

# WHY BE HUMAN?

{ We are increasingly living in a virtual, digitalised environment – what might happen to the objects we coexist with, and their subsequent effects on human interaction?

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For Grancha John

With the increase in screen-based technology the working office environment has become more and more digitalised. With such applications as SKYPE, E-mail, widgets, Facebook, our lives are getting more reliant on screen-based technologies than on human-to-human communication. This thesis proposes ways of keeping up with the demands of technology but responds to our more intuitive tactile human tendencies. It delves into primitive cycles of designing and making through necessity, while looking towards the future and how humans play a role. I aim to show personal investigations into the role of the office and its affect on human behaviors. My proposals use our more humane tendencies such as gossip, flirting, ambition and introspection and use them as tools to create objects that manipulate technology into benefiting human office needs

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*ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS*



## 1 . Hypothesis :

We are increasingly living in a virtual, digitalised environment – what might happen to the objects we coexist with, and their subsequent effects on human interaction?

## 2 . Introduction :

A couple of months ago I started to regularly ride the bus to school. It had been quite a long period without using the bus and I was surprised at how quiet it was. If you ever need to have some 'calm' in your life or need some sort of Zen moment then the bus is the place for you. The reason for this silence originates from the need for personal space, and the awkwardness in sitting next to someone you don't know. The same feeling could be felt in a lift where many of us look to the ceiling or to such details as screws, bolts and promoting posters, anything not to start a conversation with our fellow man.

On reflection of such encounters I often wonder is there such a notion as neighbor or fellow man anymore, why do we care so much or so little about the human race?

Reverting back to the bus anecdote I question how much of a role technologies have played in the demise of physical human contact.

Take portable music as an example; before the invention of portable music devices, music was a luxury that was shared in specific situations. Without sounding nostalgic, families would congregate around the gramophone or radio, listening to their favourite songs, dreaming of other worlds far removed from their own; in essence music was a social commodity. The invention of the portable music player removed people from the chains of physically being at a specific place, it made music moveable. In doing so the social aspect of music changed. Once a ritual shared by others, today music can also provide escapism from the arduous tasks of social interaction. Devices such as Apple's iPod, which has sold over 220 million, are also used as tools of escapism from socially awkward moments.

*"After constantly getting bombarded by charity and religious groups asking for donations or god's forgiveness, I now pretend to be on the phone or listen to my music"- Anonymous.*

This quote highlights how a physical object and function can sometimes be used for a different purpose. It reflects our attitudes toward technologies in a way, that it can also become a tool to distract and hide us away from physically being somewhere, and having to socially interact. **Portable Technologies can become the invisibility cloak of our daily lives, something the Internet and virtual reality have mastered for a long time.**

The bus anecdote was the catalyst for my thesis, and made me question the impact technology, especially virtual and screen based technologies have on our physicality. If we live more and more in a virtual environment, what happens to the objects that we have to coexist with? A desk, for example: is it a means to work, a surface for elevating objects? What if those objects cease to exist, a mouse, a keyboard, what is the role of the desk?

If digital and virtual technologies have evolved and their interfaces have become more advanced, should physical objects advance with them? Who leads whom?

Our physicality has broadened beyond the borders of our bodies. Increasingly we see that products are becoming interface, our homes, cars, phones, even pets are all virtually connected. The development of the RFID tag paved the way for a new type of system that could link everything to anything.

Physical objects such as the iPad now become windows into an on-line media community, while the object itself is mere casing or packaging. You could argue that we are evolving into objects, all working for one machine 'the Internet'; Interconnected items that talk and communicate to one another via wireless. In doing so the question of what is physical 'real' and virtual 'unreal' becomes more important.

In trying to find an answer to the hypothesis I need to understand what it means to be human and the daily interactions we undertake. Can we conceive a human without a body? Are feral children brought up with no human contact still regarded as human? Is a coma patient human? What constitutes being human?

I often wonder if tribes in the Amazon unaffected by western policy are more humane than high-powered capitalists societies. These questions can become endless and in principle have no one true answer, but they raise important issues as to what makes us human, what objects define our species, and the basic necessities for human survival.





### 3 . Primitive archetypes :

If man finds a material he will make use of it, probably damage it, find out its capabilities while usually contributing to its extinction, man is a consumer, an architect and fundamentally an evolutionist.

The first primitive tools were found to originate from the Paleolithic Period roughly 2 to 1.5 million years ago. Core flake tools from this period showed the early signs of creating an object fit for a purpose. The core material would be chipped or flaked away to leave the objective tool. The Acheulian period came after, roughly 1.5 million years ago and lasted till 150,000 years BC.<sup>1</sup> This period was significant in the development of tool use. Homo erectus fashioned tools not from the core flaked final object but from the flakes themselves, creating more intricate, useful and more abundant tools. (Image 1)

If we revert back to present day I believe we are going through a similar process of designing for necessity. Take the Iphone for example, the actual object could be seen as the core flaked tool, while the flakes could be deemed applications and widgets. The Iphone itself is a physical object but the 'flakes' are digitalised into programs, icons, screen based tools.

As we evolve into a new era in human evolution where a virtual and digital world is more widely used we can begin to see that objects that cannot be replicated digitally or virtually will only exist out of human necessity (the archetype object). Items such as wheelchairs, tables, beds, and toilets all are designed for specific human and anatomical need. Already there is another strand of physicality, which is a hybrid of digital and physical: Mobile phones, laptop, credit cards, any screen or digital based technology can become embedded into our bodies or architecture, in essence humans become architecture. The laptop or casing could cease to exist, the phone could become embedded into you (image 2), credit cards will become more human based and resort to an eye scan. These physical items we now use and take for granted could become obsolete. **The physical nature of their existence is only needed when the function permits them to be.**

