Tools of the trade
Reflection Document

Where your specific ‚craft' lies in relation newer technologies

There is no art without craft, no expression without technique - Richard Sennett. 1

I have developed a fascination for creating objects and settings for those objects with a focus on their influence on the different perceptions of human beings. In the best cases, it results in a relationship between the work and the viewer. To achieve a real interaction between the work and the viewer is what interests and motivates me. This is especially the case, since we are constantly surrounded with high quality visual stimuli, often with very effective impact.I have a variety of different creative ways of working. To classify ones own work is difficult, as it means somethings will always be excluded. But like many other artists, I do not want my own work to call art, but I'll leave it open if the viewer want to do this. I look at it as a process, to anchor my work in the division of art and creative scene.

Working as a windowdresser, I learned fast how to work with all sorts of materials and use them in settings which where not made to be there forever but still gave that idea. So, often I would encounter the danger of unintentionally being tinkered. In some way I consider myself as an amateur because I have not committed myself to one single discipline. But that is only because when I start something new I try out new, different way of working. This has it's good sides as well as it's bad.This gives me more freedom to find more results and I try to allow myself to fail, and try again. Even if it is not always easy to reconcile with the expectations of school, critics or myself.

Im struggeling with giving an clear definition of my work. I feel that this last two semesters of my studies could be crucial in order to come closer to a clear description. As much I love to do many different things (and figuring them out, while doing), I feel a need to specialize more in one direction; Not so much in terms of tecniques, but of themes.

For me, the process of working with materials brings with it a certain responsibility: I want to make the actual usage of the material worth the process, both for maker and viewer. This does not exclude experimentation at all. It is rather more about details and finding the essence in everything than about following rules or guidelines.

Craft can bring physicality and texture to an object. A traditional craft can even add a historical context to the design. An example of a successful transformation of a common tecnique into a new way of usage, is „The Tactile Treatment", designed by Izzy Parker. The object, which is something between garment and jewellery. It's made from 11'570 acupuncture needles. The needles are hand woven into the textile base as a flat piece, a process that took Parker over 300 hours. Draped over the shoulders, the spikes open out. When the wearer moves, the needles reflect the light as they move.

This can be compared to a project I did in the past, where I made jacket out of toothpicks. The toothpicks were stuck into soft foam. By using a an existing tecnique, Izzy Parker is achieving a way more refined result.

1 Richard Sennett

New tools of the trade

Timing is important for new ideas. When a creative domain is accepting a specific idea, similar ideas might suddenly pop up in several different places at the same time. Each domain is a cultural system with different forces which influence the acceptance of ideas. The introduction of the internet has brought these forces closer and each part of that system became more influential on his own. Also since the tools of creation became accessible for everyone who has a computer, it's easier to create in spite of tools. But all the possibilities with new tools and the extremely accessible knowledge through the internet about the work and projects already existing, can in my opinion have a positive as well as a negative impact on creativity. The recognition that everything has been made before in some similar form, can also take „the wind out of the sails" and slow ones motivation down. In this perspective, doing my own version of something, seems valueless. To appreciate the working process, helps me to overcome this dilemma and create things without getting caught up in this dispiriting fact. If the accessibility to creating tools means that we can more easily copy existing creative works and styles, then this only allows us to make more of the same. Although it seems that creating more of the same is the opposite of creativity, On the other hand copying can have a quality of it's own. As it in the history of art, it was the common way to teach respectively study art to copy a master.

Today the teaching approach is often more conceptual and can inspier and change how we see existing pieces of art or design. In this manner it does not mean, that we have to ignore technologies in order to create valuable things. There are great opportunities in the world of digital crafts, that can still inspire wonder in people. Yes it seems hard to create something new now a days but the constant movement of technology and techniques through digital achievements, can lead to exactly that.

The current trend in contemporary art and crafts, has other influences on the art world.
When the disciplines of art and technology cross, they create interesting intersections, and open questions like: what art is, how we exchange it, who makes money from it, and how we experience it.
While some believe art can only be experienced in person, in a museum or a gallery, others find that online platforms allow artists building a sustainable life (which is something that has become increasingly harder to do.) Digital artist Sterling Crispin, said "Technology is an extension of humanity, and an embodiment of the human spirit. We are by our very nature, tool users. The world of technology itself has its roots in craftsmanship and art, so I think it makes perfect sense for artists to directly create, confront, and utilize technology."[2]

New tool for my trade project

This reflection document, like my work has two parts. Because I came to the conclusion, that I went too far from my original starting point and changed my implementation. At first it might look like a completely different project, but what I did was took a step back and went closer to my initial idea. With this approach my end result becomes clearer.

