

Article

Forming a circle

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The practice of Forsøgsscenen (the Experimental Stage) in the self-organised political-artistic milieu of 1930s Denmark

By Cecilie Ullerup Schmidt

In the interwar period, Denmark was marked by economic recession, grave poverty, high unemployment and class struggle. After great human and material losses during World War I, and in the wake of the Wall Street crash in 1929, it was imperative to break with the conditions of exploitation and rethink the distribution of wealth between classes as well as countries. The circumstances of art in both Denmark and the neighbouring countries were characterised by cuts and austerity budgets: “In times of crisis, cultural life is in an exposed position as a luxury that can no longer be afforded”,¹ theatre historian Kela Kvam writes about the economic circumstances after the stock market crash in 1929 (Kvam, 1976, p. 174). The critical situation thus also forced artists to reconsider their role and co-creation of the organisation of society. Many artists worked actively with both theorising and with aesthetic strategies of art as a weapon against the growing inequality and, not least, the increasing fascism.

Forsøgsscenen (1929-32) was a short-lived, ambitious association in the avant-garde of Copenhagen consisting of a little magazine and three ‘departments’ for production of, respectively, experimental theatre, puppet theatre and presentation of international art films. The association of intellectuals and artists shared their political commitment and the intention that art should fulfil a social idea. In the light of theatre history, Forsøgsscenen has primarily been remembered for its consolidation as an independent association without a stage, and especially for its gathering of later influential protagonists: as the nomadic place where plays by Georg Büchner, Nordahl Grieg, Friedrich Wolf and Bertolt Brecht were staged by, among others, Per Knutzon, and where Ruth Berlau played her first part (Kvam et al., 1993; Jørgensen, 2011). In other words, Forsøgsscenen has been historicised based on an interest in the changes of organisation within cultural policy as well as the centring of artistic geniuses; a humble contribution to the story of the early organisation of the independent field, as well as a consolidation of the traditional oeuvre-and-genius-centred – the dramatist’s, the playwright’s, and the director’s – theatre history. I will try to write another history based on the kinship between the political, collective and cross aesthetic practices around 1930. Specifically, I will try to situate the activities of Forsøgsscenen in a transdisciplinary and politicised infrastructure of partly the other artistic associations around little magazines in the avant-garde of the Danish interwar years, and partly the proletariat’s groups of actors in Germany and Russia. Here it is not works of art but the doing or *practice* that count; not singular authorship and significant works that matter but strategies of redistribution, accessibility and organisation within the aesthetics of production.

A community consolidated in a little magazine

The continuous, unifying organ of Forsøgsscenen was the little magazine *Forsøgsscenen*. *Forsøgsscenen* was published in Copenhagen but organised people around itself, nationally and internationally, and connected different art scenes and political milieus through a both educational, agitating,

1) All translations from sources not previously translated into English are by Marianne Ølholm.

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propagandising but also sensuous approach. In theatre history, the little magazine *Forsøgsscenen* was belittled as a member's magazine of a theatre association *Forsøgsscenen* itself (Jørgensen 2011), but I propose reading *Forsøgsscenen* as a little magazine related to other little magazines of the avant-garde – all well described in art and literary history – that had in common that they collected and distributed international works and texts in translation, and also developed and institutionalised a new critical and experimenting artistic practice in explicit opposition to the precedence of “Beauty”, “Taste” and “Amusement” in bourgeois culture.

In the 19 issues in total published from 1929 to 1931 it was especially the montages of the cover that supplemented the otherwise text-based content. The texts in the little magazine consisted of, among other things, manifestos about non-bourgeois theatre, translations of central texts from German theatre or Russian film culture, agitational texts by the editors intended to recruit new members and co-creators of *Forsøgsscenen*, as well as ‘schooling texts’ informing about new techniques in the French films of Surrealism, about the principles of new realism or about the context – for example, the question of free abortion – of the plays that *Forsøgsscenen* produced.