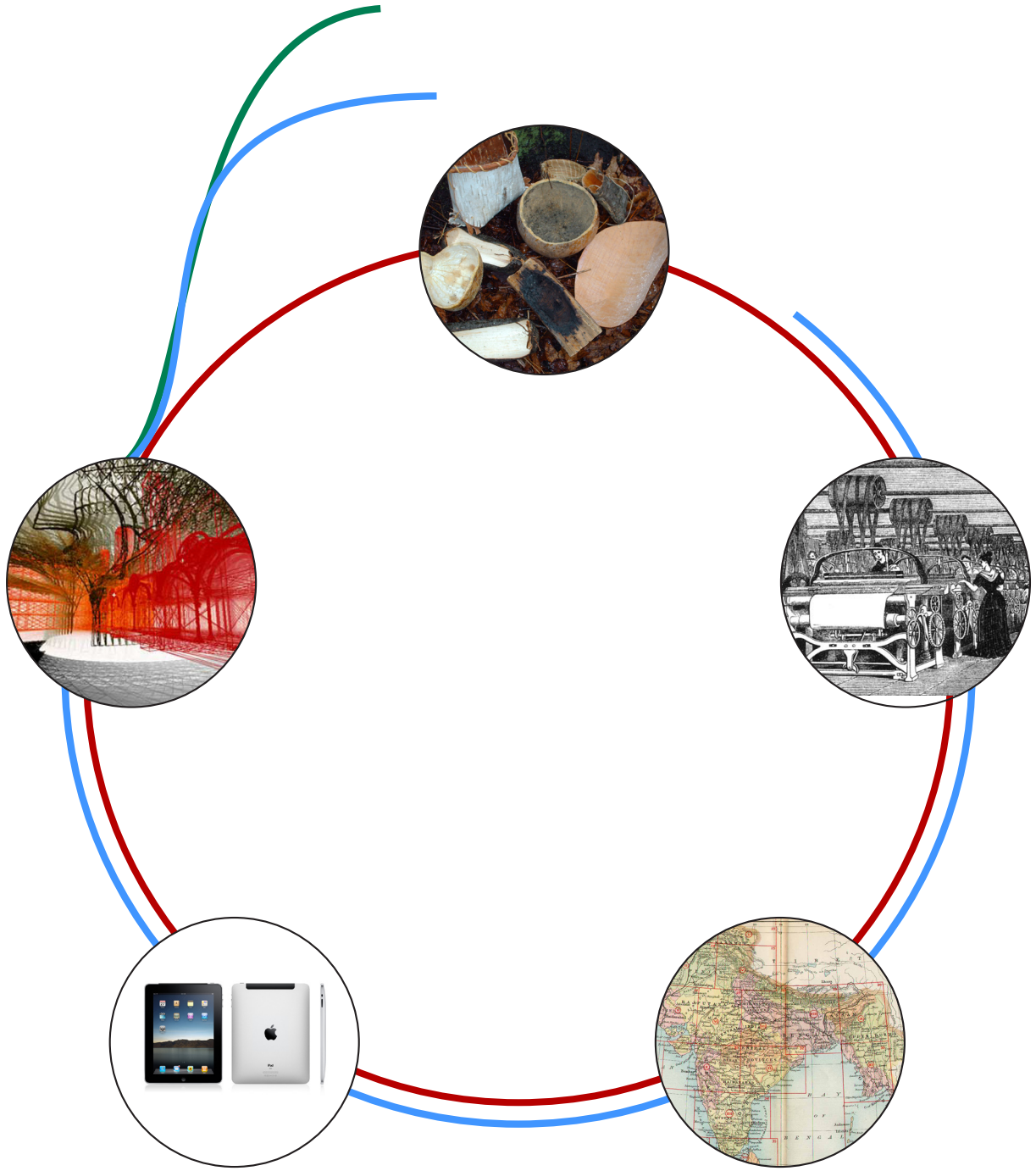
Today I sit in a design school asking myself; 'Do we honestly need more chairs, do we really need more abundance of objects that fill our lives? It is a tough reality to live with being a designer of objects, and your own conscious saying " Man let's reflect and think before doing anything drastic like creating another object'.

Yet what I believe in is not the vast amount of nonsense that bombards my profession, but objects that deal direct with benefiting human beings and having an honesty and an integrity. This maybe an old fashioned possibly nostalgic way of looking at designers, but if we live in a physical world then we are surrounded by physical objects. If our lifestyles are already digitalised, then the more valuable physical objects are to that lifestyle.

Think of a room with four white walls and a bright white ceiling. As you enter, the architecture reads your body temperature, changes the colour of the walls to something that benefits your mood, and provides you with a list of options that appear on the wall as if by magic. Then a voice says "Hello, how are you today?" in an American accent. "What would you like to do?" After thinking what you want the architecture reads your neurological response and creates virtual screen based windows for that task. There are no buttons, no human contact, no physicality and everything can be controlled by a thought. Is this reality? Today no. In the future? Yes. Will it happen? That's a more interesting question, as the reasons why technologies cease to exist or fail to materialise are based upon homo sapien (human) factors. Economic, religious, political views, these are obvious issues, but the real issue is do I want everything controlled at a thought, or do I still want that physical interaction. If so, when and in what context.

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<sup>1</sup> PALEO DIRECT. INC, 'Primitive Man', <http://www.paleodirect.com/primman1.html>, 24th February 2010




