from the now to the next

THE
MINIMALIST

Lens On Practice
David Martens

discover

define

develop

deliver

brief

How might I learn from the relationship we have with cheese to reimagine plant based food experiences for the future?

With a growing sensibility around animal products in recent years in Europe, the demand and offer for vegan chees has been growing. Different than meat, the process of making cheese can contain many parameters and can be highly complex which is hard to mimic with plant based ingredients. Desiring to become vegan myself, but also a cheese enthusiast, I find it hard to accept the alternative vegan cheeses. And why is that? What is it about cheese that we love so much? How can I learn from the relationship we have with cheese, by doing qualitative research and taking a speculative and experimental design approach in order to reimagine the animal product in a future plant based planet?

experience design?
speculative design?
experimental approach?

Mangez-vous aussi du fromage seul, par vous-même?

Vous dépenser de l'argent au fromage?

Avez-vous deja goute du fromage végétalien? Qu'est-ce que tu en penses du fromage vegetalien?

CHEESESELLERS

Combien de temps travaillez-vous déjà avec du fromage?

Savez-vous beaucoup des processus de la majorité des fromages?

Et vous pensez que juste le processus de la fabrication de fromage est important pour do

Es qu'il y a des clients qui posent des question du processus de fabrication du fromage?

Vendez vous un fromage avec une manière spécifique de manger, ou une tradition spécifi

Quelle est ta tradition préférée du fromage?

Qu'est-ce c'est un bon fromage à partager avec d'autres personnes?

Es que il y a quelque chose comme un fromage social?

Quel est l'environnement ideal pour consommer ce fromage?

Idéalement, avec quels autres produits ce fromage devrait-il être conso

During an excursion in Paris, I took the opportunity to visit 8 cheeseshops to learn about the customer service and the in-store experience they provide and interviewed four cheesemongers about traditions and rituals based around the product.

field research

I wanted to learn about the process of making cheese, and the traditions and rituals around eating it. To then document these findings and applying it to a fictional world where using animal products is a thing from the past in order to create new plant-based food experiences, inspired by previous cheese experiences.

I also visited vegan shops, to learn
about the branding, packaging and
general communication of the vegan
produce, on top of the general notes
I made about the (sad) in-store
experiences and customer service.
I managed to speak to 3 vegans
about their previous and current
relationship to cheese and its
vegan alternative.

As a last stop during the trip in Paris,
I visited a shop called Jay and Joy,
which is an artisan "plant speciality"
producer, using cheese processes to
establish an artisan vegan substitute.
I interviewed them about the craft
and characteristics of the plant-
based produce to compare and
contrast the two.

In order to fully understand vegan cheese as a material, I tried to create my own. With cashews, walnuts or potato as the base ingredient, I iterated multiple times to make a delicious product. With new flavours asking for more exposure to become accepted and liked, my cheesy tastebuds were missing the real deal already.

To understand the people that are eating cheese and vegan cheese, I looked into research about motives, health and sociodemographic profiles of vegans and vegetarians. I also looked into future trends and forecasts concerning food and gathered projections of meat production in the near and far future. To see how previous unusual products made it to the market, I searched for case studies like quorn and the betty croquer egg.
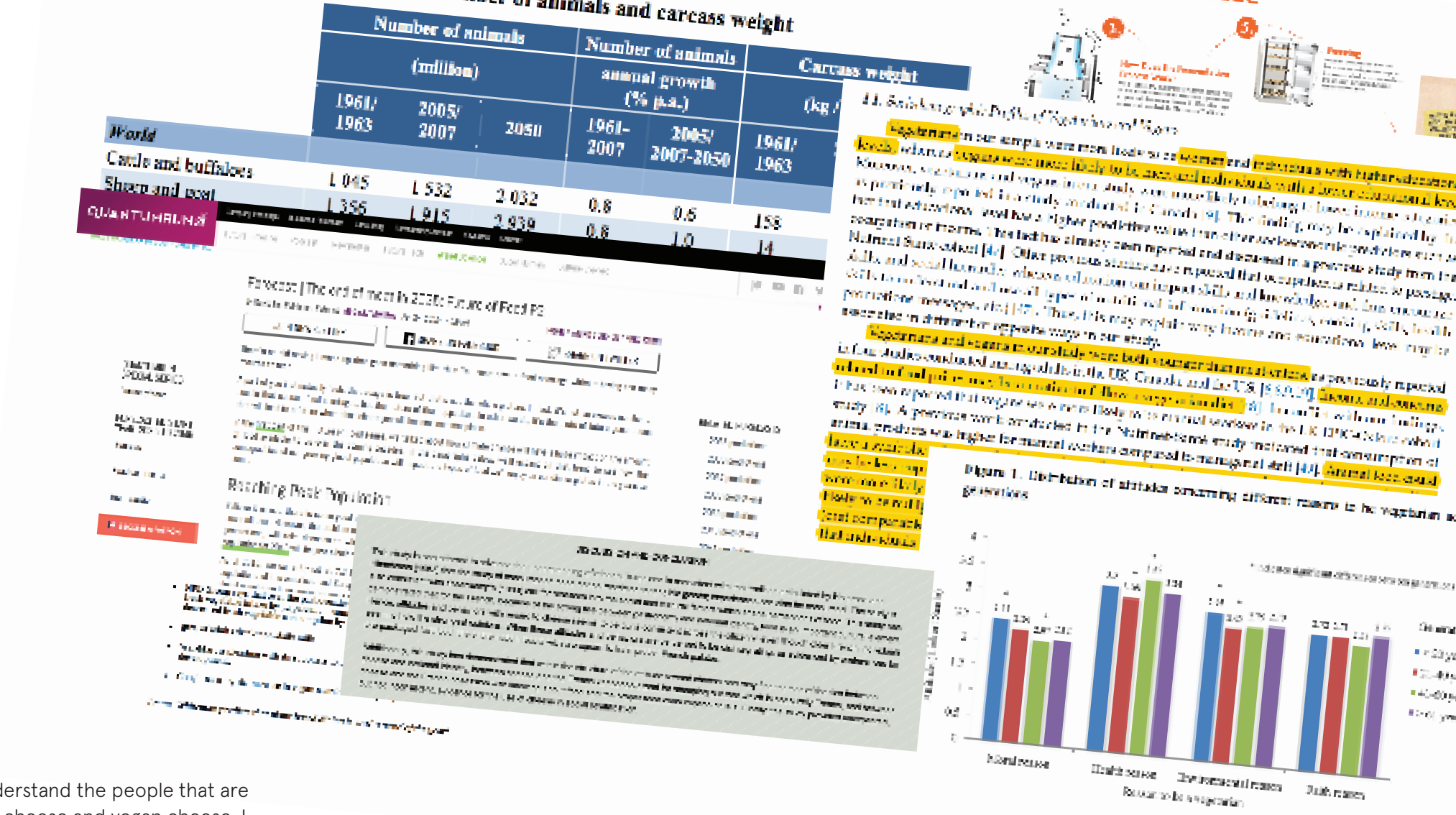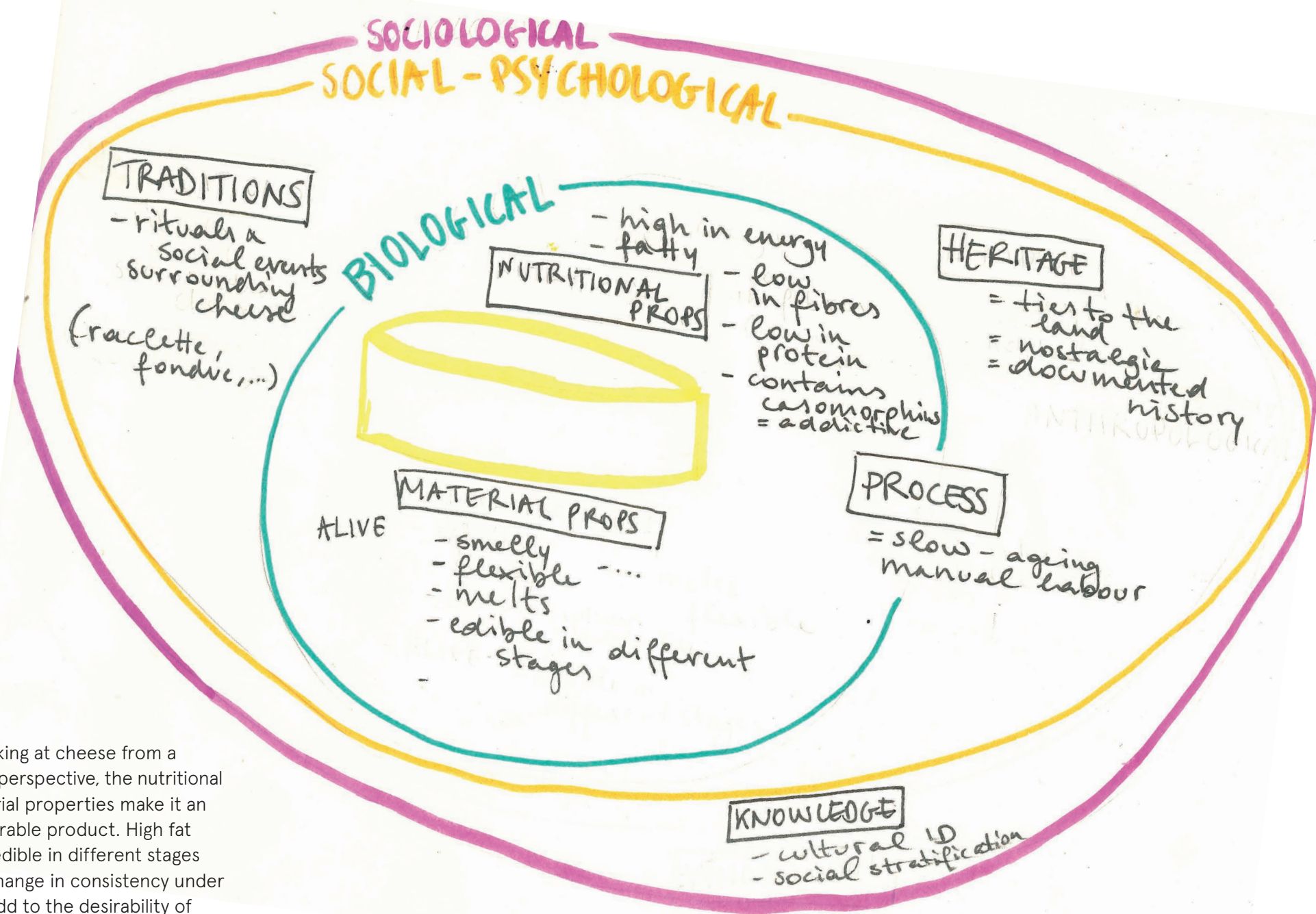
data organisation

