



*somewhere  
in between  
the jurisdiction  
of time*

~ DAVID HORVITZ with ALEXANDER PROVAN ~





**DAVID HORVITZ:** Recently, for an exhibition in Los Angeles at Blum & Poe, I exhibited a row of glass vessels positioned on the floor of the gallery in an exact north-south line. Each vessel contained water from the Pacific Ocean that I collected by sailing to the longitude line that divides the Pacific time zone and the Alaska time zone, 127.5 degrees west of Greenwich, England. I wanted to materialize this imaginary line that determines spatial and temporal coordination, and to displace it by some 400 nautical miles. I imagined the line existing in neither zone, being outside of standardized time. The title I gave to the piece is *somewhere in between the jurisdiction of time*. The vessels are small enough to fit into your hand, so you can hold them—rather than the line holding you.

Recently a friend said something to me in the mountains in Pennsylvania. He was high on psilocybin mushrooms. He said, “Does anyone here know the real time!?!” This was after everyone’s cell phones had died and I had changed all the clocks in the house where we were staying. But we can say that at any time. Do you know what time it really is?

**ALEXANDER PROVAN:** We bring the longitude line with us wherever we go. The actual placement of that line—of the prime meridian at Greenwich and of all derivative meridians—is arbitrary. A country used to determine for itself from which point to measure longitude, but in order to determine the time in New York and Vienna and Tokyo at once, which became a matter of concern in nineteenth-century commercial centers, a common meridian had to be established. The riverside suburb of London



was anointed in 1884, despite the objections of other nations with their own cherished invisible lines; this being the height of the British Empire, a preponderance of ships were already navigating in accordance with the Greenwich meridian.

The point is for an agreed-upon line to exist, and for innumerable other aspects of our lives to be oriented in relation to it. The Greenwich meridian is like the bedrock; on top of it you can add time, units of measurement, manufacturing methods, paper sizes, construction materials, street signs, satellite data transmission protocols, pant sizes, screw threads, manhole covers, film exposure ratings, file formats, quality-management processes, etc., with each additional standard being more compressed than the previous layer—the result being a diagram of the earth as untold soil horizons.

Maybe the pedological diagram isn't the best way to represent how the world has been remade by standardization. But I prefer it—the impression of an artificial world being superimposed on the natural one—to the alternative, which I imagine to be an MBA/Pentagon-style tree chart with the longitude near the center and thousands upon thousands of overlapping text boxes, opacities desperately tweaked to ensure visibility, floating in every which way. This kind of image automatically claims to be legible, to represent a comprehensible order and thus the possibility of exerting control in a meaningful way. In reality, the system that has been created by myriad standardization bodies, engineers, corporations, bureaucrats, and governments is too complex to be controlled; or, rather, regulation via standardization offers an alternative to forms of control that hinge on such legibility.

How do we hold the meridian and all it represents, or all it fails to represent, in our minds, much less our hands? In these glass vessels, you're addressing a question that I've been thinking about a lot recently: How to make visible these obscure, if ubiquitous, standards in a way that enables us



