

WITZ

For Members of Syntax Projects for the Arts

COLLOQUY

DAVID BROMIGE / ROBERT GRENIER

This conversation was recorded on July 3, 1986 in Robert Grenier's kitchen in Berkeley, California, and transcribed by Robert Grenier. That transcription is reproduced here.

DB: ...ever happen in your own work?...of being taken over by another?...I'm thinking of, say...The Rolling Stones' *Sticky Fingers*, the "Sticky Fingers" piece, where Emily

RG: Yeah

DB: features, or Amy...certainly, you allow other...voices to speak

RG: Yeah, it's a primary consideration (**DB:** um hmm)...I don't know, whether "taken over by" is...is adequate, although I would willingly...vouch for that...were it the case...it's rather too 'intimate' a...summary of what happens (**DB:** um hmm)...& so, "like they say"...the work itself is the only

DB: "Not heavily!"

RG: (laughs) "Not heavily!!" ...the work itself is the only evidence of any...condition of... 'possession' I've ever experienced...outside of a...few... relationships & landscapes...one might say, as well

DB: Well, I thought that in the...early issues of *This*, where there are—&, like, the cover illustrations suggest...children's books—thus, that being in relationship with Amy, then three or four, was... perhaps prompting that...Do you remember the covers of *This 1 & This 2*?

RG: Yah, sure

DB: And, in fact, Amy's illustrations?...& so (**RG:** yah)...&, how did that...that the relation of that to your work at the time...is that children, or *some* children, tend to say these very revealing things, but it comes in small pieces...so that, your own work, at the time, is quite...in small pieces...& has continued to be so, up until...*Phantom Anthems*?

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**Kathleen Fraser's *when new time folds up*
and Janet Gray's *A Hundred Flowers*
Reviewed by Susan Smith Nash
Books and Journals Received**

RG: Yeah, well, only that's the evidence of it, see, so, it's been a selectivity, so...I mean, it's an ongoing...it's not that 'the life is the work', but there's surely a...a language activity that you're born into, & which is...ongoing from...long before I can remember...*anything*, so, ah...I would say that was just, that was, surely, the outside...I mean, to say "He wrote short poems when he was young, & then (DB: um hmm)...but, when he was younger than that, he wrote *long* poems & they were...drivel, & then he wrote short poems, & they were, they were brief...& then, later on, he, he, he became effusive &... couldn't control his...selectivity..."

DB: Well, I hope you're not putting those words into my mouth!

RG: Oh, no, no, no...not at all! (DB: uh huh) but, but that evidence...but, as we were saying the other...night...in some sense, some way of giving recognition to...or, giving *on* to...an 'other', the 'other'...is, is what I was commending *you* for...in that, in the variousness, one finds...evidence of ...another way that, that something might come to be, in its...in any way that it happens...so...*yeah*, & that was one of the things that—"one of the questions that I had for you"!—which is, we didn't touch upon explicitly &...directly, was that...this bit about the self-containedness of the 'signifier' & the 'signified'...as, as if the...& actually, as a *denial* of, of the existence of the 'other', actually...unless you say that this is...it's *all* 'language' & 'Language' becomes the current word for 'Being'...& that we range inside 'Language' as a...an extant, historical continuity of social, ah...understanding of things, & so that it would be possible to say that, all senses that we have of the 'Other' are contained within language, insofar as we know them at all...as the 'meaning' of the word 'other', for example, with a capital... 'TH'—it would be...just as much a mystery to think of the whole thing as contained *in* language—but that's, to me, to really...erase the whole problem of...not necessarily 'possession by the other', but...times in which, *yah*, there's a, there's a...*shear*, there's a *wi*...there's a vast, there's a window out toward some other condition, & it could just be "you"...you know, as in Creeley's work

DB: Projectively

RG: in Creeley's work, the "you" exists as the 'Other'...addressed...ceaselessly addressed

DB: Well, that starts three or four hares, already, so (RG: sorry)...let me interrupt—that's all right (RG laughs)—but, the first one was already out of its hole, but isn't back in there yet...so, would you

say that, ah, it wasn't so much a matter of...it was more a matter of recognizing, say, in Amy's coming into speech, something in your own relation to language (RG: sure) & writing, rather than "being taken over by" her, but just that, her being there & doing this, you...you were ready to recognize it, because

RG: Proto-human...(DB: um hmm) a child's learning of language, everybody, everybody...is probably somewhat awed by it, bothered by it

DB: Well, then, too, I know that you...read a lot of Heidegger at one point, perhaps continue to do so...& I think I

RG: I don't know that I...I...well, no, yes!

DB: and I think I know that he proposes...like, back before some "Rift", that there was (RG: ouch) a big-B "Being"...a kind of a (RG: aah...) unitary state (RG: *no*) or condition*

RG: *No*, it's defined in Heidegger as a complete...*other*, as a total rift...that you don't really have...experience of, except as...being the 'opposite' of it, in some way

DB: Oh, you mean yourself, in reading it...or you

RG: It's that, yah, language is so much the 'opposite' of that which it... 'stands for' that...the thing that comes to be is, is...sort of, enacted as its *other*

DB: Well, do you have some sense of a 'primary state', when...things were 'unified'...like, 'for the race' (RG: oh!), from which we've 'fallen away, over the centuries'?

RG: I love my Moth-, I *loved* my Mother, but (DB: uh huh)...*even before that*, y' know

DB: Well, I was thinking of Olson

RG: I'd *like* to say that... "even before that"

DB: Well, it's a big factor, as we know, in Olson's work...he says that somewhere about the year 3000** B.C., a bowl went smash...& (RG: yah...) fragmented...South America drew away from Africa (RG: well, he) at some point before that, & all of these become *symbols*, I suppose, in his work (RG: um hmm) for some original sense of being...connected (RG: yah), to which he aspires...& would devote his poetry, both to naming the present...