— Necessary objects for human use

— Technology


— An amalgamation of both virtual and physical objects

  
Acheulian  
period

  
Industrial  
Revolution

  
Information  
Age

  
Digital  
Revolution

  
Virtual  
Revolution

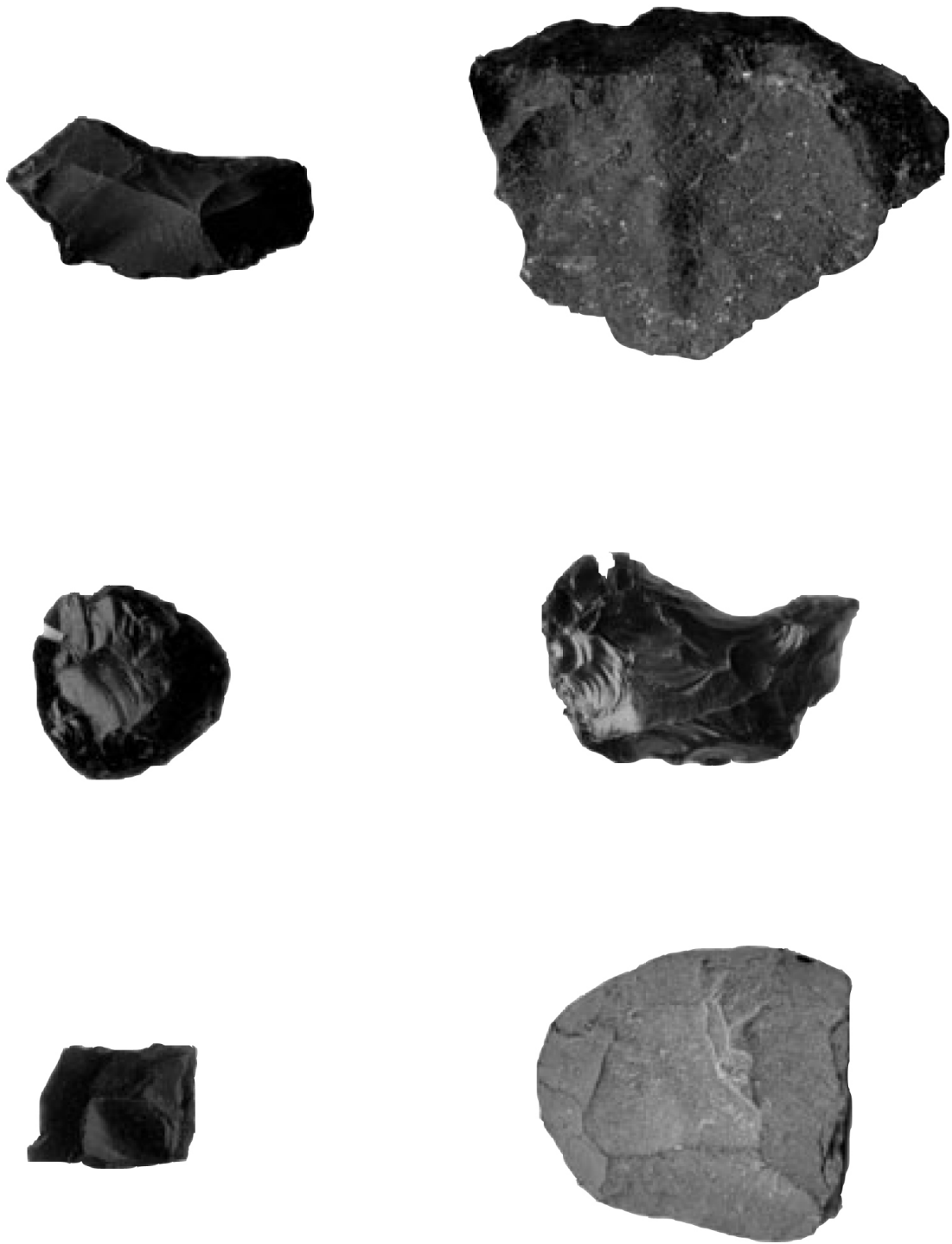


Image 1



Image 2 Audio tooth Implant

## 4 . Death of the switch and the surge of the widget :

This chapter is a continuation of the notion of objects designed out of necessity. The death of the switch is a belief that objects that don't need to physically exist will cease to exist.

When the first primitive tools were formed they were made for a specific purpose, i.e. a club was used to kill, a bowl was used to contain liquid et cetera. They were made out of necessity; as they were functional objects born out of need. Today you could argue that we are beginning to use the same ideology of functionality over frivolousness, biological and human necessity opposed to abundance. I believe the rise in craft design is popular today as it reflects this functionality born out of necessity and honesty.

With the rise in green, eco aware products, systems and politics, Countries have slowly started to realise that we need to question the abundance of objects we surround ourselves with, and their impact on our planet. This abundance was a bi- product of the industrial revolution. Now we see that companies use a similar 'industrial revolutionist ideology but in a digitalised platform', i.e. You tube videos, pop-up adverts, online shopping, downloadable books et cetera. In essence the consumerist need is still present but in another dimension, the virtual and digital dimension.

If we look at applications and widgets on Iphones, or screen based interfaces we can see that where once we filled our lives with an abundance of physical objects, now digital tools fill our lives (image 3). Clocks, convertors, calculators, games, video's, music devices, seismoscopes, even spirit levels to name but a few can all do the same functions as their physical counterparts. The main difference is of course the lack of physical imprint left by such devices.

In evolutionary terms, human technology has taken great leaps, from striking some flint to create light, to pressing a button, to turning a switch, to clapping hands to switch on a light and finally to saying 'lights on' and light appears. If we break down each action we begin to see that previously we designed out of manipulation. We said ' this is how you use it', now we see that the environment and tools needed to use such an environment are beginning to revert back to human 'intuition'.

If I want the lights on I say 'lights on', if I want to open a door or flush a toilet my presence, as opposed to my physical action, dictates that task. Another example could be the keyboard or mouse, now we see that both items do not need to exist physically, but can become screen based. What is interesting about the computer keyboard is that we have been using this interface for over 50 years and we are accustomed to its interface. Today the keyboard can be virtualised but it still remains the same as its physical counterpart. We need that reference and familiarity in order to understand how to use it.

A Royal College of Art London (RCA) project called sensual interfaces by Christopher Woebken is exploring new interfaces using organic technology: *'This project focuses on exploring its potential further, creating more manipulative prototypes such as organic electronics. Synthetic Biology combines the techniques of biology and computer science, nanotechnology that works.'*<sup>2</sup> (Image 4)

The idea is so far removed from our notion of a keypad that it would be extremely difficult for people to understand how to use such an item. Yet it is an interesting project that questions a lot about the physical nature of such a digital tool.

The specifics and exactness of digitalised tools, however useful, leave little room for inventiveness and flexibility. Everyday objects can have functions depending on what they offer in their tangible shape and capabilities. Although the objects are mostly used for one function, because of its physical imprint over time if damaged it could be adapted to fit another purpose. **A cup with a broken handle could become a toothbrush holder or a pencil holder. This inventiveness is a human trait that cannot really be seen in the virtual world, as the way we measure our objects in the physical world has a different**

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2 Christopher Woebken, *'Nanofutures : Sensual Interfaces'*, [http://www.woebken.net/nano\\_project.html](http://www.woebken.net/nano_project.html), 12th March 2010

set of scales to that of its virtual equivalent.

What is so popular about the Internet is the idea of 'virtual space'. I can design applications, tools that exist virtually and cannot be seen to make a physical impact unlike a chair, a stapler or anything that remains in the 'real' world. If you don't want to use something you can hide it away, put it into a folder icon (a digitalised filing system). Of course the servers needed to host the net, the power to run such a virtual world, does revert back and have an impact in the 'real' world. I believe it's about balance, finding reasons to create, stop and think.

By fundamentally analysing the reasons why objects should exist in the real world, we could then create a filtration system that is based on human necessity apposed to human abundance.



Image 3



Image 4



## 5 . One machine one trillion eyes :

In the previous two chapters I have looked at past and present reasons for making physical and digital products, and the affect they have on human interaction. This chapter will look at future based scenarios, and question the role of man in such a virtual technologically based society.

I believe the next 20 years will rise the greatest change in mans evolution than that found over 1.5 millions years ago.

In the last few years there has been a growing interest in ubiquitous computing environments, the 'disappearing computer'. As a consequence of this type of research, miniaturised computers 'disappear', becoming embedded into various kinds of artifacts.

These artifacts are called 'Hyper objects' ordinary objects such as chairs, tables, kettles or cups; all varied in shape, material and capabilities but are able to communicate with each other through an invisible network, while sharing the processing capabilities they individually have.

The journal titled "Personal and Ubiquitous computing" written by Irene Mavrommati and Achilles Kameas examines the affect hyper objects could have on our existing lifestyles <sup>3</sup>:

*"What is the underlying methodology to create hyper objects? A simple way to explain this is that hyper-objects are created by adding the ability to have links to objects... Such artifacts have a dual nature: a tangible self and software self. In addition to processing, they may be enhanced with sensing or actuating capabilities of their own."*

An example of this could be the ritual of making tea; once I boil the kettle the cup starts to get warm, once the kettle is boiled and ready, the cup becomes as hot as the boiling water. After consuming the last drop of tea the kettle automatically knows I have finished and turns back on. This relationship between cup and kettle can be created from hyper objects, using technologies built into one another to have a dual function and interconnected partnership.