Little magazines as a genre played a central role as a unifying organ in avant-garde movements at the beginning of the 20th century. The genre of “little magazines” is studied in modernist research as social fora that brought together political radicalism and aesthetic experiment (Churchill and McKible, 2007). The little magazines both stimulated and organised the milieu of the avant-garde, and at the same time it was a historical product of the technological development: the popularisation of the printing press and the prevalence of the typewriter. The social fora around the little magazines materialise an alternative narrative to the artist myths of individual figures that also characterise Modernism: editorial communities, networks across art forms and across national borders, co-authored texts, but also competition and conflicts between the little magazines.

In the interwar period, left-wing circles in Denmark were informed by *Dansk Monde* (Danish Monde), *Clarté* and *Kritisk Revy* (Critical Review). The Danish surrealists had the little magazines *linien* (the line) around the eponymous artists' association (1934-1939) and *Konkretion* (1935-1936) that consisted of reprinted works and aesthetic theoretical reflections on the one hand, and radical political visions brought about by the liaison of Danish surrealism with the DKP (the Danish Communist Party). The little magazines could be perceived as fora of intellectuals and artists who, by academic and artistic means, created a political front – or as *Linien* writes:

When new ideas within a small circle have grown sufficiently strong, a natural demand arises to spread them to a larger audience. It is inherent to these times that such a circle rarely stands alone; within other cultural fields similar circles form whose ideas are kindred in spirit. In a time like the one we live in at the moment, where opposites become larger and larger, it is necessary for like-minded within all fields to join – creating a cultural front. (*Linien* in *linien* 1, 1934, p. 9)

One could say that the little magazine is a small, more sensuous, and more politicised variation of the newspaper as a genre. One can say that the newspaper – as historicised by the anthropologist Benedict Anderson (1983) – creates imagined communities. It connects physically and geographically separated readers, and the newspaper has thus had a function in the formation of the nation state. In 1901, Vladimir Lenin similarly writes about the function of the newspaper as not only collectively propagandising and agitating – that is, politically educating according to certain convictions and interrupting in relation to the *doxa* of the time – but that the newspaper also

collectively organises. It was of course not a national community that the avant-garde artists aimed at consolidating. On the contrary, the artists wanted a hybrid institution inspired by international practices across artforms and politics, standing on its own – and financially quite fragile – feet outside of the institution of the museum and the established theatre.

The little magazine *Forsøgsscenen* was one part of Forsøgsscenen's external activities, and the other was theatre production and film presentations. The overall purpose was to create a Danish scene – a milieu – across artforms and concentrated around a political agenda, namely, to break with the logic of production and the purpose of entertainment and identification of bourgeois art. On the first page in the first issue of *Forsøgsscenen*, in a text resembling a manifesto in terms of genre, co-founder of *Forsøgsscenen*, the lawyer Oluf Rosenkrantz wrote:

The fact is that our culture is in a crisis where it is a matter of life and death whether humanity will understand how to reinvent itself (...) 'Forsøgsscenen' has set itself the goal of assembling young intellectuals in this city (...) To make a breach in the grey wall of the funding system. (Rosenkrantz in *Forsøgsscenen* 1, 1929, p. 2)

The way to break with bourgeois culture was to meet across art and politics and across different artistic fields – both as an association that could organise activities beyond the state funding monopoly, but also to co-organise the production of art, politics and thinking into a new kind of practice. From the beginning, there was an agenda of creating an alternative institution that breaks with the prevailing aesthetic and political logics of distribution. In other words, *Forsøgsscenen* was not a place, not a permanent stage, but a group with the ambition of running art institutions in a different way, a self-instituted milieu – or in the words of Linien, a circle – cultivated by activities spanning intellectuals, the politically committed and artists who all wanted an internationalisation, an intensified awareness of artistic form and political awakening in the Danish art scene.

