This is the published version of a paper published in *Action Yes*.

Citation for the original published paper (version of record):

Bäckström, P. (2008)
*Action Yes*, (9): 1-5

Access to the published version may require subscription.

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

Permanent link to this version:
http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:kau:diva-30436
Guru Papers: The Rise and Fall of a Swedish Little Magazine in the 1970s

by Per Bäckström

The driving force behind a little magazine can for the most part be associated with one or more engaged editors and authors, who in their choice of media react to and attack conventions of the contemporary cultural scene. In this way, little magazines can be seen as a means of editorial self-promotion on the literary field; this, plus the fact that such editors have the forum to create their own canons, precipitates a rather overheated, aggressive polemic. The Swedish mimeograph journal Guru Papers (1972–75) is one example of such a strategy, and, even though it was not a one-man project during its dramatic development from a cultural magazine to an avantgarde little magazine, its front-line fighter, the Swedish poet Bruno K. Öijer (b. 1951), remained a target for the polemic attacks surrounding the journal for more than a decade.

The group behind Guru Papers was one of the spear-heads of the Swedish avant-garde at the time, and they fueled the tenor of the cultural debate with slogans like: “BLOW UP THE DAMNED CULTURAL ELITE!”, “RELEASE THE ELEPHANTS, LOCK UP THE BOURGEOISIE PHILISTINES!” and “POWER TO THE LAWLESS IMAGINATION!” At the end of the Guru Papers era, in January 1975, Bruno K. Öijer was awarded a grant of 4,000 Swedish crowns from the editor Bonniers, a sum which at that time equalled close to $1000. In a demonstration against the capitalism of the big publishing houses, he changed the entire sum into small coins, and then, together with his compañeros, tossed the money to the rush hour commuters at the Sergelsplats subway station in Stockholm, all while reading a manifesto written by the “art group Vesuvius”:

VESUVIUS

– art as the baby carriage of the UNIVERSE filled with kerosene

Angie Desperado nails the posters:
blow out Lucia/ light THE DARKNESS/ DEATH TO ETERNITY/
Death to THE PRESENT/ Death to REALITY

Johannes RAZORBLADE writes in the air:
SINK THE ARK! / NOAH TO THE VULTURES!

Rosie Emigrant coughs: PSYCHOSIS!/ HATE!/ ABSOLUTE PAROLE

Susie Nitroglycerine stutters: ANTI-PROSTITUTION!/ The revolvers against the PARACHUTES of the bourgeoisie!/ ANTI/ ANTI

Sweet Lobo dances: POETRY to the ABDOMEN/ Total Illiteracy/ POWER TO THE LAWLESS IMAGINATION

The hunchback of Notre Dame turns his back on us:

TOTAL DESTRUCTIVITY!!
The demonstration attracted a lot of attention, and brought about furious attacks from indignant (socialist) critics and authors who asked why Öijer had not donated the money to a deserving cause instead: "Why didn’t you give the money to Vietnam instead, BKÖ?" and "Hush up the buffoonery of Öijer" were typical of the articles’ headlines. In the first, the Swedish author Britt Arenander writes that it is "sad to see how BKÖ tries to resuscitate the individualistic tradition of anarchism from the fin-de-siècle, which has always only functioned as a decorative flourish somewhere at the outskirts of bourgeois society". Both the demonstration and the ensuing debate reflect the Zeitgeist of that period, where the political stalwarts and aesthetic avant-gardes faced off in the struggle for influence on the cultural field. This is why the editorial board of Guru Papers was accused of anarchism, and willingly adopted this label in their fight against what they saw as oppressive Marxists. Today, more than thirty years after the event took place, we might instead see that a better characterization of their activities is “avant-garde”.

The seventies—The situation

When the seventies began, the cultural field in Sweden was more or less unaltered from the sixties, pairing a rebellious attitude with a socially aware writing. Slogans from the early sixties postulating that one should write about everyday life and the world resurfaced in the seventies. The new generation, however, were distinguished from the previous one by their interest in historical artistic movements, orienting themselves toward symbolism, early modernism and the historical avant-garde. They were also interested in the neo-avant-gardes that had risen to the surface of the continuous avant-garde underground existing from the mid-fifties in Sweden, but here too they departed from the practices of the sixties: experimentalism was replaced by a demand for a metaphorical language, and concrete poetry by texts influenced by beat-poetry and rock’n’roll.