As mentioned previously the development of RFID technology and nanotechnology has opened new possibilities to computer and screen-based technology that can be implanted into ordinary products (hyper-objects), even our 'architectural self' ( Image 5 ). We already have pacemakers, insulin dispensers, or prosthetic aids, built into our bodies. What would happen if we have the Internet - screens featuring Facebook or Gmail fitted to us by "nano' doctors? Do we remain human or will we become a new superior type of species? (Images 6 + 7 )

The Australian artist Stelarc has created a project called muscle machines (Image 8 ). The project focuses on the idea of the human body as an obsolete body, exploring whether or not the body is an adequate biological form in today's technological environment. He works with enhancing the physical substrate using robotics, prosthetics, virtual systems and the Internet as tools<sup>4</sup>. **Stelarc sees the body as a mere biological shell that can be enhanced through technological manipulation rather than treating it as a God artifact.**

This project is a great example of the type of thinking and research that is currently being undertaking, and the reaction to such projects are important as it highlights if we truly are loyal to our species, or whether we embrace such a radical technological future. If we are shocked and worried, then why are we? **What human traits are we nervous about losing?**

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<sup>3</sup> Springer London, Chris Schmandt and Mark Ackerman, Personal and Ubiquitous Computing, 'The evolution of objects into hyper-objects: will it be mostly harmless?', Pages 389 -390, Published 23rd October 2004, 15th February 2010

<sup>4</sup> Digibodies, Jeremy Drummond, 'Stelarc', <http://www.digibodies.org/online/Stelarc.htm>, 25th April 2010

This balance between our current human state and the technological fate we might be approaching has a direct influence on the objects we are interacting with. One could argue that already the phone is an extension of the body, is the digital screen an extension of ourselves?

Moore's law describes a long-term trend in the history of computing hardware, in which the number of transistors that can be placed inexpensively on an integrated circuit will double approximately every two years. This law has held true for the last thirty years and it seems it will continue. If such predictions regarding developments in processing power continue to come true, we assume that a day will come in future when processing power will advance beyond human intelligence. Ray Kurzweil is an American inventor and futurist who describes this point as "The singularity".

*"The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology"*

If we look at the basic fundamental actions of man we see that we are evolutionary creatures defined by competitive dominant behavior. Therefore everything we create we try to make better, as a species we have the ability to introspect and hence develop. Taking technology into account, I believe there will be a point in time when technology surpasses human intelligence, as ironically we will be the ones powering its advancement.

Many pose the question: Logically how can artificial intelligence surpass human intelligence, as we are the architects of that artificial intelligence? One answer in the future could be Seed A. <sup>5</sup>. This is a type of strong artificial intelligence capable of recursive self-improvement. At the moment no such artificial intelligence exists but if created, could exponentially increase the development of artificial intelligence.

In a 1950 paper titled "Computing Machinery and Intelligence" Alan Turing proposed a test that asked someone to create a machine that could successfully impersonate a human<sup>6</sup>. The test works by a person asking the same questions to both a human and a machine. If the person cannot decipher which answer is the human's, then the machine wins. Ray Kurzweil predicts that by 2029 a computer will pass the test. Yet many people have attempted and all have failed.

As I asked in the introduction: if everything and anything is digitally connected and wired toward one machine 'the Internet', then who controls whom? **What happens when we begin to lose the handshake or replace a laugh with an LOL?**

As Kevin Kelly noted author and editor of Wired magazine believes the Internet will be vastly different from its infant version, created over 6500 days ago. *'The next generation of the Web, which we may call by any name we choose -- Web 2.0, or Web 10.0, or the Semantic Web - will be a more conscious, intelligent, sentient manifestation that is aware of the purpose and nature of data. The Web will evolve to a mechanism for sharing data, a finer resolution, a more elemental unit of information than the current one. We're headed to a Web of data, where data will be the heart, and applications will move to the 'cloud'<sup>7</sup>.*

*As our worlds become smarter, and get to know us better and better, it becomes harder and harder to say where the world stops and the person begins.* <sup>8</sup> - Cognitive scientist Andy Clark.

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<sup>5</sup> Singularity Institute for Artificial Intelligence Inc, '1.1: Seed AI', <http://singinst.org/ourresearch/publications/GISAI/paradigms/seedAI.html>, Published 2001, 5th March 2010

<sup>6</sup> JSTOR, 'Computing Machinery and Intelligence', Turing, A.M, Mind, New Series, Vol. 59, No. 236. (Oct., 1950), pp. 433-460, 17th March 2010

<sup>7</sup> IT Conversations, Kevin Kelly, Wired, 'Believing in the Impossible', <http://itc.conversationsnetwork.org/shows/detail4097.html>, 18th January 2010

<sup>8</sup> Edge, Andy Clark, 'Natural born cyborgs' [http://www.edge.org/3rd\\_culture/clark/clark\\_index.html](http://www.edge.org/3rd_culture/clark/clark_index.html), 23rd April 2010



