Reflection Composing Everyday Rituals

I have a great interest in how we as people experience emotional value. In my vision, I state that 'technology should make use of the value we have as people by encouraging and enabling us to live life to the fullest, find joy in the simple things and create our own stories of life.' I believe that finding joy in the simple things is exactly what rituals enable us to do. They let us experience details in a mindful, engaging way, such that we realize the beauty of them. For that reason, I chose to follow this elective, because I wanted to learn how to design for this in more detail, especially in an everyday context influenced by technology.

Analyzing the initial videos and trying to design a new ritual made me realize the importance of little details. Every time we would discuss the designed ritual within our group, new design choices would come up. Every little decision influenced the experience of other aspects, making it hard to make those decisions; it was extremely important to be aware of the consequences of every decision, while still hesitating as less as possible. Ambiguities would ruin the strength of the ritual. Within these engagement focused designs, anything that breaks away from the complete picture also breaks the level of engagement.

Connected to that, setting strict boundaries around the design were very important in this elective, and in designing for rituals in general. Focusing on practicalities too much or leaving too much ambiguity creates more of a routine instead of a meaningful ritual. Restrictions in the design force people to cope with specific movements or interactions, making them more meaningful through mastery and satisfaction in the action itself.

Next to that, I learned that we humans are very stubborn creatures, especially in our daily rituals. There is a constant search for a control balance in our actions and the objects we use. Together with the restrictions I mentioned before, this means that rituals will always become very personal and unique sets of actions, that are decided partly by the designer of the object, but for a big part by the user. In designing for rituals, leaving the exactly right amount of space for this personalization and interpretation is an interesting challenge, but finding the right balance of control will increase the level of engagement.

As an interaction designer, I will definitely pay more attention to details and especially this balance of control in future projects. I have an interest in IoT, and I believe that this area specifically will need a lot of exploration within this control balance, in order to provide people with meaningful interactions and rituals with these complex technologies as they become part of our everyday life. I hope that documenting the specific decisions surrounding my future designs and the consequences they have will help me to be aware of the subtle influences that design can have on people's everyday lives.