

A Little Magazine Called *Mak* In the Periphery of the Revolution *Thomas Hvid Kromann*

The Danish avant-garde magazine *Mak* contained throughout its short life an extensive discussion on whether or not art could be used as a weapon in the struggle for the new society the counterculture was dreaming about in the late nineteen sixties. *Mak* was devoted to this question: How can art move from the (aesthetic) periphery to the centre of (political) influence?

From 1969–1970 six issues of this little Danish magazine, *Mak*, were published. Let's start off with the title of the magazine. What does "mak" mean? The use of the word "mak" is not actually explained in the magazine, but in *Ordbog over det Danske Sprog* (A Dictionary of the Danish Language) the word "mak", which resembles the word "makværk", which means "a mess", is described in the following way: "A disorganized, confused mixture of incoherent things; miserable, bad work".¹ Thus, using the word "mak" as a title for the magazine seems like quite an ironic gesture, but is in fact also utterly descriptive of the mess, confusion and internal disagreements that occurred between the editors. The word "mak", however, also resembles the word "gak" ("crazy"), which fits very well with the more carnivalesque tendencies of the late nineteen sixties, and in certain aspects regarding the layout, parts of the content, etc, *Mak* was certainly *crazy*.²

The editorial board of *Mak* was a mixture of authors and critics that included poet Per Højholt, author Svend Åge Madsen, critic Steffen Hejlskov Larsen, poet and critic Hans-Jørgen Nielsen, editor Claus Clausen from Rhodos, a left-wing publishing house and Ebbe Reich, a former politician who was by then primarily a counterculture rebel. In many ways, it was the best minds, or at least some of the best minds, of a new generation of critics and authors in Denmark who

¹ The translation of quotes into English has been done by the author of this article. Thanks to Nancy E. Ake Aaen for proofreading.

² The magazine's short (and catchy) title also makes it an easy victim of puns. In a review of the first issue of the magazine, reviewer, Søren Schou could not, in a half parodic, half serious way, resist making puns. The title of the review in *Information* (2.6.1969) was "Fantasien til MAKten" (Power to the imagination), which copied "L'imagination au Pouvoir", the phrase French students had written on walls in May 1968 in Paris. Schou simply replaced the "g" in "magt" (power) with a "k". Another and similar pun was: "MAK betyder forberedelse af den store, rungende MAKovertagelse" (MAK means the preparation of a great, resounding assumption of power/craziness).

cooperated.³ One could divide the editors into two groups, an aesthetic wing (Højholt, Madsen and Hejlskov Larsen) and a more political wing (Nielsen, Clausen and Reich). This division nicely illustrates the schism between literary experiments and the call for more direct political involvement, which, as it turned out, laid the battlefield for every single issue of *Mak*.⁴

As one of the editors, Ebbe Reich, explained twenty years later:

[*Mak*] was a resolute attempt to create something that had not been seen before, and something which none of us knew about in advance. Or you could say that it was an attempt to hold onto the strange, flipped out, culture-revolutionary eruptions of the late sixties *and* to develop these eruptions, which could however neither be held onto nor developed. [...] *Mak* was pushed out into a no man's land and disappeared. (Kløvedal 1986, p. 150)

The controversy with Gyldendal

Gyldendal, Denmark's largest publishing house, which already published the leading cultural magazine *Vindrosen* (The compass rose), was supposed to publish *Mak*, which would have meant moving the avant-garde from the underground to, at least potentially, a more visible, acknowledged and influential position, i.e. a move from the periphery to the centre, so to speak. Problems arose, however, even *before* the first issue of *Mak* was published because of the planned content.

Gyldendal refused to publish *Mak* if the editors did not exclude a certain drawing and a text intended to appear in the first issue. Sketched by Danish artist Bjørn Nørgaard, the drawing (appearing on the back of the first issue of the magazine) showed a member of the bourgeoisie ejaculating in the face of Scrooge McDuck, who exclaimed: "Nah! Death is beautiful, life is empty and love is dead", a statement which negates the dogma of happiness and love in the

³ Per Højholt (b. 1928) was thirteen years older than his co-editor Hans-Jørgen Nielsen, and in this respect Højholt is closer to writers like Klaus Rifbjerg (b. 1931), Peter Seeberg (b. 1925) and Villy Sørensen (b. 1929) rather than to Nielsen and the other editors. In many ways, Højholt's experimental poetry and prose from the nineteen sixties are related to the next generation. In an important anthology, *Eksempler* (Examples) from 1968, pieces by Højholt are located right next to authors that are almost twenty years younger.

