Olafur Eliasson's Riverbed

A research of the encoding and decoding processes involved
in the meaning-making of a modern art exhibition

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Abstract

This project deals with the perception of the exhibition *Riverbed* by Olafur Eliasson. We aim to find out, how the exhibition was encoded by the artist and decoded by students. In order to examine this topic, a focus group discussion has been conducted and a "quick and dirty" survey at Louisiana served as a supplement to get a deeper insight. The theoretical frame is given by Stuart Hall's four step model of encoding and decoding. In order to examine the production stage of *Riverbed*, a monological interview with Eliasson was taken into account. The main finding of this research is that meaning-making of an abstract artwork as Riverbed can not be regarded as a linear transmission process from sender to receiver, but must be approached in much more flexible and complex terms.

Summary in German

Dieses Projekt untersucht die Auffassungen zur Kunstausstellung *Riverbed* von Olafur Eliasson. Das Hauptziel dieser Recherche ist es zu untersuchen, wie diese Installation vom Künstler kodiert und von Studenten dekodiert wurde. Um dies herauszufinden haben wir im Museum 80 Menschen nach ihren Wahrnehmungen gefragt und zusätzlich ein Fokusgruppeninterview durchgeführt. Als theoretischer Rahmen für diese Untersuchung dient Stuart Halls Modell des Kodierens und Dekodierens. Einen Einblick in die erste Stufe dieses Modells, die sich mit dem Kodieren beschäftigt, erhielten wir in Form eines monologischen Interviews von Eliasson. Das Interview wurde vom offiziellen Youtube Kanal von Louisiana im November 2014 veröffentlicht. Das Ergebnis dieser Untersuchung ist, dass die Ausstellung auf viele Weisen verstanden werden kann, genau wie die Absichten des Künstlers. Die Auffassungen und Perspektiven hängen von den individuellen Rahmenbedingungen, Hintergründen und der sozialen Umgebung ab und sind somit nicht zu verallgemeinern. Die Anwendung von Halls Modell hat dazu beigetragen, einige wichtige Aspekte in der Wahrnehmung unsere Zielgruppe und den Motiven des Künstlers zu beleuchten. Wir konkludieren, dass das Model abstrakte Prozesse jedoch zu sehr vereinfacht. Es wurde deutlich, dass das Modell des Kodierens und Dekodierens beim Behandeln von komplexen Wahrnehmungen zu abstrakter Kunst ihr Limit erreicht.

1. Introduction

We live in a time where the borders of the doable are constantly renegotiated and expanded. Performing in an innovative manner has become a necessity in order for a single person as well as whole institutions to be successful. The latter applies not only to schools or universities but also to museums. The role of art, and museums for that matter, has shifted drastically. Art has become much more accessible than in former times where art was reserved for upper-class members of society. In the age of mechanical reproduction, printed versions of art works have become affordable and in order for both an artist and a museum to offer novel, interesting material, they have to reinvent themselves repeatedly. With *Riverbed*, Louisiana and Olafur Eliasson take on an active part in this reinvention of artist and museum, spurring the fundamental question of what art is and to a certain extent reinterpreting the notion of a modern artist as well as an art museum. With this project we aim to explore how this art exhibition is perceived by mainly students. We seek to find out how our target group *decodes* this exhibition and what kind of discourse it engages in with regard to *Riverbed*. As a complement, we will examine in what way the exhibition was encoded, thus what the artist aims to express and convey with *Riverbed*.

1.1. Problem statement

The abovementioned contemplations have led us to formulate the following problem statement:
How does our target group decode the exhibition Riverbed *and how was it encoded by Eliasson?*

The examination of this question will be based on Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model, hence we aim to find out:

- How does Hall's four step model of encoding and decoding apply to this case study?

Dealing with this question will subsequently lead us to investigate the following sub-questions of this project:

- What was the participants' overall experience with the *Riverbed* exhibition*?*
- How do Olafur Eliasson and Louisiana influence the perception of the exhibition?
- How does the public discourse about the exhibition influence the perception?
- What, if any, consequences does the exhibition have with regards to actions taken?

1.2. Motivation

This project is a research project within the field of communication. It seeks to uncover a specific focus group's perception of the exhibition *Riverbed* by Olafur Eliasson at Louisiana as well as it aims to reveal parts of the encoding processes involved. This exhibition was chosen due to its controversial nature, namely that of taking a piece of nature and placing it within a museum. The exhibition has created debate in the newspapers, on social platforms and in art forums alike. Therefore, we find it relevant to go into depth with the meaning behind this work of art and with a specific target group's perception and sense making of it. We considered different methodological approaches and decided that a semi-structured focus group interview would probably grant us the most detailed understanding of how the exhibition is perceived.

This project allows us to further our education and acquire first hand skills of how to plan, execute and analyse data collected through focus groups. This investigation might enhance our understanding for interactive artworks like *Riverbed*, the role the artist and the museum play within the process of meaning-making and the most significant factors in the perceptions of modern art.

1.3. Delimitation and plan

In order to investigate our research questions we have chosen to focus on the qualitative focus group methodology that we will shed light upon in the next section of this paper. As a point of departure we conducted the so called 'quick and dirty' research method, that took place in the actual museum setting. These two methods were chosen over other forms of research methods, such as surveys, questionnaires, participants observation or experimental research because they appeared to be the most useful and suitable for this specific investigation.

The theoretical framework is given by Stuart Hall and his work on encoding and decoding, as it can be considered as the basis of audience reception theory. In order to be able to reflect on the findings of the analysis in a critical manner and as a complement of Hall's contemplations, we will be taking into account parts of Kim Christian Schrøder's reflections on the matter.

To begin with, we will briefly introduce Eliasson, Louisiana and the exhibition.

1.4. Olafur Eliasson

Eliasson was born in 1967 and grew up in Denmark and Iceland (web source 1). He studied at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts and then moved to Berlin in 1995 where he founded Studio Olafur Eliasson (web source 1). Since the 1990s he realised multiple major projects and exhibitions all over the world, such as *The weather project* in London from 2003, *Take your time: Olafur Eliasson* in New York or *Innen Stadt Aussen* (Inner city out) in Berlin (web source 1). Many of Eliasson's projects are situated in public spaces like for example the *Green river, The New York City Waterfalls,* or *Your rainbow panorama* that is located on top of ARoS museum in Århus and consists of a circular 150-metre coloured-glass walkway (web source 1). (see Appendix A)

1.5. Louisiana

Louisiana – Museum of Modern Art was founded by Knud W. Jensen and opened in 1958. The original idea was to exhibit modern Danish art, but it quickly opened up and became an international museum (web source 2). Jensen worked from within the framework that "The more opportunities for experience that the program offers, the more Louisiana lives up to its idea – to be a 'musical meeting place' and a milieu that is engaged in contemporary life." (web source 2). Louisiana still employs Jensen's 'sauna-principle' of presenting the guests with a hot, well-known artist and a cold, less-known artist. This is done in an attempt to attract guests and let them experience what they are already interested in and simultaneously intrigue or challenge them with something they otherwise would not experience (web source 2).
Riverbed breaks with the sauna-principle, as Eliasson has a four-part exhibition that fills the museum. The Louisiana collection is, however, still on display (web source 3).

1.6. Riverbed

Upon arrival at Louisiana in Humlebæk, the visitor will cross the cobblestoned courtyard with its big sculpture before climbing the stone staircase that leads to the ticket sale right at the entrance. The view from up there is of the gift shop both straight ahead and down the white staircase. The room has a grand panoramic window, which reveals some of the garden area surrounding the museum.

Moving down to the shop area and through it, the visitor enters the south wing, where the majority of the gift shop's literature on *Riverbed* and related works are placed. The hallway leading from the corner has undressed wooden planks on the floor, a bare white wall on the right hand side and the window view of the gardens has been blocked by wooden planks. Turning around the corner of the hallway, leads the visitor straight to the first of three rooms strewn with greyish black stones and rocks. Somewhere in the middle of the room water from a small stream pools. Around the stream the stones are shiny and black. Some rocks are big enough for visitors to sit on; other stones are small enough to fit into the palm of a child.

There are no more wooden planks to walk on and the visitor will proceed to walk in and on the exhibition. There are doorways of different heights with the stream passing through the lower one. As one proceeds through the exhibition more rooms with the same white walls, black stones and running water reveal themselves. In the third room, the stones have been arranged up against the side of a staircase, creating a rocky pile, which seems to be the source of the stream flowing through the rooms.

