

*French Feminist Theory and Surrealism in Karin Moe's Kjønnskrift ('Sextext')*ⁱ

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I shall speak about women's writing: *about what it will do*. Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies – for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement (Cixous 1976: 875).

Kjønnskrift ('Sextext') is Karin Moe's (b. 1945) debut collection published in 1980. Over the course of her career, Moe has been one of the most experimental contributors to Norwegian literature and an innovative literary critic. She has until recently been active as a columnist in the Norwegian left-wing newspaper *Klassekampen* ('The Class Struggle').

The poems and short prose texts constituting *Kjønnskrift* were all written during the late seventies, and some of them had previously been published in the Norwegian magazines *Vinduet*, *Basar*, *Kontrast*, *Sirene* and *Kjerringråd* (cf. Rottem 1998: 439). The most prominent themes in *Kjønnskrift* are women's writing and the unequal conditions for literary production, reception and publishing facing male and female authors at the time. In the exploration of these themes, motives affiliated with sex and sexuality abound. A straightforward and quite humorous handling of orgasms, placentas, menstrual blood and genitals goes into the investigation of the relationship between the sexes, as well as into an exploration of important aspects of writing. Another distinguishing feature of the book is the literary appropriation of theoretical and abstract concepts. This applies both to the collection as an entity—or as a project—and to the respective texts constituting the work. The most apparent and fundamental source of appropriation is French feminist theory from the nineteen-seventies, and this theory is also Moe's point of departure. Among other references in *Kjønnskrift*, some of the most interesting are allusions to Gertrude Stein's aesthetical-theoretical concept of repetitive writing in "Materalienasjon i bokstaveleg forstand" ('Materalienation in the literal sense') and to surrealism in "Sur realisme. Svelg piss og Le åjoda" ('Sour Realism. Swallow pee and laugh ohyesthen') and "Opp or havet! Dikt til tørk i sol og språk" ('Up from the ocean! Poems drying in sun and language').ⁱⁱ In this way, the collection establishes a central trait in Moe's authorship: the constant appropriation and reworking of literary forms and aesthetic features. The collection is divided into three parts: Part I is focusing on being a woman and on being part of a female tradition. Part II is problematising (the Norwegian) society at the time—politically and culturally dominated by men as it was. In part III women are encouraged to write.

In this article, I focus on how Moe appropriates French feminist theory into literature, how she elaborates on central ideas in this field and how, with this experiment as point of departure, Moe carries out her rebellion against the contemporary state of literature in Norway, including the work of most feminist writers. Towards the end of the article, I investigate some of Moe's references to French surrealism. Moe claims that early surrealism was not only dominated by male artist, but also philosophically male-oriented and I inquire how this applies to the experimental feminist discursive field in which Moe is operating in *Kjønnskrift*.

Cultural context

The Norwegian critic Øystein Rottem, in *Norges litteraturhistorie*, vol. 8, *Vår egen tid 1980–98* ('Norwegian Literary History, vol. 8, Our own time 1980–98'), describes Karin Moe's early writings as a significant break with the dominant social-realist approaches in Norwegian literature in the sixties and seventies: "Neither formally, nor thematically could the break with the social-realism of the preceding decade, including 'women's literature', have been more radical" (Rottem 1998: 443).ⁱⁱⁱ Norwegian female authors engaged in feminist issues at the time almost exclusively expressed themselves through social-realist writing. Moe however argued that this tradition should be avoided, because it implied an adherence to rules laid down by male authors and critics. She claimed that Cecile Løveid's (b. 1951) novel *Sug* (1979) was the only experimental novel written by a Norwegian female author in the seventies which did not follow these rules (cf. "Nye former i norsk romankunst" ('New forms in the Norwegian novel') in Moe's *Sjanger* ('Genre') 1986: 246–254). According to Rottem, Moe, in her emphasis on the seemingly purposeless, marginal and irrational, was among the most radical neo-avant-gardists of the nineteen-eighties (Rottem 1998: 441).

As Moe's work was both formally innovative and thematically provocative, she had a hard time getting her texts published in the seventies, and when *Kjønnskrift* appeared in 1980, it caused quite a stir. Rottem accounts for how the board of the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (Nrk) was utterly alarmed after Moe's reading from the collection on Nrk-radio following the publication. He also refers to harsh reactions from the reviewers, one of whom claimed that Moe's revelation of female nature indicated a need for a leash law for women unable to control their sexuality (Rottem 1998: 444). It is apparent that the experiment carried out by Moe in *Kjønnskrift* was a subversive and provocative act, disturbing the Norwegian cultural institutions—and this was exactly her intention.

