INVENTING THE TRUTH

On Fiction and Reality

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INTRODUCTION

INVENTING
THE
TRUTH

Diana Marincu

The transformation of the past into the solid matter of history is always an act of excess, a political gesture, a subjective intrusion on the part of the researcher who studies the "traces of phenomena" (François Simiand), despite constant attempts to keep the area "clean" and objective. The relationship between fiction and factual truth has always been a topic of reflection upon the methodology for studying history. Discussions of memory as the burden of identity, history as a national myth, and meta-narratives as unequal ideological filters have led to the formulation of answers whereby the boundaries between two distinct worlds—truth and fiction—have in fact become more interesting than the territories they separated.

One reaction to the tradition of forcibly delimiting history from fiction might be to insert history within the "privileged" domains of fiction (visual arts or literature), which are capable of becoming tools of historical investigation. Rather than denouncing fiction in the writing of history, we shall proceed to examine the authentic elements of fiction in order to attain a panorama of strategies capable of re-writing, correcting or re-inventing history.

The exhibition *Inventing the Truth. On Fiction and Reality* took shape along two simultaneous directions of research, one of which interprets fiction as the "repressed" part of the discourse of history (as defined by Michel de Certeau), while the other focuses on seemingly ordinary everyday life, where quotidian elements are poetically re-contextualised and temporally recomposed by means of fiction. Therefore, the works presented here enrich the analysis of history through the insertion of fiction and personal micro-histories. However, the present provides even greater interpretative versatility and a better dynamics of narrative construction thanks to real-time revisions and corrections.

The works on show bring to the fore both the interpretative process and the production of such narratives. The visual construction of each project engages with the conventions of fiction, making visible the traces of the author and the subtle joins linking authenticity and invention. The impossibility of identifying the limits of reality leads the viewer to waver between how convincing and how jarring the mise-en-scène is.

Consuming History, a photographic project by **Carmen Dobre-Hametner** (b. 1978), sets out from the premise that all social practices create realities, and history is one element subject to this process. Looking at history as radical alterity, the project focuses on the extreme experience of discovering history as real life, through perfect re-enactment. The Soviet Bunker in Vilnius, a theme park opened in 2008 on the site of a Soviet secret service station, adopts the format of the former political regime and is available to all tourists interested in experiencing the ordeal of interrogation, arrest and aggression, performed by actors who play the rôles of executioners or secret service officers. Carmen

Dobre-Hametner photographed the individuals who opted for the tour as victims of the re-enacted communist internment camp. The mix between historical props (the costumes of the actors and the scenery suggesting a gulag setting) and contemporary details (the clothing, accessories and attitudes of the tourists) will be integrated into a cinematic aesthetic that refers not only to the fictionalising of history by means of re-staging it, but also to enacting fiction as a real experience. The "obscene" reality, which brings the spectator into dangerous proximity with the theatrical stage of the action, determines certain acute sensitivities to the excess of real or to hyper-reality (defined by Jean Baudrillard as simulacrum, paroxysm and parody, abuse of information and image). *Consuming History* inquires about individuals' need to get a taste of hyper-reality by means of extreme experiences and their attempt to achieve being-in-the-past (according to Fredric Jameson's concept of "nostalgia for the present").

Ștefan Sava (b. 1982) proposes a video essay on the potential and limits of interpreting an archive containing photographs from inter- and post-war Germany. Having selected around 45 frames from the 850 he acquired from a flea market in Berlin, Ștefan Sava questions the visual representation of a traumatic past. Each image is submitted to an archaeology of the image based on the dialectic between what is rendered visible and what is left out of the visual field. The video *The Falling of the Arches* reviews various theoretical approaches to looking, as well as the interpretation of images according to the methodology indicated by Georges Didi-Huberman: the privileging of singularity over a unifying, collective vision. Hence, the discontinuity as a strategy of furthering knowledge and the flexibility of free associations between images via comparisons, similarities and differences.

