive for children to explore the world bodily. I started to question the norms of the way we interact with things as adults, when we are so used to organize and stay in structures. What happens when playfulness was embedded into our everyday situations, such as at work?

In this project, I wanted to create experience for people to explore relations with objects through playfulness. The action of playing requires the focus of being in the present, which offers opportunities for us to explore the moment we are engaging with the objects.

Miguel Sicart in the book Play Matters described 'play' as a portable tool of being. It is not necessarily tied to objects or specific activities, but brought by people to the complex interrelations with and between things from daily life. (Sicrat, 2014, p. 2)

"To play is to be in the world. Playing is a form of understanding what surrounds us and who we are and a way of engaging with others. Play is a mode of being human." – Miguel Sicart (Play Matters, 2014, p.1)

I related to how Sicart sees 'play' with how playing can be seen as an action of being in the present. It is a portable tool; a tool allows us to be in the moment in a specific period of time. During the time of playing, play not only articulates the time, but also creates the understanding of the connections with and between things, activities, and people in that specific period of time.

Sicrat also mentioned that 'play' can be designed. It is designed as mediated by things created to facilitate the emergence of play. It creates itself through objects, rules, players, situations, and spaces. (Sicrat, 2014, p. 7) Therefore, I aimed to create possibilities for people, by the action of play, to explore and look into our relations with everyday objects.
Defamiliarization: From familiarity to unfamiliarity

"I think the attempt to create 'unfamiliar' objects is the essence of the creativity that leads us to 'understand' things in this world." – Kenya Hara (White, 2010, p. 71)

Kenya Hara in the book White mentioned about 'defamiliarization'. He described the process of mediating on or 'understanding' something as 'defamiliarization'. Alike what Shozo Fujita once said, Hara also pointed out the moment we think about a thing happens when the thing becomes 'unfamiliar' to us.

There are a lot of things we consider as familiar in our daily lives, such as the pen or the glasses we are using and wearing everyday. There are also things we considered as familiar like the light switch or the clock that we are having near us everyday, but barely get to interact with.

After trying to understand my relations with objects around me in a day, I found it interesting to look into objects in two directions, to understand why we consider familiar and tend to easily forget in the office space. Moreover, to bring up these objects from being familiar to unfamiliar.

Figure 9 are office pens with different parts added for triggering the chewing behavior. Figure 10 is a simple prototype of an office clock showing the time with movable paperclips. I tried to change our way of interacting with familiar office objects to unfamiliar, in order to provide possibilities for us to think about our relations with them.
OBJECT A – PEN

One of the office objects I chose to work with for the final proposal is the pen. It is a magnetic pen that goes with eight different components with magnets (Figure 11). The idea came from the chewing habit with the pen.

Each of the components came from the shape associated with chewing, such as lollypop, pacifier, and the end of the wooden pencils. I also added two wooden round shapes, a feather, and a hook together with the pen.

The pen itself is designed symmetrically with two round ends. When it doesn’t need to be functioned as a pen, the lid can be turned into the body, which provides ambiguity and possibilities for diverse ways of playing.

Object A is an object that designed for adults. I see it as a medium to communicate and to be explored. Therefore, it remains mainly in the color white, and the appearance of the material itself.
During the prototyping process, the biggest challenge was to create the body of the pen in thin magnetic shells. In order to make the pen work, it required certain kind of mechanical structure inside the pen. So the body has to be hollow, but strong enough to magnetize the parts. I tried with different ways and materials, including magnetic paint, PLA with iron for 3D printing, and metal tubes (Figure 12). In the end, the iron tubes worked out better because of the high percentage of iron.

The shape of the lollypop and the pacifier came from the behaviors with the mouth from children. The wooden long shapes came from the experience of chewing on the end of wooden pencils, as well as the wooden round shapes. The feather refers to the old ink pen and was brought from my design process. The hook was added for hanging or and opens for other possibilities. All the parts are designed to trigger the thoughts of the habits around the pen and allow people to play freely and creatively. (Figure 13)
During the tests, some people used the parts as supports for writing. A lot of them had their own preferences with a certain shape and way of using.

The way of how people interact with it also deferred from the length of time they were with the object. The more time they were spending with the pen, the more comfortable and creative people had become.

I also realized that habits only appear when people already own or get used to the object. In other words, allowing habits happen requires time.
Through bringing up the habit of chewing, I wish to create possibilities for people to think about their 'unconscious behavior' with the pen. Moreover, to challenge our norms of the chewing behavior itself. For children, the behavior of chewing or putting things in their mouth is considered as a way of learning and exploring the outside world (Figure 14). On the other hand, it seems to be a forbidden, but habitual thing for some adults (Figure 15). Whether physical sensational experiences are still important to us, and how it affects in our everyday lives are also important subjects I would like to bring up.

The following figures show how Object A can be engaged with different parts of the body. The detachable components allowed people to create their own ways of using and building the pen.
Object A allows multiple ways of using and playing. It not only can be used by individuals (Figure 16), but also involve more than one person to play. Figure 17, for instance, shows the moment when two people were using Object A as a tool to create a game of shooting.

Figure 16. Playing by individuals

Figure 17. Playing with others
Object B – clock

Another office object I worked with for the final proposal is the clock. It is a clock that doesn't show the information of time before you interact with it. (Figure 18) The idea came from the habit of looking at the clock constantly everyday, but without noticing it.

Time is something intangible and an important information that creates our routine in a day. But at the same time, without the clock, we would not be able to understand time.

