

ROUTLEDGE RESEARCH IN DESIGN HISTORY



EDITED BY KJETIL FALLAN, CHRISTINA ZETTERLUND,  
AND ANDERS V. MUNCH

# NORDIC DESIGN CULTURES IN TRANSFORMATION, 1960–1980

REVOLT AND RESILIENCE



# Nordic Design Cultures in Transformation, 1960–1980

Covering the 1960s and 1970s, this volume explores new ways of investigating, comparing and interpreting the different domains of design culture across the Nordic countries.

Challenging the traditional narrative, this volume argues that the roots of the most prominent features of Nordic design's contemporary significance are not to be found amongst the objects for the home collectively branded as 'Scandinavian Design' to great acclaim in the 1950s, but in the discourses, institutions and practices formed in the aftermath of that oft-told success story, during the turbulent period between 1960 and 1980. This is achieved by employing multidisciplinary approaches to connect the domains of industrial production, marketing, consumption, public institutions, design educations, trade journals as well as public debates and civic initiatives forming a design culture. This book makes a significant contribution to current, international agendas of historiographical critique focusing on transnational relations and the deconstruction of national design histories.

This book will be of interest to scholars in design, design history and Scandinavian studies.

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### **Nordic Design Cultures in Transformation, 1960–1980**

Revolt and Resilience

*Edited by Kjetil Fallan, Christina Zetterlund and Anders V. Munch*

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# Nordic Design Cultures in Transformation, 1960–1980

Revolt and Resilience

Edited by  
Kjetil Fallan, Christina Zetterlund and  
Anders V. Munch

Cover image: Susanne Ussing and Carsten Hoff, Communal building of the ten-week building experiment in The New Society/The Thy Camp 1970, Denmark. Photo: Flemming Østergaard Nielsen

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# Introduction

## Nordic Design Cultures in Transformation, 1960–1980

*Kjetil Fallan, Christina Zetterlund and  
Anders V. Munch*

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Mainstream attention to Nordic design, whether contemporary or historical, tends to be predominantly aesthetic in nature and to feed off a distinct and distinctive variety of ‘mid-century modern’. In this book, we argue that the roots of the most prominent features of Nordic design’s contemporary significance are not to be found amongst the ‘gourmet objects’ for the home collectively branded as ‘Scandinavian Design’ to great acclaim in the 1950s – but in the discourses, institutions, and practices formed in the aftermath of that oft-told success story, during the socially, culturally, politically, and economically turbulent period between 1960 and 1980. This period saw profound transformations of Nordic design cultures through dramatic changes to the production systems, consumption regimes, economic policies, and ideological paradigms in which they were enmeshed. But unlike the previous ‘golden era’, it has received surprisingly little attention. The transformative period of the 1960s and 1970s proved challenging to traditional design practices, but also spurred on important new initiatives in fields such as design activism, social design, ergonomics, user participation, and ecological sustainability (Brunnström 2004; Robach 2010; Korvenmaa 2012; Zetterlund 2014; Lundahl 2015; Lie 2016; Jensen and Munch 2020; Fallan 2022). These arenas became crucial in forging new design cultures in the region, and because the concerns, challenges, and debates regarding these topics are no less pressing today than they were half a century ago, this history of revolt and resilience in Nordic design cultures is more relevant than ever.

This book explores historical developments and changes in the professional networks, discourses, institutions, and practices which made design from the Nordic countries in the late 1970s something very different from Scandinavian Design in its heyday of the 1950s. The relatively homogenous, but also narrow-gauged understanding of what design was, should, and could be, gave way to a far more complex and diverse discourse and experimental attitude. In the ranks of critics and practitioners alike, voices of dissent expressed concern for design’s conventional role as an integral part of the consumer society, and called for design and designers to engage in other activities and arenas. But even commercially oriented design cultures underwent significant changes during the period. The 1960s saw not only a veritable revolution in the field of fashion, but also profound changes in consumption patterns and lifestyles moving away from the mid-century ideal of ‘easy living’. At the same time, rapid developments in production technology and artificial materials facilitated new forms, styles, and products, but also new ways of designing and collaborating. Even the term



## 2 *Kjetil Fallan et al.*

'design' itself changed both in content and use, for example, through the consolidation of industrial design as a domain in its own right and the increasing attention to design of public spaces and services (Wildhagen 1988, 187–214; Fallan 2007).

In the wake of broad structural developments, including international free trade, consolidations in industry, technological innovation, and specialisation came also growing critiques of the social and ecological unsustainability of production and consumption. This reinvigorated critical debates at the design schools, in the professions, and in the broader public about the uses and abuses of design. International exchanges and transnational circulations of ideas were integral to these debates. Perhaps the most paradigmatic example is the case of the Austrian-American designer and critic Victor Papanek, who in the late 1960s and early 1970s spent extended periods at and made brief visits to the design schools of Helsinki, Oslo, Stockholm, and Copenhagen – experiences which in turn significantly informed his internationally influential social design criticism (Lie 2016; Clarke 2021, 197–208). This activism tapped into a broader range of socially engaged projects in Nordic design education and practice with an impact far beyond the region, including the development of participatory methodologies in educational, activist, and professional contexts (see Chapters 1, 4, 5, and 11), as well as in the practice of designers working with communities with disabilities (Guffey 2018, 125–130). Designers and design institutions were also deeply involved in the demonstrations and alternative programmes organised in response to the official agenda of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972 (Scott 2016; Fallan 2022).

Equally important is that this was a change that did not just happen within institutions but was an engagement that went far beyond, as this is a decade where long-standing civil rights movements gained increased visibility. Perhaps the most well-known example in a design context is second-wave feminism, organising for women's rights in society. An engagement that became apparent in exhibitions as well as in an interest in craft, and especially in the field of textiles. However, there were several civil rights movements during this period, among them we find for instance LGBTQ+ rights groups, as well as Roma and indigenous Sámi organising themselves (Lantto and Mörkenstam 2008; Mohtadi 2019; Selling 2020; Cubbin 2022). It is an engagement that does not just argue for changes in current society, but also in how history has been understood and written. History became a tool for change (Zetterlund 2019). By examining the impact of various socially and politically charged intellectual currents, this book portrays Nordic design cultures in rapid and profound transformation.

Nordic designers have been regarded as social engineers, contributing to the organisation and promotion of the region's highly valued welfare states (Råberg 1970; Mattsson and Wallenstein 2010; Dahlkild 2020). However, the relationships between designers, markets, and institutions changed in the course of these two decades, which mark the largest expansion of the Nordic welfare states, but also their first signs of crisis (Kettunen and Petersen 2021, 20–25). Design activism, social utopian spaces, and public design were some of the responses emerging from designers. Today, the critical, imaginative thinking of the late 1960s and 1970s is often re-invoked as inspiration for finding alternative ways of practicing design and how to formulate design in society. Nordic designers were a significant part of the international movement that has inspired such reappraisal, which makes it important to investigate the region's local conditions and developments, potentials, and failures. A salient point

of divergence is that where US activists often formed counter-cultures of self-supply, Nordic designers engaged more in public projects – and many enjoyed stronger institutional support (Jensen and Munch 2020). As both the welfare states and the alternative movements of the period are reassessed today, it is crucial to discuss both the Nordic Model and the role and contributions of design, beyond its function as a ‘brand’ (Mordhorst 2021), on the basis of historical investigations into the period.

Since the developments of the late 1960s and 1970s have often been characterised as a period of decay following the ‘golden age’ of Scandinavian Design, scholarship on this epoch has been sparse. Furthermore, understanding these transformations of Nordic design cultures across discourses, institutions, and practices involves studying different kinds of objects, actors, and archives, which in turn calls for different kinds of investigations. These kinds of historical materials do not conform to the usual suspects populating design exhibitions or coffee table books, and therefore require other modes of engagement with actors and communities, exhibitions and debates, for example, through the use of oral history, grey literature, and private archives (Lie 2017). By prioritising discourses, institutions, and practices rather than products and individuals, we not only provide a suitable framework for the discussion of design cultures in transformation, but simultaneously demonstrate a key methodological transformation of the field: From a preoccupation with form, objecthood, and creation towards a focus on ideologies, critique, and systems. This book explores new ways of investigating, comparing, and interpreting the different domains of design culture across the Nordic countries, with a specific focus on the significant transformations in the 1960s and 1970s. Key to this aim is employing multidisciplinary approaches to connect the domains of industrial production, marketing, consumption, public institutions, design education, and trade journals, as well as public debates and civic initiatives forming a design culture (Julier et al. 2019). Furthermore, the project makes a significant contribution to current, international agendas of historiographical critique, focusing on transnational relationships and the deconstruction of national design histories (Fallan and Lees-Maffei 2016).

The contributions of this anthology have been developed through a series of workshops, gathering a broad group of design historians across the Nordic countries and beyond. This collaboration was only made possible by a *NOS-HS grant for Explorative Workshops*, 2019–2021, awarded by the Joint Committee for Nordic Research Councils in Humanities and Social Sciences. Our explorations have been investigations into new aspects of design culture in this period, hitherto more or less ignored in Nordic design history, as well as new ways of collaborating – actively encouraging co-authorship to foster transnational and comparative studies, enrolling the voices of time witnesses and historical actors through interviews, and gathering researchers from a more interdisciplinary field, beyond design museums and universities. The collaborative methodologies underpinning the book also mirror the transition towards collaborative design processes that constitute one of the shifts we observe in the design cultures of the period examined here. Besides this book project, we have also reached out to the Nordic design museums and developed ideas for how to research and display the design culture of this period, where the well-known designer names and iconic objects played a less significant role. It has been a challenge for museums to show the transformations of the years between 1960 and 1980, because the period is not well represented in their collections, and it does not fit smoothly into the usual narratives and permanent displays. This project has revealed a need for museum

researchers to investigate, interpret, and show this period in new ways, focussing more on discourses, institutions, and practices. Among our participants, we have had representatives from many Nordic museums related to design, and we hope to have initiated a continuous dialogue, inspired by the topic of the book.

No project of this nature can be exhaustive in terms of topics covered. The sheer richness and diversity of transformations, experiments, and developments that characterise the two decades under scrutiny here constitute our strongest argument for focusing on this particular period – but it also means that the 14 chapters which follow can only ever provide a partial picture of how Nordic design cultures changed. For instance, we devote considerable attention to the rise of ecology and environmentalism as new influences on design discourse, as well as to issues of social justice. Conversely, the book does not to any great extent discuss the impact of the many civil rights movements that were strong agents of change in the period and thus could have warranted closer consideration. Design schools and museums dominate among the institutions featuring in this book, whereas the roles played by archives, libraries, associations, organisations, governmental bodies, etc. will have to be deliberated in future studies. If the potentially relevant discourses and institutions are many, the corresponding number of practices through which transformations could be traced is virtually countless. Our selection includes the design of work management systems, of clothing, of coop-organised craft and of books. And while all of these in different ways exemplify crucial shifts in how design was practiced and under which conditions, alternative takes on this task could have taken account of, say, the design of public services, of retail spaces, of consumer electronics, and the emerging role of computers and other new technologies as key factors in transforming design practices.

The book is structured in three parts, each examining transformations of Nordic design culture in different arenas or levels of abstractions, from discourse, via institutions, to practices. Part I sets the tone by focusing on key topics defining the intellectual and political climate of the period, including environmentalism, activism, social justice, and indigenous rights. In Chapter 1, Kjetil Fallan shows how the emergence of ecological design was characterised by close and reciprocal interrelations between ideology and methodology. Spurred into action by wider knowledge of the ecological crisis, designers, critics, educators, students, and activists struggled to find new answers to the questions of what design should be, and how it should be practiced. The chapter draws on examples from the fields of design education and design activism, where the interaction between ideology and methodology arguably was particularly prominent, since both education and activism are ideologically charged and methodologically explicit. In this manner, Fallan argues that the dynamic relation between the *why* and the *how* was integral to the shaping of ecological design as it made its way north. In Chapter 2, Anders V. Munch and Hans-Christian Jensen offer a close reading of the term ‘environment’ (*miljø*) in Danish design discourse around 1970. If it is an unruly concept today, it was no less so half a century ago when concerns about the natural environment and the built environment alike assumed unprecedented political currency, both in public and professional debates. Munch and Jensen demonstrate that the term acquired a broad range of meanings, from the decidedly abstract to the specifically concrete, and argue that this fluid conception facilitated new directions in the vivid discussions at the time over what design should be and where it should be heading – but that the same, indeterminacy also rendered constructive exchanges across different design disciplines more challenging. The theme of environmentalism

is pursued further by Beata Labuhn in Chapter 3, where she documents a little-known example of how architectural students in Sweden and Norway in the late 1960s engaged in the public dissemination of knowledge about the ecological crisis. Drawing on the work of public intellectuals and concerned scientists, these students organised travelling exhibitions which proved to be surprisingly effective in bringing design and environmentalism into conversation. Retaining the notion of exhibitions as a mode of design activism, Chapter 4 takes the form of a conversation between Christina Zetterlund and Gunilla Lundahl, a journalist, educator, curator, and activist who was a key figure in the Swedish and Nordic design scene in the 1960s and 1970s. Looking back at her activities in this period, Lundahl argues that the major and lasting value of the experimental exhibition projects she worked on lies not so much in the end results as in their planning and development, and, more importantly, how the social involvement did not end with the exhibition but continued in other grass-root initiatives. Offering another take on the trope of community, in Chapter 5, Malin Graesse and Kaisu Savola show through two different case studies how craft was by designers perceived as a tool for rural development. From highly diverging organisational origins, their Norwegian and Finnish case studies demonstrate a shared – and perhaps naïve – belief in the power of traditional craft-based production systems to mitigate the detrimental effects of industrialisation and centralisation on rural communities. The chapter analyses these initiatives and examines agency in how the projects were formulated and staged. This question reappears in Chapter 6, where Anna Westman Kuhmunen starts in the second wave of the Sámi rights movement and shows how *duodji* (Sámi handicraft) became a prominent part of this transnational mobilisation. She also analyses differences between when Sámi craft was formulated from within Sámi society, and when it was staged from the outside, by institutions representing the Swedish majority society.

In Part II, we move from the above discussions of the broader ideological discourses to examination of how these were reflected in, and responded to by key institutions in the design field, such as organisations, museums, and schools. In Chapter 7, Peder Valle, Sabina Maria Rossau, and Leena Svinhufvud take a closer look at three exhibitions which sought in different ways to address the rapidly changing and expanding understanding of design in this period. The case studies, from Norway, Finland, and Denmark, reveal that institutions founded in the 19th century found it challenging to come to grips with the new social and cultural meaning of industrial design articulated in the 1960s. Neither the historical-aesthetic approach of decorative art museums nor the commercial logic of promotional organisations proved very apt at conceptualising design as an agent of social change. These exhibitions thus pinpointed the need to develop new curatorial strategies better suited to contemporary design culture. Like higher education in general, Nordic design schools became the sites and subjects of rebellions and reforms in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Pekka Korvenmaa discusses in Chapter 8 how Helsinki's traditional arts and crafts school during these years was transformed into the region's first dedicated university of art and design, and how this process unfolded under the long shadow of the cold war. The government intended for the reformed, upgraded institution to supply and serve the manufacturing industry – but like most art and design schools, it was populated by students and teachers of a decidedly leftist bent, who did not necessarily agree. Korvenmaa posits that what started as leftist radicalism, much like at other schools throughout western Europe, soon developed into a conformist type of Marxist-Leninism, which

arguably turned the institution into a sleeping cell of Kremlin-loyal subjects awaiting the communist revolution. Driven less by global geopolitics and more by demands for individual creative freedom and increased student participation in institutional governance, the rebellions at the Danish design schools are the focus of the next two chapters. Chapter 9 brings the historical actors themselves to the stage in the form of an interview with three designers who were students at the schools at the time, and active participants in the since-mythologised events some fifty years ago. In Chapter 10, Anders V. Munch, Alison Clarke, Vibeke Riisberg, and Lene Kiærbye Pedersen complement and contextualise the interviews by fleshing out the history of the revolts and reforms at the Danish design schools. Their analysis also places these events in an international perspective by tracing the ambivalent role played by Victor Papanek when he was a visiting professor in Copenhagen during these tumultuous times.

Part III shifts the attention from institutions to practices and professions, asking how designers both responded and contributed to the broader social, cultural, economic, and technological shifts of the period. Whether working in/for the industry or seeking alternative modes of practice, the role of the designer and the nature of the work they performed underwent significant changes. Even the very definition of what design was and who designers were, was in play. For instance, as Maria Göransdotter shows in Chapter 11, user-centred, or participatory design emerged in unexpected circumstances. This entirely new methodology for structuring a de-centred and inclusive design process, which is largely considered a Nordic specialty, was not concocted in a design school or a consultancy office – it was developed beyond the pale of conventional design circles, chiefly in the context of public sector organisations and heavy industry implementing new work-management systems, which often included computer technology and where labour unions were key actors. But even time-honoured design work such as that in the textile industry was thoroughly transformed by technological developments and the surge in international free trade. In Chapter 12, comparing Norwegian and Danish cases, Tone Rasch and Trine Brun Petersen examine how the figure of the fashion designer rose from the ashes of older professional identities and helped constitute a new and increasingly distinct discourse which moved fashion away from other branches of design. For some designers, though, the habitual role of their trade as the handmaiden of industry and commercialism grew ever more uncomfortable, leading them to explore other options. In Chapter 13, Tau Ulv Lenskjold charts one such effort, the Elverhøj cooperative store in Copenhagen, which became a vibrant and long-lasting venue, connecting and supporting a network of predominantly female designers who through this initiative found ways to combine creative practice, economic sustenance, ideological integrity, and family life, which could be challenging to achieve in conventional careers at the time. If the established structures and understandings which underpinned the renowned and stereotyped Scandinavian design culture of the 1950s were contested in the ensuing period by the kind of grass-root initiatives described by Lenskjold on one side, it was simultaneously challenged from the diametrically opposite side by overtly commercial interests. As a final example of the transformations of practice in this tumultuous period, Thomas Nordby in Chapter 14 shows how book design moved from the realm of artists and printing professionals to the domain of graphic designers, as the Norwegian publishing industry reorganised in response to and as part of the rapid democratisation of culture and education. The pocketbook revolution and the tidal wave of textbooks combined to thoroughly recast both the cultural

image and the social function of the book as a medium and object, thus requiring a new approach to its design as well.

By reading this history through the three levels – or arenas – of discourse, institutions, and practice, we arrive at a complex, yet structured understanding of the profound transformation of Nordic design cultures in the period from 1960 to 1980.

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Part I

# Transforming Discourse





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# 1 The Way North

## Merging Ideology and Methodology on the Road to Ecological Design

*Kjetil Fallan*

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Visions of ecotopia are design ideology. Suggestion of how to build it is design methodology. This distinction might seem straightforward enough—but the two are intricately intertwined nonetheless, and perhaps never more so than in the making of ecological design, where the *what* and the *how* were never far apart. The road to ecological design represents one of the most significant transformations of Nordic design discourse in the 1960s and 1970s (see also Chapters 2 and 3). And because the interrelatedness of ideology and methodology is such a key feature of this journey, our itinerary points beyond the realm of discourse and gestures towards the spheres of institutions and practices, thus connecting the three parts of the book.

If ideology is, as the dictionary definition says, ‘a system of ideas and ideals, especially one which forms the basis of... theory and policy’, or ‘the set of beliefs characteristic of a social group or individual’ (OED), then design ideology is the system of ideas and ideals underpinning design as a knowledge system, practice, and culture. Correspondingly, if methodology is ‘a system of methods used in a particular area of study or activity’ (OED), then design methodology is the system and methods used in the study or practice of design. We might say that design ideology concerns what design *is*, or *should be*, whereas design methodology concerns *how* design is, or should be, *done*.

Can ideologies have methodological implications? Can methodologies inform ideologies? Is there something of a double hermeneutic at play here? In the context of the making of ecological design in Scandinavia, I believe these questions can be answered in the affirmative. To take one example: Suggesting design for disassembly as a method to facilitate recycling of materials presupposes an acknowledgement that waste and resource depletion is an environmental problem. In turn, this new methodology helped articulate and consolidate ecological concerns as an ever more crucial element of design ideology.

In the following, I will explore two arenas for the becoming of ecological design in Scandinavia where the interaction between ideology and methodology has been particularly prominent: design education and design activism. Both education and activism are ideologically charged and methodologically explicit, and therefore lend themselves to analysis of the relation between the two modes of thought.

## Rationalization as ideal and method

When environmentalism became a central influence on design ideology in Scandinavia in the latter half of the 1960s, the design field was still in the ebb tide of a decade-long process of specialization and professionalization which significantly altered both its ideology and its methodology. Put briefly, this had involved the disintegration of the applied art movement because several of its constituent parts—especially the emerging industrial design profession—no longer found its totalizing ambitions and conventional conceptual framework to be relevant. New organizations such as Denmark's Society for Industrial Design (1954), the Norwegian Group of Industrial Designers (1955), Sweden's Industrial Designers (1957), the Norwegian Design Centre (1963), and Industrial Designers in Denmark (1966) reflected a deeply felt need to cultivate a community and identity distinct from the old institutions, and played key roles in the professionalization and consolidation of industrial design in Scandinavia. Through active involvement in the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID, est. 1957), these organizations enrolled their Scandinavian constituencies in a wide international network eager to raise the field's prestige and refine its practice.

The fast and profound scientific, technological, industrial, and economic developments during the post-World War II boom years had resulted in increasingly complex and varied tasks for designers to work on. And to do so, they needed a different tool-set than that inherited from the applied art movement, the art school-derived education, and the museums of decorative art. This situation led to hectic activity throughout the 1960s in search of new methodologies better suited to guide work in a rapidly changing field. One of the more concerted efforts among these initiatives is what became known as the design methods movement. This involved incorporating insight and tools from a range of fields including sociology, psychology, semiotics, cybernetics, economy, and many more—but also the development of new methods more integral to the field of design itself. For all its diversity, what more than anything characterized this movement was the ambition to create a more scientific grounding for design. Although this was chiefly driven by the understanding that the increased comprehensiveness and complexity of the practice field required more systematic, rigorous, and rational methodologies, the 'scientification' of design was partly also motivated by the desire to improve the field's standing compared to neighbouring professions such as architecture and engineering. This development towards a more 'rational' foundation for design was deeply paradoxical, however—as D.J. Huppertz has remarked: 'Ironically situated against the backdrop of 1960s' social and political unrest, this was a model of problem-solving that was decidedly apolitical' (2020, 133). Towards the end of the decade, therefore, as the faith in progress and the trust in science as a universal panacea subsided, the design methods movement, too, was challenged both from within and from without by those promoting more qualitative approaches to design and its methodology (Göransdotter 2020, 216–218).

In her recent study of the history of design methodology in Scandinavia, Maria Göransdotter (2020) convincingly argues that key concepts such as 'participation' and 'use', as well as the methods developed to operationalize these notions in design processes, have a long and complex genealogy (see also her contribution to this volume, Chapter 11). But, crucially, to access this knowledge, we need to shift our perspective from a history of *design* to a history of *designing* (Göransdotter 2020;

Auricchio and Göransdotter 2021). Another important caveat is that designing is always a situated practice, not a generic procedure: ‘Making histories of designing, therefore, also necessarily must entail at least some amount of precision in regard to which ways of designing and in which contexts its outlook and perspective is positioned’ (Göransdotter 2020, 17). Göransdotter traces histories of Scandinavian participatory and user-centred design across much of the 20th century to specific and sometimes unexpected settings, including public management, labour unions, home economics research, and women’s study circles. Correspondingly, histories of how design ideology and design methodology intersect and interact in the making of Scandinavian ecological design must also be sought beyond the pale of the most conventional sites and modes of designing, because just like participatory design, ecological design did not emanate in mainstream commercial design practice, but in more exploratory contexts.

### Making design do good

Between 1967 and 1969, the short-lived, but nonetheless influential Scandinavian Design Students’ Organization (SDO) organized a series of seminars in Helsinki, Stockholm, and Copenhagen, which challenged the principles and methods of traditional design education. The motivation for doing so was a widespread dissatisfaction among the students with the education provided by the design schools, and in particular the perceived mismatch between simplistic themes and assignments populating the closed ‘model world’ of curriculum and the complex and chaotic experiences of the open-ended ‘real world’ beyond the confines of the institutions. The SDO seminars and accompanying magazine included contributions from some of the most prominent and critical voices of the above-mentioned design methods movement, including Christopher Alexander and John Christopher Jones. But for the students, the issue of *how* to design was inseparable from the questions of *what* to design, and *why*. Fuelled by strong ideological currents including environmentalism, anti-consumerism, anti-authoritarianism, the students conceived of the seminars as workshops for the development of new design methodologies which in turn consolidated new design ideologies. In the words of Ida Kamilla Lie, these events

[n]ot only... foster[d] a fully-fledged Nordic design student movement, but they also provided a kind of incubator for new ideas, concepts, and working methods that would form key components of what later became known as participatory design, social design, design for need, and ecological design.

(Lie 2016, 229)

Thus, more than anything, the SDO seminars should be understood as methodology laboratories. Through a workshop format, participants learned to think of design as a process-oriented activity which is best undertaken as teamwork, often in co-operation with experts from other fields. This recalibration, combined with a shift of emphasis from problem-solving to facilitation and user-involvement, is what made these student-driven events such a key contribution to new design methodologies (Figure 1.1).

When Roar Høyland began teaching design methodology at Oslo’s National College of Art and Design in 1968, he greeted the students with a banner hung on the

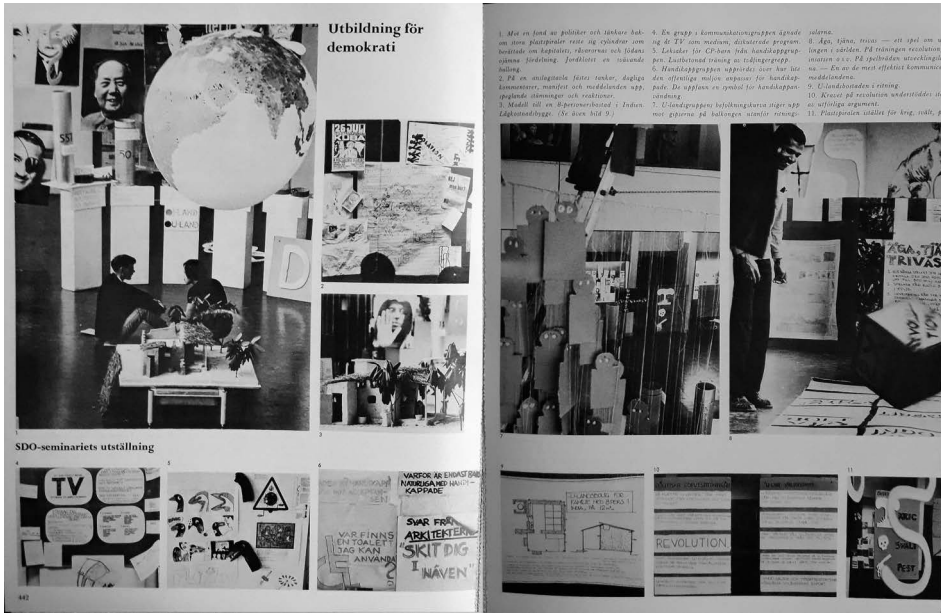


Figure 1.1 The SDO seminar ‘Human and Environment’ organized in Stockholm in July-August 1968 as covered by the Swedish design magazine *Form*. Courtesy of Form.

classroom wall proclaiming ‘We Have Teacups Enough!’ By this time, Høyland was well-acquainted with SDO’s work, but his deep commitment to the ethics and social responsibility of design predated that organization as well. In a 1965 interview, he emphasized the complexity of design as an activity as well as its societal significance:

We must break free of regarding design as merely a drawing task. Technology and economy enter the picture, it is a question of analyses, tests and trials... The designer must, in collaboration with technicians, engineers, and economists, have a grounding on which to promote his ideas.

(Clayhills 1965, 278–279)

In other words, designers who wanted to use their trade to contribute to the betterment of society and the environment required skills and methods by far exceeding the conventional confines of his home institution. As mentioned, Høyland’s remit at the school was to teach methodology. But, as these remarks clearly show, his motivation was deeply ideological. He was also a passionate proponent of an anti-elitism, believing that improving the design of a milk carton was a far more important task than designing yet another exquisite chair (Fallan 2017, 165). Høyland’s classroom banner was an emphatic and symbolic showdown with the applied art movement. It bears pointing out that his revolt came from within the fold. For added effect, the act took place the very year the Norwegian Applied Art Association celebrated its

fiftieth anniversary and the National College of Art and Design celebrated its 150th anniversary. Symptomatically of the time, the students complained that they had not been allowed to participate in the planning of the anniversary, and even threatened to boycott the event. A compromise was hastily struck to avoid potential scandal—but the students' misgivings about insufficient involvement ran deeper than the anniversary celebration. In the same resolution, they went on to question and criticize the continued relevance of the material-based program structure, a too rigid curriculum, the inadequate attention to critical analysis, and the lack of interdisciplinary contextual studies (Lie 2015, 51–53). This criticism was directly inspired by the discussions taking place within the SDO and in particular the 'Human and Environment' seminar in Stockholm two months earlier (Dagbladet, 05.10.1968, 25), where the students so emphatically had proclaimed their demand: 'Make Us More Useful to Society!' (Nilsson 1968).

These student protests were obviously ideologically driven (see Chapters 8, 9, and 10 for comparable developments at design schools in Finland and Denmark). But how, if at all, did they relate to methodology? The connection is arguably closer than one might initially suspect. If students are seen as 'users', the school as a 'manufacturer', and the education as the 'product' or 'service' to be designed, these complaints become the educational equivalent of the call for user-centred and participatory design methodologies. But the content of their criticism, too, gestures at the need for new design methodologies, much in line with the reforms requested by their newly appointed methodology teacher Roar Høyland.

Høyland, 38 years old at the time, identified more with his students than with his employer. In the spring of 1968, he had even travelled to Paris to experience first-hand the student uprisings there. Like many of the students he was now to teach, he had attended the SDO seminar in Stockholm that summer, where Victor Papanek was one of the invited speakers. Deeply fascinated by Papanek's provocative performance, Høyland promptly invited the American designer, educator, and critic to Oslo, convinced that his visit could invigorate what he considered to be an overly conservative learning environment. In line with his image as a travelling design demagogue, Papanek accepted Høyland's invitation, and came to Oslo in January 1969. His daily lectures loosely organized under the heading 'Design for the social good' drew full houses and left regular classes empty (Lie 2015, 58). Crucially, though, theory and ideology were duly paired with methodology and practice. Following the lectures, Høyland and Papanek organized a two-week field-project focusing on a neglected and polluted communal backyard in one of the city's less privileged neighbourhoods. The brief was to redesign and transform this dilapidated space into a more agreeable recreational area, complete with a playground, furnishings, greenery, and all. When Papanek later discussed the backyard project in his book *Design for the Real World*, he described the process as a deeply transformative, collective, and inclusive experience which expanded the notion of what design is, what designing involves, and who designers might be:

The students were appalled to find that the backyard was infested by rats and that the children played with the rats and thought of them as pet animals, something of the order of small dogs. We saw that design would have to go beyond a playground to include factors of public health and hygiene. Because of the social relevance of this project, other students from the Architectural School [Oslo

School of Architecture], the School of Landscape [Norwegian Agricultural College, Dept. of Landscape Architecture], and Oslo University [University of Oslo] became interested and volunteered their help, even though students from these schools normally have little or no contact with the State School of Design [National College of Art and Design].

(Papanek 1971, 125)

Of course, learning ‘in the field’, as it were, was nothing new for design students. But what makes this project so interesting in the current context is how its deeply ideological motivation of designing for social and environmental improvement was so closely connected to innovative methods of working characterized by collaborative processes, interdisciplinary teams, and ‘real-world’ intervention.

### **Accounting for resources and ecological impact**

The full-blown revamping of the school which Høyland and the student council had hoped for did not transpire. But new approaches to design methodology did gradually infuse the curriculum, partly through Høyland’s own classes, but also through other initiatives. Key in this regard was a one-year continued education program in industrial design beginning in 1973, intended as a first step towards a regular, permanent four-year program or school. This initial foray was a collaboration between the National College of Art and Design and the Norwegian Design Centre, with funding from the Ministry of Industry. Led by Thorbjørn Rygh, a veteran of the profession with ample experience in designing for a wide array of the manufactured goods industry, the ambition was that the program would foster design expertise more in synch with the needs of both industry and society (cf. Chapter 7). Issues of process and methodology were at the heart of the endeavour, and the environmentalist movement explicitly influenced this work. A newspaper article explained it thus:

From being industry’s make-up department, designers are now heading in a different direction: they seek to place environmental qualities and human welfare front and centre... These are designers who are intent on analysing society’s needs and who share the basic attitude that they want to build their work as industrial designers on a more ideological foundation... But identifying the users’ real needs is not enough. The problem of resources must enter the picture. Because one must always also keep an eye on the *consequences*. The program has developed a product cycle which includes impact assessment, and where users, resources, work environment, and social structure are keywords.

(Wormdal 1973)

This description paints an unusually clear picture of how design methodology is directly shaped by a design ideology which has internalized environmentalism and ecological modes of thought (Ask 2004, 151). We see here how the procedures developed in Rygh’s experimental program systematically incorporated resource analysis and environmental impact assessment in the design process. Increased ecological awareness thus affected not only the question of *what* to design, but also the question of

*how* to design. The relation between *what* and *how* is reciprocal, though. Designers who were trained to methodically include such considerations in their practice would presumably in turn help make them part of the system of ideas and ideals underpinning design as a knowledge system, practice, and culture. In other words: design methodology also influences design ideology.

In the evaluation report submitted to the Ministry of Education following the 1973 continued education program, Director of the Norwegian Design Centre, Alf Bøe, remarked that resource use was one of the topics which would require more room in the curriculum in the future (Bøe in Romsaas 2000, 94). Even if this comment was primarily aimed at a full-fledged specialized industrial design education which would still be many years in the future, the regular teaching at the school also gradually became more ecology-inflected. The annual reports offer a good indication of this shift and how it was made manifest. The report for the academic year 1976–1977 emphasizes the ideal of interdisciplinarity and the capability of learning how to learn:

The education must not be based on the idea of imparting as much specialized knowledge as possible, but first and foremost teach the students themselves how to acquire the knowledge they need, when they need it, and how to make use of this in the best possible manner.

Learning about the environmental ramifications of mainstream design culture was considered particularly important for the industrial design students, where ‘much emphasis is placed on the concern for the product’s social and utilitarian use value, as well as the human and environmental costs of our manufactured goods industry’ (Årsberetning 1976–1977, 22). Høyland’s ongoing interest in these topics as part of his methodology courses was complemented by a series of seminars and guest lectures. In April 1973, his colleagues Tormod Alnæs, Bjørn Engø, Håkon Stenstadvold, and Fredrik Wildhagen organized a ‘resource seminar’, the aim of which was ‘to provide us with insight into and knowledge about our world’s resources, with particular attention to the materials and energy we as design professionals use, and the responsibility this entails for the entirety’ (Alnæs et al. 1973). The seminar included guest lectures by Magne Akervold of the Norwegian Forestry Society on ‘The Living Forest and We Who Shall Live off of It’; Nils-Ole Lund, professor of architectural history at Aarhus School of Architecture on ‘The Designer’s Responsibility for the Human Environment in Light of the Resource Problems’; Vidkunn Hveding of the Norwegian Water Resources and Energy Administration on ‘The Global Supply Situation for Non-renewable Resources’; and Erling Stordahl, disability activist and outdoorsman, on ‘The World of Things – Human and Environment’.

By this time, design ideology was profoundly influenced by environmentalism and ecological thinking, and this was reflected in new approaches and methodologies being taught at the school in the following years. In 1974, industrial designer Elisabeth Nordang gave a series of lectures on alternative technology (Årsberetning 1974–1975, 17). Alternative technology, also known as appropriate technology, or intermediate technology, was an approach and a movement inspired in part by E. F. Schumacher’s book *Small is Beautiful* (1973), and promoted design and manufacturing on a smaller scale, based on low capital investment, basic tools and machines, non-specialized labour, and local resources (see Chapter 5 for similar approaches aimed at rural development within the Nordic region). Arguably, alternative technology became one of



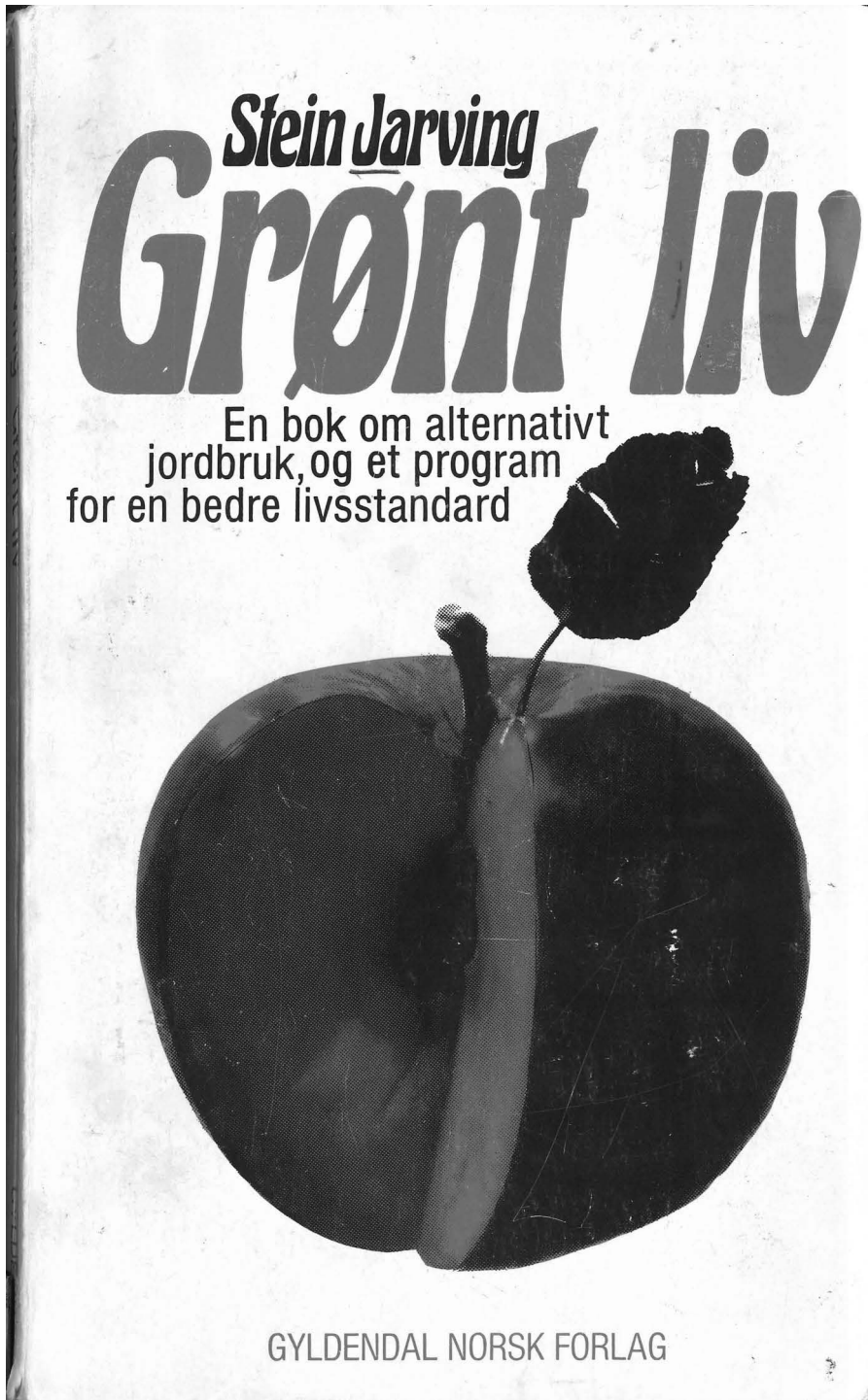


Figure 1.2 Front cover of Stein Jarving's book *Grønt liv* (Green life) published in 1974, two years before he and Paul Hofseth taught a course on 'Ecology and Resource Problems' at the National College of Art and Design. Cover design by Peter Haars. Courtesy of Gyldendal.

the most significant methodologies in the making of ecological design. Although the movement is often associated with the US, the UK, and international development aid (Kirk 2007; Oropallo 2018), its inclusion in the curriculum of the National College of Art and Design shows it was also a key feature of the Scandinavian discourse—a point I will return to soon.

Two years later, in the fall of 1976, Stein Jarving and Paul Hofseth were commissioned to lead a lecture series with accompanying student assignments on the topic of ‘Ecology and Resource Problems’ (Årsberetning 1976–1977, 23). This event is of particular interest because it was organized by key figures of the deep ecology movement. Stein Jarving was an engineer, commune enthusiast, and author of books like *Green Life* (*Grønt liv*, 1974) (Figure 1.2) and *Equilibrrious Societies* (*Likevekts-samfunn*, 1976). Paul Hofseth was a founding member of the Ecophilosophy Group at the University of Oslo, where he also taught Environmental Studies. Hofseth was dedicated to action research as a methodology capable of connecting academic interests with real-world situations in an explicitly active and unapologetic manner. At the University of Oslo, he had coordinated action research groups where students dove into issues of pollution, urban planning, public transport, hydropower developments, and oil drilling (Anker 2020, 106). In all likelihood, then, Hofseth brought his affinity for action research also to the National College of Art and Design and the ‘Ecology and Resource Problems’ seminar, thus infusing design methodology with a form of collaborative inquiry devised explicitly to stimulate social change and which was closely connected to the unapologetically interventionist strategies of the deep ecology movement.

### Design activism as environmental politics

In the making of ecological design, the distinction between the realms of education and activism was, as we have seen so far, blurry at best. But moving more to the latter end of the spectrum, we might take a look at a momentous event taking place in Stockholm in June 1972 where ideology and methodology merged in various modes of design activism: the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. This mega-event received massive public, political, and media attention both before, during, and after the conference itself. What makes it interesting in this context is that beyond the official proceedings and the semi-official side program called the Environment Forum, the conference provoked a wide range of responses in the form of deeply ideologically driven initiatives of a designerly nature and methodological interest (Scott 2016, 115–166).

The first of these to be mentioned here is an extracurricular project by a group of students at Konstfack College of Arts, Crafts and Design. To mark their discontent with the ‘design by committee’-approach of the UN conference, they designed a series of posters which were illicitly put up across the city in the middle of the night (because they would be removed by the end of the day). Inspired by their politically engaged teacher Kerstin Abram-Nilsson, students such as Eva Trolin, Åke Carlsson, Eva Lindström, Barbro Flygare, and Ulf Frödin devised a distinctive graphic language of protest which became emblematic of the period’s environmentalism and design culture alike. The posters had to be made quickly and cheaply, so they required the use of simple and efficient means. Add to this the project’s clandestine nature and spirit of resistance, and we are looking at a methodology we might label ‘guerrilla designing’.

A second example of design activism in the context of the UN conference is a bike sharing initiative organized by a collective called Alternative City, a group of concerned citizens (which included several designers and architects) campaigning for a more socially and environmentally sound city. Inspired by a similar idea devised by the Provo movement in Amsterdam, Alternative City collected and restored used bikes, painted them white and green for easy identification, and placed them around town for free use by anyone (Fallan 2022). In methodological terms, the project is probably best described as a sort of ‘citizen designing’. It sidestepped both official and commercial structures, relying instead on volunteer work and a collectivist spirit. Just as important, though, the designing did not involve new materials or new products, but was entirely about repair and recycling, system and service.

A third example is an exhibition on alternative technology organized as a criticism of the UN conference’s inability to move beyond the realm of policy, negotiations, and resolutions. Hastily planned and deliberately rough around the edges, *For a Technology in the Service of the People! (För en teknik i folkets tjänst!)* opened at Moderna Museet’s project space Filialen the day after the conference started. The exhibition was staged by the action group PowWow, with architects Per Janse and Varis Bokalders among the core crew, supported by alternative technology experts from the community around the British magazine *Undercurrents*. The result was no ordinary museum show, but a decidedly dynamic and participatory experience, a work-in-progress which was gradually modified and expanded, partially in dialogue with visitors. Exhibits explained topics including closed-chamber composting, soil-less horticulture, renewable energy production, low-energy housing, waste reclamation and recycling, and the continued relevance of natural materials and traditional manufacturing methods (Scott 2016, 209–217). Many of the topics, concepts, approaches, and actors involved were carried over when Moderna Museet four years later, in 1976, hosted another experimental design exhibition: *ARARAT* (Alternative Research in Architecture, Resources, Art and Technology). Like its predecessor, *ARARAT* was a distinctly collective undertaking. It was initiated, planned, and coordinated by a core group of architects, designers, and engineers, but the process was deliberately set up to involve many more in developing and executing the plans (Figures 1.3 and 1.4). As such, these exhibitions were not so much displays of objects as they were explorations of design methodology. They can be read as events where activists sought to demonstrate key principles of their approach to ecological design and the significance of design to the environmentalist movement. In other words, it is the process rather than the product which represents the true cultural importance and legacy of these exhibitions. One of the organizers of *ARARAT*, design critic Gunilla Lundahl, confirms this in her conversation with Christina Zetterlund in the present volume (Chapter 4), where she highlights the community building which resulted from the collaborative process as well as how the project generated new grassroots initiatives and networks.

Looking at the various forms of unsanctioned design activism cropping up around the UN Conference on the Human Environment reveals that the unorthodox methods, tools, and procedures cultivated in these settings were part of the symbiotic formation of an ecologically informed design ideology and design methodology in Scandinavia. This prompts the conclusion that if, as suggested in the first part of this discussion, design education is a continuous exploration of design methodology explicitly informed by design ideology, then design activism can arguably be understood as a near complete convergence of design ideology and design methodology.

## Uppbyggnad

"Jag hade turen att besöka Ararat redan i fredags förra veckan. Visserligen var utställningen ingalunda färdig: Många monter tomma, de ekologiska husen knappt halvbyggda, men jag träffade idegivare och planerare med sådan glöd i rösten att det färdiga resultatet måste verka förkolnat vid en jämförelse, och, kanske ännu bättre; jag mötte unga androgynner med spik i munnen, hammare i handen och visdom i ögonen. I bättre sällskap har jag aldrig varit. Jag menar förstås att jag hamnade mitt i utställningens tillkomstprocess och fick uppleva en sällsynt arbetsglädje — lusten att göra något som inte bara är funktionellt riktigt utan samtidigt ger den där obeskrivliga känslan av sommarmorgon för tusen år sedan.

Medan jag gick där i bräten och snubblade över sladdar och ribbor och kände doften av halm och sågspån och Karlssons klistor fick jag för mig att jag inte skulle leverera en färdig artikel utan lämna den ifrån mig i det skick jag mötte utställningen — i impulsernas ännu oarbetade form. Visserligen skulle min tonart inte bli den jag hörde omkring mig — förhoppningens dagdroppskänsla — utan snarare den motsatta: tvivel, osäkerhet, en pendling från min obestridliga förtjusning mot mörkare stämningar som för mig är ännu mer tidstypiska, men kanske kunde en sådan motvikt ge relief åt vad det är fråga om."

Ur "Tal till Hermes" av Sven Fagerberg

□



4

Figure 1.3 Page from *Rapport från ekoteket*, no. 4–5, 1978—a special issue dedicated to documenting the ARARAT exhibition. The images show the distinct collaborative and processual nature of the project. Courtesy of Varis Bokalders.

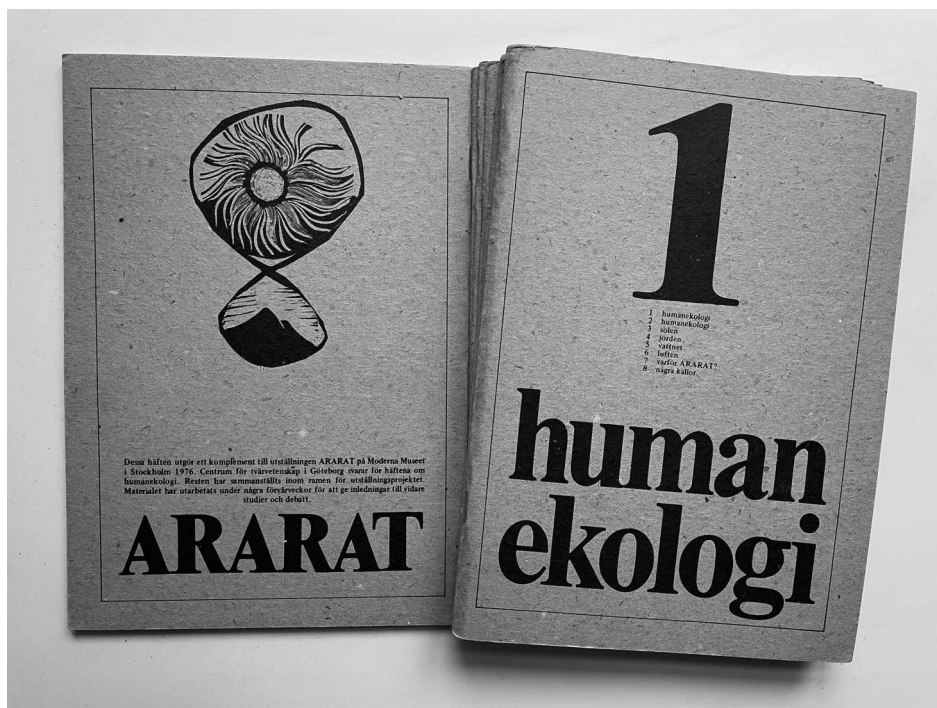


Figure 1.3 As an extension of the exhibition format, a collaboratively produced series of booklets were published to accompany the ARARAT show and elaborate on core themes such as human ecology, renewable energy sources, etc. Courtesy of Gunilla Lundahl.

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## 2 The Total, Global, Living 'Environment'

### A Key Concept in the Danish Design Debate around 1970

*Anders V. Munch and Hans-Christian Jensen*

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People have been worried about the 'environment' for many decades now. But do we have any clear ideas or consensus of what is meant by this word in public debates or even by experts? Today, the public might primarily think of the natural environment when the word is mentioned. It is still used in other ways for human or artificial environments, though. And even the meaning of 'natural environment' is heavily debated today. Of course, this lack of clear consensual meaning is the case of most terms and concepts, if we look closer. But the environmental debate has mostly been going on, as if everyone agreed on the meaning. If we look at the first, broad, public debates on environmental issues around 1970, many of the very same phrases were stated as today. But did they mean quite the same then? In the end, the word 'environment' does not seem to have any specific meaning at all, and this might explain both the strengths and weaknesses of the concept. Around 1970, new debates started out with references to many sorts of environments, many others than natural ecosystems. And they were driven by very different scientific, professional, institutional and political agendas. We will trace uses and understandings of the concept of 'environment', or 'miljø' as it was called in Scandinavia, in Danish design debates. In the period under examination, it carried meanings as living habitat, creative milieu and spatial design. In these ways, the 'environment' was central to ideas of a mental, cultural and physical transformation throughout any scale. The concept served as a lens both to gather – but also muddle – the many perspectives of design practice, housing and consumption. And the field of design shows examples of 'our' environment as meaning both very abstract and concrete things, as in this sweeping description by Victor Papanek published in a Danish magazine: "Our environment consists of landscapes, regions, cities, climates, shelters, tools, devices, information, products, happenings, messages and much else." (1970b, unpgn.) To guide us through the complex discourse on the environment in Denmark around 1970, we have listed the following cluster of agendas and uses of this key concept:

Public design – 'visual environment'  
Spatial experiments – 'creative environment'  
Home culture – 'domestic environment'  
Critique of housing – 'social environment'  
Critique of city planning – 'urban environment'

Labour unions – ‘working environment’  
Conservation – ‘cultural environment’  
Pollution – ‘natural environment’  
Overpopulation and overconsumption – ‘global environment’

The threats to natural habitats or global resources were not the primary agendas, though the issues were often interlinked and went in circles. Nature was not the primary meaning of ‘environment’ in earlier theories, where ‘human environment’ was more in focus (Banham 1969). The muddling of aspects and the dilemmas are still stumbling stones in our debates on ‘environmental’ sustainability today, so an understanding of the constraints of the initial, environmental discourse around 1970 is crucial, especially in a field such as design, where the framing of problems and actions is closely interlinked.

### **Environments, environmental discourse and conceptual history**

Most historical investigations into the international upspring of environmentalism in design and architecture focus on the years around 1970 (Fallan & Jørgensen 2017), and this is also where we find a veritable ‘bubble’ in the very widespread and versatile use of the word ‘miljø’ in Danish debates. Travelling back in time by reading the environmental debates, we recognise many of the words and explanations about climate change, pollution and overexploitation from recent debates (Warde, Robin & Sörlin 2018, Kallipoliti 2018). This raises disturbing questions about the current situation: Has nothing changed at all? Have we experienced a collective amnesia leading us to repeat the very same arguments? We must remember, however, that both conditions and understandings have changed. During the intervening decades, different labels have been used for environmental concerns in design, as Pauline Madge noted early on:

Changes in term can sometimes indicate changing values and priorities, although they can also disguise continuities. In the design field the change from ‘alternative design’ and ‘design for need’-catchphrases of the 1970s – to ‘eco-design’, ‘green design’ or ‘environmentally affirmative design’ in the 1980s and 1990s reveals an underlying shift in social and political attitudes.

(Madge 1993, 149f)

And even if we repeat many arguments on the environment from around 1970, we might not refer to the same understanding, as the term ‘environment’ itself is highly ambiguous or fuzzy. Our aim with this investigation is to understand the versatility and differing uses of the term as both a strength and a constraint to the debates and to political and civic actions. We cannot just ask for a strict definition of the term, as the diverse sources quickly show.

[...] there is no guarantee that by getting to the root of a word we are making it unambiguous. Still, when we study the genealogy of terms we learn a great deal about their current use and thus about our current thinking.

(Pinkus 2013, 89)



We have to look into specific uses and contexts of a term to note how it assembles meanings and develops into a general concept, referring to certain lines of thought or ways of looking at the world. “A word becomes a concept precisely because it gets involved in action stemming from a certain situation or context. It is made into a concept by speaking and writing actors” (Ifversen 2011, 74). Jan Ifversen here refers to an approach to Conceptual History in the Koselleck school, having tracked the role and development of central concepts through huge political and societal changes. Key concepts could play a huge role, despite the fact that they were often contested and even used differently by conflicting groups. Investigating a concept such as ‘environment’ historically requires tracing its semantic development and grasping its contextual impact (Ifversen 2011, 83). Our case study will be limited to the aim to study the concept of environment in the initial phase of the current environmentalism, more specifically, in Danish debates on design and architecture around 1970.

This understanding of contested concepts is, of course, close to the Foucauldian approach to ‘discourse’. Discourses refer to common problematics of groups or periods rather than clearly defined topics. The architectural scholar Necdet Teymur did, in fact, make a contemporary, in-depth analysis of the environmental discourse in the 1970s. He was highly critical towards what the whole ‘ED’, environmental discourse, was really about because of many confusions. “It is an unresolved problem of the ED that it deals with birds and blocks of flats, images and buildings, forests and hospital corridors, ecology and interior design, ideal forms and sewage problems *in one and the same term*” (Teymur 1982, 57). To him, the references to anything ‘environmental’ seemed only metaphorical, and ‘environment’ itself a pseudo-concept. His book is an interesting example of how to analyse such a highly complex and confused interdisciplinary discourse. He is, however, more concerned with the mechanisms producing the messy debates than with any of the ideas or intentions. Instead, we will stick more to the content of the discourse and follow the uses and meanings of ‘environment’ as a concept or metaphor, whilst taking note of Teymur’s critiques.

If Teymur looked at the broad environmental discourses from outside, US art historian Larry D. Busbea has dug into the most advanced and often speculative theories on the ‘responsive environment’ among North American scientists, artists and designers in the period (2020). This was understood as the invisible environments, media, systems and patterns, which shaped our perception, understanding and ourselves as human beings. But the human environment was produced through history, culture and technology and could be changed itself as a responsive environment, so that both humans and the world changed. Busbea shows how these thoughts were crucial to our understanding of science, nature and humanity, and investigates how they took shape in both theories and design experiments.

There is virtually no theme, practice, or technological advance being addressed today that was not discussed at length at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the next decade. If I choose here to return to this earlier context, however, it is [...] to identify moments of ideological rupture that were much more explicit than they are currently.

(Busbea 2020, xvi)

We look for ruptures in the same way, only in the Danish debates. Busbea reads Edward T. Hall, Marshall McLuhan and Gregory Bateson, and the two first were translated and introduced in Danish in the period, Bateson a bit later on. We find, however, no specific references to their theories, nor any of the designers or artists he examines who made the often computerised experiments with responsive environments, but references to other international sources. So the ideas were very widespread, and influences blurred at this point. And Busbea's cases are again examples of how the natural environment and global issues played a minor or rather implied role.

Historically, the word 'environment' (or 'milieu') covers a bewildering range of scales and contents from biology and sociology to psychology and aesthetics. This broad range often challenged the specific meanings of the word, but it has carried a basic meaning of interconnectedness and feedback between individuals and surroundings, of systemic development. It expresses a basic awareness of contextual conditions for both the living and our understanding and experience of life. As French philosopher Georges Canguilhem stated in his 1952 book *Knowledge of Life*: "The notion of milieu is in the process of becoming a universal and obligatory means of registering the experience and existence of living things, and one could almost speak of its constitution as a basic category of contemporary thought" (Canguilhem 2008, 7). He argued for a scientific episteme going back to early biology and sociology, but his own book became part of the extended use of the notion.

There are two basic aspects of the way of thinking that the notion implicates – and they are, of course, interlinked. The first is the understanding of the living and its milieu as a large set of mutual impacts forming a dynamic equilibrium. This is understood as a kind of balanced, chemical reaction scheme, but also projected on many other contexts. US designer Victor Papanek referred to the theories of cybernetics developed in this period as a way to understand the challenge and the full range of design in the Danish magazine *Mobilia*.

*Design means coming to grips with our environment and doing so from a socially responsible viewpoint.* Nigel Calder and Norbert Wiener have shown that our man-made environments are beginning to take on all the characteristics (feedback, interlocking, regeneration, self-duplication) of natural ecological systems.

(Papanek 1970b, unpgn.)

It is the responsibility of the designer to be aware of all the factors of mutual impact and establish an overview of the interdependences between humans and environments throughout any scale. The designer has the ability and awareness to register impacts at all levels, which then brings along a responsibility for the total environment, the whole system of production, society and nature. The second aspect is that this equilibrium might be disturbed, and that whole systems might break down. In nature, the huge, complex systems are often found to be very resilient. However, when human endeavours are scaled up, they might challenge this resilience and bring disturbances at global or societal scales. The environmental theories shifted towards this less predictable and more catastrophic paradigm around 1970, according to Madge (1997, 50). Both Papanek and the Danish voices we will introduce were in the middle of this transition, and the confidence in natural resilience, technological progress and human empowerment was gradually decreasing.

## **Broad responsibility and public design**

Many examples of the use of the term ‘environment’ in Danish writings on design and architecture are rather sweeping, referring to a very broad and general concern for the state of things:

Horried we discover these years, how badly we have exploited the rich possibilities of modern society, how unfair the richness and goods are distributed over the planet, how we are about to suffocate in poison and noise. More than ever before we have to deal much more with comprehensive issues, with communities, with the environment.