⁴ The Danish writer Klaus Rifbjerg wrote a witty parody of this semi-revolutionary milieu in his novel *Marts* (March) 1970 using the names of the real people (Nielsen, Hejlskov Larsen, Reich etc).

hippie culture. Scrooge McDuck tries to wipe his eye, thinking: "Maybe I should start selling cheese again".

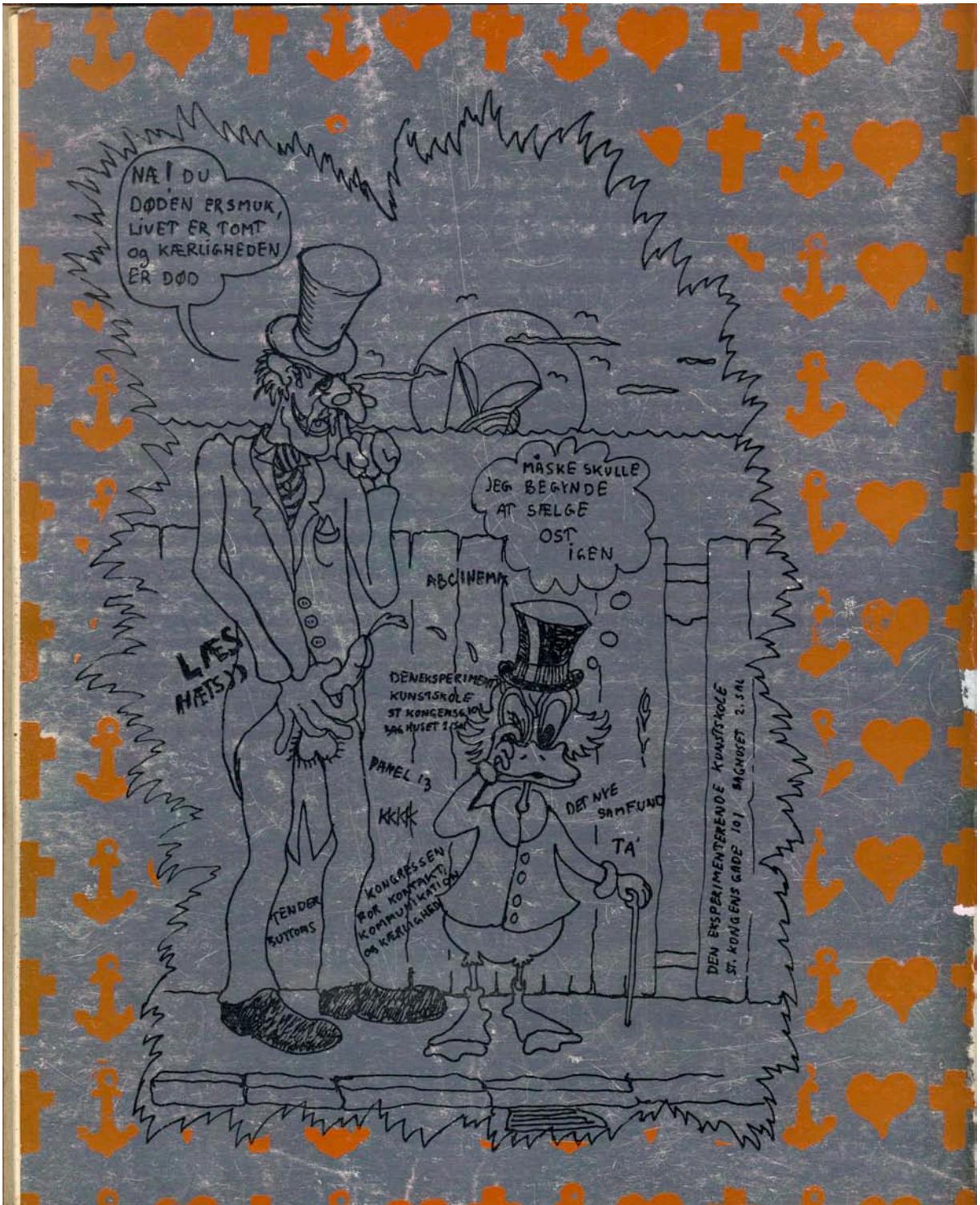


Illustration: Drawing for *Mak* by Bjørn Nørgaard.

Behind the two characters a fence covered with the names of Danish avant-garde, counterculture and new left-wing groupings are visible, including: *ta'* (take), Det Nye Samfund (The new society), Den Eksperimenterende Kunstscole (The Experimental Art School), Panel 13, Tender Buttons, ABCinema, the KKKK (kongressen for kontakt, kommunikation og kærlighed – the congress for contact, communication and love) and the edict: “Read Hætsj”.⁵

The prose piece that was too provocative for the old and noble publishing house of Gyldendal was by the English science-fiction writer J. G. Ballard and was a short story called “Why I would like to fuck Ronald Reagan”. A typical quote from the piece that was included in Ballard’s collection *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1969) is:

Motion picture studies of Ronald Reagan reveal characteristic patterns of facial tones and musculature associated with homoerotic behaviour. [...] Slow-motion cinema films of campaign speeches exercised a marked erotic effect upon an audience of spastic children. (Ballard 1969, p. 15)

Obviously, it was not easy to combine the avant-garde or peripheral/underground-aesthetics with the demands of the centre. After negotiating with Gyldendal, the publishing house allowed “Why I would like to fuck Ronald Reagan” to be published, but Nørgaard’s drawing, which would be considered nothing but a silly school-boy caricature today, was still rejected. As the publishing house explained in a letter to the editors: “aggressive obscenity has a polemic effect, which does not equal our opinion of broad-mindedness [frisind] as a democratic procedure”. There is, however, a hidden message in Scrooge McDuck’s statement, “Maybe I should start selling cheese again”, because it refers to Danish cheesemonger Knud W. Jensen, who founded the art museum Louisiana in 1958 and who, some years later, bought enough