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EPHEMERAL VOICES AND PRECARIOUS DOCUMENTS: FIXING ORAL HISTORY AND GREY LITERATURE TO THE DESIGN HISTORICAL RECORD

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Taking as a starting point the recent interest of design history in the history of actors, groups or events that fall outside an institutional context, this article discusses methodological challenges related to research on histories that are less documented in conventional archives. As these histories may often be found in private archives and/or the memories of historical actors rather than in conventional archives, they require a different type of methodological reflection and practice. Drawing on examples from the author's ongoing PhD research on design education in the Scandinavian countries and the emergence of a discourse on sustainability in the late 1960s and 1970s, this article discusses problems and benefits regarding the use of oral sources, ephemera and grey literature. The latter is presented as a concept to expand the borders of the archival category in order to include more unconventional source material which might otherwise be lost. The article further argues that a more conscious approach to this type of methodology may add nuances to existing interpretations and complement the more conventional use of sources in design historical research.

1. Introduction: Why Oral History and Grey Literature?

Recent developments within design historical research include a broadening of the field to include not only the histories of main actors or institutions, but also to encompass the history of actors, groups or events which fall outside an institutional context (See e.g., Atkinson, 2006; Beegan, Atkinson, & Ryan, 2008; Fallan, 2012; Stern, 2014; Guins, 2015; Stein, 2016). Methodologically speaking, this trend actualizes a range of challenges regarding sources, as these histories are normally not well documented in what could be described as conventional archives, such as archives of educational institutions or professional organizations. Rather, they can be found in a variety of locations such as private archives and, if the time perspective allows it, in the memories of historical actors. The use of such unconventional archive material is far from new in design history, and material such as brochures, company catalogues or oral histories have been used to a large extent within the field. This does not, however, diminish the fact that this material requires special attentiveness and a different type of methodological reflection and practice.

This article draws on examples from my ongoing PhD project conducted at the University of Oslo as part of the research project Back to the Sustainable Future: Visions of Sustainability

in the History of Design. The aim of the research project is to explore the historical conditions for, and development of, sustainable design, and my study focuses on design education in particular. It investigates how thoughts on ecology and environmental protection were developed at design schools in the Scandinavian countries, Norway, Sweden and Denmark,[1] in the 1960s and 1970s, and intends to show how design students and educators were important actors in promoting new attitudes regarding the environment. The study thus focuses more on the conceptions of design held by these actors than the actual objects they designed. It thus attempts to respond to Buchanan's call for an approach that "would reposition design history from material objects or 'things' to thought and action. In other words, what designers say and do, the history of their art as philosophy and practice" (1992, p. 14). In the case of design education and the emergence of a discourse on ecology and environmental protection in the Scandinavian countries, the design historical importance could be said to reside in "thought and action" just as much as – if not more than – in designed objects.

Despite its prominent role in today's design discourse, the history of sustainability and design is a scarcely explored field. The generation of design students and educators working with sustainable design in the 1960s and 1970s can hardly be characterised as a marginalized group in the traditional sense. The absence of research on the topic nevertheless shows that these voices are represented in design history to a lesser degree. This may seem a peculiar claim, considering that several of my interviewees must be considered highly acknowledged designers and widely described figures.[2] It does not, however, change the fact that there are histories that have received less attention and which remain to be told.

The design schools examined in the study are The National College of Applied Art and Craft (Statens håndverks- og kunstindustriskole) in Oslo, Bergen College of Arts and Crafts (Bergen Kunsthåndverkerskole), The School of Arts, Crafts, and Design (Konstfack) in Stockholm, The School of Design and Crafts in Gothenburg (Högskolan för design och konsthantverk), The School of Arts and Crafts (Kunsthåndværkerskolen) and The Royal Danish Academy of Architecture (Kunstakademiets Arkitektskole) in Copenhagen. These schools' archives play a key role in my research as they have provided crucial information on the content of the education through curriculum and syllabus, accounts of the teaching staff and students, minutes of meetings, annual reports, etc. Although these sources have provided valuable information, the archival material available is, however, often sparse, both in volume and in wealth of detail. This has made it necessary to search for information outside the institutional archives, and use interviews with central actors to supplement the written source material and fill in gaps in missing information.

