

KYLE SCHLESINGER

NEW PARADIGMS FROM THE OUTSET: AN INTERVIEW WITH STEVE CLAY

Steve Clay is an editor, writer, curator and director of the legendary Granary Books, specializing in artists' books, poetry and books-about-books. In the autumn of 2004, he traveled from New York to London to give the keynote at the Small Publishers Fair at Red Lion Square organized by Martin Rogers. He brought a glorious showcase of books, including mock-ups and printer's proofs. Geraldine Monk, Alan Halsey, Alec Finlay, Redell Olson, Simon Cutts, Tim Atkins and I gave readings in the Bertrand Russell Room. Before flying back to Berlin the next day, I had the opportunity to interview Clay at a quaint Quaker bed and breakfast near the British Library on October 24, 2004.

KS: I'm interested in the intersection of ontology and the book — particularly the question of *how*, *where*, and *in what sense* it exists. I feel that most books, particularly the handmade, exude a residual element of collaboration long after the printer and papermaker, typesetter and binder, calligrapher and lithographer, etc. have done their work. At Granary, you've clearly taken collaboration to another level — one that reflects a highly personal sense of involvement that exceeds the nuts and bolts of logistical coordination. "Personable publishing," for lack of a better phrase, is like curating in some respects, insofar as its a form of art all too often overlooked.

You've brought a mindful understanding of the material and social relationships at work in the book into Granary's publications for two decades — not merely putting scores of important texts into circulation, but helping artist and writers realize the books they want to produce. In other words, you've facilitated new collaborations between poets, artists, scholars

and artisans in a way that few contemporary publishers could. Could you talk a bit about the impetus for a particular collaboration?

SC: They range from blood and guts stories to more amiable tales. There's one that comes to mind immediately, a collaboration between Trevor Winkfield and Larry Fagin entitled *Dig & Delve* (1999). I keep a wish list of people I'd like to work with, and when the occasion arises that I meet or fortuitously bump into someone here or there, things start to happen. Trevor and Larry were on the list and one day Larry phoned, nervously explaining, "Well, I've got a project I wanted to propose to you and I know you don't usually take work this way, but I thought I would propose it anyways. I really want to work on this idea for a book with Trevor." I said, "Great! Let's meet. That's fine." He said, "Really? That's all there is to it?" He sounded somewhat surprised by the simplicity of it all, but yes, that was it.

When we met, Larry was very concerned. He wanted to know precisely the point size, line length, the number of lines on a page, exactly how the text would flow through Trevor's construct and how it would retrofit his text. He was curious as to how he might compose for the line, the line breaks and so forth throughout the book. I thought it was interesting for an experimental writer like Larry to kind of nurse his text into position.

KS: So they worked together on this project specifically for Granary?

SC: Well, not entirely "specifically" in that sense, insofar as they've known and worked with each other for thirty-five years. They've been in the same kind of milieu for a long time as are many of the people with whom I work, so in that way the collaboration is so entrenched in their relationship that to make a book is almost second nature. It's an opportunity to work more formally, or to realize another kind of collaboration that has been in process from the outset.

Another instance is a collaboration between Lyn Hejinian and Emily Clark entitled *The Traveler and the Hill and the Hill* (1998). I had Lyn on the list, but I hadn't heard of Emilie Clark at that time. Lewis Warsh had mentioned that he had been out in California where he had been to visit Lyn. He said that she was working on a wonderful project with Emilie, and suggest that it may be perfect for Granary. Emilie had been sitting at a reading of Lyn's and had a strong visual response to the literary work. She asked if she could begin doing some kind of monotypes without any expectation of publication, exhibition or anything of the sort, she just found it a fascinating way to produce new work. She took fifteen of Lyn's poems, which were sort of aphoristic

or fable-like, and made fifteen images. Then I visited, saw it and immediately wanted to publish it. Later, Emilie produced fifteen additional images. Lyn wrote fifteen more texts based loosely on those new images and it became another deeply entrenched collaboration.