Gyldendal stock to be a majority holder. Knowing these facts, it is quite easy to read the drawing in the following way: Knud W. Jensen stands in front of a fence covered with avant-garde graffiti and is annoyed by the ejaculation of Capitalism Inc. Simply put, Jensen was caught between experimental art and capitalism. Maybe he *should* have started selling cheese again.

⁵ *Hætsj*, an underground newspaper that came out almost daily, inverted and negated the official news from established newspapers.

One of the editors of *Mak*, Hans-Jørgen Nielsen, made the following conclusion in the newspaper *Information*: “This affair shows [...] the necessity of stepping outside the established publishing system. The official culture can only accept the younger generation as long it isn’t new and unconventional. We have to make our own system”. The end of the polemics was the founding of the “independent institution *Mak*”, whose distribution was given to the publishing house Rhodos, most famously known for publishing major theorists and icons of the counterculture such as R.D. Laing, Germaine Greer, Frantz Fanon, Karl Marx, Eldridge Cleaver, Guy Debord, Daniel Cohn-Bendit and many others. The editors of *Mak* were moving from the centre back to the periphery. Or, in other words, they were trying to create a new centre, a centre for the new left wing, where Rhodos had an influential position.

The first issue of *Mak* was a mixture of prose, poetry and essays, but the political implications were most significant in the five essays contained in that issue. In Svend Åge Madsen’s “Was ist ein Bild?”, the political and literary conditions are parallel (Madsen 1969).⁶ Madsen claims that anti-parliamentarism and anti-literature had been the result of the current political and literary conditions, but that pure negation had not proven to be an effective strategy, which is why it is necessary to operate inside the established system. The solution, according to Madsen, is to be elected, but also to keep the anti-parliamentary attitude in the parliamentary work and to use anti-literary strategies in the making of pulp fiction (the detective novel, for example), and by doing so, establish a glittering Trojan horse to conquer the minds of the innocent readers by using popular forms.

