

Pierre Coupey / A SPECIAL SECTION

COMPASS

There is no dragonfly in this dream the smell of piss still thick
on my pants the heart taken apart wing by wing
in its own insect intelligence the love of others
coming alive in the transparent shadow of wings
the breathing almost a color I could speak
clearly an anguish rose

to write as I paint layers, mistakes intent on the tones
composed in the flesh of the lovers Beloved
the stink of any love song
I am not sick with

You don't owe your life to anyone he said
God questions all of this imagine
a heart without color your life
gone into

the dragonfly

the ladybug

the ghost

the diamond rainbow

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¶ One morning as I was sitting in the garden beside the pool, a dragonfly lighted on this paragraph of the Motherwell book and rested there for the better part of an hour:

A true history of modern art will take account of its innumerable concrete rejections. True, it is more difficult to think under the aspect of negations, or to contend with what is not stated. But this does not justify the history of an indirect process being written under the category of the direct. I do not see how the works of a Mondrian or Duchamp can be described apart from the description of what they refused to do. Indeed, a painter's most difficult and far reaching decisions revolve around his rejections.

— Robert Motherwell, "A Tour of the Sublime" (*Tiger's Eye*, December 15 1948), in Frank O'Hara, *Robert Motherwell* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1965), p. 40.

¶ Later in the day a ladybug touched the Spicer poem I was reading to my class. Then the ghost entered the room and my voice in the form of a little wind. As I was driving west from the college in the evening, the sky opened and showed an immense rainbow in the shape of a diamond. I was wearing dark glasses. The dragonfly poses the question: where does one live?

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INTERVIEW

Sharon Fawcett, Ann Rosenberg and Bill Schermbrucker interviewed Pierre Coupey at Sharon's home in Vancouver, 18 March 1978. The transcript that follows has a few additions and many deletions from the rather exuberant original eighty pages.

AR How did the journal drawings start, Pierre?

PC Accidentally. My original intention was to do a set of drawings for Robin Blaser's *Moth Poem*. I went out and bought felt pens and paper, but when I got home I found I'd been given the wrong kind of paper. That's the first accident, because I'd wanted an opaque paper, not a transparent parchment. My instinct was to rush back and get what I'd asked for, but it was too late in the day by then to go over to town, the shop would be closed. This is the virtue of living in North Van! So I said to hell with it and started to draw, and was surprised to see the strange way the felt pen ink behaved on the parchment, which was totally unexpected. After drawing for a bit I began to see possibilities I couldn't have imagined. So that's the second accident, the behaviour of the ink on the paper. I began to play, just trying to find out everything that might happen between the ink and the paper, and began to accumulate an inventory of strategies and effects. When that got boring I started to do "sets" of drawings for Robin's book, working with the poems in front of me. Half way through the third set, after a month's intense work, I suddenly became bored and exhausted, not with the poems, but with the drawings — they began to seem facile and unreal to me. Out of this boredom, I started drawing a face, just for a change, to do something different, since the other things were abstract configurations. And I became interested again, excited at how this face began to emerge from the different combinations and layers of ink. I got this drawing of a red-haired guy who looked romantically introspective and tortured. He seemed to be asking for some kind

of response, and without even thinking, I started writing a note on the left side of the drawing — there seemed to be a space there also asking to be filled — with my response to the drawing, and that was the beginning. Then I thought, ok! journal drawing! and wrote it in at the top, Journal Drawing #1, and also gave it a title, *Le critique se regarde dans le miroir*. Third accident: a form.

SF What's the date of the first drawing, Pierre. And how long did you work on them?

PC That first one is dated December 17, 1976, and the last one in the series, Postscript #10, was done December 30, 1977. About a year.

SF You've worked with writing and images before. How are these things different for you?

PC Yeah, I've been trying for a long time to find some way of combining writing and images spontaneously, without artificially subordinating one form to the other, or self-consciously blurring one into the other, and for the first time I felt this is something I can do, this is a way of attacking that problem. It happened so swiftly. I think I did three or four that night, just looking at what was going on. The informality of the process attracted me deeply — after all, these weren't poems, nor were the drawings done with the intent they would stand formally on their own. I liked the fact that both the drawings and the notes could be swift notations, without pretense to high art. I found something liberating in that.

AR Have you ever kept a journal separately?

PC I once tried to keep one, with an absurd seriousness on my part. I've always been impressed with the kind of intelligence that can work in that way. Both Bill and Sharon have read me portions of their journals, and what they were saying in them seemed to me very valuable. I liked Audrey Thomas' attention to detail in her *African Journal Entries*. I liked the apparent candor and energy in Stan Persky's journal entries, which *The Review*

also published. I thought the journal was a terrific way to record and examine experience. But when I tried to do it, I found myself too self-conscious, I was embarrassed by my efforts to be "interesting." You know, you buy three or four special books in which to write all these great thoughts, etc, and with all that self-consciousness and preciousness I never could write a damn thing. I gave it up.

SF What is it about the drawings that relieve you of some of the self-consciousness?

PC I guess it's because I do the drawing first, and then write the note in response to the drawing, from what's there. Although I change the procedure sometimes, it's easier for me to respond to something concrete in front of me, rather than try to think of something to say.

