

Alexandra Martini

Inspired by Method

creative tools
for the
design process

B/S

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Inspired by Method

What is inspiration?

Can there be a method for achieving it?

Inspiration is an essential part of any successful creative process. But as I have noticed in my many years of teaching at design and art schools as well as in design offices, there is often no coherent approach in place. Over the years, I have developed a method of creativity that enables people to make the most of their potential. The method can be categorised as innovation research and is based both on traditional teaching methods and on current specialist knowledge. It should be the golden thread guiding you through the creative process. Do not see it as a straitjacket, but as an aid to help you find your way. Based on its process-oriented structure and the five transferable dimensions, the method can also be adapted to future developments in the hybrid discipline of design. You can, in principle, use these five dimensions in any design project.

This book is both a guide to and a source of inspiration. Our design approach relies on a mix of individuality and a clear methodology, and these are applied – whether consciously or subconsciously – in accordance with the particular project. The 5D method for inspiration described in Part A is an incisive little tool that you can use in any design process, including those you are starting from scratch.

The first phase will loosen up your thinking and set you on your way. The second phase allows you to experiment and explore some unusual paths. The third phase will reward you with your finished project.

Who is this book for? For all budding creatives involved in design in the broadest sense who want to deepen their knowledge and intellectual portfolio professionally and develop their creative skills further. The book does not require special skills, such as programming knowledge. You can “work through” this book in a completely analogue fashion. Activate your senses and imagination, learn from analyses and experiments, and get a feel for non-linear ways of working.

You can train your ability to act, think and reflect in a coherent, interconnected way, accepting the idea that linear is not always best. In the future, creativity, process competence, and flexible thinking will be an essential professional skill. A Delphi study has also made this clear.¹ In an age of artificial intelligence² and algorithm-based technologies, human capacities, such as creativity and (design) competence, that allow us to confidently handle agile processes are becoming increasingly important.

Key

- go to page
- ^a check glossary
- ↓ keywords

My method is based on transformation⁶. Knowledge, context, and material, cultural, and formal elements are transformed into something new. A plea for the sensual, the unpredictable, the unconventional, the surprising.

In **Part A** of the book I present the method. Each chapter description is visually accompanied by one example of a realised study project. Words with a superscript ⁶ are explained in the glossary.

In **Part B**, you will be accompanied by sessions tailored to each section. They serve to sharpen your perception⁶, completely independent of your concrete project. If you work in a team, I recommend these pages from page 96.

Part C illustrates ideas for immediate implementation. These ideas all derive from exercises, studies, and projects that use the 5D method and which I have supervised. They should be stimulating and inspire you to get started yourself.

In this book, I would like to bridge the gap between a world undergoing radical change and the small, subtle role designers play in it. As Gillian Crampton Smith says: “We don’t merely have to ask if we are designing the things right, we have to ask if we are designing the right things.”² Don’t shy away from socially relevant topics. Good design is an attitude – and design is an intellectual and emotional process that combines many different elements. Find your place in it, determine what you are working on and with whom.

The method presented here offers you an introduction to the creative process in the form of creative-scientific inspiration. It will give wings to your imagination, allowing you to recognise inspiration when it comes and use it for yourself. Be inspired by your project and have the courage to try things out. Wild ideas can always be tamed. Humour is allowed.

This book will give you a tool enabling you to approach your projects in a more multifaceted way and your ideas will always be ahead of the pack. There’s one gift I’d like to give you along the way: you’re allowed to fail – it brings new insights. Don’t lose your sense of humour, just carry on. Reading this book will encourage and reward your curiosity and open-mindedness. I hope you enjoy lateral thinking and the mental kick that comes with it – it’s the elixir of creativity.

Alexandra Martini

Inspiration springs
from the pleasure
of perception, from
the fertile soil of
thinking, and from
the composure that
allows you to deal
with what comes.



The three phases of the 5D method are described in part A. Each phase is exemplified by a single student project that accompanies you visually through the nine steps. Have fun exploring the potential of analysing, experimenting, and realising with the five dimensions!

