

ARTHUR ECHO

**CAConrad
&
Thom Donovan**

Arthur Echo

CA Conrad
Thom Donovan

Echo Arthur

While house sitting for friends in Philadelphia we collaborated on the following (Soma)tic exercise, playing Arthur Russell's CD *World of Echo* on repeat on all five floors of the house. We moved from floor to floor from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., taking scheduled breaks for food, conversation, and checking in for further fine tuning of the (Soma)-tic maneuvers.

BASEMENT: Windows covered, pitch black. On a little table covered with clothespins and pottery a small boom-box plays CD on repeat with bass controls set to maximum. A white candle to light when sitting down, blow out when leaving. The sink beside the table to slowly drip water on one hand while taking notes with the other.

FIRST FLOOR: CD on stereo with balanced equalizer settings. All shades open. A chair sits by the front door. Open mail slot to peer at passing feet on the sidewalk. Every other page of notes should be nouns only, a page of nouns.

SECOND FLOOR: CD on small stereo, volume low. Computer set to show videos of Arthur Russell and his cello. In bathroom the tub is filled with a mixture of water and jasmine flower infusion. Jasmine invokes the Muses. Take notes sit-

ting in a chair by the tub while feet soak in the jasmine infusion.

THIRD FLOOR: CD on large stereo, volume high, treble adjusted to maximum. Books on alchemy sit at the desk by the window. Take notes.

UPPER LOFT: CD on third floor stereo carries up to the loft. At the end of the bed, facing the window which looks over the Philadelphia treetops and skyline. There are tarot cards and binoculars on the bed to better see the world. Take many notes.

CAConrad & Thom Donovan

Note

Last winter I had the pleasure of composing a (Soma)tic Exercise with CAConrad. Our exercise was based on Downtown NYC cellist Arthur Russell's masterpiece, *World of Echo*. It is difficult to describe Russell's *World of Echo* for anyone who hasn't heard it before. It has a rare spiritual quality which issues from Russell's song writing, voice, and cello playing, but also from the production values of the album. Perhaps the following passage from Tim Lawrence's biography of Russell, *Hold on to Your Dreams*, makes palpable Russell's subtle-accidental studio processes:

During these sessions it became standard for Arthur to splice together separate tapes, and he would regularly grab a track from one tape and fly it into the multitrack of another while his onlooking engineer tried to stay calm. "We would be mixing on a piece of tape, and I would see the splice go by," recalls [Eric] Liljestrand. "It was all very confusing. I could never really tell what we were working on until it was done." The ghostly accidents that arose from Arthur's insistence that they re-record over old tape became an integral part of the sonic fabric.

At one point, Conrad told me that he used the album to heal a knee injury that he had suffered.

Russell was trained foremost as a musician and only afterwards as a Buddhist, so the healing powers of his music I can only imagine come from the confluence of these two disciplines.

For our exercise, Conrad and I decided to have Russell's album playing on four different stereos throughout a five-story house for a twelve-hour duration. Twelve hours is a long time to do anything, and especially to listen to an album triply on repeat. Among the constraints I recall imposing upon myself, many had to do with memory: trying to forget the last line I had written before continuing; interrupting myself midline, then picking up with the line again. These exercises in attention and distraction I felt were true to Russell's music. So was a certain circularity that the exercises were trying to induce amidst interruption and disjunction.

We also spent much of the nine hours improvising lines with a set of books I had brought with me from NYC to Philadelphia, many of which were of a holy, metaphysical, or medical import. Among these books included the writings of Henry Corbin and his acolyte, Christian Jambet; Oliver Sacks's *Seeing Voices*; Maurice Merleau-Ponty's selected writings on phenomenology; a collection of Gaelic folk tales & ballads; Helen Keller's autobiography; Robert Kocik's *RHRURBARB*; and *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. I also remember reading a number of recently published poetry books, including Jules Boykoff's courageous *Hegemonic Love Potion*.

Russell, perhaps more than any other composer I have come into contact with, understood the importance of tuning his body and his mind as instruments coeval with his cello and the other instruments (drum machines, guitar, tabla) he would use throughout his compositions. Via studio production, Russell gained access to the occult and otherworldly in ways similar to Conrad's use of his own body as a source of information and vision explored through the (Soma)tic Exercise.

