

1 The Way North

Merging Ideology and Methodology on the Road to Ecological Design

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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

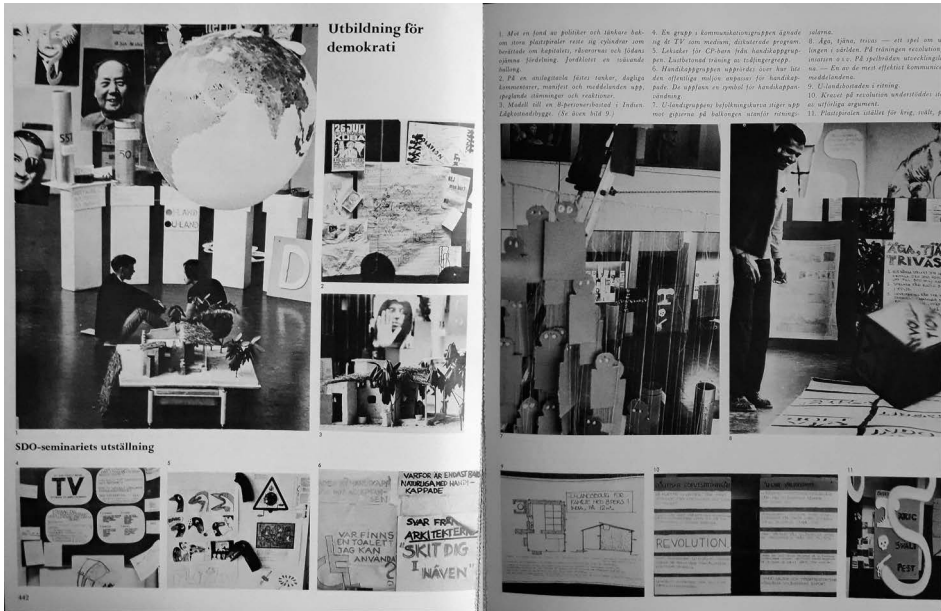


Figure 1.1 The SDO seminar ‘Human and Environment’ organized in Stockholm in July-August 1968 as covered by the Swedish design magazine *Form*. Courtesy of *Form*.

