DPB220 — Design Research Project
'Huenite' Reflection

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The Interactive Lighting project was my first substantial experience with the research part of design. As a preparation I took two electives: DCB412: Designing for the User Experience and DHB411: Do, Reflect, Learn. In these electives I became acquainted with the techniques needed to conduct and document research correctly, although I did not have any research in applying them on a bigger scale. Our research started with a context mapping study, something I had never done before. It allowed us to quickly gain insight in our future test users, and provided us with the knowledge needed to guide our research in the right direction.

After the context mapping study we started prototyping. I quickly learnt that prototyping for research purposes is completely different than prototyping for design purposes. Because of the high time pressure, rational choices had to be made quickly, which meant that the focus was on usability, stability and efficiency rather than aesthetics. We consciously chose to make the prototype using a laser cutter, as it is a fantastic way to create rapid prototypes. By designing the prototype out of thin layers of laser cut MDF, it was easy to make changes later on in the project. I was able to design the exterior and give some shape to the user interaction while others were working on the electronics and the code. This collaboration was something that I definitely noticed in this project. Rather than working in a clear hierarchy where tasks needed to be divided all of the members of this were actively present in the process which allowed us to work fluently.

As a whole, this project has helped out immensely in developing my ability to design with the user rather than for an imaginary user. I was introduced to numerous research methods and methods that can be used to acquire valuable data from user tests. In the user tests, we ensured that we got as much insight as possible in the users' minds. We had special questionnaires that were taken before, during and after the research. Next to that we collected real-time data: the user inputs were logged by our prototype. Finally, we interviewed the participants which concluded the research. This allowed us to discuss irregular- and eye-catching things in the responses which, in retrospect, is essential in interpreting data.

The way of thinking we needed to adopt for this project was refreshing. All of the steps taken in this project were documented, and design choices and considerations were made based on logical thinking and concrete evidence instead of vague assumptions. Even though I foresee that these research methods and data analysis techniques are of lesser value in earlier stages of regular design processes, I am grateful that I got to experience going through a project where they were highly present. In the future, I will be able to apply these skills in tasks of a more analytical nature, such as user satisfaction testing, usability testing and other tests of that nature.