

# Communication in ceramic tiles

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## INTRODUCTION (working paper)

I will briefly describe some theory about communication, and the relation to my own practical artistic work. New methods or models will be examined.

## ARILD BERG

I teach in Communication and different visual presentation techniques at Faculty of Product Design. The Program is based on material-oriented product-design, with focus on methods related to materials, production and processes, close connection to industry and sustainability. We question value, identity and ritual in the product. My art education is from the National College of Art and Design in Oslo. I make ceramic tiles for art in architecture.

## BACKGROUND

The research tradition in art and design is different from established academic research. Practical artistic methods meet theoretical methods. The examinations of how these can relate to each other in a constructive way are going on in many research areas.

Today many designers search for how to communicate on an emotional level with an audience or a specific user group. Thus it can be relevant to understand how communicative design relates to the identity in the group. Consumers want to create their unique identity by the things they buy. The interpretation of semiotic and semantic qualities can be ways of understanding the product. To explore the "message from the product" may include viewpoints from a wide cultural context.

Important values can be seen from different positions, such as political, social, ethical, psychological, etc.

Artistic work in a design context has old traditions, what kind of meeting points can be found today in connection to business and industry? In product design today are soft values essential, and values from the art field can contribute to this.

The aim in this project is examine methods and theory to create good communication between people, and to create constructive communicative situations.

The research question is:

*How can ceramic tiles be used as communicative design in relation to the identity of a user group?*

## THEORY

### PRODUCT SEMIOTICS:

Rune Monö introduce a model for analysing communication in products: The semiotics is the study of signs. Semantics is the study of the signs message. Syntax is the study of the signs relations and the way it interacts in compilations of signs. The semantics can be divided into: describing (facts), expressing (properties), exhorting (to reactions) and identifying (e.g. origin).

This model is often used to identify and analyse different qualities in a product.

### MELANCHOLY AND CREATIVITY

Julia Kristeva shows the relation between depression, language and art. She writes: "Melancholy brings us to the strange aspect of *affects*: fear, fright or thrill. The sadness can not be reduced to its verbal or semiotic expressions, and are as all affects, the psychological representation of energetic movements, from outer or inner crisis". Her studies are used in art theory, and can be interesting in the study of creative methods in design, especially when the focus is on identity and emotional or affective user experiences.

## METHODS

There are four empirical studies, and the methods vary according to each practical experiment:

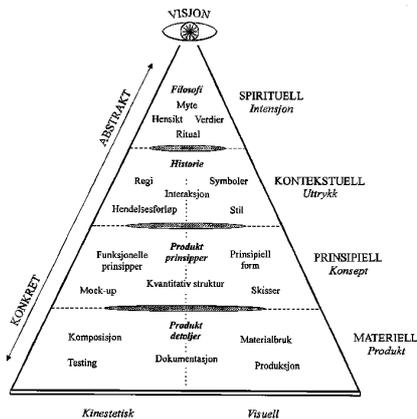
Qualitative methods:

Interviews with the user-group.  
 Observations/ Photo-documentation  
 Practical experiments with composition in the tiles.  
 Practical experiments with tiles in different contexts  
 Judgement by a professional jury.  
 Workshops

Quantitative methods:

Material experiments in tile-making.  
 Material experiments with concrete.

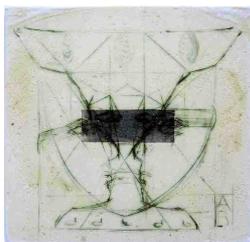
## INNOVATIVE METHOD



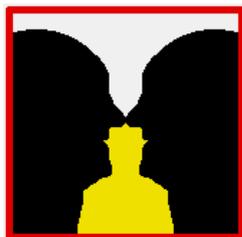
Erik Lerdahl introduces a model for work on different levels of abstraction in the design process: visionary, spiritual, contextual, principle, material. The process can move freely between all levels during the whole process.

## EMPIRICAL STUDIES.

CASE 1: Tiles exhibited in gallery.



Vanitas, tile, 32x32 cm



principle

Three tiles were exhibited in a Oslo-Gallery: Kunstnerforbundet.

In this context the tiles are understood as art works. A reaction from comments and in the newspaper-critics was that they were "simple and beautiful". My intention was to say something about moods, identity and narcissism. This theme was never mentioned in any interpretations. Later the tiles were bought by the Ministry of research and education, and given as a gift to Akershus University College. Today they are part of the schools art collection.

## CASE 2:

Tiles integrated in the architecture in a secondary school.



In progress: concrete architecture

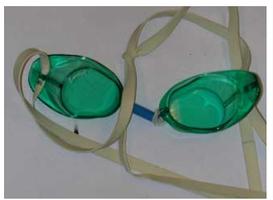
In this project I really wanted to make something that communicated with the users. I wanted that the school should be in a kind of dialogue with the pupils, and not a dominant, public institution. The pupils were invited to bring three things from their home. It should be the everyday-things they considered the most important. Photo-documentation was made of the things, the pupils were interviewed, and they wrote why they brought exactly these things. Later I took some of the objects as motifs on the tiles. Their texts were used as well. Thus I wanted to put in something intimate in a public place. I deliberately chose objects related to the body, to catch some of their energy as teenagers in puberty.



Thing no. 42: Boy, 14 years old:  
 "The shoes I chose because they are the ones I dance in, and because they are very light. Breaking."  
 (He changed "popular" with "light").