When I hung everything on the wall, I could get an overview of what exactly I was investigating and different design directions became visible. With post–it notes, I noted down different problems, insights and links surrounding the information I collected. Through my research and material exploration, I came to my first grand insight concerning cheese and my first design challenge.
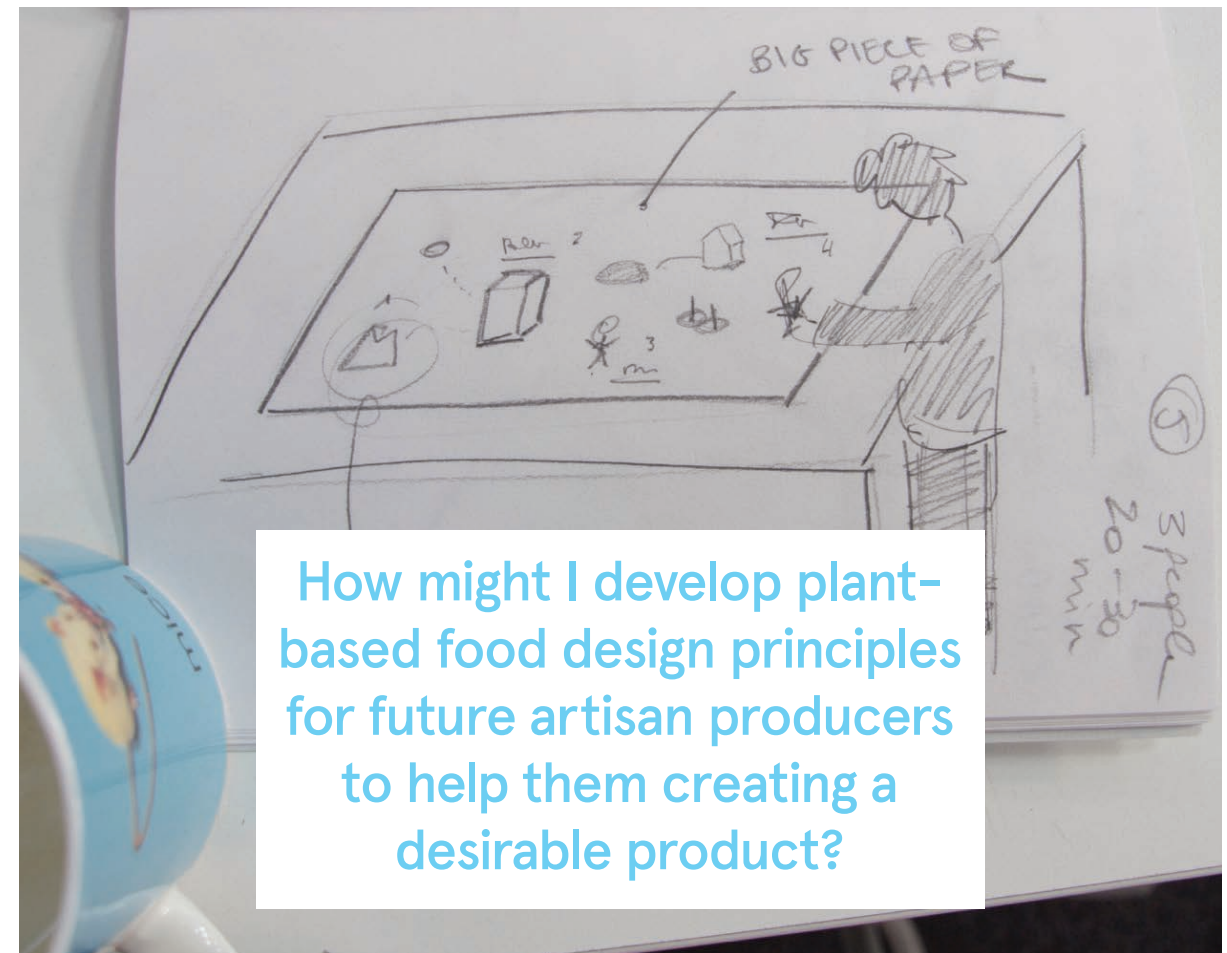
SOCIOLOGICAL
SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL
BIOLOGICAL

TRADITIONS
- rituals a social events surrounding cheese
(raclette, fondue,...)

