Reflection

Design for Peripheral Interaction

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I choose this module because of my general interest in the topic of richer and 'different' interactions. Designing for peripheral interaction is a new perspective on how we could interact with our products and this raises my interest and curiosity.

My biggest struggle
I have mixed feelings about this module. It is hard to explain since I find it hard myself to really understand how it feels. On one hand I'm very interested in the topic of this module; the papers, presentations by Saskia Bakker, the video assignment and discussions gave me a clearer picture and understanding about the periphery and some 'rules' and guidelines on how to design for peripheral interaction. Though, in practise I faced quite some struggles; both personally making peripheral interaction concrete, tangible and applicable, instead of it just being written in papers and methods, and with the group in applying the 'rules' and guidelines for peripheral interaction into a concept in a way that they were validated and constructed.

Duality
Sometimes I felt really 'dumb' during this module cause there were moments I had no clue what we were doing; making decisions in the group process sometimes felt a bit like guesswork; unstructured and not based on theories. Was I thinking too much? Making it too complicated for myself? I don’t know. I really faced some difficulties, not in the understanding of the theories but in the practical implementation and validation of those theories. While developing the concept it felt we were building an assumption, on an assumption, on an assumption. And then trying to defend that process.

Though, I am still really attracted by and interested in the topic of peripheral awareness and interaction. The somewhat older paper about Calm Technology raises my interest and makes me see a (potential) value in the future. With the same fascination I read and learned about how our brains function in perceiving, processing and responding (to) our environment. Doing the assignment with analysing our videos was helpful and gave me the surprising realization how many activities happen outside the centre of our attention. It all sounds so interesting and promising. I want to know more about it! But then in the following days I notice how complex, frustrating and in a way experiential this topic can also be.

I got faced with the fact that it is hard for me to deal with something as complex and ungraspable as designing for the periphery.

Yes; in theories and models it works and makes sense. And I actually think myself that it makes sense, though it is very hard to put in practise in a constructive and logic way. Maybe I was a bit disappointed in this?
Dirty prototyping vs guidelines and rules
It is interesting to compare the two concepts we presented at the midterm presentation. One (shower mat) we overthought and discussed too much, spending way too much time and energy on it. The other (paper toilet role) was just developed in a more natural, quick and dirty exploration, by just trying out. Reflecting on this now I realize; doing a quick and dirty prototyping session while trying to implement the ‘rules’ and guides for peripheral interaction might be contradicting and resulted in our case in lots of discussion about ‘nothing’, while doing quick and dirty prototyping without any restrictions results in an explorations with much more potential in the outcome. It's logical and not new but I didn’t realize this until we presented at the midterm presentation. From the feedback of the group on both concepts it was clear that the concept with the paper toilet role had more potential. This was for us a, maybe the, reason to continue with that concept, while actually no one of our group had actually seen the potential of this concept before we presented it.

In a way this shows me how dependent we were in that phase from external feedback. And this relates to my own experience that we had difficulties in creating a decent process. On the other hand, it is also a lesson that shows how different approaches (dirty prototyping with or without using the guidelines and ‘rules’ for peripheral interaction) result in different processes with different outcomes.

Validating the design decision
From the moment that we choose to continue with the paper toilet role, I noticed that it became easier to develop the concept. Though it was still difficult to implement the ‘rules’ and guidelines for designing for peripheral interaction combined with the context (lighting systems) because we had little time and resources to validate the functionalities and interactions in a real scenario with real users. It took sometimes so long that I would pull back from a discussion to let Marjolein and Tijs ‘finish the fight’. I wonder how we/I could have solved this differently?

Conclusion
Looking back to it I realize that the context we were designing for could have been more difficult, and in that I was very pleased with the testing labs we could make use of. This did help us to act out scenarios to some extent, based on our own experiences. I’m very happy with the theoretical background that I gained about peripheral interaction. In the process (of decision making) I had more struggles then usually and maybe more then necessary. I experienced how complex but interesting designing for peripheral interaction can be and the struggles in a way also contributed to my understanding of peripheral interaction. And I’m still very curious where peripheral interaction will bring us in the future.