

LIBER IGNIS is the fifth volume in a collaborative project of appropriations, constructs, and inventions documenting the ongoing civilization of the American West by

PETER RUTLEDGE KOCH

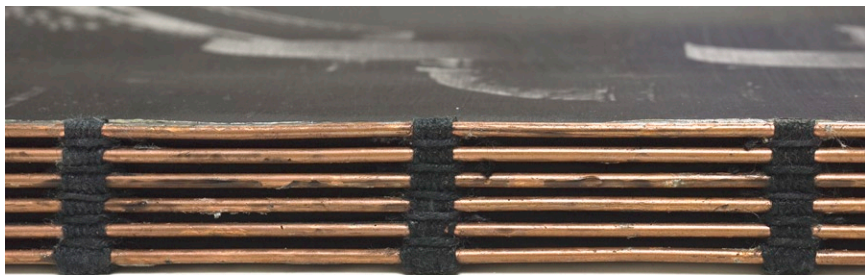
Serial collage poem [composed in counterpoint to the images] by

ADAM CORNFORD

Engineering design, image manipulation, and binding structure by

JONATHAN GERKEN

EDITIONS KOCH  **BERKELEY 2015**



Copper rod and linen thread binding detail.

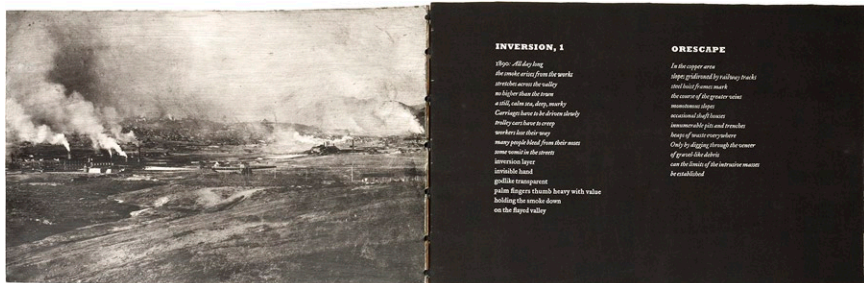
IN MAY OF 2013, Susan Filter and I visited the Städl Museum in Frankfurt, Germany and turning a corner I found myself in a small gallery in which the atmosphere seemed saturated with ashes and the grey shades of suffering. I felt I had entered into a set designed to stage a reading of Charles Baudelaire's poem "La Béatrice"

*Dans des terrains cendreaux, calcinés, sans verdure,
Comme je me plaignais un jour à la nature,
Et que de ma pensée, en vaguant au hasard,
J'aiguissais lentement sur mon coeur le poignard,
Je vis en plein midi descendre sur ma tête
Un nuage funèbre et gros d'une tempête,
Qui portait un troupeau de démons vicieux,
Semblables à des nains cruels et curieux.*

"Through ashen fields, burnt to a cinder, where no green thing grew,
one day I lamented..."

I had chanced upon an exhibition of selected works by Joseph Bueys, Anselm Kiefer, and Sebastião Salgado, three artists deeply affected by the dark side of human nature. The massive lead sculpture *Zweistromland*, a shelf of mysterious and impenetrable volumes by Kiefer and Salgado's photographs of the Serra Palada gold mine in Brazil acted upon me as catalytic forces while I stood transfixed in the gallery. A cast iron sculpture of a charred corpse by Bueys [perhaps derived from being shot down over the Crimea during WWII] was lying on the floor. I felt a sudden and deep connection with their evocations of the terrible weight of power, war, and its aftermath.

I see echoes of my own life reflected in the ruins that littered the Montana landscape after the War's great gluttony for minerals abated and prices declined. Ghostly smelters, abandoned mines, and the once great forests where only burned slash,

