

# **‘Make us more useful to society!’ –The Scandinavian Design Students’ Organization (SDO) and Socially Responsible Design, 1967-1973**

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## **Abstract:**

The article explores the brief, but ardent history of the Scandinavian Design Students Organization (SDO) in the late 1960s. Dissatisfied with contemporary design practice and education, a group of students aimed to reposition design, both in its methods and purpose, bringing it more in line with what they perceived to be the urgent challenges of society. The article focuses on the three summer seminars organized by the SDO as well as the two published issues of the member’s magazine &, and places them in a broader history of social design, co-design and participatory design. The study also reveals the mutual influence between Nordic design students and Victor J. Papanek, and places this cooperation in a broader geographic context.

## **Keywords:**

social design; participatory design; design activism; sustainability; design education; Victor Papanek; Scandinavian Design Students Organization (SDO)

## **Introduction**

Design activism, social design, co-design, and participatory design are receiving an ever-increasing focus in today’s various design practices. The roots of these developments may be traced back to the late 1960s and early 1970s, when—intimately intertwined with the period’s counter culture and radical politics—the social and activist potential of design emerged in tandem with an interest in the involvement of users, experts, and other stakeholders in design decisions. An important advocate of such changes was Victor Papanek, who, through his polemical book *Design for the Real World* (Papanek 1971) became a key figure in the establishment of a discourse on social design (e.g. Margolin 2015; Whiteley 1993, 98), and in the movement labeled by Alastair Fuad-Luke as ‘Design for Need’ (Fuad-Luke 2009, 210).<sup>i</sup> As noted by Fuad-Luke, designers connected to this movement generally focused on disadvantaged sectors of society, using alternative and appropriate technology and encouraging an efficient use of resources. This pragmatic ‘hands-on approach’ to design, where the *output* of design was the main concern, may be seen in contrast to the methods used by the Design Research Unit and the Design Methods movement in Great Britain. Pursuing a more scientific approach to design, these British groups took more interest in the design

*process* itself. Both of these trajectories of design history were key elements in a radically new design discourse emerging in the Nordic countries.

Although these developments were characterized by influential international connections, they also make up a unique Nordic design history. The concept of democratic design was key to a new generation of Nordic designers in the late 1960s. Dissatisfied with contemporary design practice and education, a group of design students repositioned the entire field by placing new issues and working methods on the agenda. Under the collective banner of the Scandinavian Design Students' Organization (SDO), these students aimed to reposition design, both in its methods and purpose, bringing it more in line with what they perceived to be the urgent challenges of society. By organizing workshops and seminars and inviting radical design visionaries like Victor Papanek, Buckminster Fuller, and Christopher Alexander as guest lecturers, the students challenged the previous generation's quest for beauty in domestic objects. But, perhaps even more important, they also confronted the very principals that formed the basis of traditional design education. Furthermore, by introducing themes and methods concerning social design and user involvement, the students anticipated the user centered design we know today.

This article argues that the SDO seminars were an important arena in the molding of a new generation's design thought and practice in the Nordic countries. Not only did they foster a full-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. By the second half of the 1960s, after the Scandinavian Design frenzy of the preceding decade had peaked, many young designers felt a need to distance themselves from what they viewed as an "elitist and narrow minded" set of prescriptions (Fallan 2007, 54). As in the rest of the Western world, and especially among young people, a growing recognition of environmental challenges and a stronger criticism of excessive consumption had now come to the fore. These concerns merged with a growing disbelief in the social, cultural, and political status quo and its materialist outlook. The design profession did not steer clear of this critique, and was blamed for neglecting its power and responsibility towards society, overemphasizing form over substance. Former SDO member and later professor and rector of the University of Industrial Arts Helsinki (*UIAH*), Yrjö Sotamaa, notes that, "beauty, which was the essential word in design in the 1950s and 1960s, disappeared from the Finnish design vocabulary for over ten years. People felt that it was unethical and immoral to talk about beauty in a world

full of inequality and problems.” (Sotamaa 2012, 3) In line with the period's breaking down of the hierarchies of western design practice (Clarke 2013b, 334), the SDO aimed to offer a new direction in design.

The keynote speakers at the SDO summer seminars found an enthusiastic body of followers among the design students, and their presence was a catalyst for a new direction within Nordic design. Victor Papanek's presence at the SDO seminars is of special interest, as it established his high standing and reputation among the participants. This prompted his visits to the Nordic design schools in the first half of the 1970s. Alison Clarke has shown that Papanek's involvement with the Nordic design scene formed the basis for his seminal book *Design for the Real World – Human Ecology and Social Change* from 1971 (Clarke 2013a, 161). As a direct result of this fertile period, the first Swedish edition of *Miljön och miljonerna: design som tjänst eller förtjänst?* [The Environment and the Millions: Design for Service or Profit?] was published in 1970 (Figure 1). As Martina Fineder and Thomas Geisler suggest, “*Design for the Real World* outlines a ‘new type’ of designer, calling for generalists to become ‘mediators’ of a multidisciplinary, process-oriented design team” (Fineder and Geisler 2010, 99). In the Nordic design community of the time, this view of the designer as facilitator of a team, rather than as lone creative genius, differed considerably from the dominant image of the artist-designer. Papanek's ideas seemed to represent the fresh and dynamic new approach that many students sought.

Papanek's activities and reception in late 1960s Finland has been thoroughly discussed by Clarke. What still warrants attention, however, is parallel developments in the other Nordic countries as well as the SDO's progressive work and critical role in shaping a new generation of designers. This article aims to expand our current understanding of the brief, but ardent history of the SDO, and to place the organization's collaboration with Papanek in a broader geographic context. In addition, it introduces the activities of the SDO in a broader history of social design, co-design and participatory design. For these reasons, this analysis focuses on three SDO summer seminars organized in 1967, 1968, and 1969 respectively, and also the two published issues of the organization's magazine titled *&*, which appeared in 1967 and 1968. Due to Papanek's prominent role in the summer seminars and his prolonged interactions with the Nordic design students' community, the article concludes by discussing Papanek's lasting presence in the Nordic countries in the years following the SDO's dissolution. The analysis is based on archive material and primary printed sources, as well as interviews with former SDO members.<sup>ii</sup>

## **Educational Reform Through Pan-Nordic Action**

The SDO was founded in February 1966, when the student union at *Konstfackskolan* (The School of Arts, Crafts and Design) in Stockholm invited student representatives from a number of Nordic art colleges and design schools to a meeting to discuss growing discontent with the education and organization at individual schools.<sup>iii</sup> In line with their communal ideals, the organization resulted from a genuinely collective effort, and this spirit of equality and participation permeated their proposals for new pedagogy. As noted in the organization's statutes, which were passed at the organization's first congress in Helsinki on July 16, 1967, the students saw mutual contact as a way to stimulate the environment around design education:

The organisation aims to improve the education, activate its members and the circles outside the schools, promote knowledge about the industry and strive to accomplish close cooperation with parties that is tangent to, or is in close contact with the industry, to further develop and coordinate it. The organisation should be open to international contacts and shall each year carry out a seminar on current interests.<sup>iv</sup>

By organizing seminars that brought students from the Nordic countries together and jointly publishing a Scandinavian student periodical, the group meant to supplement the formal education provided by their schools. This exercise in pan-Nordic co-operation was organized by an SDO secretary from each member school. Together with the school's student council representative, they would take part in frequent meetings with the entire group. The original member schools were the National College of Applied Art and Craft (*SHKS*) in Oslo, the Bergen College of Arts and Crafts, The School of Arts and Crafts in Copenhagen, The Institute of Industrial Art in Helsinki, The School of Design and Crafts (*HDK*) in Gothenburg and The School of Arts, Crafts and Design (*Konstfack*) in Stockholm. Beckman's School of Design in Stockholm and Kolding Design School later entered the organization.<sup>v</sup> This inclusive list of members demonstrates how quickly the initiative gained widespread support and how keenly the students felt the need for an organization like the SDO.