A highly conscious use of language is another distinguishing feature of *Kjønnskrift* and Moe's other works. Her written language is a construction, more precisely a mixture, of Nynorsk and Western Norwegian dialects. By using this language and by thematically focusing on coastal and Western Norway, she performs a politically charged linguistic and geographical dissociation of herself from the conservative establishment using Bokmål, and from the centralised cultural institutions of the capital Oslo in southeastern Norway.^{iv} Nynorsk is linked to creativity in Moe's authorship, as we can

see for instance in her 1992 article “Bestille ørner for betrestilte...?! Surrealisme på norsk” (‘To order eagles for the well-to-do...?! Surrealism in Norwegian’) in *Syn og segn* (‘Vision and Legend’).

At the core of every sentence in Nynorsk, is a joy for a new and created language, it rolls off the tongue, it is oral, bodily, with the great freedom and belief in creativity it gives, just to know that languages are created and may be recreated, the insight given by this is uncontrollable, both in theory and in joy for what is really possible, le surréel, in language. Remember with Terry Eagleton: The one who does not have a theory, who writes naturally and spontaneously is in the claws of an archaic theory. This is of course also the case for today’s surrealists, not least! (Moe 1992: 6)^v

As we can see from this quotation, Moe is making the interconnection between language and theory explicit. For her language *is* theory.

In Moe’s combination of a kind of popular carnivalesque tradition and vigorous provincialisms on the one hand, and intellectual references to philosophy and aesthetic theory on the other, we can see an obvious parallel to the work of Sissel Solbjørg Bjugn (1947–2011) and Ellen Einan (1931–2013). Both also represented and depicted the ‘periphery’ of Norway, more precisely Northern Norway, and like Moe, they referred freely to French surrealism. Moe is alluding to Bjugn’s first book, *Den første avisa på Lofotveggen* (‘The first paper on the Lofotenwall’), published in 1978, both in *Kjønnskraft*, and in later books, such as *MORDATTER* (double meaning: ‘mother daughter’/ ‘murder again’) from 1985. In “Quickstep i marknadsføring av poesi” (‘Quickstep in marketing poetry’, Moe in *Sjanger* 1986: 15–16), the speaker criticises a bookshop for not placing Bjugn’s book in a prominent position where people can see it. Ellen Einan’s debut collection, *Valmuesanger fra solhuset* (‘Poppy-songs from the House of Sun’, 1978), is, according to Moe (1992), the very first Norwegian poetry collection carried out in automatic writing. The interest in surrealism shared by these three authors—so distinct in the context of Norwegian literature in the late seventies—makes it crucial to figure out what surrealism means and how it works in Moe’s project. Bjugn, Einan and Moe together established surrealism as an important feature in the (very small) Norwegian *experimental* feminist context around 1980.

Kjønnskraft

Why does Moe appropriate French feminist literary theory? Undoubtedly, an important motivation for this choice must have been that central contributors like Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray represented a so far unknown degree of intellectualisation of feminism. Their writings became a reservoir for a new feminism; a new set of perspectives. Moe was a scholar herself, and very interested in post-structuralism (especially Jacques Derrida) from which French feminism derived.^{vi} The appropriation of theory in *Kjønnskraft* heralds an interest that would recur in Moe’s authorship; her writing is often an investigation and a practice in between fictional and academic writing. An important element in her

avant-garde practice is the testing and deconstruction of genres and literary concepts, which result in creative responses (Cf. Omdal forthcoming). *Kjønnskrift* appears to be an experiment carried out in direct response to “Le Rire de la Méduse” (‘The Laugh of the Medusa’, Cixous 1975), and as a consequence, the relationship between Moe and Cixous will be central in my investigation. From *Kjønnskrift* I will primarily focus on the preface “Kvinna som ville skriva litteratur” (‘The woman who wanted to write literature’) and on the poem “Materalienasjon i bokstaveleg forstand’.

First things first: If we look at the title *Kjønnskrift*, we can see that Janet Garton’s translation of it as *Sextext* makes the resemblance with the term *sextes* (a combination of the terms *sexe* (‘gender’) and *textes*) used by Cixous even more obvious: “Let the priests tremble, we’re going to show them our sexts!” (Cixous 1976: 885). The term *Kjønnskrift*, invented by Moe, differs slightly from both *Sextext* and *sextes*, however, as *skrift* can mean both ‘text’ and ‘writing’ in Norwegian. Another aspect that gets lost in translation is the phonetic closeness to the Norwegian word *kjønnsdrift*, ‘sexual drive’. This association mirrors a more outspokenly sexual approach in Moe’s case.

