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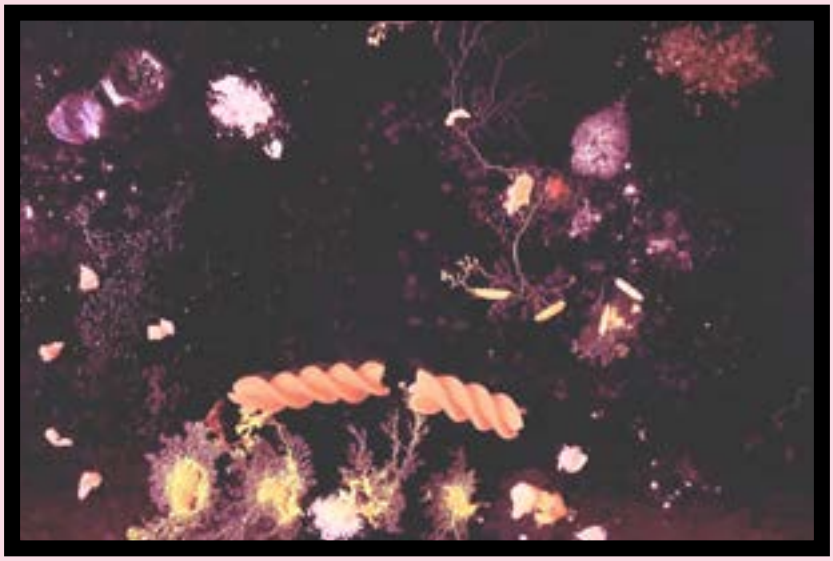
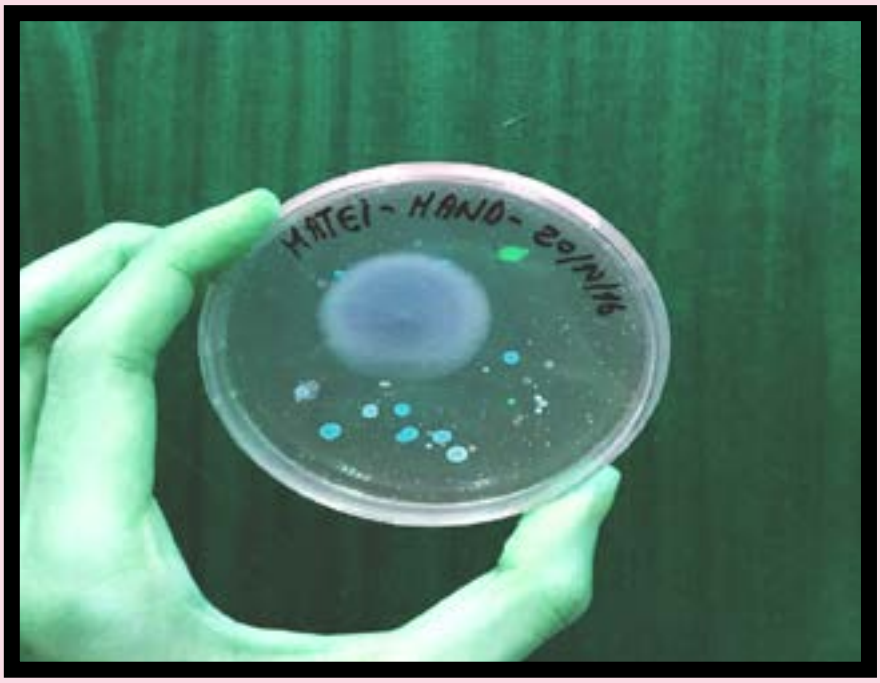
In order to understand the process through which I went we have to go on a journey that starts somewhere in September. It was back then when during the first week we discovered that our next project, which was to last 3 months, will be exploring synthetic biology. It might seem odd to do biology in a Product Design course but soon it all started to make sense with the help of frequent visits to the laboratory and of other people from the domain talking to us about all the possibilities.