It is in this situation that Guru Papers makes its entrance and turns up the pitch of the discussion somewhat. Poetry shall now be made more democratic; in what one might call a people’s movement – the drawers at home should be emptied for writings. In a call for material for Guru Papers (GP 7 1974: 3)

WRECK THE ELITE CULTURE, SEND US
YOUR poems, novels, short stories, ink drawings, open letters, pamphlets, accusations, explosive paste, typewriter ribbons, voice pitches, death’s-heads, panties and black roses to the address given on the previous page!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
NO REJCTIONS!

The democratic stance, clearly shown by the promise of no rejections, was typical for the time—and most certainly contrary to Marxist practice. Researchers and critics who want to analyze the seventies almost always return precisely to Guru Papers: Even critics and scholars who haven’t read the magazine have in one way or another heard about it. Such slogans of Guru Papers have been rubbed into the collective sub-consciousness, and function as a signature for this little magazine.

Guru Papers

Guru Papers was launched quietly in A4-format in February 1972, by Lauri Perälä and Jan Meiland. In an announcement in Kulturmagasinet Vargen (The Culture Magazine the Wolf) two years later, the birth was described in superlatives:

GURU PAPERS/the culture guerrilla – free, independent, avant-gardistic poetic magazine born in February 1972 in one of the cinema theatres of Linköping. the front page repeated hundreds of times: the cannabis red book… we made the people participants of a political poetics.

This proclamation to be “avant-gardistic” is followed up by a promise to teach “a political poetics,” a statement that directly draws attention to both André Breton and Surrealism and Russian futurism/s: movements that in a
similar way adopted the political. Throughout the manifestoes, announcements, and interviews relating to Guru Papers, one finds an emphasis on independence and liberty, a forceful *non serviam:* "POETRY = no alliances. We do not cooperate/ with anybody."

**Counterculture**

With issue five, the slogans that people associate with *Guru Papers* appear in the magazine, for example: "Blow-up the damned cultural elite!". The magazine defends the word—not the worn-out everyday word, but the Word that will be created anew by everybody together. The main line in the manifestoes is resistance against authority, described as supressing "freedom of conscience" and freedom of speech in Sweden. According to a manifesto written by Bruno K. Öijer, pulp literature dulls the intellect and is thus repressive. The only hope comes from Art:

Therefore we have to protest against everybody that puts handcuffs on poetry, and especially against the big publishing houses in their capitalistic strait-jackets, starting with Bonniers, Norstedts and Wahlström & Widstrand. In the power concentration of their dark rooms, manuscript readers sit and press close like bats in black judges’ robes. They, together with the editorial boards, reject about 99 % of all poetry manuscripts received in a year. [...] The editors do not represent a word that is ready for press but the oppressed word. *GURU PAPERS* is an answer.

As we can see, the manifesto combines the rhetoric of the avant-garde, with a social pathos of the day.

**Avant-garde**

*Guru Papers* changed its appearance with issue seven, and now came printed in a different format and in a higher quality. Already on the front-page the "Imperialism of the publishing houses" is under attack, and the cultural establishment is condemned with the words: "Aim the sight against the established tails... Let poetry bloom," which—characteristically, for the time—alludes to Mao’s slogan for the Chinese Cultural revolution, "Let a hundred flowers bloom!". It also refers to the avant garde exhibition "Poetry has to be made by everybody!" which was held at the Museum of Modern Art in Stockholm in late fall, 1969. Also in this issue, the declaration that *Guru Papers* is a "Free, independent, avant-gardistic poetical magazine" is found in print.

(9–10), is also the most ambitious in the magazine’s run. The whole issue has the character of an avant-garde manifesto, in which the two editors, Bruno K. Öijer and Per Eric Söder, declare their literary allegiances and state absolutely their aesthetic values. Here one finds many slogans, such as, “Adapt BOMBS in Mr. Jones electric shaver!”, "The breath of the Bourgeoisie is TEAR-GAS!", as well as attacks against critics and "cheap authors," including "LOCK ALL castrated pulp authors/impotent literary critics in a box of matches & BURN IT!". The leftist movement, which had accused the editorial board of joining the cultural establishment, also came under attack: "Do not VOTE for reality! (Catshit on the parliamentarianism!) LIVE IT! DEATH TO THE RULES, EXPLODE the time clocks above the toilet seats of the Stalinist-Marxists!".