The way in which *Kjønnskrift* draws attention to itself as a piece of feminine, even vaginal writing, is very concrete. In the preface, “Kvinna som ville skriva litteratur”, Moe is embodying a concrete unification of the vaginal and feminine writing. The preface appears to be a performative manifesto, pointing forward to Moe’s engagement with stunt-poetry and performance art: A staged ‘I’ walks into the big bookshop at Karl Johan’s street in Oslo, looking for a writing tool. The I wishes to buy this tool, which will make it possible for her—in the literal and physical sense—to write with her sex, i.e. with her female genitalia:

Would you have a fairly long, not too thick, not smooth but not rough either pen, preferably one of those with a barrel like smooth leather which doesn’t slip, you see, I’m going to begin writing literature and I wondered whether it might not be possible to write from my sexually specific female situation in a *concrete, material way*, that is by gripping the pen with my vaginal muscles... didn’t you know it was possible, it even says so in a book, there on the left on the third shelf from the top, yes there, you can look it up... .” (Moe in Garton 1995: 119, my italics)^{vii}

In this way, Moe is referring directly to Cixous, and probably also alluding to Irigaray’s thesis *Speculum de l’autre femme* (‘Speculum of the other woman’, 1974). Moe is from the outset echoing and experimenting with Cixous’ ideas concerning writing and sexuality: To ‘write the woman’ is to bring her bodily drives into the writing. The preface constitutes *Kjønnskrift* as a concrete exploration of the idea of feminine writing. Moe is presenting a literal answer to Cixous’ call for women to return to their bodies, and from this position to seize the opportunity to speak/write. Women have been silenced in and through masculine writing, and female sexuality has been taboo, and this is strengthening the subversive potential of feminine writing when its time has finally come.

The idea introduced in “Kvinna som ville skriva litteratur” seems to be pursued in the poem “Materalienasjon i bokstaveleg forstand”, in which Moe is at her most experimental. One possible interpretation of the poem is that Moe is visualising and developing crucial aspects of Cixous’ theory

in and *as* concrete poetry, i.e. as a calligram. The poem can be read as a literal and material fabrication of the idea of masculine versus feminine writing. The figure will then represent the tip of a pen/head of a penis (the symbolic), enlaced by the feminine (the semiotic), maybe even by vaginal musculature, if the poem has an intratextual correspondence with the opening text. This interpretation can be supported linguistically. Tristan, Plato, Descartes, Freud, Shakespeare and Henry Miller (all famous men from literature and philosophy) are mentioned in the central part of the poem and will be part of the pen/penis. In the middle of this figure, we can moreover see a coherent line resembling a squirt on its way out (or the ink cartridge inside a pen). This line contains the words “Shake of your speare” and “fucking” and it finishes with the only exclamation mark in the poem. Traditional and slightly derogatory Norwegian designations for women (“førkje”, “filletante”, “fruentimmer”, “furie”, “flokse”) and references to traditional depictions of women (Eve from the bible and Sleeping Beauty from the fairy tale) also appear in the male figure. Outside the figure we find women who have been important in cultural and political history, and who have also been difficult to grasp and define. In this way, the poem can be read as a performative argument. Since the pen/phallus is also part of the figure, we can see that Moe is incorporating the notion of phallic or phallogocentric writing, the male is enclosed within the female and inside female language.^{viii}

Mater-alienation in the Literal Sense

As you discern	am I and am not	Virgin Marilyn Monroe
Light-years rushing	on stretched tarsi	am I the other
Madonna	with a nipple	or the not-other
Angel missis Marx	either Mona and	or Liza
Minelli is	limply laughing	is a rose is a rose
Gertrud is	cold-blooded	as Stein ^{ix}
walking over stock and stone to the blue hills to bloksberg in blocktype		
FALLEN and FAIR	MOIST and LOOSE	UNFINISHED and SHREWD
multifarious	miss	
proverb:	a aunt	
	t female	
sunflower	r	fury
	o	wanton
horsetail	n	busy lizzie
fireweed	e	fairy
camellia	n e s s	non sense
sleeping beauty	how you ride and	rush inside me
thank you	how you twist and	turn upon me
correlating with	your dichotomies	vine leaves in the wound
Tristan at the ocean	Platon à la Descartes	Freud and the nurse
Shake of your Speare, dear Henry Miller, I'm a fucking killer!		
come, come, come	meaninglessly soft	in my black holes
nowhere	in liquid anti-matter	on a thin, thin tone
in bog cotton-spun	pancrekirtle	do I come you
butterflyishly	squidishly	in cosmoss
utterly in different	to the Idea	of One in all Eve
merciless	against your cerebral	cuticle
		do fall
		I
		in
		991
	letters	
	on	
moss yellow		

syntax

materialienation without concepts in your embrace
(Moe 1980: 20)