NUTRITIONAL PROPS
- high in energy
- fatty
- low in fibres
- low in protein
- contains casomorphins = addictive

HERITAGE
= ties to the land
= nostalgia
= documented history

MATERIAL PROPS
ALIVE
- smelly ...
- flexible
- melts
- edible in different stages
-

PROCESS
= slow - ageing
manual labour

KNOWLEDGE
- cultural ID
- social stratification

insight

When looking at cheese from a biological perspective, the nutritional and material properties make it an easily desirable product. High fat content, edible in different stages and the change in consistency under heat, all add to the desirability of cheese. The traditions and rituals based around it, are built on these nutritional and material properties, and are therefore honest to the product. In creating these traditions, there is one defining factor and that is time. I couldn't just copy cheese experiences and paste it to a plant-based product with different properties.

new design challenge

Although I wasn't sure what I wanted to find out during the workshop, I was motivated to try it out. I developed different exercises and scenarios that could be used during the session and I also searched for engagement artefacts. But when I wanted to do the workshop, I noticed that I couldn't get a format together that would work, because I missed a proper research question and end goal.

I had to reassess my design challenge and looked back at the wall to find a new focus. Thinking about my first deliverables, I kept in mind the design principles I wanted to create. But instead of focusing on experiences, could I make (sustainable) fooddesign principles to help artisan producers creating a desirable product? Without access to my target group, I looked into different ways of establishing these principles and planned to do a workshop to get to know people's vision on the future of food.

How might I develop plant-based food design principles for future artisan producers to help them creating a desirable product?
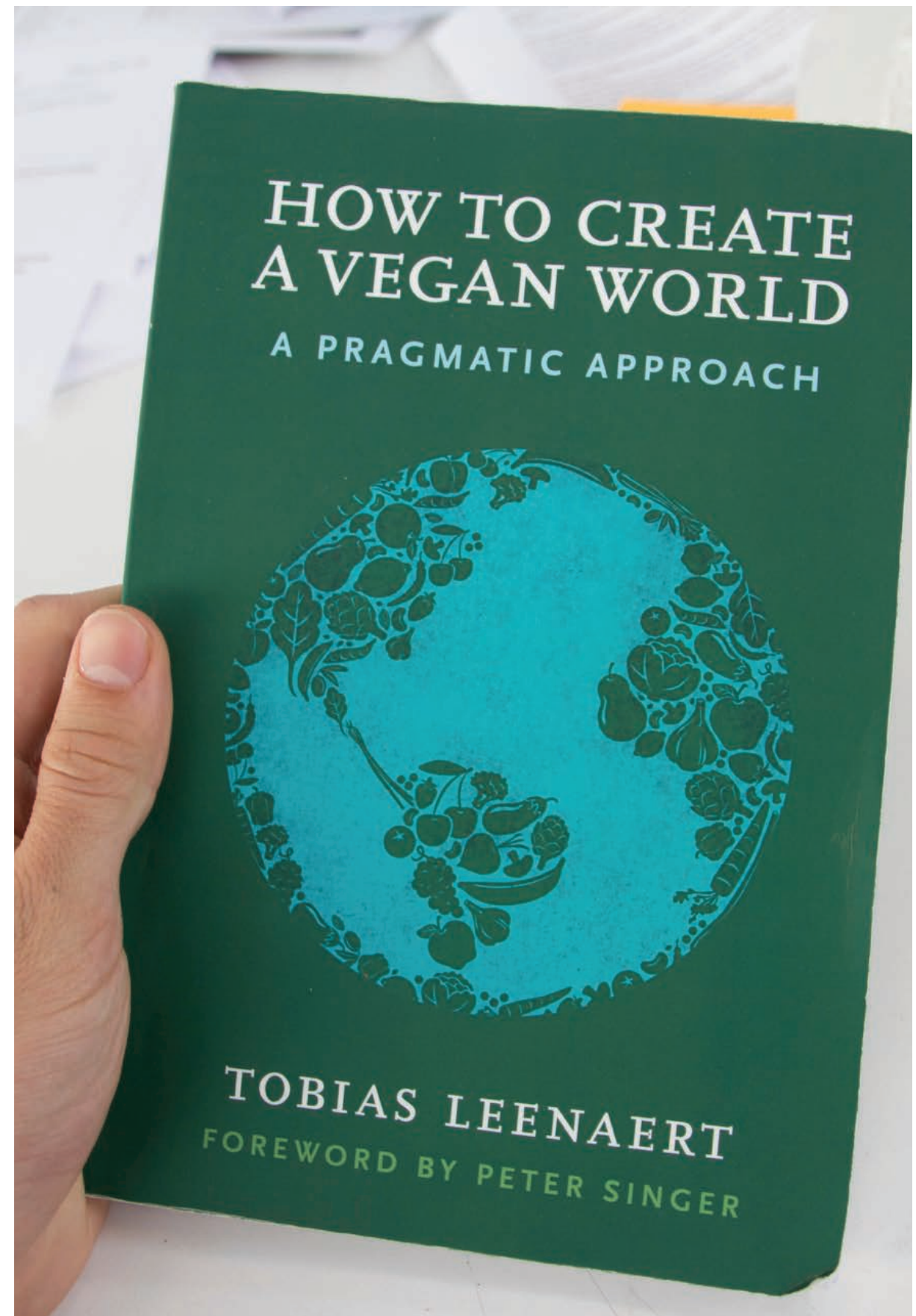
nice guy

When I was back in Belgium during the holidays, I received a contact from someone who was supposedly making his own vegan cheese for a while already. So I decided to pay him a visit. He guided me step by step through the full process of making vegan cheeses with fungi coating. Besides that, we had fruitful conversations about the vegan movement and vegan cuisine. I also pitched my ideas to him to which he kindly pointed out many problems.When I left, he gave me a bunch of books for me to read that I could borrow.

nice book

'How to create a vegan world – a pragmatic approach' by Tobias Leenaert was an important source for my project. Reading this gave me new energy and made me see the value in the topic and my work. This book outlines different strategies, objectives and communication of vegan and animal rights movements and looks at change in the long run. The author ends the book with a plea towards activists to go hand in hand with commercial business which informed my final design challenge.

HOW TO CREATE A VEGAN WORLD

A PRAGMATIC APPROACH

TOBIAS LEENAERT

FOREWORD BY PETER SINGER

final design challenge

How might I create a tool to collaboratively explore the future of plant-based products?

With the idea of establishing 'sustainable', 'empathic' or 'mindful' design principles, I felt I got too much in the classical preacher narrative of how and why people should do this or that. I believed that a big part of people's resistence towards a plant-based diet, is the lack of imagination. So I decided to focus on making a tool for fast idea generation, for plant-based food concepts, for designers or food enthusiasts, in a world where the usage of animal products is a thing from the past.

speculative design?
collaborative design?
toolmaker?

futures research

As I was completely new to thinking about futures, I needed to do my research. I started of by browsing the web, gathering food trend reports and future forecasts. I looked into different co-design tools and speculative design methodolgy. But it was mainly when talking to other students who had experience within this design field, that I was directed to the right sources. During a valuable feedback session with the tutor, the basic layout for the tool was given form. It would consist out of future people (actors), future scenarios and use cases. Without much experience in co-design toolmaking, I started off with pen and paper, away from the computer.

