

Christopher Bucklow interviewed by Amy Johnson

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AJ: What is your definition or understanding of "nature"?

CB: As I understand it now, nature is everything. All things, all thoughts, all matter and all history. This view of it is closer to what used to be called Creation. Maybe it is close to the old sense of Cosmos. But we have to remember that both of those terms have been affected in their meanings by the separation of nature and culture at the end of the Renaissance period. After that time, Creation and Cosmos might be mistaken for ideas that only apply to the 'nature' side of the nature-culture divide. But for me all things are nature. In a sense, I think of it just as everything that IS.

When I included, above, all thoughts and all history, in this Everything, it shows that this idea of nature includes the immaterial – includes thoughts; the world of the symbol (all the billion, billion, billion symbols encoded in the internet, and in all the libraries and all the heads of all the people in the world). I include also all the events in the history of the universe. My idea of nature is not 'thing' biased. An event; the fall of Troy, or the fall of a leaf... all these events are real to me as if they were things. A past event is real to me now; it DID happen.... Perhaps this is a view of nature that is beyond time? At any rate it is super-inclusive.

I talked (at the High Museum) about how this began for me; how I began from a slightly different position with a need to see culture (all things of the human) as part of nature (just in the way that we might include a stick used as a tool by a chimp to get ants out of a nest as a part of the natural order of things... so that any kind of tool became for me a phenomenon of nature... this mac book for example). But then I realised in the post-Renaissance view of things, that the concept 'nature' is all that is not culture. It depends, for its definition, on its opposite. Similarly the idea of 'culture' is similarly all that is not nature. SO THAT if you said, as I had begun to, that culture is actually a phenomenon of nature, the two things just cancelled out (as one cancels like numbers in a mathematical equation). ZAP! ... The duality had imploded. I was beyond a duality that I had lived. I was out of jail.

Note that the most interesting word I used above is the word 'need'. Why I needed to think about all those ideas is revealing about what is really going on in the way we make concepts and theories and categories about the world. I needed to think that whole set of thoughts I just described because the concepts I applied to the EXTERNAL world were emotionally wedded to the needs of my INTERNAL world my psyche. But they were linked in ways that were killing me. This is how I think it worked: 'Nature' was something I identified with the 'given,' that which is already in

place (in the psyche, as one comes into consciousness of one's self as a child)-- It's the law (of the parent those who have power over us) and it is internalised to become what the Freudians call superego. So that is one idea, opposite it is 'Culture' - all that comes into being through human acts of choice (or desire or will) - I had identified this with MY own desires (of my ego and partly of my id). It is very hard to write that because I think the actual situation is rather more complex... but that is for another time, and the above will have to do here in this context. Now I had grown up feeling that nature was more legitimate than culture... had more moral right, more right to exist. Internally I was obviously being hammered by my superego into believing that the demands of society AS LODGED IN THE DEMANDS OF THE PARENT, took precedence over any wishes or needs that I as an individual may be feeling. Having the two concepts blip out of existence as I described above - signaled the end of my internal subjugation. I had grown up.

I think all concepts and theories are very likely to be influenced very thoroughly, or even totally by such psychological drives. What is interesting to me is how the psyche, as it were 'disowns' these drives or meanings, and projects them into the external world, as if they are really out there, and are nothing to do with 'us'. It seems to be an efficient system for processing ideas. BUT until one realises the reality of this situation it is as if MOST OF ONE'S MIND IS NOT IN ONE'S HEAD ITS OUT THERE ALL AROUND ONE MASQUERADING AS THE THINGS OF THE EXTERNAL WORLD. Only when you see what really is happening can you truly own your mind, and have it all in your head... AND moreover, see the external world AS itself, instead of camouflaged psyche. I should also note that for me this also included all human beings too. As I have tried to say, only after this could I see any of the people I loved.... really see them... become porous to them.

By the way, please note that I am not claiming this unfortunate story has anything to do with other people. I hope other people were not similarly afflicted... I may only have reached, in my own struggle, the place that other people started out from! But this doesn't mean that the general point is invalid, from what I have observed, I think this way of being is commonplace, perhaps even universal.