* Despite Bob's rejection of this description, the notion of some *Ur-unity* is surely implicit in the proposal of "a total rift". (DB)

** What Olson actually said was: "it was just about 1200 B.C. that...a bowl went smash"--"The Gate and the Center", *Human Universe and Other Essays*, p. 19. (DB)

dissipation of things, & also, in the hope that some...unity can be restored (RG: hmmm)...now, I certainly can see...*this* as a projection *onto* history...from one's own early childhood

RG: Yeah...that's what it sounds like (laughs)

DB: And that's what it sounds like to you, also...I mean, that's what it sounds like to me

RG: Well, I can't imagine wanting to go 'back'—or to go 'forward'—to, toward an ideal...no, I like the 'rift', so-called, I like the...diversion, divisiveness of the...difference between...the language activity & the other, which has its own, & I would say, much more...interesting & complicated pattern

DB: So, it's not a matter, in your writing, of (RG: oh, no, a) like, primary...like, these 'glimpses' (RG: no)...because there's a sense I get from your work, that you...move very fast, or you hear things very fast, & note them (RG: mmm?) with equal quickness (RG: ahh), in the sense that one might get... 'around', somehow (RG: 'around'), the 'erring brain'

RG: That's more interesting than getting ...going 'back' (DB: um hmm)...I would rather 'get around' (DB: uh huh) than 'go toward' or...I mean, as a projection forward in time...or, some completely impossible.. 'hearkening back toward' a...I don't have any experience of a 'better state in the old days' (DB: mmm)...that was something we touched on

DB: Is it, in an earlier tape?

RG: Yah...*Toby* *...you say, mentioned that

DB: *Toby*? Uh huh

RG: that...he used to say, "*Bromige*...

DB: Oh, yeah, an older, & a better, time

RG: "...an older, & a better time..."

DB: "an older, &, I think, a better time"

RG: "the 18th Century!"

DB: Yes...well, that brings up the idea of the Enlightenment, certainly

RG: What would you mean by..."getting

* The late Edward Leonard Oldfield, 1923-1981, B.A. (U. Brit. Col.), Ph.D. (U. Wash.), bibliographer manqué of Henry Carey, author of "Sally in our Alley." In the unpublished "*Toby's Song*" (words and music by Barry Gifford and DB) the pertinent lines run: *He knows for a fact / mankind jumped the track / back in 1789. / I know that's right / 'cos just the other night / Toby threw me his line: / I was having a dream / And just when it seemed / The mob would chop me in the guillotine, / Toby appeared, in his reasonable beard, / And said, "An older and a better time, Broms, / An older and a better time".* (DB)

around"...that there was a... 'obstacle', or 'barrier', between you &... 'it'?

DB: Yes, that somehow language interferes

RG: Oh, *no*...not in the slightest! (DB: um hmm) Language is your, one of your...is *my* primary access, apart from

DB: Ah, access to what, though? (RG: oh...)

What's "access"?

RG: Oh, yeah...to some...a...*something that's talking to you*...if you, if you want to talk in terms of language

DB: Aaa...so, language is talking to you (RG: yah), & through language

RG: Trees, trees

DB: history...the condition of the present, all that

RG: What does it mean to say, you know...that, their..."trees...speak, trees spoke...their minds stood before them"...or something like that, in "Canto XCII", or whatever it is..."trees...", something "spoke...their minds stood before them"***...yeah, I have some experience of the...of the...'concrete talking', doesn't everybody? If you walk down...can't walk '*down*' Times Square (DB: um hmm), but if you...walk along, walk a... 'around' Times Square? That's interesting...what would be in the middle of Times Square, that you could...get 'around' to?

DB: Traffic...

RG: You have to construct figures for any understanding of this, & the figures are obviously language, & they're made up, by you (DB: um hmm), for your own amusement & those of...some friends, on the spur of the moment...& this does *not* give you an adequate... 'account' of what that might be

DB: Well then how do you

RG: You raise an issue

DB: What about revision?

RG: Revisionment?

DB: Yeah...*revision*

RG: If it's *revisionment*...so that, it's like 'envisionment'...except that you...revise it, & see it,

** *Here*, Grenier is much mistaken; the Canto he is misremembering is *CVI*, & the misquoted passage actually reads: trees open, their minds stand before them and what RG 'has in mind' (but does not bother to say) is his hearing of Pound's voice (at the Spoleto Festival of Two Worlds in 1965, CMS Records, Inc. #619) in the mountains in Franconia, N.H. in 1971 (?) as *testimony* that such things 'have been', are resounding & can be. (RG)

anew & again...then, maybe, it would *help* you...& you could...language is a primary way of...getting at it

DB: But, at what?

RG: What-it-says-it-is!...I don't, obviously we *don't know*, you know...I mean, this is a primary, *old-time*, philosophical...condition &...a great question ...'what is something?'

DB: The 'it' must be...what they called, 'the...object'

RG: The 'object'

DB: And one...one's self, then, is the 'subject'

RG: The 'subject'...the active...hypothesizing, heavily...derivative &...conditioned...& determined 'subject'

DB: But the subject constitutes the object

RG: But the object constitutes the subject ...*(DB: um hmm)* & this is the primary meaning in Heidegger* ...& it's Aristotelian...a, in some sense...that you...know yourself...by—& this is also in Olson—that you know yourself by virtue of...where you are...& 'where you are' means...your position, relative to these 'what's' which, equally, actively condition you...& that's the truth of Hegelian or, you know, the whole, Marxist...determinism...is that, in fact, you find yourself in a certain set of physical historical conditions...*however*

DB: However, one can be deceived—that is, when the self constitutes its *(RG laughs)* objects, often

RG: I don't have

DB: there's a great deal of error, & yet *(RG: ohhh...)*, & yet the subject can also break through that