(Møller 1972, 107)

And this cry of anxiety was just mentioned as an intro to a review of the Cologne Furniture Fair that didn’t contain further calls to action. The most hesitant and loose use of the term might be seen in the early writings on public design, which was introduced as a new field to Danish designers and authorities in 1970. It was heralded by leading graphic designers as a ‘democratic art’ connected to the ‘wide spanning notion: environment’ (Ejlers et al. 1970, 5). They did think of both objects and signs, buildings and print forms, but clearly thought of a purely visual environment, the comprehensiveness of signs and form in public spaces or state institutions. Another spokesman even warned about ‘cultural pollution’ in the form of bad and misleading examples of signs or public transport with direct reference to the brand, new Ministry of Pollution (Nielsen 1971). It was an early state department to fight chemical pollution and protect both the human and natural environment.<sup>1</sup> Architects and planners, however, expected the Ministry to regulate and protect the visual environments of cities and landscapes as well, according to their professional recommendations. Such very broad references to public responsibility show how the term served as a buzzword in those years, to actors mostly concerned with highlighting their own agenda. We will, however, return to concerns of public spaces and citizens later.

## **Creative environment**

In Denmark, the artistic experiments with playful environments had a long trajectory from the 1950s with artist Gunnar Aagaard Andersen and his collaboration with designers Nanna and Jørgen Ditzel and through to Verner Panton’s spectacular environments around 1970. Aagaard Andersen drew his initial inspiration from the international, interdisciplinary *Group Espace*, and continued to collaborate with designers and architects, retailers and manufacturers. His polyurethane armchair from 1964 is widely known, but it is less known how it was made as part of a whole foam environment for an exhibition shown at the *Museum of Decorative Arts* in Copenhagen 1965. He had written on the subject ‘On creating environment’ in the furniture trade magazine *Mobilia* in 1963, based on his experiments at the Ege Carpets factory, Herning, where he contributed to a new showroom and made a temporary design of the workers’ canteen in 1960 (Andersen 1963). The latter was the most radical example, where the rooms were wholly draped in white linen, dipped in plaster. The idea of engaging artists to enrich the working environment with spatial interventions

spread to other manufacturers in the local area of Herning in central Jutland during the 1960s – and has had a continuous branding value as well.

This artistic understanding of and approach to environments was strong throughout the 1960s internationally, from Allan Kaprow's environments and happenings and Constant's ludic constructions in his New Babylon-project, the latter both exhibited and published in Denmark (Constant 1969). A strong inspiration to design creative environments came also from media theoretician Marshal McLuhan, who explained the comprehensive impact of new media technologies surrounding us in environmental terms. These dynamic environments are not perceptible to us, as they are the condition of our perception. But artworks can be counter- or 'anti-environment' and make the impact of media and technology perceptible (McLuhan 1966, 90). Such media theories, together with system theories and cybernetics, inspired understandings of and experiments with spatial and visual environments on how they had an impact on human perception and behaviour. And how humans interacted with and changed their environment as a feedback loop (Busbea 2020) (Figure 2.1).

The playful and innovative furniture in foam and colourful textiles by Nanna Ditzel and later Verner Panton were challenging conventional behaviour, and urged people to let go, float and relax. The furniture elements were designed as modular systems, so the customer could build their own living environment, playing with forms, colours

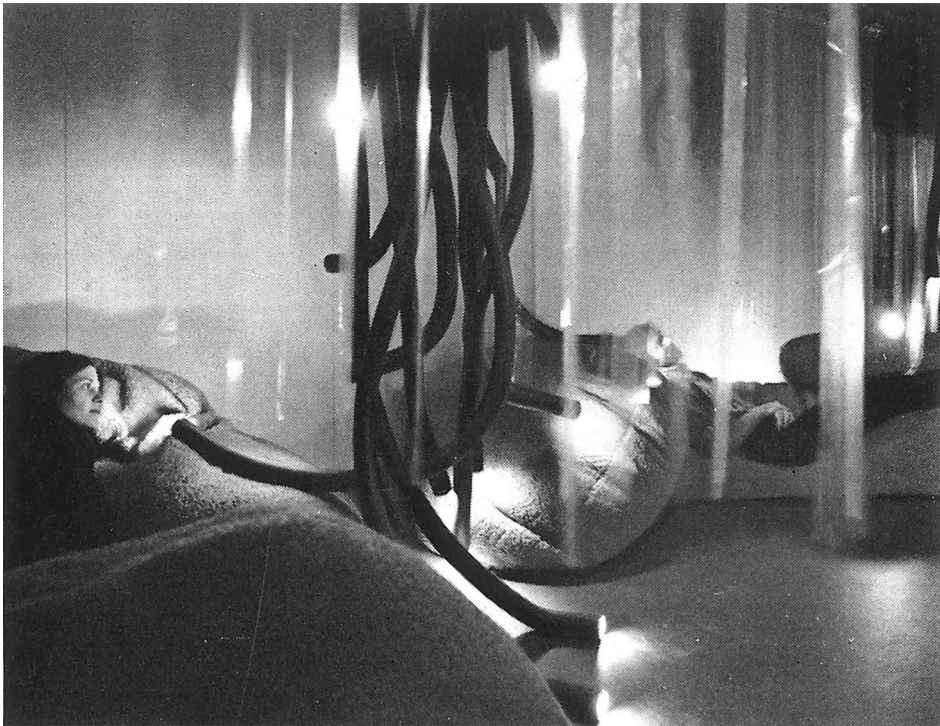


Figure 2.1 Ussing & Hoff, *Sensation Room 4*, Domus Danica, Bella Centre, Copenhagen 1970. Copyright Carsten Hoff.

and behavioural patterns. The show rooms by Panton at the Cologne Furniture Fair became more and more artificial and intoxicating with coloured lighting, scents and abstract, curvilinear form, associating to travels in outer space or inner bodily organs. In Denmark, however, they were paralleled by the series of *Sensation Rooms* 1–4 made by the artist-architect duo of Susanne Ussing and Carsten Hoff from 1968 to 1970. Ussing was trained in studio ceramics but took over the experiments with free forms of polyurethane foam from Aagaard Andersen (Hoff et al. 2017). In the first *Sensation Room*, visitors walked between hanging ‘clouds’ of foam, and in the later installation, the environmental effect became more intense and interactive, with forests of transparent plastic tapes, spotlights and long serpentine bean bags one could rearrange in collaboration with fellow visitors.

The visitors are participating by their presence in forming the space – in creating nuances. It is soothing to the mind to be able to get high without taking drugs in this room [...]. It is the senses that are awakened and stimulated – we are totally involved and contribute to the physical surroundings.

(Schmidt 1970, 164)

The reviewer, architect Torben Schmidt, even preferred the environmental experiments of Ussing & Hoff to Panton’s showrooms because of this facilitation of user involvement. This highlighted the overall ambition of making people aware of the comprehensive effects of environmental design on behaviour and perception and to emancipate and empower them to creative and responsive engagement with their own everyday environments.

### Domestic environment and social milieu

The showrooms and public interior designs by Panton show, however, that this interest stretched beyond mere avant-garde experiments and into the furniture industry. In the histories of Danish modern furniture, the years around 1970 are commonly regarded as the ‘decay’, but reading the contemporary commentators, their eager interest just shifted more towards designing the overall atmosphere of home environments rather than singular items. The critic, Svend Erik Møller, even saw this care for the entire room as in line with Scandinavian traditions.

I am sure that the Danish furniture industry will aim more and more on the conceptual and stimulating correlation of the furniture in the coming years. In Scandinavia and perhaps especially in Denmark we have a significant talent for ‘being cosy’. We have traditions for an environmental consciousness and have always put more effort in the overall coherence than in the detail.

(Møller 1972, 109f)

In this quote, the brief mentioning of the broad responsibility for inequality and pollution we saw in the earlier quote from Møller on page 28 has gone, and the ‘environmental consciousness’ refers only to a comprehensive home environment or ensemble of furniture.

In the same journal, editor Bent Salicath made a broader, historical reflection on the tendency towards *Sensation Rooms and Floating Furniture* (1971). He focussed

on the enrichment of sensorial and bodily experiences in modern interiors with references back to church rooms and haystacks. He described *Sensation Room 4*, Fig. 2, as a seabed, with beanbags as sea urchins moving around by use of the visitors or 'dunes of the furniture landscape forming a kettle hole for caprices of the body' (Salicath 1971, 72). The many analogies to natural habitats highlight the bodily emancipation in all dimensions of the rooms, just like children exploring the full floor as a landscape to conquer. In the end, however, this romanticisation was countered by the more down-to-earth warning that most people would have to exercise to be able to get up and down many times from the very low seats. This article showed an effort to mediate the experimental attempts of creative environments into ordinary, domestic use.

The more critical voices presented the emancipatory experiments as direct attacks on the high modernist standardisation and industrialisation of housing. The critic Torben Schmidt saw the *Sensation Rooms* of Ussing & Hoff as based on the precise diagnosis of the lack of diversity, sensorial experiences and open living spaces, 'almost gone in the depressive deep freezer called model housing' (Schmidt 1970, 164). Ussing & Hoff took part in a common criticism of the large-scale housing areas as inhuman, physical environments in the late 1960s. "[...] you feel that these environments are frustrating, they produce aggressions, and they're called slums from the very beginning. This might relate to the unambiguousness of the structure and shaping of the environments" (Ussing & Hoff 1969, 27). The large housing schemes were initially planned out of the best intentions and scientific optimisations, but the results became fiercely debated.

In the same years, environmental psychologist, Ingrid Gehl, conducted a thorough study of the *Living Environment* in large social housing areas in the Copenhagen suburb of Albertslund (1971). This was in parallel with the seminal study of her architect and urbanist husband, Jan Gehl, *Life Between Buildings*. Her book has never been translated, however (Peters 2016). She made the same kind of observations of human behaviour, just in the semi-public spaces between housing blocks, whereas her husband looked at the streets and squares of the Copenhagen city centre. In the book, she made useful distinctions between the physical and the social:

A living environment can be split into a physical environment and a social milieu. The physical environment is understood as the experience of the individual of that part of his surroundings not containing other people, that is, space, houses, materials, colours etc. The social milieu is understood as the experience of the individual of other human beings and relationships between them. Both the physical environment and the social milieu affect us.

(Gehl 1971, 12)

The contemporary social housing might have been designed to take care of the most basic needs, but the psychological well-being was challenged in several aspects. Ingrid Gehl suggested further needs to be taken into consideration in future design and invited ongoing discussions of the social sustainability of physical planning of built environments.

Turning back to the earlier text by Ussing & Hoff, *Form, Space, Nature, Computer*, from 1969, it is significant that they seek the solution in self-grown, less ordered and more composite structures (1969, 28). This is inspired by the system theory

and cybernetics we also find in Papanek's and McLuhan's texts, where the same feedback loops are seen in many fields of nature and society. The challenge is to avoid solutions which are fully programmed by technology or the architect. "Can we as designers create more rich milieus, where the human being is not manipulated on our conditions? Environments that are not the expression of the architect's personal aesthetic intentions" (Ussing & Hoff 1969, 28). They are interested in artificial materials behaving like nature, and want to make experiments with growth principles and processes open for user involvement and participation. In the *Sensation Rooms*, this means environmental experiments where amorphous foam clouds, plastic tape forests and beanbags invited people to change bodily and social behaviour. They even spoke of 'cyberspace' in this rather analogue fashion. The choice of artificial materials such as foam and plastics was parallel to international examples of 'soft, responsive environments', where, for example, inflatable structures suggested flexible and non-permanent solutions (Busbea 2020, 145).

Later, Ussing & Hoff expanded their social experiments to camps, where participants had to build their shelters together. This also led to an award-winning proposal for *New forms of multi-storey housing*, 1970 & 1973, where inhabitants should be able to choose freely between flexible housing modules or pure Do-It-Yourself sheds with very few limitations, so the overall impression of the environment would be very diverse and dynamic. We have discussed Ussing & Hoff's work as social design elsewhere (Jensen & Munch 2020). They turn their attention more and more towards the social milieu with less control of the total environment. It is significant, however, that the base structure of the proposal of multi-storey housing is planned as an 'artificial landscape' of concrete – very far from Danish flats and off the track



*Figure 2.2* Ussing & Hoff, building modules and participatory constructions, the Thy Camp, 1970. Copyright Carsten Hoff.

towards nature conservation (Ussing & Hoff 1971). Their ideas were rather carried by a strong urge to stimulate ongoing human creativity and expectations toward flexible production technology, so inhabitants could keep on modifying their own living environment and avoid the permanence of concrete buildings (Ussing & Hoff 1970) (Figure 2.2).

## Human resources

Ussing & Hoff also saw themselves foremost as care takers of human environments.

As care takers for mental health, as artists, we have to create experiences and images that can enhance and sharpen the awareness to know that the physical environment can be different and better; that housing can also be a tool in the expansion of the possibilities of the individual as a human being.

(Ussing & Hoff 1970, 641)

They had, however, less confidence in the capabilities of architects as social engineers of large-scale housing, and focussed more on developing the awareness and agency of people to make their own experiences, consider their real needs and explore alternative spaces for dwelling. The temporary experiments in the summer camps, mentioned above, were made as part of this effort for 'mental hygiene'. To make people able to construct and design their own living environment more permanently would, however, demand more flexible and accessible building materials, than the concrete slabs of contemporary building industry.

If the dwelling shall be applicable as an instrument for the removal of rotten layers of civilisation, destruction of alienation, the building industry has to be able to deliver completely different and manageable, more freely combined components in open systems.

(Ussing & Hoff 1970, 639)

This is where they had hopes for more flexible components made of new, artificial materials and open systems calculated by computers. The main obstacle, as they saw it, was to wake up the slumbering or reduced sense of spatial possibilities and social interactions and try to scaffold open situations, where people could get new experiences and redevelop basic instincts for creativity and expression.

This was a way of protecting human resources as irreplaceable, in accordance with British economist, E.F. Schumacher. In his popular book, *Small is Beautiful. Economy as if people mattered*, from 1973, he states that industrial mass-production breaks a basic rule of economics. "To use the language of the economist, it lives on irreplaceable capital which it cheerfully treats as income. I specified three categories of such capital: fossil fuels, the tolerance margins of nature and the human substance" (Schumacher 1973, 19). Again, we see here three rather different macro-perspectives. Besides the oil-based economy and pollution of nature, it is significant that he also mentions humans as an irreplaceable resource not to waste.

The critic Henrik Sten Møller presented Ussing & Hoff and other designers of their generation as embracing human needs at a new level (Møller 1975).



If we are to survive the pollution of the environment and people that is taking place, we must unite in serious efforts to solve essential tasks. A new generation stands sneering at the society of surplus asking about the human content, seeking the will in each individual to consider more than just himself.

(Møller 1975, 260)

He thinks here more of the ‘pollution of people’ than of any natural environment, but he ends his book on Danish Design evocatively with a fictitious nightmare, where piles of waste and pollution grow around the city. The noise of trash grinders, the basic sound of our consumer society, stops as the garbage workers go on strike to get better working condition and wages under the increasing burden of rubbish. Under the endlessly growing mountains of trash, however, the walls end up falling and people have to flee into the countryside. He ends on a more optimistic note with hopes for a new building technology, foam-based 3D-printing, to build us a new society. This rescue seemed rather far away, however. Radical architect Lars Ulrik Thomsen, mentioned in Chapter 7 as part of an exhibition curated by Møller in 1968, was portrayed in the book despite having given up design entirely years earlier.

### Design education

We have already quoted Papanek’s *An Alternative to Sterility*, published in the Danish magazine *Mobilia* in 1970. The Danish translation had the title, *On Design and Design Education*, and it addressed the meaning of design practice and education. This text is also discussed in Chapter 10 on the student rebellion at the Danish design schools. Papanek attacks the ‘sterility’ of market-driven design and referred to environments to indicate the broader responsibilities and involvements of designers in social and global aspects. However, when he speaks of ‘coming to grips with our environment’ and lists many sorts of environments, he focuses mainly on social and societal responsibility (Papanek 1970b, unpgn.). The debates on reforms of design education were widespread across the Nordic countries, because of both the student rebellion and the general changes in industry and consumption, and they proposed many aspects of the human environment to be improved by design. See also Chapter 9 with recollections from three, rebellious students. The Scandinavian Design Students’ Organisation’s summer schools organised between 1967 and 1969 had ‘Human and Environment’ as the overall theme, which was further elaborated in group work on urban, working, leisure and social care environments. Global solidarity and pollution were continuous concerns, but the main focus was to design for improving human environments.

In a comment on the student rebellion at the School of Arts and Crafts in Copenhagen in 1969, Torben Schmidt pointed towards two areas in which the crafts students could be trained: industry and design of environments (Schmidt 1969, 94). And in this case, there was no hint of contradiction, as the environment was clearly thought of as human surroundings, whether artificial or natural. This comment was written for the Swedish journal *Form*, and a brief look at their volumes from 1968 and 1969 shows that the term ‘miljø’ or environment was even more dominant in Sweden at this early stage. It seemed literally ubiquitous, obviously in line with the way the concept itself encompasses any connections entirely. A special issue on

Nordic educational reforms in *Dansk Brugskunst* 1972 presented a Swedish proposal where all branches of artistic education were somehow translated into environments (Johansson 1972).

If we return to Victor Papanek's reflections on design education, published in *Mobilia*, he not only focussed on the human environment, but on human beings themselves, in masculinum. "Design is the synthesis of science, art and technology. It is the most powerful tool yet placed in the hands of man with which to alter his environment and, by extension, himself" (Papanek 1970b, unpgn.). It is central to the use of environment as a key concept that it is understood as a feedback relationship between people and their surroundings. Education is basically a concern for human resources and artistic education should establish creative environments. When Papanek stated his very broad examples of 'our environment', it was intended to guide and mould students into more responsible designers and make them conscious of any moral and social issues in the expanded field their designs would affect.

Our environment consists of landscapes, regions, cities, climates, shelters, tools, devices, information, products, happenings, messages and much else. To deal with all this, design must concern itself with moral and social issues, and, in doing so, help students in their search for an appropriate value system within themselves.

(Papanek 1970b, unpgn.)

### **Natural environment and global issues**

In 1965, 'environmental control' would unambiguously refer to the adjustment of human, interior environments to a commentator like Reyner Banham, and any thought of accelerating power consumption would be answered with the confidence in miniaturisation and other technological progress (Banham 1965). The global, environmental concerns did, however, sneak into the futuristic optimism of environmental design. In a text for the Scandinavian Design Students Organisation magazine, *ø/sdo* 2, 1968, Papanek writes on 'Systems design for sustaining human life under marginal conditions', and this paragraph shows a discrete change to the more critical perspective.

As mankind moves into jungles, Artic, and Antarctic new parameters for environmental design have to be considered. But even more marginal survival conditions will be brought into play as suboceanic settlements and experimental stations on asteroids and other planets begin to make their appearance. Design for survival in space has already become important.

The pollution of rivers, streams and the air above our cities; the agglomeration of cities, suburbs and exurbs into gigantic sprawling city-smears, that often stretch for a thousand miles or more, also make a re-examination of environmental systems design necessary.

(Papanek 1968)

In Denmark, the visible and smelly pollution of streams as well as the air pollution and congestion of cities were also the first issues of a broader public, environmental awareness. Emerging from a former students' association of natural science, the

activist organisation, NOAH, made its entry in 1969 by a spectacular happening at a public seminar on pollution as a societal challenge at the University of Copenhagen, where the audience experienced fish dying in factory wastewater and the noise and smoke of a moped in the auditorium (Hougaard 2019). This debate inspired the establishment of the above-mentioned Ministry of Pollution, later renamed the Ministry of Environment in 1973. So, despite the initially somewhat superficial references and buzz, a concern for the global environment grew as part of the public debate in Denmark, strongly provoked by the Oil Crisis in 1973, of course. A much-debated call for reform of the whole political culture even stated: “If we wait too long there won’t be any environment left in which society can find its equilibrium” (Meyer et al. 1978, 180).

A marginal, but much more persistent voice in this debate was architect C.O. Gjerløv-Knudsen. Since the early 1950s he had published small texts as critiques of technological development in agriculture, industry and culture, some even in English. In 1969, however, he changed to a more apocalyptic tone and prophesied the total collapse of industrial society and ecosystems around the year 2000 (Gjerløv-Knudsen 1973). Inspired by the student rebellion, he called for a long list of reforms against overpopulation, waste, pollution, starvation, social, gender and racial inequality, colonialisation, nuclear power, commercial exploitation and the arms race. Many of these aspects were woven closely together, so everything had to be changed by new mentality and behaviour, politics and values, in a reborn society.

In this way, the values are not to be sought in technological development or industrial production causing further consumption, but in cultural activities searching towards understanding of mankind and its relationship to its historical, present and future environment. These activities will have to be cultivated through art and humanities in a world liberated from pathogens and poison.

(Gjerløv-Knudsen 1974, 17)

Both the Doomsday rhetoric and the tightly knit problems meant that this kind of wake-up call on environmental issues lead to few specific actions in politics and no plans for radical reforms. The fight against pollution and nuclear power along with nature conservation was the most successful actions in Denmark. Generally, however, it was immensely difficult to keep focus on global issues and translate them into any kind of action. The quotation from Gjerløv-Knudsen is significant in the way it vaguely indicates how cultural activities, arts and humanities (somehow) should take a lead and guide developments in technology and economics.

### **Lots of words and lack of solutions**

To a contemporary reader, it might be surprising how little the natural environment or global issues were addressed in the broad use of environment as a key concept around 1970. But when we look at the debate on the whole entangled global environment, we also see how the attention somehow bounces back and becomes either abstract and speculative or dissolves in a myriad of specific, disciplinary aspects. To conclude our reading of the Danish uses of the word environment, three kinds of problems seem to challenge common understanding and joint actions. First, the vagueness or abstractness of the concept of environment. Second, illusions of transdisciplinary consensus



people can sit in the sun drinking beers. In the fight against economic growth or any kind of development, the term environment is used in some specific meanings. In this way, *environment* is among other things:

- 1) something emerging in and around any building, just before it is going to be torn down,
- 2) something discovered in any site, no matter how dreary, if there is any risk it could be used for industry, trade, traffic or any superfluous activities.

*Environment* is in this sense mainly a good thing.

(Dansk Industri, 1974)

Of course, this was written in defence of unrestrained industrial and commercial developments, but the imprecise meanings popping up anywhere anyone had any reason for resistance, is recognisable.

To Teymur, the very concept of environment itself became an obstacle to obtaining any consensus and searching for solutions. “[...] ‘environment’ cannot designate phenomena which can be handled, and whose ‘problems’ can be solved” (Teymur 1982, 52). He was right in the sense that the term had much more power in making awareness about the connections and entanglement of problems than in convincing any on specific solutions. The singular issues had, and still have, to be translated somehow into more specific discourses of socially and economically sustainable scenarios.

This translation is a huge challenge, as the importance of problems seems to fade and even become ridiculed, when discussions oscillate between overall connections and specific areas of action. Busbea also points this out. “Environment was at once ubiquitous and elusive, totalising yet absolutely localised in its discipline-specific manifestations. In retrospect, this lent the concept its simultaneously banal and obscure characteristics” (Busbea, xiv). This is, however, often the case with key concepts, that the very vagueness is part of the reason for their role. They might mean slightly different things to different groups, but combine diverging interests in a powerful framework. The protagonists of a discourse might not even agree, but constantly negotiate the right meaning to confirm their own position. “Even among the proponents of change there might be disagreement as to how to conceptualise the new, and with which words. That is why basic concepts are contested and controversial” (Ifversen 2011, 75). The success of the term ‘environment’ might exactly have been its plasticity and vagueness towards different meanings and uses.

We have investigated the Danish debates in the broad field of design. And ‘design’ itself was both a term and a field of practice that expanded during the 1960s and 1970s. According to Busbea, this was closely linked to the concept of environment. “To be more precise, during the period in question, environment was widely apprehended not just as a problem or an object of design but rather as the very fabric of design itself” (Busbea, xvii). Design became a way to unfold understandings of environmental feedback on humans and to address environmental aspects in any physical and visual context. In Denmark, only a few professionals labelled themselves as ‘designers’, but professionals from architecture, art and studio crafts joined in through projects on ‘the environment’. The disciplinary differences and diverging interests made their marks, though and formed the core of the second problem we have detected, the illusions of transdisciplinary consensus dissolving in diverging foci and

interests. The 'environment' was not only a mutual challenge to everyone, but also fields of expansion for many disciplinary and professional interests. They all gained influence by reproducing the vagueness of the concept and expanding its use, instead of making clarifications, discriminations and specifications. Everyone called for actions to start in their own domain. In this way, any consensus on cause and effect constantly slips away, and singular interests lead away from mutual concerns for the whole. Even if everyone speaks of the 'whole', it turns out to be different 'wholes', different understandings, perspectives and interests (Martin 2004; Mestrovic 2017).

The most basic confusion was whether it was human environment or natural environment that was the main concern. This is clearly shown in the Danish examples, where most ideas addressed the human environment, while the global concerns for climate and nature were mentioned rather as a call for urgency. It exemplifies the third problem we want to state: the continuous confusions of the human being as a responsible actor or subject of change. It is a challenge of environmental thinking, how environments are understood as responsive systems, where humans are moulded by environments as well as shaping environments. "Response hints at a state of uncertainty regarding the locus of agency in complex systems" (Busbea 2020, xvii). Both agency and causality are constrained notions here. In the end, the concept of environment is defined by the perspective of perception. To whom are these surroundings the environment? In his biological vocabulary, Canguilhem explained the 'milieu' as defined by perception.

The milieu that is proper to man is the world of his perception, that is to say, the field of his practical experience in which his actions, oriented and regulated by values that are immanent to his tendencies, carve out certain objects, situate them relative to each other and all of them in relation to himself. This occurs in such a way that the environment he is supposed to be reacting to finds itself originally centred in and by him.

(Canguilhem 2008, 26)

If the environment is only perceived as a whole to us and is only environment in our perspective, then we lack a joint perspective to act responsibly. As a key concept, 'environment' is based on perception in the sense of producing awareness of the entanglements we are part of as human beings. The problem might be that this awareness reaches far beyond aspects one can specifically react to. So, the downside of the strength to produce wide-reaching awareness and global concern is constrained consensus and a constant confusion of agency.

Our Danish cases show how designers, architects and artists reacted to environmental issues within their own domain and confirmed their own competencies by mainly aesthetic responses to visual, physical, spatial and social environments. They perceived the challenge of environmental crisis out of their own tradition, the avant-garde attempt to reform society through artistic experiments, physical planning and visual communication, through redesign of homes, public spaces and consumption. Everyone spoke of 'the environment', but their actions addressed innumerable specific environments. If 'the climate' has taken over as the key concept today, we might experience political consensus and agency at a higher level. The very awareness of entanglement and totality is, however, still based on the fuzzy, environmental discourse that was a prerequisite for many scientific, philosophical and creative disciplines to

share interests in the very vaguely defined area of environmental issues. We just have to deal with this fuzziness as part of the challenge (Pinkus 2013).

## Note

- 1 This ministry was enlarged with an Agency of Environment in 1972 and renamed to Ministry of Environment in 1973. Together with the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency from 1967 and the Norwegian Environmental Protection Department from 1972, it is among the first governmental organisations to protect the environment.

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### 3 Students of Architecture as Environmental Activists

#### Two Sister Exhibitions about the Environmental Crisis in Sweden and Norway, 1968–1969

*Beata Labuhn*

\*\*\*\*

10,000 children [will] die of starvation today. [...]  
Their starvation pays for our luxury. [...]  
All people have the following poisons in their body: DDT, lead, mercury. [...]  
In 80 years, our energy resources will be gone. [...]  
You must change your attitude, if your grandchildren are to survive.

This is just a small selection of the messages featuring on the posters, in the catalogue and on various pamphlets of the 1968 exhibition *So What (Än sen då)* made by students of architecture from Chalmers University of Technology in Gothenburg. These messages, as well as the images on the posters such as emaciated children, dying birds, mountains of waste, smoking chimneys, dead bodies and people begging for help, were meant to disquiet the public and create a sense of urgency for the environmental problems such as global injustice, population growth and pollution of the planet. Next to the photocollages, there was another category of visuals in the form of infographics. These were simple diagrams in the colours black, white, grey and red, representing scientific and statistical facts such as humanity's narrow life margin on earth, the distribution of water area versus arable and non-arable land on earth, or the presence of industrial pollution in the air, water, plants, fish and humans. The intended disquieting effect of the posters was further enhanced by a sound installation and in addition a claustrophobic room with mirrors all around. The sound installation – a sound recording of water dripping into a tin basket three times per second – was connected to a numeric counter which displayed and updated the population growth of the moment:

The clock is ticking, the numbers rush past in front of the astonished spectator. [...] In six hours close to 60,000 new mouths to feed in a starving world. [...] After all these stunning facts – still haunted by the threatening ticking of the counter – one enters the experience room. A darkness filled with mirrors. Here is the person who is the spectator himself.

(C.A. 1968, 14)

The confrontational woman-in-the-mirror dark room made by Pietro Raffone was unfortunately only to be seen during the beginning of the exhibition as the installation

caught fire and was deemed unfit for further travel (Raneland 2019). The posters were distributed on around 80 corrugated cardboard panels, ca. 1 × 2 m in size. Each of these basic elements belonged to one of the four categories of thematic poster families: (1) The introduction in the form of population explosion and limited resources, of which the first poster would always be the ‘ticking-and-counting-poster’; (2) the problems of the developing countries (*U-land*) such as overpopulation, hunger and persistent exploitation by the developed countries; (3) the problems of the developed countries (*I-land*) such as city growth, traffic pollution, consumerism and waste (Figure 3.1); (4) summary, of which the ‘question-poster’ would be last: ‘Have you got it? Have you got that we are jeopardising our whole existence? Or do you have to read it all through again?’ (Ån sen då 1968a, back cover; 1969, back cover). All material was accompanied by a logo design featuring a death skull superimposed upon the Earth. This logo was designed by Christian Pedersen (later Christian Kajanus) and the design has been adapted slightly depending on the occasion (*Affscherna* 1968). It could be blue-white or red-white for the cover of the catalogue, black-and-white on the one-A4-pamphlets, as well as more elaborated dark blue-white-black or red-white-black on the posters announcing the presence of the exhibition in yet another city. After the opening at the City Library in Gothenburg, the exhibition was shown in many cities in Southern Sweden, such as Malmö, Uddevalla, Lund, Karlskrona, Uppsala and Stockholm where it was on display twice, first at the Gothenburg Bank (*Göteborgsbanken*) and then at the City Museum (*Stadsmuseet*). At the same time, a copy of the exhibition was travelling in the Northern part of Sweden (*Norrland*), where it was managed by Per-Uno Ågren from the Västerbottens Museum in Umeå (Ån sen då 1969).

Although graphic design was the most important means for communicating the students’ environmental concerns (Torpe 2013), their architectural design skills also came in handy. In fact, during the exhibition tour, these skills were tested repeatedly when the size and the spatial form of the exhibition had to be adapted time after time to yet another locale (Ån sen då 1968b, 1968c; Raneland 2019). In every new hosting location, the exhibition was re-arranged as a new configuration of passages and rooms. One could say that there were almost as many architectures of the exhibition as there were people who contributed to the making of it. The project was made in the collective spirit of the day when people worked anonymously on a common project, often without much interest in personal recognition. (On collective authorship from the time period, see also Christina Zetterlund’s interview with Gunilla Lundahl in Chapter 4.) The informal list of students who in one way or another were engaged with the making of the exhibition adds up to forty-seven first names (Ån sen då 1968d). The picture of the ‘core team’ made at the opening of the exhibition in the Gothenburg library in May 1968 features twelve people, a number which is also repeatedly confirmed in various newspapers. The picture shows among others: Mats Raneland, Ivar Fernemo, Mats Henriksson, Christian Pedersen/Kajanus, Olle Ribbing, Carl-Johan Engström, Pietro Raffone and Michael Hideon (Fernemo 2019). The students did not only invest their energy, talent and time, but they took a financial risk with the exhibition. All the expenses such as cardboard, glue or electronics were first bought from their own money or ‘on credit’. Luckily for them the selling of the exhibition catalogue eventually covered the costs, while the students managed to convince the Swedish transport company ASG to drive the three boxes with the exhibition from place to place for free (Raneland 2019).

# Århundrets oppfinnelse – automobilen

- konstruert for å kjøre 100 km i timen
- konstruert for å fremme individets bevegelighet

Av dette teknikkens vidunder har mennesket klart å lage et instrument for kollektiv ubevegelighet.

For å transportere 100 000 personer  
pr. time. trengs

60 kjørefiler eller 2 tunnelbanespor



Dessuten: Bilen krever plass, forbruker energi, forgifter  
luften, lager støy, invalidiserer mennesker, dreper  
mennesker,

## Er teknisk fremskritt alltid utvikling ?

Figure 3.1 The 'car-poster' reoccurred in the Swedish and the English *So What* as well as in the here portrayed Norwegian *And After Us* where one can read: 'The invention of the century – the automobile. [The car] was designed to drive 100km per hour and promote individual mobility. Out of this marvel of technology, man has managed to create an instrument of collective immobility. To transport 100 000 people per hour, 60 car lanes or two subway tracks are needed. Furthermore: the car requires space, consumes energy, poisons the air, makes noise, disables people, kills people. Is technical progress always [the same] as development?' Image courtesy of *og etter oss*.

## The 1967 environmental turn in Sweden

With the title of the exhibition – *So What?* – the students aimed to highlight the usual disinterested reaction to global injustice, overpopulation and industrial pollution of an average Swede...

...until experts like Georg Borgström unearthed the eerie cleansing behind these facts. In November last year, the environmental debate and its global meaning had become more relevant than before, amongst other things through Hans Palmstierna's debate book.

(C.A. 1968, 14)

Hans Palmstierna is widely recognised as the central figure of the 1967 environmental turn in Sweden (Bennulf 1994; Anshelm 1995, 2004; Djerf Pierre 1996; Kaijser and Larsson Heidenblad 2017; Larsson Heidenblad 2018, 2019, 2021; Thiberg 2019). Although Palmstierna was already quite known in Swedish politics and public life since the 1950s, as being affiliated with the reigning Social Democratic Party, as a researcher at Karolinska Institutet, and as regular contributor to the liberally oriented *Dagens Nyheter*, his breakthrough as a pioneering environmentalist came in October 1967 with the publication of *Looting, Starvation, Poisoning (Plundring, svält, förgiftning)*. The book, which Palmstierna wrote with the assistance of his wife Lena Palmstierna, was a bombshell in the Swedish public realm. Baron and biochemist Palmstierna instantly became the public's favourite on matters of environmentalism, and was preferred to the 'elitist scientists' from the other noteworthy 1967 publication on the topic edited by Karl-Erik Fichtelius and Hannes Alfvén titled *The Predicament of Man. A Book by Scientists for Politicians (Människans villkor. En bok av vetenskapsmän för politiker)*. In addition to the publications by Palmstierna and Fichtelius and Alfvén in 1967, Sweden hosted other significant events devoted to the matters of the environment that year. In June 1967, the government established *Naturvårdsverket*, the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, the first of its kind in the world. On 1 November 1967, the Government's Official Investigations (*Statens Offentliga Utredningar*) also published the report *Environmental Research (Miljövärdhetsforskning)*, summarising national scientific research on air, soil, water, nature conservation, biocides, toxicology and health. This was seen as Swedish-national in-depth supplement to Palmstierna's global expertise by *Dagens Nyheter* on 11 November 1967 ("Sent på jorden" 1967). Also, on 13 December 1967, the Swedish delegation to the United Nations proposed a conference on the topic of the environment, laying a foundation for what history would later remember as the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in June 1972 titled *Only One Earth* (Larsson Heidenblad 2018, 2019, 2021).

In short, until 1967, the Swedish government, most scientists and the public saw environmental issues as a series of isolated problems. The year 1967 marked the awakening to the 'notion of a globally entangled environmental crisis, originating from the very foundation of modern industrial civilization' (Larsson Heidenblad 2018, 271). Against the backdrop of this rising environmental awareness in the Swedish public sphere, *So What* started in summer and autumn 1967 as a reading group at Chalmers. After reading Palmstierna, Fichtelius/Alfvén and the documents of Government Official Investigations, the students dug deeper and found more than twenty additional books on the topic. Many of those publications had been available as paperbacks since the 1960s thanks to the paperback revolution in the publishing industry, described

by Thomas Nordby in Chapter 14 (see also Svensson 2020). The students' reading list was arranged in four themes: the living standard inequality between developing and industrial countries, population growth and scarcity of Earth's resources, environmental pollution, and the problems of the industrial countries (Än sen då 1968a, 30).<sup>1</sup> While reading, the students gradually developed the idea of making this knowledge even more accessible to the public by condensing the information from the books into communicative texts, graphics and images:

When we decided to produce this exhibition illustrating man's predicament, [...] our aim was to take the facts that are already known and present them to the general public, as a basis for broad discussion. [...] The purpose of the exhibition is to give an overall impression of the diversity and severity of the great threats to humanity, in order to thereby contribute to a reconsideration of the conventional standard needs, and thus contribute to creating a debate and an opinion that will enable political action.

(Än sen då 1968a, 1)

### Discomforting aesthetics and prominent politicians

On 12 June 1968 the exhibition was inaugurated in the hall of Gothenburg Bank at the *Sergelstorg* in Stockholm by Olof Palme – an opponent of imperialism, authoritarianism, colonialism, apartheid and the war in Vietnam – who from 1969 on would become the Prime Minister of Sweden, as well as the leader of the Swedish Social Democratic Party. The ceremonial association with *So What* totally fitted the upcoming profile of Palme who:

played a crucial role in establishing North-South “small state interests” as a discursive alternative to the antithetical East-West bipolarism of the Cold War during his first terms in power (1969–1976). [...] In both shaping and reflecting the growing New Left sensibilities of Swedish public opinion, Palme strived actively to establish *multilateral* progressive networks – for example in the UN and Socialist International – as well as *bilateral* contacts with individual states across the Global South, aiming at bypassing or defusing the dichotomizing logic of the Cold War.

(Mørkved Hellenes and Marklund 2018, 1, 3)

During the opening of the exhibition in Stockholm Palme was still the Minister of Education and in this function he let *So What* be transformed into an educational audio-visual project for schools comprising a 12-minutes tape that included 38 images accompanied by audio-scripts written for each scene (Pogo Produktion 1969). The exhibition also got attention from other prominent politicians<sup>2</sup> as well as religious leaders who attended the World Council of Churches between 4 July and 20 July 1968 in Uppsala (ARBIN 1968). Also the media eventually loved the exhibition despite the students' initial conviction that the journalists would not be interested:

Both TV and the press have “informed” us that a demonstration like this has no real news value as long as it stays within the raw marks of the law, while deviations from democratic behaviour are valuable news material [...].

(Än sen då 1968a, 1)

However, the opposite happened: ‘hopefully what many visitors will realise is that an intelligent exhibition is a great form of protest...’ wrote *Dagens Nyheter* on 13 June 1968 and hinted that it might have been the ‘discomforting’ aesthetics of the posters, which actually made it impossible for the media and the public to pass this exhibition by indifferently: ‘It is now impossible not to take a stand in the face of the discomforting figures, picture collages and posters [...]’ (Vogel 1968). Art historian and -critic Beate Sydhoff was also impressed by the ‘strict, simple and ascetic frame’ of *So What*, especially when compared to the ‘ironic and grotesque’ *Beautiful Moment* (*Sköna Stund*), the contemporaneous exhibition about the inequality between developing and developed countries (Sydhoff 1969). Yet, for some, the exhibition could not be dark enough. Jan Myrdal – author of one of the twenty-five books from which the students extracted information, an ardent Maoist and son of two Nobel Laureates Alva Myrdal and Gunnar Myrdal – who inaugurated the exhibition at Stockholm’s City Museum on 22 July 1968, said that the otherwise excellent exhibition could benefit from being more heart-breaking, and from more explicit finger-pointing at who exactly is responsible for the world hunger and the exploitation of world resources. Jan Myrdal found a good example of what he desired this exhibition to do more in the juxtaposition of the poster featuring a dramatically famished child next to the poster with all kinds of contraceptives, where one could read about the Anglo-American company Ortho as the organisation co-responsible for overpopulation as they elevated the prices for the intrauterine device by 300-fold after it had obtained the world patent on this product in 1966 (ARBIN 1968).

### **Censored transition from national to global**

When Mats Henriksson was asked in 1968 what the students wanted to do after their studies, he answered: ‘Maybe go to some developing country and start building according to the conditions that exist in the country. Broaden all fronts, not just use what you learned at school. No global projects’ (Vogel 1968). While ‘no global projects’ might have been the good intention for later undertakings, the *So What* exhibition itself became a worldwide export product. During the autumn of 1968, while the successful exhibition was still touring through Sweden, the Swedish Institute – a Swedish governmental body that focusses on national branding and promotion – already started to search for ways to promote the exhibition internationally. During a meeting on 16 October 1968 the assisting director of the Swedish Institute Lars Björkbom – later actively involved with Palme’s intercultural programs in the Global South (Mørkved Hellenes and Marklund 2018) – and four employees of the Swedish Institute – Gunnar Hultner, Bo Kålfors, Bo Wingren and Birgitta Lönnell – discussed the progress after having approached the Information Office and the Foreign Office Agency (*U-byrå*) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Utrikesdepartementet*, UD). What appears from the meeting minutes is that the Swedish Institute received a rejection from the UN regarding the possibility of showing the exhibition within the UN. However, it was decided that the Swedish Institute would try again to get the UN involved somehow and explore possibilities to display *So What* at the Swedish Institute for Standards, the Swedish Embassy in Vienna and Bonn, as well as in Holland, England and France. In any event, the Swedish Institute would:

press that this was not an official Swedish manifestation, which would be shown, but that the exhibition was made on private initiative by a group of

young students. In any case [The Swedish Institute] intends to seek to produce a [foreign] language version, possibly for England.

(Lönnell 1968)

Although the abovementioned tour-intentions of the exhibition are still awaiting scholarly investigation, later reports briefly mention that English versions of the exhibition were on display in the USA, the Netherlands and the UK (Nylén 1998, 145), while the online exhibition platform for Swedish countercultural posters *Affischerna* brings up also Belgium (*Affischerna* 1968). When the English version was presented in Sweden in the Arvfursten Palace in March 1969, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Torsten Nilsson, said that it was important ‘to show that Sweden not only deals with business issues and beautiful things, but also wants to emphasise things that greatly engage young people’ (“Än sen då på UD” 1969).

While taking care of the translation of *So What* from Swedish to English, the Swedish Institute neutralised some of the more politically sensitive information. For example, they removed the – by Jan Myrdal so much adored – mention of the firm Ortho. They replaced the pictures of specific coffee and tobacco brands with neutral – brandless – cartoons of coffee cups and cigarette packages. To some posters, the Swedish Institute added promotion of new green technologies: ‘Water, sun, wind provide only small amounts of energy, but they will never fail’ (Än sen då... – *So What?* 1969, 19). At the end of the introduction to the English version of the *So What* catalogue, one can read that ‘a copy of the exhibition has been made in Norway, and has in two months been visited by more than 100,000 people’ (Än sen då... – *So What?* 1969, 2).

### ...*And After Us...* a Norwegian copy of *So What*?

In the end, the UN did help with the international *So What* promotion, at least in Norway. Together with Ivar Öhman from the Swedish Embassy in Norway, the general secretary Anders Guldvik from the UN Association of Norway (*Norsk Samband for de Forente Nasjoner*) contacted the general secretary Magne Midttun from the Norwegian Society for the Conservation of Nature (*Norsk Naturvernforbundet*) in late summer 1968. The idea was to make a copy of *So What* at the Artists’ House (*Kunstnernes Hus*) in Oslo with the help of the artist Gladys Raknerud and her son Nils Amund Raknerud. However, the plan to make the exhibit at the Artists’ House failed when the Norwegian Artists’ Association (*Kunstnerforeningingen*) suddenly pulled out of the collaboration on 7 November 1968 (*Kunstnerforeningens Sekretær* 1968). It was then that Canadian-born architect Robert Clarke Esdaile came to the fore. A fan of Le Corbusier and Che Guevara, Esdaile was also interested in ecology, which he already had explored in numerous articles since the mid-1960s (Fallan 2021). In 1969, Esdaile was temporarily replacing Sverre Fehn as teaching assistant to Prof. Knut Knutsen at the Oslo School of Architecture (*Arkitekturhøgskolen i Oslo* – AHO). One day Esdaile showed his students an article about *So What* in the Swedish magazine *Form* (Wickman and Björkegren 1968). Inspired by the article, Heidrun Rising Næss, Turid Horgen, Dag Norling and Snorre Skaugen launched on 12 December 1968 a wall-newspaper (*veggavisa*) on the topic in the new premises of AHO. Later, the group was bolstered by Gábor Szilvay, who designed the exhibition’s pavilion, and Eyvind Kvaale, who acted as a representative during the exhibition’s tour around Norway. This core team got help with the poster

production and pavilion construction from Nils Amund Raknerud, other students from AHO, especially Mai-The-Ngüyen, Ole Bording and Kristen Grieg Bjerke, as well as students from the National College of Art and Design (*Statens håndverks- og kunstindustriskole* – SHKS) such as Torbjørg (Bolette) Nordsletten from Graphic Design who designed the typography for the posters.

Norwegians visited *So What* when it was shown in Malmö in December 1968 and launched an organisation, in the first weeks still under the Swedish name *So What* with its first official meeting on 18 December 1968 at the Swedish Embassy in Oslo (Og etter oss 1968). In addition to Esdaile and the students, the following people were also present during this meeting: Öhman from the Swedish Embassy, Guldvik from the UN Association of Norway, Midttun and Fritzvold from the Society for the Conservation of Nature, Rørslett from the Norwegian-Swedish Association (*Norsk-Svensk Forening*), Gladys Raknerud and Nils Raknerud, as well as Ivar Fernemo from *So What*. The minutes from this first meeting – written in Swedish – give the impression that the Norwegian students who were expected to produce the exhibition's copy were only listening to Guldvik, Öhman, Fernemo, Esdaile and Raknerud, who put forward ideas on how the Norwegian exhibition should be done ("Protokoll..." 1968). However, this first impression is highly misleading, since that 1968 generation of students had their own ideas about how things should be done.

### **Back to *Materia Prima***

The Norwegian students first of all modified the 'dark and dramatic' tone of *So What*. They replaced the upon-the-Earth-superimposed dead skull with a human embryo. They substituted the black background with a simple white for the catalogue and brighter colours for the posters. They changed the title to ...*And After Us...*(... *og etter oss...*). This was meant as a reference and a rebuke to 'After us the flood' (*Après nous le déluge*), the let's-live-as-we-please-and-who-cares-what-happens-after-us remark of Madame de Pompadour.<sup>3</sup> Inspired by the work of the Norwegian writer Georg Johannesen, Heidrun Rising Næss composed a poem that would become this exhibition's opening motto:

you human  
- what you're thinking  
and refrain from thinking  
- what you do  
and fail to do  
has consequences

However, years later, the Norwegian writer Lars Saabye Christensen did not remember the ironic dialectics with the history, nor the hopeful embryo, nor the poems. Instead, he was reminiscing about the dark and serious aspect of the exhibition. In his 1984 bestselling novel *Beatles*, Saabye Christensen described how the brain hammering sound installation, combined with the macabre posters, provided unforgettable impressions for his 'horror cabinet.' (Saabye Christensen 1984, 357).

The Norwegian students found the making of a copy of *So What* 'unsustainable' and they reasoned that 'some information [in *So What*] turned out to be questionable on closer inspection', and that *So What* was unsuitable for Norwegian public since it



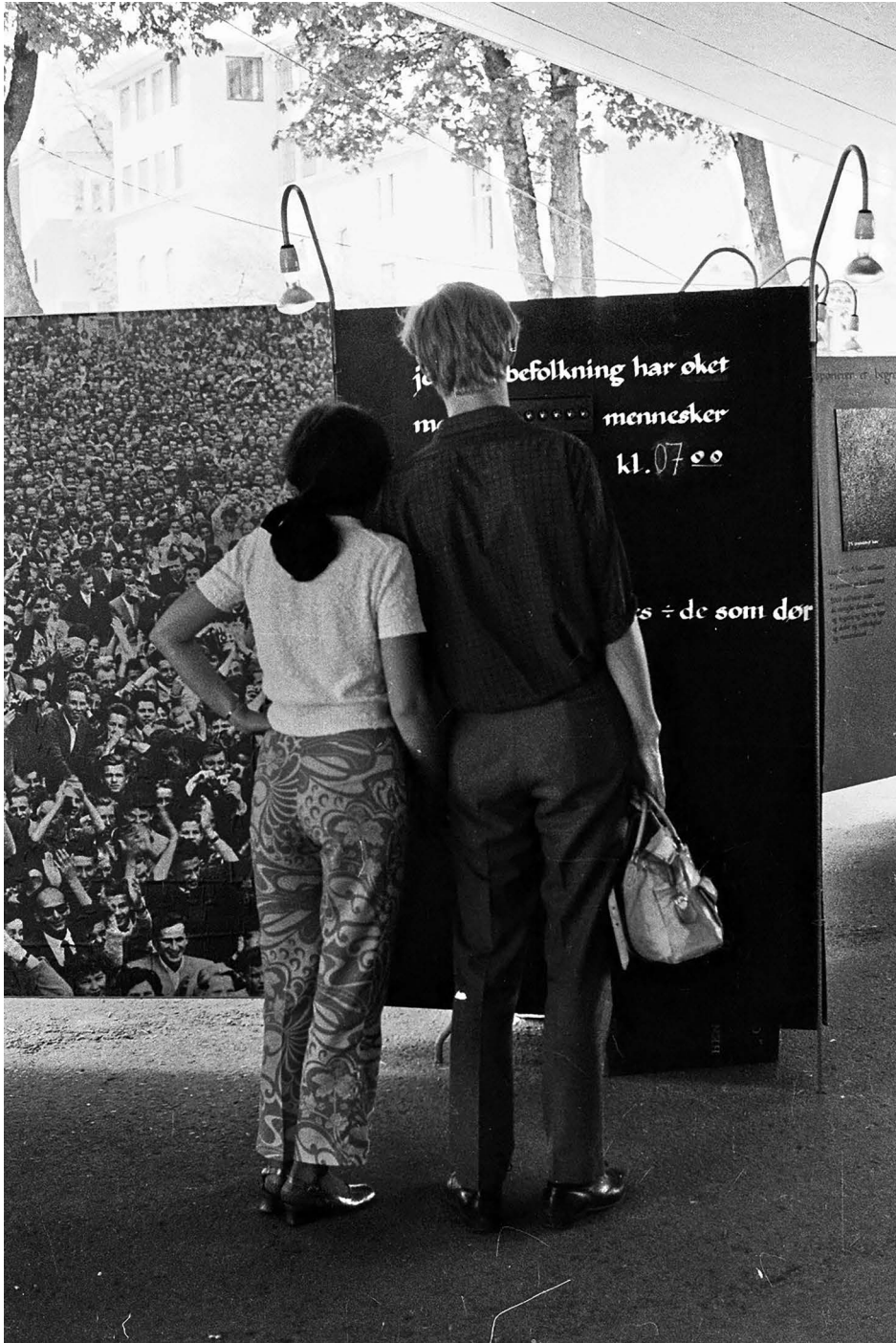


Figure 3.2 The people-counting poster with the sound installation at the *And After Us* exhibition, 1969. Photo courtesy of Dag Norling.

contained ‘examples specifically intended for Swedish conditions’. As the Norwegian students desired to guarantee more quality, they composed an advisory consortium.<sup>4</sup> that helped the students to compose the new literature list and peer review the preliminary poster drafts. While the Swedish catalogue featured just the miniatures of the posters, the Norwegians included in their catalogue also longer text extracts from their literature list that was especially tailored for Norway.<sup>5</sup> The Norwegian students also found that there were ‘better alternatives’ for posters (Og etter oss 1968). In the end, out of 100 images used in *And After Us*, only fifteen images – like for example the images on the ‘car-poster’ (see Figure 3.1) – were direct copies from the Swedish precursor (Og etter oss 1968).

Other posters were deleted, modified or completely changed, such as was the case with the ‘recycling-poster’, which was turned into a poster pair. On the left poster one could see the wasting industrial society against the background of a Manhattan-like cityscape. On the right poster one could see the ecological circular society against the background of an idealised Norwegian landscape (see Figure 3.5). Environmental historian Peder Anker has described this pair of posters as precursory and quintessential for the radical thinking of the later Norwegian deep ecology movement: an ‘either/or dichotomy between the polluted city or the clean remote countryside, a future of industrial doom or ecological bliss’ (Anker 2007, 463; Anker 2020, 63–64).

### **The flying exhibition pavilion and skyrocketing costs**

The architectural framework of *And After Us* was the greatest deviation from the Swedish precursor. Unlike the architecture of *So What*, that adapted itself each time to another interior of a public building, the Norwegian exhibition had a fixed form. Wanting to bring the exhibition to as many people as possible, the Norwegians envisioned that the exhibition should be ‘in the heart of the city centre, in Oslo preferably on Karl Johans gate’. And ‘it had to be outside (*in friluft*)’ (Horgen 2019). Having formulated these urban requirements, the core group basically ‘outsourced’ the architectural design of the exhibition pavilion to the already mentioned student Gábor Szilvay, who was the most experienced in construction works. Szilvay figured out that the architectural design needed to guide visitors through different themes and protect both people and the posters from the rain. To enable travelling, the exhibition also had to be constructed out of mobile elements. In response to these pragmatic requirements, Szilvay designed a tent above a multi-circular structure carrying seventy poster panels. The multi-circular space underneath – abundant in alternation of concave and convex half circles – was inspired by the Baroque lectures of Christian Norberg-Schulz who was professor of architectural history at the Oslo School of Architecture. He transmitted to his students his passion for the Bohemian Baroque of Kilian Ignaz Dientzenhofer, as well as the Baroque-inspired modern architecture by Paolo Portoghesi. The tent structure – made from Norwegian sailing equipment – was inspired by the architect and engineer Frei Otto’s tensile and membrane structures (see Figure 3.3). Szilvay did not intend to link the exhibition’s political agenda to his architectural inspirations, which he found worth emulating simply because of their beauty. The multi-circular space and the tent were interconnected and made constructable by a ‘Portoghesian’ pattern of circles that would be first drawn on the ground. In each city, the exhibition was built according to a strict procedure specified both in written instructions and drawings although one could adjust the entrance

point and the pitch of the tent according to the surrounding context. For example, the tent was almost horizontally spread out in Oslo, while it was very angled in Bergen and Trondheim (Szilvay 2019). Again, Szilvay's design was his own and totally different from the plastic pavilion suggested by Esdaile ("Protokoll ..." 1968).

Unlike the Swedish students who had to find creative ways to crowd-fund their exhibition, the Norwegian students managed to garner extraordinary support from their Swedish and international patrons, even if they used the Swedish precursor only as *materia prima* for their own creation. While the diplomats' actual plan was to save funds by letting the Norwegian students work on the exhibition, in the end, much more money was spent than intended. As the Norwegian students demanded more and more means, Guldvik and Midttun went out of their way to organise additional support, writing tons of sponsoring requests to their contacts. In the end, they managed to enlist many sponsors, including Pan American World Airways and the oil company Norske Shell (Og etter oss 1969, 79), 'the very companies deemed responsible for the pollution of the planet', as expressed by Kvaale for *Rogalands Avis* (Risanger 1969). The Swedish Embassy and the UN Association in Norway also used their network to connect the exhibition with prominent people. The students got a kick-off guest lecture by Hans Palmstierna on 28 February 1969 (see Figure 3.4). The exhibition was opened by the Norwegian Prime Minister Per Borten and Swedish Professor of Economics Gunnar Myrdal on 12 April 1969 on the University Square in the centre of Oslo. After Oslo, *And After Us* went to Bergen, Trondheim, Namsos, Bodø, Tromsø, Stavanger and Haugesund. It was scheduled to appear also in Fredrikstad, Kristiansand, Horten and Alta. However, the exhibition never made it past Haugesund, where it was swept away by a hurricane on the night of 21–22 September 1969 (Utstillingen «og etter oss» fullstendig rasert 1969).



Figure 3.3 The *And After Us* exhibition pavilion at the University Square in Oslo, April 1969. Photo courtesy of Dag Norling.



Figure 3.4 The announcement of Hans Palmstierna's lecture in Oslo on 28 February 1969. Image courtesy of Heidrun Rising and Dag Norling.

### Norwegian environmental politics after *And After Us*

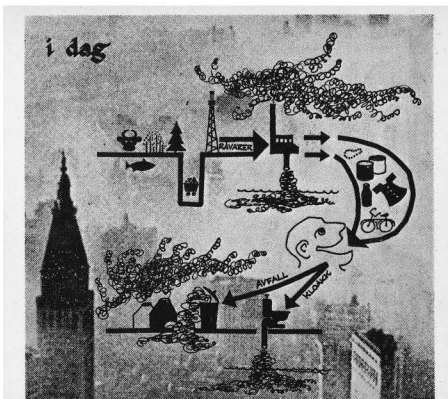
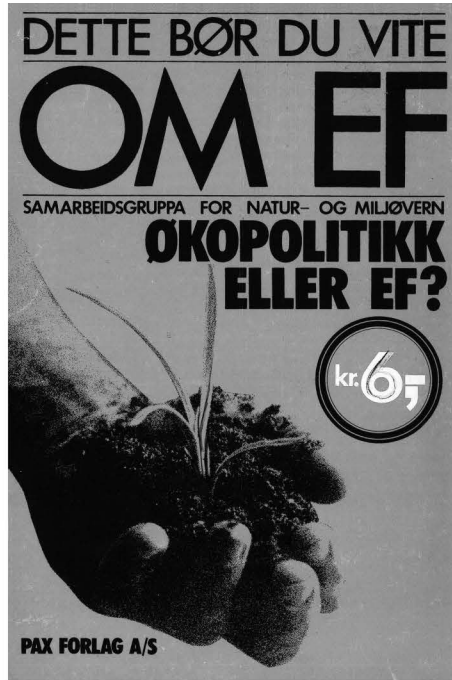
*And After Us* aspired to be trans-political and to appeal to everybody: socialists, Marxist-Leninists, Maoists, social democrats, liberals, conservatives, Christians, the military and above all, school children (R.S. 1969). It succeeded in this to quite an extent: the exhibition was reported in all the Norwegian newspapers in over a hundred articles and Norwegian schools ordered hundreds of exhibition catalogues, which can still be found throughout Norway in various public and private libraries. In Oslo (12 April–4 May) the exhibition was accompanied by a series of public debates open to all who were interested on 15, 17, 22 and 29 April 1969. The exhibition was then also freely appropriated by rightist, centrist and even far-leftist politicians such as Peder Furubotn, who devoted to the exhibition a big part of his lecture for the Student Association on 22 May 1969 (Furubotn 1969). *And After Us* resonated also in other grassroots events such as the concurrent (14–30 April 1969) manifestation *A Place to Be (Et sted å være)*, which included the occupation of Vaterland school in protest against the consumerist *Teenage Fair* and against the demolition of the Vaterland neighbourhood in Oslo's city centre (Solbakken 2010; Mujezinović 2016, 136–139). *A Place to Be* adopted the wall-newspaper, which was the very first sketch of *And After Us* (Og etter oss 1968; NRK tv 1969).