SYNTH-BIO



We started off by being split into groups. I had to research Slime Mould or P.polycephalum. So what is it? Slime mould is an aggregate of eukaryotic cells that act as one organism. capable of complex behaviour such as finding the shortest path through a maze, solving computationally difficult puzzles,
balancing nutrient intake and is even capable of making irrational decisions. This organism can also regenerate.



Even though I started researching into Slime Mould I became interested in human related bacteria and human emotion. In other words, I became interested in how I could explore human emotion through bacteria and if there were different forms an emotion could take through different mediums.

I started swabbing parts of my body to see if there would be a difference in how bacteria looks like depending on how I feel within a period of time. Would there be a difference between times when I am happy and times when I am sad?

Because our bodies are usually home to millions of bacteria I had to start to isolate small amounts of bacteria and see if I can make them grow separately. In doing so I was hoping to be able to isolate individual substances that only grow on the skin when we are happy for example.

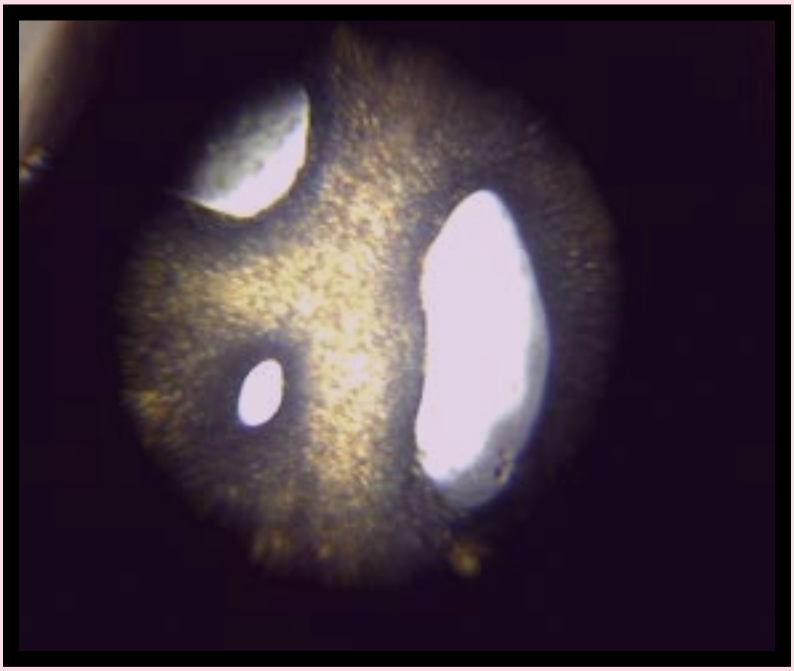
JOY<JOY<SAD<JOY

I managed to separate individual bacteria and grow it separately. The problem is that there is no way of telling what I was isolating. I couldn't tell if it was the fabrication of an emotion or just a door handle I touched.

