Rebeca Gonzalez Morales

Through
the
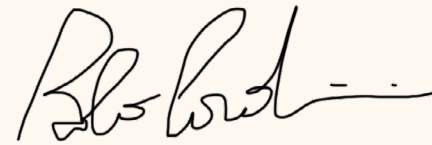
labyrinth

A Thesis

Presented in partial fullfillment of the requirements for the degree **Masters in Industrial Design**, in the department of Industrial Design, of the Rhode Island School of Design.
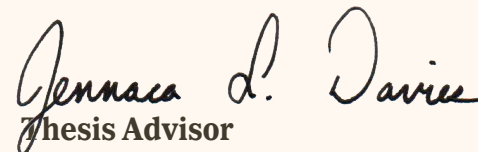
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Rhode Island School of Design
2020

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Special Thanks to:

For the people of Puerto Rico, the driving force behind my every thought and decision. I want to make you proud.

Note to the reader:

This thesis was designed as an interactive digital experience in the form of a maze. Navigate your way through the labyrinth by making decisions along the way through buttons. You can always reference back to the map with the menu on the top in each page.

Labyrinth:

/ˈlæb(ə)ˌrɪnθ/ *noun*

1. A structure consisting of a complex network of tunnels, paths, etc., deliberately designed or constructed so that it is difficult to find one's way through; a maze.

2. A complex or confusing situation; an intricate system; a situation or condition from which it is difficult to extricate oneself; an entanglement.

Oxford English Dictionary

After many turns, I made my way through. Making connections between different paths, paths I thought I had forgotten, abandoned, discarded. My goal is to understand how the environment around us affects our emotional state, our behaviour, our mental health. I seek a destigmatized idea of mental health, a way to show that it is a factor of everybody's health meant to be prioritized as much as physical health, to expose the burden of frivolousness that it carries. I seek ways to burst the bubble that mental health lives in the world of design, to show that mental health should be as integrated in all designs as much as ergonomics and sustainability. I seek to integrate areas of design and psychology. Through product experience and cognitive behavioural sciences, I explore areas of play, nostalgia, aesthetics, functionality, human-centered design and everyday objects as well as neuroscience, depression, anxiety, stress, frustration and overwhelm.

I take different twists and turns both in research and design which lead me to the Labyrinth. The Labyrinth proposes to be a new typology of everyday products meant to fit our everyday activities and emotional states. As every object, it serves multiple functions, some obvious and some not. It serves as a way to externalize and objectify our personal Overwhelms. It becomes our companion and a helping hand as we try to balance our time. It concretizes our everyday accomplishments. It shows us we are not alone and we are all just trying to make our way through the labyrinth.

Map

Entrapment

Overwhelm

A New Lens

Fountain Faucet

Mental Health

Self-Care

Junction

Depression vs. Joy

Experience

Play

Joy

Freedom

Think Piece

Nostalgia

Playing Around

Tactility

Microtasking

Rewards

Playfulness

Entangled slides remind me of my childhood. Playful chaos. Chaos, that's how adult life feels; not playful anymore. The entangled slides tell me how I can play with my chaos, my Overwhelm. I pick my Overwhelms from the collection. A wave of relief and comfort overtakes me as I recognize tasks that I thought I only dealt with. Tasks that I've burdened myself with because I felt something was wrong with me for finding them impossible to do. In the collection, my burdening tasks are accompanied by typical overwhelming tasks; but that's how they feel for me too, especially on my worst days. It is reassuring to see them on the same level, publicly normalized. It says, it's ok and normal to identify these tasks as overwhelming.

I choose my Overwhelms from the collection. Each one is small and precious yet filled with hope and encouragement. As I open the box, I hear the lid slide against the container, very little friction but enough to keep it closed. As I open it, the contents are revealed, five items in total: four sun-colored chips and a card. The chips are soft and warm, despite being metal. Each chip has a different symbol engraved on its face. The card gives them meaning. Seems that the answer to my Overwhelm is to break it down. Simple enough, I've heard it a million times before yet I've always had trouble doing it. I've struggled to come up with the smaller tasks inside each task, especially for these seemingly already small tasks. I place each task in one of the marks on the board holding the entangled slides.

Beads trace a path laid out for them. Laid out to confuse my sight. Laid out to please my visual senses. Seeing them fall as they make a swooshing sound as the metal of the beads graces the wooden path. When a bead reaches its destination and its journey is fulfilled I see my accomplishment. Finally, I can see them add up.

I sit and stare blankly ahead. I feel my stare drift into an empty space. Just me and my thoughts in this space. Not even my body is here. My body feels frozen and foreign. My thoughts are loud. Not "yelling" loud, they are just the only sound I hear. I desperately try to find solutions. Alternatives to my problems. Well, not really problems, just things I need to solve. Things I need to tackle. It's like a puzzle. I love puzzles but I don't love this one. I'm desperately trying to find a way out. That's the solution. I need a way out of my problems. They're not really problems, just stress. My mind is going through all the alternatives. None of them seem to be appropriate. They seem unlikely, improbable, extraneous. My mind is going through solutions. I am paralyzed. Well, not literally, just not taking actions to relieve the problem. This makes the stress grow.

Ironic. The alternative I seem to pick is avoidance. I avoid dealing with the problem. Not really problems, just Overwhelms. Just things I have to do. Avoidance doesn't fix them though. Avoidance just postpones them. So it's not really a solution, it's a strategy. A strategy that fails me. The stress is still there. It traps me. That's it, I feel trapped. That sounds like a bit much. How else would you call not being able to find a way out of something? I want a way out of my stress. The thought of it stresses me out so I avoid thinking about it. I am pulled out of my head. Reality pulls me. The world pulls me. No alternative was found. Avoidance it is.

Entrapment

Male Hazel
iStock.com/Peter Llewellyn

Hanging by their tails. Sounds like a medieval torture device. This is the inescapable situation that scientists put mice in to provoke stress. Drowning in a cup of water. We tell ourselves that there is no reason to be overwhelmed by something so small, yet this is another way stress is induced in mice. A cup of water, another medieval torture device. Drowned by stress.

Drowning in a cup of water. Making a mountain out of a molehill. We say this to disregard our worries. We do it to ourselves and we do it to others. These small things shouldn't worry us, shouldn't overwhelm us, shouldn't stress us but they do. Telling ourselves not to stress doesn't work. Avoiding our Overwhelm doesn't work. Sooner or later we have to deal with the situation. We either get out of the cup or we drown. Life shouldn't have to be this battle between our responsibilities and our desires. That will be my mission: to make our responsibilities go hand in hand with our desires. Big words, responsibilities and desires. What do we have to do? And what would we rather do? The search is on.

9to5notquite. 8to6ismorelikeit. Commuting, dinner, cleaning, quick entertainment, rinse and repeat. The days are scheduled. Everything is so time consuming. I live for weekends. Finally I can do what I want. I sleep in. I binge on my favorite shows and movies. Anything so that I don't have to think about what I have to do. I have to clean. I have to pay bills. I have to do groceries. I have to wash clothes. I have to prepare for the week ahead. The scheduled week with no free time. Every week I plan to make it better. Make it different. Make it meaningful but it always feels just productive. I live for the week. Not for me. Not for what I want. I want freedom. Freedom to do what I want.

Overwhelm

We hate it as kids. It isn't a surprise we still hate it as adults. Doing chores is dreaded by most adults. When I asked people what their most unpleasant tasks are, domestic chores dominated. Dishes, laundry, cleaning. Every now and then someone would say something work related like preparing a presentation or writing emails. Others would say things relating to social interactions like talking on the phone or going out. I took the majority win and tried my hypothesis on chores. If I were to understand what about the tasks made it unpleasant I could change it. I would have to produce feelings that counteract the existing feelings of unpleasantness. I could get these feelings from the exception, the people that do like doing those chores. In order to be clear I asked people what they considered chores. I started asking them about their favourite chores and their least favourite. I was also interested in their reasons why.

Research on chores

Looking at all the things people mentioned as chores, I noticed that I could put domestic chores into two categories. More time consumption the longer you put them off and Same time consumption no matter when you do them. My main interest is in the former. This is the concern I wanted to tackle: time-consumption. This seems to be the main reason why people don't like doing most chores.

From my conversations, I could see that doing the dishes and laundry are the least liked by people from different generations and gender roles. There were still people who liked to do the dishes and their laundry. Their reasoning was because they found it relaxing. One person described getting lost in their thoughts when doing the dishes because it doesn't require thinking.

At this point, I knew I had a good understanding of the chore most people don't like, doing the dishes. I knew why they don't like it as well as a reason why some do. Based on this I could try my first attempt on provoking an emotional experience through the task to make it feel worth the time and less daunting.

Same time consumption no matter when you do them.

Cooking

Vacuuming

Cleaning Windows

Mowing Grass

Watering Plants

Taking Out Trash

Mopping

Sweeping

Cleaning Bathroom

More time consumption the longer you put them off.
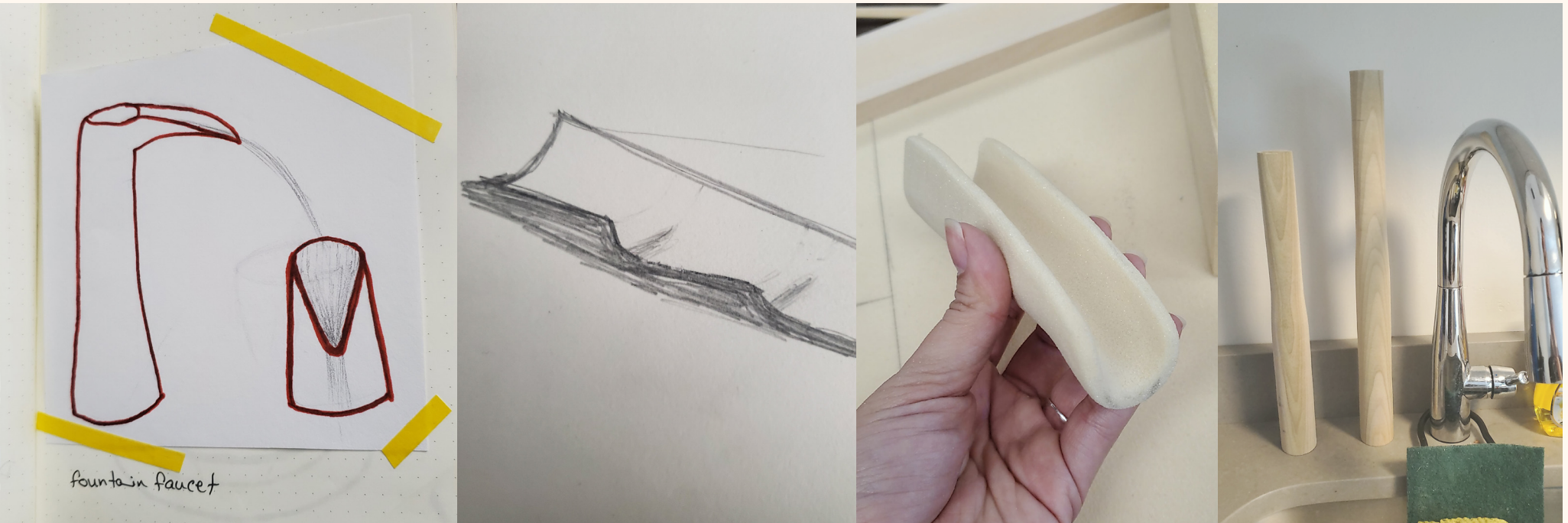
Laundry

Dishes

Tidying Up

Ironing

Sorting Clothes

Cleaning Litter Box

Paying Bills

Fountain Faucet

Prototyping Process
for the Fountain Faucet

Through designing positive responses to these chore-related objects, I hope to change our relationship with chores and improve our quality of life at the same time. I believe that by integrating additional design elements that encourage closeness, such as an emotional attachment due to nostalgia or an emotional experience, I can improve our relationship with chores.

Browsing the objects immediately available to people in store aisles and online catalogs, I could quickly notice the overall design approach. Objects relating to chores are typically designed to be functional and nothing else. Our association with chores is a "get the job done effectively and quickly" approach therefore the objects are designed with these needs in mind. What if we viewed chores differently?