Most importantly – besides pointing out the conceptual affiliations between *And After Us* and the later deep ecologists – Peder Anker boldly suggested that it was *And After Us* which stirred Norway's various environmental fractions into some of

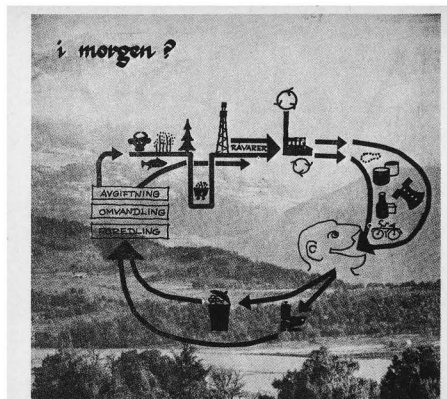
Norway's most legendary political protests (Anker 2007, 463; Anker 2020, 63–64). It was after seeing *And After Us* that Sigmund Kavløy – later one of the central figures of Norwegian deep ecology – sent a letter on 19 June 1969 to the *And After Us*-students, their teacher Robert Esdaile, and everyone who mattered in Norway in matters of environmentalism at the time (Kvaløy 1969). The letter was an invitation to join the first meeting of what later would be known as Cooperation Groups for Protection of Nature and Environment (*samarbeidsgruppene for natur- og miljøvern* – SNM). Three out of the six *And After Us*-students – Skaugen, Horgen and Norling – became active in this grass-roots organisation where different groups worked on various projects focussing on environmental protection. The SNM-groups also prepared public disobedience demonstrations against hydropower development and the energy-intensive aluminium and fertiliser industries. Well-known are their demonstrations at Mardøla waterfall in 1970 and their actions for the preservation of Hardangervidda.

Around 1972, ecology started to infuse from the grass-roots into mainstream politics. Norway established that year its Ministry of Environmental Protection (*Miljøverndepartementet*) (Julsrud 2012) and the University of Oslo launched the 'Humans-Nature-Environment' event in February 1972, after which plans started to be made in May 1972 for Environmental Studies as a new field in Norway (Anker 2020, 81–85). While environmentalism seemed to be winning real presence as the middle ground in the political left-right dichotomy, SNM and other bottom-up environmentally engaged organisations in Norway often did not appreciate the way in which politicians instrumentalised their concerns. In September 1972, during the Third World Future Research Conference in Budapest, Arne Næss – who was important for SNM and who transformed from a positivist professor of Logic into an environmental thinker sometime after the 1970 Mardøla demonstrations – coined the term *deep ecology* as opposed to the shallow environmentalism which he saw expressed in for example the Club of Rome's *The Limits to Growth* (Anker 2020, 86–87; Meadows et al. 1972). While that same year the world was discussing the environmental crisis at the UN Conference 'Only One Earth' in Stockholm in June 1972 (Scott 2016), Norway was under the spell of the EU referendum which would be held on 25 September 1972. SNM was one of the many grass-roots organisations opposing the idea that Norway should join the European Union. In their anti-EU booklet, images from the exhibition *And After Us*, and also from the Mardøla demonstration, are being recycled in support of the statement that joining the EU would be catastrophic for the Norwegian environment (SNM 1972) (See Figure 3.5).

Towards the end of 1970s and the beginning of 1980s, SNM organised their last big protest, this time against the industrialisation of the river at Alta-Kautokeino, which became entangled with the fight for the civil rights of the Sámi (For the Sámi institutions and exhibitions around the time period see Chapter 6 by Anna Westman Kuhmunen). During these many years of Alta protests from roughly 1978 to 1982 Gro Harlem Brundtland was the Minister of Environment (1974–1979) and Prime Minister (1981). Adding to the 1977 Bravo oil spill disaster on the Ekofisk field in the North Sea, the Alta controversy definitely crushed the environmental image of Brundtland in her own country. The SNM activists, deep ecologists and other Norwegian environmentalists made sure that she knew how they judged her as a pro-European and hypocrite environmentalist (Anker 2020, 201–206). However, strangely immunised against the critique she received from these 'radical' environmentalists at home, Brundtland took to the international level where she became the Chair of the World Commission on



het og «den gode husbonds økonomi», men u-landenes problem er jo som nevnt ikke primært betinget av mangel på ressurser. Deres fattigdom skyldes tvert i mot at de selv ikke har muligheten til å utnytte sine egne naturrikdommer. Folgelig kan en hurtig økonomisk vekst i u-landene bare skje ved en like hurtig nedtrapping av produksjon og forbruk i de industrialiserte land. Dette grunnleggende fordelingsproblemet berører imidlertid Mansholt i så upresise vendinger at vi bare med sikkerhet kan slå fast følgende: Mansholts manglende forståelse av utbytningsforholdet mellom de rike og de fattige land gjør hans program helt uskikket til å løse u-landenes alvorligste problemer: sult og materiell undertrykking. Den samme ufullstendige forståelsen av hva problemene krever preger også avsnittet som omhandler landbruksoppgaver. De viktigste økopolitiske oppgavene på dette området mener Mansholt er å forordne kjemiske sprøytemidler som brytes hurtig ned, og som ikke er sunnhetsskadelige. Begrunnelsen for dette er i og for seg riktig: sprøytemidlene (de såkalte biocider) har lett for å



forstyrre den økologiske likevekten. Men det forholdet som nødvendigvis gjør bruken av sprøytemidler, er jo opprettelsen av de store monokulturene som skjer gjennom strukturrasjonaliseringen i landbruket og henger sammen med den generelle sentraliseringsprosessen. Denne utviklingen som både innebærer sløsing med ressurser og nedbryting av økologisk mangfold, ofrer Mansholt tydeligvis ikke en tanke. Dermed unngår han jo også å trekke den pinlige konklusjonen at hans egen landbruksplan er fullstendig uforenlig med en økologisk riktig og nødvendig ressursbruk. I det hele tatt karakteriserer manglene Mansholts brev men de problemer han tar opp. Nå er det jo klart at det nærmest er umulig å utvikle en fullstendig økopolitikk på de få sidene som Mansholt bruker til sitt brev. Ufullstendigheter kunne derfor ha blitt akseptert, hvis de bare ikke hadde vært så fundamentale som de Manholt presterer. Når han bare nevner «desentralisering» *ett* sted i hele brevet, vitner det om at helhetsperspektivet er skjævt — og vi vil tilskrive det analysen som uteble.

Figure 3.5 The anti-European Union pocketbook produced by SNM in 1972 includes many of the 1969 *And After Us* posters such as the pair where the wasting industrial society depicted against a city scape is juxtaposed with the ecological circular society portrayed against an idealised Norwegian landscape. Published by Pax under the title *What you should know about European Union. Ecopolitics or European Union?*

Environment and Development (WCED) and the godmother of the 1987-publication *Our Common Future*, commonly known as *The Brundtland Report*.

### ***So What and And After Us: concluding remarks***

The young people have no precise aims; they are (so far) only dissatisfied. They are not politically minded, but the ‘others’ try to make them ‘politically minded,’ to sell their ‘goods’: e.g., in the USA, China, Italy, Germany, Czechoslovakia, etc. [...G]overnments, even the most authoritarian, are nothing but puppets, faced with the slightest movements of this ‘plasma’ [young people].

(Friedman 1968, 33)

This is what Yona Friedman originally wrote in April 1968 and I think that no other citation could describe more accurately – and literally – what happened between *So What* and *And After Us* as ‘young people’ or ‘plasma’ on one side and the already established institutions on the other. First, the spontaneous grass-roots idea of the Swedish students was turned into a promotional campaign of the Swedish elites who wanted to demonstrate ‘how much they are concerned with what young people are concerned with’. When the Swedish Institute set up a plan, with the help of the UN, to export the exhibition abroad, they expected the Norwegian students to simply execute that plan in Norway. Even if the Norwegian students did not want to make a copy of *So What*, but used the Swedish precursor as *materia prima* for their own creation the Swedish and international diplomats worked unexpectedly hard in order to support the Norwegians financially – something where the Swedes could have only dreamt of as they struggled to finance their pioneering project.

Friedman’s description does not only apply on the level of the relation between ‘young people’ and the institutions. It – at least its first part – also resonates with how the exhibitions entangled with environmental politics, both national and international. Both *So What* as well as *And After Us* aimed to reach beyond the political left-right dichotomy and attract attention to environmental crisis as an ethical matter, a trans-political issue. Yet, as soon as these exhibitions came into being they ‘got arrested by association’ by other political initiatives. While the Swedish *So What* was in a way an extension, a graphic perfecting of Palmstierna’s meta-overview of globally interconnected problems, the exhibition marked also the beginning of Olof Palme’s pioneering North-South politics. The Norwegian *And After Us* also marked a beginning – even if its impulse could be understood like a butterfly effect – of a series of political protests against the industrialisation of the Norwegian landscape and the development of the Norwegian deep ecology movement.

Although the exhibitions were made by students of architecture, in both cases, their operative tool for raising environmental consciousness was provocative graphic design. In the end, it was 1968 and political posters were in vogue as they ‘represented the most immediate form of action’ (Di Carlo 2008, 71). When writing about the 1968-posters of Atelier Populaire, Clifford Deaton argued that many of the posters produced during the 1968 revolutionary movements can be understood in terms of dialectics and irony (Deaton 2013, 30). When looking at the exhibitions *So What* and *And After Us*, one can clearly recognise that the dialectical ‘collapse of the temporal distance between the decadent aristocratic elites from the *Ancien Régime* and contemporary wealthy elites of the industrialised world’ is especially present in – *nomen omen* – the *And After Us* exhibition, and that irony is certainly not absent from

wordings such as: ‘The invention of the century – the automobile...’ (Figure 3.1). However, it was not the irony nor the dialectic that got to be considered the main characteristics for which these exhibitions would be remembered. Instead, ‘grim’, ‘discomforting’, ‘ascetic’, ‘horror cabinet’ happened to be the words that were used to describe these two productions. Although *And After Us* is certainly more ironic and dialectic than *So What*, none of the two fully escapes the – for the time and genre exceptional – seriousness and darkness that surfaced in both. In the end both exhibitions reflected an understanding of the environmental crisis as the crisis of the human condition and as a result of actions of the most powerful and wealthy who do not care neither about other people, nor about the environment they inhabit. These students were serious about it.

## Notes

- 1 The biggest issue for the students back then was the living standard inequality between developing and industrial countries, which the students saw represented in ten books (Gunnar Myrdal 1957, 1968; Benham 1961; *Statens Offenliga Utredningar* 1961; Heppling 1967; Jan Myrdal 1967; Lindqvist 1967; Berntsson and Persson 1968; Kihlberg 1968; Nyerere 1968). Eight books were listed to address mostly the topic of population growth and scarcity of Earth’s resources (Borgström 1953, 1962, 1966, 1967; Heppling 1961; Stolpe 1962; Fichtelius 1967; Palmstierna 1968). The topic of environmental pollution was covered by five books (Carson 1963; Forsman 1966; Landell 1968; *Statens Offenliga Utredningar* 1967; Palmstierna 1968). Finally, the problems of the overfed industrial countries were the topic of four books (Galbraith 1964; Hall 1966; Borgström 1967; Palmstierna 1968). Some of the books were listed twice or three times, such as Palmstierna’s *Looting...* (categorised as population growth, environmental pollution, and problems of the industrialised countries) and Borgström’s (categorised as population growth and problems of the industrialised countries).
- 2 The exhibition inspired also initiatives for public debates such as the one by the Study Association Vuxenskolan in cooperation with the Stockholm City Museum that jointly organised a series of public discussions – with introductions by leading experts, authors and politicians – on the topics addressed by the exhibition on 3, 5, 10 and 12 September 1968. On 28–29 September, they also organised a workshop with Hans Palmstierna, specialist in planning methods Ingrid Jussil, and politicians: Torsten Sandberg, Sten-Erik Tilander, Erik Grebäck (Centre Party), Einar Larsson (Centre Party) and Lennart Levi (Centre Party), who later became Sweden’s first professor in occupational medicine. (Ån sen då, Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan and Stadsmuseet Stockholm 1968).
- 3 Paraphrasing a similar verse from Eurypides, Madame de Pompadour reputedly tried to cheer up her lover and King Louis XV by saying ‘After us the flood’ after the French defeat against the Prussians at Rossbach in 1757 (Mould 2011, 24; Henrichsen 2020). The expression ‘and after us’ as a way to describe in the 1960s humanity’s uncaring and destructive ways of acting was also popularised by the Swedish nuclear physicist Tor Ragnar Gerholm – one of the authors in the anthology of Fichtelius and Allvén – during an interview on Swedish television in 1967 (Larsson Heidenblad 2018, 278).
- 4 The following persons were in the consortium: Harald Andersen, Eilif Dahl, P.A.M. Mellbye, Jul Låg, Karl Evang, Ragnhild Sundby, Hans Palmstierna, Finn Carling, Nic Stang, T. Linné Eriksen, Erik Brofoss, Olav Skulberg, Rolf Vik and Georg Hygen.
- 5 The Norwegian literature list contained the Norwegian translation of Palmstierna’s hit (1968) and four Norwegian translations of the books by Borgström: *Limits to Our Existence* (*Grenser for vår eksistens* 1969), *Food for Billiards* (*Mat for milliader* 1968), *Revolution in World’s Fisheries* (*Revolusjon i verdens fiskerier* 1968), *World’s Food* (*Verdens mat* 1969). The anthology by Fichtelius and Alfvén was already adapted to the Norwegian context and included only three texts by Swedish scientists, namely Fichtelius, Alfvén and Jan Rydberg, while four texts were written by the Norwegians: Finn Carling, Harald T. Andersen, Anton Brøgger and Rolf Vik. The book was recognisably titled *Five to twelve. A book by scientists about our possible future* (*Fem på tolv. En bok av vitenskapsmen*



*om vår mulige fremtid*) (Carling 1968). Also included were the two Norwegian translations of the American best-sellers *The Silent Spring* (*Den tause våren* 1966) by Rachel Carson and *Man's Place in Nature* (*Menneskets plass i natur* 1966) by the American zoologist Marston Bates. Finally, there were three Norwegian books: *World Hunger and Norwegian Agriculture* (*Verdenshungeren og norsk jordbruk* 1968) edited by Andreas Skartveit, *Development Aid and Imperialism* (*U-hjelp og imperialism* 1968) by Lars Allén, Lennart Berntson and Gunnar Persson with a foreword by Tore Linné Eriksen, and *The City and the Community* (*Byen og samfunnet* 1966), the report on the 1965 congress of the Norwegian Architects' Association (*Norske Arkitekters Landsforbund*, in short NAL). Although absent from the literature list, there were also excerpts from Doxiadis' lecture 'The Inhuman City' (Doxiadis 1967).

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## 4 Exhibition as a Critical Tool

### A Conversation with Gunilla Lundahl on Exhibitions, Making Change and Participation

*Christina Zetterlund*

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History became politicised in the 1960s and 1970s. Questions were asked not only about what but also about who became history. Alternative movements developed to move away from the established history. In his article *Local History and Oral History* (published in the *History Workshop Journal*), British historian Raphael Samuel discusses the importance of oral history in being able to go beyond the standard documents of official life (Samuel 1976). The History Workshop Movement was a movement started by British academics at Ruskin College in Oxford in the late 1960s to organise the writing of history from the viewpoint of the non-elite. When writing the history of the experimental design practice of the 1960s and 1970s, it can be difficult to find records in the archives of the attempts, the slow organisation that led to the images, results and documents that we do find in the archives. Practitioners who researched or were even critical of the institutionalised story of design might not always be reflected in what has been saved in the archive. Here we find a design that focused on processes rather than the creation of individual objects; it was collective making rather than individual creation. The period's expanded concept of design, in which design became actions, has only been saved in a few archives. It is therefore essential to talk to those who organised the design and created the formats in which the design took shape. In actual fact, this questioned something that often becomes difficult for the archives to handle. Extended design practice needs other methods to be described. This is where we can learn from Raphael Samuel's *Local History and Oral History*.

An informal conversation with Gunilla Lundahl, who is and has been an important figure in Stockholm's design and architecture discourse, follows below. She is a journalist, educator, curator and activist. She was active as a writer and editor for magazines such as *Form* and *The Architect Magazine (Arkitektidningen)* – the membership magazine for the National Association of Swedish Architects (*Sveriges Arkitekters Riksförbund*), a teacher at Konstfack University College in Stockholm and is also the author of many books (Figure 4.1).

Among other things, she took part in organising the well-known Scandinavian Design Students' Organisation seminars in the late 1960s. In addition to this, she was part of grassroots movements during the 1960s and 1970s that organised well-known exhibitions such as *The Model – A Model for a Qualitative Society (Modellen: en modell för ett kvalitativt samhälle)* (1968) and *ARARAT* (1976), both at Moderna Museet in Stockholm.

In her contribution to this volume (Chapter 3), Beata Labuhn shows how the exhibition format was something that architects and designers acted through. There are

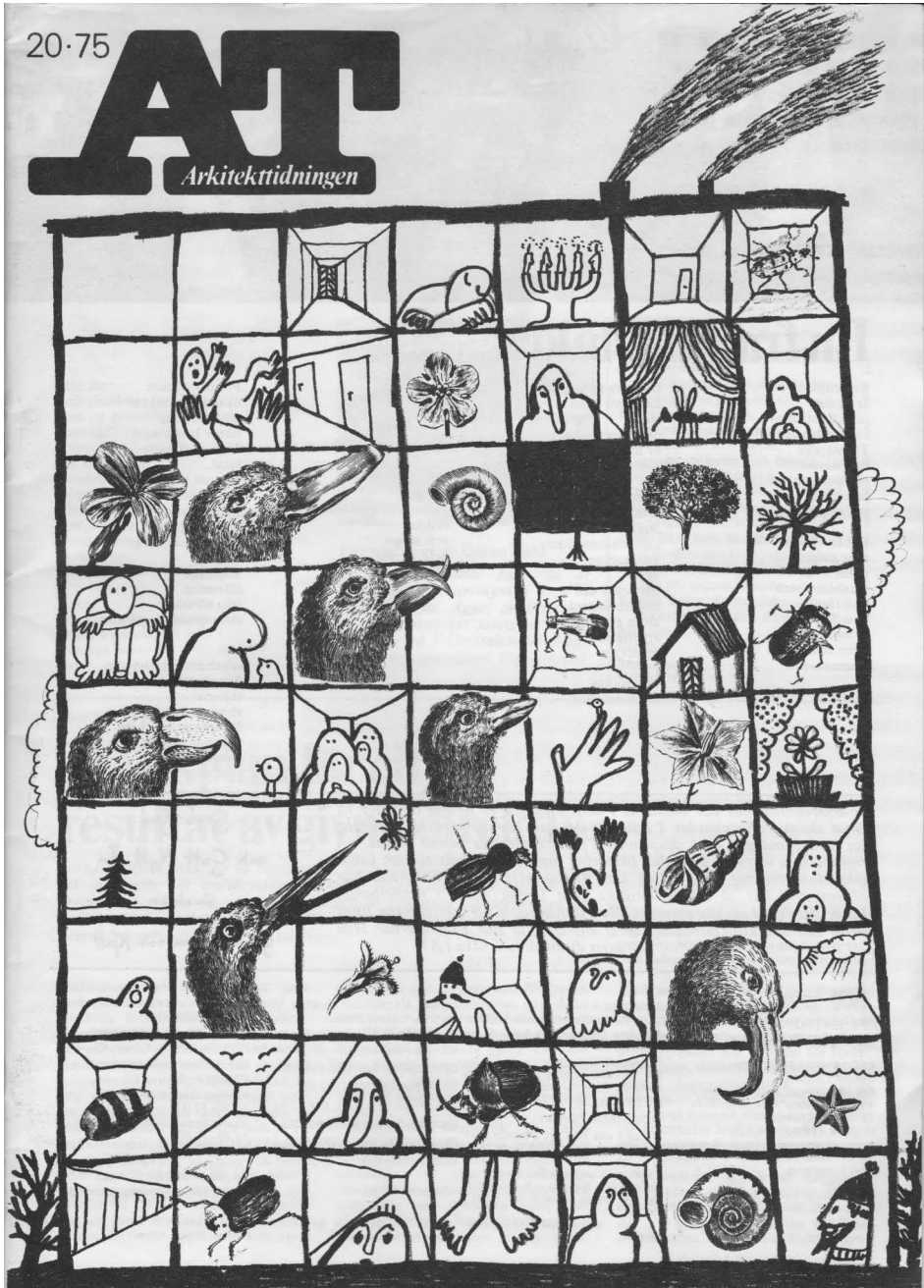


Figure 4.1 Cover of *The Architect Magazine (Arkitektidningen)* from 1975 with drawings by Kerstin Abram-Nilsson. Image from the archive of Gunilla Lundahl.

many examples of this in both a Nordic setting and internationally. In addition to her main case studies, Labuhn mentions another dynamic example, which is the exhibition *Beautiful Moment (Sköna stund)* organised by the then recently established Swedish Exhibition Agency (*Riksutställningar*). The purpose of this organisation, established in 1965, was to support the investigations of a government committee in the process of formulating its report on the role of museums and exhibitions in society by exploring how culture could be conveyed by means of touring exhibitions. After eleven years, this pilot project became permanent with the name Swedish Exhibition Agency and ended up producing many exciting exhibition formats during the 1960s and 1970s. On many occasions, these became essential for the local organisation of both history and political issues. The conversation reproduced below is about making exhibitions rather than the exhibitions themselves, about how grassroots organisation led to exhibitions but also the role played by exhibitions in society.

Christina Zetterlund: It is difficult to know where we should start our conversation as you were involved in so many processes and projects during the 1960s and 1970s. You were part of organising the SDO seminars, developing courses about environments, curating the exhibition *The Model – A Model for a Qualitative Society* (1968). The SDO seminars are discussed in this volume (Chapter 1) and in the book *Craft in Sweden part 1 (Konsthantverk i Sverige del 1)* (Zetterlund, Hyltén-Cavallius and Rosenqvist 2015) you have written about the collective organisation of *The Model*, so perhaps we could start this conversation by talking about another well-known exhibition, namely *ARARAT* that was shown at Moderna Museet in Stockholm between the 2 April and 25 July 1976. The name *ARARAT* was an acronym for ‘Alternative Research in Architecture, Resources, Art and Technology’, and that somewhat indicates what the exhibition was about. It was a progressive and thought-provoking exhibition dealing with sustainability through various perspectives and practices. What was interesting in your presentation at one of the seminars we held during this research project was that you did not focus on what was shown in the museum but on the grassroots organising before and after the exhibition. This is an important perspective as it paves the way for interesting historical perspectives. Rather than talking about what was shown at the museum, could you tell us something about this grassroots organisation going into the *ARARAT* exhibition?

Gunilla Lundahl: *ARARAT* had a fairly long origin story, stemming from the deep impressions left by marine biologist Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (Carson 1962), chemist and environmentalist Hans Palmstierna’s *Looting, Starvation, Poisoning (Plundring, svält, förgiftning)* (Palmstierna 1968) and Swedish food researcher Georg Borgström’s *A Study of Earth’s Biological Limitations (Gränser för vår tillvaro)* (Borgström 1964), which resulted in a broader debate in the public domain as well as among researchers and practitioners. Students and teachers of architecture, art and humanities got involved by writing, travelling, demonstrating and organising seminars and exhibitions. But the movement expanded to include the extraparliamentary groups that took to the streets and squares. Numerous education programmes, on the verge of transformation, provided space for critical theory and practice. I can distinguish two poles, or magnets, in the process behind *ARARAT*. One consisted of the circle around Hans Nordenström, an architect, teacher and researcher at Lund Institute of Technology, newly appointed professor at Chalmers University of Technology and an artist associated with the core ambition of Moderna Museet. The other was formed in a circle around artist Kerstin Abram-Nilsson, who was strongly

involved in the ongoing fight against nuclear power, and a teacher at Konstfack University College and Gerlesborgsskolan in Bohuslän. Together with her husband, the architect Valdemar Axelsson, she gathered not only artists but also human ecologists, humanists and scientists around her. Each of them had tentacles extending outwards, upwards and across disciplines to young activists, aspiring architects, artists and designers. After four years of planning, almost a hundred people were involved in the creation of *ARARAT* with a fairly free rein. The more responsible roles were allocated to seventeen people.

Philip von Schantz, the director of Moderna Museet did not participate in the process instead a large part of the funding came from The Academy of Fine Arts. In fact, the museum was not at all involved in the making of *ARARAT*. I myself was responsible for the exhibition's printed materials and produced an exhibition catalogue using a loose-leaf system and eight small booklets that explored the background to the exhibition in more depth. At that time, I was the editor of *The Architect Magazine*, or *AT*, the magazine for members of the National Association of Swedish Architects, and I taught Environmental Knowledge part-time at what was then the Art Teacher Institute (*Teckningslärarinstitutet*). Mutual trust, exceptional commitment to the key issues and an explosive display of creativity were the prerequisites for the exhibition. It goes without saying that there was a great deal of tension when art and technology had to work together. There were hierarchies in place. In a piece she wrote for booklet no. 7 called 'Why *ARARAT*?' (Abram-Nilsson (1976)), Kerstin Abram-Nilsson described it like this:

Our ambition was not to create a perfect exhibition with depth of experience in the usual sense. We have conducted an experiment through different areas of knowledge where the artist has almost always come last. Sometimes it has felt like a hopeless denigration. Sometimes it has felt positive because the exhibition has grown on all fronts and it has become something like a nice work environment where we got in each other's way, knocking and hammering and phoning and explaining endlessly. With never-ending visitors. A popular movement right in the middle of structuring an exhibition. Difficulties? Most definitely. We've been exasperated and close to giving up several times. Our political beliefs and life experiences have just been too different. Perhaps that's how it's supposed to be. We know that some things are a common driving force: The certainty that it's not sustainable for the gaps in the world to keep growing, and if there is anyone who can change, then it's us in Sweden.

*ARARAT* was wrongly recorded in the chronicles of Moderna Museet as an art project. It was a collective process that transcended borders of practices and disciplines of knowledge. As personal experiences, it would fuel many projects that continue to break ground.

Christina Zetterlund: When we talk about exhibitions, we often focus on the specific weeks, or in this case months, that the exhibition takes place. But an exhibition is so much more than this. What is clear from the *ARARAT* process is how it fuelled many projects that continue to break ground. Could you tell us a little more about that?

Gunilla Lundahl: For many people, exhibitions, campaigns and working groups actually became a kind of practice for continued professional activity on their own



and something that still leaves an impression today. Two examples: the artists Bengt Carling and Michael Crisp, were responsible for the pedagogical experiments in ARARAT. Most of the experiments were conducted outdoors using solar power, water or natural gas and aimed at small-scale production and reuse. A dome was built and food prepared in a solar oven. Michael, an artist and blacksmith, would continue to make tools for woodworking lessons in schools, among other activities. Bengt started up an experimental workshop in Sättra, an under-resourced suburb south of Stockholm, calling it the Experience Workshop. It became a meeting place for young and old alike. Somewhere they could meet up and do things together, too. It became a place of mutual caring for people, objects and friendships. To cook food together, have fun, go on trips. For Bengt, the social aspects of these alternative movements were very important. During that time and ever since, he has initiated and participated in countless alternative movements. He went around Stockholm's playgrounds for a while with his solar and wind-powered pancake machine. In the summer of 2012, he returned to Moderna Museet's garden with his Buckdome, inspired by Buckminster Fuller, turning it into an open space for music, meetings and conversation. The spirit of ARARAT survived on a small scale at The Capsule (*Kapsylen*) on Södermalm in the centre of Stockholm, which was established as an alternative cultural centre. The group that worked on a centre for reuse and recycling, Formverkstan, at ARARAT managed to scrape enough money together to buy a brewery threatened with demolition. It is now a home, meeting place and workplace for people who work in the fields of architecture, film, music, clay and photography. Today it houses, among other facilities, a café and a playground.

Christina Zetterlund: When we talk about what happened after ARARAT, was there a difference in what attracted the participants afterwards? Are there alternative paths here that perhaps did not receive as much attention?

Gunilla Lundahl: The meetings and activities, the organising of collective workshops and establishing of centres, and the fight for nurseries and playgrounds, communes, cycle lanes and reasonable rents, lighting in courtyard areas, schools and forests with conservation status also became the real-life experience for many of the women among the activists. They needed regular working hours to take care of their children, and as a consequence became important figures in the public welfare system that began to be built up around family and everyday life. Their activities were not as spectacular as ARARAT's, but they were also concerned with our resources for the future on a more pragmatic level. *What if! (Tänk om!)* was the name of a small exhibition and publication created by Domestic Advisers (*Hemkonsulenterna*) – a project run by Stockholm County Council. 'Earth's raw materials are running out. We need instruments and tools. We want a life that is comfortable for the soul and for the body. We want to sit comfortably, sleep well, socialise, rest and enjoy ourselves.' That's what they wrote. This is where the thrust from two pioneers of the women's movement comes in: Elin Wägner, who wrote *Alarm Clock (Väckarklocka)* (Wägner 1941), and Brita Åkerman (Åkerman 1983), who worked for a daily life protected from the abuses of consumerism. She founded the Swedish Home Research Institute (*Hemmens Forskningsinstitut*) in 1944. She also created the research project Women and Housework (*Kvinnorna och hemarbetet*), the results of which were presented in three anthologies. It would be some time before that side of reality achieved an equal amount of visibility.

Christina Zetterlund: It must have been dynamic to have so many different skill sets in interaction. What did that dynamic contribute to? What happened in the process that you could not have foreseen?

Gunilla Lundahl: Dynamics and power in protests and alternative structures were drawn from the mixture of established and professional measures and spontaneous self-organised activities. That was how they took their place in society. For example, SDO's (Scandinavian Design Students' Organisation) seminar in Stockholm, held at Konstfack University College by an independent group in August 1968, put forward a theoretical and practical basis for the change in teaching that was actually implemented both at the architecture colleges and in arts-based education programmes. Both May 1968 in Paris and the student union occupation in Stockholm the same year had their origins in protests against the industrialisation of education, but they added experiences that influenced the end result of the struggle. The final-year students at the reformed Art Teacher Institute at Konstfack held Methodology Weeks throughout the 1970s (Figure 4.2). Teachers all over the country could attend these to acquire new tools for examining and interpreting society together with their students.

Even though you could see critical and experimental projects at the large institutions, perhaps the more interesting practices were not found here but in self-organised spaces. A very good example of this is the small gallery Hos Petra on Södermalm. Petra had taken on the task of paving the way for the new arts and crafts, and now she wanted to give it some context. She set up an exhibition in her gallery as a themed exhibition in which she attacked the 'heartlessness of contemporary life'. At this time, men were obviously able to speak for themselves and take the lead. This has given the impression that many of the projects from the 1970s were their work. In most of these, women also had a role, albeit a subservient one. They became invisible, as did their interpretation of the world. Women now saw the need for their own change projects and created their own places in these projects, their own agenda. The women's movement took shape with Group 8 in 1968. Also The Textile Group (*Textilgruppen*) was founded in 1970 in Stockholm and turned forty women and one man into a working community with shop premises where they could talk about their views on women's daily lives and, for example, invite other people to a workshop to make banners for the demonstrations against nuclear power. In 1972, the artists Anna Sjödahl, Kerstin Abram-Nilsson and Boi Edberg rented advertising space in the city for alternative advertising campaigns such as 'Sit down. Relax' (*Sitt ner. Stressa av*). With the assistance of the still fairly new organisation Swedish Exhibition Agency and the adult education organisation Vuxenskolan, a letter about pictures became the 1972 companion piece to weaver Maria Adlercreutz's travelling exhibition *Woven Pictures (Vävda bilder)*, in which she wanted to strengthen the bonds between the woven work and those viewing it. Tell us about the driving forces behind the creation of images. The exhibition *We Work for Life (Vi arbetar för Livet)* was held at the Liljevalchs art gallery in Stockholm in 1980. The bookshop *The Pink Room (Det rosa rummet)* opened there, *Princess Panic (Princessan Panik)* was given a spot and *Scandal in Art History (Skandal i konsthistorien)* also featured. All this female power that manifested itself in the public space paved the way for new subjects, new approaches and new issues at the same time as the postmodern era began.



Figure 4.2 Cover of the program of the Methodology Week (Metodikveckan) of 1976 held at Art Teacher Institute at Konstfack. Image from the archive of Gunilla Lundahl.

Christina Zetterlund: We've talked a lot about ARARAT, and I would like to conclude by taking a step back and asking you to reflect further on what an exhibition can do, how you think it can serve as a critical tool?

Gunilla Lundahl: During the protest movement of the 1960s and 1970s, holding an exhibition was a popular tool for spreading and presenting ideas and messages. A mass medium for contemplation that was inexpensive and often the result of group work. Too many times these exhibitions were too focused on the word, which made them impenetrable and dedicated purely to one-way communication. Swedish Exhibition Agency offered simple and cheap screens so that more exhibition producers could participate. An aim at making the exhibition as a democratic tool. Many of the protests of the 1970s were aimed at authoritarian planning. They put spokes in the wheels of impatient authorities. These same authorities attempted to nip all this in the bud by launching the concept of citizen influence and proposing dialogue in various forms. One of the major projects headed up by the Government was about national planning. A comprehensive approach would now be taken by regulating the use of land and water throughout Sweden using legislation and planning instruments. The Ministries of Public Administration and the Interior investigated the situation and presented their proposal in the official government report SOU 1971:75 *Management of Land and Water – Inventories, Planning Considerations for Certain Natural Resources, Forms of National Spatial Planning and Legislation (Hushållning med mark och vatten: inventeringar, planöverväganden om vissa naturresurser, former för fortlöpande fysisk riksplanering, lagstiftning: rapport 1971) (Hushållning med mark och vatten, SOU 1971:75)*. The ministries also wanted to test whether the proposal could be more widely anchored in society through an exhibition in a local setting that presented its consequences. The next year, 1972, I was commissioned to put on a pilot exhibition in Skellefteå in Västerbotten County in which methods for citizen influence could be tested the following year. I was given a budget to stick to plus some minders in the form of representatives of the clients – the ministries, the National Board of Physical Planning and Building, Västerbotten County and Skellefteå Municipality. Swedish Exhibition Agency joined the project to offer studio space for the physical implementation.

A centrally located, spacious and vacant bingo hall due for demolition was to be the venue for the exhibition, which was called *Skellefteå is growing. But how? (Det växer i Skellefteå. Men hur?)* And so the exhibition process became an invitation to discussion. I invited two fairly recent graduates from Konstfack University College's interior design department, Björn Ed and Jaan Zimmerman, to put together the exhibition with me. They, in turn, could invite their friends to assist in the practical work. A basic idea for the design was that a large amount of text (*Hushållning med mark och vatten, SOU 1971:75*) would be transformed into physical spaces, recognisable objects for change. We created a series of rooms that made visible the objects of planning, the consequences of life's different shifts (Figure 4.3). The rooms in the exhibition were given names such as The cottage (*Stugan*), The Forest (*Skogen*), Industrial Planning (*Industriplanering*), Labour Market Waiting Room (*Arbetsmarknads väntrum*), The School – The Municipality (*Skolan-Kommunen*), Regional Politics (*Regionalpolitik*) and Outdoor life – Tourism (*Friluftsliv-Turism*).

We wanted the text to be the object of as little focus as possible in the exhibition. There were framed and embroidered proverbs in the cottage, felling labels on the felled timber. Sune Jonsson's photographs of the cultivated landscape were allowed



Figure 4.3 An image of the exhibition plan for the exhibition *Skellefteå is growing. But how?*, shown 1972 in Skellefteå. Image from the archive of Gunilla Lundahl.

to speak for themselves in the barn. Prohibition signs outside the lead-heavy Rönnskärswerken smelting works indicated that something could not be mentioned. One room was devoted to a clear subject of conflict, the plans to harness the Norrland rivers for hydropower purposes. Byskeälven was one of these rivers. A large wall was allocated to the painted image of a village tug of war. Byskeälven was the rope. One part of this room was devoted to life values associated with the river, while another was dedicated to the development stakeholders. Many villages in Västerbotten had, with the support of the Västerbotten County Museum (*Västerbottens länsmuseum*), been writing their own history. Somewhat of an act of resistance to the strong wave of migration from the north. The exhibition could both present and drive that work. Meetings were arranged in the larger communities. The school was involved, and the adult education organisation created many opportunities for discussion. Renowned Västerbotten author Sara Lidman participated with her strong voice. Rewarding contacts were made with Skellefteå town architect Göran Åberg and the chairman of the local building committee, later leader of the town council, Lorentz Andersson. The town had high expectations that the Government would make Skellefteå stronger

by offering help to solve its major problem – the lack of jobs for women. At the exhibition opening, the ministers announced their gift. SEK 70 million to the clothing company Algots in exchange for employing a thousand women in Västerbotten.

What happened after that? The River Saviours (*Älvräddarna*) was formed and through their resistance saved four Norrland rivers from being harnessed. Algots Nord soon went bankrupt, with this leading to a trade union battle that eventually paved the way for a worker-owned company. That battle has left its mark and still provides inspiration today. The play *Factory Girls (Fabriksflickorna)* by Margareta Garpe was performed all over Sweden, and Frida Hållander addresses these events in her 2018 crafts thesis *Whose Hand is Making? (Vems hand är det som gör?)* at the University of Gothenburg. The ministers did not end up with the model they had imagined would secure a good response to the Land and Water commission report. They did not continue with the exhibition, instead hired a company that produced posters to explain the content. These were distributed to libraries all over Sweden.

*Skellefteå is growing. But how?* is an example of how the exhibition medium can be explored, which in this case consisted of turning exhibitions into a workroom that offered material for action. That room then expands and moves beyond the level of abstraction. Co-creation can occur. Visitors are invited to participate. In the best-case scenario, to participate in communities that embrace the power of the collective. The exhibition makes it possible to create recognition through its physicality. It's not immediately clear in which direction everything should go. But a passion for the subject is contagious and leaves an impression that more people can pass on. That is the spirit that also brought about the Model ARARAT exhibition.

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# 5 Nordic Revival

## Crafting Rural Development in Finnish and Norwegian Design Discourse

*Malin Graesse and Kaisu Savola*

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In the years following the Second World War, the Nordic countries, like many others across Europe, experienced accelerated urbanisation and industrialisation. This meant the centralisation of not only employment opportunities, housing and other social structures, but of power, resulting in a strong division between urban and rural areas. Norway, with its particular geographical conditions of secluded and often isolated areas, worsened by harsh weather, tall mountains and deep fjords, made distances between rural and urban areas not only into a geographical issue, but also a political and cultural one. Geographical and climatic conditions produced metaphorical and physical distances in Finland, too. With its lakes and forests, the distances

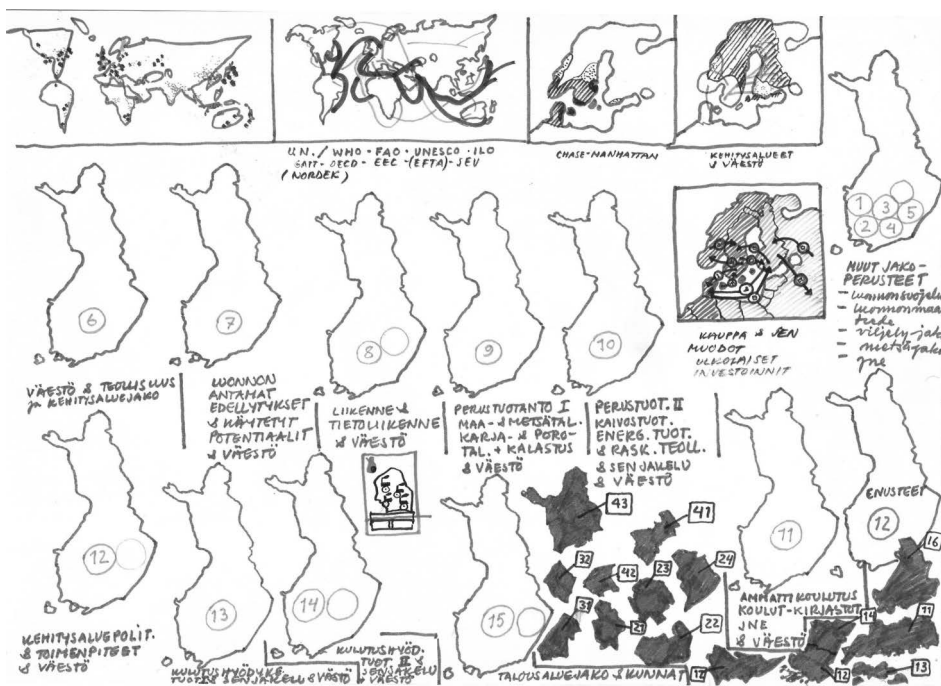


Figure 5.1 A drawing by Harry Moilanen shows his interest towards political and geographical issues. Undated. Harry Moilanen's archive, Aalto University Archives.

between what in the 1960s and 1970s was considered ‘traditional’ ways of life and the urbanised areas of the central south of the country grew. These conditions produced social differences and inequality, not only between what could be considered social classes, but also between the centre and the periphery of culture and power.

This chapter draws attention towards how these circumstances caused two different factions within the Finnish and Norwegian design communities to ‘look back’ to the origins not only of their professions but of rural regions and traditions in their respective countries. We argue that these factions can be understood as reviving the ideology behind the Arts and Crafts movement. By exploring the teaching activities of the Finnish designer and educator, Harry Moilanen and the designers in the social research group behind the Nord-Odal project (1968–1972) this chapter shows how Nordic design discourses in transition contained voices who saw the heritage of the Arts and Crafts movement and, more specifically, its Nordic counterparts (the Norwegian Home Craft movement and the Finnish Craft Organisation) as a viable option for a more just future. Furthermore, we argue that this revivalism expressed a specific definition of a national identity tied to the rural regions of the respective countries. By supporting the traditions and livelihoods of these regions, the designers presented in this chapter saw themselves as producing resilience towards accelerated centralisation of both political and cultural power.

### **‘Political actors first, designers second’**

In the late 1960s Finland, designer and educator Harry Moilanen was concerned with the relationship between design and politics, and the way the design community should approach the role of politics in relation to design (see Figure 5.1). Moilanen, a committed socialist, designer, teacher and journalist, urged designers to be ‘political actors first, and designers second [...] because to design is to engage in a socially dubious activity’ (Siltavuori 1970, 80). According to him, one of the most urgent issues in the increasingly industrialised and urbanised Finnish society was the state of rural regions and the disappearing lifestyles and livelihoods of their people. He became aware of the issues of the countryside, such as unemployment, bad living conditions, poverty and alienation, working as a reporter for YLE, the Finnish Public Broadcasting Company, making a radio programme called ‘Everyday Lives of the Workers’ (*Työläisten arkea*).

Moilanen thus wished to direct attention towards the problem and consequences of increased centralisation. Concerned not only with the issue of unemployment and the disappearance of pre-industrial and pre-urban ways of life, Moilanen worried about the loss of the particular type of knowledge and skill at work in rural craft traditions, and he emphasised that these issues were fundamentally intertwined. This is evident in how the recording and transmission of what was defined as disappearing skills became part of the curriculum of the course called ‘General Principles of Design and Communication’ (*Suunnittelun ja viestinnän yleiset perusteet*) Moilanen was teaching at the University of Industrial Arts in the 1970s and 1980s. According to him, on the one hand, the course aimed at making future designers become aware of societal problems and issues. On the other hand, the goal was to learn how to utilise knowledge and skill sets to mitigate these problems.

As a part of his work as a journalist, Moilanen travelled across Finland interviewing people living in rural areas about their lives and struggles amidst a changing cultural



and economic landscape. Moilanen empathised with what he saw, and wanted to make it known that the workers ‘had their own thoughts and ideas about their lives and problems. Their voices are just not heard’ (Härkönen 1985, 1). To what extent he managed to communicate this message, or make voices heard, remains unclear, but in his attempts to empower the rural regions, Moilanen and a changing group of colleagues and students arranged countless workshops around different parts of Finland during the 1970s and 1980s with the purpose of revitalising traditional craft techniques and developing small-scale cottage industries that would allow the rural population to increase their income and keep on living in their home regions. Planning and carrying out these workshops often became part of the ‘General Principles of Design and Communication’ course, and design students arranged and participated in workshops exploring Karelian soapstone, blacksmithing, traditional weaving techniques from Eastern Finland, boat building from the Western archipelago, and burl sculpting from Northern Karelia, to mention a few. The programmes of the different workshops varied: some were about recording and transmitting disappearing skills, others about designing new products to be made and sold by farmers in order to increase their income, which had plummeted due to industrialisation (see Figure 5.2).

For example, a project in Eno, North Karelia, lasted throughout the 1970s. The starting point was to find out whether the local farmers’ craft skills could be developed into a second source of income to replace other, traditional incomes which had disappeared due to industrialisation and mechanisation. According to a report from the project, the Eno population had lived in a natural economy until the end of the



*Figure 5.2* Resulting products of a workshop focused on leather barking and sewing, 1970s. Location and photographer unknown. Harry Moilanen’s archive, Aalto University Archive.

Second World War. Thus, handmade objects and tools still played an essential part in people's everyday lives, and craft skills, such as weaving and blacksmithing, had not yet disappeared (*Kansankäsityön elvyttäminen Enon kunnassa*, Harry Moilanen archive, Aalto University Archives).

The Eno project was started in 1974 by a group of students and teachers from the University of Industrial Arts led by Harry Moilanen, who began recording local craft techniques and patterns. Eno craftspeople were interviewed, and their making process and the finished objects were photographed (see Figure 5.3). The interview tapes and photographs were intended to be archived so that they would be available for anyone interested in learning traditional craft. This way, a continuation for Finnish craft traditions could be ensured. What happened to these records remains unclear, but according to the project report, this work continued until 1976, when a survey among the Eno population was made to map out the craft skills and the interest to employ them in order to generate a regular income.

Over 300 people participated in the survey, of whom 150 were interested in developing their craft practice towards something that would produce a livelihood. Throughout the process, a plan was made for how to organise the cottage industries in Eno in a way that would make it productive and profitable for the craftspeople. As a successful example, the report mentioned a contemporary cottage industry network in the Turku archipelago in Western Finland, where seventy craftspeople shared resources including a possibility for material deliveries and a small shop. At the time of writing the project report, the intention was to arrange craft courses in Eno, either to get new people interested in craft-making, or to deepen existing skills. In spring 1979, the goal was to organise courses in product development and establish a craft centre, with workspaces, deliveries for raw material and tools, and a shop. Unfortunately, remaining sources do not reveal just what, if anything, became of all of these ambitious plans. However, by 1982, similar initiatives, workshops and projects had taken place in countless villages and small towns, such as Suomussalmi, Ylä-Kainuu, Juntusranta-Ruhtinaansalmi, Selkoskylä-Pyhäkylä, Alavuokki, among others (Moilanen 1982, 21).

In the wider context of Nordic policy-making throughout the 1960s and 1970s, scholars and politicians became concerned with the decline of livelihood in rural areas. In Finland, a committee was formed in 1963 with the task of defining the so-called 'developing regions', a term describing areas struggling to follow the rest of the country in terms of economic growth and increasing welfare (Moisio 2012, 157). In addition to recognising and defining these regions, the goal was to secure them funding for development and administration. The Finnish state began to make considerable investments in building basic material infrastructure in rural regions, such as roads, hospitals and schools. Furthermore, municipalities were given the responsibility by law to arrange the services expected to be offered in a welfare state (Moisio 2012, 153).

Almost simultaneously, in 1966, Norwegian social scientist Ottar Brox published the book *What is Happening in Northern Norway (Hva skjer i Nord-Norge)*. Here, Brox expressed his concern about the social and economic situation in Norway's northernmost region (Brox 1966). While the book discusses in length the problems of the nation's economic model for the region, Brox also proposed his own solution for the current situation: cottage industry. It is interesting, but perhaps not surprising, that the idea of craft and cottage industry unfolds as a possible antidote to the

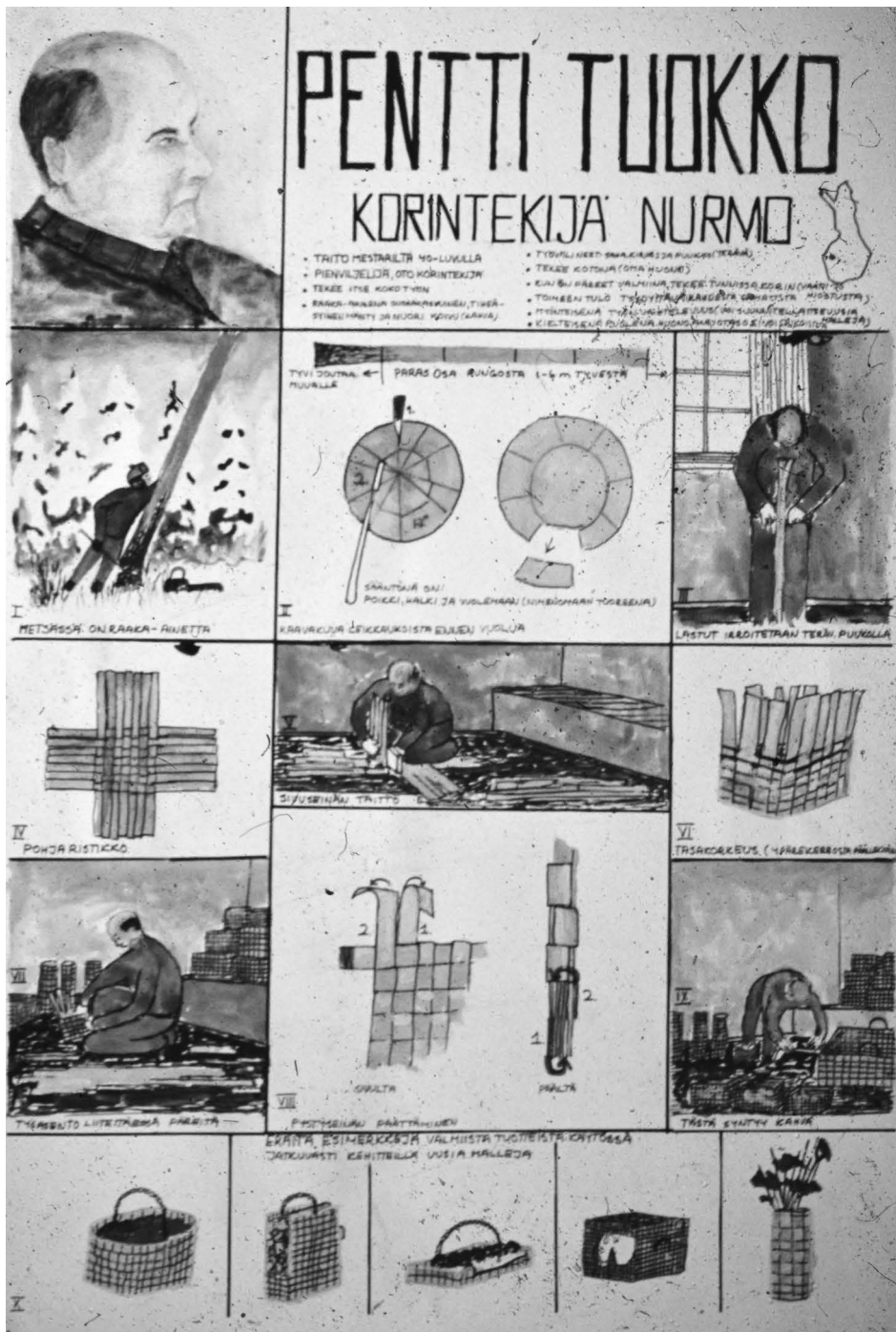


Figure 5.3 Student assignment depicting the work of Pentti Tuokko, a basket weaver from Nurmo in western Finland. 1970s, maker unknown. SVYP archive, Aalto University Archives.

accelerated centralisation interesting, because of the author's disciplinary affiliation, but not surprising because of the relationship between design and industry, which will be discussed later on.

According to Brox, while situating large- or semi-large-scale industrial production to areas with little material infrastructure or technical expertise would do little to mitigate the difficulties facing local communities, which at this point were reduced to producers of raw materials, small scale industry in the form of cottage industry would build upon already existing expertise, knowledge and lifestyles (Brox 1966). Towards the end of the 1960s, these ideas were mobilised by a group of scholars in the Nord-Odal project, an interdisciplinary study of the social and economic situation in rural Norway commissioned by the Norwegian Ministry of Social Affairs (*Sosialdepartementet*).

The goal of the project was to plan and execute an alternative model of employment for rural areas with little or no existing industry, and at the same time provide a work environment for people with social or physical disabilities. Parts of this goal materialised through the Austvatn Craft Central, a small-scale factory for serial production of handmade goods. In 1970, the Nord-Odal project scientists contacted renowned Norwegian textile designer Sigrun Berg (see Chapter 12 for more on Berg). The idea was to establish a craft production hub, organised as a cooperative. The aim was to present a model based on needs on the 'grassroots' level, it was therefore imperative that the initiative would not be perceived as being imposed upon its users by outside forces (Midré 1973).

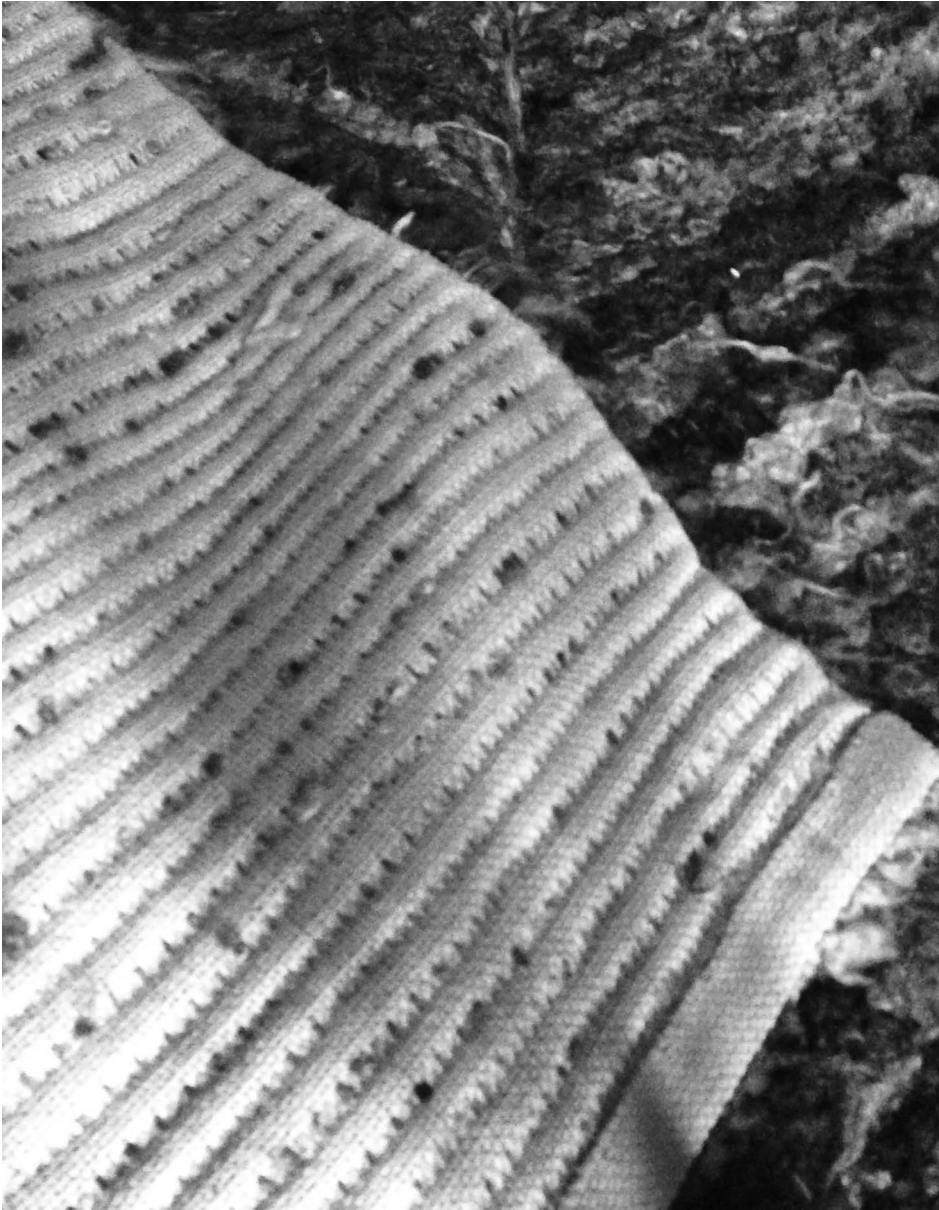
The design ideology behind the Austvatn Craft Central was not only a revolt against the market-driven and fashionable concept of 'Scandinavian Design', but also an alternative to the contemporary Norwegian crafts discourse, whereby craft practitioners wanted to situate themselves closer to the political, aesthetic and economic framework of fine arts (Midré 1973, 206). Sigrun Berg, together with Olav Dalland and Rolf Harald Olsen, two young designers involved in the creation of the Craft Central, aimed towards what they understood as a revival of the original framework for craft and design described in the Nord-Odal project report:

[...] grounded on crafts, and it was meant as an option for employment within its local community. We were going to focus on an organised form for small-scale serial production. We regarded the hub as the heart of a system of production, and this system should utilise local resources.

(Midré 1973, 207)

This formulation leaves little doubt that the group found inspiration for a model for small-scale industry in the ideology of the Norwegian Home Crafts Movement (*Husflidsbevegelsen*) of the 19th century. As Kjetil Fallan has suggested, home craft is associated with the rural areas because of its origins as a subsidiary economy, while at the same time providing people with quality goods for their own use (Fallan 2017, 19). However, as Fallan also argues, the Norwegian Home Craft Association (*Husfliden*) was enrolled into the national market economy during the course of the 19th century, because of its appeal to urban elites (Fallan 2017, 19).

As a design initiative, the people behind Austvatn Craft Central saw the origins of home craft, and how it originated within the 'natural economy of the agrarian community' (*Naturalhusholdningen*) where resources were allocated by sharing, direct



*Figure 5.4* Details of the front and back of Odalsteppet, designed by Sigrun Berg. Image: Malin Graesse, with permission from Olav Dalland, 2016.

bartering or according to traditional customs, as a natural model upon which to base a small-scale factory for the serial production of quality goods (Midré 1973, 207). In other words, the Austvatn Craft Central sought to accommodate both the plight of ‘the periphery’ by offering a viable source of income for rural areas with difficult social and economic situations, while at the same time bridging the gap between crafts

and design coming to fruition in Norwegian design discourses in the 1970s by organising their activities as a small-scale factory for the serial production of hand-made goods of high quality. Case in point was the craft central flagship product; Odalsteppet (see Figure 5.4). The Odalsteppet was a custom-made flossy wool carpet woven by beating raw wool into a cotton backside. The raw wool was inserted between each cycle of the weft crossing the warp and then beaten into place, creating a flossy but durable surface with a stable cotton backside (Dalland, personal communication, 2016).

