THE EVOLUTION OF THE D PRESS PROCESS

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In the late 1950s, I attended Oakland High School. We were curious about the Beatniks. They were said to be in North Beach. My buddies and I surfed at Stinson Beach, near Bolinas, and my first guess was that North Beach was on the coast, but we found ourselves in Little Italy, a neighborhood adjacent to Chinatown, in San Francisco, looking at Keene paintings and at people dressed in black wearing berets with paint swiped on their jeans. Bored, we made it to a jazz club in the Tenderloin, called The Black Hawk, to dig Cal Jader & Mongo Santamaria. We admired these cats. We'd sit in the back in our suits and drink Grenadines or Cokes.

Later, the establishment insisted we sit in a special section behind chicken wire. My heartfelt thanks go to Herb Caen and Ralph Gleason who campaigned to let the youth hear many musical giants in an atmosphere where liquor was served. Crazy, now, to think the City Fathers fell for it, but they did. At 2 am, when The Black Hawk closed, we would follow the musicians to an afterhours club. Soda pop was served in paper cubs, and I could see small brown paper bags emerge from suits and whiskey be poured into the soda pop under the table. I was beginning to catch on—something was happening on the surface, and something was going on beneath the surface. This was the Underground. I did my best to catch the scene in words:

> Grandure of grey dawn in transparent gold
> as miramids of restless weary wanders
> play the harpstrings of youth
> and separating a bright red bar
> held by a square bolt.

Breastbeaters, my first collection of poems, was published in 1963 by Berkeley Pamphlets. I had renewed a childhood friendship with Dennis Wier, who worked at the Lawrence Rad Lab monitoring the cyclotron. He showed me how to burn a plate with a 250-watt light bulb in an orange crate in his closet. *Breastbeaters*, with all its imperfections, gave me a de facto introduction to The Sticky Wicket, near Aptos, where I was received as an aspiring lyric poet and befriended by Vic & Sidney Jowers, owners of this oasis for the local Bohemian crowd. I took parts in plays and read poetry, had affairs, drank wine, and danced on the tabletops. I studied occult philosophy. I broke from my wife and fled to New York. I smoked pot for the first time. I returned to California and took peyote. I thought I was going to murder my family and spent a year in and out of mental hospitals, and since I couldn't think on more than one level, I sat and meditated on emptiness, until my dad suggested I go back to college. I closed my eyes, ran my finger down a list of schools and stopped at California Polytechnic State University. Thus, it was in the atmosphere of highly charged horticulture and animal husbandry that I wrote "Scorpio, Scorpio Rising" à la George Barker, Kenneth Anger, and Madame Blavatsky. A new alchemy was at work.

There were a lot of ideas out there to choose from, but I decided on MAKE IT NEW—NO IDEAS BUT IN THINGS—DON'T FORGET TO EAT LUNCH— knowing that what I thought I knew might not be true, as I dropped acid in Big Sur and contemplated a bench on which was carved "Thinker, Worker, Lover" and had trouble making up my mind where to sit,— so I lay on the bench and tried to be all three archetypes. I saw tiny, elven-like people in the foliage. I freaked and ran up the hill and encountered an ogre cutting a fresh swath through the bank with an earthmover. I ran back down the hill and went to dinner and tried with difficulty to read the spidery script on the lunch menu at Dietrich's restaurant. I remember jumping from hot pool to hot pool at the Esalen Institute to discover my human "poetential" before attending the Berkeley Poetry Conference.

In 1965, I had been given an introduction to Robert Creeley by one of my college English professors,

who said I'd learn more in two weeks at the conference than I'd learn in a year attending classes at Cal Poly. I longed to get back to Berkeley. In *On the Road*, Jack Kerouac had hopped a freight train as it was slowly climbing the grade outside San Luis Obispo. I was afraid I'd get hurt or else get caught in the Oakland railroad yards, so I hitch-hiked my way up the coast.

It was a hot day. My first ride was with a soldier who took me as far as Fort Ord, and I stood in the heat and radiance of poetic determination, until a carload of drunken farmworkers, after determining that I hadn't any money for gas, kicked me out of their jalopy about a half-mile further down the road. And so it went, steady on, toward Berkeley. *Back to Berkeley*, story of my life.

I wrote a poem for Elio, a barista at The Piccolo, which he traded me for a shot of espresso—an auspicious beginning. The windows were open in California Hall on the Berkeley campus, and I joined other young poets on a ledge. Creeley was saying, "There is a war. There is not a war," and Robert Duncan, who was sitting in the classroom said, "Why don't you let those guys come in?" Creeley gave a nod, and we hopped down and joined the I.W.W. of Poets, although I expect Richard Baker—not yet Zentatsu Richard Baker—who was in charge of collecting admission fees, might have had a concern; however, nothing was said about it, and from there on the events were free, as it should be with poetry.