Cixous considers masculine, phallogentric writing to be much more limited than feminine writing:

Though masculine sexuality gravitates around the penis, engendering that centralized body (in political anatomy) under the dictatorship of its parts, woman does not bring about the same regionalization which serves the couple head/genitals and which is inscribed only within boundaries. Her libido is cosmic, just as her unconscious is worldwide. (Cixous 1976: 889)

The infiniteness of the female libido constitutes a potential for encircling and comprising the manly, which in Moe's figure is more restricted. Being a quite humorous illustration with serious implications, the poem exemplifies a characteristic trait of Moe's overall project in *Sextext*. The mixture of 'high' and 'low' is also a characteristic trait of the avant-garde.

A potential embodiment of Irigaray's idea of *le parler femme* can also be observed in "Materialienasjon i bostaveleg forstand" (cf. Irigaray *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* ('This sex which is not one'), 1977). Distinguishing features of what Irigaray calls *le parler femme* are simultaneousness and non-distinct and non-determined identities. This corresponds with the following lines from Moe's poem: "As you discern am I and am not Virgin Marilyn Monroe / light-years rushing on stretched tarsi am I the other / Madonna with a nipple or the not-other / Angel missis Marx either Mona and or Liza / Minelli ..." (Moe 1980: 20).^x The lines do also underscore the infiniteness of the poem's content.

As the poem emerges in form of a concrete figurative presence, it is pointing forward to Moe's later collection *MORDATTER*. Rottem claims that in *MORDATTER*, published five years later, Moe has left behind both the notion of the central individual and the linear perspective. "In this way, one can say that the text(s) in themselves are the main characters of the book" (Rottem 1998: 446).^{xi} In *Kjønnskraft* as an entity, this is not yet the case, though, as the performative 'I', which was introduced in the preface, is occurring on several occasions throughout the book. The same performative 'I' also seems to return in *Sjanger*, in the before-mentioned "Quickstep i marknadsføring av poesi", where Moe is referring to Sissel Solbjørg Bjugn.

The idea of masculine and feminine writing rewritten

Both Moe and Cixous are aware of the power of language, and of the fact that it is impossible to change the order of things or to stop oppression if you do not master language. They seem to agree that women have been prevented from using *their* language, and consequently, that they have been contributing to a hegemonic upholding of existing structures. Cixous writes:

I maintain unequivocally that there is such a thing as *marked* writing; that, until now, far more extensively and repressively than ever suspected or admitted, writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural – hence political, typically masculine – economy; that this is a locus where the repression of

women has been perpetuated, over and over, more or less consciously, and in a manner that's frightening since it's often hidden or adorned with the mystifying charms of fiction; that this locus has grossly exaggerated all the signs of sexual opposition (and not sexual difference), where woman has never *her* turn to speak [...]. (Cixous 1976: 879)

Cixous' main assertions are that sexual opposition has been exaggerated, and that sexual difference has not been recognised. On this point, however, Moe's views seem to differ, as to her mere biological and psychological differences are less important issues. In her view, it is culturally constructed differences above all that are keeping up the structures holding women down, and these seem to be unfortunate for male writers as well.^{xii}

Male writers are locked in the Cartesian dichotomy, where the body belongs to the material world, and the 'soul' or the mind to the spiritual one. Moe seems to regard this as an obstacle for their writing, while at the same time it is a contribution to the oppression of women (mark that Descartes is mentioned in the pen/penis part of "Materalienasjon i bokstaveleg forstand"). If we look at part III in *Kjønnskrift*, we find descriptions of how this works in practice: The texts "Skrivemaskinen og eg på ein måte" ('The typewriter and I in a way') and "Sylvia Plath står opp på svart kaffi klokka 04.00 og skriv for livet til klokka 07.00" ('Sylvia Plath rises on black coffee at 4am and writes for her life until 7am'), describing female writers, are set in opposition to "Sjelsproblematikken møter ei vevkjerring på veg til kjøkenet" ('The problematics of the spirit meets a spider on its way to the kitchen'), describing male writers. What is apparent here is that feminine writing is a concrete activity that is part of daily life, tied up with daily obligations and family life. Masculine writing on the other hand, is a vague, spiritual or mental activity, lacking the same efficiency. Daily life is an obstacle to this activity, and it makes male authors less flexible. At the same time, the lack of male participation in daily life makes the situation difficult for women. From this, we can conclude that Moe regards feminine writing to be a practice bringing art back to life, and away from the idea of art as an autonomous sphere. Feminine writing is also a practice which disconnects the author from the position as an individual or individualistic genius. This adheres to one of the most important avant-garde traits that Peter Bürger pinpoints in *Theorie der Avantgarde* in 1974. Consequently, feminine writing, especially in Moe's version, may be regarded as avant-garde, while male writing is modernist or romantic.