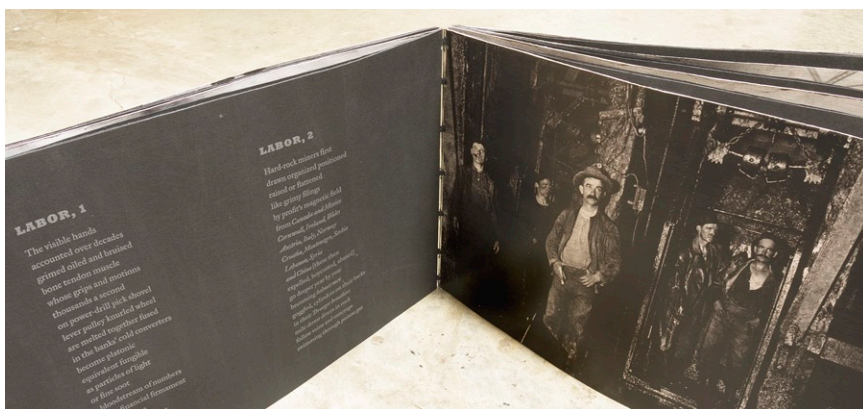
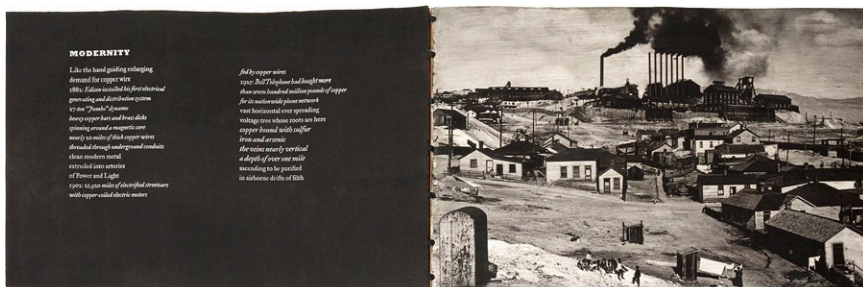


and stumps remained were the most obvious aftermaths. The concrete and marble monuments erected in our municipal cemetery and public parks were but feeble responses to the terrible cost of that war. Now, 70 years after Omaha Beach, I bear witness, pursuing my work in the archives of mining and smelting—appropriating images and constructing my own memorials.

I left the museum that afternoon with a notebook half-filled with sketches and plans for *LIBER IGNIS* [a *Book of Fire*, possibly in several volumes]. I had begun imagining a distorted ode to the drilling machines, hard-rock miners, crushers, furnaces, and railroad engines that serve the “dark satanic mills” that William Blake’s poem “Jerusalem” calls to mind. Powerful engines of destruction, engineered to convert the minerals that underlie the thin mantle of our vegetation-covered earth into serviceable energy, haunted my thoughts. I could not help but draw close enough to peer into the mirror that human nature provides us and examine the scattered, often unacknowledged seeds of raw power and self-destruction.

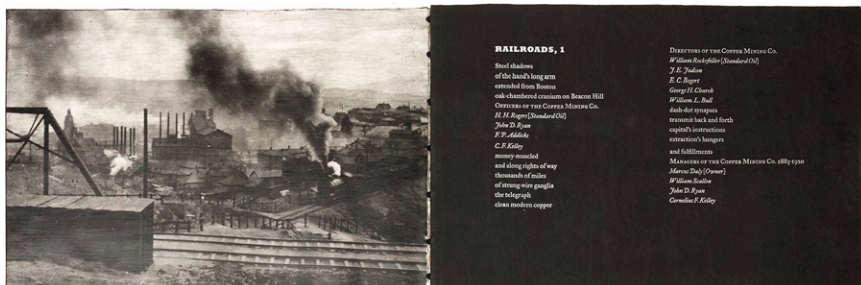
Without any conscious or deliberate plan, I had been building a personal response to the disasters of war for my entire life. I felt suddenly that it was possible to give shape to my thoughts. Eventually, painfully, I composed a small chaotic dirge, as an office of the dead—freely adapted from Charles Baudelaire’s “de profundis clamavi” in *Spleen et Idéal*:

*The city is a blackened pit
 A sombre graveyard poured of lead
 For sixty years a red sun burned
 No leaves were born—the streams lay choked and dead
 What horror remains yet un-foretold?
 Old chaos is refreshed—curses are renewed
 Greed is spread like honey on our tongues
 Fear—a blackened factory choked with dust
 Dangerous as a glacial sun
 Chaos once again becomes our hope
 And night our closest friend*



Hard-rock miners first
drawn organized positioned
raised or flattened
like grimy flings
by profit's magnetic field
from Canada and Mexico
Carnegie, Ireland, Wales
Austria, Italy Norway
Greece, Madagascar, Serbia
Lithuania, Syria
and China (East and
expelled, impoverished, shamed,
go deeper by you
between America
grapped, cylinders on their back
in their Dragnet imaginations
mishandled their own
Fellow slaves and company
exhausting through prison and

Upon returning to Berkeley, I began to research and assemble photographic materials and written documentation to bring the project into focus.