RG: The question of 'error'

DB: or that's the bet

RG: This is a really great...I would like to take 'Error' & make that a...kind of general...matrix for a series of discussions *(DB: um hmm)*...that's more interesting than a question like...“What's...what's good, now?”...or, what can you think of, that's happening, that...that, a...you'd like to...refrain from tearing apart?...something like that...that was a

* It is this very *slighting* of the subject's power to constitute the object, of course, which I (and others) find obscurantist in H., with its suggestion that all subjects are interchangeable before an identical object; class differences are thereby dismissed. *(DB)*

* I.e., the two together, 'subject' & 'object' released into a "clearing" & given to each other ("es gibt") by the "there is" that lights the possibility of their mutually determinative 'opposition'. *(RG)*

** Various & active journal edited by Andrew Schelling & Benjamin Friedlander, always a pleasure to read. *(RG)*

question *(DB: mmm)* for *Jimmy & Lucy's*...did you get that?

DB: I got *Jimmy & Lucy's House of "K" ?***

RG: Did you get the question? *(DB: oh...)* The question was, like...“What's...what's great, what's so hot, what's so *(DB: yeah)*...is there anything, that you could—stop tal-, stop tearing things down, for a minute *(DB: uh huh)*—is there anything that you...?”

DB: Want to build up?

RG: No, not necessarily, but...would just *leave alone* *(DB: um hmm)*...would refrain from destroying with, with your vicious...cogency...ability to see the flaws & *(DB: um hmm)* presumptions of?...Is there a literature that could be a *testament* to, to...at least the—for some reason, I would *stop* & not...& not destroy it

DB: Well, as I said earlier, I'm *glad* that there's a world that has blueberries in it *(RG: yah)*...I don't know, now I suppose if I were a blueberry expert, I might be worried about a way to improve the blueberry...but, I'm *not*

RG: But the blueberry isn't it

DB: Well, the blueberry is *an* it, I mean it really is there, we can both eat the blueberries

RG: When I think about the blueberry

DB: and *share* them

RG: *O, man*, when I think about the blueberry...what a, what a long...resonant chain of historical & sympathetic association I *have*, going back to...before I could talk, probably *(DB: yeah)*...& I think I was picking blueberries before I could *talk*, that's the way it seems...there were piney slopes, with...dappled sunlight coming through the

DB: Right, all that

RG: the Norway pine

DB: The taste of it...it keeps coming back to the fact that

RG: You could taste it!

DB: there's something in your mouth that...is a sense experience

RG: ...that the correlation between the smell of the pines & the taste of the blueberry, for example, is so exact & specific that...the 'blueberry' is just...this accidental record of my...experience of picking it in northern Minnesota...in lots of places—in Maine, for example—it doesn't grow, it grows by the water...& it has the sense of salt...salt-marsh smell *(DB: um hmm)* to it...in Maine, where it's much more profusely evident...but in Minnesota, in northern Minnesota, you would pick it, it would be associated with pines—whereas raspberries were associated with...bees, so that whenever you pick raspberries—

just like out here, whenever you pick blackberries, you have to worry about poison oak (DB: right)—but the ‘thing’ is so much the part of, the ‘product’, quote, of our activity...& so much of that is...historically determined, that...it doesn’t seem that there’s any room for ‘*the thing*’—just as, for example, what we are now seeing...‘the blueberry in a blue bowl’—or, *or* our ability to re-imagine it...I mean, at the one time ‘the thing’ is wiped out by the historical accident of its determined...condition, *and* by our... commercial use of it, for example, that now this blueberry is just a product (DB: um hmm) that costs...quite a lot of money

DB: It certainly does

RG: in, in...but I’m grateful, most supermarkets wouldn’t even have it (DB: um hm-*u*)...& who knows under what conditions it’s been grown, with what...encouragement...so, the whole thing is to re-imagine the ‘subject’ & the ‘object’ as *one*...actual...division, absolute division...& that’s the, that’s in Heidegger...that they are...‘*other*’...as in Heraclitus, the ‘war’ between the...various forces of existence...& that’s in Olson’s retelling of the Hesiod myth*

DB: I don’t know how absolutely I experience that division, since I experience myself as ‘other’ also, in a way

RG: Of course!

DB: and I can see that I’m

RG: As soon as it’s

DB: a person like “‘hello’ said the apple, both of us were object” in Spicer

RG: I would rather...just call ‘subject’ & ‘object’ ‘other’ & ‘other’...you know?

DB: Yes, but that’s not entirely the truth of it either, since one...has this experience, subjective experience, of being always present at these deliberations

RG: So does the ‘object’, probably

DB: *Well*...I don’t know

RG: This is in Heidegger...I mean, you’re talking about the “clearing” or the condition in which these...‘others’ occur...in their, in this...repulsion & attraction

DB: Well, back it up to the associations that you spoke of, as being so clear to you, that you have with blueberries...now, is something that you do in writing to...manifest these associations?...that are...after all, particular, not to yourself only, but to other persons, say, who’ve grown up in...northern Minnesota...or

* “MAXIMUS, FROM DOGTOWN--IV”. (RG)

Maine...or, what?

RG: Thanks for these questions

DB: Uh huh...what are these...? What is this, a...? What’s the application of this to writing?

RG: None!

DB: None. Ah!

RG: None, except that you learn what ‘mental’...forebears have thought...in order to

DB: Aha, a bit like phenomenological association

RG: That’s the truth in Pound, is that you read in order to disavow...you read in order to...honor by...‘othering’...I mean, what you don’t want to fall into, & so...I mean, I’m so, so *thick* wth historical association that...it just falls away, when you write, it’s just like the ‘veil falls away’...& for that...*time*, there’s an *identity* between the...‘subject’ & the ‘object’, the ‘language’ & the...‘thing’...& this is enacting itself...through you, with your...heartfelt &...devout participation

DB: Well, you speak of this as though it were (RG laughs)...something that could be counted on, in the way that I know that if I go swimming laps, that within half an hour...my respiration will have changed its nature, & so forth...so...but is it, actually, always the case that...all one has to do is to sit down at the typewriter, under the kind of...aegis or (RG: *no*) panoply of ‘Writing’ & this will deliver itself...?