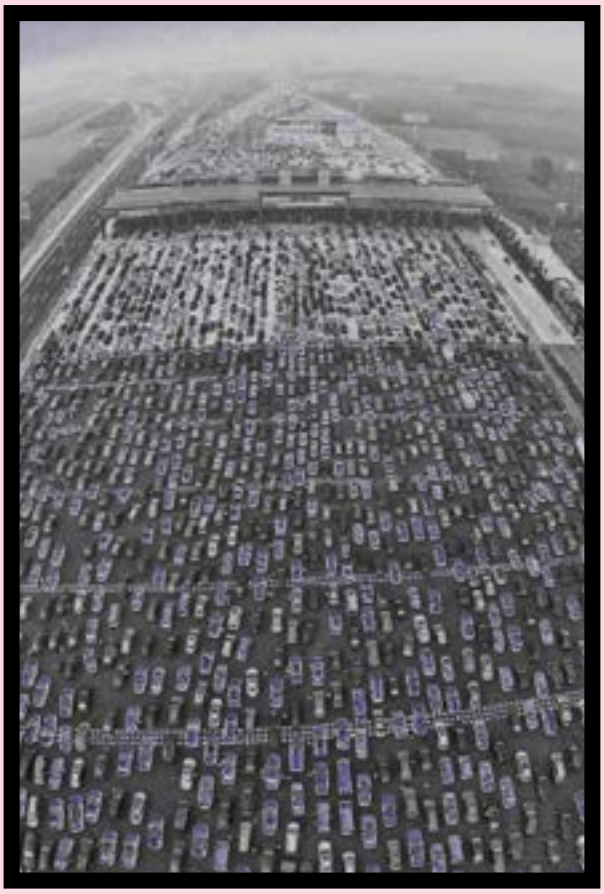
HOW< HOW< WHAT< HOW

I started looking into Slime Mould again.

During one of the visits to Ascus public laboratory I had the chance to observe Slime Mould under the microscope. This opens up a whole new unseen world.



This “new world” looks very familiar though. It looks like a busy highway. With cells going up and down at amazing speeds through the slime mould’s veins it is no wonder that this was the first thing that came to mind.



I understood then that I would have to work with the human perception about its surrounding, but also with movement, the movement from one place to another, dictated by instinct, preference, interest, and so on.

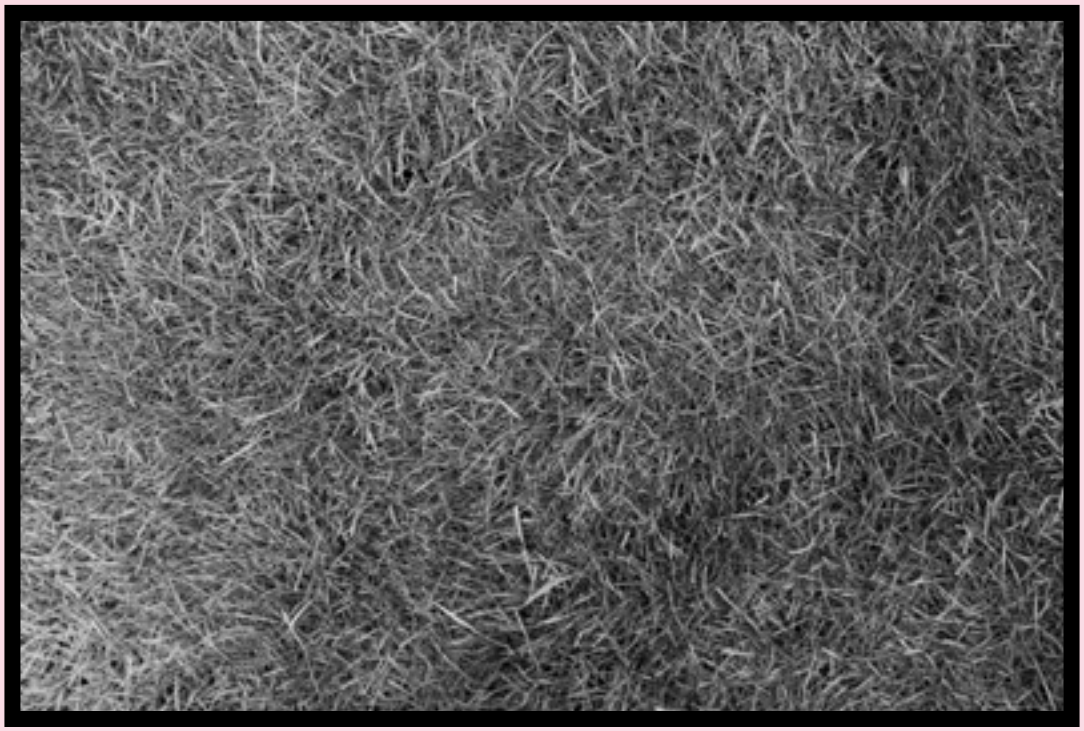
nature does nothing in vain
Aristotle

I understood then that I would have to work with the human perception about its surrounding, but also with movement, the movement of people from one place to another, dictated by instinct, preference, interest, and so on.