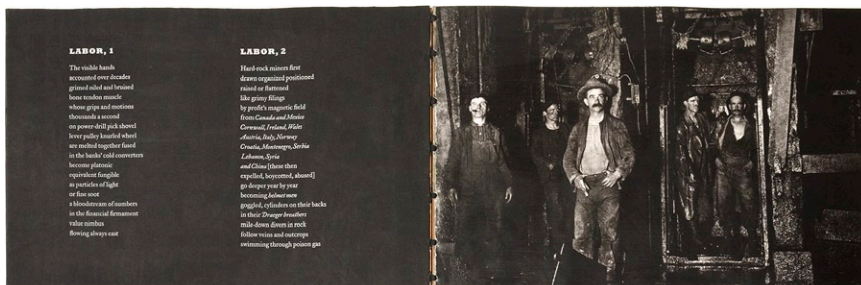


RAILROADS, 1

Soot shadows
of the band's long arm
emitted from smoke
and chambered creation on Beacon Hill
Cortez and the Great Western Co.
H. H. Rogers (Standard Oil)
John D. Ryan
J. C. Kelly
money mangled
and the rights of my
thousands of miles
of strong wire gangs
the telegraph
close smelter copper

DIRECTORS OF THE GREAT WESTERN CO.

W. H. Rogers (Standard Oil)
J. C. Kelly
J. C. Rogers
George H. Clark
William L. Hall
Ashley Symonds
transient lack and forth
explosive instructions
extraneous hangers
and falliments
Miners of the Great Western Co. 1882-1900
Marion Day (owner)
William Rogers
John D. Ryan
Cordell F. Kelly



LABOR, 1

The visible hands
accounted over decades
glazed steel and beyond
these visible hands
above gray and massive
thousands of miles
on power drill past showed
were pulled together hand
are welded together hand
in the hands and movement
become plastic
explosive fought
in patches of light
or far away
a blackness of numbers
in the financial ferment
value unseen
flashing through out

LABOR, 2

Hard rock miners first
dances organized positioned
mine or tunnel
like giant things
by profit's magnetic field
from Canada and Mexico
Cortez, Ireland, Idaho
Arizona, Idaho, Wyoming
Cortez, Montana, North
Idaho, Idaho
and China (these then
expelled, hypocrite, absent)
go deeper past by past
becoming labor now
grapes, cylinders on their backs
in their Oregon leaders
mile down down in rock
below mine and out crop
returning through points gas

directly into the river. Contaminants associated with these sources included antimony, arsenic, cadmium, chromium, cobalt, copper, iron, lead, manganese, mercury, nickel, selenium, silver and zinc.”

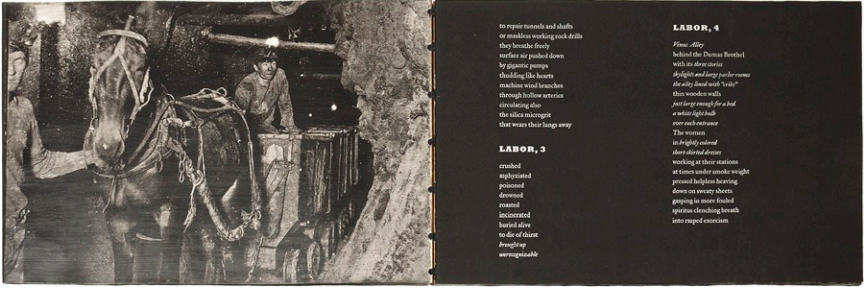
—website extract. *Superfund Records Center, United States Environmental Protection Agency*. 2012.

“Over the course of nearly a century, miners excavated an extraordinary ten thousand miles of mine tunnels and shafts, leaving behind something more like termite-infested wood than terra firma.. Sometimes the filigree of rock gives way and the ground collapses. The residents of Butte have long told stories of animals and buildings swallowed up by subsiding earth, disappearing into the ground as if pulled down by the very demons of hell.”

—Timothy J. LeCain. *Mass Destruction: The Men and Giant Mines That Wired America and Scarred the Planet*. Rutgers, 2009.

“The hellish sulphur smoke from the Butte Reduction Works and other offending smelters has been smothering the city for several days again and yesterday afternoon and last night it was as strong and as yellow and thick as at any time this winter. The official organ of the reduction works, however, says the smoke is all right; that healthy people get fat on it, and that it kills only persons with weak lungs and delicate throats.”

—*The Anaconda Standard*. February 12, 1899, page 11.



“Never has any poet been able to describe Styx, Regnum Subterraneum and Plutonis, nor any theologus hell as gruesome as we can see it here. For outside a poisonous, acrid and sulphurous smoke rises and poisons the air far and wide so that one cannot without pains go there. The smoke corrodes the earth, so that no plants can grow around.”