BS As a generalization, I often feel the writing is a talking-down after doing the drawing, that the drawing is not only the access into the experience, but also the fullest statement of it. The writing is a discussion afterwards.

PC There might be some truth in that. The notes demand a critical response and you know how dissatisfied I've been with much of the writing, though I am less so now. I haven't as yet found the energy to make a critical review of the whole series myself, so I can't speak with precision on how the notes and the drawings interact. But I'm happy to hear what people say on how they work for them.

SF Brian Fawcett says that the drawings deconstruct the text.

PC Yeah. You could also say that certain of the notes deconstruct the drawings. The relationship between the two components is always intimate, and in the best of them, complementary, or dialectical. Once they began to develop, I wanted both the writing and the drawing to be spontaneous, unpremeditated, and equal. The writing is never composed in advance or revised afterwards: the notes stay on the page where and as they were written in their first form. I decided to take that risk because I wanted the writing to be done as swiftly as the drawing, and that it be as irrevocable as the drawing. I can't revise the writing without destroying the drawing.

BS Since about 1972 you've chosen very personal formats, textures and forms for your work. Do you feel the journal drawings are your most successful form, do they satisfy you more than the others?

PC Some satisfaction kept me at them for over a year. At the moment I do them they're great fun because they are so immediate, and I never know what's going to happen. On the other hand, they're disturbing because they were usually done in a moment of crisis. But the fact I can't go back and correct them, try to make them better, if not "perfect," means I'm stuck with a lot of stuff I might wish I hadn't said. But I've censored them in another way: I've destroyed or withheld the most embarrassing ones, some twenty drawings in all. In others, I've written over the notes with a second layer of ink to make them less legible, which sometimes makes them into more accurate images, because of the added darkness. But, as I said before, the notes aren't poems, they don't aspire to "high" form. Those that are entirely legible, I accept with their flaws, even because of their flaws in instances. When I look at them only as images, I'm often quite pleased by the relationship between the written component and the drawing. I find something formally satisfying in them. At a distance the writing sometimes appears as an undecipherable, mysterious texture.

BS I'm interested in how this whole series of accidents, those pens, that paper, perhaps even your kitchen table, came together in some way and triggered them. You became incredibly productive. Sometimes you'd phone people in the middle of the night, saying "Listen to this, listen!" You were very excited about what you were doing. It was the most intense working continuum I've seen you in for a long time.

PC Yes, it was intense, and the most productive in terms of quantity. I was on the edge for a long time, but I'd rather not talk about those midnight phone calls, except to say that the journal drawings did take over my life during that year, and somehow reshaped all my relationships in my world. Instead I should fill you in on some background: two years ago I found myself selling

the oak desk I'd always considered my personal writing desk. Almost everywhere I've lived I've had a study in which I had my books, that desk, and an electric typewriter, and this was the special and exclusive place in which I lived as a "poet." Suddenly I found myself selling this damn desk, for which I'd lost affection. It began to seem large and clumsy, an obstacle. A month later I sold the typewriter as well. A few months later I realized I wasn't so much giving up the desk and typewriter as I was giving up my precious self-identification as a writer, a poet. I think now I was trying to give up all the preciousness and isolation of having a special place in which to be a poet, in which there was all the equipment and atmosphere necessary to the accomplishment of "the great task," which of course I wasn't doing anyway. I found I couldn't identify myself in that way any more. Shortly after that I moved to a new house. I realized I needed to live alone for a time if I were to get any work done at all, and I needed a house in which I could scatter myself, in which any space could be working space if I wished. I still don't have a desk, and I still don't have a typewriter. I find I can work almost anywhere now, in my friends' houses, at the college, outside in the garden. But the kitchen table is my favorite place, because it's where so much of the rest of my life takes place. It isn't cut off or special, it's simply there.

BS So that it's all an energy of stripping, of trying to get . . .

PC That's right, to try and lay bare my relationship to my sources. If the drawings are a deconstruction of the writing, the writing is a deconstruction of my attitudes and preconceptions as a poet. As much as I'd still like to write a conventional lyric or serial poem, I found I wasn't writing them at the level and pace I thought I should be. I believe in the dictum that form is never more than an extension of content, so I couldn't go on desperately trying to trick out the appearance of accomplished form. That's a misdirection of energy.

AR So it could be a new start, then, in both directions — a new start as a writer and a new start as an artist, because the drawings are figurative, for example.

PC Yeah. Just as the writing was a way of allowing myself to say things I could never get said in a conventional poem, the drawing allowed me to do things I couldn't do through conventional abstraction. Giving up some modernist and post-modernist positions was a way of abandoning myself to whatever was possible at the moment at my kitchen table. That is, to what was actually going on in my life in all its boring and maddening complexity.

SF I'm interested in your statement that you sold your typewriter. And your desk. You were removing yourself from those trappings of production that go with poetry. I think that is a political act as well, to *not* type poems, to not have that instrument of production, and ultimately reproduction, available to you. There's a whole history of what the typewriter has done to poetry. To remove yourself from that, to write longhand, so you see the actual movement of the hand on the page. The forms of those letters become as pictorial an image as the drawings. It's literally the literal, in its most organic natural form. Ann, you said you don't read them thoroughly, or that you prefer the image without the writing . . .