In addition to considering issues regarding the use of oral sources, the article discusses the concept of grey literature, which may be described as source material that falls between oral sources and commercially published material. I consider this a fruitful concept to expand the borders of the archival category in order to include source material which otherwise could be lost. By offering complementary documentation, grey literature may also act as corrective to, or corroboration of, understandings gleaned from sources such as institutional records, oral history and published material. The article further illuminates how a combination of oral history interviews and grey literature may be particularly valuable, as these kinds of sources may supplement each other to bring to light histories that have been either forgotten, under-communicated or omitted from official histories.

A more conscious attitude towards this type of source and methodology may further add nuances to existing interpretations and complement more conventional use of sources in design historical research.

2. Oral History and Design History

The use of oral history methodology has a long tradition in scientific disciplines such as anthropology, sociology and cultural history (See e.g., Vansina, 1965; Thompson, 1975; Fraser, 1979; Hareven, 1982). Although a not unfamiliar methodology in design historical research (Walker, 1989, p. 6), the past decades have shown increased interest in oral history within the field of design history. This has led to several initiatives, such as Design History Society's Oral History Project. The project records a series of interviews with people who have played a significant role in the development of design history as a scholarly field, such as designers, researchers and writers (Design History Society, n.d.). These stories are a valuable resource in the understanding of how individuals and institutions have shaped the notion of design history as an independent discipline. Another initiative is Journal of Design History's special issue on oral history in 2006, guest edited by Linda Sandino. The issue was motivated by "the increasing tendency amongst design historians to use interviews, both as a means and a resource" (Sandino, 2006, p. 275). Sandino and Partington's edited volume Oral History in the Visual Arts from 2013 comprises yet another valuable resource. Featuring contributions by historians, archivists and curators, the book provides an insight into the meaning of alternative and often both forgotten and hidden stories about visual practices. Through interviews and the work they produce, the book also demonstrates methods capable of exploring how values and ideologies are constructed, challenged or sustained (Sandino & Partington, 2013, p. 11). With its valuable examples, this work demonstrates how a more extensive use of similar sources would be important in generating new research within the design historical field.

3. The Oral History Interview: A Two-Way Thing

As suggested by Yow, oral history may be defined as "the recording of personal testimony delivered in oral form" (2005, p. 3). The fact that the term easily could be replaced by terms such as in-depth interview, recorded memoir, life history, life narrative, taped memories or life review, according to Yow "impl[ies] that there is someone else involved who frames the topics and inspires the narrator to begin the act of remembering, jogs memory, and records and presents the narrator's words" (2005, p. 4). An oral history interview is thus made up of at least two people: the person who tells the story, and this "someone else," that is the interviewer, who records the story. The interviewer consequently holds great power when it comes to the way he or she frames the topics, decides which questions to ask, and last but not least determines the emphasis in the subsequent presentation of the story in a written form. It is therefore essential to be attentive to historicizing the interviewers as well as the interviewees (Armitage & Gluck, 2006, p. 77). In the case of my own research on design education in Scandinavia, this has led to questions such as: how does my foreknowledge of the topic affect my questions to the interviewee? Is my selection of interviewees a result of coincidence or a deliberate sampling? In addition, to what degree is the information I get in the interviews coloured by my need and hypothesis? As stressed by Lees-Maffei and Fallan, researchers are "people with subjective responses" (2015, p. 12).

Even though we are ever so much "trained to put aside subjective responses in our analyses, […] personal interests, values and experiences continue to inform the work of design historians, from choice of subject matter and theoretical frameworks to our methodological approaches and conclusions" (Lees-Maffei & Fallan, 2015, p. 6). It is therefore essential that scholars reflect on these issues in view of the ethical responsibility that comes with historical research. In the case of oral history where the sources are recorded, and to some degree formed, in a social interaction between the interviewee and the historian, the historians' power of influence is particularly evident.

Equally important as being aware of the responsibility of the interviewer is crucial being attentive to the informant's role. As noted by Oak, the oral history interview paves the way for both a recording and a shaping of the past (Oak, 2006, p. 346). This means that in his or her conveyance of the history, interviewees have the opportunity to exaggerate, understate and even rewrite their role. Being attentive to this aspect is particularly crucial in cases characterized by conflict and differing accounts of events and when the opponents have something to gain from asserting their version of the story. In my own research, I experienced this when I talked to two of the actors who were central in the establishment of an industrial design education in Norway. According to my sources, the process had been far from straightforward, involving considerably more disagreement than one could gather only by reading the minutes. This background information has been important to my further understanding and account of the case. The example further underlines how interviews enable the disclosure of disagreement and conflict in a manner that minutes of meetings never will.