As Linda Beate Berg (1993) observes in her article "Frå harme til heimløyse" ('From anger to homelessness', 196–197), Moe seems to claim that the new kind of writing, with which she is experimenting, can represent a new freedom for male writers as well as for female. Moe wants to break away from the dichotomy of body and spirit, and she wants to bring language out of all restricting rooms and into "the new heretical WHATNOTROOM of language" (Moe 1980: 67).^{xiii} "Materalienasjon i bokstaveleg forstand" may from this perspective be interpreted as a representation of an ideal unification of masculine and feminine writing, at the same time as the opposition is also depicted.

Surrealism

Rottem observes that Moe sometimes seems to profess a somewhat androgynous ideal. He describes this as a fusion of masculine and feminine writing. “For (conscious) women this ideal seems to be under way to be realised, as they are forced to adhere to masculine writing, and partly also to copy it, at the same time as they do practise their own ‘feminine writing’” (Rottem 1998: 441).^{xiv} Moe’s deconstruction of concepts and genres can be understood in light of this, it involves copying, but not without commenting. There is a need to shed light on and deconstruct hegemonic structures to make room for the new. An outstanding example of this is her handling of surrealism.

Moe’s initial interest in surrealism originates from an urge to rebel against reason and realism, and this corresponds with André Breton’s definition of surrealism in *Manifeste du Surréalisme*:

SURREALISM, n. Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express – verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner – the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by the thought, in absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern (Breton [1924]: 19).

Moe is on one level practising neo-avant-gardism by bringing an earlier semiotic disturbance of the symbolic order of language into play; like the surrealists, she does not want to adhere to traditional rules of writing. On another level, however, she finds it necessary to re-articulate the surrealism of the historical avant-garde. This re-articulation is carried out by using and referring to ‘classical’ surrealist motives and techniques, with a deliberate change in perspective to an outspokenly female one.

Let us have a quick look at some examples: What appears to be stream of thought or automatic writing (cf. Breton [1924]: 16) occurs on several occasions in *Kjønnskrift*, for instance in “Sur réalisme. Svelg piss og Le åjoda”; a text, which also through the wordplay of its title refers to surrealism. A closer look reveals, though, that Moe’s poem might be something completely different from surrealism—namely sour realism, which is the literal meaning of the first part of the title in Norwegian. We also find references to psychoanalysis and a focus on dreams resounding with Freud and Breton, but as we can see in “Materalienasjon i bokstaveleg forstand”, Freud is part of the same phallic figure as Descartes.^{xv} Several references to the ocean and to fish—central motives in the iconography of surrealism—do also occur, for example in “Opp or havet! Dikt til tørk i sol og språk”, but in *Kjønnskrift* they are mixed into the very concrete and everyday West Norwegian coastal context. This is an important difference from the quite esoteric use of these symbols in the surrealism of the historical avant-garde and, again, we can see how Moe recurrently intertwines life and art. Finally, the central position of childhood is an obvious correspondence with ‘classical’ surrealism and psychoanalysis. Childhood is an important theme in several of Moe’s works, but in *Kjønnskrift* as in the other examples, it is clearly marked as *female* childhood. An ambivalence and opposition directed towards the mother is apparent, a trait that in its turn seems to be a comment on the desire for the mother ascribed to the male child by Freud.^{xvi}

