

Conversations with:

Gordon Massman

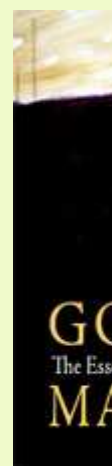
Gordon Massman is the author of *The Essential Numbers 1991 – 2008*, published in June 2009 by Tarpaulin Sky Press. *The Essential Numbers*—which most readers would recognize as a collection of poems, although Massman prefers to call them “texts”—is something of “new & selected,” in that it includes texts from Massman’s previous volume, *The Numbers* (Pavement Saw Press, 2000) as well as selections from the 700+ pieces Massman has written in the years since. As their titles suggest, Massman’s texts since 1991 have been numbered sequentially, and at the time of this interview, are closing in on 2000.

Given that Gordon’s work is profoundly disturbing, in a manner and to a degree that invites even seasoned readers (and fellow writers) to over-identify its speaker(s) with its author, and given that Gordon has, over the last two decades, firmly positioned himself outside of any known school of poetics, never mind any organized network of writers, be it established, academic, small press, micropress, underground or otherwise, and given that Gordon’s book is in many ways new territory for Tarpaulin Sky Press, I thought an interview with Gordon might be in order. Rather than conducting the interview myself—which, as his publisher, would have felt awkward if not incestuous—I decided that Gordon, his work, and his readers would be better served by a more open Q & A format. I asked five people, all writers themselves, to ask Gordon some questions about *The Essential Numbers*, and that’s all the direction I gave.

Gordon’s answers arrived four hours after I sent the last set of questions to him, three days after the first set. I did not edit them.

--Christian Peet

BLAKE BUTLER: In a book that spans 18 years of writing, how did you select which numbers were most essential to you? What is different about the continuity of those numbers with the others removed—i.e., do you see new gaps, collisions, etc?



1715

It is unimportant to me
 these poems / or their
 should they, I do not care
 they are published, nor
 literary critics say ab
 condemnation, / nothing
 than some academic a
 on my efforts or within
 able parameters pushi
 way or that, / most cont
 as is the industry that
 want no part of it, if I am
 angry then that is life
 consanguineous / they
 their pain, nothing in t
 witness nor have
 commandment, / I am
 with a religious spirit an
 have noticed the world is

1711

So here you are in my
 your ass mr. big shot, /
 man, spider fingers wrap
 lymph glands or brain n
 with gap- / ing jaw, haw
 your rustling cape but ar
 cock, coccyx kook, go

GORDON MASSMAN: Three decades ago I heard a quote, whose attribution I have long since forgotten, which fascinated me. It goes something like this: the most effective map is the exact same size as the territory being mapped. I imagine each of four corners of this crinkling paper map floating down to and settling precisely over its corresponding corner so that the map and the land are indistinguishable. This map illuminates for the traveler every vein, rivulet, fissure, and slope; it opens the land's every pore for meditation and discovery.

Similarly, I find something equally fascinating about the psychoanalytic project—applying the same rigor to the cartography of one's inner territory. Only in this case the map covers three dimensions and looks more like mist settling over deep plunging glass architectures, inside and out.

Leaving the map metaphor for a moment—at some point in my politics, I lost interest in conventional titles. I felt, and still feel, that the conventional title encapsulates a poem, monumentalizes it, loops its ending to its beginning and pulls tight the chord so that it relates only marginally to the works around it. Putting aside the fact that too many poets use titles, infuriatingly to me, to showcase cuteness, to show us how clever they can be, titles rip words out of relationship into independence, into stubborn free-floating self-sufficiency. This self-sufficiency is antithetical to both maps mentioned above and, ultimately, to what, megalomaniacally, I am striving to accomplish: a related, stitched-together, interdependent covering with language of my entire psyche from the beginning of my revelation until my end. The literal numbers for me are like threads woven together to form this covering, this tarp, if you will. Number 1 hooks onto and winds about number 2, number 2 hooks onto and winds about number 3, number 3 hooks onto and winds about number 4, etc. In short, the entire now one thousand nine-hundred ninety-six pieces (I do not really like to call them poems) are but one single entity, one map, tarp, coating, or whatever you wish to call it. Each number adds length, width, and depth to the one before it.