AR No, no. I like it that there's writing there, but since it is . . .

SF . . . but the writing is *writing*, back in its roots, back to its most primitive, in a sense, ground.

PC I never intended the handwriting to be pictorial in the way you just described. It was simply the easiest and most natural way to combine writing and drawing on the same page. Although I began to intuit some of that literalness of the handwriting, as a subject, as early as #12 I think, it wasn't until I started doing diptychs and triptychs, combinations of full page drawings and full pages of writing, that their graphic element was brought to my attention clearly. A friend noticed how similar a full page of handwriting was to a new painting hanging in the kitchen. Looked at from a little distance, the page of writing was almost an exact visual equivalent to the painting. Which seems another happy accident, since it indicates unity in the work. But to get

back to what you said about the rejection of the typewriter as a political act. I agree. I got rid of it at first in a subconscious effort to free myself, simply so I could go on. For all its real advantages, the typewriter has made it easier for people to imitate others, to imitate the appearance of poetry, without knowing what they're doing. It's easy to throw lines all over the page, use multiple margins, make fancy line breaks, use slashes, brackets, etc etc, without having them mean a damn thing in terms of furthering the musicology of the poem. And in the work of so many people you get the feeling they don't even believe in their own line lengths, they're simply there because they look good. It *looks* like a poem, but hardly ever sounds like one. After teaching creative writing, going to readings, and doing *The Review* for so many years, I've seen and heard a hell of a lot of work, and in most of it I could see people betraying their natural authenticity for the sake of meeting the conventional standards of the technique and of the ethos of the technique. I began to feel a great disgust for that, not only in others, but also in myself because I so often found it difficult to believe my own line lengths, And that's one of the reasons I no longer want to teach creative writing or edit *The Review*. It's also why I'm not writing lyric poems. I don't want any more of that. I can't be happy as a painter to work only to please the vagaries of an art market, and betray the sources of art there. That kind of corruption in poetry and art is a corruption at the heart of what might be a political life. What is supposed to be useful information to people becomes simply pretense. Of course, it becomes pretentious to propose you're doing something that isn't: God knows I'm not that sure of myself. And we could quarrel until the cows come home on what "useful information" might be. I want to give myself permission to be myself, and give myself permission to say anything I have to say, whether conventionally acceptable or not, so long as it's spoken straight from the heart and its engagement with the world. The fundamental lie in this "democracy" we inhabit is that we are entitled to speak freely. Women have learned this painfully in

the last few years. I don't presume it's any better elsewhere. People suffer and go crazy everywhere because they're unable to articulate their lives productively and peacefully. It's part of the fundamental political problem we all face: if you're going to do any useful work, whatever your task, you first have to stay with what is real for you and admit all of it, allow everything that's happening in your life to enter your work. I think we all know this. We're past the age of masterpieces, and we don't need propaganda. Poetry should be one way in which we can speak honestly, without playing to preconceived literary, social, or political roles.

SF In terms of what you're saying here, you're probably all aware of John Wieners' "Poem for Painters," and the image in this part of the poem is so much the kind of image that runs throughout the journal drawings:

At last. I come to the last defense.

My poems contain no
wilde beestes, no
lady of the lake, music
of the spheres, or organ chants.

Only the score of a man's
struggle to stay with
what is his own, what
lies within him to do.

Without which is nothing.
And I come to this
knowing the waste,
leaving the rest up to love
and its twisted faces,
my hands claw out at
only to draw back from the
blood already running there.

PC Thank you Sharon. There are a number of things present in the journal drawings as directives, and that's one of them. There's also the presence of Robin Blaser. Without his encouragement I might not have found the energy to start this new work. There's George Stanley's statement on poetry and politics in *Open Letter* (Second Series, Number One), Stan Persky's "Phuoc Binh Statement," Ed Dorn's "Love Song #22," and Brian Fawcett's *Creatures of State*. There's the presence of Malcolm Lowry, William Carlos Williams, Beatrix Potter, and all sorts of painters. I'm also indebted to Michael Ondaatje, David Phillips, Barry McKinnon, Pat Lane, and Daphne Marlatt, among others. This is a partial list of people who work in ways I respect and from whom I learn. Whatever their individual limitations, all of them have an understanding of their particular responsibility that makes poetry comprehensible and useful.

BS An area I think we should cover is the process whereby, first of all they're journal drawings, personal things done at the kitchen table, and then they move out into an audience. Gradually they get shown to close friends, then they get shown in the form of slides and read to audiences, and perhaps they'll get exhibited. How do you feel about that process of making the journal drawings more and more public?

PC In one way I would still prefer to keep them private, since that was the original intention, and only show them to friends whom I can trust to understand them. But I have come to accept responsibility for the series as public work, since I've read and shown them, first in Nanaimo at the Malaspina Poetry Conference, then in Prince George, and more recently in North Van. Showing them at Malaspina was in one way a terrible interruption, right in the middle of them, because I had done up to #30 by then, and that was the first time they'd been made public. I was absolutely terrified of showing them to strangers.