Larisa Sitar (b. 1984) presents the continuation of her project centered on constructing false dioramas that touch on the relationship between history and ideology. History is always violence, while ruin best represents dislocation, rupture, and death, therefore, phenomena that mark the transition from one political regime to the other. Covering hundreds of years of human history and progress, the collages put together by Larisa Sitar are at once misleading and sincere, at once manipulative and honest with their viewers.

Michele Bressan's (b. 1980) work *Present* appropriates an object, namely a book by Mircea Eliade entitled *Mystical Births*, which has the potential to leave behind spatial and temporal reality altogether. The book was a present from the artist's mother, with a handwritten inscription dated 31 April 2014. As April has only 30 days, the date does not exist. Through misplacing this event in time, the gesture becomes abstract, suspended outside of chronological conventions. Personal history replaces objective history and single-handedly sustains the intensity of a gesture for which there is no tangible truth. What remains is only the story of an "improved" reality, extended by one day. This is a *retrospective influence* on a life that has gained one more day. The work *Single Use* puts forward apparently ordinary objects in a state of exceptionality, by investing them with a new rôle, that of keeping the product's promise and intention intact and hidden. The encapsulating unprocessed films permanently postpone the revelation and project an inaccessible content.

Lea Rasovszky (b. 1986) composes a story from fragments of true stories she has researched, from personal memories and passages from books. Fiction here becomes an integral part of the storyteller's life and is matched with a visual setting that is site-specific to the New Gallery. The audio-video installation proceeds from the idea that there are certain "psychological realities" and melancholic feelings that influence the relationship between mental and real perceptions.

Alex Mirutziu (b. 1981) continues the series *Bureaucratic Objects*, which relies on attributing to each word that makes up a poem a responsibility in determining the spacing of the lyrics, the relationship with the typeface, the ratio between written and blank spaces, as well as the spontaneous connections of meaning that coalesce on the sheet of paper. Words from poems by Graham Foust are cut out and recombined with fragments from poems by W. H. Auden, thus forcing a dialogue across time and style. These collages are added to the performance entitled *The Finnish Method,* appropriating the idea of "ontological design" with a view to studying, by means of an ensemble of pieces of furniture, the way in which people influence objects and vice versa.

Situated on the porous border between reality and imagination, the *Inventing the Truth* exhibition recasts interpretations of history and invents new strategies for rethinking the relationship between truth and fiction. Either by correcting a historical discourse or by manipulating authentic data in order to create a new discourse, the artists put forward fictional constructs that reflect upon both the process of interpretation and that of producing narratives. The conventions of fiction remain visible, the traces of authorship are there for everybody to see, the stitches are on the surface, but even so, all of it might be true.

Translated from Romanian by Carmen Dobre-Hametner

Part I

FICTION
AND
HISTORY

"If truth is not to be found on the shelves of the British Museum,
where, I asked myself, picking up a notebook and a pencil, is truth?"

Virginia Woolf, *A room of one's own*, 1929

THE FALLING
OF
THE ARCHES

Ştefan Sava

Case study: beneath the lid of a metal box, previously used as a receptacle for pastry shop wares, is revealed a sheaf of negatives. Most of the frames measure 6 x 6 or 6 x 9 cm. The more than eight hundred negatives are inserted in yellowing photographic envelopes or old notebooks, between whose blank pages can be found stray frames, probably selected for enlargement. The box was bought at a flea market in Berlin.

Without being organised in any way, the collection of black-and-white negatives reveals itself to me in the form of a photographic archive of anonymous images. From the viewpoint of content, at least two different sources for the family photographs might be identified, according to the frequency with which certain recognisable individuals occur, but there is no further, clearer information in this respect. On most of the envelopes there are clues that they were developed in Berlin, and particular areas of the city can easily be identified in some images. The Column

of Victory in the Tiergarten can be found in one of the images, surrounded by what seems to be a desolate view of the park, an impression heightened by the blurred outlines of the skeletal trees. A photographer poses in front of the new Kempinski Hotel in West Berlin, renovated after the war and opened in 1952. The light glints in the lens of the camera he wears around his neck. But other frames were most likely shot in other regions of Germany, such as those taken near a monument to the victims of the two world wars. When it comes to placing them within a temporal sequence, with the exception of those envelopes that give the year of development (not necessarily the same year as when the photographs were taken), namely 1952 and 1953, there are no other clues as to when they were taken. But looking at the photographs, I can intuit that they were taken between the early 1920s and the early 1950s, most of them in inter- and post-war Germany.