RG: Well, I’m not speaking prescriptively (DB: um mmm) or projectively, at all...I’m speaking as one who, whose circumstance is completely fraught with various peril...&...I want to make a *record of what I have experienced*...to make a...bald statement of it—as, I have experienced this condition & it is possible—but, I haven’t written anything for months, & have been ‘on the go’...instead

DB: But the relation between...say, in *A Day At The Beach*, one of the most interesting ways that it works for me...is the play of meanings, or relation, say, among the six pieces...on each page

RG: Sure, I looked at that

DB: and always the question, or the risk or perhaps the peril...that, there is no relation there, or that the relation I...find in it isn’t the relation intended...Now, that’s not a big risk, actually, in reading...I mean, the worst that can happen is that one can...‘get it wrong’, ‘make a mistake’ or ‘be in error’...ah... if I were driving a car & I made that kind of mistake, then there’s...peril of another order

RG: That’s what I thought, when I was out running today (DB: uh huh) (mutual laughter), if I was driving a car...‘*like this*’...I wouldn’t get here as

fast as, as...because I would probably...run into something, or they would run into me

DB: But then, the risk one takes in writing, & in reading, poetry...is of a *symbolic* order...I mean, it *means*, in some way, 'other risks'...the 'risks of Being'...*alive*

RG: Yeah...I'm grateful for your articulateness, today...I wish, I wish...I *hope* I can

DB: Well, to some extent I

RG: These are wonderful...questions that you're asking, &

DB: But they're questions, you see, that come up, to my mind, in reading your work (RG: yeah), but it's, they come up *to me*...because (RG: um hmm) I recognize...these aspects of your work, since I recognize them (munches berries) with my own address to writing (RG: um hmm) &...I'm very interested, also, in...oh, various kinds of 'angle'...in relation...so that *this* part of the poem

RG: "Tight Corners", for example (DB: a huh), is a...& also, it seems—& that's a question I had for you, is...you know, in relation to this 'other'...bit, in part, was—the *apparent*, if you look at the, the...just if you lay your books out in a row...& one were to pick them up & read them, in sequence...*very... quickly*, or something, & in order to make, make a... 'rough map' (DB clears throat) of the terrain, in order to... 'get the better of them' (DB: mmm), one might...come to the conclusion that this fellow was making a series of willful...*forms*, there was such variousness in the (DB: um hmm), in the *look*, & the whole 'tack' & what each one...sets itself as a...not a 'problem' but as a...thing to do, so, the...decisiveness that you were speaking to, the other night, relative to—& I believe you said that there are times when one does have to make a decision—would, *to me*, be much more...the 'background' of those, that series of...works...*than* any sense that you had simply decided to...write 'something else' because... 'you wanted to'...there is a point in that discussion where...there was a complicated question asked, "What's the difference between what 'could have been', 'might have been', 'should have been' (DB: uh huh)...& what *actually happened*?"...& there was a pause...& then you say—resoundingly, & gloriously—"Me!" (DB: uh huh)...& at that moment, I, I'm swept away, myself as well, with...with the...*glory* of the...of the happenstance, of happening to be the place where...you see a number of different things happening, &...you *decide* for one, like...you'll

take it, out of its... 'nexus of possibilities' &...make it, make it *happen*...so, I see these as different kinds of, *stuff* that you've been doing...you're really, in that sense, like...it's selected out of some, of a range of— & each one bears witness to the 'others', to the range of the 'others'—because of the, sort of, a...it's a, it's almost a—*what is that?*—it's not a 'fan-like shape', it's like a shape of, a...shape it's in is

DB: Or like the, "Hey, ya...how many cards can you hold in your hand?"

RG: Yeah, or like the '*colors*' when they come, when they first used to come out, on color television (DB: ummm)—when, when, when, when, the, the, the, the, the, *the wing* would unfold, &

DB: More like a spectrum that that was throwing on you—the crystal in the window, a little while ago

RG: Yeah, it's in any one

DB: —& so, light, after all, isn't seen that way, & yet, of course, it *is*...a way we see light, &

RG: *Of course it's a*

DB: we know quite a lot about light (RG: yeah) for, because of that...prism

RG: Yeah, a...

DB: I think that...of the *light* that's a...there's, I think that there's the same *light*, in a way, over all my work (RG: yah), & it really has to do with what we were talking about here a little while ago, which is, that through the strength of the 'subject', or force of the 'subject', to 'break through to the object'... despite (RG: 'subject' & 'object'...), despite the fact that one...that, any 'subject' constitutes the 'object'...still, I think it can be known, somehow, sometimes

RG: I don't know, I—you see, this is a problem—now...now, in Bruce Andrews'...*talk*, presented at...that's in the

DB: The "*Total Equals What*"?*

RG: Yah (DB: um hmm)...I mean, he starts out with this, *to me*, rather simple-minded &... 'final' statement of the 'fact' that the...subjects constitute

* See "Total Equals What: Poetics & Practice", *Poetics Journal* #6, pp. 48-61. E.g. (p. 49):

...That language, being social, being socially constructed, suggests that what's not possible is a condition of transparency or presence or the aura. Because meaning isn't naturally reflected in language; language is producing it actively. There isn't a natural or automatic possibility of presence. This ends up being a dream, an illusion of satisfaction. Instead, you have absence, displacement, the erosion of the aura.