Stepping from the stones onto a patch of wooden planks will take the visitor to the foot of the white marble staircase, which leads to another plateau strewn, lightly, with stones. From there it is a short walk to the Panorama Room with its view over Øresund and a small library laden with books by Eliasson, about his artworks and about *Riverbed*. The room is equipped with couches facing the windows, and the library set off in an alcove with a big wooden table and plenty chairs.

To exit the *Riverbed* exhibition, the visitor must return through the landscape of rocks and water with the uneven doorways and out through the empty hallway with the wooden planks. Once again, the visitor will be in the gift shop with a possibility to leave the museum, visit the gardens, the café, or even continue to visit the West Wing with Louisiana's collections on display and another two rooms with Olafur Eliasson's works.

2. Methodology

2.1. The "quick and dirty" research method

The so called "quick and dirty" method is an uncomplicated, easy form of research that we chose as a point of departure for this investigation. This method allows the researcher to jump right into a topic without any extensive preparation made beforehand. Despite the fact that the findings made on the basis of a quick and dirty are not representative, they are capable of assisting in acquiring a first impression that can shape deeper-going research angles.

We have conducted a "quick and dirty" type of research in the last room of the actual setting of the exhibition, where we asked 80 people of different age and gender to describe the exhibition with one word (see result in Appendix B). Connecting our visit to Louisiana with an interesting compact kind of research, enabled us to instantly dive deeper into possible perceptions of this exhibition enriching us with good ideas on how to structure and approach the focus group interview.

2.2. The focus group methodology

The main method that we have chosen to anchor this project in is the focus group interview. This research method has gained popularity in the course of the last decade or so and is now "employed extensively", as Pranee Liamputtong, a medical anthropologist at Melbourne University, explains in her book *Focus Group Methodology: Principles and Practice* (Liamputtong, 2011: x). However, the focus group methodology is not a new phenomenon - indeed "[i]t can be traced back to the year 1926 when Emory Bogardus described group interviews in social science research." (ibid.: x). Initially, focus group interviews were developed as an academic research method, however, they have since the 1950 become quite synonymous with market research (ibid.: 2).

2.2.1. What is a focus group interview?

A focus group interview is, at the simplest level, "an informal discussion among a group of selected individuals about a particular topic (Wilkinson in Liamputtong, 2011: 3). The size of a focus group may, according to Liamputtong, reach a maximum of eight individuals, who "(...) gather together to discuss a specific issue with the help of a moderator in a particular setting where participants feel comfortable enough to engage in a dynamic discussion for one or two hours." (Liamputtong, 2011: 3). However, the size of a focus group discussion is negotiable and when Liamputtong explains to have a maximum of eight participants and a time frame of one to two hours, one has to keep in mind, that this is only one theorist's idea. Liamputtong explains that "[t]he primary aim of a focus group is to describe and understand meanings and interpretations of a select group of people to gain an understanding of a specific issue from the perspective of the participants of the group (Liamputtong 2009)." (ibid.: 3). Importantly, the aim is not to reach a "common consensus" on a matter, but rather to "(...) 'encourage a range of responses which provide a greater understanding of the attitudes, behavior, opinions or perceptions of participants on the research issues' (Hennink 2007: 6)." (ibid.: 3). As a researcher one should be aware that a focus group discussion is not merely a means for obtaining informational accounts and data of individuals, but that it is much rather "(...) 'a means to set up a negotiation of meaning through intra- and inter-personal debates' (Cooks & Crang 1955: 56)." (ibid.:4).

2.2.2. Why a focus group interview?

There are many good reasons for conducting a focus group interview, the major of which, Liamputtong argues, being "(...) the collective nature, which may suit people who cannot articulate their thoughts easily, and which provides collective power to marginalised people." (Liamputtong, 2011: x). Thus, this method is especially suitable when studying different social and cultural groups. However, the collective power applies in other fields and issues of study as well, since many people find face-to-face or one-on-one communication scary or intimidating.

With this project we aim to unravel parts of our target group's reception of an art exhibition in a way that is appropriate to the rather limited scope of this project. As in our case, focus group interviews are often conducted because this research method "can provide results quickly" (ibid.: 2). Furthermore "[i]t is perceived as a methodology which can generate complex information at low cost and with the minimum amount of time. It can also be used with a wide range of people

and groups in different settings." (ibid.: 2). Thus, this method can be utterly useful and efficient. Nevertheless, one should not, as Liamputtong warns, mistake this method as "cheap, easy and quick as has been claimed" (ibid.: 2).

Fundamentally and most importantly, focus group interviews make it possible to listen to people and learn from them (Liamputtong, 2011: 2) and to find out what, how and for what reasons they think the way they do (ibid.: 5). Focus group methodology is considered ideal for exploring the points of view, concerns, stories and experiences of individuals (ibid.:5). Another often rewarding factor in group discussions is the sort of language and communication that is being used, namely an everyday-language that can be revealing when it comes to exploring people's experience and knowledge (ibid.: 5). The researcher can obtain rich and detailed information about the participants' thoughts, understandings, feelings, perceptions and impressions (ibid.: 6) which can be much harder to gain access to by "more orthodox methods of data collection" (ibid.: 5).

2.2.3. Why this specific target group?

We chose students as our focus group. First of all, as we are students ourselves, this group was rather easy to locate and contact. Secondly, as the exhibition is suitable for every age group we considered students to be quite in the middle of the spectrum of people who visit Louisiana and *Riverbed.*

2.2.4. Limitations of this method

As pointed out before, conducting focus group interviews can be a giving way of doing research on a subject. However, it is important to note that this method holds some considerable pitfalls that one needs to be aware of when working with this method. Knowing where these are will ideally lead us to treat the data of the focus group interview in a rather advanced manner.

In his book *Advanced Focus Group Research* from 2001, Edward Fern explains why this method is often critically debated on, putting forward a body of different arguments: "First, focus group research is criticized because the sample sizes are small and samples are not selected using probability methods. Therefore, the samples are not representative and the focus group results are not generalizable." (Fern, 2001: 121). This aspect is vital to keep in mind, as it may be tempting to

generalize the findings of a focus group interview. Another important aspect to keep in mind when conducting and assessing an interview is that: "(...) responses are not independent; some respondents inflict their opinions on others, and some respondents do not participate." (Ibid.: 121). Thus, one needs to bear in mind, that a discussion is of dynamic nature and that answers are often interrelated to one another. This is also connected to the fact that a successful focus group discussion is highly dependant on "(...) 'the development of a permissive, non-threatening environment within the group' where the participants can feel comfortable to discuss their opinions and experiences without fear that they will be judged or ridiculed by others in the group (Hennink 2007: 6)." (Liamputtong, 2011: 4).

It is moreover crucial to be aware of the fact that all sorts of conclusions are rather subjective depending "on the analyst's interpretation, and the analyst/investigator can easily influence the results—"Bad analyst: bad report" (Wells, 1979, p. 12)." (ibid.: 121). The role of the analyst thus is a decisive one, as he "digests" the data, interpreting it in his own, possibly biased or incompetent, way.

Even though it is possible to minimize some of the problems mentioned above, it is, after all, important to realize that focus group interviews remain limited in multiple ways, as Fern also stresses in his book that the data focus groups can generate as well as the sort of analysis that can be performed on the data are limited (ibid.: 122).

2.2.5. Methodologically dealing with the interview

A central piece of data for this project's investigation is the video of Olafur Eliasson that was made accessible online by the official Louisiana channel (web source 4). In this video, Eliasson, who is situated on the stones in the actual museum setting, is giving a monological explanation of many different aspects of this exhibition, sharing not only his reflections but also his observations and thoughts on the artwork as well as on the museum and society. As Hall's model includes the encoding stage or production stage to be precise, it was important to this investigation to find a piece of profound data that is concerned with Eliasson's reflections on the matter. We could not get the chance to interview Eliasson ourselves, so we were fortunate to find this video, that tackles many of the questions that we would have asked. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that this data was not generated by us and that it is therefore to be considered a piece of

'data found'. As opposed to self-generated material, one cannot influence the data found whatso-ever which of course makes obvious where the limits of this method lie. However, it can also be a very time-sparing, rewarding way of collecting data, especially when the content is as suitable as in this case. Furthermore, it is also questionable, if the artist himself is the most suitable person to interpret his own work in such detail, because it is not certain that an artist, whose main job is to make art, is also capable of reflecting on his work. However, Eliasson has a profound academ-ical background and as professor at the Berlin University of Arts he has the means to talk about his art in a very advanced manner. Another point to bear in mind is that the interview must be regarded as a new text that is autonomous from the exhibition. Strictly speaking, we are dealing with decoding again, namely with the artist's of his own text. However, this is as close as we can get with regards to finding out about the encoding of the exhibition.