It is interesting to observe how Moe in “Bestille ørner for betrestilte...?! Surrealisme på norsk” considers female writers (Sissel Solbjørg Bjugn, Ellen Einan, Sissel Lie, Lisbeth Hiide, Cecilie Løveid, Eva Jensen, Karin Sveen, Gro Dahle and herself) to have been the most important descendants of the surrealists in Norway, together with Tristan Vindtorn. There is no doubt that Moe acknowledges the importance of early surrealism, and she is here referring directly to formative texts of surrealism: *Manifeste Dada* (Tzara 1918), *Essai d'écriture automatique*, *Les Champs magnétiques* (Breton and Soupault 1919) and Breton's *Manifeste du Surréalisme*. It is clear however, that she finds the gender-perspective quite alarming. She claims that the apparent objectification of women carried out by the early surrealists is an inheritance from romanticism. She writes that early surrealism is:

[a] boys' project[...], with all femininity as its reservoir and source/sensation – ‘le réel vécu’, lived truth, ‘le savoir des sens’, the knowledge of the body –, dream, madness, primitivism/a relative of the shivers and chills of romanticism, over the carnal, the sublime, the perverse, the abject or disgusting: with femininity as glorified and at the same time dismissed reality. (Moe 1992: 4)^{xvii}

A divided view on the founding texts of surrealism was probably also the point of departure for Moe's use of surrealism in *Kjønnskraft* more than a decade earlier. In Breton's *Manifeste du Surréalisme*, women are indirectly excluded from the surrealist movement. When he mentions them at all, he is presenting them as objects of desire and control, and this seems to be the only possible position from which they can take part in creative activity.

The passage where Breton is describing the fantasy dream castle of the surrealists (Breton [1924]: 11–12) is an example of this objectification. All the persons referred to in the companionship of surrealists are men, and Breton gives a list of names of whom the companionship should consist of on which we find Louis Argon, Philippe Soupault, Paul Éluard, Robert Desnos and Roger Vitrac and many more. Towards the end of the passage, Breton adds that there will also be “gorgeous women”. “Nothing is too good for these young men, their wishes are, as to wealth, so many commands” (Breton [1924]: 11). Further, the fantasy of ‘living’ surrealism includes not only the mastery of self, but also the mastery of women: “And anyway, isn't what matters that we be the masters of ourselves, the masters of women, and of love too?” (Breton [1924]: 12). The ruling out of potentially active female surrealists in Breton's first manifesto is probably a factor triggering Moe's interest in surrealism. The depiction of surrealism inherent in the first manifesto does of course not represent the entire truth about early surrealism. The point is that it transmits a quite provocative ignorance of potentially active women, and this is an important trait of phallogocentric writing according to Cixous. She writes, “[W]omen have existed within, as part of, the masculine discourse; this within must be dislocated for women to get a grip and invent a language for themselves to get inside of” (Cixous 1976: 887). Moe's references to surrealism may from this perspective be considered semiotic, as a rebellion from inside the symbolic order (even if surrealism is not symbolic writing in the traditional sense, it has created its own conventions).

Cultural context revisited—alienation in the literal sense

Cixous is emphasising that the problem is not that there have been few female authors, the problem is that most products of female authorship do not differ from male writing. Female writers have in other words been taking part in the reproduction of classical representations of women (Cixous 1976: 878). In light of this, let us take a closer look at the title “Materalienasjon i bokstaveleg forstand”. If we read it literally, the title may indicate that the poem is a literal alienation from the ‘mother’ (mater in Latin), i.e. that the poem is a break with the preceding Norwegian feminist tradition. The mother–daughter relationship and the detachment from the mother is also touched upon in “Dikt til tork i sol og språk”, and it is central in *MORDATTER* a few years later. In this context Moe’s reference to Gertrude Stein in “Materalienasjon i bokstaveleg forstand” is also very interesting. Stein writes in *Composition as Explanation*:

There is singularly nothing that makes a difference a difference in beginning and in the middle and in the ending except that each generation has something different at which they are looking. By this I mean so simply that anybody knows it that composition is the difference which makes each and all of them different from other generations and this is what makes everything different otherwise they are all alike and everybody knows it because everybody says it. (Stein 1962: 513)

According to Stein, it is in the composition that the new and different finds its expression; it appears on a formal level. *Kjønnskraft* and particularly “Materalienasjon i bokstaveleg forstand” represents the new form of the new generation of feminists. In this new kind of feminism, the female body takes central stage, and for Moe the focus on the body and on sexuality becomes a recurring trait. As we have seen, the call for women to step forward as manifest, physical beings is central, also for Cixous.

