

PROFILE: coach house press, toronto

Editor's Note: In May during my visit to Toronto, I had the great pleasure to visit with Stan Bevington, the guiding light of Coach House Press, and with Victor Coleman who used to be associated with Coach House in the early days. We began talking, and some of the innovations, trials and errors of small presses can be appreciated in this conversation. Coach House is a landmark press in North America, and by this interview, we wish to salute Stan Bevington and his staff, with great admiration and respect.

How did it really begin?

VC: A modest little operation, undercapitalized—no grants available. Stan and some friends wanted to go into publishing, so one summer, that of 1965, there was a very famous parliamentary debate, called the Flag Debate, when the government at the time had a competition for the new Canadian flag, and Stan had put together a lot of different designs, silkscreening a lot of different flags which he sold on the street in what was then a hippy community, Northville, and Stan turned over 3 to 4,000 dollars, with six to eight people selling them, all before the flag was officially adopted. The most popular one was the flag that showed the nine beavers pissing on the frog. Although it doesn't seem like a lot of money now, Stan was able to buy a small letterpress, type with the intention of making letterpress books. Soon after that, Stan bought a linotype machine, because he had trained as a linotype operator for a newspaper.

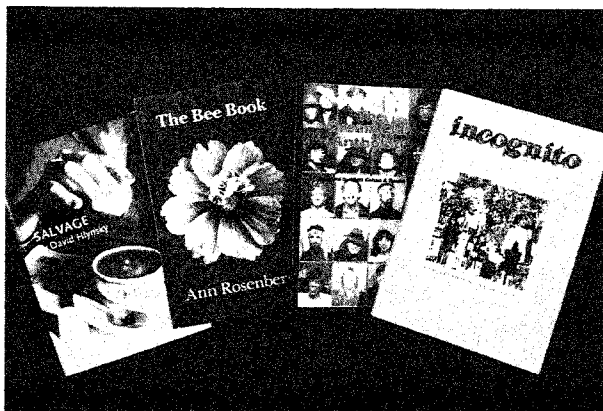
There was a confluence of people. Wayne Clifford, poet, who was very interested in publishing poetry, a friend of Stan's, did ephemera. We approached six writers to come in and submit manuscripts. Those six books plus a couple of others began sporadically over a year and a half. They were crudely produced, although they don't look particularly crude. Some were offset, letterpress, silkscreened and handbound. We were doing things by hand to live by hand. We did make a move for some kind of design sensibility, which Stan dominated. Along with the writers who were attracted, a number of artists also came in. Coming from the mimeograph revolution, many artists decided this was interesting to do bookworks, and they became intimately involved. Coach House was not a literary press strictly speaking.

SB: We tried to get away from the private press doing exquisite volumes for dead authors.

VC: Computer artists, sculptors, electronic artists all saw something in the printed page, something which they could use such as the experimental in printing.

SB: We did silkscreen on anything—we printed on balloons, on flag, on anything. Michael Hayden (now resident in Los Angeles) came along and wanted things silkscreened in plastic which were day-glo and would also glow in the dark. He also did those catalogs for artists' books, some of the first Coach House had anything to do with. No real theme went through our products except for the normal things that occurred in the 60s, but there was a sense of good humor and camaraderie that was extremely important and held it all together.

VC: Stan taught me to be a linotype operator (I earned my living by setting type), and I had to learn pretty fast. I never learned how to set type properly. I did it some



other way—fairly fast, fairly accurate.

SB: I was pretty sympathetic, because I learned from a newspaper operator who insisted that you should never use your thumb on a keyboard.

As you made the books, how did you distribute them?

We walked around and did direct visits to local bookshops; we were really amazed how the community in Toronto picked up on it. 2 or 3 days later, writers were coming to say "do my book". There was no problem of selection or editorial process.

But the process of distribution was quite strange, peculiar to Canada. We had a local market, the only one we had access to, but we did have contacts outside of Toronto, so we started sending books to people, and they were amazed. So we got recognition from New York, the Bay Area (San Francisco), France, all over the place, and the word was out fairly quickly. It was only a matter of time before there was a real catalog of books.

Did you recognize that there were small presses elsewhere like Something Else Press, like Beau Geste Press?