2.2.6.   Reflections on the methodological process of this project

Instead of conducting two or more focus group interviews, we have, also due to the scope of this project, decided to only do one profound rather long interview instead of more superficial ones. The reason for that is, that the results of qualitative focus group interviews are neither quantifia-ble nor generalizable, so we figured that it makes more sense to go into depth with one interview and concentrate on the data it generates. With this project we aim to get an experimental ap-proach and therefore we do not even want to generalize the data. The interview was conducted in a semi-structured way and questions were prepared beforehand. We chose a semi-structured in-terview, because we thought that it will give us the best insight in all the different topics and as-pects we want to cover within our research study.

As aforementioned, we also conducted a "quick and dirty" at the actual *Riverbed* exhibition the idea and outcome of which we embodied in the focus group discussion. The table of 73 words that were mentioned by 80 different people in the frame of our research at Louisiana is to be found in Appendix B. Fortunately, there was a great variety of people present, willing to express their thoughts which enabled us to gain a broader picture of perceptions. That most words were only mentioned once, already established the impression of the exhibition being perceived in all possible ways on a very subjective, versatile level.

After conducting the focus group interview and analysing the data we generated we found some aspects that would do differently next time.

Firstly, we realised, that the order of asking the participants about their reflections mostly went in the same order. When getting to a new topic or question, participant 1 was mostly asked first, due to the fact, that she was sitting next to the interviewer.

Secondly, participant 1 had quite strong opinions and it could be stated, that she was an 'opinion-leader' during the whole discussion. Her dominant role could also be due to the position she was put into. Having one dominant participant might have led to the fact, that the other participants were influenced by her contemplations instead of stating their own thoughts and opinions. At future investigations, the less talkative participants should sometimes be asked first about their reflections, to avoid the issue of biasing their utterances.

Thirdly, we did not precisely ask the participants how they became aware of the exhibition. Within our analysis, the second step deals with 'circulation'. From the collected data we got answers to this step only to some extent. Due to the fact, that we only did superficial research on the theory part before the questions for the interview were prepared, we are short on data concerning this point. During the whole process of analysing the circulation stage we recognised, that a profound research in advance would have been of avail.

However, all those insights and reflections helped us to a great extent to improve our research skills and we gained important experience on the topic for future works.

3. Theory

With this chapter we seek to establish the theoretical foundation for this project's investigation. Stuart Hall and his work revolving around encoding and decoding can be considered of constitutional nature for the field of audience perception theory, which is what inspires us to take a closer look at his theoretical concept that entails a four stage model of communication.

3.1. Encoding/decoding model of communications

Stuart Hall first developed the encoding/decoding communications model in the essay *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse* in 1973 as a critique of the linear mass-communication model of sender-message-receiver (Hall, 1981: 128). His theoretical approach of communication is expanding and elaborating on this model by including the way in which recipients decode a message with different meanings and the help of signs.

According to Hall, every message has different layers of meanings and dependent on the social context of the receiver, the layers are interpreted in various ways. Hall refers to those multifaceted meanings as "polysemic values" (ibid.: 134). "Polysemy must not, however, be confused with pluralism." (ibid.: 134). In turn, those multifaceted meanings are "(...)hierarchically organized into dominant or preferred meanings." (ibid.:134). Furthermore it can be argued that preferred readings "(...) have the whole social order embedded in them as a set of meanings, practices and beliefs (...)." (ibid.:134). With social order is meant, that the structures of everyday life, ranking of political authorities and legitimations and general social constructions are known by the receiver.

3.2. The four step model by Hall

Based on the abovementioned contemplations, Hall compiled a four step model of a process that produces structure in distinctive moments. These four steps are elaborated on on page 129 of the book *Culture, Media, Language* and are explained as follows:

Production

Production requires the sender of a message to encode the information. This can involve biases, dominant ideologies and special viewpoints. The sender always selects the information that will be in circulation. Therefore information can never be "raw" as Hall formulates it (ibid.: 129).

Circulation

Circulation is the moment, when the individual perceives the message. This stage is influenced by the individual background, which will affect how the receiver will interpret and set the message into use. This stage leads to the recipient trying to make a meaning out of the message.

Distribution/Consumption/Use

If the message makes sense to the receiver and is fully understood, the interpretation, or decoding process, starts. The receiver is not just a passive consumer, but an active part of the process, because the message will be decoded according to the individual's background, beliefs and experiences. In other words, the decoding process is about construing a message according to the knowledge that already exists beforehand combined with the new information of the message. At this point Hall's definitions of dominant, professional, negotiated and oppositional codes come into play, the concepts of which will be introduced in the next section.

Reproduction

The process of interpreting is finished and after being exposed to a message, one can see whether actions are taken or not.

Hall also implies that every stage of the model has its specific modality and conditions and is thus "relatively autonomous" on its own. However, the stages are still interdependent within the whole process of communication (Hall, 1981: 129).

Referring to the figure below, the terms of 'meaning structure 1' and 'meaning structure 2', are in most communication cases not the same and therefore bear room for misunderstanding (ibid.: 131). In other words, the sender of a message can never be sure, if the receiver understands - decodes - the message in the same way it was encoded.
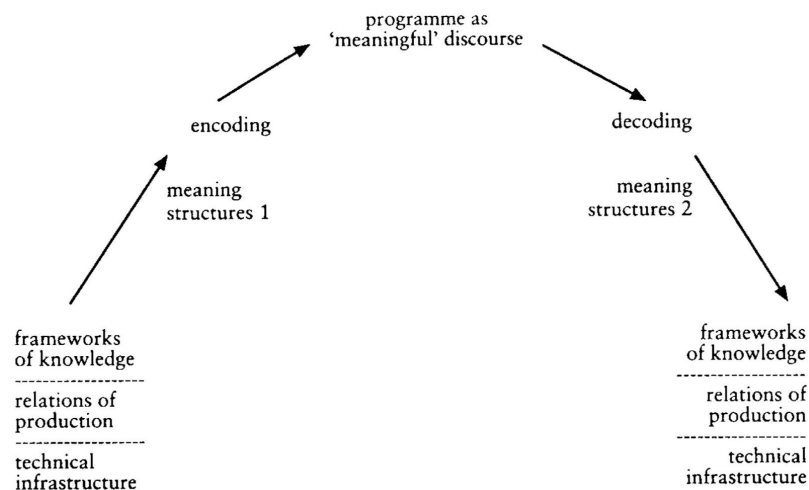
Figure 1: Encoding/decoding model (Hall, 1981: 130)

While the message is in circulation, it must be transformed into meaning (Hall, 1981: 130). If there is no meaning to the audience, then there will be neither effective nor successful communication (ibid.: 130). The process of decoding a message is highly influenced by ideology and consciousness (see glossary in the appendix). Hall stresses that it is easy to mistake certain codes as naturally given, as they appear so natural to us:

> Certain codes may, of course be so widely distributed in a specific language community or culture, and be learned at so early of age, that they appear not to be constructed - the effect of an articulation between sign and referent - but to be naturally given. (ibid.: 132).

However, communication is only possible, when one is able to decode one anothers' messages and sign systems. This process of decoding is just as active as the one of encoding.

3.3. How messages are decoded

There are several different ways in which a communicative piece can be decoded or read. Stuart Hall's model of encoding and decoding includes four codes or four kinds of readings of a message. He specifies them as following: the dominant-hegemonic code, the professional code, the negotiated code and the oppositional code. Those codes, or also called positions or types of reading, are defined and described by Hall in the book *Culture, Media, Language* on page 136 and 137.

Dominant-hegemonic code

The dominant-hegemonic code would imply the perfect form of communication. The message is decoded in exactly the same way it is encoded. As clarified in the glossary, hegemony can be referred to as the power a certain group has over another.

Professional code

The professional code is autonomous, but works within the dominance of the dominant code. It also can be seen as a supportive level, that is used by the sender to show the receiver that the message is delivered in a professional way.