(RG)

the object, & we all *know* this (DB: um hmm)—
'Now, the question is, what's to be made...by words,
with words?'—it's as though, again, the whole
problem was solved, in a very, let's say,
'idealistic'...I mean, that's what they used to call
Idealism

DB: Um hmm...well, no, certainly I think my
work as being, much more a kind of negative dialectics,
in which...both the positivist & the idealistic, ah,
'views' of what happens...are challenged, or

RG: Yeah, 'Positivism'

DB: thrown into perspective

RG: 'Positivism' is better than 'Idealism', it's a
more recent version...the late 19th Century determination
(DB: um hmm) that human subjectivity, in its
desire to make—of course, it isn't, now, any longer,
simply to make the world... 'perfect'

DB: Well, one puts too much weight on the
object, & the other too much weight on the subject

RG: But, *dissolve these conditions, of course*
(DB: um hmm), &...as a *prism* is...Is the *prism*, that
we were looking at...?

DB: Yeah

RG: —you can't see it, anymore, because the
sun is going down (laughs)—but we can see *it* better
now, it's just more like, less looks like...there's no
color, to speak of, except the...something of the
green...garden behind it

DB: Well, there's a poem for you...it's like
Steve Benson said, at the end of a poem, he said
..."sometimes I think it's a beautiful poem, some-
times I think it's a lot of words"...so that one can
(RG laughs) sometimes *read* & sometimes not...& I
have that experience with (RG: umm) poetry,
whether my own or other people's...sometimes 'the
sun isn't shining', & 'I can't see' the... 'spectrum'

RG: But the '*prism*' always exists...I mean, the
question in relation to *that* would be, like, is *that* the

DB: *Words on a page*

RG: Is the '*prism*' the 'words on the page'...&
if it *is* the words on the page, are they determined by
the...language pattern in the mind of the...of the
writer, only, or are they determined by the...
conditions of light that...allow them to be seen? The
fact that a... 'table lamp is on'...is sometimes very
significant...& a...the fact that you're 'as-', you're
'awake' rather than 'asleep'...that might be, sort of
'subjectively' (laughs)

DB: 'Asleep'?

RG: ...like a table lamp being on, or something
like that, & there's such a...I mean, the '*prism*', for
example, I would *never* summarize as 'subject'/

'object', or—or, you know, just a 'form' which
'creates its condition'—because it's so evident
that...that (plane flies over) *the Thing*...stands...
'between'...between 'you' & the 'thing', & partakes
of, of this...'double measure'—if you couldn't see it,
it wouldn't exist/if...the light didn't shine through it,
you couldn't see it

DB: When I think of the self, I think, one thing
I think, is that...or, in relation to my work, that the
more various the forms throughout their...(RG: yeah)
whole sequence of books

RG: So it seems

DB: the more one sees the persistence of a *self*
(RG: oh...oh!...yeah!) through the variety of forms,
but also, how that self is *changed*...by different
'contexts'...I mean, something like being married
four times

RG: I think 'the *self*' is completely unknown...I
mean, 'the self' is, is like, a

DB: But, discoverable, at all? Or that

RG: —No!—so much a matter of the hand, the
'genetic code' one physically lives...in specific
conditions of warmth & sound, or snow or...which,
but...*but 'blind'* totally, & '*blind*' basically, despite
all that

DB: You have no way to look at your work,
say...I mean, for *others* to look at your work, surely,
or for myself (RG: yeah), is to say, now, one way I
could...reify my experience of it, would be to
say...'These patterns *are*, in some sense, this person

RG: Oh, that's

DB: and this person is, like, generous...enough,
& hard-working enough...& relaxed enough (RG
laughs) to be able to show...his fellow, beings
...something of the kind of patterning, that *we*
all...are—not that 'I'm' 'you'...but that, we are
similarly constituted

RG: Well, I would say, that the...'yourself-
among-themselves'—this sort of compound noun—is
made in your work...& that...both of these, ah, 'poles'
or 'together conditions-of-persons' are...constructed
& (DB: um hmm) borne witness to, by the... *all the*
stuff, of course, all of these different...ways of seeing
them...I mean, the 'statement' in your work is al-...is,
is...*basically* '*social*' (laughs), like they used to say

DB: I think that's true...yeah, I agree

RG: ...it thinks that the *base*, it thinks the base
of...*exchange*, amongst persons, but in a very...in a
number of different ways, sometimes...for you, you
were, you were—you '*opened the dark side*', in our
other discussion, by saying...that you questioned the
idea of whether 'art is good for us' (DB: oh) or

'writing is good for us'

DB: Well, it's been good for me

RG: and, a

DB: *I think* (RG: un huh)...that is a decision, ah, I came to (RG: mmm) again, recently—of course, all of these conditions can be reversed...or revised—but I, thinking of my life, I see that

RG: You always see that, in a situation

DB: myself *cohered*, more...with a commitment to poetry—now, perhaps any commitment...would have helped it 'cohere'—it's like (RG: teaching!) someone says, "When you *die*

RG: Well, teaching helps it cohere

DB: you have to meet death with your whole self'...& this is *why* there're so many 'death-bed conversions'...it's not, so simply, a matter of 'cowardice' or 'copping out' or (RG: no, no), or, like, 'hedging your bets' at the last moment

RG: People say, "He was always a Catholic!" (DB: yeah!)...that's what they say

DB: It's a side of the self that is repressed, but you have to...if you have time to meet death—like Lawrence says, "build your ship of death"—that's an image of this wholeness, where you have to

RG: Are you *Catholic*?