AJ: For as much as you discuss yourself and your self-examination openly, it seems to always begin with your career. Since I began making art, I have thought often about my childhood and I wonder what yours was like?

CB: Well I suppose some of the latter part of the answer above has much to say about my childhood. I think children tend to be born into a situation not unlike that of a totalitarian state. There is a massive power imbalance. I could give you all kinds of anecdotes about my happy childhood and all my nature collecting... birds eggs, plants etc., but I really think that the relevant things are to do with the psyche of the group one is born into... And that is so hard to recollect and reconstruct. It is possible in analysis or therapy, and I have seen it a little bit there and been fascinated by the

insights that emerged... But also part of me wonders if I have not transcended it now? Or is that just pride?

AJ: I wonder also how you first became interested in art at all even if it was in terms of the more academic or scholarly approach. Is there anything in particular that you can think of that influenced you or sparked your interest?

CB: That's a hard one. My first interest was only in making art. I didn't know anything about it, but I remember being good at painting and drawing (in comparison at least with my class mates). But when I was about 11 or 12, I recall seeing, for the first time, reproductions of El Greco and Paul Klee paintings in magazines that my art teacher had in the stock room. And I was drawn to them- magnetised by them. Something about the power of their vision and their expression connected with something in me. I wanted to have that power. To be able to do it. To be able to make others feel it?

After that I discovered the melancholy early landscapes by the Impressionist painter Alfred Sisley. And I became OBSESSED... between 1972 to 1976, I was totally taken over by the need to be a painter, to see the world through a landscape painter's eyes. Almost to live, in some strange, way during those early years of his, a hundred years previously, in the 1870s. It was like I was in a time warp. The scholarly approach to art only came later when I was given only the option of studying art history at college (by my parents, who naturally wondered how I would ever make a living studying studio art). And I became seduced by the thinking process around the study of art, and loved it, and forgot about the joys of making art for some 10 years (1978-88). Who knows what that magnetism really was? An emotional, visual language of feelings, the sense of touch, the sensuality of touch involved in those painters, needing feelings to flow both ways in and out, needing touch....? Ring any bells with the first question - the nature question?

AJ: Do you think that there is a lack of good criticism in the contemporary art world?

CB: I have to say that I do on the whole. Certainly I think career art historians or academic art critics have far less a chance of coming equipped to be able to really SEE the artist. The best criticism I have read always comes from artists writing about others, or film makers about artists or writers too... And vice versa artists writing about either of the others (that is what is great about the magazine called BOMB that comes out of NY... No professional critics write for it. Poets write about film makers, artists write about writers, writers write about painters etc etc etc. Subscribe now!

AJ: How do you feel about the showing and selling of your work? In other words, does the process of making art, for you, stop when the painting is finished, or the photograph is made, or the drawing... or does it continue into the process of showing it, discussing it, selling it, etc.?

CB: Selling is a necessity. I can't see a way to pursue my investigations with all my might, taking up all of my time and energy, without selling the deposit at the end of the process. I suppose that the implication there is that if I could see another way, I would follow it. Showing is another thing all together. It caters for one's basic need for conversation and understanding. I always have hopes of being understood – hopes that sufficiently like-minded people might recognise where I am coming from and engage in discussion from their various perspectives. I always fantasise that my testimony will help others.... always this need to feel useful! I guess it is deeply rooted, genetic even. Many books on altruism in human and animal societies I have read over the years.

AJ: Do you think a discussion of the work is important (in your case and in the case of others' work)?

CB: Discussion is important – but not that important. I kind of crave it but rarely find it. So I get along without it for years at a time. But it does help you define yourself better – even if it is in negative relation to the views of others. Anyway one is always in dialogue of this sort – with those in your thoughts. Other artists, dead and alive. That is a discussion of sorts too.

AJ: What is art?

CB: For me it is a second self. I put myself into it and that act or process allows me to see myself. Its a kind of mirror that sees beyond appearances. It also allows me to show myself to others. Just as I show myself to myself. So it is also a communication device between me and others and between the other in me and the me that normally has no access to that other inside.

AJ: What is the role of the artist?