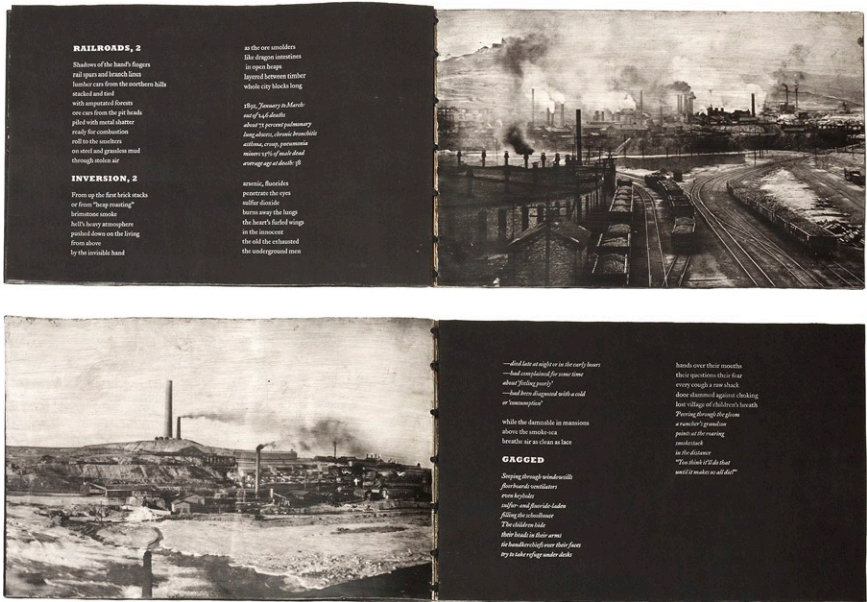
—Carl Linnaeus. 1734.

*I see the four-fold Man, The Humanity in deadly sleep
And its fallen Emanation, The Spectre & its cruel Shadow.
I see the Past, Present & Future existing all at once
Before me. O Divine Spirit, sustain me on thy wings,
That I may awake Albion from his long & cold repose;
For Bacon & Newton, sheath'd in dismal steel, their terrors hang
Like iron scourges over Albion: Reasonings like vast Serpents
Infold around my limbs, bruising my minute articulations.*

—Wm. Blake, from *Jerusalem*

ON LEAD

This was not my first exploration of elemental lead as a substrate for the work of the imagination. In 1994 I printed the *Defixions of Diogenes*, a text-transmission object and “Artist’s Book” in collaboration with the art critic Thomas McEvelley, ceramic sculptor Stephen Braun, and lettering artist Christopher Stinehour. The *Defixions* are anecdotes from the life of Diogenes of Sinope the ancient proto-Cynic as re-told by McEvelley. I printed the short anecdotes from zinc engravings onto lead tablets in the manner of the curse tablets called *defixiones* that are found in ancient Greek archeological sites around the Mediterranean. I was preparing an homage to my classical roots along with a cynic’s urge to shock. Lead, a toxic element in its salts and acetates, closely attends the arsenic that ran in the streams of the Hell Gate River where, long ago, I grew up fearing the dark waters that ran out of the sulphurous heaps of Butte and Anaconda a hundred miles upstream.



Lead is a dark material “... a chthonian medium, ‘of the earth,’ a medium of grinding subterranean force, of the bowels and not the surface or face of things. Curses, insults, reproofs, spells, *defixiones* are drawn to lead, drawn on lead. There is an instinctive reach for lead when the work is crude, binding, and painful as the truth.” [from “On lead as a text transmission object.” *Diogenes Defixions*. Peter Koch Printer, Berkeley, 1994.]. In spite of poisonous associations, lead is the matrix, the medium, a malleable and essential element in the typefoundry and as printers we feel comfortable in its presence.

With *Liber Ignis*, the work progressed slowly. I spent months compiling sources for the photographs, and then several weeks travelling in the summer of 2014, digging through archives in Butte and Helena, Montana. There followed a period of close examination of each selected photograph for alterations and cropping to produce the maximum impact. For much of that year my assistant and collaborator Jonathan Gerken and I engaged in a protracted series of experiments aimed at preparing a suitable surface for printing photographic images on large lead sheets at Magnolia Editions in Oakland. Once the lead sheets were printed to our satisfaction and over-painted with acrylic medium impregnated with bone-black to dirty the brilliant whites and lighter grays, we then began to design and test binding structures adequate to support the extreme weight of the pages.

