

Reflection

M1.1 Project Sensory Matters Squad 2023-2024

In the first semester of my master program Industrial Design, I took two electives (DAM180 - Design Entrepreneurship, DCM180 - The Sound of Smart Things), one mandatory course (DCM100 - Constructive Design Research) and was part of the Sensory Matters Squad.

Experimental mind-set & making skills

Creativity & Aesthetics, Technology & Realization, Math, Data & Computing

In the SeMa squad I expected to gain a different mindset towards making, see it more as the central thing in design instead of a means to an end. Looking at the projects that colleagues did before in this squad I thought these projects would always focus on speculative design. However, during this project I realized that research and documentation was actually a more central part of our project. And in our case, we produced a material which could have real-life applications.

I enjoyed the trial-and-error process of the material driven design (MDD) approach: *researching, preparing, making, failing, reflecting* and repeating this cycle. Compared to the beginning of the semester I now am able to think more systematically about design through research, by imagining a possible outcome, trying based on knowledge, and measuring scientifically whether this was the desired outcome and what a next step could be. But also when to stop and assess whether an outcome fits the design brief or desired outcome.

Discarding the user as much as we did in this process, surprised me. Although I had enough discussions with people in our squad about our and their project, I realized we could have done user testing by asking about people's experience of a material. This would have brought another interesting perspective to the table, as we found during one of the squad workshops. But this also made me trust my own judgement and *experience* more, using all my own senses to *assess* the material design made during the semester. I strengthen my scientific approach on design by learning how to characterize material qualities, reflecting on this making process and setting up a new design cycle.

It was hard for me to let go of my old ways. I was used to designing something for a problem and was now challenged with an open topic. It took a while before I could let go of the application side of the project and focus entirely on the making, since I believe design should be done purposely, which means, I want to add value to people's life with my designs. Even though with this project, I feel like this was not the outcome, it made me realize that this should be the center of my vision.



Presentation and presenting skills

Professional Skills and Math, Data & Computing

Furthermore I wanted to work on my presentation skills in this semester. Not only to become a more confident speaker, but also to improve the way I *present* my finished designs when working for a company. To be able to present my work, I learned during my time in the Sensory Matters squad that *documentation* was the beginning of the presentation. Since I am also a bachelor student law, I am used to write a lot. By reading papers for our project, I found the fitting jargon to write and talk about material design. But also to find other papers related to the topic in a more structured way. This was something I hoped to learn with my team, but ended up to be more of an individual journey.

Along the way, I learned that it was important for everyone in the group to photograph and annotate the photos we took of the samples immediately or we would forget *to note the important details*. In the last weeks I had a nice dynamic with my team member Pin, who took most of the photos, which I annotated or added details to. Because I am a natural leader, I took it on me to reorganize our materials, create a material catalogue, add extra utensils and motivated the team to write as much as possible down in my absence. Although I did not completely succeed, I realized that its in my nature to want to control everything and everyone, but it is fine to let people be responsible for themselves.

This does not take away the fact that I was greatly disappointed in one of my team members Chen, and it has been challenging to stay calm and constructive. In my leading role, I tried to organize multiple interventions, trying to stimulate a positive attitude and a better collaboration. Just to find ourselves at the same point a few weeks later. This was hard, but also taught me to make the best of it and move on together with Pin to make up for lost time and activities if there is no other way.

Within my electives I took as many chances as possible to *present*. During the Dutch Design Week 2023, I was a host at the TU/e Drivers of Change expo. This gave me the chance to have a more informal conversations with visitors and get more comfortable in the position of a public speaker. In my course Design Entrepreneurship, I *practiced* pitching and I am now able to quickly write and perform a pitch. Even if I am still stressed when I have to present, I feel that I have become more confident and can still deliver the core message.



Future steps

Next semester I will take a break from the department of Industrial Design and continue my law study for a year. In this time I want to develop my professional identity and vision further to make a better decision on what I want to learn in the rest of my master's degree. I feel that this first semester it was still alright to explore, but I would not choose this squad again and also would not take the approach of putting the material in the center of a project, because I feel like this does not give me the satisfaction of meaningful and purposeful design. However, I do want to take the mindset of the MDD method with me to the next project, in the sense that I want to start making earlier on in the process and allowing myself more to try and fail.

Furthermore, I feel like starting at this department again past September, triggered my interests in many design topics at once. I did discover I like the hands-on approach which I am currently exploring in the course The Sound of Smart Things. For now I am still interested in legal design with my law background, but this course and past semester reintroduced me to sound design. Which I was interested in before my bachelor, but I never pursued because I was afraid to fail, since I have minor experience in this field. After this project I feel more confident to just try, fail and improve, or perhaps surprisingly succeed.

So my goals for this upcoming year, away from the department are to find a design field and topic that I am passionate about and can connect my research, design and final master project. So that I can become a specialized industrial designer in my master. Next, I want to further develop my professional identity & vision accordingly and create a stronger portfolio to start my research project (M1.2) with.