CB: My role, the role I prefer for myself, is to provide visual pleasure to onlookers, while also offering insights about myself and my world. Hopefully, as I am not unique, this can also offer insights for others of my kind. I note that the niche activity or role 'artist' has been conserved by our society across a long period of time, down through the ages, in fact. So it must have an evolved use. Perhaps it is as outside commentator and advisor. Certainly I feel that people visit places like MOMA in NY for advice. The artist is thought of as a kind of oracle, offering philosophical observations that

onlookers can use to think about their lives. To a large extent artists – since Romanticism, since Individualism – have bought into that idea themselves too.

AJ: What is the need to make work? Where do you think it comes from and why? Do you think all people have it or only some? Do you think different artists have different motivations, or does this need come from the same place, at some level deep down, in all of us?

CB: My need started as a boy. I saw objects – the paintings I was drawn to – as representations of the world. How magical – the world captured by a two dimensional object. And I wanted to be able to do them too. I was sensitive to the patterns of composition too... Just like one is innately sensitive to the patterns of melody. It moved me, pulled at my emotions. In their images the artists pointed to the things they thought were beautiful. I wanted to be able to point too. But I sensed, unknowingly, I think, that the painting became the artist's second self, it became invested with the artist's soul. My paintings are me. I am those paintings. I don't think everybody feels this. Why some have it and others not, I cannot yet say. Perhaps it is only a question of awareness?

AJ: Your paintings are a really exciting body of work and seem to be endlessly coming out of you. You discussed this briefly both at the High and at Shakerag, and I know also that you believe they are a further development or manifestation of the same needs and ideas that you've had all along. First of all, would you agree with that? And secondly, would you mind discussing your paintings a little bit more in terms of what they are allowing you to do that the previous work didn't?

CB: Yes I agree that I've had the same motives all along. Differences arise from my changing ability or inability to see those motives... or act from them. My changing opinions about the motives also come into this too. I think I am gradually refining and focusing in on their nature and essence. The core of the motives, as far as I can understand it now, and this is putting it very simply, is that I question the role and place of my consciousness within the totality of my unconscious mental systems. At least that seems to have been my motive since I was in my early 20s. Ten years of the time since then was spent (unconsciously) exploring those same questions as a writer and art historian. Before I was 20 the motive was less complex – more like the first part of the answer to your last question. Maybe my consciousness, my nature was more unified? My teenage paintings were landscapes in which nature and the products of human consciousness coexisted happily. (The word 'Nature' in that sentence being a symbol for the totality of my mental systems – including my unconscious). Though I have to entertain the possibility that this harmony might just have been the ideal wish of a deeply divided mind.... one that projected its ideal out into the world as the paintings I did.

...As far as what the paintings offer that previous work couldn't... Well before the paintings I was less narrative. The story of my nature was either compressed into singular, monolithic symbols (like my very early plant sculptures) or it produced ideal solutions (to the tensions implicit in the story) and these were singular, or monolithic, too - the Guests and the Tetrarchs. The arrival of the paintings coincides with my being able to make my narrative as narrative work. Painting also, now that I allow events to unfurl as I paint, gives me a long production time. This allows time for things to occur during the making that deeply affect the outcome. Other media are too fast for that to happen in a single work. Painting is also a severe test of one's nerve. You have to do it all. I love the fear of failure.

AJ: I want to talk a little more specifically about your paintings as well: You mentioned that in their evolution, the characters (in the narrative) began to disappear and what was left is the stage. I find this fascinating especially in terms of your ideas about the implosion of dualities and your above definition of nature as everything- I suppose I wonder what the stage is then? And in terms of you and your place in the world, how this is relevant?