By creating a visible water stream, my design, the Fountain Faucet, aims to produce a visual and auditory experience provoking a relaxing and tranquil environment that enables reflection and meditation thus creating a positive response, much like the reactions we have when surrounded by a river, a fountain or the rain. The limited features of the faucet allow the user to be more mindful during the process and therefore reducing stress levels.

Seeing my idea physically made me reflect on the direction I was headed. I am definitely interested in redesigning task specific objects but it is not the issue that concerns me the most right now. The focus was never on the task, but on the feelings of Overwhelm. Of course, every task has its own set of objects and context so finding a solution that would fix the pleasantness

Fountain Faucet

of each task that would fit all of them is pretty close to impossible. Overwhelm on the other hand is a common feeling throughout despite being provoked by different things. I had gathered answers from my deep dive on chores and I would not discard them but it's time to take another look at Overwhelm.

A New Lens

as technological advances and sustainability. Afterall, our mental health is directly linked to our quality of life.

To no surprise, finding people dealing with mental health disorders willing to open up about it was nearly an impossible task. I needed to find a group of people, best if it were anonymous for reliability, and ironically transparency. If people don't feel exposed I believe they are more likely to open up. Reddit seemed to be a great platform for just this. I found a lot of pages there specific to dealing with mental health disorders. In these pages, people asked about coping mechanisms and whether other people shared the same experiences and feelings.

I embraced this opportunity and posted my own questions on multiple channels. It seemed silly not to browse these pages for other relevant posts and include the input into my thought process.

Drowned by stress. Maybe we should be worried about drowning in a cup of water. Remember the mice? They feel trapped in their situation. They stop fighting. They give up. They float on the water. They hang by their tails. Resigned to whatever happens. They let life happen to them. These are the signs of depression in mice. That is precisely the purpose of these sadistic experiments. Scientists put them through this in order to find ways to fix the chemical imbalance in our brains that makes us freeze, resign, give up. These methods are the industry standards for measuring the effectiveness of antidepressant treatments.

This perspective definitely fits my big picture goals. As a designer, I am surprised that mental health is not dealt with as often as other equally important areas of design such

Self-Care

Through my Reddit adventure, I stumbled upon an alarming amount of people dismissing self-care practices. The common perspective amongst these specific people was that some self-care practices are selfish and self-indulgent. They only considered self-care to be physical self-care. While physical self-care is important for our mental health, it does not make mental self-care irrelevant for our general health. This distinction between our physical health and our mental health, I believe, is one of the main factors that contributes to this way of thinking. Have a conversation with any health professional like I've done on multiple occasions due to my healthy obsession with the topic and they'll agree with it. Exercise, good hygiene practices and balanced diet can significantly affect our moods. During these weeks of quarantine, I am sure

Reddit posts about Self-Care

everybody has to some extent noticed how much their mood improves when they practice physical self-care. In the same way, when we are stressed, depressed, sad, anxious, etc for prolonged periods, our sleep cycle gets affected, our muscles get tense, we get headaches, it can trigger psoriasis and increase our risks of getting a coronary heart disease. As you can see this distinction between the two is an important part of mental health that I am very interested in. I intend to increase people's value of self-care particularly on the practices that are seen as self-indulgent.

As a preteen, I read a book by Sean Covey that talked about "sharpening the saw" as an analogy to self-care. As I have developed certain manual crafts, it clicks in my head better than it did back then. As makers, our work is only as good as our tools. Cutting wood with a dull blade will produce a jagged edge and take at least twice as much effort to do the job of a freshly sharpened blade. That is if the blade doesn't snap which is quite common with dull blades due to the increase in friction to get the job done.

As I tried to understand why exactly people found mental self-care to be indulgent, I noticed a recurring word popping up in their posts. People felt the need to be productive. They seemed to define productivity as accomplishing their responsibilities; if it didn't, it would be a waste of time. Instead of productive, how about we look at it as a meaningful time. That should be the goal. What is meaningful is subjective but there is value and meaning in practices like a long bath, a walk in the outdoors, doing a puzzle, etc.

The waste of time feeling reminds me of the complaint of chores being too time-consuming. Not just chores but we complain about time-consumption whenever something feels daunting and long. Why? What do we want to do with this instead? Seems that most of us just end up using it for other work, sleeping, or glued to a screen. Sleep and digital entertainment are the ones that don't have to do with our responsibilities. While talking with a mental health expert about this, we analyzed the purpose of these outlets, our conclusion was wanting to have an escape from our responsibilities and reaching for the quickest and most available to us. The main problem with this comes when we feel guilty during or afterwards. If we are aware of our accomplishments we can change our guilt into a sense of "I earned some time off". When we deliberately plan our free time, it actually ends up being a productive use of our time. We can actually relax and enjoy our earned reward rather than continue stressing out about what is left to do.

I am frozen but not cold. Too much effort required to move. This is hard! I feel like not doing anything. Just letting life happen to me. My mind is fighting. It tells me that it's ridiculous. How can something so uncomplicated and straightforward be so difficult. It feels like a constant battle. Neverending. There's a rare sound. Quietly, it tells me I'll get over it. I don't know if I believe it. It's exhausting, overwhelming, stressful, inescapable. I feel like giving up. It drains me to just think about what I need to do. I'm not talking about work. It's everything. Getting out of bed, taking a shower, playing music, eating. Just thinking about them makes me tired. All I want to do is sleep.

One of my questions on Reddit provided me with a common approach on how some people deal with difficult tasks, specifically relating to mental health. I had asked "What gets you out of bed when you are battling depression?". Several people mentioned focusing on small tasks and breaking them down into smaller ones. This "making a molehill out of a mountain" approach is not all that unfamiliar. We use it in other areas of life but I hadn't yet seen the applicability to mental health until now. In a more public platform, Kirsten Bell opens up about her mental health. She talks about dealing with everyday things that feel overwhelming just because of her depression.

"'You just have to do the next right thing,' she explained. 'You just stand up. That's the next right thing. Then you brush your teeth. That's the next right thing. I've (been) very one-step-at-a-time.'"

r/mentalhacks · Posted by u/Local-Rise 4 months ago

[Seeking] What gets you out of bed when you are battling depression?

Support

lvs301 1 point · 3 days ago

Small goals, like brushing my teeth, putting in my contacts, changing my clothes. And letting that be enough.

murklore 11 points · 3 days ago

For a long time, it was simply really small goals. Couldn't bother taking a shower, so I would brush my teeth or change my clothes. Couldn't bother prepping food, so I grabbed a granola bar. Couldn't bother cleaning my whole room, so I just threw out the trash.

Eventually I was able to make those goals slightly bigger, but I had to take it slow. Anything that seemed like it took to much energy to do would be an instant "no", so I had to break it into smaller parts.

And then at some point it became "because I am stronger and more capable than my depression tells me I am, and I am not going to let it win".

daithisfw 1 point · 3 days ago

Obligations. Work, events/plans, etc. Also if I'm down, I tend to tuck into one of my hobbies. Like gaming or music or the gym. So I'll just get away from my problems for a bit, focus on those things, and it can give me a moment to breathe and just think about my problems from a step away, instead of just sitting in it.

It's not easy, but usually that little bit of action away from "myself" for a bit can kind of help reset the day. I can come back with a better perspective, or just in a slightly better mood.

Sometimes I just tell myself to suck it up, get it done. And almost always I feel better having done SOMETHING productive, rather than wallow in my sorrow. Even if all I do is get up and clean my apartment. Something that simple, but it works wonders when you are a little tired and your back hurts from cleaning, but you finally finish and you sit on your comfy couch and look around at a clean and presentable home. "At least this is handled" comes to mind, and you can start to feel some positive progress. Same with hitting the gym, or playing music. And when I need to "escape" a bit, a good single player game can be just the ticket. Of course you need to balance that escapism, or it can do more harm than good.

Reddit posts about dealing with depression

I had specifically asked about the struggles of getting out of bed because this is one of the known manifestations of depression. It seems to affect almost everybody that gets depression at some point in their life even though depression, just like any other illness and disease, can manifest itself differently from person to person. Having had the "getting out of bed" identified as an overall task that people dealing with mental health conditions find overwhelming I wanted to find others. Through my conversations with friends, families and mental health experts, I realized that there are tasks that cause high anxiety levels, therefore, making them overwhelming to overcome.

It's worth mentioning that when it comes to conquering Overwhelm, it is related to the concept of "fight, flight or freeze". When we find the job to be too exhausting, it's because we are going against our instinct to give up. We all get tired after reaching our individual threshold for fighting. This is completely normal and logical when you think back at the mice fighting for their lives. After so much fighting, eventually their bodies get tired and stop.

Junction

It is my belief that there is a direct relationship between the life we lead and the things we surround ourselves with. A fruitful life is the result of being surrounded by objects that offer positive affective reactions such as motivation, pride, glee, comfort, pleasure and satisfaction. For these objects to provide people these affective responses, the objects must help them reach the goals they are trying to achieve during the interaction. There is never a single goal, hence why I purposely use the word in plural.

On a straightforward task such as throwing out the trash, there's a clear goal: getting the trash out of the home. Nevertheless there are additional goals that aren't as obvious for instance, keeping the trash contained during the process, getting it picked up by trash collectors, not getting filthy during the process, getting the task done as fast as possible and not being overwhelmed by the smell. Due to all these goals, the task experience is designed by a combination of objects and services that facilitates the accomplishment of the goals. The design of trash bags and waste-baskets as well as the trash collecting guidelines and services support these goals.

The search for happiness, meaning, and satisfaction are part of human nature. This means that these searches are always goals in people's lives, therefore they must be taken into consideration when designing objects, experiences, services and environments. When tasks are repeated habitually in such a way that people cannot escape them, achieving these ever-present goals must be required. Everyday tasks are often overlooked as small responsibilities we are required to do in order to be functioning independent humans; but when there are many frequent everyday tasks, they add up, taking up a large part of our life.

When there are everyday tasks that produce negative affective responses, it means we have a problem. We have failed to design for the user's needs. We need to change the environments around these "small' everyday tasks that produce negative affective responses. In order to truly be doing Human-Centered Design, we must turn the affective responses from negative to positive. How can we design objects as a vehicle for a positive affective experience? How can we change experiences and perceptions so deeply ingrained in our upbringing and our society?

Depression vs. Joy

Positive affective experience, or Joy. Joy is the umbrella term for pleasant emotions such as happiness, surprised, comfortable, relaxed, satisfied, etc. This was the emotion I wanted to provoke through my design choices. Afterall, I wholeheartedly agree with the idea that play and work aren't opposites. We can definitely enjoy life and work at the same time. Instead, the opposite of enjoying life is being depressed. There's already proof that our surroundings affect our mental health. It's no longer my belief; it's a proven fact.

Office Cubicle
iStock.com/T_A_P

Hospital Room
iStock.com/Sami Sert

School Building
iStock.com/lawcain

Dining Room

Google offices are famous for reinventing how a workplace looks and feels like. Their approach was to focus on the employee's wellbeing and incorporating creative spaces to increase creativity and productivity.

Google Workspace
Image credit: 2018
Google

Gernes describes the colors in the hospital as having an atmospheric function as well as artistic. Patients of the hospital described being cheered up by the colors. Statistics show that patients get healthier faster when surrounded by positivity.

Herlev Hospital
Painted by Poul Gernes

After the school shooting of 2012, the school was rebuilt with new anti-terror measures. The design not only focuses on physical safety but emotional safety by keeping spaces, open and inviting.