[...]

Perhaps one of the main motivations I feel is that of using immersion in the images to place myself in spatiotemporal proximity to the historical experience described in them, in a manner appropriate to my attempt to understand what happened in a period that does not belong to me. In this respect, the understanding I am aiming at forces me to adopt a dialectic of transactions between that which is visible and that which is invisible in the photographs. The initial perception is that provided by a hard, direct impact with a two-dimensional image, in which the details are diluted to the same extent to which their visual effect is subsequently banished, in the instant immediately following that in which my reading of them begins. The photographs emerge bathed in light, enveloped in emptiness, in a void of representation

that I realise I am unable to fill no matter how many ploys I might try. The precarious way in which this reality presents itself to me is determined by the very nature of the image as a trace, an imprint. These apparitions cannot replace the continuous flux of the existence of anonymous people photographed in the naturalness of ordinary, apparently un-posed, free-time activities.

I aim to work with the images, but nonetheless I experience a certain state of provisionality, in which my perceptions remains blocked: the feeling of an abrupt, intense closeness to the photographic subject, by the mere fact of focussing my gaze on an image, immediately followed by just as powerful a feeling, one seemingly imposed from without, a forced drawing back from what is essentially perceived as fragmentary, incomplete, but no less true. Each image is viewed once, twice, a number of times. Whence arise the first elements of an understanding of such frames? The visual impact with the surface of the image brings about a contemplative state, now numbed, now disarticulated, an empathetic illusion based on identification with the mechanical viewpoint of the camera and the subjective viewpoint of the photographer and reinforced by the elements I recognise: a natural setting, a cityscape, a stadium, a person lighting a cigarette in a park, family portraits. Everything seems to be understood at first hand, dominated by a melancholy gaze fastened on ordinary images. It is certain that the texture of such photography contains the drama of the recent past, to the same extent that the words which I am now uttering will be overwhelmed by other, probably just as transient, futures.

The effort of penetrating the surface of an image is concerted and here and there coalesces into culturally or purely visually

identified areas of interest. These image-bodies present themselves primarily as palpable elements whose existence is incontestable, revealing themselves according to spatial architectures of self-exhibition. The perception of their presence is immediately followed by a coming to awareness of the mode in which they display themselves to me, in a performative manner and legitimising themselves through the continual oscillation between whole and fragment. Even if the perception of the image seems instantaneous, it in fact disciplines the gaze through the way in which it imposes its own configuration, its own execution, and concomitantly it shows itself to me as the material format for a medium of expression, but also as a syntax constructed on the basis of internal rules. It transcends the status of mere object and thereby claims for itself, in the first phase, the place it occupies between being a product and describing a reality, and the way in which it addresses itself to me thereby depends on its autonomous position, in strict agreement with its materiality. In one form or another, the image imposes its quality of being a record of the reality it describes; it causes me to believe in it. The image is not merely an illusion, or a flat screen, or a plain representation, but a real body, to the same extent that the images, once placed together under the appearance of an archive, form a self-contained organism, with its own operational logic.

Translated from Romanian by Alistair Ian Blyth

[Editor's note: This is an excerpt from the artist's monologue in the video *The Falling of the Arches*, 2015.]