But one thing I've always felt about giving a reading is that you don't rely on past work, which is familiar, or which you no longer believe. You do what you've got at the moment. I feel that's an obligation, to show what your present struggle is. I didn't want to do it, but that's all I had, so I was stuck with my own work.

SF But they're so beautiful, Pierre; you must have had some sense of how beautiful they were, what a shame it would be to deprive people of them!

PC No, I had no sense of their being beautiful, though I might have liked some of the drawings and some of the jokes. I was afraid they were far too revealing and vulnerable. In fact, I arranged the night before to have Pat Lane, Barry McKinnon, and John Furberg meet me at 9 a.m. the day of the reading to preview them and help me decide whether to show them. Apparently they kept the appointment, but I was so hung over I missed it! After that, I had no choice. I went ahead and did it, and the response I got, unfortunately, was that many people liked them and did think they were beautiful.

SF Unfortunately for whom?

PC For me, because I was too gratified and happy. Though I tried not to be. Also, I felt I had come through something. I remember thinking that if I didn't find the nerve to read that writing in public I'd be finished for good.

AR I find it a big paradox with you, Pierre, in all this — the writing is really just the pits of despair and horror and self-dislike. But the drawings are beautiful. I feel better about these not reading them from that point of view. I think, though, that you must have that dichotomy anyway.

BS It's the dunghill and the rose.

AR You have one image of yourself which is very at odds with the other.

PC Yeah, maybe we're all schizophrenics. On the one hand one wants to be the romantic, and give that outpouring of soul, and on the other hand the classicist, and be very rigorous and structured and intellectual. Does that make sense?

SF Oh yes! You just described yourself.

PC Perhaps everyone who makes art has a sense of being at war with himself or herself. There are different directions one would like to go in and satisfy fully, but there's always the contrary which undercuts either of the impulses. You go in one way, and immediately and in the instant the other direction pulls you back. So you're constantly being torn apart — Plato's two horses — the black and the white that Brian talks about in one of his poems. For me that image goes right back to *Circle Without Center*, as the first image in "To Will Is To Stir Up Paradox": "this bridge / which if I walk in one direction / moves in the other." I think the journal drawings exhibit that contrariness within the experience constantly. Perhaps that's why I'm still confused. But to get back to the negative effect of having a "success" in that Malaspina thing: I had to go back home and live alone again, and still have the energy to keep on working in that more or less private way. But now it was with the sense that people knew what I was doing and *expected* something, which was part of what I had been trying to avoid. That's when the whole direction of the drawings darkened. They became darker and far more introspective, perhaps because I'm a contrary bastard and think it's a mistake to cultivate "success." But don't misunderstand, I'm not interested in cultivating failure either. It seems to me the most difficult and important thing you can do if you wish to be responsible is to stay as close to your sources as possible, without any view to acceptance anywhere.

BS You're talking about what the poet is doing in the world, about providing that information which has to be honest, which has to avoid that awful business of trying to fit into the current of what is expected, or what's the vogue. How does that relate to the political?

PC Brian Fawcett takes up as a sub-text through *Creatures of State* the issue of how we're continuously conditioned into being mere consumers and consequently deprived of a true citizenship. If, as an artist, your main intent is to produce a consumer product, and to consume recognition so as to have an edge on your competitors in the market-place, then it seems to me your usefulness becomes suspect, since you are literally turned into a product yourself, a dead thing, when you advance your private interests above a possible public good. If art intends, as one of its objectives, to empower people's lives to be fulfilled and real, then it seems to me the artist must resist the reduction of art into a consumer product, and to insist instead upon everyone's right to speak in an equality that should be more than a dream.

SF Probably art is the only realm where that can be possible.

BS That is the nature of art.

PC Well, if that is a *demand* of art, then I think we should be rightly appalled by ourselves if we don't do our utmost — even if we fail — to fulfill that demand. We reject a prior aesthetic, in whole or in part, only in order to be in a more accurate relation to our time, and to be able to speak from that relationship. We should be against careerism in any profession. The objective, I take it, of anybody's work is to make it and yourself, after you've been of use, useless, so that somebody else can do something else. No? You don't teach people in a class in order to have them come back to you the next year and the year after and the year after. You try to teach in such a way that they don't need you anymore. That is, they are empowered to do something for themselves. Unfortunately, the society we live in insists constantly on our inability to do anything authentic for ourselves: it's always someone or something else, an expert here, a perfect product there, that will do it all for you. This is part of the political deprivation we experience daily. Finally the journal drawings are political, and subversive.

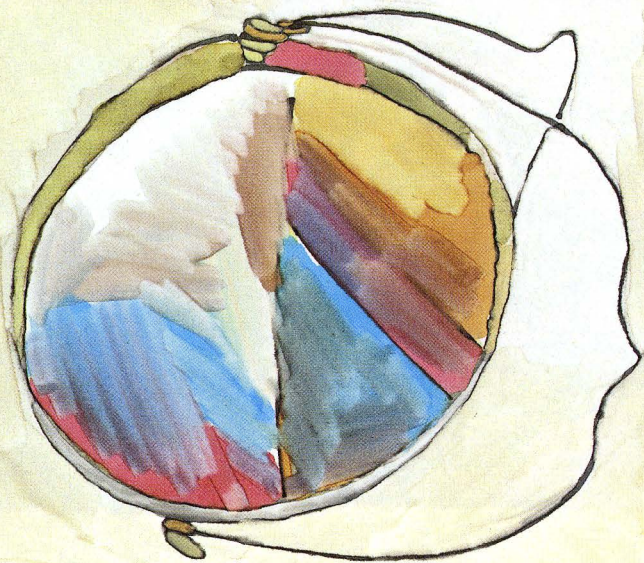
BS Because they assert the personal.