As interviews simultaneously engage with both the period being discussed and the period in which the interview takes place, they must consequently be regarded as "locally managed occasions of interaction in which participants collaboratively construct meaning" (Oak, 2006, p. 346). This aspect of collaboration and social interaction could be said to be one of the key features of oral history. Through the narrator's descriptions, he or she creates meaning and constructs stories about previous events in order to represent the past. In this way, the interviewee too becomes an historian, and the traditional distinction between professional and amateur collapses (Sandino & Partington, 2013, p. 11).

As appears from the above, oral sources are not objective. As pointed out by Portelli, however, this is of course the case with every source, but the "holiness of writing" often makes us forget it (1991, p. 53). While we usually view written documents such as minutes of meetings and conventions, parliamentary records, interviews reported in newspapers etc. as legitimate historical sources, we tend to forget that these written documents very often are merely the presentation of unidentified oral sources (Portelli, 1991, p. 51). Consequently, a written reproduction is not necessarily truer than an oral one. In oral history, however, one has to take into account the possible deficiency of memory. Memories may be floating and malleable and subject to modification over time. Oral testimonials should therefore be handled with the utmost care when used for research purposes.[3]

4. Whose Stories and How They Are Told
Many of my interviewees have been identified through archival research where their names have appeared in the archive material. While some here have had an evident position, others have been identified more by coincidence.

The latter was the case when a negligible voucher revealed the name of a physicist at the University of Oslo who gave a guest lecture on solar energy at The National College of Applied Art and Craft in Oslo in 1976 (Figure 1). Despite the non-existing record of this in any other archival documents, the interview gave me important information, both on the content of the education at the design school in Oslo and the contact between this school and the University, which will be of great importance further on in my project.[4]

In many cases, the interviewee's enthusiasm and knowledge has led me to other interesting actors as well as new leads to explore, a process described by Stein as "snowball sampling" (2016, p. 31). It is, however, important to be aware that this may affect the selection of interviewees and consequently aim at a balanced selection. An enthusiastic interviewee's "spinning off" may furthermore be both beneficial and challenging for the interviewer (Hazell & Fallan, 2015, p. 117). At best, it may lead to new discoveries and perspectives, which was the case when I interviewed former teacher and rector of the National College of Applied Art and Craft in Oslo, Roar Høyland. In a digression, he came to mention a solar energy installation he designed for the school building's roof in the 1970s.[5] Highly relevant for my research, but with no record of it in the school's archive, a possible further exploration of this project will rely on the existence of oral sources and grey literature, such as drawings or notes.

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Biologibygget, Universitetet, Blindern.

Løpenr.: 230443-33554   Skattekommune: Oslo

Prosenttrekk: 30

Bank: Konto nr.: 6094.30.58124

Regning

for

Industridesign, solenergi.

1 dobbeltforelesning 8.3.76   kr. 601,20 –

Fig. 1 – Invoice for double lecture on solar energy held by physicist Torfinn Lindem at The National College of Applied Art and Craft in Oslo, March 1976. The Regional State Archive, Oslo.

An informant's derailment may, however, become a problem if the interviewer allows his or her digressions to unduly form the project. What the informant may wish to tell about may be something other than the interviewer is interested in. The reason for this discrepancy may be caused by the interviewee's interest, but also by his or her memory. In one of my interviews, I talked to a person who constantly seemed to avoid answering my questions, leading the conversation into other topics outside the scope of my project.

Frustrating there and then, this apparent insistence on telling, even if it was ever so irrelevant to my questions, could, however, be because the person felt bad about not remembering the things I asked about, and felt the need to obscure or compensate for this fact by talking about something else. It could also be that they had never known anything about the particular topic at all, but feared that they had forgotten. Whatever the reason, the example points to the possible deficiency or weakening of memory, which seen in relation to ageing might be a source of discomfort to some people. This underlines the distinctive quality of oral testimonials compared to written material, as the sources are people, not documents.