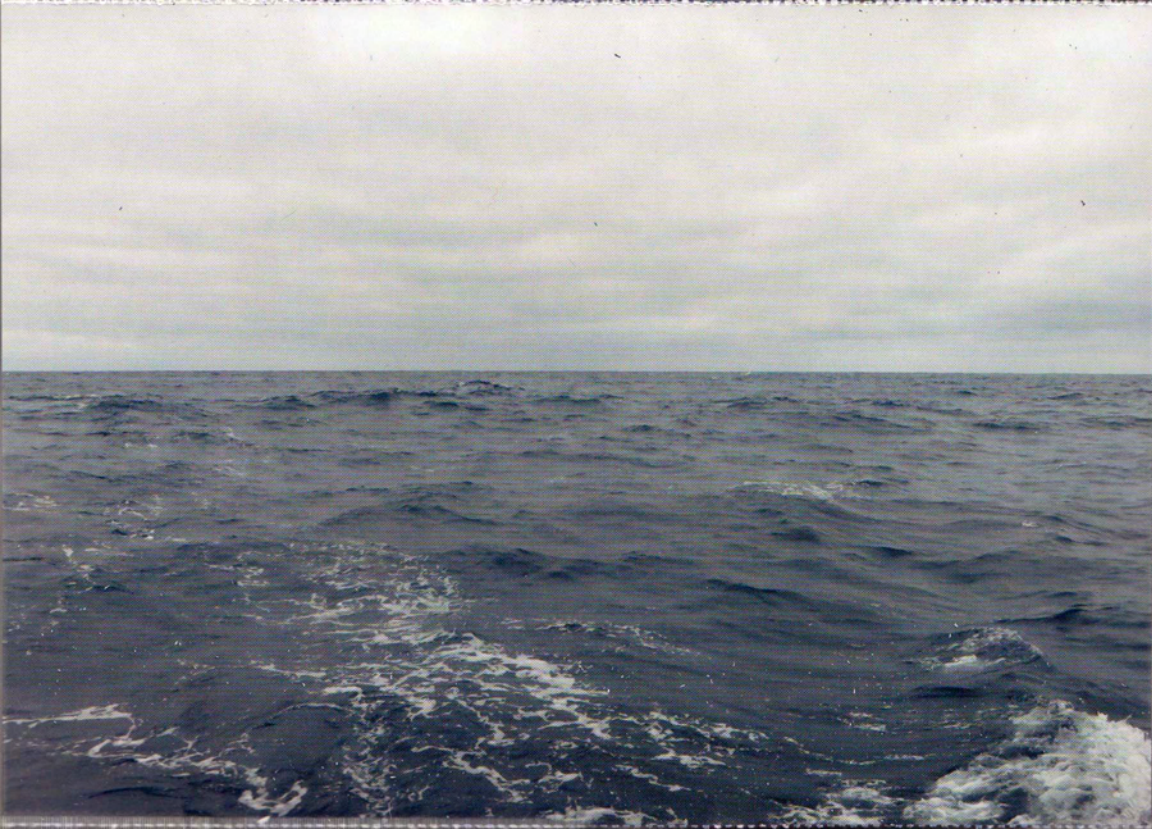


to not just speak about them but to change them? How to harness the constitutive elements of these standards—as language, as representations, as documents, as objects, as rules—and use them to other ends, to create an experience like the one your friend had on mushrooms (assuming it was more revelatory than terrifying) or to foment disorder? How do people respond when they see the vessels on the floor and imagine cradling them in their palms? Do you feel that, in the gallery, there's some possibility of reconfiguring time and space in accordance with our own ideals and desires, if only momentarily?

I'm writing this from an old mill in the Swiss Alps, converted into a house sometime in the early 1900s, overlooking a valley marked every few kilometers by the alabaster bell tower of a church emerging from the pines. An aperture in the shape of a Swiss cross has been crudely carved through the bedroom wall so that one awakens bathed in sunlight shaped like the national logo. The bells chime once on the half hour and copiously on the hour, until 10 or 11 at night—I've usually had a few drinks by then and I can't remember to note when they fall silent. Each time, I think: Who cares what time it is here? Is each ring an assertion of Swiss time or a reminder of the forces that connect this village to every other settlement in the central European time zone? Switzerland refuses to join the EU and is otherwise protective of its autonomy, and for this reason the most prominent international standards agencies are based in Switzerland. Clocks are pasted to the façades of government buildings like advertisements—for the development of social bonds through mechanical competence, or vice versa. Does anyone here know the real time?

According to Wolfgang Schivelbusch's *The Railway Journey*, train travel made us define towns not by their distinctive features (and one's experience of them) but by their proximity to other towns: Landscape became geographical space. "Every place in such a space is determined by its position





with respect to the whole and ultimately by its relation to the null point of the coordinate system by which this space obtains its order,” he writes. Did we see this coming? Britain delayed its acceptance of the Georgian calendar until 1752, and so correspondence with the rest of Europe required dates listed in the Old Style and the New Style. Because of this tardiness, when the calendar was finally implemented the British had to delete eleven days. The public was dismayed. In a print made at the time by painter William Hogarth, you can see a placard marked with the slogan “Give Us Our Eleven Days” amidst a depraved, drunken, dim crowd on the verge of violent eruption.

**DH:** You are sleeping on the bed of a sundial. It’s nice to be woken by the sun—a reminder that there still are natural rhythms that surround us.