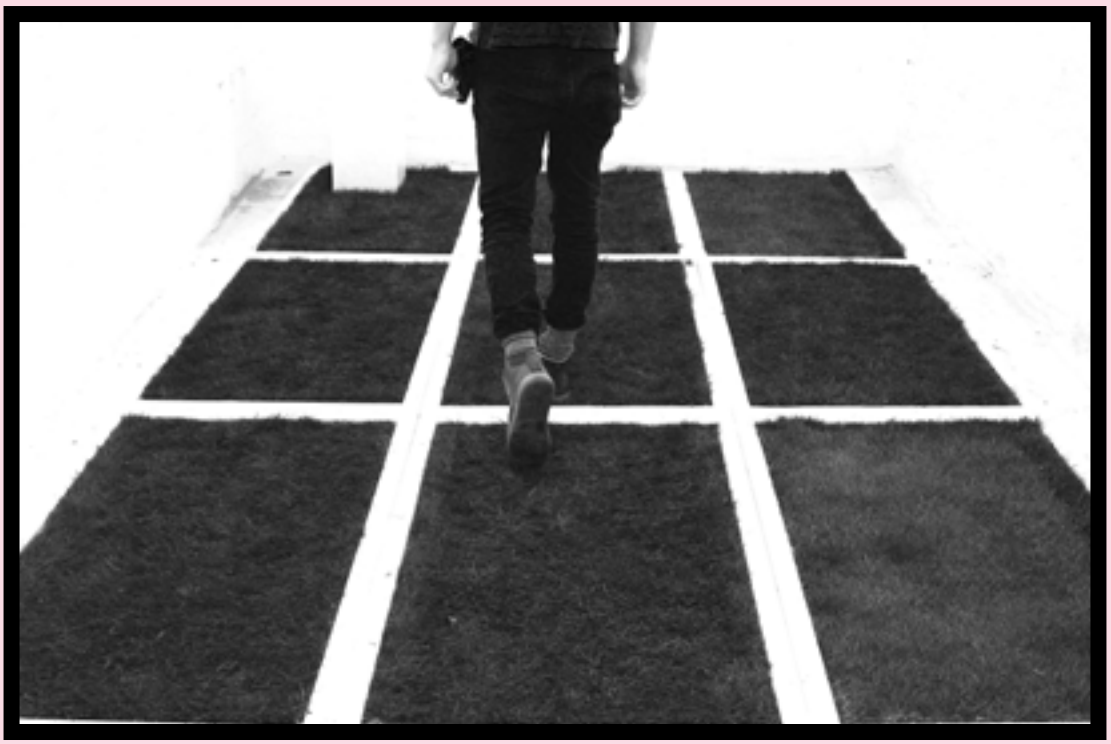
But how do I trap movement in a static piece? What I needed was a medium that deforms/changes as people move over it. This could be snow, sand, grass, or all sorts of other mediums. A japanese sand garden would be a perfect environment to trap paths in.

WHAT<WHAT<HOW<WHAT

My proposed idea is to create a set of nine big floor tiles which are covered in grass. As people walk over it, the paths formed become a visual symbol of time passing and of the human preferences and the impact of these left on its surroundings, similar to those paths left behind by slime mould, but on a much bigger scale.



Why grass? I chose grass because it is a living organism as opposed to sand for example. The fact that we can alter how grass grows by stepping reputedly on it ties in with the narrative about the impact we have on our living surroundings but also how through time this impact changes as grass and nature in general are not static enti-ties.



Each one of the wooden frames that support the grass is made out of 42mm by 42mm thick beams with a width of 850mm and a length of 1200mm. Each wooden frame has a plywood back and each one of them is lined with a polyester sheet to prevent water leakage from the soil. The area covered by the tiles comes to a total of 2550mm by 3600mm or 9.18 meters squared.

On the 7th grass tile there is a display that hold the slime mould. The slime mould is grown separately in a dark place and placed in the display above two days before the showing. The case that holds the organism is lined with wet black paper on top of which some oats are sprinkled. The black paper provides enough moisture for the slime mould to keep surviving while the oats are part of its diet. Because the paper is black the slime mould can be easily spotted.

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