Negotiated code

The third code defined by Hall is the so called negotiated code. This way of decoding a message means, that the receiver does not fully agree with the message. The recipient accepts the great views and meanings, while more situational parts are negotiated, not taken for granted and adapted to the personal viewpoint. This code bears a great amount of risk for misunderstanding because the hegemonic viewpoint is not fully accepted and the construction of power within the society is doubted.

Oppositional code

As a very contradictory perception of a message, Hall implements the oppositional code. The receiver fully understands the message and the way it is encoded, but does not share the viewpoint. The recipients form their own interpretation on the basis of a different cultural or situational background and clearly reject the view of the sender.

4. Analysis

In this chapter we aim to investigate our problem statement that is concerned with the overall questions of both how the exhibition was encoded and how our target group perceives and reflects upon, hence decodes, the *Riverbed* exhibition. In order to do so, we will apply the theoretical findings provided by Hall to the data found in the interview of Eliasson and the data generated by the group interview.

Although the structure of this analysis suggests that we started out this investigation by examining the encoding of the exhibition, it is important to stress that our work with the artist was actually the last step of this research. This means that the 'quick and dirty' as well as the focus group interview were conducted free of any influence, or biases for that matter, from Eliasson's contemplations.

4.1. The Production Stage - The Encoding of the Exhibition

To begin with, it is important to clarify that we regard Eliasson as the main encoder of this exhibition, as he is the artist, and the one who is mainly responsible for the content of the exhibition. Nevertheless, it is, of course, important to be aware of the fact that Louisiana also plays a major role in the encoding of *Riverbed* as the work of art and the museum are inseparable in this case. All the time codes in brackets within point 4.1 refer to the interview of web source 4.

4.1.1. Eliasson's reflections on the problematic aspects of encoding

Olafur Eliasson seems to be quite aware of the fact, that he can barely influence the way in which people make meaning out of the artwork he has designed. The loss of control from the encoder's side is something he expresses several times in the interview. Eliasson explains that he came to see the exhibition multiple times, just to overcome what he calls the blindness towards his own works (4:28). Eliasson explains: "Watching the people allows me to experience the exhibition through their eyes and that kind of re-synchronises my vision a little bit, so that I can see what I have lost." (4:37). He seems very aware that he as an artist has no control over how people read or decode this exhibition: "I would like to think that I can predict, to some extent, what they see. But the truth is: I can't. (...) I have a certain feeling of losing control also, having given the vision of the exhibition to someone else" (4:48). The artist brings up an interesting example of how

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people interpret and mentally organise what they see. One time, the artist sat close enough to a group of children to hear what one of them said to an elderly person that came in: "You are too old for this art." (5:50). Eliasson brings up this situation as an example of how little control he has with regards to the meaning-making of the visitors. What comes into play here is the fact that the meaning the encoder aims to convey does not necessarily have to correlate with the meaning the recipient interprets from a given text. Thus, one could argue, that the child has decoded the exhibition in a rather oppositional way, as Eliasson did not mean to exclude elderly people from the content of this exhibition. This example demonstrates quite vividly, how dynamic meaning-making processes can be and how little one's own notion and image might have to do with the one of the encoder.

4.1.2. Eliasson's message with this exhibition

One of Eliasson's aims with this exhibition is to "challenge the individual in a way where [he] feel[s] that the individual will take up the fight with [him]." (7:42). What he means is that he inflicts a certain discomfort on the visitor by means of destabilisation. The visitor needs to pay attention to the ground and reorganise their speed and way of movement in order to stay stable. The main discomfort lies thus "in changing your modus of how you move with your ground" (9:36) which results in a shift of emotion: from feeling somewhat lost to regaining stability and realising: "I can move anyway. I have senses for this also." (10:13). This discomfort is not only applying to the physical level, but involves also the mentality, as the visitor is put into a position where their notion of art is possibly challenged, resulting in a process of renegotiating what art is. This makes contemplating on this exhibition a much more personal and active matter, as one is directly involved and possibly even confronted with oneself on a rather sensitive level.

The debate that Eliasson is willing to spur with *Riverbed* goes far beyond the field of art. What he wants to make the visitor rethink is the commonly held notion that what we perceive or the way in which we make sense of the world around us is real or *natural*, although it is indeed *cultural* (10:28). Eliasson stresses that even our "senses are actually relative to the cultural circumstances." (10:55). *Riverbed* is artificial and so are the ways in which we give meaning to the world based on cultural constructs. Eliasson emphasises: "My point is: There are no real things. This is it. We are living in models and that is how it will always be and it has always been."

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(11:40). Reality, according to Eliasson, lies in the way in which a person handles and interacts with their own model (12:03). He sees the authorship and main role of an exhibition to be played by the visitor, the decoder so to speak, who, the artist argues, should be trusted to take the authorship to become creative (13:00).

4.1.3. The unstableness of experiences

That this exhibition can sometimes, especially on days where it is very crowded, have a rather dreadful atmosphere is admitted by Eliasson: "The experience gets more conventional but it also gets more (...) ugly and dreadful (...) there is no colours it's like 'ugggh', all these people, it's just, it's stressing and it gets a little bit depressing." (web source 4: 20:11). However, Eliasson considers this "also very beautiful" (20:23) and "a big success" (20:33). On good days the artist feels like this exhibition brings up fundamental questions about our society such as: What does it mean to be public (22:35)?

He has the impression that visitors can develop their own opinions without being excluded (22:26), whereas he, too, sometimes experiences that it "(...) is dreary and it's not a good day. (...). Sometimes it is in a way kind of an elitist and a little bit hostile type of environment where people feel discomfortable because they just don't feel they understand it." (23:19). This results in the feeling of alienation and even being excluded and part of the 'outgroup', as Eliasson calls it (23:55).

4.2. The Circulation Stage - Perception and Message

In order to understand the focus group participant's experience and sense-making of the exhibition, it is relevant to know that most of them had heard or read about *Riverbed* in the media. They especially highlighted social media as a source for inputs. As we are unable to research the social media influence, we instead researched some easily available, mainstream news media coverage. Mainstream newspapers like *Politiken*, *Berlingske* and *Information* have expressed very different viewpoints ranging from overall positive, over critical to negative because of predictability. This range in reviews results in our focus group possibly encountering multiple angles that they need to deal with.

It is reasonable to expect our participants to have acquired prior knowledge about the exhibition, whether directly or indirectly, from media sources. *Politiken*'s review would inform them that the landscape stems from Iceland, and that Eliasson considers Louisiana as a piece of the exhibition. It is evident that our participants have picked up on this cohesion between artwork and museum as participant 1 expressed that: "(…) it would be a different experience in the middle of the city (…) it is a museum in the nature…and then inside the museum there's nature (…) it would have been different… like the meaning of nature (…) if it was in a museum in the city(…)surrounded by no nature (…)" (web source 8: 1:14:55).

Information calls *Riverbed* predictable and Eliasson a harmless artist to exhibit. At the same time it states that Louisiana must exhibit Eliasson's work as he is folksy, bordering on populist. *Information* argues that: "Eliasson is able to make art for all those who feel excluded by a whole lot of other art." (web source 5) and because of that they must display his work, but they should not expect all critics to wait in line avidly (web source 5).

These critical sentiments do not correspond to our focus group's meaning-making, but the article mentions one important thing, which has steadily been part of the reasoning behind participant 3's visit to Louisiana: the artist. He expressed a desire to experience *Riverbed* due to prior knowledge of Eliasson's works (web source 8: 18.32). To him, this was the main incentive to go to Louisiana, whereas the remaining three participants expressed that the visit was foremost to Louisiana and the surrounding gardens and to one participant the *Riverbed* was "(…) like a extra cherry on top (…)" (ibid.: 17:15).

Throughout the discussion it became evident that our participants trusted Louisiana as an institution, which reflects on Louisiana's strengths as a museum. As a matter of fact, the museum's professional appearance corresponds to Hall's professional reading. Participant 4 explicitly stated that "[she] kinda trust[s] Louisiana and their choices and their reputation (...)" (ibid.: 1:06:20). This statement combined with participant 3's relation to the artist work together to support Eliasson and participant 1's claim that the museum and the artwork are inseparable.

It remains to be said that it is evident that some currents in the media may, through different channels, have influenced the expectations, and perhaps experience of our participants. This has most likely taken place without their full awareness. Those influences combined with their personal backgrounds are what positions them and direct their meaning-making processes.