The Process at a Glance

I provide you with a toolkit that you can always fall back on in the future. Start by abandoning any preconceptions you have about the outcome. The method^α structures the design process^α but does not lead directly to the perfect design solution – instead, it encourages you to connect familiar elements in a new way. You get off the beaten track, because going round the houses is a sure way to improve your knowledge of the local terrain. You learn to ask yourself the right questions at the right time. The following elementary aspects of design, the five dimensions of reality, will help you. They give the 5D method its name:

1. What does it look like?
Formal-Aesthetic Dimension
2. What is it made of?
Material-Haptic Dimension
3. How is it made?
Productive Dimension
4. In what cultural context does it operate?
Cultural Dimension
5. What relationships does it create?
Interactive Dimension

These dimensions will be useful to you in each of the method's three phases:

The **first phase** is about analysing^α. You will learn how to observe the world using the five dimensions and the art of visualising^α.

In the **second phase** you will explore the five dimensions experimentally^α.

You will enter the "laboratory^α", which can be any place you decide to work.

The **third phase** involves realising, completing, and documenting the project.

As a starting point for exploring inspiration in the design process, I take an example of one artistic work in the description of the 5D method. In it, these five dimensions are finely calibrated to one another.

The first time you read the book, I recommend that you go through the steps in order. Researching^α and documenting will keep cropping up. Once you have internalised the process and the dimensions, you can always come back to individual steps or skip some. You can go through the method in a few hours or several days. With a little practice, quickly observing your environment in a few seconds will lead to inspiration.

Here's a brief overview of the mental processes involved:

When you analyse, you work inductively^α, primarily training transformative thinking, the mental linking of language, words, writing, images, and spatial imagination, where you associate^α, create analogies, find metaphors, visualise^α, and abstract.

When you experiment^α, you act abductively^α and alternate divergent and convergent thinking by combining^α ideas and finding out and deducing constraints and variables in order to take the next step.

When you realise, in a process of synthesis^α, you deductively^α train the convergent thinking that your mind has access to for logical reasoning^α and decision making as it fine-tunes your ideas.

*Art and literature should
help us to get out of our
mental cocoons.*

– ELIF SAFAK

4

Grasping

Picking up, emulating, understanding

**You
get
to
the
bottom of things.**

Idea

This module is optional, but helpful. It focuses on understanding through empathy. If all the dimensions and relevant contextual connections are already (completely) clear to you in your analysis of the work, please go on to the next chapter. If you want to understand an aspect of your analysis in more detail, I recommend this step.

If we look at the work of another creative person, we can generally access, via a process of creative empathy, an immediate understanding of the contexts in which their work arises on the basis of unlimited respect for intellectual property^a. A legitimate step, especially to examine individual aspects more closely, is analytical empathy. You may have seen product designers at furniture trade fairs examining the joints under the tables to find out what construction solution was chosen.

Prior systematic analysis and research have enabled you to see your selected work through new eyes. This has brought new aspects into play that you can take up and pursue in your project.

Challenge

Taking an active, spatial approach, try out one dimension of your selected work or a detail of it by tracking it exactly. Reverse-engineer^a your work. First, observe the principles you encounter. Follow the rules of your chosen work and deduce your design or organisational decisions for a study.

Then grasp the dimensions (Formal-Aesthetic, Material-Haptic, Productive – methods and manufacturing processes – Cultural, Interactive) that you find exciting in your analysis and whose details you would like to understand more closely. Try to create something yourself under similar conditions. Research your own project by trying to “look underneath” it and understand it.

You can also do this on a different scale, work on a model^a, or switch to another medium in which you expect to gain valuable insights. It is definitely not about making a one-to-one copy.

Tip: With formal-aesthetic studies, you can quickly produce good results on paper. If it is the spatial experience that you want to reproduce, then I would still recommend a small model. If your focus is on the material that was used, work with it. If you are investigating an approach where different people were involved in the design process, try creating scenarios where you get feedback from others.

