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The Beauty of Making Hot Chocolate – an inquiry on designing for everyday rituals

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The everyday is often mentioned in design, yet hardly inquired. The everyday is about what is banal, *infraordinary*, not memorable, as well as about the force that makes things habitual, *endotic*. In the research encompassing this paper, we question the everyday and explore opportunities to enchant it by design. This paper focuses more specifically on the design of everyday rituals, and aims to propose a descriptive framework to ‘read’ and compose such rituals. The elaboration of the framework is done based on a case study: the making of a hot chocolate in the morning. Through an autoethnographical approach, the main dimensions of the framework are determined (place and time, essentiality, and strength) and discussed. Throughout this inquiry, the value of a first-person perspective while designing for the everyday is discussed, as well as its relationship with the third-person perspective. This framework proposed points out the importance of quick iterations and of the consideration of consequences of design decision at all levels of the everyday ritual (structural, temporal, aesthetical, ethical...).

everyday; everyday ritual; descriptive framework; hot chocolate

1 Introduction

Although we would have enjoyed speaking extensively about the making of a good hot chocolate, in this paper we focus on the design of everyday rituals. Previous works (Lévy, 2015) have shown the importance of everyday rituals as they are importantly constituting one’s life experience, and ethically pervasive: the values appreciated in everyday rituals have consequences on the way the everyday is experienced and lived outside the time of the ritual as well. Designing everyday rituals is therefore not only beneficial for the quality of the experience of the ritual itself, but also how the everyday is experienced as a whole.

In this paper, we aim to make a more practical step to design of everyday rituals, that is to propose a descriptive framework to ‘read’ and support composing such rituals. This framework intends to provide means to characterise the elements of a ritual from the perspective of the experience of the

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participant(s), in a way that would serve the design of this ritual. To start the study, it is first important to clarify what is heard by the terms 'everyday' and 'rituals', which are often used yet hardly discussed.

2 The everyday

The term *everyday* is highly utilized in the design literature (e.g., (Hallnäs & Redström, 2002; Norman, 2013; Saito, 2007; Wakkary & Maestri, 2007). But very little is said about the notion itself. And as we look closer to this notion, it is not as trivial as it may seem in the first place. An explanation on the *everyday*, probably arguable yet intendedly constructive, is proposed here to point the non-triviality of this notion and the focus of this research.

We suggest here that the everyday is the reality in which we act and perceive through unremarkable experiences. It is about going to sleep, waking up, cleaning, eating, dressing and undressing, reading, drinking tea or coffee... Dewolf (Dewolf, 2008) tells that "the spirit of the everyday life is in the closest facts, the least significant and perceptive ones". It is therefore in the flow of the *infraordinary* (Perec, 1989), away of the *extraordinary* and of the memorable. What the everyday is therefore less a matter of activity value than a matter of 'specific mode of manifestation'. Dewolf continues adding that "the quotidian is what is manifested in the habitual things as well as in the implementation force that makes them habitual, force that could be called *quotidianisation*". The everyday is therefore the result of a continuous process making things around us *quotidianised* or domesticated (Paavilainen, 2013), of the reality that is made banal, liveable with quietness.

However, describing the everyday only as space of habits is too limited. It is also framed by its limit, that is an *irregularity* (Yanagi, 1989), a moment of the unexpected which provides a space of imagination, creation, and transformation. The everyday, as an endless process of *quotidianisation*, is therefore composed of the transformation of things and activities towards quietly liveable habits, as well as of irregularities creating space for changes through creativity.

The first design challenge related to the everyday mainly lies in its obviousness. It is that obvious that calling it into question is already non-trivial. How to start? How to reflect and to question the apparently obvious? Designing for the everyday seeks for matter to (re)explore, to (re)question, to (re)shape the everyday. The second challenge for design is the disdain of the everyday by the consumer market, and often by people themselves. Georges Perec magnificently pictures this (translated by the authors):

In our haste to measure the historic, the significant and the revealing, let's not leave aside the essential: the truly intolerable, the truly inadmissible. What is scandalous is not the pit explosion, it is the work in coalmines. 'Social problems' are not 'a matter of concern' when there's a strike, they are intolerable twenty-four hours a day, three hundred and sixty-five days a year. [...]

What is really going on, what we are living, the rest, all the rest, where is it? How to consider, question, describe what happens every day and repeats every day: the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual?