Another beautifully titled book, *Yodeling into a Kotex* (2003), is clearly a product of the sixties. Ron Padgett and George Schneeman totally worked together on the page in real time, marking each other's work, adding new work, both working with text and images with a total acknowledgement that Ron was the poet and George was the artist. They took the page as a field, and worked with it together. They collaborated on this book in 1969, made one copy, put it in a drawer and forgot about it. We were shown the book, among some other work when we were preparing a checklist on the work of Ted Berrigan. When we met with George Schneeman, he brought out this book along with some other works he had done with Ted, including one called *In the Nam, What Can Happen?* which we also printed in a small edition as a poets' or artists' book in 1997. This led to another book with George published very recently called *Painter Among Poets* (2004), referring, of course, to Marjorie Perloff's book *Poet Among Painters* about Frank O'Hara. During five years or so, from 1968-73, Schneeman collaborated with the East Village poets and really did a remarkable body of work that has very rarely been seen. It's a unique body of work from that geographic location from that period of time and I think it deserves more attention. I think this monograph aims in that general direction.

KS: Were all of these books printed letterpress?

SC: Well, letterpress is less and less central to literary publishing right now. I mean, it's a *form* among forms — a *possibility* among possibilities. In the seventies, the balance was certainly more weighted towards letterpress printing among the small presses. But another way to say that would be that among those who were doing letterpress printing at that time, it was always hard for me to find printers who were publishing literature that I was interested in reading. From a personal perspective, the fact of a book being letterpress wasn't as important to me as the writing. Today, the balance is tipped even further. I think it is even harder to find letterpress people who are interested in bringing innovative writing and visual art together in bookworks.

KS: This is one aspect of your work at Granary that makes the overall project so remarkably singular among contemporary publishers. Granary is exceptional insofar as it has set a precedent for innovative bookworks by way of example, while it has actively advanced the range of historical and scholarly frameworks for thinking about the history (and futurity) of the book through the critical editions you've published for the last decade or so.

SC: There's still a lot of room for writing on the book, insofar as it seems we're still limited by too little critical discourse, and even information such as interviews, straight writing and reviews about these sorts of contextual intersections. I think that there's a general lack of synthesis between straight literary reviews of poetry that appear in literary magazines, and the more formal reviews that are published in the few periodicals there may still be on letterpress printing. In journals such as *Fine Print*, for example, reviews tended to present a more formal approach to print-

ing, design concepts, paper, etc.

KS: It's that classic Cartesian split. I was recently editing an essay on artists' books, and as I was looking over the bibliography it occurred to me that it would not have been possible to write this sort of essay without Granary. There were, for example, numerous references to *A Book of the Book* (2000), *The Century of Artists' Books* (1995), *A Secret Location on the Lower East Side* (1998) and *The Cutting Edge of Reading* (1999). Granary has that certain edge, insofar as there's a very particular editorial, or perhaps curatorial, emphasis on the book as object, concept, means and end. Print is a poetic, visual and material expression in time, but in your estimation, what are the vanishing points or blind spots now on the horizon in the advancement of the discourse of the book arts?

SC: It seems that there are still so many possibilities that it's really hard to narrow them down. I remember Johanna Drucker saying, as we were very recently republishing *The Century of Artists' Books* (2004), that when it first came out about ten years ago, it felt like it was at a moment when an incredible amount of energy and interest was in the air. It felt like there was a renaissance, kind of an apex in the mid-nineties when there was so much interest in artists' books that we thought that this would be the first of many volumes by various authors. We were in a hurry to get it out because the atmosphere was so lively, and it came out just as Riva Castleman's *A Century of Artists Books* was being published. Castleman's book has a different angle, but shares in a certain amount of overlap with Drucker's. Nevertheless, *The Century of Artists' Books* and Castleman's *A Century of Artists Books* were still just taking up two parts of a pie. We were really hoping other people would rush in to take up those other portions, and

it hasn't happened aside from some of the books you just mentioned. I see those as sketching out the territory to some extent, but I still think its a little odd that there hasn't been some more academic work in this area.

KS: Then there are younger people like Craig Dworkin, whose *Reading the Illegible* (2003) was recently published by Northwestern. Its not a study of the artists' book, but the ideologies of people like Jerome McGann, Susan Compton and Johanna Drucker are clearly in the background, insofar as materiality is almost an innate component of his research, a bedrock in his figuring of how illegibility acts within a branching poetic plateau. I think Craig's book its indicative of a kind of working criticism that is very much on the horizon, while works like Marjorie Perloff's *Radical Artifice* (1991), Michael Davidson's *Ghostlier Demarcations* (1997), or Katherine Hayle's *Writing Machines* (2002) work in a kind of eclectic constellation. Scholarly works like Craig's make its clear that the book *is* a form, that language *is* visible, and that the process, politics and technologies acting on the writer affect how "what" gets written, and yet he's not really required to make the same persuasive argument people were making ten or fifteen years ago.