Objective

You will achieve a detailed understanding of individual design parameters, new insights, and expand your creative wealth of experience. You gently enter the realm of scientific experimentation, because you work with the intention of getting to the bottom of something. You will train your ability to transfer your discoveries if, for example, you reduce the scale, abstract the form, or change the medium. Designers regularly use changes in dimensions, material, and format in every phase of a design. In this step they generate models, three-dimensional sketches, and mock-ups^a or paths. You train your openness to different sources of inspiration. Irrespective of the degree to which an artist is known, we can enjoy the mental kick we get out of their delightful solution. You can finish the Phase I “Analysing” process with a sense of satisfaction and pride.

If, after the first phase, you are bursting with ideas and everything is wonderful, then simply continue, with or without method. If you want to use the dimensions again in a different way, then get into the second phase – experimenting!

in “Material – From tangible to spatial”. In the following chapters you will find a detailed list of the dimensional factors. If you are looking for a stimulus to get you started, pick a factor from this list. Document your studies. Please do not do this too meticulously, as this will kill the flow.

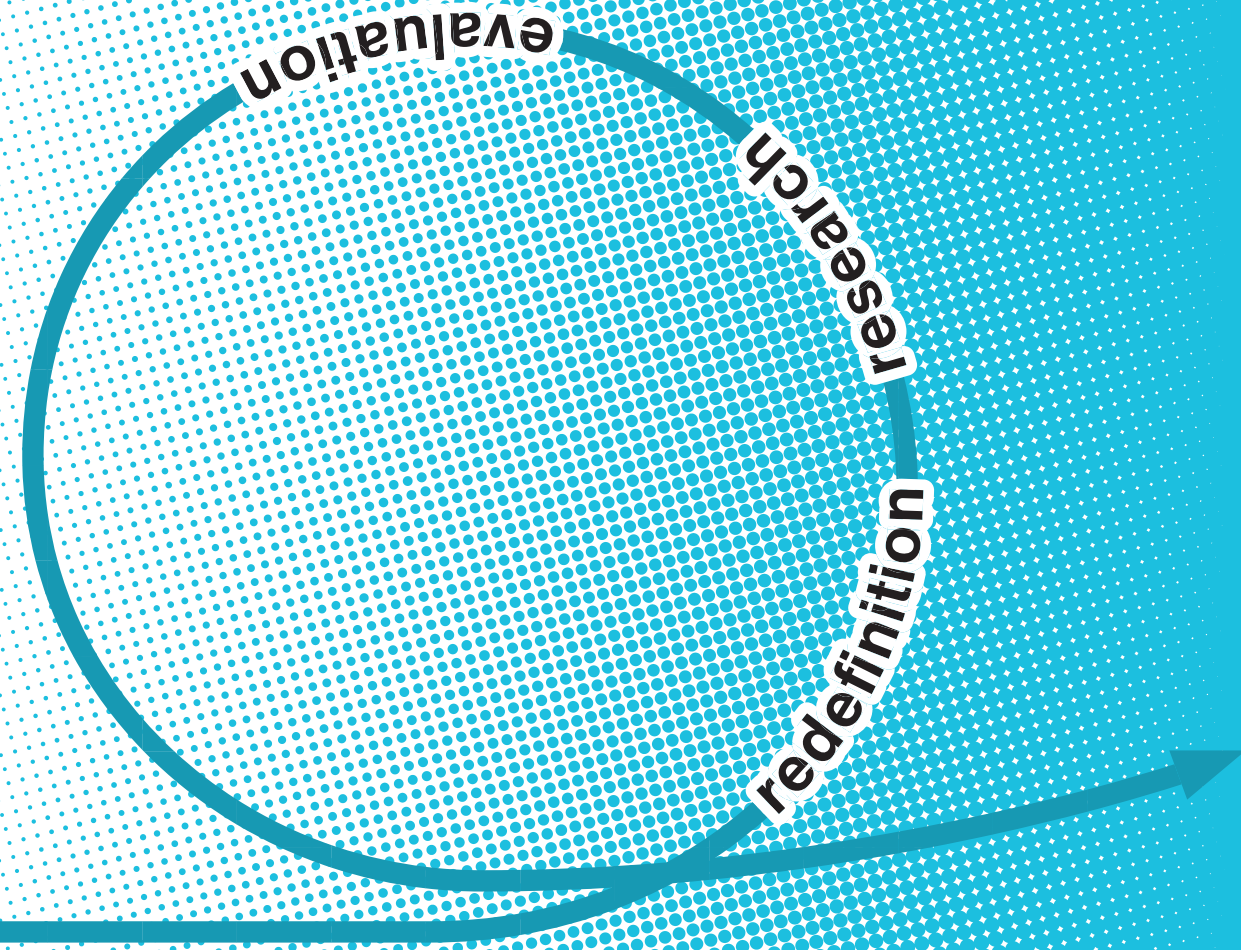
With each dimension you open a space and position your studies and the project within it, as if in a coordinate system. When you intensify your experiments, you usually combine two or more dimensions. It becomes multidimensional with overlapping dimensions. This is actually the next step (Combining and Trying Out). The shift is fluent and is described in the chapter Connecting and Consolidating. You don't need to carry out studies for every dimension, but you should think through all the dimensions until you have integrated them all. Now also take a look at Part C of the book (the picture section with principles and other projects). How intensively you work is up to you. You can never guarantee the perfect design idea. But the probability that the many combinations in your head will set off a creative firework is certainly very high.