PC No, not because they assert the personal, but because they assert my right to speak as clearly as I can, with all the personal and public difficulty that entails. We have this complex belief that art transforms the real, and it can, if we're conscious and passionate, because it keeps imagination alive and nourishes it. But, if Shakespeare didn't change the world, if Cézanne didn't, if Williams didn't, I mean in an obvious sense, in our whole relationship with mother earth, in our daily economic and social inter-relationships — well, who are we to think that we're going to do that either? We're not. Otherwise the world would clearly have been paradise at least three hundred years ago. And the world ain't paradise. But I think, if art has a dirty function, which it must have, as well as a beautiful function, it's to keep our faces, our noses rubbing into the shit of our lives and of our world, so that we don't forget *the smell*. Don't forget *what it looks like*. Don't forget *where we are*. It's *not* paradise. At least not in our day-to-day living. It's paradise somewhere in our imaginations, which is also part of our day-to-day living, if we didn't have that we would surely die. But we can't afford to propose transcendent beauty all the time, we can't afford to do that because we're walking in a real world.

Le miroir -

M. Couper

Shall it always return
to landscape? Where
face is this? Is the
chrysalis within
contained within
reversing covers? Or a
mirror flower, those
dead things in the
brandy glass in front
of me? Whirl & swirl,
its stream in the sky,
this Pacific edged in
a yellowish grey, the
cold of the tulips I am
not unhappy - the cat
sits on my lap - I talk
to myself in the frozen
food section of the
Superway - do I need
orange juice? I look
for love in the mids of
these miracles.



Journal Entry #9.

January 21, 1977.

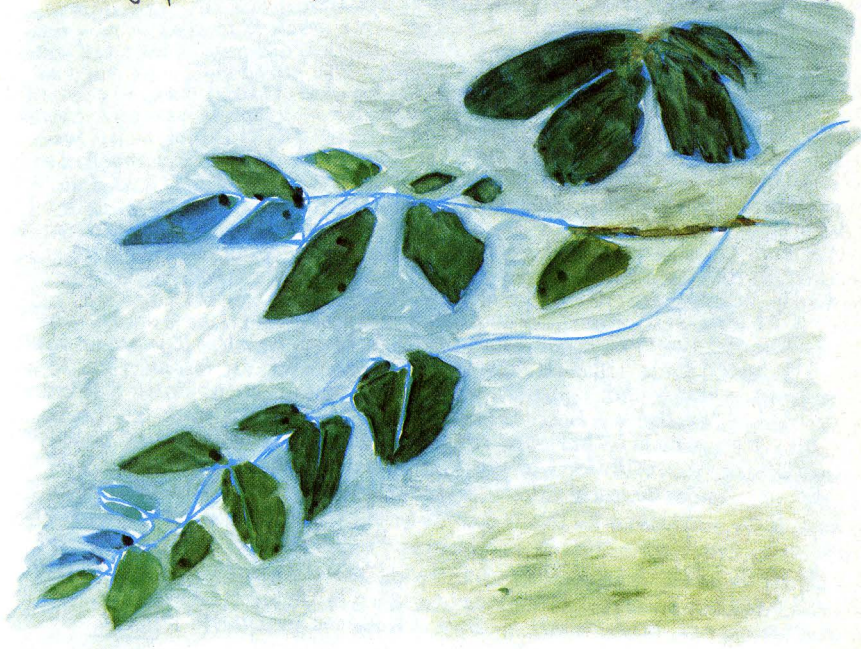
The shabby angst - the endless whining about invisibility - to pay the tolls, to draw to write to paint to teach, to make & keep friends, to love - The shabby grip the poet holds me in - the endless radio with its monotonous & varied - world, local, national - undisturbed, brilliant, multiplying - a new stream mean a bloody turn - the shabby fermentation - expect to make close to hand - a new myself threatened in my shabby wife's too shabby poetry & two days later a come to watch it heart bleated with its shabby games, I wait for someone else whose duty, job it is to leave the thing out, day it wash it & let it go, I write out the in voice. The wolf cry in the distance, in the heart. The endless elaborate about identity, everything is out of place, in the place & time. The shabby insistence on order - focus in the kittens' activities - worms in the sweater they sleep on - the shabby poems of my elders (I have few contemporaries) - & the shabby audience - they hear nothing because they have been to themselves - & the shabby poet. Cravens & poor (love, advice, repairs for revolution, transcribing, for fear of another shabby election - love or dead well - let us wander in) the shabby we have sought to shabby seats in the pool, drifts flash to the shainer - lifts a shabby arm & leads the survival of the endless, shuffling & shabby, wind down - Dante & Beethoven sit on my lap in their mother's bed before - the mountain shrouded in the flower. The shabby search for grace, for its own other human feature - has been dead since - there is cry in the distance, in the heart. Flies & worms crawl over my skin. Bottom of. Eat the shit. The present paradise of a shabby person & self - pity - the redemption of the gods who refuse to accept of the ends of the world. I touch their soft fur - the little beads who pick up the shabby of murder - I crack another beer, but what other drink, needles & dirt, beyond over the eye: pray for the physical perfection of grace - the physical voice that itself tell me how exists in the distance. The live poet - shabby with shabby who could it - they have way out of hell. No lot to Canada. No thing to sleep. No thing to go - what is the shabby who will accept me out of shabby with kindness? for whom does the perfume herself now? for whom the color on the lips, the clear in, the fresh underwear? significance of the bottom of this page - a full color drawing of the body floating in the pool. Breaks the body in blue tears, a blue lion with a black front garden belt, black boots. The color of the water in the lovely central turquoise green. The edge of the pool is green & the woman's body is a yellowish green, almost gold in the ground. I sit at the Pacific after noon. And I would be to getting the world - to get a that as a reflection before the vision of paradise, which is all shabby my wife. To know I should never read that to my father or mother, my brother or sister, my wife or my children. And who should I call now? who hasn't heard enough of the shabby in this world? who or not afraid of the shabby, shabby & shabby does it? who does not wish to become a shabby angel?