DB: No...I wasn't *raised* Catholic

RG: But the meaning of 'catholic' would apply (DB: uh huh, yeah, I suppose) very well

DB: Well, I think Jung was 'catholic'...& I'm now using his thought, on this (plane flies over), because it does intrigue me, that (RG: well, of course...)...*I mean, it's easy enough to*

RG: *Like, it's much more accurate than 'various'*, for example, as a kind of (DB: mmm, a ha), you know (DB: yeah, right), 'sign' onto that (plane flies off)

DB: Well, I guess I want to...have my whole self together...not 'idealistically' (RG: yah), I hope, just that, the more—I mean, to take an extreme case of, mmm...human experience, there's this book, *Sybil*...about a woman who had 16 different selves, & had them all...*named*, & had different behaviour, & *memory*, systems that went along with each...I don't feel, at all, like that—well, I don't feel very much like that, but I feel something like that—& so, for *me*, to find some activity where I could have, ah...like a 'coherence' of these various (RG: ahh) ways (RG: mmm) has been very useful

RG: Well, the 'dark side', of course, would be—& this is another, 'stock'... 'psychology...chunk' (DB: um hmm), to set 'with', or 'on top of', or...or 'in a clump' with (DB: 'club the universe') the idea

that everyone wants to go back to the primordial, initial condition from which, from which *all sprang* (DB: um hmm), evidenced, in life, for each of us by 'the womb' (DB: mmm)—the other sense is that, if one were released into this...catholicity of...moving bodies, one might become *terrified* by (DB: yes), by the...*void* of...existence, & stumble blindly into...catatonia, via schizophrenia (DB: uh huh)...because there was just too much 'freedom' (DB: um hmm)...but I don't feel *that* in your work

DB: *No*

RG: ...meaning, although

DB: Hard to work in that condition

RG: How come this...variousness is not...is not ang-...is not productive of 'angst'?

DB: Well, it is, in me (both chuckle)...I don't know, if the 'angsscht', if the 'Angssht' doesn't show in the work...perhaps it's not there because it's too threatening

RG: 'Angst'...

DB: 'Angsscht'...

RG: That's, a... 'Sud-Deutsch', or something like that

DB: What I'm saying? (RG: yeah)...it's possible. My stepmother was Swiss

RG: 'Angsscht'... 'Angsscht'...

DB: so maybe I learned some of my German pronunciation from her

RG: that's the strangest thing...so, you don't mind if it's too... 'strange', or...?

DB: Well, of course if it's *too* strange, I mind it...yeah

RG: You "mind it"...if it's strange (DB: yeah), mmm...well, it could be productive of...also, an extraordinary mental activity...I should think

DB: But, to hark back a bit, I never sat down, that I can recall, &... 'invented' a form—that seems to be impossible, like raising yourself by your own bootstraps

RG: Well, how would you tell it was an 'invention'...as, over against—because others 'voted' that...it wasn't the case?—or, how can ya tell?—that's like 'error'—how could you, how could you even bad-mouth your—how could you even *be*—how could you be 'in error'...by just making something up? If you call that, something 'in error', you always have to define it in relation to something that you say is *not* in error...is a...is 'correct'...& each time you do that, you make a, mmm, judgment, which is equally...part of the activity of the organism, & so...the same *mi-*, the same *head*...*says* 'error' and/or 'judgment', & so, this leads me (DB: uh huh),

'this leads me' (DB: mm hmm) to...this other question that I had for you, which was...Could you expand a bit on your statement that...or your raising of the question of, whether art is...or may not be...'good for us'? Ofttimes we talk, I tend to talk, in...in glorious terms about, ah, the *virtues* of these seldom...actualized...possibilities

DB: Well, I certainly know a list of...I guess, aphorisms, about art...oh, well, it's "to purify the language of the tribe", or it's "the clarity of the head that we want"...& so on, I mean, there're all these

RG: It's to bring...the world into existence ...through our participatory (DB: um hmm)...con-juring

DB: So, I have...a lot of mistrust of these ...generalizations, though from...each in its own context...can be understood much more fully—that is, there are distinct limits, uh, on, poetry is..."emotion recollected in tranquillity", but in the context of Wordsworth's work, it makes a lot of sense (RG: yah)...& also, I'd say, in the historical context, that is, one way I have of understanding that work, is...you know, that he's in response, or reaction, to, say, Lockean thought (RG: mmm)—so, ok...now, I'm trying to back it up, to something else

RG: But I've always

DB: But, like, to...undo the...iron hand of the ideal with...just the ideal of one's own experience is, somehow...in a way, being all one can testify from...is that, ah, I've felt...I've felt more *coherent*, & less *anxious*, & more '*organized*', in a way that I...appreciate...since...feeling committed to poetry, both as a reader of it, & as one who writes it (pause)...so I would say, just from my own experience, yes, I think it's good for me, &...I can't...in a sense, it's simple-minded, but, I think it is...but what else?...was there to do?...any number of things...I could have made a lot of money, I suppose...& it may

RG: I wonder about that

DB: it may just be, you know, that whatever one

RG: I used to say that to myself, "I could make a lot, I could have made a *mint*", you know..."I could have gone to law school"... "I could have..."

DB: *that whatever one*

RG: sometimes I wonder, I don't think I, I don't think I '*could have*', because I would have refused to...at some point, I would have made a *mess* of it, by...by, ah, just undermining it, at exactly the moment when it reached

DB: Yeah, *sure*...ok...but let's assume there's a social identity, so that one could say, "I has made a

lot of money"...you know, like "I has made a lot of poetry", "I has made a lot of mistakes", & so forth

RG: "I has breathed"...(DB: yeah), "I has had...I has taken breath"

DB: "...and thought has taken me" (RG sighs)

RG: But I always thought, you know, in a sense, that your work was

DB: Well, I said in the interview*

RG: in a very...homegrown, & primordial fashion, 'deconstructive'...that is, that the entry often comes from (DB: yes)...from...not merely combat-ing—or not combating, really—but simply re-thinking what was presented to you, & presenting that *back*, to what was...then, faced with the problem of reconsidering its...& re-thinking, *itself*, & so...that was—I love it, & I like to talk, for that reason

DB: Well, the big problem

RG: I love the rhythms, as for example, you'd written about Steve (Benson), that...(DB: uh huh) just...immersing oneself in the pat-...in the *sound* of an exchange...I always love to do...but—& I do like to talk to you, that way—but I'm *more* interested in the way in which something is never...taken...simply, on its own terms

DB: Well, there's various ways of immersing oneself in a social exchange...& I must say, I enjoy following the bouncing ball...uh, *more*

RG: I've never known you, I've *never* known you to (laughs)

DB: Really? No, no, you're sure?

