



Aalto University  
School of Arts, Design  
and Architecture

# Sustainable design S4

## How to communicate sustainability

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# Agenda

- 9.15 - 9.30**      **Topics self uncovered from last session**
- 9.30 - 10.30**    **Design semiotics; meaning and visual language of sustainability**
- Break**
- 10.45 – 11.00**   **Small groups: What product/service you chose. Place it at the Miro (see MyCourses Announcement**
- 11.00 – 11.30**   **Sharing of thoughts of the breakout rooms**
- 11.30-11.45**    **Learning diary and other questions**

# How does design speak?

**Iconic – likeliness, metaphors**

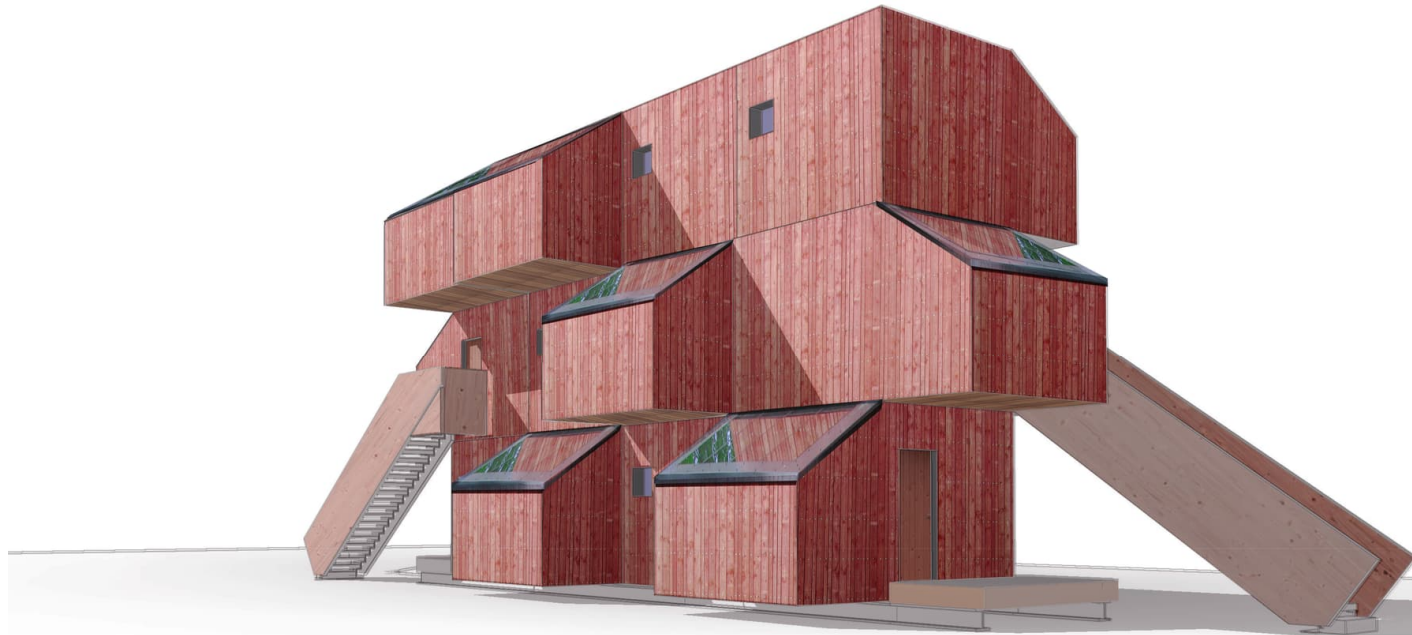
**Indexical – traces of manufacture, causality**

**Symbolic – arbitrary, has to be learned**

S.Vihma: Design reaches beyond providing affordable tools for people to do their job.



## Futuro-house: WeeGee, Espoo



<https://www.aalto.fi/en/wood-program/kokoon-project-information>



Flickr: Jurriaan Persyn



# Environmental sophistication vs design sophistication?

**“Look at the architecture of the last 15 years,” architect James Wines complained in 2009. “It’s been more flamboyant and more wasteful than it’s ever been before. To build any of these buildings by Frank Gehry [the architect famous for sculptural structures of crumpled metal], it takes . . . 60 to 80 percent more metal and steel and construction than it would to enclose that space in a normal way . . . Mind-boggling waste.”(SoG, 2-3)**

Hosey, Lance (2012). *The shape of green : aesthetics, ecology, and design*. Washington DC: Island press.