## **From Scandinavian Design to Social Design**

The SDO's first summer seminar was organized by members of the student union at the design school in Helsinki and held in Otaniemi, outside Helsinki, from July 10<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> 1967. The seminar was called 'The Work Environment' (*Työympäristö – Arbeidsmiljön*) and lectures were given by an interdisciplinary group of speakers whose interests revolved around

the renewal of design education and the role of industrial designers in it. Around 150 participants from Scandinavia and Finland took part in the seminar, which was funded by the Finnish State, the Nordic Cultural Fund and private organizations (Savola 2015, 55). The three keynote speakers were Kaj Franck, Victor Papanek, and Richard Buckminster Fuller. It was the latter two that got the most attention by the Swedish magazine, *Form*; according to the reporter the two “rushed over the auditorium like a small prairie fire” (Hausen 1967, 460). In his lecture, Buckminster Fuller presented the Dymaxion House as well as his famous geodesic domes that had been displayed at the World Expo in Montreal that same year. Promoting his thesis on doing “more with less,” Fuller upheld the claim that social problems like housing shortages, unemployment and famine all could be solved through design, that is a coordinated effort of engineers, architects, planners, and designers (Hausen 1967, 460). This view of design as a tool to meet social needs was highly present also in Papanek’s lecture. Moreover, according to *Form*’s journalist, many listeners found Papanek’s ideas more accessible than Fuller’s big scale projects (Hausen 1967, 460). Design for developing countries was a key issue in Papanek’s lecture, and challenges regarding communication and the distribution of products were in this context identified as areas of high importance. As examples of responses to these challenges, Papanek presented designs by himself and his students. Among these were his now-famous tin can radio and a car costing \$150 to construct and meant to provide ambulance transport in rugged terrain (Hausen 1967, 461).

The seminar received a great deal of attention in both the local and national press (Savola 2015, 56). *Form*’s reporter emphasized the seminar’s potential as a powerful institution that could stimulate internationalization, praising the organizers for establishing connections with authorities like Fuller and Papanek. (Hausen 1967, 461).<sup>vi</sup> Papanek himself commented on the seminar in the article “Northern Lights,” which was first published in the American magazine *Industrial Design* in 1968. The article may be read as an homage to Finnish design, which Papanek referred to as both authentic and democratic, and claimed that the country’s design culture was shaped by climatic factors as well as its nearness to nature (Papanek 1968b, 29-33). In his report on the seminar, Papanek also described dissatisfaction among the majority of young Finnish designers and design students, suggesting that they felt that their future prospects were too limited and overdetermined by tradition. With characteristic sarcasm, Papanek hailed the social and moral commitment of the young Finnish designers:

Young Finnish designers feel there must be a new way of designing. In addition to the Scandinavian way (confecting objects of jewel-like perfection for an aesthetic elite) or the American way (designing and manufacturing mediocre pap for everyone on the level of a 12-year old and helping to turn the whole world into “God’s own junk yard”) they are seeking a middle way. The unique talents, sensitivities and skills of the industrial designer can find their finest fruition only in social and moral engagement. Possibly the rapport between Finland’s young designers and myself was brought about by our sharing an identical view regarding the responsibility of the designer to his society. (Papanek 1968b, 33)

Clearly Papanek esteemed the students as much as they admired him. As Clarke has shown, Papanek’s thoughts on the value of an interdisciplinary design education and his understanding of design practice as part of an anthropological discourse found an enthusiastic audience in Finland (2013a, 155). That Finnish design students felt a need to distance themselves from the recent successes of Scandinavian Design is confirmed by Pekka Korvenmaa who notes that the “‘tabletop aestheticism’ was seen to represent values that were obsolete in an era of massive global problems” (Korvenmaa 2012, 229). It is, however, important to note that this by no means was an impulse exclusive to Finland. In line with the political climate of the 1960s, a growing critique was directed towards the Nordic design profession in its entirety, both from voices inside and outside the field. At the 1967 SDO seminar this was most clearly expressed as a wish to expand the traditional designer’s field of work from domestic products for the upper middleclass to design solutions meeting basic human needs, and consequently to set a new social agenda for designers.

### **From Product to Process: No More ‘Sexy Toasters’**

Both Buckminster Fuller and Victor Papanek returned to Finland the following summer. This time the occasion was the seminar ‘Industry – Environment – Product Design’ (*Industri – miljö – produktdesign*) which was held in two sessions, from July 1-3 and 15-20, at the fortress island of Suomenlinna outside Helsinki (Figures 2 & 3). Even if this seminar was organized by a group of young engineers, architects and designers independent of the SDO, many of the same participants and speakers were present, and the meeting remains a benchmark for gauging the further development of the SDO. Funded by the Finnish state and with the participation of the Minister of Labor, Jussi Linnamo, this seminar had a more national character than the SDO seminars before and after it (Lundahl 1968b, 440). The active part taken by the Finnish state can be read as an acknowledgement of the seminar’s potential

to improve the character of Finnish design, and also to change the very character of design itself from a practice that make beautiful objects to one that improve people's quality of life.

While the seminar's first section, which concerned the social purposes of industrial design and the possibilities of technology, may be seen as a continuation of the 1967 seminar's focus on socially responsible design, the seminar's second section dealt with the design process itself. A diverse list of speakers reflects a belief among the organizers in the value of an interdisciplinary approach to design problems and a view of the designer as a facilitator and coordinator of a team. During the seminar this view of design as a process, involving various actors with different competence, was dispersed to the participants. Among the speakers were four members of Design Research Unit from the Royal College of Art in London.<sup>vii</sup> Referring to experiences from their work for hospitals, the DRU members emphasized both the valuable inclusion of psychologists in their team, as well as the importance of user involvement to optimize a design solution, thus giving the Nordic students insight into the most recent developments of DRU.<sup>viii</sup> According to *Form*'s reporter it was the lectures on systemic design that had greatest impact on the audience (Lundahl 1968a, 444). This thematic was further discussed by Christopher Alexander, whose high tech solutions must undoubtedly have been fascinating to the Nordic students. In the lecture "The Organization of Design Pattern," Alexander described how information could be "fed into a computer, that through different codes would generate all the information needed in every project – windowsill or million city" (Lundahl 1968a, 444).

The list of speakers also included Henrik Wahlforss, an industrial designer trained both at the design school in Helsinki and at Pratt Institute in New York, and he worked under the influential design educator Rowena Kostellow. Kerstin Wickman describes how Wahlforss came to Stockholm with his American wife, Dagmar Arnold, in the early 1960s and set up the design office Product Program (Wickman 2005, 86). Also a graduate from Pratt, Arnold spent the year 1958-59 at the *Hochschule für Gestaltung* in Ulm (Ulm School of Design) on a Fulbright Scholarship, before working as a designer for both General Motors and IBM in the United States. Dagmar and Henrik Wahlforss had extensive knowledge of the Ulm methodology, and this connection is emphasized in a period article on Product Program published in *Form*. Here the office's idiom was described as reflecting the "hard hammered elegance of the Ulm school" (Hausen 1967, 81). Among the designs presented in the article was the *Permobil*, one of the first battery-driven wheel chairs for outdoor use, designed by the doctor Per Uddén and further developed by Wahlforss.<sup>ix</sup> *Form* had published two articles on

the Ulm School of Design already in 1958 and a few Swedish and Finnish students followed courses at the school in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Maldonado 1958; Jonsson 1958; Wickman 2005, 78-79; Vihma 2005, 68). But Wahlforss' presence at the seminar indicates a further dissemination of the Ulm methodology to a Nordic audience.<sup>x</sup>

The roster of speakers also included chemist and environmentalist Hans Palmstierna (Figure 4). The latter had risen to fame after the publication of his popular science book *Plundring, svält, förgiftning* (Plundering, Hunger, Poison) in 1967, a Swedish answer to Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. Through his severe critique of the exploitation of the earth and its resources, Palmstierna became a key initiator of the environmental debate in Sweden. The inclusion of Palmstierna in the program shows that even if the SDO mostly engaged with issues concerning social design and the human environment, an ecological awareness and interest in environmental issues remained a high priority for most of its members. It also demonstrates that the turn from product to process, which may be said to be the seminar's fundamental tone, also was about seeing design in a broader perspective. This recognition of consequences and after-effects acknowledges design as a continuing process more than a practice limited to the designer's drawing table.