Sandy Hook Elementary School
by Svigals + Partners

A Space for Being exhibition in
Milano
by Google, Muuto and Reddymade
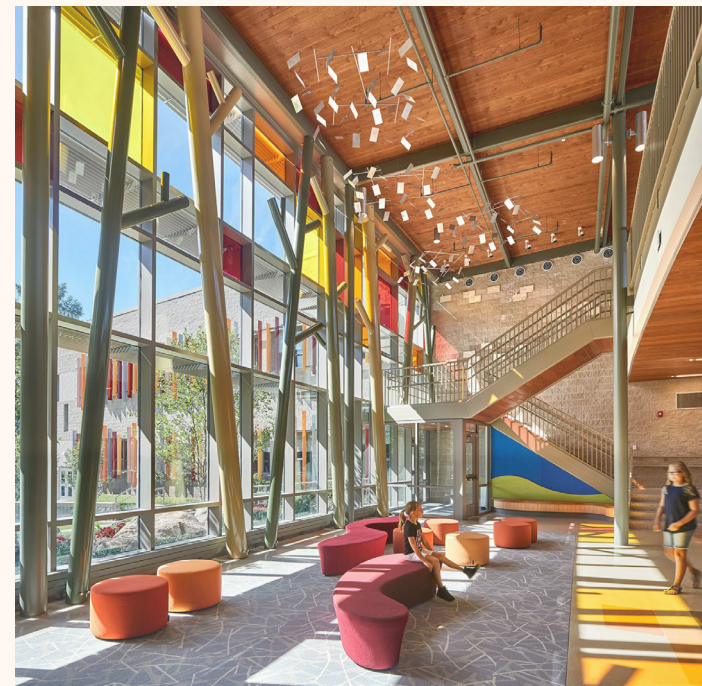
In an interactive multiroom installation at Spazio
Maiocchi, A Space for Being will explore the field of
neuroaesthetics and how design and the elements around
us have the potential to impact our biology and well-being.

Somewhere in Tokyo, there's an apartment complex focused on joy and health in its design, the Reversible Destiny Lofts. The design plays with the materials, colors, textures and our associations with different characteristics to give us an experience that will bring joy.

At this fork on the road, in order to move forward with my designs, I needed to understand how to design an experience and how to design joy.

Reversible Destiny Lofts by Arakawa and Madeline Gins

Hopeful. Curious. Intimate. Elegant. This project promises to help with Overwhelm. It promises to help with falling into a rut. It promises to help with designating time to ourselves. Guilt-free time. It promises a lot of things. A lot of hope. A lot of fear. Fear of disappointment. Hope of success. It sparks curiosity and skepticism. I need to experience it first-hand. It's a personal experience. Only I can know how it feels. Only I can know how I feel. Overwhelms hidden. Secrecy. That's part of the mystique. Hanging it on the wall camouflages it as art. Is it art? It has meaning. I see me in it. I see an ideal me. An ideal of how I want to be. How society wants me to be. A balanced me. It nurtures me. It does not coddle. It invites me. It does not shame. It respects me. It does not patronize.

IKEA +365
Paring Knife

The term user experience isn't new for most designers, in fact it's been around since Don Norman wrote his incredibly famous book "The Design of Everyday Things". While user experience is the main component in Human-Centered design, I find it to be an umbrella term that includes more specific types of user experiences ranging from spatial experience to digital experience to emotional experience. Product Experience is a relatively newer term that focuses on the experiences one has with a physical object. Of course experiences are unique to their context and the user's individuality, just to name a few. This does not mean that there isn't a general commonality in our experiences due to our human nature. Most, if not all, are based on our relationship with the natural world. We receive signals from the environment that get interpreted automatically. When we take a closer look at product experience, we can see how it's possible to identify this pattern.

Product experience can be broken down into 3 main components that make up a complete experience with the product. These are in the nature of aesthetics, attributed and associated meanings and emotions.

The aesthetic factors of an object include everything relating to the stimulation of our main 5 senses. Colors, textures, sounds, smells, shapes, tastes, etc. Of these, we are most immediately aware of colors. We think about how colors affect something when we decide what clothes to wear and what colors to paint our homes. We categorize them into bright or dull, warm or cold. Biologically, we are attracted to brighter colors. This is one of the reasons why we are attracted to rainbows, fireworks, well lit spaces. Our brains react positively to those colors. When

it comes to shapes, our brains are in high alert when we are in the presence of geometric, angular shapes and relaxed around organic shapes. When we are attracted to characteristics that go against the biological attraction, its considered an acquired taste like coffee or wine. Now when we think about these characteristics, we know that they are inherent in absolutely everything around us since everything stimulates our senses to some degree. Symmetry, roundness, smoothness, pleasant tactility, saturated colors, pleasant odors, sweet tastes. In product design, these elements are designed through the selection and treatment of materials.

In addition to their aesthetic values, materials carry with them attributed and associated meanings. These meanings are typically cultural but there are certain meanings that correspond to the materials physical characteristics which are universal. For example, wood is warm to the touch therefore we attribute it meanings related to warmth such as coziness and inviting much like we would describe a warm person. The meanings that don't have to do with the objects physical attributes are more related to the social associations of the object. For example, a matte metal material is considered sleek, elegant, modern, sophisticated. Metal and glass are universally considered modern due to the developments of these materials as opposed to wood. The elegance, sophistication and sleekness can be attributed to the minimalist movement overtaking the market in recent years.

The last component of product experience is the emotional factor. Despite general belief, designers can provoke emotions. Emotions are a result of an automatic evaluation we do subconsciously that let us know whether something is beneficial or harmful to us and our priorities in the given moment. This is referred to as the appraisal theory. We don't necessarily have to be aware of the appraisal in order to feel the psychological and behavioural responses to it. For example, when we accidently touch a heated stove burner, we immediately

remove our hands. This would be the behavioural response and the jolt of adrenaline and quick sudden fear would be the psychological response.

There are different ways a product can trigger an emotion, but I'm only focusing on two: functional triggers and aesthetic triggers. The aesthetic triggers are through the aesthetic characteristics of the product. The emotions we get because of these triggers exist in the spectrum between desire and disgust based on the biological responses to the aesthetic characteristics as mentioned before and our personal preferences. Emotions caused by the function of the product refers to the ability and effectiveness of an object in helping us achieve our goals. As I mentioned in the Junction section, our goals can be as abstract as achieving ha`ppiness or as concrete as throwing out the trash. The emotions can occur as we use the objects or through the anticipation of usage. Although the anticipation is connected to the function of the object, it is more directly provoked through the branding of the product. If our goals are met, we can feel joy but if they are not we can feel frustration.

> *I desire this because I believe it will make me feel - happy/pretty/healthy/successful/productive/ useful.*

> *I am satisfied with this because it makes me feel - happy/pretty/healthy/successful/productive/ useful.*

I applied these concepts back when I designed the Fountain Faucet. For the design, I had picked a warm colored ceramic as an attempt to counteract the typical metal one. These metal kitchen faucets can subconsciously make the environment cold and unwelcoming.

All together, the aesthetic characteristics, the attributed and associated meanings and the emotional responses, form the trifecta for creating a product experience. This is what I used to understand objects around me and integrate them into my decisions when designing the Labyrinth.

Have you ever held something in your hands, and have it felt just right? As if it was made using your hand as a mold to create the shape. As if the weight was decided according to your individual strength in your hands. As if the material was chosen to fit your tactile sensitivity. That's how I felt when I first held what is now my favorite object in my kitchen.

I remember watching cooking shows with my mother during my childhood. We would sit on the couch and turn on The Food Network. Our favorite show was 30 Minute Meals with Rachael Ray. Ray's upbeat attitude and approachable methods in the kitchen sparked my interest in the kitchen. As I made my own meals, I would talk to an imaginary audience as if I had my own cooking show. I had about a handful of go-to dishes to make that would follow me until the end of my Bachelor's. As I entered the fast-paced world of college and adulthood, I lost any interest I had in cooking. Something about spending 2 hours in the kitchen preparing a meal that is going to disappear in 30 minutes doesn't really motivate me. I cooked for survival; I microwaved, cooked rice on a rice cooker and used the bare minimum dried spices avoiding any sorts of dicing and slicing. Unlike most, my kitchen was equipped with the essentials for each of my meals: a spatula, a pasta spoon, a pot, a pan and a microwavable mixing bowl. Some people are very particular about their cooking utensils, their knives, their pots, their pans. They carefully dissect every option on the market and pick the one that satisfies their every need. They pride themselves in having the best of the best. In my case, the only knives I owned were steak knives for when I needed to cut my food while I ate. I'm not a caveperson after all. Granted, part of the reason why I owned very few cooking utensils was my financial situation as a student; cooking utensils aren't exactly on my priority list of investments.

It was in my friend Val's kitchen that I first encountered the object of my admiration. Its physical appearance, of course, was the first thing that attracted me to it. Most knives I'd seen were made of two parts: the blade and the handle. These two parts are not necessarily different materials but definitely two distinct parts; both individuals to their own style, shape, color or material. This one was just one part: the knife. I'm not saying that there isn't a blade or a handle. One can still look at it and know which end to hold on to and which end to stab things with, but it's one harmonious part, one brushed and satin stainless-steel part. The transition between the two sides of the knife is a subtle one, a smooth organic slope that slowly rises from the blade to form

the handle. The handle continues this subtlety as it gradually forms a slight curve that fits my fingers just right, without making it too obvious that this is where the fingers are supposed to be. Angled lines cover both sides of the handle giving it the needed friction to avoid it from slipping from your hands. It calls my hand to grab it. So, I do.

When I hold it, I realize that its weight and proportions are perfectly balanced. Now, full disclosure, I didn't know what a paring knife was for, but the weight of the knife felt like it was perfect for whatever you need it to do. As I felt it, I noticed that the angled lines on the side of the handle aren't just lines, they are shallow channels. Shallow enough that they don't bother me. I have an obsession with keeping things clean especially around the kitchen, so creases and straight edges annoy me because I feel like there is always dirt stuck in it and I can't fully clean it. The depth of these channels is just right to keep them clean. "This knife is perfect" I immediately told Val, "Where did you get it?". At this point, I should mention that I was in Europe, my second time actually, so naturally I was expecting some exotic answer, some European designer or brand. I wasn't all that wrong. Turns out the knife is sold by the Swedish retailer IKEA for $8.99.

Now what is it about this knife exactly? As I mentioned before, the qualities that stand out for me are the material, the shape, and the weight. The material and the shape must play a very important part, after all, they are the only characteristics you see in the object. Stainless-steel is a very common material for objects around the kitchen. Actually, it's a very common material for hospital objects as well. Stainless-steel carries an idea of clean. The name itself implies it: "stainless". When I met the object, I thought of clean when I noticed the seamless design and the shallow channels but not immediately by the material. This association between the material and cleanliness must be so ingrained in our minds that it becomes an automatic assumption when we see stainless-steel: the object must be clean. Assigning this characteristic to the material is part of what [Paul Hekkert and Elvin Karana call the Experience of Meaning.]

This term is part of the three experiences one can undergo when encountering an object. According to their description, we attribute characteristics to materials to describe them. These characteristics can be part of the materials physical qualities or can be associated meanings. When thinking about stainless-steel, the idea of it being clean is a characteristic that corresponds to its physical entity therefore it is safe to think that it is a universal meaning that attracts me to the knife due to my obsession with cleanliness. On the other hand, there are other meanings I am attributing to the material based on my personal associations to it; meanings that might not correlate with Hekkert's and Karana's opinion. In their examples of what characteristics people assign to steel they imply metal is not welcoming due to its aesthetic quality of being cold. As opposed to warm objects, like wood, metal objects are perceived as cold and therefore not something we are attracted to. Seeing as I am in love with this object, I find it very welcoming. Per my associations, stainless steel is sleek, modern, elegant.

As I am thinking about these characteristics, I realize that these are attributes I associate with the material. This means that from that perspective I should be feeling this attraction to all things made of stainless-steel. I have since seen, or at least started noticing more often, other stainless-steel knives. Val even shared one design with me wrongfully assuming I would like it as well. This

other knife had been designed by a recognized manufacturer in Sheffield, England that has been making knives for 150 years. In contrast to the IKEA knife, the Sheffield paring knife leaves me cold, proving Hekkert's and Karana's description of steel objects. The handle doesn't provoke me to grab it. The handle is a rectangular shape with rounded corners and has an entirely smooth finish relying on the rigidness of the shape to function as the grip. This knife also consists of two parts rather than one. Despite being made entirely of one material and having a slope connecting the two sides, the knife doesn't have that same congruous connection between them. The slope is steeper and ends abruptly once it meets the radius of the rounded rectangle. This is where most knives made entirely of stainless-steel fail for me: the handle. Either the shape looks uncomfortable, the texture hoards the attention, or it doesn't feel like it's part of the blade. For Val, the Sheffield knife and my knife have the one thing he looks for in knives other than

the material: "that the heel of the knife be sharp rather than rounded. I don't want to feel like they are treating me like a child that needs scissors with the rounded tip".

