

Inclusivitea: A Process of Intertwining Pragmatism and Design



Figure 1: Inclusion shown in the first iteration

ABSTRACT

Drinking tea is a social phenomenon in many different cultures that brings people together. As we live in a multicultural society, inviting someone over for tea may result in different interpretations of that drink and with that, it creates an awkward situation that articulates the differences between people. To overcome this separation of cultures in drinking tea, I combined pragmatism and design over three iterations to create an inclusive tea experience. Inclusivitea is a method allowing for a playful and expressive production of different teas simultaneously and through that, it can positively impact people's relationships. This study contributes to the exploration of how philosophy and design can complement one another.

Authors Keywords

Pragmatism; inclusion; design; tea; philosophy; transformation.

INTRODUCTION

As designers we add to the world. This can result in good things, but also turn out differently. To ensure moral responsibility, designers need to be aware of the possible impacts their design can have. How it can transform the world.

As a designer, I want to transform the world according to my vision of a more sustainable and inclusive society. E.g., I strive for circularity and different consumer behaviour, but in order to achieve this, I require knowledge of how to accomplish such a transformation. This instigated me to partake in the course Matter of Transformation in the department of Industrial Design of the Eindhoven University of Technology. In this course, the phenomenon of transformation is explored through the intertwined act of designing and philosophizing. The course's setup consisted of reading a chapter of James's Pragmatism and using it as inspiration for designing a tea set [16]. This continued for three iterations.

According to James, how we perceive reality is influenced by our previous truths similar to our previous opinions influencing our new [14]. Therefore these previous truths influence how we add to the world [3]. To make the direction of my design process more understandable, I will provide some background information that I suspect of influencing the process.

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Besides some general influences such as my upbringing and the setting of the course, my past experiences with tea functioned as my starting point, thus having a large influence on the design. This concerns what I defined as tea and the setting of drinking tea.

I grew up drinking rooibos tea with milk and sugar, but most people around me drank tea without milk and sugar. I disliked this tea as it is not sweet and you easily burn your mouth. Due to the inconvenience of always asking if people had milk and sugar, I started to dislike tea and chose to go with water when tea was offered. This changed when I moved out and suddenly had three Indian roommates that drank and offered me chai: A spicy black tea with milk and sugar that combines all ingredients in a pan on the stove. It became my favourite version of tea.

I have always experienced drinking tea as something comforting and cosy. I often drank it together with family or friends and it added a warming atmosphere to the conversation.

ITERATIONS

In six weeks, three iterations of reading a chapter on pragmatism, group discussion, design and reflection were performed. In this section, I describe what I was influenced by, my thought process and its result (the design).

Iteration 1: What Pragmatism Means

The chapter What Pragmatism means defines and explains pragmatism [11]. It is a method and attitude that looks at consequences [12]. What makes a practical difference? Pragmatism is also a theory of truth. Inductive logic can be used to test our theories, but there is never a definite answer. Truth is what we say about reality [13]. It is influenced by our previous experiences. We cannot easily say something is true, as it needs to cohere with previous truths. The truth is then what coheres the best. James also speaks of Absolute truth and the practical difference the existence of God would make, concluding this would be in the form of a moral holiday [15].

In this iteration, I was inspired by the influence of previous opinions in forming new opinions and our image of reality (truth) [14]. This is interesting when designing for intrinsically motivated behaviour change, as that requires a change in beliefs. Truth is very subjective as it can be from one person's point of view. It can also be shared and influenced by a bigger group of people. In relation to mutual understanding and respect, leading to equality and inclusion, the concept of sharing truth by practising theories and using inductive logic is inspiring.

I combined these notions with my personal striving to be able to enjoy tea together without any trouble due to different ways of drinking tea. To do so, I tried to define what tea is, resulting in water + something. Describing the way I usually drink tea as normal tea, I noticed that this is a matter of perspective. My upbringing has resulted in me calling this normal tea. At this point, I wondered if this could be called a personal tea truth. I later learned that giving it a name does not make a practical difference.

The next step in my process was to find a way to make different teas together. I focussed on the three types of tea I knew (water + tea, water + tea + milk + sugar, and Indian chai), to maintain feasibility and to stay true to the tea. Based on my own experience of drinking tea my definition of tea broadened. By creating a situation where different kinds of tea can be drunk together, I would not only create a more inclusive situation but also test people's definitions of tea by practice. The design could bring tolerance and make people try out new teas.

The design consists of all the tools and ingredients needed to make three different kinds of tea in one pan. There are also coasters and circles that mark spots where tools and ingredients can be put. The coasters for the tea and the cups have different names in relation to tea: "not my cup of tea", "normal tea" and "my new favourite tea". These can be placed under whichever tea fits the description for someone.