CB: What is the stage? I wonder too. But the thing is that I know now that my mind is producing authentic symbols for itself, and the task now is to let it flow and to think later. This takes trust. And I seem to have become able to trust. But that is not to say that it isn't fraught with doubts. I worry, for instance, that the empty stage is too lacking in signs of humanity. I worry I might be empty. I worry that it is too cold. And yet these empty paintings forced themselves on me. Dozens more rushed out onto the pages of my sketchbooks too. So what is the stage? In the painting 'Djoser', I know I am the cratered Martian surface. And that I am the double doors of the horizon (google those words and you will find something interesting amongst all the products!) I know I am also the stairs leading to one point in the invisible realm. Do the portals stay open? No I imagine they blip out of existence. But that is okay too. The top of the staircases had to be on the horizon. The shadows had to be at 45 degrees so that they all point to the vanishing point in the centre. So the 'abstract' shape of the two doors taken together is six-sided - a hexagon on its point - made up of six equilateral triangles all pointing inwards... Like a flower in a way. Nothing of this was planned. Something about my mind is this shape. I am the stage. I have not gone. It is me. Something of the stillness of those doors just hovering there is me too. Something is mirror-imaged in me. One reality has appeared in another reality in me. Are the doors my conscious self, the Mars-scape my unconscious totality? Who goes up the stairs? Me and someone else... me and my soul? Like the dream of the alien girl and the machine that collapses souls. I still don't know. But I am getting to know. Work evolves, this empty series will be a phase, perhaps the stage will fill again.

AJ. After discussing the value of self-reflection, or self-study, and after hearing you talk about the divided mind, or divided self, as opposed to this "implosion of dualities," and even the discussion of the definition of "nature," I wonder what you think the risk is in fully believing in all of those separations? I mean, what is the value in understanding the unity, or harmony, and what is the other side of that? What is the danger in or result of splitting everything up/ dividing the self/ dividing nature and man? I hope this question makes sense, and if so, then how does all of this relate to the state we are in now (as human beings in 2009)?

CB. Well again, this answer has to be personal. But the first thing that comes to mind is this: it's not so much that dividing the world up into categories is intrinsically bad – obviously it's necessary if we are just to be able to think about the world – but the hidden values that get attached to the categories can be a problem. To follow from what we have already talked about earlier, examples of that would be the values attached to the division of the human and the natural, which nowadays are broadly that the human is bad, and the natural good. Obviously this is a terribly crude caricature used for the sake of brevity, but there is a core of truth to it. Just as an aside, it comes about because the Romantic system of values still largely operates in our Western cultures. Anyway, to say the very least, this system undervalues the human as a phenomenon of the universe. This concerns me, but this is only the external aspect to this situation we are talking about (where unconscious values are attached to seemingly scientific or neutral categories applied to the world). Now to look at the internal aspect – and this is just as worrying, for the separation of the human and the natural is also used to maintain the dominance of what the Freudians call superego – that is to say the dominance of culturally learnt values and behavioural requirements insisted upon by the group. Again, as I said earlier on, if the human is bad, the human is equated with choice and personal desire, while nature is equated with the seemingly given, 'natural' moral laws that operate within us. These were however implanted by our society, and are the demands on the individual to behave in certain ways the society finds useful. Of course it produces selflessness - the putting of the wishes of the mass before those of the individual, and clearly these are good things - in moderation. But that is the point, they are often not moderate, and stifle the needs of the individual. This idea about the internal aspect to all this is probably quite tricky to get one's head around, but it's well worth trying to grasp, for it lays bare things that usually pass beneath our notice. And indeed it is just one example of a very, very wide and common phenomenon of the way we think. Once you tune in to seeing this lower layer, then I think one sees the truth of human affairs much more clearly.

Now on the question of believing in the separations, I think one has to recognise that there are divisions in the mind that are probably structural and actual (the lack of access to the unconscious pointing to just one of them) and there are divisions that

seem more apparent and illusory and based on wishes and purposes – but which nevertheless appear real and actual under normal circumstances (the separation of the human and the natural for instance). Both of these divisions can be made permeable or even made to vanish if one examines one’s own inner nature carefully. But paradoxically it is only by noticing them, by seeing them (seeing is believing) and by owning them, that one can begin to heal them, begin to fuse the fissions... re-marry those spouses that have been cast asunder. This, at least, was the case in my own life. And I did say that this answer would necessarily be drawn from personal experience and just as necessarily be completely coloured by that personal experience. You would have to really try this whole view on, as it were, in your own mind, to see if it holds any truth or use for you. My nature was formed at a definite and particular time in the cultural stream of ideas and in a certain family situation. These are the particulars of my life. Yours may be very different. That is the danger of reading the views of others; we tend to try to identify with the position of the author (at first), and only later learn to spit them out again if they don’t fit with the internal system built in the circumstances that we grew up in ourselves. You really have to test such views against the truths of your own kind of soul. Really test them. That has another value itself in that you will learn to define yourself as my (or any author’s) negative, if indeed that is what your soul is in relation to mine. It’s a win/win situation so long as you really test your truth against mine. And spit mine out soon if it isn’t nutritious.