Overall objective

In this section you will not only discover an eye for the unusual but you will also learn to break with habits and use them profitably for your projects.

Design can sometimes get dirty – indeed, it has to! You combine your senses, train your translation skills, and systematically fill your project with complexity. When you create new things yourself, you gradually gain control over all five design dimensions. You understand and determine every single dimension of your project and handle it with virtuosity. You work scientifically and creatively and generate a personal wealth of experience. You will learn to cope with the uncertainties of changing circumstances and influential factors. This dynamism is guaranteed in agencies, companies, and projects. Ultimately, you practice the “creative loop”^G and the “mode change”^G.

The Creative Loop



Ideas are intangible

idea

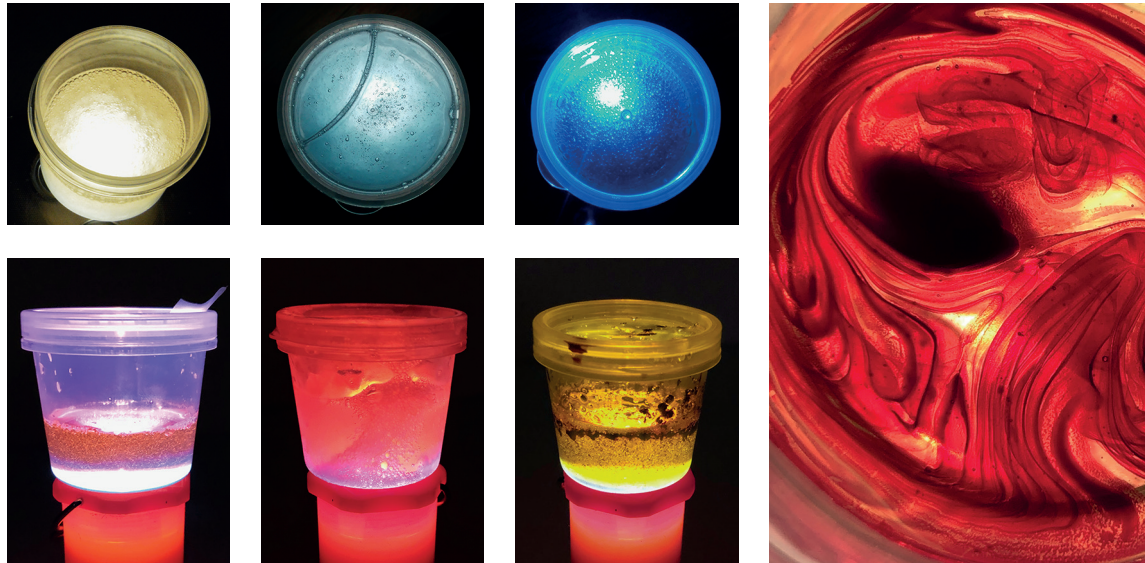
creative outputs.