The raw wool was to be selected without attention to composition or patterning in order to produce a carpet that appeared as a total and unified wool fabric. As such, the Odalsteppet was more of a technique than a design, and each product would differ in nuance and texture. It was Sigrun Berg who came up with the design of the carpet, and her attention to technique rather than pattern unified traditional skills and knowledge with the tastes and sensibilities of the 1970s consumer. The fact that the Odalsteppet drew on existing skills and traditional techniques of handling, and caring for, raw wool implies that the craft central mobilised some of the same design thinking as Moilanen utilised in his quest for a design which not only collected and protected rural craft traditions and skills, but also put these in motion in order to give agency back to the areas threatened by accelerated centralisation.

However, unlike Moilanen, the Austvatn group aimed at mobilising these skill sets, traditions and knowledge as a means of production in an industrial age. This is where the comparison between Moilanen and the Austvatn Craft Central diverge significantly. Despite their common socialist ideology, Moilanen a self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist and the young Dalland and Olsen inspired by Maoist ideology (Olsen, personal communication, 2017), the idea of what ‘the periphery’ was and should be differed not only because of two disparate approaches to the politics of the autonomy of rural areas, but also because of two different attitudes towards craft and cottage industry. However, it is this divergence of attitudes towards *making* that we will now direct attention to. Because, while there is a common origin behind this particular ideology of making, of the origin of craft in the rural setting, the mobilisation of craft as social aid interestingly reveals different ideas about the binarity between ‘the centre’ and ‘the periphery’, while unravelling questions of power, identity and agency.

### Reviving craft as industry’s ‘Other’

Coming back to the issue of designating a growing interest in ‘the periphery’ in the 1960s and 1970s design discourses as a sort of ‘revival of craft’ serves two purposes in this context. First, it aims to situate the relationship between rural and traditional craft practices within a historical context where the heritage from applied arts and crafts movements, both globally but also regionally, is at work. The Norwegian Home Crafts Association and the Finnish Crafts Organisation (*Käsi- ja taideteollisuusliitto*) were crucial precursors and influences for the ideology and activities at work in both Moilanen’s work and the Austvatn Craft Central, if not expressly then at least contextually. Both the Norwegian Home Crafts Movement and the Finnish Crafts Organisation had from the outset been deeply involved in providing frameworks, infrastructure, and distribution channels for home craft traditions and practices to function as viable sources of income, and at the same time marketing traditional craft as viable and desirable design objects.

The second reason for designating the 1960s and 1970s interest in the periphery as ‘a revival’ in the contemporary design discourse is to unite a modern definition of craft, taking the general application of the Arts and Crafts Movement as precursors of modern craft as the point of departure, and including its hankering for ‘the periphery’ as an ideal place for the production of true and honest goods. Glenn Adamson has described this to be the co-emergence of industry and craft, which occurred not because craft was industry’s ‘other’, but because craft is the origins of industry (Adamson 2013, xiii). As such, according to Adamson, the invention of craft must be understood as in kinship with the industrial revolution due to craft’s role as the main producer of goods before the advent of mechanical mass production. Modern craft, he argues, occurred as a systematic annotation because of its nature as mechanical production’s ‘other’ (Adamson 2013, xiii). In other words, the invention of the binary between craft and industrial production relied upon industry’s urge to distinguish itself from the craftsmanship of the past.

This last part is an important contextual backdrop for a discussion about who has the power to create an image of a *rural identity*. Despite the recent critique of the Arts and Crafts movement’s apparent anthropocentrism and romantic inclinations towards a pastoral utopianism of ‘the past’, the relationship between a romanticised, or at least ideologised, idea of ‘the rural’ is at work when both Moilanen and the Austvatn Craft Central utilised what they understood as traditional craft practices to designate autonomy to the periphery. Thus, the question of who has the power starts to take shape. However, far from pinpointing the ideas and activities of Moilanen and Austvatn Craft Central as reactionary, the purpose here is to accentuate how, within a context of Nordic design discourses in transition, there were voices addressing the historical heritage of both design and sociality. In other words, both Moilanen and the Austvatn Craft Central, perhaps driven by the socialist ideology forming their activities, their heritage and their visions, understood that social inequality was situated and not universal.

Moilanen’s intention was to stop, or at least change, the course of ‘development’ in order to preserve traditions and ways of life. In doing so, however, he was also guilty of imposing his own ideas, and ideals, about traditions worth preserving and lives worth living. According to Moilanen, ‘domestic colonialism’, by which he meant the way in which capitalism was suffocating local cultures and ways of life, was one of the most urgent issues in 1970s Finland (*‘With whom do you feel your solidarity’*, seminar programme, undated, Ornamo archive, Aalto University Archives). By calling urbanisation and centralisation ‘domestic colonialism’, Moilanen put Finland’s rural population into a victimised position, likening it to forcefully occupied and exploited countries and cultures.

It is true that while rural regions increasingly became seen as ‘developing regions’, state power was represented in citizens’ lives in a new, more visible way as welfare services advanced and became available for all citizens (Moisio 2012). However, this also meant that everyone would have access not only to better living conditions in the form of electricity and running water, but also better quality of life through education and healthcare. Undoubtedly, this was done by capitalist means of economic growth fuelled by industrial production and consumption, which, for a great number of people, meant that their way of life was not possible anymore, forcing them to flee their home regions in search of other ways to make a livelihood. Nevertheless, Moilanen did not take into consideration those who welcomed the change. Perhaps they did not

fit his image of rural craftspeople living the kind of life that he found admirable and worth pursuing.

This image of rural life is perhaps exactly what is at work in Moilanen's designation of 'the periphery' as a special place where knowledge is preserved and archived. It is tempting to consider Moilanen's thinking as a romanticised version of a nation, which at the time was literally situated between two conflicting global ideologies. However, one should be careful of assigning this type of meaning behind Moilanen's project. Instead, we suggest one lingers a little on his description of the relationship between the centre and the periphery as 'domestic colonialism', because colonisation will always designate an imbalance between those who have the power to define, and those who are defined by it. Taking into consideration Moilanen's efforts to collect, archive and transmit the knowledge and skills in rural crafts tradition, it becomes clear that his project was not only one of asserting the power of the designer, the problem-solver, on to the peoples of rural Finland. He wanted to address the issue of power relationships in its totality.

The kind of threat to the total sum of the Finnish people that Moilanen saw was not an erasure of the individual for the sake of a universal Finnish or socialist identity. It was the threat of accelerated centralisation, which would erase traditional social spaces and life practices of a country. At the heart of this was the issue of making the way people had made their lives, through their crafts and individual cultures, shaped their identities as part of a whole. The centre's excretion of power, in the form of erasure of autonomy, an autonomy that had everything to do with the way people expressed themselves creatively and *made* tools and goods perfected through centuries for the execution of their lives, was at the core of Moilanen's definition of 'domestic colonialism'. Crucially, through the archival material uncovered for this research, we never learn how the rural communities and their people wished to shape their lives. The only voice that is able to provide an account of the events and their importance belongs to Moilanen.

Unlike the concept of 'domestic colonialism', the mobilisation of *making* through the Austvatn Craft Central must be understood as a way of accommodating a centralised narrative, while at the same time aiming at preserving livelihoods in 'the periphery'. Although the aim of the Craft Central was to provide means of employment, the recording and preservation of traditions and the cultural particularities of the place and people living there seems not to have been a main objective. As such, and within the context of a governmental programme of rural politics, the ideology behind the Nord-Odal project was one of providing aid, more than examining agency and identity. This aid was based on an idea of helping people in the places where they lived, with the means and skills available to them. Despite the effort, the aid was given from above.

To put this in context with Adamson's claim of craft being industry's other because it provided modern industry with the means of designating its own space, Austvatn Craft Central seems to, if not exactly succeed in its objective to revive the origins of craft and design, then at least bring this revival to the surface. However, by doing so, by addressing the relationship between industry and craft in a context of the identity politics of the urban and the rural of 1960s and 1970s Norway, the project also brought attention to a binarity between the two. While Moilanen addressed what he called 'domestic colonialism' as a means to criticise the way the centre asserted power on the periphery, the ideology behind Austvatn Craft Central, firmly grounded in



the origins of the Norwegian Home Craft Movement, seemed to reinforce a national identity of a nation built by the conjugation of small and isolated areas, separated by tall mountains and deep fjords. As such, despite the socialist objectives of flat hierarchies and self-determination, craft still became industry's other in two modern market-driven nations.

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## 6 Sami Mobilisation

### Institutions and Exhibitions in the 1970s<sup>1</sup>

*Anna Westman Kuhmunen*

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My point of departure when approaching *duodji*<sup>2</sup> is the ongoing project Arctic Indigenous Design Archives (AIDA) – Archives as Actors. The geographical location is Sápmi. There are three Sámi institutions that have jointly created a space in which to discuss the meaning of archives from a Sámi perspective: Sámi University of Applied Sciences (*Sámi allaskuvla*) in Kautokeino, the Sámi Archives (*Saamelaisarkisto*) in Inari in Finland, and the Ájtte Swedish Mountain and Sámi Museum (*Ajtte, Svenskt fjäll- och samemuseum*) in Jokkmokk. Within the framework of this project, we have worked to establish archives of Sámi craftspeople and artists at the Ájtte Museum, a form of archive previously lacking at Sámi institutions. The project explores how Sámi archives can be designed based on the premise of Sámi handicraft, *duodji*, and better harmonise with Sámi perceptions and needs, something that may well require a change to working practices at museums and archives (<https://arkisto.fi/aida/en/about-aida>). Many current projects, and activities within AIDA rest on the political work to increase self-determination and on cross-border collaboration that was undertaken during the 1970s, eventually leading to the establishment of Sámi museums, archives and universities.

Through the AIDA project, we seek to establish design archives from a Sámi perspective, which affects processes of establishing, storing and exhibiting archive materials (Westman Kuhmunen 2022). In this chapter, I seek an underlying narrative to these perspectives – about how it can be formulated, organised and, eventually, institutionalised – something that has been essential to the establishment of AIDA. The article also explores the Sámi strivings for greater self-determination over their cultural heritage during the 1970s. This is a story about the organising of a practice that clearly fits into the political struggles and debates of the 1960s and 1970s, although based on geographies, practices and points of reference other than those commonly found in the discourse on Nordic design history. It is a story told through the contemporary Sámi voices that emerge in public archives, exhibitions, publications and through Sámi researchers. They are voices often unheard in the writing of design history, placing the emphasis on individuals, proper names and places that here are afforded space to tell stories. Another track in the chapter explores the differences inherent in cultural practices created by Sámi themselves, rather than those taking place or staged by institutions far from Sápmi. The point of departure is that practices differ depending on who does it and where it happens.



Figure 6.1 The Alta conflict reported by Sámi media. Photograph by Lena Kuoljok Lind.

The Sámi voices highlighted here are taken from various archival materials. I study editions of the periodical *The Sámi People's Magazine* (*Samefolkets egen tidning*) published between 1970 and 1979. Founded in 1904, the magazine was published regularly throughout the 20th century. Only part of the discourse on *duodji* took place in *The Sámi People's Magazine*. The Handicraft Committee of the National Organisation Same Ätnam (RSÄ) (*Riksorganisationen Same Ätnam*) was another important contemporary voice. Journal studies were therefore supplemented with studies of material such as annual reports, minutes of meetings, reports from handicraft consultants and exhibition catalogues from the RSÄ archives during the period in question. The significance of exhibitions for *duodji* is reflected in both published articles and material in the RSÄ Collection. The chapter discusses the significance of the location of an exhibition and who is curating it to the content: in what way does an exhibition produced by an institution outside Sápmi differ from the Sámi's own exhibitions? The article concludes with a discussion about how the Ájtte Museum was established, thus creating opportunities for projects such as AIDA to explore how we can collect and organise archival material in the long term from a Sámi perspective.

### Political and cultural mobilisation in the 1970s

In hindsight, the Alta conflict is strongly symbolic of the 1970s. The Alta conflict, which lasted from 1968 until 1982, pitted Sámi interests and environmental protection against the Norwegian state's plans to construct a hydroelectric power plant in Máze on the Alta River in Finnmark, northern Norway. Alongside petitions, action groups, various forms of civil disobedience on the construction site and hunger strikes

outside the Norwegian Parliament (*Stortinget*) in Oslo *duodji* and artistic projects were part of a local and national resistance that united the Sámi across the Nordic countries (Figure 6.1). The Sámi struggle also attracted international support from indigenous people's organisations and the United Nations. The conflict laid bare the attitude of the Norwegian state in relation to Sámi issues, which suffered in comparison to Norway's international efforts for human rights. Although the dam was eventually constructed, the conflict forced the Norwegian government to reform its policy, recognise the Sámi as a people and enter into negotiations, reshaping the power dynamic between the state and the Sámi (Andresen, Evjen, and Ryymin 2021, 370–388; Samefolket 1979/9–10, 20–26; Seurujärvi-Kari 2005, 11–12). The ČSV movement surfaced in the wake of the political mobilisation against the dam project. ČSV was a radical Sámi political and cultural movement. Č, S and V are the most used letters in the Sámi alphabet. The acronym and its meaning were elaborated on by authors and artists. The ČSV movement was appealing in particular to the young cultural workers, artists and writers engaged in establishing Sámi cultural institutions and organisations. According to Johan Klemet Hætta Karlstad, it is possible to distinguish between the movement's outward-looking political actions intended to create space for Sámi issues in the arenas of majority society, and the internal dialogue about how a Sámi society should be designed on Sámi terms. Literature and especially poetry soon came to reflect the ideas behind ČSV, a development that can be traced to a Sámi literature seminar held in Sirma in Finnmark in 1972 (Björklund 2020, 40–41; Hætta Kalstad 2013, 32–33). Despite the brevity of the ČSV movement, it succeeded in uniting Sámi youth with an interest in politics and art and was part of a process that raised awareness of a common identity that extended beyond national borders, with the motto: one Sámi people independent of national borders.

The 1970s has been characterised as a decade of Sámi mobilisation and revitalisation: politically, socially and culturally. The period has even been referred to as a Sámi Renaissance (Lehtola 2014, 116). Historian Patrik Lanto calls the decade a second wave of Sámi mobilisation, while art historian Moa Sandström has raised the question of whether we witnessed the third wave of mobilisation in 2010 (Sandström 2020, 36–38). The first wave was, in turn, the political struggle for civil rights and to organise during the early years of the 20th century, led by activists such as Elsa Laula, Torkel Tomasson and Gustav Park (Lanto 2015, 87–93). Culture would play an important role especially in the second wave: In the field of the arts, *duodji*, music and literature the end of the 1960s marked the beginning of a Sámi Renaissance during which a more distinct and diverse self-defined art, in combination with artistic practices (e.g. visual modern art, cinema, photography and theatre) and a politicisation of artistic arenas begin to emerge (Lehtola 2014, 270–285; Sandström 2020, 29–30). To a certain extent, artist and author Máret Ánne Saras' reflection on the significance of art during the period can also be applied to *duodji*.

Art is a weapon and a witness; something to reflect on and discuss. Even though art talks a kind of silent language, it's enormously powerful. To make a draft of a Sámi flag that didn't exist, and maps with Sámi place names – without colonial borders – stood for a powerful, but at the same time subtle activism that was momentous as a starting point for discussions around Sámi issues, something that's still important and worthy of reflection today.

(Susanne Hætta/Máret Ánne Sara 2020, 180)

The presence of *duodji*, in the form of the creation and wearing of Sámi garments, at actions and protests made visible and reinforced the Sámi identity and positioned the wearer in relation to the majority society. Professor of *duodji* Gunvor Guttorm believes that the wearing of Sámi clothing and accessories can be viewed as a weapon of protest against the actions of police at the dam construction site (Guttorm 2020, 254). While terms such as *mobilisation*, *revitalisation* and *renaissance* accentuate the energy of the decade, they may give the somewhat erroneous impression that the Sámi had been passive until the 1970s, when they somehow ‘awakened’. As Gunvor Guttorm has previously observed, one prerequisite for traditional dress to be able to become such a distinct political symbol during the 1970s was that women and men had retained and passed on traditional knowledge of *duodji*. For them and their crafts, this was hardly a question of an awakening (Guttorm 2001, 30–31). In other words, the gap between activists and the traditional Sámi environment was not necessarily as wide as the term *revitalisation* suggests. In addition to *duodji*’s incorporation into the political activism of the 1970s, the decade also institutionalised *duodji*. New Sámi institutions and organisations were established that worked with issues related to traditional handicraft and that exhibited *duodji* (Guttorm 2010, 89–95; Magga 2018, 49–50).

### ***The Sámi People’s Magazine* and National Organisation Same Átnam**

The founding of *The Sámi People’s Magazine*, which was published regularly for most of the 20th century, is closely associated with the Sámi political movement at the beginning of that century, a period that has been called the first wave of Sámi mobilisation. The Sámi press is also associated with the establishment of national Sámi organisations during the same period. The first attempt to publish a newspaper was made in 1904, at the same time as the first national Sámi organisation was being formed. A total of five issues of *The Lapps’ Own Newspaper* (*Lapparnas Egen Tidning*) were published in 1904 and 1905. The next attempt was not made until 1918, again coinciding with a political mobilisation. A number of Sámi associations were established at that time and the first Sámi national meeting in Sweden was held in Östersund in 1918. Torkel Tomasson was the first editor of *The Sámi People’s Magazine*, which would continue in the same format until 1961, when it changed its layout and shortened its name to *The Sámi People* (*Samefolket*). The magazine remained a significant opinion builder throughout the period. Since the 1960s, periodical *The Sámi People* has been the official organ of the Swedish Sámi National Association (SSR) (*Svenska Samernas Riksorganisation*) and the RSÄ (Lantto 1998, 140–143; Lantto 2015, 88–91; Ledman 2012, 15–17).

Established in 1944, RSÄ is the oldest national Sámi organisation in Sweden. The organisation was founded following a proposal at the Sámi Youth Conference held in Sorsele that year. From its inception, the RSÄ was focused on pursuing cultural issues. This work was prepared by various committees. From 1945 onwards, *duodji* was one of the RSÄ’s areas of priority, within the remit of the RSÄ’s Handicraft Committee. There was also a Trade Committee, Literature Committee and Executive Committee. The ideas generated on the Handicraft Committee were realised by Sámi handicraft consultants working throughout the Sámi area (Guttorm 2010, 89–95;

Hyltén- Cavallius 2014, 109–110; Ledman 2012,79) and the task of the committee was defined thus:

A Handicraft Committee, tasked with seeking to revive and advance interest in genuine Lapp handicrafts. The committee should engage in the employment of handicraft consultants, the training of handicraft teachers, the acquisition of pattern collections, arranging exhibitions and the introduction of a control marking for genuine Lapp handicrafts, as well as the sale of handicrafts.

(RSÄ Collection. Minutes 1945)

The archives of the Sámi People's Magazine and the RSÄ obviously contain material of great interest if one wishes to proceed from Sámi voices and to describe events from a Sámi perspective. Nevertheless, it is relevant to ask who's voice is revealed in this material? Sigga Marjja Magga defended her doctoral dissertation on *duodji* in 2018. She posits that the discourse on *duodji* and its associated social norms operates on different levels. There is a formal level consisting of *duodji* within Sámi organisations, schools and museums, which is based on a collective understanding of *duodji*. At this level, the norms of *duodji* are communicated through exhibitions, courses, seminars and diverse statements. There is also an informal level consisting of non-institutional Sámi society. Here, individuals exercise control over the various expressions of *duodji* through other means, mediating and maintaining its norms (Magga 2018, 63–66). It is the public discourse taking place at the formal level that we are apprised of through *The Sámi People's Magazine* and the RSÄ archive, and this is not necessarily representative of how *duodji* was discussed or viewed in Sámi homes. What the archives convey, above all, is the values of the RSÄ Handicraft Committee and its consultants, the same people who are represented in *The Sámi People's Magazine*. So, one can say that the discourse on *duodji* in these articles is limited to the opinions of a few individuals on the RSÄ board, that is, the members of the Handicraft Committee, the majority of whom are men. This does not, however, reflect the committee's composition. During the 1970s we can see that the percentage of women increases, although the chair was always occupied by a man. The same relationship applies to handicraft consultants, among whom men and women are largely evenly represented.<sup>3</sup>

### A public discourse on duodji

A review of *The Sámi People's Magazine* over the course of a decade reveals that between 1970 and 1979, handicrafts and related topics were mentioned on 133 occasions and No 1978/3 was a themed issue. While coverage of *duodji* had already risen during the 1960s (Ruong and Ruong 1985, 303), it was during the 1970s that the number of articles increased significantly. It is possible to discern two thematic strands in articles: *duodji* as a commercial enterprise, and *duodji* as an expression of culture and identity. The increase in articles can be traced to the discourse on *duodji* as commerce.

### Duodji as a commercial enterprise and copying duodji

In an article with the headline '*The Sámi themselves should control Sámi handicrafts*' (*Samerna sjálva skall styra sameslöjden*), Arvid Kaddik, a member of the board

of the RSÄ and former chairman of the organisation, described the background to the subject and he demonstrated that *duodji* entrepreneurship was part of the work for increasing Sámi self-determination (Samefolket 1977/3, 84). The work for self-determination often gave rise to conflicts with majority-societies institutions, and on this specific occasion between the Norrbotten County Handicraft Society (*Norrbottens läns hemslöjdsförening*) and the RSÄ. RSÄ was opposed to the Handicraft Society taking on the role of marketing and distributing *duodji*. RSÄ chairman Gustav Heikka meant, since the Sámi regard handicrafts as a highly significant cultural component they wished to take responsibility themselves (Samefolket 1974/7–8, 163). One means of securing the supply of *duodji* materials, such as fur, leather, horn, cloth, sinew and tin thread, was the establishment of *Sameslöjd och Material* in 1966 (Samefolket 1977/3, 93; 1977/5, 161; 1979/6, 28; 1979/1, 24–25). There was tension between the National Association of Swedish Handicraft Societies (*Hemslöjden*) and the RSÄ throughout the 20th century, both on a national and regional level. While cooperation was sometimes possible, at other times there was open conflict (Guttorm 2010, 71–98; Hyltén- Cavallius 2014, 109–110; Magga 2022, 94–95).

A number of articles also addressed the issue of fake *duodji* or copying of *duodji*. *Duodji* makers considered copying as one of the greatest threats to their traditional crafts (Samefolket 1977/5, 165). Copying was twofold in that it relates to both commerce and cultural identity. Fake *duodji*, *duodji* that was produced by others than Sámi people and labelled as *Sámi duodji*, had a negative impact on Sámi entrepreneurship, as copying eroded the income of both individual craftspeople and Sámi businesses producing souvenirs. The issue of copying was also intrinsically linked to matters of cultural and local identity and the question of who has the right to craft *duodji* becomes unavoidable. There is clearly a risk that *duodji* will be mass produced, fabricated, regardless of whether or not the ‘craftsperson’ is Sámi. As Sámi, we are unanimously opposed to this; on no account do we wish Sámi handicraft to become a hobby for people without any connection to the Sámi. It therefore seems to me inexplicable that representatives – government officials – should find it so pitifully difficult to grasp such a simple matter, was a statement in an editorial (Samefolket 1974/7–8:163). The major conflict in this matter during the 1970s was with the *County Board of Labour (Länsarbetsnämnden)*, and its efforts to turn the production of handicrafts or *duodji* into a labour market project to reduce unemployment in northern Sweden, something that both the RSÄ and North Sámi organisations partly questioned (Samefolket 1975/5, 140; 1979/12, 27).

That said, the issue of copying also created tensions internally. In a debate article, one reader highlighted the northwards spread of the South Sámi tin thread embroidery tradition; in her opinion, this was an example of Sámi copying Sámi. She reserved particular criticism for the RSÄ’s Handicraft Committee, which she accused of ignoring this development (Samefolket 1976/10:295). The benevolent initiative of courses and education can on the other hand lead to significant local traditions unintentionally becoming pan-Sámi knowledge (Magga 2022, 96–97).

## Duodji as culture

In addition to the discourse on *duodji* as a commercial enterprise, the second thematic thread in articles is the significance of *duodji* to Sámi culture and identity (Utsi 1973, 38–39). Many of the articles touch on the issue of how *duodji* education

should be designed. Education was one of the RSÄ's areas of priority and this generated a number of articles, particularly concerning plans for establishing a longer, more comprehensive study programme in *duodji* at the Sámi Community College, now *Sámij áhpadusguovdásj*/Sámi Education Centre, in Jokkmokk. How this programme was to be organised was a matter for discussion both nationally and by the cross-border Saami Council (Samefolket 1978/5:6–9). One prerequisite for formal education is literature of relevance to the subject in question. In many cases, the RSÄ was involved in such publications. This literature was considered important enough to warrant announcements in *The Sámi People's Magazine* (Samefolket 1970/1–2, 14–16; Samefolket 1970/10–12, 186; Samefolket 1978/1, 42; Samefolket 1978/3, 4–5 and 9). Majority of books on *duodji* were at that time written by authors outside the Sámi community and the consequences of this has been discussed by Magga (2022).

The coverage of exhibitions is extensive during the period. The large number of articles on exhibitions is due to the influence of Israel Ruong, a professor of Sámi languages and culture and former editor of *The Sámi People's Magazine*, who had an abiding interest in the exhibition medium. Ruong stressed the importance of exhibitions as an effective means of disseminating knowledge, with Swedes as the primary audience. At the same time, he was keen to promote the younger generation of *duodji* makers and artists and he highlighted their significance to the development of Sámi society (Samefolket 1971/8–9, 139–141). The Sámi population is by no means large and Ruong's expertise was often called on in the production of exhibitions by the majority society and, on several occasions, later to report on the same exhibitions in *The Sámi People's Magazine*.

### Duodji exhibitions: by and for whom?

One of the early *duodji* exhibitions in Sweden produced by Sámi and mentioned by *The Sámi People's Magazine* was arranged in Kiruna already in 1960 by the teacher at the Sámi school, Nils Nilsson, and handicraft consultant Kristina Negga-Wallström. The exhibition conveyed the site-specific and local nature of *duodji* in an educational manner (Samefolket 1971/8–9:140). While the source material here used primarily sheds light on this type of cultural historical exhibition, one should also be aware that individual artists such as Rose-Marie Huuva, Folke Fjällström and Lars Pirak were attracting nationwide attention during the 1960s with exhibitions at galleries in Stockholm with reviews in the national press (Huuva Collection).

A variety of exhibitions were produced during the 1970s in various places and for diverse audiences, many exhibitions also included demonstrations of various handicraft techniques and the sale of *duodji*. These exhibitions thereby weaved together several of the RSÄ's stated ambitions: *duodji* reached a wider audience; the demonstrations of crafts added an educational aspect; and the sale of *duodji* alongside the exhibition highlighted the economic aspect of traditional Sámi handicraft. In all, it helped establish *duodji* as a commercial craft. Still, not everyone was in agreement regarding how the resources of the RSÄ should be prioritised. Essias Poggats, a *duodji* maker and handicraft consultant during 1970–1971, was in favour of prioritising direct, advisory activities aimed at individual *duodji* makers over time-consuming efforts to produce various exhibitions (RSÄ Collection. Annual Report 1970–1971, Essias Poggats). Marianne Nilsson, a handicraft consultant from 1971 to 1978, on the other hand, shared Israel Ruong's view of exhibitions as a means of raising awareness and



showing the special nature of *duodji* (RSÄ Collection. Annual Report 1970–1971, Marianne Nilsson), that in the long term would elevate its status as an art.

### **Producers, arrangers, experts: who's voices?**

Whenever majority-society institutions sought to produce exhibitions on Sámi culture, and especially *duodji*, the RSÄ stood out as an obvious contact. Throughout the 1970s, the organisation's handicraft consultants engaged in collaborations outside Sápmi, called on to offer expert advice but seldom with responsibility for the production of exhibitions. A number of major exhibitions of Sámi culture, of which *duodji* was an significant element, were arranged in various collaborations, with galleries such as Lund's Art Gallery (Lunds Konsthall) and Liljevalchs, with the Swedish Institute and with Swedish Exhibition Agency (Riksställningar) in Malmö and Stockholm House of Culture (Kulturhuset). Rarely, however, did these exhibitions reach Sápmi. One exception was the travelling exhibition *The Sámi* (*Samit, Samerna*) produced by Norrbotten Museum on behalf of the Swedish Institute.<sup>4</sup> For the exhibition's producers, photographer Pål-Nils Nilsson and Sámi school superintendent Gösta Andersson, it was important that the exhibition was shown to those portrayed in it. One such occasion was at the Seventh Nordic Saami Conference, held in Gällivare in 1971 (Samefolket 1971/6–7 103).

Collaboration with handicraft consultants from the RSÄ was a prerequisite for external institutions and producers. The consultants had an extensive network of personal relationships with *duodji* makers, visiting them on a regular basis and staying up-to-date with who was active and could either produce or lend *duodji* for exhibitions. At the same time, they were the gatekeepers of a normative system. The opinions of the handicraft consultants constituted the eye of the needle through which Sámi *duodji* makers and artefacts needed to pass to gain entry to exhibitions. While the RSÄ had prepared guidelines on how *duodji* should be judged as early as the 1950s, based on the materials used, design, surface treatment, ornamentation and site-specific expression (RSÄ Collection. Guidelines for Assessing Lapp Handicrafts, 1950), by the 1970s these criteria and the representation of *duodji* makers at exhibitions were being increasingly questioned (RSÄ Collection. Minutes Handicraft Committee 1978; Samefolket 1970/3–4, 52).

In parallel with this cooperation with national institutions, we can see that local Sámi associations were increasingly collaborating with the RSÄ on arranging exhibitions. Collaboration with Sámi associations lead to exhibitions in Funäsdalen, Vilhelmina, Dorotea, Kittelfjäll, Åre, Malå, Jokkmokk, Arvidsjaur, Gällivare and Kiruna. Contrary to the afore-mentioned exhibitions, these were produced by Sámis, within Sámi organisations, for a Sámi audience in Sápmi or in towns with a strong Sámi representation.

### **External temporary exhibitions produced outside Sápmi**

Lund's Art Gallery was one of the major art institutions. The exhibition *Sámi People* (*Samer*) was shown in June and July 1971. The museum, which opened in 1957, specialises in contemporary art and therefore art by Sámis this time was given a prominent place beside *duodji*. According to the exhibition catalogue, *Sámi People* was the largest exhibition of its kind ever mounted. In addition to art and *duodji*, visitors

were greeted by documentary photography by Pål-Nils Nilsson, as well as general information on Sámi culture and minority rights issues (Figure 6.2).

The exhibition was produced by director Marianne Nanne-Bråhammar and curator Ingvar Svensson. There was also a curatorial board responsible for content, whose members were appointed from northern Sweden. One of them was head of social services in Vilhelmina, Sven Fisk, who together with Ulla and Anders Ranstam, director of Gallery Volgsjö in Vilhelmina, was tasked with formulating contemporary Sámi history. Fisk was also provided with the opportunity to develop his thoughts about ‘the Sámi’s situation’ in the exhibition catalogue (Fisk 1971, 7). So, a core group of Swedes with a base in Swedish institutions and with limited knowledge of Sámi culture was in place, although with an unreflective view on power relations. Fisk was asked about his position, as both curator and head of social services in a radio interview. He himself did not differentiate between his personal and professional roles, when it came to producing the exhibition (Hövenmark Collection. SP355). Still, the curatorial board was dependent on Sámi expertise to produce the exhibition. To this end, Marianne Nilsson and artist Lars Pirak from RSÄ were responsible for the representation of *duodji* makers and artists. Nilsson especially for the ‘female handicraft’ and Pirak for the ‘male handicraft’ (Nanne-Bråhammar and Svensson 1971, 2). In total, 72 artists were represented in the exhibition by 477 artefacts, which makes it a comprehensive exhibition of *duodji* (Samer at Lunds Konsthall. 1971). The *duodji* and artworks were exhibited in the large gallery with eleven-metre-high ceilings and on several floors. In addition to selecting the works, the RSÄ’s consultants were also responsible for returning all 477 works to the *duodji* makers and artists (RSÄ Collection. Report 1971, Marianne Nilsson).



Figure 6.2 The exhibition *Sámi People* at Lund's Art Gallery in 1971. Photograph by Lars Pirak.

Although the relationship and tensions between Sámi experts and others working on the production are not explicitly mentioned in the archive material, perhaps Israel Ruong's catalogue text can be interpreted as such. Ruong's contribution consists of a comment on Sweden's national Sámi policy. He firmly believed that, just like any other ethnic group, the Sámi were the best judges of their own situation. But he noted that the State and its officials believed themselves to be superior to the Sámi and in possession of knowledge of Sámi conditions. Ruong adds that this does not apply to all state officials; there are exceptions (Ruong 1971, 11). In retrospect, it is difficult not to view his reasoning in the light of the prevailing power dynamic during the production of exhibitions such as *The Sámi People*. A dynamic that might be expressed as the tension between Sámi knowledge and the knowledge of non-Sámi, and the question of whose voice was to take precedence in the public discourse.

So, who was represented in the exhibition at the art museum? While Lars Pirak was admittedly not one of the RSÄ's handicraft consultants, he was heavily involved in the work of the RSÄ's Handicraft Committee and he regularly wrote for *The Sámi People's Magazine* on art and *duodji*. In selecting works for the exhibition, he placed equal emphasis on male artists as on *duodji* makers: 16 men were represented by paintings, sculptures or photographs, while 19 craftsmen exhibited *duodji*. Meanwhile, Marianne Nilsson selected *duodji* by 36 female *duodji* makers from South Sámi, Lule Sámi and North Sámi areas. Both Pirak and Nilsson were personally represented in the exhibition. Only one woman exhibited art. Unfortunately, it is not possible to deduce the reason for this imbalance; however, Laila Spik's art received special mention when Israel Ruong reported on the exhibition in *The Sámi People's Magazine*.

The ambition was to present contemporary Sápmi and Sámi. In terms of *duodji*, this usually consisted of a core group of established *duodji* makers: Sune Enoksson, Lars Pirak and Esaias Poggats, as well as Rose-Marie Huuva, Ellen Kitok-Andersson and Kristina Negga-Wallström (Samefolket 1971 8–9, 140). In this exhibition, however, representation extended far beyond this core. Marianne Nilsson observed, the exhibition presented a new generation of *duodji* makers who had taken paths other than creating *duodji* for home and family, or for sale. Instead, these young people tried their hands at new forms and combinations of materials. A number of novel areas of use were presented in the form of jewellery, accessories, boxes and baskets (Nilsson 1971, 6). Ruong perceived something common to all of the exhibitors, something he formulated as a genuine feel for Sámi life and a more or less conscious effort to develop Sámi culture (Samefolket 1971/8–9, 139–140; Samefolket 1979/6, 5). In addition, the exhibition introduced Sámi visual artists to a national audience.

Although Lund's Art Gallery did not follow up with more *duodji* exhibitions, other institutions in the region of Skåne did. Archives established within the AIDA project clearly show that interest in *duodji* in southern part of Sweden did not wane over the coming decades. *Duodji* maker Svea Länta's collection shows that she has participated in many exhibitions outside of Sápmi during the 1980s and 1990s, including at the Abbey Museum (*Kloster museum*) in Ystad, where she both exhibited *duodji* and demonstrated the making of tin thread and tin thread embroidery (Länta Collection). In Stockholm, the art gallery Liljevalchs also continued to show *duodji* in various contexts (Labba Collection; Svakko Collection).

Finally, it should be noted that there are examples of exhibitions created outside Sápmi but where the production and curatorial power were in Sámi hands. The

exhibition *Sájuvva* was produced in 1979 by young Sámi university students from the Uppsala Sámi Association. *Sájuvva*, the title, alludes to one of the first dissertations written by a Sámi, *Sájva: Sami concepts of help and protection in the sacred mountains* (*Sájva: Föreställningar om hjälp- och skyddsväsen i heliga fjäll bland samerna*) by Louise Bäckman from a South Sámi area. The youths chose to address contemporary Sámi issues. Reviewing the exhibition in *The Sámi People's Magazine*, Israel Ruong was extremely enthusiastic about the new generation of young artists (Samefolket 1979/6, 4–5).

### Internal temporary exhibitions produced in Sápmi

During the 1970s, it became increasingly common for Sámi associations to produce and curate exhibitions in Sápmi. Already in the 1950s summer exhibitions with local *duodji* were produced in Kiruna (Pirak). In 1974, the Sámi Association in Kiruna created an exhibition for Samegården, a hotel with conference facilities and a small museum. It was a permanent exhibition titled *The Sámi in Sámiland* (*Samerna i Sameland*) that was renewed with new *duodji* artefacts each year. In 1979 they introduced the work of Edit Anna Svonni, whose archive was donated to the AIDA project (Samefolket 1977/9, 257; Samefolket 1979/9–10, 16–17). In South Sámi areas, there was clearly a development towards temporary, local exhibitions arranged in collaboration between Sámi associations and the RSÄ, for example produced in Åre, curated by Folke Fjällström with 15 local *duodji* makers (Samefolket 1978/15:38). The Härjedalen Sámi Association also frequently produced exhibitions including *duodji* artefacts (Samefolket 1979/5, 27).

### Strategically located exhibitions

The choice of place and location for an exhibition could be made strategically, to influence ongoing discussions with the majority society. In the same year as the government bill 1976/77:80 on Sámi issues was debated and passed in the Swedish Parliament (Riksdagen), the exhibition *Dakkan* (1976/77) opened at the House of Culture (Kulturhuset) in Stockholm. The exhibition was co-arranged by RSÄ, SSR and the Stockholm Sámi Association. It was a travelling exhibition based on photography and *duodji* in display cases. The time and place of this exhibition was strategically chosen. The Swedish Parliament is only a few blocks away and *duodji* was one of the issues addressed in the government bill (Samefolket 1976/8, 219; Samefolket 1977/2, 46 and 48–49). As on other occasions during the 1970s, *duodji* became a front in the struggle for increased self-determination. That said, this political strategy did not exempt the exhibition and book from Sámi criticism, both the choice of language and the content of the exhibition were under debate (RSÄ Collection. Annual Report 1972, Per-Ola Utsi; Samefolket 1977/4, 123).

Another strategically chosen location was at the 1974 Swedish Cross-Country Skiing Championships in Gällivare. On this occasion targeting a large audience of prospective buyers rather than politicians was the focus. On its first day, the exhibition at the parish hall attracted 550 visitors, including King Karl XVI Gustav and the Governor of Norrbotten County Ragnar Lassinantti. The attendance for the entire exhibition period was estimated at between 1,500 and 2,000. The RSÄ had invited 35 *duodji* makers to exhibit and, according to a report by Per Ola Utsi in March 1974,

10 *duodji* makers and 8 artists exhibited a total of 120 artefacts. The majority of the *duodji* makers were from local Kiruna and Gällivare areas (RSÄ Collection. Exhibitions; RSÄ Collection. Annual Report 1974, Per Ola Utsi; Samefolket 1974/4, 75).

### Duodji as part of the Sámi community

In the interest of clarifying if and how exhibitions produced within the Sámi sphere differ from those produced by institutions in the majority society, there is reason to study especially one exhibition aimed at a Sámi audience in detail. The exhibition was held in conjunction with a Sámi festival, The Sámi Winter Games.

In March 1972, the 20th Sámi Winter Games was held in Funäsdalen, a village in Härjedalen Municipality. The participants from all of Sápmi competed in individual and relay skiing events and a reindeer herder competition which included skiing, lassoing and shooting. The Sámi Winter Games attracted competitors and spectators from all over Sápmi, and was covered by reporters from *The Sámi People's Magazine* (Samefolket 1972/5, 113–115). It was estimated that 1,000 spectators attended the reindeer herder competition, and this in a village with a population of 1,290 people. In other words, the game was an event that brought together Sámi people from different areas, families and generations. Alongside with the popular evening event the Sámi dance in Tenndalen, the *duodji* exhibition was a key cultural event associated with the games. RSÄ had selected a strategically important location for the exhibition and in my opinion, the exhibition in Funäsdalen is comparable to the exhibition at Lunds Art gallery the previous year.

Marianne Nilsson was once again responsible for curating the exhibition, now with her colleague Per Ola Utsi. In addition to curatorial work, their task included localising, cataloguing and packing artefacts. The *duodji* exhibited came from different contexts. There were artefacts from the RSÄ's *duodji* collection as well as *duodji* from craftspeople based in the South, Lule and North Sámi areas offered for sale. The South Sámi, local site-specific *duodji* for sale, was mainly the work of female *duodji* makers. Additionally older, traditional *duodji* was borrowed from families around Funäsdalen exclusively for the exhibition.

Nilsson and Utsi arrived in Funäsdalen on 4 March to inspect the venue in the parish hall. The same evening they arranged an initial handicraft event to meet local *duodji* makers in Brändåsen. Nilsson has described the personal meetings as vital in her job. Due to distances in Sápmi *duodji* makers can become isolated and meetings allowed the consultants to converse with and offer advice to craftspeople and to sell *duodji* materials and tools (Nilsson 1973, 35). Setting up of the exhibition began the following day, and that evening another local *duodji* meeting was held, this time in Mittådalen. At this meeting, they also took the opportunity to borrow older family owned *duodji* for the exhibition.

On 7 March, *duodji* makers from Mittådalen arrived to deposit *duodji*. The same evening, the film *The Hands of Art* (*Konstens händer*) was screened and a lecture given for tourists and guests at Hotel Funäsdalen. Made by Rickard Tegströms in 1966, the film was regularly used by the RSÄ and the Sámi Education Center (Samer-nas Folkhögskola) for teaching purposes. It depicts the creation of *duodji* by some of the foremost contemporary *duodji* makers.

The final touches were put on the exhibition on 8 March, only hours before it opened. A hundred patrons visited the exhibition on its first day. On the second day, it

attracted 300 visitors. The film *The Hands of Art* was once again screened, providing another opportunity to inform the audience about *duodji*.

The consultants offered guided tours of the exhibition to local schools on 10 March, during that day 300 people saw it. The highest attendance was achieved on Saturday 11 March, which was also the first day of competition at the Sámi Winter Games, when approximately 500 visitors saw the exhibition. Saturday was also the most successful day in terms of sales. On the evening of 12 March, the RSÄ closed and prepared a balance sheet (RSÄ Collection. Annual Report 1972, Marianne Nilsson).

The Funäsdalen exhibition was comprehensive; some 50 *duodji* makers from various Sámi areas were represented by a total of 600 artefacts arranged typologically: knives, spoons, bowls, woven ribbons and bags. The exhibition aesthetics was to place different kinds of artefacts, for example bags, in groups in order of origins, from north to south. This is done to highlight the local variations in *duodji* in terms of shapes, colours and ornamentation. There was a strong emphasis on showing local tradition. The total attendance during the week of the exhibition was a somewhat improbable figure of 12,000. While in its scope and attendance the exhibition is certainly comparable to the exhibition in Lund, there are a number of differences. The central one in relation to place. The exhibition in Funäsdalen was produced in Sápmi with a Sámi audience firmly in mind, even if it was viewed by visiting tourists. The close dialogue between the consultants and local *duodji* makers was vital in the production. In the first dissertations about *duodji* written from a South Sámi perspective, Maja Dunfjeld shows how south Sámi ornamentation is deeply connected to individual families and the patterns have both a social and spiritual dimension (Dunfjeld 2006). When exhibited together and viewed by a Sámi audience, the older South Sámi artefacts borrowed from Sámi families alongside contemporary *duodji* from different Sámi regions became a manifestation of both a local and a common Sámi cultural heritage. For the local female *duodji* makers who exhibited woven goods and tin thread embroidery, the exhibition introduced them and their work to a wider public. The interaction between *duodji* makers from different areas with the public was significant for the exhibition in Funäsdalen. In a separate context, artist Maj-Doris Rimpi underlined her preference for Sámi group exhibitions over solo exhibitions, contending that *duodji* makers together, through their work with various materials and techniques, could create a more holistic image of *duodji* than one single artist (Samefolket 1974/10, 199). In other words, *duodji* makers too were part of the community that *duodji* afforded during the Winter Games. Susanne Hætta has also addressed the need for those who are not *duodji* makers to experience, see and smell *duodji* from the area that is considered home, which creates a sense of belonging (Hætta 2021). In Funäsdalen the social dimension of *duodji* was even further enhanced by the proximity between the exhibition, the Winter Games and the evening festivity with dance. The boundaries between *duodji* makers, consultant and reindeer herders were also blurred. Per Ola Utsi recounted how he hurried between work at the exhibition and the arena to compete in the reindeer herders' competition. The social demission of exhibitions and of *duodji* was, as shown, entirely dependent on where and by whom it was created. And thus differs between the exhibitions in Lund and Funäsdalen.

Why do locally produced exhibitions vanish from the historical record? Locally produced exhibitions were not held in art galleries or museums, but instead in premises of associations, schools, parish halls and other social areas that were transformed into temporary exhibition spaces. For this reason, these exhibitions were never

immortalised in the histories of institutions or places. Another factor underlying this invisibility is the lack of exhibition titles as well as catalogues. The exhibition at Lund Konsthall survives through its title and, above all, its catalogue. It is searchable in the national library database, while the equally comprehensive exhibition in Funäsdalen remains more obscure and only visible through archive materials. It is the latter kind of exhibition that I have attempted to make visible.

### **A Sámi museum takes shape**

The establishment of a Sámi museum in Sweden can be viewed as another example of how the struggle for self-determination was expressed politically during the 1970s and 1980s. With the founding of a Sámi museum, a new Sámi forum in which to collect and display *duodji* emerged. The museum acquired its own collections of *duodji* for both permanent and temporary exhibition.<sup>5</sup> The Ájtte Foundation was established in 1983 and the Ájtte Swedish Mountain and Sámi Museum opened in 1989 in an extension to the building that once housed Jokkmokk Museum. The foundation is managed by the Sámi organisations SSR and RSÄ, the Swedish Government (which has given one of its seats on the board to the Sámi Parliament), Region Norrland and Jokkmokk Municipality.

The creation of the museum was preceded by extensive debate locally, regionally and nationally and by an inquiry that resulted in the report *Swedish Mountain Museum (Svenskt fjällmuseum)* (1981). By the 1980s, state-owned energy company Vattenfall had completed work to expand hydroelectric production on the Lule River. The river system had been dammed, with a concomitant socioeconomic and cultural impact on the local population. For reindeer herders and reindeer, damming meant less grazing land and for families losses of homes. Even for those not forced from their homes, the change was evident on many levels (Össbo 2014, 170–171). Regionally and nationally losses were counted in terms of lack of jobs and a declining population. Therefore the government instructed the County Administrative Board of Norrbotten to assess opportunities for creating new jobs in Jokkmokk Municipality and a museum was one way (Svenskt Fjällmuseum 1981, 31–32). A parallel discussion on how a Sámi museum might be structured was already underway within Sámi organisations. Since its first meeting in 1953, the Nordic Saami Conference had provided a forum for discussion and information exchange for Nordic and Russian Sámi at which joint, cross-border policy and cultural strategies could be developed. The process of readdressing separate national issues such as economic, language and education policy as relevant to Sámi in several countries created a sense of both community and political force. The most significant result of the first conference was the establishment of the Nordic Saami Council in 1956 (from 1992, the Sámi Council). At the Nordic Sámi Handicraft Conference held in Jokkmokk in 1966, a joint Nordic study programme for *duodji* teachers was discussed (Samefolket 1968 5/6, 90). A cultural policy programme was adopted at the Nordic Saami Conference in Gällivare in 1971 (Ruong and Ruong 1985, 56–57). The museum issue was on the agenda at the 1976 Saami Conference in Inari, at which a museum committee was appointed. Major collections of Sámi artefacts were held by national museums in each of the nation states' capitals. These national museums were through exhibitions, keepers of the image of Sámi culture presented to the outside world. For this reason, the establishment of Sámi museums working from an entirely different perspective was a matter of urgency.

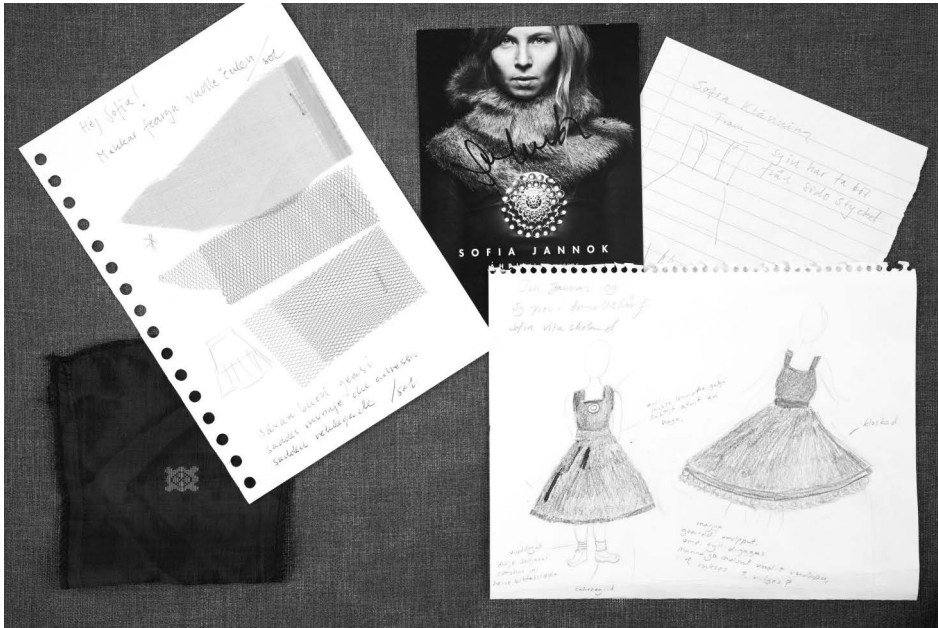


Figure 6.3 Collaboration between *duodji* maker Solveig Labba and artist Sofia Jannok. Solveig Labbas Collection. Photograph by Lena Kuoljok Lind.

In a memorandum written in 1977/78, titled *Sámi museums in the Nordic countries*, the Museum Committee laid out the criteria for a Sámi museum, emphasising a Sámi majority on the board and in the institution. Sámi culture must be the main theme of the museum and have a policy that respects Sámi cultural traditions and the museum must be located in the Sámi area (Figure 6.3).

This cross-border cooperation was the foundation of Sámi strategies for establishing a museum in Jokkmokk, while the Sámi community in the area also put their weight behind the initiative. The proposal of the earlier commission for a mountain museum was subsequently modified to become the Ájtte Swedish Mountain and Sámi Museum (Svenskt Fjällmuseum 1981, 9).

### Concluding remarks: The archives of Sámi *duodji* makers and artists

The purpose of the AIDA project has been to establish individual archives of *duodji* makers and artists and to reflect on how to indigenise or *samify* working practices at archives and museums. The project rests firmly on the cross-border collaborations during the 1970s and 1980s to increase self-determination over cultural heritage. The underlying narratives, when discussing indigenisation, have in this article been shown by placing *duodji* in the debates of the 1970s and the establishment of Sámi institutions as well as by tracking two themes in the Sámi public discourse on *duodji*, that of *duodji* as a commercial enterprise and *duodji* as culture. By comparing two exhibitions of *duodji*, one in Lund and the other in Funäsdalen, it has been shown that aims, decision making, working processes and the social embeddedness differ



when exhibitions are produced by Sámi for a Sámi audience or not. Place is therefore significant. In the end, one of the prerequisites for establishing the archives is location, with Sápmi at the centre.

Thanks to Per Ola Utsi, RSÄ handicraft consultant from 1972 to 1974 and one of the curators of the Funäsdalen exhibition. Thank you for sharing your knowledge and experience and offering valuable feedback on the article. Thanks to members of the AIDA project for valuable discussions during the writing process. That said, any errors and misinterpretations rest entirely with me.

## Archives

Huuva, Rose-Marie Collection. Ája archive and library, Ájtte Swedish Mountain and Sámmuseum, Jokkmokk, Sweden.

Hövenmark, Gun and Nils Collection. Ája archive and library, Ájtte Swedish Mountain and Sámmuseum, Jokkmokk, Sweden.

Labba, Solveig Collection. Ája archive and library, Ájtte Swedish Mountain and Sámmuseum, Jokkmokk, Sweden.

Länta, Svea Länta Collection. Ája archive and library, Ájtte Swedish Mountain and Sámmuseum, Jokkmokk, Sweden.

National Organisation Same Átnam (RSÄ) (Riksorganisationen Same Átnam) Collection. Ája archive and library, Ájtte Swedish Mountain and Sámmuseum, Jokkmokk, Sweden.

Svakko, Anna-Stina Collection. Ája archive and library, Ájtte Swedish Mountain and Sámmuseum, Jokkmokk, Sweden.

## Notes

- 1 This article was written within the framework of the project *Design History in Other Geographies*, which is funded by the Swedish National Heritage Board.
- 2 Sweden has several official Sami languages and the word for handicraft varies: *duodje* in Lule Sami, *duodji* in North Sami, *duöjjie* in Ume Sami and *vätnoe* in South Sami. Older literature generally defines the term *duodji* as meaning any traditional handicrafts created by the Sami. The Swedish terms *lappslojd* or *sameslojd* are also found in the source material. I use the North Sami term *duodji* throughout the article, even though it is an anachronism. The definition of *duodji* has broadened since the 1970s. Sami *duodji* researchers have pointed out it is for Sami and the *duodji* maker to define the meaning (Guttorm 2015) Today, it is defined as a creative activity that can be associated with practical skills. And a creative activity related to Sami traditions of crafting and aesthetic expressions that are deeply rooted in collective values, meaning and norms, as well as intangible knowledge of material processes and experiences (Liisa-Ráinvá Finbog 2020a, 215–217, 2020b, 29–31). It is the latter meanings of *duodji* that we find in the archives established within the AIDA project.
- 3 Handicraft consultants during the 1970s were: Marianne Nilsson, 1971–1978; Essias Poggats, 1970–1971; Paulus Utsi, 1970–1974; Per Ola Utsi, 1972–1974; Lydia Unnes, 1974–1975; Merika Dahlström, 1979; and Arthur Jilker, Anna Andersson and Ella Omma. RSÄ archives B 1:3 Annual Reports 1965–1979. In the AIDA archives, both Edit Svakko and Solveig Labba have been handicraft consultants. The Edit Svakkos archive contains some material from the organisation, although none from the 1970s.
- 4 In 2020, a complete copy of Pål-Nils Nilsson and Gösta Andersson's photographic exhibition was donated to the Ájtte Swedish Mountain and Sami Museum by the Hasselblad Foundation in Gothenburg.
- 5 In 2019, the permanent exhibition *Duodje: Sami Handicraft* opened at the Ájtte Swedish Mountain and Sami Museum. The exhibition includes 450 artefacts.

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Part II

# Transforming Institutions



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## 7 Exhibiting New Cultures of Design

### Representing the Cultural and Social Meanings of Design in Three Nordic Exhibitions

*Peder Valle, Sabina Maria Rossau and  
Leena Svinhufvud*

\*\*\*\*

The plot behind an exhibition can at times be just as important as the objects on display: This plot reflects an intention, which adds perspective to the exhibited and stimulates the intellectual capacity of the visitor beyond the simple – and often irrelevant – question of beauty.

(Bøe 1966, 14)

Though originating in an unrelated 1966 exhibition review in the journal *Dansk Brugskunst*, these words by Norwegian design historian Alf Bøe (1927–2010) are apt in capturing the qualities of institutional transformation traceable in three exhibitions studied in this chapter. Seeking to broaden the scope of design and strengthen its relevance to society, these three exhibitions all come close to embodying this overall ‘plot’ as Bøe describes it, each in a different way. They are: the *Norwegian Industrial Design* exhibition at the Oslo Museum of Decorative Art in November 1963; the *FORM 68* exhibition at the Danish Museum of Decorative Art in Copenhagen in May 1968; and the exhibition *Object and Environment (Esine ja ympäristö)* touring Finnish schools, libraries and other local exhibition spaces between 1968 and 1971.

The desirable luxury objects and furnishings of the post-war years encompassed by the ‘Scandinavian Design’ label were – and still are – an obliging category for exhibition formats based on aesthetic premises in museums and kindred organs. With the 1960s and 1970s increased attention to the expanded concept of design, its social meanings and activist potential, institutions of didactic cultural exhibiting were faced with a new challenge of communicating design as contemporary culture and as an element of social change. In national museums of industrial and applied arts, the traditional art historical practice of highlighting an aesthetic canon held sway, consequently leading to a retrospective approach. Conversely, within the exhibition activities of national societies and associations of craft and design, the commitment to advancing industrial export and domestic production were dominating and implied a demand for novelties and goods ready for mass production. In order to afford the general public a way of exploring the cultural meaning of design at eye level without addressing them as immediate consumers, the need arose for developing new curatorial strategies.

The three exhibitions studied in this chapter were not based on a consolidated understanding of ‘a new culture of design’ per se. They are not explicitly responding to a manifested new politics or social meaning of design and should not be studied as such. But each display a curatorial sensibility – unprecedented in their respective contexts – towards design as a subject matter to be conveyed by institutions and considered by the public in a closer proximity to everyday life, such as it is, could – or even should be.

### **The 1963 Norwegian Industrial Design Exhibition**

In November 1963, the Oslo Museum of Decorative Art (*Kunstindustrimuseet i Oslo*) hosted the exhibition *Norwegian Industrial Design (Norsk Industrial Design)*. Claimed to be the first of its kind in Norway, and allegedly in the Nordic countries (*Morgenbladet* 1963), the exhibition showcased a hand-picked selection of high-quality mass-produced Norwegian design products, implicitly reflecting notions of Norwegian design as progressive and innately democratic. The fact that the English term ‘industrial design’ was kept untranslated in the Norwegian versions of the exhibition’s title and catalogue text attests to the apparent novelty of ‘design’ to the Norwegian public in 1963, and simultaneously marks its divergence from the established rationale of the applied arts movement.

The exhibition was an ambitious project that involved the support of the Export Council of Norway (*Norges Eksportråd*) and the Federation of Norwegian Industries (*Norges Industriforbund*), as well as the collaboration of the Norwegian National Association of Arts and Crafts (*Landsforbundet Norsk Brukskunst*) and the more recently established ID Group for Industrial Design (*ID Norsk Gruppe for Industriell Formgivning*). The latter’s formation in 1955 by a group of designer members of the National Association was motivated by the wish to acknowledge the complex, problem-solving character of modern industrial design and untangle it from the inherent aestheticism of the applied arts context (Fallan 2007). The ID Group went on to initiate the Norwegian Design Award (*Den norske Designpris*), established in 1961 by the Export Council of Norway and the Federation of Norwegian Industries, and whose winning objects – a grapnel, door handle, liqueur bottle, flatware and refrigerator – closely reflected similar ideas. That the 1963 exhibition also runs along the same lines should come as no surprise.

The exhibition consisted of 255 objects sourced from a wide range of Norwegian producers. The objects had been carefully selected by a jury consisting of four members, each representing one of the following: The Oslo Museum of Decorative Art – where the exhibition took place, the Norwegian National Association of Arts and Crafts, the aforementioned ID Group and the Central Institute for Industrial Research (*Sentralinstituttet for Industriell Forskning*). The museum’s representative in the jury was senior curator Alf Bøe, who was the original initiator of the exhibition (Engelstad in Bøe, 1963b). Bøe was newly appointed only the year before – 1962 – and had introduced the idea immediately after taking up his post at the museum. In his mid-thirties, Bøe was hard-working and ambitious, and his treatise on Victorian design theory had received wide acclaim (Bøe 1957). Keen to demonstrate that modern industrial design was of relevance to a museum of decorative art, Bøe set out to restore the ties between the museum and the field of industrial design.