EXTRAPOLATION FACTORY
OPERATOR'S MANUAL
未来推演工厂
操作者的执行手册
ELLIOTT P. MONTGOMERY AND CHRIS WOEBKEN
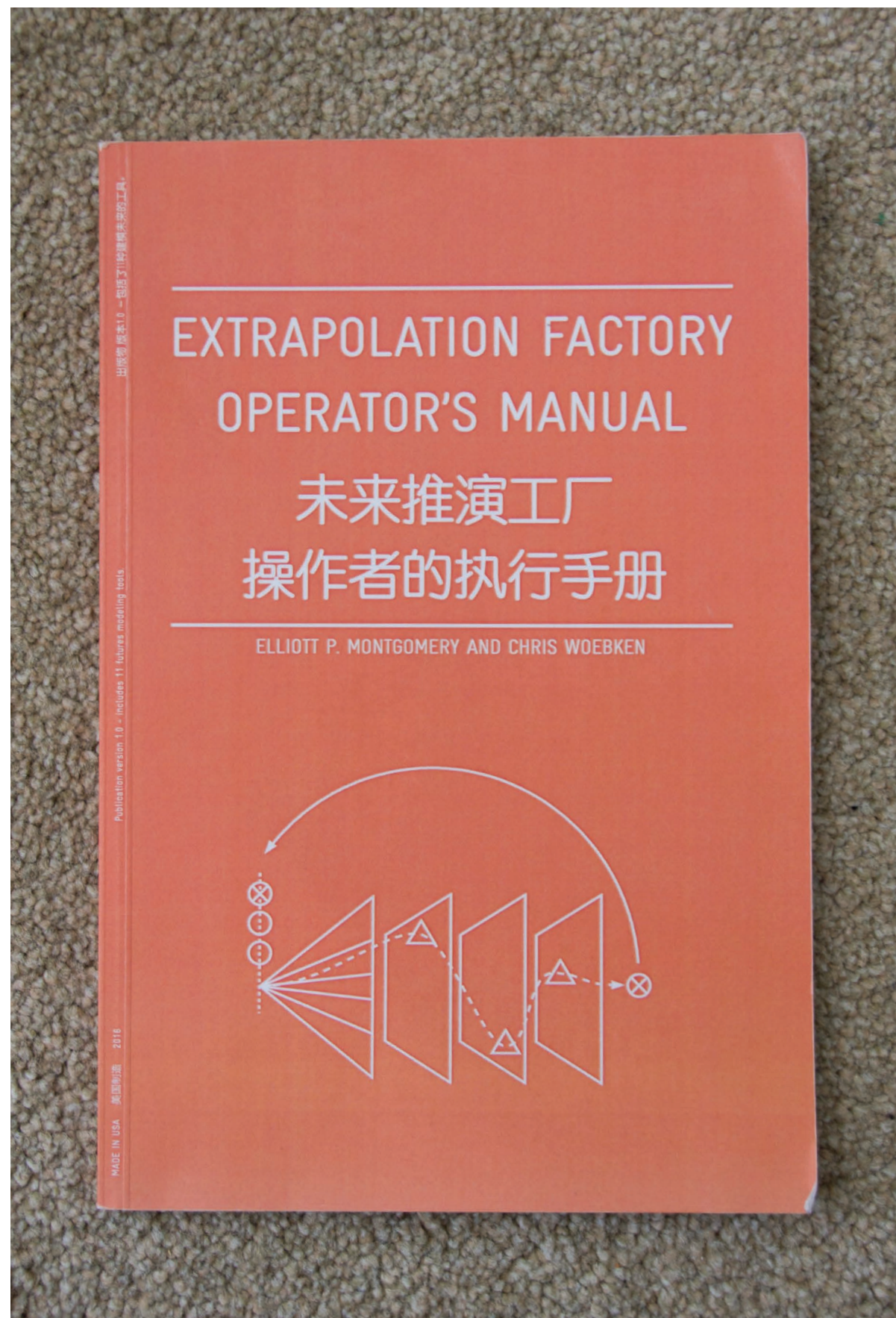
prototyping

I started the prototyping by drawing out different scenarios where you can find animal products today such as the freezers at iceland, the ice cream store, the kebab or the barbeque. These spaces informed my first series of actors for which I used food consumer-type research to create a variety of relationships to food among them. When my first prototypes were ready, I asked fellow students to come by, listen to my project and give me some feedback.
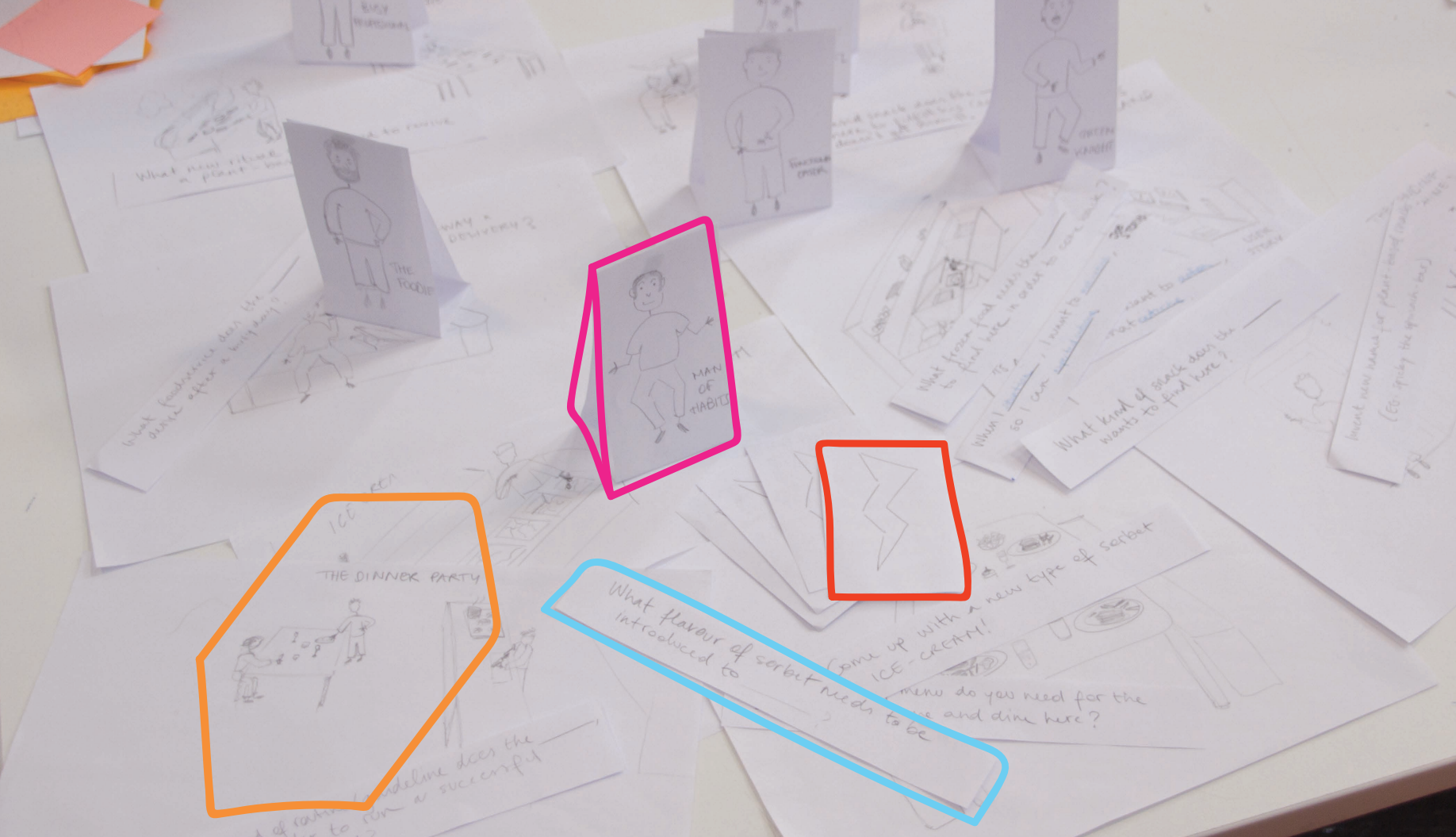
As I was still figuring it out how the tool could work and what exactly the outcome should be, I developed different elements to make the tool work on itself. I tried to make it into a game by adding challenges and event cards and tested various formats to make it a fun and entertaining experience. But although this was helping me to understand what I was building, I was making it overly complex as making a game would require a new brief and building blocks different from the ones I had.
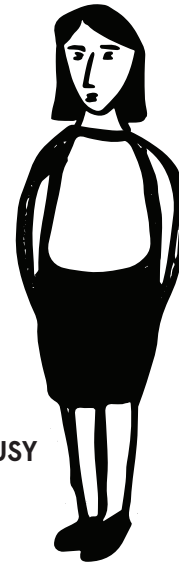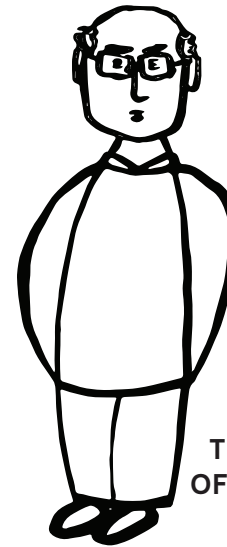
actors