In the first part I focused more on a fantastic, storytelling piece. Thus the experience evolves rather as a perceptual than a conceptual one. I wanted to challenge the observer to participate in constructing their own meaning of my project with their questions, interpretations, and criticisms to incorporate them into the meaning, hopefully without confusing the content of the implementation.

In the second part, I committed to the radio, as an object to work with and was thinking more about the connection of men and appliance.

Theme

About the relationship between man and thing

Excessive consumerism can lead to a lack of emotional attachment between users and their products. The trend goes to an uniformed digitization of all sensory experience, which are all coded identically.

I aspire to make the user a protagonist in a narrative experience rather than passive consmers of a product. The human being is equipped with sensors and they also want to be served. Since our technical devices are designed to make our lifes more convenient, we only have to control them by most minimal gestures.

2 Sterling Crispin

We take them for granted. The conventional everyday experiences with electronic products can impoverish our imagination. I want to establish a relationship between man and thing, by an interaction. What interests me is the moment of contact, in what form whatsoever. The viewer acts as a kind of unsuspecting puppeteer with the object, and as such he must try out, how one plays it.

Part one: Project

I want to create objects, which react on opposite force. The object will move as soon as it gets the correct impact, and the observers task is to figure out on what impact it will react. First the object should draw attention to it by its look. When the object comes to the surface, it's also about the internal functions. Inside, I have created a shared sleeve to trigger something.

The look as well as the movements, gives the object a character. Its organic (wesenhaftes), to help the viewer to connect with it. Its an interaction, a confusion, a surprise to awaken our senses. A combination of known and unknown to generate a excitement and arouse interest. The known aspects make it easier to connect with, while on the other hand, the excitment comes by the unknown part.

Even the looks are inspired by structures found in nature, bright colors transforms it into something more artificial. Because it should work more as an inspiration for me than an obvious connection to nature.

Not that there arent bright colors in nature but i don't want to give the impression of land-art, more an undefined look. The viewer can study these features and reconstruct his own story, by using his imagination.
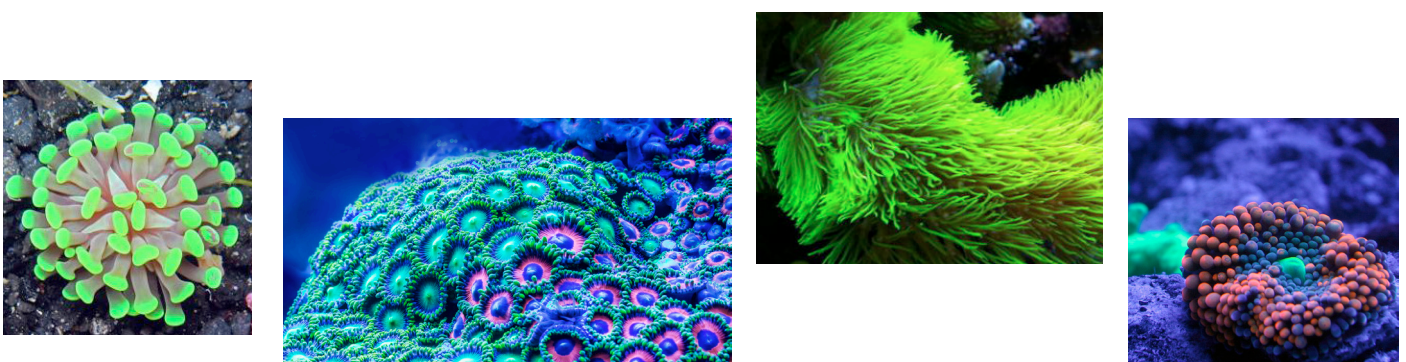
Inspiration

For inspiration I looked at works of architectural, interactive installations that surround the observer and havr them figure how they can communicate with it.

Philip Beesley made several pieces with similiar concepts. This installation is inspired from the polar aurora, with its natural plays of light. The movement dependens on chance interactions and energetic collisions. Beesley has envisioned a large scale installation that offers the public its own interaction. So the instalation is ever-adapting and interacting with its intelligent LED lights that responds to viewers gathering below.

The sculpture is composed of thousands of individual components including laser-cut stainless steel, acrylic and mylar, densely massed glass vessels, and custom computer-controlled circuitry.

Interactive Architecture Lab have designed a pavilion using soft robotics which allow for telekinesis to make an adaptable shape shifting structure. Furl is a model of a kinetic interactive pavilion created by combining electroencephalography (EEG) with silicon casting. To me what was intresting at this installation was that the orcanical silocon shapes were replacing the mechanical structures that exist in interactive architecture. Furl allows the individual to dictate the structure on a telekinetic level before hard architectural elements make the structure a physical reality. Not only does the EEG sense the desires of users needs but it can also pick up and adapt to the environment.