The motto *carpe diem* comes to mind. Instead of understanding “seize the day” as taking full advantage of the moment, as not wasting one second, you could understand it literally as what you described: to assert control over these structures that dictate our lives. To take control over what time it is. To take control over which year it is, which day it is, which holidays occur, how many days are in a week, how long the minute is, whether there is such thing as a minute, what the days will be called, what the hours will be called. Isn’t it strange that the days of the week have names but the hours of the day are just referred to by numbers? I think we should name our hours.

**AP:** In April, the Royal Observatory Greenwich opened an exhibition called *Longitude Punk’d*, in which steampunk artists—among them Lady Raygun, Herr Döktor, Major Thaddeus Tinker, and Citizen Griffdawg—are presenting works that assume the form of submissions to the competition, initiated by Parliament in 1714, to devise an instrument for sailors to calculate longitude. Among them are a silk observing suit and garments adorned with functional orreries.

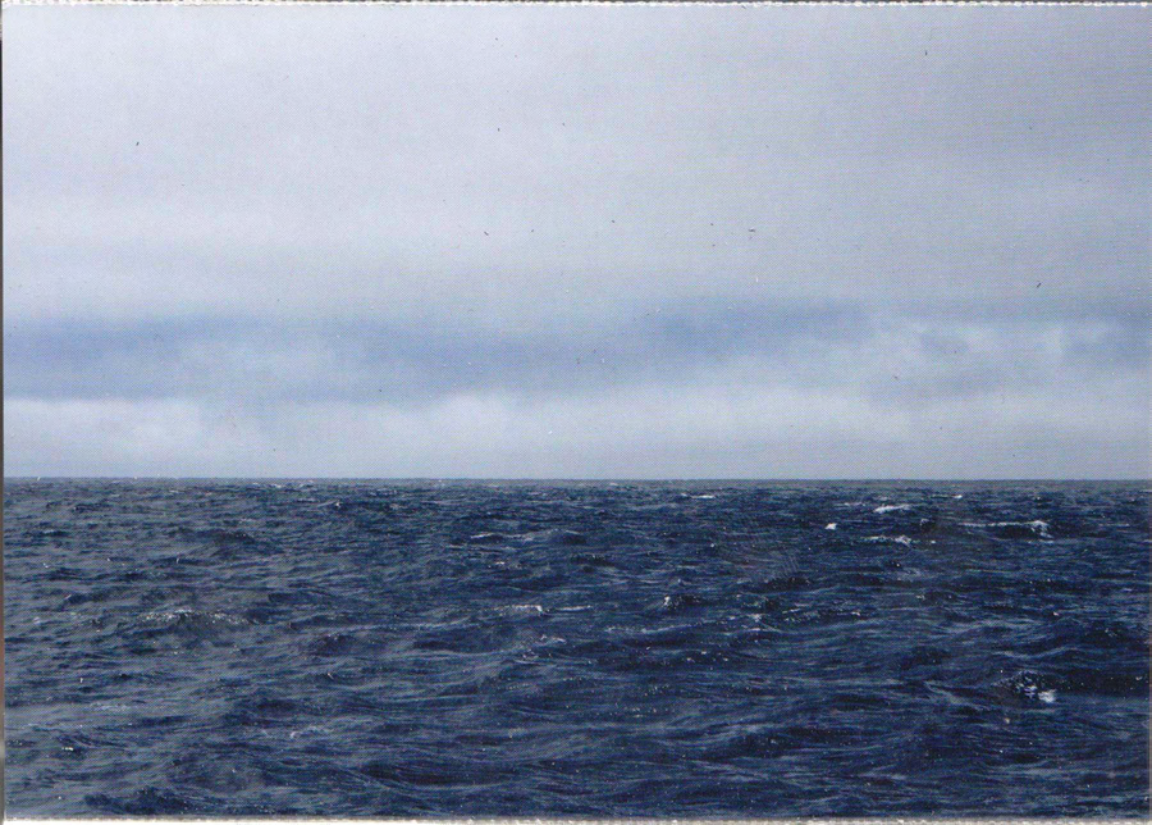


**DH:** When I visited the observatory a few years ago I read about a crazy proposal that called for using a magic powder. The proposal involved stabbing a dog with a knife, sending the dog to sea, and then dipping the knife in the magic powder every day at noon in Greenwich. The dog, far away from the knife in Greenwich, would feel the pain of the wound and bark, thus marking noon and enabling the sailors to calculate longitude. And let's not forget the "proposal" of Martial Bourdin, a young French anarchist who attempted to blow up the observatory (or maybe the Prime Meridian itself) in 1894.