SB: One of the interesting characteristics of our books, which was a carry-over from photo-silkscreen, was that the photo and the visual aspect were there immediately—color reproduction on the cover right away, whereas others were worried about how they could pay for color separations, we just did it!

There's a long tradition here of color separation being here long before color separation. All mechanical separations too, and nothing sophisticated about it at all.

VC: *Light Burst* was a book of snapshots. Stan printed them on the A.B. Dick and the first run we scrapped. That was painful, but the second run we did on a laid paper, and something happened to the photographs so that we were getting reviewers saying that these photographs were "art" and I was embarrassed about it. We let it go, however. It was that kind of leaping into illustration, and this is how it can be done and let's do it that way.

SB: We couldn't afford a process camera, or anything. Our camera was a wood and brass thing with light bulbs and some tinfoil up there for lighting, and we did our separations right off, and that attitude has carried on. It was beyond "experimental"; it was alchemical, a sense of magic

that permeated the activity and caught on with whomever was here. People were attracted to it. Anybody with the least bit of graphic sensibility and some kind of mechanical talent and some vision could pull something off. Trick Simon came (I didn't know what kind of training he had, not like Hlynsky).

SB: No, I don't think he had any kind of graphic art training. There was a wave of draft dodgers. My first job was to print up their letterhead with a job application! I was just reminded of making these letterheads for farmers, plumbers, all of these different things of giving out job applications, strange printing. . . .

What was an average edition?

500 was the average. If we thought there was a bigger market for it, we did 1000, hardly ever more than 1000. I am sure we did some books in an edition of 500 of which there are still copies.

How was the business end of it?

We tried to keep it pretty low key. We were a cooperative. We didn't have funds to pay someone to keep the business going until the fourth year of operation. The 1970s. We did our first catalog in 1968-69, mailed it out, and kept a customer list.

Were you all doing something else to keep going?

No, this was a full-time operation. We started in 1967 with 6 to 8 people, and always had a staff like that. We printed everything in sight, besides books. Posters, other jobs, so that counts for the artists doing brochures for galleries, posters for artists' events, always happening at the same time that books were being done. There was always a stable of artists who were always available, so that Coach House's reputation was clear that we would be approached by other publishers, galleries, etc. to attach an artist/ designer to a job.

Did you ever apply for grants?

Sure. There was a program from the Canada Council, and we were turned down, so I did a campaign. I took the correspondence and reduced it all down to one sheet and sent it out to a lot of people and got a letter-writing campaign going. I called people, bugged them on the phone, met them in person. Eventually they gave us a pittance in 1967. \$3000 for 6 books, and we had to be specific about the titles, and the budget for each book. The Canada Council did not have any program in place for such a project. It was under "Projects". Artists were given grants, but no programs for publishers.

The problem with the way Canada Council is set up is that it is split up into media, and any interdisciplinary activity that is set up gets short shrift. It is better now because it has a media section by which artists' books could be funded.

From that early equipment, you obviously improved your equipment as you went along?

Yes, we occasionally handset type and pull proofs, since phototype is a bit messy, but for display lettering, it's still hard to beat! And then there's the computer downstairs. We just applied what we learned in offset books in the 60s to computerized books now!

Are you still doing artists' books? What percentage is literature, what percentage art?

We have increased the amount of words in the books.

So have artists!

Coach House hasn't had a bookworks program. It did in an ad hoc way ten years ago. That was largely self-generated. If an artist wanted to do something, we accommodated him. Quite often the artist would end up funding the whole thing, or a portion of the costs. Time, paper—I always remember Robert Fong's book *Antimorphis*, but it really is an artist's book full of writing. We also do duotone reproduction books, but we don't feel we want to use duotone illustration that wants to get on with the message in words. We are aware now when at an earlier time we did not have the ability of making that choice, so we printed it in color!

Coach House recognizes the quality of the book from process to product as a piece, whereas manufacturers see it as a product alone. You see the aesthetic of the book.

SB: Well, computers are stuck on quality, which we could never have done by hand.

VC: David Hlynsky is the prime example of someone who was grounded in visual imagery who became a writer through his association with Coach House. So this book is similar to *Incognito* in that the text is not illustrated *per se*. There is a parallel thing that is happening here, and that is an aesthetic thread at Coach House which is very strong. It is not unlike the Beau Geste aesthetics too.