THE PICKY EATER
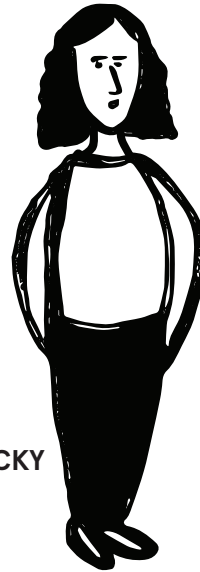
**THE BUSY PRO**

THE MAN OF HABITS
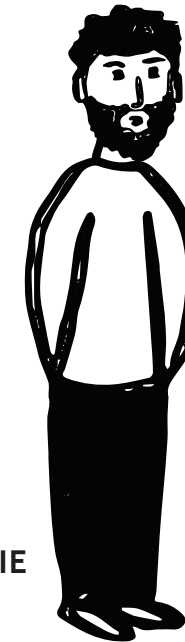
THE MINIMALIST
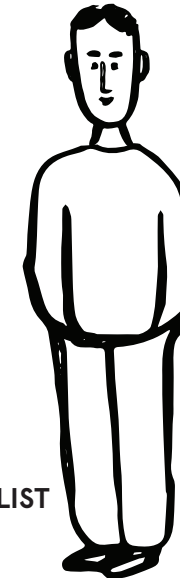
THE OLD SOCIAL
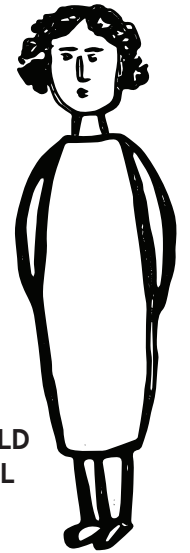
I ended up creating 8 future actors, all with a unique relationship to food. Out of the feedback I got from fellow students, the prototypes I had built were not "wild" enough to truely trigger a futuristic image. Therefore, I added little 'hints to the future' in each of the actors narrative. The illustrations are kept simple and neutral so that users could colour the clothing themselves. The title summarises the relationship to food the character has and on the back side, a narrative describes an example of such an actor.
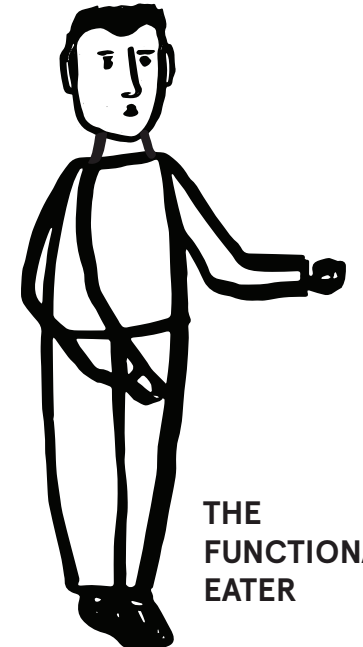
THE DEAL SEARCHER
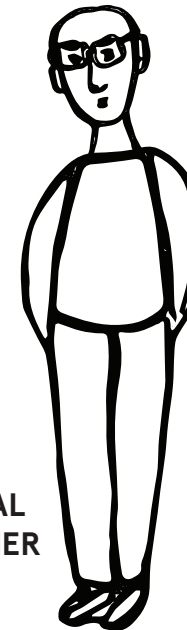
THE FOODIE