Ştefan Sava, *The Falling of the Arches*, 2015,
video HDV, 30 min.,
Courtesy of the artist and Ivan Gallery

Ștefan Sava, *Untitled*, 2012,
object-net, string, 9 hooks, aluminum wire, approx. 200 x 40 cm.
Courtesy of the artist and Ivan Gallery

Editor's note:

The work *Untitled* by Stefan Sava was initially used in the video *Fundata*, the documentation of a performance made by the artist in a village of deportees, where his grandmother once lived. The net-object functioned as an instrument carried by the performer and scratched the surface of the ground with hooks at the end of a rope. The symbolic meaning of this action, although related to what the layers of memory hide and reveal through an aggressive gesture, here stands as a trace of a past action, invisible for the viewers, but still loaded with a capacity to reveal hidden meanings, histories and identities. The old Venetian palace that hosts the Romanian Institute amplifies the metaphorical meaning of this strange looking, organic element, waiting to be used again.

"HISTORY IS THE ONLY CULTURAL ANCHOR WE HAVE"

An interview with Carmen Dobre-Hametner

Diana Marincu: *Consuming History is a new documentary project, which you recently began working on for this exhibition and which involves extensive fieldwork and theoretical research, given that your works are always on the border of different disciplines. I would like to start by asking you about your artistic take on the documentary and how you relate to it. Documentary films and documentary photography often find it difficult to make the crossover and find audiences open to contributing by filling the space left by objectivity and the mediating distance between viewer and subject.*

Carmen Dobre-Hametner: Perhaps neither objectivity nor documentation is a very productive notion in the field of the documentary anymore. The documentary covers a huge variety of images, ranging from ideologically-minded FSA projects to Rineke Dijkstra's *Beach Portraits*, for example. It is basically the history of non-staged images. If we take a poststructuralist stance, then there can be no objectivity at all. However, one thing is certain in non-staged photography, namely the presence of a photographed object in front of the camera at a time in the past. In such images,

two things are going to clash: the representation pertaining to the photographer's intention and that which cannot be absorbed by art (in the words of [Walter] Benjamin), namely that presence which has something accidental about it. Not because the photographer did not choose to photograph that piece of reality, but because there is always a lack of control in photography deriving from the way the photographed fills the photographic moment and the visual field. Conversely, there is always a tension between the generality of representation and the singularity of a particular photographed object at a particular moment in time. This is more apparent in some photographs than in others. Documentary photography at its best relies on the photographed as excess in relation to representation. The photographer has to research the subject and construct a coherent representation, but faced with the photographed subject, he or she should allow him or herself to be blinded and mesmerised. When doing research, I think the danger is to produce a visual project that illustrates the conclusions of that research in a way that makes the images didactic, like an appendix to the text. You should always be attuned to the material resistance of the photographed reality, the present time, and the technology employed. In the case of *Consuming History*, my intention when I set out for Vilnius was to take photographs that would look like stills from a movie. But the nature of this participative show and the fact that it is not happening on a film set but in a poorly lit bunker, with actors alongside normal people who bear the marks of the present, changed the actual image, making it look more like a still from a low-budget film in which the costume designer and the lighting director have done a sloppy job. Such a look fits well with the fact that the *Survival Drama* [the name of the show staged at the Soviet Bunker] is a soft simulation of traumatic living in the Soviet Union, which does not intend to catapult the visitors

into the past reality itself, with all its horrors, but to create enough psychological pressure to push visitors to the limits of fun, as it were. Just as the images look like stills from a film that needed more work, the show is a deliberately imperfect simulation of life in the Soviet Union.

As for the second part of your question, I assume you are asking about the relationship between art photography and the documentary. I don't think they are as separate as one might think. We ought not to forget that photography was accepted into the field of art not as *photography-as-art*, but rather as *art-as-photography*, to quote [Walter] Benjamin again. In other words, it was when photography ceased trying to prove itself as a product of the photographer's subjectivity and when art opened up to non-art in avant-garde works. Photography entered the artistic scene as archive, pop culture productions and photographs that stressed the indexical. When it comes to the distance between the subject and the viewer, a photograph will never provide access to the depicted reality, and nor will it pin down the full meaning thereof. There are of course ways to narrow interpretation down, but these do not deliver the truth about the subject.

