

POET AS RADIO: WEEK 4

Curating an Extreme Present

Outside my window as I write these notes, the crows along this stretch of the green River are beginning their morning murder debrief. Living along a high ridge now (we recently moved to this portion of the West Valley a few months ago), I'm beginning to notice things about my local environment I didn't have the perspectival vantage point to sense out before. I've read about this social aspect of crows in the abstract but seeing it within a stone's throw is quite mind altering. If you've never witnessed this, imagine something between [UK PM Question Time](#) and Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*. I am noticing how my consciousness is slowly beginning to open to this new aspect of neighborhood activity.

In cosmic news, this past Tuesday (Nov 19, 2024), Pluto entered a section of Earth's ecliptic (our annual path around the sun) it hasn't traversed since the end of the 18th century. That last time we were similarly aligned with this (dwarf) planet (1777-1798), humans were unaware of its existence, though a musician and moonlighting astronomer paying close attention to the constellation Gemini did extend our senses enough to realize there were more "wanderers" beyond the rings of Saturn. Next Summer, if you manage to escape the light pollution, and you open your sense perception just enough, you, like William Herschel, might catch against the backdrop of those cosmic twins, another extremely rare sighting of that planet, originally named for the "mad" British monarch, whose manic mood swings left room for grifty politicians to mask their financial malfeasance by over exploiting their colonies in North America, sparking the first of a series of revolutions in France, Haiti, and Latin America over the next 2 decades.

These events may seem disconnected, but both are part of locating experience in time and space. The one may seem more concrete and the other too abstract, but that's an illusion. In this age of reductionist mechanized science, we're conditioned to think of space as empty, floating rocks as inert and lifeless, and disconnected from life on Earth. Coincidentally (or not so), that worldview came into prominence the last time we were in this same spatial relationship to Pluto and Uranus. If you find the correlation of collective human behavior with planetary cycles fascinating, you might take a look at Richard Tarnas', *Cosmos & Psyche* (You can get a teaser for it with [this podcast interview with him on AstrologyHub](#)) and maybe start tracking time a little differently, like returning to a pre-18th century practice of using an [almanac](#) to track your own busy schedule with the lunar and planetary cycles.

But back to the present.

We often talk about "the present moment" as a kind of escape from time (as though past and future are immaterial abstractions), but that's a mistake or an overreach too. In fact, when we let go of control and get "in time" what we're stretching, bending, and at times breaking free from is not time itself, but our canned expectation of it. The Industrial Revolution conditioned western societies to

think of time as objective, operating independent of material reality, but that is a relatively new story we've been telling ourselves.

The time measured by our phones and computerized clocks was invented in the 19th century to make railroad shipping more efficient. Before that, time of day was measured by geo-centric spatial relationships (particularly, the earth's relationship to the Sun and Moon). This gave time a very visceral property that kept people grounded in their bodies' spatial awareness, which in turn made them less malleable and less predictable. You might take stock of how your body reacts to shifts between "daylight savings" and "standard time," as if it were trying to tell you that something is off. It is. When in 1918, Ezra Pound challenged poets "[to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome](#)" he was reminding us that mechanical time is no longer aligned with the rhythms of life. Measured time is but the trace(s) of movement, of shifting and changing relationships, the mysterious force that propels life, that gives it animate properties.

For this week:

So how do we cultivate a practice of experiencing that crucible of time and space (what we might call place)? So much of our experience of a day is habitual, our little routines that so often run on auto-pilot so that we can get our work done and be good employees, family members, citizens, etc. One way to start waking up to life is to periodically switch off that auto-pilot. We can take a routine or habit and make it ceremonial, meaning that we engage it consciously and notice what comes up.

To that end, check out Allan Kaprow's essay "[The Real Experiment.](#)" Kaprow was a student of Zen practitioner and avant-garde composer, John Cage and a friend an inspiration to the artists of the [Fluxus](#) movement. He was briefly art-world famous for what he called "Happenings," in which everyday events were engaged as conscious performances. The idea was to get art out of the galleries and museums and apply it to everyday living. However, much to his chagrin, the idea was co-opted by the art world he was rebelling against, and turned into "Performance Art," which he saw as a caricature of his intention. This is essay is from the end of his career and really gets at some great examples of how we might blur those lines.

In that same vein, take a look at Fluxus artist (and lightning rod for Beatle-fan misogyny) Yoko Ono's [Grapefruit](#), which is a collection of poems which are instructions for little rituals, or rehearsals for the real poem, which takes place in the mind of the reader-as-a-collaborator. It's like a text book in how to ritualize little things in your life. Also, take a look at the online archive for [Learning to Love You More](#), an art-as-living project by Miranda July and Harrell Fletcher, in which the artists gave volunteer participants on the internet simple assignments for having and documenting creative experiments in their communities.

You'll also want to familiarize yourself with the work of CA Conrad, who for the last 15 or so years has been presenting their poetry in the context of what they call (Soma)tic ritual. Like this brief [JUPITER HUMANIFESTO: A \(Soma\)tic Poetry Entrance](#), this [basic breakdown of the practice into 3 parts](#), the [short introduction to their book ecodevience](#), this [course packet of CA's rituals](#) compiled by Michelle Taransky at UPenn, this [video of a Ritual construction workshop CA gave for Mack \(live\)](#)

in [January of 2022](#), and poems from their most recent collections posted at [A Velvet Giant](#), [Just Buffalo Literary Center](#), and [poets.org](#).

Read what you can and try to envision a small ritual for yourself that you can practice over the next two weeks. The ritual should involve your body in some fashion and engage some aspect of your everyday life. Maybe there's a nervous tic you have that you want to become more aware of, or a regular interaction with a person or group that's become more habit of personality than conscious relating. Maybe you want to explore how your vexation from your divination exercise shows up for you. Whatever it is you want to wake to in your everyday life, find some physical intervention you can practice in the moment (have a safeword or phrase or a gesture to inject in those routine conversations, or clench your toes or fingers, or shift your posture or gaze to a new perspective, etc) and TAKE NOTES. Give yourself some brief time (5min) each day to write automatically (faster than your editor can keep up). DON'T EDIT these notes (yet). We'll engage them in class and come up with a strategy for letting the transmissions come through as they want to.