Image 5

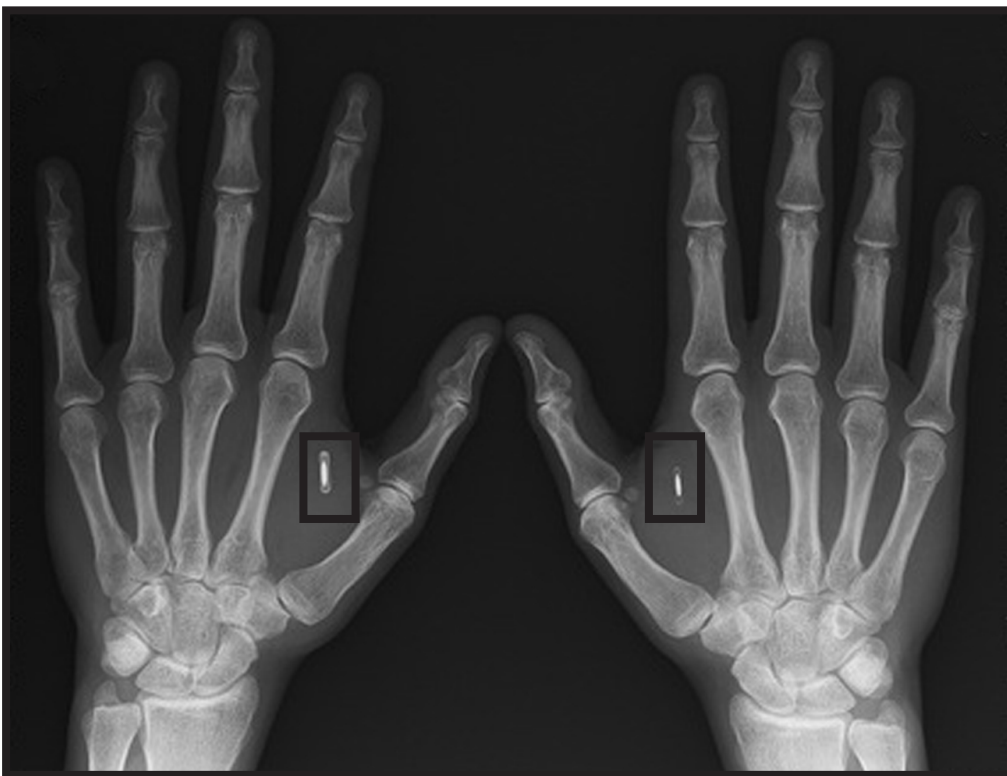


Image 6



Image 7

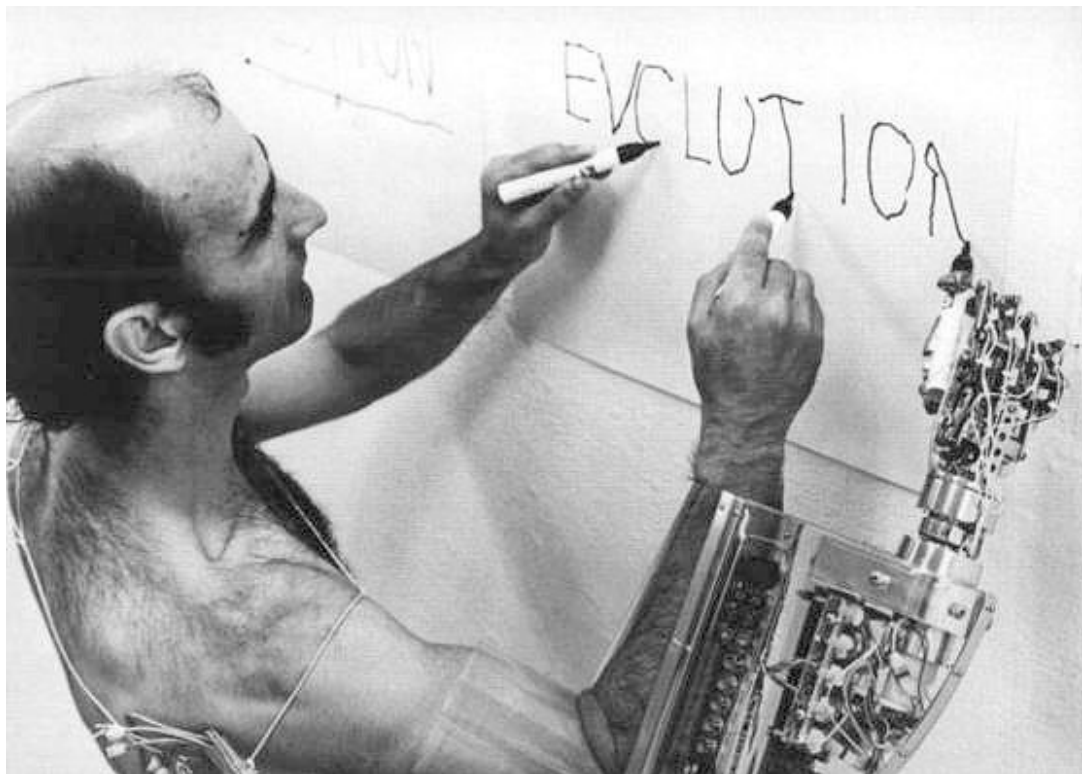
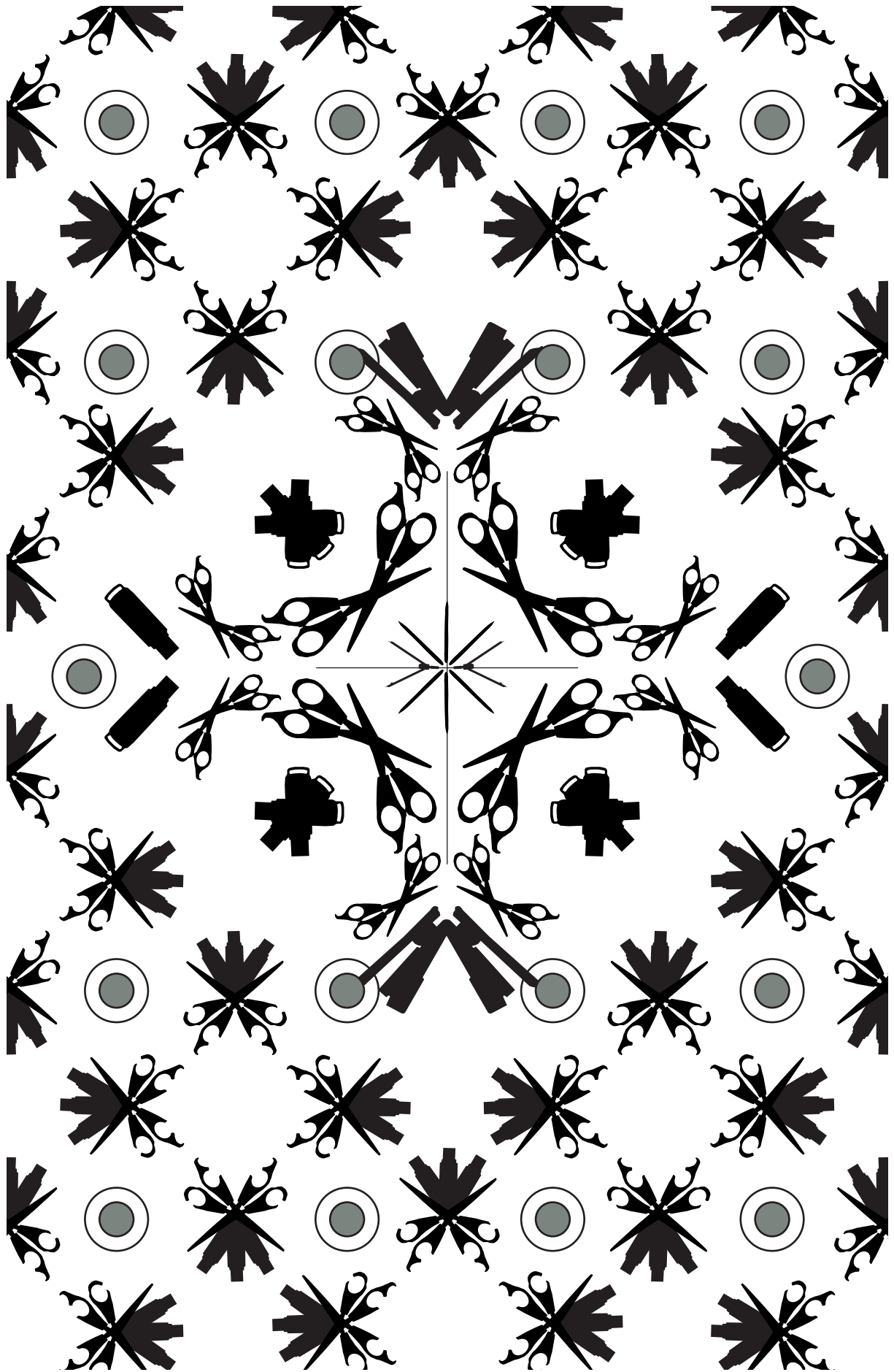


Image 8





## 6 . The Office :

I want to focus on present day scenarios that as a designer I can deal with and act upon.