DM: *When you have found out about the Soviet Bunker, I remember we were talking about a wider category of similar tourist sites and about the development of a new type of tourism. Can you tell me more about this and about how the Soviet Bunker relates to dark tourism or experience tourism?*

CD-H: In the last half of the twentieth century people got very used to travel for sightseeing purposes. Holidays abroad are now routine. The tourism industry worked to meet the demand for safe and fast access to foreign places. With increased standardisation, people started to have less and less of a personal experience of

those sites. Nowadays, it is very hard to imagine what travel was like in the nineteenth century: not being able to see pictures of the places you will be visiting and being completely surprised once you get there. In this context, a kind of experience-based tourism rectifies the feeling of jaded disconnectedness characteristic of classic tourism, by opening contexts to engage the visitors. Examples of experience tourism vary greatly, from sex tourism in Africa and Thailand to visiting the Chernobyl reactor, travelling to war zones, or being in zero gravity. This of course goes hand in hand with an appetite for the unusual and the exotic. On the other hand, dark tourism means going to places where tragedies happened, such as concentration camps or the Twin Towers, Ground Zero. Although it deals with the dark realities of the Soviet Union, the *Survival Drama* relates to experience tourism more than dark tourism. To my knowledge, the bunker where the *Survival Drama* takes place only housed communication operations, and so it is not known as the site of any tragedy.

DM: *What was the most intriguing thing you saw during your trip to the Soviet Bunker in February? What struck you the most, apart from the carefully constructed setting prepared by the organizers?*

CD-H: The show is designed to mix moments of tension with moments of relief. This is a soft simulation of trauma, as not very many people would agree to experience trauma to the extent, intensity and violence to which it occurred under the Soviet regime. During the *Survival Drama* visitors submit to military instruction, KGB interrogation, rough medical examination, and propaganda training. Towards the end of the three-hour show they are given a tour of a communist shop and a meal characteristic of Soviet times. To me it was very interesting to see the limit almost

being reached and to notice signs of discomfort appearing on the faces of the visitors. The organisers of the show need to maintain a fine balance to prevent things from getting too rough, but also to prevent them from getting too cosy.

DM: *Although your project is very correct in relation to the subject and careful with the whole context, without being intrusive in any way, I am sure it stirred very strong emotions in you. The way in which history is altered and delivered in the commercial packaging of a theme park unsettles me. It seems that trauma is being peddled like in the tabloids. I think a critical stance is dissolved in the background of your project, but it is there nonetheless. It is not obvious, however, and it does not force a guided reading of the pictures on the viewer.*

CD-H: I think several phenomena present in our societies come into play here. What the organisers invoke as a motivation for producing the show is reconciliation with or exorcism of their dark history by making light of it. Of course someone who has gone through the Soviet gulag or has been a subject of political oppression might have some objections to this method. But in a sense, every country that has a memory of recent trauma finds it difficult to position itself towards it correctly. What do you do? Do you put it on a pedestal, do you bury it in the past, do you make fun of it and thereby say you have overcome it, do you relentlessly seek out the guilty parties? Perhaps all these tendencies are at work simultaneously in a society still haunted by the spectre of communism.   Trauma in general is something that cannot reach a final solution. That is why it resurfaces and goes hand in hand with repetition and re-enactment. All you can do is to learn to live with trauma and make it manageable. As for capitalism, it does have the capacity to incorporate and privatise everything, even things it opposes ideologically. We saw T-shirts with the face of

Che [Guevara] or the USSR flag on sale to cool kids everywhere after the fall of communism. In late modernity cultural clashes have intensified, along with a reconsideration of difference and marginality as something positive. Capitalist economies have discovered a market for difference and unusual experiences, and the *Survival Drama* is an example of this kind of development. But to me it is more interesting to track the dynamic than split things into black and white. As someone who is interested in putting such close encounters with reality into the picture, I focus on the particularity of the phenomenon in question. The particular deals in imperfection and excess in relation to settled meanings, ideology or representation.