AJ. Note: Amy – here I think you might add something like: “I just want to go back to the question of What is it about painting that you love? And what is different about it, to you, than photographing, for example? Please say some more.

CB. Lots of things. I love the material. It is so sensual in a way that we understand through metaphors of touch rather than sight. The way a brush licks a surface. I was looking at that Monet in the High a few months ago, such variety of surface. I thought of him carrying it wet along the banks of the Seine all those years ago... having to hold it away from his trousers to keep it from getting smudged. And there it was across the wide ocean, and yet an impression - like a fossil is, like a photograph is too - of a certain morning of his experience in his life. Those are two things that painting and photography share for me. But the main difference I think has to do with how simple and direct it is, in painting, to just have what it is that you need to see there on the 2D surface of the work. With the classic photographic means of working (say Lee Friedlander, for example) you have to go looking for those things - for the equivalents for what it is that you are feeling or saying. (By the way, feeling that gap between what you need and what is there may have had some part in the recent usage of constructed imagery in photography – despite all the Pomo theory that says otherwise!) Another similarity between photography and painting is that, of course, I don’t usually exactly

know what it is that I am doing, feeling or saying. So just doing a painting, or just going out and shooting a photograph is a way of finding out.

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AJ: So I am beginning to realize my unconscious personal agenda through my questions... I want to ask is this: to justify making art- Why do people do it? What makes it valuable or not? And, what are the connections are between the artists that I respect and admire? So...

CB: Ah, well, I began thinking that I knew why I needed to do it, and now I've reached the point where I have no idea. But with that has come this kind of trust that it's okay- that it's worth doing.

AJ: Yeah. You seem to be comfortable with self-study, that it is a worthwhile thing to do. I feel that my own work constantly questions that, or doubts it, but I get the feeling that you are not that way- Is that true?

CB: It's true. It is true. But it's true *and* I live with that same doubt, but I've come up with some ways of explaining it to myself to make it all seem more right. I know that I'm driven to do it and I think I would do it even if it didn't feel alright because there's something in me that's obsessed with it- and needs to do it. But maybe in order to fend off the doubt, I've thought around the subject quite a bit- especially in imagined conversations with this friend of mine from my very earliest days when I was an early teenager. He's a Marxist, well at least he began as a Marxist, so he's got a view of our duties to our fellow human beings and he's definitely much more social and outward looking that I can find any energy to do.

So I have these imagined conversations with him, because he lives in Japan now, but when we meet he usually takes the piss out of me and says, 'Oh, you're just a

navel-gazer, self-obsessed, etc etc.’ And the way I found of explaining it to him, my imaginary adversary, is to say, ‘Look, the way that the whole of humanity is kind of set up is it’s as if the psyche of every individual is part of a whole, as if somehow the whole of the world’s psyche put together is like one organism. And an organism, like a human being, is made of lots of different organs that cooperate: So you know- heart, liver lungs, legs, veins, whatever, to make the whole thing function. Society, the mind of society in general is an organism and certain parts of that organism, certain organs, are destined to do outwardly socially caring things, and other parts of the organism are programmed to do much more inward looking, almost like housekeeping.... And it makes up this wonderful unity in diversity that makes the human mind function as a totality- all the psyches in the world. So it’s kind of ecological- to view it as a whole that functions as something that’s evolved.’

I think that when things evolve, its very hard to call into question their rightness or wrongness.... It seems that they have a necessity. If the thing has evolved, it seems to me that it probably has some kind of function in the whole economy of the human race as a totality. So it’s almost like looking at it as like a pond. One eco-system.