In addition to lectures, the program included group work centering around two projects—a mobile reindeer slaughterhouse and a collapsible playground for children with cerebral palsy (Lundahl 1968a, 444). In both projects students gained experience with virtually all parts of the design process, including the definition and demarcation of problems, background studies, construction and testing by user groups, as well as planning for the further development of products. They also became conscious of design's ability to improve people's lives. According to *Form*, both projects were developed for further production but, according to Kaisu Savola, whether this actually happened remains unclear (2015, 76). The playground project became an important reference in Papanek's further work, both at the seminar held in Stockholm a few days later and in *Design for the Real World*. Here Papanek describes how the students, through the project, were able to alert the Finnish people to the challenges faced by children with cerebral palsy. At the same time, he hoped, they also changed the attitudes of therapists, nurses, doctors, and other people working with these children. Last but not least, according to Papanek, the project led to a change in the lives of the design students themselves: "He [the student] has completed deeply satisfying work; never again will it be possible to engage in design directed *only* toward 'good taste'. Having experienced this kind



of work, he will forever after feel a little ashamed when he designs a pretty, sexy toaster.”  
(Papanek 1971, 287)

### **Co-opting Cooperation**

Two days after the seminar in Suomenlinna ended, the SDO held its second summer seminar. This meeting was named ‘People and the Environment’ (*Menneske och miljö*) and it was organized at *Konstfack* in Stockholm from July 22 to August 4, 1968. While the seminar in Suomenlinna had focused on working methods and the design process, this SDO seminar linked ideology with global consciousness, and aimed for the development of new forms of cooperation. The seminar got extensive coverage in the Swedish media and the newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* even carried daily reports where they wrote about the speakers, themes and the rest of the program. Despite a long list of speakers it was, according to *Form*’s journalist Gunilla Lundahl, Victor Papanek’s message that dominated the seminar (Lundahl 1968b, 440). This was also reflected in the daily press, which published several interviews with Papanek. In fact, Sweden’s leading newspaper, the *Dagens Nyheter*, even appointed him as a kind of figurehead for the entire seminar (Anon. 1968d).

In his three lectures Papanek discussed the social and moral responsibility in design and how design—and especially design education—can contribute to social change. In his first talk, referred to as a “marathon lecture” in *Dagens Nyheter* (Anon. 1968a), Papanek gave a twenty-minute introduction describing the heavy responsibility resting on the shoulders of industrial designers, and then launched into an illustrated lecture, showing and commenting on 350 slides. These showed objects exemplifying six neglected fields of work that he believed young designers should be encouraged to focus upon: (1) safety (of all kinds – sports equipment, traffic safety, toys etc.); (2) under-developed countries; (3) medical equipment; (4) education (educational aids); (5) research equipment (for laboratories etc.); and (6) residential environment (Papanek 1968d). Given the rather complex nature of the tasks Papanek presented here, it is clear that a successful result was entirely depended on cooperation between the designer and relevant experts.

The topics presented by Papanek were, however, familiar to the seminar’s participants. Consciousness of safety and ergonomics already constituted a long standing concern in Swedish industrial design (Brunnström 2004, 297-325). At *Konstfack*, this had already been more concretely explored in a three-day symposium about design for disabled children, organized by the school’s student union in January 1968 (Savola 2015, 79). In March of the

same year, 300 participants attended a four-day seminar, also at *Konstfack*, focusing on developing countries (Savola 2015, 79-80). That Papanek's pragmatic design approach still was appealing and found resonance in the audience is nonetheless clear. *Dagens Nyheter*, for instance reported that the collection of slides prompted "a flood of interest, suggestions, witty remarks and good student solutions" (Anon., 1968b). In retrospect, participants recall a kind of power in Papanek's elucidative way of speaking and were especially struck by his seemingly easy solutions to complicated problems. Wenche Gulbrandsen, a former student at the National College of Applied Art and Craft (*SHKS*) in Oslo, expresses her fascination for Papanek's tin can radio, and notes that "I felt that he spoke so clearly and had such comprehensive ideas. It was quite simply all about making the world a better place, about making it sustainable!"<sup>xi</sup> Roar Høyland, a lecturer at SHKS from 1968 and later rector of the same school, agrees with Gulbrandsen's impression, recalling that: "I had read about these gurus in England [Design Research Unit] of course, but it felt very vague. But then Victor Papanek came along, and I thought 'Yes of course, that's the way it is! How lovely that someone gives words to it!'"<sup>xii</sup>

In "Revolution, Social Change and Design," the second lecture that he delivered at *Konstfack*, Papanek commented on the difference between designers like himself and design researchers like Bruce Archer and his Design Research Unit. While designers want *action*, Papanek claimed, researchers want *knowledge* (Papanek 1968c, 4). Papanek's observation may suggest that he had less time for research, and preferred a more hands-on approach to design than what he saw in the works of Archer and the Design Research Unit. This was further elaborated in his description of the playground project carried out at the Suomenlinna seminar. While acknowledging the importance of research, Papanek nevertheless emphasized the value of exploring by doing, underlining that the first step often must be to simply take action. Since a playground for children with cerebral palsy had not been made until then, nobody had been trained to make one. But taking action and involving therapists, doctors, as well as end-users in the explorative process was the most productive way to start, argued Papanek. Then, in the next round, the researchers could observe, analyze and find ways to improve the design for a revised version (Papanek 1968c, 5).

It was, however, Papanek's lecture "Design Education" that attracted the biggest audience that summer at *Konstfack* (Anon. 1968d). Bearing in mind that design education was heavily contested and remained the very reason for the foundation of the SDO, the attention given to Papanek's lecture comes as no surprise.<sup>xiii</sup> Moreover, one of the most prominent and widely

proclaimed demands of the Nordic students was for a more interdisciplinary education. In fact, the five-year long design program developed by Papanek at Purdue University included social anthropology, psychology, engineering science, and structural biology as mandatory core courses and these naturally gained great interest (Anon. 1968d). The program was further discussed by Papanek in *Design for the Real World*, where he wrote that:

It is unfortunate that almost all schools or departments of design in the United States require an undergraduate degree in the same field as that in which the student hopes to do graduate work. We chose a different way, because of our passionate belief that the true design needs of the world must be carried out by cross disciplinary teams. (Papanek 1985, 301)

The quote reflects how interlinked Papanek's way of thinking was with the theme of the seminar, which also included an extensive section on group work. This was arranged around the following five themes: education, disability, challenges in developing countries, residential environments, and communications. The groups identified specific problems for discussion and brought in a variety of external specialists who might bring their knowledge to bear by cooperating with the study groups. By the end of the seminar, each group summarized its findings in a report and a small exhibition was mounted at *Konstfack*. It reflected the participants' rallying cry, "make us more useful to society!" (Nilsson 1968). *Form*'s journalist pointed to the group work as the event's most significant feature because it fostered the personal and professional development of the participants. By immersing themselves in a particular problem, the participants not only learned to work in teams, but they also became conscious of their broader role in society (Lundahl 1968b, 440).

One of the most concrete results of the group work occurred in the design for disability group. A Danish student, Susanne Koefoed, sketched a symbol consisting of a simplified white wheel chair on a black background. Koefoed's work got international acclaim when a revised version of the symbol was adopted as the International Symbol of Access by the special interest organization Rehabilitation International (RI) at their world congress in Dublin in 1969 (Guffey 2015, 358-359).<sup>xiv</sup> Koefoed's symbol shows that Papanek's ideology and teaching methods also generated concrete, real, and important design solutions. But perhaps even more important, it is a lasting result of the interdisciplinary work possible when these Nordic design students collaborated together.

The seminar should in fact also become significant for the development of Swedish design, and Kerstin Wickman points to "People and the Environment" as a decisive reason why

design for disability became an important part of public discourse and official policy in Sweden during the 1960s and 70s. Maria Benktzon, a *Konstfack* student at this time, highlights this learning experience, noting that “I learned to cooperate with other groups in society, with occupational therapists and psychologists.” (Wickman 1994, 286) This aspect would become important in Benktzon’s future career as a designer. After graduating from *Konstfack* in 1969, she teamed up with Henrik Wahlforss and his fellow designers in a cooperation that in 1971 was officially established as *Ergonomidesign*. Together with Sven-Eric Juhlin, Benktzon designed several products for RFSU Rehab, Sweden’s most important supplier of remedies for disabled people since its formation in 1970 (Brunnström 2004, 321). Among Benktzon’s and Juhlin’s most acclaimed products in that context, is the ‘eat and drink’ series from 1978, which is also represented in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. The work of RFSU Rehab is also referenced by Papanek in a paragraph on design for people with special needs in the second edition of *Design for the Real World*:

This probably is the place to mention the excellent work done by RFSU Rehab in Sweden. They have developed cutlery for impaired strength and movement, especially for those suffering from rheumatic arthritis ....The Rehab people in Sweden have also developed handle extender, tap-handle or faucet turners, pens, and crutches for the handicapped. (Papanek 1985, 135)

The atmosphere during the seminar in the summer of 1968 was marked by the unflagging belief in making a difference through design, not just locally, but on a global basis. The Stockholm based *Svenska Dagbladet* reported on an engaged atmosphere when problems in developing countries were on the agenda:

It was somewhat of a revolutionary atmosphere in the lecture hall when Benjamin Monachgotla from SKAN-SNCC [Scandinavian Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] presented the organization’s view on the reprehensible system that exploits developing countries. Victor Papanek and a number of others did however consider design to have little to do with politics or the political situation in Africa. (Anon. 1968c.)