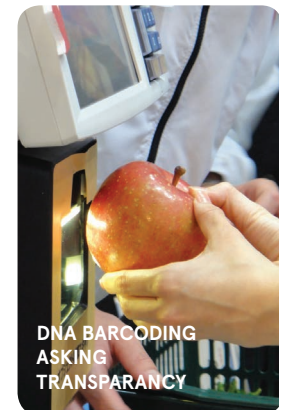**THE FUNCTIONAL EATER**

The final scenes, I made much more
minimal. I tried to describe them with
a minimum amount of elements, just
enough to communicate the space.
I chose six scenes which are highly
likely to still be popular in the near
future and could serve as retail
spaces or spaces of consumption.
By providing simple line drawings, the
user is invited to colour the spaces
themselves.
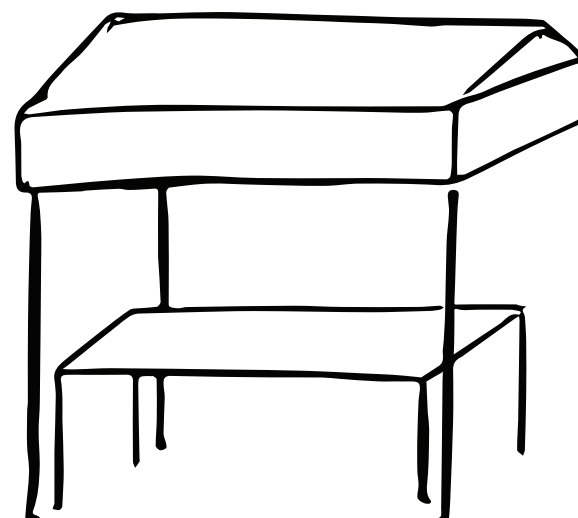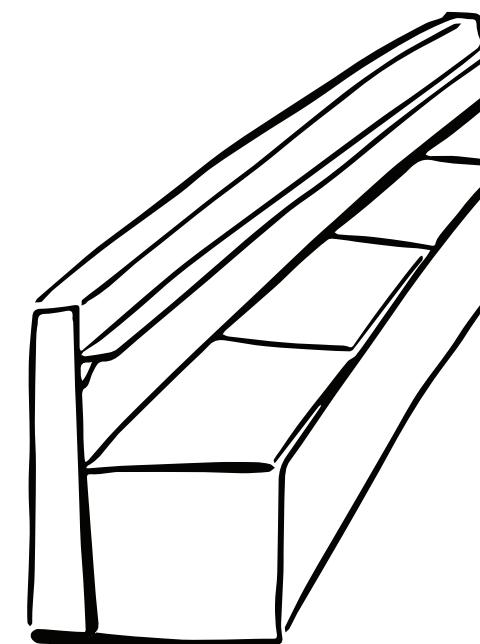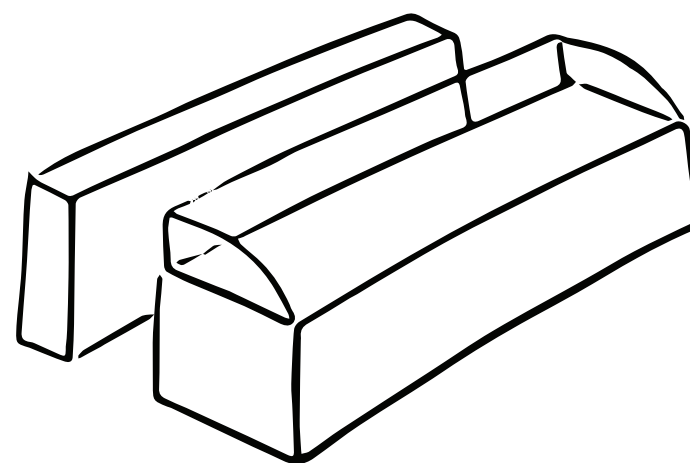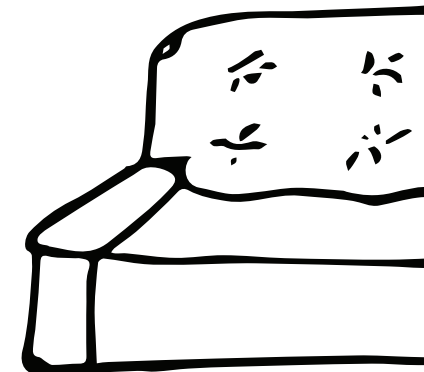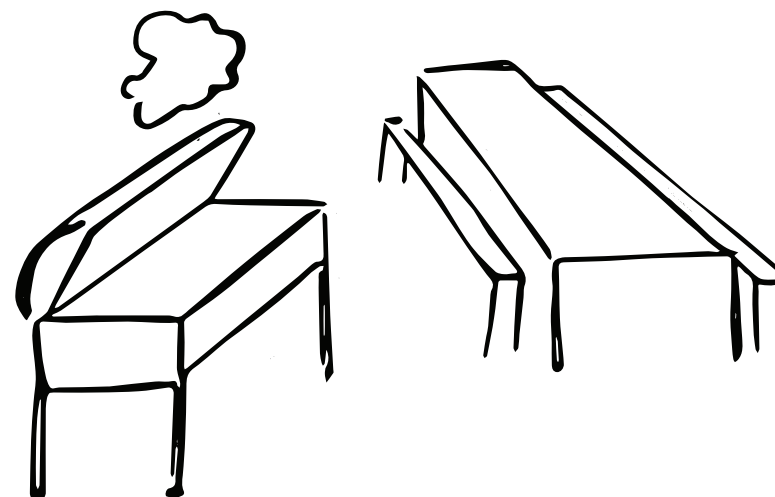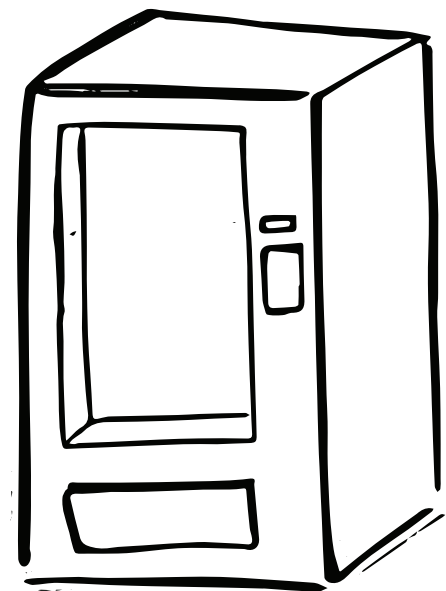
phenomena

I took inspiration from STEP-analysis methodology and from the work of a fellow student to create phenomena that are taking place in this future world. Ranging from technological artefacts to new social experiences, the phenomena are gathered out of data from forecasts and wishful thinking and serve as inspiration for users and to help shape an image of the future.

SMART STEAMING TECHNOLOGY

FUNGI PACKAGING

TABLETOP INSECT FARMING

PERSONAL CHEFS

WOODEN SPOONS

REVIVAL OF THE PRESSURE COOKER

BREAKFAST IN A BOTTLE

HYDROPONIC FARMING

FLAVOUR TRAINING CLASSES

SYNTHETIC FOODS

NEW DINING EXPERIENCES

DNA BARCODING ASKING TRANSPARANCY

PROBIOTIC BACTERIA INFLUENCES COGNITION

HEALTHY INSTITUTIONAL EATING

PERSONALISED SUPER-FOOD READY MEALS

OBJECTS AGAINST OVEREATING

print

As part of the concept, the tool should be easy to reproduce so everything needs to be able to printed out in A4 by a standard printer. The graphic style does not contain colour so it can accomodate a black and white print. All elements can be printed on 8 A4 sheets, designed to be easy to cut out. Empty scenes and actors are also provided for users to make their own.

THE PICKY EATER
THE BUSY PRO
THE MAN OF HABITS
THE MINIMALIST
THE OLD SOCIAL

THE DEAL SEARCHER
THE FOODIE
THE FUNCTIONAL EATER

THE BARBECUE
THE COUCH

THE FREEZERS AT ICELAND
THE PLANT-BASED CREAMERY

THE MARKETSTAND
THE VENDING MACHINE

FLAVOUR TRAINING CLASSES
SYNTHETIC FOODS
NEW DINING EXPERIENCES
DNA BARCODING ASKING TRANSPARANCY
PROBIOTIC BACTERIA INFLUENCES DONATION
HEALTHY INSTITUTIONAL EATING
PERSONALISED SUPER FOOD READY MEALS
OBJECTS AGAINST OVEREATING

SMART STEAMING TECHNOLOGY
FUNGI PACKAGING
TABLETOP INSECT FARMING
PERSONAL CHEFS
REVIVAL OF THE PRESSURE COOKER
BREAKFAST IN A BOTTLE
WOODEN SPOONS
HYDROPONIC FARMING

workshop

I wanted to test the tool during a workshop as a part of a broader context. To incorporate elements of my first research phase, I organised the workshop in two stages. The first stage – the now – carried the research question: How do people brand taste? Expec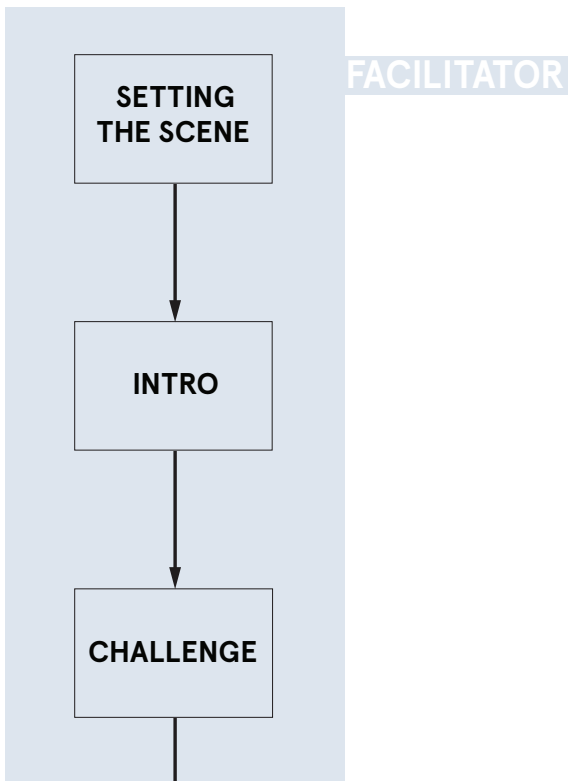ting a physical branded model of a product as an outcome. As input, the participants received a spoon of homemade vegan produce that they needed to taste blind. They subsequently had to answer questions about the use, the form and the shape of what they have tasted, which would provide the context, model and branding of the end product.