To question the habitual. But precisely, we are adjusted to it. We do not question it, it does not question us, it does not seem to pose any problem, we live it without thinking about it, as if it was carrying neither any question nor answer, as if it was not the bearer of any information. This is no longer even conditioning, it is amnesia. We sleep through our lives in a dreamless sleep. But where is our life? Where is our body? Where is our space?

How are we to speak of these 'common things', how to track them down faster, how to flush them out, wrench them away of the gangue in which they stay bogged in, how to give them a meaning, a language: for them to finally speak of what is, of what we are.

What is needed perhaps is finally to found our own anthropology: one that will speak about us, will look in ourselves for what for so long we have been plundered from others. Not the exotic anymore, but the endotic. [...]. (Perec, 1989)

3 Designing for the everyday

To question and to design for the everyday, i.e., the banal and the infraordinary, a two-step approach is currently being established throughout a larger research programme called *enchaining the everyday*, encompassing the project presented in this paper. A brief description of the draft of this approach is provided in this section as it will help later to clarify the position of the current project in the larger research. Both steps presented here highly involve reflection in and on action (Reymen, 2003).

The first step (on the left of Figure 1, in blue) aims at creating through design – it is therefore based on a constructive design approach (Koskinen, Zimmerman, Binder, Redstrom, & Wensveen, 2012) – enough insight for design to be able to transform the addressed, and possibly reshape design space. It is therefore a step of exploration and sensemaking at the lower level possible of experience in the everyday. Considering that the everyday experience may often appear irrational from a third-person perspective, but most often rational from a first-person perspective (Coyne & Mathers, 2011), this step is done at the first-person perspective (Tomico, Winthagen, & van Heist, 2012). By experimenting through design on the everyday, we can determine the values at stake in the design space, how they emerge in and impact the experience of the everyday, and how they can be addressed through design. In other words, through this step, we point out the values embedded in an everyday experience and its way of *quatlidianisation*. This eventually leads to two outcomes: first a descriptive framework to comprehend how various elements (which can be artefacts, gestures, interactions, signs...) constituting the experience of the everyday may influence this experience, and second a refined (and sometimes redefined) design draft to address more accurately the key value(s) greatly impacting the everyday experience.

The second step (on the right of Figure 1, in green) aims at using the insight and the descriptive framework created in the first step to transform the everyday. Keeping in mind the rational-making issue at the third-person perspective (Coyne & Mathers, 2011), this step is actually a dialogue between designing at the first-person perspective and at the third-person perspective. The earlier is used as a means to keep the rational clear and the experience accessible to the designer. The latter is used to validate the proposition made by the first-person perspective and to eventually produce a valuable design for the targeted user group.

Figure 1 Process on designing for the everyday (v.3)

4 Designing everyday rituals

The research project presented in this paper focuses on everyday rituals and intends to give a base for the first step of the everyday design approach specifically for everyday rituals.

In everyday life, we perform many regular practices, apparently established and repetitive yet always in progress, i.e., relatively more *framed* in comparison to other everyday activities, through which a certain ethics is expressed and experienced (Petrelli & Light, 2014). We call such regular practices everyday rituals. Multiple definitions of the notion of *ritual* exist in numerous disciplines (e.g., anthropology (Firth, 2012; Levi-Strauss, 1963), cultural studies (Petrelli & Light, 2014), economics (McCauley & Lawson, 2002), ethnology (Bell, 1992; Cullen, 1966), psychology (Erikson, 1966; Schelling, 1980), or sociology (Chwe, 2013).

Yet, to specify more precisely what an everyday ritual is from the perspective of this design research, we distinguish it from the routine and the ceremony, especially considering the way values are put into the activity. However, it is to be noted that these comparisons consider the extremes to ease the clarity of the comparison, and that any observed habits may lie in the in-between these extremes. All are habits, regular activities with a seemingly stable structure, and meaningful (possibly from an aesthetics, functional, social, ethical, or religious perspective). However, the difference between rituals and routines lies into the individual focus, and the difference between rituals and ceremonies lies into the explicit formalisation of the activity.

Whereas routines quasi-exclusively pay attention to the result, rituals pay attention as well to the experience of the journey to reach the result. The efficiency, described here as the ratio between the quality of the result and the effort put into reaching the result, is of paramount in routines. The engagement, described as the level of involvement in a certain experience, may be seen as of greater importance for rituals. Rituals invite for a higher appreciation of the process to reach the result, of the possible choices and the required skills, of the creative potential of irregularities on the way of the making.

