

Present Tense

by John Olson

What fascinates me now is now, this instant, this moment.

This fugitive, this delinquent, this indiscreet, this forever elusive now.

Now now.

Now is now and now it is not now.

Now is the adversary of time. It is a convergence of everything that is not time. That which is not time is the pure hollow of space. The raw gaze of the universe in its own reflection. The paradoxical entanglement of the mutable in the immutable and the immutable in the mutable.

A breeze on a pond. Steam from a heifer's mouth. The smell of hay. The drone of a plane. The invisible torques and pressures holding the Eiffel Tower together.

Emotions are the weather of the blood. They cannot be photographed. But what a marvel it is to structure an emotion in steel. To slip out of your clothes and take a shower. To lie down on a bed and drift into oblivion. To languish like twisted metal in a junkyard of regrets.

What one refuses in a minute no eternity will return, said Frederic von Schiller.

Sometimes a thrilling force enters the blood and the pounds disappear and resistance turns frail and green as the leaves of a sapling. Not the mahogany of Madagascar but the flutter of aspen on a Rocky Mountain slope. More like the round sounds of birds and the electric murmur of bees at work in a hive. And then we say something. The words rise in air from our lungs where they are shaped in our mouths by lip and palate and tongue with what seems an astonishing suddenness and with such force that they seem to carry us out of ourselves. We turn and spin and tumble down an imaginary river and lose the moment we had before, the moment before this moment, this current, this present. This now.

Life is not always accommodating, to put it mildly. Things can hurt.

Life, meanwhile, slides through us, convulses us, lights our inner marquees, bulbs flashing through our rags.