Definition of Sensory Play

While thinking about using such sculptures for other uses, I came to the thought of my sister. She is an educationalist which works with children with all kind of special needs.

We have five senses through which we experience and explore our world. Intellectual capacity is highly influenced by the ability to receive and correctly interpret sensory data. To allow a child to engage in play activities that appeal to their senses is important. Through sensory play, children can experience stimulation of their senses. Normally, the various senses work together. This helps people navigate their surroundings. Some children with intellectual disabilities have difficulty interpreting, integrating, and coordinating sensory input. Sensory integration activities help these children strengthen these abilities.

With the help of scientific data and experience the project could be developed into a sensory experience for therapy with visual, auditory and kinesthetic-aesthetic (feel) inputs, therapy used for with intellectual and physical disabilities and developmental delays. Each special needs child may have unique needs. So a variety of new tools are intresting. The objects could enhance and develop their skills by engaging their senses or according to the each special need. People with autism, who have limited social and verbal skills, could learn to engage and verbalize more.
But some disabilities can cause some children to be overstimulated by certain sensory inputs. With strong disability in which any physical or psychological stimulation is difficult, such inventions could be used.
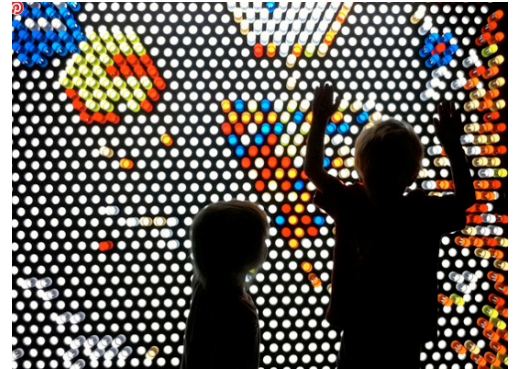
Some treatments use objects such as bubble tube lamps, LED fibers. But more creative possibilities are hardly offered. So there would be a possible market for inventive items like this.

Part two: Theme
I altered my theme because the initial meaning of the project „to make aware of our daily interactions with electronic items" was getting a bit lost. To make sure that the viewer would see the link, it needs to be closer to an actual electronical device. So I decided to leave the fantastic, bizarre, natural inspiered look and take a known object instead and work with the expectations that come with it. The subject matter stays the same; it's about the realtionship between man and an electronic tool, which exemplified by their interaction, is required in order to use it.

I chose an analoge radio from the 1950's, which added a new aspect, and creates a clear connection betwee past and future. It doesn't just play with an unexpected interaction but also with our memories of a departed technology; one that is close enough that most of us will remeber easily and make a connection with it on more than one level.

This technology casts an eye on the past, hopefully so those can understand the present and asks questions for future. Where does new technology lead?How does this change our relation to our everyday appliances? What influences does this have on culture? It's like trying to understand what this object change is, and why it's happening.

Idea
I want take a departed mass-produced everyday object and blur the lines between past and present by developing its possibilities of animation. Using technology, I will give the object a unique personality by making it more look expressive. Demonstrating the simplicity that lies in the function and operation of this analog radio and comparing it to the handling of the digitalised appliances and how humans relate to these situations.

Interfaces

My object is playing with the fact that the digitalisation was and still is transforming our objects, but also demonstration that our relationship with them is changing. These transitions are periods in which social practise and cultural forms are unsettled and negotiated. Many people theorize on the materiality and embodiment of technologies as well as the meanings arising from their use. By mixing technologies of different times I will be demonstrating these interfaces, and making reference to the representation of a system comprising of obsolete electronic appliances. Through hacking, the definition of its original identity is investigated.

The radio can be operated by simple movements. The protagonist of my project is standing in front of the radio and changes the channels by moving to the left and to the right. This action refers to newer computer gaming with kinect function. But in this case, it's broken down to a simple interaction. One that is kept as simple as possible, also including the digital and mechanical interventions.

A stepper-motor on the outside of the radio attached to the button is giving it a old machine-like look and so the mechanical intervention is visible. A ultrasonic distance sensor take on the operator and can enter the information for the settings.