Sept 20 1977. Shabby journal drawing #42. The Corpse of the poet.



Journal drawing #43. Oct 2, 77. P. Causey.

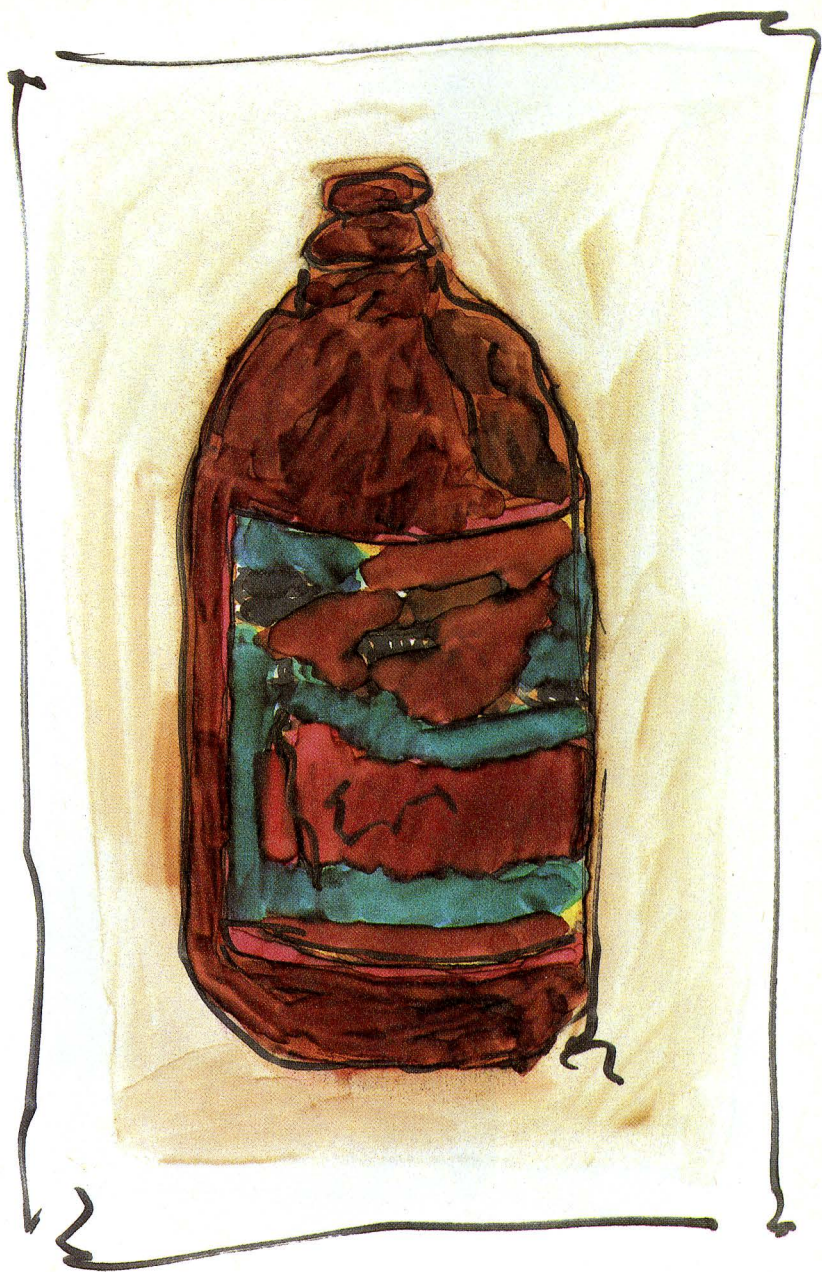
The brightness of the day after love - the sky blue, the complex light on the leaves - the diamond pattern of the wind on my back - the pool rippling, filling w/ the cold here water. The sun flowers precisely angled, attentive, attending from their green temple at the end of the garden. After love, the brightness in the water, the corpse of the feet. The body looks pale & foolish after no more dark kisses, so many words burning into the bright air. Minor music lies in the sun, her ears angled back to catch the squirrel's chirp. Dante & Beatrice play in the tangled weeds by the shed. The ink as bright as glass on the page. The solid hairs of my arm knit points to the pool, my eyes glazed & my brain turning into ice, into water, into ice. The body half-submerged in the cold green light turns, pivots on the navel, abandoned, absent. Dead or asleep, done with, going nowhere. Empty of complaint or desire. So many spider webs. So much hunger.