Conclusion

Moe does not present an answer to what feminine writing should be or consist in, and even this echoes Cixous: “It is impossible to define a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded – which doesn’t mean that it doesn’t exist” (Cixous 1976: 883). It is a new medium, and an infinite one. Moe gives some clues, though, and the connection between life and work (writing) seems crucial. What feminine writing *does*, is even more important. Moe’s *Kjønnskraft* has, with its fundament in Cixous’ writing, a practical and political aim, namely to strengthen the position of women and to expand their freedom; *Kjønnskraft* is about conventions and institutions, it is not an individual or individualistic project. Wenche Larsen, in “Karin Moe – 80-tallets avantgardedronning” (‘Karin Moe – the Queen of the Avant-Garde of the 80s’ in *Norsk avantgarde* (Norwegian Avant-Garde), 2011), claims that Moe at this stage was more related

to the historical avant-garde than to high modernism and more non-committal versions of postmodernism (Larsen 2011: 630). In her opinion, what primarily defines Moe as an avant-garde writer is exactly her commitment to poetry, women and the body—against the institutions. As we have seen, it is through the alignment of these elements that the most prominent experiments in *Kjønnskrift* are carried out. For Moe words and language are vigorous, and responsible for consequences in the world (‘konsekvensansvarlige’, Moe 1986: 12) and thereby poetry is uncompromisingly tied to life. According to Larsen, this is maybe the most significant trait of what she labels Karin Moe’s avant-garde poetics (Larsen 2011: 638).^{xviii} *Sextext* emerges both as an appropriation of “The Laugh of the Medusa” and as an answer to Cixous’ call for feminine writing:

Write, let no one hold you back, let nothing stop you: not man; not the imbecilic capitalist machinery, in which publishing houses are the crafty, obsequious relayers of imperatives handed down by an economy that works against us and off our backs; and not *yourself*. Smug-faced readers, managing editors, and big bosses don’t like the true texts of women – female-sexed texts. That kind scares them. (Cixous 1976: 877).

In *Kjønnskrift*, Moe is elaborating on Cixous’ idea of feminine writing, and on the idea that this kind of writing can be a tool for changing oppressive and subduing structures in society on a more general level.^{xix} She does, however, not only adapt Cixous. As we have seen, she adds her distinctly own contributions.

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i Janet Garton (1995) is using this title in her translation of a selection of texts from *Kjønnskriфт*.

ii For a thorough analysis of the reference to Stein, see Omdal (2016). Some of Moe's titles are almost untranslatable, as she is using wordplays dependent on the meaning of the words in Norwegian. When we translate *Le* in Moe's title as 'laugh', its meaning in English, we lose the allusion to the French masculine definite article.

iii "Både formelt og tematisk kunne ikke bruddet med det foregående tiårets sosialrealisme, inklusive 'kvinnelitteraturen' ha vært særlig mer radikalt". All translations of Rottem are my own.

iv Norway has two official languages: Norwegian and Sami. Norwegian has two language variants: Bokmål and Nynorsk. Bokmål developed from Rigmål, the first official written language in modern Norway, founded on Danish. Nynorsk developed from Landsmål, which was based on Norwegian dialects.

v "Det er i both av kvar nynorsksetning ei fryd over eit nyskapt og eit skapt språk, det har gått over tunga, det er muntleg, kroppa, med den store fridom og tiltru til det skapande det gir, berre dette å vite at språk er skapte og kan omskapast, balstyrig innsikt gir dette, både i teori og fryd over det som er reelt muleg, le surréel, i språket. Husk med Terry Eagleton: Den som ikkje har ein teori, som skriv naturleg og spontant er i klørne på ein forelda teori. Dette gjeld sjølvstapt også dagens surrealistar, ikkje minst!" Unless otherwise mentioned, the translations of Moe are my own.

vi Derrida and Starobinski constitute the theoretical framework in Moe's hovedfagsoppgave (master's thesis), *Å lesa Rousseau: mellom farlege supplement* ('Reading Rousseau: Between Dangerous Supplements', 1976).

vii The original reads: "Har du ein passe lang, ikkje for tjukk, ikkje glatt, men heller ikkje ru penn, heller ein sånn med skaft som av glatt skinn som ikkje glepp, du forstår, eg skal begynna å skriva litteratur og så lurte eg på om det ikkje skulle gå an å skriva ut frå min kjønnsespesifikke kvinnesituasjon på ein konkret, materiell måte, altså gripande om pennen med skjedemusklane... visste du ikkje at det går an, det står til og med i ei bok, der til venstre i tredje hylla frå toppen, der ja, det er berre å slå opp..." (Moe 1980: 9).

viii The idea of the pen as a metaphorical penis goes back to 1886 and Gerard Manley Hopkins reflections in a letter to Richard Watson Dixon in *The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon* (1935).