The elements of the design were mostly ready-made. The choices for natural/raw-looking materials relate to the idea of a tabula rasa [1]. The idea is that we are born without any knowledge, as all our knowledge comes from experiences. Pragmatism is in a way a more radical form of empiricism in saying that there are no abstractions and that looking for truth is an ongoing quest [16]. Therefore, there will always remain something raw and unknown.

The design is used as follows (Figure 2):

1. Measure the required amount of water by filling up cups and pour it into the pan.
2. Turn on the stove and bring the water to a boil.
3. Put teabags in the cups that require teamaking by adding boiling water to tea in a cup and poor water in the cup(s).
4. Add milk and sugar when desired.
5. The remaining water is for making chai. Add spices, chai and sugar.
6. Leave it to boil for 3-5 minutes.
7. Measure milk in a cup and add the milk.
8. Bring the mixture to a boil and lift the pan when the chai is about to boil over. Continue until the desired flavour is achieved.
9. Poor the chai through a sieve in the cup.



Figure 2: Setup and use of the design.

Iteration 2: The One and The Many

In *The One and The Many*, James discusses the importance of thinking as a monist or pluralist for pragmatism, as it has many consequences [7,8]. According to James, the world is one when things come together through e.g. unity in purpose or continuity, but it is many when things are not coming together [9]. With this, he says that the pragmatist is not an extreme monist or pluralist. Monism implies being done with your metaphysical quest, which does not fit with the pragmatic attitude of practising theory [10]. By applying the pragmatic method and starting from a pluralistic viewpoint and using inductive logic, we might at some point find unity [10].

I relate my design from iteration 1 to this text in the sense that it strives for unity in the definition of tea by bringing people together with different kinds of tea (many) to create a bigger group of people that agree on the same definition of tea. Through this continuity is created. This relates to using inductive logic from a pluralistic perspective (pragmatic method). The chapter inspired me to look further into the differences between the teas and why we call it all tea, which is one name.

My last iteration was very focused on truth and the definition of tea. I stripped the design of its coasters and changed the starting question “What is tea?” to “How to make tea?”, as I expected to find more practical differences between teas when looking at its process.

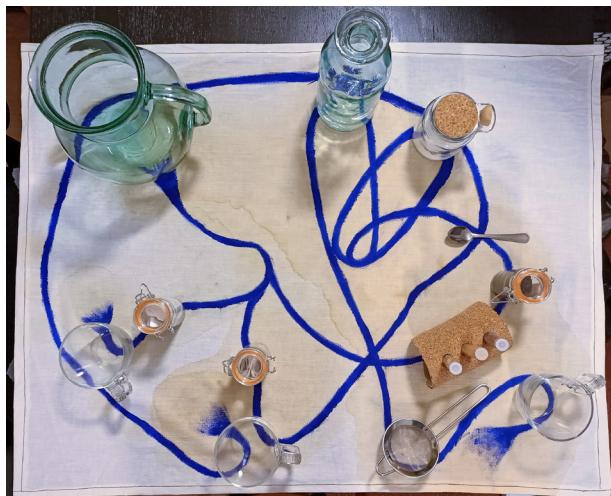


Figure 3: The design, showing paths and stains.

I found differences in time, tools, order of steps, ingredients, taste, waste and origin. Then I wondered whether it mattered that despite the practical differences, it was all called tea. No: In the end, it is about experiencing the tea, not talking about it. Yes: Calling all of it tea implies that there are no practical differences. Different names would allow for smoother communication. E.g., when people want to drink tea together, you need to explain which tea you mean, possibly something that they were not prepared for.

These thoughts motivated me to make the practical difference explicit in this iteration and to use them to name the different teas in the form of labels. I decided to use the tea waste (the tea leaves etc. after use) to colour a tablecloth to mark different teas with colour. This was influenced by my personal belief that waste is not useless.

I designed a tablecloth showing the different teas, but simultaneously showing how they originate from water and are all leaving stains (Figure 3). Furthermore, labels were added with the stain colour and path to the jars with the different teas (Figure 4). After evaluation, this was meaningless, as the label represented a process, not one kind of tea.

This design allowed for people to drink all kinds of tea together and to get insight in what the differences are between the teas.



Figure 4: The labels displaying practical differences.

The practical differences are made explicit by:

- Showing the ingredients that are in a tea (already explicit in the previous design).
- Showing different paths (order of actions) for making the tea.
- Showing the required tools (already explicit in the previous design).
- Showing the colours of the stains that are made with the waste of the tea.
- By drinking the tea, the taste becomes explicit (this was already included in the previous design).