The four other essays in the first issue of *Mak* discuss the literary and political situation as well. In “De sociale kunstnere” (The social artists), Palle Nielsen argues for the necessity of a new category of artists, social artists, who try to *live* art instead of just *reproducing* feelings in their art works (Nielsen 1969). Ebbe Reich’s “Temps pour temps pourtant” is an ahierarchic essay made up of several quotations, crossed out words and drawings and included revolutionary and sexual themes (Reich 1969).

In Henning Christiansen’s essay, “The composer turned on”, Christiansen describes the polarisation between artists who think that art can be used as a necessary weapon in an attack on the existing society *and* those artists who are rather sceptical about the potential of art (Christiansen 1969). Christiansen’s essay is an attack on the German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen, who he accuses of being political in an apolitical sense. Last, but not least, the first issue

⁶ “What is a picture?” In spite of the German title, the essay is in fact written in Danish.

of *Mak* features Steffen Hejlskov Larsen's defence of systemdigtingen (system poetry), which was using models and rules in order to create literature (Hejlskov Larsen 1969). Significantly, Hejlskov Larsen's essay is the only essay in which political discussion plays a minor role.

...og mange mennesker havde anbragt nede på sandbunden. Flagskibet l'Orient blev sprængt i luften og der er intet tilbage, men af de mange andre fregatter og lineskibe ser man endnu oppe fra klitterne de ovale rækker af kanoner spredt som halsbånd nede under vandet, frigjorte fra deres træskeletter som forlængst er smuldret bort. I det nærliggende Abukirmuseum, en lang flad bygning af glasfiber, der er boret ind i klitrækken, findes en modelopstilling af søslaget. For en drikkeskilling hælder kustoden vand i bassinet, og man vil da kunne se l'Orient ryge i luften, idet der er anbragt en klump kalium under vandlinien.

Der er knyttet en ejendommeligt anekdote til søslaget: englændernes marineinfanteri havde på Napoleonstiden hvide uniformer med sorte frynser og røde striber. Da den franske flåde i desperation søgte at undslippe ind i en af Nilens arme, dukkede snorlige rækker af storme op inde på land i krudtrøgen og da franskmændene troede

det var fjenden, som allerede havde gjort landgang, var der ikke andet at gøre end prøve at slå sig igennem ude i rum sø.

EL ALAMEIN. Den berømte krigsskueplads ligger, hvor Libyen begynder, og har som eneste attraktion det bombastiske Montgomery Memorial, hvori en kludedukke ved indkast af 1 D-Mark giver sig til at rotere. De ægyptiske myndigheder har aldrig kunnet glemme de billige virkemidler, hvormed englænderne vandt slaget. Sækkepiberegimenterne trak nemlig en hel masse heste og kameler over med hestehuder og kamelskind, så tyskerne troede det drejede sig om mekaniske dyr, da de så dem storme afsted. Og kunne englænderne spille brændstof og reservedele på den slags narrestreger, måtte de jo råde over enorme ressourcer og der var da intet andet for tyskerne at gøre end påbegynde et orienterende tilbagetog.

DET SIKER BT

TEMPS pour TEMPS
 pourtant is money
 -et essay af Ebbe Reich

Man tjener kun reaktionens Interesser ved at stirre sig blind på ekstremisterne, hvis propre næver og flossede argumenter er bedre egnede til

Sagt på en anden (-1)tsizz- måde: Vi (-2)tsizz- opererer med (-3)tsizz- et meget primitivt (-4)tsizz- tidsbegreb som vi (-5)tsizz- følgende Dunne og Priestley (-6)tsizz- vil kalde (-7)tsizz- *passing time* (-8)tsizz- engelsk for (-9)tsizz- forbigående tid (-10)tsizz- (-11)tsizz-.