The difference between ceremonies and rituals lies into the formalism of the process. Whereas a ceremony is structured by a set of formalised rules, known and accepted by an entire community of practice, the ritual is structured by a set of implicit rules, often individually elaborated or at least nuanced. Moreover, as ritual rules are implicit rituals are often more flexible and evolved with the skills and the level of engagement of the individual performing the ritual.

What characterises the ritual are the expression of cultural and ethical values, their affect on participants, the engagement of participants (Rozendaal, Keyson, & Ridder, 2008), and the context in which the ritual takes place. Although rituals are part of the everyday, they are not necessarily completely banal (Petrelli & Light, 2014). This is implied by the notion that the rules of the rituals do not matter so much, but rather the lived experience through the fulfilment of the ritual.

The design of everyday rituals focuses therefore on two points: the beauty of the process that leads to the result, and the result itself, obviously considering that these two points are in a complex interrelation in the way they can be appreciated. Previous researches (Lévy & Wakabayashi, 2008; Rozendaal et al., 2008) show that the involvement of senses and of skills, the possibility of choices, and the social dimension impacts, as well as the qualities of the result of the artefacts impacts the experienced quality of the ritual.

In this research, the design of everyday rituals is a case in the design for the everyday, addressing the design space of the everyday and its values, away of the extraordinary. Our intention is to focus on what is here and now, too often ignored or forgotten (Perec speaks about amnesia) in our lives and in design. Focusing on the design of everyday rituals is still about the banal and the endotic, to find there what is or what can become beautiful.

What is to be questioned is the brick, the concrete, the glass, our table manners, our utensils, our tools, our use of time, our rhythms. Questioning what seems to have ceased forever to astonish us. We live, for sure, we breathe, for sure; we walk, we open doors, we go down stairs, we sit at a table to eat, we lie down on a bed to sleep. How? Where? When? Why?

*Describe your street. Describe another one. Compare.
 Make an inventory of your pockets, of your bag. Wonder about the origin, the use, the future of each of the objects you take out.
 Question your tea spoons.[...]
 It matters little to me that these questions are fragmentary, barely indicative of a method, at most of a project. It matters a lot to me that they seem trivial and futile: that's precisely what makes them as essential, if not more so, as so many others by which we have vainly tried to capture our truth. (Perec, 1989)*

Perec points out again here what design is challenged by while focusing on the everyday and on the infra-ordinary. It questions life as it is, its many details as they are, not as they are dreamed. It demands to consider life as it is lived and not as it is imagined. We clearly distinguish here the way life is, and the way imagination and imaginary are experienced in the everyday life. The latter is to be considered by design for the everyday, and especially in designing rituals.

5 A descriptive framework for everyday rituals

The first step of the research is to determine a descriptive framework to 'read' rituals in order both to comprehend and to support their composition. To explain our approach, we base our description on the main everyday ritual that has supported the elaboration of this framework itself: making a hot chocolate in the morning.

5.1 The hot chocolate ritual

Making a hot chocolate is a simple everyday ritual that may take place in the morning, nested with other activities that may also appear to be (or not) everyday rituals. In this case, such activities were preparing other elements of the breakfast, partly for other family members, taking shower and getting dress, preparing things to go to work. The overall could be described as a complex nested structure of activities.

The ritual starts entering the kitchen (which is actually a trigger of the ritual). Then the first actions consist in picking a cup and putting it on the kitchen counter, and to do the same with a spoon. Then I take a big jar of glass with cocoa powder in it from the top of a higher shelf, and put next to the cup. I open the jar and plunge the spoon in order to take some cocoa powder that I put then directly in the cup. This action is repeated another time, making sure that there is enough as well as not too much cocoa in the cup. Then I hit the spoon on the edge of the cup, before leaving the spoon in the cup and closing the jar to put it back to its original place. Then I mix the cocoa powder with the spoon to make the powder loosen. Then I pick the milk from the fridge. I put then an insufficient quantity of milk and start to mix for a little. I add more milk and mix again (left picture of Figure 2), repeatedly until starting to obtain a dense paste, that requires more mixing to obtain a dense yet smooth and uniform chocolate paste, paying attention to remove lumps. This mixing can take enough time to be able to enjoy looking at the street outside the window where a bakery is preparing to open (right picture of Figure 2). Then I pour more milk in small quantities around three times while continuously mixing the content of the cup with the spoon, in order to obtain the desired quantity and consistency of hot chocolate, again paying attention to remove any remaining lumps. The texture at the surface of the mix shows the quality of the mix and of the ratio between cocoa powder and milk. To warm the chocolate, I use a microwave for 1:20s. I place the cup slightly on the left side of the tray, the handled oriented towards the diagonal left-back. The cup is then positioned such as after the warming up, it is in a position which makes me feel that the microwave is serving me the cup as I reach for it. The colour and the little bubbles on the surface of the hot chocolate are pre-gustatory signs attesting the success of the making.

