

Profil 1966–69 – Triumph and Crisis of the Collective

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Abstract

The history of *Profil* from 1966 to 1968 illustrates nicely how a little magazine, marginal in scope, can have a huge and lasting impact on the historical processes of consecration and the formation of a canon. By 1969, however, the magazine was no longer a showcase for upcoming writers eager to establish new literary taste, but a radical actionist group putting into practice the insights of critical theory and the revolutionary spirit of '68. From a stage of system-immanent criticism in the mid-1960s *Profil* now entered the stage of self-criticism on behalf of the literary institution as such.

The magazine *Profil* (1959–92) has gained a legendary position in the history of Norwegian literature as it has given its name to epochal terms such as '*Profil* Modernism' and the '*Profil* Rebellion', labels associated with now highly celebrated writers such as Dag Solstad and Jan Erik Vold. At the beginning of 1966 these young men – together with Noel Cobb, Espen Haavardsholm, Paal-Helge Haugen, Otto Homlung, Leif Stavik and editor-in-chief Tor Obrestad – took control of the editorial board of a small student magazine, earlier called *Filologen* (The Philologist), based at the University of Oslo. Although some signs of change towards promoting experimental fiction had been seen in *Profil* in the early '60s, the little magazine suddenly turned into a dynamic workshop, a group enterprise claiming the power to define contemporary standards and practice of literature. A couple of years later, after Helge Rykkja, Hansmagnus Ystgaard, Jan Carlsen, Thorstein Bugge Høverstad and Bjørn Myhre took over the editorial board, *Profil* went through a more profound radicalisation which aimed at dismantling the very idea of the individual writer and widening the concept of literature to include architecture, social planning and political documents.

Issue 3/68, initiated by the ingenious Hansmagnus Ystgaard, was crucial in *Profil*'s turn from the literary workshop towards a platform for cultural criticism in a broader sense. The issue was promoted as a critique of so-called "NATO language", triggered by an increasing dissatisfaction with the US anti-communist warfare in Vietnam. The specific rhetoric of NATO (the North

Atlantic Treaty Organisation) was seen as a linguistic manifestation of power. In a long editorial "Conversation" cultural institutions such as publishing houses, newspapers, radio and television were described as language monopolies working in line with NATO, talking in the same secretive manner as the defence treaty. NATO's discourse was seen as representing the symbolic violence of all language that served conservative forces. This new political tone, and the turn away from a purely literary engagement, repulsed Solstad, eventually Vold and most of the original "coup leaders" of the 1966 *Profil* rebellion.

Given its more than thirty years of existence, *Profil* was obviously not *one* magazine with one constant programme, but rather, as Jahn H. Thon has argued (Thon 2001), five different enterprises: a student magazine (1959–65); a writers' magazine (1966–68); a magazine of avant-garde cultural-critical interventions (1968–69); a platform for political Maoism (1970–81); and, at the end, a channel for the breakthrough of post-modernism in Norway (1984–89). When talking about the "*Profil* rebellion" and the "*Profil* circle", literary historians are normally referring to *the writers' magazine* as it appeared on the public scene in the mid-1960s. However, in these years *Profil* maintained a romantic idea of the writer and of fiction as privileged artistic concepts; there were few attempts to transcend the frames of the literary institution as such until Solstad and Vold left the board in late '68. They had been among the first to enjoy the benefits of the newly launched Purchasing Programme for Contemporary Fiction, administered since 1965 by the government-appointed Arts Council Norway. The historical confusion of the *avant-garde* with the *writers'* period may be partly explained by the tireless, still ongoing, self-staging by the Solstad/Vold/Økland-group, but also by the fact that among the contributors to the early *Profil* was Otto Hageberg, who in his later capacity of professor of Scandinavian Literature helped spread the myth of the *Profil* circle as the ultimate manifestation of a literary generation in Norwegian history.

Indeed, the self-confident editorial of the first issue of 1966 proclaims: "We do not feel committed to any literary tradition other than the one we create ourselves." The whole issue was dedicated to modernism, which the editors considered as a suitable working concept for contemporary literature. Addressing the conventionalism of critics and reviewers in their own time, especially their lack of openness to artistic experiments, *Profil* took on the mission of giving the reading public a general education. However, to promote modernism in 1966 was not particularly avant-garde, even in the periphery of Norway.

In fact, the larger magazine *Vinduet* (The Window, 1947–), financed by the established publishing house Gyldendal, had been paving the way for experimental literature since the early '50s. Brikt Jensen, who edited *Vinduet* in the