Finally, to your question. Yes, dropping out large sections of this map forms gaps, rents in the map. These holes force the wanderer to jump over disorienting spaces, from one cliff to another perhaps weeks or months apart. Such omissions take the softness—the safety—out of the singular blanket I am trying to weave. My hubris would prefer, naturally, to publish the entire project without omission in perhaps two volumes: two thousand pages of what I have already completed, and in volume two the final installments I have yet to complete before I die. I would love it if it could be said of me that I attempted the impossible task of transferring myself entire to the world of language, that I replicated all dimensions of myself and, therefore, continued to live, to be known, into perpetuity. How insane is that? How mad?

So sure, unintended collisions exist in this volume which by necessity picks and chooses what Christian Peet, my editor, and I felt were the strongest pieces. I am entirely happy with this. There is, after all, a practical consideration with all art. Some of one's oeuvre is better than others, one is in better form on one day than another. One must always discard one's breakage to strengthen the whole.

I am sorry to go on at such length, but please indulge me a little longer. I do not

Chesterfield lung, the
ride, go fuck / yourself
enough to fill a lake and
shit every bloody day and
drive a bucket of balls th
so blow it out / your ass
fine, be done with it, I j
decapitate me then like
you fuckbutt, what do
port-o-potty, / slit me
flounder, bull red, speck
the rotting white meat c
coagulate, head in the
my sister like / a genital
john or underpants, flec
the water, fall leaves, w
on stuck yellow, with h
blowhard, / I poke a
noneyes, gossamer soc
pelvises, meatless pig,
wide mouth, boneless
collector of the / gorgeo
enhoued mortal valkeri

1624

First we plunge knife
knees, toppled, lay / li
spotted tongue, then b
months, pillow over f
before baking, / extract
from cabinet, beheaded
glued to chair like sh
head- / less body in
sliced my clothes like
whack cling, strips, I l
mastectomy, slashed F
crea- / tures, we eyed
said, "love," I assented,
"agreed," I chimed, "I o
"yours drank herself de
you like me," she warn
one by one / we pulled
our Parrot, poor Dante
a bauble, several prim
killed him like a shot we
finger, "monster,"
"Frankenstein," I fired, /

subscribe to the perceived wisdom, the laws of literature promulgated largely by academics and furthered by large segments of the intelligentsia, that poetry and prose are distinct and separate warring genres, to be defended to the death by proponents. For me, at least in modern times, the divisions falls more logically between effective, powerful writing and ineffective, weak writing. What law forces the lyric “poet” into small orgasmic increments while similarly demanding the “prose” writer spin out developed stories. Why cannot a writer, such as I, produce a single voluminous piece, hopefully, of effective, powerful language without being characterized as poet or prosaist. I intend my numbered work to be a single, inner-logical, complex entity, and in that sense, yes, the gaps do disappoint me—practical considerations aside—and create jarring collisions.

BLAKE BUTLER: Do you feel a different person inside your text than you are in your body? Is the writing a focusing of another person, or a removal, or some kind of smudge therein? Or is it something else entirely?

GORDON MASSMAN: I believe the great nerve-work and fiery forge within each one of us almost godly in its omniscience and powers of perception. I believe you, Blake Butler, are murderer, industrialist, mendicant, spiritualist, rapist, whore, misogynist, and lover. I believe you are all human permutations from Hitler to Gandhi. When a man is nailed to a tree for his sexuality or ethnicity, I believe you are both the nailer and the appalled. You both refuse slavery and smoke crack alone in dingy rooms. You are God and The Devil.

I throw as best I can, as believably as I can, the billion colors of human existence through the prism of myself. Over long and intense personal interior struggles I have unearthed my otherwise unspeakable capabilities and visceral dark emotions: rage’s boiling mud, shame’s hot cauldron, the alligators of self-loathing. Not only am I a beautiful child, I am a hideous monster.

Like us all.

