From *Going To The Market*, performed by Peg Shirley
...There is in Guy's work a complex but subtle quality that deals directly with the levels of multiplicity as experience. He provides presence with thought and at the same time creates an enigma based in our suspicion of things not understood but to which we are attracted because of our faith in logic and reason. Just as the child stares at the clouds and dreams of things there, we with crowded mind must also not forget the simple pleasures of reading the clouds.

George Miller, 1976

Guy de Cointet has created a rich body of drawings, books and live performance pieces in which the look of language and the sound of language are lyrically manipulated into uncommonly exotic expressions. On one level de Cointet's work seems to result in nimble-witted propaganda for structuralist theories, a diverse branch of contemporary linguistics and philosophy that would have us better understand the ways in which the vast complexities of language patterns shape how and what we think. More explicitly, however, de Cointet's fecundity gently obliges us to experience the demilitarization of language thereby leading us back to "the simple pleasures of reading the clouds."

In his drawings de Cointet takes the letters of the English alphabet and supplants them with unfamiliar equivalents. De Cointet has created many such alphabet transformations. The titles of his drawings always give adequate information to reveal the code. The viewer who wishes to confirm the reliability of de Cointet's systems will find it relatively easy to transpose the artist's designs back into English letters.

It is important to note that in these drawings de Cointet is not altering, in any way, the syntax, the meaning or the sound of the English language. He changes only the appearance of the letters and complete disorientation is the result. Despite the absolute logic and accessibility of de Cointet's codes, an air of mystery prevails.

One of de Cointet's great gifts is the subtlety and elegance with which his individual letters connect to each other, sometimes from side to side, sometimes from one line down to the next. In the early "zig-zag" drawings the letters themselves are but points on a horizontal scale which runs from A to Z. Here the main visual elements are the lines which connect these points one to the next in small vertical increments. In the other four drawings there are no such ligatures between letters. Letters touch only by chance when certain combinations of letters join each other in sequence or are placed atop one another in consecutive lines.

In contrast to the alphabets that have emerged over centuries of evolution, de Cointet's alphabet inventions are carefully designed suites. Attention has been paid only to the appearance of the letters and not to the origins of their meanings. The result is a series of alphabets wholly devoid of historical antecedents but strikingly refined in visual appearance.

De Cointet's live performance pieces are less schematic and more elusive than his drawings. The artist does not perform the works himself but usually hires professional actors and actresses. The performers read from de Cointet's texts and use his props. These stories are apocalyptic, melodramatic and replete with intrigue.

Says the artist, "The props used in the performance are very important and usually abstract: a large painting, a group of drawings, a book written in an unintelligible manner, geometric forms of various sizes, etc...The performances provide the audience with
information, interpretations, explanations, deciphering texts, shapes, forms, colors, etc., loading them with precise meaning. For example, in Going to the Market the blue is a river and the green a forest through which a desperate engineer is driving...The pieces are rehearsed, texts are memorized or read but always acted out, in a dramatic way, borrowing from the theatre some of its techniques."

In two of the works performed for MATRIX — Going to the Market and Two Drawings — actress Mary Ann Duganne valiantly and energetically attempts to explicate several "works of art" (one painting and two drawings). When performed within the unique confines of an art museum such works flirt with parody.

In each of de Cointet's performance pieces, the presentation is so convincingly out of the ordinary that his works seem to be a series of revelations. Curiously his texts make us feel that we know nothing and we know everything.

Guy de Cointet was born in Paris in 1940. His father was in the French Army and de Cointet spent much of his childhood travelling in France, Germany, Indonesia, Morocco, etc. His mother was a gifted linguist and it is likely that the artist's interest in language dates from his childhood. He never pursued formal training in art but instead travelled to places such as Spain, Ireland and Germany "to play cards with people and learn the language at the same time."

De Cointet visited New York City in 1967 and returned to the United States the following year to become an assistant to artist Larry Bell in Los Angeles. De Cointet still lives in Los Angeles and is represented by Cirrus Gallery, Ltd.
The work may seem difficult to approach at first sight. A part of this difficulty, I think, is inherent in the context in which we inevitably see it: it sits uncomfortably in the tradition of strictly conceptual word-art as it has developed in the United States in the last decade. Its true roots lie in the aesthetic tradition of Raymond Roussel—a writer whom this artist greatly admires, and indeed emulates in his performance work; of Tristan Tzara and other French language-experimentalists of the early part of this century; and, more recently though less directly, in the aesthetics of structuralism which seeks, through scientific or quasi-scientific analysis of systems and structures, alternative approaches to the traditional concerns with "form" and "meaning" in the arts...

"Reading" de Cointet's work is an experience akin to reading the author who provides him with the source of many of his quotations: Jorge Luis Borges—a writer who delights in constructing enigmatic and seemingly irreducible systems, which nonetheless tempt the reader on with the bait of melodramatic narrative, philosophical reduction or interpretation. Or again, it is akin to the experience of reading poetry: all the quotations used are "poetic" in the sense that they offer us images or ideas which have an absolute clarity, but a clarity which defies logic or understanding—or rather creates its own. Poetry, as Sartre said, is not a use of language—it is a madness within language.
Works in MATRIX:
Remember those...exciting days, 1971-72, pen and pencil on paper, 23" x 17".

Deep in the...circled by hazardous, 1971-72, pen and pencil on paper, 24" x 19".

October 10. Evening. This has been the most exciting day of my life..., 1977, ink and pencil on paper, 20" x 25½".

That treacherous drink finished me..., 1976, ink and pencil on paper, 20" x 25½".

Proper Rhythm, 1977, ink on paper, 25½" x 40".

She's in wonderful shape!, 1977, ink on paper, 25½" x 40".

All works have been lent by the artist and Cirrus Gallery, Ltd., Los Angeles.

MATRIX will present three performance works by Guy de Cointet on Thursday evening, April 27, 1978 at 8 p.m.

The works will be performed by Mary Ann Duganne of Los Angeles.

1. MY FATHER’S DIARY
   On his deathbed a man gives his daughter a book, a precious book, filled with texts, signs, diagrams, drawings. "This is my diary...", he starts to tell her, but too weak to give additional information he closes his eyes... forever. At this moment the war breaks out, dragging along in its turmoil the young girl and the diary. Recalling for the audience these tragic events, she presents the large book and attempts to explain it page after page. The book sits on a small table. Duration: about 15 minutes.

2. GOING TO THE MARKET
   A shaped painting with colorful edges, and a plain white background covered at random with black letters. At random? Maybe not. Definitely not... The performer taking only a few minutes will unravel the whole story contained within the piece. The painting hangs on the wall. Duration: about 8 minutes.

3. TWO DRAWINGS
   Browsing in a West Los Angeles shop, a young woman is attracted by a curiously shaped drawing. "Quite simple and pretty!" she says to herself, and she buys it. But at home, looking at it carefully, she has to admit the modest piece is strange. Very strange indeed, as strange as another drawing...

   The performance is a detailed account of this young woman's reactions toward these two drawings. The two drawings hang on the wall, side by side. Duration: close to 20 minutes.
Selected one-man exhibitions:
Cirrus Gallery, Los Angeles '74 (first), '76, '77; Simon Lowinsky Gallery, San Francisco '78.

Selected performances by de Cointet:
Cirrus Gallery, Los Angeles '73 (first), '74, '75; Galerie Sonnabend, Paris '73; Otis Art Institute, Los Angeles '74, '77; Theatre Recamier, Paris '76; Whitney Museum of American Art, NYC '76; Portland Center for the Visual Arts '77; San Francisco Art Institute '77; Fort Worth Art Museum '77.

Selected exhibitions:
Newport Harbor Museum, Newport Beach, CA, Books by California Artists '72; University of Toronto, Language and Structure '75; Braathen and Freidus Gallery, NYC, '77, '78; Museo de Arte Contemporaneo, Caracas, Venezuela, International Video Encounter '77; Long Beach Museum of Art at the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, Southland Video Anthology '77; Kassel, Germany, Documenta 6 '77; The Fort Worth Art Museum, Los Angeles in the Seventies '77.

Selected bibliography by de Cointet:
"Thick Foliage," Choke, September 1 '77, p. 27+.

Selected bibliography about de Cointet:
Welling, James. "Linking Dream Structures and Images," Artweek vol. 6 no. 24 (June 28 '75), p. 16.
Miller, George. "Guy de Cointet," The Portrait Review, Monogram vol. 3 (January '76).
Frank, Peter. "Guy de Cointet and George Miller at Braathen and Freidus," Art in America vol. 65 no. 4 (July-August '77), p. 100.

Publications by Guy de Cointet:
ACRCIT (newspaper) '71;
A Captain From Portugal (book) '72; Esphahor ledet ko uluner! (book) '73; Cizeghoh Tur Ndjmb (portfolio of prints) '73;
TSNX C24 VAFME (play) '74;
Animated Discourse (book, in collaboration with Larry Bell) '75; A Few Drawings (book) '75.

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