This brings me to think about the shape in the same way as the material, applying the Experience of Meaning theory. As I described before, the IKEA knife has an organic, congruous, and continuous shape, that calls me to grab it. Translating that to theory language, the organic shape of the knife is ingrained in our biology to attract us. Just like they describe wood to be universally warm and therefore seen as welcoming, organic shapes are universally seen as natural and therefore attractive to us. Maybe this is where the meaning of the material as being cold is overwritten by the shape. Without the organic shape, other knives are cold to me.

The third characteristic I experienced with the knife is its weight. And as I mentioned before, the immediate reaction is to notice how perfectly balanced it is. Now weight is directly associated with

the ergonomics of an object. Ergonomics by definition means that an object's design is thought to fit the anatomy of the human body and in the case of knives, the hand's anatomy. Clearly this knife is nailing this design application. The fact that it is balanced immediately makes me think that it must be heavy enough to perform its function well. Obviously, this presumption (later confirmed), attracts one to an object. An object that does its job is the ideal object, so ideal that an object, no matter how beautiful, if it does not work it is often dismissed.

So what is it about this knife then? Well, if I think about the three properties I mentioned: material, shape and weight, obviously all three elements make the object what it is. But if I were to remove any of these qualities, I should be able to see which one of these carries the essence of the object for me. I have already mentioned that the material alone is not decisive for me to say that it is special as I find all other stainless-steel knives I've encountered to be cold. The weight is

part of its function, so if it didn't have this weight then it wouldn't function properly and I would obviously dismiss it. On that note, the material also plays an important role in the function of the knife. It comes down to the shape; the shape seems to be connected to my biological nature of attraction to organic shapes. If I were to have a wooden letter opener with the same shape, including the shallow channels and everything, would I love it just as much? Probably not as much since it doesn't have the added values of the stainless-steel meaning for me but I think I would really admire it and probably buy it even though I don't use a letter opener. Maybe if I had that letter opener, I would use it just like I use my knife because I don't like cooking; I like using my knife.

Pressing. Tapping. Stroking. Sliding. Slicing. Pushing. Pulling. The immediate reactions to our hand's actions are so satisfying. The sounds are so important. The tapping of a key on a keyboard. The immediate sound feedback and the slight level of pressure needed to press the key. As a kid, I would play around my parent's computers testing out their different keyboards. When I would go to electronic stores, I would test out the keyboards. In school, I would pick the calculators based on the way the keys felt. Once I got my first phone, I loved the way the keys felt. Touch screens can't compare.

Tactility

Fidgeting has become such a trend lately. Something we had never seen before suddenly was sold everywhere. Everyone had a fidget spinner. While the Fidget spinner causes a visual response to our touch, digital cameras give us a sound. When we take a picture with our smartphones, or even other digital cameras, there is an option to add the shutter sound. Digital cameras don't have a shutter like film cameras do but the designers decided there is still value in the sound. Then there's the combination of sound and visual. When we cross off an item on a To-Do list, there's a level of satisfaction that parallels having accomplished the task on the list. When we cross with pen and paper, we get the sound of the mark on the paper and we get the visual of the ink following the tool we are moving. When we check off an item on a digital To-Do list, we are simply tapping on

Mazonite Stones
Antique Brass Beads
Hematite Stones

a flat screen. We get a visual response as a check mark appears but we don't get the sound and more so, we don't get the tactile complexity of the analog world.

Sound feedback is important for us to know if something is safe or alarming. When something stops working, we get sound feedback. Hear the knees crack when you stand up, telling you that you need to move more. The paper jam sound. A flat tire. These sounds communicate a problem and we can quickly understand it. When something is working, we can also hear it. We associate these sounds as pleasing. The smooth roar of an engine, a well running printer, the closing of a car door.

The importance of tactility is the reason why I decided to make the Labyrinth an analog object. Could I be able to reach the same concept through an app? Most probably. Nowadays, everything can be made into an app. But the tactile experience is another factor that connects us to objects. A satisfying sensorial experience invites us to repeat it. This is precisely the relationship I want the user to have with the Labyrinth.

In order to help create an attachment, I have chosen materials because of their aesthetic value and social associations.

Every decision was based on a balance between playful and mature. That's precisely why, in the visual aesthetics, I decided for a marriage between organic and geometric shapes. When it came to material selection, this marriage took the form of wood and metal. Wood is immediately associated with warmth and inviting. While metal has social associations with elegance and

Materials Selected
Walnut wood, Amazonite
stones and brushed brass

sophistication, it's also cold. To balance that, I picked brass for its warm and uplifting color.

The wood also adds another aesthetic value, in the form of sound. The tunnel sections in the paths emit a soothing echo as the stones roll down their paths.

All together, these elements provide an association of preciousness to the object. The Labyrinth becomes warm, elegant, inviting, soothing, sophisticated, intimate. This preciousness can create an attachment to the Labyrinth, since it becomes something valuable and important to the user.

It's quite nice to think back at these moments. Reminiscing, one can't help but smile. When we notice the birds playing and singing. When laughter gets so infectious, words can barely make their way out. When fireworks in the distance still surprise and amuse us even when we expect them. When we play around outside, running while laughing. In the moment, we enjoy the feeling without acknowledging it. After it's passed, we reminisce. We want it back. For those few minutes. We experienced the best part of being alive. Pure joy.

Screengrabs from Lee's
TedTalk presentation

In order to design joy, I need to understand how it looks, what are the elements and what's the pattern. The designer, Ingrid Fetell Lee, luckily composed a guide of just that. This was to become my source of reference for whenever I needed to design elements of joy. She has made it her life's mission to point out the characteristics of joy, how it looks, how it feels and the benefits of it. The attempt is to override the association that joy is something extra, not something essential to our survival.

> "A cultural bias deep in Western society that runs towards sophistication, away from joy. This bias was forcefully expressed by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe when he wrote in 1810 that 'savage nations, uneducated people, and children have a great predilection for vivid colors,' but that 'people of refinement avoid vivid colors in their dress and the objects that are about them, and seem inclined to banish them altogether from their presence.' We may not realize it, but in most Europe and America, Goethe's philosophy permeates our lives. We dismiss color and joy as childish and frivolous, prizing neutral hues as a mark of coolness and mature taste."

The pattern she identifies is divided into ten categories based on dominant characteristics such as "round shapes, saturated colors, radiating symmetries and things that floated gently in the air" as well as connections to nature, exuberance and surprise. Personally I want to understand each and every one of these categories and surround myself with them but based on the feelings of monotony and entrapment, I wanted to deeply understand her descriptions of Play and Freedom.

Screengrabs from Lee's TedTalk presentation

Seeing my friends is my favorite time of the day. Running around the playground. Our parents don't always like it. They don't like when I come home with my clothes all dirty. They pick me up from school and they just know I had a good day. My hair is all messy. My shoes have dirt. I have sweat all over my face. I can't stop smiling and laughing. Weekends and summers are the best. Nothing to do but play. Now that is living life.

When was the last time I played? I was at a park. My partner and I were fighting over the last bite of our snack. Stealing. Chasing. Tripping. Jumping. That last bite was better than all the previous ones.

Play

Why is it that acting our age as adults means being serious. No more playing. Work now, play later. Productivity over all. We spend most of our lives as working adults yet after retirement we regret those years. We hear the warnings from older generations. It seems to be a choice. Disappointing our future self or our present self. Wishing we spent more time doing what we wanted or wishing society recognized our productivity. It is up to each one of us to decide what matters most. We still have responsibilities though. Money doesn't grow on trees. The house doesn't clean itself. Homework needs to get done. If we don't do these things, we can easily spiral down to feelings of failure and uselessness. Why can't we include some fun with these things, these responsibilities.

"In every job that must be done, there is an element of fun." I don't know how else to say it to make other people understand and listen. We need more fun in our lives. We often talk about the joys of childhood and not having to deal with responsibilities but do we ever consider bringing that joy back into adulthood? Why do we look down on these childish things? I mean of course just like we need to create the concept of savages in order to feel civilized. We need to create a difference between children and adults in order to match the difference in authority. I get it, we grow up and take on responsibilities. We become independent and we need to make money to survive. In order to make money, we need to work hard and be good at what we do. In order to work hard, we need to put in lots of time. In order to be good at what we do we need to put in the time. There is a lot of time that we need to invest just so that we can sustain ourselves let alone our families. Time becomes a valuable asset and if we need to choose between having money to survive and having a stress-free life logic tells us that you can't have one without the other. The amount of time we dedicate to work is never going to be enough. We are always going to think we need to put in more time, more effort. That's the downfall of the world we live in. If we decide to take some time for ourselves we make sure that we don't spend too much time on that because then we feel lazy and self-indulgent. We don't time our "work time". I'm not talking about the 9 to 5 schedule. Yes, that is timed. What about our other responsibilities? What about extra time? A lot of people work longer hours, bring work home, work multiple jobs or simply have to deal with other responsibilities.

We hear it a million times "when you die you won't wish you had worked harder". Somehow that feels too far away. We don't tend to talk or even acknowledge death. The thoughts pop into our heads when we experience it with a loved one. And as sad as it sounds, these thoughts don't tend to last long. As soon as the grieving process is over we are back to our normal selves not caring about

living a life without regrets. Sounds nice. A life without regrets. Unfortunately, that's not the case for many of us. Some of us may think we don't regret anything in life because it got us to where we are. We don't think about what-ifs; but what if on our deathbeds we regret not enjoying life as much as we could. We all have a bucket list even if it isn't written. When are we hoping to get these things done if we are too busy working all the time? The idea is that we work hard upfront so that we can retire early and do all the things on our bucket list. We have this idea of earning our time off. We work to get our vacation time. We work to get paid so we can go on vacation. We work so we can retire. We look forward to the weekends, the holidays, the days off. Everywhere in society we are all just wishing to have time off to do what we want. To have fun. To be childish? Yes! why not? Children are notoriously curious. They are incredibly imaginative. They don't second guess themselves. They speak their minds. They ask for what they want. They find joy everyday. I don't see how any of these things are a bad thing. We all have, to some degree, an inner child, we should let them out more often. Tapping into our nostalgia is a great way to let them out.

"Blazing with Color"
Round Puzzle
Image by Rohit Sen
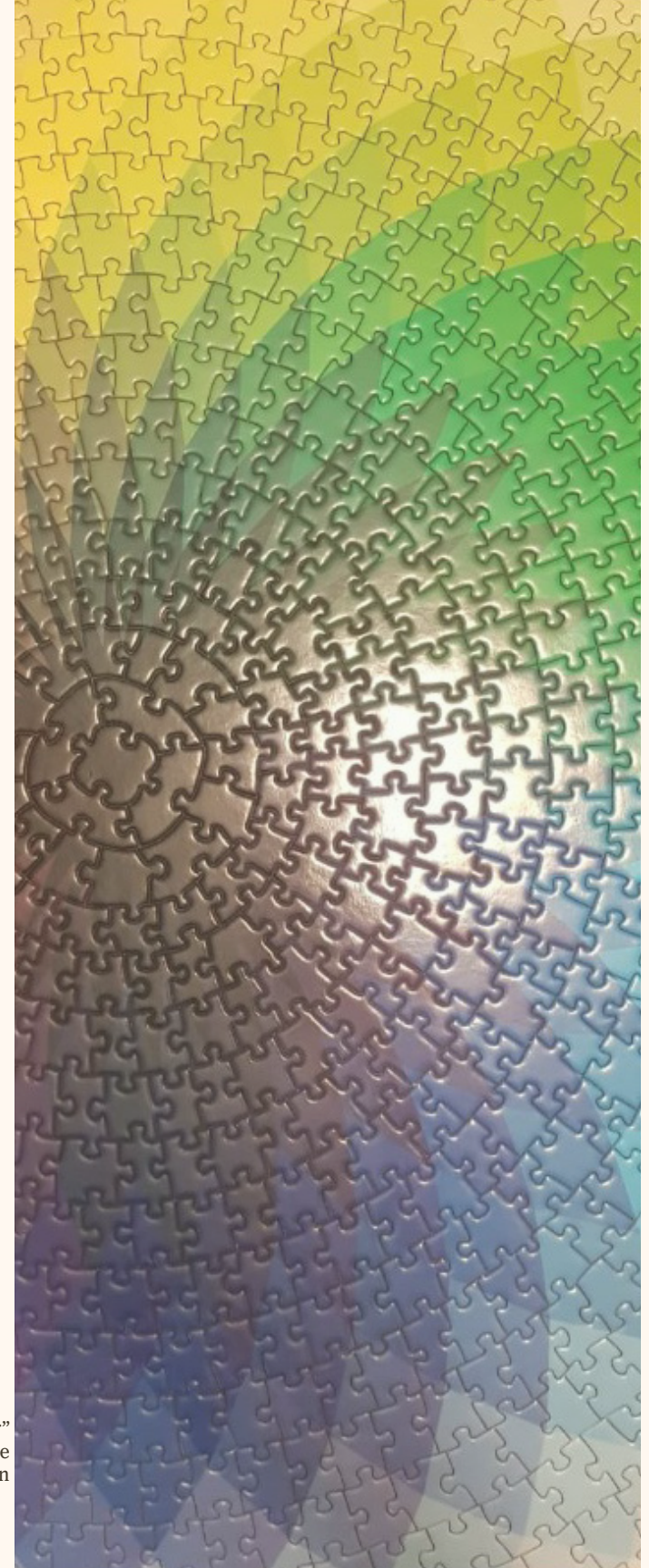
Prototyping process for
the dish sponge

It always happens. "Oh, you speak German? Say something!" All words vanish from my brain. That's exactly the pressure I felt trying to design play. All of a sudden I didn't know what was fun anymore. We know what's playful for children, after all that's where play is focused in design. So, I went back to the basics of design research, getting people's opinions on certain objects and textures.