SC: I was talking to Clive Phillpot yesterday. Clive was the librarian at MOMA for a number of years — you must know his work to some extent? He's now working here in England, he's British, and has been back here for about ten years now. He left MOMA at a very high point in his career, having just acquired the Franklin Furnace Archive and had recently secured major funding for ongoing acquisitions and research in artists' books. In my mind, he was also a key polemicist, in some ways

creating a divide between the Ruscha model (a purist, conceptualist, cheap democratic multiple) of the artists' book as exemplary — almost to the exclusion of everything else. I mean, that is his baby, and we've kind of always been arguing against that. It couldn't have *only* started with Ruscha, and it couldn't *only* include that. Its a hallmark work, and its a certain type of work, but its not everything.

Just to sketch that in a little bit, what was interesting in talking to him yesterday afternoon, has to do with the fact that he said he was going to do some writing and I asked him if he was going to be writing about artists' books. He said, "No, I've basically said what I've had to say and I've been repeating myself for twenty years." But that's interesting, because I've certainly been sensing it as well. He said, "I think its time for a new paradigm, but I'm not sure what it is, and I'm not the person to be talking about it and discussing it." But in conversation with various people, and just in my own work at Granary, it became evident to me that there was clearly a new paradigm in the air during the mid-nineties.

I had been exhibiting books as art in a Soho gallery context for five or six years, and received very little serious response from the art world. I had almost felt something of an antagonistic response — as if I were doing something wrong in some funny way. So, not to blame Clive, but what was happening at Printed Matter was somehow right, good, purist in a way — as if there were some moral purpose behind it all. Meanwhile, what was happening at places like Granary or the Center for Book Art, places that were somehow more inclusive, were perceived as somehow just off the mark. Not in a good way, but in a way that just didn't work. I felt that the

art world somehow thought that what we were doing was wrong, but as soon as we started doing literary readings, the poets *completely* took it in.

KS: The readings in Granary's gallery?

SC: Not just the readings, the whole project: the exhibits, the books, the printing, the structure, the form . . . everything that Granary was about was almost self-evident to the poets, while it caused a lot of head scratching from the art world. That's when I realized that the connection between writing and the book was enormously important and wasn't just incidental. That was ten years ago, and now working with Jerome Rothenberg and reuniting with poets like Charles Bernstein and Johanna Drucker, and other writers who are more aware of the totality of the book — writers for whom writing isn't disembodied content on a computer screen that can be printed out and disseminated in any way. These writers are very concerned with the way writing is presented. I'm thinking in very general terms, and as I say these things I'm aware of about a million arguments against it, but in general, it was very satisfying working with them at that time.

So now, I'm continuing to work in the interest of bringing writing decisively back into Granary, whereas the first batch of publications were more visual, and writing was less central in some ways. Right? Yesterday I had great conversations with people like Simon Cutts or Susan Johanknecht from Gefn Press and I find it exciting to meet with people such as yourself who share in this particular affinity; people who know the book inside out historically, people who've also made paper, sewn bindings, set type, etc. Susan is particularly interesting as an example because she was so

close to Claire Van Vliet, and came out of a high craft tradition. Now, nearly twenty years later, Susan is bringing experimental writing back into her work. She made a very interesting comment to me that when she was studying in northern Vermont with Claire at UVM, literature was very important to her but she wasn't finding it there. At that time, she felt that poetry wasn't working for some reason, and she just felt that the correspondences weren't coming together for her in that context so she went off into this papermaking and high craft structural approach. I was really quite happily surprised to see the kinds of writers she is working with now; Caroline Bergvall, Redell Olsen and a whole roster of fascinating young writers she's working with and it's pleasing to see because I think this is the new paradigm we're coming to in a moment that is really very juicy again.

It may be a time when we look forward to the next real high in this new field. Claire MacDonald is a writer / critic that I am very interested in, and she's starting a project here in Britain called "Performance Publishing." I'm not sure exactly what she means by that, but I have a hunch based on her past writing that it's certainly very close to what I'm thinking about. She did a little review for *Performance Research* and then her husband, a critic William or Bill Sherman has also written a little bit for the same magazine. I think they're doing an issue entitled "On the Page," and so it seems like a really exciting time coming up.

