REFLECTIONS

Project: (Es)sential Details | "Amnis"

Done by: Melvin van Berlo

Benjamin Lehn

Roosmarijn Ovaa

Coached by: Pierre Lévi

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GROUP REFLECTION

After the kick-off of the project, we everyone came forward with their personal strengths and weaknesses, ambitions and fears, as well as their way of working. In this way, we could already anticipate how the dynamics in the group would take shape. We concluded that we had chosen the project for the same rasons, but differed in priorities and methodswell.

During the first weeks we got acquainted with both the explorative, first-person perspective approach and how each other's personalities would play out in this context. For example, Roos' structured way of organising was a great way to balance out Benjamin's creative chaos, while Melvin put forward a strong getting-things-done attitude. Keeping each other balanced while moving the project forward in a meaningful was not always easy, but ultimately rewarding.

The longer we collaborated, the more efficient and self-explanatory our communication became. It was especially challenging to convert abstract or vague concepts floating through one's mind into usable information - this was a great learning point for all of us. The experiential nature of our work required a lot of room for open thought and discussion, which we got a better grip on after each iteration. Especially during moments at which one person had a sudden stroke of inspiration, trust, active listening and sensemaking played an important role.

First-person experiencing and experimenting was a vital part of the project. We were all fairly new to this technique, which made the first part of the explorations hard to figure out. However, after we established the common ground with some laughs, we managed to get work with it quite efficiently. The creative atmosphere we eventually created was a great opportunity and in its form new to all of us, which provided opportunities to learn and grow both as a designer and a person.

On a practical level, communication channels like calling, WhatsApp and especially Google Drive were used to make collaboration as fast and efficient as possible. Regular meetings in person were nevertheless vital to the success of the project.

Our team consisted of clear individual skills that made valuable contributions to the project and on which we could rely on most of the time. The straight-forward and expeditious approach of Melvin, the conceptual mind and critical opinion of Benjamin and the organizational and perfectionistic approach of Roosmarijn made for a healthy mix of attitudes. Through this, we were also able to learn from each other, complementing each other's attributes. In between project milestones, we held rounds of constructive feedback, which will again be done after this deadline. Resulting in that we were all getting closer to an aligned approach in which the different qualities were embedded.

MELVIN VAN BERLO

I realized that imbedding detail in my work is an important value of the designer I aim to be. Further, I Strife to connect with the user in a broad way. But connecting to the user with details, would be for me a great goal in my future design progress. The project group (es)sential details in the Transformative practises squad seemed to me the best option to realize this learning goal.

The first weeks of this project was all about the approach. For me it seemed even philosophical. on the advice of the coach I started reading David Abram's book "The spell of the sensuous". From this book I got a new perspective on technology and people and the interaction between them. The quality of interaction between human and the nature itself (in our case the water) instead of manmade technology seemed after reading this book more important to me than before.

My work style has always been very fast. I favour the coincidence. I never find it difficult to make decisions. And this works for me. Yet I can sometimes not be precise enough. And if there is one thing I've learned over the past year, it's a matter of working exactly. Before cutting a knot, think twice more and proceed carefully. This has not always been easy for me, because that ultra-careful approach is not in my nature. Yet I am very happy to have worked with this approach. And I also thank Benji and Roos because they have helped me (often unconsciously) a lot to work more precisely.

After four weeks we closed our concept and then only worked on details of this concept. The idea was to come up with a better product in this way without changing the concept. I have learned that this works. I will certainly also take this to upcoming projects. However, this method also entailed some disadvantages. I completely lost the thread and did not know how to proceed with the project. Only after the coach-meetings on the Fridays I knew the direction again. To prevent this, I want to create a clearer picture for myself of the process that goes through the project.

By using first person experiencing, we came far as a project group. From our own experience, we could improve the design. When the project stalled, first person experiencing was a perfect form to continue. I will apply this technique to emerging projects when a concept is stuck. first person experiencing is fast, brings you new insights, and the only thing you need is yourself (and your project partners).

It was interesting to work with the TP framework. However, I did not have the trouble to understand it until too late. This made it difficult for me in the middle weeks of the first quartile. The preparation for this project left much to be desired. Improvement is here for me. I have found out how positive a good preparation can be. As a result, I now aim to be much better prepared in the future and to fully know and apply the framework of the project in question.

The teamwork went great. We had a motivated team of three persons and spent a lot of time together. My satisfaction is high.

BENJAMIN LEHN

When I went into the project, the brief sparked excitement in me for several reasons. I wanted to fully immerse myself in interaction design for a whole semester, as opposed to the rather practical or business-focused projects that made up the rest of my education so far. Being confronted with an entirely new perspective and way of working was what I hoped to learn the most from, and I can now say that this was exactly the case.