Therefore, the person in my body and the person in my text are one in the same. He is me, and I am flinging from my deepest core—making visible—what is universal, I believe, in every male human being. I want my work to spark if not an already conscious embracing, then some subterranean dreamlike ghostly recognition of who you, my reader, are. I want to insist that my sometimes disturbing visions are more or less within everyone, with slight variations. Hasn’t every father fantasized infanticide? Doesn’t every husband want to binge on lovers. Doesn’t murder and suicide lurk in every man?

Like the majority of people, I live a pacifist’s life; I am gentle, tender, soft-spoken, kind. I am generally a courteous and decent citizen. That person, too, resides in my text and body alike; indeed, were he not there to mediate—if he were not infinitely stronger—I would probably not be an intellectualizing writer harmlessly throwing out human colors, but a bona fide miscreant and soul ripper.

ELENA GEORGIU: What is your latest obsession, and how does it work its way into the poem you are currently writing?

GORDON MASSMAN: Curious you use this word “obsession,” rather, than say,

the canon my mouth,
babies her wishbone gl
sail, meathooks, striatio
in my / mind, psychopat
me like a cannibal, / and
flurry of slurp, boner, ju
and shirts collapsing like

1562

Dear God, I wish to re
about a few things: mo
shit, I could pop you in t
/ ocide sucks, you dese
raping; what about cer-
by the neck, my good
neck; / I’m a little dis
teenager canon-fodder
blown off limbs and
appendages, / post trau
freckled unwrinkled ba
one could fucking kick
plier them / off like t
chickens, here chick o
amateur, scratchy violi
little matter / of peder
sour bugging preado
itself between consente
lee- / ward-to-stern ch
dopamine-filled squiggle
shame hunger megalom
itual death, smashed in
bibles burned simul- / ta
once a skyscraper of to
what about space trave
they / booster to moon i
to tramp around, / d
applause, famine’s wo
assume neck not in ass
boy peanut / brickle Luc
Coke, finger-poke out
fornicator, superstition
wrapped in fear, Mr. F
you this; blood- / cover
bursting, new beautiful v

“preoccupation” or “fixation.” To me “latest” implies these latter words and not the former. I’m splitting hairs, but I have a reason. I have been twice hospitalized with obsessive-compulsive disorder; I have battled it for twenty-five years. If it had a physical appearance it would resemble one of those hairless, mountainous, many-fanged monsters lurking at the bottom of a Hollywood pit villains throw men into to die. In reality, it’s a deathless monster wreaking havoc on innocent lives. This kind of clinical monster does not back down or mutate into something else. My clinical obsessions have numbered over thirty at any given moment, which I had to perform in a specific order at threat of having to repeat them beginning with number one, ad infinitum, through the night without sleep or rest. These involve locks, clocks, ovens, toilet seats, numbers, body lotions, dental floss, defecation, urination, noises, bottom sheets, light switches, hunger, toilet paper, and edges of desks. These are bizarre, inexplicable, torturous non-subjects, although the underlying monolithic demon of OCD infuses my work. That is, my death battle with OCD becomes a heightened metaphor in my work for all peoples’ battle against mortality. Hence, the outrage, despair, resignation, viscera, and velocity of my writing.

On the other hand, fixations, preoccupations. My most recent is hubris, the fatal fall in the face of God-aspiration. I think of Herzog’s masterpiece, *Aguirre, the Wrath of God*. How pathetic human beings look in their ridiculous gear “conquering” a river or a mountain. How pitiful our rocket ships spewing into space, like sparks popping two feet above a campfire. I am amused by the tragedy of megalomania, man’s ridiculous attempt to stick his or her jaw out beyond all others in the bas relief sculpture of squirming humanity.

Other fixations, always there, which I shoot through myself variously depending on life situations are: body weight; sex, death, hedonism, suicide, and parenticide. I usually mix one or more of these sub-dominantly into whatever I am writing, primarily because they are my major subjects.