6

Connecting and Consolidating

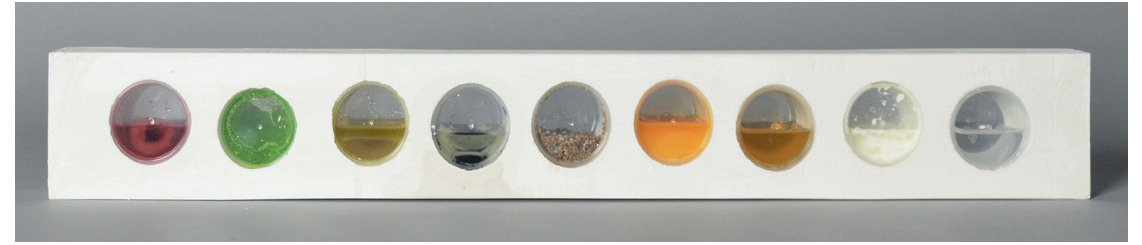
Fusion
Complex experiments

In studies and design approaches you relate the five dimensions in a controlled way.

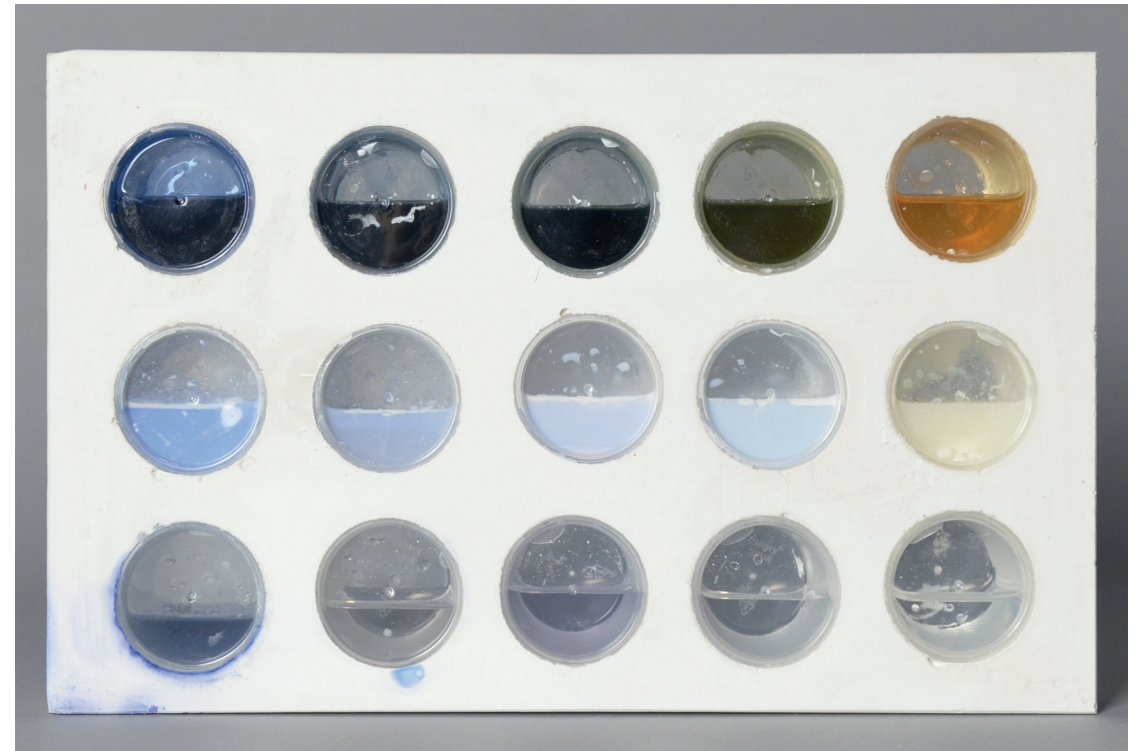


Examining the translucency of various materials

Shining through: stirring with light



Looking for the potential of cast-in liquids and their movement
top: water with ink, below: vodka with raspberry, gelatin, oil, ink and water, seeds, egg, honey, milk, glue



Colour series of water, honey, and ink



The viscosity and colours of honey with ink are investigated in more detail.