KS: If we may return to the relationship between the poets and artists' respective reception of Granary's presence in Soho in the mid-nineties. I'm curious about your own background — would it be fair to say that your own orientation is more literary than visual?

SC: Yes, absolutely. At the University of Iowa, I studied with Sherman Paul who is a transcendentalist and his early work was on Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Herman Melville. He became interested in Hart Crane, William Carlos Williams, etc., and then Sherman just shot forward into the world of contemporary poetry. I was lucky enough to be working with him at the time he was putting together the Olson Festival in 1978. It was about the time his book *Olson's Push* was being published. He developed a new kind of criticism called "Re-Reading." I mean, he wasn't promoting it, but just as a touchstone term for his own use, it was a kind of engaged reading rather than a close reading or a heavily academic, referential, or deeply hermetic approach to the text. His was a performative reading practice. Whatever came to him found its way into his essays, almost without the use of ancillary texts. He had a way of bringing in everything he could to perform a reinvestigation of David Antin, Jerome Rothenberg or Gary Snyder — these were some of the people he was working with then. He has a book called *Re-Reading David Antin* you might have seen? They're wonderful things. Its performative, spontaneous, very much about what's happening right now, on the instant, on the desk, on the typewriter . . . He was interested in working with whatever's there in the moment — so recent correspondence or other news might come into it, etc. He did a book on Dorn, Duncan and Creeley . . .

KS: *The Lost American Love . . .*

SC: Right. Its kind of an exploded Rothenbergian approach where he's linking it to as much as possible rather than trying to distill it down to as little as possible, in a sense.

KS: It sounds very much like a post-Olsonian approach to criticism, an eclectic or kinetic assembly of correspondence, field notes, conversations, interjections — a means of engaging with the poet head-on by way of response.

SC: He sent you back to the historical texts, urged you to go back to the special collections. He taught his students not to be afraid of the library. That was really my introduction to any book that wasn't a "normal book." I mean, looking at the old Robert Duncan books made in the 40s, 50s, 60s . . . That simple process of just going to the library and looking up every book by an author, rather than just buying the collected works made all the difference. Going to the original sources and seeing the diversity of ways they were made, from the production to the distribution, I found it all fascinating. Then you get the whole social, cultural milieu; the bookstores, the magazines, the mailings, the readings, everything. Its all right there. Independent publishing and the kind of writing we're interested in, its all of a piece. Its kind of unfair to lop off a hunk of writing for *The Collected Paul Blackburn*, and say, "Hey, here's Blackburn." That's really not the whole picture.

KS: And at that time were you writing poetry?

SC: Yes, I was writing poetry and reading everything I could, but it was all done in a very unfocused way, much in the same way as I've published through Granary. Someone visiting from Canada asked if I was an autodidact and I said, "No, I'm just self-taught." I mean, college would have no point to it. As soon as I found out about Naropa I left college and headed out there to Boulder in the late 70s shortly after the Olson Festival. I was there for a few years

because so many, if not all of the writers I was interested in, were coming through Naropa for the summer programs in particular. That was a great awakening in a certain way, because there you have the West Coast, the Bolinas group, the poets from Southern California, the New York School, the Buddhists — everyone intermingling. Then there were the books, the publications and magazines, etc. It was just so rich, so incredibly rich, diverse and just kind of crazy. The remnants of the bohemian beat past were very much evident.

KS: Were out there year-round?

SC: We were there for two summers and a year in between, so a year and a half or so. That was enough. That did me in completely. I wasn't a student, I was just hanging out but was able to do a lot of auditing and could attend all the readings and lectures as well. I took workshops, one with Ginsberg, Burroughs — I took his course on the Great Unknown Classics of Literature, I think it was. Ginsberg's course was on Blake, but it was done in a *very* unstructured manner. I mean it was a wonderful place to learn, very intense, but very unfocused for me because I wasn't a registered student. I had a job, mostly at a bookstore at that time, and just hung out and did little bits and pieces. However, at that point I was aimed at opening a bookstore of my own.

KS: Was it the experience of working at the bookstore that gave you the idea to open your own?

SC: No, not really. All the time I was in Iowa I was interested in having a bookstore, being a poet and having my own bookstore. It was kind of a romantic model that wasn't very solid. I hadn't worked it out in a real world way. I didn't have a

budget or a plan, or any idea of how to do that stuff.