The passing of time and people's acquisition of experience may also affect their attitudes and opinions. This could influence their recollection of past events, because, as pointed out by Portelli, "people's versions of their past change when the individual changes" (1991, p. 61). In the case of Scandinavian design education in the late 1960s and 1970s, a time marked by political radicalism and young people manning the barricades for change in society as well as prevalent education, this is an important acknowledgement (Figure 2). Some of my interviewees have expressed that their political views have changed since the late 1960s, and explain their thoughts and actions at that time as "young idealism". Others have described how their firm belief in the ability to improve the life of the worlds less privileged through design were undermined when they left school and started working for an industry run for profit.

The experience these people have acquired over time has thus formed the attitudes they now hold. Their outlook has changed because they have changed, which again may influence the way they recall their past. This illustrates Portelli's acknowledgement (1991, p. 61) that a life story is a work in progress, and that the point of time when the researcher's path crosses the narrator's consequently is a crucial factor for the shape of the presented story.

Fig. 2 – Unknown artist, illustration in notification distributed by the students' council at The National College of Applied Art and Craft in Oslo, 1968. Despite the charming depiction, the students demanded school democracy, co-determination, interdisciplinary cooperation, and an education more in line with society's true needs. The Regional State Archive, Oslo.

A personal testimonial from someone who experienced an event has the potential of adding layers of empathy to the story (Kjeldstadli, 1992, p. 186). The value of empathy is further emphasized by Lowenthal, who claims that: "Unless history displays conviction, interest, and involvement, it will not be understood or attended to. That is why subjective interpretation, while limiting knowledge, is also essential to communication. Indeed, the better a narrative exemplifies an historian's point of view the more credible his account" (Lowenthal, 1985, p. 218). Consequently, according to Lowenthal, the actor's subjective experience of an event is of great significance for the credibility of the story. In order to investigate how the late 1960s student rebellion developed at Scandinavian design institutions, it becomes significant not only what actually happened or "what people did," to quote Portelli, "but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did" (Portelli, 1991, p. 50). In such a context, meanings and feelings about a particular event may be as important as the event itself, and oral history offers a fertile approach to this purpose. Interviewing Roar Høyland, I was initially interested in details on the Austro-American design theoretician Victor Papanek's visit to the school in 1969. In a digression, quite irrelevant to my enquiry about Papanek, Høyland did, however, come to mention that he had been in Paris in May 1968, taking part in the student protests.[6] His vivid recounting of the event, including his dramatic escape from the Parisian police, revealed an immensely engaged person, extremely updated on student politics and current societal issues. Due to this background, Høyland has turned out to be a highly important actor in my further research and his work as a teacher at the school from 1968 and onwards has become of particular interest.

The positions and voices of key actors like Høyland are crucial in forging a credible account of the events and developments I am interested in. In acknowledging this type of multi-vocal subjectivity in the construction of our narratives, we can turn what is often cast as a weakness of oral history into a strength. Thompson has stated that "Oral evidence, by transforming the 'objects' of study into 'subjects', makes for a history which is not just richer, more vivid and heartrending, but truer" (Thompson, 1978, p. 90). Without the backdrop of Høyland's history, his role at the school might have been judged differently. This could again have led to a different interpretation of the history.

People experience things differently and this might sometimes seem challenging for the historian. On some occasions, the interviews have revealed substantially different accounts of the same events. This is particularly the case with the mentioned visit of Victor Papanek to Oslo in 1969. While some of my interviewees describe how Papanek, with his radical views of design, caused furore among the students and irritation among the teachers, others describe the event in more moderate terms. This does not mean that one of the accounts is false. It rather demonstrates how people experience an event or a situation differently, which underlines the impossibility of finding an objective historical truth. In the case of the mentioned example, the differing experiences may also reveal different positions in late 1960s student politics. Even if the late 1960s generally is considered to be a period of student opposition and political revolt, a study on the on the period should not overlook the fact that there also were students with more moderate political views. This is an important acknowledgement when it comes to my project, as it sometimes may be tempting to emphasize and possibly overstate the more spectacular portrayals.

5. Source Material in the Grey Zone

Through my interviews, I have come across a more indefinable category of source material, given to me by interviewees. This material, such as letters, conference programmes and proceedings, reports etc., from the interviewees' private archives, has often been highly original and of great value to my project, and it has many of the same qualities as the material preserved in the institutional and official archives. This applies, for example, to material complementary to the student publications found in the school's archives, which has much of the same spontaneous visual expression. The fact that it is not protected by the preservation policies of the former, gives it a precarious nature, which leaves it at risk of being lost. Grey literature is a concept that moves across the sanctioned borderline of institutional archives. By acknowledging and applying this category, one may hopefully equate the status of more unconventional material with that of source material found in traditional archives. Such a rise in status of material of more vulnerable and/or ephemeral character, often found in private archives, may hopefully contribute to more of this material being preserved.