As a starting point, I decided to make multiple bags made up of different fabrics and filled with different granular materials based on what I found browsing around a department store. I wanted to get an idea on textures with the hopes of creating a new version of a sponge. This was still when I was focused mainly on chores.

People found the bag with sand to be relaxing; the one with the wax pellets, mesmerizing and the one with the beads playful. Having had one of the test bags result in playfulness I went ahead and made a sponge out of fabric and plastic beads. When I washed dishes with it, the rigidness of the plastic beads didn't allow me to fold the sponge around the objects. For the next prototype, I went with foam beads. This was an improvement but I was left unsatisfied. This, once again, felt very task specific and not focused on Overwhelm so I moved on from this idea.

Texture bags
Sand, wooden beads,
wax bead pellets

Texture bags
Wax bead pellets, sand
and wooden beads.

Marble Run
Abacus
Bead Maze

We are our most playful when we are children, so it's only logical that when we are reminded of it, we feel playful. So, I decide to tap into the nostalgia of childhood and think back on the objects we have as children. For starters, I want something that I can use to keep a tally. I want to keep some sort of a score of our accomplishments. All the tasks and microtasks we actually accomplish. I remember the abacus. Simple enough, whenever we finish a task we can move a bead from point A to point B. For an added element of fun, I decide to make it into spirals and loops instead of straight lines. This way, when the beads move through the path, it will create an intriguing visual that would cause joy and make us want to do it again. I called it loopy abacus. Once I prototyped it, I realized that I had seen this before. A bead maze. I left this bead maze in my studio table and when I came back a couple of days later, colleagues commented on how they loved my prototype cause they found it so fun. This prototype has proven to be successful! Adults found the movement of the beads entertaining and fun. I had made a counting toy. Now I had the concept, I needed to design it further.

I continued with the idea of the bead maze but I decided to look at other maze type toys. I remembered a maze box my older brothers had when I was growing up. It was a wooden box with a maze. The goal was to move the box to make the metal ball roll around the maze until you reached the goal. The added fun part was that there were some trap doors that you had to avoid falling into or you'd have to start over. This inspired me with the idea of trap doors on the maze. This would add a level of fascination, surprise and curiosity to the experience

BRIO Labyrinth

of using the product. The trap doors in the Labyrinth don't take the stones out of the game. They simply lead to secret tunnels that lead to different paths. These tunnels give the stones a way through what seems to be a constrained path. Instead of being stopped by the wall, the stones find the tunnel and overcome the obstacle.
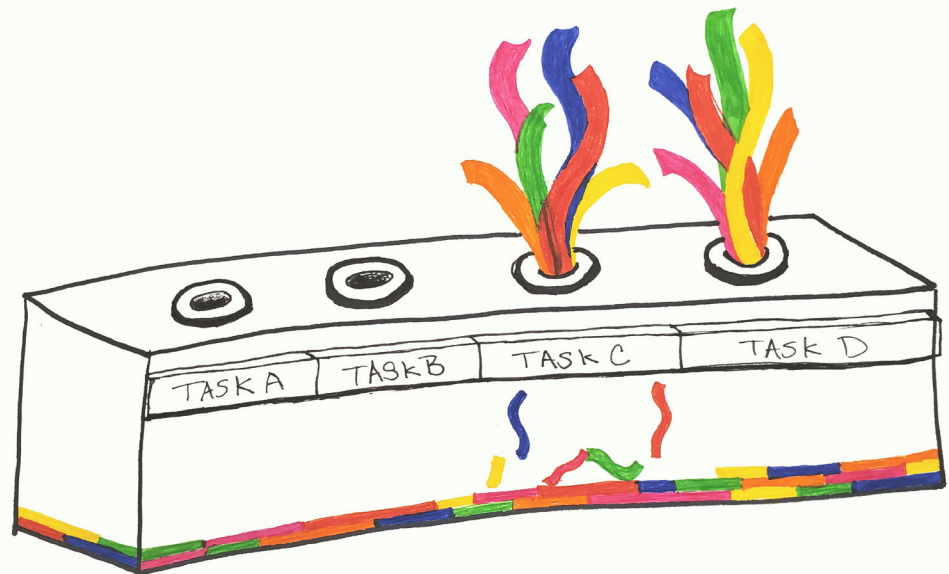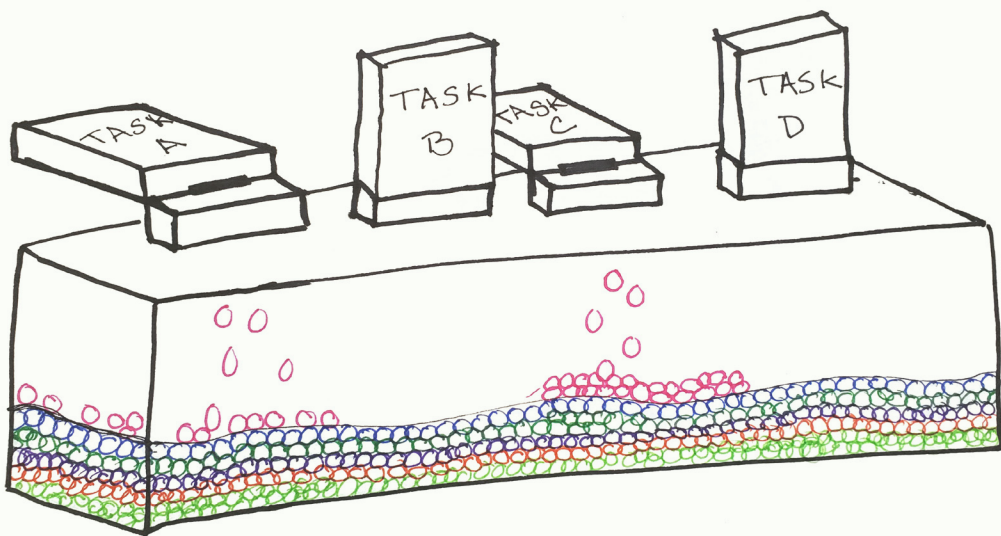
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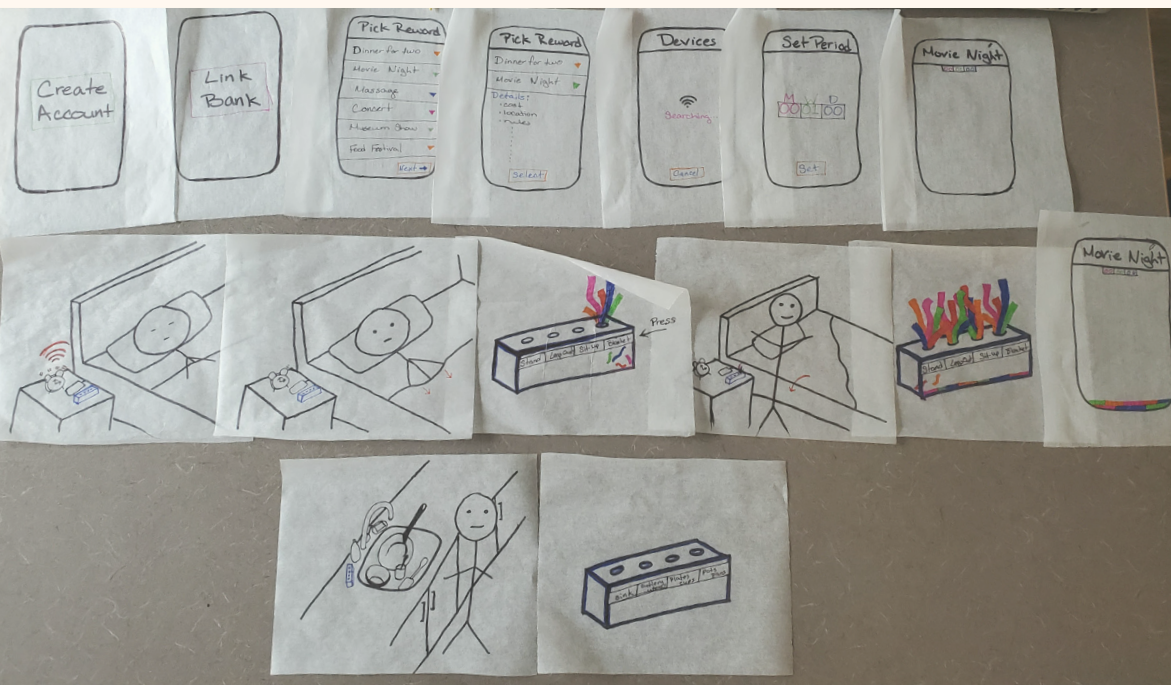
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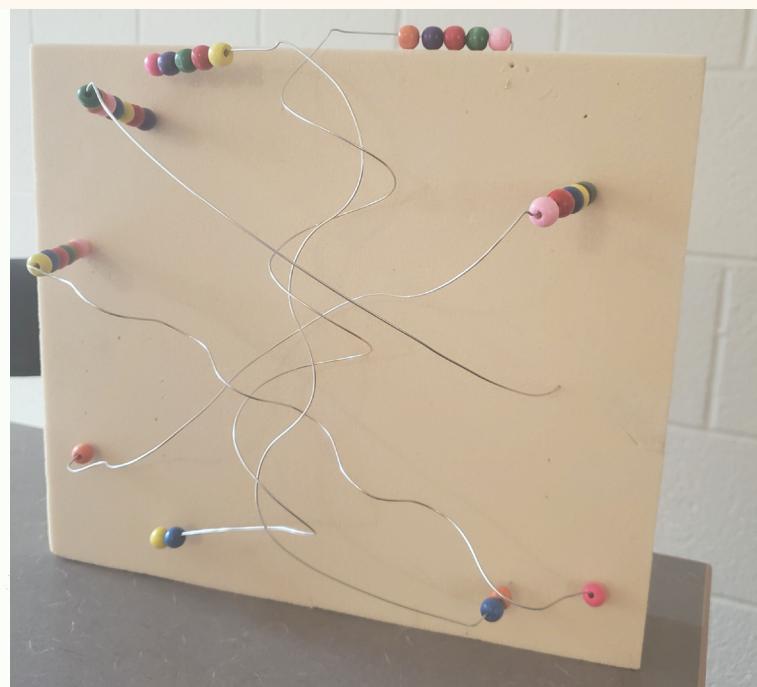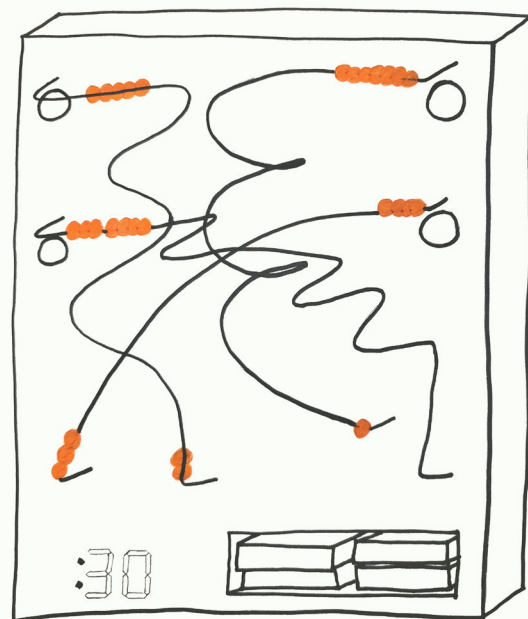
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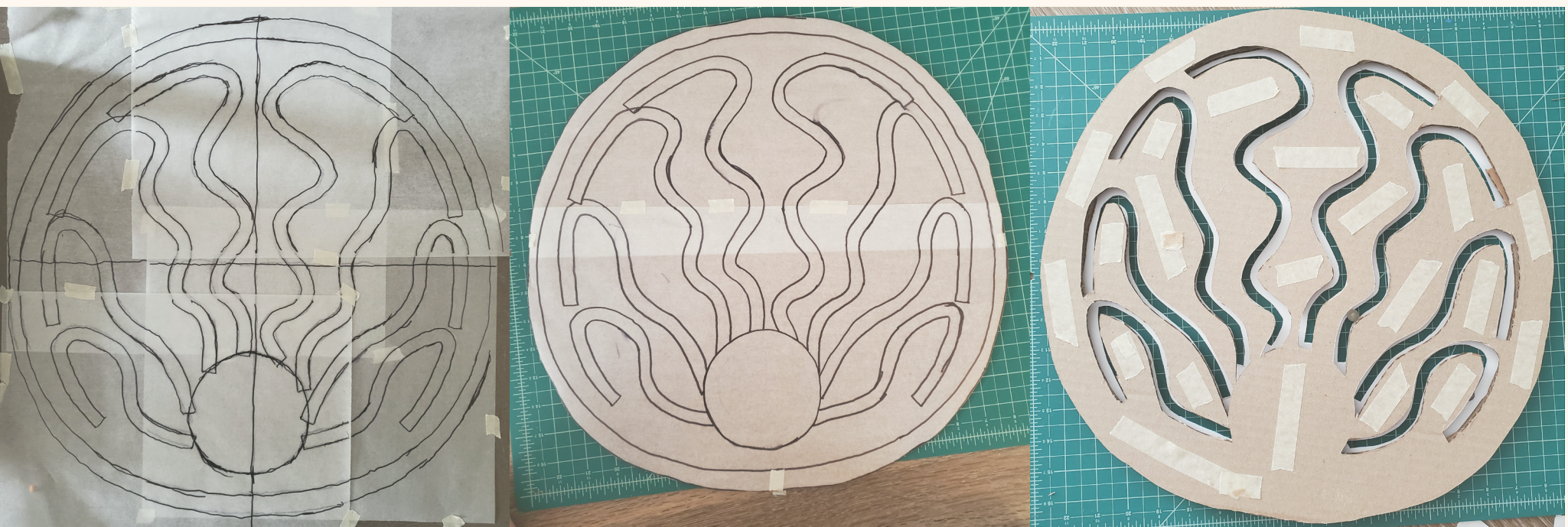
Prototype for the
Labyrinth
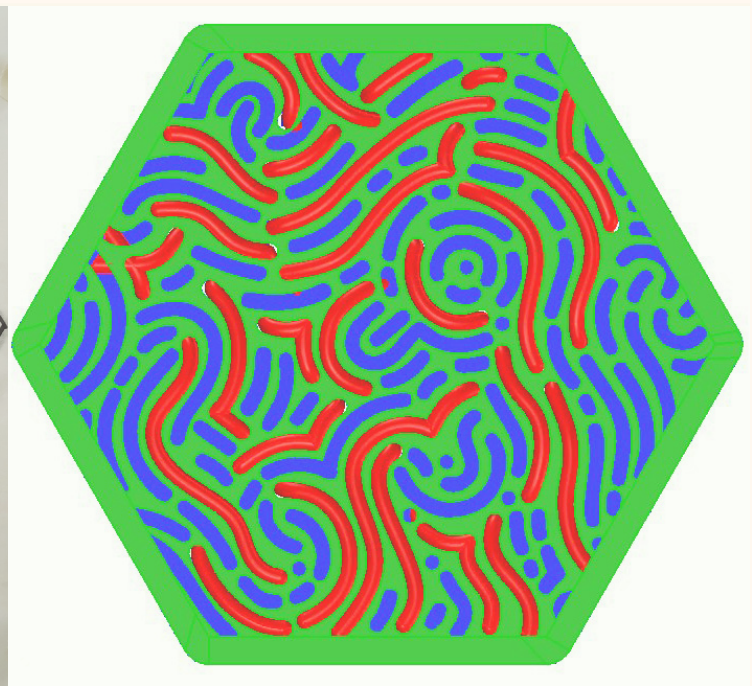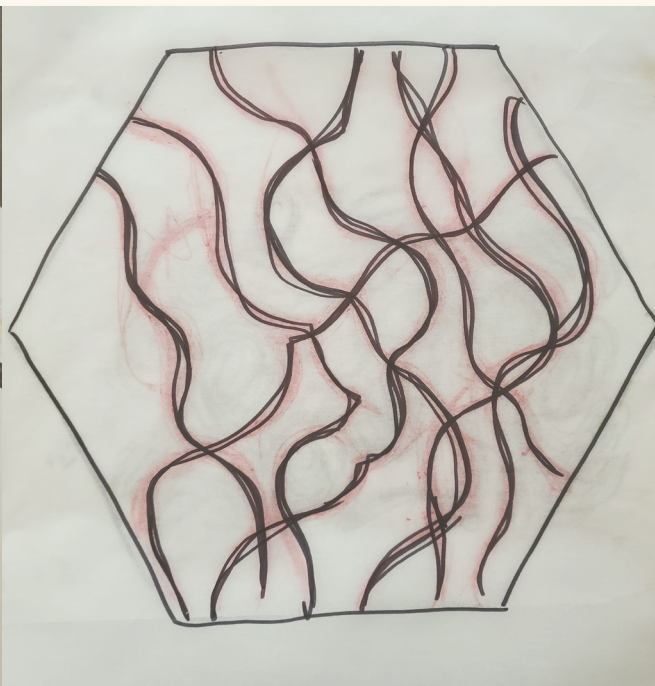
Prototyping, sketching
and 3D modeling for
the Labyrinth