KS: Were you in touch with printers and publishers when you were in Iowa?

SC: No. It wasn't really until I was leaving Iowa that I began meeting people. I was kind of shy about coming out to those people. There were printers around, but I didn't make any effort to meet them. I mean Alan Kornblum was still around, Harry Duncan was probably in Omaha by then and Kim Merker was definitely there. I was in the English Building and walked by the Windhover Press a million times and never stepped through the door. I was also studying religion at the time, and literature was kind of like a secret for me, reading, writing and all that. Although I did have a degree in English it kind of took me a long time to start reaching out to people in the printing and publishing world — and in the writing world too for that matter.

KS: Do you remember where you had your first poem published?

SC: I never published. No, I didn't publish anything. I sent out a couple things but didn't continue. I worked at it into the 80s and it gradually fell away. It just wasn't what I was doing and the more I got involved in putting the bookstore together the less I wrote. My interests were always very divided, and the more I got into the history of publishing — not that I couldn't have done all of it, but somehow the way it unraveled the writing fell away and the other activities became more dominant. After Naraopa, my then girlfriend and I drove to Chicago with a U-Haul full of books where we intended to start a bookstore. I spent every penny I had on books for an imagined bookstore. We were in Chicago for a while, but it didn't seem

quite feasible, so we moved to Minneapolis where I lived for about eight years, and did start a bookstore.

Merce Dostale and I started a bookstore called Origin Books, and that was primarily a poetry bookstore although we had a little bit of everything: a few cookbooks, a few children's books, a little bit of this and that. So at that point, I became aware of who was around locally, and started making some contacts with those people and quickly became affiliated with Granary Books, which already existed. It was an offshoot of Bookslinger, a distributor, and the man who was running Bookslinger, Jim Sitter, had a little side distribution thing called Granary under whose umbrella he distributed for Harry Duncan, Toothpaste, Windhover, Copper Canyon, etc. Granary distributed a few of the literary fine presses' then in operation, but their holdings were quite small, perhaps a shelf. That was Granary circa 1980.

We got involved, thinking naively that it would be a way to bring economic feasibility to the poetry bookstore, somehow. Of course, that was a ridiculous idea. Through distribution, the continuity, the stability of an ongoing distribution thing called Granary, we imagined that this would be a way to reach out a little. So we were the exclusive distributor of Abattoir Editions, Windhover and eventually Red Ozier. At one point, we had over two hundred presses in stock from around the world, and that peaked when I moved to New York and started attending the Frankfurt Book Fair. I began buying from continental presses, and we had perhaps thirty English presses, twenty or so from Germany, France, Italy and a few things here and there from Australia, New Zealand and Japan. At the peak there were a lot of presses represented, but it was also at this juncture that I real-

ized there was a lot of work in circulation, but most of it was not really what I was interested in. I realized that I had all the pieces to the puzzle. I knew offset printers, lithographers, mimeographers, binders, papermakers, *everyone*. I even knew writers and had a sense of what I would want to publish.

Alison Circle. The germinal seed moment for me was when Alison Circle, Charles Alexander's ex-wife with whom he ran the Black Mesa Press, came into Origin Books one winter day. She was a friend and she asked me, "Steve, if you were going to publish anyone, who would you publish?" and I immediately said, "Jane Brakhage." I had been reading Jane's work in *Rolling Stock* magazine, she was married to Stan Brakhage at the time and was writing this column called "Lump Gulch Tales" in *Rolling Stock*. They were bizarre little Steinian stories about freak happenings in the mountains of Colorado. They were passed on stories, made up stories and so forth. I was surprised even to hear myself say that, but I didn't forget and eventually we published Jane's *From the Book of Legends* (1989). This may have been Granary's third book. I was distributing for Charles Alexander, he had split up with Alison by this point, and she was in Minneapolis where she was intending to continue doing Black Mesa, but I don't think she did anything more than a broadside or two. Charles was then in Tucson, where he was running Chax Press and we had talked about doing a book together which became *Firebird* (1987) by Paul Metcalf.

KS: That's terrific! It was Charles who put Granary's first book to press?

SC: Yes, Charles designed and printed it, and a friend of mine, Mary Beaton, made the paper out in Oakland at the Magnolia

Paper Mill. The irony of it, thinking in the context of the publishers I was distributing, was that so few of them were publishing the work that I wanted to publish. We had that Paul Metcalf manuscript in hand, and we later learned that Red Ozier had also had a look at Paul's manuscript and they rejected it, and they were a press I was distributing. So conceivably, I could have been very happy to see that Red Ozier had published *Firebird*, but in a way, I found it quite amusing that they had turned it down.