RG: to "follow the bouncing ball" very...I mean...very long

DB: Well, you know "whose ball"...& "which bounces"? I follow the bouncing ball, as I see it bounce...more so than I'm doing now, where I have a distinct sense of...keeping myself on track

RG: But you're already thinking about the next thing, you're already thinking about the...the 'other', in that respect

DB: That's an old anxiety...you mean the 'next' thing *in time*?...or the thing 'next' to me, proximate to me?

RG: No...the next thing that (child's voice, outside)...that...that, sort of (phone rings loudly), that sort of *str-*

DB: There's the next thing

* See DB's written exchange with Tom Beckett in the David Bromige Issue of *The Difficulties*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 29-39. (RG)

Readings & Reviews

WHEN NEW TIME FOLDS UP

by Kathleen Fraser, Chax Press, 1993,
86 pages, \$11 paper.

A sense of mystery and discovery underscores the text of *when new time folds up*. Kathleen Fraser's lyric poems are interspersed with letters, quotations, fragments of explanation, and the effect of reading the work evokes the feeling of participating in an archeological dig. As in an excavation, what is probematized is the constructions of history.;

How does one go about reassembling the fragments uncovered in the excavation? The task requires one to decide how to compartmentalize and separate the areas of knowledge. Possibly the most tempting method of organization is to correlate chronology with strata — the youngest are near the surface, the oldest are at the bottom. The result of this organization scheme is a privileging of the hidden — the deepest, most hidden layers — and a devaluation of the surface. In *when new time folds up*, Fraser suggests that such an organization scheme is limiting because it confines the finds to the layers in which they were discovered, and it reduces everything to simple, discrete, and ultimately separate groups. In Fraser's view, the exciting part of an archeological investigation is realizing that the layers are not completely separable.

The layers containing the archeological discoveries — the relics of pottery, ceremonial pieces, funerary material, as well as the fragments of written language — cannot be considered in isolation. The materials pervade the other layers — perhaps by mechanical means (recycling, mixing), perhaps by the use, the adoption of the materials by later cultures. The persistence of influence is not an easily mappable quantity; ancient Etruscan pieces may be mixed with scraps of letters from a

later age. Furthermore, the influence may migrate — fragments of Etruscan culture may be found far away. Fraser suggests that the fragmentary, scattered, and irreducible quality of an archeological investigation may be the source of a deeper understanding about the nature of our understanding of time. Time is not a simple line, neither do cultural developments proceed in a simple-to-complex fashion. Instead, Fraser questions the notion of evolution. In fact, she suggests that the Etruscans possessed a spiritual life and a set of beliefs that may be virtually ungraspable by a mind trained to trust only empirical evidence.

When new time folds up is divided into three sections. The first, "Etruscan Pages," confines itself primarily to the experience of uncovering Etruscan antiquities. Of the three sections, it is the most specifically archeological, and in it, Fraser concerns herself with questions of representation and signification. How does one assign meaning to a shape, or a series of inscriptions in a writing without a Rosetta stone, or a key to interpretation? In a letter describing her thoughts and dreams upon living near the cliff tombs a Norchia, Fraser recounts what a classical archeologist told her about the Etruscan language: "We still have no idea,...beyond family names and lineage or sometimes an inscription to a particular god or goddess ... one doesn't have much to go on, with tombs as your main reference" (28). And yet, there is something decipherable in the Etruscan texts, and in the fact that Etruscan foundations underlie the "severe parabola" of Roman arches. What is decipherable is history — it is not, perhaps, the clearly organized chronology of invasions and sackings. Instead, it is the awareness that human history is the history of the body — the stuff of textbook history has little or nothing to do with how history affects our own living bodies. We are touched by the fragmentary relics of the past: "Tight fist that held you,/you entirely separate — // what is mortal / in this body" (48).

The second section, "Giotto: Arena" incorporates a more medieval aesthetic than the one operative in

"Etruscan Pages." Fraser opens with a passage from Dante's *Inferno*, which foregrounds the tension between narrative and symbol. In this passage, the reader is cured that this is a polysemous text — that is, it contains a multiplicity of potential interpretations and meanings. By referring to Dante, Fraser alerts the reader that part of her project involves questioning the manner in which allegory functions. The *Convivio*, Dante explored how one can learn to read transformationally. The strategies for reading that Dante developed were not new — they had been in place since at least the time of St. Augustine, whose *City of God* and *De Doctrina Christiana*, spell out the nature of signs, and how one might interpret signs and symbols in order to connect the text to ethical, theological, and moral significations. The purpose of the allegory is essentially directional — it allows one to ascend from the fallen, corrupt earth to the realm of perfection, the realm of the spheres. This is a Platonic conception even more fully developed by Neo-Platonic thinkers. Fraser seems to be simultaneously employing and questioning the Neo-Platonic tradition in this section, which is set in the Vatican, a place where one might expect to find confirmation of two things: first, a Neo-Platonic idea of how one might gain an understanding of the realm of perfection, and second, an orderly, Dantesque, medieval cosmology where one's relation to the divine (and to the profane) is always clearly mapped. Such orderly notions of the world are questioned by Fraser in this section, and even more so in the third and final section, "when new time folds up."