SB: Coach House has spawned a great deal of activity. For instance, A.A. Bronson worked here one summer and designed a few books, getting his hands dirty. People from all over Canada did put in their time here; also some have come from across the border. The Rochester Connection has been very important. I go down there and pick up a few ideas, come back here and polish them up. It is an incubator for new ideas and new processes, and old processes used in a new way.

Up to now, your solvency has come from within, or does Canada Council help?

Last year, we got grants from Canada Council that equalled what we paid the federal government in income tax and unemployment insurance, so we zeroed in!

Do you ever have aspirations of taking a break, or changing the direction, or does the direction change by the people who work with you?

A new person may come in and they are expected to produce things of similar quality which puts quite a bit of pressure on the press at times. The pressure is on a new pressman. There is also the necessity of scheduling things to match the capabilities of the people here. A project may be set aside for a year until we get a person who can do it well. The frustration is that we are a teaching resource for people to come in and learn, and when they have learned, they go. It does germinate projects but it doesn't give us a long-term basis for doing adult books. So our books will continue looking experimental, since a lot of our people are learning while they are doing.

Is distribution best in Canada?

Yes, in Canada, because we have narrowed in on our audiences, to target our audiences effectively. There is a full-time person here who concentrates on marketing research, to increase the press run, or whatever, making events in bookstores. The books, therefore, are made more directly for a specific audience.

Do you advertise?

We cannot get trapped into that regular advertising schedule, so we create catalyst situations, a symbiosis between product and the audience. We had a remainder guy come look at our books, but he turned us down, and it was so embarrassing! Selling small press remainders should be an interesting market. We have a couple of good plans. With the computer, we have kept track for the past five years of who bought what book, and we have supplied that list to a couple of other small presses, so that we can snowball through the audience who that author is, and that audience becomes part of what the author presents with the manuscript. That's an important consideration for us in Canada, particularly because the authors publish here and with other small publishers. The other one is that we encourage people to phone us for orders, and everyone here is reasonably informed to chat up other books and to tell them where their local bookstore is, and if they've called from Montreal collect and tell them that their bookshop has that book in stock, order from us by phone and we ship them to their local bookstore, tell them where their bookstore is, and get them to go there. So we get a response from the bookstore, encourage the customer to go to the bookstore, rather than the book club attitude that means you cut the bookstore out as the middle man. We have tried to encourage this. We put slips into all the books to say "write in and order a catalog," and when the catalog goes out, we say, phone in, so we've tried to encourage that loopback. It has been an amazing long-term battle to get shelf space, display space. We have 75 bookstores in Canada; we know exactly who they are! I tour around to the bookstores, and since there are only 75, it is manageable. They are responsive if you come in with 7 or 8 books. They buy! It has never been de-personalized! And I have made postcards of each of these stores! There is a real visibility, and we have efficient shipping. We give people a schedule from a small press publisher!

Do you ship immediately to bookstores?

Yes, we have a good number of standing orders and 75 good bookstores, not the chains!

Then your bookstores are your partners!

Yes, its handwork for 75 bookstores. We do a flashy display. We reached an important point to say it really isn't open-ended. And by definition, we are doing good marketing and good sales for this quality book! We've tried to keep our quantities down, and we overprint the covers and the guts, and make up more copies than we can since we have begun to do our own binding. We began that 3 years ago. We would never have survived unequivocally if we hadn't done this. There is no way we could have survived. I should have done it years ago! It was largely a space problem before. Either warehouse copies, or have a bindery! You get trapped into having to do a long run in order to get them cheap. The bindery is the exact opposite. You do handwork, you can make up a couple of hundred copies and get them out, and then when you have time, you can bind up a few more! We did that with little books, producing it in 10 days, binding by hand, in order to have them ready during a reading by a poet, Robert Creeley.

Have those eight people been constant?

There have been a few changes.

Will electronic publishing change your look?

It already has. The typographic quality has improved dramatically. All the typographic refinements are definitely built in. Ten years ago, type design was lead type, rigid type, and the new technology has clearly made a difference. There are manuscript editions, better forms of electronic publishing. You don't need a monitor, just printouts. They are done on demand! We never have any in stock, since 1979.

How do people know about this?