DM: *I would conclude with the following question. How do you interpret the relationship between real historical details and the fictional construction of the* Survival Drama, *in the thematic context of our exhibition* Inventing the Truth*? Where is the dividing line and can it be traced with any precision? Or is there a more subtle passage between the two, in your opinion?*

CD-H: Let me go back to [Walter] Benjamin, this time to *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, where he discusses Paul Klee's painting, *Angelus Novus*. The angel of history is depicted as being propelled into the future while gazing intently behind him, toward the past, where the trauma of history lies inaccessible. He cannot intervene since the wind of progress relentlessly removes him from the object of his gaze. This also implies that history is the only cultural anchor we have. Most of the time, the present is lived individually, and perhaps no one has the ability or the impulse to draw any conclusions about the present. The distance we have to the past enables a reconsideration thereof, which is in itself partly invented, since it reduces the material variety of this past

present to something graspable. Therefore, the fiction of history always partakes in present living and how we imagine the future. But, if we set the fiction of history to work on present tasks, new realities ensue. This is also the case with the *Survival Drama*. The re-enactment of life under communism does not revive the past but rather speaks of contemporary social practices. One of these is re-enactment, as a way of approaching history as otherness, which thereby takes on a manageable, customised form and can be consumed. As I have already said, the re-enactment of history is a form of experience tourism and a way of approaching the traumatic past of a nation. So, in such cases we can see how deeply past or present reality is connected to fiction.

Carmen Dobre-Hametner, *Consuming History*, 2015,
digital photograph, series of 12, 30.2 x 55.9 cm each, ultrachrome print
on lightbox, edition of 5 + 2 ap. Courtesy of the artist

AND THEN, ONE THING LED TO ANOTHER...

Some reflections on the work of Larisa Sitar

Diana Marincu

The series of collages by Larisa Sitar under the title *And then, one thing led to another...* juxtaposes images from different sources, contexts and periods, creating complex scenes which are difficult to grasp on one viewing. Sitar integrates disparate elements into the works thereby dissolving the limits of the original source materials. The result is a unitary construct that evokes fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Flemish engravings and paintings.

Sitar has meticulously collected images from a digital archive that the British Library has recently released into the public domain through Flickr Commons. The collection contains over 1,000,000 images from seventeenth-, eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century books, with no known copyright restrictions, that have been scanned and made freely available for use and

re-purposing. Through the virtues of leading edge technology, the archive's individual components are allowed to share a common digital public space and to be used in ways that their authors could never have imagined. Sitar's gestures build on the idea of the digital archive and create new associations between the disparate parts of the collection, with each fragment representing but one piece of an immense and infinitely reconfigurable puzzle.

Collage - as an instrument for the manipulation of historical and anthropological discourse, is here filled with humankind's desire to get closer to the inaccessible and to create new projections of the often mythic and mysterious past. Sitar's interest in morbid scenes, as is apparent in the visuals she has selected, arises from a wish to examine from a distance the dramatic situations people have encountered over the course of history and to reflect on their behaviour in the presence of death.

And then, one thing led to another... is an extension of a study Larisa Sitar began in 2014. This new iteration has been both expanded and adapted to the exhibition space in a manner that is reminiscent of museum panels in which the chronological unfolding of events builds on our need to simplify and order information. Here, however, the temporal sequence is manipulated so that fragments of narrative overlap and throw into disarray the classic view on the relationships between past and present. The work also reveals the artist's preoccupation with our relationship to our cultural heritage, our cultural burden and our duty to perpetuate its landmarks. By recomposing elements from different historical periods, Larisa Sitar erases the divisions between them and creates possible and realistic visions that reflect on the subjectivity which is inherent in the exploration of any archive.

Questioning the potential for manipulation inevitably contained in such images, *And then, one thing led to another...* negates the chronological milestones of human cultural evolution and opens historical narratives to new interpretations and approaches to knowledge, maintaining a subtle balance between the irony and the solemnity with which an archive can be consulted.

