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## *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!”<sup>1</sup> 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!!!<sup>2</sup>



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 suppressing "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.<sup>5</sup>  
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.<sup>6</sup> Also in this issue, the declaration that *Guru Papers* is a "Free, independent, avant-gardistic poetical magazine" is found in print:<sup>7</sup>



The last issue of *Guru Papers*, which is a double issue

(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 triggered 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 Gunder 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”.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> *Guru Papers* no. 7 1974; hereafter GP. Translations are mine, if otherwise not stated. This article contains in concentrate an argument presented in a more elaborated form in my doctoral thesis: Per Bäckström. *Aska, Tomhet & Eld: Outsiderproblematiken hos Bruno K. Öijer* (Ash, Emptiness & Fire. The outsider in Bruno K. Öijer), Lund: Ellerströms förlag, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Leif Elggren *et alii*. *Vesuvius. En antologi i ord och bild*, Stockholm, 1974.

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

<sup>4</sup> *Kulturmagasinet Vargen* no. 2 1974.

<sup>5</sup> Bruno K. Öijer. ”Det förtryckta ordet”, *Guru Papers*, no 5 1973, p. 24.

[6](#) *Poesin måste göras av alla! Förändra världen!* (Poetry has to be made by everybody! Change the World!), Katja Waldén (ed.), Stockholm: The Museum of Modern Art, 1969. The exhibition lasted from November 15 to December 21 1969.

[7](#) *Guru Papers* no. 7, 8 and 9–10.

[8](#) Gunder Andersson. ”Det mesta som skrevs under 60-talet är fruktansvärt tråkigt”, *Aftonbladet*, 740624.

[9](#) Bruno K. Öijer. ”En ny variant av gammaltestamentlig moralism”, *Aftonbladet*, 740802.

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