AJ: Maybe because I am in the US , and it is different in other parts of the world, but it seems to me that the balance is off between the outwardly social functions and the inward ones... It seems to me that the looking inward is discouraged, less valued.

CB: Well it is. I mean, just those terms... selfish, navel-gazing, all those things.. I think its very understandable because we are social creatures and the will of the individual has to be subjugated to the will of the group. So it has become transferred into a kind of morality that what’s good for the group is paramount, and you kind of minimize your own needs, and that translates into a moral code that says self interest is kind of out.

AJ: And then we get confused between self-interest and self-examination.

CB: Exactly.

AJ: I want to talk about the metaphor of the mind and the womb, and the womb as a feminine quality. I feel like a lot of things in history associate the feminine with the dark, the unknown, even something fearful, and I want to know your thoughts about this and the dream that you talk about with the feminine character ...

CB: So which part do you want to talk about?

AJ: I guess the historical aspect of the feminine being associated with something more natural, more instinctive, and therefore more mysterious, and even dark. I mean, do you agree with me that it is this way?

CB: Yeah. I mean, it's patchy, but that's the general trend. I mean you can read, and I have read, amazing books by people who study mythology. Alan Watts' *Man, Woman, and Nature* is a really interesting one. But there is a personal dimension that does resonate a lot with this, but it's a thing that I can't talk about easily, and that is that I certainly have dreams, recurrent dreams, where there's a female character who is dark and mysterious, fascinating and emotional, and with a kind of quiet wisdom to her. And very often in these dreams, we swim together in a night ocean with no land. It's just a deep ocean and it's night and we swim together and we swim face to face and we just share information- just about our lives, just little tidbits of nothing, nothing huge - but this incredible intimacy of quiet sharing and confidence each in the other. And I don't know what the Freudians would make of it, but the Jungians would instantly call her *anima*, or soul. And the Jungians, it seems to me, they call this aspect of the male psyche (that's what we're talking about the male psyche)... they say that in infancy we are polymorphous, sexually, and that during the development of sexuality in the infant, that ability to be both male and female mentally, which must exist as a capacity in the embryo because the embryo's not male or female immediately is it? So, soon after conception, there's a divergence on the path to one way or the other. That those latent abilities for the mind to be predominantly male or predominantly female, they would say that one of them closes down and goes into latency and that carries into the socialization of males or females in our society so that certain aspects which may have come to the surface of being expressed become suppressed and that exists as a kind of forbidden part of the self.

And that definitely... I mean, I was one of the most 'male' people you could have ever met, in my 20s... total rationalist, against intuition, against emotion, completely interested in intellectual and rational things and that other aspect of me [the 'feminine'] must have been completely kept under a ton weight. And since I started to make art, that's been the story of what's happened. Somehow that part of me has been released into the mental system again and it's become something that I've incorporated in some way. In some way, this dream of swimming with this woman is meeting that dark side of me that's more intuitive and emotional. In reality I never really knew this girl that well, but in the dreams I now know her as if she were my twin.

AJ: So it's kind more about the part of you that's being suppressed.

CB: Yes.

AJ: So why do you think that male is rational and female is the opposite? I want to know your thoughts on why it is that way. ...Or the reason why the woman is the

darker more obscure/ maybe even feared side of it? Is it just because our culture has been a male-dominated society?

CB: Yeah, it's been a male-dominated society that has demonized the feminine aspect of the male self and castigated it as something fearful in woman... historically. But why; why the sex is divided like that? Interesting; I think you'd have to look at it from an evolutionary, psychological perspective as to why it has happened. It's part of nature as we have developed, it's part of evolution, it's undeniably there. I'm interested in kind of working against it I suppose. Because society and individual men are so much impoverished by the making illegitimate of a huge psychological resource. But then, you know what interesting is, how, in a way, I envy women for being cast in that light. I don't want to get into whether it's genetically inevitable that that's how woman is, but culturally that's how it's constructed. But part of me I guess, envies the position of woman within that system for being allowed to be more emotional and more able to have contact with an aspect of the psyche which in men is discouraged. Because it seems to me it's just so much more exciting and interesting than the rational part which I explored to death when I was younger.