In her final section, Fraser depicts a chaotic, yet possibility-filled world. The period of time which is under investigation is the present, and it is a vigorous one, containing the "high whine of electric saw on false marble" and an "old Smith-Corona crumpled in a heap." Although the book's organization — progressing from the Etruscan to the modern cities of Rome and Berlin — suggests a linear, chronological organization of time and history, there are indications that the past intrudes into

the present, that "a city's constant / and hidden remove" lies "beneath construction." The difficulties for the poet are in how to represent the complexities of time, and to create a discourse that shows how time does not merely repeat, but seems to fold in upon itself. Fraser's techniques suggest that one must, to a certain degree, recreate the form and appearance of an excavation. Further, *when new time folds up* asks the reader to consider that collage, fragmentation, inverted syntax are the most effective when combined with letters, overheard conversations, scraps of journal entries, which interject a hint of autobiography and the presence of living, breathing bodies.

SUSAN SMITH NASH

A HUNDRED FLOWERS by Janet Gray, Thumbscrew Press, 100 pages, \$11.95 paper

A Hundred Flowers explores the body's transformations, and how language may posit the capacity for change, even when the alterations are slight, and they occur, not in a world of constructivist text, but in one where poetic language possesses a more concrete anchor in the tangible world of fervent bodies and fragile lives.

There are surreal relations to self and to others, and these relations

reinforce the body's transformative capacity. In "XXVI," as in the other individual flowers, or poems, Janet Gray utilizes poetic form to suggest various states of being, and she conterposes unity with isolation. "XXVI" consists of seven stanzas: six couplets, followed by a single line. The lines are brief, and yet, in the first stanza, a condition of broken unity and of rupture is introduced:

The bride is sleeping rolled up in a blanket.
The groom notably absent

To reinforce the impression that the condition of the married couple is flowed, and that this condition contains implications about how it is that we view unity, and that the loss of unity reflects our notions about the state of language, Gray creates a spare, Imagistic collage of objects, which include "wings, beaks, antennae, pseudopods." The effect is essentially lyrical.

In the one hundred poems, there is almost a refusal to engage in an extended narrative, or to appeal to archetype, myth, or other language patterns which carry with them long chains of allusions and associations. This is, as Marjorie Perloff points out, an Objectivist strategy, which Gray employs with dexterity — an almost easy virtuosity. The technique could begin to seem somewhat facile, particularly when faced with one hundred such po-

ems. However, Gray avoids that pitfall by concerning herself with issues of gender inequities, and the tendency of the female body to be broken, violated, and "the skin of the breast / turned to salt" (98). What happens to the female body in *A Hundred Flowers* reminds one of what Simone de Beauvoir suggests in *The Second Sex*. De Beauvoir proposes that in a culture hostile to the work of women artists, whose work is perceived to be ideologically threatening and destabilizing to a locus of power, the women who dare to be artists will feel enormous, destructive forces which will seek to damage the will as well as the artist's own body.

In *A Hundred Flowers*, Gray stretches the limits of flesh and body in "a late mutation of the mind" (17). The condition of the body replicates the condition of language in this work: there is "a chasm through her" (64). Implicit in the form of the work is the desire to create a poetic language which reaches across language's rifts. By making frequent use of the language of rupture, erosion, and violence, Gray emphasizes that the task of unifying the poetic body with the mind's mutations is a difficult one. Her work also suggests that despite the advances of feminism, our culture still makes it dangerous and painful for a woman to produce art or poetry.

SUSAN SMITH NASH

JOURNALS RECEIVED

Abacus #77. \$3.00. Ed: Peter Ganick. 181 Edgemont Ave. Elmwood, CT 06110; Jefferson Hansen's *Three Poems*, 1993.

Abacus #78. \$3.00. Ed: Peter Ganick. 181 Edgemont Ave. Elmwood, CT 06110; David Bromige's *Romantic Traceries*, 1993.

ACM #26. \$8.00. Eds. Barry Silesky and Sharon Solwitz; 3709 N. Kenmore, Chicago, IL 60613.

Apperances #21. \$5.00. Eds: Robert Witz, Joel Lewis, et al. 165 West 26th St., NY, NY 10001; Mike Topp's *Local Boy Makes Good*.

Asylum Annual, 1994. \$12.95. Ed: Greg Boyd. P.O. Box 6203, Santa Maria, CA 93456.

Arshile #2. \$10.00. Ed: Mark Salemo. P.O. Box 3749, Los Angeles, CA 90078.

Context South #3, #1. Three Issues \$10.00. Ed: David Breeding. P.O. Box 4504, Kerrville, TX 78028.

First Intensity #1. \$9.00. Ed: Lee Chapman. P.O. Box 140713, Staten Island, NY 10314.

Five Fingers Review #12, "Place, Displacement, Travel and Exile". \$9.00. Eds: John High & T. Lovell. P.O. Box 15426, San Francisco, CA 94115.

Hot Bird MFG. Vol. 2, #17. Ed: Ray Di Palma; from Pierre Alferi's *Les Allures Naturelles* (tns. from the French by Cole Swensen).

Hot Bird MFG. Vol. 2, #19. Ed: Ray Di Palma; from Olivier Cadiot's *L'Art Poetic* (tns. from the French by Cole Swensen).

House Organ #5. No price given. Ed: Kenneth Warren. 1250 Belle Ave. Lakewood, OH 44107.

Letterbox #2. \$4.50. Ed: Scott Bentley. 3791 Latimer Pl. Oakland, CA 94609.

Lift #13. \$18.00 (Four Issues). Ed: Joseph Torra. 10-Rear Oxford St., Somerville, MA 02143.

Lingo #2. \$12.50. Eds: Jonathan Gams & Michael Gizzi. P.O. Box 184, West Stockbridge, MA 02166.

O ARS #9. \$6.00. Ed: Don Wellman. 21 Rockland Rd. Weare, NH 03281.