Thom Donovan
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NYC

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CAConrad

how am I selfish?
tell me before it's
too late
a simple
extraordinary fact
the more I like water
the more I like
80% of myself
water going
into me turning
into me
a great cloud continuously
reconstitutes herself
I grow toenails without
meaning to
how about you?
I didn't think so
but I like how we grow toenails while
eating dinner without mentioning it
we know we're doing it
eating and growing them
it's a nice thing friendship
beautiful silent cell growth
we would die without one another
our toenails would stop growing our
toenails depend on our friendship
delicious noodles and water

activating miles of nutrients
before it's too late we
distract friends from crawling to
the razor blade and pills
the pills always seemed easier and I'm so
glad we are friends because a great cloud
manages the tears of millions
I am speechless in the sweat with you
cum on the dictionary
WHAT?

cum on the dictionary just do it do it do it
oh OK oh oh OK ah ah OK ah oh there I did it
you did it so fast you didn't enjoy yourself
I wish you would enjoy yourself
what about your enemy's toenails
blood semen pussy-juice ear wax?
condoms in your enemy's pocket for
your enemy's pleasure
we are selective with love
but I think it's because
there's only so much
does anger have the same amount per
square mile for water-drinking people?
I'm glad we're friends
space can be divided by
popsickle sticks or
pyramids in Mexico where
enemies didn't want to bleed but
bled anyway
sometimes I cannot believe
how delicate tendons
muscles and bones are thrown
crackling into oil
are chickens enemies?

are cows and fish?
are pigs too?
I am never sure how to address
these enemies at the market
bodies cut and cleaned
nicely packaged
for friends to carry home
our enemies don't seem so frightened
don't look so tough
ground into burger
cooked with noodles
but they deserve it isn't that right?
she drinks her milk
he eats his sperm
it's good to taste our production of
warm light before it's too late
train cars
linking in the
train yard for a long ride we learned
this natural lesson putting cells together a
spit of love between them as
clouds gather moisture over graveyards to
cool the thirst of cities
graffiti is beautiful
an emblem of AWAKE
saying I WAS HERE
AND HOPE YOU CARE
care is selective we
select among the
water-drinking people
who to care for
who to ignore
our toenails grow the same in
seasons of neglect

seasons of love
you can tell by their tone when they
say TAKE CARE OF HIM whether
they mean be kind and nurturing or
kill him before I get back
I've had it up to HERE
how many times have you wanted to
kill yourself
I remember feeling
envy hearing of
a suicide's success but it's
no comfort today
this composite of mucus
bone and blood is a
friend named Thom
Donovan the poems
come out of him
sublime torrents we
enter with him reading from our
bodies mostly made of water
I want to clone myself
read Thom's poems with myself
I want a clone
before it's too late
teach myself to
tango in this stupid
hippy world I want to
dance when I touch my
cheek to my clone cheek
every single time my cheeks
touch DANCING
HAPPENS
touch me to me
this is the point in the

poem where I moisten my
fingers with snow from
crotch of the tree
in honor of the
living tree the piano in
this poem MUST have it's
dead polished wood
SMASHED TO
BITS we will be accepting
deep threats
did you say death threats?
that's what I said to
honor the living taking him home
to love him
he is not a chicken but
a dog not afraid of being eaten
stone angels breastfeeding
stone doves I want angel
milk too before it's too late
with energy from my
angel milk I will
use five semicolons in a row
against the King's 5 NEVERS
just this once and I must do it
before it is too late

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“means inhabit ends”

– a living sage

Crane migrations static branches tessellate
Reality of the light means inhabiting ends
Stomach a wreck of eyes across his strings
With strings repatched an effective overlap
Exchangeable reams without end trickle in

formation from the ear in the street just a
New technology applied to old ideologies pol
itics business as usual if not for the light this
Old sense of withdrawal ears open interrupt
Their own flight tongues songs say doing

Say this is another play of being becoming
First streams a lowly paperweight in my peri
phery unrecognizable as any face of God
Half-dreaming what we would like to have hap
pened there is shame in your wings or the

Symphony he would write without alibi there
Is shame in being here at all break beams
Orders which path without reams information
No one's there just modulation mind interrupted
By what it would seize he has taken a worth

Of stress to the collection of blues an open
Crisis hush listen the world is alive repeat cho
rus here follows passing through solid sub-
stances essence hypostasis subsistence that
Sets us apart from hearing people these

Findings of the spontaneous origination of
Signs ports out in such selection systems has
Revived a body that is in exile at the death
Of the body the imagined salvation buried by
Whole eons whose soul has the virtue of a

Diamond although no conductor would instruct
The group true subjects emerge the intri
cate embryo of grammar motors signs as
First forms no passive potentiality there
Being no duality I should like to have the men

Of heaven in my own dwelling consciousness
Deploys or constitutes time renewing a ruin
From the heights of selection not only the fingers
And the body as a single organ because it
Flickers so a sun marries none but I raised

To a fugue soft 'to-be' languageless though he
Was Helen Keller's water another's cats pass
Through experiential filters happy endings for
If the voice of human beings is received by hear
ing the voice of God is received by sight con-

comitant to this act of existing the temple
Will not be destroyed rock salt vs. sea pseudo-
Selves grieve I let my attention wander with
The bow when my eyes cease to focus and
When the ears cease to focus and when the

Mind ceases so that we must see each collation
Of bodies a blind-spot or blank embodying ide-
ology my thoughts will have been here before mis-
taking static for running water sister-flicker in
Place of substance what instance liberty coracle

Races against chariot what a nebula that no
One sees could possibly be no substrate sur-
viving activity vital signs so sound is itself a
Straight gait tunneling called away from graves
A new way to breathe transforming the lyric.

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Scary Topiary