4.3. The Distribution/Consumption/Use Stage - The Decoding Process

4.3.1. The choice of words

To get a simplified, straightforward impression of how the participants experienced the exhibition, we reused the method we employed in the "quick and dirty" research at the museum. At the beginning of the interview we had them choose and explain three words that described their initial perception of the exhibition. All the time codes within point 4.3 refer to the focus group discussion (web source 8) unless otherwise noted. As an inspiration and help, we handed out the list with the 73 words collected at the museum (see Appendix B). Everyone had the list in front of them and they chose the words independently before discussing them in the group. The chosen words constitute a considerable part of how our participants understood the exhibition and allowed our participants to ease into the further discussion.

Participant 1 chose the word 'unexpected' since she initially claimed that she did not have any expectations when she went to see the exhibition. She pointed out that she found it positively surprising how art and nature can be combined (web source 8: 5:48). Moreover she chose 'constructed reality', as it was all constructed but looked real at the same time. Her third choice was 'active':

> (…) Active in a sense that…you could actually… interact with it…like play with the rocks and there were lot of kids playing with the rocks…you could…also…just sit on one rock and think your own thoughts…meditate if you wanted (…) (ibid.: 6:06).

The same word was also chosen by participant 2, who suggested to change 'active' into a word that was not on the list, namely 'interactive' since "people could move the stones around and you could see that the riverbed probably didn't look the same as it did one hour ago" (7:50). The other two words the participant chose reflected a conflict in her - on the one hand she found the exhibition 'harmonic' because of the "(...) nature and the river flowing and small kids playing around (...)" (7:30), and on the other hand she found the overall atmosphere 'cold'. She explained: "First of all I got excited that 'oh, they actually brought the nature in here' but then to look at all the white walls… and I in the end almost felt that now it's time to get out of this exhibition and go back to a little bit warm colours [in the] rest of the (...) museum." (8:30). As a sup-

plement to the word 'cold', participant 2 wanted to add the word 'industrial' (9:27) to describe the atmosphere in the exhibition.

Participant 3 chose the word 'extraordinary', as he was impressed with the "combination of the smell and the feeling" (10:30). The second word he chose, namely 'walking art' correlates to the aforementioned ones of 'active/interactive'. This form of participating in the work of art, being able to "play with it and transform it" (11:24) also made him choose the word 'entertaining'. Participant 4 agreed with the interactive part as well and added 'bold', as she felt that it was "(...) provocative to put random stones into a museum and claim: 'that's art and I'm the artist!'" (12:38). She also found the exhibition highly 'illusionary' and even called it 'fake'- as the riverbed is only an illusion and not real (13:05).

4.3.2. The interactive experience

An aspect that was thus noticed and given credit to by all participants was the impression of the exhibition being interactive. The fact that the exhibition constantly changed as people walked through it, was found interesting by everyone. Participant 2 pointed out the momentary nature of this artwork, the placement of the stones, which kept changing every time someone stepped through it. She contemplated, that

> (…) it might have been Eliasson's purpose maybe, that first of all you enter the scenery…but every time someone steps through it…you kinda ruin this whole harmonic setting that you just entered…then you…leave behind the coldness of the place, because it has been kinda ruined by the man. (9:35).

One could argue that this way of decoding is of a negotiated kind, as Eliasson does not express an intention of making the visitor 'ruin' the scenery. He rather sees the visitors as active parts of the exhibition, not stating that the changes are even capable of ruining the artwork. What comes into play here is possibly the participant's notion that an artwork can be ruined, like a painting can be cut into pieces or a statue can be broken. Nevertheless, the aspect of constant change is intentional from the encoder's side, thus this way of interpreting the artwork relates to a negotiated extent with Eliasson's encoding.

4.3.3. The lack of green

Another impression that all of the participants shared was that it had a 'calmness' to it, even though "not necessarily in a good way" (23:17). This calmness was perceived like this, because there was nothing green - no signs of life besides the water - to be found in the rocky landscape. Participant 2 pointed out that: "(...) it was still but a little bit in this creepy kind of scary way" (23:38). Since the artist clearly mentioned, that he excluded signs of life on purpose, the reading is of dominant nature. The lack of sounds and green, i.e. pictures on the wall, bird sounds or plants in the exhibition, had the effect of making some of the participants feel uncomfortable. Furthermore, it strengthened the impression of this landscape being unnatural and constructed.

4.3.4. The effect of other visitors

The sound of people stepping on the stones, and other visitors in general, were perceived differently by the participants. One of the participants found it to be irrelevant how many people there were, as she was able to shield the sounds of other visitors. Regarding the presence of other visitors as irrelevant goes against Eliasson's view, who argues that it is highly relevant how many people there are in the exhibition. That participant 1 regards the number of other visitors as unimportant can be said to be oppositional reading, as it goes against the artist's thoughts on the matter. Another participant found herself to be hindered by the others and can thus be regarded as dominant decoding (27:50): "We actually felt like it: okay, it's necessary to sit down and be quiet but because of the crowd (...) it [was] not as natural as it would have been if it would have been only us." (40:40). In her opinion, the other visitor play a role in changing the experience in its entirety, making it less personal and hence, as Eliasson puts it more conventional.

Participant 3 thought of the other visitors as part of the artwork, not minding their presence. He found it to be very interesting to observe other people and their way of interacting with the artwork: "(…) I think the people *are part of* the exhibition, because you can sit…and see how other people are interacting with the artwork (…)" (33:30, our own emphasis). In this type of reading, one can see elements of the negotiated and the dominant position, as Eliasson, too, regards the visitors as part of the artwork although, as clarified, the artist sees the potential of disturbance by other guests.

Thus the presence of other people in the exhibition influenced their experiences in rather different ways; positive, negative or somewhat neutral ways.

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4.3.5. The role of the museum

The participants also acknowledged the fact that the museum plays an important role with regards to this exhibition: "(…) that's special with Louisiana… you couldn't do that with many other museums… because they don't have this combination of art and…nature (…)" (10:42). The importance of Louisiana and its characteristics is highly acknowledged by the artist as well, who has created this exhibition with special regards to the museum and the way it is located. Another participant pointed out how the experience would change if the museum's location changed. Louisiana situated in nature instead of in the city thus becomes part of the experience (1:14:30). All these realisations are to a great extent concordant with the artist's contemplations, which means that the participants' way of decoding the role of the museum can be said to be of dominant nature.

4.3.6. The aspect of nature in *Riverbed*

When considering the participants' perception of nature in this work, the aspect of associating this work with something familiar or unfamiliar for that matter, was interesting as it illustrates the influential role of a person's background in the decoding process. Two of the participants, who are both originally from Estonia and are now living in Denmark, did not find the exhibition to be representing anything familiar. As a result, they articulated it as somebody else's nature and 'Icelandic' nature, according to the images they had of Iceland. One of them even talked about it as being from another planet (1:16:28). In turn, the two other participants associated *Riverbed* with some familiar sceneries from their own backgrounds, as one of them had been to Greenland and both of them had backgrounds in Switzerland. Thus they associated this work with landscapes from Greenland and the Alps.

Furthermore Eliasson, who comes from an Icelandic-Danish background, refers to *Riverbed* as being a very domestic, typical Scandinavian landscape (web source 4: 14:23). From these rather different interpretations and associations it seems quite clear that both parties, encoder and decoder, are influenced by their cultural backgrounds, which vary from one another, on how they perceive the same aspect of this work. Considering the latter, one can refer back to Hall's contemplations saying that readings strongly depend on the social background.

4.3.7. How the participants interpret the meaning of the exhibition

Whereas one participant expresses that: "(...) I don't really see a sense" (1:21:11) in this type of exhibition, another one sees the message of the exhibition in grabbing "people's attention to what is actually going on in the world (...) that the ice blocks over there are actually melting" (1:21:47). Participant 4 changed her mind from not seeing a sense to articulating that the message could be: "appreciate nature more!" (1:26:06), elaborating that it makes her wonder why nature needs to be put into a room for us to pay attention to it (1:26:10). Another participant sees the meaning of the exhibition in the fact that: "(...) every man who steps through it leaves a trace. Even if it's not a visible trace… that you ruin a flowerbed or something… even those small small traces, almost unnoticeable still change the landscape" (1:26:28). Another participant throws in the notion of the 'ecological footprint' to elaborate on the previous utterance (1:26:40). Thus, three of the participants interpret the message as a 'wake-up-call' to think about nature and our responsibility towards it, while the last one does not see a concrete sense or message at all.
The decoding of the message from the side of all participants strongly differs from what the artist had in mind, namely to make the point that there is no unconstructed reality - that *Riverbed* is just as artificial as the rest of the world (web source 4: 11:40).