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
 Old Time is still a' flying:
 And this same flower that smiles to-day
 To-morrow will be dying.
 Herrick. **MAN HÅSER J**

Seksten billeder i sekundet — som i gamle dage:

1. Chaplins fingre rører Chaplins hat **JOHN WAYNES**
2. Chaplins fingre rører Chaplins hat **NOSSER**
3. Chaplins fingre bøjer sig om Chaplins hat **SOMER ET STYKKE VIRKELIGHED**
4. Chaplins fingre bøjer sig mere om Chaplins hat
5. Chaplins fingre bøjer sig endnu mere om Chaplins hat
6. Chaplins fingre bøjer sig ultimativt om Chaplins hat
7. Chaplins løfter så småt på hatten
8. Chaplin løfter så småt på hatten
9. Chaplin trækker hatten et stykke skråt opad mod højre
10. Chaplin trækker hatten endnu et stykke skråt opad til højre
11. Chaplin trækker hatten endnu et stykke skråt opad til højre
12. Chaplin trækker hatten endnu et stykke skråt opad til højre
13. Chaplin står med Chaplins hat løftet op over hovedet
14. Chaplins mundvige løftes lidt opad
15. Chaplins mundvige løftes mere opad

16. Chaplin smiler ("Gather ye rosebuds while ye may")
 Dette er en beskrivelse af et sekund, opdelt i sekstendele efter gammelt filmisk forbillede. Men der er det ved film, at de kan køres om og om igen. Og baglæns. Eller med en fart af 24 billeder i sekundet. Eller løbe løbsk:

14. Chaplins mundvige løftes lidt opad Chaplins mundvige

15. Løftes mere opad Chaplin smiler ("Gather ye rosebuds while ye may")

16. "may") den store sortskæggede bølle løfter øjenbrynene og svinger bordet rundt over hovedet og slynger

17. Det i hovedet på Chaplin dukker sig og bordet rammer familieportrættet der braser ned fra væggen og damens kriger og Chaplin løber den ene vej og den anden vej ... ("Old time is still a' flying")

Meine Geduld ist jetzt zu Ende gekommen! → ⊙
 Adolph Hitler.
 Nonsens **BARE PÅ EN ANDEN MÅDE**

FINN EINVA

til at begynde med er der trængsel på scenen

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Illustration: From Ebbe Reich's "Temps pour temps pourtant" in *Mak*.

From *ta'* to *Mak*

In many aspects, the little magazine *Mak* was continuing the avant-garde poetics of the little magazine *ta'*, which was published from 1967–1968. *ta'* had functioned as an apolitical discovery of a new media, new technology and new art forms, especially Minimal Art, whereas *Mak* can be described as a rediscovery of the political potential of the historical avant-garde, Dadaism and Surrealism, combined with left-wing politics and Eastern philosophy.

One of the main differences between *ta'* and *Mak* was that *ta'* was strongly connected to Eks-skolen (The Experimental Art School), an avant-garde group that existed from 1961–1972. In fact, *ta'* could be regarded as one of Eks-skolen's major contributions and contained the expression of their poetics and trans-aesthetics, so to speak, whereas *Mak* belonged to neither a group of artists nor to a political movement.

The progression from *ta'* to *Mak* follows what Tania Ørum has described as “the logic of the gradual radicalization of the avant-garde” (Ørum 2005, p. 223) – which means a progression from purely aesthetic experiments to art, whose existential, social and political content becomes more and more explicit and which finally culminates in explicit political involvement that may or may not be within the sphere of art.

In *Mak*, one finds attacks similar to those in *ta'* on the art of the bourgeoisie, on the Author as an almost holy figure and a repressive institution. The important difference is that in *Mak* these attacks are linked to a broader critique of society. It is less a call for a new, open and democratic approach to art than it is a discussion of whether this new approach can function as a critique of capitalism or not.

