



POETRY NEWS

# Childhood Recovered: David-Baptiste Chirot at *Jacket2*

BY HARRIET STAFF

Up at *Jacket2*, with thanks to Jerome Rothenberg, is an essay by poet, visual artist, and visual poet, David-Baptiste Chirot. Chirot recollects his childhood and the objects that filled this time, from discarded pieces of metal from his grandfather's steamfitter's construction site to the bric-à-brac hauled out of his family's house to junkyard vehicles. The entry into the essay is framed by a quote from Charles Baudelaire's *The Painter of Modern Life*. Chirot writes:

In *The Painter of Modern Life*, Baudelaire writes: “But genius is nothing more nor less than childhood recovered at will ... consider ... (the artist) ... as a man-child, as a man who is never for a moment without the genius of childhood — a genius for which no aspect of life has become stale.”

I'm leaving genius out of this, it's childhood recovered that keeps fresh the story of one's artist life in working with what childhood discovered.

One of the early and great revelations for Chirot was his discovery of a crow's nest and its implications for collage. More:

One of the greatest events of all was finding a large crow's nest lying in the road running along the edges of a forest, blown down by winds signaling a coming storm. The roomy interior was lined with strips of foil, bright cigarette packets, shiny coins, bits of glass, fragments of cloth, buttons, ticket stubs, wiring, chips of plastic and china, shreds of garish newspaper ads, and most startling of all, the crowning jewel, a Dinky Toy luxury car intact nestled among woven dried grasses and glittering junk.

A vivid example of collage and bricolage that revealed a vision of combining natural and industrial elements in creating a home, a space in the world, made of found elements.

The crow's use of texts it could not read but valued for their letters' bright forms and colors revealed written language as an element among others, simultaneously "readable" and "unreadable." Just learning to read myself, this fired my imagination in the same way hieroglyphs and calli-pictographic scripts did — recognizably writing, yet beyond fixed meanings known to me. It kept alive the childhood apprehension of all forms as writings, signs, and alphabets. The sense of disappointed confinement one felt in discovering there were only twenty-six letters was done away with again.

These experiences are the *childhood recovered* I use daily in finding and working with materials. The huge part the physical and found play for me begins in "the genius of childhood ... for which no aspect has become *stale*. The importance of this aspect is its questioning of imprisonments of the "art of looking." To see things fresh is a key to freedom's desiring.

In "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects," Robert Smithson writes:

A great artist can make art by simply casting a glance. A set of glances could be as solid as any thing or place, but the society continue to cheat the artist out of his "art of looking" by valuing only "art objects." Any critic who devalues the *time* of the artist is the enemy of art and the artist.

Paradoxically, developing through time this "art of looking," of seeing fresh the possibilities of openings of freedom, brings a more acute awareness of their imprisonments. The powers, processes, and possessiveness which seek to make of the artist and the "art of looking" an object, a label, a category, ultimately a corpse are ever more visible.

Developing the "art of looking" and "childhood recovered" is a way of learning survival, "thinking on one's feet" and learning to camouflage oneself in the manner of the things one finds hidden in plain sight.

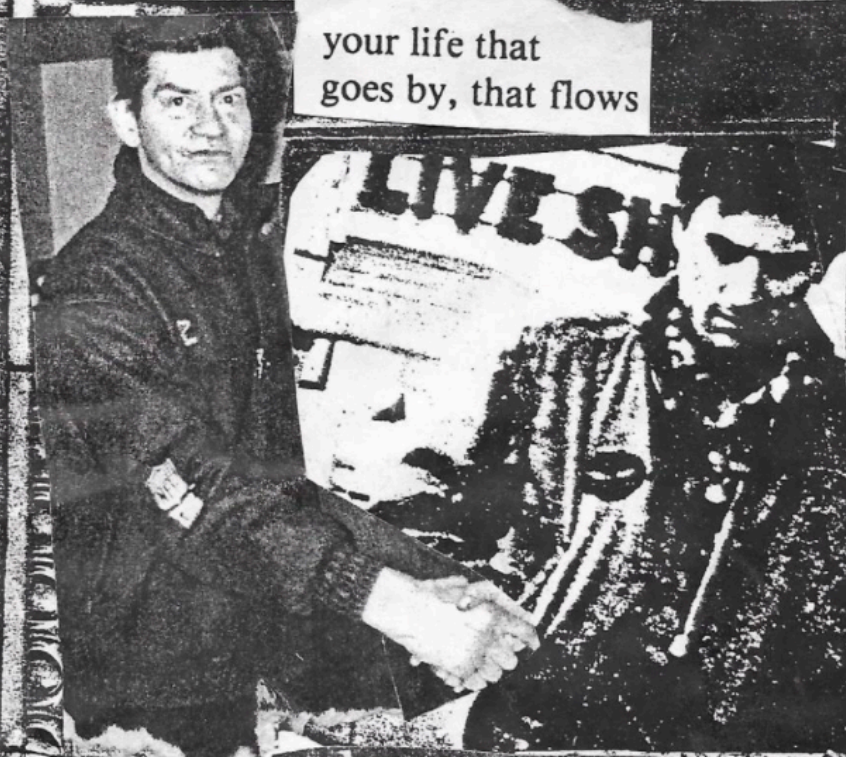
The journey continues with travels through France, through addiction and recovery, and through a meeting with poet Bob Cobbing. Head to Jacket2 for it all!