From our catalog. They're banged together with staples or perfect bound and deliberately made to look like computer printouts, the ugliest, works in progress quite often. This is byproduct of typesetting. We insist on keying things and passing it through filters that humanize the printout. It is the **humanized printout** as part of the manuscript editions. We have a computer file that passes through a filter that goes through the typesetting machine and comes out typeset. So in a way, the manuscript editions are a bit of a media joke. They could have just as well been nicely typeset, but they go through the computer to come out typeset, but they have to look as if they come out of the computer.

We send our annual catalog out to a mailing list.

Have you ever done a survey to see percentage of sales from the catalog?

We did a specialized catalog, books written by women, and although we had no intention of a publishing program to target such an audience, it just turned out that it was possible. We sold back volumes by theme for the first time.

We are now working on a catalog of Fiction, of presses known as poetry publishers, the style in post-modern tradition of writing. No beginning nor end. Books by David Young, for instance. The short story and experimental is definitely the most difficult to market. Not much fiction is being written.

The look of your books is distinctive and very much "Coach House". Is that due to you and to your aesthetic?

I have a tremendous amount of respect for Michael Hayden, who came in and coached us on how to be more of what we really were. If you can do it on a rectangle, let's try a triangle; if you can do it in black, let's do it in color. He kept that awareness of any new media that came along. If we can do it on the computer, then let the computer do it in color. If we're going to do a book, then let's make that book become a member of a class of books so that it comments on bookishness!

It's pushing beyond the prescribed limitations, so making postcards was a great exercise. We had great racks at art galleries, we encouraged the audience to consider the artists' postcards the same way as they thought about the artists' book. I feel really responsible for that kind of development so that XOX postcard shop is full of our stock. I believe in pushing every kind of new form so that it becomes something in itself. I got interested in postage stamps years ago. Michael Hayden was doing Zero stamps years ago, and Rick did all kinds of stamps. In the printing postcards were considered ephemeral, but now there are postcards everywhere in Europe and in America. Anyone who is publishing knows that the postcard is a work of art.

We've spent quite a bit of effort in our word processing relationship to writers taking a stab at the Teledon graphics,

computer graphics in which I am interested.

The aspect that makes us independent of location is by doing electronic publishing. We have a proposal in for doing a magazine called *Swift Current*, and it's starting out with writers of Apple Computers. They're all on line now. The advantage of an Apple is that you've got your Volkswagen and you're waiting for the highway. You're all lined up beside the highway, and the highway is there for the big corporations. The goal in the next few months is to get the Arts Council saying okay. The highway has got to be made available for the Volkswagens too. So we're lobbying for electronic book rate. Forget about the post office rate problems. Our goal at Coach House is to distribute and manufacture, keep the stuff electronic and if you need a hard copy, make it locally. Our goal is an integration there of guts and covers; the guts get manufactured locally and the four-color cover can be shipped around if you have to, so we're trying to keep an inventory of four-color covers, and we getting used to putting guts in on demand. We did our Manuscripts Editions, which were crummy looking, on demand, and now we're trying to gear up for this situation of quality. Thus, the material made on demand will be indistinguishable. In publishing this is a very important direction. A book comes to life, has very slow sales, and then peaks out. It justifies going on the press, and it fades out, but it should be kept in print forever and that is on demand, because it's a book.

There will be nothing out of print, and the second-hand book dealers will go crazy!

There won't exist the problem of diversity of editions, and that does point very critically to that old tradition of form and content, each putting a value on the other that isn't necessarily there. This must be good writing because it's in a printed book, and that's going to fade away a little bit.

And you won't have to warehouse anymore.

There are other positive features as well. A designer can establish a look for a series and feature that look in a variety of different manuscripts. So if I choose to read my books in Herman Zapf's newest typeface, okay. Quite a different approach and exactly the opposite of everything the same robot-computers. What are your choices?

So we've established a procedure that we shared with George Quasha of standard input on all of our texts. We type all the books the same way no matter what. We apply a design to them which goes through the design filter and it comes out looking like a Baskerville book or a Bembo book. The filters have the typographic refinements for Baskerville, and we go through the punctuation carefully. The texts of the books are relatively portable and can be form independent, and when display screens come along to allow you to see without going to hard copy, we are continually trying to develop that archive of portable texts. This has been a dramatic reversal for the arts, where before it has always been a question of is it going to be in stone, or on cloth, or what is the quality of the leather. I'm so upset by seeing big book manufacturers saying that they've really done something by buying all white cloth-like material and printing a stripe on it to simulate a three-piece

binding. That form of using materials to gain an economy, and that economy should be in terms of variety and using materials more interestingly is really frustrating.