4.3.8. Final choice of words

Toward the end of the discussion, the participants chose one final word to describe their overall perception of the exhibition after having discussed it extensively. Participant 4 abandoned all three words chosen at the beginning ('active', 'bold' and 'illusionary') and decided to conclude with the word 'experimental' as the discussion made clear to her how experimental she finds this artwork (2:07:00).
Participant 3 stuck with 'extraordinary', one of the three words he chose at the beginning, since it reflected his feeling for this exhibition (2:07:32). Participant 2 abandoned the words 'harmonic', 'interactive' and 'cold' and went with the word 'provocative' with the reason that the exhibition is "(...) experimenting but in a provocative way." (2:08:03).
Both words, 'experimental' and 'provocative' can be interpreted as dominant reading, since Eliasson's encoding coincides with those perceptions. As aforementioned, in the interview he argues, that he has the intention to make the individual take up the fight with him (7:42).

Participant 1 stuck with one of her starting words, namely 'constructed reality', pointing out once again that: "(...) it is sort of real, but it is constructed." (2:08:25).

Noteworthy is that the 'active' part of the exhibition, that everyone stressed at the beginning, was not part of the final evaluation. Instead, two of the participants chose entirely new words which shows that in the course of the discussion they have become aware of new aspects, namely the provocative and experimenting dimension of the exhibition. The other two participants were affirmed in their original choice of words.

4.4. The Reproduction Stage - Taking Action

As mentioned in the theory chapter, the decoding and the meaning-making processes are already finished at the reproduction stage. Therefore we consider next if, and how the participants took action after experiencing *Riverbed*. This stage also includes encoding as the participants share their interpretations with their social surroundings.

The participants agreed that the exhibition was a great success (web source 8: 2:03:02). The reasons for considering the exhibition a success were the great amount of visitors as well as the attention the museum got due to the vivid discussion and negative criticism about it in the media and particularly on social media. One of the participants recommended it to her friends mentioning especially the experience: "(...) it is super cool and a really nice experience… and I don't get the whole critique of it." (ibid.: 56:09). One of them mentioned to be slightly disappointed as she expected there to be more than what was shown in the circulating images of it (20:58). "There shouldn't be any pictures out there (...) but I guess that is impossible."(ibid.: 38:00).

Moreover participant 1 emphasised that "(...) you need a little time to think about the meaning. Right after I always feel reluctant about discussing experiences (...) because I need to digest it a little bit." (ibid.: 54:48). When the participant was asked if she had discussed it after a little while, she negated it, but felt the focus group discussion was a very good opportunity to reflect on the whole experience.

As elaborated earlier, the exhibition was described as an interactive piece of art. Louisiana also displays signs on the museum walls that encourage visitors to take pictures of the exhibition and share them on social media and in this way spread awareness of it. When discussing visitors tak-

ing pictures of the work, there was an overall tendency to take pictures and share them with others: "It is part of the attraction to spread it and show that I am in a museum." (ibid.: 45:40). Although it was uncomfortable, they could not resist the urge to take pictures and share them (ibid.: 47:45).

An interesting phenomenon was that two of the participants, independently from one another, took a stone from the exhibition (web source 8: 40:50). Upon the question of why they did that, one participant explained: "I actually don't know, I thought I can never steal from an exhibition, because I'm not gonna go home with a whole painting but this time (...) I can actually take part of it without anyone noticing" (ibid.: 41:20). It is interesting to see, that an interactive exhibition like *Riverbed* makes visitors want to take the experience with them.

Summarising one can state that the exhibition definitely encourages visitors to take some kind of action. Be it starting a critical discussion about art, taking a piece home as a souvenir, or the urge to make a statement by showing others via social media. The installation is conceived as interactive and therefore the immediate experience at the museum is of more relevance than the reproduction stage. Nevertheless, it is important to consider this step of the model because it completes the process of understanding the encoding and decoding processes.

5. Discussion

Applying Hall's four stage model of encoding and decoding to this case study has revealed the vast field of interpretations and ways of meaning-making from the artist's perspective as well as our target group's perception of the exhibition. We have realised that investigating the perception of this artwork is a very complex matter, as there is a great variety of angles from which it can be looked upon. According to social and cultural circumstances, everyone is affected individually by this artwork. This was not only well demonstrated by the multiplicity of words expressed by the visitors at the museum (see Appendix B), but also by the many different viewpoints shared by the participants in the focus group discussion. In the course of the analysis, it has become clear that our participants have, respectively, made their own meanings, which had, at times, relatively little in common with what Eliasson intended to convey. As pointed out in the analysis, three of our participants have perceived the message of the exhibition to be concerned with nature and our awareness towards it. However, Eliasson expresses in the interview that the message he tried to convey was about our relationship with reality and where we draw the line between artificiality and reality. Although there were also some major parallels, or dominant ways of reading, between the artist's and our participants' points of views, this investigation has made clear, that interpretations and meaning-making processes on *Riverbed* are infinite. Thus, the investigation has made us critical towards the model we have employed for this research. We have become aware that it is too simple for the complexity of the communicative processes between artist, museum and visitor.

It is vital to bear in mind that we have not been dealing with a communication campaign with a clear message that can either be understood in a dominant, negotiated or oppositional way. Rather we have been dealing with an abstract work of art, that is capable of being perceived in endless and, importantly, no wrong ways. A crucial keyword in that respect is "polysemic", that Kim Christian Schrøder argues for in his article *Audience Reception Analysis* from 2014. According to him, a cultural text can have multiple meanings depending on the receiver's communicative repertoires (Schrøder, 2014:2). In his other article *Making sense of audience discourse -Towards a multidimensional model of mass media reception* from 2000, he furthermore argues that audience receptions are more multi-faceted than Hall's codes cover (Schrøder, 2000: 234). Schrøder uses

empirical fieldwork to exemplify how the recipients interpret meanings into a text that were not at all intended by its sender. He argues that it is often unlikely that:

> (…) the 'preferred reading' is a property of the text (as the Hall/Morley approach would have it); but is it then the reading intended by the (…) creator, or the reading actualized by a majority of informants, which qualifies as the preferred reading? (Schrøder, 2000: 236).

Schrøder even questions the possibility of a dominant reading in the article *Media Discourse Analysis: Researching Cultural Meanings from Inception to Reception* from 2007, as the communicative codes of the sender and the reader of a text always vary from one another (Schrøder, 2007: 79). He reasons that, while media texts have their role in constructing people's knowledge, views, values and identities, their sense-making codes empower them to negotiate the meaning in the text (Schrøder, 2014: 4).

It is interesting to consider how the reader is empowered by being granted authorship and authority in their evaluation and sense-making of a product like this exhibition. When thinking of meaning as a joint product, the reader is lifted from a level of being merely the receiver, the decoder of a message, to being equally responsible and involved in constructing a message. To think of sense-making in this way, so to speak, liberates the visitor, making their perceptions and thoughts on a product just as valuable as the artist's. Interestingly, Eliasson talks about exactly this issue, stating that the visitor should be given authorship and trust to become creative in their encounter with his exhibition. He sees the main role of the exhibition to be played by the visitor and their encounter with *Riverbed*. The artist decided to leave as much space for the visitor's interpretation as possible, not providing the visitor with any explanation from his side in the actual exhibition. This creates spaciousness and freedom for all types of interpretations.
However, the very idea of decoding actually goes against the free authorship of the reader. Thus, it is necessary to point out, that the visitors we have asked at the museum as well as the participants in the focus group discussion are to be considered more than decoders. They are active meaning producers. A quote that figures this out beautifully was formulated by Dervin:

Communication cannot be conceptualized as transmission. Rather, it must be conceptualized in terms of both parties involved in creating meanings, by means of dialogue. The sense people make of the media messages is never limited to what sources intend and is always enriched by the realities people bring to bear (Dervin 1989, p. 72). (Schrøder, Lecture: slide 7).