To use the design, people can use put the cloth on the table and place the ingredients on the path. Then people can select what path they want to follow to see what tea they want to drink. People can make the tea as described in iteration 1 and follow the path. After making the tea, the tea waste can be left on the tablecloth to emphasize the stain of the chosen path (Figure 5).



Figure 5: Letting the tea waste emphasize the stain.

Iteration 3: Pragmatism and Humanism

In the chapter on Pragmatism and Humanism, James returns to the concept of how truth is formed and states the impact of our human view on reality [2]. Schiller's humanism is explained, stating that our truths are man-made products. The world is unfinished and we have the responsibility to shape it [4]. Furthermore, reality is defined. It consists of sensations, the relation between them and their copies in our mind, and our previous truths [5]. We, humans, have sensations and by what we (unconsciously) select to perceive from them and by what we call and do with them, we add to the world. Only the latter can be called true or not [5]. This is due to the fact that all our perceptions are always humanised [6]. Therefore, according to pragmatism, there is no practical difference between how we perceive the world/reality and the world/reality itself, as we cannot escape our human glasses.

This chapter made me consider the effects of our previous truths on our ability to be creative and that creativity is maybe just a matter of perspective, as a new idea for one person can be an old idea for someone else. We cannot escape our own perspective, but can we make them explicit to learn from one another and to be inspired? The responsibility to add to reality made me reconsider how I want my design for a tea set to shape reality. This resulted in giving more room for influence from my vision in the design.

Taking my own findings from the chapter seriously, I tested my design from iteration 2 in combination with an unstructured interview. The main useful insights were:

- Use of a context where people can use the playfulness of spilling to lighten the mood in a conversation.
- Desire to draw the tea paths yourself and collaborate in that.
- Desire to influence the stains by working with wax led to the idea to use the batik technique to prevent certain parts to be coloured by the stains.

These results in combination with the question of whether it was possible to make your own route led to the next design (Figure 6):

A tablecloth to spill on. On one side there are tools and on the other side, there are ingredients. These can largely be replaced by similar ingredients or tools. Only the crayons, beeswax and cups for the beeswax are essential. On the bottom of the tablecloth, the steps to take are mentioned. The crayons are in many different colours, giving people the opportunity to distinguish their paths.

The design can be used by following these steps:

1. Everyone gathers the necessary tools and ingredients for making tea. Furthermore, everyone picks a crayon and adds some beeswax to their metal cup.
2. All the ingredients are placed in a way that everyone is able to draw their tea path to their liking. This can require some discussion (Figure 7).
3. Everyone draws their tea path with their crayon (Figure 8).
4. The required amount of water is added to the pan and the heat is turned on. The metal cups with wax are then placed in the water with the handle over the pan's edge, in order to melt the beeswax au bain marie (Figure 9).
5. The melted beeswax is taken and spilt to the users' liking over their paths on the tablecloth (Figure 10).
6. The tea is made according to everyone's path and as described in iteration 1.
7. The users can now drink tea and use their tea waste (e.g. teabag) to spill the tea on the cloth and be playful. The places where the beeswax was spilt earlier will remain uncoloured (Figure 10).
8. When everything has dried, the beeswax can be scraped off and ironed away with paper towels, leaving an expressive tablecloth (Figure 11).

The design's purpose is to allow for sharing, learning, creativity and collaboration in the teammaking process to let people get to know one another in a setting that is known (drinking tea is something in many cultures) and unknown (drinking tea with the paths and the spilling starts with my design) for them. This allows for open-mindedness, with the goal of people respecting and accepting one another more easily, eventually resulting in an equal and inclusive group atmosphere. (There is no right or wrong way to make tea?)

To enlarge my insight into the design, I tested it with my family. This is not the intended context, so nothing can be said about the effect the design has on people's feelings of being included. However, it became clear that the story of how the design should be used definitely requires extensive explanation and maybe even a facilitator (which I was in this test). There is also a lot of freedom in how people do things, which can result in people feeling uncomfortable as they block. This would be the opposite of the desired effect, showing the importance of the designer thoroughly developing their design before exposing the world to it. In contrast, people can take freedom as a sign to go wild. (One participant started swinging around a used teabag and spilt it on another participant.) Furthermore, the act of moving a part in the drawing process can create unmatched paths and disputes over the location of an ingredient. This led to finding a solution together, which resulted in a larger coloured area in which the ingredient was placed (Figure 12). It is questionable whether these risks for dispute are constructive. Nevertheless, the participants expressed a large amount of joy in the process.



Figure 12: Compromise in the location of an ingredient in paths during the usertest.