Internationalisation and distribution policy

Forsøgsscenen was inspired by the *drive* that existed especially in Germany around the political theatre groups Truppe 1931, Piscator-Kollektiv, and Gruppe Junger Schauspieler Berlin, but also the new international distribution of Surrealist and Expressionist films from Russia, the Netherlands, France and Germany. The German collectives that inspired *Forsøgsscenen* had three characteristics.

First, the groups of self-organising actors had established themselves in working collectives as a consequence of the global recession and its resulting unemployment. Thus, their origin was historically based on an economic crisis, and as a result of this, their point of departure became an anti-capitalist organisation, that is, a horizontal and often rotating distribution of work founded in an association structure.

Second, the groups understood themselves as being in opposition to the bourgeois concept of art, the institutional and economic reproduction of bourgeois theatre, and the concept of genius in bourgeois art.

Third, the actors in these collectives identified explicitly with the revolutionary working class and were often members of the communist party: their goal was to transform capitalist society (Pfützner, 1966, p. 98). The German collectives, however, were also different in the sense that some groups had educated actors, mostly from the upper middle class, whereas others worked with a mixed ensemble of professionals and amateurs. Due to their social composition, the collectives were internally confronted with the question of who is in a position to speak for the proletariat.

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This led to pieces of drama that were meant to make the middle classes conscious of the fact that they were as structurally vulnerable and potentially exploitable as the workers (Wangenheim and Truppe 1931's *lehrstück* titled *Musefelden* (*The Mouse Trap*) from 1932), but also discussions about aesthetics: whether well-researched neorealism and alienation or more multicoloured and bold agitprop was the right strategy to awaken the commitment of the audience (Kvam, 1976).

The core members of Forsøgsscenen were artists, students and intellectuals. They did not attempt to identify with working-class culture, but rather entered into a critical dialogue with the existing bourgeois concept of art in Denmark, which they saw as conservative with “nauseating, sentimental, sleazy, corny” works that defended war (*Forsøgsscenen* 1, vol. 1, 1929, p. 5). Forsøgsscenen longed for an experimental idiom nourished by an international outlook that was to awaken the critical masses and inform about contemporary art. In that way, Forsøgsscenen can be regarded partly as a producing body – theatre plays were produced – but perhaps even more as a body of political distribution. The principles for the film department were educational and meant to provide access: to show ‘forgotten’ works from the early avant-garde, to show more recent films that contributed to developing cinematic art (Man Ray, Germanie Dulac, Walter Ruttmann, Sovkino, Chinese social films etc.), to inform about the development of the concept of film and to discuss it. The theatre department also obtained rights to works by the contemporary playwrights Marcel Achard, Bertolt Brecht, Gustav von Wangenheim and published introductions to positions in contemporary German theatre and discourse-generating feature articles in the little magazine about the democratic endeavours of modern theatre (see for instance Flygare, Calle, 1929. “Moderne Teater”, *Forsøgsscenen* 1, 3, p. 1).

In addition to the distribution of new, experimental aesthetics from the international field, Forsøgsscenen also worked on a concrete redistribution of art from a class perspective, this despite their own situatedness in the middle class: they provided low prices at their own film presentations and discounts for selected films in major cinemas. Making art accessible to the proletariat was an agenda they shared with other artists' groups. The artists' association Corner, for instance, handed out admission tickets to their exhibitions to unemployed people queuing for work (Kristensen, 2020) and made it possible to buy art by paying in instalments (Corner & Høst, 1936, p31). Likewise, the programming of artistic experiences was adjusted to the workers' daily schedule and capacity to consume culture: Forsøgsscenen held midnight performances – also partly because they could then have stage and acting capacity when funded theatres had finished playing – and the Corner exhibition in 1932 was open in the evenings until 10 pm Wednesday, Friday and Sunday (*ibid.*, p. 9).