BB

Mini class on perception:
With five-finger exercises to train perception, organisational principles, and much more, you can enhance your skills 24/7 and independently of your project. Please do them any time you like as a relaxation exercise! Further suggestions on the kind of project you can actually tackle can also be found here. (How can I try out the method? → 95)

Five-finger exercises

Tapas for in-between moments

In this part of the book you will find exercises that you can use immediately to relax your mind. You transfer basic principles of individual work steps from section A (the method description) into the everyday environment.

Have fun!

1

Selection criteria

Every day we unconsciously select things and make decisions every minute. For this exercise, I ask you to remember the last time you went grocery shopping. How do you choose the products that end up in your basket? Is price a critical factor, do you prefer organic products, or do you always rely on tried-and-tested products? Do you proceed systematically or spontaneously? Write down the criteria that played a role. Apply three of your criteria to the selection of a font for the design of a receipt. (Analysing ► Selecting)

10 min.

2

Navigating using voice commands

(1–4 persons)

Imagine two or more people navigating through a space exploring the precision and interaction of information. The basic principle is used in autonomous driving and in the design of interfaces. There are two different roles. One acts as a guide and speaks in a loud voice, while the others walk and translate the words into actions. Only use announcements, singly and in combinations that have been agreed in advance: Right, left, stop, 30 degrees, 45 degrees, 60 degrees, 90 degrees. Observe a variety of how the guided ones interpret the same command. Instructions like open the door, climb the stairs, bend down are disregarded. It's about directional turn-by-turn navigation based on speech recognition. The people taking directions have their eyes open. Work out the angles (How far do I turn for 30 degrees?) and the speed in advance and get yourselves in sync. Then swap roles. Keep the destination secret. An outdoor route or walking through large rooms is particularly suitable for this. You can also do the exercise on your own and try to give yourself instructions before performing certain actions. In this way, going to the toilet becomes a parking manoeuvre. (Analysing ► Describing)

5 min.

3

Describing sound patterns

For ten minutes, concentrate exclusively on what you hear. This works best in situations where you can close your eyes. For example, on a park bench or during a long train journey. There is the rustling of paper when your neighbour reads his newspaper or the sound of nylon straps on a backpack. Have your pen and notebook ready to document your experiences. You will find that you automatically search for the right words, and new pictures will appear in your head ... (Analysing ► Describing)

10 min.

4

Analysing proximity and distance

The law of proximity lets us read. We associate letters that are closer to each other. Distances create spaces. The alignment of volumes and elements defines their relationship to each other and creates a composition. Analyse your own environment according to organisational principles. It's also an intriguing exercise in public space, on the train, and in shops. Who is facing whom? How are the chairs arranged? What kind of seating area do they produce? And how are the magazines laid out on the shelves? For 10 minutes at a location of your choice, look with an analytical eye exclusively through the "distance and alignment glasses". (Analysing)

10 min.

5

Letter to Granny

In this exercise, you imagine a conversation with a person who is not familiar with the subject. How would you describe the project or the facts to this "outsider"? What are the relevant facts that this person needs to know? Explain the current state of your project in simple words. Apply this to one of the next challenges you're currently facing. Write it down or speak out loud on your own as if you were having a conversation. This will enable you to step out of yourself. (Analysing ► Describing)

15 min.

6

Organisational principles Tidy house, tidy mind

How are the clothes in your wardrobe sorted? By colour? Try rearranging it sometime! Focus in on the fabrics: Are there any similar features in the materials your clothes are made of? Are there clothes that can only be worn at certain times of the year or could you sort them by outfit? Do the sorting process once and look at the changes. (Analysing ► Sorting and Evaluating)

20 min.