Originally Published: December 19th, 2017

<http://jacket2.org/commentary/david-baptiste-chirot-hidden-plain-sight-found-visualsound-poetries-feeling-eyes-and-seei>



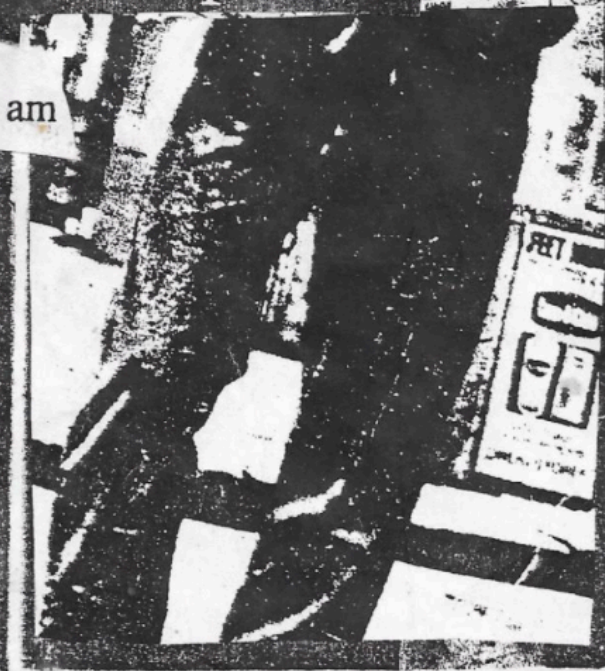
your life that  
goes by, that flows



shadow partner

death—whispers softly  
—I am no one—

I do not even know who I am









S E E

IL NC



Everyone is troubled

("even the  
poetry" c  
words us  
to call to  
phenomen



with the world we live in.