Dervin sheds light onto a very important aspect: the realities people live in. As already pointed out earlier, the encoding process is highly influenced by the readers' own social backgrounds and personal surroundings. This means, that the actual meaning of a text can neither be taken for granted nor specifically located within it.

The degree of educational background is just one of many elements that influence the decoding of the exhibition, and the overall perception of this artwork, and therefore the data we generated with the focus group discussion. The relatively high level education is one of the main similarities of the participants, because we chose university students to be the target group. One participant stated during the discussion that she thought that "(...) random people don't get [the meaning of] it, so it must be a higher level of understanding (...)" (web source 8: 16:36). Her thoughts were based on a negative critique about the exhibition which shows that a certain level of critical thinking and personal interest in controversial issues can fuel the willingness to visit such exhibitions. Education is, of course, not the only factor that influences an individual's perception. The overall perception of *Riverbed* is strongly affected by individually known environments. The results and meaning-making processes would possibly have been different had we chosen participants with Icelandic backgrounds.

One of the recurring themes of the focus group research was the question of what makes something art. It turned out, that this is not easy to answer. As the topic of art itself is a highly abstract matter and interpretable in an infinite number of ways, the responses of our participants were diverse as well. Decisive keywords like the 'newness factor', 'institutionalisation', the 'art-world' (see Glossary) or the 'idea behind the artwork' were mentioned and brought up a whole new discussion. All of the participants had very strong opinions on why they considered something art, and they elaborated on this topic with a high degree of knowledge. All these aspects and backgrounds have determined the outcome of our research.

All in all, with this project we have learned that the understanding of a cultural text, such as this exhibition, is very individual and dependent on a great number of different circumstances. Strictly speaking, we have not only been dealing with the exhibition as one text, but with a multitude of texts from the artist's side as well as from the visitors' side. All these texts, including this project paper, are to be considered autonomous and carry both decoding and encoding elements. Thus, we cannot regard the understanding of the text as a linear transmission process that follows one direction. This investigation has demonstrated to us that we have to think of this understanding in much more complex, not to say chaotic, terms, namely as starting from several angles and going into many different directions.

6. Conclusion

Referring back to the problem formulation of this investigation, we can conclude that there is a huge spectrum of perceptions of *Riverbed*. It can be stated that the participants of the focus group discussion expressed a rather positive attitude towards the exhibition, approaching and reflecting on the exhibition in an open-minded, interested way. The understanding of the exhibition is very individual and is constituted by many different aspects, which makes it impossible for us to present a clear answer to how the exhibition was decoded. When considering the encoding process from Eliasson's side, we in our project group, interestingly all have different aspects in mind. This vividly demonstrates that there cannot be an explicit answer to this question either. While some of us think that the main factor in the encoding was the inflicting of discomfort on the visitor to make them renegotiate their senses, others believe that the encoding was about challenging our notion of reality and where we draw the line between it and illusion. The fact that there are so many perspectives from which one can view the encoding, underlines the impression that by analysing the encoding, we are again decoding. As pointed out, decoding, or meaning-making as we would rather call it after doing this project, is highly individual and dependent on an infinite number of circumstances. Thus, the main finding of this project is not how the exhibition was encoded or decoded but much rather, that it is necessary to think of these processes in much more flexible and complex terms.

The application of Hall's four stage model has given us insights on various levels, helping us to deconstruct meaning-making processes involved in this exhibition. In order to conduct this type of investigation, we applied theoretical concepts that were concerned with a major goal: simplification - making abstract processes tangible. The notion of encoding and decoding originates from the idea that there is a distinct message encoded into an explicit signal which can be decoded back into the message. It has become evident that when approaching complex material like this artwork, this notion reaches its limits.

We conclude that intentions and perceptions on Eliasson's *Riverbed* are difficult to simplify and if doing so, one is bound to take away from their integrity. The fact that impressions and motives are so rich in angles and interpretations that there is no clear, unambiguous meaning to this artwork is what characterises and shapes this exhibition, giving it its special character. Shortly speaking: Perceptions on *Riverbed* deserve to be abstract.

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8. Appendix A

All the pictures were taken by Marlene Kurzmann, unless otherwise noted.
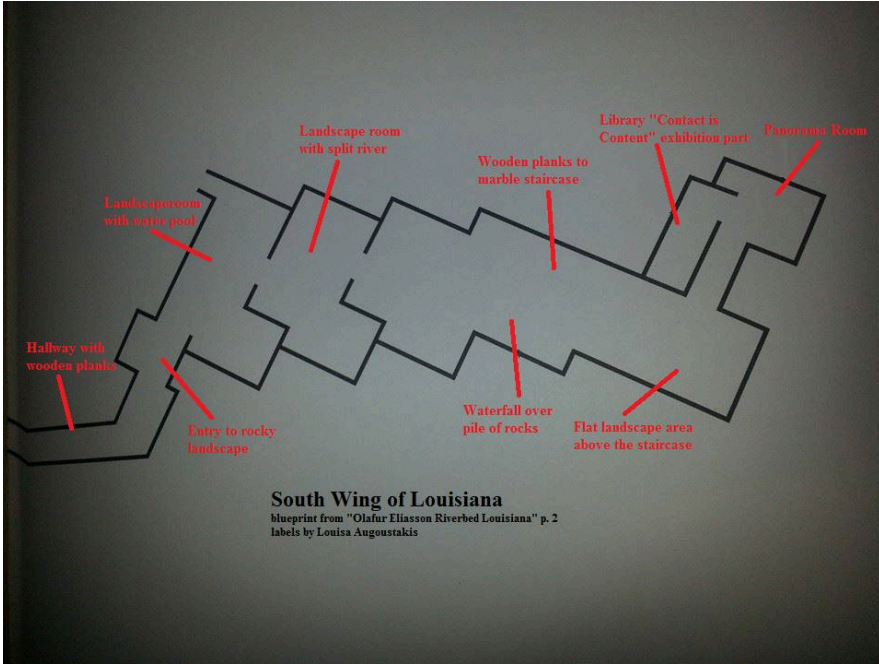

Picture 1: Entry to Louisiana Museum of Modern Art

Picture 2: The middle room of Riverbed

Picture 3: Riverbed

Picture 4: Detailed blue print of Louisiana's south wing. Source: see picture.

Picture 5: ARoS Museum with *Rainbow Panorama* by Eliasson on top.

Picture 6: Details from within the *Rainbow Panorama*.

Picture 7: Details from within the *Rainbow Panorama.*

9. Appendix B – results of the "quick and dirty"

exciting	deserted	impressive (2)
time-consuming	confusing (2)	overwhelming
pompous	fascinating	extraordinary
landscape	constrained	big task
noisy	beautiful	special
unexpected	crazy	hiking
changing	walking-art	physical
monumental	moving	nature
grey	stagnant	fantastic (2)
interesting	quiet (2)	Iceland
alive	boring	strange
calm (2)	cold	mountain
dark	lonely	clean
pure	nowhere	unique
constructed reality	prehistoric	meaningless
significant	homely	pointless
unimaginative	active	abandoned
sad	flowing	unbelievable
experimental	deep	surprising (3)
different	shallow	"a small smile"
realistic	dead	contrastful
harmonic	fine	illusionary
waste	natural	empty
provocative	entertaining	bold
passive	clinical	

10.   Glossary

10.1. Art world, the

In 1964 Arthur Danto, a philosopher of art, coined the term of the "Art world", which highly re-negotiated the way in which art is theoretically approached in the modern age. In his famous article *The Art world* that was published in the *Journal of Philosophy*, "(...) [h]e stated that the new art forms of his time - in which pop art, minimal art and conceptual art presented themselves and won a position - couldn't be seen as art without the introduction of the notion 'art world'." (Van Maanen, 2009: 18). Danto saw himself confronted with certain problems about modern, contemporary art works, such as Warhol's Brillo Boxes, that are also well applicable to the *Riverbed* exhibition. He wondered why and how something can be considered art although looking exactly like a real object (ibid.: 18). Danto reasoned, that in order for one to be art and the other to be reality, some sort of distinction is needed (ibid.: 18):

> What in the end makes the difference between a Brillo Box and a work of art consisting of a
> Brillo box is a certain theory of art. It is the theory of art that takes it up into the world of art,
> and keeps it from collapsing into the real object it is. (2003 [1964]: 41). (ibid.:19).