The featured objects closely reflected the ‘design turn’ of Norway’s professional scene in the years running up to the 1963 exhibition (Fallan 2007). Whilst including traditional objects like armchairs, glassware and cutlery, the selection also consisted of less typical objects like telephones, electric switches and a chemical lavatory, making the curated totality of the exhibition a far cry from other more conventional presentations of Scandinavian household wares of the period, such as the celebrated travelling exhibition *Design in Scandinavia*, touring Canada and the USA in the years 1954–1957, and the 1958 Paris spectacle *Formes Scandinaves*. By extending the design term to technical and industrial goods, appliances, machinery and commercial packaging, the jury deliberately shifted the scope of the 1963 exhibition to allow for a renewed understanding of ‘industrial design’ as something reaching beyond the mere aesthetic discourse of the applied arts movement. Featuring more than just living room furniture, the exhibited objects carefully underpinned the idea of design as an overarching discipline in modern industrialised society, imbuing the modernist designs with an almost ‘positivist’ flair.

A catalogue and a booklet were published to tie in with the exhibition. The illustrated catalogue included a foreword by the Norwegian Minister of Industry, Trygve Lie, and an introductory essay by Alf Bøe outlining the properties and history of modern industrial design. It also contained a comprehensive, 264-page photographic presentation showing all the objects exhibited, complete with a detailed description of form and materials, measurements and year of introduction. The booklet, on the other hand, was mainly a list of the exhibits; however, it also contained a foreword by museum director Eivind Engelstad (1900–1969) and a short introduction text by interior designer Birger Dahl (1916–1998). Dahl was chairman of the jury and a central member of the ID Group. In his text, Dahl stresses the scientific aspect of industrial design and underlines the authority of functionality – both with regards to aesthetics and quality (Dahl in Bøe 1963b). From here on we will turn our attention to the illustrated catalogue, keeping in mind Dahl’s technocratic approach to design while exploring the exhibition further.

In his essay for the illustrated catalogue, Alf Bøe explains that the selection of objects exhibited ‘demonstrates the extent to which modern industry bears the responsibility for shaping today’s environment – how formal standards in industry and formal standards in our material culture have come to mean one and the same thing’ (Bøe 1963a, 46). What’s more, on the preceding pages, Bøe programmatically declares that

[w]e want to promote a design policy in Norwegian industry which is based on legitimate demands, arising out of our way of life in modern society, and which tries to satisfy these demands through the production of goods which are both practical and attractive.

(Bøe 1963a, 45)

Using words like ‘practical’, ‘modern’ and ‘legitimate’, Bøe neatly outlines the new-found virtues of industrial design, as well as its aptness to the ‘modern’ condition. Notably, apart from his use of the term ‘attractive’, Bøe abstains from commenting on the very aesthetic and artistic issues which were defining traits of the applied arts tradition.





Figure 7.1 Photo from the exhibition *Norwegian Industrial Design* at the Oslo Museum of Decorative Art, November 1963. Photo courtesy of Nasjonalmuseet/Teigens Fotoatelier/DEXTRA Foto.

### Picture perfect design

To believe that appearance was not important, however, would be a mistake: Both the exhibition and the accompanying catalogue bear witness to a stark, restrained aesthetic that permeates all aspects of the presentation. In the exhibition, the objects were placed on low podiums and along the walls, painstakingly arranged with almost grid-like accuracy, visually separated here and there by thin gauze-like panel curtains (Figure 7.1). A minimum of catalogue information was printed in bright lettering on a dark background, with the small, rectangular labels neatly following the grid-like layout. Though the objects were grouped thematically throughout the four exhibition rooms – household items and kitchen appliances, technical and industrial equipment, graphic design, furniture and lighting and, lastly, sports and leisure goods – the presentation is noteworthy for its marked absence of any contextual information. This is perhaps most critical when remembering that all the exhibits were in fact *utilitarian* objects, designed not primarily for display, but for use. Stripped of any reference to the intended use and hence function of these objects, the resultant ‘white box’ aesthetic of the exhibition rooms mimicked the scene of the modern art museum more than it did the presumed setting of the objects’ everyday use.

Similarly, the object photographs featured in the catalogue presented the exhibits less as utilitarian objects than as mere formalist exercises, portraying everything from kitchen appliances to plastic jerry cans as purely aesthetic articles with distinct visual qualities. Photographed against plain, white backgrounds, the different objects were

DESIGN  
KITTELSEN & KVÆRK A/S, OSLO  
FOR A/S GRANFOS BRUG, LTD.,  
LYSAKER



Pakning for toiletpapir «Lindy». Cellofan. På tvers av rullen uregelmessige striper av fiolett, blå og klar cellofan. Fiolett etikett med utspart trykk. Rullen leveres i hvitt, gult og rosa. Br. 11,4 cm, diam. 9,5 cm. I produksjon fra 1962.

*Wrapper for toilet paper "Lindy". Cellophane with irregular stripes of violet, blue and clear cellophane. Violet label with negative print. The roll is offered in white, yellow and pink.*

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Figure 7.2 Facsimile of page 283 from the Norwegian Industrial Design catalogue, 1963. Photograph by Bjørn Winsnes of striped packaging for Lindy toilet paper. Photo courtesy of Ola Winsnes.

flattened, isolated and ‘cut out’, leaving it up to the reader of the captions to figure out their intended use, functions and material qualities. This was further enhanced by the eccentric compositional strategies that were applied to some of the objects. For instance, the standard furniture series were portrayed with their different units spread out and very neatly arranged, almost like a technical layout presenting the many different parts of a scale model kit. The sewing table *Syclus* was depicted, blue-print-like, with the table top as seen in bird’s-eye view, suspended in the air above a rendition of the same table as seen from the side. With some designs, such as Tormod Alnæs’ *Ponny* chair, the depiction of the chair alongside its components was of course intended to reveal the design’s constructional properties. For others, however, like the packaging for *Lindy* toilet paper (Figure 7.2) and *Twist* chocolates, the arrangements bordered on comical, sporting bits of confectionary balancing impossibly on top of each other. Recalling Bøe’s words, it seems fair to point out that these pictures reveal very little about the actual ‘practicality’ of the objects presented; rather, they serve as a reminder that the catalogue as well as the photographic presentation of the objects were themselves – effectively – designed.

### **Design virtues and the museum**

Despite only being on display for one month, the 1963 *Norwegian Industrial Design* exhibition received much publicity and press coverage. Swedish critic Ulf Hård af Segerstad applauded the initiative and called it ‘an entirely impressive act by a devoted few, whose work will lay the foundations for a broad and quick renewal’ (Hård af Segerstad 1964, 44). He immediately goes on to present the founding members of the ID Group and praise them for having succeeded in ‘stirring up’ the Norwegian design debate. Reading Hård af Segerstad’s review, it seems clear that the ideals promoted by the likes of the ID Group were regarded as the future of modern design.

In the introductory essay, curator Alf Bøe explained the historical background of industrial design. Furthermore, he made an effort to connect the virtues of modern design to the original founding statutes of the Oslo Museum of Decorative Art, dating from 1876 and aiming to improve the quality of contemporary mass-produced goods. In other words, Bøe was seeking to link the modern endeavour for high quality in design with the original intentions of the Museum, thus building legitimacy for the exhibition project by means of retrospective reference. This is particularly interesting as the Oslo Museum of Decorative Art in the 1960s neither spent much curatorial time nor much of its scarce funds on collecting and exhibiting contemporary design objects – and indeed had not been doing so for many years. In his foreword to the exhibition booklet, museum director and Alf Bøe’s superior Eivind Engelstad found it apt to point out that ‘such an exhibition would help clarify the term [i.e. “industrial design”] and would make it easier to form an opinion as to whether or not these objects belong in a museum of decorative art’ (Engelstad in Bøe 1963b). Engelstad’s views were not at all uncommon in his day. Rather, his implicit suspicion towards industrial design reflects a scholarly heritage that left its mark on the field of design and decorative arts for much of the 20th century. Alf Bøe, on the other hand, was convinced of industrial design’s relevance to the museum. Some years later, he unsuccessfully applied for the position as the museum’s director, before leaving in 1968 to take up the post as director for the Norwegian Design Centre (*Norsk Designcentrum*). The first of its kind in Scandinavia, the NDC was modelled on the British Design

Centre in London's Haymarket (1956). The Norwegian Design Centre opened in 1965, the same year that Alf Bøe was elected president of the National Association of Arts and Crafts, but it was in fact founded two years prior, in 1963, while the *Norwegian Industrial Design* exhibition was still on display. Bøe stayed on as the Centre's director until its closure in 1973. It is thus tempting to note how his work on the 1963 exhibition ties neatly in with his career path.

When the Oslo Museum of Decorative Art celebrated its centennial in 1976, Alf Bøe briefly returned as curator for a touring exhibition on *Nordic Industrial Design*, later to travel to Finland (see below) and Denmark. Superficially, the exhibition appears to follow the 1963 exhibition in many respects, and the exhibition catalogue's foreword by museum director Lauritz Opstad symptomatically opens with a reference to the 1963 exhibition (Opstad in Bøe 1976). Once again, Alf Bøe authored the catalogue essay, in which he sketches out the main concerns and challenges for the modern industrial designer's work. Though maintaining that the museum's original statutes were still relevant to the ethos of modern industrial design, Bøe speaks more of the collaboration between the designer and other disciplines. Compared to his 1963 essay, history is also downplayed. Thirteen years on, it is worth noting Bøe's mention of the five design centres that were opened in Nordic cities between 1959 and 1967, of which only two were in operation by 1976. Similarly, he laments the unfulfilled plans for a proper designer's education in Norway, pointing out that the matter had been debated without result for twenty years (Bøe 1976). It is difficult not to discern a slight disappointment or *ennui* between the lines of Bøe's essay, contrasting sharply with the marked optimism of the 1963 exhibition. By 1976, the pressing awareness of environmental concerns and consumerist critiques had changed the wind, leaving both the design community and society at large with new and unprecedented world-views that made the old pursuit of 'good design' lose some of its currency. A few years earlier, design activist and educator Victor Papanek had travelled Scandinavia, publishing in 1971 his book *Design for the Real World* (first published in Swedish in 1970) that denoted a polemic point of no return for the traditional consumer goods industry (more on Papanek in Chapter ten of this volume). Furthermore, the impact of the international 1973 oil crisis no doubt contributed to the general perception of a society in disrepair. As for the Norwegian situation, it has also been remarked that the establishment of EFTA (European Free Trade Association) in 1960 and the discovery of the Ekofisk oil field in 1969 both accelerated the processes that would ultimately render the manufactured goods industry 'inessential' to Norway's national economy (Fallan 2007, 46).

The feeling of estrangement was more openly remarked upon by Bøe's Danish contemporary Viggo Sten Møller (father of Henrik Sten Møller, whom will refigure below). Writing in 1977, a year after Bøe's essay for the centennial exhibition, Møller states that: '[t]he situation in the Nordic countries is somewhat chaotic. The associations are facing difficulties [...] The designers are struggling and are making strange designs [like] inflatable furniture in plastic and paper [...] Today's situation calls for radical change' (Møller 1978, 82–85). Though a far cry from Bøe's understated dissatisfaction, Møller's polemic description reminds us that the curatorial and exhibitionary strategies that were developed for the 1963 *Norwegian Industrial Design* exhibition quickly took a hit to their appeal and relevance. Despite the attempt to establish a new canon of high-quality mass-produced Norwegian design products, effectively promoting Norwegian design as progressive and innately democratic, the

programmatic outlook from 1963 was soon supplanted by changed visions and revised realities. Intended to embody the new culture of design, the *Norwegian Industrial Design* exhibition eventually morphed into an image of the future that never was.

### FORM 68 at the Danish Museum of Decorative Art

On 3 May 1968, the exhibition *FORM 68* opened in the Danish Museum of Decorative Art (*Det Danske Kunstindustrimuseum*, since 2011 *Designmuseum Danmark*) – hereafter the Museum. *FORM 68* was initiated and organised by journalist Henrik Sten Møller (1937–2019), a design and architectural critic at national newspapers *Politiken* and *B.T.* In Møller’s words, he was offered the keys to the Museum by Erik Lassen (1913–1997), director since 1966, in response to his critique of the Museum’s outdated scope and practice; a practice of allowing promotional organisations like the Danish Society of Arts and Crafts and Industrial Design (*Landsforeningen Dansk Kunsthaandværk*) – hereafter the Society – to dictate the premise of curating contemporary design. In his press announcement, Møller (1968d) stated:

The exhibition was made in spite. It is inspired by the dull and ever more mercantile displays by the Society. Exhibitions, that bring us the ‘good’ Danish taste, appraised until unconsciousness [...] I have created this exhibition because I believe we have been missing it. This I stated to Erik Lassen when he some years ago became director of the Museum. I wanted to force the museum to concern itself with what was happening here and now – and not only attend to the historical highlights, in which the museum is so plentiful as is [...].

The visual appearance of *FORM 68* is documented in archival photos and in the daily press descriptions. Scrutiny of these materials quickly reveals that any merit as a curatorial milestone lies not within the physical manifestation of the exhibit. Rather its significance is found in Møller’s own articulations of his intent in four central documents: Møller’s two letters to Erik Lassen mapping the exhibition concept (Møller 1967, 1968b); his introduction in the exhibition pamphlet (Møller 1968a) and his announcement of *FORM 68* published on 1 May in the leading newspaper *Berlingske Tidende* (Møller 1968d). Focusing on these four documents, this case study examines *FORM 68* as a discursive approach to curating the emerging cultural values in design. We begin with a brief account of the exhibition’s form and content.

*FORM 68* presented works by ceramicist Erik Magnussen (1940–2014), illustrator Bo Bonfils (1941–2019), artist and Gobelins-maker Jan Groth (1938–2022),<sup>1</sup> architect Lars Ulrik Thomsen (1946–) and photographer Gregers Nielsen (1931–2002). Visitors were greeted at the gate by Magnussen’s human-sized sculptures, made of piled-up ceramic cones and half-spheres in bright blue and red. This unprecedented use of the museum front yard was celebrated in reviews, but inside, the curating was rather less surprising. In the smallest of five consecutive halls, Thomsen’s architectural sketches and models were respectively hung as a wall-frieze and placed on top of his tubular furniture prototypes. In the adjoining hall, more tubular furniture posed as podiums for Thomsen’s smaller items (cutlery, kitchenware, alphabet building blocks) and for ceramic tableware by Magnussen. More of Magnussen’s sculpture components were placed on low plinths, just elevating them off the floor, as was his prototype for the Z-down tubular chair. Groth’s vast black and white Gobelins were hung from gallery rails, directly

against the bare sand-plastered museum walls. So too were graphic posters by Bonfils. Sketches and smaller works by both Groth and Bonfils were shown in the museum's renowned mahogany display cases by Kaare Klint. The final hall was massively dressed in Nielsen's black-and-white photos by the hundreds. They were fixed in groups on forty-three frameless boards and hung frieze-like around the room and on freestanding room dividers. In between, more of Thomsen's seats and the Z-down chair were placed directly on the floor, thus suggesting a place to rest and contemplate the cacophony of photo narratives. The exhibition deployed no customised scenography; rather the works were arranged against the backdrop of the museum's naked floors, walls and ceiling. Re-using Klint's display cases, the overall look did not deviate much from the museum's regular appearance. If anything, the show would have seemed a bit bleak and un-curated, which was also suggested in the daily press reviews.

### **Protesting the commercial premise**

The un-decorated, no-nonsense look of *FORM 68* served as a curatorial point. In the pamphlet, Møller (1968a) expressed his 'fundamental dislike of arts and craft (*kunsthåndværk*)' and his firm conviction that time would soon enough rid us of 'the vice of idolising frippery'. He declared that the exhibition was protesting the canonised craft of the day.

In press reviews, one passage from the pamphlet was cited or rephrased repeatedly, namely Møller's polemic testimony of inspiration: 'Every morning I open the door. Collect the milk carton from the staircase. Every morning I think to myself how it continues to be as ugly and impractical as ever' (Møller 1968a). This and the stated protest made more than one headline. In the pamphlet, Møller bluntly called out schools and associations that he found to be failing in their efforts to advance Danish design. 'Who is to blame?', he asked regarding the ugly milk carton, pointing also to the 'conscientious press and its pet child the consumer'. He flat out accused the Society of doing little more than parade how 'tame and trivial craft ha[d] become in craft's own little country' (Møller 1968a).

Møller's grudge with the Society was rooted in a profound concern with the commercial outline of its exhibition activities. The Society was part of a network that, through exhibitions and publications, facilitated the successful branding and export of Danish design – particularly carpentry furniture – in the 1950s. The success of the network rested largely on the heralding narrative of high quality resulting from a unique collaboration between cabinetmakers and furniture architects, which also led to price-points beyond average consumer level (see Hansen 2018 about the concept of Danish furniture architects and for an exhaustive account of the mid-century success of Danish design). In his pitch to Lassen, Møller (1968b) called it a 'moral' issue to promote young artisans working unaffected by the dominating mercantile premise. To this end, it was important to (1) afford each participant the room to show a full body of works and not just a few samples and (2) include sketches, experiments and 'flaws' since '[...] perfection can occasionally obstruct'.

These terms recalled the exhibition series *Danish Designers* (*Danske Kunsthåndværkere*) that Lassen himself had supervised up until his appointment as director. Between 1956 and 1966 the Museum had on nine occasions invited three to five designers from complementary areas (e.g. furniture, textile and product design) to jointly curate an exhibit of their own work – at their own expense. While early versions appeared

quite commercial (including price-tags and direct sales), exhibitions VIII and IX were much less, so as they integrated the sort of sketches and experiments that Møller was advocating – and he had indeed reviewed the series with praise (Møller 1965b).

In the pitch, Møller (1968b) stressed the importance of adding to the standard introductory data and portraits information about each artisan's method of working – from conception to materialisation. In this way of emphasising the creative process, Møller deployed a strategy that has since become principal in design curating, but which had previously, with few exceptions, been approached by the Museum in a more traditional understanding and normative appreciation of artisanal skills.

There were other aspects of *FORM 68* that escaped the traditional museum approach. Møller wanted to *force* the Museum, he wrote, to engage with what was happening 'here and now' in Danish craft and design, and as we shall see next by his selection of participants, he exceeded a style- or trend-based understanding of 'here and now' and challenged traditional narratives of the rationale behind Danish Design.

### Practice on display

Magnussen, Bonfils and Groth each represented the typical participant for *Danish Designers*. They were classically trained and young but well on their way. Magnussen (a 1967 Lunning-prize winner) and Bonfils had both set up independent workshops upon graduating from the School of Arts and Crafts in 1960. Both had prestigious additional engagements, the former with the porcelain manufacturer Bing and Grøndahl and the latter teaching at the Royal Academy of Arts. Groth had studied traditional painting, but since 1960 he had been collaborating with the weaver Benedikte Groth (his wife from 1965 to 1985) on abstract black-and-white Gobelin tapestries. In 1965 they represented Denmark at the third Biennale Internationale de la Tapisserie Lausanne, which marked an international turning point within the genre, breaking with traditional motives and techniques (Paludan 2003, 30–31).

The three shared an exploratory approach to artisanal expression that Møller found pioneering. Magnussen's dedication to mass-production rather than decorative studio art made him the ideal designer in Møller's view. The components for the *FORM 68* sculptures were manufactured by the industrial porcelain plant *Norden* that specialised in high voltage insulators. Møller (1968d) called it *industriekunst* (industry art) – as opposed to *kunstindustri* (industrial art), thus connoting the period's rebellion against high culture rather than the customary museum subject matter. Bonfils' advertising posters for Ole Palsby and the Danish Design Centre may seem curious in a display protesting mercantile design exhibitions. But Bonfils appeared in *FORM 68* as both a graphic designer and 'independent artist' (*fri kunstner*) with free-hand sketches, showing the range of his method first and foremost (Møller 1968b). Groth's work Møller simply found 'highly innovative', and to be sure Groth was part of the movement that repositioned Gobelin-making within art and design in the late 1960s.

### Adding social context

Lars Ulrik Thomsen was the wildcard of *FORM 68*. Though young and unestablished, he had strong opinions on relating the social and designed environment. He had trained as a mason and architect, studied sociology, travelled Europe by bike and lived on a Kibbutz. Thomsen was driven towards architecture and design by his

vision of a simplified life in smaller communities, free from consumer goods and status symbols (Thomsen 1968). At *FORM 68* he presented a fully-fleshed utopia: Prototypes for democratic clothing, furniture, lamps and kitchenware; urban plans and architectural models – most notably his mushroom-like design for commune housing (Figure 7.3). His presentation included strategies for sharing resources and reorganising public institutions such as supermarkets, schools, churches, hospitals, museums etc. Literally a body of work spanning from the spoon to the city, as Ernesto Nathan Rogers famously phrased it, but in contrast to the Italian movement, Thomsen’s aim was not to elevate the status of everyday objects; rather he pursued the lowest consumer price above all else.

Møller included Thomsen for his strong social engagement, his creative use of waste materials and his earthbound ideas. Thomsen had an unaffected and pragmatic attitude towards the heralded Danish furniture tradition. He refrained from the category all together, using the term living devices (*bo-redskaber*) instead, and prioritised the democratic rationale of low cost above aesthetics or even comfort, which in his mind was an all too individual parameter anyway. If a chair was to be truly comfortable, Thomsen felt, it would have to be tailor-made to the user’s back. As this was unattainable in efficient industrial production, Thomsen had disposed of backs and armrests all together in his seating devices (Møller 1968c). Thomsen was indeed the antithesis of the ‘Conclave in Bredgade’, as Møller had mockingly called the Museum, referencing its location and normative approach (Møller 1965a).



Figure 7.3 Lars Ulrik Thomsen’s sketches, tubular furniture and mushroom-like model for commune housing exhibited at *FORM 68*. Photo by Ole Woldbye, courtesy of Pernille Klemp, Designmuseum Danmark.



The social impetus in Thomsen's work was underlined by Gregers Nielsen's contribution. Nielsen was a renowned pioneer in documentary photography. In 1964 he co-founded the Delta Photo group, honoured by posterity for its work on social issues in Denmark in the late 1960s. Nielsen exhibited roughly 200 portraits taken between 1962 and 1968 of ordinary people in common settings like the animal show, the meatpacking district or the village hall. Møller wrote in the pitch that Nielsen's 'natural photography [...] should usher us to the milieu that surrounds us, and with which we must commit' (Møller 1968b). Reportage photography, especially on fashion, was relatively commonplace in the Museum. In 1964, it hosted a jubilee show of Albert Eisenstadt's work, which in its black-and-white aesthetic was not far from Nielsen's. However, *FORM 68* included Nielsen's work not primarily for its artistic quality but for its testimony to the current – the here and now – way of living for a large part of the Danish consumer society that was never immediately addressed by the typical contemporary design exhibition.

### **Transforming museum discourse**

In seventeen days, *FORM 68* had nearly 5,000 visitors and received an above average amount of press coverage, including the Society's moderately defensive response. In the Society periodical, Aksel Dahl refuted any claim to *FORM 68* transcending contemporary design exhibitions on account of it being visually and structurally too much in keeping with the *Danish Designers* series (Dahl 1968, 146). Dahl otherwise agreed with most of the reviewing press that the exhibited work raised important issues.

Henrik Sten Møller organised *FORM 68* from a position as critic – not curator. His contribution to design curating was not a clear-cut how-to as much as a how-not-to. It was not a ground-breaking visual spectacle with a self-explanatory message, rather its meaning had to be extrapolated from a dialogue that took place in only partially public writings. And it did not revolutionise exhibition practice overnight, either in or outside the Museum. Still, *FORM 68* offered a noticeable alternative to exhibiting contemporary design on the customary commercial premise of promotional organisations.

Displaying the work of Magnussen, Bonfils and Groth through the lens of sketches and technical experiments rearticulated their work as process rather than product. Audiences were invited to transgress their consumerist position and instead engage with design as a practice, especially regarding Magnussen and Bonfils, who were both known from commercial contexts. With Thomsen's work, Møller outlined a new museum practice of addressing the design of the present and the future rather than the past. Collectively, the work of Thomsen and Nielsen added the social context for design as practice and emphasised its potential for responding to emerging social issues and cultural values beyond traditional narratives of aesthetics, and unrivalled but also prohibitively expensive craftsmanship. *FORM 68* thus anticipated the social discourse of design that only a few years on gained momentum with the aforementioned work of Victor Papanek.

### **'Object and Environment' – citizen education with design**

In contrast to Denmark and Norway, there was not an active design museum in Finland at that time. The design collection established by the Finnish Society of Crafts

and Design (*Suomen Taideteollisuusyhdistys*) in 1873, was packed in storage during the Second World War and the museum was not re-opened until 1978. However, the Society took other kinds of steps to represent contemporary design.

Playing with similar instruments as the *Norwegian Industrial Design* exhibition of 1963 and showing new, high-quality mass-produced design objects ranging from cutlery and scissors to door locks, the touring exhibition *Object and Environment* (*Esine ja ympäristö*) aimed at widening the arena for discussions about democratic ideals of design. This exhibition took design objects to Finnish libraries, schools and local exhibition spaces between 1968 and 1971. According to the Helsinki-based *Uusi Suomi* newspaper (6 June 1968), the goal of this exhibition with its 200 images, eighty slides and 200 objects was to offer something most essential that we all should recognise and be able to discuss. The carefully selected and displayed artefacts and black-and-white images depicted the evolution and cultural specificity of object design. Colour slides of contemporary everyday surroundings and utility items designed by Finnish designers and produced by Finnish industries were presented with the up-to-date Kodak Carousel projector. A local newspaper from Eastern Finland reported:

There are no luxury items in this exhibition, just essential everyday objects from door handles to chairs and plates to vehicles. The aim is to show visitors with these images and objects how design makes things more convenient, easier to use and cheaper through mass production.

(*Pieksämäen uutiset*, 26 March 1969)

The didactic exhibition texts informed visitors that three quarters of Finns lived in cities and urban areas and that the city is a designed environment. The slide presentation canonised catchphrases such as ‘Our daily surroundings are the result of thousands of overlapping solutions’ and ‘In Finland, the domestic artefacts started to change by the design activity in the post-war years. The everyday has become more cheerful. The designer’s work can be seen on the streets’. The tone verges on the ‘happy’ propaganda of socialism.

The overall message was to link design with functional products and daily environments. To illustrate this, there were images of using certain object types in different cultures and comparisons presenting how ‘design problems’ like sitting or cutting fabric have been solved at different times. There was no printed catalogue, but visitors could study the content with the help of a small leaflet containing texts by the curator of the exhibition, journalist and art critic Jaakko Lintinen (1933–). The exhibition design using light table structures for objects and standing panels for large black-and-white images was made by interior designer Esa Vapaavuori, and graphic designer Jukka Pellinen (1925–2011) stood for the stringent graphic design (Svinhufvud 2020) (Figure 7.4).

*Object and Environment* started touring in 1968. During the first year, it visited ten locations and reached a total of 15,000 visitors. According to the archival material, the exhibition was shown for example in the city of Savonlinna during the local Opera festival. It was also exhibited as part of the programme of the annual *Jyväskylän kesä* summer festival which, interestingly, that year hosted also Victor Papanek’s lecture about ‘the need for design in a tradition-bound society’ (*Kulttuuri-päivät* 1968, 9, 17).



Figure 7.4 Photo from the exhibition *Object and Environment* was published in the Year-book of the Finnish Society of Crafts and Design in 1969. Photo courtesy of Aalto Archives, Aalto University.

Internationally, the year 1968 was a ‘crazy year’ of political turmoil and assassinations, resistance and student revolts, and Apollo 8. According to Finnish historian Henrik Meinander, many Finns look back at this year with nostalgia – it was when Finland was considered the most ‘Finnish’. Today, the student revolts live vividly in the stories, although many did not have anything to do with those historical events (Meinander 2019). In the historical year of 1968, the geo-political status of Finland in the East of Europe founded the basis for politics. The President of the Republic, Urho Kekkonen (who stayed in that position from 1956 to 1982) was at the top of his power. Kekkonen drove a politics of national defragmentation. Despite the noisy resistance of the younger generation and students, a post-war ideal of uniform culture prevailed. On the other hand, people lived quite different realities. More and more families lived in urban apartment buildings with cosy sofas in their living rooms, while others still carried water to their house in the countryside. This was a time of massive structural change in the Finnish society. Transition from agrarian to industrial culture cut roots from many traditions and chores and during these years, a total of 40,000 Finns moved abroad each year, seeking a better livelihood, first and foremost to Sweden (Meinander 2019).

Finland was urbanising fast, and ways of consumption were changing. Increasing wealth and leisure time accelerated spending as well as production of consumer goods and services. However, the old agrarian idea of self-sufficiency prevailed in civic educational short films that were shown in movie theatres before television took over marketing. (Lammi 2009) These films promoted rationalisation of homes and an economical and frugal lifestyle and guided people to accept and appreciate industrial goods and at the same time, to internalise the notions of planning and saving. Around 1968 there were films about frozen food, bank savings, safe products of the cooperative market chains, and on industrially advanced production of furniture for the home.

The ways of life and the living environments were developing fast and exploded with the new ‘tele-communicational devices’. As Jaakko Lintinen encapsulates in the exhibition texts of *Object and Environment*, the world was closer than ever. ‘Technologised’ society was facing challenges like short life spans for consumer goods, acceleration of consuming, throwaway culture and the waste issues resulting from the use of artificial materials. On the other hand, new materials were seen as a necessity and for example, the use of plastic was considered a decisive solution. According to the exhibition narrative, the focus had been too much on history. Now design was created for functions that did not exist before, like computers. The topical challenge was the increasingly complex environment and the alienation of man from it. (See chapter 2 on the expanding and fuzzy discourses on environments.)

In the time of big changes, the role and impact of the designer were seen as very broad and the belief in the potential of professionals was strong. The spirit was that of techno-optimism: ‘Contemporary design should be seen as part of the activities that make it possible to create a functional and effective culture for the industrial society’ (*Esine ja ympäristö* 1968). Here the tone of voice comes very close to that of Alf Bøe, who connected the responsibility of shaping the contemporary environment with the activity of modern design industries (see above).

## **The role of design institutions**

Jaakko Lintinen was recruited as curator of the *Object and Environment* exhibition by the director of the Finnish Society of Crafts and Design, H. O. Gummerus

(1909–1996) who was, in fact, the mastermind behind clever marketing of Finnish design industries in the Milan Triennials and other international exhibitions (Aav & Viljanen 2009). Lintinen had previously worked for the Finnish *Viikkosanomat* magazine which published photo reportages in the style of Life Magazine. He had written a special article for the magazine about the future, ‘Finland in 2000’ which was published in 1966. Lintinen recalls that in the article which caught Gummerus’ attention, he had written about icebreakers in the ‘naive happy faith of progress’ spirit of the time. ‘It was believed that designing better environments would lead to better people’ he recalls (Lintinen 2001, see also Kivirinta 2001).

Compared to many design exhibitions organised by the Society, the press clippings and correspondence showing negotiations with a variety of local and regional communities around the country, frame *Object and Environment* as a different kind of a promotional manoeuvre. The Society was at that time the main promoter of Finnish design industries abroad. It had been the key actor behind the international success story of ‘Finnish Design’ in the post-war years. What was the motivation of the Society to organise a touring exhibition for the ‘ordinary people’?

It seems that the immediate motivation was pedagogical. The documents state that there was a need to spread knowledge. Finnish design was internationally known, but in Finland, there were no educational materials on the subject for schools or for wider audiences. The aim was to give basic information related to the use of everyday objects – to provide ‘consumer education for design’ (Salokorpi & Runeberg 1969). In his opening speech of the exhibition in Helsinki, H. O. Gummerus stated that: ‘The exhibition strives to inform about the relationships and rational of the object world closest to man. It seeks to explain the background of design and the principles where it aims’ (Gummerus 1968). This kind of material was missing from schools and the educational field, and it had been anticipated also within consumer and adult education. In fact, the exhibition was executed with the support of the Finnish National Agency for Education (*Opetushallitus*) and included in-service training for teachers in the cities of Helsinki, Rauma and Jyväskylä. It can be perceived in the context of the developing egalitarian national schooling system, which culminated in the founding of comprehensive school in Finland in 1972.

In this show, there were no names of individual designers or companies mentioned although the objects and images were apparently loaned from or donated by design industries. Using the Finnish word ‘*muotoilu*’ in the texts instead of the English term was certainly a conscious choice. Since the mid-1960s, the concept of ‘Finnish design’ had been publicly attacked by the younger generation of designers. For a wider audience, the international term was not meaningful. ‘What is “design”?’ asked TV reporter and documentarist Hannu Karpo in the marketplace of Kuopio city in Eastern Finland in 1965. Representing the embarrassment of the common people before the unfamiliar concept, this documentary can be seen as one kind of design criticism (Karpo 1965).

For the Society, this was a time of redirecting activities. In 1965, the country’s only design school was detached from the governance of the Society, and in 1973 it became a state-supported institution with university status as the Institute of Industrial Arts (*Taideteollinen korkeakoulu*) (see chapter 8 on the political transitions of the school). During those years the Society participated actively in topical discussions about design education and the designer’s role in industry. The Society’s Yearbook published short research articles about contemporary design. In 1968, Jaakko Lintinen wrote

an analysis of contemporary industrial design. Based on a study about design research and its possibilities, it portrayed the role of a designer:

The problem addressed by an industrial designer is not 'shape' in the traditional sense. His activities in the product design team include combining a whole range of different information, consisting not only of technical, technological and economic data, materials and ergonomics, but also of the use of psychological and social research data. [...] An industrial designer is a new professional whose main task is to represent both the producer and the consumer. His main problem is to represent the human contribution in the product design process.

(Lintinen 1968; see also Sulonen 1969)

The Yearbook also gave voice to critical statements. Art historian Marika Hausen, who worked as a teacher at the Institute of Industrial Arts, wrote a biting anti-capitalist article about the new aims of design in the yearbook of 1967. Crushing the Nordic contribution to Expo 67 in Montreal she stated that present-day design does not meet the needs of the present day, which is facing major challenges such as global injustice and population explosion. Hausen writes:

Our Western way of life has included the right to make anything, the right to turn our backs, stating that it is not of our business, the right to overproduce, to destroy, to waste, to poison, the right to be short-sighted, to refuse to cooperate, to uphold the right of the individual over society, all the way. Today, we no longer have that right.

(Hausen 1967)

Critical voices were concurrently embraced also by other institutions. In 1968, the international seminar *Industrial, Environment and Product Design* funded by the Finnish Innovation Fund SITRA was organised in Suomenlinna, Helsinki, with Victor Papanek and Buckminster Fuller as invited guest speakers (Clarke 2013).

Regarding the role in front of the Finnish audience, it is good to keep in mind that the Society was, in fact, a membership organ for citizens, which organised, for example, annual lotteries. Domestic touring exhibitions were part of the programme going decades back and there were annual applied arts exhibitions in Helsinki organised jointly with the Finnish association of designers, Ornamo. Besides exhibition activity, the Society took up new didactic activities in the 1960s. A central image archive for design was initiated, collecting photos and slides from design industries and from individual practitioners, to be used by the media and in teaching. In 1968, the Society launched its first slide series on design to lend for teaching purposes, and for this, Jaakko Lintinen studied similar activities of *Svenska Slöjdföreningen* on a study trip to Stockholm.

The abjection of the national design collection and need for a specialist museum comparable to those in other Nordic design nations were expressed more and more empathically in the 1960s, when objects from the museum collection were also shown in exhibitions in Finland and abroad. The developments coincided with rapidly professionalising museum activities in the country. The curator of the Society's collection, art historian Seppo Niinivaara, made a study trip to Scandinavian design museums in

1966. Niinivaara was followed by Jaakko Lintinen in the curator's position, and these developments lead to the re-opening of the museum.

When the aforementioned touring exhibition on *Nordic Industrial Design* visited Helsinki in 1977, the exhibition was housed in Broberg's co-educational school, Korkeavuorenkatu 23. The exhibition anticipated the transformation of those facilities into a permanent design museum – which they also did a year later, in 1978. Reviewing the exhibition, art historian and art critic Leena Maunula notes that for the first time in decades, the domestic audience learned about current prospects in design. She argued that due to the lack of similar exhibitions the opportunities to learn about designers' efforts had been limited (Maunula 1977). There is another stance in the review which argues for the importance of linking contemporary design with the tradition.

Maunula points out that the names of Finnish designers whose works for the Nordic review had been selected by the Finnish Society of Crafts and Design were certainly unknown to the general public although their products – Valmet's tractor, Sisu's truck or a milk packaging and distribution system – were better known. According to Maunula, it was important that in the exhibition contemporary design was complemented by familiar market classics – 'good Danish furniture and light fixtures, Swedish glass and a lot of familiar goods from Finland from Aalto, Wirkkala and Sarp-paneva' (Maunula 1977). This gave perspective to the work of the designer and provided a good transition from the historical background to the present day, she stated.

### **How to exhibit a new culture of design?**

The curators of the exhibitions presented here sought to address this question, whilst simultaneously grappling with the existing regimes of exhibiting and even thinking about 'design' that prevailed within museums and organisations. Terminology exposes the first sign of their struggles. Alf Bøe's use of the foreign expression 'industrial design' showed commitment to a novel approach to the subject matter. Jaakko Lintinen was aware that he was addressing an audience of commoners and avoided the English term in favour of the less suspicious Finnish word 'muotoilu'. And Henrik Sten Møller rather awkwardly scorned the craft-term without ever offering a qualified alternative (in later works Møller did adopt the design-term).

All three cases display the ambition to communicate design through the lens of 'use' and 'process' in addition to 'beauty', and the design profession as driven by social problem-solving. In the museum framework, Bøe and Møller each relied on a familiar visual approach to promote this new attitude towards the subject matter – arguably at the risk of adhering to the aestheticising museum premise. By including photographs of everyday life and use in different cultural contexts both Møller and Lintinen took steps towards overcoming the problematic issue of mediating design culture in a dissociated exhibition setting.

The three curators offered very different interpretations of the designer's role to the narratives of use and process. Lintinen emphasised the profession itself by leaving out the designer's identity. Bøe's scholarly approach listed designers and manufacturers on the same footing as material and formal object properties. Møller staged the designer personality at the very centre of his interpretation of design as process. Perhaps these differences of curatorial approach reflect the level of influence by the national societies of craft and design.

These were central to the realisation of all three exhibitions. In both the Norwegian and Finnish case, the societies acted as the organising unit and the average consumer was the uncontested target audience of the propagated message. In the Danish case, the national society, because of its promotional scope, sparked a counter position and motivated Møller – a newspaper design critic – to suggest a discursive approach to exhibiting contemporary design. In this sense, the addressee was the museum and the national societies rather than the general public, and the exhibition itself played the part of a critical tool, which relates this case also to the chapters in part one of this volume.

Using the exhibition as a changemaker or even a protest connects the three cases to an avant-garde aesthetic, offering individual and alternative responses to common or conventional problems. Importantly, the exhibitions can also be viewed as attempts to come to terms with the institutions' influential heritage, implying institutional criticism.

## Note

- 1 Benedikte Groth, the wife and collaborator of Jan Groth, was accredited in the exhibition concept and in some press reviews, but she was not presented in the official exhibition pamphlet and is therefore not considered as an exhibitor here.

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## 8 On a Stormy Sea

### Design Education and Politics in Finland

*Pekka Korvenmaa*

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Helsinki Craft School (*Veistokoulu*) was founded in 1871 to teach the elementary skills of shaping objects, not designed by the pupils but by the style-defining elite of artists and architects. The school went through several content-based and administrative transformations, having a monopoly on upper-level craft and design education until the 1980s. In 1973, it was granted full university status, the first design school in the Nordic realm to reach that echelon amidst the academic establishment. By the government and industries, it was expected that the school would now be the producer of skilled designers for the successful design-intensive industries of that time, serving not only domestic consumption but also championing the international market. But instead, the new design university landed in a political minefield, triggered first by international leftist radicalism and then by conformist, Soviet-led Marxism-Leninism steered from the Kremlin. It was the bigger picture that mattered: Moscow attempted to evoke an internal revolutionary mood in Finland, and when the moment became ripe they would come as ‘friends’ to support the transition from capitalism to socialism. And to shift the border of the Communist block to the western shore of Finland – where it had been when Finland was part of the Romanov Russian empire 1809–1917. In this global geopolitical game, university education and the academic youth were in many ways important. Especially regarding the cohorts of cultural influence, within which design education also belonged. This article will focus on the microcosm of the Central School of Applied Arts (*Taideteollinen Oppilaitos*) as it was named since 1949. From 1973, it changed to the Institute of Industrial Arts (*Taideteollinen Korkeakoulu*). In the 1990s, the English translation was changed to University of Art and Design, and since 2010, the school has been the Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture (*Aalto-Yliopiston Taiteiden ja Suunnittelun Korkeakoulu*). Here the parameters of greater political tactics were strongly felt but less understood. Lenin’s view of ‘useful idiots’ was adequate considering the inner dynamics of the school in the 1970s.<sup>1</sup>

#### **From shining success to schisms and paralysis**

Finnish design stepped briskly into the limelight of international visibility in the early 1950s, mainly via the Triennale exhibitions in Milan, where the country made its first and amply rewarded entry in 1951. This success continued up to late 1960s and was supported by several other exhibitions, such as the *Design in Scandinavia*

exhibition which toured North America in the mid-1950s. Simultaneously, the export of design-intensive industries grew and also domestic consumption, shielded from competitive imports by customs policies, became increasingly aware of the benefits of 'good design', avidly propagated by the producers as well as by promotional organisations both private and public nature.

The unison bond between the Central School of Applied Arts, the national professional guild of designers, *Ornamo*, and the industrial sector worked well up to the late 1960s, also lubricated by the economic upswing of the period. The internationally felt oil crisis, peaking in 1973, shook everything and the aftermath brought an economic stagnation *cum* rise in unemployment in Finland. The design-driven industries, such as the once so powerful Arabia ceramics producers landed in troubled waters. On the national scale, unemployment rose to unforeseen numbers. Simultaneously, the political left gained ground and the cultural 'leftism' was the banner of the boomers, the children of the upsurge in births after World War II. Having said this, let's turn our focus towards design and especially design education.

### Diverging goals for design education

After having been upgraded several times in relation to its educational programme since its founding in 1871, the Central School of Applied Arts went through another educational reform in 1965. The course now became a four-year programme. This consolidation was also a signal to the industrial sector: a more reliable system to provide experts for the productive sector, regarding both domestic consumption and export industries. But the absolute high point occurred in 1973 when education in crafts and design was upgraded to the level of university education: the Institute of Industrial Art now had all the formal rights to act as a university – but simultaneously the pledge to perform as a university. This meant significant introspection and revamping the whole ethos of the school: what does it mean for a craft and design school to be a university? The whole term 'university' was so laden with symbolic institutional weight and national status.

Thus it was foreseen that this new design university would be a suave mechanism producing ever more competent cohorts of designers to serve national industries and their product quality in the domestic market and in exports. But, alas, broader cultural, social and political currents marred the realisation of this vision. Instead, the new university drifted into internal chaos, loss of credibility among both the industrial sector and national political decision-making. How did this happen?

As in most Western societies, cultural, leftist radicalism rose like a tidal wave from the mid-1960s onwards – we just have to remember the rebellions in Paris in 1968. In Finland, the Social Democrat Party had a landslide victory in the parliamentary elections in 1968. The country also had a strong Communist Party, in influence at par with the Italian one. Simultaneously, Maoism made an entry to the political discussions of the generation born after World War II. But all this first stirred welcome criticism and cultural radicalism, where 'all the flowers blossomed'. But upon entering the 1970s, the scene became strongly polarised. What had been spontaneous, inspirational rebellion vis-à-vis the establishment became more rigid, and was soon steered from the Kremlin. Only two colours remained, white and black/red. The unfathomable happened: the sons and daughters of the men who had defended the independence of the country with huge sacrifices against the Soviet Union in World War II now

became loyal servants of the Kremlin, which used the Finnish Communist Party as a tool to spread a revolutionary mood, tightly in the grips of the Party. ‘Leftism’ became orthodox, dogmatic Marxism-Leninism. Western radicalism was shunned. East Germany became the paragon. The Stalinist youth belonging to the organisation Socialist Student Union (*Sosialistinen Opiskelijaliitto SOL*) even used matching, uniform-like shirts. After this sojourn to macro-level, our focus shifts back to the micro-level of Institute of Industrial Arts.

Dogmatic Marxism-Leninism spread among the university youth in the whole country in the first years of the 1970s. But in the new design university, it became exceptionally virulent, capturing not only the students but a great deal of the teachers. The school adopted a decision-making rule of ‘one man – one vote’ where, in an inclusive manner, the students, staff and teachers were equally qualified to rule. This principle was never approved by the Ministry of Education, the organ funding the school, which led to antagonism between the school and the ‘feeding hand’. From the early 1970s up to the end of the decade, the internal culture of the school was marked by a paralysing political terror from the extreme left, which sought legitimisation by allying with the Communist Party and via that channelling to the Kremlin. At the same time, the term ‘sovietisation’ was launched in the international press, and Finland being the epigone for that.

We have a document from those years, a close encounter: Antti Hassi, a leading figure in the school at the time, head teacher in art education, that is, educating art teachers for Finnish schools, had his posthumous memoirs published in 2020 (Hassi 2020). There he paints – with some backward-looking vengeance – a drastic picture of the school in the 1970s. Anarchy was prevalent, mainly caused by the Stalinist fraction. The principal of the school in the late 1970s, renowned furniture designer Yrjö Kukkapuro, was threatened by students with outright violence. Sometimes the students were on strike, sometimes the teachers. Education suffered. Courses in ‘anti-capitalist product design’ were offered. Several teachers left the school to work abroad, especially in what was then commonly referred to as the Third World (Figures 8.1 and 8.2).

Designers in Finland formed a tightly knit clan. All came from the same school, all belonged to the union of designers, *Ornamo* – founded back in 1911 – and many taught at the school, even leading figures with their own studios like Ilmari Tapiovaara, Tapio Wirkkala and Antti Nurmesniemi. So when political confrontations broke out, this intertwined design context was very vulnerable. Emotions ran high and arguments became vehement, old bonds were torn apart. But there was one area of design which now rose to prominence: industrial design (Valtonen 2007). Education in this field began 1961, and four years later the first class was entering the job market. But the products they designed – in teamwork with mechanical experts and marketing – were no longer labelled by the designer, as was the case with a ‘Tapiovaara chair’ or ‘Sarpaneva vase’. A washing machine was not presented as a ‘Juhani Ahola machine’ but by the producer, the company behind it. So the call for anonymous design, raised by Kaj Franck already in 1961, became reality via appliance, ship, vehicle and electronics design. Naturally, technical industries had used design before, but those experts had their career and training in the so-called traditional design branches. Hence furniture designers like Ilmari Tapiovaara designed electronics, ceramic designer Richard Lindh lightweight motorcycles and graphic designer Jukka Pellinen tractors. Companies understood the added value design gave



Figure 8.1 Students of furniture design preparing plaster prototypes at the Central School of Applied Arts, 1962. Aalto University ARTS Archives.



Figure 8.2 Revolting students in front of their alma mater, Central School of Applied Arts, Helsinki 1969. Photo: Jarmo Matilainen.

in order to reach – as Raymond Loewy has said – ‘The most beautiful curve is a rising sales graph.’

But apart from the rather dystopian political reality, we have to look at the positive aspects: besides the political game, there were also heartfelt aspirations towards a better world. This meant the living environment. As well as the concern for the loss of traditional crafts amidst the escalating urbanism which emptied the countryside. Leading, established designers such as Ilmari Tapiovaara and Tapio Wirkkala spoke for the preservation of craft abilities and workplaces. The *ARARAT* exhibition in Stockholm in the summer of 1976, focusing on ecological aspects of the human habitat, was a landmark in environmental consciousness (see Chapters 1 and 4). Sweden had always been the model and paragon to Finland, as well as a portal for ‘western’ movements and influences soon to be felt in the Finnish context. The environmental movement was also an alternative and antidote to the political wind blowing from Moscow. The school had several environmental projects, like one considering the dwelling of the nomading Sami population in northern Finland. Another apolitical outlet was the design of working conditions. There the emerging practice of ergonomics found a dual benefit: it served both the worker and the provider of work.

### **Touching the bottom – but then upwards**

In addition to the turmoil and schisms within the school, the general economic and political parameters turned disadvantageous for design in the mid-1970s. Design practice and the design-intensive industries had fared well during the long economic upswing which began in the 1960s. And the palette of design expertise was now also enriched with rapidly growing input from industrial design. But in 1973, the same year that saw design education upgraded to university level, the first global oil crisis broke out, as mentioned above. Saudi-Arabian producers raised the price of raw oil dramatically. This had multiple consequences. The price of plastics soared, the costs of heating and fuel rose rapidly. Western societies and industries had been ‘oiled’ so profoundly that they had grown totally dependent on affordable crude oil. The oil crisis, among other internal factors, pushed Finland into an economic crisis and unemployment. Investments in design are precarious and easily fall victim to volatile economic and social conditions. If a company was fighting for its existence, design was an easy cost to reduce from the balance sheet.

In the mid-1970s, a cost crisis also hit the design-related industries. Renowned locomotives of the national design scene, such as Arabia and Iittala, undertook a series of organisational rearrangements in order to survive. This national condition led also to a flourishing of micro-enterprises in craft: when the major corporations cut down their recruitment of young designers graduating from the University of Art and Design, they had to find means of self-employment. Hence the late 1970s witnessed an upsurge in small workshops producing small-series craft-based ceramics, textiles, knitwear etc. On a more general level, the cultural currents had turned from international cosmopolitanism towards a romanticised idolisation of the countryside and the already vanishing rural culture. (See Chapter 5 on design-based rural regeneration projects in Finland and Norway.) In suburban kitchens, modernist furniture had to give way to reinterpretations of tables and benches paraphrasing models from the peasant past.

The 1970s also witnessed the return of history in design, especially in furniture for the living room. But designers did not reiterate the Finnish past. Instead, the market became permeated with living-room sets inspired by the immensely popular British TV series set in the vulgarly re-interpreted and romanticised Victorian era. The project of the modern appeared to be – if not dying – at least questioned. Thus we can speak of a tidal wave, a macro-level shift in the cultural understanding of the nation. The same phenomenon was surely reverberating elsewhere in the Nordic realm, with varying immaterial and material expressions.

Inside this larger context, the University of Art and Design tried to find its way into realising its fresh potential as a university. The right to grant licentiate degrees was obtained in 1981, with doctoral degrees following in 1983. But the harvest of post-graduate education came only to be reaped from the mid-1990s onwards. A major factor weakening the internal culture of the school was its diaspora: the Ateneum building, originally opened in 1887 for fine arts and crafts in the centre of Helsinki was in bad, even dangerous, condition. The government now decided to turn it into a museum of fine arts only. So in 1982, the University of Art and Design was pushed into multiple locations in the capital, which hindered the previously so important co-existence of all disciplines under the same roof. This was only regained in 1986, when the university was relocated to the thoroughly renovated former premises of the Arabia ceramics factory, from where large-scale ceramic production of sanitary equipment had moved away.

So the design university entered the 1980s formally strengthened by its university status and the rights this entailed, but internally weakened by the generally political and soon party-political tensions destroying fruitful, consensus-based collaboration. It had to a high degree lost the trust of the industrial sector, as well as that of the government and ministries. Being expelled from the school building originally raised for ‘arte utili’, the useful arts, was detrimental. This infrastructural ‘via dolorosa’ lasted up to 1986. How to rise from the shambles, how to get regroup, how to step up from the political trenches, how to generate trust capital within the school and among major economic and political stakeholders? And how to open up to fresh input from not only national collaboration but from the Nordic, European and global scene?

By chance, while writing this a book was released which paints a full picture of the path of the Central School of Applied Arts, later Institute of Industrial Arts, then the University of Art and Design, and finally the Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture from the 1980s to the present day: *Pro Arte Utili: Multidisciplinary Collaboration - The Key to Success* (Hyvönen et al 2021). Through that lens, we can see how the school rose from its ostracised position in the early 1980s to become a design university which in the recent QS World University Ranking was ranked as the 6th best in its category, globalwise.

## Note

- 1 On the development of Finnish design and design education since the 1870s see: Korvenmaa (2014), Huovio (1998, 2009), Korvenmaa (1999, 2011, 2012).

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## 9 Voices of Rebellion

### Interviews with Former Students at the Copenhagen School of Arts and Crafts 1969

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As part of the on-going project *Inflections of Design, Art and Craft – Debates and reforms at the Danish design schools since 1967*, we have initiated a series of interviews with former students at the two state-supported design schools situated in Copenhagen and Kolding. The goal of the project is to clarify how ideals of and debates on art, craft and design have formed the Danish design schools and their relationships to culture, industry and politics (Lees-Maffei & Sandino 2004). The project's starting point is to investigate the turbulent years around 1970, to trace how the debates and the schools developed and shaped the expectations of design today. This is crucial because the history of the Danish design schools and the underlying debates have neither been researched nor systematically documented. This investigation aims to discuss references to understandings of art and craft in Danish Design critically, and contribute to contemporary discourses about the role of design education in society. Radical changes in the societal tasks of design have been on the agenda since the late 1960s, and in order to fully understand the current situation, we need to uncover the trajectory of the debates and reforms.

In the following, we present extracts and preliminary insights from three interviews with active participants in the student rebellion at the School of Arts and Crafts (*Kunsthåndværkerskolen*) in Copenhagen, which at the time was under the umbrella institution, Copenhagen Technical Schools. Formally, it was named 'School of Arts and Crafts and Industrial Arts' since a merger with the Drawing and Industrial Arts School (*Tegne- og Kunstindustriskolen*) in 1967 but this full name was hardly used. The protests culminated with the rebellion's occupation of the Ministry of Culture on 3 March 1969 (Land og Folk 1969) (Figure 9.1) and later the principal's office at the School of Arts and Crafts on 1 May 1969 (Jyllandsposten 1969). These events caught the attention of the press and other media thus some written sources are available and investigated in Chapter 10. Apart from the descriptions in the press, our preliminary studies have shown that there are few and scattered written sources available in national libraries and the school archives. We therefore find it important to supplement the documents with oral testimonies from first-hand witnesses before it is too late, as most former students are now in their mid-70s and beyond. Both the educational culture and professional practice of arts and crafts and design had a rather low level of written communication, which makes oral accounts central. Internationally there have been other projects involving oral history in the field of arts and crafts and design (Oak 2006; Sandino 2006), but mostly with a



Figure 9.1 Occupation of the Danish Ministry of Culture 3 March 1969, where students from the School of Arts and Crafts and the Royal Academy School of Architecture joined forces to demonstrate for school reforms. Photo in the newspaper *Land og Folk* 4 March 1969, photographer unknown.

focus on professional design practice, and to our knowledge, no investigations of oral recollections of educational history and culture in design has been carried out so far.

## Method

According to Sandino, interviews are now a standard method for ‘eliciting information’ about objects, practices and cultures (Sandino 2006). On the other hand, oral history ‘focuses on people in order to understand them as subjects in the socio-historical contexts of the immediate past or the present’ (Sandino 2006, 275). In this project, oral histories were gathered, through a series of semi-structured interviews carried out between October 2020 and July 2021. The first took place at Design School Kolding – due to the location of the participant and long affiliation with the institution, and the two others were carried out in the participants’ studio workshops in Copenhagen. The three interviews followed the same list of issues but allowed conversations to diverge according to the participants’ different experiences and memories of the events.

The issues of the participants’ roles in the rebellion and their reasons for protesting were used to open the conversation. Then we moved on to talk about general

issues including the teaching, relation between students and teachers, management of the school and desires for change in the education. The third issue concerned the on-going debates and understandings of art, crafts and industrial production at the school. The fourth issue focused on relationships and divergences between departments and disciplines at the schools, from textiles, furniture and ceramics to graphic design and fashion, as well as external relationships to rebellious groups of students at the School of Architecture and universities. And finally, a fifth issue was raised on engagement in societal and cultural critique, production, consumption and the environment. Here the outcome of the interviews is reduced to three themes, the reasons for rebellion, desires for change in the curriculum and, finally, the question of societal criticism, where the interviewees turned out to be surprisingly reluctant to claim any higher goals for the rebellion. The recollections of involvement seemed to be rather in line with the later professional practices of the three participants.

In this study, oral history as a way of collecting information poses some challenges in terms of validity due to the long time span since the events took place and the very nature of the participants' memories. Many details have been lost in the individual recollections, and to spark memory we sometimes had to introduce images and information from archival sources. However, the interviewees also added to the written material with valuable personal descriptions of the events and their motives for taking part in the rebellion, aspects not present in the newspaper articles or other sources we have identified. Furthermore, and unexpectedly, one participant brought along original internal documents from her personal archive, thus giving unique insight into the students' thoughts and demands of dissolving the strict school system.

In the next paragraph, we introduce the participants before going into the interview data and discussing preliminary findings. The participants were recruited based on personal connections to one of the authors and knowledge of their personal roles in the protests. By chance, they actually represent three different carrier paths within design, art and craft, corresponding to the research focus in our ongoing project on the debates and reforms of Danish design schools since 1967.

### **Participants' backgrounds**

Birte Sandorff Lock was educated in the textile department from 1965 to 1969 and specialised in woven designs for industrial production. After refusing to attend the exam, she left the school to work as a freelance designer of interior textiles for Cotil and other Danish companies. She later started teaching at the Kolding School of Arts and Crafts, where she also became head of the textile department, and later principal of the school from 1996 to 2007.

Kirsten Dehlholm was educated in the textile department from 1966 to 1969 and specialised in textile art. Without completing the education and refusing third year exams, she left the school and started working as a freelance set designer for theatres. In 1977, she was one of the founders of the artist collective Billedstof Teatret and in 1985 she established the experimental theatre company Hotel Pro Forma. In 1995, she was awarded a lifelong grant from the Danish Art Foundation.

Helle Nybo Rasmussen was educated in the ceramic department from 1964 to 1969 (including one year of maternity leave) and specialised in ceramic murals and building parts, along with functional ceramic items. She refused to attend the exam and left

the school to establish a studio workshop and produce hand-crafted ceramics. Later in 1979–1980, she returned as a guest student and graduated with an exam. Besides her studio craft practice, she taught ceramics at a folk high school for a number of years.

### **Reasons for the rebellion**

A strong common theme we can identify from the three participants is their view of the school as an authoritarian old-fashioned institution with rigid rules and traditional ways of teaching. On the other hand, they also praise several aspects of attending the school and express satisfaction with some teachers. In the following, we will mainly focus on the discontent leading to the rebellion and only briefly touch upon the positive statements. Out of the three participants, Sandorff recounted the events in most details, and at the very start of the conversation she explains:

The rebellion that took place at the School of Architecture was very much an example for the School of Arts and Crafts – at the time, half of us had boyfriends at the School of Architecture. Kirsten Dehlholm was, so to speak, our pioneer, and was also the one who, kind of, gathered the different groups at the school and gave talks about it. A general discontent was accumulating regarding the fact that many old teachers were very, one might say, authoritarian and perhaps also rather stagnant, and we wanted much more ... School registers were kept, which meant that if you arrived five minutes late, you got a whole day of absence, and if you had a certain amount, you were expelled. That's just how it was. And you had six weeks in a year as a maximum which one could miss. Some of us also had children along the way, and if you wanted to continue you only had six weeks of maternity leave. But it was not called maternity leave, it was simply your sickness absence, and otherwise, you had to start the school year over again.