Before considering a text I first needed confirmation that all the structural concepts were workable. Lead’s malleability couldn’t be exploited as part of a book’s structure. Folded and unfolded, a sheet of lead—already one of the weaker metals—will quickly fatigue and break. Model after test model were made to find a

SMOKE FARM

Deer Lodge Valley
Bielenberg Ranch
autumn 1902
more than 1,000 head of cattle
800 sheep, 20 horses
grazing under
a steady stream
of stinking yellow smoke
sulfur centipedes
bristling with wire feet
crawl down their long throats
claws tearing their alveoli
with each breath
gray metal white metal
static disrupting
their cells' converse
nerves transmit spasm
hearts falter and seize
bodies founder
in dusted fall grass

INVERSION, 3

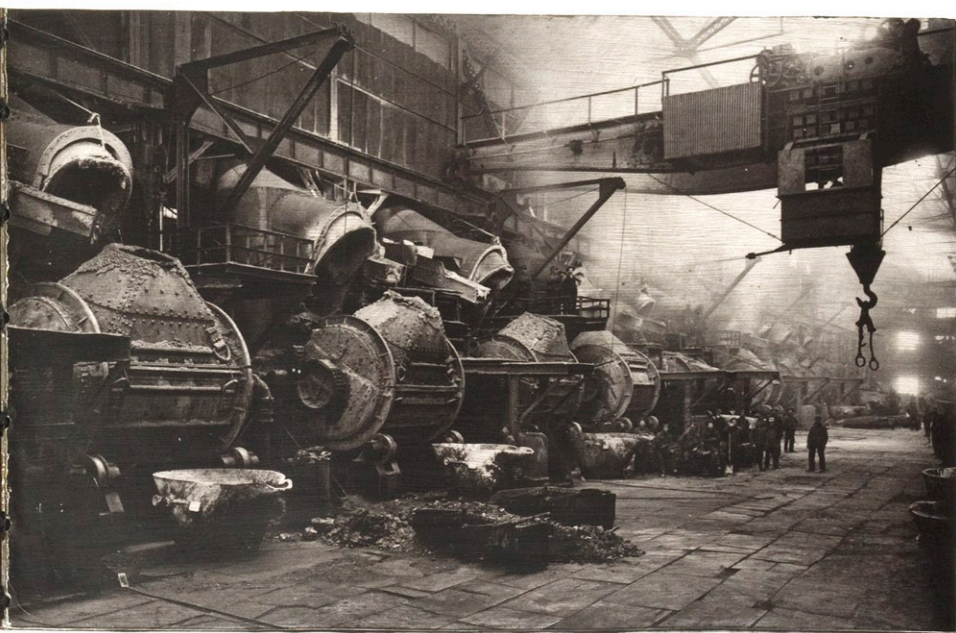
the mines of Butte somehow
carved out of the surrounding rock
as a single block
lifted up inverted and set back down
a mile high at its tallest point
the resulting structure of
stone steel and wood
twice as big as the world's
largest skyscrapers
nearly two miles thick at its base
forest-maze of hollow branches
ghost world-tree
empty necropolis
inside a vast grave marker
for the smoke-strangled
and rock-crushed dead

design both rugged and flexible. Woven copper grounding straps acting much like linen tapes, small ferrules linking one page to the next, interlocking copper brackets soldered to the edges of pages, etc were all rejected. Eventually, and much to our relief, Jonathan arrived at the final soldered copper tube and knotted black linen thread binding.

While we determined that the unusual parts and disparate materials would successfully function as a book, I began showing bits and pieces of the project to the English-born poet Adam Cornford. Adam has been a constant presence in my life since 1974 when we first collaborated in a pro-situationist action group in South Berkeley. I printed a few of his poems in *MONTANA GOTHIC*, a literary magazine that I founded shortly after we met and subsequently published his first book of poems *Shooting Scripts*, under the imprint of Black Stone Press in 1978. After a few visits and serial viewing of the progress and images, he brought me a poem that revealed a close and sympathetic understanding of the nature of the project. I requested him to write a series of pieces to accompany the images and was delighted when he accepted the challenge.

Working with friends, including Adam and Jonathan, and the curators and archivists: Becca Kohl and Brian Shovers at the Montana Historical Society, Ellen Crain at the Butte-Silverbow Public Archives, and Jennifer du Toit at the World Museum of Mining, has been a very great pleasure and a deeply rewarding experience.

We succeeded in producing our first successful prototype a few days before the opening of the 2015 CODEX Book Fair where it debuted to considerable interest.