Figure 2 Everyday ritual of the hot chocolate (left), the view and its bakery in white (right)

5.2 Explorative experiments

To reach and to comprehend the elements of this ritual, many explorations have been done. It is unfortunately not possible to expose them all here, yet providing a few of them here helps to understand the approach.

The microwave – The use of the microwave was a logistic necessity considering the other events taking place in the morning. However, finding the right time for warming the chocolate and the right place for the cup required many tests. Variables are numerous and of different nature. Among others, the temperature the hot chocolate rises depending on the cup, the warming duration, and on the place where the cup stands in the microwave. The place was itself explored to provide this feeling of being properly served by the microwave, which also depends on the shape of the cup (e.g., the presence of a handle gives the cup a ‘direction’, which is not the case with a completely cylindrical cup). Finding a proper balance is therefore a matter of exploration and refinement, while any change (e.g., of the cup) might demand for a readjustment.

Figure 3 The cup while put in the micro-wave oven (left) and before taken out (right)

The jar – The glass jar containing the cocoa powder was selected after on exploration with different jars of various volumes and materials. The transparency of the material was appreciated as it enables the visual attention for the cocoa powder to be engaged early in the ritual. The size of the jar provides the possibility to insert the hand in the jar to collect some cocoa powder, action that requires a movement of the entire arm and of the upper part of the body. An appreciable body expressive movement that enhances the engagement. However, this is possible only if the jar is not full of powder. In the case of a full jar, even the spoon does not really enter the jar. Therefore, the jar needs to be big enough and not full so that the expressive movement is possible. The quantity of cocoa powder in the jar influences as well the quality in the interaction with the jar.

Figure 4 jars (left), taking cocoa powder in half-full jar (centre), full jar (right)

The cup – The cup is used as a container to mix the cocoa powder and the milk, and then to contain the hot chocolate. Different forms, as well as bowls, have been experienced. In the case of this ritual (and we will see later that this may vary with other rituals), the cup itself was interchangeable, yet with a specific structural constraint: the inside bottom of the cup needs to be round, narrow enough and its side vertical enough so the spoon would be able to *properly* and *smoothly* mix the cocoa powder with the milk at the bottom of the cup without accidentally sliding up. Here again, the balance is determined by the structure of the cup and the movement of the spoon inside.

Figure 5 Various cups used for the experiments

These three exemplary experiments show both the richness and the complexity of exploring and comprehending rituals. Choices in the rituals are numerous and interdependent, and their appreciation can be functional (the spoon moving well at the bottom of the cup), emotional (felt as the entire body contributes to the hand movement entering the jar), and ethical (the microwave oven serves properly the hot chocolate). Moreover, the aesthetics does not concern only the structural and visual qualities of the artefacts used in the ritual, it also concerns the beauty in interaction, i.e., the aesthetics of the movements and how various movements come together. All these are elements that requires to be characterised in order to create a descriptive framework supporting the ‘reading’ and then the composition of the ritual in a design manner.

5.3 Elements of the descriptive framework

Place and time – It is first to be noticed that this ritual takes place at home in the morning. It is not done anywhere else in the morning, without the feeling of missing it. When home, it is emotionally missed if it is not done in the morning. The coincidence of space and time triggers the attention for the ritual, while entering the kitchen triggers the ritual itself. This coincidence is seen in other rituals (e.g., “At home, I cook dinner; at friends’ place I let others do”) and deserves a greater attention in design to understand its impact on ritual and possibly how to trigger them.

Essential elements, contingent elements – In this everyday ritual, one can observe essential elements: the cocoa, the milk, the cup (as a container), and the spoon. They are necessary for the ritual to happen and to be experienced as expected. In order to look for essential elements, other ones were tried and then tentatively put away. For example, sugar and almonds were tried, and orange was suggested. But none of them stayed as essential elements of the rituals, as their absence did not significantly distort the ritual. They are contingent elements.