A fusion of Beat, Black Mountain, and Bay Area Renaissance poets, most of the names on the roster were unfamiliar to me. The readings and talks continued informally into the night in coffee houses and bars and people's homes.

Lectures:
July 13, Robert Duncan, "Psyche-Myth and the Moment of Truth"
July 14, Jack Spicer, "Poetry and Politics"
July 16, Gary Snyder, "Poetry and the Primitive"
July 20, Charles Olson, "Causal Mythology"
July 21, Ed Dorn, "The Poet, the People, the Spirit"
July 22, Allen Ginsberg, "What's Happening on Earth"
July 23, Robert Creeley, "Sense of Measure"
Readings:
Gary Snyder, July 13, introduced by Thomas Parkinson.
John Wieners, July 14, introduced by Robert Creeley.
Jack Spicer, July 15, introduced by Thomas Parkinson.
Robert Duncan, July 16, introduced by Thomas Parkinson.
Robin Blaser, George Stanley, Richard Duerden, July 17, introduced by Robert Duncan.
Young Poets: Jim Boyack, Robin Eichele, Victor Coleman, Bob Hogg, Stephen Rodefer, David Franks, July 18, introduced by Victor Coleman.
Special Poetry Reading: John Sinclair, Ted Berrigan, Ed Sanders, & Lenore Kandel, July 17, introduced by Allen Ginsberg.
Ed Dorn, July 20, introduced by Robert Creeley.
Allen Ginsberg, July 21, introduced by Thomas Parkinson.
Robert Creeley, July 22, introduced by Robert Duncan.
Charles Olson, July 23, introduced by Robert Duncan.
Ron Loewinsohn, Joanne Kyger, Lew Welch, July 2, introduced by Robert Duncan.
Young Poets from the Bay Area: Gene Fowler, Jim Wehlage, Eileen Adams, Doug Palmer, Sam Thomas, Gail Dusenbery, Drum Hadley, Lowell Levant, Jim Thurber, July 25, introduced by Gary

Snyder. Also, a reading by David Bromige, David Schaff, James Killer and Ken Irby, but the tapes are lost.
Two weeks of mind-blowing poetry transmission. In hindsight, there is a notable absence of women on the program, and I remember that Leroy Jones (Amiri Baraka) refused to attend, saying, he didn't "want to be the token Negro." Still, it was, as John Bennett put it, in *Air Guitar*, "an event creating a white-light intensity that rivaled any drug experience and had more staying power."

After the Berkeley Poetry Conference, I met Luis Garcia, and we continued in the conference's spirit with many of these young poets. Lu's parents had gone on vacation, and we partied down. Lu gave me a used thesis binder with a spring spine and told me to get my shit together. He instilled confidence in me, and I began to write in earnest by composing and blowing with words in an acid-induced psychosis, making steady progress, in and out of mental institutions, the Summer of Love, The Death of Hippie with a move to Alaska where I began printing on a small Kelsey hand-press in an attic apartment in Ketchikan.

Coming home from a day's work in the back shop of The Ketchikan Daily News, I'd print 100 pages and hang them to dry on cotton string along the roof line of the apartment. On the weekends, I'd set type and prepare for the following week of printing. The printing was smudgy and uneven, but I pressed on. The typefaces were worn, so I over-inked and pressed harder, embossing the page, letting the ink bleed through. Grant Risdon taught me how to cut linoleum blocks, and in a rush of visual imagery, I tipped my linoleum nudes into the books, alternating poems and blocks, giving color to the big words.

After reading *How to Live in the Woods on $10/Week*, I moved my wife and child and press to Deep Bay, fifteen miles from the nearest road by boat. Pouring the words right into the type case seem natural, and I began to break my poems into smaller and smaller units, expressing myself with the Anglo Saxon, printing with 60 point Bodoni type, and thus limiting the number of words that could be arranged in a 4X6 inch type case.

Positiong vowels, basic breath building blocks—anagogical to the extent of being sacred sounds. Internal rhyme scheme, i with y, can be read, "Yes, I owe you." Zen take on the alphabet, beginner's mind discovery that there were poems inside poems and pages inside the pages inside serial poems inside serial chapbooks. What is a chapbook?