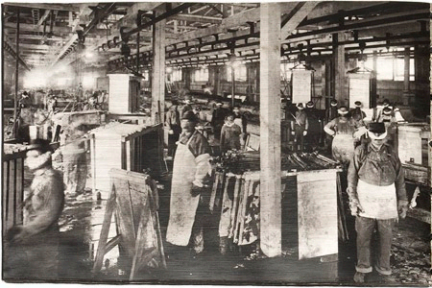


THE POETICS OF LIBER IGNIS by Adam Cornford

My involvement in the LIBER IGNIS project began when Peter Koch asked for my help in finding text that would work with the historical photographs of copper mining and smelting at Butte, Montana he had recently found as part of his ongoing project to document the conquest and environmental rape of the West in unique books and print works. I was haunted by the ghastly power of the images, all the more because, evidently taken simply as documentation, they did not seek to exaggerate or dramatize in any way what they recorded.

One of us, I don't remember which, suggested that I find some quotes from William Blake, since I know his work very well. I did find some verses from his unfinished and never-printed epic, *The Four Zoas*. The relevant section was the one in which Blake's "Zoa" of the Fallen analytic intellect, Urizen, attempts to create a world in his own image and produces something like a cross between ancient Babylon and the hellish industrial Midlands of Blake's day—an aborted mechanical universe that soon collapses. But there was not enough material to serve as captions or companion text for more than a few of the photos. I suggested that I have a go at writing a poetic text of my own, which Peter encouraged.

Peter then handed off to me three books—or rather, two books and a pamphlet—that dealt with what happened in Butte. The pamphlet, *Butte & Anaconda Revisited : an Overview of Early-Day Mining and Smelting in Montana*, [Shovers, Fiege, Martin and Quivik. Butte, 1991] was a guide from the mid-1980s to the history and remaining traces of the mining and smelting works formerly



REDUCTION

Repeating the leaps
 revolutionary, forever
 fast, machine, moving
 to the rushed converters
 where fiery air forced through
 bones-off superheats
 as cellular breath
 one right, receipt and bold
 moment like romance or matter
 slithers of machinery
 drawing the machine
 away in rag tanks
 who serve them

STACKS

Fingers of black brick
 one hundred feet high
 grooves with hollow ones
 in parallel
 know the fast sky
 etch characters
 with infinite acid
 Each new set
 reaches taller
 you feel
 measuring the faith
 that six will displace
 on the wind
 as we range upward
 from a social world
 into the heaven

while down planes the core
 given on shivering
 the earth floating on their sides
 the greatest running between
 the old large descending

Finally the great Washoe track
 and back into the fast high
 surrounded by
 a twenty-foot bank
 of debris and vegetation
 and a more this double
 appears to descend and
 drop from beyond
 finally right under the walls
 returns, would catch their
 risk to copper, gold, and silver

RESIDUE

left when the Washoe
 shut down in 1980
 its million cubic yards
 of toxic residue
 left thousand cubic yards
 of copper waste that
 soon after
 children nearby Mill Creek
 found to have dangerous
 levels of arsenic in their water
 all Mill Creek residents
 evacuated and relocated
 until tested and accepted of
 managed habitat

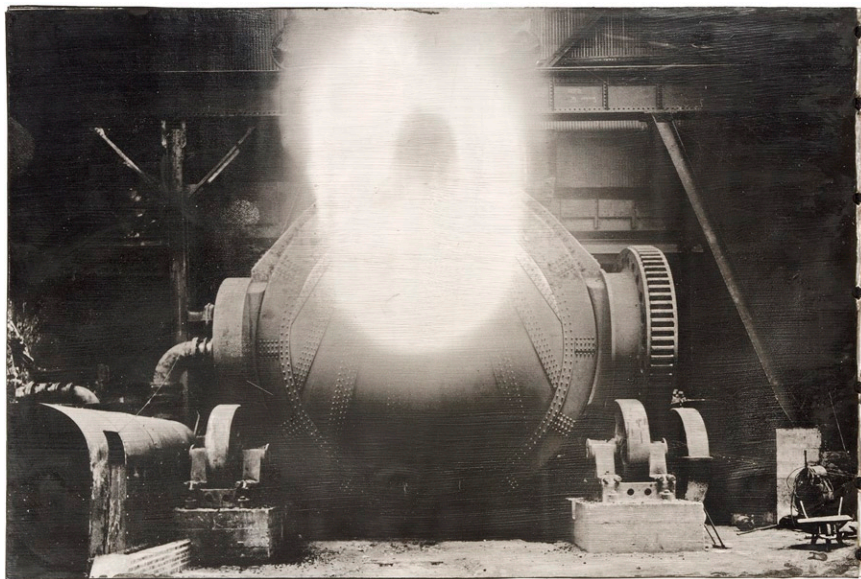
—Adam Carfield



operated by Anaconda Copper. The two books were *Smoke Wars: Anaconda Copper, Montana Air Pollution, and the Courts, 1890-1924*, [Donald MacMillan. Helena, 2000] which recounted the efforts of the citizens of Deer Lodge Valley and nearby areas during that period to curb the pollution that was killing them and their farm animals; and *Mass Destruction: The Men and Giant Mines That Wired America and Scarred the Planet*, [Timothy J. LeCain. Rutgers, 2009] a work of critical social history on copper mining in Montana and Colorado.