But then there were also some little projects with Jonathan Williams at that time. We did a couple of little items, like "Noah Webster to Wee Lorine Niedecker" (1986). To be quite honest, it was rather terrifying to be in touch with Jonathan at that time. Really. It was a moment of much stretching on my part to be on the phone at that time because I revered him in a way. Well, he was just a person who was doing some interesting stuff. We had produced a catalogue of Jargon Society books for sale because we were selling books at that time, and had sent it to Jonathan just so he could see what we were doing, kind of as an homage, just to let him know that someone was interested in keeping an eye on what he was up to. Somehow, he found our number and gave us a call at the apartment much to our surprise, thanking us for sending the catalogue and we had a great conversation.

KS: He's always been very giving of his time and information . . .

SC: A wonderful guy, absolutely. Then I asked him for a little poem and he sent something and we printed it letterpress. So, that's why letterpress was so important for Granary at the outset. It was kind of built in from the outset, and there was a certain awareness that the perception of letter-

press as being elitist, in a way, necessarily made the books more expensive than they would have been if they were printed any other way. I remember the first time I had ever — at the University of Iowa bookstore in Iowa City, found a letterpress book by Robert Creeley up on the shelf published by the Toothpaste Press.

KS: *Later?*

SC: Yes, *Later*. It was three dollars. I thought, "Three dollars? That's *way* too much. I can't buy this." So there was always that sense that it was a little out of reach, and I've never really gotten over that, and rightly so. But at the same time, as Bernstein points out, no one is being deprived of Charles Bernstein's work if occasionally a letterpress or more involved version of his work comes along.

KS: I consider it an extension of the writing in some ways — its just another form of experimentation. Reading Bernstein and Susan Bee's collaboration *Little Orphan Anagram* (1997), for example, is very different from reading Charles on-line or in an old mimeo magazine, while another collaboration with Susan, *Log Rhythms* (1998) came out at about the same time, while the modesty of the format gives it another feeling altogether. Its really a fascinating textual, or textural, transmission.

Would it be too simple to suggest that the greatest difference between Granary Books and The Jargon Society is Williams' affinity for the rural culture, the handmade or provincial way of life — while your own editorial direction seems to be more inclined towards an urban or metropolitan culture? Williams was accustomed to seeking out writers who were off the mark, at least geographically, celebrating and supporting the writing of people like Olson,

Creeley, Niedecker, etc. That was always his preference in a sense. While Granary is quite cosmopolitan and international in its scope, it shares in what Williams would celebrate as the local, that sense of making use of those people and resources in one's immediate environment, locale, region, time, vernacular, etc.

SC: Exactly. Yea. Absolutely. For sure. I'm sure that's a factor. It was always fascinating to hear Jonathan and to know that he always had a desire to be accepted by an urban community. There was always talk, or a complaint, "I could have gone there to have lunch at the Harvard Club, or this or that, but I chose this other thing." Its an easy split, but I really noticed it yesterday when listening to Harry Gilonis, the person who read before Simon Cutts. As I was listening, I kept thinking what an interesting, fascinating and bizarre outsider he is; highly intellectual, very articulate, very able. Somebody that would be perfect for Coracle, perfect for Jargon, a real outsider in the best sense of the word.

It kind of struck me then that there is a very particular kind of refinement that Jargon and Coracle were always interested in. They share a lot, and although Coracle is often urban, it is also very much outside of the dominant urban conventions, and very much interested in what was not mainstream. Simon and Erica are very interested in what is not being shown in the mainstream or published elsewhere, and that was certainly the case with many of the writers you just mentioned. When Jargon published them, they were not available in other forms. But there was something about the style and again, I come to that word "refinement," the way Harry Gilonis was so beautifully refined but just completely off the radar. I mean this poet was just really, really interesting. It would be

perfect for Coracle. They have published him of course, and Jargon has published Simon, and Thomas A. Clarke and others who are bridging this gap: somehow rural without becoming pastoral.