# Iconic mode of reference: likeliness

Smart?

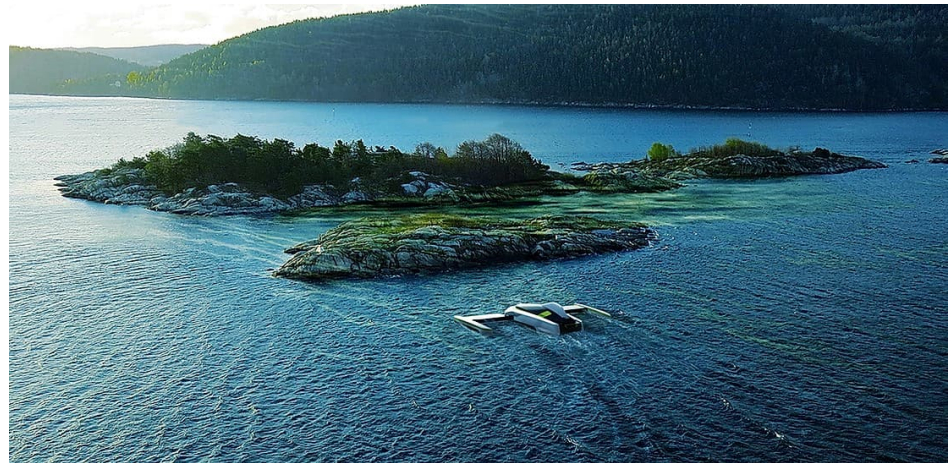


Sustainable?

Aggressive?









**Forget Me Not.** <http://www.pleasurabledoubletroublemakers.com/>

# Indexical mode of reference



## Smart Shape.

The original Smart Car, shown here in comparison to the MINI Cooper, the Prius, and the Hummer, gets better mileage than most hybrids, simply because of its size, shape, and weight.

Hosey, Lance (2012). *The shape of green : aesthetics, ecology, and design*. Island press