ix Stein means stone in Norwegian.

x "Som du forstår er eg og er ikkje Jomfru Marilyn Monroe / lysår fykande på strekte vrister er eg den andre / Madonna med brystvorte eller den ikkje-andre / Engelen fru Marx enten Mona og eller Liza / Minelli ...". The twisting and turning of the I might also be inspired by cubism, since the poem continues with references to Gertrude Stein, who had an intimate liaison with this school of art. Cubist portraits are often showing the portrayed person from different angles (cf. Omdal 2016).

xi "Slik sett kan man si at det er teksten(e) i seg selv som er bokens hovedpersoner".

xii Cixous is defining a few male authors as feminine writers (e.g. Kleist and Genet), but her overall mission in proposing the new kind of writing, is voicing women writers.

xiii "det nye kjeterske ALTMULIGROMMET for språket".

xiv "For (bevisste) kvinners vedkommende synes dette idealet allerede å være på vei til å bli realisert idet de er tvunget til å forholde seg til en mannlig skrift og et stykke på vei også til å kopiere denne, samtidig som de praktiserer sin egen 'kvinnelige skrift'". Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar are investigating the relation between female writers and manly forefathers with Harold Bloom's "The Anxiety of Influence" (1973) as a point of departure in "Infection in the Sentence" (1979).

xv Moe shares the critical view on psychoanalysis with Cixous, who is opposing the idea of fitting the unconscious into structures. Cixous is also claiming that psychoanalysis is rooted in the fear of becoming a woman (castration), and that it reproduces the masculine view (as do all ‘human’ sciences) (cf. Cixous 1976: 883).

xvi This is a recurrent theme in *MORDATTER* (1985), see for instance the first poem in the collection.

xvii “Eit gutteprosjekt, attpå, med kvinneligheita som reservoar og kjelde/sansing ’ –le réel vecu’, levd røyndom, ’le savoir des sens’, kroppens kunnskap –, drøm, galskap, primitivitet/i slekt med romantikkens gys og frysninger over det kjøtelege, det sublime, det perverse, det abjekt eller avskyelige: med kvinneligheit som opphøgd og samtidig bortvist realitet!?”

xviii This is clearly a trait connecting Moe with the historical avant-garde. The practice of the Dadaists did, as we know, imply an ideological break with art—both as a term and as an institution—and with the ‘organic’ work of art. Art should be de-aestheticised and brought back into life. Hugo Ball, creating his dada-manifest in 1916, claimed that art could be a device or have a potency for insight in and critique of the present time, but that it had no value in itself.

xix The oppressive structures related to publishing are directly thematised in *Kjønnskraft* in the prose-text “Fleire arbeidsplassar for kvinner” (‘More jobs for women’), where the criticism of publishing houses etc. is explicit.

Appendix

Materialienasjon i bokstaveleg forstand

Som du forstår	er eg og er ikkje	Jomfru Marilyn Monroe
lysår fykande	på strekte vrister	er eg den andre
Madonna	med brystvorte	eller den ikkje-andre
Engelen fru Marx	enten Mona	og eller Liza
Minelli er	lealaus leande	is ei rose is ei rose
Gertrud er	kaldblodig	som Stein
går over stakk og stein til berget det blå til bloksberg i blokkskrift	FUKTIG og FRI	UFULLENDT og FUL
FALLEN og FIN	førkje	
fleirfaldig	o filletante	
ordtak:	r fruentimmer	
solsikke	s furie	
	t flokse	
kjerringrokk	a flittiglise	
geiterams	n fe	
kamelia	d a r i n n e	non sense
tornerose	som du rir	og sprengrer i meg
takk som byr	som du snur	og vender på meg
i takt med	dine dikotomiar	med vinløv i såret
Tristan på havet	Platon à la Descartes	Freud og ammen
Shake off your Speare, dear Henry Miller, I’m a fucking killer!		
kom, kom, kom	meningslaust mjukt	i mine svarte hol
ingenstad	i likvid anti-materie	på ein tynn, tynn tone
i myrullspunnen	bukspyttkjortel	kjem eg deg
fivrelsk	blekksprutande	i kosmose
revnande like glad	mot Ideen	om Ei i all Eva
ubarmhjertig	mot din cerebrale	overhud
		fell
		eg
		i
		969
	bokstavar	
	på	
	mosegul	
syntaks		
materalienasjon	utan omgrep	i dine famntak

(Moe 1980: 20)