Your question, how such preoccupations work their way into what I am writing, is a difficult one to answer. This will sound phony or like a parody, but I write in a trance; I literally put my head in my hands, close my eyes, and induce random dream-state imagery, very similar to deep sleep dreams. I can sit in that position for as long as an hour, eyes closed, half asleep, yet monitoring the ribbon of language streaming through me. If something authentic flies by I grab it and hurl it on the screen, at which point I might consciously build on it, but always quickly re-induce this dream state which usually takes the work in unexpected directions. I believe that we all possess a root system of logic, under ground as it were, and that if we harvest it naturally—genuinely—within ourselves, ideas which appear disconnected will in fact be connected and logical. I depend a great deal on the subconscious.

Who has a “poetic sensibility,” who is a natural singer and who isn’t? Who has that indefinable something in their gut, can play words like the virtuoso violinist? That is a question for the gods. Whether I have it, or you have it, or he or she has it, one must summon every ounce of power from within to compose one decent song in ten. All the obsessions, preoccupations, passions, and ideas are fairly worthless without this X factor, this musicality which none of us will ever know if

Huey, Dewey, and Louie
whores for dinner. / Huey
blown, Dewey’s a blind
Louie does it dog style
three / women cont
mechanically filled mus
worship zooming tits, pu
slot machine of the na
turns Huey green /
growing sour, the prom
diarrhea’s looming in g
storms, / but hell we’re
a Pabst, and red be- / t
sucks off his purple c
drags, dies, the fema
blacked out, ash / tray
packets, missed chunk
anticipating an after the
at / the profligate nep
menstrual blood. Don-
dammit! Daisy to Don
Daisy: Look at this shit.
Dish- / washer filled, ble
covered in blankets /
fucked Donald hell for k
genitals failed with satia
with love, penis a lim
drunk with semen, / in
flower, hiving for conce
blown apart, hinged at
Oh / Daisy, Oh Huey
swaddled, lifted, and / h
heaven’s nipple, do not
of eggs and lust, sper
floor of / booze, musk
safekeep, angels angels

Against my will, I rip do
before face, grow /
myself. Rapist f
undercircum- / cision tis
into toilet, and bangs
hawk leaving me on c
response team, / rape s

we possessed.

ELENA GEORGIU: What was the first obsession you tried to explore with writing? Do you still have that piece of writing?

GORDON MASSMAN: My life cleanly broke into two disparate parts, like the Gregorian calendar; my B.C. period—Before Crisis—lasted until I was thirty-four years old and was marked by a measured control and possession of the senses. It was a paradisiacal sense of well-being and youthful confidence wherein everything blossomed and shone for me, producing a fairly standard poetic fare: poems about Mary Magdalene washing clothes in a river or the one who discovered the artichoke or the hurricane I witnessed as a boy or the Beluga whales off the coast of Seward, Alaska. The poems were conventional and composed in the stepped-back object vein of a very clever man with something profound to say. It was capital P Poetry of the sort best exemplified by Harvard and Sorbonne graduates such as Richard Howard, Richard Wilbur, John Ashbury, James Merrill, and Jorie Graham—people with intellects and IQs massive enough to win them staggering careers. The rest of us bashed our heads against their wall.

My A.D. period began the moment I accidentally tuned into the movie *Sybil*, about a multiple personality woman and her sadistic mother, which unleashed from my neck high false floor all my weltering monsters. What clawed through the plywood my denial I had nailed over them: primal rage against my parents, my subtly lousy marriage, a horrible self image, resentment toward my young son, and what felt like an unnamable cloud of other demons minor and major. Here began twenty years of psychological battering during which time I developed the demon seed of OCD—my attempt to ward off catastrophe by endlessly performing rituals—and the undergirding for the employment of obsessional subjects in writing.

My first obsession was about insomnia and sleep, as I slept almost not at all for thirteen months, and I still have in a basement box a manuscript of about twenty-five short poems titled, *Quarry for Night Howlers*, which one could say prefigured the kind of pieces I write today. They are prose poems without stanza written urgently to help me heal. Since the moment the demons cracked through and crawled into my head, writing has been my therapy, my catharsis, and unabashedly I have placed the reader directly behind the psychoanalyst's couch whatever may come; my poems are psychoanalytical sessions; I have tried to set horror to music for my own benefit. But, I think in my optimistic periods, perhaps others too could benefit from my effort.