You may develop a new audience because of refinement, and you can adapt a kind of writing to a different audience by seductive means and also upgrade a certain sensitivity.

I hope that the manufacturing on demand scattered around the country may revive a return to hand bookbinding with people to put their own bindings on themselves and make objects of them that are special, where the information that you need as information is not wasting paper, but it's on the screen, and when you're doing the book object, you will be doing an object because you like the object. It might not be a letterpress book, but it might have a typographic style where black is blacker and it is on more interesting paper. I have an ongoing joke with the push-it-in-paper letter press people: make the black ink better, they always say, and here we have Xerox which meets the requirements of letter press people better, where black is really black.

That range of machines that Canon and Xerox have are really printing machines. And the typesetting machines 9700 go so fast that they become a printing press.

It is the perfect thing for a small publisher, and we tend to operate more viably than any publisher who has to dump pipelines to fill. If our audience knows and wants a book, we can make it, although when the economies are set up on a large scale. . . It's amazing that the transition from letterpress to offset has happened within 10 years, and we're in the next transition, and it's a bit easier and smoother. And it is a much shorter period!

My colleague Frank has his Apple at home, and he puts a mimeo master in it and cranks out purple copies on his duplicator. He's made the spirit masters from his word processor. You cannot Xerox those purple copies, and they fade! A perfect way to protect copyright, a perfect way to publish.

In the graphic arts, we've had digital computers for separations and forming dots, and that's very specialized and recognized. We're looking at color scanning machines that can form dots so nicely that they form type and put the two, type and pictures, together. When that becomes smooth, there is no reason for us to put effort in intermediary devices. We're better off to use that awareness on traditional technology and make really nice pictures. We cannot afford it. We'll stay with our clackety-clack photo-mechanical typesetter until a class of digital mechanisms are created. We bang things out with our Linotype and enlarge it in Helvetica to look like phototypeset.

The future will definitely improve things. My fantasy about working at home is becoming so clear. The cottage industry will really be a cottage industry!

As far as our darkroom, we force our computer to do paste-ups for us, and we don't even bother using a camera. No paste-up, no dark and light, it all comes out in pages, and we have a contact print! We publish 120-130 books a year for many other people. We skip the paste-up, since we got our computers in 1975. We buy time on machines that are quite a distance away, transporting the data over the phone lines, and we are putting all that we have done for the last five years on computers.

(The Coach House Press is truly a Coach House and Stan Bevington showed me the door for letting straw in. That is the place where the line printer types promotional letters automatically. Bevington also publishes a union catalog for all the literary presses of Canada, supported by the Canadian government, in an edition of 12,000 catalogs sent to all places in Canada and abroad. All the files for the literary presses are at Coach House, and Coach House publishes the catalog for the government. The paper comes from a mill in Quebec, which fills the large order of the Coach House Press inexpensively, because Coach House orders by the ton, and it's laid paper too. The folding machine is set up to make the Coach House kind of book. The fresh sheets of paper are folded into sixteenths, and it can fold a few of this book, and a few of that, chop it up in different sizes, and away they go. The books they have done are stored in flats, as are the negatives in case there is a request. Cover stock is printed on "good American paper" but coated in Canada. They make color paper by putting colors on it by printing the color directly onto off-white paper. It all was a dream, but one created out of hard work, imagination, and that alchemy that Bevington says is so much part of Coach House Press. The address for this fine publisher is: The Coach House Press, 401 (rear) Huron Street, Toronto, Canada M5S 2G5.

SOME ART PRESSES IN FRANKFURT: A GOOD LOOK

EDITION HUNDERTMARK

We had a good look at several presses during our stay at the Frankfurt Book Fair. Edition Hundertmark has made a name for itself over the past 13 years. Having begun modestly in 1970 with a little file made from artists such as Joseph Beuys, Stanley Brouwn, Robert Filliou, Ken Friedman, Ludweg Gosewitz, Gerhard Ruhm, Gunter Brus, Hermann Nitsch, Otto Muehl, Tomas Schmidt, Milan Knizak, Armin Hundertmark made works that ranged from signed action photos to collages, Xerox copies of pages from catalogs to signed men's shirts. Catalogs were sent out in that year, no orders ever arrived.