Top of the world. The silhouette of the mountains in the distance. Trees protect me. Birds greet me. Body energized. Mind is focused on one thing and one thing only. Accomplishment. I made it. One step after the other. One step at a time. Looking forward to the top. Looking forward to the view. Looking forward to freedom. Freedom from life. For a moment, It's just me in the world. This is what I want. That's what I want to live for. Clarity, peace, no worries, no guilt.

A slightly darker blue where sea and sky meet. Waves playing. Wind, running freely. Birds floating in the air. Sounds of freedom. No constraints. My mind feels clear. My mind floats freely. No dark corners. Detoxed inside and out by the salt. Finally, I am free

Freedom

As the opposite of entrapment, Freedom seems like a clear topic of interest as I try to find a possible solution against Overwhelm. There's a stress managing practice meant to relax our body which consists of tensing up our muscles for a couple of minutes and then releasing. We are stressing out our muscles and freeing them up in order to feel better. There shouldn't be any surprise that "joy thrives on the alleviation of constraints".

Ever since we are children, one of our first instincts is to be free. Any parent would tell you the dangers of having a toddler in a crib unsupervised; they just want to get out. That's how long we've been craving freedom.

Right now, in multiple countries across the world, we are all living under constraints. COVID-19 has forced us into isolation and into working from home environments. This means that we don't have the freedom to go outside, visit friends, go out for dinner and a movie, or even meet with our colleagues. Meanwhile, we are all fantasizing about the moment when these constraints are lifted. We dream about having a choice and not feeling trapped in a situation with no control over our lives.

Though most of these examples are about a physical constraint, there are intangible constraints that can make us feel trapped and of course, time is one of them. This is why I am interested in freedom as a way to manage Overwhelm. Through the Labyrinth, I want the product to serve as a visual reminder of our accomplishments in the hopes that it reminds us that we have accomplished valuable steps and earned guilt-free time. This is why the object needs to show the accumulation of the accomplishments.
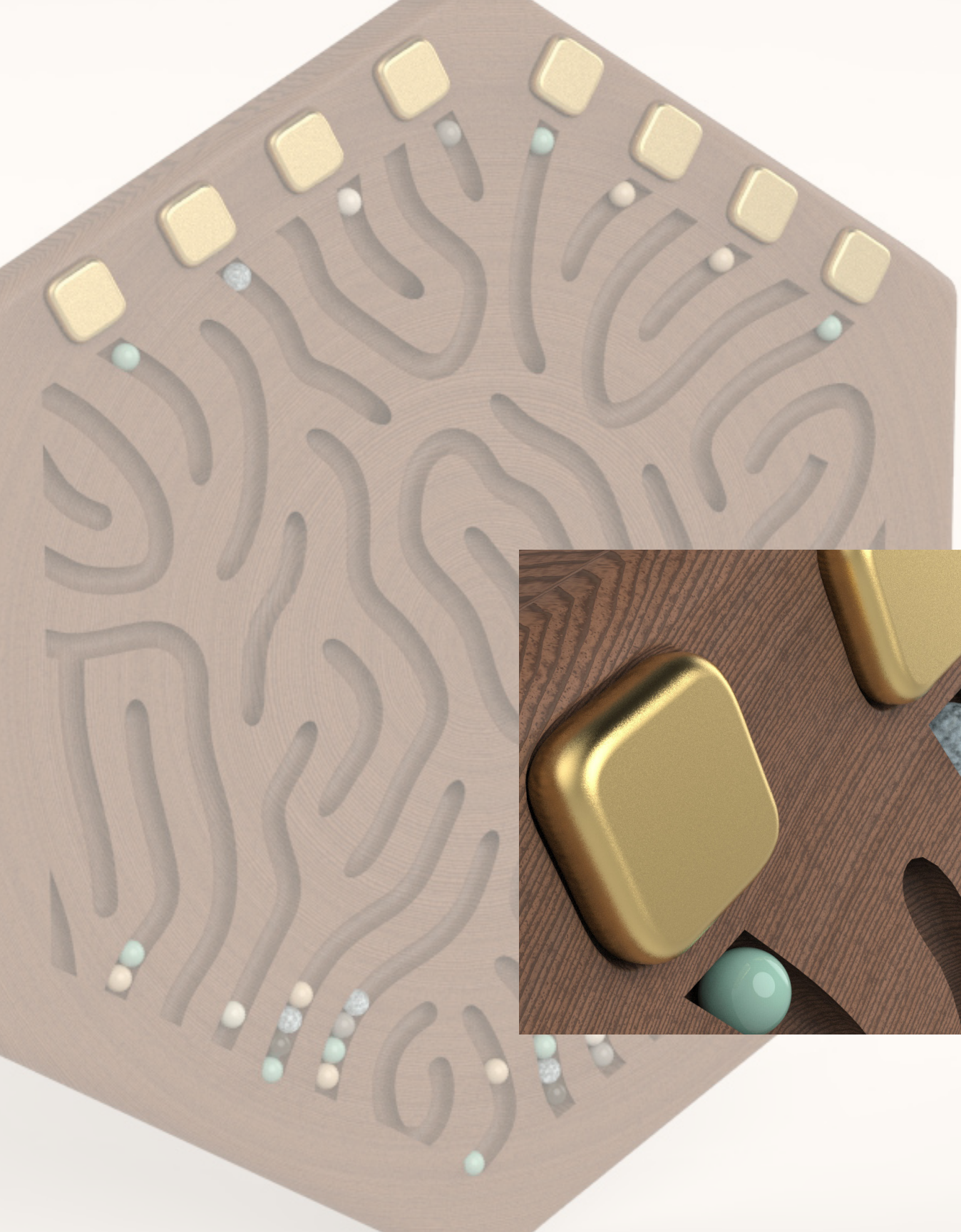
The Trifecta

As you may have already realized, structure, joy, and motivation are powerful and sustainable tools against everyday Overwhelm and therefore improve our wellbeing and quality of life. Though there can be multiple manifestations of these elements, my approach for them is based on microtasking, play and rewards. Each one of them is already used in other scenarios dealing precisely with overwhelming and unpleasant tasks. Microtasks are used for big projects most commonly seen in To-Do lists, play is sometimes used to get toddlers to clean up after themselves and rewards are constantly used by employers and parents.