Grey literature may be defined as "non-conventional literature, not issued through the normal commercial publication channels" (Alberani & Castro, 2001, p. 237).[7] It could also be added that grey literature is material that is not always easy to find, not always available, and that the documents usually are intended for a limited number of readers (Alberani & Castro, 2001, pp. 237-238). Based on this definition, material that falls into the category of grey literature includes theses and dissertations, faculty research works, reports of meetings, conferences, seminars and workshops, students' projects and in-house publications of associations and organizations, to mention a few (Okoroma, 2011, p. 790).

Much of the material found in the archives of the design schools has been of this nature. The label "grey" should therefore not be limited only to material outside conventional archives. Drawing a line from published material to oral testimonials, imagining these as bookends, one may rather say that grey literature is everything in between. This consequently includes material from conventional archives as well as more atypical information such as letters and personal notes.

The diverse nature of grey literature may raise questions regarding classification of the source material. One of these is whether or not the definition includes "ephemera", which according to Makepeace is "the collective name given to material which carries a verbal message and is produced either by printing or illustrative processes, but not in the standard book, periodical or pamphlet format" (Makepeace, 1985, p. 10). Ephemera are usually produced for short-term use, and include material such as tickets, timetables, posters, invitations, postcards etc. (Makepeace, 1985, p. 220). Consequently, this category shares obvious characteristics with grey literature, such as the intention of production, circulation patterns and intended durability. A possible conflation of the two is, however, rejected by Alberani and De Castro (2001) who emphasize the fact that ephemera is not literature (p. 237). I would nonetheless argue that in the context of design history, this is a detrimental and superfluous distinction. Dealing with both visual and text based sources, design historians may easily come across written material on the borderline to ephemera.

This may for example be the case with fanzines, which as (fan) magazines easily could pass as literature and consequently be labelled grey literature, according to Alberani and De Castro's definition of the term. In a design historical study, however, the fanzine's visual expression could be considered just as relevant and interesting as its textual expression. This is confirmed by Triggs, who in her study on British punk fanzines from the 1970s argues that it is "as much the graphic language that differentiated fanzines from the mainstream as the content of these publications" (2006, p. 81). A too rigid emphasis on the textual or literary aspect of the material thus seems less productive in a design historical context. Rather, one has more to gain from accepting these blurred lines between ephemera and grey literature, or even be prepared to see the former as a visual form, or an under category of the latter. Fanzines can also serve as an example of how grey literature may enable a broadening of the design historical field to include the histories of actors, groups or events that are not well documented in conventional archives. One of the aims in Triggs study is precisely to "recover from history an area of graphic design activity that has largely been ignored" (Triggs, 2006, p. 69). Showing how "fanzines became vehicles of subcultural communication and played a fundamental role in the construction of punk identity and a political community" (p. 70), Triggs' study sheds new light on a subculture which would influence cultural expressions in years to come.

In the case of my own project, I came across a comprehensive range of grey literature material in an interview with a former student at the design school in Oslo. The material consisted of extensive documentation on the activities of the Scandinavian Design Students Organization (SDO), a scarcely described pan Nordic cooperation that was active in the late 1960s. By studying the minutes of the organization board's meetings, the programme for and lectures being held, at three summer seminars, as well as the two published issues of the organization's members magazine &, I have gained insight into an organization which proved to be influential, not only in the late 1960s design student politics, but also in the further development of Nordic design education (Figure 3 and 4). Thanks to this source material, I have also been able to specify and verify much of the information I have been given in the interviews.

