

Matter of Transformation Pictorial

Tea/coffee and (ine)qualities

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INTRODUCTION

In this project I explored potential implications for design on knowledge found in various topics related to transformation. The reflection on this knowledge is expressed in the design of artefacts. There are four design iterations with four different topics: a rich landscape of affordances, sustainable transitions research, environmental psychology and design informed post phenomenology. Every design expresses a reflection on the contents related to that iteration. For every topic, corresponding literature and lecture were used as an input for the design. The design is a means of expressing a statement or perspective on the topic in a physical manner. All designs are made separately and reflected upon through use. However fed by literature, the subject of all designs is tea/coffee (ine)qualities. All designs relate to this subject.

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In the start of this project I have been resonating with subjects regarding to social relations and transformation. I was sparked by the topic of transcendence mentioned in literature on transformative experience design [1]. Scholars speak about transcendence through emotional engagement, self-reflection and presence as facilitators for transformative experiences. However, in transcendence, the social aspect of transformation is not addressed. Nevertheless, considering Rietveld's work on skill and normativity [2], I think that the social context has a strong influence on personal transformation. Combined with literature on social affordances [3] inspires me to either exaggerate on either the social aspect of transformation or the private aspect of self-reflectiveness and transcendence.

This pictorial shares the images and rationale behind every iteration followed by a brief reflection on how this rationale came to life whilst using the design.

The four designed artefacts:



ITERATION #1

A Rich landscape of affordances

Our material reality influences sociocultural practises and vice-versa [2]. Considering the material reality relating to western porcelain and tableware are highly functional and hygienic. Tea is a laborious product with a journey and history which is often not respected in consumption due to the functional and hygienic nature of the corresponding material reality. When I look at myself whilst drinking tea, I often find myself lost in thoughts dissociated from the drink. However, the warmth of holding the cup are assets that draw me towards engagement with the drink.

The purpose of this prototype is to create the ability for connection. I want to create a moment of Intimacy with the beverage with the goal to connect the user to the journey of the beverage respecting all energy needed in its creation. By using materials associated to intimacy and relaxation the material reality functions as a trigger for a moment of intimacy and connection to experience the full richness of tea.

Design Reflection

The softness and size give a different identity to the artefact. The material and shape invite to slow down and relax. On the contrary, the hygienic aspect is compromised to find this comfort. However, the impact of the redesign on the difference in interaction is still very mild. Maybe attaching a complete blanket, glove or scarf to the cup would have been a more rich and speculative interaction on the perspective of enforced mindfulness.



ITERATION #2

Sustainable Transitions Research

This iteration looks into sustainable transitions research as inspiration. An important topic within transitions research is the changing and assigning of appropriate roles [4,5]. Witmayer, 2016 states

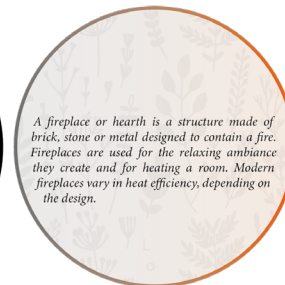
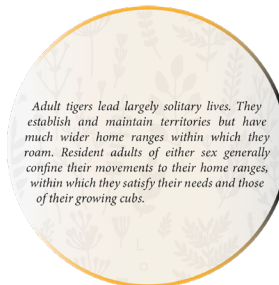
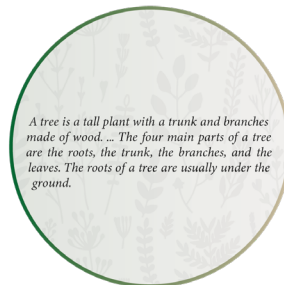
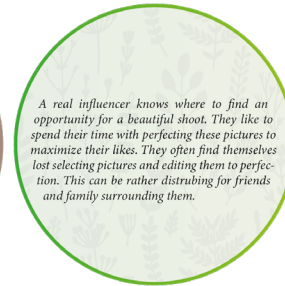
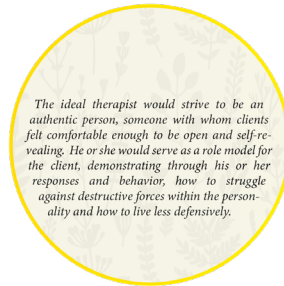
“It requires a capacity on the part of individual and/or collective actors to play into stimuli for role change and provide alternative role understandings, or even (re)invent them.”

This part of transitions research literature, the capacity to adapt your role, inspired me to reconsider social roles in informal settings. The social dynamics in group settings are often unconscious and unconsidered. People can be unaware of their effect on a group atmosphere and social dynamics. I want to design an artefact that makes people reflect and reconsider their social role in a group. This can help reflect on social behavior and creates a space to discuss social roles and step in a different role. I am wondering how to design for these small but important learnings. How we can give them value in the everyday life of people. How do we incorporate moments of learning and reflecting in the everyday life? In summary, the final design consists of a set of coasters with characters or objects. The coasters represent a role you should take in that moment and have a description about the role. This is meant as an object which you can use in the everyday as a playful and implicit way of learning to adapt and reflect social roles.