Distribution was thus politicised: Forsøgsscenen was to expand the horizon of the spectator with international and cross-disciplinary perspectives, but it was also to expend the social and class-dependent dissemination of art by transgressing national borders and temporal rhythms of presentation. Forsøgsscenen transformed the organisation of distribution, that is, what was shown and when, and how art could be experienced. But Forsøgsscenen also wrestled with the traditional idea of an aesthetics of production sustained by genius, in which the artist produces in structural and social isolation. Forsøgsscenen was, as I will analyse in the following section, an attempt to practise a social idea.

Collective re-organisation in the infrastructures of art

Among the members of Forsøgsscenen, you could find both wealthy scholars, students, artists and politically active artistic amateurs. Membership could be for six months at two Danish kroner

for the less prosperous or a life-long subscription for a lump sum of 20 kroner. And as an active member, you could assist by recruiting other members or co-create works: “we need every one; if you cannot act, you can make costumes, annotate parts, assist with the scenery or alike” (Rosenkrantz, Oluf, 1929. “Forsøgsscenen”, *Forsøgsscenen* 1, 1, p. 2).

Forsøgsscenen constituted a self-organised film and theatre club with a little magazine and monthly showings. In this way, the organisation of people, artworks and knowledge created a scene. Sometimes they even called it a “study group” (Riisager, Knudåge, 1930. “Schönberg – og så videre!”, *Forsøgsscenen*, 2, 8, p. 1): a stimulating environment – a circle, as Linien in fact also called it – around an aesthetic and political ideal of schooling. They wanted to bring together “young intellectuals in this city”, that is, to bring together and strengthen an intellectual league in Copenhagen around an international and politically oriented expansion of modern art. Seen in the context of little magazines of Modernism, to encourage and qualify a broad and transdisciplinary conversation constitutes a main track in the networks of the avant-garde (Churchill and McKible, 2007, p. 5). Even so, Forsøgsscenen also made sharp distinctions in their recruiting by sneeringly distancing themselves from the preference of bourgeois culture for entertainment and beauty.

If we address the repeated imagery about the circle, the study circle, the closed circle, the semi-closed circle, it evokes associations of chains of bodies protecting against threats from the outside, and also a kind of collective conjuration, an exorcist circle of witches, a protective circle – or more profanely, a strategic form of resistance. In a Danish etymological context, forming a circle has the connotation of an action after external loss.² The threat of loss, that Forsøgsscenen could arm itself against, with its structure of interlacing bodies, came from the societal state of crisis consisting of a nationalistic, uncritical culture of entertainment and emerging fascism. But Forsøgsscenen also came into existence within a political infrastructure where theatres had to have state funding to present plays and as late as 1954 were subjected to the censorship of the authorities: the funding system “was an instrument to suppress the wish to experiment at a time with no theatre support fixed by law”, theatre historian Lisbeth Jørgensen writes (2011, p. 108). Thus, there were infrastructural reasons for forming a circle: the experiments would necessarily be presented to an initiated few and allies.

To form a circle was a necessity but also a form of collective organisation of scholars, students and artists across artforms. When the writers from Forsøgsscenen wrote enthusiastically about Russian avant-garde film, it was because – in contrast to the organisation of Danish film – there was a social idea behind the collective distribution of tasks of Russian film:

What most clearly puts Russian film in opposition to Western film is that in every Russian film there is an idea. Just as it has emerged from a free collective cooperation between workers, technicians, and artists it is also a clear and simple expression of a social idea in one respect or another – shedding light on functions and social systems that in their structure and effect are fundamentally shared by all of us, to the, in terms of numbers, enormous, in terms of perception, endlessly sadly varied, cinema audience (Neergaard, Ebbe, 1930. “Filmens Avantgarde”, *Forsøgsscenen*, 2, 7, p. 6).