A few of the same foreign artists and theorists can be found in both *ta'* and *Mak*, for example, composer John Cage and concrete poet Helmut Heissenbüttel. It is significant that Heissenbüttel's essay “Spielregeln des Kriminalromans” (The ground rules of the detective story), appears in *ta'* because the essay fits perfectly within the ambition of trying to break down the border between high art and low art, more specifically by legitimizing the detective novel (Heissenbüttel 1967). An excerpt translated from Heissenbüttel's essay “Über das Halluzinatorische in der Literatur” (On the hallucinatory in literature) in *Mak* combined avant-garde poetics with politics and surrealistic

inspiration (Heissenbüttel 1969). This essay also fits perfectly within the ambition of trying to break down the border between art and life.⁷

Compared to *ta'*, it is easy to detect the influence of hippie and counterculture in *Mak*, for example, in the anti-hierarchical composition of the magazine, the collective editorial group, the anti-Vietnam War statements, the comments on specific conflicts between the police and the counterculture, the psychedelic prose pieces, the hand writing, the reprinting of naked bodies (some with quite an homoerotic approach), the fascination with the mad (for example the reprinting of Vaslav Nijinsky's diary) and the discussion of R. D. Laing's anti-psychiatry, etc.

The avant-garde and the advertising-agencies

Mak was published in the late nineteen sixties when art was largely beginning to be judged as naive and as a powerless intervention in society – or, even worse, judged as completely ridiculous, as some luxury hobby in the quiet life of those living in the periphery. In 1968, German critic Hans Magnus Enzensberger published an article in the magazine *Kursbuch* called “Gemeinplätze, die Neueste Literatur betreffend” (Clichés, concerning the latest literature) (Enzensberger 2004). In the following quote, Enzensberger underlines that art had become powerless because society, and especially advertising agencies, had become capable of absorbing avant-garde strategies and in this way neutralizing them:

Eine kritische Rhetorik, die den Begriff der Revolution auf ästhetische Strukturen übertrug, war nur zu einer Zeit möglich, da der Bruch mit konventionellen Schreib- (Mal-, Kompositions-)Weisen noch als Herausforderung gelten konnte. Diese Zeit ist vorbei. Proklamationen und Manifeste, in denen “Umwälzungen”, “Revolten”, “Revolutionen” der Sprache, der Syntax, der Metapher usw. angekündigt werden, klingen heute hohl. (Enzensberger 2004, p. 448)

According to Enzensberger, it is no longer possible to contribute to the revolution by trying to cross the established aesthetic borders; no proclaimed experiments with the language, the syntax, the metaphor are enough. Instead, the borders, as such, between the aesthetics and so-called real life had to be not only

⁷ “Über das Halluzinatorische in der Literatur” was the sixth and final lecture in a series of lectures entitled “Frankfurter Vorlesungen über Poetik 1963” (Frankfurt Lectures on Poetics 1963). “Spielregeln des Kriminalromans” and “Frankfurter Vorlesungen über Poetik 1963” were both published in Heissenbüttel's collection *Über Literatur* (On Literatur) (Heissenbüttel 1966).

crossed but broken down. But Enzensberger is certainly not a Guy Debord. From Enzensberger's point of view, it is not a matter of the death of literature and art, but rather a matter of creating new literary modes of expression, which are more journalistically inspired in order to influence society. The death of the author becomes the birth of the journalist.⁸

The editors of *Mak* certainly did not agree on which direction their little magazine was moving towards. It is significant that the words "revolt" and "revolution" in the late nineteen sixties were understood as a revolution in *life style* and/or as more explicit political and violent intervention. The political wing in *Mak* included more and more current events (anti-Vietnam War demonstrations, police clashes, etc) in the magazine, whereas the aesthetic wing was trying to keep the focus on art. Because the editors could not agree on a subject, every issue of the magazine ended with an editorial, which was not a manifesto or a collective statement, but a signed letter from only one of the editors, from only one specific person, for example, Claus Clausen presenting his personal opinion. This editorial ping-pong showed the internal disagreements, which quite rapidly ceased to serve as an inspiration but rather began to threaten the life of the little magazine.