I opened *Butte & Anaconda Revisited* and was immediately struck by the descriptions both of the mining and smelting operations and of the way that the entire city of Butte would disappear for days beneath smoke so thick that it looked like a grayish lake. In *Smoke Wars* I found accounts of the toll taken by the pollution from open-air smelting—lead, arsenic, and sulfur—and in *Mass Destruction* more of the same, along with a detailed account of the technological innovations used to burrow more and more deeply into the copper deposits and of the almost explosive growth of electrification and telegraph-telephone infrastructure that Butte's dearly bought copper made possible.

From that point on the poem began—to use a clichéd expression—to write itself. Passages I had marked, snipped out, and stripped down syntactically, [printed in italics] gave rise to imagery of my own [printed in Roman], and material from all three books and various Internet sources was generally easy to integrate with the new writing. Although I have described the text as a collage, it is actually more of a montage, with elements partly blending into each other as in the photomontages of John Heartfield, Jess, or [latterly] Winston Smith.



The poem found its form in short lines, generally of two to three beats but quite often four, with the line breaks mostly at stress shifts or syntactic turns. The effect I realized belatedly I was aiming for was a combination of driving rhythm and short breaths—almost panting—as if someone with trouble breathing was struggling fiercely to get across vital information, unable to pause more than briefly before starting to talk again. A rhythm of urgent gasps and blurts. The tone, by turns sardonic, furious, horrified, and resigned, emerged directly from the text, and the tempo shifted accordingly.

I cannot claim any significant originality in form. The poem's ancestry is easy to trace: the Neruda of *Canto General*; the documentary poetry of Hans Magnus Enzensberger [notably his serial poems "Mausoleum" and "The Sinking of the Titanic"]; some work of Tom Clark and Ed Dorn from the 1980s; and looming behind them, Muriel Rukeyser's great and unjustly neglected *The Book of the Dead* from her 1938 collection *U.S.I.*, a poetic account of the worst industrial accident in American history, the Gauley Tunnel disaster of the early 1930s, which led to the deaths of between 700 and 800 mostly Black workers from silicosis. And behind all of them, William Blake's infernal visions from the prophetic books he collectively labeled *The Bible of Hell*.

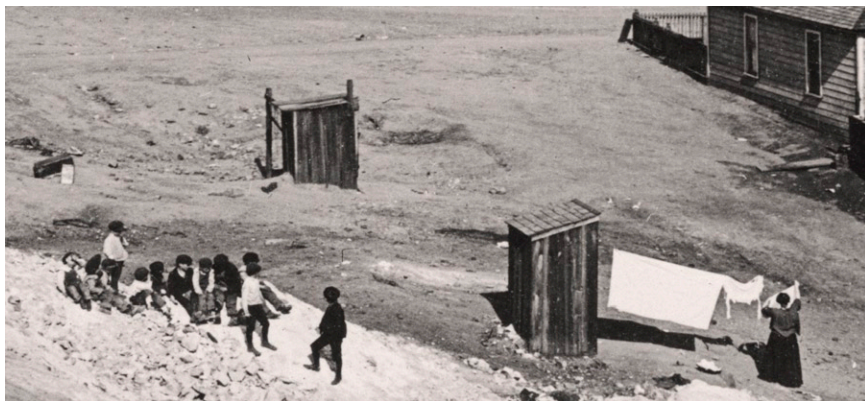
To that very small group familiar with my earlier work—and with my enthusiastic acceptance of the label "neosurrealist"—this work may seem out of character. In some sense I suppose it is. But the marvelous [in the surrealist sense] and the nightmarish are close cousins. Moreover, much of my work over the last quarter-century has addressed science and technology. The beginning of this for me was exploring the phenomenological aspects of being a "cyborg—starting from IT



Detail of miners at station at 1600 level in Original Mine, Butte, Montana

experiences like coding or exploring large networks and segueing into activities as ordinary as wearing sunglasses or driving a car. At around the same time I was working on a long narrative science-fiction poem, “The Snarling Gift,” which addresses the environmental and social consequences of profit-driven technology [including chemical pollution and global climate change] at a time now about twenty years in our future.