Fig. 3 – Timo Aarniala, front cover of the second issue of the Scandinavian Design Students Organization's magazine & (1968).
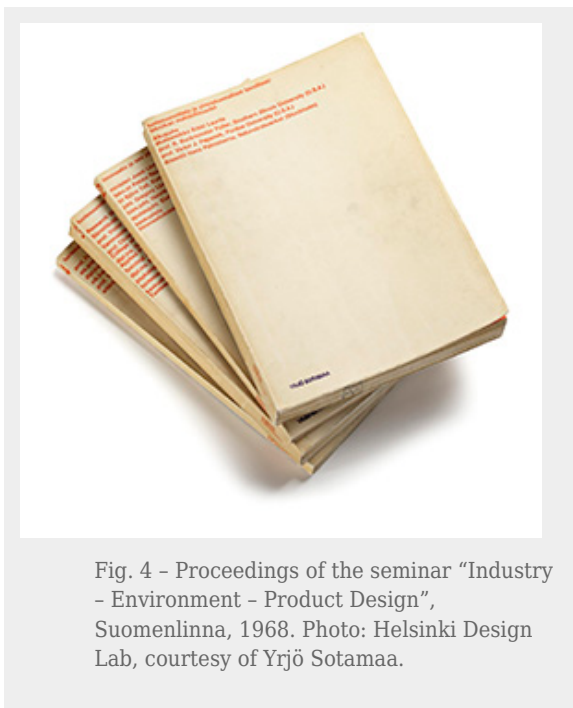
Fig. 4 – Proceedings of the seminar "Industry – Environment – Product Design", Suomenlinna, 1968. Photo: Helsinki Design Lab, courtesy of Yrjö Sotamaa.

As Makepeace points out, grey literature can "help to give an increased awareness of the age when it was produced" (Makepeace, 1985, p. 219). An interesting example in this context is the project "Affischerna 1967-1979" (The Posters 1967-1979), which presents an impressive collection of posters from the Swedish alternative movement.

Originally an online presentation (http://www.affischerna.se/) of the enthusiast Håkan Agnsäter's private collection, the project later developed into several exhibitions as well as a book (Agnsäter, 2013). The project is particularly relevant to my project, as the collection contains a series of posters made by student of the School of Arts, Crafts and Design (Konstfack) in protest against the United Nations' Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm in 1972 (Figure 5). According to Agnsäter, the students went out during the night and "put up posters on the walls of buildings in the central parts of Stockholm, where the UN delegates would pass the next day. Every morning, however, the posters were painted over with grey colour" (Agnsäter, 2013, p. 102).

This damaging of the posters that were put up makes the ones that still exist both scarce and valuable. It also brings to our attention an amazing story about which I have found no record of anywhere else but hopefully will be able to research further.

Fig. 5 – Unknown artist, *Hur länge ska utvecklingen ligga i förrädarnas händer?* [How long will the development be in the hands of traitors?]. One of several protest posters made by Konstfack students for the United Nations' Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm in 1972. Courtesy of Håkan Agnsäter.

In the introduction to his book, Agnsäter describes how he accidentally, while looking for something else in his basement, came across his old collection of posters:

> We roll up poster after poster and are met by a many-coloured splendour, fists eager to fight, solidarity with the Vietnamese people, rock music against nuclear power, ideas for a better world. Memories come flowing; the motives become keys to long-closed rooms. This has to be shown to more people, I keep thinking. (Agnsäter, 2013, p. 7).

In light of the discussion on ephemera, the quote is interesting in several ways. Firstly, it describes Agnsäter's reaction when he acknowledged the value of the material: that it deserved a better fate than lying hidden and forgotten in a basement (which is exactly the case with much grey literature and ephemera). Agnsäter initially clearly saw the value of saving the collection, as he, at some point, placed it in his basement instead of throwing it away. The rediscovery of the posters many years later was, however, accidental. This points to the fact that the rediscovery and preservation of ephemera often is a result of coincidence. It could also be added that many posters are torn down when they are replaced or pasted over with new ones, especially those which have been put up illegally on walls or fences (Makepeace, 1985, p. 70).

Secondly, Agnsäter's quote demonstrates the power of ephemera material to serve as memory triggers or, as he describes them; "keys to long-closed rooms". The posters are thus not only important due to their visual qualities or sentimental value; they are keys to uncovering histories from the past, which makes them valuable tools also in oral history interviews. Stein has shown how this kind of material (in her case photographs) had "the effect of sparking the conversation, reminding the participants of something they had forgotten and that I would not have known to ask about" (Stein, 2014). This has also been the case in several of my interviews. Showing a former student at the design school in Oslo the minutes from a meeting he attended in the late 1960s called forth memories, which again led both him and me onto new themes, valuable for my project.