Maintaining a career in an association of rabbit breeders

Mak's story ends in July 1970 with its sixth issue, which was edited by a large group of women. The decision to hand over the magazine to a feminist group by Nielsen, Clausen and the other editors can be seen as a political act *and* as the final battle to save the life of the magazine; it was simply no longer possible to unify interest in art and interest in politics. As a result, the last issue was written and edited by a collective group of fourteen women. In this case, it was a real collective as the individual essays and fictional pieces were not signed, but functioned as anonymous pieces in a larger feminist discourse. This issue of *Mak*, which contained academic essays on female liberation, had an excerpt, for example, from Karin Schrader-Klebert's "Die kulturelle Revolution der Frau" (The cultural revolution of the woman), which was one of the earliest German-language publications on feminist philosophy (Schrader-Klebert 1970), a piece, which originally had been published in *Kursbuch* 17, 1969. The sixth issue of *Mak* also featured personal stories and letters between sisters; for example, there was one piece of correspondence in which the husband is described as the "master" and the women are involved in a secret female struggle. The letter states: "If we approach discreetly, all the male innovations will be used against

⁸ For a more elaborate discussion on this subject, see Buch 1975.

them – and we will create a happy society, with happy women” (Collective 1970, p. 9). In the editorial at the end of the magazine, the group concluded their statement as follows:

Every single human being, woman or man, must have the same opportunities to take active part in a society; they must share the exciting duties and the boring ones, and their feelings towards each other as beings male/female, female/female, male/male must not be institutionalised. The male role as the head and the female role as the object for the male in holy, traditional marriage must be torn to pieces. Destroy all institutions. All power to everyone. (Collective editorial, p. 41)

Why did *Mak* stop after six issues? It was not for economic reasons, as was the case (or at least one of the reasons) for the magazine *ta*.⁹ Claus Clausen tried to find an explanation in 1986:

It was a chaotic period, so we never published another issue. I really don't remember why, but it seems to me, that at least the editors from Copenhagen became more and more involved in the culminating cultural revolution in Denmark, for example, in collectives, gender politics, the drug culture. (Clausen 1986, p. 154)

This explanation underlining the difference between the political and aesthetic parties seems reasonable.⁹ It seems clear that the internal differences no longer served as an inspiration and that the differences between the interests and goals of the editors were simply growing too large. Claus Clausen moved on to the magazine *Hug* (Cut) which had a more clearly defined political profile and which would exist throughout the seventies. Hans-Jørgen Nielsen stopped writing concrete poetry and experimental novels and instead worked as a journalist. In 1982, he noted in an interview that: “Art became a ghetto, writing novels seemed

⁹ This is pinpointed in a quote from the last regular editorial comment by editor Steffen Hejlskov Larsen, who was a part of the aesthetic wing of the magazine: “Dear *Mak*, Writing to you now seems like settling an old score with a misbehaved child of one's own. At some mystic point I was involved in your birth, but now, as you grow up, I must admit, that there is not much family resemblance. I have to write, you annoy me enormously” (*Mak* 5 1970, p. 37). Larsen settles the score with two of the others editors especially, Ebbe Reich and Claus Clausen, who Larsen describes as preachers and missionaries, indicating that their political involvement has turned into a quasi-religious approach.

like maintaining a career in an association of rabbit breeders” (Skyum-Nielsen 1982, p. 292). For him and others in that generation, newspapers became *the* most relevant and influential medium.

One finds, on the other hand, writers like Svend Åge Madsen and critics like Steffen Hejlskov Larsen. The latter published an influential book on the use of systems in contemporary Danish poetry and prose, entitled *Systemdigtningen. Modernismens tredje fase* (System poetry: Modernisms third phase), a book in which Hejlskov Larsen argued that political intervention should (and could?) only be experiments with language in order to manipulate society (Hejlskov Larsen 1971). In Svend Åge Madsen’s work, the years right around 1970 represent a turning point. Madsen rode into the seventies on (or rather in) a glittering Trojan horse. He moved from sophisticated literary experiments to more mainstream types of literature, partly for political reasons, but maybe also as a result of the avant-garde ambitions to close the gap between high and low culture, but while still insisting on literature in itself.

The short life of *Mak* was due to the internal struggle between the politicians and the artists among the editors. How can you possibly turn a little magazine into a Molotov cocktail? With *Mak*, at least, it was not possible. The ambition of breaking down the border between *Mak* and the world outside resulted in the closing of the magazine.

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