There is, besides, an eerily science-fictional quantity to the story of Butte. Some of it is the overlaid contradictions of its history and wider significance: the almost space-program-like efforts to drill deeper more safely [using technology adapted from deep-sea diving] and then to expel the pollution from taller and taller stacks with more and more elaborate filtration systems—while miners and smelter workers and locals and cattle went on getting sick and dying. Meanwhile, American capitalism was burning billions of tons of coal and oil to generate more and more electricity. So all this earlier work was preparation for writing *LIBER IGNIS*. I am honored to have been part of what is, in Blake’s sense, a prophetic project.



Detail of children playing under the shadow of The Richest Hill on Earth, Butte, Montana

IMAGE SOURCES (IN ORDER)

Converters #1 Great Falls type showing tuyers, [1913 December 8]

Photographer Unidentified.

Photograph from the Anaconda Copper Mining Company.

Courtesy of Montana Historical Society Research Center Photograph Archives,
Helena, Montana. PAc 82-62 2238

“birds eye view of the great mining camp / Butte City Mon’t.” [no date]

Photographer Unidentified.

Photo courtesy of The World Museum of Mining,
Butte, Montana. 03181

“Richest Hill on Earth, Butte, Mont., The” [detail of right side of stereograph] [no date]

N.A. Forsyth photographer [ca. 1909].

Montana Historical Society Research Center Photograph Archives,
Helena, Montana. ST 001 100b

Ore Train and Gagnon Mine [stereo] [no date]

1983.087 #3.003

Photographer Unidentified.

Photo courtesy of Butte Silverbow Archive,
Butte, Montana. PH510.012



Peter Koch and Tallulah Terryll printing the lead sheets at Magnolia Editions.

“Station at 1600 level in Original Mine, Butte, Mont”

[Montana] [stereo] [ca. 1901-1911]

N. A. Forsythe Photographer.

Montana Historical Society Research Center Photograph Archives,
Helena, Montana. ST 001 171

Mule Train on 1100-foot level, Rarus Mine, Butte [stereo] [no date]

N. A. Forsythe Photographer.

Montana Historical Society Research Center Photograph Archives,
Helena Montana.

Smelters at base of Anaconda Hill, Butte Mont., richest mining city in the U.S.A. [no date]

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/95509048/>

Photographer Unidentified.

The Library of Congress. 3C13596u

B & M Copper Smelter at Great Falls, Montana [1910]

G.V. Barker, photographer.

Montana Historical Society Research Center Photograph Archives,
Helena, Montana. 949-542

Converter, Anaconda smelter [1906 November 22]

Photographer Unidentified.

Photograph from the Anaconda Copper Mining Company.

Montana Historical Society Research Center Photograph Archives,
Helena, Montana. PAc 82-62 1554



Jonathan Gerken binding *Liber Ignis* at Peter Koch Printers.

Zinc plant, cathodes & strippers [1916 June 20]

Photographer Unidentified

Photograph from the Anaconda Copper Mining Company.

Montana Historical Society Research Center Photograph Archives,
Helena MT. PAC 82-62.2631

Butte Explosion, 1895

Photographer Unidentified

Photo courtesy of The World Museum of Mining,

Butte, Montana. 05655

Converter, Great Falls type, first charge, 1913 December 13.

Photographer Unidentified

Photograph from the Anaconda Copper Mining Company.

Montana Historical Society Research Center Photograph Archives,
Helena, Montana. PAC 82-62.2243

LIBER IGNIS

LIBER IGNIS consists of six .033" lead sheets printed at Magnolia Editions on a UV cured acrylic flatbed press interleaved with laminated felt and Evolon split microfiber sheets dyed black and printed from polymer plates on the Hacker Test Press at Peter Koch Printers. The binding is constructed with soldered copper tubing and linen thread. The text was composed in Fell Roman and Italic with Rockwell for titling. Box construction by John DeMerritt Bookbinding, Copper cover plate executed by Christopher Stinehour. Editions Koch : 12 x 18 inches, 22 pp [boxed]

Edition 25 and five A/P copies.

Warning: Contains Lead

We encourage you to visit the press and gallery;
please call or write to make an appointment.



PETER KOCH PRINTERS & EDITIONS KOCH
2203 & 2205 FOURTH STREET BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA 94710
TEL: 510 849-0673 PETER@PETERKOCHPRINTERS.COM
WWW.PETERKOCHPRINTERS.COM