As the paper suggests, Papanek was unwilling to commingle design and politics, and returned to the subject in his lecture on design for social change:

This will raise the question immediately in many of our minds: A design answer, but why not a political answer? In other words, why not make a revolution in the United States or in Vietnam and this [is] of course where the breakdown of communication

between some of the people in the audience and myself has made itself felt very strongly during this week, but I feel, speaking for myself only, that I am a better designer than a revolutionary. I also feel that many of the revolutionaries I have met are better designers than revolutionaries. Because when you give them a design job they can solve it very well, and when they are given a social action job they sit and talk, for days, weeks and months and nothing happens. (Papanek 1968c, 2)

For his part, Papanek clearly saw design and politics as two factors that should not be mixed. Nevertheless, others criticized his disinterest in the political context. This wish for a 'political answer' among some of the SDO members points towards the growing politicization of the organization. In fact, this fissure would eventually lead to the group's dissolution the following year. Papanek's interest in clear-cut results is also worth noting, as the SDO participants' inability to accomplish concrete results was, according to *Form*, the reason for the failure of the following summer's seminar (Lundahl 1969). Because of its seminal influence, and the extensive media attention, the 1968 seminar must be considered the culmination of the SDO's activities, but it also disclosed challenges that would rise to the surface at the next year's gathering.

### **Radical Design Activism: 'The revolution has started, come along!'**

The third and last SDO seminar, 'People and the Environment II' (*Menneske og miljø II*), was organized at The School of Arts and Crafts in Copenhagen, taking place from June 21 to July 4, 1969. The seminar built on the event at *Konstfack* the previous summer and continued the emphasis on group work, but in this case focusing on different parts of the man-made environment. These included city environments, work environments, leisure environments and environments of care, as well as the question of international solidarity. The results were eventually presented through a physical, visual, or verbal product. Each group was reinforced with students from disciplines such as ethnography, architecture, sociology and psychology, who worked as affiliate members or informants for the teams (Anon. 1969, 4-7.). The entire conference had the rather ambitious aim to "not only give a stronger informative base, but to provide the participants with an intuitive confidence, thus helping to reform the schools' methods of teaching and highlighting the students' relationship to their own education" (Anon. 1969, 4). But it may have been too high, as a gathering of members on the seminar's last day decided that "the SDO, as an ineffective organization with neither a goal nor a long term program, shall be closed down." (Anon. 1970)

Given the successful seminar the year before, this rather abrupt end might seem surprising. It must, however, be seen in the light of growing politicization and the emergence of a more radical leftist militancy that was beginning to sweep through society as a whole. With deep ties to colleges and universities, the “New Left” represented a break with Soviet communism and the social democracies of Western Europe. Both in form and content, this new kind of left-wing radicalism looked towards post-colonial liberation movements and the Chinese Cultural Revolution (Thue and Helsvig 2011, 319). Across Europe, the movement would soon make its mark on society as a whole, demanding changed gender roles, gay rights and legalized abortion and drugs. Although the ideological evolution of the movement took a somewhat different form in the Nordic countries, it is fair to say that all aspects of society were politicized in the late 1960s (Jørgensen 2008, 249; Kolbe 2008, 371; Östberg 2008, 344).

Naturally, this trend profoundly impacted the SDO. One of the Norwegian students attending the seminar was Terje Roalkvam, an artist and former student at the National College of Applied Art and Craft (*SHKS*) in Oslo. He and some other students drove to Copenhagen in an old van decorated with a poster designed by Per Kleiva (one of the most politically radical artists of 1960s’ Norway); the placard announced that “The revolution has started, come along!”<sup>xv</sup> (Figure 5) The politicized spirit of the poster was echoed throughout the SDO meeting. This is further confirmed by an alternative manifesto drafted during the seminar, which stated that, “We will by all means defeat capitalism to achieve a dynamic socialist system that enables total social justice.” (Anon. 1970) This shift, however, prompted *Form* magazine to publish a negative article about the conference soon after it ended. Its members were criticized for their inability to accomplish concrete results and the SDO was blamed for having become a “Scandinavian discussion club for a few ignorant students” (Lundahl 1969). Swedish historian Kjell Östberg argues that many of the Nordic social and political movements that had emerged throughout the 1960s lacked a distinct perspective. When this radicalization peaked around 1970, conflicting agendas emerged (Östberg 2008, 344-345). This was obviously the case also for the SDO, where the desire to change design practice eventually became overshadowed by the desire to change the world order. The organization failed to follow up this vehement anti-capitalism through practical design activism. Instead, the SDO imploded under the yoke of its own radical design activism. The revolution had started, but nobody came along.

Despite the rather unfortunate end of the SDO itself, the Copenhagen seminar was, of great importance for Papanek. Here he developed and constructed the so-called Copenhagen Chart,

which, according to Alison Clarke, “marked the beginning of his broader populist activism in the United States” (Clarke 2013a, 164). Mapping out the designer’s ethical commitment and role in a society ruled by the market, the chart functioned as a tool for understanding the consequences of the designer’s work. Starting out by claiming that “we are all handicapped,” whether due to physical, social, emotional, economical, educational, or political reasons, the chart showed how good design could benefit everyone. With handwritten diagrams and an informal look, it then presented both what people “really need” and what people are “told they need,” contrasting how false and real goals are achieved, and finally how to change this. According to Papanek’s flow chart, the needed change could be accomplished through education, creativity, social and communal planning, and research (Papanek 1985, 313-314). The seminar in Copenhagen represents the ultimate political radicalization of the SDO. At this point the organization had become so politicized that Papanek’s message, centered on practical action, drowned in the students’ infatuation with revolution. At the same time, this is where Papanek formulated his design activism in its most easily understood way; the Copenhagen Chart may be regarded as a summing up of his message presented at the previous seminars. Interestingly, Papanek’s Nordic swansong was also his ticket into the more mainstream American industrial design community, even if his message was largely the same (Clarke 2013a, 164).<sup>xvi</sup> The Copenhagen seminar may consequently be regarded as a turning point in Papanek’s career, first from a Nordic to an American context, but also from a perception of his work in a countercultural to an institutional context.

### **A ‘little magazine’ on Design Education**

The SDO’s legacy must be judged by more than its seminars. In 1967 and 1968 the group also produced an ambitious and seminal magazine with the cryptic title &. In their first issue, the editors established the journal’s iconoclastic content and tone, explaining that the title “& is a concept, a term, a symbol for everything that was never said, a much needed action that did not exist before.” (Anon. 1967a) (Figure 6) An editorial in the first issue further described it both as a part of, and a concrete result from the cooperation between the student unions at the Nordic design schools. Intended as an annual publication, with editorial responsibility alternating between the member schools,<sup>xvii</sup> the magazine functioned as an arena for the exchange of views among its far-flung student members. Even if & was mainly aimed at design students, it should, however, be seen in relation to the many small and independent magazines published in the 1960s and 1970s, and characterized by Beatriz Colomina and

Craig Buckley as “little magazines.” The two published issues of & focused on design, not architecture, but the publication is very much like the

innovative and energetic publications [that] helped form a global network of exchange among students and architects and also between architecture and other disciplines. The little magazines acted as incubators of new ways of thinking and a key arena in which the emerging problems facing architectural production could be debated. (Buckley and Colomina 2010, 11)

The first issue of & was published in April 1967, and centered on the SDO’s preoccupation with design education and how it related to society. The significance of Nordic cooperation in connection to pedagogic reform was discussed in an article by Jaakko Halko, who claimed that even if Scandinavian design was highly regarded in the past, the education of industrial design students in the Nordic countries was no longer up to international standards. The establishment of the SDO was, however, both a common platform and an initiative to encourage wider international activity. Specifically, it aimed to reanimate Nordic design and raise it to international standards. To succeed in this, Halko called for a common visual Esperanto, a *Visperanto*, so that different specialist groups may cooperate and share ideas more easily (Halko 1967, 4). Whatever their form of communication, the group’s focus on pan-Nordic cooperation is interesting in light of the postwar Scandinavian Design movement. Even if this new generation of designers distanced themselves from many of the ideas that shaped the Scandinavian Design movement of the previous two decades, they were still unwilling to disengage from the experience of a common Nordic design effort. Instead, they made a conscious decision to face the international stage as a single bloc.

