Against Restrictions and Exclusions – For Expansion and Inclusions – The Little Magazine ta’ (1967–68)

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Abstract

The magazine ta’ was the most important Danish channel for the crucial changes that took place in the field of aesthetics in the 1960s. In ta’ one encounters the whole range of new attitudes and approaches to art that were introduced and discussed at that time. Prominent among these were the cross-aesthetic approaches, the breaking down of the high–low dichotomy as well as new concepts of performative and processual subjectivity, which Hans-Jørgen Nielsen, one of the leading editors of ta’, called “attituderelativisme” (“attitude relativism”).

Despite its short life, the little magazine ta’ undoubtedly represents one of the most important manifestations of the Danish avant-garde of the 1960s. This is where new currents in the Danish and Nordic post-war avant-garde, international affiliations as well as rediscoveries of the pre-war avant-garde, were introduced and where new ideas about art, subjectivity and technology were launched. In Danish literary history ta’ has been seen either as part of late modernism or as an anticipation of post-modernism, whereas new research (Ipsen and Mogensen 2005) has suggested that an avant-garde perspective offers the most complete and precise understanding of ta’.

As proclaimed in an advertising folder, ta’ was intended to be a “dogmatic magazine” whose goal was to update “the domestic debate on arts and culture in accordance with a completely new attitude and sensibility” and to “operate across the borders of the arts”. The intention was to “create an advanced debate about the new art forms that have emerged during recent years”. The people

1 The little magazines of this period include digte for en daler (1964–65), which introduced concrete poetry in Denmark, the underground newspaper Hætsjj (1968–70), the newsletter Panel 13 Information (1968–69), MAK (1969–1970) which focused on politics and literature, as well as the art magazines Billedkunst (1966–68), Arkitektur og billedkunst (1969), A + B (1970) and the more established magazines Hvedekorn and Selvsyn (both ongoing). Taken together, these magazines map the heterogeneous activities of the Danish avant-garde during the 1960s.
behind ta’ wanted to break down the barriers between high and low culture. The focal points were literature, music, the visual arts, hybrid intermedia forms as well as popular music, fashion, advanced technology and information theory. The name ta’ (the imperative: “take”) emerged during an early editorial meeting, when one of the editors, Peter Louis-Jensen, took the name from the slogan on a six-pack of Coca-Cola: “ta’ 6” (take six) (Bjørnkjær 2005: 11). As the writer and critic Hans-Jørgen Nielsen later wrote in the essay “Gruppebillede fra 60erne” (Group Portrait from the ’60s), the name was “totally unpretentious compared to the usual emphatic names” (Nielsen 2006: 470). As stated in an editorial in ta’ no. 6 ½, it signalled the magazine’s intention of being “against restrictions and exclusions”, but “for expansion and inclusion”.

ta’ can be seen as a parallel to the magazine Gorilla (two issues, 1966–67), published by key figures of the Swedish avant-garde of the 1960s (see Jesper Olsson’s essay in this section). The two magazines shared an interest in concrete poetry, cybernetics and game theory, among other subjects, and there were numerous contacts between the Danish and Swedish artists involved. Gorilla, however, was not as concerned with cross-aesthetics and popular culture as ta’, and ta’ had a much greater impact than the short-lived experiments by their Swedish colleagues.

The cross-aesthetic orientation of ta’ was a natural consequence of the group of people who launched the magazine, as a platform to communicate their ideas to a larger audience and establish themselves as a new generation of artists. This group sprang from the cross-aesthetic discussions and experiments taking place in the circles around the Experimental School of Art (1961–72). More than half of the ten editors were from the Experimental School of Art, and the rest were recruited to provide contact with other artistic circles. The editors were the visual artists Peter Louis-Jensen and Stig Brøgger, the authors Erik Thygesen, Hans-Jørgen Nielsen, Kristen Bjørnkjær, Jørgen Leth and Vagn Lundbye as well as the Swedish folklorist and Fluxus artist Bengt af Klintberg, the composer Henning Christiansen and the music critic Poul Nielsen.

ta’ was in every sense a little magazine. The format was 15.5 × 23 cm, and the number of pages of the eight regular issues (four issues per year) ranged from 30 to 42 per issue. The magazine was published in 1967–68 by the small publishing house h. m. bergs forlag. Two additional issues were published: number 6½, which was included in the Swedish art magazine Paletten 2, 1968, and number 8½, which appeared as Selvsyn 3, 1969.2 Every issue of ta’ had a cover

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2 Only the first additional issue, which introduced the magazine to a Swedish audience, can be regarded as a regular issue of ta’. Number 8½ was mostly a collection of old articles from ta’