FACILITATOR

STAGE ONE

PARTICIPANTS

INTRO

BLIND TASTING

USE → CONTEXT

SHAPE → MODEL → PRODUCT

FORM → BRANDING

FOLLOWING PAPER INSTRUCTIONS

INTERPRETATION AND PHYSICAL MAKING

OUTCOME

SETTING THE SCENE

↓

INTRO

↓

CHALLENGE

↓
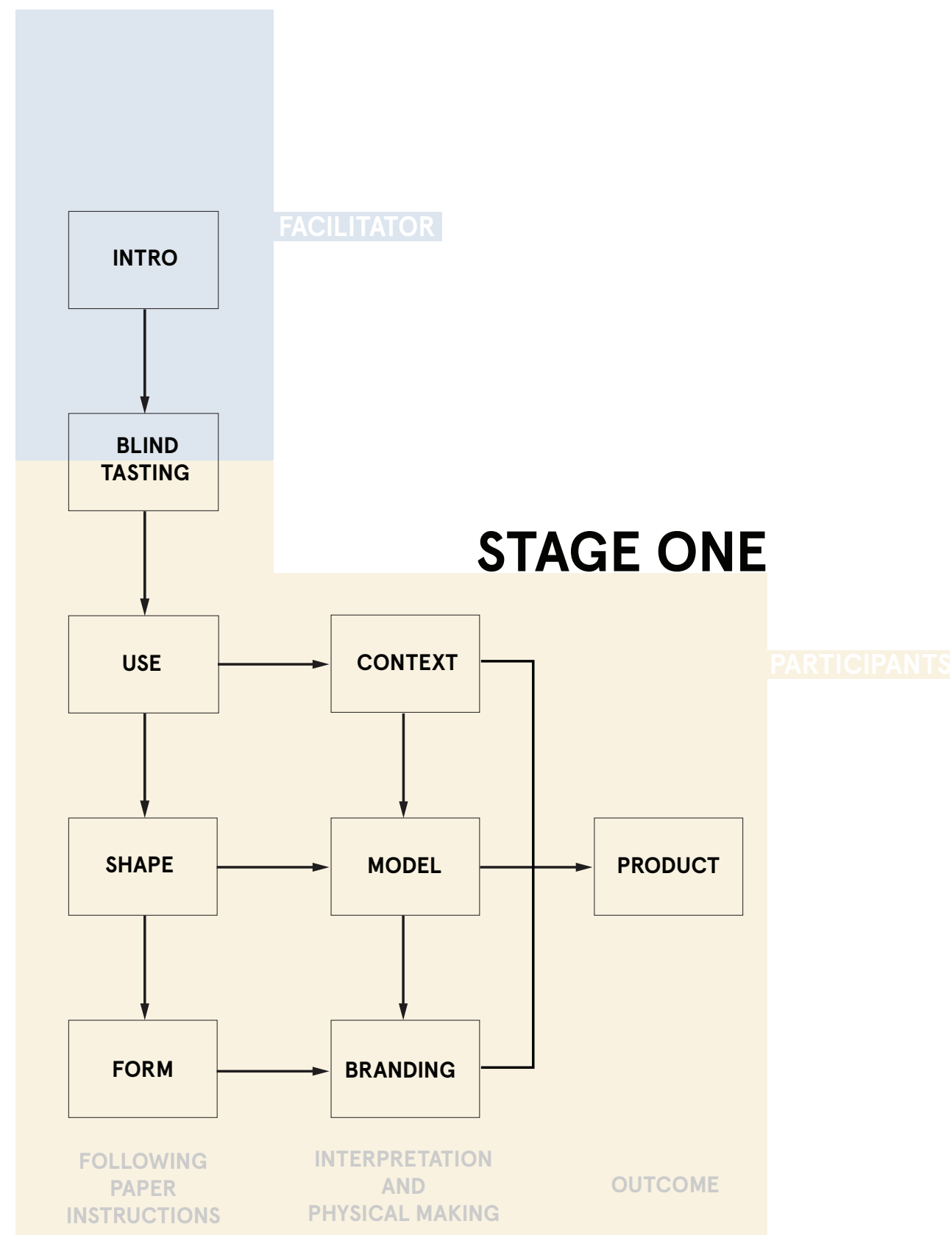
STAGE TWO

In the second stage - the next - the tool was tested. After setting the scene and giving the challenge, the participants could use the actors, scenes and phenomena, to build a story in a short period of time that would inform the physical model, which would then inform the branding and eventually, the final concept.

PHENOMENA → EXTERNAL INFLUENCERS

SCENES → RETAIL SPACE → MOMENT OF USE → MODEL → BRANDING → PRODUCT

ACTORS → TARGET GROUP

PAPER TOOLS   INTERPRETATION   STORY BUILDING   PHYSICAL MAKING   OUTCOME
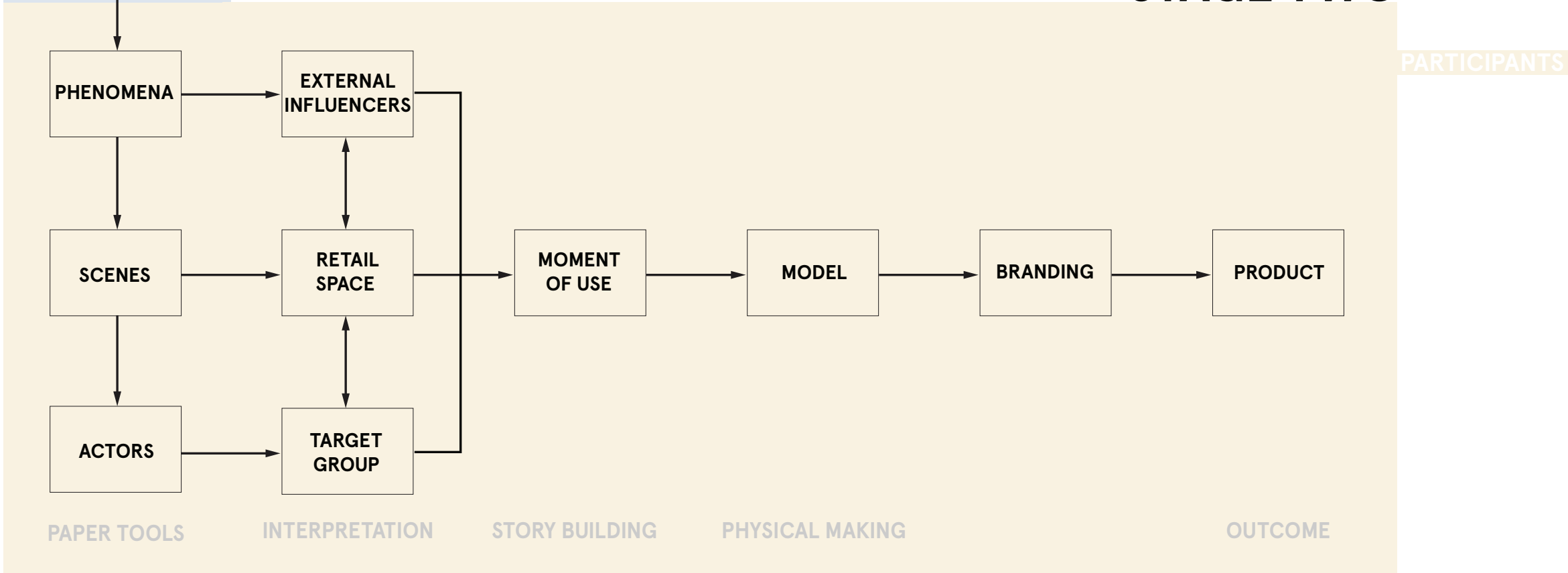
stage one