Keeping this larger, unified focus in mind, the other articles published in the first issue of & discussed a range of questions of interest at the member schools. One featured a cooperative project launched by the Swedish Defense Research Agency (*Försvarets Forskningsanstalt* or FOA) in Stockholm and *Konstfack*’s sculpture program. In the latter, the students’ task was to make a prosthesis that could imitate a human hand’s grip, but could also appear natural both in movement and rest (Anon. 1967b). This expansion of the sculpture department’s traditional field of work, from fine arts to the applied and industrial arts, is symptomatic of a long tradition at *Konstfack* that was given full expression when the artist Palle Pernevis served as section coordinator between 1962 and 1970. Exercises given to students included the development of a three-dimensional stocking ad for *Kooperativa Förbundet* (the Cooperative Association), and an automotive body design for Volvo (Millroth 1994, 233). The prosthetic



hand project, however, suggests a newer direction. In fact, its lengthy treatment in the first issue of & demonstrates emerging importance of ergonomics not only in the SDO, but also in Nordic design more broadly.

Much space in the magazine was also given the students at the National College of Applied Art and Craft (*SHKS*) in Oslo, and they voiced extensive unhappiness with the school's organization and management. In a resolution passed at a general meeting in October, 1966, the students demanded more co-determination, further interdisciplinary work and greater cooperation between *SHKS*, craft organizations, and Norwegian industry. This document was published in & and accompanied by an interview with designer and former *SHKS* student Roar Høyland. Sympathizing with the students' demands, Høyland claimed that designers too easily "isolate themselves in their small private world of applied arts....Immersing oneself in the world of form is of little help when the market on daily basis is flooded by the worst monstrosities that mass production may churn out." (Anon. 1967c) Høyland called for a focus on more responsible, publically minded design, and his rhetoric and arguments do in fact predate the agenda that soon would be laid out by Papanek at the SDO seminars and later in the publication of *Design for the Real World*. Høyland's comments suggest that many young Nordic designers and design students were already urging designers to take on greater social responsibilities. Papanek's words consequently fell on eager ears, and the community of Nordic design students clearly acted as a motivating factor to his work.

Less than a year later, in 1968, Høyland was appointed lecturer at *SHKS*. Here he would make his mark as a radical voice in the teaching staff. He was also a key person in organizing Papanek's visit in Oslo in January 1969 (Fallan 2011, 41). Before his arrival Papanek had asked the organizers to prepare a practical task that would run parallel to his lectures at *SHKS*. Chairman of the student's council at the time, Kjell Kvernaas recalls that during the SDO seminar in 1968, a group of students from Oslo had become aware of Stockholm municipality's work on green zones in the city, and how the city's courtyards were considered recreational areas. Inspired by the work in Stockholm, a derelict, rat-infested courtyard in Oslo was chosen as project area.<sup>xviii</sup> Under Papanek's guidance, the students worked in three groups—administration, planning, and model making—and transformed the courtyard to a pleasant outdoor environment for the residents. In addition to the students from *SHKS*, the project attracted architecture students from the Oslo School of Architecture and students of landscape architecture from Norwegian College of Agriculture. The experience of working in interdisciplinary groups was considered especially rewarding by the students (NRK, 1969).

Presenting the project on national television, student Ann Bjerke also emphasized the social aspect of the project: “We think it is important to engage in other tasks than those we traditionally have solved, tasks that can help other groups than those we have been used to help.” (NRK 1969) (Figure 7) The comment reflects some of the critique of the school in Oslo that had been presented in & magazine, and also partly what had motivated the founding of the SDO.

### **New Design Methods**

The second and last issue of &, was published in 1968 (Figure 8). The editorial responsibility was this time assumed by students at The Institute of Industrial Art in Helsinki, with Yrjö Sotamaa as editor-in-chief. The second issue was more like a newspaper in both format and paper quality and considerably more comprehensive than the first issue. It contained articles on a wide range of subjects and several pop cultural references. Its many illustrations included techniques like photo collage and cartooning, and there were several articles on music, on bands like The Who and The Velvet Underground and Nico. Much space was given to Richard Buckminster Fuller. In 1961 Fuller had launched the idea of a “World Design Science Decade” and proposed to the International Union of Architects (IUA) that the architectural schools around the world should invest the next ten years in resolving how to make the world's resources serve all humanity, not just a privileged minority. Through a series of documents, Fuller suggested, in great detail, how this problem should be attacked. Two of these texts were reprinted in & (Fuller 1968a, 6-7; 1968b, 8-23). Doing more with less was once again the characteristic theme, and Fuller's solution for how this tactic could improve the standard of living for the disadvantaged majority of the world's population must have resonated well with the SDO's social agenda (Fuller 1968b, 18).

In addition, this issue contained early drafts of texts by Papanek and John Christopher Jones that would reach a broader audience through later iterations published elsewhere. The extensive article by Victor Papanek was provocatively titled “Do-it-yourself Murder.” Based on a lecture Papanek held at the SDO seminar in Otaniemi in 1967, the article challenged designers to find meaningful fields for their work. It encouraged them to consider socially meaningful design for dentistry and hospital equipment, as well as suggesting that they should attempt experimental research and strive to develop breakthrough concepts. The title of Papanek's lecture—and the heading of the SDO magazine article—would be recycled later as

the title of chapter 4 in *Design for the Real World*. The text, however, is almost identical to a different chapter in the book, “How to Succeed in Design Without Really Trying” (Chapter 8) (Papanek 1971, 152-184). The reason for this interchange of title/text in the different publications is unclear, but this re-use of material does suggest that Papanek used the SDO as a test audience for *Design for the Real World*. In point of fact, it also serves as yet additional proof that Nordic design students were introduced to Papanek’s theories at a very early stage.

While Papanek used the second issue of the SDO magazine to criticize the design profession’s ethics, the Welsh designer John Christopher Jones published an attack on the very methods used by contemporary designers. In his article “Trying to Design the Future,” he criticized these methods for being both conservative and rigid and not taking into account the consequences, that is the situation created by a ‘new thing’. As an example Jones points to the invention of the automobile. While it was commercially successful, cars caused a number of unintended problems, including a growing number of deaths and injuries from accidents and the unfortunate need to build roads and car parks (Jones 1968, 70). With more predictable and flexible design methods, he argued, designers would also be able to study and analyze the outcomes that resulted from their designs. Jones’ criticism of design practice and its methodologies, as well as his observation that designed objects have ramifications in the world, is prescient. In fact, his reflections anticipate arguments made more recently by design theorists like Tony Fry, who insists that “everything designed goes on designing”, and the de-futuring consequences of failure to acknowledge this fact (Fry 2008, 30). By 1970, Jones would go on to publish a theoretical treatise, *Design Methods*, that would later be referred to as one of the most important books on design methodology in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Buchanan 2009, 415). Like Papanek, Jones used his SDO magazine article to try out provocative and new ideas. But in Jones’ essay, the very act of designing is utterly transformed. To Jones, design was the process of planning whole systems, or environments, rather than individual projects. The article, like the later book, also placed a high value on the end user’s involvement and participation in the design process (Jones 1970).

Like many of the other ‘little magazines’ from this period, the second issue of & has an audacity and spontaneity that traditional magazines often lack. It attracted attention outside the relatively limited community of design students. By 1979, the magazine was described in *Uuden Ajan Aura (New Age Aura)*, Finland’s most important counterculture magazine, as “one of the most important, maybe the most important alternative publication ever published in Finland (Sotamaa 2012, 4). The fact that the SDO was a student initiative with no formal

ties to educational institutions, allowed the organization greater liberty in both its aims and progress. The willingness to experiment with ideas, combined with the youthful fervor that characterized both & magazine and the seminars, may be one of the explanations for the organization's lasting imprint on Nordic design.