The Greeks had two understandings of time. One, *chronos*, a term we still have today, considers time quantitatively, as sequential. The other, *kairos*, considers time qualitatively, as opportune moments, as indeterminate. You may feel that something is happening outside of chronological time. Earlier this year I was invited by Julia Wielgus to do an exhibition that took place in two locations, at Jan Mot in Brussels and at Galeria Dawid Radziszewski in Warsaw. The opening was synchronized with the moment my friend gave birth, so no one knew exactly when the show would open. You couldn't put the date in your calendar (which made it impossible for the gallery to make a Facebook event). The time of the opening was unknown, so you couldn't fit it into your hourly schedule. The show demanded that you embrace the unexpected and the unplanned when so much of life is about organizing time, planning, scheduling. The show hinged on other rhythms and times transpiring at once, like the time of the body.

That Schivelbusch quote made me think about temporal durations, about a world in which the concept of defined durations does not yet exist. Imagine a world in which there is no such thing as a second or a minute or an hour. Two events occur at once but exist independently of each other, separated by a vast expanse of undefined time, like two far-flung villages before the railroad. I don't know what goes on in peoples' heads when they're looking at the work, but I'd like to think that what you describe



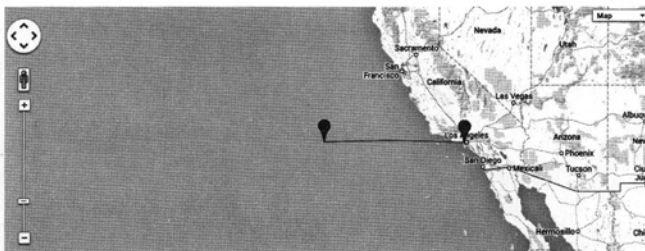


is possible: Viewers may reconfigure time and space to suit their own desires; they may sense that time is tangible, that it can be grasped and shaped. One of the reasons I chose this medium for the vessels is that glass is made from sand. Sand was once a symbol for passing time, for duration, because it was used in hourglasses. The vessels are hand-blown, so each is particular; I like to imagine each vessel as a unique shape for time. In Blum & Poe's upstairs gallery, in a separate group show curated by Andrea Neustein and Jenny Jaskey, I've placed a piece called *three standard breaths or the shapes of hours*, which is a reference to Duchamp's *Three Standard Stoppages*. Duchamp threw a meter-long string up into the air and retraced the shape—which no longer measured a meter—it made when it fell to the ground. I found an hourglass somewhere in upstate New York and broke it open, measured the sand, then used the sand as material for three unique hand-blown vases. Each was made with one hour's worth of sand, as defined by the hourglass I had found. I've always imagined how I could remake Duchamp's piece with a standard minute or a standard hour: Throw time into the air and see what shape is formed. The vases hold roses.

**AP:** Goethe, in his *Italian Journey*, rolling through the country by horse and cart, just before the advent of the train, wrote: "No-one who has never seen himself surrounded on all sides by nothing but the sea can have a true perception of the world and his own relation to it. The simple, noble line of the marine horizon has given me, as a landscape painter, quite new ideas." You get this impression, too, when you hold the meridian in your hands.

**DH:** My cat just came to me. He's bored because I'm on the computer, this artificial glow fixating my eyes and illuminating my face. I once read that ninjas in Japan knew how to tell the time of day by looking into the eyes of a cat.





Published by *Art in America* - 2014 -

Photographs from sea taken by Avery Regen and David Horvitz.  
Installation photograph courtesy of Blum & Poe, Los Angeles.  
Design by Miya Osaki (helloazuki). Printed in Carlsbad, CA.

Thank you to Jeff Poe, Michael Smoler, Lynda Bunting, and everyone else at Blum & Poe, Avery Regen, Mia Nolting, Jim and Kent Milski and their forty-eight-foot *Sea Level*, Joe Cariati and studio, and Kylie Gilchrist.

And thank you to my mother for dropping me off at Cabrillo Marina in San Pedro and picking me up in Marina Del Rey.