What's interesting is how, and I've tried to explore this and nobody I've talked to really understands enough to talk to me properly about it... but what is our first encounter with the opposite sex (if we're heterosexual)? What does that person represent? You know, when you fall in love for the first time or you see somebody you fancy, as we say, what's happening psychologically? Apart from the whole sex thing, what's going on in the psyche, what are you seeing that's exotic and desirable, and do you wish to incorporate it by having a part of that person, by forming a bond with it?? Is that what it's about- wanting to incorporate the opposite? The whole thing I don't think has been explored very much- Freud didn't explore it because it wasn't in his nature- Jung explores it a bit, but he was pretty messed up in his love life anyway and he just calls it anima and kind of then doesn't open the box and explore it very much. But for some reason all the psychologists and anthropologists that I've talked to, they don't think very deeply about it and it's disappointing. So I'm looking out for somebody all the time who might have thought about it from another perspective because I feel like I'm groping around trying to explore it and you need some stimulus from somebody else who's thinking about the same things to give you some thing to latch onto or kick against or whatever.

AJ: I always wonder what it would be like if the western canon, or what we consider to represent civilization, was not male dominated, and I wonder what qualities we would then encourage or fear? I also think that real discussions about the feminine and the masculine are actually clouded or blocked by the fact that our culture has been the way it is for so long... in other words, we are deeply programmed to think a certain way so it is hard to look at a thing clearly.

CB: I think about it from the other dimension as well. I think if this is true about the male psyche that there's this suppressed feminine side, then it has to be that the straight feminine psyche has a repressed male side.

AJ: Right. No one ever talks about that.

CB: No; the *animus* is what Jung calls it. He does talk about it a little bit, but I think about, you know, what do women want in men? What do they want men to be? Because that must be the animus. What are women attracted to? Well, in my experience women are attracted, in their early teens, to narcissistic men; Men who have incredible self-assurance and seem to be self involved. Those are the ones that seem to be the most attractive- those are the ones the girls that I fancied liked- They liked boys to be like that. So, is that animus?

AJ: That's interesting because it sort of makes a loop. If the idea (which an artist seeks) is to be able to look at yourself deeply... then you've got this thing discouraged in the male psyche which is a female characteristic which is to be connected deeply to emotion, intuition and all this... And then you've got the female psyche wishing to have the confidence to be self- absorbed, but that is morally discouraged (being selfish etc.) It seems like sort of the same thing- that we are both seeking the same thing that has been shut out one way or the other by society. So regardless, to put the two together in one person is to go against what we are taught.

CB: So what you're saying is that the feminine in our society is encouraged in one way or the other to feel comfortable with being self-aware and therefore she is attracted to the un-self-awareness of the man...

AJ: ... or attracted to behavior which is shamelessly self-confident or self absorbed...

CB: But it's a shallow self-absorption in men I think. It's a vanity that doesn't really think about the self as an internal thing- it's more how good you are in society, your position in society, or something like that.

AJ: It's that confusion that happens between being selfish and being able to self-examine. So it seems like maybe we are just trying to reconcile that all the time.

CB: Well I was certainly a narcissistic man of the un-self-aware kind and I became my opposite one way or another. I'm probably still narcissistic, but I'm certainly more emotional and self-aware than I ever was. And I found the opposite of my early ego self in my wife. She has got very swift access to her emotions in a way that I never had, and I'm sure that my attraction to that was that I wanted to incorporate that and learn from it and be kind of enlarged by having that relationship, and that I could

grow more like her. Now whether or not she wanted to be more like me,... haha. Because I was, you know, because I had that kind of complete certainty of action and belief and all the rest of it you know? Now I'm riddled with doubt... Does she like me less?!

AJ: I think I'm obsessed with the idea of explaining that and justifying it, somehow justifying the fact that my self-examination feels like it's the least selfish thing I can possibly do.

CB: Yeah, I mean, not everybody's drawn to it, but if you are drawn to it, then it's almost ecological, in the economy of the world's psyche and you should embrace it with all your passion and be un-embarrassed about your fate. It's been given to you to do it, so do it completely, vigorously, and unashamedly if you can. Because if you don't do it to the extreme, you're not really carrying out your fate. I can't believe I'm saying this, because I don't know if I believe in fate...