6. Conclusion

In line with Buchanan's call for more focus on the various conceptions of design held by designers in the past, presented in the introduction (1992, p. 14), Fallan (2010) has pointed out that design history is best expressed as a history of both objects and ideas, consequently not just manifested in concrete objects, but also as discourse and ideology (p. 48). In this article, I have argued that oral history and grey literature are invaluable assets in this ongoing expansion of the field of design history, as it can facilitate access to historical actors' ideas and actions not documented by conventional written sources. By listening to the histories of actors in a particular design historical discourse, we may learn about the mode of thought and ideals that have formed the basis of their work, whether as designers or educators. In her study on domestic advice literature, Lees-Maffei (2014) introduces the concept of "real ideals", which she describes as "the normative ideals shared by members of a society [that] prescribe desirable behaviours and consumption practices" (p. 2). While Lees-Maffei employs advice literature to uncover the real ideals of household advisors past and present, oral history, and also grey literature, may be instrumental in revealing the real ideals of designers and design educators in the 1970s. Time is, however, of essence when it comes to oral sources, and utilization of these requires prompt action.

Although its methodological discourse is more mature in disciplines such as archaeology, medical science and library and information studies (See e.g., Luzi, 2000; Farace & Schöpfel, 2010; Roth, 2010), I would claim that grey literature is also a fertile concept for design history. As a comprehensive category, grey literature includes material from both conventional archives and private archives. The distinction between these two may be changing, as private archives may eventually become sanctioned and institutionalized. This has been the case with the archives of, for example, Richard Buckminster Fuller and

Victor J. Papanek, which have been transferred to Stanford University Libraries and the University of Applied Arts in Vienna, respectively (Chu & Trujillo, 2009, p. 1; Sacchetti, 2012). The private archives I use in my research will, however, never go through the same transaction as the affiliated actors do not have the same status. They nevertheless hold important historical documentation on lesser known groups and events, invaluable to both me and researchers to come. A possible application of these archives does, however, require a more general acknowledgement of the value of the material they hold. An expansion of the borders of the archival category, to include conventional as well as unconventional archive material may equalize the relation between the two. Such a rise in status of unsanctioned archive material may, furthermore, contribute to its preservation.

By presenting examples from my research on design education in Norway, Sweden and Denmark in the late 1960s and 1970s, this article has discussed the practice and methodological challenges that accompany the use of oral history and grey literature. It has argued that the value of oral testimonies to design historical research lies in the ability to both reveal information that does not appear in written sources and to supplement and expand existing information. As shown, oral sources may also disclose information on groups that have been left out of public record. Interviews may reveal different perceptions of past events, but this does not necessarily make one perception truer than the other. It does nevertheless indicate that oral histories – as well as conventional archive material, should be treated with an academic distance and presented as one point of view rather than an absolute truth. This is, however, the case with all records of the past, also conventional archive material.

Oral history may be particularly fruitful in combination with grey literature, and the article has suggested the concept of grey literature as a suitable framework to expand the borders of conventional archival categories. By considering written, unpublished sources, whether they are conventional or unconventional archive material, under the umbrella of grey literature, one avoids the risk of underrating the latter and consequently losing important parts of our history. Such an expansion, of course, will not be at the expense of traditional archive material. I would rather claim that a rethinking of the archival category would strengthen the field of design historical research and allow new and interesting histories to be told. Moreover, I believe that through rigorous attention to the use of less conventional sources of grey literature and oral testimony, design history can open up new trajectories of inquiry for a broader constituency of scholars interested in the history of visual and material culture.

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NOTE

1. Even if Finland often is included in design historical discussions on Scandinavia, I here employ a stricter definition, based on established geographical and language cultural demarcations.↵
2. Among my interviewees are industrial designer Peter Opsvik, of international renown for his ergonomic chairs.↵
3. For a thorough discussion of oral history and memory, see Yow (2005, pp. 35-67).↵
4. Interview with Torfinn Lindem, December 14, 2016.↵
5. Interview with Roar Høyland, January 13, 2017.↵
6. Interview with Roar Høyland, February 27, 2013.↵
7. This definition was formulated at the 1978 York seminar, which was organized by the Commission of the European Communities – EC (now European Union) in co-operation with the British Library Lending Division – BLLD (now: British Library Bibliographic Services & Document Supply Centre), as a response to the growing awareness of the problems associated with access to documents not issued through normal communication channels. A major aim of the seminar was to agree on a definition of the concept (Knowles, 1981). According to Alberani and De Castro, the seminar "represents a fundamental stage in the discussion about non-conventional or grey literature (GL) in Europe" (Alberani & De Castro, 236).↵