The context for my thesis is based in the office; I want to investigate a period in our daily lives where we are in contact with screen-based technology for an extended period of time. What is also interesting about **the office as a context is the duality of a serious, regimented, often monotonous place to work, while underneath this serious facade is a more human idiosyncratic way of dealing with office life.** By reflecting upon an office environment I hope to find human characteristics that are beginning to emerge in both a physical and digital platform, enabling me to find new possibilities for interaction away from constant screen based interactions.

### 6.1 Cigarettes and coffee cups :

*“This coffee plunges into the stomach...the mind is aroused, and ideas pour forth like the battalions of the Grand Army on the field of battle.... Memories charge at full gallop...the light cavalry of comparisons deploys itself magnificently; the artillery of logic hurry in with their train of ammunition; flashes of wit pop up like sharp-shooters.”<sup>9</sup> – Honoré de Balzac*

When working in an office there are two constants, cigarette breaks and coffee. It is interesting to question the impact both have on the daily ritual of office life, and how they provide escapism from the arduous tasks of work.

Since the 1st of July 2007 the United Kingdom has prohibited smoking in public and workspaces. From that date onwards, cigarettes have given the worker an excuse to leave the desk and its problems, get ‘fresh air’ and interact with fellow smokers. This has left non-smokers to ponder other means of escape, such as making tea, playing an in-office joke, or going to the local shop for milk. It could be said that the cigarette becomes more a tool of ritual than of need, addiction not only to the nicotine, but also to the escape and social contact that comes with it. For none-smokers the ritual of making tea or coffee creates a sense of social awareness, interaction and escape from the tasks at hand.

What’s interesting to me is how the quality of the object such as a cigarette or the coffee itself is not of primary importance but more the ritual it ensues. Therefore it could be said that the quality of the object can be secondary to the ritual it creates.

### 6.2 Organised Chaos :

Files, A4 papers, A5 papers, sticky pads, pencils, pens, scissors, sharpeners, hole punches, staplers, erasers, biros, lamps, clips... objects, chaos but ultimately order. A workspace is a personal space. If I think of my work area it usually comprises of many items cluttered around an area the size of an A4 that I call ‘my actual workspace’. What is important for me, as a designer is how I can design objects that appeal to such chaos, those imperfections that ultimately make us human.

**As humans we are irrational creatures, we usually work in a very personal and unmediated fashion. I believe how we organise such chaotic behavior represents who we are as people and inevitably consumers.**

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<sup>9</sup> Dorian Scott Cole, ‘What we need is a really good cup of coffee’. <http://visualwriter.com/Journalism/End.htm>, December, 2006, 14th March 2010

The main difference between a virtual desktop and a physical desk is the ease in which virtual clutter i.e. applications and documents can be 'hidden' away. This is one main benefit of virtual spaces and computer aided organisation, but what is also interesting is how your virtual desktop could be a representative of your real life desk.

New design applications for computers have started to emerge that bring the physical environment back into a screen-based environments.

Anand Agarawala is the creator of 'Bump it' a new computer three-dimensional desktop interface based upon the physical real life desk. What is interesting about this interface is how Agarawala tries to replicate the human possibly aggressive way of using an environment in a digital platform. (Image 9 )

If we think of an office as a systematic, formal, usually horizontal and vertically lined space, any change in that grid reflects our human behavior. Esther Stocker creates an installation called 'Abstract thought is a warm puppy'. What I like about her work is that a slight break in a grid or the dissecting of space can have such an influence on human psyche and social behavior. The installation is thought provoking, as it appears unfinished, unformulated and asks the user to occupy and give function to such a space. If we revert back to the office environment, we begin to see that it operates within a more strict format, a desk, a chair, a table, a certain sized room, all of which have a controlling element that's based on dimensions. Yet as we begin to use such a formulated grid we start to humanise such spaces. (Image 10 )

### 6.3 I want to break free!, Politics, romance and underground rituals :

Everyone has a back story, another life beyond the concrete walls and the less you disclose about yourself the more stories or gossip accumulates.:

I knew a man once; he would always turn up in a pristine shirt, braces with matching tie and socks. I think his name was Rory although we called him Mr. Neat. Not so much for his appearance but because he always used the word neat to describe anything cool that happened. 'Hey Rory, how was lunch?'... 'It was neat'!

Cathy or Catty as we called her was a temptress. A cunning fox that was very ambitious, she loved hierarchy and even though we shared the same desk, she would always say this is my area and this is yours, usually by putting a ruler or a box of staples in the middle. 'I am the team leader so you have to do what I say', always in a tone of seduction and gentle but hard hitting persuasion.

Big Barry or Bazza to his friends was a large, round, bald fella from what I can remember. Always with three pens in his top pocket: red, black and blue. He had a way with management that allowed him to get away with murder, not literally of course. Not sly, but just a perfect manipulator that could sell anything and everything usually with 10% interest.

When working in such enclosed office environments any differences, strange habits or rituals get magnified to the degree that you become sociable even if you don't socialise. This brake in formal office behavior reflects our human tendencies, much like Esther Stockers work in the grid.

Objects such as water coolers, fax machines or architectural spaces such as corridors that are so tight that it forces interaction become catalysts for gossip, bitching or frustration providing a level of humanity in such regimented working environments.

Alice Wang from the RCA London created an interesting project called 'Peer Pressure'<sup>10</sup>. Within this project she designed two office concepts that could help ease your working environment. One concept is the positive printer: This printer helps generate positive rumors for you in the office. It filters your e-mail inbox and automatically prints out all your positive emails. When your colleagues pick up their print from the shared printer, they will accidentally see your prints and gets the gossip going.

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10 Alice Wang, *PEER PRESSURE* (2007), [http://www.alice-wang.com/project.php?pj\\_id=6](http://www.alice-wang.com/project.php?pj_id=6), 23rd January 2010



The second concept is a fast typing keyboard for the slow typer; when you are in your office cubicle, your colleagues

often can't see you but can vaguely hear you. This keyboard is designed for those who are worried about getting picked on about typing too slow.