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

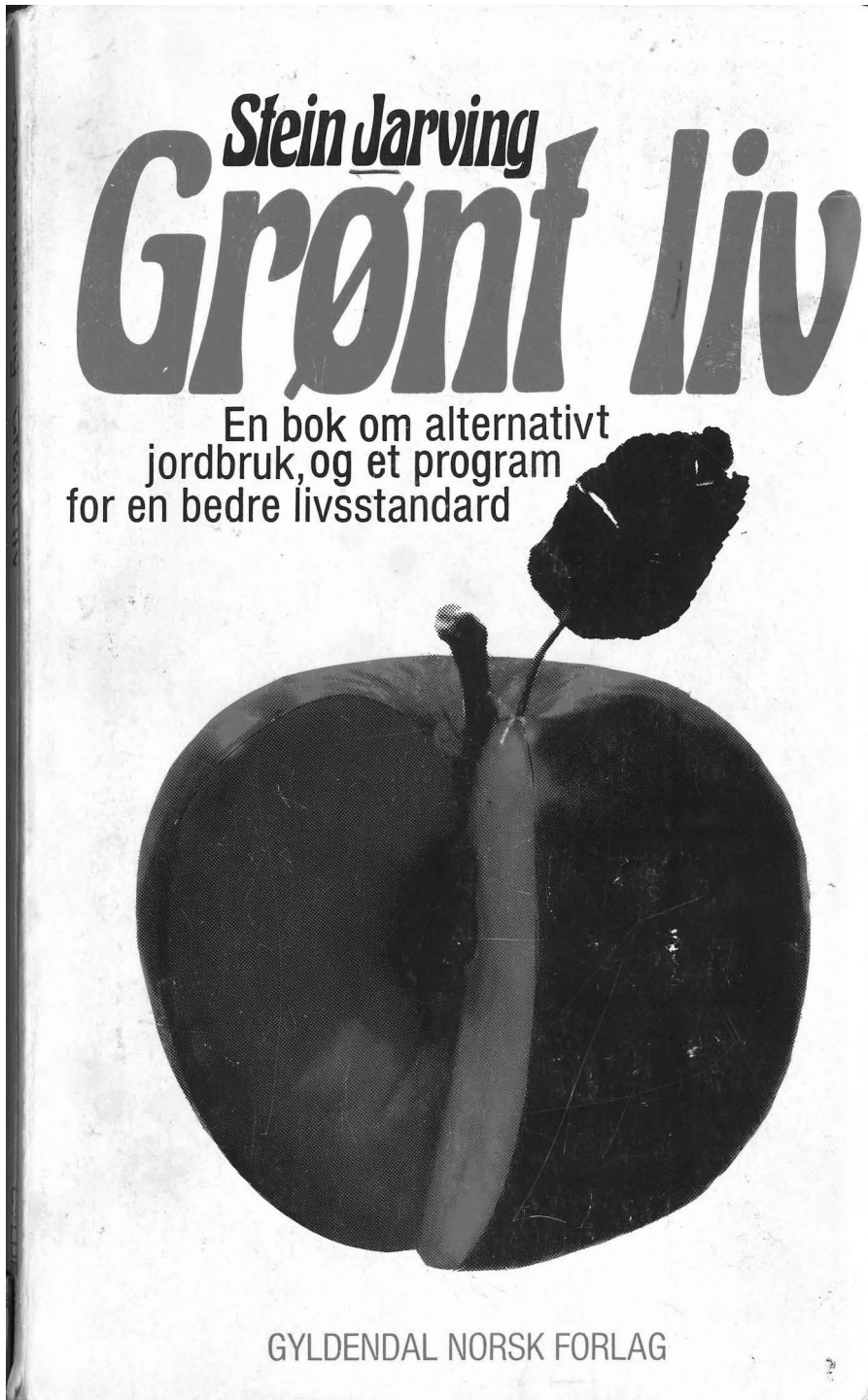


Figure 1.2 Front cover of Stein Jarving's book *Grønt liv* (Green life) published in 1974, two years before he and Paul Hofseth taught a course on 'Ecology and Resource Problems' at the National College of Art and Design. Cover design by Peter Haars. Courtesy of Gyldendal.

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 tomta, 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 bråten 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

□



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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.

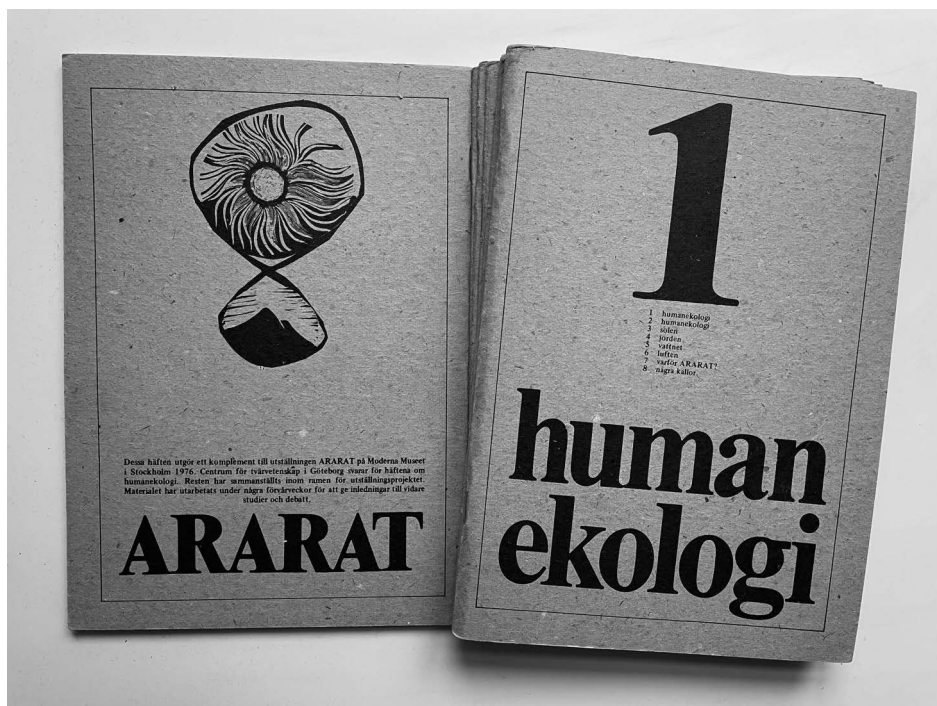


Figure 1.3 As an extension of the exhibition format, a collaboratively produced series of booklets were published to accompany the ARARAT show and elaborate on core themes such as human ecology, renewable energy sources, etc. Courtesy of Gunilla Lundahl.

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