SELAH SATERSTROM: Gordon, there are so many commas in the poems. For a couple of years I've been thinking about the energetics of grammar—how those marks/structural hinges constellate the logic that emerges from the syntax in the space/field of the line/lyric. Sometimes in the presence of yr poem's commas, I give them a sound. The terrible gurgle and swish and popping of a function, performing (the animal in the muscle or the sound of deep inner-space, the oceanic echo in meat). Other times the commas feel like gut—a particular texture of connectivity. Sometimes they are like a hot tongue—a kind of, you know, devil

sharded glances in mir
unexpected, brutal, Ca
night of self, vast, / and
rage, not sex; reven
abusers; howl in hea
cerebral wires; I've not
he's hit before, cracke
beat incessantly ripping
fled like a murderer / in
subjugation and sperm
victimization by his hung
the shock, the / degrad
world, his closet appea
he's always within dea
shoe- / toes replicating
wrenched out his thro
could not know; Karen's
rication, the exquisite bl
pipefish, the / unexp
caverns of emptiness,
weird tectonic schisms
stability; my / sup
confusing me with iden
my dick between fist w
arm, he hal- / lucinatori
are me," then incompre
the instant my come b
pride / terrorizes—I've
years, homosexually, p
plumbing swallowing
sucks / off a devasta
hazel; six feet; gray wre
teeth; cupcake m
moustache; / olive; one-
spoken; black bush; left
big fingers. Grab handfu
him through sewer gra
imposter, fake soc- / i
impresario, abominator
gorgeous stacks, c
blackguard bastard.

1262

Dear God: thank you fo
the world, etc. / and
festers under veneer. A
and the other even-corn

tongue (oy): commas as swipe marks, the incessant interruption of which Blanchot speaks. Neither here nor there. But I want to ask you about the comma—the form and narrative speed they contribute to or even co-create in your work. "Comma"—from *koptein* "to cut off," from PIE base *(s)kep- "to cut, split." I suppose what I am really asking you to speak about—to any aspect of—concerns how you experience language on metaphysical and/or visceral levels—its translation through your syntax and marks, into the forms . . . how that happens for you.

GORDON MASSMAN: The man who has been shot doesn't have time to put on a suit. He's on the table shouting, "here, here, lower, the gut, oh Jesus, please god though I walk, yea, valley, no evil, fuck, god damn, shit. . . ."

There's no metaphysics here, no formalism, no important superstructure, no Ph.D. in grammatology. I stopped using periods and capital letters to begin new sentences because I haven't the time. Screw convention, measured breathing, jam and croissants, the contemplated stanza, do I break here or here, how much white space, is it poetry or prose. My psyche's hemorrhaging, emotional blood's gushing. Goddammit, I'm hit. I'm trying to save my life.

(Surely "form" solidifies subject, is in fact subject, as subject is in fact form. My "form" is the brick of terror, guilt, shame, pain, horror, hope, rage, love, and innocence jammed into my head, square, compositionally shifting, and lodged like a bloody bludgeon I can only exorcize it by duplicating it on the page, repeatedly and, perhaps, eternally.)

SELAH SATERSTROM: I wonder what you look at or listen to: the necessary juxtapositions that inform your process.

GORDON MASSMAN: I revere great world cinema . Among my favorite directors are Imamura, Fassbinder, Herzog, Bergman, Varda, Passolini, Cocteau, Dryer, DeSica, Wertmuller, Satyajit Ray, Fellini, von Stroheim, Bresson, Schoendorfer, Resnais, Bunuel. Some of my favorite movies are *The Passion of Joan of Arc* by Dryer, *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* by Herzog, *Salo, or 120 Days of Sodom* by Passolini, *8 1/2* by Fellini, *Shame* by Bergman, *The Ballad of Narayama* by Imamura, *Woman of the Dunes* by Teshigahara, *Au hasard Balthazar* by Bresson.

Elias Canetti, Naguib Mahfouz, Vladimir Nabakov, Borjes, V. Woolf, Mishima, Kobo Abe, Musil, George Konrad, Calvino, Kenzaburo Oe, R. Ellison, Zora Neale Hurston, Alan Paton, Nicanor Parra, R. Jeffers, Ted Hughes, Alan Dugan, Berryman, Sexton, Whitman, Dostoevsky, Laxness, Hamsun, Kafka, James Wright. . . . I have a love affair with literature and in addition to "the classics" seek out esoteric obscure works in translation wherever I can find them. I favor creative artists of all genres who dip their instruments directly into the gut, bypassing that cool, objective, distant intellect. I prefer interiors to exteriors, juice to dry, messy psychological eviscerations to cold perfectionism.

I rarely listen to music but when I do I almost always return to sixties and seventies rock: Zeppelin, Hendrix, Cream, early Santana, CSNY, Jefferson Airplane, Joplin, The Doors, Ten Years After, Quicksilver Messenger Service. I

at- / op the cauldron of
absurd prevarications, /
sea, water to wine, the
litany. What do you take
jail, my / parents hate
the biggest crock of shit
up the ass mr. big. I sh
ever-regenerating fasci
You / "work in mysteriou
Like multiple / sclerosis
schizophrenia, ovarian
endless battlefield sla
starvation, crack cocaine
survival, / family and
christmas eve, the wh
mechanistic panoply of
goguary, power-lust, and
with The / David, Notr
The Cello Suites, The
Night at the Opera. Yo
your poured concrete.
Oops! / a brief eulogy-
decimated friend—b
chemotherapy, steroid
trans- / plant—closed
daughters, 9 and 13—
chant: HeyHeyHeyHey
Hayi-o-ku-oo, tum tum.
an- / other picnic in the
But we know / the irre
with hypodermic stinge
walls, money, steel, pe
neck. "Come down, Com
hide thy / face?" one fr
will reveal. The mere /
visible would decimate
happiness. You th
circumstances / blind a
make me laugh. I obse
scientific objectivity the
and geological, and s
inan- / imacy the inc
wedge a baseball bat /
swing, and Hercules-h
another planet-island of
with / your miracle-lad
take a lifetime of / resti
off the end of Louisville

love the Chicago blues and Jazz but don't know much about them. I don't understand classical music and am continually mystified by how it fills enormous music halls generation after generation with such passionate devotees. But this is my failure.

I am a tireless devotee of the arts and just wish I had more time to explore them.

ANA BOŽIČEVIĆ & AMY KING: In your poems life is a serial killer. Is the trauma he inflicts primarily mental or physical?

GORDON MASSMAN: Physically, I'm in good shape (well, cancer survivor) for a sexagenarian. Mental.

But, short of some heinous assault against one's person, I don't think life is a serial killer. I think life (nature, existence, breathing, feeling) is wonderful. For me the serial killer resides within, with only one victim, who keeps getting up.

ANA BOŽIČEVIĆ & AMY KING: If you can't adore a woman and you can't hate her, what can you do with her? I really want to know.

GORDON MASSMAN: Confusion here, one that has caused me much unjustified criticism and, from my partners, pain. The confusion is this: I am my poetry. I am the man who can neither adore nor hate a woman, who tortures cats, who eats himself. I have done none of these things and am not the persona of my work. This is an impossible issue to untangle, it's as enmeshed into itself as flesh is to veins; it's all of a piece. Where does artist leave off and persona begin? Kafka, Dostoevsky, Baudelaire, Hemingway: were they beetles, murderers, misanthropes, and misogynists? Yes, that is—partially—their conceit, but were they that as companions and compatriots. As lovers?

On the basis of my writing I have been rejected by women who otherwise loved me. "I cannot stay with a man who could write this," they said, attributing more life to my poetry than to me. My work frightens them even though, as witnessed by the fact that they love me, and by their own admission, I am not a frightening man. My poetry embarrasses them and shames them in public. They hide it from their friends. To this I say, if you cannot understand the complexity of art and artist, confuse him with ink and white paper or paint and canvas or iron and sculpture, then, yes, I think we are ill-suited.

What I can do with a woman is love her in the same flawed imperfect way all lovers love, even better than some.

ANA BOŽIČEVIĆ & AMY KING: If "vision is puncturing," is the goal of poetry the blast or the emptiness after the blast? Which is more important?

GORDON MASSMAN: That's a sexual question: orgasm vs. after orgasm, so I'll answer it sexually. If the poem is like a love interest—you woo her, you romance her, and then, maybe, you have her—then for me it is the instant of penetration, the exhilarating instant of grasping those last words.

ANA BOŽIČEVIĆ & AMY KING: Is the lasting flaccidity of an executed idea really

Sewed two cat heads
breasts, black, whisker
one amber eyed, mo
grimace / (decapitated
fixed a pig snout into my
red, jagged, but eterna
pieces / for kneecaps
sexy; casava skins for
smooth, pettable, del
banana peel / for hair, l
lilt like a soccer star
doubled as moccasins a
fine scrot- / um wrap
hazelnuts, hanging. Ne
decided the ripe red pl
with a sur- / geon's vice
glutted, sugary-sweet,
streaks mosquitoes co
moonless af- / ternoons
rind for bladder and bl
chin, the kind I smeare
and called it / art, beam
in compost to the crow
and buzzard feathers to
for whom / I am cookin
with coconut milk, cay
Rachmaninoff, she who
telephone / voice accep
unseen—the Personals,
I am positive will be we
thong pan- / ties with th
nudy magazines. Decid
dangle one live goldfish
punched / through goss
accessory as Paloma P
with a smattering of
wrist / cologne. I have
angled house, roomy
everything squared, s
lacquered, and / wide
ichthyologically glitterin
glammed, mythologic
creature no woman coul

something to aspire to—turning boner into bone?

GORDON MASSMAN: Sometimes the flaccid man is lying alongside a suddenly conceived woman. It is delusional, of course, to equate a work of art to a fetus, but your assumption that once finished the work is a lasting shred of flaccidity is invalid for me.

When young I aspired, romantically, megalomaniacally, to write something so real it lived, that the pages of my theoretical book would groan to get out and actually bounce up the covers like a coffin lid. I wanted to create something so honest it squirmed with new life.

I don't believe in the flaccidity of a finished work—I aspire to write poems that embody enough "life" in them to conceive in the lives of others.

ANA BOŽIČEVIĆ & AMY KING: If you can't love men and you can't kill men, what can you do with them? I really want to know.

GORDON MASSMAN: Two and a half decades ago I lunched with a certain radiant and conceited young male sociology professor at his faculty club (U. Wisconsin). Menus in hand, we were greeted by a stunningly gorgeous waitress. "Bring me the roast beef with vegetables, and a Coke," said he. I said something similar, maybe "Baked chicken, white meat, tea." When she left he raved, "Beautiful, amazing, ooo-la-la, must have her, who is she, think she's a student, see the way she looked at me, she noticed me, that 'I'm available to you' look, she's mine, I know it." I agreed, "Adorable, excruciating beautiful, did you see those ankles, those feet, those perfect toes, oh man." Then I looked him in the eye and said, "What if she prefers me?" A bullet entered his brain. "Then," he said, "I would have to leave the table."

In matters of sex and love men are each other's rivals. If both want the same woman, then they hate each other and it is an unendurable pain not to be chosen. The greatest pleasure is lost to the rival and the loser graphically visualizes the other receiving it, the wetness, the kisses, the caresses, the wonderful penetration.

In a locker room naked men simultaneously feel solidarity and repugnance. They dare not accidentally touch each other in the shower stall without feeling revulsion, that competitive matted body hair touching me. Their dangling weaponry. It's an animal visceral reaction. All men (heteros, of course) want all women and fantasize destroying the competition.

So, I lie that I am the more desirable in order to befriend men. As long as I feel superior, I find men acceptable companions. My best male friends are in their 70s and 80s and unable to do harm to me.

This is oversimplification as men do have fishing, camping or football buddies, but I think the deeper animal primal rivalry lurks underneath it all.