Object B is a clock designed with movable paperclips, common office objects that can be found everywhere. The clock itself remains as a white round surface, indicating the symbol of a clock. The twelve corners on the edge of the surface point out the twelve hours. Magnetic dials of the hour and the minute are hidden behind the surface.

The following figures show ways of engaging with Object B. The more paperclips thrown on to the clock, the more time will be shown.
During the prototyping process, the biggest challenge was to create low friction and high torque for the engine of the clock. In order to make the clock functioned as a real clock, I tried to use two stepper motors connected with Arduino (Figure 19). The result was not as good as I wanted. It turned out that, when the speed of the stepper motors are controlled as slow as a regular clock, the power of electrical motors are not strong enough against the friction and the gravity when dragging the paperclips.

Object B is designed in a scale bigger than most of the regular wall clock. The idea is to create a public clock for the office that allows more than one person to use it. I built different shape in SolidWorks and made prototypes for the shell of the clock with CNC machine (Figure 20). The following figures show the final shape of the prototype and details of the object.
Time became tangible and controllable while interacting with Object B. The paperclips can be changed and replaced by other office objects, creating possibilities for recording personal traces and reminders. (Figure 21) The appearance of the clock is changing with time and renewed by people's interactions every minute.

The action of play can also happen easily around Object B. In order to see time, it allows people to compete and play the game of throwing around the object. Figure 22 shows the moment while a competition occurred. The players were aiming to get most paperclips onto the clock.
**SPRING EXHIBITION**

The concept of *room in room*

During the Spring Exhibition, I got a room with two doors and one window for the exhibiting space. I wanted to create a room inside a room, and let the audiences grasp the feeling of an office environment outside the context of Konstfack.

Instead of mimicking an office space, I wanted to create the feeling of an office. The room in room was built away from the walls and the floor, to create another space. I also built two tables in the same scale and filled up the space with the color bluish grey (Figure 23). The repeating tables represent the repetition, relating to our habits. I aimed to create a space that provides the dull, regular, and structural feeling of an office, but in an indirect way.

The window and the door of the room naturally created an office feeling, allowing people to peek in the rectangular box. The biggest challenge of the exhibition was the lighting. Without the light, the room itself was very dark. However, the shadows also became the contrast for giving focuses on the films and the objects.

![Figure 23. Prototype of the space](image)
Storytelling

It is important to show how the objects can be used in the exhibition. The relations between the body and the thing are the keys to understand our behaviors around the objects. I aimed to create scenarios for the audience to participate during the exhibition. Figure 25 for instance, I placed the film on the surface of the table, to bring the movements of the hands on to the surface.
Learning and Findings

The most pleasant thing during the exhibition was to receive feedbacks and have discussions with the audiences. The most common feedback I got is people saying that they never thought about the subject before. Some of them thought it will be great to have the objects in their everyday lives.

It was interesting to see people had played with my objects. Every time I went back to the space, the objects had been moved, and new creation has been made. It once again illustrated that playing is a mode of being human (Sicart, 2014, p.1). I was glad to be able to provide a space for people to explore and play with their curiosity.

In general, I got lots of positive comments on the films. The films played important roles of storytellers in my project. Despite without having explanation texts, the films clearly visualized ways of using the objects.

The Spring Exhibition itself was like another project. How to display and convey the whole picture of the project was difficult, but challenging. The proper use of the space can become the support to the project, and a bridge for the audience to be easier to connect with. I enjoyed the process of making decisions for the space and challenged myself with creating a stage for the objects to perform.
DISCUSSION

Why everyday?
There are some reasons I chose to work with existing objects and the everydayness. One of them is to bring up the question of the presence of things around us. Being a designer, instead of creating new products, I wish to design or re-design objects we use everyday, in order to let people be able to reflect upon their relations and roles with them, and be able to project them in their ordinary lives.

In the beginning of the design process, I started with my own experience and people’s daily experiences. It is interesting that, even though the stories are from individuals, the scenarios still can be related to everyone else. Working with the everydayness equals to working with people’s living ways and styles. That is what always attracts me. I wish through bringing up something small and ordinary to affect people’s everyday behaviors.

Unconscious or unintended?
During the final presentation, an interesting question had been brought up. Is it ‘unconscious’ or ‘unintended’? In my opinion, unconscious and unintended happen respectively in different time. Take Object A for example, the habit of chewing the pen happens at an unconscious moment, but the ways of playing with Object A are unintended behaviors.

Why white?
The reason I remain my proposal mainly in the color white is because I see the objects as mediums for understanding our relations with everyday objects. White also represents the color of paper. The cleanness and the openness of the color allow people to build up their own thoughts around the objects. It is also a color that easily reveals forms. Instead of giving the objects colors without certain reasons, I chose to keep them white in the end.

Stress reliever
Working stress is a common subject that associates with the office space. During the design process, a lot of habits can be related to stress while working. Playing, on the other hand, is also an action often stands opposite of being stressful. Whether Object A and Object B can be used for releasing stress has become another angle for me to think about. I see this as a possibility for future development and another value to be explored.

How could I have done it differently?
Reflecting back my design process, if it could have been done differently, I would like to start with a specific situation or a group of people. I had spent a lot of time in the beginning of the process in framing and defining my own constrains for the project. It was hard to start with a broad question. I also feel my project could have been done better by involving more people during the process, to understand office situations through meeting people working in the office, and to let people really have the chance to use and experience my objects in their daily lives.
REFERENCE LIST & BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books:


Websites:


