

GUY DE COINTET

WITH PLEASURE THE WAITRESS REPEATS: "3 5 6 2 8 2 5 3 9 2 0 0 8 1 2 7 6 0 1 9 4 6 7 8 3 1 7 2 4 6 5 3 9 8 8 3 2 0 5 8 0 4 1 7 2 8 0 0 2 5 7 9 4 1 1 6 8 9 0 3 1 5 4 6 9 2 8 6 3 2 3 0 7 4 5 6 8 9 7 5 0 6 0 9 7 9 5 8 3 1 2 3 9 2 6 1 5 4 1 4 3 4 0 5 2 7 7 4 8 0 6 4 0 5 6 5 6 1 0 9 5 3 1 6 1 3 9 5 6 4 9 1 8 7 3 2 5 7 5 9 2 8 6 7 0 8 9 3 8 7 0 0 8 6 8 6 5 4 3 9 0 7 2 0 5 3 9 2 7 5 1 8 7 8 6 2 5 9 5 2 1 6 3 6 7 2 2 6 9 4 7 3 6 8 4 7 9 8 2 1 3 4 0 2 5 9 1 2 0 3 5 5 2 7 8 6 9 5 8 6 0 0 5 8 7 4." HOW WISE SHE IS!

GUY de COINTET
A page from *A Few Drawings*, 1975



Guy de Cointet (b. Paris, 1940, d. Los Angeles, 1983) explores cultural and symbolic codes in his works for theater, performance, literature and graphic design.

This interview with Guy de Cointet was conducted by Emily Hicks in August, 1983 in Venice, California. At the time, he was seriously ill and died a week later.

Emily Hicks: Some of your dialogue [for your plays] includes odd substitutions for words, the sort of substitutions that occur in dreams. (Note: In *Tell Me*, Michael says, "Mary, can I have a cigarette?" Mary replies, "A cigarette? Wouldn't you rather have a scotch?" Michael says, "No, I prefer a drink." Mary asks "What would you like to drink?" Michael answers, "A Marlboro." Mary apologizes, "I'm sorry, Michael, I'm out of Marlboro. I drank the last drop of it yesterday morning.") Do you ever eavesdrop or overhear conversations?

Guy de Cointet: Yes. I use lots of things that I hear on the radio or from people I know. Sometimes people don't speak very precisely, but they still seem to understand each other, even though their words could be interpreted in many different ways.

Why did you decide to stop writing books and do performances instead?

Because the books were so abstract in a way. I wanted to show a different side of my work. In some performances I have used books, but I use large ones that I make myself, so the audience can see exactly what is written or what is drawn.

So the performances provided a way to explain the books, to make them more accessible.

I wanted to present the different relationships visually.

You said some of the performances have actual codes.

Yes, but when you start to translate some of them, you may come across another layer of codes, which you then have to solve.

How is music related to the performances?

It's not music, it's more codes. Some codes I make up and some come from Gypsy writing; some codes are really just about codes.

Do you want the reader to try to translate or decode the books?

No.

You just want them to know there is some order?

Right. That's why I decided to do the plays.

What relationships exist between characters and objects, in addition to the characters telling stories about the objects?

I usually don't use the same color for everything in the set. Each object is specific; each has its own function as much as the actors do, so each has to be different. The actors are all different, as are the props. Everything has to be placed as precisely as possible on stage to keep ambiguity to a minimum.

When the audience sees the piece, is the set completely explained?

All the objects are used in the action so it all comes together. The performers talk about all the objects, one after another, until the enigmas are resolved.

Does the activity of telling stories about the objects become the plot? You don't use plot in a traditional sense, but the plays begin with the audience knowing nothing and end when their confusion about the objects has been resolved.

Yes, but not always. In the last performance, there were no props at all, only light.

That was *Five Sisters*.

Yes. The lights were designed by Eric Orr, as were the colors. He used very bright colors: purple, magenta, yellow, blues. Sometimes the lights were cued by what the characters were discussing. For example, to relax, you need blue light. A character says, "it's so blue," and she slowly starts becoming completely blue. Another character is very sensitive to the sun; in fact, she can't stand it. Once in a while a bright yellow square appears; when she sees it, she starts to get sick and then becomes completely upset, out of her mind.

Emily Hicks is a Los Angeles writer and art critic.