Sitting here, w/ nothing to say, as in, what have I got to say, as in, is it possible to no locate
oneself - the sun's lance coming to rest on the porcine spot verbally - when all
you can think of is your own sorrow & self-pity, everything you've failed to do and be.
Sitting on the log over the stream, almost lost in the color of the bronze rocks below the green &
white water, the traits of the world, how half the population of this city (at least) is also,
at this precise instant emotionally disturbed - men, women, kids, alone in some room,
on a park bench walking past apartment towers watching other people's lives half-enriched.
And to find your life in this cliché as well in almost a joke, but not quite - Dr. Paul thought of
despised poetry, & how people died every day for want of what is found there - & he is right:
our deprivations, what we want in the shared world - happy to mean w/ a thousand
hearts who can so narrow the multitude - by reaching the beautiful - This Sunday,
this life is almost consumed by the Beat, where precise palate demands the best parts of us
first, the tastiest - the rest is left for the truly lean times. How should I think of you? I
burned the 2 poems I wrote for you yesterday. I am also tired of sacrificing my desire. I
want to be met to share a nourishment. I am also tired of being consumed. How should
I think of you? Of course I should think of the precise way in which you are absent. How the absence
excludes all of its flaws, none of its perfections. Or how the absence is perfect when it is so
defined by the absence of its perfections - I don't want to say how I think of our bodies,
there in the perfection, I don't want any more anymore, I don't want to think! - I cut
that off here, because I'm afraid of the unknown - having travelled there beyond myself
& even the sense of desire without the comfort of being able to return to where I began, or
to the person I began with, without the presence of the companion beside me I do live &
desire. To be so excited & to burn the head & see the bed is empty beside you, suddenly,
& to know it is your own impatience to make the ascent has lost you your companion,
who might have been willing, had you waited only a little longer, to stand there
beside you. Therefore this can be no lament nor analysis, nor plea. Some little recognition,
perhaps, of the swiftness of the liquid air, the bright water, the roomers of the heart.
Even more every sensation, a judgement. I go on talking, to fill the page, to let
myself off the hook of having to move, to do something real, my job. The hook
of the real is under & harsh. Almost no-one is up to it. Will I ever be. Almost.
Hunched drawing #52. October 16, 1977. The Corpse of the Abernethy Dancer. P. 100p.



Keep the language here simple: remember to say what you have to say as directly as possible: without rhetoric. The problem in the last few weeks in the drawings has been in the language: it's embarrassing, self-indulgent, & finally, weak. I have resorted to rhetoric: to phrases, phrases. I have little direct knowledge of. Speak of what you know: nothing else. When I don't do that, I have to mask the words with a second layer of art. I wonder now whether I should take permission to revise, correct, improve. Perhaps I have taught myself as much as I can now learn through an acceptance of the immediate, of flaws, of mistakes. After all, it isn't necessary to display one's indulgences: this work does not need to be printed or shown or read. Nowhere has it possibly been of help? If it could be of use, then it's almost obligatory to make it available. Each day I write simply that all speech is public. That takes courage. I'm not sure what to do: of course I would like to contribute something enduring which would earn me praise. But because I'm afraid of being misread, laughed at for being so vain, so manly, so downward etc. Part of the problem in writing first & doing the drawing afterwards, is knowing the original process. But I'm feeling it out. I'd like to start now, making large & definitive drawings, with coherent & specific language, & scrap everything else so far. But then that takes on all the attributes of the ambition that I've wanted (or pretended) to refuse so far. A complex meditation, which is what I intended if I can call it anything, is not pop-art. A complex meditation in the immediate, what is immediately before your attention immediately in your attention, what floods in on you when you are disposed to respond and recognize. I would rather not see my own marks (almost so on my right hand alone), & I certainly don't want any possible lover to see them either - but what else can I do when I know they're there. If anything has a necessity, it informs, perhaps for no one else, to learn what I can of virtue, and to register the pressures (mostly of the future) of the process. Perfect utterance, like the perfect poem, is yet to be encountered. A speech of signs, of the hand writing, simply. Almost by itself at its best. But an accompaniment enters, the shadowy twin. The ghostly dark. The ghostly light. By search of the Beautiful - grace, music, color - I have come to be worthy of someone else's intelligence. Journal Drawing #53. October 30, 1977. CP





Mokey. 20. 27. 77.

Postscript # 6.