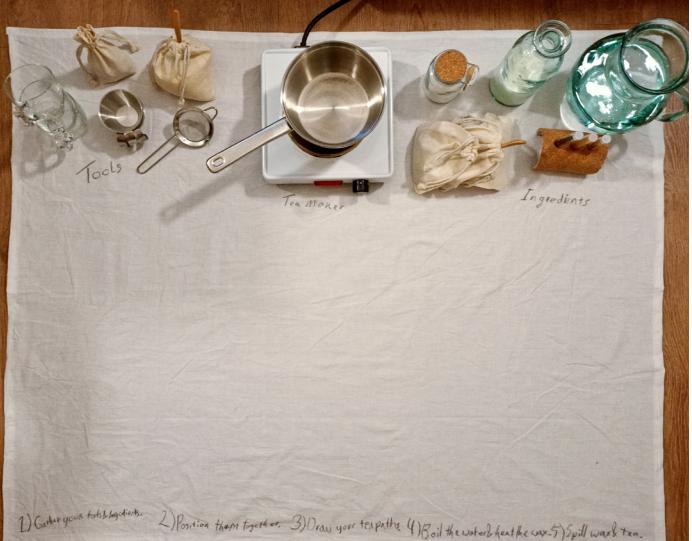


Figure 9: Melting the beeswax.



Figure 6: The design before use.



Figure 8: Drawing the tea paths.



Figure 10: Spilling the wax and tea.



2) Position them together. 3) Draw your teardrop. 4) Fold the watercolor the wrong way. 5) Spill water on tea.

DISCUSSION

This discussion critically reflects on certain aspects of the designs and the process. In this process I kept on adding and adding to a concept, which in the end maybe resulted in an unexpected togetherness of elements. This can be very interesting, but it can also lose its intuitiveness in the use.

For the first iteration, I took the coupling of my design to the chapter very literally, resulting in the concept of a personal tea truth. When actually taking a pragmatic attitude, one can question whether it makes a practical difference to call something your personal tea truth. Maybe it can illustrate the diversity and through that make people aware of their differences, but is that functional and desired? Furthermore, saying something is your truth implies that you have reached the end of your search for ‘tea truth’, which is not according to the pragmatic attitude. However, by sharing how you normally make tea and seeing how others do this, inductive logic can be applied to define tea together. With your normal tea as a starting point, you can break the hypothesis that only that is tea when experiencing that there are more kinds of tea by making them together. Practise tea. This is a step in the direction of going from many hypotheses amongst people that do not cohere towards one that is shared (relating to the One and the Many).

Furthermore, the coasters suggest that the design is meant to be used for one person, as the names differ per person and when drinking tea together, people probably do not choose to drink “not my cup of tea”. The initial reason why they were created, was to show different perspectives that people have on certain teas, however, after evaluation, this clashed with the initial goal of the design, which was drinking tea together.

Additionally, the process of making all teas in one pot is not perfectly inclusive and equal, as the tea made in the beginning is finished earlier than the chai. This makes the moments that tea is consumed out of sync. Also, the possibility of drinking another cup of tea is not an option. However, this last issue could easily be solved by replacing the cups with teapots.

For the second iteration, I did not adapt my design drastically to make it fit with the subject of the One and the Many. This chapter’s content is easily used

by playing with many elements that build up to one concept. I did this visually by making all the different tea paths into one line, in an attempt to keep the chapter’s content close to the design. However, this resulted in a more confusing design. Nevertheless, the idea to create unity in the definition of tea by practising many teas fitted the topic. It appeared to be difficult to depict these more abstract ideas about the use of a design in a visual manner. Next to that, the already present map with the tea paths will prove to be inconvenient to communicate the kind of tea desired, as it is meaningless without the ingredients present.

Reflecting on the last version of the design (in the third iteration), it is very questionable whether the combination of elements is actually helpful. This became clear after the last user test. If it becomes so complex to drink a cup of tea together, this design might actually not be that valuable, as there are probably many other ways in which its goals beyond drinking tea itself can be achieved. However, to get a proper understanding of its value, more testing and iterations are required. If the design were to make a practical difference in the world, it would probably be useful in a future where we live in an even more culturally diverse society. In this situation, it could help bridge gaps between people and support them to get to know one another.

The final iteration did not try to implement James’s chapter that literally anymore. I think this is due to a combination of the following:

- The design was already in a further developed stage, making it already more grounded. Especially due to the fact that the final chapter contained some references to the earlier chapters which the design had already implemented. This also relates to the fact that I got a better overall understanding of pragmatism.
- As a designer, I was inspired to take my own vision of how I want to transform the world more seriously.
- I started to collect more feedback through user testing. Before doing that, there was mainly an input dialogue between me as a designer and James as a philosopher. By adding more perspectives, the gravity of one perspective reduces.

By intertwining the design process with pragmatism I became aware of my responsibility as a designer, the importance of the design being able to tell a story, and how these stories can be interpreted differently due to the differences in our truths.

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