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(among them Ida Applebroog and Carolee Schneemann) and the third being artists “whose publications are not milestones in the field, but who played a key role as publishers, animators of the artist’s book network, agitators even or mavericks” (p. 65), who include Klaus Groh, from International Artists Cooperation Publications, and Leif Eriksson, the founder of the Wedgepress & Cheese Publications. A fourth comment could be this—should we perhaps recognise that the aesthetics of the artists’ book are inherently Western, because artists’ books produced in Eastern Europe during this period were often handmade and fundamentally political, even illegal, due to a repressive political system?

I’ve mentioned that Møeglin-Delcroix keeps her focus on the period 1960–80. This is not completely true. For this new edition she has written a superb preface, where she explains the lack of interest in contemporary art, and especially in artists’ books (ignored by art collections, art critics and in solo exhibitions of the artists themselves), in the 1990s when the first edition was conceived, and by contrast, the current situation. Møeglin-Delcroix strongly criticises two current tendencies, for which she coins the neologisms “bibliophilisation from the outside” and “bibliophilisation from the inside” (my translation). The first includes the (un?)intentional mixing of artists’ books with other types of books by artists (the illustrated book, the *livre de luxe*) at exhibitions as a result of mental laziness and a lack of historical knowledge, thereby turning the story of the artist and the book into one without breaks and conflicts—the legacy of the 1960s and 1970s is gone! The second tendency concerns the artist herself, given that a lot of artists are copying the *livre de luxe* by printing it in a deliberately small edition (and numbering and signing it), with the focus more on the object than on the book. More on the art market than on the arts. This last tendency can be seen even at fairs such as the NY Art Book Fair, but it doesn’t seem to dominate these places (sometimes the problem seems instead to be all the bad artists’ books, not bad just because they are book objects, but bad as in poorly conceived and executed . . .).

To be continued . . .

The recent books on artists’ books, among these the highly commendable *Booktrek* and *Esthétique du livre d’artiste*, not only demonstrate the history of artists’ books, with its many major works and major artists, but also underline the inherent potential of using the book medium in the service of art, although the danger of bibliophilisation certainly lurks in every corner.

Keep on *Booktrekking* in the Gutenberg Galaxy!

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BOOKS RECEIVED

Heather Beuchler (HB)

Levi Sherman (LS)

Shelly Carter (SC)

Bäcker, Heimrad.

Seascope: Transcription by Heimrad Bäcker.

Brooklyn: Ugly Duckling Presse, 2013. 5.75 × 7.5 in.

edition of 500, \$25, (\$18 direct from UDP)

<http://shop.uglyducklingpresse.org/>

Seascope by Heimrad Bäcker (1925-2003) is a recent and welcome addition to Ugly Duckling Presse’s Lost Literature series. The book is letterpress-printed with gray ink and hand-bound, resulting in a soft-spoken quality that belies its subject. Translated into English by Patrick Greaney, the 1985 work, which constituted the entire thirty-second issue of Bäcker’s magazine *Neue Texte*, is a powerful piece of appropriated writing. Like Bäcker’s other books, *Seascope* excerpts text from Holocaust documents—in this case the ship’s log of a German submarine and the captain’s testimony during the Nuremberg Trials.

The use of documentary material not only determines the content of the book, but also the form. The spare layout of type, mostly white space, reflects the sparse language and design of the original documents. Nevertheless, the narrative is deeply affecting as it retells the Germans’ encounter with and refusal to rescue stranded Norwegian sailors, who are resupplied and abandoned to their certain death. The use of negative space around the text, though reminiscent of the ship’s log, is not merely a convenient coincidence. It serves to invoke a sense of absence and loss, not just of life, but also of information, which is critical to Bäcker’s work. It reminds the reader that they are seeing only a tiny portion of the documentation of these events. As an act of witnessing, *Seascope* addresses not only the events of the Shoah, but also the memory, documentation, and language thereof.

Bäcker’s focus on aesthetics and linguistics through historic documents results in what he called “documentary poetry,” which is the result of three factors. The first factor is Bäcker as an Austrian poet in the era during which Theodor Adorno, in the essay “Cultural Criticism and Society,” from his book *Prisms* declared: “To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.” Bäcker sought to show that aesthetics were not a trivial distraction from the Shoah, but rather that language was deeply implicated in the horrors that transpired. Greaney, who translated this edition, writes extensively on this in his essay which focuses on Bäcker’s later books “Aestheticization and the Shoah: Heimrad Bäcker’s Transcript” in the journal *New German Critique*. He says Bäcker “aims not to create a new language but to allow its readers to gain some kind of knowledge about the specialized language of National Socialism.” (34) *Seascope* thus aims to show that language, as a tool used by the Third Reich, is worthy of witnessing.

To Bäcker, it is not only the unspeakable events of the Holocaust that are worrisome, it is the very belief that they are “unspeakable.” That this discourse persists even today is evident in Jacques Rancière’s 2003 book, *The Future of the Image*, in which the final chapter is entitled “Are Some Things Unrepresentable?” and grapples with representations of the Holocaust. To this question, Bäcker would say, “no.” Bäcker shows us, Greaney writes, that the Holocaust was “an eminently describable and described act that was spoken about, extensively, by thousands of people concerned about the precision and even the beauty of their language.” (35) Rancière comes to a similar conclusion and ends his book with the thought that “the logic of the unrepresentable can only be sustained by a hyperbole that ends up destroying it.” (138)

This understanding of *Seascope* as witness to not just the Holocaust, but especially its representation makes sense of the particular documents which are used. Rather than primary sources, the book is taken from testimony at a tribunal. The captain’s recitation of the events, though concise to the point of callousness is still mediated by the language of National Socialism, and so exists in tension with the objective style of the weather entries in his ship’s log. These nuanced linguistics are more than the result of Bäcker’s careful study or philosophical engagement with Adorno—they result from the poet’s own eager adolescent participation in the Hitler Youth, the implications of which he dealt with for the remainder of his creative life.

It would not do the work justice to read it simply as Bäcker’s attempt to reconcile his youthful and thus mitigated moral lapse. He was committed to avant-garde poetry, and *Seascope* fits easily into the tradition of poetry with a meaningful visual component. For instance, Stéphane Mallarmé’s seminal work, *Un Coup de Dés*, shares *Seascope*’s emphasis on negative space, expressive use of typography, and even the theme of shipwreck. By referring to the poetry canon, Bäcker strengthens his assertion that the Shoah occupies a place on the cultural spectrum. He also further challenges his own use of Nazi language by aligning his work with experimental poetry. The poetic success Bäcker achieves through the aesthetics of grim documentation, and its easy fit within an art and poetry discourse are perhaps the most unsettling aspects of his project, even alongside the inhumanity elicited in *Seascope*.

Readers of this complex work will benefit from the inclusion of a new afterword by Charles Bernstein. His writing not only situates *Seascope* within a corpus of similar works by poets including Åke Hodell and Charles Reznikoff, but also highlights how Bäcker’s work differs. Of note is the integral nature of citation as well as the layers of transcription. Bernstein reminds the reader that *Seascope* is not simply a transcription as the subtitle states, but rather a transcription (*Seascope*) of a transcription (873-D) of a transcription (ship’s log). By further complicating the line between reference and literature, the afterword contextualizes this book in a literary struggle to find poetry in an undeniably barbaric world.

(LS)