Postscript #6 - quit the watch game black, young, ghostly against space & time. Done 6 c.m.
after everyone had left, after all the beer was gone, the wine, the port, and now it's 5 p.m.,
the day so dark as the watch. I feel like killing myself again, & only because the house is
empty. I'm hung over, & I won't have the energy to do anything - either to feed or
annoy myself. Thus being the emphasis is - & afraid to pick up the phone to
call a my dear, for fear they'll hear their stupid need in me, & no one needs that.
Against & again. No one needs your sin again (where in the Virgin for those who have
nothing left). Dear Larry. And we were all so perfectly drunk, high on the bad casino
& laughing @ the grim task of poetry, talking all at once & on the phone, & explaining
our likes to each other again & again. Each one possessed of unworldly
secrets, & talking & laughing each other, telling the stories, doing the dance & simply
high on our being here. And now not & alone, my skin being eaten by one (and
what foulness, I'm sick of myself & want to laugh, but can't. To tell up the empty
house - what to do between now & the moment - I can finally stop with sleep -
and not have to listen to myself, the scratching pen, the cracking leave, the noise of my
lips & throat as I drink the last of the dog's milk, sweet port, which slips into my
stomach with the most awful gracefulness. Fatigue. Fatigue. As if the whole world
has come here, stepped out of its nothing left but this hand making the paper
dirty. As if somehow you could look down at them, from the moon, from Venus,
from Mars everywhere at all, & see nothing but in other hands moving back &
forth with its intricate machinery, scratching the paper, scratching itself. I am
being eaten by the spaces between microbes, by the faults & cracks in the
molecular chain - each hair on my hand a whole America of horror.
Surfers in it of the task of poetry - the task of poetry is the forming of the place
behind the screen - the comic, ghostly use of the watch trying to leave itself
behind the screen will warm my back & film will hold me when I speak in my sleep to all
my accusers: does it matter - I never did. I did not ask for them. You did not
ask for them. No one was asked for them. 17/10/1977. 77.

Postscript #10 - Such an old story. He leans into the electric cigarette player. How the music takes a turn, dips, into the bodies into a motion not their own. He would like to cry in his office. He's just another sad old English teacher who hides the knowledge from his colleagues that as he hates himself as much as he pities them, that he doesn't know the difference between a run on & a comma splice. The ruins of civilization in his head, grand thoughts, echo the music. He thinks, it doesn't matter if doesn't a weekend in the woods did diabolically old priests float between the trees, they know what goes down in South America. They know old Bach's Variations given piano in the trees, like only in the city everything mixed up without any political anxiety in notwithstanding for a moving space. - The bodies move as a motion not their own. Not their own. Was anything here to be his, theirs. What does he belong to now, if not to his own loss. If not to his own. The music is never gentle than it comes to that. He ought to know. He ought to know better. - To take it somewhere. What it needs to be taken anywhere. He thinks of studies against orders. He has been ordered not to think. He can remember that, a long time ago. He remembers the crippled elbows at the baseball game. What difference do they make on his pictures? Arms crinkled at the elbow, the body they belong lifting bear to its face. Thus did it get there. Such an old story. Every one's heard it. Someone goes quickly mad in a corner of the room, & he thinks of crippled elbows, the folk singers hands cut off in Chile. The night of darkness in Rem death sounds in Brazil. He looks his own throat open & holds the pipe in his hand, the smoke rising through from the last cigarette. The piano in the freesteps, given light on the key. - He's been asked to make plans. Collocos, what is the game plan? What action plan to do, then ask. About what. About it. He doesn't know what they're talking about. He has a telephone with a dial and 8 buttons on it. What are the buttons for. To press! The telephone is vacant there's a switch. He it turns off the ring he never turns it on, never notices that it's ringing an incoming call. Who is it that isn't calling him, who is it calling him. It's on or off. Press the buttons. A mistake maybe, and then then there's a sigh. The music to put an old key to sleep to put an old fool to sleep, the centuries to sleep. To put him in the freesteps to get a better look at the Moon, the dead. To go there. - He will get on the boat, go 50 minutes up the coast. Look the whole time at the water slipping gravity under the height, think stupidly of slipping over the edge, into the soup, the humless peace, hazy on the coast line, small houses, small lives, perfect in their distance from the city, the police sounds coming to make them work, to squash complaint. Whiners, who deserve nothing, blessed a 1000 times by the music they never asked for. Aloupy. The Goldberg Variations. 30. XII. 77 - 17. VIII. 78. (36 yrs. old. It's done.)



RAINBOW

Was this the talk all night, coyote's arc,
Spicer's diamond, do we have to
speak of poetry & not know
what hits us, the garden's drift
under the moon light
ready to give up —

It isn't a speech
or helplessness —

It is
a love
missing teeth

eagles & tides
the shock

that whatever you do or do not do does not
disturb the world's angry sleep & the wild
life inhabits that ghostly city,
to fell a forest so dark, stepping

into the orange light, the tiger
lilies & green holly,

summer & winter

whatever leaves you
so swiftly
you can't tell
what it was,

but this: *You stepped*
into my heart I didn't know
You had such power

& there's a silence in the house,
& any description of their breathing would be
a deprivation of what I want.
I think of the pink anemones in the tide pools,
& the coyotes singing on the hillside. It is a distance

between the dream & the island

the love & the scent of
somebody you know for sure

quarrel & embrace

helpless

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