### **Nomadic Nordic furniture**

Victor Papanek's ongoing involvement with the SDO meant he was a frequent guest in the Nordic countries in the late 1960s. The dissolution of the SDO was, however, not the end of his involvement there, nor did he lose sight of the beliefs he shared in common with them. In 1970 he published *Miljön och miljonerna* with the Swedish publishing company Bonnier. Yrjö Sotamaa notes that the publication may be directly tied to the strong reception that Papanek had already received from students, designers and the media in the Nordic countries.<sup>xix</sup> Papanek's book contract with Bonnier came through Per Johansson, a Swedish SDO member.<sup>xx</sup> The project-based education carried out during the SDO-seminars was continued on several occasions in the following years. After an invitation from the students in its metal department, Papanek conducted a two-week seminar at Konstfack in January 1970. One of the tasks given the students was to design a locally produced, muscle-powered vehicle for transporting materials over rough terrain in underdeveloped countries. The exercise resulted in a number of solutions, which were widely commented on, in both *Design for the Real World* (Papanek 1985, 238-241) and *Form* (Lindkvist 1970, 74-76). One of the most acclaimed designs was a tricycle made by the students Erwin Kube, Pär Lindahl, Bengt Palmgren, and Eric Sylwan. The vehicle could quickly be transformed into a luggage carrier or, alternately, be easily extended to carry stretchers. Another high profile design abandoned rough terrain and focused on problems caused by cars in cities. The students James Hennessey and Tillman Fuchs made a proposal for an inner-city runabout and shopping vehicle. Made of monolithic plastic and constructed on three wheels, this muscle powered vehicle could carry up to 400 kg. But even as these designs were acclaimed, many observers feared that their spirit of collaboration and exchange would not last. Worrying that the 1970 Konstfack seminar might be the last of its kind, *Form's* reporter insisted that,

The SDO seminars showed how stimulating it is for the design schools to get in contact with guest lecturers. This seems more important today than ever....One is therefore indignant with the fact that there is no budget for this. The metal department gave up the department's grant to invite Victor Papanek to give a seminar in January. (Lindkvist 1970, 74)

The meeting with the above mentioned American design student James Hennessey, who was studying at Konstfack on a Fulbright scholarship, would become especially important for Papanek. In fact, three years later the two published the book *Nomadic Furniture* together (Hennessey and Papanek 1973). Using the slogan “You are nomadic!” the authors encouraged the readers to “have more by owning less.” (Hennessey and Papanek 1973, 1-3) With a simple and direct text that was printed in handwritten letters and simple drawings, they showed how to build, dismantle, and recycle furniture. *Nomadic Furniture* was published in 1973, at a time when Papanek was working as a visiting professor at Erik Herløw’s department for industrial design at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts’ School of Design (Dybdahl 2006, 57). Although the book was wide-ranging in its sources, it presents an astonishing number of designs based on Nordic furniture.<sup>xxi</sup> Easy to fold, store, and transport, and made of natural materials like wood, leather, and linen, they were all considered well-suited to the nomadic lifestyle that Papanek and Hennessey encouraged. Produced mainly after the Scandinavian Design craze, the furniture may be said to represent a new turn in Nordic design. As scholar Kjetil Fallan suggests, in these designs, indigenous materials became a more important factor (Fallan 2011, 34). But the designs themselves were also shaped by ideals held by Papanek and the SDO. In the book, each design presentation was followed by instructions on how to make the furniture yourself. This approach reflects Papanek’s disapproval of the concept of patents. In *Design for the Real World* he argued that a good design solution should benefit as many people as possible, and that it is wrong to make money from the needs of others (Papanek 1985, xi). But this view is also very much in accordance with the SDO members’ core beliefs. Striving to distinguish themselves from figures prominent in the Scandinavian Design movement, the SDO remained opposed to the personality cult and commercialism connected with the previous generation of designers.

In an article written for *Danskform* in 1974, Papanek had an opportunity to reflect on his experiences with Nordic design. He especially went out of his way to commend Danish designers for acknowledging and working with the social, socio-ethical, political, ecological, and environmental consequences of design activity. He also emphasized the contributions of engineers and architects sent by the Danish International Development Agency (Danida) to work on development aid projects in Africa. “They [the engineers and architects] no longer set out to the developing countries as missionaries to disseminate the gospel of the late capitalistic consumer society; *they have also learned to learn.*” (Papanek 1974, 14) The latter comment is particularly interesting in light of the second edition of *Design for the Real World*,

published some ten years later. Acknowledging in the introduction that “[m]uch of what [he] wrote about design for the Third World in the book’s first edition now seems somewhat naïve,” Papanek further stated that, “While we fought against colonialism and exploitation, I and others failed to appreciate how much we could learn in the places we had set out to reach....The road between the rich nations of the North and the poor southern half of the globe is a two-way street.” (Papanek 1985, xvii-xviii)

Papanek remained aloof from the more political gestures mounted at the SDO seminars. But his reflections on Danish design here may be prefigured by his experiences in the early 1970s with aid workers from the Danida. Kristian Vedel, for example, worked concurrent with Papanek at the design school in Copenhagen. From 1968-1971 Vedel was sent by Danida to the University of East Africa in Nairobi, Kenya, where he organized and led the education of industrial designers (Dybdahl 2006, 58). Design for developing countries had been a prominent topic at the 1968 SDO seminar in Stockholm. Vedel’s example shows to what extent this philosophy on design for social need had developed from theoretical projects or stunts, as expressed at the Stockholm seminar, to a few years later becoming an institutionalized policy that was part of the official Danish development aid.

However much he may have admired Danida and been pleased with his time in Denmark, by the time he left Copenhagen in 1973, Papanek strongly criticized the Design School’s department of industrial design. *Ingeniørens Ugeblad (The Engineer’s Weekly)* published an interview with Papanek under the headline “*Kunstakademiets designskole er spild af tid og penge*” [“The Academy’s design school is a waste of time and money”].<sup>xxii</sup> Directing his critique not towards the school itself, but rather to its students and their lack of commitment, Papanek claimed that “Of 114 students, we have maybe 25 or 30 students actually working – and participating. They are content with partaking in the general meetings, where they hour after hour discuss what to discuss.” (S 1974, 359) According to Papanek, this was partially a result of “the so-called democratization, where everyone is supposed to have a qualified meaning about everything.” (S 1974, 359) Of course, just a few years earlier, the SDO presented Papanek’s pedagogy as a welcome alternative to traditional Nordic design school curricula. This later critique was, however, not directed towards the SDO or student democracy as such, but rather towards the Marxist-inspired students who he considered to be preventing change. Papanek suggested that they introduce representative democracy, only to have his proposal voted down. This, he believed, owed to the fact that,

some students, believing they are Marxists – which they are not, but they believe so – hope that ... direct democracy will give them real power. They will vote for the same and control the meetings. That is neither Marxism nor direct or representative democracy. That is adapted fascism – that is the Marxist expression of the conception. The worst thing you can say about any school is that it year after year is wasting young people's – and the teachers' time, only because things are supposed to stay the way they are. I am annoyed when I see tax money being spilled. But I get furious when I see young people's time being spilled. (S 1973, 360)

Papanek's call for practical action had been met with the Danish students' radical activism. Bearing in mind Papanek's reluctance to mix design and politics, his critique of these Danish students comes as no surprise. We should, however, be careful not to conflate Papanek's view of the students at Copenhagen's Design School in 1973 with his experiences of Nordic design students in general. Lars Dybdahl, for example, would later describe Papanek's work and presence in Copenhagen as a catalyst for the development of ecological thinking among Danish designers, especially in the education community (Dybdahl 2006, 57). Nevertheless, Papanek's observations accurately reflect the student rebellion that verged into a more political phase around 1970, and certainly coincided with the gradual politicization of the SDO.