Design Reflection

Whilst testing the design in a social setting (a family breakfast), several things become apparent. The design invites people to reflect on their natural role in a certain company or environment. It's a playful manner to experience a change in roles and learn how this affects yourself and the social dynamics. Hiding the role information under the cup invites for people to engage in their role without sharing it with others. Abstract role cards that are more open for interpretation work better than very specific roles.





First thoughts on the coaster sheets:

ITERATION #3

Environmental Psychology

This iteration focuses on ecological and environmental psychology as input. Stokols & Altman, 1987 share four worldviews as a basis for different psychological approaches: trait, interactional, organismic and transactional.

I was sparked by the transactional worldview as for its holistic and interconnected foundation. The transactional worldview in psychology is defined as “the study of the changing relations among psychological and environmental aspects of holistic unities” [6]. The relation between human aspects and environmental aspects invited for reflection on current design solutions and approaches. Artefacts are often designed in isolation, only taking into account the aesthetics of the object in relation to the observer. Some objects are designed in consideration with their context. I am interested in creating a physical artefact which has the purpose to connect a person to her environment. To create an interaction in which the artefact functions as mediator to connect a person to his or her environment that is larger than the human and object together. The objects main purpose is not to appealing but to connect worlds by visualizing relations. The object forms a mediator to connect a person to its environment. Whilst gazing at the artefact, the user can observe her entire environment and her position in this environment. In this sense the artefact is a summary of contextual relations.

Design Reflection

The way the object catches the environment interesting and appealing. When drinking from the object you see your own reflection getting larger as the cup approaches your face. When placing the cup back on the table you notice your own reflection getting smaller. I consider this an aesthetic visualization of your relationship with the environment. Despite the aesthetics, the artefact is a very abstract interpretation and might not consciously convey a message.



ITERATION #4

Design informed postphenomenology

In his interview [8], Hubert Dreyfuss speaks about culture. He states that People are not able to learn what is a good life from science since people are formed by their cultural practices. Culture teaches us things, not science, since science cannot contain judgement. Culture is inherently dynamic because humans strive to create a life of possibilities. This behavior is also apparent in our relationship with technology considering multistability. Rosenburger and Verbeek [7] describe multistability as follows: “In technological contexts, multistability means that a “same” technology can have multiple instantiations in history or across cultures, which are coherent to the particular circumstances of use”. Technological mediations are the outcomes of the relations we have with technologies and not their functionalities. Multistability is strongly connected to the perspective of Rietveld on affordances and ability [2] who states that the perceived affordances change in accordance with a person’s abilities. What Dreyfuss, Rosenburger, Verbeek and Rietveld have in common is that they speak about the human ability to find creatively find new uses for technologies based on their changing needs.

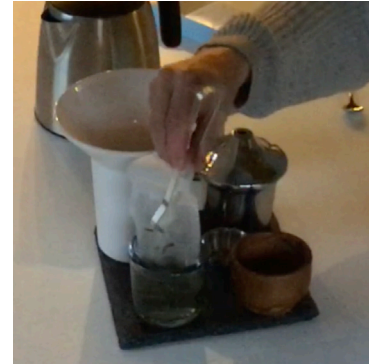
It becomes apparent that humans are inherently creative to an extend that might not be fully considered by designers. Designers often define how something should be done. One could even say that by designing solutions that can only be used in one particular way, we expect humans to behave like machines. Maybe design should aim for solutions that invite for experimentation and expansion. That design should embrace human creativity and provide society with tools rather than determinative solutions. The way we currently design is counteracting one of our core human values: creativity. With this perspective I started ideating. I wanted to create something that demands people to become creative without limiting them. I want the artefact to carry the functional properties needed for making a cup of tea, without demanding how it is to be used to explore the way people will use artefacts in a creative manner in order to fulfil their needs.

In doing so, I’ve made a tea set from a selection of random objects that have been designed for other purposes than making tea. The tea set provides a collection of tools that allow for people to be creative in finding applications based on their current need. The set consists of a candleholder, a vase, a piece of slate, an ice bucket, a wooden bowl, an ice tong and a spoon.



Design Reflection

I tested the tea set with multiple people to see how they would make use of the set and how they cope with unclarity and uncertainty. They were all given two tasks, first to make a single cup of tea for themselves. Secondly to make tea for a group of people. Its noticable that all participants utilized the set differently and managed to fulfill the assignment without any complications. Without asking for it, everyone mentioned what they would do different next time to improve their process. This design shows how powerful creativity can be when facilitated by design. I would argue that the perspective of designing for creative interpretation can support the development of creative abilities. From a sustainability perspective it could be posited that it is valuable to design a single object that can have a variety of meanings and purposes rather than having several objects with singular meaning and purpose.



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