Both are quite ridiculous for the practical amongst us, but are interesting as they deal directly with human behavior, and its light humorous tone serves well in a strict, usually monotonous office environment.

As previously stated, when working in an office there is a slight monotony, ritual and camaraderie that is associated with office life. Work colleagues thrown together with little in common except for the shared use of the carpet floor:

Today corporate companies such as Google or Facebook try to create new working environments that help workers relax and breed creativity. The stagnant box rooms are now filled with pool tables, "cool" bars, even slides that reflect the inner child in you. Companies such as these that live in the virtual are aware of the dangers that arise with too much human to computer interaction.

What is more interesting from a designer's point of view is how to implement ways of creating social interaction not by disassociating yourself away from technology but by using ways of sending files, data pick up points or social behaviors that could increase human to human interaction. For me it is too easy to say: 'Here's a games room, take thirty minutes from the computer and enjoy', or to say: 'Wow, look we have cool friendly interiors that you can be creative in'. I believe by looking at more human ways of socialising with stagnant office environments you can make subtle but more humane changes. Not all companies have the space for a 10ft fireman's pole, or a games room, but by introducing new products that create social interaction but can still be beneficial to tasks and work related projects you can be more creative than just say, here's a pool table go crazy!



Image 9



Image 10



## 7. Practical Investigations :

## 7.1 Breaking rigidity and ritual:

This experiment was for two purposes;

1: Catalyst for office- interior design ideas

The reason I installed these shapes was not directly because of the actual shape they created but I wanted to know how it felt to have something suspended above you, marking a subconscious desk area underneath. I also attached the paper shapes together by thin wire, and connected them to the ventilation system. When the vents blew all the paper shapes moved, which made me question why we design buildings and then put furniture into the building. Why not design objects that link directly to such Architectural objects, therefore creating a more harmonious building.

2: Creating a different break in the upper part of the room height, which is stagnant and not connected to the furniture and people beneath it.

There is a separation between architectural items such as light switches, air-vents, concrete beams, radiators... and the people and furniture that occupies it. When I installed the paper shapes, I noticed them as I looked directly up from the street below. This made me think, why do we design these large commercial skyscrapers, but when looking from the street up, all the citizen see are the office roof tiles.





## 7.2 Home workspaces :

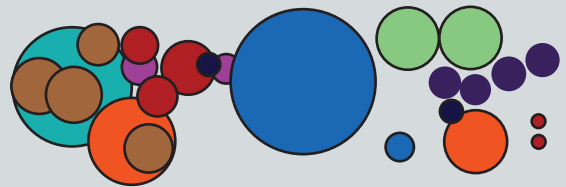
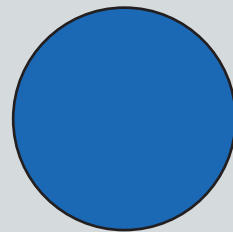
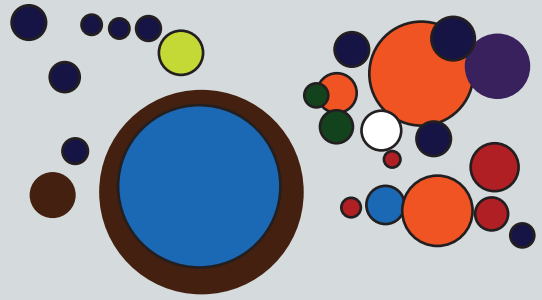
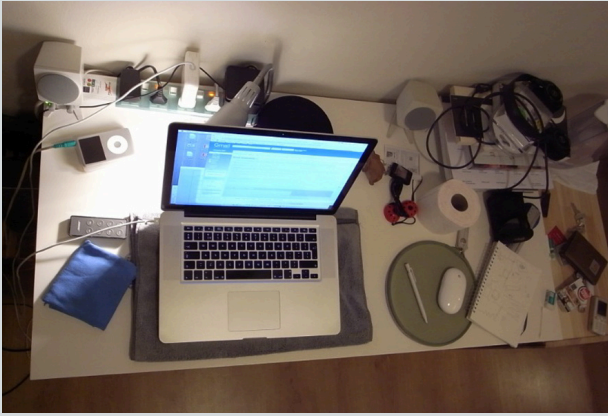
I asked a number of students to photograph their workspace in order to see if there were any similarities in how they used their space, organise their objects, or what objects occupied their desk.

From the diagram it is interesting to see that on nearly every workspace a computer could be found, but more importantly, regardless of the size of the desk, the area where the person sits and works is mainly found in the middle, roughly the size of an A4. Therefore it could be said that the more space given is not that influential, we are still slaves to the size of paper, or physical object, and therefore live our lives through the dimensions giving or designed to us. This is a main difference to the virtual desktop on our computers, it has no real dimension and when an object or icon is not used it can easily be put away. However cluttered the real desk looks it still has some human order, whether through size, function or even colour - an individual human system that gives a specific order to the physical working environment.

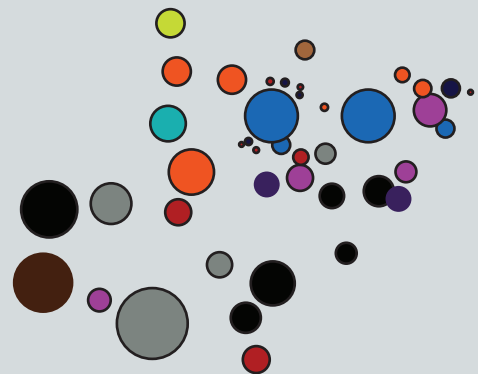
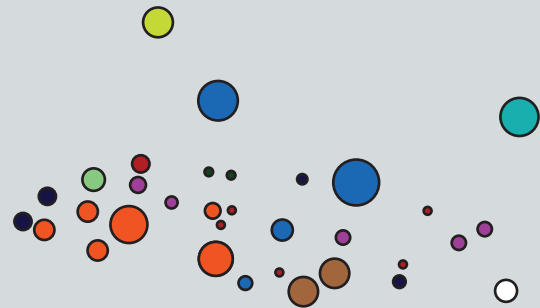
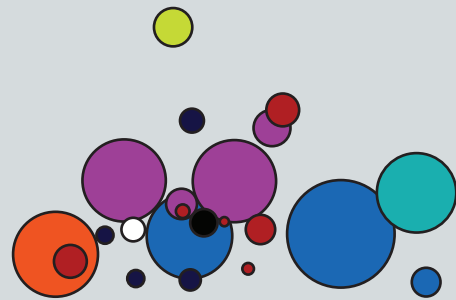
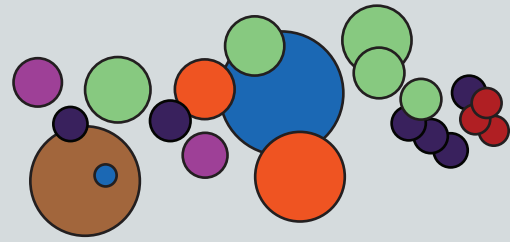
### Key Chart :