2) After the loss of Slesvig in 1848, the poet Carl Ploug writes *Påskekløkken kimed mildt* (The Easter bell mildly chimed) where a line says: “Form a circle and stand firm all Danish men! / God rules, when we will be victorious again” (Slutter kreds og står fast, alle danske mænd! / Gud han råder, når vi fange sejr igen.).

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Co-founder of Forsøgsscenen, scholar of Danish Literature, and writer Ebbe Neergaard here writes about “a social idea in one respect or another” manifested in the way in which the work is distributed horizontally between various specialisations. Behind the organisation of work in Russian film lies, as far as I can see, a production aesthetic suggestion of distributing capability and capacity – as common goods. In that way, the organisation of the aesthetic practice is political: it organises a shared economy, a ‘household’ of what the participating producers can do and what they have, respectively.

To redistribute the common goods among producers of art is theorised by Walter Benjamin in the essay “Der Autor als Produzent” (1934). Benjamin distinguishes – based on Sergei Tretyakov’s Russian theory of aesthetics from 1931 – between an informing and an operating artist (Benjamin, 1934, p. 770). The informing artist can talk about political content, whereas the operating artist arranges matter in a political, that is, a class solidarity way. Benjamin describes how a political organisation of art involves an innovation of the technical part of production, not the spiritual. Consequently, he radically changes gear from an imperative of creating ‘the new’ within the aesthetics of reception to a transformation within the aesthetic of production. This involves transforming the actual organisation of the art institutions (Brecht in Benjamin, 1934, p. 774). From the perspective of aesthetic theory, a ground-breaking change takes place just around 1930: transformative and social operations – via Tretyakov in 1931 and Brecht in 1930, recapitulated and theorised by Benjamin in 1934 – have to take place within the very infrastructures of art.

The organisation of work at Forsøgsscenen was also organised according to the possibility of capacities: the midnight performances made it possible for professional actors to play at Forsøgsscenen ‘after work’. And students from Forsøgsscenen’s own drama school took the stage to reduce the financial expenses (Jørgensen, 2011, p. 114). At the same time a consensus prevailed in the experimental theatre milieu that the non-professional actors were more able to dismantle the load of psychological motivation and professionalism of traditional acting – they were able to embody the more physical expression of the machine age dictated by structural principles (ibid., p. 116). Despite the fact that the Danish Actors’ Association did not allow professionals to perform together with amateurs (ibid., p. 112), the closed circle of Forsøgsscenen reorganised those who collaborated in art, and this reorganisation in the interior of the production apparatus, of course, led to new aesthetic possibilities: more people – a greater group – on stage, but also the possibility of employing, for instance, speech choir consisting of the more anonymous bodies among the students.

The idea of taking care of the social through the division of labour in the here and now (not for later redemption in the future) is a Marxist practice that is repeated in the theorising of the poetics of artists’ collectives. The art theorists Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette have theorised the collective as committed to the production of social life: here the very (re-)organising and the production of sociality is an artistic medium (Stimson and Sholette, 2007, p. 11). Elsewhere, I have called this work an infrastructural performance: to perform in and with the production conditions of art as the actual material (Schmidt 2018). Infrastructure should here be understood as the “the labor networks necessary to produce and transmit power” in art (Larkin, 2013, p. 329), which means the mundane, everyday background machinery of art. When performing takes place in the infrastructures of art, the otherwise invisible machinery of art is recoded and operated, and new ways of producing are invented. It is the logic of distribution in art itself that is made visible and reorganised: a new working cooperative appears and rearranges affiliations, conditions of access, time frames, streams of distribution, exchange of ideas and money.

The infrastructural performance of Forsøgsscenen can also be understood as what the philosopher Gerald Raunig in his re-historicisation of institutional critique terms an “instituent practice”: a practice that creates the art institution based on another and more social idea than the one suggested by the existing contemporary artworld. The community organising practice of Forsøgsscenen across little magazines, artforms, norms of production, and (cultural) politics is self-instituting, that is, institution-forming outside the prevailing art institutions (Raunig, 2009). Seen in the light of other modernist little magazines, it was precisely the performative institutional work that often motivated the editorial groups. Or, as the American painter Charles Demuth stated, the ambition was not only to create a small momentum but a little magazine that could expand into “a gallery – a theatre” (Demuth, 1914-15, p. 32).