In part C you will find suggestions and guidelines on how to deal with a material, the dimensions of space and time, and what approaches you could follow for your project. This section of the book with its plethora of pictures is a potential source of inspiration for you in the process. Just dip into it when you're in between things.



1st

principle

Changing the spatial relationship
 Small things are not so small when they are put in relation to even

smaller things. Everything is relative. The umbrella shape of a drawing pin is transformed into a floral shape

with minimal mechanical effort and becomes a forest or an item of décor for a (relatively small) room.

2nd

principle

Developing a tool for form finding
 This model is made with acrylic glass and cotton buds. A movable net structure serves as a modular principle for form finding. The shafts are connected with cords on the



surface. Pulling the cords changes the shape of the model, creating variant forms.
Idea: A ceiling element and its changing movements might relate to the volume of the place. The room

interacts with the user.
Mini tip: Take a look in the kitchen or bathroom before you buy expensive model-making materials.

Material

What material should I use? How can I process it?

Material is what a thing is made of. In many cases, we only look for an adequate – possibly the cheapest – material to implement our designs. But if we start with the material itself, it can inspire us and give us new ideas. Everyone is in a position to do material research and develop a material. In principle, it can be anything: photographs, pictures, or video footage. Your material in the current project can also be a semi-finished product, the small and inconspicuous things that you have all around you and which have specific properties and functions. Just ask yourself: What else can this thing do? As my mentor Vico Magistretti taught me, “Look at the usual with an unusual eye.”

In this section you will find principles about what can be viewed as material, how you can use and stage its creation or decay for your design, as well as examples that utilise specific material properties (Time/Oil → 136) and show how semiotics and the level of interpretation of material aesthetics underscore their message. You can use plastics or organic and natural materials and draw on their sensuality, sound, aesthetics, haptics, or specific properties. Does it burn? Does it deform? Is the material digital?

In this third section of the book, you can regard everything as material. So here is just a brief reference to two other projects that use the technical procedure of manufacturing or material processing as a design principle (Structure/3D printing → 209) or take the transition of aggregate states as an exciting moment in the narrative (Time/Ice → 140).

Quick tip
to get you
started:

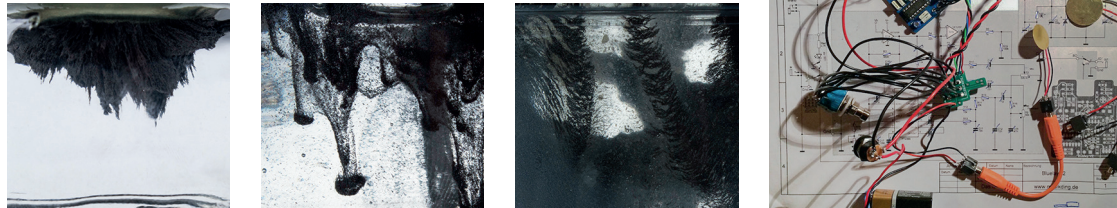
**Paper is
amazingly
versatile.**

MaterialDistrict.com is
an informative website
with newsletters about
materiality.

Material



loud – silent
organic – geometric
irritation
2D/3D/4D



79th

principle

Creating sound experiences through interaction with a material
Iron powder is put on a copper plate. Magnets are placed underneath it, causing the powder to rise.

Piezoelectric pickups below the copper plate become a microphone. Every movement can be perceived and made audible by the piezos. The result is an experimental musical

instrument with five potentiometers. Acrylic glass and concrete form the housing.
→ Create artefacts that use material behaviour visually or sensorially!



80th

principle

Mapping materials

The orange, its peel, mesocarp, and pulp serve as masters. In a 3D program, the surfaces, texture

and structure of the citrus fruit are modelled and processed as digital material, sculpting, shading, and texturing Nike Jordan 1.

→ When it goes digital, create surfaces and materials for models yourself!