What do I do with men? Depending on the man, I screw up my psychology and behavior therapy strategies and try my best to enjoy their company. In many

These are the grotesque
fingernails painted purple
bitten fingers used to enter
data into a PC; a bent
man giving him- / self
bedspread at mid-day
to a whirring traffic sound
Midwest- / ern town
industrial smells and
mediocrity, sucking like
snorting and slurping /
flan into his rasping
boobs "anesthetized up
birthday balloons / as t
heavy pouches into slit
grins, the kind that close
and slams a / Charlie
two massive mounds ri
with bright red hard pro
a half / dozen frosted
medicine chest like circ
to be bowled over, one
insomnia, one for anxie
one for rage, and / o
theater with a silver c
reside Princess Penel
Poh-Poh the Clown, / H
the dastardly Count Ba
respective handmaide
courtesans, / all attired
and the family crest ac
the prescription for vict
brain ag- / ainst the
particularly if the scalp
has four running le
pinwheeled by / a com
ends with the word "pre
drift, in Bama, Tejas,
electrical / taped for gr
consistently smacked
opponents under flo
stands, / flashbulbs b
grandiosity and captu
beautiful slaughter; O
these: / shoving the mi
knuckle up the anus of
sculpture of horror, in th
the closet and wall-s
jammed a light bulb /
chord and a two finger

cases, I do.

ANA BOŽIČEVIĆ & AMY KING: Are you the Sam Kinison of poetry?

GORDON MASSMAN: Without the humor, unfortunately.

ANA BOŽIČEVIĆ & AMY KING: Do you love? Are you loved?

GORDON MASSMAN: I'm self-critical and insecure and find it difficult to believe that I am loved. Yet, I feel loved by one or two.

I subscribe to Eric Fromm's concept of the word "love" (in *The Art of Loving*). Loving is an art to be practiced and mastered. To succeed one must make it his or her highest priority. Most fail. Most flounder in passive pools. I believe that, at sixty, after dozens of attempts, I have learned to love, passably, acceptably, maybe even beautifully. I do believe that loving is human beings' most divine calling. It's just infernally hard.

ANA BOŽIČEVIĆ & AMY KING: Why don't you just fucking calm down?

GORDON MASSMAN: Don't think there's a why here. When the fire burns up all the wood, it will die. I guess there's still wood.

(I am calm on the outside.)

ANA BOŽIČEVIĆ & AMY KING: (How) do you think life translates into poetry? How much is it a question of translation and how much of transmutation/alchemy? Does the voice in this book suffer because he is not an alchemist?

GORDON MASSMAN: Lead into gold, transmuting sinful human into perfect being, creating the panacea. No, I have not done that. I go into my gut and amygdala (base instincts, drives, motivations, urges, fantasies, reptilian capabilities). There once existed alchemists, the finest in the land, who perfected the art and against whom present-day alchemist-hopefuls can only be derivative. I speak of Keats, Shelly, Byron, Rumi, Blake, Wordsworth, Dante, etc. My voice certainly would suffer were I to try to emulate these alchemist/masters. They had their pre-Freudian day of courtesies, formalities, corsets, class punctilio, platitudes, meticulousness, generalities, and narcissism. We have our post-Freudian-Einsteinian day of nihilism, nuclear fission, hedonism, birth control patch, gluttony, environmental destruction, and postmodernism. I write for my day and do not suffer that I, or my persona, is not an alchemist. Once it was transmutation, now its translation.

drummer grinning under
dome full of booze, /
panthers, one strumpe
pew / coats his body w
clash, the snares and tr
hot nothing connects th
but / blurry air or a he
flies round a fool divin
gloves through fasci
and / sheath and strit
boulders sunk in silt, gr
gut, granite lungs, gra
rock / in soft mud, immo
tumors imbedded and
cold, dead, blunt, blind,

911

After binging on Dreye
period of / weight gain
almost forced myself / to
the toilet like Narcissus.
two fingers down my t
roared. I felt the weepin
my accusatory belt. I wa
in / me, the cowa
executioner. Down- / s
Wayne movie: the ch
beating of horse hoove
motion of rifle fire and e
a series / of walls and c
cube, wondered. / I k
tortured not enough to p
my gut, that I was still a
I would rejoin unpunctu
film. This brief lavatory
to you by Glamor Maga
par- / enting, powerless
of male bulimia.