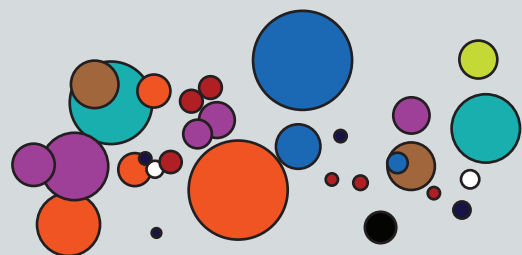
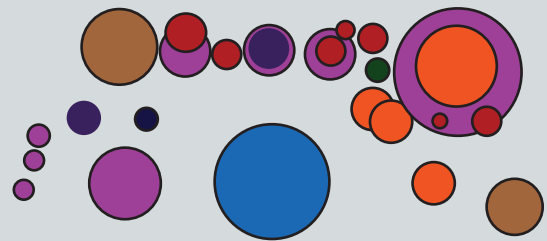
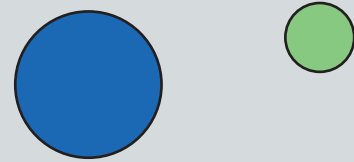
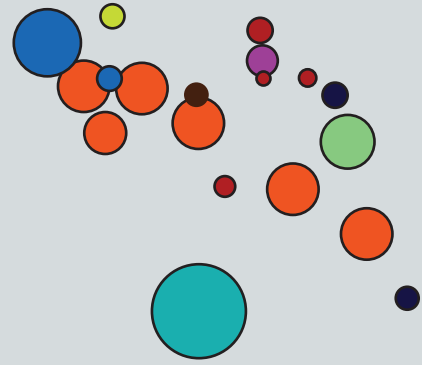


\* The larger the size of the circle the more influence it has on the desk









### 7.3 Computerised order :

When working at a desk there is an unspoken grid or order that is at work. I wanted to collect a vast amount of office stationary that could occupy a desk and begin by creating a system that was very unhuman, more technological and machine based.

The order I chose was by size and then colour, I then proceeded to do a task. What I hoped was by the end of the task, the space and grid I was now using would become more human, more irrational but have a human logic and order that fitted my task.

At the end of the task I found that I did not use the outer edges of the desk, so in all purpose the desk could have been any real shape. I brought the items near me that I used frequently and did not touch the objects I failed to use.

The most important finding I had was that the grid or desk system I naturally found to be using was purely based on functionality and time scale. As I have mentioned previously , the beauty of the virtual desktop is the ease in which I can hide away objects. It made me question the need to see all these items, and if there was a way to hide physical objects on the desk top surface until needed.







## 8 . Conclusion :

We are increasingly living in a virtual, digitalised environment – what might happen to the objects we coexist with, and their subsequent effects on human interaction?

*Self-awareness and the creative urge distinguish us from other creatures. To create requires that something can be envisioned before it can be caused. This is called Hellenic Imagination after Prometheus, the Greek god, credited with the discovery of the magical power of being able to imagine the future by projecting a horizon of possibilities<sup>11</sup>.*

What is our future, what possibilities will arise out of such digital and virtual based technologies? The impact of screen-based technology is undoubtedly having both a positive and negative effect on our species. This evolutionary change from looking at each other to looking at a screen toward one another has a cultural importance which should be noted. We only need to look at the relationship between child obesity and online gaming, rise of social network sites, transporting of data, time spent at a screen, Ipods, mobile phones, to realise that our species are reliant on such technologies. Therefore because our daily life requires such technologies, we need to find a balance rather than become enslaved.

I believe a new breed of physicality is needed, technological objects that aren't mere casing or windows into the potential of digital virtual programs, but provide a physical social impact that helps strengthen human to human contact. Acknowledging their existence in reality while offering digital or interconnected possibilities.

The human benefit is the most important, second to the technology that creates such benefits

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<sup>11</sup> Agile sensibilities, Julie Diaz, *'The horizon of possibilities'*, September 16, 2009 – 11:47 am, <http://www.agilesensibilities.com/why-this-blog/>, 3rd May 2010

## 9 . Proposals :

With the increase in screen-based technology the working office environment has become more and more digitalised. With such applications as SKYPE, E-mail, widgets, Facebook, our lives are getting more reliant on screen-based technologies than on human-to-human communication.

I aim to propose new physical objects that keep up to date with advances in technology but respond to our more intuitive tactile human nature. Through these objects I want to regain a slight control over technology and for the users to become more the manipulator apposed to the manipulated, using technology for our most humanistic real life needs.

**Corporate Postman** : is a large digital mailbox that distributes information, data, office life, politics, gossip or in-house information. I want to use an existing system of interacting in the office but that is currently being used in a digital format. In essence I want to make the digital tangible. The corporate mail will be sent to a pick up point situated in the reception. Here every member of the office has a USB and can collect their mail. By moving the information from your desk to a social point , it creates the possibility for exchange. The USB's are aligned in a grid, with an LED light above. The pick up point changes and can be moved around to cater for certain office needs. I.e. an ambitious man wants to be close to the CEO are put together, or an office romance can be placed directly next to one another. The postman becomes the coffee machine of the office. By just accessing the information at different points on the postman the object becomes almost architectural.

**Office Confessional** : is a coat hanger with a secret. I want to use an existing object that is used by many in the office today. The office coat hanger is a social object that will still be needed in the future. When in need to rant or gossip about employees or co-workers, or record a statement about a previous meeting, the office confessional is situated inside the coat hanger. A box with a microphone and a digital recorder is set up that records whatever you have to say. The actual coats that hang become the architectural screen to your private moment. What I like about this object is that in its purest form it is a practical and sociable object regardless of its secret function. The confessional box is linked to the corporate postman, via wireless or Bluetooth, in essence they are 'hyper objects'.

**E – Paper Plane** : is a future based scenario. In the not to distant future electronic paper will be more abundantly used due to its sustainability and versatility. Already we see that E-books such as kindle's are quickly developing the way we access information. The majority of people today have experienced making a paper plane, something that is childlike and very human. Especially in the office environment, paper balls, or planes were seen to be thrown around, a fun activity but with a serious function. Fun and light entertainment is crucial in an office environment as it creates a much needed break from the screen or work. Short breaks breeds efficiency, that is why coffee or cigarette breaks are so important. I want to use electronic paper planes as a means of passing and sending data. Creating a sociable act by just changing the path of the data.

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