According to the *1911 Encyclopedia*, the chapbook was first mentioned in 1824, when Thomas Dibdin described a work as being "a chapbook, printed in rather a neat black letter." The source of the word is from the OE, *chap,* to buy and sell, and is a comparatively modern name applied by booksellers and bibliophiles to the stitched tracts written mainly for the lower class and circulated in England, Scotland, and the American colonies from the late 15th century onward by itinerant dealers, or chapmen.

I've also heard that the derivation of the word comes from an apron worn by the chapman, which had pockets that contained items for sale, but this might well be a term confused with the leather pants called chaps (from the Mexican, *chaparajos*) worn by the American cowboys to protect their legs from the bramble bush known as chaparral. In *Poets & Writers Online*, Therese Eiben claims that the origin of the word is either cheap book, sold at newsstands during the era of Penny Dreadfuls or chapter book, because of its scant number of pages.

There are many kinds of books, books that range from, say, a pre-Columbian codex (where a

manuscript is painted on strips of deerskin that are glued together to form a single band, then folded accordion-fashion and glued onto wooden boards) to Jackson Mac Low's pages made from two-by-fours. As always, when you look at something in a metaphysical way, what holds it all together is the mystery.

While working at Arīf Press, on my return to Berkeley in 1975, Wesley Tanner showed me how to make what is known in bookbindery as a *signature stitch,* and I applied this technique to my book-making formula, fusing high-tech and low-tech elements.

You need a needle with a large eye. Darning needles are dull; get a sewing needle long enough to grasp. I use linen bookbinding thread, which has a strong weave. Dental floss? Sure, I've used that, but book-binding thread is best. Cut the thread to length by wrapping it once around the length of the book; thread your needle with a few inches of string sticking through and punch it through the middle, from the inside, outward. Make sure you go straight, or the stitch will come out off center. Next, go to the top or bottom of the spine on the back cover, a couple inches from the edge, and poke straight through to the inside. Then, go back to the center hole, and being careful not to run the needle through the thread, stick the needle through the center hole. Now, go to the opposite end of the spine and poke through the back cover to the inside. The stitch is complete except for tying it off. Run the needle and what's left of the thread under the piece going into the center hole and cinch the two ends tight, not so taut that the book bows but taut enough to remove any slack. The two ends should be about the same length; but if not, work the shorter end forward, and tie the two ends in a square knot, not a slip knot. Trim the two ends to equal length. I leave them long, so if the knot slips, you have enough thread to retie the ends. Sew together a few pages and, *voilà*, you have a chapbook.
Originally, the signature stitch was employed to sew a quarto page (a large sheet of paper, printed on both sides, folded twice and cut along the folded edge to form eight pages, called a *signature*). Sewing the pages to the cover is part of the foundation of the book, what holds it together, and it contains a utilitarian element as well as an esthetic element. Jerome Rothenberg remarks in his editor's note to *The Book, Spiritual Instrument,* "To say again what seems so hard to get across: there is a primal book as there is a primal voice, & it is the task of our poetry & art to recover it—in our minds & in the world at large."

The computer changed the way a book is designed. A note about justified lines,—lines of text move from the left margin to the right, in columns, and it is one of the uses of a computer is to solve the problem of justifying lines. Justified lines are the even alignment of words at the margins of a text. It is the demarcation of where a line of type ends, not the end of a rhythmic line, where the number of scanned syllables makes one line a bit longer than the next because of the constituent parts of the sentence in various scripts and fonts. It's the printer's task to choose the right font and make the line end at a given spot, to choose the point size of the font so the longest line fits in the type case, within the margins. Poetry is usually justified to the left margin and proceeds as a dance of consonant and vowel, whereas the carcass of prose is anchored to both margins with hyphenated word breaks. In letterpress printing, lines are justified by filling the space between pieces of hand-set lead type. In a computer, this operation is accomplished in a text box by clicking the desired lineation format on the tool bar.

In contrast to letterpress or offset press production, where the setup cost is higher and the print runs must be longer in order to recoup the initial investment in labor and materials, digital technology establishes the unit cost per book as essentially the same for one book as it is for one hundred. I use the book as an editing tool and print off one copy at a time until I am satisfied with the layout and

content; then I run a handful of copies to be archived in the collections of a few friends. I sell books at readings and exchange books with poets that I meet.

FORM IS AN EXTENTION OF CONTENT, LIKEWISE CONTENT IS AN EXTENTION OF FORM Taking this process a step further, I can now write right into the book, using the book as a vehicle to write poems. To me, the book fuses Newtonian sequence and Blakeian simultaneity. What starts it?—a pun, maybe, or something off the washroom wall, something fleeting, a little synaptic firing in my brain. I get these firings into words and onto a page because I have developed a modicum of mind-hand coordination, and the words might even mean something.