## **Conclusion**

By investigating the activities of the SDO, this article has explored a dynamic and decisive phase of Nordic design. Returning to the summer seminars, one can easily be mesmerized by the impressive list of speakers. Figures like Papanek and Buckminster Fuller should rightly be considered important catalysts for a milieu that gained momentum in the late 1960s. Moreover, this prefigured some of the most important trajectories in design practice and thinking today. Following the dissolution of the SDO, Papanek's activities in the Nordic countries points to the mutually beneficial relations between the American and Nordic designers. Nevertheless, the ambition and mission of the SDO's student-led initiatives also remain remarkably impressive. Engaging with issues such as design for disability and developing countries, they developed a dynamic, participatory curriculum of workshops, pop-up projects and seminars, and consequently foreshadowed methods central to design practice today. Moreover, by conveying the outcome of their activities to the general public through wide-spread news coverage, the SDO contributed to a broader public interest in the practice and purpose of design itself.

Two months prior to the 1968 Stockholm seminar, the 14<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennial was occupied by a group of students, critics, and intellectuals. They described the act as, “the beginning of our participation in the conflict, which has spread from the factory floor to every level of society, as a struggle between capitalism as ‘world machine’ and the oppressed, the exploited and the manipulated (as we are).” (Nicolin 2008, 232) Certainly, as Alison Clarke has already argued, this action reflects the “heterogeneity of the late 1960s and 1970s activisms” in design (Clarke 2013b, 336). But such actions were quite different from the atmosphere that characterized the Konstfack seminar held in Stockholm that same summer. Even if the 1968 Stockholm seminar saw the rise of a more political awareness among its participants, the dominant atmosphere was still one of idealism and solidarity; these participants believed that design itself could make a meaningful difference in the world. By the 1969 Copenhagen seminar, however, radical leftist politics gained a foothold here, too, and the earlier eagerness for change was in many ways replaced by disillusionment. As Kaisu Savola observes, “If during the summer of 1968 the students had felt that they were in a key position to help the oppressed, the growing engagement with extreme left-wing politics created the understanding that the students were victims of ‘the system’ themselves.” (Savola 2015, 92) This change in the students’ self-perception, wherein they stopped seeing themselves as crucial problem solvers and initiators and began feeling like prisoners of a larger ‘system’, explains in part why their discussions became increasingly stranded, and the students were increasingly paralyzed, unable to accomplish concrete results.

As emphasized by Guy Julier, “design activism and social design must...be regarded as representing *discursive moments* that are bound to their historical circumstances.” (Julier 2015, 154) The SDO’s activities in the late 1960s constituted such a ‘moment’, providing what we may call a window of opportunity for the development of social awareness within Nordic design discourse, as well as for enthusiastic experimentation with collective, collaborative design methods. Pekka Korvenmaa has suggested that the SDO’s revival of Nordic collaboration helped change the ‘design thinking’ of a generation of new designers who came of age in the early 1970s (2012, 229). Despite the organization’s short life, the SDO was a significant—if often overlooked—actor, both in the history of Nordic design and in the development of prevalent tendencies within today’s design practices.



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"SDO, Skandinaviska Designstuderandes Organisation Stadgar" [SDO, Scandinavian Design Student's Organization's Statutes]. Unsigned note on the SDO's organization, dated late autumn 1967. Distributed by the student's council at SHKS. Part of source material lent from Terje Roalkvam, October 2013.

"*Ut av isolasjonen, inn i SDO*" [Out of the isolation into the SDO]. Unsigned article in pamphlet distributed by the SHKS student council in the autumn of 1968. Part of source material lent from Terje Roalkvam, October 2013.

**Illustrations:**

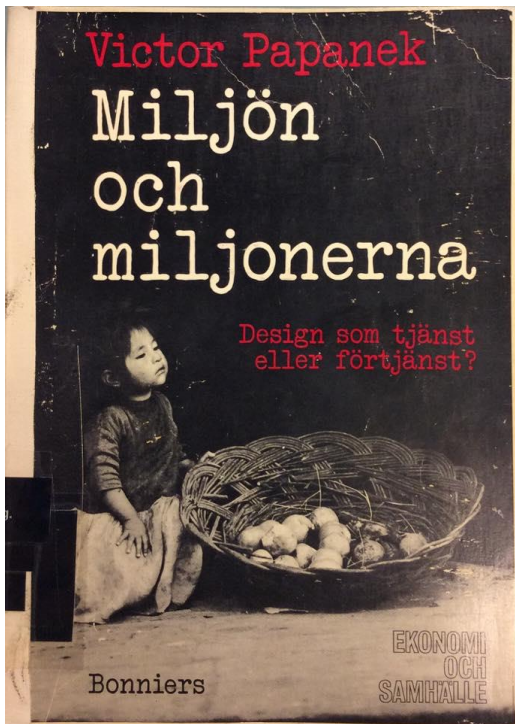


Figure 1:  
Book cover of Victor Papanek's *Miljön och miljonerna: design som tjänst eller förtjänst?* [*The Environment and the Millions: Design for Service or Profit?*]. Published by Bonniers, Sweden, 1970.



Figure 2:  
Nordic design students in the meadow of Suomenlinna Island, 1968. Photo: Kristian Runeberg. Courtesy of Yrjö Sotamaa.



Figure 3:  
Proceedings of the seminar ‘Industry – Environment –Product Design’, Suomenlinna, 1968.  
Photo: Helsinki Design Lab. Courtesy of Yrjö Sotamaa.

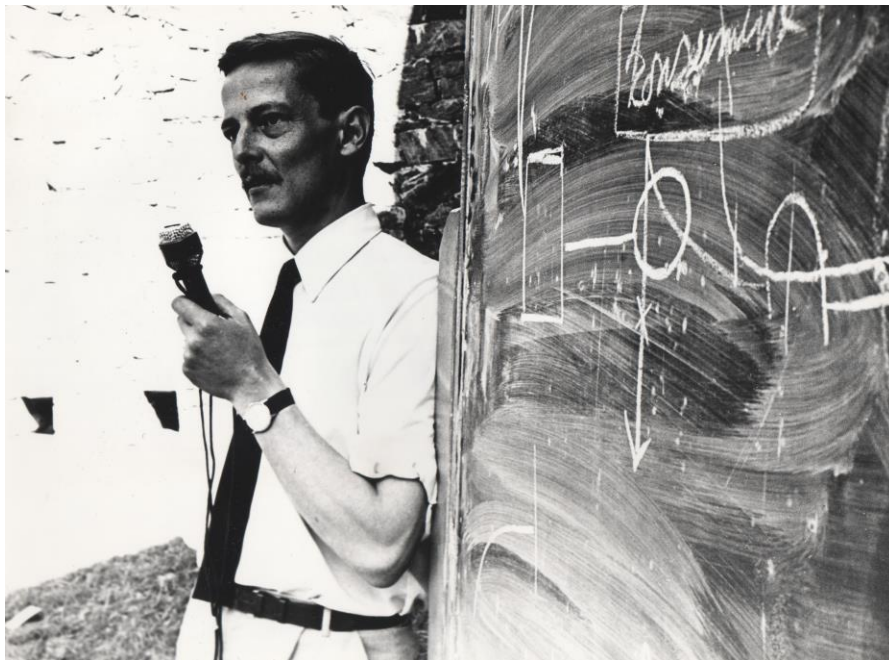


Figure 4:  
Chemist and environmentalist Hans Palmstierna lecturing at the 1968 Suomenlinna seminar.  
Photo: Kristian Runeberg. Courtesy of Yrjö Sotamaa.