As described in the project's documentation extensively, we applied a rather unconventional approach to design decisions, compared to the usual way of working at the TU. What felt completely counterintuitive at first, revealed its value during the process to me: Immersing yourself in an experience you just devised opens up a whole world of details and possibilities you could not possibly have imagined or anticipated just by conventional means.

I realized that there was an aspect to design that I had little knowledge of before, and suspect that over the course of the project I was able to develop a new way of experiencing and looking and things. Letting loose of the now seemingly strict framework of a conventional design process taught me about new ways of creating insights, as well as quickly iterating and finally making important decisions based on intuition, which is a side of myself that I can value much more now.

Even though the final product we came up with was not meant for a market, or especially because of that, we could focus completely on what was important: The interaction and everything that contributed to it.

From the literature I studied, "Augmenting fun and beauty: a pamphlet", "The beauty of making hot chocolate : an inquiry on designing for everyday rituals", and especially "Designing for respectful embodied interactions" provided me with the necessary tools to successfully navigate through and finally integrate important decisions throughout the Essential Details project. But all results and learning points would have been unimaginable without the weekly tutor meetings. Especially the stimulative and inspiring nature of our conversations, which might be disorientating for some, were especially valuable to me. Every time we came into a meeting standing in front of a mental barrier, we left with plenty of new directions to explore and further investigate. This meant there was never a point in time where I felt the project would be static or come to a halt and I could keep delving into completely new aspects of details that are completely invisible to the untrained eye.

The weekly meetings with the squad were a great opportunity to listen and learn from other standpoints outside of the cosmos of our own project, being a place for open debate and exchanging ideas. Even though understanding the Transformative Practices framework is something that took a while to catch on for me, I feel that I time and time again saw its value in approaching complex issues from multiple standpoints and in collaboration with your peers.

Finally, I can already say that I will be able to make use of the aforementioned learning points in a much wider context than I expected, because there is always another side to what seems already completely understood - no matter what the issue is actually about. Gaining awareness for the more human side of things is also something I now place much more importance on, and I think that most people could profit a lot from this perspective as well if they just were a bit more open-minded about their approach.

ROOSMARIJN OVAA

Within the (Es)sential Details project, we applied an approach that was completely new to me. Personally, I am interested in gaining new ways of working and thinking, because I think it will give you more freedom during upcoming projects. Knowing multiple approaches allows you to apply a certain method that really suits the situation and next to that enables you to think more widely. In this project, we had to make up and evaluate ideas through experimenting, instead of thinking. Personally, I am always looking for rational structures and prefer to be completely in control, which is almost the opposite of the approach we had to apply. In addition, because of my 'structured' and concrete way of thinking, I had some difficulties with the complicated way in which the approach was described. Because of all these aspects, it took me a while to understand how the approach worked and what values it contained. This learning process can be found in the project process as well: in the beginning of the project, we often fell back on the traditional way of designing through writing down goals and arguments. However, once we started our first-person-perspective explorations, I began to realize the values of using the 'feel' as main source, instead of the rational. When aiming to create a design with a nice experience, it works way more effective to create a design by trying and feeling, then by thinking about how it would feel! Through trying-evaluating-trying-evaluating (etc.), you got the opportunity to isolate the essential details of the design and adjust them until they feel perfect.

I actually think that the approach we learned during this project, can be applied in a lot of different contexts. The main thought is that you start thinking from the interaction itself, instead thinking about the interaction. Almost every type of design (conceptual design, digital design, product design, social design, …) contains interaction. Furthermore, I found the first-perspective-person explorations a great way of brainstorming. We could just try whatever we made up, and see how it worked out. When comparing

it to brainstorming by the rational, it was easier to not restrain myself to personal morals or goals, but to think completely free. I definitely want to use this way of brainstorming and making design decisions in upcoming projects.

This approach also taught me to let go the control. In projects, I prefer to know precisely how the project is going and at what level of our results are. However, when decisions are made by experiencing instead of rationalizing, you simply do not have any idea in which direction the project will go. I was really struggling with this insecurity in the begin phase of the project. However, at some point I realized that not knowing where we would end up, was the exact reason why we could think so freely during the experimental brainstorms. From that moment, although still feeling uncomfortable, it was easier to accept the lack of control. All in all, this project showed me the benefits of insecurity. I think it will be very valuable to integrate the lack of control in other projects as well (if possible), to enable myself to think with an open mind.

Furthermore, the collaboration was an educational process as well, partly due to the new approach. Within this method, details were very important. Since I am quite perfectionistic, this was in line with my personal way of working and interests. As result, I set pretty high standards. However, not everyone in our group was focused that much on the details by nature, which resulted in some difficulties in the collaboration. In order to deal with this, I tried to think about the qualities everyone in our group had and how these could be used within the project. Besides, we planned to do a group feedback session at the end of this project. However, I think it would have been valuable if we would have organized such sessions earlier during the project as well.