Microtasking

Since the very beginning, my research hinted at this element of my approach. As I was casually discussing my thesis thoughts with my sister, she commented on what she learned in her own studies. She is currently at the tail end of her psychology degree. We discussed feelings of motivation and comfort and how they are provoked through objects.

Structure is essential for our everyday life. That becomes ever presently clear during this pandemic. We crave order, we crave schedules; and for some reason it feels like we still don't know how to establish structure for ourselves. As employers, we do it for our employees; as professors, we do it for our students; and as parents, we do it for our children. During my deep dive into understanding our relationship with domestic chores, I found out how people

What's the topic.

Objects that act in/on our lives

It's interesting. It has Psychology.

Yes :D

In my practice centre we were discussing a case we had last week of this girl that uses a teddy bear as an external emotional regulator.

If she doesn't have the bear, she loses control.

But that is obviously already pathological.

But it's an example of how far one can go with emotional attachment to objects.

And I'm talking to you about a 28 year old person.

learned to do chores. It was surprisingly nostalgic to hear how they were taught to do chores as children.

Toys would be sorted into categories. Stuffed animals, blocks, dolls, stationary. Even as a teenager, I actually continued this whenever I had to clean my room. It wasn't fun unless I played music but it definitely makes the job easier. Clothes. Papers. Stationary. Body products.

Dishes are no different. An old family friend was telling me how she was taught to do dishes in categories. She would start with the cutlery. Followed by cups, plates, pots and pans. This clearly implies a size based category, which is exactly how I, as an adult, do my dishes. As a kid, the focus was to ease them into the task by starting with a small surface area to clean. As an adult, I still base it on the size of the surface area but the focus is more towards how fast I can get the sink to feel clean. This is why I start with pots and pans.

Microtasking for tackling chores didn't seem to be that informative to me when I first saw it. It wasn't until I read about microtasking as an approach for mental health struggles on Reddit. It's amazing how we retain information and make connections to things we learned and forgot that we learned. The commonality between these two approaches made it clear for me. The way to tackle overwhelming tasks is by breaking them down.

My goal is to have a collection of tasks broken down into smaller tasks that can be placed on the Labyrinth to give meaning to each of the paths on it. The purpose of having a collection is so people can select the box labeled with the task they want encouragement overcoming.

Yes. I am focusing on the everyday psychology that affects everyone not just those that have serious psychiatric conditions... I don't know if there's a name for it.

Yeah, yours is more lite. It's psychology for "normal people"

If I find a proper term I'll let you know.

Exactly I am trying to see if there's a pattern in the characteristics of the objects and the emotions with objects.

To see if then we can provoke specific emotions with objects.

Do you already have your hypothesis

Sort of

I have certain characteristics hypothesized.

Because in my expierience, if you want it as a guide, objects that establish structure and order in a task

That the person wishes to do, usually are motivating.

Objects that remind us of love and maternal warmth (think babies) are the ones that cause comfort.

Each box contains four magnetic brass tiles and a guide. The tiles are engraved with an icon that represents each of the microtasks that make up the main one; and the guide includes information on what these icons mean and how to place the tiles on the board.

The chosen tasks for the collection are based on my findings on chores and mental health. I'm focusing on tasks perceived as small. This perception is precisely what makes them harder to break down at first glance. Recognizing that our Overwhelms can be individual, the design is open to user customization if they want to have a task that is not in the pre-established collection. In the same platform where they would purchase the object, the user can create their own digital drawing for their own four microtasks. These drawings would be engraved in the same manner as the pre-designed tiles.

Structure as a motivator is used a lot in behaviour modification and with people with autism and ADHD

Interesting

And think about how weighted blankets are used to calm down, giving the sensation that one is being hugged.

I'm thinking in first identifying the characteristics but once I understand up to a certain point the characteristics, dissect what it is that these objects have that cause these emotions, texture, colour, material, etc. to then try to create objects that motivate people to have excitement for life.

Big task for an object but we'll see

Put Clothes Away

Pair Socks
Fold Clothes
Hang Clothes
Put in Drawers

Showering

Get Moving
Grab Clothes
Grab Towel
Get in

Going Out

Pick Destination
Get Dressed
Put on Shoes
Head Out

Clean Kitchen

Clean Stove
Take out Trash
Clear Counters
Sweep Up

Laundry

Sort Clothes
Collect clothes
Wash
Dry

Getting out of bed

Sit Up
Pull Blanket
Stand up
Feet out

Dishes

Pots & Pans
Cups & Plates
Flatware
Sink

Responding Emails

Open Email
Write Draft
Proofread
Send Response

labyrinth

dishes

This set in the collection is meant to break down doing the dishes into four manageable tasks that can be done in any order and individually.

Washing pots, pans, trays and all other large sized objects

Washing cups, plates, bowls and all other medium sized objects

Washing cutlery, cooking utensils and all other small sized objects

Cleaning the sink area and the sink strainer

Example of guide that comes with the tiles.

Playfulness

Incorporating games into work is a common parenting practice. Through the Labyrinth, I am harvesting the nostalgia of our inner child by capturing the essence of a classic game: the maze. The Labyrinth turns the tasks into missions. Once all the missions are completed by getting all the stones to the end of the maze, the user wins the reward.

Some of the joys of games are amusement, curiosity and the physical and mental interaction required. The way the stones roll down the Labyrinth is designed specifically to create this level of playfulness. All the paths seem to be blocked off but some of them connect through the underground tunnels. Some paths are there just to add mystery as to where the stones will come out once they go inside the tunnel. This way the tunnels and the paths provoke curiosity and intrigue. The visual and the sound effects of the stones gliding down the wood amuse our senses. This is meant to be an immediate short term reward that sparks joy in an instant.
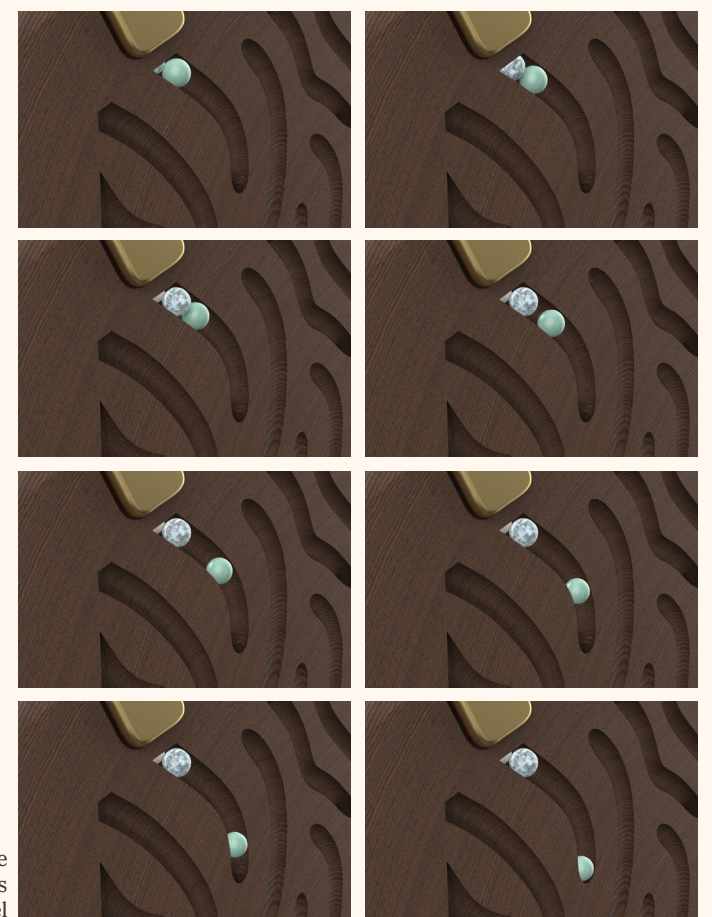
Sequence as the stone is released and goes into a tunnel
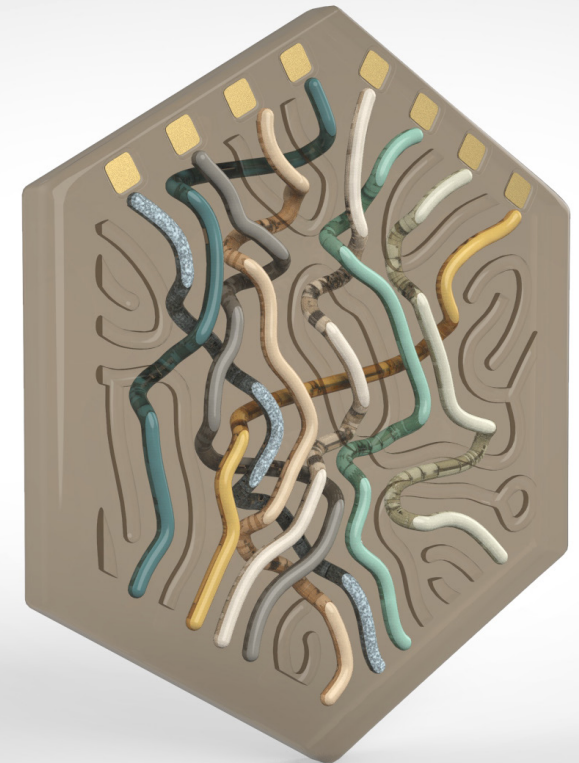
Traced paths, darker sections on the pipes represent the tunnels

Rewards

There are eight paths on the Labyrinth. Each one represents a micro-task and every stone represents the number of times the task has been accomplished. Every time a stone reaches the end of its path, it stacks up at the bottom serving as a visual reminder of the accomplishments one has done working up to the final reward.

This reward is freedom. Freedom to do what we actually want to do with our time, ideally, guilt-free time. As the counterpart of entrapment, the sense of freedom in itself will improve our wellbeing by relieving us from our Overwhelms for a period of time. I can't guarantee guilt-free time since it's something completely subjective to the person's priorities but the idea is that the accumulation of stones at the bottom releases us from the guilt of taking time for
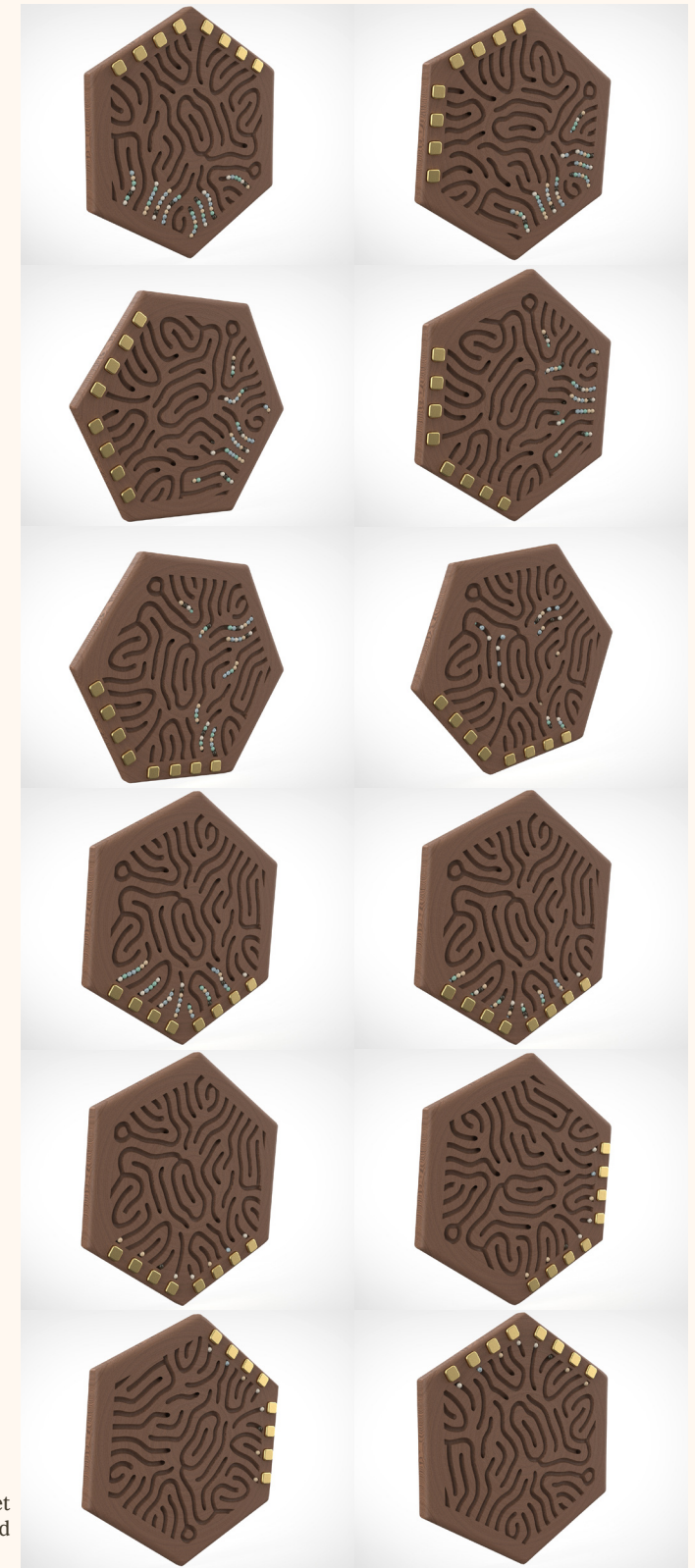
Sequence of the reset rotation of the board