After spoonfeeding the participants my vegan produce, they had to fill out 3 sets of questions and start with answering the first question of number 1, to then fold the paper over to answer question number two and so on. This part was done individually and as they were following the written commands, I could take a step back as a facilitator and let the participants work in peace. The instructions would ask them to create a physical model with clay and create a packaging with the elements I provided.
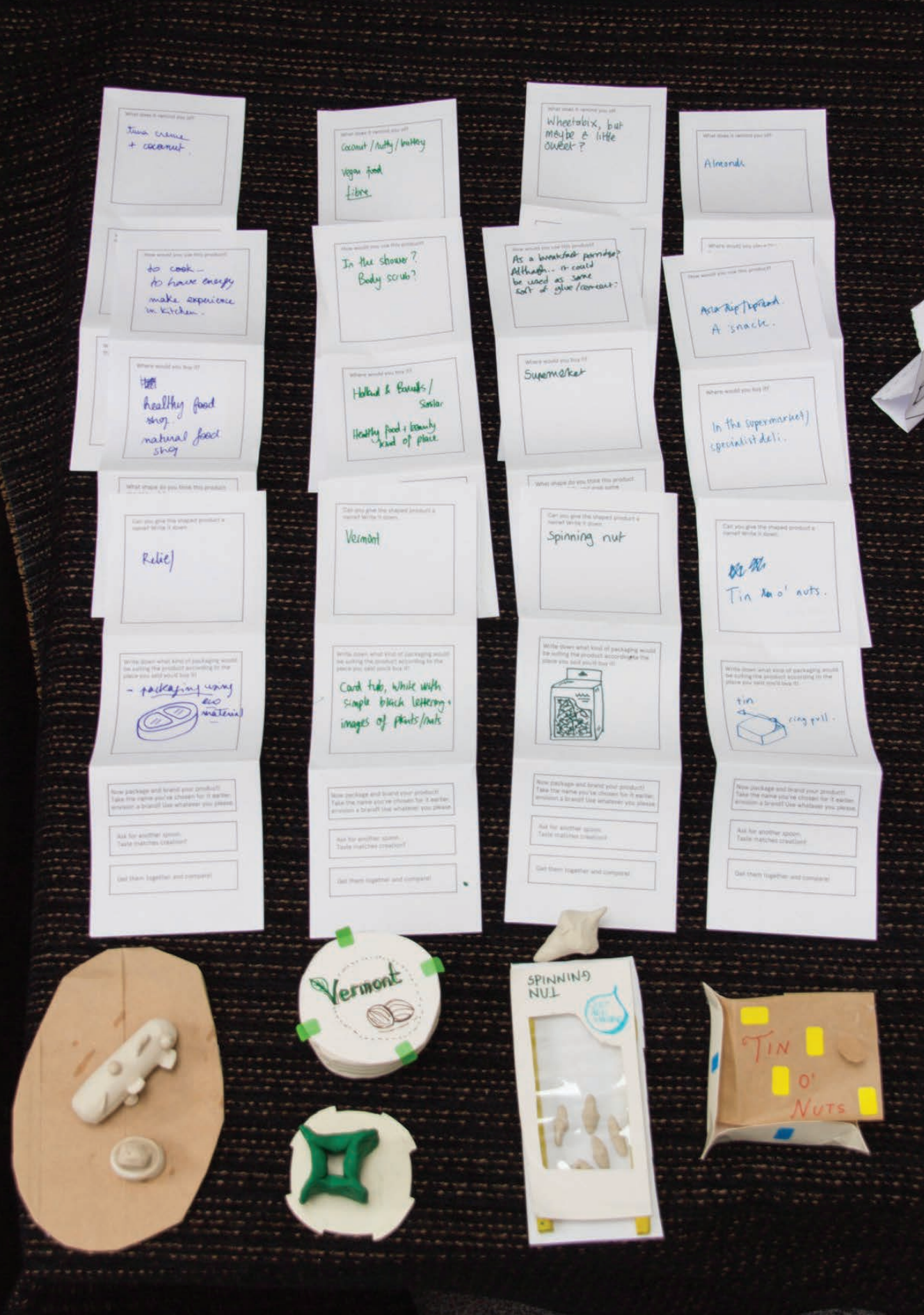
The final outcomes of the participants were all very different, so were the answers on the questions. Although they could all retrace back some of the main ingredients, they interpreted it personally. The feedback I got was "by following a linear structure, where one question builds upon the next, you get pushed into a rabbit hole to which you just start responding." So in that sense, I should try it out without a linear structure but with a general end goal.

And see what happens.

stage two

Setting the scene by reading out fictional news articles made the participants get into the right mindset. I created a fake economist edition from the year 2036 with headlines such as "alternative animal product market drops" and "bush his biofuels are banned" which would help create the context of this fictional future world. I subsequently gave them the challenge and introduced them to the tools. They had 45 minutes time in total and we would come together quickly every 15.
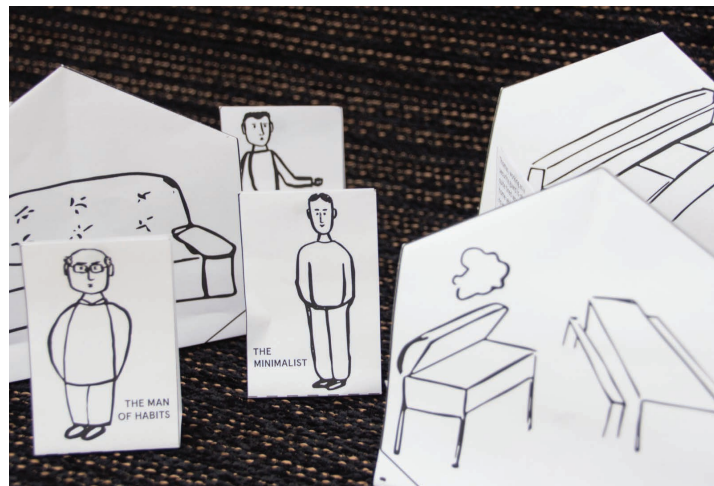
They were working in two teams of two and used the actors, scenes and phenomena to build a scenario, a user story for which they wanted to create their food concept. The modelling and branding were similarly like the previous exercise and feedback I received here is that there could be even more time pressure to stimulate even faster decision making.

One of the outcomes of the workshop was a leaf only boutique salad bar called Arbre + Cactus which brings you tasty leaves from different ecosystems from all over the world. Every kind of leaf is grown in a unique environment with efficient hydroponic farming in the Arbre + Cactus warehouses. You can mix and match your own salad or take home various kinds of leaves seperately in the specially designed organic carry bag.

from the now to the next

So how do we get from the now to the next? Through the physical concepts that are created by using the tool, a conversation can be triggered about what needs to happen in order to get to that future in terms of political, social, economical and technological development. To do that, a contextualisation and reflection tool would be needed to structure and capture a dialogue about collectively building a better future.

I believe that such tools can be a stepping stone to help steer food designers, restaurant owners, activists or bussinesses in the food industry to a new and positive kind of thinking towards a plant-based future. I am still discovering how the tool's structure could be applied to explore other topics and why exactly it can be helpful.

reflection

I think this was a fantastic project where I was allowed to explore various research methods, take on different roles and search for new design directions that I was inspired by but didn't have the chance to try yet. I have learnt so much in the past two weeks, trying to imagine futures and coordinating a workshop was fun and challenging. I noticed that during my individual process, I needed other people to pitch my ideas to as I was trying to involve others at all stages. I took on different lenses during the project but that characterises my broad design education at KISD.

Although I didn't completely figure out yet what the thing I have made is about, I believe I am not the designer who comes with these great concepts, but I want to be the kind of designer in between, getting the right people together and facilitating and driving a collaborative process. And I think creating such tools could be part of it. I see this as a lens I will take in the near future as I am also ready to produce and explore even more. I hope I will keep on working on this project and I am sure I will cherish this learning experience.