Thus, according to Danto, what makes a modern art work such as *Riverbed* with its thousands of real stones and an artificial but of real water consisting riverbed art, is the world of art in which it is located. The art philosopher argues that works such as Warhol's Brillo boxes or Eliasson's *Riverbed* for that matter, express something about reality which makes them more than a repetition of a real Brillo Box (ibid.: 19) or a real riverbed. Continuing this path, Danto formulates his founding statement (ibid.: 19): "'To see something as art requires something the eye cannot descry - an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an art world' (ibid.). (ibid.: 19).
These contemplations of Danto on the art world served as the basis for the institutional theory of art by George Dickie that argued that in order for something to be art it needs to be in an institutional frame.

10.2. Consciousness

To take the idea of ideology to another level, James Lull claims that "dominant ideologies reflect the values of society's politically or economically powerful institutions and persons, regardless of the type of system in place." (ibid.: 23).

Another keyword that has to be stated at this point is the fact of consciousness. The term consciousness refers to the delivery of dominant ideologies (Lull, 2000: 29). Mass media has the power to influence what and how a certain group of the society thinks (ibid.: 29). Two very important terms have to be brought to attention when talking about consciousness: direction and repetition (ibid.: 30). The attention of people has to be directed to information in order to provide an effective change of mindset, hence the information has to be repeated. This is exactly how Lull connects ideology and consciousness: "Ideology refers mainly to the representation of ideas; consciousness is the impression those ideas leave on individuals and groups." (ibid.: 30).

10.3. Hegemony

Tracing back to Antonio Gramsci who was an Italian Marxist theoretician and politician, the concept of hegemony combines the two approaches of ideology and consciousness (Lull, 2000: 48). Gramsci expanded the theory of socio political view of Marxism to the area of cultural hegemony (ibid.: 49). Hegemony in his definition is to combine dominant ideology and consciousness. It is merely the power of a dominant social group over another class (ibid.: 48): "If ideology is a system of structured representations, and consciousness is a structure of mind that reflects those representations then hegemony is the linking mechanism between dominant ideology and consciousness." (ibid.: 48).

10.4.Ideology

> Ideology is organized thought - set of values, orientations and predispositions that are expressed through technologically mediated and interpersonal communication. (...) they are points of view that may or may not be true (...). (James Lull, 2000: 13).

Ideologies themselves appear in many different varieties and do not follow a clear definition. But, according to James Lulls *Media, Communication, Culture* from 2000, there is one character that applies to every organized thought, namely that "it always serves a purpose." He goes on to stress that: "Ideologies are implicated by their origins, their institutional associations, and the purposes to which they are put, though these histories and relationships may never be entirely clear." (ibid.: 14).
Ideologies in the mass media are used to start a discussion among the receivers and the effective implication of ideology aims to affect the implementation of a publicly accepted way of thinking. As Lull argues, "ideas [and ideologies] are never neutral and they rarely stand alone." (ibid.: 17).

In the course of page 18 in the book *Media, Communication, Culture* Lull goes on to explain the following idea: Ideology can also be compared with language. Language is a system, but it is not closed. People use generally understood words, phrases and sentences to communicate with each other. Those communicative elements are understood and accepted within the system. But the system is constructed and a receiver needs to have the ability to decode the mediated message. As in every constructed reality, there is space for misunderstanding and deviation within the message that is conveyed.

11.   Article

Have you ever wondered what students at other faculties write about in their semester projects? Now is you chance with **our new serial: Bachelor Project of the month**.
Every month RUSK will feature a research project at the bachelor levels from one of the four basic faculties: Humanities, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences and the Humanistic Technological Sciences.
The serial is created as a complement to the initiative "Thesis of the Week", which explores research projects conducted by RUC's graduate students.

Bachelor Project of the Month: Riverbed - Modern Art and Linear Communication Models.

Getting a specific message across to many people at once is a tough task. One that has resulted in many models of how that can be achieved most successfully. It has been proved that they are, to some extent, sufficient for e.g. advertising campaigns, but how well do they work when you want to figure out the message of a modern art exhibition?
 "We were supposed to do a reception analysis. In other words, we needed to find out how somebody made sense of something." Explains one of the authors, Marlene. She continues: "Instead of doing another reception analysis on an ad campaign, we decided to look at Olafur Eliasson's artwork Riverbed."

The artwork itself is an installation piece at Louisiana Museum. The Danish-Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson has created an actual riverbed inside the museum's south wing. "It's amazing" says co-author Louisa, "they actually flew in tons of stones from Iceland to make this exhibition."
How people experience this specific exhibition is the basis for the project work. So they set about doing a very basic data collection at the museum, where they asked 80 people for a single word that described their experience of the artwork. With these words in hand, the project group put together a focus group interview with four students who had visited the exhibition.

"These words gave us an idea of what to expect from our focus group discussion," says moderator and co-author Anneli, "they served as an icebreaker between us and them, and helped us shape the direction of the discussion a bit." This combination of methods gave the group a chance to get in depth knowledge of how these four youths had understood the meaning of placing tons of rocks inside a museum with a stream of water running through.

Making sense of the data

Co-author Marlene explains how the group set about exploring the data they had gained: "We needed a way to order and make sense of the focus group discussion, so we found a well-recognised model of communication and used that to structure our findings." She explains how most communication models are linear, which means they only allow for a sender to try and convey a specific message to an audience. Lena elaborates: "Most models of how a message is delivered do not allow for the receiver to influence the message. And even when the model tries to allow for the individuals background to influence the message, the model still holds to the idea that there is a specific message being delivered."

In conclusion

Because the models were meant primarily for campaigns like 'RenKBH' or advertising, applying it to a modern art exhibition proved difficult.

"We wanted to see if it was possible to use Hall's four stage model on an art exhibition, and in the process we realised that, on its own, it wasn't enough for our exhibition that did not have just one meaning." says Louisa and Anneli adds "Yeah, so because of this insufficiency, we brought in a different theory that allows for many meanings to be drawn from the same experience."

"In the end," says Lena, "we concluded that the constrictions of Hall's model were not beneficial for the artwork, although the structure worked well. But in the end we all agreed: Riverbed deserves to be abstract in meaning."

12. Synopsis

The article is an informal article to be published on the online paper RUSK. RUSK is a student driven campus paper at Roskilde University, which is not being monitored by the administration. The publication is placed as a counterpart to the existing serial "Thesis of the Week" and brings about a new serial following projects at the bachelor modules of RUC. RUSK makes a point out of having articles and blogs by all factions at RUC - students - including Ph.D.'s, staff, administration and political organisations. They aim to keep tabs on all current events on campus, whether social, political or study related.

As RUSK allows all factions to contribute with entries, it seems logical that they hope to cater to a wide audience. The entries primarily cater to the student body. It is, however, clear that they wish for the paper to be able to reach the staff and administration as well. On the side, as unexpected receivers we may find students from other universities as well as professional journalists covering educational matters.

The purpose of the article is to shed light onto current research taking place within RUC's bachelor programme. It is reasonable to believe that students from other faculties and subjects will read the article, and the hope is that they will gain knowledge and understanding of a topic they will otherwise never come into contact with. In this case it is specifically how communication models work when being applied to a modern art installation and how such an exhibition does not necessarily conform to the common practice of linear communication.

If the article manages to reach students across faculties, the hope would be that, besides enlightening them, it might inspire the students to employ similar methods and considerations within their own field. In such cases, knowing that a project with the desired theory and method exists will allow the students to lean on each other and thus improve their studies.

The article is constructed as an interview with the project group based on the project report. It therefore appeals to the reader by building arguments factually. The article breaks down the methodological process in order to be understandable for all factions at RUC. As

the primary receivers are peers, the credibility beforehand lies in the mutual faith between students. Referring to Aristotle's means of persuasion, one can state that ethos is established by the way in which the article approaches the reader, namely from student to student. Already the headline fuels the impression that one deals with a trustworthy, credible article whose intention is solely to provide interesting material for other students at RUC. Pathos plays a role in that the reader has most likely dealt with project writing himself and can thus identify with the process of working on such a paper. That this article is formulated by students from RUC to students from RUC strengthens this identification and possibly leads to an increased empathy and sympathy. The article appears reasonable and the content is presented in a coherent way. Furthermore the reader gets the impression that they read about a successful project, as it is not only the project of the month but also seems to have been conducted successfully. This establishes logos. All in all one can argue that all three means of persuasion are covered by this article to a sufficient extent.