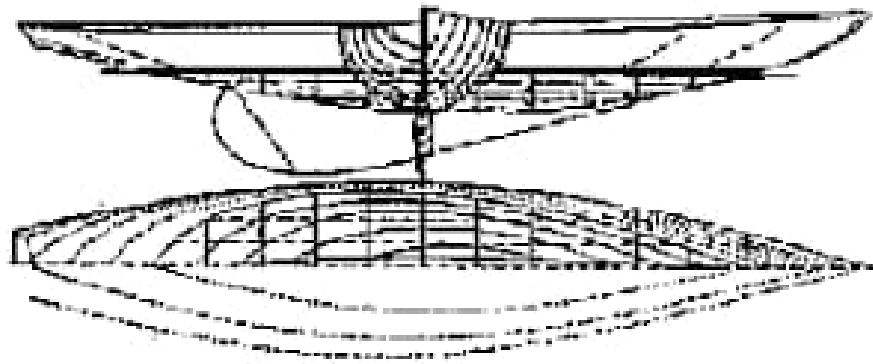


# Symbolic sign of 1970's environmental movement





# Symbolic: Democratic leisure





# Symbolic reference $\neq$ Indexical reference



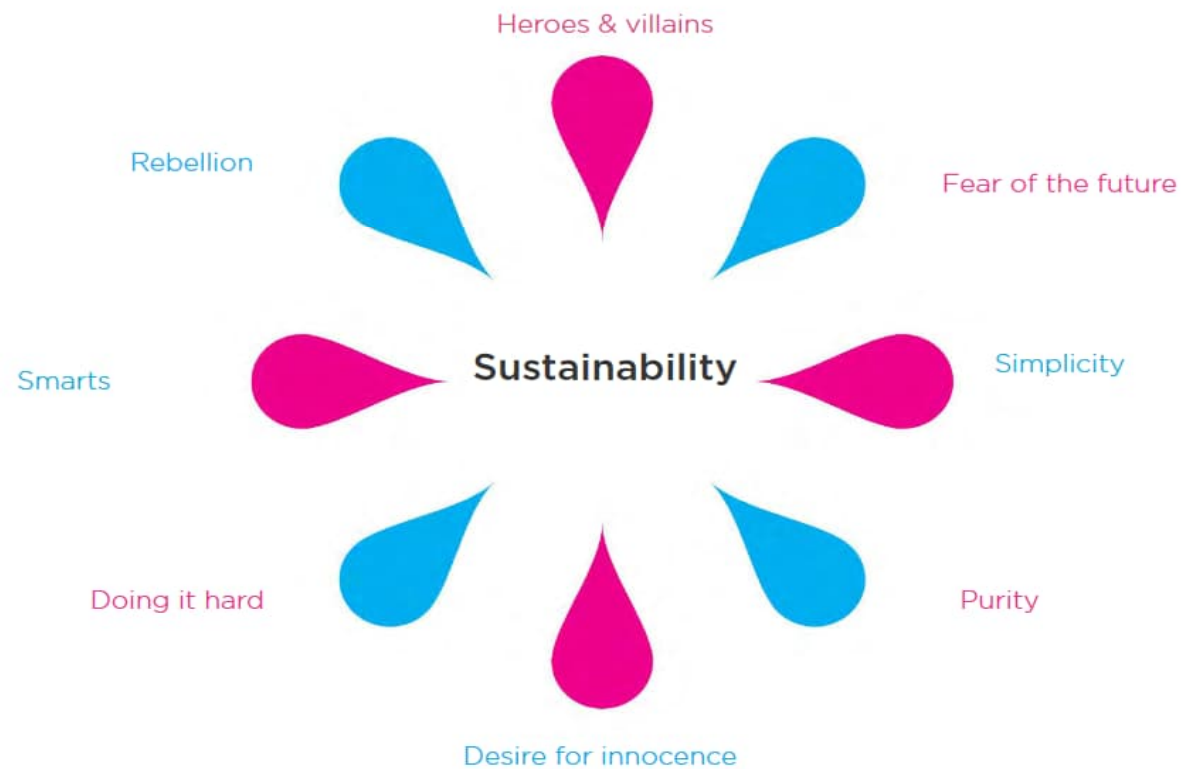








## Some of the codes of sustainability





### The Ecology Era

1962-2005

*The rise of the environmental movement*

**Residual**

**Codes**  
Green values: trees, animals  
Dystopian and destruction scenarios

**Values**  
Intrinsic value of nature and living beings  
Harmony, peace, wisdom with nature

**Ideology**  
Mass consciousness  
Activism and social movements, ethical consumption, boycotts, campaigning

### The Social Innovation Era

2011 - present

*A departure from the environmental and the corporate  
A shift towards people, creativity and community*

**Emergent**

**Codes**  
Multi-ethnic and cultural  
Flat icons and illustrations  
Flat icons, deeper green, icons & block

**Values**  
Tightness, creativity, community, interdependence  
Personal ethics & behaviour  
Responsiveness

**Ideology**  
People-oriented systemic change  
Through innovation and engagement



### The Sustainability Era

2006-2010

*Sustainability becomes commodified  
There's a green version of everything*

**Dominant**

**Codes**  
All shades of green, soft warm blue  
Rustic textures and natural objects  
Single, distinct, and subtle

**Values**  
Recyclable & biodegradable  
Industrial accountability

**Ideology**  
Everyone needs to do their bit  
while we continue business as usual

Laura Santamaria. Critical discourse analysis of sustainability representations.  
<https://prezi.com/ezkvxajy3zv/semiotic-analysis-of-sustainability-representations/>



# Planet

*Global • Environmental ideology*



The eco friendly alternative to buying bottled water

Who needs bottled water when you can have fresh, purer water always at hand? The WH1 Water Dispenser can help you save one of earth's most precious resources.