(Sandorff)

Dehlholm confirms the motives for the rebellion and puts it this way:

The reason for starting the rebellion was that ... we wanted out of Technical Society schools. That was ... vital to us ... And then we wanted to move to another ministry ... I do not remember if it was the Ministry of Culture, we wanted to be a part of. [She goes on to explain what she liked and did not like at the school:] ... I just loved being there, so I was there all the time. But I did not like that the teaching was so organised. It was organised in such small portions – an hour with that, and an hour with that, and an hour with that, and an hour with that – ... it was the only thing I did not like.

(Dehlholm)

So along with other students, she advocated for longer courses.

I liked long courses ... otherwise, I kind of did what I wanted. So, I loved it all, I loved being there, and I worked all the time. But then came '68, where there was rebellion everywhere. And I also had to get involved in that, so I started, and then I became the leader right away – just like that, of the rebellion. I always say it

was where I learned to speak into a microphone – so I have done that a lot. And we have probably been somewhat disorganised, but we had meetings all the time, and we occupied the principal's office, besides the Ministry of Culture – that I cannot remember – but occupying of principal's office I can remember. ... I really liked our teachers. The rebellion was in no way against them, and they also agreed with us. They also kind of thought it was right.

(Dehlholm)

Likewise, ceramist Helle Nybo Rasmussen was not pleased with a lot of things at the school, but also calls it 'a splendid environment':

As a more mature student I felt that the teaching was too rigid. You know, there was not much independence, as you would demand as a more mature student. Then you want to be respected for having your own opinions on certain issues, and this was, I suppose, one of the reasons why I got involved so much in critiquing the way of teaching. I had a great time, when I came into the school. I thought this was a splendid environment to be part of. It was like coming home, I felt. But there were a lot of things that were less satisfying. And I thought that the headmaster's style, the school bell, the grades, were kind of irrelevant, and I thought that the intellectual stimulus was too weak.

(Rasmussen)

Birte Sandorff also explains that:

The rebellion smouldered for many years at the school. We all knew each other, and it very much originated from the textile department, but we all had the feeling of 'what is going on?', and it happened everywhere in the different schools and universities, so it was, you could say, the culture of the time.

At this point, she pulls out an original document authored by the students in March 1969 and starts reading aloud:

We hereby refuse to approve the current type of exam; we hereby refuse to attend/prepare for the exam ... The form of the examination is highly restrictive and controlling work time has nothing to do with the working methods which otherwise underlie the basis of and reflect the students' results from the remaining part of the year. The students' diverse interests and talents are not taken into account by the examiners at the exams. The same criteria cannot be the foundation for all of the students' work. The technical quality of the work is judged separately from the artistic quality of the work.

(Sandorff)

Sandorff pauses to give an example of an exam in freehand drawing before continuing to read from the document:

The assessment is made by incompetent people. ...We hereby refuse to approve any kind of exam. Instead of an exam, we want an assessment of the work the student has done during the year – solely based on these works a student's position

can be assessed, for example in the form of a report or final statement. The students themselves must be present at the assessment. In a replacement of the final exam, we likewise want an assessment of the students' work which has been done during the year, along with a declaration of the fact that the student has followed the teaching of the school for the applicable number of years.

(Sandorff)

She stops reading and says:

And we all signed that. It was '69, and it was the year I was graduating. Kirsten Dehlholm was a grade under me, her whole class boycotted, but it did not have quite as high a cost [NB: since it was not their final exam] ... After all, it was us who boycotted, no other graduating students boycotted the exams like that. So, it was the textile department who did it, and it was clear that Kirsten was the pioneer, and she was well-spoken and went right to the point. The exam took place from 16 April to 1 May 1969. That is, the whole discussion had been going on in the spring. And the paper is from March '69, where we proclaim that we would not attend the exam.

(Sandorff)

Sandorff states that:

The ceramicists were the next to join in, and so it spread. But I think, when it was the textile department who were in front, it was largely from a certain pressure from Kirsten because she was a strong person, and she was a firm advocate for this. She was very politically engaged ... and was definitely a rebellious lady – and also one with a good head.

(Sandorff)

Referring to the rebellion, Rasmussen recounted that:

All the time, we had been criticising, how we had to take final exams in each discipline. You had to take an exam in wheel throwing and got a grade, your final grade, in wheel throwing as in all other sorts of practices. And you had classes, you know, until the end. Some of us said, this doesn't make sense to go to these exams and get those grades. ... So, we wanted to make a final project, each of us, and some of us did. It was at this point we refused to go to exam. I was part of this group. It was probably the only time it happened, that we refused in protest and didn't care about the graduation certificate. Because what was the use of it? We wanted rather to concentrate on the specialisation we had chosen.

(Rasmussen)

As explained further in the chapter 10 the strict rules and regulations were due to the school's position as part of the Copenhagen Technical Schools, administrated by the Ministry of Industry, Business, and Financial Affairs and the political framework for these schools. So, the primary goal for the student's rebellion was to become an independent school acknowledged at the level of higher education, and move to the Ministry of Culture along with the School of Architecture.

### **Boycott of final exams and wishes for the curriculum**

The boycott of the final exams, both at the textile and the ceramic departments, was driven by the desire to make individual graduation projects instead of the traditional series of disciplinary exams, as explained above by Rasmussen. There was a general desire for more openness to elective courses and individual specialisations. She recalls how the protests spread:

The Danish university students started to make noise, and this spread to us. However, we had already had the discussions about our wish to change the teaching, especially so it would not be split so tightly into disciplines. We wanted the educational programme to be a bit more open to choosing directions. Perhaps in third year, where you would choose, if you wanted to get educated in a more industrial or a more artistic direction. I myself was very interested in ceramics for buildings, and this was the direction I would have taken if I had the opportunity for that. It was this kind of thought and ideas, we had.

(Rasmussen)

Instead of taking the classes of all the disciplines to prepare for the exam, she chose, along with two fellow students of ceramics, to embark on her own graduation project – a ceramic building decoration:

... I made a proposal for a decoration to the Panum Institute of Medicine that was under construction at that time. It demanded all my energy, and I was pleased with that. Kjærgaard [the head of the department of ceramics] was furious because it meant that I didn't come to the classes in chemistry or all the other stuff. I did not come because I had to work on the decoration project, and I did complete it. And then we exhibited our projects. To my great triumph I even got the silver medal from the Schools of the Technical Society. This was a triumph because Kjærgaard was so furious at me as I joined the rebels and refused to take the final exams. It was a defeat for the school if you didn't want your graduation.

(Rasmussen)

Most Danish newspapers only mentioned the boycott at the textile department, however. The protesting students from Textile were expelled from the school, so this might be the reason for the omission of the ceramic students, as they seem not to have been expelled (Information 1969). Sandorff explains the situation at the textile department in detail, where five protested and chose to make individual graduation projects:

We were nine in the class and four who completed, which also contributed to a certain division in the class. And you were not self-assured either. I was weaving on a carpet, and halfway through the work, I was not allowed to appear at the school. But we went anyway, and Gjerløv-Knudsen [the principal] walked by and said: 'I do not see you.' But this was at the same time that the other students were attending the exam. So clearly some discussions arose, and it also gave a feeling, both ways, of a kind of betrayal or failure.

(Sandorff)

The desire for individual choices and specialisation did not only relate to the final exams but also to earlier activities during the course. Rasmussen explains how they wanted to be able to pick subjects and even take courses at the Royal Academy schools of either architecture or pictorial arts.

What we wanted was, as students at the School of Arts and Craft or the Academy, to be able to pick a subject and then, for example, go to the School of Architecture some months or half a year, if you had chosen a line where you thought it was exciting to study your subject elsewhere. You know, I was interested in this myself, because I thought, it was exciting to work across arts and crafts and architecture. This has always been of enormous interest to me, and I would have had tremendous benefit from being at the School of Architecture. We did, in fact, go to some lectures there.

(Rasmussen)

All three participants followed the direction they chose individually at the school in their later career. We asked if it mattered that they graduated without a diploma, and Sandorff answered:

No, and it never has. ... I was aiming to be a designer and thought 'I need to make a living from this'. So, I happily and calmly took my portfolio of things and walked down to Cotil, which at the time was a reasonably good design firm, and I was admitted and got off to a fantastic, privileged start, where I got into the Cotil interior collection together with Børge Mogensen, Lis Ahlmann, Bent Salicath, Vibeke Klint and various, also Kim Naver was a part of it. So, it was a somewhat privileged start I got, and it was probably also a bit like: 'I will show you that I can do well without it'. I have never been asked about it, and actually, I went to Mr Hornby [the director of the Technical School] after a few years and got him to make a paper saying: 'It is hereby confirmed that Mrs Birte Sandorff – I had gotten married – has been a student at the School of Arts and Crafts and Industrial Arts – it was not the name it had among us – in the department of textile printing and weaving: the textile school in the years from 1965 to 1969.'

(Sandorff)

So, later on she acquired documentation of her education, but was never asked for her final grades by any employers. As described further in the next chapter, the School of Arts and Crafts in 1973 became independent from the Technical Schools, now under the name School of Applied Arts. Graduation projects were introduced and grading was abolished.

### **Inspiration and critique?**

All three participants refer to the international student rebellion and other kinds of protesting in the period as inspiration for the local actions at the School of Arts and Crafts. They focus, however, mostly on their wish for improvement of their own education and do not refer much to the more general societal critique or political activism we know of from these years. When we asked if a critique of the consumer



society within design and crafts was prevailing at the school back then, Sandorff answered:

No, I don't think so, it came gradually because it is something which is followed by becoming more politically aware of the structure in society, and we were not so aware in my recollection. It was very much about something looking good, that was just how it was. Something significant also happened in the '70s, where one turns to the industry and operates much more with independent art. It kind of happened in our class where I chose the industrial strand. I think I did it because I had been in apprenticeship and experienced those who lived poorly and were underpaid and worked on hand-woven fabrics by the metre for *Den Permanente*, which could have been woven just as well industrially. I believed it was foolish and I wanted to be making a living from it. It was a must for me, I did not want to be working for such a starvation wage, as I had experienced. But, well, Kirsten went the more experimental, free path, and she did that already in her education.

(Sandorff)

Sandorff recalls how Dehlholm worked at the school with dyeing heavy ropes for textile sculptures, 'so the entire kitchen was coloured', and that her work to a great extent was very inspired by artistic movements in Poland and other East European countries (Sandorff) (Figure 9.2).

Despite the joint efforts of protest actions and the general rebellious atmosphere of the time, they wanted individual freedom the most and took different tracks. As described by Sandorff, Dehlholm took a much more artistic track, and central to her engagement was a frustration with the low status of arts and crafts in the hierarchy of independent art forms. When we asked Dehlholm about the engagement in societal critique on a more general level, she only refers to a critique of the juried art exhibitions, for example, the Charlottenborg exhibitions in Copenhagen, where her textile works were judged as works of arts and crafts, not as experimental art works.

So, when I submitted something made in textile materials, it came to the arts and crafts jury, and I rebelled against it. It was more in the arts. I was not so politically rebellious. ... it was centred around the arts. It was the fact that it was not an art education; it was an arts and crafts education – and it bothered me a lot. And concerning that point of view, Franka [Rasmussen, form teacher at the textile department] was entirely on my side; she was an artist herself.

(Dehlholm)

When we asked Rasmussen whether criticism of society and the societal relevance of the education played a role in the discussions at the school, she also answered that she didn't think they thought much of these aspects beyond the school.

Not really. It was, as I recall, not so much what came after the education or what to use it for we had in mind. This wasn't really what we were occupied with. It was rather the content of the teaching we thought was important to get improved. Of course, this was also about being able to get along afterwards, but I don't recall the issue of how to make a living when you were finished. It was no central issue.

(Rasmussen)



Figure 9.2 Textile installation by Kirsten Dehlholm, here together with her partner Otto Sigvaldi at the exhibition *Experimentell Nordisk Textil*, Röhsska Museum, Gothenburg 1970.

While Sandorff had more thoughts on how to get a living as a designer, Dehlholm and Rasmussen were more focused on the freedom of choice and individual, artistic development. There were close contacts to the more politically engaged student movements at the School of Architecture and Danish universities, and societal issues were on the agenda of the debates arranged by Dehlholm in March 1969. Rasmussen confirms that the societal issues were part of the rebellion, as at the other educational institutions, but believes they played a minor role at the School of Arts and Crafts:

Well, this was also partly the case with us, but in my memory, it was mostly about the craving to learn all that which wasn't available. There might have been some discussion, I didn't notice, about those kinds of issues. Well, there was societal engagement, of course. I remember mostly, however, issues about Bauhaus and the craftspeople being flushed out by the manufacturing industry's focus on machines, so the crafts should just get out of the way.

(Rasmussen)

Our three interviews show their value in the diverging expressions of interests in the student rebellion. There were, of course, very different interests and understandings at the school, and only some of the students took active part in the boycott. The three different versions here align with the trajectories of their later careers in, respectively, textile design, experimental performance theatre and studio ceramics. Their memories of the distant events and discussion might, however, partly have been shaped by this alignment, as they look back on a long and successful professional career. In this way, such oral testimonies cannot stand alone as historical evidence, and further sources are discussed in Chapter 10 on debates and reforms at the Danish design schools.

The most puzzling aspect of the interviews is the question of the role and level of political engagement and societal critique. All three participants tone down the many external agendas of protest, despite being active in the boycott and having a personal risk in their involvement, so they must have felt a strong motivation. Was this motivation only for improvement of the education and opportunities for individual specialisation, as they all emphasise? Or could there be a general bias to forget or tone down ideological involvement, when you look back on your own development as a young professional? When we look back at the history of protest movements and debate in the late 1960s and 1970s, political activism and societal critiques seem to play a crucial role, because this has been discussed so fiercely afterwards. Both collective memories and history writing on this period might also be too focused on this, so we should listen carefully to the individual recollections of our participants. The tight organisation of political movements and fixed ideological agendas had only begun in 1969 at the major educational institutions, and situations as well as agendas changed rapidly and radically across different contexts during the years around 1970, as Chapter 10 shows.

## Interviews

Birte Sandorff Lock, interviewed by Vibeke Riisberg, Anders V. Munch and Patricia Fie Nielsen at Design School Kolding, Dec 3, 2020.

Kirsten Dehlholm, interviewed by Vibeke Riisberg, Anders V. Munch and Patricia Fie Nielsen at Hotel Proforma, Copenhagen, May 17, 2021.

Helle Nybo Rasmussen, interviewed by Vibeke Riisberg, Anders V. Munch and Patricia Fie Nielsen at Frederiksberg, June 10, 2021.

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# 10 Harmful or Useless? Victor Papanek and the Danish Design Students' Protests

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*It is the job of the students together with their faculty to change the university; and, once changed, to preserve the university as an instrument of change for society at large.*

Victor Papanek (1970)

Victor Papanek dedicated his book, *Design for the Real World*, 'to all his students thanking them for what they had taught him'. He might have been thinking of both his American students and the Scandinavian students he met at summer schools and lectures at Nordic architectural and design schools in the late 1960s. The latter taught him lessons in design activism, user involvement and collaboration that showed new methods for industrial design, in order to prevent it from being the most 'harmful profession' – together with advertising – in the ways, it helped accelerate global consumption and waste, social inequality and pollution (Papanek 1971a; Clarke 2013). He lectured in Denmark several times from 1969 on, and moved to Copenhagen as a guest professor for one year in 1972/1973. So he both inspired and experienced the student protests and reform processes at the Danish schools of architecture and design during the most turbulent years. Some of his ideas on design education were published in Danish as well, and this makes it interesting to compare these ideas with the events, debates and reforms at the Danish schools.

The protests and reforms in Denmark were, of course, part of the broader international developments of student rebellion, youth movements and political activism. What makes this case interesting from an international perspective is a radical use of direct democracy at the schools involving students, teachers and principals, and the introduction of open student admission at the schools of architecture. Papanek felt inspired by Danish design and often referred to Danish examples of usability and simplicity, especially in his and James Hennessey's *Nomadic Furniture I & II*. His stay in Denmark, however, and his experience teaching at the Department of Industrial Design at the Royal Academy School of Architecture for one year gave him a rather different view of the Danish students and their involvement through direct democracy (Clarke 2016, 2021). In an interview shortly before leaving the Academy in August 1973, he expressed deep disappointment with the students. Even a comparison with kindergartens would be unjust – to the kindergartens – because the children showed

much more curiosity and discipline than the majority of the Academy students. He concluded with another comparison:

... if my daughter was ill, I would not send her to a doctor who is educated the way you are educated at the Academy. Imagine entrusting yourself to a brain surgeon who has spent five years studying the way you study here. It would be better to just put a bullet through your brain — less painful anyway.

(Papanek 1973)

The historical investigation of student activism, design critique and educational reforms around 1970 is an important reminder of an engaged criticism – which is much needed again – but also of many unfortunate experiences with educational experiments that we do not have to repeat, as Papanek's verdict indicates. The focus of this investigation is on how the students' desire to have an impact on society was articulated in their actions, and how it developed with the changes in the schools. Initially, many students felt that their education taught them useless skills with rare possibilities for employment, and they were far removed from the impact of changing the harmfulness of design consumption, as expressed during their debates and meetings. Though, the wish for more elective courses and open possibilities for individual development in the programmes was also on the agenda, see the interviews in Chapter 9. Some of the political experiments with direct democracy, however, turned out to be harmful to their education as well, especially at the School of Architecture. So, our main question is: On which issues did the paths of Papanek and the Danish students diverge?<sup>1</sup>

### Design schools and reforms in Denmark 1967–1976

In order to outline the reforms, understand the rebellion and related events an overview of Danish design and architecture schools around 1970 is provided as an introduction to this section.

| <i>Institution and location</i>                                                     | <i>Design departments</i>                                                   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Royal Danish Academy School of Architecture, Copenhagen                             | Industrial Design, Graphics and Furniture                                   |
| School of Arts and Crafts, Copenhagen (after 1973 The School of Applied Arts)       | Textile, Ceramics, Furniture, Graphics, and Fashion                         |
| Kolding School of Arts and Crafts, Kolding<br>Aarhus School of Architecture, Aarhus | Textile, Graphics, Fashion, and Ceramics<br>Industrial Design and Furniture |
| School of Interior Design, Copenhagen                                               | Interior design and Furniture                                               |

Our investigation so far has been focussed on the first three institutions on this list<sup>2</sup>:

**Royal Danish Academy School of Architecture** (*Det Kongelige Danske Kunstakademis Arkitektskole*) founded its department of furniture in 1924 and its department

of industrial design in 1957. The Academy followed a Beaux-Arts or art school tradition, and the polytechnical tradition only played a marginal role in Danish design and architecture.

**School of Arts and Crafts** (*Kunsthåndværkerskolen*) was under the Copenhagen Technical Schools, but the staff were a mix of subject-specific teachers, architects and artists. Its curriculum and statutes were influenced by industrial organisations and rules and regulations were decided by the Danish Ministry of Industry under the system of vocational education.

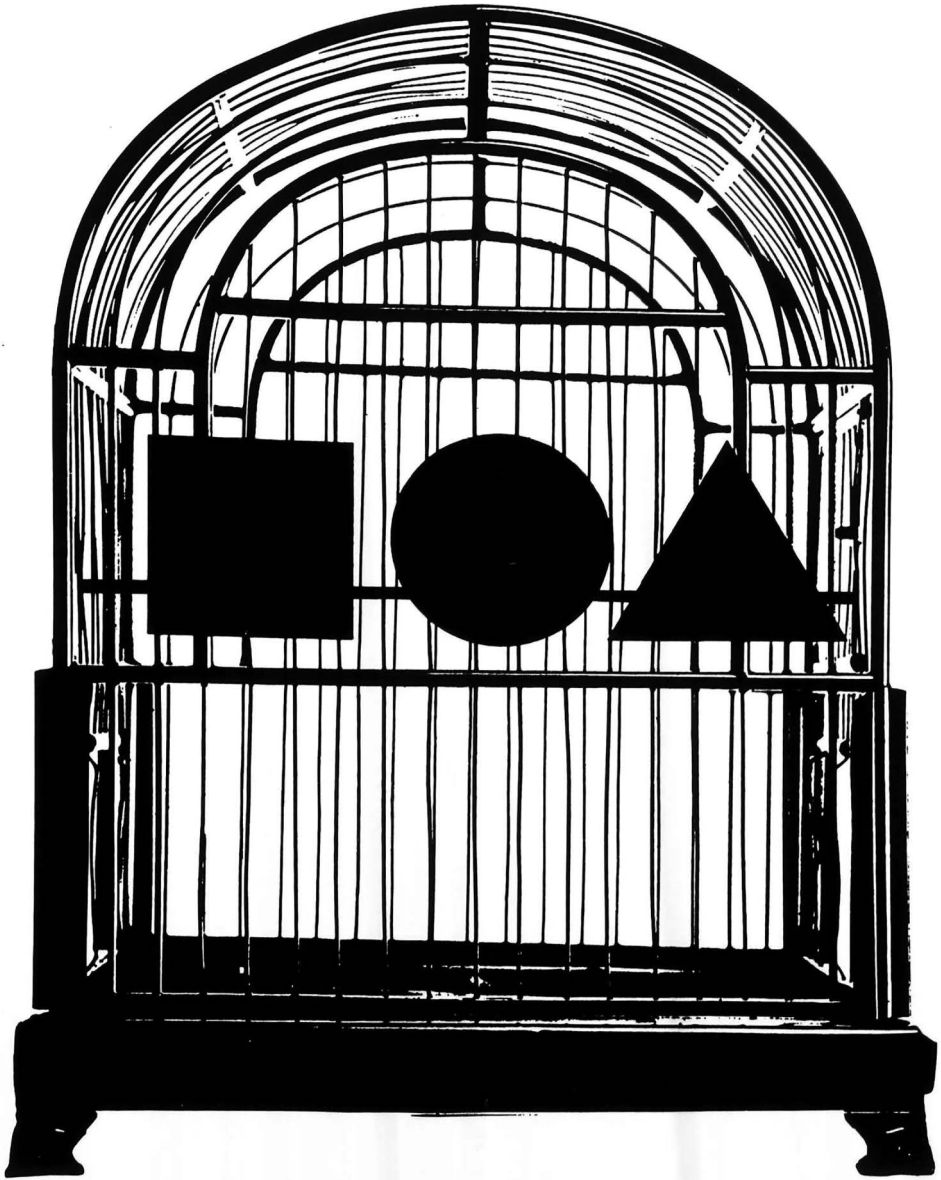
**Kolding School of Arts and Crafts** was established in 1967 as part of the local technical school under the same rules as the Copenhagen school.

In 1967, the School of Arts and Crafts in Copenhagen was merged with the independent School of Drawing and Industrial Arts (*Tegne- og Kunstindustriskolen*), originally a women's school, which mainly had programmes in graphic design and fashion by this time. These two schools were combined under the provisional name, *Kunsthåndværker- og Kunstindustriskolen*, that is, 'School of Arts and Crafts and Industrial Arts', but usually just called the School of Arts and Crafts. The provisional name signalled a long transitional period with standing committees working on new statutes and more contemporary curricula until it was changed to the independent School of Applied Arts (*Skolen for Brugskunst*) in 1973 under the Ministry of Education. This long process was affected by impatient students, critical of both the quality and relevance of their education. A strong desire of both the principal and the students throughout this period was to elevate the schools to an institution of higher education with research, as happened in the other Nordic countries during the 1970s, see Chapter 8. In Denmark, only the Royal Academy School of Architecture had obtained this higher status around 1950 (Millech 1954).

It was at the School of Arts and Crafts and the School of Architecture in Copenhagen that the most radical protests and educational experiments took place. The relatively young principal of the School of Arts and Crafts, appointed in 1967, Ole Gjerløv-Knudsen (1930–2009), also wanted reforms and agreed with much of the students' criticism. But he had a difficult job in changing the statutes of the school, obtaining independence and new educational regulations, maintaining funding from the Ministry of Education and negotiating new forms of education with protesting students. The official, annual reports of 1966/1967 and 1967/1968 featured both his own reflections on the need for reform and debates by students and other stakeholders. The front cover of the latter report stated a subtle critique, picturing a locked bird cage with the three primary, geometric forms symbolising the school and the Bauhaus ideals in the cage (Figure 10.1). On the back page of the report, the door is open and the cage empty. The report from 1968/1969, the very year of protest actions, however, gave less voice to the critique. The actual student actions were only described briefly:

The problems linked to future educational regulations have caused an array of principal activities among the students, including a week of debate, a group of interest, a protest march, a forest of protest signs and the boycott of exams.

(Gjerløv-Knudsen 1969)



*Figure 10.1* Front cover of the annual report of *Kunsthåndværker- og Kunstindustriskolen* 1967/68. Archive of the Royal Danish Academy Library.



## The student rebellion

A brief history of this student rebellion begins at the School of Architecture. Taken as a whole this school was much larger than the School of Arts and Crafts and the architect students collaborated closely with students from Sociology and Psychology at the universities, who were the leading groups in the Danish student rebellion. In March 1968 different manifestos on open study programmes led to a three-day debate meeting and a Students' Plenary (*Elevforsamlingen*) was established to obtain a stronger influence on the school. An official board of students' representatives (*Elevrådet*) was dissolved by the students themselves in both the School of Architecture and the School of Arts and Crafts due to their mistrust in representative democracy. The students of the much smaller School of Arts and Crafts did not establish a similar permanent plenary but took action to invite state officials, industrial leaders and design professionals to a debate on the societal role of design and the quality of their education in February 1969. This was rather effective, as the state agency of vocational education offered permanent positions for six new heads of programmes in the following days. However, both the principal and the students continued negotiations independently, and a group of students went directly to the Minister of Education. The students also skipped classes for a week and arranged plenary debates with invited guests from industry, as well as activists in politics and research, to discuss professional conditions and societal challenges.

Independence from the narrow vocational school regulations and the status of higher education was central to the students of the School of Arts and Crafts. Thus, on 3 March 1969, they joined forces with students from the School of Architecture at a demonstration in front of the Danish Ministry of Culture, where representatives from the School of Architecture were attending a meeting. The demonstration developed into an occupation of the Ministry for one hour, which got the attention of the public media (Figure 9.1). The protests continued later with a boycott of exams in April at the School of Arts and Crafts as explained in the interviews, Chapter 9. As a result, five students were expelled from the school according to the regulations, and this led to renewed demonstrations, including the occupation of the offices of the principal and the director of the technical schools. The general demands of the students were the abolition of admissions tests, grades and exams as well as influence on curriculum and faculty positions.

Apart from the boycott of exams, the school administration was quite open to negotiations, as they were working on new regulations themselves. Unofficial study boards with equal representation of students and teachers were established at both the School of Arts and Crafts and the School of Architecture in the spring of 1969. Many teachers, especially the large group of young assistants without permanent contracts, agreed with the students' critique. At the School of Architecture, they even agreed with the critique of the admissions tests, and as a result, they were cancelled, allowing for open, free admission to the study programme. As one of the most radical achievements of the Danish student rebellion in general, the two schools of architecture in Copenhagen and Aarhus had open admission between 1970 and 1977. The number of students quickly tripled, but the state funding did not increase. And as experiments with new kinds of teaching or open, individual study activities flourished, this developed into a rather volatile situation. Despite collaboration and equal representation in the school board, the Students' Plenary insisted on direct democracy and held on to its

stronghold in many ways, for example, through plenary meetings at the departments in order to influence curriculum and faculty positions.

The archives from this period are scant and there seems to be neither continuous annual reports nor school magazines during the most turbulent years of 1970–1972. Interviews with former students and teachers are needed as a supplement to archival sources, and Chapter 9 presents interviews with three participants in the student rebellion. The archives contained one issue of a school magazine from the Kolding School of Arts and Crafts called *The Sprout*, Spring 1971, which contains extensive comments on the situation. There is an article by the young teacher Ole Sørensen called 'An Attempt at an Analysis of the Arts and Crafts Education Today and Proposal for Alternative Problematics'. It states the problem with vocational training stemming from an apprenticeship in crafts at a time when students are more mature, experienced and critical towards bourgeois societal organisation. He concludes:

A highly relevant new kind of thinking in design education must rely on: confidence in the intentions and skills of the student, confidence in the disciplinary competence of the teacher, huge flexibility in the planning and implementation of the course of study, the student taking responsibility for the benefits of his/her study, the elimination of useless exams, openness in all questions concerning the well-being of the school, democratic collaboration between all parties involved in the administration and practice of the school.

(Sørensen 1971)

The schools of arts and crafts did not introduce open admission as the schools of architecture did, but they did create more flexible regulations and embarked on many social and psychological experiments with teamwork and individual creative emancipation. In 1973, the Copenhagen School of Arts and Crafts became independent from the Technical School and was reorganised under its new name, School of Applied Arts. The student activism, however, continued.

### **Papanek and the students' agenda**

In January 1969, one month before the first debate event initiated by the students at the School of Arts and Crafts, Papanek visited the school and lectured on design for disability and social design. He returned in June for the third SDO Summer School, 'Human and Environment II', arranged by the Scandinavian Design Students' Organisation and held at the School of Arts and Crafts in Copenhagen (Lie 2014, 2016). Papanek was engaged in all the summer schools and developed his ideas on collaboration and user participation together with the students (Clarke 2013, 2021). A year earlier at *Konstfack* in Stockholm, he had lectured on his ideas on design education. In Copenhagen, the lectures and group work focussed again on different human environments, and Papanek developed his famous *Copenhagen Chart*, a flow chart sketching all the challenges and possible collaborations of the designer through distinctions between the false and genuine needs of all kinds of people. SDO was established in 1966 as a platform of discussion on design education and societal critique. It had members from School of Arts and Crafts, the School of Architecture and later the Kolding School of Arts and Crafts, so it had a role on the Danish design

students' protests. Ida Kamilla Lie and Kaisu Savola have investigated the sources of SDO through student members (Lie 2014; Savola 2018).

It is also vital to understand the student revolts of this period in the context of the broader geopolitics of the Nordic region. When the Danish Furniture Manufacturers' prominent magazine, *Mobilia*, published a polemical article *What to Design and Why* by Papanek as self-proclaimed social designer – the year before his guest professorship at the Royal Academy – it placed on its front cover a low-technology design artefact aimed at the Global South: a discarded vehicle licence plate re-fashioned into a moveable stove on which, the accompanying editorial declared, a Mexican 'family cooks all of their meals' (Papanek 1971b). Other self-assembly and alternative technology designs included a co-design project with James Hennessey, namely a portable cooler that could be powered by a windable handle, for distribution in Lesotho, South Africa. The design's radicalism resided in its adaption for local use: 'Instead of using imported Styrofoam, we can build a box-form and line it with old newspaper pages [...] the design has been given to UNESCO' (Papanek 1971b).

It was no coincidence that, a year prior to becoming a popular figure within the Danish design fraternity, Papanek had been featured in the same journal discussing 'TVs for educational uses in the Third World [...] and power sources for emerging nations,' further asserting that 'design must always be operative, that is, socially relevant and responsive to change. Design cannot avoid being a social, political and revolutionary tool' (Papanek 1970). These appeals to the politics of inequality within the Global South and engagement with development agencies, although coming from an American designer-activist, appealed to the contemporaneous discourse (and controversies) regarding the extension of newly imagined Scandinavian welfare models into recently independent countries (for a broader discussion of this theme see Clarke, 2022). Reports of the period, for example, an overview titled the 'Scandinavian Development Agreements with African Countries' (1971) published by the *Scandinavian Institute of African Studies*, Sweden, emphasised 'the readiness of the African countries to enter into bilateral agreements with Scandinavian countries on account of their non-colonial past and above all their resolute stand in the decolonisation of Africa and apartheid' (Widstrand and Zdenek Červenka 1971, 18). While post-colonial scholars have pointed out the 'myth' of the non-complicity model of Nordic and Scandinavian colonial history, as a facet of social design and student activism in the late 1960s and 1970s, the Global South (or 'Third World') issues, and particularly the politics of Pan-Africanism extended the revolts in design and architecture departments way beyond intrigues of individual design schools.

Here we will focus on Papanek's own statements on design education and compare them to the debates and events in Denmark. Some of his thoughts on design education were published in *Mobilia* in 1970 under the English title *An Alternative to Sterility*. The magazine made four-language issues, and the Danish had a slightly different heading: 'On Design and Design Education'. We assume this text is rather close to the issues he discussed with the students in the SDO summer schools and at the School of Arts and Crafts in Copenhagen. It sums up an agenda of actions to democratise design education:

We must also (as we have already begun) democratise our process by: (a) Including students as full voting members on all levels of the design program, dealing with education, research and service; (b) establishing a policy-generating faculty-student team; (c) bringing students in to help us elect new faculty and evaluate

present faculty through a basis of free choice; (d) having students help us in writing future curricula; (e) having both faculty and students spend more time on constructive mutual criticism and self-criticism; (f) having students and faculty together demonstrate the relevance of design to our society.

(Papanek 1970).

In the spring of 1969, the students at the School of Arts and Crafts had joined new study boards with the same level of representation as the faculty. They were engaged in decisions on both courses and policy and were involved in electing new faculty the following years. While they seem to have had a fair vote in decisions on curriculum, it is difficult to determine how they may have used it based on the sparse archival sources available. The debates seem to have been the most successful element, arranged by either students or young part-time tutors. And this continued when the school got its independence in 1973 and was renamed as the School of Applied Arts. One debate seminar arranged by a teacher of ceramics, Ursula Munch-Petersen, with speakers from the profession and industry as well as critics, was praised in an issue of, 'The School Magazine' (*Skolebladet*) in 1974. The same teacher also developed material for a course called 'Societal Conditions and Culture' (*Samfundsforhold og kultur*) together with artist Erik Hagens (Munch-Petersen & Hagens 1974). This was also an early demand by the students that the role of their profession in society should be addressed and discussed in the curriculum (Figure 10.2).

There was also a demand for elective courses and interdisciplinary projects, so that students could choose more freely, develop individually and thereby attain more



Figure 10.2 Plenary evaluation of the first-year thematic workshop with the assignment One Year at Hesselø (a small Danish island), 10–14 November 1975, The School of Applied Arts, Copenhagen. Archive of the Royal Danish Academy Library (also reproduced in *Skolebladet* Dec 1975), photographer unknown.

complex professional profiles to handle societal challenges. The sources are more tacit on the resulting activities. Some students made their own projects outside the schools and demanded having their products, for example, a film on workers' conditions, accepted for evaluation. The school arranged thematic weeks, where all programmes worked with the same overarching theme to train students in interdisciplinary work and problem-solving for broader societal challenges. Whether these themes were suggested by the students or faculty is unclear. But one issue of the Copenhagen school magazine in 1975 is dedicated to the critique of such a one-week first-year project for all new students. The statement of purpose from the school regulations was even printed on the front cover to remind everyone of their mission (*Skolebladet* 1975). The most critical student states in the magazine that he quit the project on the day of its initiation – in order to write his critique. The faculty had to constantly explore new ways to teach, as the students had no clear consensus in their critique. One of the authors of this chapter started at the School of Arts and Crafts in 1971 and found the tutors a bit lost in how to meet the demands of a new kind of students. Psychologists were invited to do group exercises in a week-long workshop, which some of the students strongly objected to. Images from this event show various attitudes and postures that reveal the mutual opposition of both teachers and students to any established norms in a learning situation – staged on wooden crates for Danish aquavit (Figure 10.3).

When comparing the list of changes suggested by Papanek in the 1970 article to democratise design education, quoted on page 148–149, with the archival sources, it is clear that the first four goals of student empowerment and participation in decisions



*Figure 10.3* Debate, first-year workshop, the School of Arts and Crafts, 1971. Archive of the Royal Danish Academy Library, photographer unknown.

on educational programmes were reached at the Danish schools. This was an important improvement to Danish design education. Regarding the latter two goals concerning collaboration with faculty, though, it seems evident that the wish of 'having both faculty and students spend more time on constructive mutual criticism and self-criticism' succeeded, but somehow at the cost of mutual demonstration of 'the relevance of design to our society'. Both faculty and students ended up spending endless amounts of time on 'criticism and self-criticism'. In Papanek's later critique of the Danish students, based on his experiences at the Royal Academy Department of Industrial Design in 1972/73, he scorned the endless plenary meetings that never resulted in any actions or changes. Ideological discussions were repeated endlessly with a new audience at each meeting. Papanek refers to how he asked several times for a representational organisation of the democratic processes to secure some continuity, but the students voted against it. 'This is neither Marxism nor direct or representational democracy. This is adjusted Fascism – that is the Marxist expression for this concept' (Papanek 1973). The students favoured 'direct democracy', and their leaders misused it to produce a permanent emergency situation where any deal or decision could be cancelled. This was not what Papanek had imagined with his demand for 'including all students as full voting members'. And when he asked the students to work together with him on mutual projects, they left. His ideas for a more critically engaged design education were in parallel with many experimental activities at Danish schools, but the study culture did not quite turn out as he had initially hoped:

The biggest lie told to students is, that they are in school here to learn to 'make a living'. In fact, they are here to start a life-long process of education, in which some of us can sometimes help them for a time. While there are discrete skills in design, any increase in 'professionalization' is so outdated as to be ludicrous. A series of intensified undergraduate workshops should allow the student to create his own cross-disciplinary mix from the arts, social and behavioral sciences, etc.

(Papanek 1970, up)

The question is whether the Danish students shared his ideal picture of higher education – or ever had the proper conditions to pursue it. Despite his appreciation of Danish design, Papanek might not have realised how different both the academic and craft traditions, as well as the institutional situation of the schools, were from his polytechnical background (Clarke 2018). In fact, the rebellion at the School of Arts and Crafts as a tiny school and part of the vocational education system started out with the demand for learning in order to 'make a living' as professionals. Danish design culture did not experience the same professionalisation as the US in the 1950s and 1960s. The declared ambition of this epoque might have been for higher education, driven by critical engagement and artistic experiments. However, the high ideal of 'a life-long process of education', assisted by visionary teachers such as Papanek, in many cases turned into fragmented activities around individual emancipation or political organisation, neither fitting into the interdisciplinary teams of social intervention from Papanek's vision nor the job positions of the Danish design industry.

The two major design schools in Denmark, in Copenhagen and in Kolding, did obtain the level of higher education and status as research institutions as late as 2010, so this turned out to be a rather long transition. And this was at a time where any

ideas of open admission were long gone, and the influence of students as well as teachers was diminished by a university reform in 2003. Despite his fierce critique of the students in 1973, Papanek kept close connections to Denmark and inspired the continuous development of sustainable design, participatory design and social design.

## Notes

- 1 This is a work in progress as sources have been sparse and incomplete, and an earlier version of this chapter has been presented at ICDHS 2020 (Munch et al. 2020).
- 2 The School of Interior Design (*Skolen for Boligindretning*) under Frederiksberg's Technical School, also in Copenhagen, opened in 1934 and merged with the School of Applied Arts in 1990 into Denmark's Design School (now merged with the Royal Academy under this name). We have not yet found any documentation or comments regarding either reforms or radical protests there. The second school of architecture was opened in Aarhus in 1965 (Poulsen 2015). We have not looked into their archives.

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Part III

# Transforming Practices



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# 11 Designing Together

## On Histories of Scandinavian User-Centred Design

*Maria Göransdotter*

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The concept of ‘Scandinavian design’ has had a strong presence in design history, establishing the Nordic countries’ international reputation for designing sensible and elegant everyday goods since the mid-20th century (Halén and Wickman 2003; Fiell et al. 2017). However, there is another kind of ‘Scandinavian design’ that holds an equally strong conceptual presence in much of contemporary design practice and design research, while being practically invisible in design history. This latter ‘Scandinavian design tradition’ refers to a way of designing, rather than to a certain aesthetic. This collaborative design approach – often with political and democratic aims – emerged in the Nordic countries around the 1970s, bringing designers and non-designers together in the process of designing (Simonsen and Robertson 2013). While ideas and aesthetics of ‘Scandinavian design’ have been critically re-visited in Nordic design history (Fallan 2012), the histories of the ‘Scandinavian design tradition’ as referred to in user-centred and participatory design practices remain largely untold.

Considering the substantial impact that Scandinavian user-centred design continues to have in contemporary collaborative design practices, the absence of attention to its origins in design history is noteworthy. Why is it that user-centred design – with rare exceptions – has not been included in design history? To be fair, this is not only an issue for Nordic design history (Auricchio and Göransdotter 2021). There may of course be several interlinked explanations for these design historical gaps. Let us here consider two probable reasons: Design history has often tended to favour outlooks relating to the meanings, impacts and aesthetics of designed things, rather than how designing itself has changed in terms of methods or meanings. Another possible – and reasonable – explanation could be linked to a lack of design historical source materials. Where would one find archives and publications from which to draw forth histories that go beyond *what* changed in terms of design outcomes, and that speak to *why* and *how* collaborative design methods were actively sought and developed? The efforts made to re-think, and re-shape, what designing could be, through seeking methods for collaborative design have left few written traces explicitly addressing this as design methodology development. In the following, video recordings of public talks and interviews with design practitioners active in Sweden in the 1960s through 1980s form a starting point in the search for histories of Scandinavian *designing*.

### Bringing ‘users’ into design

Since its emergence some 150 years ago, design has continued to make change through materialising things that alter the ways we behave, think and engage with the world. Simultaneously, how designing itself is done has changed, as have expectations on where design takes place and what its results can be (Valtonen 2020). In Swedish design history, attention to the turn towards user-centred design practices in the 1970s has mainly focused on design results. From the perspectives of ergonomic, inclusive and safety-oriented design (Pagold 2006; Brunnström 2019; Wickman 2018), some of the products designed – coffee pots, hand tools, cutlery, baby carriers – have been included in design historical overviews. Less visible, however, is the radical expansion of design approaches and methods that also re-shaped ideas of designing in terms of the roles and engagements of designers and users.

In Scandinavia of the late 1960s and early 1970s, design explorations sought new ways for designers to engage with non-designers in processes of designing. The search for new methods supporting collaborations between designers and users did of course not spring forth only in the Nordic countries. In the formation of industrial design in the mid-20th-century United States, for example, designers’ attention was directed towards people both in their roles as ‘consumers’ with the intent of addressing needs and wants to design attractive products for increasing sales (Loewy 1951/2002) as well as in their capacities as ‘users’ from ergonomic, social and cognitive perspectives (Dreyfuss 1955/1974). In European contexts of design education (Archer 1976/1979; Maldonado 1958), questions of how designers could or should engage with users of products and environments were an integral part of aims to redesign designing itself as a systematic and methods-based practice, rather than one based on the individual designer’s ideas and aesthetic competencies.

The issue of if and how designers should collaborate with experts from other fields as well as with users became highly present in the UK-based design methods movement. With references to the increasing complexity of design situations, the design methods movement sought to understand and describe ‘the new design methods that have appeared in response to a worldwide dissatisfaction with traditional procedures’ (Jones 1970/1992, xviii). This included finding methods for how designers could work together with non-designers. Indeed, ‘Design Participation’ was the theme for one of the early conferences, held in 1971 (Cross 1972), in the context of developing systematic design methods and design research. The conference presenters debated what it might mean for designers if users were to be invited into processes of designing. Conference coordinator Nigel Cross pointed to the probable blurring of roles between designers and laymen as the design process opened up for the inclusion of ‘ordinary people’:

Many designers view the prospect of user participation in design with some concern, while most laymen probably still see design processes as secretive and mystical. To explore some of the possibilities and problems, the Design Research Society sponsored an international conference on ‘Design Participation’, in September 1971, which brought together a wide range of people whose interests overlap in this area. The result of the changes underway and reported at the conference may well be to blur the current distinctions between ‘designer’ and ‘user’: designing may not always continue to be the exclusive prerogative of professionals.

(Cross 1972, 6)

In the Nordic countries, attention towards such changes in relationships between designers and users, and the associated methodological challenges, can be found already some thirty years earlier. Tensions between designers' intent and users' active input (or observed behaviour) were negotiated, practiced and discussed in Sweden's early 1940s housing reform initiatives (Göransdotter 1999). How people *actually* lived, and how they engaged with things, furniture and everyday environments could, and should, influence the design of these: but how, and how much? A systematic search for new ways of designing everyday tools and behaviours – from ergonomic kitchen knives to equal parenting practices – together with expert users was present already in the domestic work rationalisation movement propelled by socio-political and feminist aims in the 1940s and 1950s (Göransdotter and Redström 2018). These methodological explorations later came to directly influence methods development in Swedish user-centred design in the 1970s, as to how user studies were set up, documented and approached in design situations that moved beyond what traditional or established design methods at the time could support (Stott 2021). Let us, therefore, take a closer look at contexts of design education and industrial design practice in the late 1960s, from a perspective of changes sought in how, for what and for whom design was done.

### Education and frustration

Industrial design was a young field in Sweden in the 1960s. Some industrial design offices working on commission for various companies had been set up, with inspiration from American industrial designers like Raymond Loewy or Henry Dreyfuss (Zetterlund 2002; Brunnström 2004). Other industrial designers worked in-house at companies such as porcelain manufacturer Gustafsberg and power tool producer Atlas Copco (Brunnström 2004). However, while industrial design was a budding professional field, no full-fledged industrial design education existed in Sweden at this time. Students interested in industrial design during the 1960s would enrol in the metal course at the craft-oriented school Konstfack in Stockholm, as this also included an orientation towards form-giving in relation to industrial production (*industriell formgivning*).

The design courses at Konstfack were directed towards teaching skills in crafts-based and artistic techniques (Wickman 1994). Solid foundations for working with form-giving in metal, wood and ceramics were taught, but no training was provided in handling new technologies and materials – such as plastics – nor in working with industrially oriented processes. Though 'industrial formgiving' was mentioned in the school's promotional material for the metal course, it was headed by silversmith masters teaching their craft in a traditional way. Students entering the metal course to study the new and 'largely unknown field' of industrial design found the education lacking, as noted by designer Hans Erich who enrolled at Konstfack in 1962:

[it was] not so much industrial design but more metal craft in general, and silver- and gold-smithing in particular [...] which initially made me feel duped, and a bit disappointed since I came there with the hope of learning to give form to industrially mass-produced objects of all kinds. Instead, I had to endure weeks, if not months, of standing in the workshop banging a hammer on various metals, mainly copper. It wasn't at all what I had dreamt of and was very far removed from what I wanted to do.

(Erich 2008, 17.00)<sup>1</sup>

Not until the late 1960s did Konstfack gradually begin to introduce specific industrial design strands, adding to existing courses. From 1967, students were offered an elective weekly session in industrial design (Wickman 1994). In the module, design challenges were situated in real-world contexts, introducing team-based work and collective discussions between students and teacher. The contrast between the industrial design sessions and the crafts-based artistic courses was apparent, and further fuelled a critical stance already expressed by several students towards educational frameworks and content. Many were frustrated with a design education seen as out-of-tune with changes in society as well as in the industrial design profession. Designer Maria Benktzon who studied in the textile course at Konstfack in the late 1960s, recalls:

We were assigned to do things that we did not find important. We were supposed to make jewellery out of mink fur. When there were children with impairments who couldn't eat [on their own] for example. When we saw that contrast – it was an eye-opener for us.

(Benktzon and Juhlin 2008, 06.56)

The frustration expressed by Konstfack students towards a design education perceived as out of date was not only a Swedish phenomenon. In the late 1960s, design students in Scandinavia made a joint cause of critiquing the traditional craft-oriented design educations and calling for other, more socially responsive, approaches to design that would make designers 'more relevant to society' (Robach 2010; Lie 2016). Design students coordinated efforts within the Scandinavian Design Students' Association. The association ran a series of workshops across the Nordic countries with invited guest lecturers, to collectively explore new ways to go about designing. One such seminar was held in Stockholm during the summer of 1968, focusing on 'People and the environment' (*Människa och miljö*). Several industrial designers were invited to the seminar, but it was the lectures held by American-Austrian designer Victor Papanek that received the most attention both during and after the workshop weeks. In his later publication of *Design for the Real World* (1971), first published in Swedish as *Miljön och miljonerna* (1970), Papanek's message was the same as during the Stockholm seminar: designers must take action on 'design for need' which meant addressing matters of sustainability and accessibility rather than designing for increased consumption in liaison with business and industry (Clarke 2021).

The Konstfack seminar in the summer of 1968 became a watershed moment in the views of design for many of the participants. A special issue of the design magazine *Form* (1968:10) reported on the workshop sessions and the work carried out, and especially highlighted the need for 'designing for disability'<sup>2</sup> as the most relevant area for designers to work within. This special issue of the journal included material that designers could use in study circles to better gain an understanding of the built environment and of disabled persons from an accessibility point of view. Maria Benktzon described how this seminar and its focus on design and accessibility for her 'became the start of beginning to work in completely other areas' engaging with work environment issues, ergonomics and in the 'handicap field' (Benktzon and Juhlin 2008, 6.56). During their final year of studies, as a direct result of wanting to explore more socially relevant areas of designing, Benktzon and co-student Britt-Marie Persson began working together with external partners in projects on designing environments for

children with cerebral palsy, and eventually presented a joint degree project on therapeutic toys and training rooms for children with arm prostheses (Benktzon 2009). Benktzon later became one of several industrial designers actively researching and developing user-centred methodologies, establishing 'inclusive design' and ergonomics as prominent areas in Swedish industrial design practice.

The turn in Swedish industrial design towards user-centred approaches has been acknowledged in design history as one incorporating ergonomics, especially in contexts of 'design for disability' (Wickman 1994; Lindkvist 2003; Brunnström 2004). Some of the products developed in these contexts are regularly included in Swedish design history overviews, then often showcased as notable design objects, awarded prizes or showcased in museums: the SAS coffee pot (1987), the cutlery series for people with hand and arm impairments (1978) or the Gustafsberg bread knife with a slanted handle (1973) (Figure 11.1). The main attention in these historical accounts is placed on the products as examples of function-based, mass-produced design objects embodying a new aesthetic and a new ethos of designing for disabled persons. In these narratives, the development of new methods aimed to support designing for and with users is seldom given much focus. As the historical attention is directed towards specific objects, these tend to be portrayed as having inherent artistic qualities, where for example the cutlery for persons with reduced hand and grip functions can be described as 'a work of art in plastic' (Brunnström 2004, 317). The importance of these objects thus becomes expressly linked to their formal qualities, as they are 'awarded design prizes and are exhibited in design museums around the world, not least because they, besides being ergonomically functional, have had a beautiful form' (Brunnström 2004, 321).



*Figure 11.1* A test model of the 1973 Gustafsberg bread knife in use. Photo provided by Maria Benktzon.



An aim for designers engaging with issues of accessibility was indeed to actively work with aesthetic considerations – visual and formal – to make aids and tools for disabled persons more attractive: ‘One of the reasons to work in this field was to make these things appealing to everyone, since these things looked horrific’ (Benktzon and Juhlin 2008, 28.00). At the core of the user-centred design that began to take shape in Sweden in the 1970s was a search for how to actually work as a designer when the starting point was not initially form or aesthetics. The ambition was not to disregard matters of form, but to shift the starting point of designing from aesthetics to foundational matters and meanings of use. As Maria Benktzon later stated:

It sometimes annoys me [...] that one during the 80s claimed that our generation was not interested in issues of aesthetics and that we had a one-eyed view on function. Aesthetics was the starting point, but we mastered that. Functional demands, on the other hand, we knew nothing about. That is why we threw ourselves over this subject.

(Benktzon quoted in Wickman 1994, 287)

An ambition was to design things that would not only support autonomy for disabled persons but also make products that would appeal to a broader range of consumers – thus also providing revenue for the producers. But the main issue was to figure out how to be able to conduct research and obtain knowledge that would be directly applicable in making design decisions. Initiatives among a young generation of industrial designers, already thoroughly trained in working with formal and material expression, thus became directed towards identifying new methods and processes of designing. How would one practice design if the starting point were to be the needs and conditions of the people who would be *using* products and environments?

### **Redirecting design practice**

Many young designers entering the field of Swedish industrial design in the late 1960s and early 1970s were driven by an ambition to re-shape the industrial design profession. Designing, to them, ought to be about dealing with issues of real and crucial importance for industry and society alike and not a practice associated with superficial product styling and marketing. However, this did not mean that these designers shunned any commercial or industry connections. On the contrary: the ambition was to establish a new kind of relationship between designers and industry, where commercial and financial considerations were integrated with making substantial societal and work environment-related impact. Industrial designer Bengt Palmgren, a 1972 Konstfack design graduate, frames the Swedish context as one where industrial designers struggled to have the kind of impact they hoped for:

We must know, that industrial design was mainly unknown to industry and society. [...] In these days, in the 70s and 80s, nobody knew what we were talking about; we tried and tried to convince people to be able to do projects. [...] We wanted to do something more. [...] We wanted to do something that was good for people, we wanted to contribute to society, we wanted our profession to be used for something, that people could benefit from it. [...] Industrial design was at that time about visual appearance. [...] It was more or less only about physical

objects. Isolated objects – like in a museum, almost like a piece of art. [...] We came in late, and only in a restricted part of the process. We thought that was horrible. Everything was decided. Our hands were tied.

(Palmgren 2015, 03.23)

This frustration prompted the establishment of several small design offices in the late 1960s, gathering designers aiming for a societally and industrially more engaged industrial design practice. These were, among others, Ergonomidesign<sup>3</sup> and Designgruppen – both started in 1969 – and A&E design, founded one year earlier, which all came to focus on exploring how to systematically include aspects of use, ergonomics and function in designing (Pagold 2006; Wickman 2018). The designers setting up these offices did so from a position of critiquing and wishing to change the professional practices of designers. Shifting towards new design practices included ambitions of altering the relations between designers and production industries, by introducing more extensive and strategic roles for designers earlier on in product development processes. This included arguing for the necessity of redirecting design practice towards engaging with use and users through seeking and developing new design research methods. Working in multidisciplinary collaborations, new methods were brought into designing with the ambition to gather information about and from people in their everyday life contexts. A substantial part of this work entailed figuring out *how* that even could, and should, be done. Allotting time and money for designers to engage in extensive explorations and user studies was not something that companies commissioning designers in product development work were interested in. A crucial question was therefore how to find funding for the design methodological development work needed?

## Researching methods

Much of the development of user-centred design methods in the 1970s was made possible through funding in the form of research grants, in combination with new legislation (Benktzon 2009; Palmgren 2015). The late 1960s and early 1970s was a period when various state-funded bodies were set up to support research. New legislation in the areas of work environment and accessibility and autonomy for disabled people led to an intensified work with supporting research projects in these areas. For designers, this meant that the Swedish Center for Working Life (*Arbetslivsinstitutet*), the Swedish Handicap Institute (*Handikappinstitutet*) and Swedish Planning and Rationalization Institute of the Health and Social Sciences (SPRI, *Sjukvårdens och Socialvårdens Planerings-och Rationaliseringsinstitut*) came to provide project funding for research into areas important for the formation of user-centred designing. This funding gave unprecedented possibilities for extensive research and prototyping of ergonomic and user-oriented methodologies in design work that resonated with designers' ideas of expanding design practice, compared to what was possible in commercially commissioned projects:

What also was new, totally new in this area, was that design research projects that we actually carried out was funded by official authorities. There were not many, but there was actually a few. [...] So we actually had money to do something which gave us suddenly a totally new freedom that we hadn't had. As consultants

we were restricted to do what the industry told us to do. But if we had our own money, we could actually start research projects and discover things that we couldn't do otherwise. And what also happened was that these research results could be offered to the industry and we could by that get a quite another role. *We* could actually go to the industry and ask *them* and ask them to do something for us. We became a commissioner, or a client instead of someone just doing what they ask us to do.

(Palmgren 2015, 10.10)

Ergonomidesign was one of the consultancies that repeatedly and successfully applied for research funding for studying ergonomics, accessibility and user involvement in design. Much of this early work came to lay the foundations for user-centred and collaborative design methodologies for decades to come (Benktzon and Juhlin 1981). Henrik Wahlfors, one of the Ergonomidesign founders, had in the late 1960s, together with Sven-Eric Juhlin (in-house designer at the porcelain and plastic manufacturer Gustafsberg) secured funding from the newly formed Handicap Institute. This Institute held national responsibility for increasing everyday accessibility and autonomy for disabled persons, not least through providing tools and aids free of charge. This was a crucial part of the legislation, and funding schemes, that directly enabled designers in Sweden to explore new areas and new collaborations in cross-disciplinary settings together with disability organisations, producers and users.

The aim of the project collaboration between Wahlfors, Juhlin and the Handicap Institute was to develop a grip tong that would be produced and provided free of charge, in line with the recent Swedish legislation. In designing the grip tong, the designers worked together with two young men, both wheelchair users, asking them to provide their suggestions for how they would like the tool to work. The result of this user-attentive process resulted in a first version of the grip tong, produced at the Gustafsberg factory (Figure 11.2).

Maria Benktzon came onboard the project when was asked to evaluate the grip tong, as she moved into the shared office space at Ergonomidesign. Her evaluation found that the grip tong was difficult to use for other than young, strong, male users, as it was not at all adapted to persons with smaller hands or limited hand strength

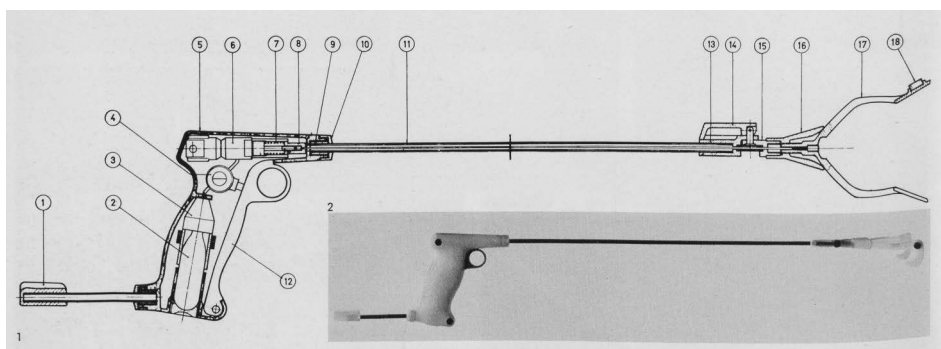


Figure 11.2 Prototype and technical drawing of the first iteration of the Gustafsberg grip tong, with the pistol grip, 'estimated to come into production in 1969–70'. Photo: *Form* 1968:10.

such as arthritis. Also, the pistol grip solution for opening and closing the tongs was something that certain users, especially ‘elderly women’, reacted strongly against due to its weapon-like design (Benktzon and Juhlin 2008, 13.58).