BE PATRIOTIC  
CLEAN YOUR CLOTHES FOR IMMIGRATION MEN

ATTENTION  
IMMIGRATION  
SHOE  
SHINE





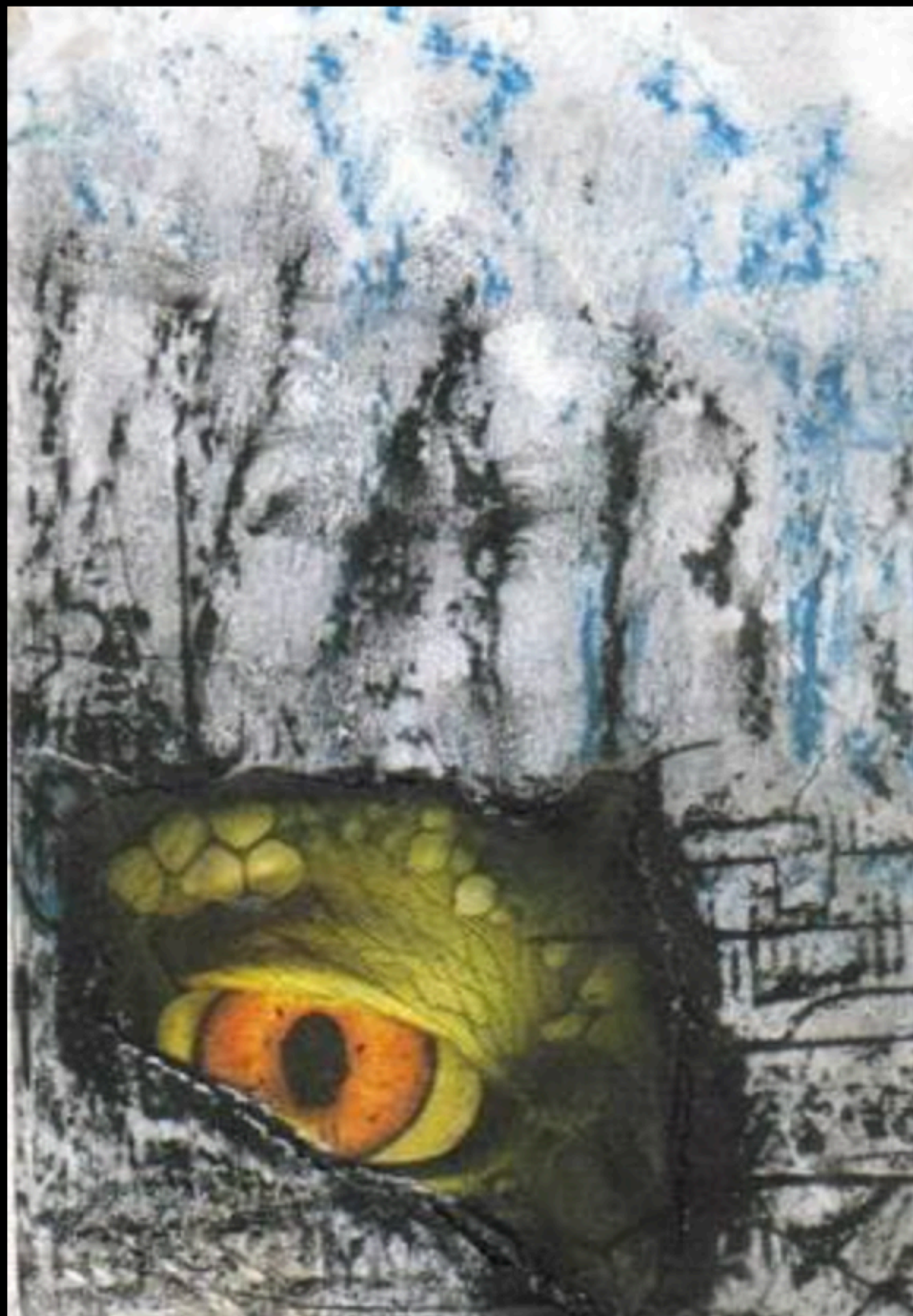




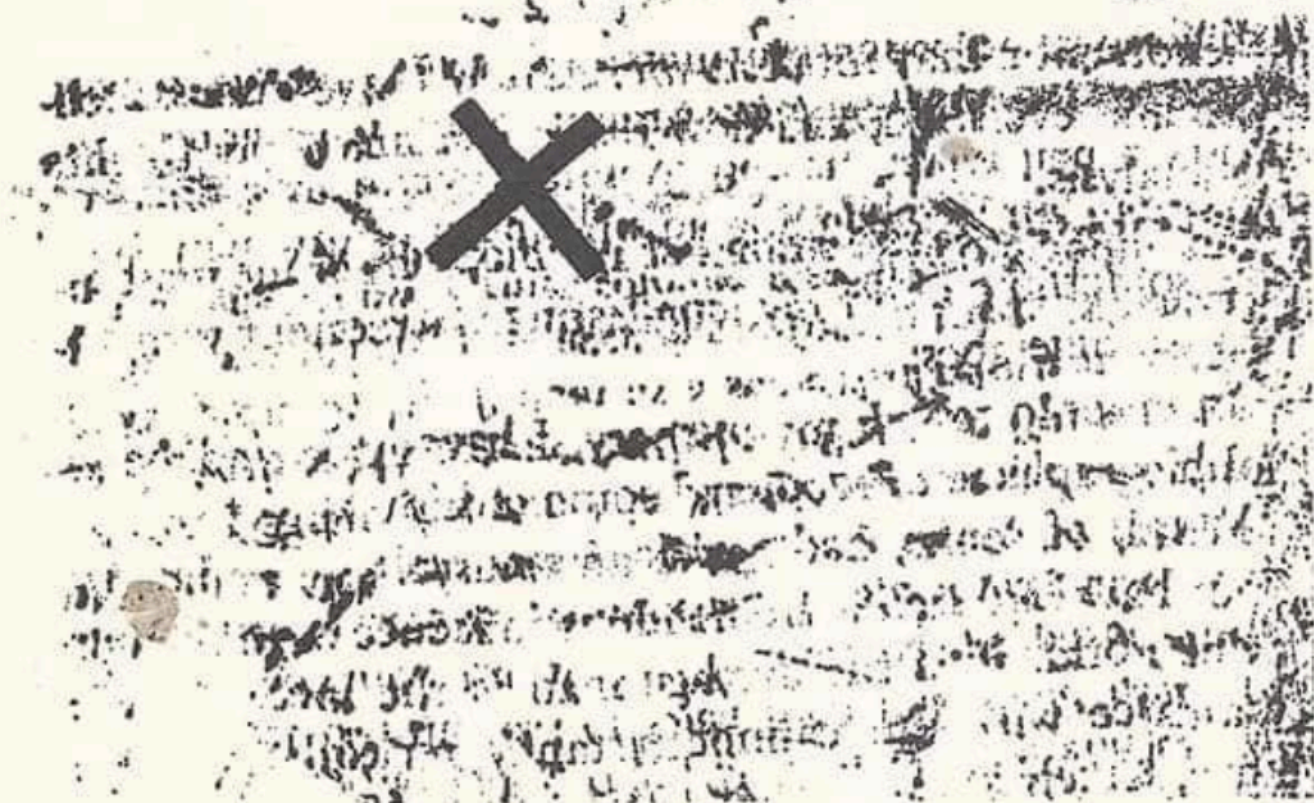
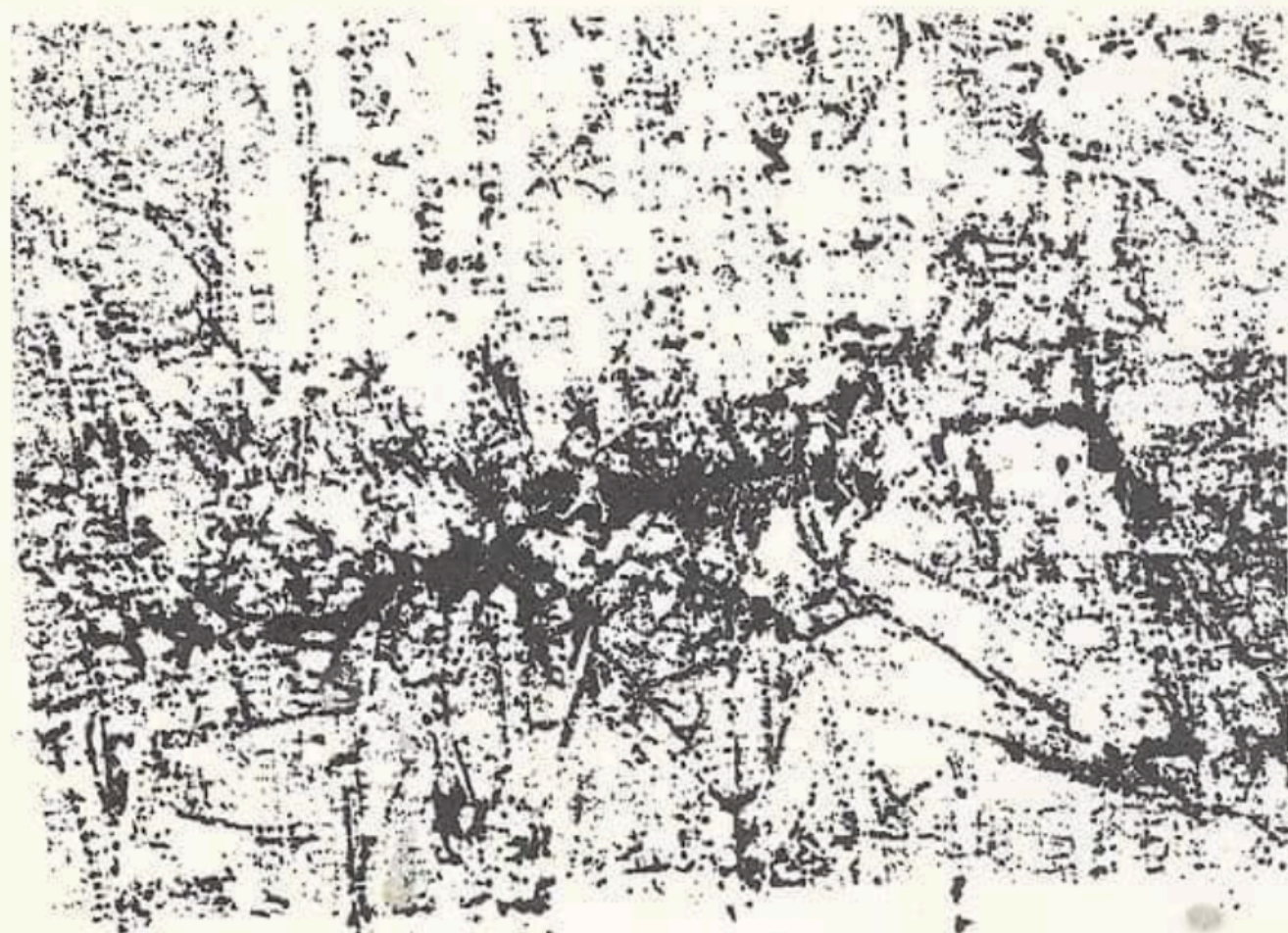