AJ: But what you were saying before, if you think about it in terms of a massive human movement, like evolution, then you do your little part.

CB: I think anyway, if you do anything that you're drawn to, if you do it with all your heart and it explores what it is to be a human being, and you testify to others what you find, then you're doing something very useful regardless of what people say. People are so silly and shallow often about these kinds of matters so you just have to have a thick skin and do it anyway I suppose.

AJ: This is to do with your talk last night, but I think a lot of this has to do with reconciling things that seem to be paradoxical or separate- You say 'an implosion of dualities' often when talking about your work. Last night you started off by talking about intention and you said, 'Rather than saying what I've done, I say what's happened to me'. And then you say, about your work, 'I work on it and it works on me', and so I guess I wanted to talk a little bit about intention in the art-making process. You know, where the line between spontaneity- and intention, or thought-out, rationalistic processes-is drawn...

CB: It's so hard to talk about this, it really is, because of the way I think about the unconscious nowadays and its relationship to the conscious mind.... Even things that by most normal standards have been consciously arrived at, I would now say, Ah hah BUT, most of what seems like a conscious decision was dictated by an unconscious desire. So it makes it very complicated and yet, I do feel that there's been a big change in the way that I work; that I finally made my leap of faith that I've been inching towards for about 20 years, of abandoning some kind of conceptual need to pre-arrange what was gonna happen in the work. And that there was some moment

not long ago, less than two years ago, when suddenly, something clicked into place where I was able to trust that whatever I did was not free floating and groundless and arbitrary, but was related completely and solidly to some essential unconscious core. And I still can't explain the difference. Why couldn't I do that ten years ago? ...when I started to paint? Why did everything that I wanted to paint seem arbitrary, and why now does everything I want to paint seem totally un-arbitrary even though I couldn't care less about how the images arrive- they just seem to arrive. I don't plan any of them- they just sort of come- ping- you know, into my imagination as to what's next... I don't know why that happened.

One thing I could say is that somehow... Well, there was a moment a couple years ago when I gave up all hope of ever being a good artist- and that somehow abandoning hope meant abandoning all one's wishes for what your work should be . And that those wishes even though they seem to be originating within you, are actually conditioned by the social context of ideas that you live within somehow and that when you abandon those wishes- only then can what is truthfully yours emerge and... Yeah, I feel like I've been blessed. Suddenly, what I'm doing is truthfully mine. I know it with all my heart and it just seems like a gift that I almost feel like I don't deserve. It's too good a gift for me to have been given.

AJ: This reminds me of when you were talking before about falling in love, or when you really love someone and how somehow that transforms your way of being yourself in the world. [This was a conversation that was not recorded]. I also relate it to how we were talking about how when you are able to really look at yourself, you actually become less of yourself getting in your own way.. . It all seems to relate somehow to me to this idea of being able to let go of your conscious wishes that you want to project onto your work, and now it's flowing more freely.

CB: But there's definitely a time lag between this letting go in my work that allowed me to just work... There's a time lag of many years between that and the other kind of major revolution, in my head, which was when I started to see myself and paradoxically was able to see others and fell in love, and all that good stuff that came with it... That happened a long time ago, and yet it has taken all this time to get to the point in my work when I could let go of my wishes for what it should be like.

AJ: Do you think that has to do with just realizing that you don't have control, or letting go of any sort of idea of being able to control?

CB: I think I was just exhausted... by trying. I was trying on all these wishes, trying to be what I wished- and I had a lot of wishes for what I ought to be and should be and wanted to be. And one by one, they dropped away... they were like weights, and they were exhausting to carry and after I was thoroughly depleted by the exhaustion and let them all go- that was when it really began to happen for me. And some people are

lucky- they don't have to go through that. Some people have better access to their inner life and they don't have all these mirrors within mirrors of mirrors for these wishes for what they are. Some people are much more able to be genuine with themselves immediately. I was not blessed with that. It was my misfortune to be in the hall of mirrors for much longer than I ought to have been .