

this is the first time I've worked thirty straight hours
since I popped the disks in my back last year
I'd almost forgotten how good it can feel
to be this tired when you don't have to do it
on a regular basis the pressroom was hot
throughout the day and now the cool air
coming in through the window makes the city
-blue in the twilight- seem like a garden
dried sweat feels like a salve
my stained hands seem to extend
into the darkness the work I've done

[from Milestones 1985]



Grumpy
Tractor
Press
2019

aBullHead.com



PRINTING POEMS

I kept on trying different ratios



/but



Karl Young

of ink and water but couldn't get
a tight enough dot with eight different halftones
on a single sheet all looked dull
washed out or muddy I checked the adjustments
on all the rollers and repacked the blanket
and still I got mud as I came to the end
of tricks to pull sometimes a press
will correct its own problems if given the chance
mine had done so before but not with problems
as delicate as this I had plenty of scrap
and nothing to do since I was unwilling
to accept the results I'd gotten so far
so I loaded the feedboard with scrap I save
to adjust register run off scum
work out the difficulties this feed system gives me
and all the other daily procedures
that simply require the feeding of paper
set ink and water at reasonable levels
and let the press run I didn't even look
at the first hundred impressions just let the press
crank them out let ink and water
fight out their battle without intervention
and sure enough the press had corrected
the problems it gave me I didn't stop it
just let it run through the stack of scrap
and go right from there to the paper I loaded
when I mounted the plate riding the wave
I didn't check the sheets coming out
just watched the counter till the job was done
the rest of the day I ran simple text copy
and only encountered a little trouble
with the feed system the weird magic
that went on in the press while I wasn't watching

gave me confidence a key to the day
out in the world in a different machine
snow works its way through mud to water
and back to the sky or down to its table
that I can trust /but the complex of automotive machinery
aw don't think too much at least not today

today I'll prepare the field of combat
for the tight battle of ink and water
by exposing plates through stripped negatives
to the intense light of carbon arcs
where light hits the plate it liberates nitrogen
from the diazo compound leaving those areas
inactive and receptive to lacquer resin
able to hold ink and repel fountain solution
the gum acid and water that fights off the ink
in non-image areas I'll line up flats
bearing black negative with the silver plates
on top of glass I'll turn on the arc
bring the carbons together and set the timer
I'll sit on a stool and sort out paper
or plot the sequence of tomorrow's runs
as the plates are transformed by the magic of light
I'll put each plate in a light-safe box
until all are exposed I'll apply desensitizer
to one plate at a time wiping it on
in large circular strokes and in similar strokes
I'll apply the red lacquer and give each a coat
of light gum solution a process I've used
for so many years it's become automatic
even adjusting the time of exposure
or the amount of lacquer I do by habit
today's work will be done by light itself