**Bruno K. Öijer and the Debates**

Bruno K. Öijer stood at the centre of many of the debates at the time, debates that often had been trigged by the manifestoes and slogans of *Guru Papers*. Texts signed by his hand both in the magazine and other medias reveal him as the driving force of the magazine. Issue five carried his first real manifesto in the magazine, the before-mentioned call-to-arms against "The Oppressed Word". This manifesto is written with an overt appeal to social pathos: “The evening drinks at the TV-sets, the office landscapes and the factories continue to enslave the
force of initiative among people. Art is more and more hiding underground – isolated and derided by our age.” He next states that he wants to defend art against the commercialism ravaging Sweden, and envisions only one true way out of this dreary situation:

The language of the lyric is a universal defense against chaos, blood and oppression in all forms. In poetry we drop our roles and take a step out, at the same time as we refuse to let the executioners soil our creation, our reality: our freedom to feel and express without chains – our freedom to let existence explode in a writing shaped by our own imagination and magic.

In the collection of poems Fotografier av undergångens leende (Photographs of the Smile of Destruction, 1974) one more manifesto is printed: "Manifesto ‘74", which also functions as a poetical declaration of intention:

we associate with self-censored people, who are frightened to death by images of language, they demand a logical, everyday & rational poetry, for the only reason that they deny their inner possibilities. the sole thing they are interested in is to be able to read the sale-signs on the windows at the mall.

my words want to explode this conservatism to pieces, together with the brainsubstance of the readers, by snatching away all floors, we will reach the revolutionary chaos, which coincides with the cut-to-pieces movie behind our eyes, & we can begin to create a visible existence without having to lie.

Though his formulations here are more rhetorically and poetically elaborate, this passage is consistent with Öijer’s characterization of the seventies. The people he describes are inhabitants of a thoroughly commercialized society. In a June 1974 interview in the Swedish tabloid Aftonbladet, conducted by Gunter Andersson, Öijer dissociates himself from the poetry of the preceding decade: "I think that most of the texts written in the sixties are terribly boring. I want an ecstatic, electrified poetry. One should accept the inner creativity of images, and not censor oneself". 8

Ironically, in his reply to an attack by two Swedish authors, Stefan Daagarsson and Lennart Carlsson in the beginning of August 74, Öijer appears as the most radical socialist of them all, stating that:

a “spiritual revolution” contributes to a social [revolution], because I do not see the human as a totally wage-slave controlled by oppressing circumstances, but as the sum total of the possibilities to transgress the conditions that suffocate and bind her life and personal expression.

[---]

the retarded Swedish poetry [should] be buried (!) once and for all, and leave space for the revolutionary poem, which embraces the total life by denying all murderous conformity, all short-range laws meant to frighten, and all narrow-minded teacher-propaganda!

To follow the Sweden’s national laws of poetry as a counter-revolutionary standard measure(!) is an unjustifiable reactionary attempt to photograph the political context down into a false glass bead game of black-and-white ABC-codes.

Here, Öijer protests forcefully against the regimented force of would-be socialist poetry, in the same way as, in other statements, he reacts against the repression of the right-wing and the bourgeoisie. He gives a rather similar answer to both the right and the left: poetry must be unbound, since it has the power to release people. This is a perfect example of the democratic attitude that coexisted with the Marxist-Leninist stance in the 1970s, even though the coexistence was not always without struggle, a struggle enjoyed by the avant-gardistes who in the end lost the war.


3) Britt Arenander. ”Varför gav du inte hellre pengarna till Vietnam, BKÖ?”, Aftonbladet, 750125; Tony Rosendahl. ”Tig ihjäl Öijers pajaskonster”, Göteborgs-Tidningen, 750129.

4) Kulturmagasinet Vargen no. 2 1974.


7 Guru Papers no. 7, 8 and 9–10.

8 Gunder Andersson. "Det mesta som skrevs under 60-talet är fruktansvärt tråkigt”, Aftonbladet, 740624.


PER BACKSTROM is an associate professor at Department for Culture and Literature, University of Tromsø, and chair for the membership commission of the European Network for Avant-Garde and Modernism Studies (EAM). He took his ph.d. in comparative literature 2003, at the University of Lund with the thesis Aska, Tomhet & Eld. Outsiderproblematiken hos Bruno K. Öijer (Ash, Emptiness & Fire. The Outsider in Bruno K. Öijer, Ellerströms förlag 2003), and has since then published the monograph Enhet i mångfalden. Henri Michaux och det groteska (Unity in the Plenitude. Henri Michaux and the Grotesque, Ellerströms förlag 2005), which has been rewritten and translated to French as Le grotesque dans l’œuvre d’Henri Michaux. Qui cache son fou, meurt sans voix (L’Harmattan 2007). He has worked as a literary critic, and has published several studies of Mikhail Bakhtin, intermediality, avant-garde and neo-avant-garde. For the moment Per Bäckström studies the Nordic neo-avant-garde and the cross-aesthetic art of Öyvind Fahlström.