Conclusion: a historicisation of the concept of practice

In my analysis of Forsøgsscenen, I have suggested reading the group as a collective that organises itself as a semi-closed circle in order to perform infrastructurally: to intervene into and transform the existing conditions of production. I have not analysed Forsøgsscenen based on the production of works but based on kinships in the cultural histories of collectives. First, based on a kinship with the other little magazines of the avant-garde that produced social fora, manifest discourse and avant-garde aesthetics across protagonists and genres. Second – akin to the avant-garde of visual art and German and Russian theatre troupes in the interwar period – Forsøgsscenen ‘serviced’ its time with an internationalised distribution of experimental, political works and understandings of art, as well as an economic and temporal redistribution policy so that art became available to more people. Third – akin to art collectives in a diachronic perspective – Forsøgsscenen reorganised the aesthetics of production in their practice by performing in the very infrastructures of art: they lived out a social idea about an art institution for intellectuals, professionals and non-professionals, which in addition created conditions for developing new scenic expressions. By analysing Forsøgsscenen based on the production of a little magazine, distribution policy and infrastructural performance as ‘objects of analysis’, I have moved far away from an interest in the reception of the artwork and closer to an understanding of Forsøgsscenen’s contribution within the aesthetics of production.

The concept of the autonomous artwork has already been dissolving for a long time – but mostly on the side of the reception (Adamson and Bryan-Wilson, 2016). A strong concept of the author has been relativised through the recognition of the spectator’s or the reader’s participation in the production of the work: be it in descriptions of the bodily co-presence and the audience’s participation in performance art (Fischer-Lichte, 2004) or in the optimistic communities of relational aesthetics (Bourriaud, 1990). Characteristic is the interest in a distributed concept of the author, the expansion of the work, and the dynamics in the relationship between work and public. In a terminology within aesthetic theory, the aim is primarily an expanded understanding of reception aesthetics that is interested in more than the intimate relationship between work and spectator, namely in an expanded sense between the work and larger sentient, co-creating, and participant communities. But I propose another category here that includes the aesthetics of production in the understanding of art, thus to shift the focus to the infrastructures of art, that is, where art is produced and distributed. This entails that I read a continuous, dynamic and relational activity across production, work and reception – a reading that can also be categorised as materialist historiography (Knowles, 2004; Jackson, 2010). To pay attention to the conditions of production of art is inevitably a politicisation of art through an understanding of its embeddedness and participation in a capitalist economy. The analysis of art’s participation in a capitalist economy

is advantageously to be approached as a collective task, which raises the individual conditions and rationales to a structural level (Adamson and Bryan-Wilson, 2016).

An interest in the aesthetics of production will draw attention to circumstances ‘behind the scenes’ – or what Gregory Sholette has called the ‘dark matter’ of art (Sholette, 2011): cultural political framework, time horizons for preparation, production and presentation, economy, social relations, institutions, gatekeeping, production norms, conditions of material, crediting. Where the aesthetics of production offers an analytical prism, it is at the same time connected to a politicisation of art from within: to read aspects of the aesthetics of production is obvious in analyses and historicisation of collective attempts at changing exactly the conditions of production as it is the case with Forsøgsscenen. Expressed in Felix Guattari’s words, collectives to a great extent attempt to answer in a compensatory way to states of crisis by rephrasing “the objectives of the production of both material and immaterial assets” (Guattari, 2019, p. 15).