DAWGER













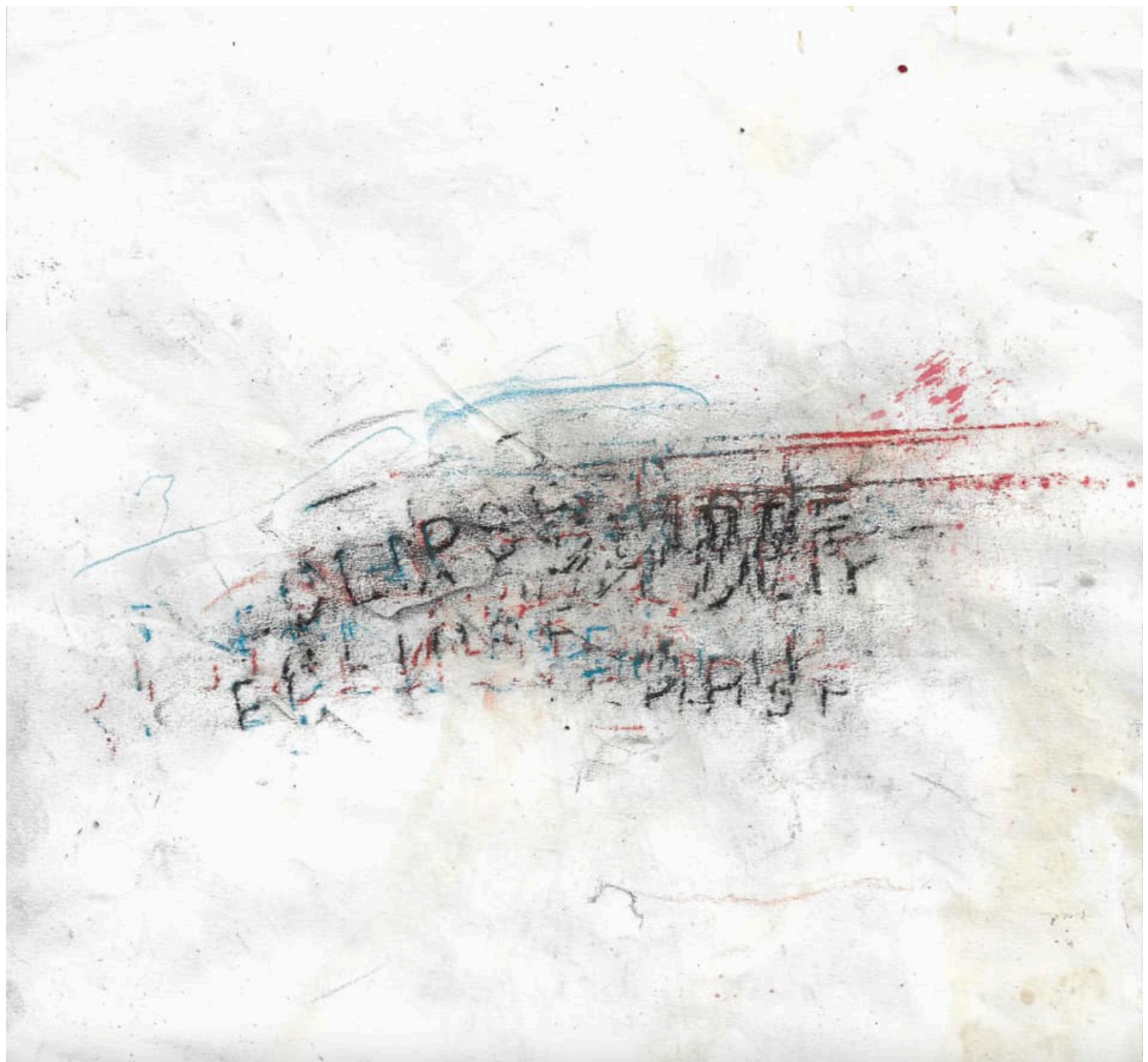
55143



[illegible]

**DANGER**  
INTOXICANT







I  
AM  
NOT  
A  
BODY  
I AM FREE