

Personal Reflection on my M2.1 design project

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INTRODUCTION

During my previous semester of the master Industrial Design I carried out a project at a company abroad. The result of that semester was unsuccessful due to a combination of circumstances. Among these circumstances was a non-disclosure agreement I had signed with the company and therefore not presenting the evidence necessary to be assessed. Therefore I repeated my M2.1 semester at a company in The Netherlands. The reason why I wanted to carry out this semester at a company was to gain insight into how my expertise, vision and identity could fit the creative industry.

The reason why I chose the Research, Design and Development track (RDD) is to be able to work for a company after graduating. After my previous semester I concluded that this should be a company that works on different projects for other companies. My aim in this context is to create designs that inspire companies to value and integrate more interactive textiles in their products.

PROCESS

When starting the project at Handmade I encountered a different situation than I had anticipated, because the fellow team members had already started research and a first brainstorm session. They were a team that have been working together for several years and have a very particular design process they always work with. At the beginning of the project I learned a lot about how they structured a design process and how different steps can be documented in a structured and coherent way. During this informative period I realized that I lost track of my own design approach which is to start from an intuitive making point of view. This made me realize the value of my design approach and allowed me to more consciously incorporate my design approach into the rest of the project. The team was pushing the prototype phase towards the end of the project, which made our approaches clash sometimes. For my final master project I would have to define a scope that would not only allow me to start with making but would also show the value of a making approach to the other parties involved.

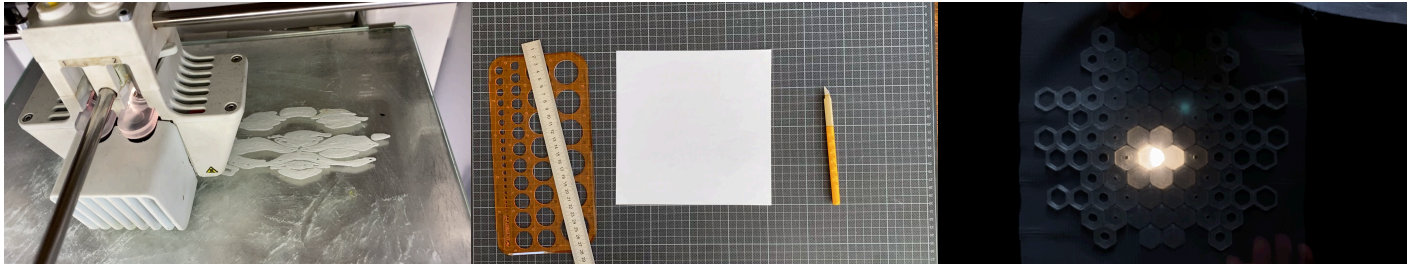
PLANNING

The first month of the planning that I had created before starting the project was quite accurate. However the outcome of the first phase was not as specific as I intended it to be. There were different concepts that we were all focusing on at the same time. I therefore suggested a specific context that I would further elaborate. After agreeing on the previous, we still met every morning to discuss and update each other on the progress we were making and exchanged feedback. This experience has taught me how to create ownership over a part of a collaborative project.

This, together with the unforeseen circumstances of the COVID-19 crisis caused the ending to turn out differently than expected. After the first month of being in quarantine I revised and remade the project planning, which I then carried out. I noticed that not being able to make use of the facilities of, for example, the materiality lab slowed the production of samples down significantly. It forced me to look for alternative materials, such as paper, and fabrication tools than I had initially intended to.

DOCUMENTATION

Previously, documentation of my everyday activities was a challenge. One of my personal goals was to find a way to efficiently and systematically document the things that I did and learned on a regular basis. At first I started to write a little summary down in a notebook at the end of each day. Soon I realised that it was almost impossible to get a clear overview at the end of the week/month, therefore I switched to an online spreadsheet where I documented what I had done and if I had learned anything new that day. Towards the end of the project, after several coach meetings, I concluded that this way of documenting, while being efficient, lacked reflection on my activities and decisions. The last two weeks I wrote a little reflection each day in a spreadsheet, with some key terms underneath and an additional end of the week reflection clarifying design activities and decisions. This journey allowed me to find a way to document efficiently while being very informative. I aim to use this approach in further design projects.



LEARNING GOALS

In the proposal written for this project I had set learning goals for this project.

I aimed to gain a deeper understanding on how textiles can communicate through different properties. I specified that I would focus on the visual and tactile design of these textiles. The project allowed me to create very expressive textiles, yet the focus was mostly on the visual and motion design of the textiles.

Secondly, I aimed for a high degree of integration of technology into the textile that I would create during this project. Even though I spend significant time on how to integrate the shape memory alloys, the fidelity of the eventual samples are not as high as I had intended. Integrating technology into textiles is very time costly, initially I had hoped to use the knowledge of Handmade employees, not being able to access labs such as D-search, the Materiality lab and the office of Handmade made it difficult to prototype with textiles and technology at times. I was unable to, for example, integrate the shape memory alloys in a woven structure instead of the alloys been sewn onto the textile. I do think that this experience has taught me to be as iterative with designing the technology as I am with fabrication and designing the textiles. I realized that I want to gain more affinity with electronics and therefore I signed up for the elective Designing User Interfaces with Emerging Technologies.

Furthermore, I aimed to integrate both sensors and actuators into the textile to demonstrate the co-dependence of aesthetics, interaction and fabrication. Instead I used actuators and worked with aesthetics and fabrication. There are two main reasons why this turned out different. Firstly, the desire of the company Handmade was not to focus on the integration of sensors into textiles and secondly, I realised that the scope of the project was too broad and had to be narrowed down. I still think it is interesting to show the codependence of aesthetics, interaction and fabrication by using sensors and actuators. However, to realise this, the scope of the samples that will be made must be very concise. Therefore I organised a curation session with Handmade (whom I will be working with during my FMP), in which we are going to specify what interactions and technologies we aim to create during my FMP.

At the start of the project I aimed to deliver samples and a prototype. The samples are finished and will be delivered to Handmade during my final presentation, I also hope to show an assembled prototype, which at this stage is not done yet.

TO CONCLUDE

At first I had difficulty accepting that I would be doing my M2.1 semester again, but in retrospect I see that I learned a lot about aligning a design process with my identity, I gained insights in scoping (un)realistic projects