This early project came to direct attention towards the methodological difficulties of how to work in constellations of designers, experts, producers and users to set up studies of use and users that would be meaningful: ‘This was our first lesson: that one must choose a user group that is broad enough, and not only design for oneself and for likeminded people’ (Benktzon and Juhlin 2008, 12.49). But how was one to go about finding methods that allowed designers and non-designers to envision what the future use could be of something that did not yet exist? Interviewing or asking a few people about what they might prefer tended to give inadequate or biased responses. As Ergonomidesign associate Bengt Palmgren, recalls:

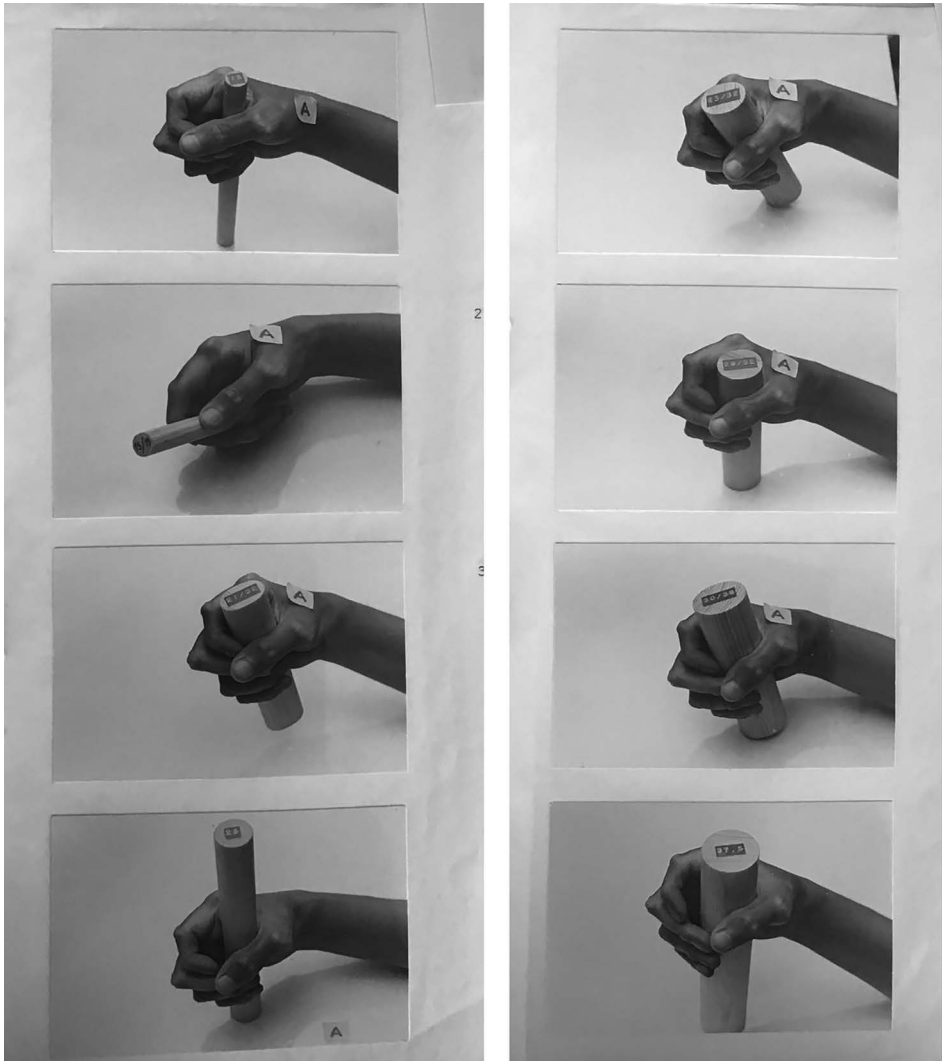
We tried to learn as much as possible from those people who used those objects that we should design. We discovered very quickly that this is very difficult, that it is impossible, to ask a person ‘how do you want your future toothbrush or something... how would a perfect cup of tea be... You can’t get an answer: what would a perfect typewriter be? People can’t answer that kind of question. It is impossible. But we tried to involve them in the development process. This was participative design but we didn’t know that it had a name. We didn’t know that it was that. We did it far before it had a label.

(Palmgren 2015, 07.15)

This shift in designing based on user engagement rather than only on the designer’s intent highlighted the shortcomings in existing design methods and approaches. In the design project of the grip tong, for example, there simply were no previous studies of hand grips or the abilities of persons with hand and arm impairments on which to base the design and development work. To develop a knowledge base for designing, a follow-up project to the grip tong was therefore proposed by Henrik Wahlforss and funded by the Handicap Institute. The aim now, was to explore methods of mapping how persons with impaired hand and arm functions actually could use their hands and arms, and what their needs and wishes for everyday activities were – and to let that work become the foundation for deciding how to continue the design work. This became the Handles and grips project (*Handtag - grepp*), carried out in 1971–1972, which became foundational for much of the subsequent design work carried out by Ergonomidesign in the following decades and well into the 21st century.

Not only did the project result in a thorough compilation of ergonomic studies focusing on hand and arm movement, grips and limitations from perspectives of everyday situations and actions such as eating, drinking, dressing and so on. It also introduced methods that have become established as fundamental for user-centred design practices such as observations and engagements in context and iterative prototyping with users.

At the core of the project were field studies in which designers engaged with people in their home environments. Rather than conducting formal interviews, the thirty-two persons with limited hand and arm function engaged in the project carried out their everyday activities while designers observed, asked, measured and took photos. Benktzon and Juhlin had made a set of tangible objects such as knobs, rods and other shapes for people to interact with to measure ergonomic limitations and possibilities



*Figure 11.3* Test materials developed to explore forms and dimensions of grips and handles with users. Photos provided by Maria Benktzon.

of hand and arm movements and grips, but also to directly engage users in discussing and evaluating these from their own experience (Figure 11.3).

The studies resulted in the decision to take the central everyday action of preparing and having meals – cutting bread, using a fork, holding a glass – as starting point for designing a series of eating, drinking and cutting utensils. The designers themselves later described this in a research report:

The basic method in the project is based on interviews and practical tests with test materials, according to the previously applied model (handles/grips). The practical tests could most adequately be described as an experimental

ergonomic development work together with users – the test persons – where functional exploration models (*provmodeller*) are tested in as realistic a use-situation as possible. It is not enough to only 'look' at or 'feel' a product. It is first when the test is realistic that the evaluation becomes meaningful and yields useful results.

(Benktzon and Juhlin 1981, 7)

Developing a series of cutlery was based on extensive testing of different prototypes of grips, angles and dimensions together with the participants – but this iterative testing sprung from the discontent that users expressed when they were presented with the designers' first final concept (Figure 11.4):

In the Handles and grip project we came to the conclusion that the cutlery we designed met all the requirements placed on them. But when we tried them in the field, a young arthritic guy said that even if the doctor said that they were good for him, he wouldn't use them. So, we started over and applied for funding, now also from *Folksam yrkesskadestiftelse* [an insurance company research foundation targeting work injuries], and made test models with handles in different dimensions and eating parts in different angles. And then you could try which combination worked best. And then one would test-eat. We brought with us ham, potatoes and peas to everyone.

(Benktzon and Juhlin 2008, 19.39).

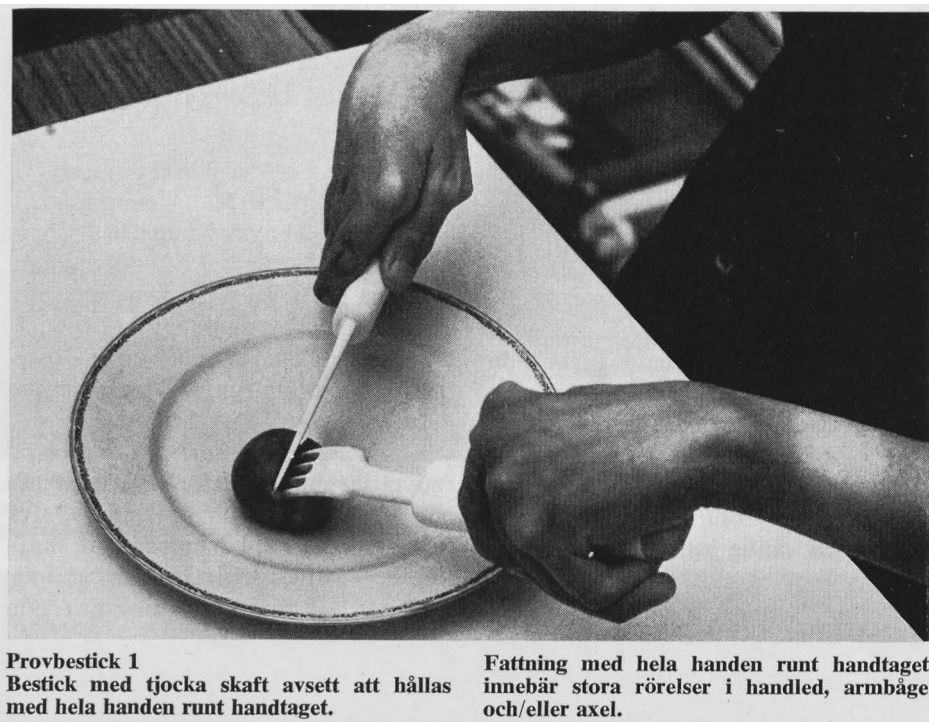


Figure 11.4 User testing with cutlery prototypes in the Handles and grips project. Photo: Form 1973:10.

The work carried out together with disabled persons and with experts in other fields than design – such as work therapy and medicine – in the development of different aids and tools led to the development of methods that have become core to practices of user-centred design. This included user studies and interviews with people in contexts of their everyday life, iterative prototyping with people in situations of use, and mock-ups and prototypes of environments and products:

We discovered that we have to make proposals in the form of models and mock-ups and have the users look at that. In the rear view mirror it sounds very self-evident but it was a huge step forward at that time.

(Palmgren 2015, 9.30)

Through introducing mock-ups that could be tested, evaluated and discussed with people in various situations, focus came to be on how things worked rather than on how they looked. The introduction of mock-ups and iterative prototyping as ways of engaging non-designers in processes of designing was a methodology that, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, also migrated from the realm of industrial product design into the area of design and development of computer software and tools.

### **Towards participatory design**

Turning to participatory design, the core idea is that designers and users should work closely together: design should happen *with* or *by* people rather than *for* people (Simsensen and Robertson 2013). Participatory design in Scandinavia grew out of political and research-based initiatives that strove to include skilled workers and a range of stakeholders in the design of new computer-based work tools (Ehn 1988). The aim to include multiple stakeholders – designers, expert users, producers, managers – extended the idea of user-centred design to include non-designers in making design decisions that also went beyond situations of use. Issues of power relations between designers, producers, management in the organisations investing in computer tools and employees working in these settings were central to the democratic aims of participatory design.

In Norway, Sweden and Denmark participatory design – initially in Sweden called ‘the collective resource approach’ – evolved in close collaboration between researchers, mainly in computer science and sociology, and trade unions in the late 1960s–1980s (Sundblad 2010). In these trade union-led initiatives, methods and processes aimed to bring researchers and skilled professionals together in collaborative processes of designing. Inspiration came from action research applied as a method of supporting workplace democracy while also developing computerised tools. Perhaps it is the fact that participatory design arose in an area – computer and IT development – not traditionally seen as directly pertaining to one where (product) design takes place, that has led to it being more or less invisible in most narratives of Scandinavian design history (Göransdotter 2020). But within the context of the development of computer-based workflows and tools for specific work sites, approaches and methodologies formed that are today highly present in collaborative and participatory design, explicitly referred to as the ‘Scandinavian design tradition’. In the following let us, therefore, take a closer look at how the trade-union politics and the development of computerised

work tools are connected to user-centred design and thus more than relevant for design histories of collaborative designing.

### Union-driven design initiatives

In a Nordic context, the formation of participatory design practices was directly sparked through initiatives by trade unions. As computer-based technologies and tools began to enter the workplace in the 1970s, trade unions had a strong voice in the design and development of systems and applications. The late sixties had seen legal reforms in the Nordic countries aiming towards industrial democracy, specifically in relation to socio-technical developments. New legislation gave trade unions legal rights and an acknowledged position in influencing any decisions leading to radical changes in the organisation of work. The introduction of computerised work tools clearly fell under this legislation – but as knowledge of computers was far from widespread, the first issue to deal with was how to know what would be possible and plausible to expect from the new tools and technologies.

Between the years 1971 and 1973, the Norwegian Iron and Metal Workers' Union (NJMF) therefore ran a project aiming to incorporate workers' knowledge of and perspectives on the introduction and development of computers at work. Kristen Nygaard, a computer science researcher engaged in the NJMF project, has described its starting point in union-led discussion groups in the late 1960s, situated 'within a broad, democratic movement genuinely representing the interests of the workers' in which the members 'came from a wide range of sectors in the society: Job shops, chemical plants, transportation, white-collar work, hotels and restaurants, the public sector.' (Nygaard 1992). Out of these discussions came the conclusion that there was a lack of knowledge about computer technology 'based upon the world view of the union members, emphasising solidarity, industrial democracy, safe employment, safe working conditions, decent wages etc'. The decision was then made by the Norwegian Iron and Metal Workers' Union to initiate a research project aiming to address the need for mutual learning between researchers and workers, bringing in Nygaard as a researcher based at the Norwegian Computing Center to collaborate with four local unions in industries distributed across the country (Nygaard 1992).

Fundamental to the NJMF project were the collaborative ways in which workers and researchers together explored methods of building and sharing knowledge and for doing development work together. On a national level, this influenced the 1975 Data Agreement between the Norwegian Trade Union Congress and the National Federation of Employers, 'stating the right for the trade unions to be informed and participate in the development and introduction of computer-based system impacting upon their working conditions' (Nygaard 1992). This new legislation set a non-negotiable framework for which parties could, and should, take part in all decisions regarding significant changes in workplace conditions.

The formal and legal aspects relating to influencing the introduction of new workplace technologies were crucial to the role that trade unions played in the formation of Scandinavian participatory design. Also in Sweden, legislation played a decisive role in catalysing collaborative, union-driven, design initiatives. With the introduction of the Swedish Joint Regulation Act of 1976 (*Medbestämmandelagen* 1977), the power balance between unions and employers in determining workplace conditions



required new formats for integrating union representation in formal decision-making processes (Ehn 1988, 256–258).

When the new Swedish legislation was set in motion, the question of *who* should participate in the negotiations of developing computer systems and tools concerning working conditions and workers' rights was therefore fairly straightforward. What was not a given, though, was *how* these computerised tools should be set up, or what specific qualities of work they should support. New processes for design and decision-making were needed to handle knowledge sharing as well as decisions in the realm of computers, and the legal conditions postulated that these should be set up in ways that enabled active participation from unions, industry leadership and the computer developers alike.

It is in light of this context that the 'collective resource approach' was introduced as a framework for exploring participatory processes for developing new computerised tools, and for strengthening workers' power and influence in decision-making on strategic levels. While not initially described as 'design', but as 'research', the methods and processes developed in these projects have eventually become firmly established as fundamental to collaborative designing.

### Negotiating power

The UTOPIA project was seminal in the development of collaborative design methods, and is often referred to as emblematic of the 'Scandinavian design tradition' in participatory design. It was funded by the Swedish Center for Working Life (*Arbetslivscentrum*) and ran between 1981 and 1985. The context was the transition from manual layout and typesetting work to the introduction of computerised layout and graphic/visual processing tools in the printing industry. The aim of the project, which engaged researchers in Sweden and Denmark in collaboration with the Nordic Graphic Worker's Union, was to collectively develop computer-based tools to support skilled work within text and image processing in newspaper publishing. The site for the project was the Swedish national newspaper *Aftonbladet* in Stockholm, with technology support by the computer supplier Liber/Tips (Ehn 1988, 327f).

The UTOPIA project aimed to bring designers and graphical workers together in developing and designing computerised tools. The design work strove to establish new roles and relationships between designers, users and stakeholders through the very process of proposing what future work situations could be like for newspaper workers and what would count as relevant as 'skill' and 'expertise' in computer-supported work.

Designing with 'skilled workers' had the aim of not only creating qualitatively well-designed tools for professional use but also of excluding non-skilled workers from entering the graphic design or newspaper printing profession (Bjerknes and Bratteteig 1995) and of safeguarding and strengthening union members' position in work negotiations with industry managers. Within the participatory design projects of the 1970s and 1980s, design researchers actively sided with unions and workers as opposed to management in the context of workplace democracy. Participation, in terms of deliberation aiming to strengthen unions on both a local and a national level, was believed to lead to increased union-level cohesion, in joining forces towards employers in the work-related political and technological developments. This tied into expressly emancipatory ambitions to change the power structures in the workplace

through opening up the design process as an arena for collaboration, contestation and negotiation. The methods developed therefore aimed to create situations where such negotiations and contestations could be supported in the design process.

### But is it design?

But how does one design future things, workflows and changing professional relationships in a completely new technological context? This was long before off-the-shelf layout software and personal computers, laser printers and scanners. To probe what future computer-supported graphic work might be like, mock-ups of computers, screens, interfaces and support tools were introduced in the UTOPIA project, from 1982 and onwards (Bødker et al. 1985). These could be made of simple materials like cardboard boxes and hand-written paper labels used to represent and prototype how different computerised tools might be used in various stages of graphic work (Figure 11.5).

What would a workflow between a journalist and a typographer be, when layout suggestions are iterated through using screens, input devices and laser printers? Using mock-ups in early design process explorations could, as the design researchers in UTOPIA explained, ‘encourage active user involvement, unlike traditional specification documents. For better or worse, they actually help users and designers transcend the borders of reality and imagine the impossible.’ (Ehn and Kyng 1991, 172). In the context of transitioning to working with computerised technologies in different areas of industry and the public sector, a new way arose for design to come about. At the time, though, the question was if what was being done was considered to be design at all?



*A mock-up of a laser printer “reinventing” the old proof machine.*

Figure 11.5 Mock-up of a laser printer in the UTOPIA project. Photo: Ehn and Kyng 1991.

At the time, in the 1980s, several of the researchers engaged in the UTOPIA project came from the fields of computer science and sociology, and were not considered to be designers – since designers tended to work with giving form to three-dimensional things, not to computers or work processes. In order to envision future work tools and processes, a design space for participatory collaboration must be created. The incorporation of working with mock-ups and iterative prototyping, borrowed from user-centred industrial design, made it possible for designers, users, managers and various stakeholders to share knowledge and negotiate decisions together in designing.

The introduction of mock-ups into the process of collaborative designing to ‘imagine the impossible’ in computer-supported work was a method directly imported into this context from the user-centred design approach developed by industrial designers focusing on ergonomic and inclusive design. Pelle Ehn, one of the researchers within the UTOPIA project, has described how he in the early 1980s came in contact with the work of Ergonomidesign. He was not particularly excited about the products as such, until he learned about the methods applied in designing them: ‘knowing the story of how it had been done changed my understanding of what problem it was there to solve’. (Ehn 2017b, 39.00). Realising that the ergonomic products were the results of new types of user-oriented methodologies involving situated observations and the iterative testing of mock-ups and prototypes together with the people who were going to use them, led to the decision to try out the same methods to support the sharing of tacit knowledge in envisioning futures through design in UTOPIA.

Using mock-ups in the UTOPIA project led to a breakthrough in the collaborative design efforts (Ehn 2017b, 32.33). As long as trying to design future work tools had been based only on blueprints and systems descriptions, it had been difficult to get a real dialogue or joint designing to take off. However, as prototypes and mock-ups were introduced, this promoted collaborative work through hands-on engagement with the mock-ups, in which design researchers, graphic workers and journalists together could enact future situations and actions, as a basis for further explorations and for making joint design decisions (Ehn 2017b, 40.35) This was a way of designing that was based on showing, doing and trying out different possible ideas together, rather than designers proposing a design concept and asking users to evaluate them while the designers observed. Taking this collaborative methodology developed in ergonomic, user-centred product design into the new context of human-computer interactions, the researchers argued that *also this* indeed was design:

The use of mock-ups described here resembles the way industrial designers use them. However, our focus is on setting up design games for envisionment of the future work process. In contrast to industrial designers, we focus more on the hardware and software functionality of the future artifacts and less on the ergonomic aspects. Industrial designers often make very elaborate aesthetic and ergonomic designs of keyboards, but the display is black, and no functionality is simulated or mocked-up. If these different capabilities could meet in a participative design effort, an even more realistic simulacrum could be created. If the future users also actively participate in the design, the mock-ups may be truly useful and a proper move toward a changed reality. But are mock-ups really professional design artifacts? Yes, they are.

(Ehn and Kyng 1991, 175)

The turn towards participatory design meant that non-designers were either engaged in design work as users who in different ways provided feedback to designers' processes, or as participants included in the very processes of designing on basis of their expertise (Ehn 2017a). This pushed a reframing of designers' roles and responsibilities in design from individual artistic form-giver, to collaborative coordinator designing for or with people increasingly viewed as 'users' rather than only 'consumers' as the relational qualities or differences between designers and non-designers shifted. Compared to user-centred product design, where designers clearly were responsible for designing and users gave input for designers to work with, these roles were increasingly blurred in the participatory design that took shape in contexts of computerisation. Here, as ideals of democratic deliberation and co-determination were strong, designing became a responsibility and activity shared between 'designers' and 'expert users'. Many of the collaborative methods developed thus aimed at overcoming or bridging differences between the roles of 'designers' and 'users' in regard to expertise, experience, presence and decision-making in the design process acknowledging 'users' as experts in processes of design and product development (Lindh-Karlsson and Redström 2016). With time, this has come to expand the ideas of what the field of 'design' can encompass, in what kinds of contexts design can take place, as well as notions of who – besides people with a design education – could and should take an active part in practices of designing.

### Histories of designing together

The examples in this chapter demonstrate how a shift in design historical outlook, from products to practices of design, sheds light on new aspects relevant to consider in histories of Scandinavian design. The Swedish design histories presented here only scratch the surface of situations and contexts that gave rise to user-centred and participatory design methodologies and approaches. Still, already from these examples, it stands clear that it is not a lack of historical source material that could explain why these narratives have not previously been made present. Rather, the reason that these have remained unseen, is simply that we design historians have been looking for things other than methods, practices and processes when making histories of design. Shifting the outlook towards searching for how and why *designing* has changed, there are definitely sources and materials to be further explored. Besides video recordings and interviews with designers active in the 1970s and 1980s, several publications from the time also account for much of the research carried by designers out in search of new methods for designing. Indeed, much of the early explorations in developing new user-centred design methods and approaches were published in core design publications already in the 1970s (Benktzon and Juhlin 1973a, 1973b). The fact that these influential shifts in design practice have not entered narratives of Scandinavian design history thus seem to have more to do with a lack of attention to practices and processes of design, than with an actual lack of historical sources. Regarding participatory design, on the other hand, publications are seldom to be found in publications or archives of design, but in contexts labelled as computer science (Bødker et al. 1985) or such. To discern histories of *designing*, it is necessary both to look for material in other places than those immediately associated with 'design', and to be attentive to the mechanisms which called new ways of designing into being.

The re-shaping of designing in 1970s and 1980s Scandinavia was fuelled by socio-political events that resonated with design-internal initiatives striving to redefine the design profession. Developing an experimental and research-driven design methodology was made possible through available research funding for addressing issues of disability and accessibility, work environment and ergonomics. Designers who were successful in obtaining such funding could – independently compared to in commercial projects – dive deep into research projects exploring what an alternative design practice might be, and how designing might be thought and done otherwise. Designers collaborated with activists and organisations working with disability, autonomy and equality, and trade unions engaged in political negotiations of power and influence in the workplace. The explorations of how knowledge and experience from fields external to design could be transformed into methods and approaches for hands-on design practice gradually led to establishing new ideas and definitions of what ‘design’ and ‘designing’ were. In this new understanding of design, collaboration between designers, users and other stakeholders was key to making a strong socio-political impact through design while *also* strengthening the position of designers in commercial industrial contexts.

Socio-political and financial reforms opened up new design spaces, where the forces calling new ways of designing into being were very different from what had until then been the case. But at the time, in the decades around the 1970s, it was not self-evident that the design research work conducted at Ergonomidesign, or in the UTOPIA project, should even be considered to be ‘design’. As participatory design emerged, it largely did so in areas that – at the time – were not considered to be included in the realm of design at all. Bearing in mind that much of the development of user-centred design methods once took place in contexts considered completely external to design, we might ask ourselves which forces, frameworks and situations that should be relevant to consider as spaces where tomorrow’s design practices are taking shape today?

What design can do, and what can be designed, always stands in relation to what designing is understood to be, in terms of its practices as well as its world views (Redström 2017). Shifts in what design and designing is about have, historically, not only called for developing methods to understand how people go about using or experiencing things. These changes have also brought about different understandings of the subject matter of design, from focusing on giving form to material things towards redesigning the design process itself. Design is not only about making and proposing things that could make a difference to how we live, act and think; it also inherently makes and proposes ways that design itself could be different. This transitional character of design typically is at its most visible in instances where established ways of doing design no longer suffice for handling the situations at hand.

The search for new design methods in late 20th-century Scandinavia took place in contexts where the existing roles and knowledge of designers did not suffice for grappling with the issues at hand. Opening up design spaces where designers and non-designers could share knowledge and experiences required re-thinking what designing could be, and who should be involved in design processes. User-centred and participatory design methods emerged in very specific situations, where dissatisfaction within design – how design was done, what the role of the designer entailed – merged with overarching societal and political concerns and issues.

The methods developed for designing together, many of which today hold a strong presence in designing, are in themselves designed: they are shaped in ways that

support certain kinds of processes, in order to achieve specific types of results. As user-centred and participatory design today expands to include more-than-human agency and stakeholders, whether algorithms or multi-species entities, the methods and approaches of collaborative, human-centred design seem to become increasingly difficult to apply. But designing together in collaborative constellations is perhaps today more crucial than ever. In light of the impact of design in the escalating climate crisis and matters of global injustices, an awareness of the fact that designing itself is historical needs to be brought to the fore. Without attention to the historicity of designing, foundational ideas and values deeply embedded in methods and approaches might unintentionally work to counteract the re-direction towards just and sustainable futures sought in many emerging practices of designing together (Dilnot 2015). Histories from perspectives of designing can contribute to presenting such core ideas embedded in current design practices, providing conceptual spaces where designing together can be thought, and done, differently.

## Acknowledgements

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## Notes

- 1 My translation – as are all translations to English of Swedish-language publications and interviews in this chapter.
- 2 In this chapter, terminology related to disabilities and disabled persons largely follows the historical use of terms and concepts when so motivated (in quotes, names of organisations etc.).
- 3 Ergonomidesign was the name of a company founded by Henrik Wahlforss in 1969 (or 1971, depending on the source quoted), which was an expansion of the firm he had founded in 1965. The Ergonomidesign office came to host the firm Designgruppen. As the two companies increasingly worked together, in 1979 they formally merged into Ergonomi Design Gruppen, which later changed name again to Ergonomidesign. Even later, the company rebranded as Veryday, which in 2016 was incorporated in the McKinsey group.

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# 12 Between Craft and Commerce

## Norwegian and Danish Textile Design in a Time of Change

*Tone Rasch and Trine Brun Petersen*

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### Introduction

The late 1960s was a time of upheaval for the textile and fashion industry in the Nordic countries. Improved production technologies increased the garment industry's output leading to saturated markets. At the same time, customs duties on clothing were lifted, which led to increased imports and competition, especially after the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) was founded in 1960. This development challenged the fashion industry's traditional ways of operating, leading to a fundamental restructuring, which changed the focus from production of staple wares to design, marketing, and branding. In this process, a new commercial persona emerged, the fashion designer, who came to occupy a central role in the new system of provision and acquisition. The process was not, however, without challenges, and the period saw debate on the collaboration between the creative designers and the commercially oriented manufacturers. After a survey of the efforts to approach fashion within the clothing industries in the 1950s and 1960s, this chapter will explore further developments up to the 1970s based on two cases: Norwegian weaver Sigrun Berg (1901–1982) and Danish textile printer Grete Ehs Østergaard (born 1938). Both women were trained as textile artisans but went on to work with the textile industry. Together, the two cases illustrate the rapid and radical changes in the textile and fashion industry in the 1960s and 1970s, and how this affected the role and professional identity of the textile designer.

### The Norwegian and Danish textile and clothing industry

In the 1950s, the clothing industry had recovered from the restrictions of the war years. New means of mass-production meant that output was higher than ever before. The garments were primarily sold on the home market, which was protected by import restrictions. During the 1950s and 1960s, the political focus changed from protectionism to market liberalisation, and the import restrictions were gradually lifted. Both Denmark and Norway joined the EFTA in 1960. In 1973 Denmark joined the European Common Market, while Norway chose to stay outside. The market liberation led to increased competition in the domestic market for both countries. Clothing manufacturers found themselves facing an increasingly volatile market, characterised by falling prices and unpredictable consumer preferences (Figure 12.1).



Figure 12.1 Workers packing underwear at Lillestrøm Trikotagefabrik, Norway, about 1950. Photographer: Mary Pedersen/Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology.

In the face of this development, the clothing manufacturers in Norway and Denmark established fashion councils to strengthen their competitiveness. The Norwegian Fashion Council for Shoes and Leather Goods was established in 1949. Three years later, the Norwegian Fashion Council for Coats and Suits was founded, owned by twenty-six clothing factories (An. 1957). In Denmark, the first national fashion council, the Danish Footwear Council, was founded in 1952, and in 1958, the Danish Men's Fashion Council was established, followed by the Danish Women's Fashion Council in 1959. In both countries, the goal was to support the local industry by creating an attractive alternative to imported goods. This was done through a plethora of initiatives, such as the establishment of trade magazines, fashion prognoses, international representation and by organising fashion shows and fairs (Pedersen 2011). These initiatives aimed to strengthen the industry's competitiveness and to stimulate consumer demand (Pedersen 2011, 148–153). In both Norway and Denmark, this endeavour entailed an increased focus on fashion as a means of staying abreast of the international competition.

In the 1960s, a new type of clothing company emerged, which produced ready-made garments in advance of expected demand. In contrast to the producers of factory-made staple wares, these companies produced small collections intended for quick turnover (Leopold 1992, 103; Melchior 2013, 59). Design became a crucial factor for the new industry, and the companies designed their own collections and

put these into production, either at their own factories or with other manufacturers. The fashion identity of the manufacturer became an essential sales parameter, and many ready-to-wear companies collaborated with professional designers to develop an attractive and coherent identity for their product lines. Examples of this include the cooperation between the ready-to-wear producer ABO in Oslo, cooperating with the Paris-based but Norwegian fashion designer Per Spook. Another concept was a new fashion line called Fjord-Look, inspired by national costumes and Norwegian nature (Figure 12.2). The project was led by the Norwegian Textile Manufacturers' Association (NTTF) representing about 30 textile and clothing manufacturers. The garments were criticised for being too folkloristic, and the concept was not the success the ready-to-wear industry had envisioned (Rasch 2011, 83–84; Rasch 2020, 181–182). In Denmark, the companies Dranella, Margit Brandt and InWear were all structured around distinct design profiles (Melchior 2013, 59–72).



*Figure 12.2* The Norwegian fashion line, “Fjord Look”, published in the teenager magazine *Det Nye*, autumn 1968. Photographer: Sohlberg Foto/Dextra Photo, Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology.

## Craft fashion

The status of textile design was the object of considerable debate in the period, focusing particularly on whether textile design possessed the same qualities as other types of arts and crafts and design. The clothing producers had a clear interest in linking their products to other types of Scandinavian arts and crafts products, which enjoyed wide international acclaim in the period. In 1956, architect Esbjørn Hjørt wrote an article in Danish trade journal *Clothing Makes the Man* titled 'Clothing as an Applied Art'. In the article, Hjørt argued that garments should be approached with the same level of ambition as other kinds of applied art, such as furniture and silverware (Esbjørn Hjørt, quoted from Melchior 2013, 55). Around the same time, however, the same kind of reasoning found another expression through the emergence of the so-called arts and crafts garments (Toftegaard 2011). This movement drew on the same thinking of elevating the status of garments but was less commercially oriented. The arts and crafts garments had roots in the 19th-century artistic movements, but from 1950 a new generation of Danish textile artisans revitalised the concept (Toftegaard 2011). Arts and crafts garments are neither bespoke tailoring, made to measure for a particular client, nor are they mass-produced ready-to-wear. They were defined by being produced by textile artisans, combining competences in garment construction with textile printing. In contrast to other types of garments, the textile would often be custom-made for the style, so that the finished garment would form an integrated whole. The textiles and garments were made by hand in small series and sold in specialty shops, which carried other types of arts and crafts, rather than in dedicated clothing stores. The textile artisans constructed the fabric, pattern, and cut of the garments with great care to obtain the desired total effect. They saw themselves as creating arts and crafts based on a high level of workmanship. In line with this, many of them were directly opposed to the idea of fashion, focusing instead on creating well-designed artefacts with a long material and aesthetic durability. Many of them related to the progressive leftist movements of the time and saw their garments as a way of promoting new, more informal ways of living. The following sections explore two key figures in the Nordic textile arts and crafts movement, Norwegian textile designer Sigrun Berg and Danish textile printer Grete Ehs Østergaard and discuss how the changes in production methods and consumer preferences impacted their work and professional identities.

### Sigrun Berg

The position of designers was strengthened in the textile industry in Norway in the middle of the 20th century, especially in the printing and weaving mills. At this time, most designers were educated in arts and crafts, and they often worked with a combination of industrial design and craft in their studios. The textile designers were an integrated part of the applied art movement and participated regularly in specific exhibitions on textiles or in group exhibitions. Interior design was the focus; however, fashion design also was a part of the exhibition programme, especially in the years after World War II (Rasch 2006, 248).

Sigrun Berg was one of the textile designers who excelled in the 1950s. Her education was fragmented, as she was educated at the National College of Arts and Crafts (Statens håndverks- og kunstindustriskole) in 1918–1919, as a midwife in the 1920s

and at the National Art Academy (Statens kunstakademi) in 1934–1935 (Mannila 1988, 46). In 1947, she established a weaving studio, which she further developed in the following years, partly with her own artistic activities and partly as an industrial designer. She collaborated with weavers in rural areas, manufacturing ready-made garments in Sigrun Berg design for sale. Her main significance was that she created woollen textiles in a new way, designing wool craft in an innovative way within art, fashion and furnishing textiles. She was a pioneer in using wool from an old Norwegian sheep breed and used plain binding systems, sometimes combined with traditional decorative techniques like rosepath or tapestry. The colours were natural from the wool or dyed in harmonised shades. Sigrun Berg received *Diplôme d'Honneur*, at the Triennale di Milano in 1954 for two rugs (Råge 2020). A couple of years later she designed and wove ten knotted rugs for the new cathedral in Bodø, and in 1959–1961, she was assigned together with the two artists Ludvig Eikaas and Synnøve Anker Aurdal to redecorate Håkonshallen in Bergen. The commission was prestigious. The medieval celebration hall had been reconstructed in the 1910s and destroyed during World War II. The hand-woven textiles designed for Håkonshallen expressed a deep interest in and continuation of the national textile heritage. Her efforts in promoting traditional Norwegian wool were especially appreciated. In 1963, Sigrun Berg was awarded with the highest valued design prize in Norway, the Jacob Award (Mannila 1988, 48).

The cooperation between Berg and the textile industry started by designing woollen curtains for the factory Røros-Tweed. In the late 1950s, she became a freelance designer at woollen manufacturer De Forenede Uldvarefabrikker (DFU), for whom she designed upholstery fabrics, blankets, and woven sweaters. She was awarded with the prestigious gold medal for upholstery fabrics at the Triennale di Milano in 1960 and 1963. Handwoven rugs were one of her specialties, and in the beginning of the 1960s, she designed machine-woven rugs at Haldens Bomuldsspindleri og Væveri. From 1964 to 1968, she was a freelance designer for Solberg Spindleri, designing the cotton fabric “Nova”. The advertisements promoted the flexibility of colours and well-adapted shades in the plain textiles, well-suited for interior decoration.

Sigrun Berg was regularly interviewed in the press; either in newspapers, women's magazines or *Bonytt*, a monthly magazine for interiors and applied arts (Dubo 1955; Hauge 1959; Clayhills 1964). The interviews had in common a particular focus on weaving as a handicraft and the weaving studio as an important site for design, creativity, and manufacturing. With her roots in traditional hand weaving, she made finished products like scarfs and ties with a minimum of sewing techniques. The characteristic simple design was cut in basic forms and inspired by historical costumes. Tailor-made clothes were avoided, and round-woven tubes were transformed into hoods and dresses. Despite the historical preferences, the design suited modern times. She emphasised the clothes without “any specific style” and continued: “I assume others than me think it's boring to get dressed in the morning. It's easier if you can just pull something colourful over your head” (Clayhills 1964).

Her employees were young women, recently graduated from the textile and design schools with a serious interest in the craft (Figure 12.3). After a journey to India in 1954, she designed a simple cut jacket, called Sami turf hut coat that became one of her most popular garments throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Feminist journalist Birgit Wiig characterised her clothes as a concept for the generation of young lefties in the 1970s, both men and women (Wiig 1984, 114). A woman is cited in a book about



*Figure 12.3* Sigrun Berg weaving studio in Damstredet, Oslo, 1960s. Berg is standing behind the weavers, enclosed by looms and other weaving equipment, yarn, and drawings. Photographer: Teigens fotoatelier/Dextra Photo, Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology.

Oslo fashion, telling how she, as a high-school pupil wearing this jacket, hoped that people she did not know would think she went to the arts and crafts college (Kjellberg 2000, 52). The school represented a lifestyle that was an ideal for many young people, and the clothes Sigrun Berg made were an important part of this style.

In addition to those clothes designed by Sigrun Berg herself, fashion designer Kirsten Ledaal Osmundsen presented garments using Berg's fabrics. These were closer to contemporary fashion (Kjellberg 2000, 54). Osmundsen collaborated with Sigrun Berg on several occasions and her clothes were sold by applied art boutiques such as Albertine in Oslo.

Berg also collaborated with fashion designers at Solberg Spinderi. During those years, the factory built up a professional design business, fitting the wide range of cotton goods produced by the factory. Yarn for needlework was sold to home production like knitting, crocheting, and hand-weaving. The weaving mill produced fabrics for clothing and furnishing fabrics for private homes and public interiors. Solberg's product range reflected the diversity in the production of textiles and clothes in Norway at the time. Most of the consumed textiles were domestically produced. The garments were alternately produced by ready-to-wear factories, at home by female family members or by often unskilled, but competent seamstresses. In Denmark,

the textile printer, Grete Ehs Østergaard, followed a similar path of balancing craft ideals with the demands of industrial production although her work primarily focused on children.

### **Grete Ehs Østergaard**

Grete Ehs Østergaard (hereby referred to as Ehs) graduated from the Arts and Crafts School (Kunsthåndværkerskolen) in Copenhagen in 1958, where she specialised in textile printing. She worked in a Dutch textile print workshop for a year, then returned to Denmark where she founded her own workshop, creating hand-printed textiles for unique garments, home products, and textile installations. In 1965, she gave birth to her first child, and in 1968 to her second. Becoming a mother opened her eyes to children's wear as a designated field of design. In a newspaper article from 1968, she describes the situation as follows:

I have two girls of my own, one is two years, and the other is a month old. It was first when I had to find clothing for them that I realised how hard it is to find good things. In fact, it was impossible. Everything was pink and baby blue, and most things had ruffles. That was not exactly what I wanted. That is why I started up.  
(Elle 1968)

Based on this experience, she started producing children's wear for her own daughters. In 1968, she had a small exhibition in Hanne Hansen, which was a known and respected shop for Danish arts and crafts products in the heart of Copenhagen. The first batch sold out almost immediately. Based on this success, Ehs established proper production of children's wear, which in time developed into a regular industry. In its twelve years of business, the company produced approximately 28,000 items of children's wear out of 3.3 tonnes of jersey. The collection won wide acclaim in the press and was sold in arts and crafts shops all over the country. The initial collection was quite small but was gradually expanded until it covered children from three months to six years of age. The garments were made from natural materials, primarily cotton. For the smaller children, cotton tricots were preferred because they offered more give and flexibility and were thus deemed more comfortable for the child. For the older children, overalls were made using more durable fabrics, such as twill, which could withstand the wear and tear of active children.

From the beginning, the level of ambition was high, and the styles were as carefully worked out as her adult's wear. The first collection was printed and sewn by hand, but as demand grew, this model became untenable, and printing and sewing was contracted out to factories and home seamstresses. Still, Ehs remained involved in all stages of the production, from knitting the fabric to the final finishing of the products. She ordered the cotton herself, which was then knitted at a factory in the town of Ikast, while another factory, Martinsen's Fabrik in Brande dyed and printed the finished fabric. The rolls of fabric were delivered to Ehs. In the beginning, the garments were sewn by home seamstresses, but Ehs soon entered into an agreement with knitwear factory, which took care of cutting and sewing in order to increase the output. She recalls that factory production demanded more careful planning of the collection because each cutting process resulted in larger amounts of each pattern part, which she had to find a use for. Hence, the transition to factory production

led to increased rationalisation of the production. Still, the relatively small batches challenged the company's running economy. To keep down cost, Ehs would still be involved in the finishing of the garments, such as making the zippers ready for instalment. Hence, although production was made more efficient, the garments still required significant amounts of handwork.

The colour palette was an important focal point in the development of the collection. Ehs resented the conventional and insipid colouring of traditional children's wear and wanted to provide an alternative to create a more lively and joyful look. To obtain this, she developed a range of saturated colours, such as turquoise, grass green, intense yellow, dark blue and orange, which she used to dye her fabrics. After the dye process, the fabrics were printed to create narrow stripes, often in unconventional and conspicuous colour combinations. In her scrapbook, Ehs explained this choice as follows:

I always wanted to experiment and take up new challenges in my work, in the 1950s and 60s it was said that green/blue and pink/orange didn't go together! I think it was about time to break those norms. Therefore, I printed dresses in the *forbidden* colours, men's jackets in new models and textiles and tablecloth on a heavy linen/cotton fabric.

(Ehs 2003)

As the quote demonstrates, Ehs positioned her work as a rebellion against sartorial traditionalism. The striped fabric was used to sew a wide variety of models, which became the company's bestselling product range. Later, several other patterns were developed, which were adapted to the small scale of children's wear, but they never reached the popularity of the stripes. The collection was based on thorough functional analysis and elimination of non-essential elements. Decorative effects were not added but were based on "upgrading" functional elements such as the fabric, zippers, or pockets. In an interview conducted in 2018, Ehs, underlined the process of deselection as being essential to her children's wear:

In my opinion, the child must be *one thing*. Because it is so small, that child. There isn't room for a whole lot of pleasantries. That will only compete with the child. And then on such a small character. No, why should it be decorated? The decoration is that it has a lovely colour. This is how I see it.

(interview with Ehs, September 2018)

In sum, Ehs' children's wear was based on a functionalistic mindset. Traditionally, functionalism has primarily been related to developments in architecture, furniture, and product design, but this case demonstrates that functionalistic reasoning also impacted garment design, where it emerged with domain-specific knowledge of the body and its movement. In line with this, the garments were based on a strong anti-fashion ethos, which prioritised material and aesthetic durability over fleeting fashion trends and effect-seeking design. Instead, the garments' expression depended on well-balanced proportions, carefully selected colour schemes and purpose-made prints.

The garments were sold in arts and crafts shops around the country. Apart from Hanne Hansen, which was the main sales venue, Ehs sold her garments through other venues which carried products of high standard. This included "Den Permanente",



a cooperative exhibition venue and shop run by a circle of craftsmen as well as the shops of the organisation for promotion of needlework, Haandarbejdets Fremme. Both organisations operated with curated selection, meaning that products were only accepted for sale after careful consideration by a panel of professionals. Despite their simplicity, the garments were not cheap, and the customers were primarily sold to a discerning audience of middle-class professionals (interview with Ehs, September 2018).

Although production had been streamlined, the quality fabric and manual processes limited the potential for price reduction. As the 1970s drew to an end the product line was challenged and eventually outmatched by mass-produced, imported garments. As Ehs explains:

In the middle of the 80s the shops began to import cheap textiles from the East and Mexico, among other places. The goods were sold at prices that were so low that we couldn't compete. Many arts and crafts shops closed and suddenly it was difficult to sell the collection.

(Quoted from Wonsbek 1998)

The production of children's wear was phased out and came to a complete stop in 1980. This heralded a larger shift towards imported, mass-produced garments, which took over the children's wear market from the late 1970s, and focus shifted towards marketing, branding and fashion.

### **The textile designers between craft and commerce**

The two cases above illustrate the transformative state of the Norwegian and Danish clothing industry from the 1960s. Both Sigrun Berg and Grete Ehs Østergaard had been trained as textile artisans, Berg as a weaver and Ehs in printing. Both started their careers as artisans, producing interior decorations and unique specimens, as well as small product series, but went on to work for or with the textile and clothing industry. Sigrun Berg started her weaving studio in 1947 when she was a mature woman, with less family obligations than younger women had. She could devote all her time to work and did not belong to the generation of architects and designers who dominated the applied art scene in the 1950s and 1960s. Her path also became different. She started with craft and ended her career with craft, as she ran her studio almost until she died in 1982. Her cooperation with the industry took place almost entirely during the decade from 1958 to 1968, and at the same time she worked with art projects. Except for the ready-made sweaters she made for DFU, her industrial design was directed towards furnishing fabrics. The Norwegian textile industry moved in the direction of furnishing design during the 1960s, due to the earlier mentioned economic and political changes in the textile trade. In retrospect, it is hard to say how much this was intended by Berg, or if it was accidental. It seems, however, that keeping control over the garment production was a success. Her design was fashionable more despite than because of being commercial. Berg became a role model with a strong craft identity for young designers trying to manoeuvre within the categories of art, design, and craft that was in play during this period. The way Sigrun Berg was mediated in the Norwegian press supported her position as a designer and led to a wide-spread understanding of how the textile designer was understood during this time.

Ehs' transformation from artisan to manufacturer of children's ready-to-wear clothing is presented as a coincidence rather than a calculated decision. In her own representation, she coincidentally discovered that there was a market for her designs, and then simply increased production to meet demand. The founding of her business is presented as motivated by her personal experience of becoming a mother, which led to the discovery of the less than satisfactory supply of goods. This type of reasoning is common in the children's wear industry, where companies are often presented as being founded on the personal experience of market deficiency rather than by the prospects of pecuniary reward (Petersen 2015, 2020).

Trained in the arts and crafts, Ehs had strong opinions on what constituted good design and she used this training to develop her collection for children. This included a preference for simple, functional garments, which never made themselves heard above the person wearing them. Based on this fundamentally functionalistic ethos, Ehs strongly distanced herself from any fashion trends, opting instead for



*Figure 12.4* Workers pressing suit jackets at Jonas Øglænd clothing factory in Sandnes, Norway, 1966–1967. Photographer: Knudsens Fotosenter/Dextra Photo, Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology.

worked-through garments in durable materials. This professional ethos limited her commercial agility, restricting the options for cost-cutting measures and for staying in front of the market through the adoption of fashion trends. As the demand waned in the late 1970s, Ehs did not strive to save her company by developing new products or business areas, but simply phased out the production, turning to other professional pursuits such as teaching. Although Ehs did collaborate with textile factories to increase output, the garments remained founded in arts and crafts thinking, which prioritised the material and aesthetic unity of the product above cost-cutting measures, which could have increased their competitiveness. The prioritising of what was deemed artistic quality over commercial success was typical for many of the textile artisans of the period, who preferred the satisfaction of producing quality garments by hand to the potential economic reward of mass-produced ready-to-wear clothing (Toftegaard 2011).

Both Sigrun Berg and Grete Ehs Østergaard focused first and foremost on craftsmanship and aesthetics rather than the industry's need for efficient production methods and rapid turnover (Figure 12.4). They viewed their products as instruments of change focusing particularly on promoting a more informal lifestyle and opposing the built-in obsolescence of fashion. Although neither had been trained in mass-production processes, they managed to apply their training as artisans to the factory production of ready-to-wear garments and other textile products. Sigrun Berg managed to establish a collaboration with the industry over several years, while Grete Ehs Østergaard took advantage of the production apparatus to increase the scale of her children's garments but remained thoroughly founded in craft thinking.

### **The designer's different roles**

The possibilities of cooperation between crafts and industrial production seem to have been a recurring experience among artisans of the time, and the period saw considerable debate on the relationship between craft thinking and industrial methods of production. This can be illustrated through an example of a lecture the Norwegian textile designer Liv Noreng Hansen Rjukan delivered at the National College of Arts and Crafts in October 1974 at a meeting arranged by NTTF, which was later published in the trade journal *Norsk tekstil tidende* (Rjukan 1975). Rjukan started the lecture by explaining her education as a weaver with a high knowledge of different textile techniques, useful for the broad spectrum of fabrics produced at the mill. However, most of her presentation was on the designer's role as a translator from the market to the factory, finding and developing the forthcoming trends into actual designs. The trend information came from different sources. The sellers at the factory could bring back demands from the customer to the designers, the yarn suppliers presented new trends during their visits, and the designers themselves participated in European textile fairs both for home textiles and fashion. The designer needed to have a flair for fashion to be ahead of the trends, as processing a design from idea to ready-made product took about a year (Rjukan 1975, 9). Rjukan claimed that the designer working with textiles for interiors needed to follow fashion. In that way, the role of the industrial designer as she explained it, combined different roles. The negotiations between the designer's professional competence and the market had been going on for decades but became more significant in the 1970s as the textile industry got into economic trouble, and there was an increasing focus on the market. The relationship

between craftsmanship and an understanding of the adjustment of consumer's preferences was still under discussion. The role of the textile designer was in transformation during these years, and Rjukan expressed clearly this changed understanding of being a textile designer. The question is, if her experience corresponded with the ongoing trends among most textile designers towards crafts?

Similar debates were taking place in Denmark. In the Arts and Crafts School's yearbook for 1966–1967, one of the themes was the relationship between textile education and the textile industry. The debate revolved around the craft school's ability to prepare the students for collaborating with the industry, thereby meeting the textile industry's need for skilled labour. Several textile artisans, teachers, and manufacturers were invited to comment on the relationship between the artistic artisan education and the needs of the industry. These statements confirmed the picture of an education which prepared the students to become artistic artisans rather than to work with industrial mass-production (Becker 1967). The textile designers' lacking knowledge of industrial production processes and their unwillingness to subject themselves to the technical and economic demands of the industry was a recurring theme of the debate. As a result of this, a new school was opened in 1968, the Danish Ready-to-Wear and Tricot School (Dansk Konfektions- og Trikotageskole, now called TEKO), which aimed specifically at preparing the students to work in the textile and clothing industry (Melchior 2013, 68). Since then, a certain division of labour has existed between the design schools, which educate textile and fashion students with a strong artistic profile, and the Danish Ready-to-Wear and Tricot School, which has remained more oriented toward the industry. In Norway, the division between industry and crafts was strengthened in 1975 with the restructure of the arts and crafts organisation to the Norwegian Association for Arts and Crafts (Norske Kunsthåndverkere), which claimed that the artisan should be responsible for the complete process from concept to finished product. The process orientation broke with the industrial designer's work tasks (Veiteberg 2005, 21–24).

## Conclusion

The two cases demonstrate that the 1960s and 1970s was a time of radical change in the clothing industry. The textile industries in Denmark and Norway were affected in different ways. In Norway, oil was found in 1969 and it soon became clear that this demanded a restructuring of the whole industry, including the textile and clothing industry. The profit in the clothing industry was poor, and labour was needed in the new oil industry, which was far more profitable (An. 1974). It was politically decided to close this industry down. The result was a faster phasing out of the clothing industry in the latter half of the 1970s in Norway than in other European countries. In Denmark, production was outsourced to low-cost countries during the 1990s. The industry survived but became more focused on the symbolic aspects of fashion production such as design and branding (Jensen 2011; Melchior, 2013, 51).

A comparison between the Norwegian fashion design through Sigrun Berg and the Danish through the example of Grete Ehs Østergaard also shows differences in style between the two countries. The success of Sigrun Berg revealed a great interest in the traditional and the typical Norwegian, according to history and nature. A strong nationalism politically characterised Norway in the 20th century, and this was also, or maybe especially significant, within textiles with close connections to the national

costumes. But clearly, Norwegian designers like Sigrun Berg wanted to take traditions further through attempts to modernise those traditions according to both use and design. The Danish designers seemed more detached from the traditions, lacking the strong national connotations. Instead, Ehs was oriented toward the Danish arts and craft community and the international ideas about design, which flourished there.

Several systems of provision co-existed in the manufacture of clothes which combined handwork and machine production in varying degrees. The changing system of provision had severe consequences for the generation of textile artisans who were educated in the 1950s or earlier. Their training had prepared them for craft production of high-quality items for a small, but discerning audience. As trade was liberated and production outsourced to countries with lower wages, this market all but disappeared. The 1970s saw the emergence of new systems of provision offering more affordable, but also less durable clothing. The dedicated shops for arts and crafts products disappeared as the focus shifted from workmanship to branding and lifestyle. Garments have become fast consumer goods, focused on quick turnover rather than functional analysis, design, and durability. In this process, the designers have gone through a process of increasing specialisation, creating a divide between textile artisans and fashion designers, who collaborate with the industry to create collections with a high turnover.

This divide has been reproduced in the design historical narrative, where textiles and garments are rarely included, thus creating a fundamental divide between textile objects and other types of design. This chapter has demonstrated that the links between classic design history and the history of textiles and fashion are many and multi-faceted and deserves to be explored in more depth in future research. As such, both Sigrun Berg and Grete Ehs Østergaard can be viewed as transitional figures between an old system of production characterised by craftsmanship and durability, and an emerging system of global mass-production of fast fashion.

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## 13 Sewing and Sisterhood

### Elverhøj, the First Collective Craft Store in Copenhagen

*Tau Lenskjold*

\*\*\*\*

On the quiet city street of Peder Hvidtfeldtstræde, in an old quarter of central Copenhagen, a collective crafts store by the name of Elverhøj operated from 1971 to 1992. The store was located in a former wholesale coffee and tea shop. Viewed from the street, the tall, narrow ground floor shop windows displayed the different crafts – ranging from textiles to garments and pottery – produced by the members of Elverhøj. What caught the eye of pedestrians passing by on the sidewalk, and set the shop apart from other shops in the area, were the colourful papier-mâché animal heads placed high-up between the shop windows, resembling hunting trophies. Above the shop entrance, an equally colourful placard depicting a woman with flowing yellow hair and free-hanging papier-mâché breasts hung for many years (Figure 13.1). This chapter portrays Elverhøj, the first in a flurry of Danish collective craft stores established in the 1970s, and considers ways in which feminism was viewed and expressed through different forms of collaboration and craft production at the time. Through interviews and testimonials from former members, and material displayed on a commemorative website, this chapter seeks to present how the quotidian practices of producing and selling crafts, mostly garments, by seamstresses, weavers and other women craft-makers were influenced by and resonated with the social and ideological changes in the 1970s.

In this respect, the chapter's account of Elverhøj first draws attention to the cooperative organisation of the collective store as a way to establish a professional foothold for women craft-makers after graduation from the School of Applied Art or other such crafts-related courses. Second, and related to this, the wish to seek out ways to maintain an independent working life while simultaneously starting families and taking care of child-rearing. A third theme running through the accounts from former members of Elverhøj is the broader affiliation with the leftist cultural establishment in Copenhagen and like-minded people living and working in communes in other parts of Denmark, as well as a mushrooming of new collective craft stores, in many cases established by former members of Elverhøj. These informal networks criss-crossed the organisation and daily activities of Elverhøj in everything from the procurement of textiles, the friends-cum-customers and the motley crew of craft-makers, their children and partners. In retrospect, one of the founders concluded:

after all, it was the seamstresses ("*sypigerne*") who were the driving force in the store's 20-year history. Popularly speaking, they dressed the youth uprising in the



*Figure 13.1* The storefront was adorned with papier-mâché animal heads and a painted sign above the entrance of a women with free-hanging breasts.

'70s, and over time at least some of them got an independent livelihood and they were often in the newspapers.

(Jørgensen, n.d., translation by author)

Following the broader description and contextualisation of Elverhøj as part of the counterculture scene, the subsequent sections examine Elverhøj as an alternative fashion shop and detail examples of the designs. The following, and penultimate section, looks at the intimate experiences of the feminist adage of the era, “the political is personal”, in terms of the role of women’s solidarity in the collective organisation of craft-making as it intersects with the role of motherhood and family life. The account of Elverhøj, more generally construed, emphasises an orientation that foregrounds the uncanonical, particular account and “the social formation of the interior subject” (Buckley 2020, 24) and thus trails recent approaches in design and fashion history (e.g. Kaufmann-Buhler et al. 2019). At the same time, the focus on interiority taken



here in combination with studying Elverhøj as an ensemble of (predominately women) craft-makers, follows a feminist critique in design history levelled at the patriarchal proclivity for monographs and the study of individual designers' significance and influence.

A second, albeit related, aim of this chapter is to explore how Elverhøj's female members' conception and reflection on sisterhood resonated with the feminist discourse of the day, especially reverberating from the activities of the contemporaneous modern Danish women's movement or Redstockings movement (*Rødstrømpebevægelsen*) established in Copenhagen in 1970 with inspiration from the Redstockings radical feminist movement founded in New York in 1969 (Walter 1990). In the chapter's concluding discussion, the legacy of feminism and femininity as experienced and practiced by women craft-makers in the early to mid-1970s, in Elverhøj and related collectives and collaborative endeavours, is considered as enactments of sisterhood, understood as solidarity between women (hooks 1986). Notwithstanding bell hooks' important criticism of white liberationists' hegemonic vision of sisterhood, as premised on the victimisation of women, it is argued that solidarity, in the case of Elverhøj constituted an empowering sisterhood (per)formed not through charged political enunciations, but through the everyday practices of craft-making.

### The Elverhøj collective store

Elverhøj was established in Copenhagen in 1971 by potter Bent Jørgensen and weaver Bente Egedorf, in the rooms of a former coffee and tea wholesaler, rented at a modest rate. The couple had begun renting the shop in 1966, and after a thorough renovation, ran a combined weaving workshop, with three looms at one end of the room, and showrooms for their production of ceramics and woven rugs at the other (Jørgensen, n.d.). By 1971, the couple had become exhausted from doing it alone, and over a lunch in the back room with a group of friends – among them Karen Grue and Lene Kløvedal, who had taken part in Thy camp (*Thylejren*) in northwest Jutland the previous year. The Thy camp was organised by the student organisation the New Society (*Det Ny Samfund*) as a temporary camp city, following anarchist principles and attracting around 25,000 participants over the summer of 1970 (Jørgensen 2005, 344; see also Munch and Jensen in this volume, on architects Ussing and Hoff's work at Thy camp).

Over lunch, the idea of forming a collective store (*kollektivbutik*) was decided in just fifteen minutes, according to Karen Grue (Grue, n.d.). The collective store was organised according to a few cooperative principles: everyone would pay the same membership fee (DKK 80, in 1971) regardless of their profits from sales, all members would take turns in manning the store in pairs of two for one week every three months, all items put on sale should be produced by members and tagged with their names, everyone would do their own VAT accounting, all decisions would be taken collectively based on unanimous agreement, and never put to vote. While on duty, the members would tend to the shop, update the window decorations, draw ads and do mundane chores like cleaning and bookkeeping. All sales were duly listed in little grey plastic books, to keep tabs on each member's earnings.

The name Elverhøj refers to a well-known and popular romantic national Danish play by the same name. Elverhøj (literally, Elves Hill) premiered in 1828 at the Royal Danish Theatre and is a romantic celebration of folklore beliefs in elves, through acting, folk songs and ballet. It is reasonable to think of the play as lending a playful

and carnivalesque symbolism to the store's image, directly mirrored by the attention-grabbing papier-mâché adornments on the storefront.