When Guattari suggests a collective, radical – transversal – change of the ecologies of production in 1989, he does so as a reaction to an environmental, mental and social crisis. When Benjamin writes about solidary forms of production in 1934, it is also as a reaction to an economic and social crisis caused by capitalism – and crisis is also on the horizon when Kvam looks back at the self-organisation of theatre groups of the 1930s in the wake of the crash of the stock market in 1929. Practices informed by the aesthetics of production can consequently be understood as responding and compensatory in relation to capitalism’s destruction of forms of life. With Guattari’s ecological crisis management, an aesthetics of production can be articulated as a restoration of “human practices” in a time of crisis, a common reconstruction of “modalities around group-being” (ibid., p. 23, 25). In the past decade, conceptualisations of artistic practice have focused on continuous organisation of forms of life as a compensation for destructive and precarious conditions within the arts. The concept of practice in the 21st century is theorised as a performative and socially embedded activity that acts – that is, a performative understanding of artistic work as something that also interacts with political life and *organises* forms of life (Eikels, 2013). The word ‘practice’ (Greek: *prattein*, to act or do), one half of Aristotle’s division into *poiesis* and *praxis* where practice is doing or acting without a goal – practice is the goal in itself. The concept of practice can also be understood through the perspective of aesthetic theory: as a way of relativising the hermeneutic understanding of art as representation; a part of the transition into a performative and mundane understanding of art as something that organises reality. This concept of practice corresponds with Benjamin’s proposal in 1934: the suggestion of organising art in a political way.

When dance, theatre and performance theorists in the past decade have developed artistic practice as something that characterises contemporary artistic *work* and *organisation* far more than the production of artworks, it has often been historicised as a conceptual change that belongs to the articulation of process and the integration of everyday life into art from FLUXUS, *task-dance*, and *event-scores* from the end of the 1950s and onwards (Klein and Göbel, 2017; Schuh, 2019; Wikström, 2020). By considering Forsøgsscenen as a production circle spanning from a little magazine across political redistribution to infrastructural performance, I suggest another historicisation of artistic practice which is not only bound to the time-based extension of the works and fluid boundaries between practice and presentation. By including the attention to the dimension of the aesthetics of production in the arts, I understand artistic practice as an organising and working participation in an art historical situation – performed in a many-headed circle of politically concerned and artistically active people who try to change art’s participation in the infrastructures of capitalism. Although it is often a historiographic ambition to introduce

a new approach to history, that is not my purpose here. Instead, I would like to suggest that the conceptualisation and theorising of especially collective artistic practice since the 1970s and until today has made it possible to revisit cultural history – and here Forsøgsscenen in particular – with an analysis of the organisation of and around the political aesthetics rather than its works. Here I position myself in continuation of contemporary readings of the social fora around little magazines and the historical avant-garde that suggest the close-reading of material, economic and social dynamics in the production of little magazines as the central *modus operandi* of Modernism and not just arenas for great artists' international appearance.

When we read Forsøgsscenen's way of forming a circle as a political, artistic practice, we see a kinship between avant-garde collectives of the 1930s but also resonances from collective work in the 21st century (see Daugaard et al., 2020). The collective practices of Forsøgsscenen resonate with the present threat of emerging (neo)fascism, precarious conditions of work for artists, improved technology for co-production, as well as contexts characterised by political movements in the streets³. The perspective of kinship places the artistic signature and the artwork in the background of the analysis of cultural history to find instead preparatory work for infrastructural performances with colleagues in the 1930s: if we see their work as a struggle that we can just continue, then the great responsibility of changing the conditions of production, criticising structural inequality and creating solidarity across activism, academia and art perhaps seems less new and more accessible.

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3) The article has been written in a dynamic exchange with the research group *The 1930s Today* at the Department of Art and Cultural Studies, University of Copenhagen. Thanks to my colleagues in the research group for contextualising the reading and thorough discussions about the reappearance of fascism today, as well as aesthetic returns of the 1930s' political motives and means in art. A special thank you to Laura Luise Schultz for a critical and knowledgeable feedback on this article.

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