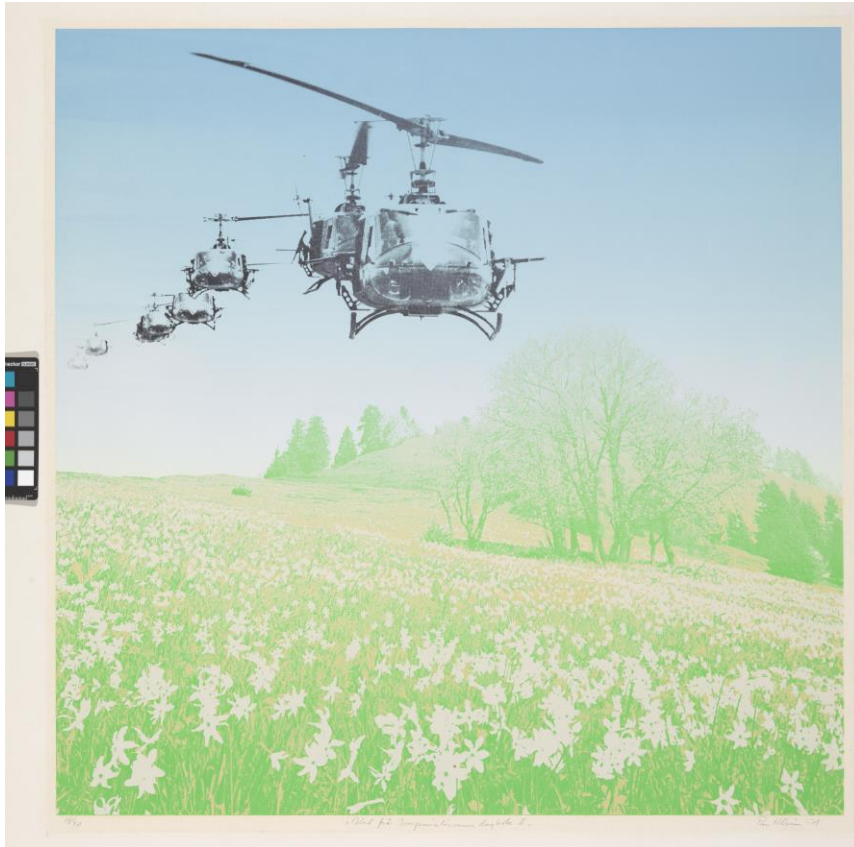


Figure 5:  
*'Blad frå imperialismens dagbok II'* (Page from the Diary of Imperialism II). One of Per Kleiva's most famous works, made as a critique of the American warfare in Vietnam. The National Museum, Oslo, Norway.



Figure 6:  
Front cover of the first issue of & magazine (1967), designed by Lennart Norman.



Figure 7:  
A model of the backyard project was presented in a TV-show aired February 21, 1969, on the Norwegian national TV channel NRK. From left host Ada Haug and the SHKS students Kjell Kvernaas and Ann Bjerke. Photo: NRK



Figure 8:  
Front cover of the second issue of & magazine (1968), designed by Timo Aarniala



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## Notes

<sup>i</sup> Fuad-Luke borrows the term ‘Design for Need’ from the 1976 exhibition and symposium organized by the Royal College of Art in London, where Papanek was one of the keynote speakers.

<sup>ii</sup> On the use of oral history in design history, see e.g. *Journal of Design History*’s special issue on oral history (Linda Sandino and Matthew Partington, eds., *Journal of Design History* 19: 4 [2006]); Linda Sandino and Matthew Partington, eds. *Oral History in the Visual Arts*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013); and Paul Hazell and Kjetil Fallan, “The Enthusiast’s Eye: The Value of Unsanctioned Knowledge in Design Historical Scholarship,” *Design and Culture* 7: 1 (2015): 117-123.

<sup>iii</sup> Scandinavian Design Student’s Organization (SDO) was formed as a co-operation without a name, but in 1967 it formally took the name *Nordiske Brukskunststuderendes Samarbeidsorganisasjon* (Co-operative organization of Nordic students of applied arts). In 1968 the organization was renamed to Skandinaviske designstuderendes organisasjon (SDO) (Scandinavian Design students’ Organization) as this was more translatable to English. (“NBS - Nordiske Brukskunststuderendes Samarbeidsorganisasjon” [Co-Operative Organization of Nordic Students of Applied Arts]. Unsigned and undated note, part of source material lent from Terje Roalkvam, October 2013).

<sup>iv</sup> From the SDO’s statutes, passed at the organization’s first congress in Helsinki, July 16, 1967. (“*SDO, Skandinaviska Designstuderandes Organisation Stadgar*” [SDO, Scandinavian Design Student’s Organization’s Statutes]. Unsigned note on the SDO’s organization dated late autumn 1967.)

<sup>v</sup> “*Ut av isolasjonen, inn i SDO*” [Out of the isolation into the SDO]. Unsigned article in pamphlet distributed by the SHKS student council in the autumn of 1968. Part of source material lent from Terje Roalkvam, October 2013.

<sup>vi</sup> The significance of the seminar is underlined in the following quote from Yrjö Sotamaa: “Suomenlinna Seminar can be seen today as a pilot project for the present Aalto University. The challenges Aalto wants to answer, relate to the key themes of Suomenlinna to ‘building a better and more responsible future, interdisciplinary approach combining design, technology and business in education and research and enhancement of the innovativeness of Finland.’” (Sotamaa 2012)

<sup>vii</sup> In the delegation to the Suomenlinna seminar were Kenneth Agnew, Gillian Patterson, Alan Bronsdon, Douglas Tomkin, Michel LaRue (Sotamaa 2012).

<sup>viii</sup> In their lecture the DRU members referred to the First- and Second-Phase of the Unit’s development. While the First Phase had been marked by Bruce Archers work to develop a systematic tool, a ‘check list’ to use throughout the design process, in the Second Phase co-operation with other actors became more important. (Lundahl 1968b, 444) Nigan Bayazit also points to this subdivision, though labeling it First- and Second-Generation Design Methods. According to Bayazit user involvement in design decisions was one of the main characteristics of the second generation (Bayazit 2004, 21-22).

<sup>ix</sup> Uddén’s persistent effort resulted in public funding of technical aids in Sweden, and he was in that respect an important figure in the general improvement of the life quality of physically disabled people. Today the company established by Uddén in 1963 is a world leading

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company on electrical wheelchairs, producing 16,000 wheelchairs a year. The name Permobil is even represented in the Swedish dictionary, where it is explained as ‘electric driven wheel chair’ (Carlsson 2013)

<sup>x</sup> Worth noting, however, is Vihma’s observation that the influences in Finland of HfG Ulm and the Royal College of Art in London “seem to have merged, because Ulm insights were connected with the methodological tools of, for example, L. Bruce Archer and John Christopher Jones.” (Vihma 2005, 73)

<sup>xi</sup> Gulbrandsen in conversation with the author, October 2013.

<sup>xii</sup> Høyland in conversation with the author, February 2013.

<sup>xiii</sup> An extensive report on Papanek and the design education at Purdue University had been printed in *Form* already before the seminar. Hausen 1968, 92-94)

<sup>xiv</sup> According to Guffey, the many local variations that had begun to appear throughout the 1960s had made RI see the need for a common international symbol of access. Without Koefoed’s consent the symbol designed at the SDO seminar was submitted to International Commission for Technical Aids (ICTA) that was asked by RI to find an appropriate alternative. In competition with five other contributions, an adapted version of Koefoed’s wheelchair was elected as the winner by RI’s international jury in 1969 (Guffey, 2015).

<sup>xv</sup> Roalkvam in conversation with the author, October 2013.

<sup>xvi</sup> As Clarke has pointed out, in 1969 Papanek was recruited by the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) Design School by the founding Dean, Richard Farson. In 1971, Farson was granted the position of program chairman of the Aspen Design Conference, which gave CalArts a pronounced presence and lead Papanek to contribute to the conference (Clarke 2013a, 164-165).

<sup>xvii</sup> Please see note iv.

<sup>xviii</sup> Kvernaas in conversation with the author, September, 2013.

<sup>xix</sup> E-mail message to author, November 1, 2014.

<sup>xx</sup> Sotamaa also reported that Papanek received a grant so that he could write the book (E-mail message to author, November 1, 2014). Further information on who provided the grant, however, is not available.

<sup>xxi</sup> The Danish furniture presented consisted of a folding chair by Mogens Koch; Ole Gjerløv-Knudsen’s *Saw chair* made of wood and canvas; a stool by Axel Thygesen; bookshelves in hemp canvas by Jørgen Højs; and a coffee table by Ingelise Bratvold and Georg Gjedde-Simonsen. The Swedish examples were a folding chair made of chrome steel tubing and canvas by Lindau og Lindenkrantz; a chair made of corrugated cardboard by Janne Ahlin, Jan Dranger, Martin Eiserman and Johan Huldt; and a folding, hanging cradle and a swing made by Ann and Göran Wärrf. The *Siesta* chair by the Norwegian Ingmar Relling was presented as an alternative to the readers who were nomadic, “but have both money and taste for simple elegance” (Hennessey and Papanek 1973, 36)

<sup>xxii</sup> This interview was recounted in *Arkitekten* (S 1973, 359-360).