However, the notion of essential element is more complex than the list of tools required for the process of the ritual. For example, the cup as a container can appear as an essential element, while the used cup would be a contingent element, as it could be replaced by any other cup (as long as it respects the aforementioned structural constraints at its bottom, cf. strong elements). But this is not the case for all rituals. In another ritual exploration on making coffee after lunch [reference to this ritual are removed for the anonymity of the paper, and will be added after review], a specific cup appeared to be essential. It happened once that the cup broke, and the person performing the ritual needed to wait the weekend to return to her parents and to find an emotionally acceptable cup to replace the broken one in the ritual. The ritual was impossible with any other cup, emotional requirement determined the type of cup and made each of these two cup relatively essential elements. In conclusion the essentiality of an element in the ritual is determined by its necessity for the proper conduct of the ritual.

Strong elements, weak elements – As previously explained, the cup itself is not an essential element of the hot chocolate ritual, but its structure contributes to the quality of the way the ritual can be performed and experienced. The shape of the bottom of the cup and its material are strong elements of the ritual as they enable to experience quality in the ritual. The quantity of cocoa powder in the jar is also a strong element of the ritual: it needs to be enough yet not too much, so the body can expressively participate to dig into the jar to collect cocoa powder. In contrast, the overall quantity of milk put in the cup during the ritual is a weak element: a reasonable change of quantity of milk does not seem to influence the experience of the ritual. In conclusion, the strength of an element in the ritual is determined by its impact on the perceived quality in the experience of the ritual.

5.4 Reflection on the descriptive framework

This descriptive framework, although simple, helps to determine the necessity (essentiality of an element) and the variability (strength) of the qualities constituting the value of the everyday ritual, regarding the qualities of the artefacts, of the gestures, of the symbols, of the relations... The designer can then better estimate what can be modified, removed or added, and then discuss the consequences of any change. Essential elements are necessary for the ritual to be experienced as such. Strong elements elevate the quality in the experience of the ritual. This is the main objective of this framework for the designer: providing a means to constructively consider the way qualities are structured in the everyday ritual, considering their interdependency, their essentiality and their strength.

6 Consequences for design

Determining the essential elements of the ritual, seen as constructive constraints in the design process, and searching for strong and weak elements, seen as design opportunities, are the main quest of the designer for the design of everyday rituals, and a fortiori for the design for the everyday taking the process of quotidianisation into account. However, we still need to understand the process of quotidianisation, and how the descriptive framework can help the designer not only to foresee the key aspects that require attention as they may have a major impact on the quality of the habitus, as well as the aspects to take into consideration for effective irregularities.

Being able to approach the design process from the first person make this quest very effective as it enables the designer (1) to explore valuable experiences for design in an implicit and intimate way that the third-person perspective cannot offer, (2) to pay attention to details that the third-person perspective may not capture, and (3) to build and follow a rational that the third-person perspective may not comprehend. The everyday, as well as everyday rituals, demand for this first-person perspective explorative and constructive approach, while not neglecting that eventually a shift is required to the third-person perspective for the resulting design proposition to be meaningful from a design practice perspective.

An autoethnographical-like approach in the first step of the design approach for the everyday is therefore obvious. Yet this approach is not strictly autoethnographical as the outcomes are not reflective description of an experience, but a means to tinker and to point out opportunities to initiate designing. It allows for dealing with complexity, for reaching details and understanding at different levels (functional, emotional, ethical) the consequences of making changes in the ritual. Whereas a third-person perspective would make this design rapidly tedious, even impossible because of its complexity, a first-person perspective enables quick iterations and trials to promptly consequences of any change both for the experience and for the flow of the ritual. We call this design step an 'exploration by consequences': every modification may have an impact on the perception and the appreciation of the targeted activity as a whole, or on any of its elements (may it be structural, temporal, aesthetical, ethical...). And details matter for the experience of the ritual. The designer needs to experience and comprehend the consequences of a modification, and to determine implications for the next iterative trials. Eventually, the designer will be able to designate

the strong elements of the ritual and to design for them, in order to enrich the experience of the practice of the everyday ritual.

7 Conclusion

This inquiry proposes a descriptive framework for the everyday ritual, supporting the determination of essential and contingent elements, strong and weak ones, as well as their interdependencies. It constitutes an important step in the design process of everyday rituals, starting on the consideration of a design space expected to evolve throughout the process. This framework is then used to compose or transform the ritual through experiential trials, and to regularly question design decisions and their consequences.

It enables then to question the *infraordinary* in an *endotic* experience, and leads towards a design for the everyday.

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