Thing no 5: Girl aged 13: "My mascara I ALWAYS keep on me,. I NEVER go anywhere without my mascara kept on me! It is a part of my life! 😊"



Thing no 30: Girl aged 15: "My goggles: because I just love to swim. And then I must use my goggles. I brought them as well because my greatest Idol (Siri Thorstensen) has borrowed them at training and I have therefore had a special relation to them. I have also been swimming since I was 6 years old. And my life is swimming and training."

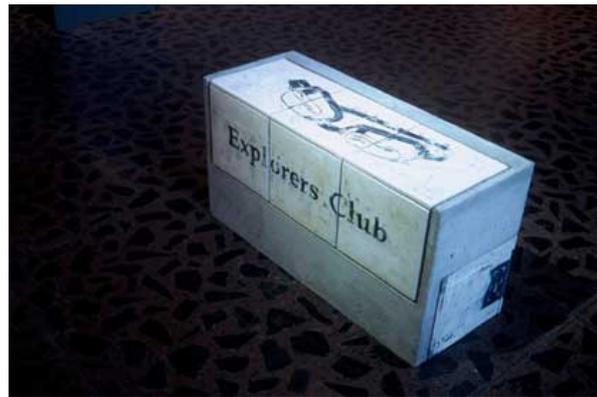


Beside the personal objects as motifs on the tiles, I chose text-fragments from the book Kon-Tiki, written by a local hero and a world famous explorer: Thor Heyerdahl. He went on a dangerous trip, in a little boat, across the ocean, not knew whether he ever would reach his goal. This situation I find as an interesting metaphor for being a teenager moving from child to adult. Text-fragments related to youths were e.g. "Explorers Club, Era of moon safaris, Isolated tribes" etc.

The documentation and registration of the project has been through photos, a catalogue, articles in newspapers and magazines, and in personal visits to the school with dialogues with the pupils and employees. Further I plan to interview some pupils after some time.

### CASE 3.

Co-operation with a clinical therapist for communicative sitting objects with tiles in reinforced concrete.



"Explorers Club, Sitting object"

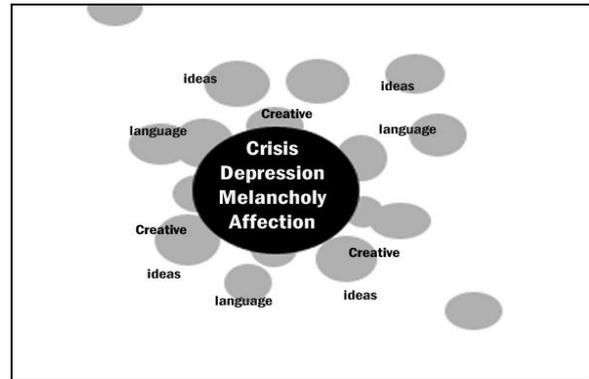
This experiment was initiated at two workshops organized by the Institute of Spatial Arts in Oslo. Artists, designers, architects, theologians and therapists were participants. The Finnish architect and author Juhani Pallasmaa had lectures and co-operated in practice.



"Meeting in space"

We wanted to create communicative situations in an urban space. If someone sit on the benches, the words may work as "ice-breakers" and strangers may start a conversation. The sitting objects have been placed with an empty, open space in the middle, with easy ways in and out.

The sitting object “Explorers Club” has been documented by photo in newspapers, a craft-magazine, an interior-magazine and in a catalogue. It has been exhibited at the National Triennial of Ceramics and Glass at the Vigeland Museum, which was a part of the Oslo International Ceramic Symposium 2003. It is exhibited at Hetjens Museum, Dusseldorf, from April to June 2004.



Kristeva: Crisis-Affection-Creativity

**CASE 4.**  
Co-operation with Fired Earth.

The multi-national tile-company Fired Earth launches a project in Great Britain in cooperation with the organisations Arts & Business, Craftspace Touring and Art First. Some artists and designers are invited to contribute with paintings, interior installations and tile-works to a travelling exhibition. It starts from the London based gallery Art First, a contemporary art gallery exhibiting British and international artists, and culminates in the Edinburgh Festival of Arts August 2004. I participate in this project with the sitting object “Exhalator”. It is decorated with text-mosaics I made from Fired Earths tile-collection.



“Exhalator” sitting object

The documentation of this project is in progress.

**DISCUSSION**

There are many possible perspectives to the case-experiments. Seen from Kristevas theories, there can be a relation between affection and communication.

In the first case there is no connection with any user group. The communication with a user group has been clearly most planned and intended in case 2, with the involvement of the pupils in the process. There are associations to some possible affections of the user groups; their most important objects, intimate things that hides their inner feelings. This has also been the biggest project and is still not finished. In interviews and conversations I will try to understand what influence the art in architecture creates. In case three there is an open, empty space, creating a vacuum that may expect to be filled with conversation. Case four represents a contact to industry and business. The sitting object is contributing to the meta-product of the tile-company.

From a product-semiotic point of view the works may seem different than from an artistic viewpoint.

Further I want to investigate how practical experiments can influence on existing theories in innovation processes in design

*Some References:*

*Design for Product Understanding, Monø, Rune Svart sol - depresjon og melankoli, Kristeva, Julia Produktens budskap, Wikstrøm, Li Risikosamfundet, Beck, Ulrich Hur mäter man vackert, Enroth, Bo Den tenkende kunstner, Kruse, Bjørn Image-based research, Prosser, Jon Genius Loci, Stedets identitet, Nordberg Schultz Stairways of the mind, article, Pallasmaa, Juhani Sement og betong som materialer i design og annen kunstfaglig virksomhet, Moen, Peer Bjarne*