ourselves by showing us our accomplishments. Since we can now see the work we've done, we can now see we are not wasting time, instead we are using the time we "earned". To avoid using too much time and spiraling out of control into procrastination, everytime you take time for yourself, the Labyrinth can be reset by rotating it around and returning the stones to their original place.
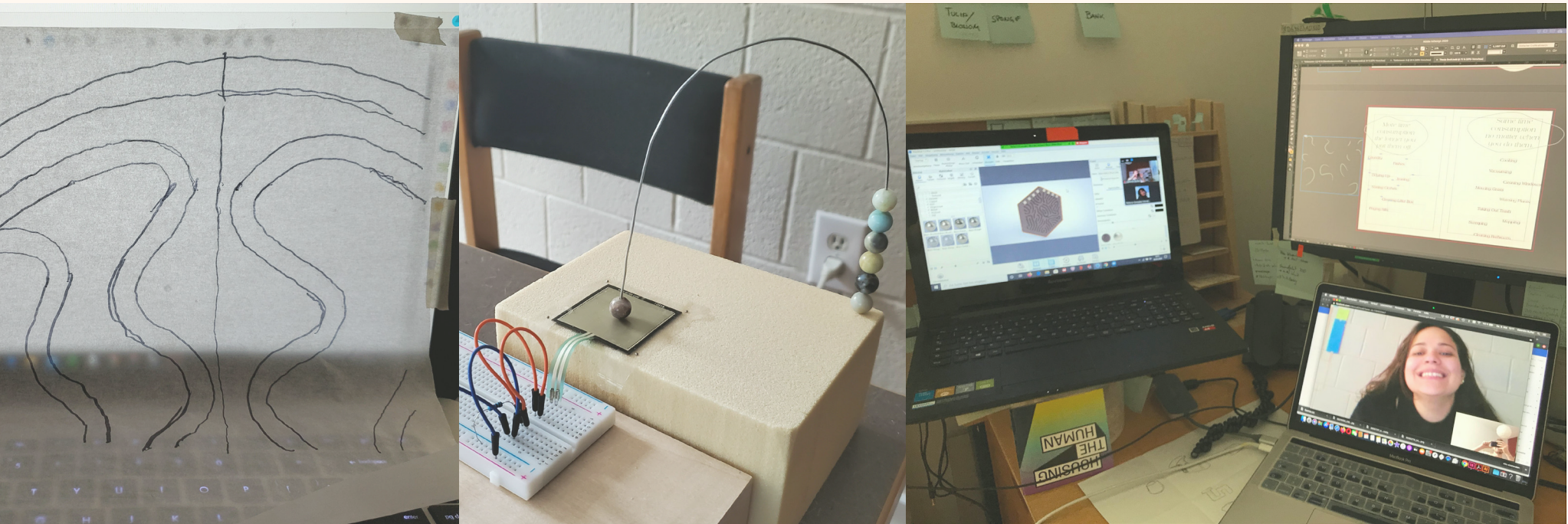
Tracing from the computer,
experimenting with Arduino and
my work station in Germany

343 days ago, I knew exactly what I wanted my thesis to be. I wanted to focus on the unextraordinary objects that surround us and use design to make these objects silent actors in our lives helping us achieve a stress-free everyday life.

343 days later, I am not where I thought I would be. I learned how design decisions can influence our emotions and ultimately our general mood. I learned the way our brains are wired to read all the cues, silent or loud, that the world puts out. I learned what are some causes of stress defined by both, everyday people and behavioural scientists. I learned how objects can be silent actors in our emotions and behaviours. What I realized through my research though, is that I did not want to make objects that camouflage the bigger problem that is our relationship with productivity and self-care. We focus around the concept of "productive use of our time" too much and forget about a meaningful use of our time. We diminish the value of our efforts based on an outsider's metric of which effort is valuable and which isn't. Our abilities and skill-sets are individual to each of us, therefore our struggles are different. The way valuable efforts look for each of us are, therefore, different

"Everyone is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid."

Thesis was not at all what I expected, I started knowing what I wanted to research. I was open to where it was going to lead me but I knew that it had to be a physical object. That was my one self-imposed restriction. A digital world can affect our emotions and behaviours as well, but there's an anchor in the tactility of objects that provides a relationship between us and them. The promise of a physical component in my thesis project was what I looked forward to the most as I concluded what was to be my seven years of design education. That was until the historic quarantine of 2020. I am not where I thought I would be. I had to resort to "creative solutions" outside my comfort zone. From experimenting with coding, to tracing drawings on the computer screen, designing and making was significantly delayed. I had to make compromises and postpone certain components of my design such as user testing. User testing the Labyrinth would require a physical object and an extended period of use, both of which didn't seem realistic after the news of the virus.

As I was making my peace with these limitations, I found out that my computer wasn't powerful enough to render proper images. Not only was I not going to be able to have a tried and tested physical model but now the renders to communicate the idea seemed impossible. My creative solution? Zoom. With a near worldwide lockdown, the video conferencing platform made its way into everybody's everyday vocabulary in a short period of time. Earlier this month, I learned that through a Zoom conference, members in the meeting could request remote access to the person sharing their screen, this feature was going to be my lifeline for rendering. I managed to set up a remote access rendering station through my partner's work computers in Germany.

With all these obstacles along the maze that is thesis, I realize this project is far from over. As designers, we are hypercritical of our work. We can always see ways to improve it, but in my case, I knew that there is still more to discover when it comes to integrating behavioural sciences into design in order to improve our wellbeing. This will be a lifelong project. I want to land on the moon but for now I have managed to get the rocket to hover and that's ok.
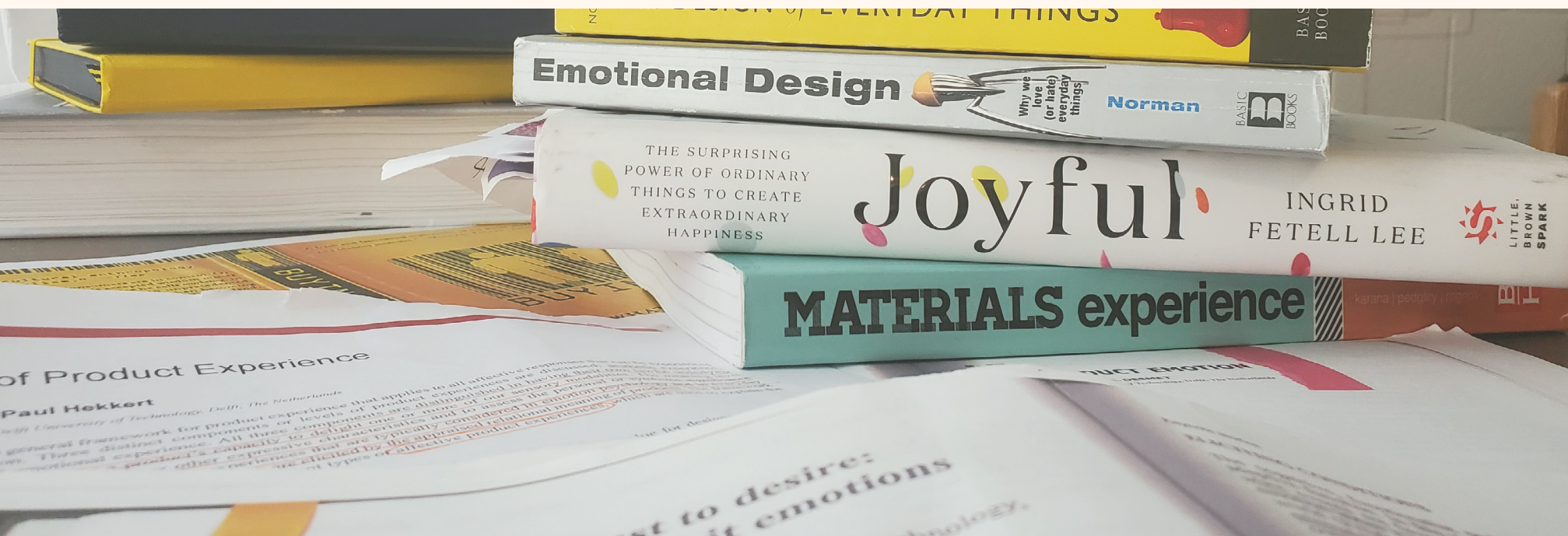
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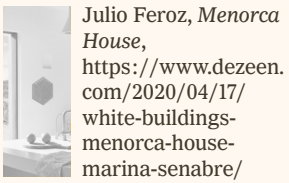
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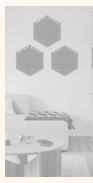
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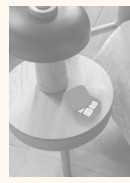
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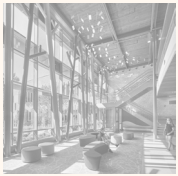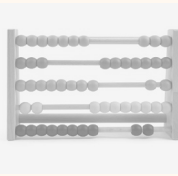
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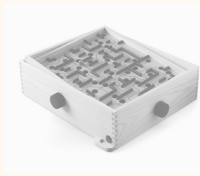
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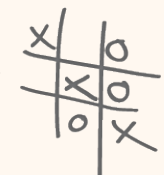forward by Yu luck from the Noun Project

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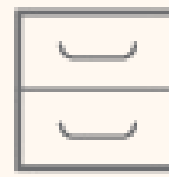
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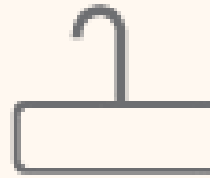
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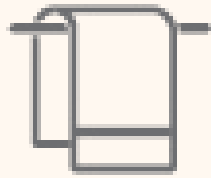
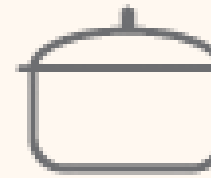towel by @w@n !cons from the Noun Project
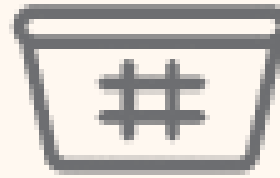
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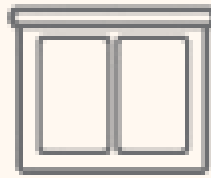
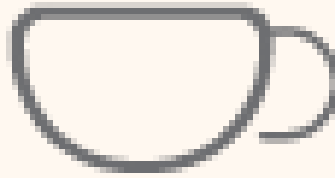cupboard by Valeriy from the Noun Project

sink by Veronica Polinedrio from the Noun Project

dish by newstudio design10 from the Noun Project

basket by CV Maker from the Noun Project

Cup by fae frey from the Noun Project

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