I think of the work of Thomas A. Clarke and Laurie Clarke, for example, which has found its place within the more radical side of publishing and writing communities, and publishing communities and readers, but would seem to me to — why wasn't this work picked up by the Whittington Press? They lived in the Cotswolds for thirty years, they were just a few miles away from these people, but they seemed to have framed this pastoral, this very charming word and image context into another field, and I'm really curious how they managed to do that. I was talking to Simon about it when we were out in Ireland, and he used this word "refinement." Its a different kind of refinement that they're getting at, and for that reason it just wouldn't show up on the radar screen of a press like Whittington. Whittington was doing very similar kinds of engravings, little drawings of little moments and pastoral scenes with writing that may be appear to be similar in tone to Clark's, but that's not the case at all.

There's really kind of a divide, just as Ian Hamilton Finlay wouldn't be mistaken for the work of this other sort of direction within letterpress, craft oriented publishing. Its an area that I find really fascinating, how that sorts out, and could you breach that? Could you cross over to the other in a meaningful way? Or, would each be lost? Are the differences so powerful that the two could never converge harmoniously? That's what's fascinating to me about what you're doing, and what I always sort of found problematic about the earliest part of Granary when I was a dealer. It was as if I was coming close, but not quite in align-

ment with what I found interesting about writing.

KS: Looking back, what changed when you arrived in New York in terms of whom and how you were publishing in Minnesota?

SC: It really flourished in New York. Before New York the publishing was just an item or so a year, and then after about two years in New York we did the John Cage book *Nods* (1991) and from there it really went from two to five books a year, then to ten, and then to twenty and from then on it was just crazy. It then became evident in that context that I had to vastly limit the number of books I was distributing because I had so much of my own work to do as a publisher. I also realized that while traveling and showing the other publishers I was representing, that I would tend to show the same books repeatedly. I would show what I was most interested in at the time, and a lot of it really languished, and I wasn't responsible to it in the way that I really intended to be. So, it quickly boiled down to a handful of works that were important to me, those by Timothy Ely, Barbara Fahrner, and Red Ozier for a short period of time. So they kind of went hand in hand, paring down on the role as distributor and concentrating on my role as publisher, which is what I really wanted to do. The other things just sort of fell away.

KS: So, what was the first trade edition?

SC: *The Century of Artists' Books* was book one in a series of trade paperbacks and critical editions. It was the first time we had done anything other than these elaborate, limited edition, special books by artists or occasionally by writers. Shelagh Keeley, Pati Scobey, Toni Dove, Buzz Spec-

tor, all of these books preceded *The Century of Artists' Books*, and the irony, among many ironies, is that *The Century of Artists' Books* actually sold quite well at the beginning, and I was imagining that there may have really been an audience for this sort of thing. So, the second trade book we did was *The Book, Spiritual Instrument* which I was shocked to discover as an issue of *New Wilderness Letter*. There's another example of being preceded by Rothenberg in so many different ways. I would think of something and of course, Jerry had already thought of it fifteen years earlier. That was kind of the most earth-shaking example on a number of different levels. I had nearly every issue of *New Wilderness Letter*, but not this one.

KS: How did you come upon it?

SC: I found it at Carolee Schneemann's as I was helping her sell her library and I just couldn't believe it, I just absolutely could not believe that they had done this in 1982. I set about trying to find just a carton of copies to send to people and wrote to Jerry, wrote Charlie Morrow, wrote to David Guss the co-editor, and even wrote to many of the contributors, most of whom had never even seen a copy. Many had never realized that it had been done, and this was in 1995 or thereabouts. I couldn't even find a second copy, never mind a box of copies, so I contacted Jerry and Charlie and asked if it could be reprinted and I thought it was going to be enormous, like the Americans liberating Baghdad or something, like we were going to be met with flowers, and hallelujahs! But in fact it was quite the opposite. There was some interest, but not really.

KS: But people weren't critical of the book, were they?

SC: No, exactly! Certainly. That's where

you get to a wider audience, this book was about Balinese books and performance, it was all over the place. I don't know. I think in the end we sold five, six, seven hundred copies in ten or twelve years, where we have ten thousand copies of *The Century of Artists' Books* in print, so it reached a different audience and its one that I want to keep returning to because its one where writing and the book, that's why *The Book, Spiritual Instrument* led directly to *A Book of the Book*. We subtitled that book, *some works and projections about the book and writing* because we wanted to keep writing central, always central to even the high conceptualists of Clive Phillpot's world, books are largely writing and documentation, so yes, that's the new paradigm I'm thinking.