But to underscore the counterculture credentials, a more urgent reason to name the shop Elverhøj was its association with a controversial restaging of the play in Thy camp the year before, with the king's character in jeans and female protagonists in the nude (Lokalhistorisk Arkiv for Thisted Kommune, n.d.). At its peak in the 1970s, the shop had upwards of 25 members. Some would stay on for decades while others were merely passing by for shorter periods of time. In the first year, the success was such that a waiting list was accumulating, and in 1973, Bent Jørgensen left to help establish Klostergården, or Elverhøj 2 as it was known, with 40 other craft-makers, some of which came from Freetown Christiania, on the upscale address Amagertorv. In 1977, Bent Jørgensen and Bente Egedorf moved to start a cooperative farm on the island of Møn (Jørgensen, n.d.).

### A collective store and the Danish commune movement

For many, the collective store marked the first organised professional affiliation practice after graduating from the School of Applied Art or other courses. And many would move on to join other craft collectives or move out of the city, as part of the general exodus from Copenhagen, especially among young people. From the 1950s to 1990s, the city shrank continuously from 768,105 to a mere 466,723 inhabitants (Wendel-Hansen et al. 2020). At the beginning of the 1970s, Copenhagen was in the doldrums; a poor and run-down city with high unemployment rates, exacerbated by the 1973 oil crisis and a subsequent decade of national economic ails. But the city was also a place of social and political experimentation and cultural innovation. For example, in 1971, the very same year Elverhøj opened its doors, a group of squatters occupied an area of abandoned navy barracks and founded what became the freetown of Christiania; and the Danish Redstockings movement revitalised the Women's movement by rapidly disseminating second wave feminism through the principles of self-organising women's groups. In the same period, and coinciding with the rise of the commune movement (*kollektivbevægelsen*) in the wake of the student revolt of 1968, the number of communes in Denmark rose from 10 in 1968 to close to 10,000 by the end of the 1970s. Many of Elverhøj's members were affiliated with communes in Copenhagen and elsewhere in the country. In May 1971, only two months after Elverhøj was started, five of its members and their children moved to Prydsgården commune on the island of Langeland. Lene Kløvedal, one of the group's members, recalls how the security they felt from being part of the collective store propelled them to leave the city. During the first couple of years, she would mostly make bespoke garments, but after moving to another commune (Skrækkenborg) on the island and being part of establishing a sewing workshop (Dagløkke systue), she began designing a range of specific styles. In the spring of 1979, Lene Kløvedal moved back to Copenhagen and established a sewing workshop in the old coffee roastery above the store with three of her fellow members (Kløvedal, n.d.).

Another of the founding members, Karen Grue, recalls how one day the owner of the Copenhagen fashion shop Buksesnedkeren, who was peddling velvet trousers to the Copenhagen youth at an astounding rate, dropped by Elverhøj to enquire if the members could weave rag rugs from the cut-off fabric from taking up the trousers. Grue's boyfriend Dan, who had previously run a teahouse at the Thy camp, borrowed

weaver Bente Egedorf's big stationary loom in the shop, and after receiving basic instructions, began "hammering out rag rugs in masculine energetic fashion and made a business out of it" (Jørgensen, personal communication). Shortly after Grue and Dan moved to the island of Lolland and started Poulstrup commune on an old farm, they bought a number of looms and taught the fellow communards to weave. For a while, this production of rag rugs provided the commune's main income, but Grue continued to sew on the side. After Poulstrup, Grue moved to yet another commune before moving to Christiana and helping to start Elverhøj 2 with Bent Jørgensen (Grue, n.d.).

Although far from all of the members left Copenhagen in order to live and work in communes, examples abound and are characterised by uprootedness, dynamism and above all an entrepreneurial spirit and desire to undertake collective experiments. Moreover, the idea of making a collective store in 1971 was directly inspired by the spirit of the Thy camp and the experiments with communal living: "The collectives had appeared and had received a lot of attention. And then we thought: If you can live together, you can probably also open a shop together" (Bent Jørgensen, in Pedersen 2021).

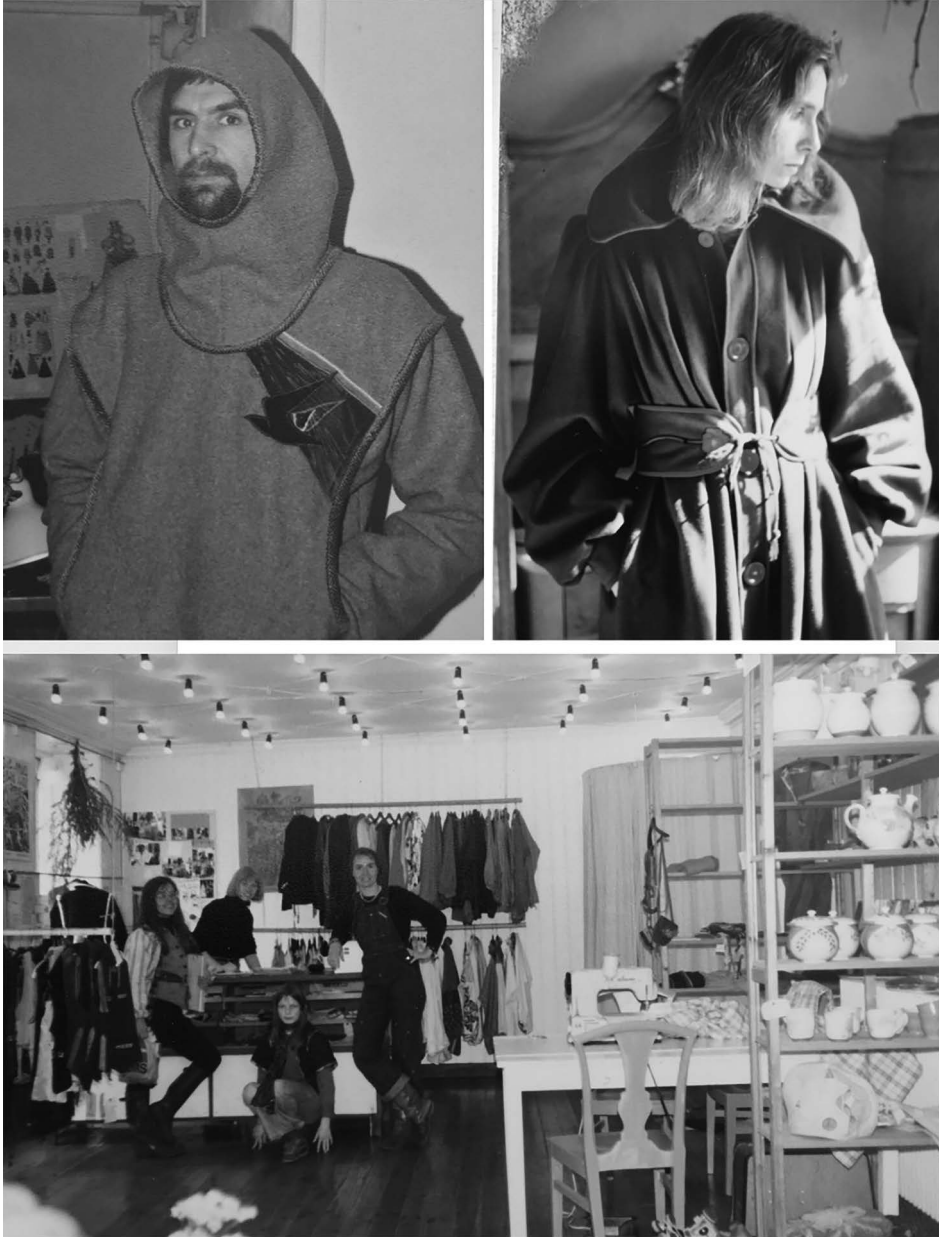
### **An alternative fashion shop**

Elverhøj was overwhelmingly, though not exclusively, an enterprise of women. According to former members, there were only one or two other male members, besides Bent Jørgensen, over the years. One of these excelled in the somewhat idiosyncratic combination of designing dresses made from exquisite English fabric and making horoscopes (Erbs & Villaume, personal communication October 8, 2020). This anecdote speaks to the general impression of Elverhøj as an "alternative fashion shop", as defined by the National Museum of Denmark (*Modens historie/1970'erne/Patchwork – tøj*, n.d.), with highly individual and personal styles and a penchant for bricolage without any collectively imposed rules of alignment and uniformity. Rather, it was the copying of a style or technique, or accusations thereof, that would cause the biggest disagreements among members. In the store, garments from the different designers were arranged along with teapots and other crafts on sale. The store space was a curious mixture of a fashion shop with elaborate and changing window displays, craft workshop and a meeting place for the women (Figure 13.2).

Gender as such, however, did not garner much attention among the members, nor were the craft and clothes items made specifically for men or women. The majority of members made and sold garments and textiles, and each decided for herself whether they were designed primarily for women, men, children or considered unisex items. In addition, the general views on gender and the hippie-inspired lifestyle and anti-establishment attitude permeating left-leaning young adults in the early 1970s were often characterised by fluid gender signifiers. In an anecdote (Erbs & Villaume, personal communication), one of the interviewees recalled how a male journalist, later to become a well-known Danish TV personality, became infatuated with, and eventually bought a jacket she had designed specifically with women in mind. Naturally, she did not object.

### **Changing the world one style at the time**

The members produced and sold a wide variety of garments in different styles. Some would develop a specific range of styles, driven by customer demand or developed from a steady supply of textiles, often sourced second hand. Certain types and qualities of fabric were in high demand in the beginning of the 1970s. In keeping with



*Figure 13.2* Top left, Erbs' brother modelling an anorak with a swallow applique; top right, Erbs in a long blue coat with a rose applique on the belt; bottom, store interior. Courtesy Yvonne Erbs.

hippie culture, reused fabrics, velour, tie-dye cotton and appliques (Toftegaard 2011, 257), but also silk screen printing, were found on the clothes hangers. Yvonne Erbs and Lone Villaume describe how they, “when the word was out”, would make their way to a parked car from where two young men would peddle thick old velvet curtains, transported back from Amsterdam and sold straight from the trunk – what

other goods the men brought back from Amsterdam they never asked about (Erbs & Villaume, personal communication). A velvet fabric produced in the USSR led to a coat style, simply referred to as Russian coats (*russerfakker*) (Kløvedal, n.d.).

A considerable part of the garments were made from second-hand fabric. In the Skrækkenborg commune on Langeland, Lene Kløvedal and other members of the sewing workshop would buy up old blue-striped cotton duvets from the locals on the island, and every Monday they would empty out the remaining down and feathers in preparation for the following week's production of garments. The feathers were used as fertiliser in the commune's gardens. In Elverhøj, the jackets (Figure 13.2) and other garments made from the blue-striped cotton made up a recognisable selection of the clothes on sale. The women working on Langeland would advertise the quality of their garments by proclaiming that even when the duvet fabric had all but disappeared the seams would still be standing (Erbs & Villaume, personal communication). Such a statement is indicative of a professional pride taken in the quality of their craft. Despite the playful ideals and overt rejection of the exclusivity of bourgeoisie fashion, a recurrent feeling among the members, especially those who had graduated from the School of Applied Arts, was the unspoken importance of professional standards and respect. A more pragmatic reason for the importance placed on quality was the comparatively high price of the clothes, as a result of being handmade. Increasingly through the 1970s and into the 1980s, a larger percentage of members' peers-cum-customers entered the professional workforce, and consequently, sales of more expensive items, such as coats with exquisite details, improved.

Among the different ways of differentiating one's line of products from the other styles of clothes in the store, and typical of the time, was the common place use of appliques. The applique of a swallow across an anorak breast (Figure 13.2) was both a symbol of allegiance to the shared counterculture attitude embodied by the anorak as style, and a way of asserting and making visible one's individual products. It is the same double attention paid on the one hand to the individual need of earning and income and fulfilling professional and artistic ambitions, while on the other hand adhering to the collectivist ideals and counterculture spirit of the store. Elverhøj was about "cutting out the middle-man" instead of selling to other shops, as Yvonne Erbs explains the advantages of becoming a member today, fifty years after the store opened its doors in 1971. But equally important, being part of the Elverhøj was also a way of changing the world through craft-making, "as it became visible in the streets" (Erbs & Villaume, personal communication).

Apart from the provision of suitable textiles and the aesthetic considerations of fabric qualities, styles, colour and surface ornamentation, many of the garments were also made with functionality in mind. Perhaps the best examples of this are the maternity overalls designed by Lene Kløvedal (Figure 13.3). The new style combined overalls – a fixture of the commune movement's wardrobe, with strong connotations to working class culture and struggle (Goldman, 2020) – with a new pattern that would follow and support the protruding volume of a growing belly. In doing so, a working garment designed for men and used by communards and in wider counterculture circles to signify equality and a gender neutral commitment to socialist ideology, was re-gendered to support the female body and freedom of movement for pregnant women. The maternity overalls exemplify an approach to design in which the emphasised feminine silhouette is the result of an ingenious solution to a practical problem, but it is also indicative of a celebratory attitude towards women and the

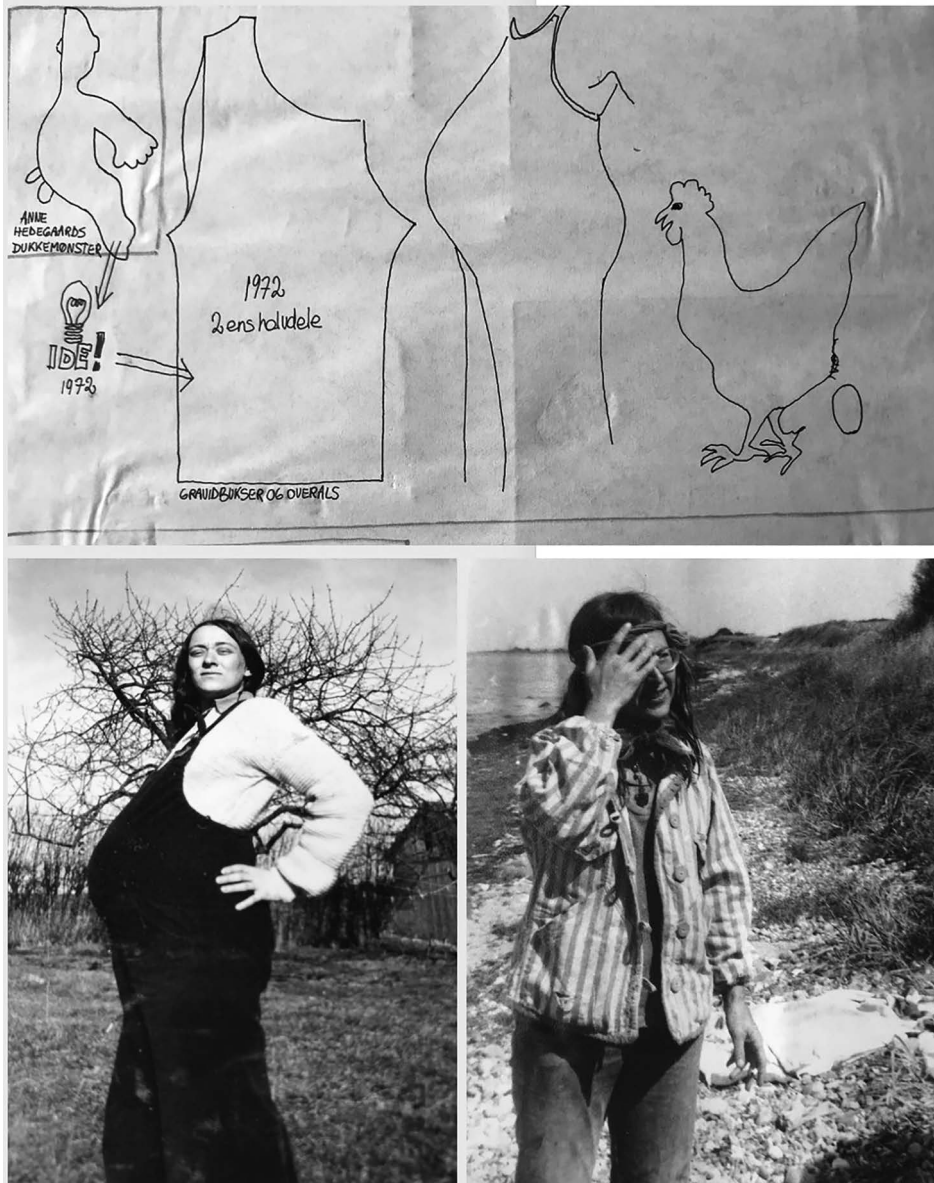


Figure 13.3 Top, annotated sewing pattern for maternity overalls by Lene Kløvedal with inspiration from Anne Hedegaard's doll sewing pattern (top left corner); bottom left, Lene Kløvedal with prototype of maternity overalls at the Prydsgården commune on Langeland, 1972; bottom right, jacket sewn from second-hand locally sourced striped-cotton duvet covers, 1973. Courtesy Lene Kløvedal.

female body shared among the members of Elverhøj. It is also worth noticing that Kløvedal's idea for the maternity overalls (Figure 13.3, top left corner) came from a sewing pattern for a doll designed by another member, Anne Hedegaard. The unlikely source of inspiration adds to the general picture of a shared playfulness and disregard for established sartorial categories also evident in the recurrent production of carnival costumes for both adults and children.

### **Motherhood and family life**

Many of the members had young children before they became members, or had children during their time in Elverhøj. At the same time children played a significant role in the marketing of the store. Every year, the members produced elaborate costumes for children and adults for the Danish winter carnival tradition of *Fastelavn*. The yearly event would normally be advertised in one of the major national newspapers, *Politiken* or *Information*. The costumes were highly sought after and were often sold out. Moreover, the *Fastelavn* costumes and events were important in maintaining the store's playful and creative image towards the public, and in keeping with the members' self-image. Children and parenting were natural topics in the conversations in the shop and workshop. One of the former members recalls how the large round oak table in the shop's main room often became a fixture for prolonged discussions about child-rearing and the challenges of juggling work and motherhood (Erbs & Villaume, personal communication). Contrary to a conventional fashion store, children were welcome and the women would occasionally bring their children along or babysit for each other, often when other options had been exhausted.

Motherhood and especially the challenges of single parenting also loom large in recollections presented on the commemorative website: "Most of us from that time were single mothers, and there had to be food on the table, so it [Elverhøj] also came to function as our women's club without us having thought about it" (Elverhøj, n.d., translated by author). This description of a "women's club" developing around the everyday practicalities of getting time to work amidst child-rearing and family life is a recurring theme among the former members of Elverhøj interviewed for this study.

Erbs & Villaume recall how their partners, a furniture designer and an architect teaching at the Royal Danish Academy's school of architecture, took very little interest in Elverhøj in the early years. The women explained their partners' lack of interest with the general perception of a hierarchy in prestige between architecture and craft-making, and especially design practices traditionally associated with the domestic environment and women's work. Designing, sewing and selling clothes were simply not considered activities constituting a professional design occupation with the same artistic and cultural credentials in society at large, but also – as the example shows – among professional practitioners sharing lives as partners and parents. In this, the craft-making practices assembled in Elverhøj exemplify Buckley's assertion that "one result of the interaction of patriarchy and design is the establishment of a hierarchy of value and skill based on sex. This is legitimised ideologically by dominant notions of femininity and materially by institutional practice" (Buckley 1986, 5–6). As a collective store mostly made up of women craft-makers working from home, Elverhøj falls well within the dominant patriarchal ideology associated with the domestic domain. This is clear from the unconcealed presence of children, the role of motherhood and family life in the products, promotional activities and everyday discourse among the store's members (Figure 13.4). However, when considered as an



Figure 13.4 The women from Elverhøj and their children dressed up in costumes made specifically for the Danish winter carnival tradition of Fastelavn.

alternative fashion shop, Elverhøj challenges Buckley's description (1986, 5) of design produced in the domestic setting as only representing use-value through crafts made and used by the family. Where the intersection of patriarchal ideologies and capitalist exchange-value would sever the home from the market, Elverhøj exemplifies a place and a time where this strict separation no longer holds true. As a niche shop catering for the likeminded, with shared cultural and political affiliations with the counter-cultural scene and commune movement, an extension of the personal through crafts associated with femininity produced in and related to life in the domesticated sphere, was made monetisable – albeit not always with ease and certainly not resulting in exorbitant economic gains for the individual members.

### Rebelling against the norms through sewing in craft-making and art

Elverhøj was, by the members' own admission, the first collective craft store of its kind in Denmark. As I have shown, Elverhøj served as an example for other craft-makers and helped midwife with a host of other collective craft shops and sewing workshops in communes across Denmark. In this regard, it played an important part in giving women craft-makers and seamstresses a professional foothold and relative economic independence.

But sewing and the use of textiles also played a more explicitly political role in the early 1970s, with a more direct and self-conscious extension of the political paroles of the women's movement. This was noticeable in many arenas and across different cultural domains, not least among female artists who formed groups and produced collective works, publications and art exhibitions, centred around female experiences and expressly feminist critiques of the patriarchal societal institutions. In the



following, I venture to discuss examples of sewing and textiles in women's art. To some extent, the artists inhabited the same countercultural landscape as the members of Elverhøj and employed many of the same techniques (sewing, weaving, embroidery, appliques, etc.) and format (e.g. textile images and sculptures) in crafting their works. But the collective store and the collective art exhibition also – and perhaps unsurprisingly – produced distinctly different sites for making the personal political, to once again return to the feminist slogan *du jour*. I will return to a discussion of how this difference might reflect the legacy of Elverhøj towards the end.

In 1974, in a tent dedicated to drawing at a Redstockings festival in Copenhagen, women artists and women with an interest in art conceived the idea of arranging an international art exhibition for women. It became a reality the year after in December of 1975 when the Women's exhibition XX (*Kvindeudstillingen XX*) opened at Charlottenborg, the Academy of Fine Arts, in Copenhagen with 70 international and Danish women artists. Among them were prominent international artists like Marina Abramovic and Danish architect Susanne Ussing (see Chapter 2, this volume) (Pontoppidan 2017). The aim of the organising group of women was “to break the isolation and blow-up borders between the artforms and work with a multiplicity of artistic expressions in the greatest openness possible” (Kluge 1977, 167, my translation). It was a deliberate strategy of extending the women's movement's focus on economic gender inequality to include culture and the arts, through an exhibition “where the woman's political consciousness could be made cognizant through visual materials with different possibilities for experiences” (ibid., my translation).<sup>1</sup> Clothing, textiles and sewn fabric images were among the many materials and objects on display in the exhibition. One textile relief would display separate lists of idioms about women (*kvindfolk*) and men (*mandfolk*) (Bordorff 2017) and thus expounded the gender political conflict in no uncertain terms.

The use of fabrics, clothes, textile images and textile sculptures were an explicit critique of the patriarchal Danish art institution's hegemonic distinction between the high and decorative arts (Storm in Kluge et al. 1977), but it was also used as a way of manifesting materials and practices traditionally related to women's work and experiences in the domestic sphere as feminist expressions of women's strengths (Kluge et al. 1977).

### Sewing clothes and crafting sisterhood

The rich and versatile feminist discourse expressed in collective exhibitions, and through the use of sewing and textile art, like Women's exhibition in Copenhagen and in other Scandinavian cities such as Gothenburg (Zetterman 2021) in the beginning to mid-1970s exemplify a programmatic and ideological critique and engagement with women's role in society. It is vastly different from the emancipatory effects of a community of practice and coordination that sustained the members of Elverhøj in their everyday business for almost two decades, and, as I will argue, constituted a different, subtler, but perhaps also more enduring, sisterhood – and in doing so different ways of politicising the private.

Like the Danish and Swedish textile artists, the textile image also held – and still holds – significance for the collective store's members, and it does so in a very literal sense.

On a wall in the middle of the store hang from 1976 to the store closed a colourful textile image sewn by Mette Hedegaard Lund (Figure 13.5). The image's title is



Today a photo of the textile image is on the front page of Elverhøj's commemorative webpage, as an emblematic token of the members' shared past and present, as many of them keep in contact and meet once a year. It is important to keep in mind, though, that the textile image, apart from a depiction of social ideals and the sometimes less ideal realities, also embodies materials, sewing skills, techniques and technologies and investments. Elsewhere in her recollection, Hedegaard writes that the textile image was the first of many others she made after investing in an industrial-grade sewing machine. Both one-off textile images and sculptures commissioned by public libraries or youth clubs and the production of clothes were part of the repertoire, which enabled Hedegaard, and many of her peers, to work seamlessly across more rigid labels such as art, crafts and design. This was equally a pragmatic necessity, many-sided creativity and countercultural disregard for boundaries. It did however often go hand-in-hand with pride in craft-making prowess and an often imperceptible valorisation of educational background that would sometimes be a cause of division. Others in the group would stay more faithful to one craft like weaving or pottery.

The patchwork of Elverhøj's feisty members, the crafted goods and garments, kids and men, sewing skills, the ideals and disagreement, friendships, creativity and marketing, all stitched together in this account, and hinged on a cooperative model of organisation, is what made the collective store a durable social and commercial enterprise.

We can think of Elverhøj as a site betwixt and between the private sphere and a publicly assessable space, serving its costumes and open to the world. When separated from domestic life in the nuclei family or in the commune – which for most of the members also constituted their primary site of production – the store became a place for bonding, sharing of collective experiences and coordination in and around craft-making; in other words, a place of solidarity among the women (and men), and a place where the private struggle to make a living through sewing is made possible through collaboration. It is in this respect, that Elverhøj characterises a moment in time, where some women were gaining a foothold as independent craft-makers and designers.

## Notes

- 1 "...hvorfors kvindens politiske bevisliggørelse kunne anskueliggøres i billedmateriale med forskellige oplevelsesmuligheder."

2

...møderne var nogle gange vildt voldsomme med hensyn til mangel på solidaritet og sammenhold, uforløste stridigheder, idealer, kvalitet... Igen og igen måtte vi diskutere rammer og væremåder, kvalitet, vores fællesbillede udadtil. Vi ville være særlige, originale, ideoer, vore fans, kunderne, dem der elskede os og købte vore værker skulle blive flere og flere... I dag har jeg stadig nogle af mine bedste venner fra Elverhøjtiden.

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## 14 Knowledge to the People

### The Professionalisation of Graphic Design in the Norwegian Book Publishing Industry

*Thomas T. Nordby*

Within modern book industry and publishing, there can be traced a growing need for people who already at a preparatory stage can determine in detail the ‘book prototype’ that then will be multiplied. [...] This specific designer is required to have aesthetic insight, but also financial sense, technical orientation, ability to analyze and to engage in disparate book assignments, and often also a sense of an advertising approach. Especially in the last 10 years, a number of modern graphic designers, several of them skilled and talented, have found a foothold in the domestic environment, partly in our publishing houses, partly as freelancers. (Ranheimsæter 1969, 51)

Graphic design slowly emerged as a term and profession in Norway from the late 1950s, and as Ørnulf Ranheimsæter points out in the quote above, many of the first self-proclaimed graphic designers found their way into the publishing houses. This phenomenon received increased attention in and around the printing trade journals from the late 1950s. It was, for example, noticed in connection with the Most Beautiful Books of the Year (Årets vakreste bøker) book design competition in 1960, where the jury announced that a new practitioner had started to make its mark in several of the larger Norwegian publishing houses: ‘it is the *formgiver* or, as he is also called, the designer, both relatively new concepts in Norwegian language’ (‘De 25 vakreste bøker 1959’ 1960, 111). And a few years later, in connection with the 1965 edition of the award, it was declared that ‘the designer, or book designer, has an important function in the book-work. We can with satisfaction state that in Norway, too, there are several such “*bruksgrafikere*”, who eagerly embark on their creative work’ (‘De utvalgte femogtyve vakreste bøker 1965’ 1966, 128)

The designers that emerged in and around Norwegian publishing houses constituted a transformation and professionalisation of design practices, which was tightly connected to broader changes and transformations in society. Using two of Norway’s largest and most prestigious publishing houses, Gyldendal Norsk Forlag and H. Aschehoug & Co, as case studies, this chapter is an investigation into this phenomenon. In doing so it will shed light on an especially transformative period in Norwegian graphic design history, while also complementing the broader narrative of Nordic design culture in transformation in the 1960s and 1970s.

As the following sections will show, the emergence of designers in Gyldendal and Aschehoug happened gradually, with a noticeable expansion from the early 1960s. This happened at the same time as the Norwegian publishing industry experienced a period of transformations and upheavals, which in turn ‘came to give the book

industry a new structure' (Jacobsen 1974, 59). The background for these transformations was a gradual stagnation in the book market during the 1950s. This was a decade where Norwegian society was characterised by reconstruction after the war, but also gradual economic growth and increased private consumption. The problem was that this increase in prosperity didn't 'immediately benefit the book' (Tveterås 1972, 368). As historian Odd Arvid Storsveen has shown, the background for the 'book crisis' was complex, and although it never resulted in any real crisis, it created concerns within the publishing industry (Storsveen 2004, 96–103). On the other hand, the sales stagnation also worked as the basis for measures, both practical and political. For example, in Gyldendal several initiatives were started around 1960, both in the form of new endeavours and revitalisation of old ones. Among these was a gradual expansion of the Encyclopaedia department (Leksikonavdelingen) and School and Textbook department (Skole- og fagbokavdelingen), the establishment of a new Paperback Department, and the founding of *Den norske bokklubben* (The Norwegian Book Club). The latter being a joint venture with Aschehoug. In connection with this, the number of employees grew, while also structural changes and a general professionalisation of the company took place (Evensmo 1974; Jacobsen 1974). These developments were again tightly connected to general developments in the emerging Norwegian consumer society, ongoing reformations and changes in the Norwegian educational systems, and radical changes and transformations in the printing industry. The latter involved, among other things, a transition from hot-metal typesetting and letterpress printing to (high speed) offset-litho printing and various forms of phototypesetting and computerised typesetting. By the 1980s hot-metal typesetting and letterpress printing were perceived as more or less extinct (see, e.g. Stein 2017).

Acknowledging how designers by no means emerged isolated from these developments, but rather as part of what Kjetil Fallan has called – paraphrasing Thomas Hughes – the 'seamless web of socio-design' (Fallan 2010, 55–56), this chapter examines how the designers who entered Gyldendal and Aschehoug were connected to on-going changes and transformations in the publishing industry, printing industry and emerging consumer society, as well as to the 1960s and 1970s political 'awakening' and extensive educational reforms carried out in the Norwegian school system during the post-war years. The first section provides a brief account of the professional practitioners involved in the visual planning and designing of books before the self-proclaimed graphic designers entered the field. The second section uses Gyldendal as case study and examines the role of designers in the 1960s and 1970s 'paperback revolution', while the third section uses Aschehoug as case study to explore the expansion of designers in publishing houses' schoolbook departments during the 1960s and 1970s. In the fourth and final section, I will provide a brief conclusionary discussion on how designers' inroads into the publishing houses represented transformation and professionalisation of graphic design practices, and how this shift reflected broader changes and transformations in Nordic design culture.

### Book design before 'book designers'

In his review of Norwegian book covers between 1880 and 2000, Kjell Norvin shows how book covers and dust jackets have been shaped by different practitioners and professions through the years. He argues that one roughly can speak of four different eras: 'The first covers were designed by craftsmen in the printing trades such as

xylographers and lithographers, the second era was characterised by artists, the third by the advertising artists,' and finally, during the 1960s 'the task was taken over by illustrators and a new profession, the designer' (Norvin 2002, 64).

When it came to the design of the inside of the book, matters were different. Books were produced at a printing house, which involved practitioners like compositors, printers, book binders, and sometimes also practitioners involved in image reproduction. The setting of text and the page makeup was done by a compositor, while the visual planning of the book was traditionally done by a foreman or an especially able compositor at the floor, often in dialogue with the author or editor. But besides the name of printer and publisher, it was rarely stated who had been involved in the making, not to mention who had been responsible for the design or visual planning of the book. The exception was where an artist or 'book artist' (bokkunstner) had been involved. The actual role of the book artist could vary, but it almost always involved some sort of drawing or illustration: From the design of selected parts of the book, like the book cover, endpapers, initials, or ornaments, etc., to overall visual planning and design. Among the most frequently awarded book artist in the Most Beautiful Books of the Year competition in the inter-war years were Sverre Pettersen, Frøydis Haavardsholm and Carsten Lien. The latter was, among other things, engaged on a permanent basis as a book artist and 'artistic consultant' for publisher Det Norske Samlaget, where he was responsible for the design of several books (Venås et al. 1968). But there were seemingly few Norwegian publishers who had book artists permanently employed in this role before the Second World War. At Gyldendal, illustrator and book artist Fredrik Matheson was hired in the mid-1930s, a position he held to the early 1940s. Matheson's role in Gyldendal seems to first and foremost have involved illustration and cover design. This perception is supported by an article written by Matheson himself in 1969, where he in reference to conditions in Norwegian publishing houses in the 1930s stated that:

In those days the book was created at the foreman's office based on directives from the customer. Often it was some compositor who had identified himself as slightly better than the others and therefore could provide a valuable helping hand to the book's most random creation process.

(Matheson 1969, 16)

Towards the end of the 1950s, however, there were signs that conditions were changing. In the printing trade journals, new terms emerged such as book architect, book designer, *formgiver*, designer, *bruksgrafiker* and *grafisk formgiver* (graphic designer). At first, the discourse was heavily informed by what was going on abroad, especially the neighbouring countries – Sweden and Denmark. In Sweden, there was a gradual expansion of designers in and around publishing houses and printers in the post-war years. And while these had their forerunners in book artists such as Akke Kumlien and Anders Billow their arrival still manifested as shift in terms of their quantity, background and design approach (Gram 1994; Bowallius 2002; Jönsson 2008). In 1956, the *Norwegian Graphic Journal* (*Norsk Grafisk Tidsskrift*) could report that book designers had started to make their way into Danish publishing houses as well ('Har boktilretteleggeren tatt typografens arbeidsglede?' 1956, 13). And as indicated

above, soon it was expressed how similar developments were also taking place in Norway.

An early and extensive presentation of the ‘new’ designer role was given by a Danish designer and teacher at the Graphic College of Denmark (Den Grafiske Højskole) in Copenhagen Erik Ellegaard Frederiksen in an article published in the *Norwegian Foreman Times (Norsk Faktortidende)* trade journal in 1958 (Frederiksen 1958, 62–64). Here, the designer was presented as a necessary result of a rising industrialisation and division of labour in the printing industry and a following need for people who could plan and design the growing diversity of books and printed matter that were produced. According to Frederiksen, the book designer’s primary task was to ‘unite the book’s dimensions, typography, materials and cover into a unit that seems appealing and functional’ and to help convey the authors’ message, so that the reader got the full benefit of the text. In that way, book design first and foremost concerned function and communication. But always on the book’s premises:

The designer is thus a servant and must feel like a servant. We shall not create printed matter for the sake of printed matter. We must communicate. And it requires insight and understanding. Not so much feeling.

(Frederiksen 1958, 63)

He then declared that though he didn’t know ‘whether one had come so far in the development in Norway as to have book designers’ he was certain that ‘no matter how much it was resisted – the development would come to Norway the same way as it had come to Sweden and Denmark’ (Frederiksen 1958, 62).

The design ideals presented in Frederiksen’s article were clearly rooted in the interwar years’ ‘new traditionalism’ and ‘new typography’ movements (see e.g. Kinross 2004; Klevgaard 2021), and were thus not radically new. Nevertheless, the article is emblematic of thoughts and ideas that were highlighted as ideals by the emerging designers. And although these ideas were in development, they nevertheless helped to shape the discourse in the decades that followed.

## Designers and the paperback revolution

One who was portrayed as an early representative for the above-mentioned ‘book architect’ or book designer in Norway was Roy Gulbrandsen (Nilsen 1957, 37–39). In 1954 he was hired as a designer and printing manager (trykningssjef) at Gyldendal. As printing manager, Gulbrandsen was responsible for overseeing both design and production of Gyldendal’s books. In the years following his arrival, he directed attention towards establishing consistency in typography and raising the general standards in Gyldendal’s book production. While also designing a large part of Gyldendal’s books, together with, among others, the designer and book artist Odd Borgersen, who had been hired in Gyldendal’s production department in the early 1950s (‘Odd Borgersen fikk årets “Bokkunstpris” 1980, 39). But while both Gulbrandsen and Borgersen thus were early representatives of the ‘new’ designer role, it was first and foremost from around 1960 that Gyldendal would see a significant expansion in the intake of designers and illustrators.



Among the permanent staff of in-house designers in the first half of the 1960s were names such as Inghild Strand, Karl Johan Foss, Leif F. Anisdahl, Kari Nordby and Gunnar Lilleng. Several of these represented the first generation of self-proclaimed graphic designers in Norway. They were all educated abroad, and most of them had their background in the printing trades or the advertising industry. Their arrival at Gyldendal coincided with the company's above-mentioned expansion and orientation towards new areas. In this, Gyldendal's paperback endeavour was an early and important contributing factor to their increasing intake of designers.

Gyldendal's paperback venture officially started in 1961 with the launch of the *Fakkell* (Torch) book series, which was followed by the *Lanterne* (Lantern) series the following year. This in many ways also helped kick off the 'paperback revolution' (billigbokrevolusjonen) in Norway, where all the major publishing houses launched their own paperback series in the ensuing years. Gyldendal's paperback section was led by Sigmund Hoftun, who had been hired as an editor in the late 1950s. Hoftun at this point was still in his late twenties, had studied the recent success of paperbacks in Sweden, and was convinced that similar achievements would be possible also on the Norwegian market (Evensmo 1974, 267–268). Gyldendal had admittedly published paperbacks earlier, but where earlier paperback series had mainly focused on popular fiction – often referred to as 'kiosk literature' – the new *Fakkell* and *Lanterne* series focused on publishing 'quality literature', sold at a low price in 'modern packaging'. The *Fakkell* books mainly focused on non-fiction, while the *Lanterne* books were devoted to fiction. And to separate them from 'kiosk literature' they were marketed as 'quality paperbacks' (kvalitetsbilligbøker).

According to Hoftun, it was Roy Gulbrandsen who oversaw the design of the new paperback series, though Hoftun himself most probably also had a say in the process (Gyldendal 1980). When developing the design, special attention was given to the covers, and as Hoftun describes it: 'The traditional cover illustrations had to give way to a stylised, powerful design as it was known from several foreign paperback series' (Gyldendal 1980). During the first two or three years, it was British illustrator Teddy Bick, and designer and illustrator Inghild Strand who designed the majority of the paperback covers, but in the mid-1960s, it was newly appointed graphic designers Leif F. Anisdahl and Kari Nordby who took over the main responsibility for the design. Prior to their arrival at Gyldendal, both Nordby and Anisdahl had worked for a short period as graphic designers in London, though without any direct connection. Nordby, who started in Gyldendal in 1965, worked as a typographic designer at Linotype & Machinery Ltd after studying graphic design at London College of Printing (Nordby, interview with Aslak Gurholt, 15 September, 2021). Anisdahl, who was a trained compositor with subsequent studies in graphic design (grafisk formgivning) at the Graphic College of Denmark, had prior to his arrival at Gyldendal in 1964, among other things, worked for a short period as a designer at Penguin Books (Anisdahl, interview with author, 31 January, 2020). Here he arrived shortly after a major revision and redesign of Penguin's book covers had been initiated under the leadership of newly appointed art director Germano Facetti (see, e.g. Baines 2005, 96–103). Whereas a large part of the covers Anisdahl designed while at Penguin was based on the 'Marber grid' which was gradually implemented on several of Penguin's paperback series as part of the redesign. This gave the young designer up-to-date practical experience as well as first-hand insight into the latest thoughts



Figure 14.1 From the left: Sigmund Freud, *Psykoanalyse*, 1961. Cover design by Teddy Bick. Gunnar Nycander, *Angst og uro*, 1965. Cover design by Leif F. Anisdahl. Vance Packard, *Statussøkerne*, 1966. Cover design by Kari Nordby. © Forlagshuset Gyldendal Norsk Forlag AS. Scans by Aslak Gurholt.

and trends within the field. And it is evident that Anisdahl, as well as Nordby, drew on their past experiences in their work as designers at Gyldendal.

While the early Fakkelt and Lanterne designs by Bick and Strand were characterised by their use of stylised, sometimes almost abstract, illustrations and individual typographical treatment, Anisdahl and Nordby put more emphasis on typography and the use of more varied graphic imagery and photography (Figure 14.1). They also introduced the Helvetica typeface, which had recently become available on the Norwegian market, as a regular feature in the cover design. This happened at the same time as Swiss typography, or *'sveitser-grafikken'* as it also was called in Norway, started to make its mark in Norwegian advertising and graphic design. This was also seen on several of the newly established paperback series – not only at Gyldendal – for example, through the more widespread use of photography, asymmetrical layout, and modern sans serif typefaces. In this period, one also saw a gradual systematisation and standardisation of the typography on Gyldendal's paperback covers. This became especially evident when Kari Nordby assumed primary responsibility for both the Fakkelt and the Lanterne series, after Anisdahl left Gyldendal to form the Anisdahl/Christensen design studio in 1966. Under Nordby's leadership, a further systematisation of the cover designs was carried out, with the intention to establish a more 'distinct identity for the paperback series', while also providing the 'opportunity to give each book its own face' (*'Omslagspikens dilemma'* 1969, not paginated). The Fakkelt covers were set in Helvetica, while the Lanterne covers were set in Baskerville. The typography was consequently placed at the top of the cover, where a horizontal rule separated the series name and logo from the author's name, book title, and 'blurb' (Figure 14.2). The standardised typographic layout was accompanied by varying cover illustrations



Figure 14.2 From the left: Selma H. Fraiberg, *De magiske årene*, 1967. Jens Bjørneboe, *Aske, vind og jord*, 1968. Cover design by Kari Nordby. © Forlagshuset Gyldendal Norsk Forlag AS. Scans by Aslak Gurholt.

made by Nordby herself, or by other illustrators and designers. This uniform standard helped separate the series from each other, while consistency in typography also gave the series identity. And although this approach had similarities to other paperbacks, like Penguin Books, it helped shape the modern ‘paperback-look’ which Hoftun and Gulbrandsen had set out to establish.

The design that was carried out on Gyldendal’s book covers during the 1960s, with its emphasis on typography and more varied use of imagery, represented a clear break with 1940s and 1950s paperback series and book covers, which were characterised by extensive use of hand-drawn lettering and illustrations. While this obviously was the result of a new and conscious design approach, it was also tightly connected to technological developments, and ongoing radical transformations in the printing industry. For example, the above-mentioned decline in hand lettering was connected to the introduction of Dry Transfer lettering and phototypesetting. In the early 1960s, Letraset’s Instant Lettering became available on the Norwegian market, and soon typography on Gyldendal’s book covers was mainly done with the help of Letraset (Anisdahl, interview with author, 31 January, 2020. Lilleng, interview with author, 21 August, 2021). Simultaneously the arrival of smaller and more flexible process cameras opened for new possibilities in terms of use and manipulation of imagery and typography. While developments in offset printing and general improvements in



Figure 14.3 The picture shows the interior of a bookstore in Oslo, dated 1967. © Oslo Museum. Photograph by Leif Ørnelund / Oslo Museum.

reproduction methods paved the way for a more extensive use of colour images. These developments also gave the designer greater control in the creation process, and made the path from idea to finished result shorter (Norvin et al., 66).

As Odd Arvid Storsveen has shown, the paperback venture was part of a wider set of measures and attempts to revitalise books in connection with the 1950s' gradual stagnation in book sales, where the 'publishing industry sought to turn crisis into success by presenting a "new product" to the public by promoting books as precisely what the contemporary and "modern" era now hungered for' (Storsveen 2004, 187). Gyldendal took an active part in this effort through hefty marketing and general promotion, presenting the new paperbacks as 'a medium for our time' (Hoftun 1971, 94). And although paperbacks never generated vast revenue, at least not for Gyldendal, they became a success in terms of sales and publicity (Jacobsen 1974, 71–72). The paperback's success is often seen in connection with the post-war 'education explosion' and rapid expansion of the Norwegian higher education systems, where an emerging generation of 'knowledge-seeking' politically engaged youth made up a large part of the paperback's customer base. At the same time, the 1960s also marked the breakthrough of the Norwegian consumer society (Myrvang et al. 2004, 310–320). The emerging consumer culture was among other things expressed in the physical space of the emerging self-service bookstores. Where bookshops were gradually transformed into supermarket-like interiors of bookshelves and free-standing gondola systems and



Figure 14.4 From the left: Eduardo Mondlane, *Kampen om Moçambique*, 1970. Cover design by Peter Haars. Simone de Beauvoir, *Når masken faller*, 1977. Cover illustration by Judith Allan. Clara Clairborne Park, *Beleiringen: Et autistisk barns åtte første år*, 1978. Cover design by Peter Haars and Bjørn Roggenbihl. © Forlagshuset Gyldendal Norsk Forlag AS. Scans by Aslak Gurholt.

customers could walk around freely and choose the books they wanted, and where books became part of modern consumer culture in line with records, jeans or T-shirts (Storsveen 2004, 174–177). With this, greater emphasis was also placed on presentation and the books' visibility in the store (Figure 14.3). This also meant that book covers, not only for paperbacks, gained renewed relevance as a means of appealing to customers. As Hoftun put it: 'You do not go into a bookstore to buy a particular paperback; you come out with a paperback – maybe two – because you have been to a bookstore.' In this, he stressed that book covers were to appeal to the customer, but always on the book's own terms: '[T]he cover [...] is the book's face towards the audience. And it should be an honest face, an invitation to read or buy, but always on the *book's* premises' (Gyldendal 1980). And designers played along, for example by emphasising the role of books as part of consumer culture. As when designer Hans Jørgen Toming in the Norwegian Book Club rather demonstratively proclaimed that he did not see any 'big difference between selling a book and selling for example a pack of corn flakes' ('reklamen – de engstelige menns bransje?' 1967, 12). But more often by emphasising how book design should reflect content, and that the cover should communicate with the potential reader, and how design thus first and foremost was communication.

After Kari Nordby left Gyldendal in the late 1960s illustrator and designer Peter Haars was hired as art director with the responsibility of overseeing the design of Gyldendal's paperbacks (Gyldendal 1980). A position he held until the mid 1980s, when Fakkelt and Lanterne were gradually phased out. Under Haars' art direction special emphasis was placed on illustration (Figure 14.4). In line with international trends, the mid-1970s moved away from the standardised typography that Nordby had introduced. In return, the covers were given an individual layout which emphasised

visual expression and ideas. In his own work, Haars showed a mix of pop art, psychedelia and science fiction influences. But he also involved others, both in-house and freelancers, and especially from the mid-1970s, several up-and-coming illustrators and designers were to make their mark on Gyldendal's paperbacks, which also helped established Fakkell and Lanterne among the most recognised paperback series on the Norwegian market.

### **The designer and the textbooks**

In the previous section, I have argued how Gyldendal's paperback endeavour was an early and important reason for why Gyldendal started hiring designers. But this did not mean that the designers in Gyldendal only designed paperbacks and book covers. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the number of designers in Gyldendal grew steadily. As mentioned above, this seemingly growing need for designers happened simultaneously as general expansion of the company took place. Designers were connected to the production department, or the small design department that was established in the late 1960s. While a growing number of designers also found their way into the School and Textbook department (Skole- og fagbokavdelingen), which was gradually expanded from the early 1960s. This development was seen in several Norwegian publishing houses during the 1960s and 1970s and was closely connected to extensive educational reforms carried out in the Norwegian school system during the post-war years. These reforms created a growing market for new textbooks, and with Gyldendal's orientation towards new markets, textbooks therefore became a natural expansion area. In the decade that followed, the School and Textbook department gradually expanded from a small 'annex' to one of the largest departments in the company (Evensmo 1974, 277–285).

The educational reforms that were carried out after the war gradually involved the entire school system: from lower and primary secondary schools (grunnskolen) and the upper secondary school system (den videregående skolen) to colleges and universities. The reform work was subject to repeated revisions and alterations, which continued into the 1980s and 1990s. Nevertheless, by the end of the 1970s, much of the foundation for the new structure in both lower and primary secondary schools, as well as the upper secondary school system, had been laid (Telhaug 1994, 93–106). The reforms also involved the development of new national curriculums. Work on new national curriculums for both primary and lower secondary schools and upper secondary schools, commenced during the second half of the 1960s and was gradually implemented throughout the 1970s. With the new curriculums came several new subjects, as well as new pedagogical requirements and learning outcomes, which in turn resulted in a growing need for new and updated teaching material and textbooks. In connection with this, publishers gradually also took greater control of the development of textbooks. Where textbooks were often previously the result of one author's independent idea and work, the schoolbook departments now took greater control over the entire process: from planning, obtaining authors, editing, and designing, conditions which again made designers, as well as illustrators, picture editors and authors, a natural part of the editorial staff (Andreassen 2006, 185–186).

As mentioned above, these developments were seen in several Norwegian publishing houses during the 1960s and 1970s, including in Aschehoug. Here, textbooks had been an important part of the company's publishing programme ever since it was

founded in 1872, but with the educational reforms of the 1960s and 1970s, these efforts were strengthened (Tveterås 1972, 332–342). In 1968, Junn Paasche-Aasen was hired as an in-house graphic designer in Aschehoug's schoolbook department (avdelingen for skole- og lærebøker), and in the decades that followed, until she left the company in the mid-1980s, she was responsible for the design of a large part of the textbooks published by the company. During this period, she also established herself as one of the leading graphic designers in the textbook area in Norway. Something which was highlighted when she received the Norwegian Book Art prize in 1985, where it was stated that: 'It is almost tempting to say that she has created the modern textbook in this country' (Carlsen 1985, 30–31). After graduating from the advertising class at the National College of Applied Art and Craft (Statens håndverk- og kunstindustriskole) in Oslo, Paasche-Aasen had studied graphic design at the Graphic College of Denmark, where book design, including design of textbooks, had been an essential part of the curriculum since the course was established in 1956 (Rohde 1967). Like many of her colleagues, she often stressed how graphic design concerned 'function and communication' and that the book designer's role first and foremost was to help in 'conveying the author's thoughts to the reader' (Paasche-Aasen 1999). As we will see, this approach also came across in many of the textbooks that she designed at Aschehoug.

When Paasche-Aasen arrived at Aschehoug she found herself to be the only female employee among the production staff, as well as the first and only designer in the schoolbook department. The department was eventually expanded with more graphic designers, but this didn't happen before the mid-1970s. Prior to her arrival, the schoolbook department consisted of two illustrators who mainly worked on covers and illustrations. At this point, design of textbooks was managed by Aschehoug's production manager and usually handled by an in-house typographer, or sent directly to the printers where it was handled by a compositor. As Paasche-Aasen experienced it, design of textbooks at this point first and foremost meant designing the cover. Whereas the typographical layout inside the book was often based on existing books and sent directly to the printer with minimal instructions on typesetting (Paasche-Aasen, interview with author, 30 August, 2019). This was also connected to how textbooks, traditionally, often were printed in constant new editions and therefore could be used 'through generations' only with minor revisions of the content (Tveterås 1979, 238). However, with the ongoing educational reforms, this was about to change.

As indicated above, Paasche-Aasen entered Aschehoug's schoolbook department during a particularly hectic period. As she recalls it today this was also an important reason for her employment (Paasche-Aasen, interview with author, 30 August, 2019). In 1967, the year before she was hired, work had begun on a national level with the new national curriculum for primary and lower secondary schools (*Mønsterplan for grunnskolen*), which together with the corresponding curriculum for upper secondary schools (*Læreplan for den videregående skole*) was gradually implemented throughout the 1970s (Telhaug 1994, 93–106). In connection with this, several new book projects were initiated under the direction of newly appointed head of the schoolbook department, Anders Havelid (Tveterås 1972, 351–352). This involved development of a range of different textbooks as well as different types of supplementary books, exercise books, workbooks, teacher manuals, etc. A multitude of these books were designed by Paasche-Aasen. As part of the design-work Paasche-Aasen undertook a gradual standardisation of both design and production. This involved standardisation



Figure 14.5 Fred Riktor and Per Hafslund, *Myr og tjern*. *Aschehougs o-fag-serie*. *Naturfag. Bokmål*, 1973. Design by Junn Paasche-Aasen. Layout by Fred Viktor. © H. Aschehoug & Co. Photograph by Junn Paasche-Aasen.

and implementation of new fonts and formats, as well as the gradual implementation of standardised column-based grid systems for a large part of the textbook catalogue. The design work was carried out at the same time as the production of Aschehoug’s textbooks gradually shifted from letterpress printing to offset printing which, among other things, opened up for greater flexibility and new possibilities in terms of layout and colour printing (Havnelid 1976, 339).

Among the new textbooks that were developed during this period was the book series *Aschehougs o-fag-serie* (Figure 14.5). This was an extensive book series developed in the early 1970s in connection with the new subject *o-fag*, which came with the new national curriculum for primary and lower secondary school. *O-fag* was a collection of several previous subjects, such as geography, history, natural science, etc. Based on this, *Aschehoug’s o-fag-serie* was developed with the aim of covering several topics within different subjects. It consisted of a series of theme-oriented books that were published individually as softcover books and as collections bound in hardcover. The design for the new series was developed by Paasche-Aasen in close collaboration with Fred Riktor, who was one of the authors and editor of the first books in the series. As Paasche-Aasen has later described it, Riktor, like herself, saw ‘the necessity and value of thinking design as a pedagogical tool’ (Paasche-Aasen 2016). When working on the design, special attention was placed on the books being well organised and easy to navigate. At the same time, particular emphasis was placed on the use of images. The books were printed four-color offset throughout the whole book, which was not very common for textbooks in Norway at the time, and contained rich image material consisting of photos, illustrations, information graphics, etc. Aschehoug argued that the extensive use of images and illustrations was a conscious move based on research that showed how especially the combination of ‘[t]ext and images together will give students knowledge and a better understanding of the topics covered’ (Nesse 1987, 71). This was a perspective shared by Paasche-Aasen. In her focus on conveying authors’ ideas to the reader, she was also devoted



to making textbooks more engaging and pedagogically available through the active use of images, illustration, and infographics. She argued that the use of images and illustrations in textbooks was often casual and ill-considered, and textbooks could potentially become more engaging through the more active use of images, adding that '[w]e must strive for a textbook where text and images complement each other to a greater extent' (Fuglehaug 1985, 3; Paasche-Aasen & Ulvund 1986, 13–15).

This approach was also the basis for Paasche-Aasen's interest in 'lexivisualisation', which was introduced and implemented as part of the design for *Aschehougs o-fag-serie*, as well as several other textbooks published by Aschehoug. Here she drew inspiration from the work of Swedish lexicographer Sven Lidman, which she had been introduced to during her studies at the Graphic College of Denmark. Lidman's concept of lexivisualisation derived from his work on illustrated encyclopaedias. In short, lexivisualisation was a way of presenting (often complex) information, for example, a specific subject or theme, using several 'information elements' such as text, pictures, illustrations, and maps, whereas the different elements were to be treated as an informative whole (see Lidman 1973). In *Aschehougs o-fag-serie*, lexivisualisation and infographics were often used to present a specific theme or phenomenon in the main text. This approach usually required close collaboration between designer, writer and illustrator, and Paasche-Aasen often involved several different illustrators in the making. A typical lexivisual presentation often consisted of a main illustration, supported by several smaller drawings or pictures that supplemented or elaborated on the main illustration, so that the page or spread often appeared as a collage of different drawings or pictures, though always within the fixed typographic framework of the series.

Although *Aschehougs o-fag-serie* was particularly rich in its use of images and illustrations, it was nevertheless representative of many of the new textbooks published by Aschehoug, as well as other Norwegian publishing houses, in the wake of the 1960s' and 1970s' educational reforms. With its pedagogically adapted design and active use of typography, images, and infographics, as well as four-colour printing, they differed markedly from previous textbooks published by the company. As this section has shown designers such as Paasche-Aasen played a central role in this development, but in doing so they were intertwined in a network of actors and events which to a high degree also affected the circumstances.

### **Transformation and professionalisation of (graphic) design practices**

As the previous sections have shown both Gyldendal's paperback endeavour and Aschehoug's schoolbook department are emblematic of how designers making inroads in Norwegian publishing houses were intertwined in a seamless web of socio-design, where political, social and technological factors contributed to the gradual emergence of designers in and around the publishing houses. However, technological changes, ongoing transformations in the printing industry and what was perceived as generally more complex circumstances, were often also used to explain and 'legitimise' the emerging design practitioner. Like when Leif F. Anisdahl presented the figure of the graphic designer to colleagues in the printing trades in an article in *Norwegian Printing Calendar* (*Norsk Boktrykk Kalender*) in 1962, where he declared that:

In our field too industrial expansion has led to competence specialization. The archetype of our profession, where the compositor himself moulds the task

from their own assumptions might find themselves today with less complicated work. [...] Any manager of a large or medium-sized printing company who wants to run his business can no longer reasonably avoid this important turning point. As with all professions in which one strives to give things shape in a practical and aesthetic sense, a designer, a facilitator, is a natural part of the manufacturing process.

(Anisdahl and Christensen 1962, 83–84)

Viewed in the light of Weberian closure theory, this argumentation is a typical case of occupational closure, where one group tries to monopolise advantages by closing off opportunities to another group it defines as inferior and ineligible (Murphy 1988, 10–11). This was substantiated by presenting the designer as a new kind of professional practitioner with in-depth knowledge and expertise, who could take care of the overall planning and designing of books. As when Kari Nordby stated in an interview in 1966 that ‘we have been printing books for hundreds of years, what is new is that you have a “designer” who takes care of the book from the inside to the outside’ (B.O. 1966, 13). Something which literally distinguished the graphic designer from all previous practitioners who had been involved in the design of books.

But books were created because of several actors involved, and it was not necessarily always the designer who dictated the conditions. As Gyldendal designers Gunnar Lilleng and Kjell Johnsen describe it, they were responsible dozens of books a year. This involved everything from the design of large reference books (e.g. encyclopaedias) to book covers, as well as Gyldendal’s literary journal *Vinduet* and other sorts of printed matter. In this work, speed was a virtue, and not all books were given equal consideration in terms of design. Many books were based on old templates or produced as photographic reprints of previous editions, where the designer mainly worked on the cover. Books with pure text (e.g. fiction) were often sent directly to the printer, with minimal instructions on typesetting. Next to book covers, it was often books with more complicated layouts where the designers came into play. But here also the designer’s actual role could vary: from books where the designer had his or her hands on the overall process (from planning to production), to books where layouts were already given, or more or less dictated by others, for example, an editor or author (Johnsen, interview with author, 2 February, 2021. Lilleng, interview with author, 21 August, 2021).

But even though the graphic designers’ actual role could vary their arrival nevertheless represented a transformation and professionalisation of design practices, which constituted a shift in Norwegian design cultures. As this chapter has shown, even though book covers had been designed by different practitioners for decades, books were primarily both produced and designed at the printing house. However, in tight connection to ongoing changes and transformations in society, the task was now gradually taken over by designers, with a different background and approach.

Graphic designers making inroads into Norwegian publishing houses thus shows how relationships between designers, institutions and markets changed in the course of the 1960s and 1970s. In this way, it also reflects broader changes and transformations in Nordic design culture, where one, against the backdrop of dramatic changes in production systems, consumer culture and economic policies, experienced an increasing specialisation and professionalisation within the design field. While also the concept of design was gradually expanded. In Norway (as in other Nordic

countries), this was among other things expressed, through a gradual fragmentation of the professional design discourse. Where, for example industrial design, handicrafts (kunsthåndverk), interior architecture, textile design, as well as graphic design gradually took shape as more specialised and independent professional communities. And even though the graphic designers who emerged in and around Norwegian publishing houses were only a small part of these developments, their arrival nevertheless manifested a Norwegian and Nordic design culture in transformation.

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## Interviews

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