Interaction

„In design, the main aim of interactivity has become user-friendliness. Paradoxically, user-centredness is not just figuring out how people map things, it absolutely requires recognising that the artefacts people interact with have enormous impact on how we think. Affordances, to use Norman's term, are individually, socially, and culturally dynamic. But the artefacts do not merely occupy a slot in that process, they funda-mentally shape the dynamic itself"

The 5 most significant things about this tool:
- a hybrid of analog and digital technologies
- let's people react by restrictions and rules
- it's about the realtionship between men and electronical tool
- it's about these relationships are changing in the digital age
- redefine the sensory ways in which we use oure items

3 Tertzian Tales (Robinson 1994, 78)

Inspiration

A record player is already an interactive device, as soon as the music is playing and you are dancing. I also thought of working with a record player at first, but as expected there are already many projects, especially those that deal with the movement of the appliance apart. Since the turning motion of the player's plate, lends itself to interaction. My own intervention in the operating movement of radio, is a further, logical continuation. It is interesting, that a smal intervention can arouse so much fun and interest in a simple old electronic device.


Polish artists Jakub KoÅ°niewski and Piotr Barszczewski designed an arduino controlled record player. It starts to play, as the people are running around - the speed depends on, how fast.

The innards of a record player have been replaced by an Arduino board. An overhead webcam sends a live feed to a concealed laptop, where a tracking application written in open frameworks then transposes the movements of people nearby to determine the speed and direction of the vinyl record.

The „vinyl workout" by theo watson, is a similar project, only that the recordplayer has been repleaced trough a projection. Which transforms the floor into a digital record player. Cameras track user's movements as they walk along a large projection of a record on the floor, manipulating the audio and video playback with the speed and direction of their steps. It looks at how humans relate to various situations and spaces.

In contrast to the first project, it seems to me the technology here is playing a less meaningful role in the project.
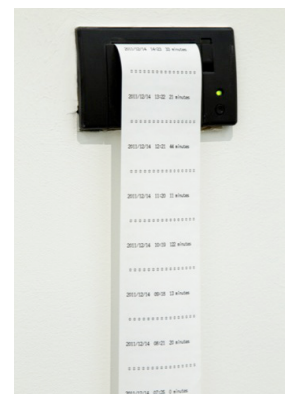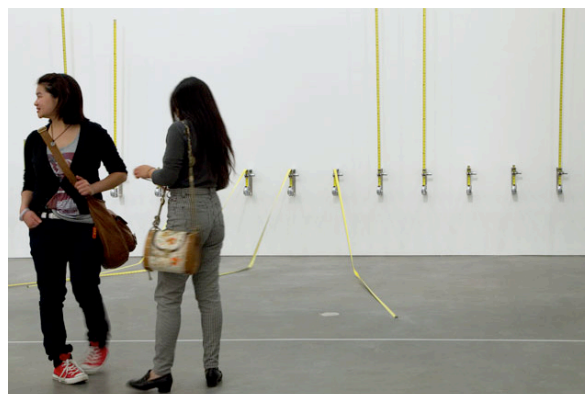
This is a more restrained interaction project, to ensure the viewer's interaction is this with the installation, although it is actually about the viewer in the exhibition. "Tape Recorders" by Mexican artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer is meassuring, how long a person is staying in the installation room. A non-electronic device, is converted as such - rows of motorised measuring tapes record the amount of time that visitors stay in the installation. As a computerised tracking system detects the presence of a person, the closest measuring tape starts to project upwards. When the tape reaches around 3 meters high it crashes and recoils back. Each hour, the system prints the total number of minutes spent by the sum of all visitors.

Advanced development opportunities

As well for my first as for my second idea with the radio, I can imagine versions of continuation in more pedagogic ways for museum, schools or for aforementioned purposes.

The interactional part, also made me think of forming this part of the installation. Why not letting a dancer or performanc artist explor it from his point of few. Because of the limited space put at disposal space, I could imagine a funny outcome, like a reference to Monty Python's „The Ministry of Silly Walks „ .

My personal relation

I'm living and studying in Holland, so listening to swiss radio is something, that brings me closer to my home in Switzerland. From the news I hear about things happening in my country and listening to known songs, brings back the familiar. But it's mostly about hearing my language spoken from known voices. Even though in this case it's only possible on the internet - no chanel searching required. Considered it conceptually, I see a poetic relation of finding a balance between Holland and Switzerland, in the action of searching for the right chanel. But in this case the action is not only a small gesture, but more an actual movement of the whole body - Which reflects on my journey between Bern and Rotterdam.

Reflection

This project was a difficult birth! I never thought (auseinandergesetzt) in a conceptual way about the theme of new technology, and their effects on my practice or in a broader cultural context. Our fast moving time, doesn't really allows use to look back very often, to think about the changes around us. Even though, it is crucial to moving in the right direction in the future. We sometimes need to see where we stand and build your own conclusion. Instead of always following as fast as possible to the next invention and trend. My installation is a visualized hybrid between different ages in technologies.