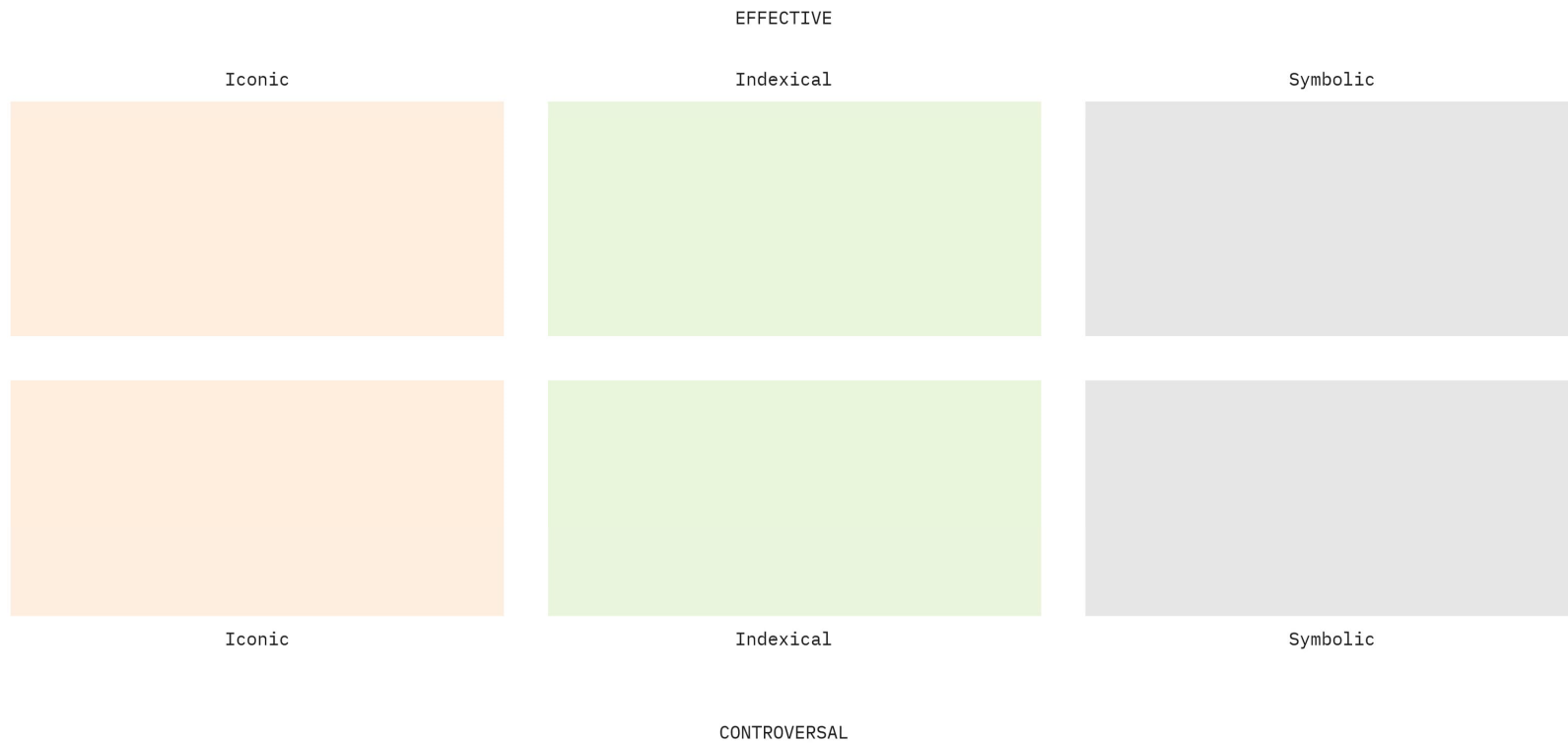
# People

*Local • Well-being ideology*



A source of wellness at the heart of your home

Who needs bottled water when you can have fresh, purer water always at hand? The WH1 Water Dispenser makes the healthier option easier to reach for.



Place your image at the Miro (link at Announcements)

# Key distinctions?

**Invisible vs. visible 'green'**

**Technical vs. social solutions**

**Conservative vs. progressive solutions**

**Green(bio) and blue (smart) and beige (reused)**

# For the next session

**Reading: Ashby et al (2013). Materials and sustainable development - A white paper.**

**Write your learning diary: pick another interesting product/image from session 4 (also view at MyCourses) and reflect on how it communicates about sustainability.**