At the Cologne Art Fair in 1971, Hundertmark finally made some sales. Now he has done more than 70 files, some books, booklets and the journal *Ausgabe*, which has now reached 7 issues. The collection of Armin Hundertmark's editions have been shown in the Stedelijk Museum in Schiedam, Holland; the Kolnischer Kunstverein, the Modern Art Gallery in Vienna, the Graz Kulturhaus and recently at the Karl Ernst Osthaus Museum in Hagen. From postcards to original drawings, Hundertmark represents names such as George Brecht, Gunter Brus, Henri Chopin, Henry Flynt, Al Hansen, Joe Jones, Milan Knizak, Takako Saito, Endre Tot, Stefan Wewerka, Emmett Williams and much more. He has a new list of publications including cassettes by Chopin, another of Milan Knizak, works in a box from Emmett Williams, and others. Write to Edition Hundertmark, Reinoldstr. 6, D-5000 Cologne, West Germany.

DA COSTA EDITIONS

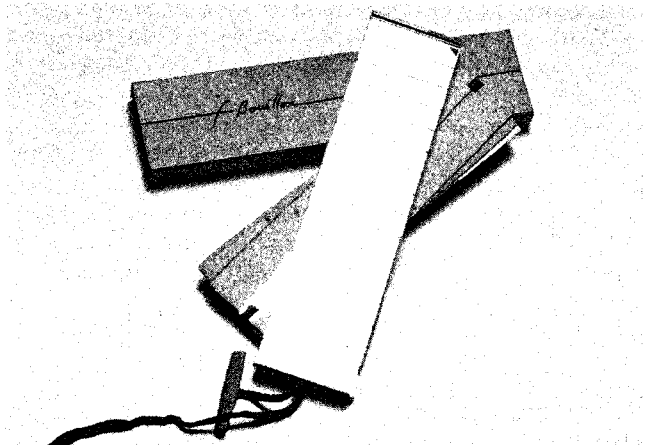
Juan Agius began in 1977 in France making illustrated books, object books. Having met Ulises Carrion, he realized that there is another possibility as an art form, the book. He tried with a collection, keeping an approach of "bookworks" as works of art. After study in Paris, he started making book objects in France, creating a symbiosis from the French idea of books as art forms:

- 1) Books as visual exploration of material
- 2) More conceptual, more bookworks that are subjective
- 3) From illustrated text to text-image, to image—not the visual into text, but just the Idea.

Juan works with each artist, using a layout and prototype, in order to produce the book. He says that creation is not the problem; the problem is distribution—to know one's targets, to bring this work to the public, contacting galleries but galleries also come to him to ask him to curate exhibitions. In Geneva, he has a show this December at the Librairie Comestibles from livre de peinture to bookworks, text and image, image and then idea. In November he showed his books in Galeria Estampa in Madrid.

Agius feels that it is easier to bring people to bookworks than before with exhibitions and collections already in museums. Most of the time, he says, artists come to him. He does go to artists to show them more about the medium.

The future, for Da Costa Editions, includes unlimited editions with communication, TV, radio, because the new dimension is Time, including two- and three- and four-dimensions. Some of the artists published are Francois Righi, Francois Bouillon, Ulises Carrion, Roberto Comini, Axel Heibel, Cornelia Vogel, Michael Gibbs, and Christian Appel. For catalogs, write to Da Costa Editions, Juan J. Agius, Korte Keizersdwaarsstraat 18, 1011 GJ Amsterdam, The Netherlands.



PENDO-VERLAG OF ZURICH

One of the great finds at the Fair was Pendo-Verlag of Zurich, where Gladys Weigner and Bernhard Moosbrugger produce beautiful books, among which are those of famed poet Robert Lax. Moosbrugger, a photographer and publisher, and Robert Lax have a symbiotic relationship, and the books that come out of the Pendo Press are exquisite. They are printed editions as well. One is Robert Lax's *Water, Wasser*, "Eau with photographs by Moosbrugger, and the other is Robert Lax's *Circus, Zirkus, Cirque, Circo*. Write to Pendo-Verlag, Wolfbachstrasse 9, 8032 Zurich, Switzerland.