Translated from Romanian by Andra Bāltoiu
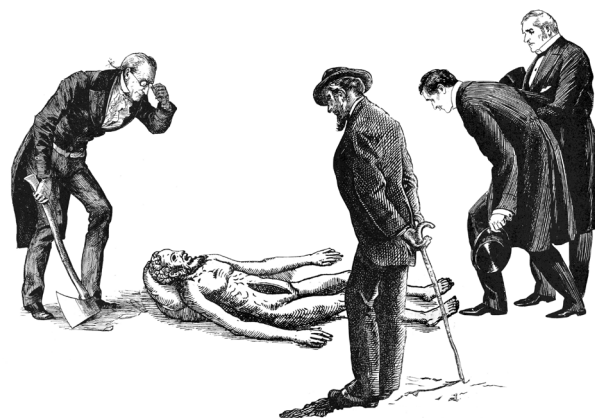
Larisa Sitar, *And then, one thing led to another...*, 2015,
digital collage, variable dimensions (details). Courtesy of the artist
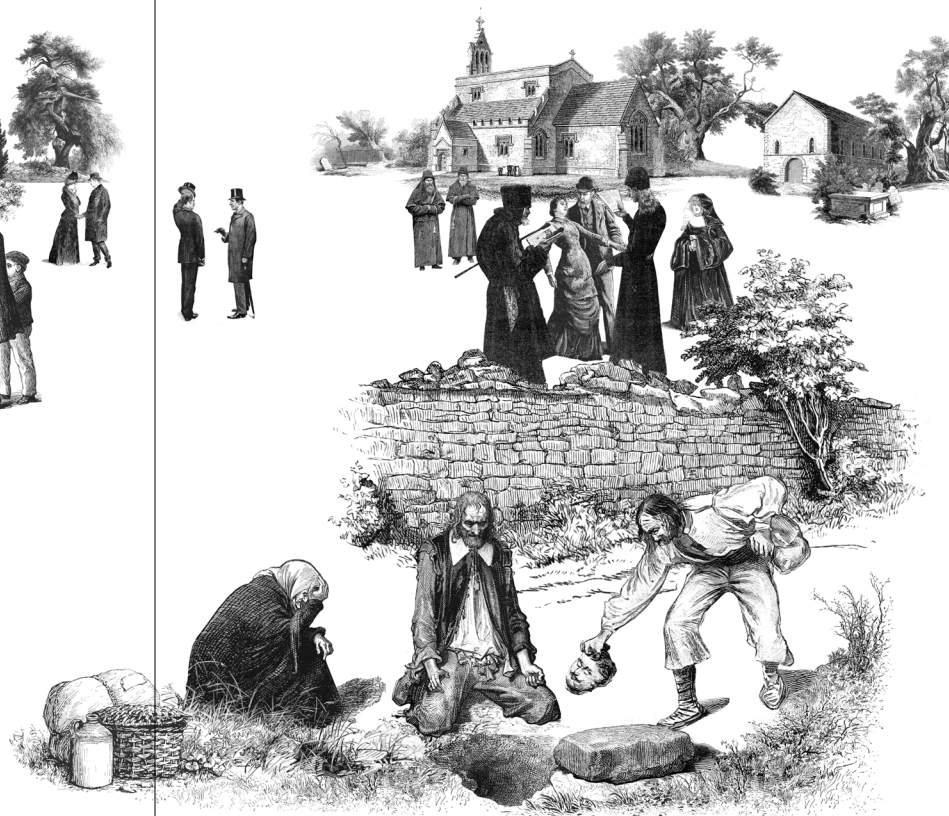
FICTION
AND
EVERYDAY LIFE

"Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the shadow"

T.S. Eliot, *The Hollow Men,* 1925

31.04.2014.
PER SEMPRE
CON TE:
MAMA –

Nașteri mistice

Michele Bressan, *Present*, 2014,
object, 20 x 12 x 2 cm. Photo: Michele Bressan. Courtesy of the artist

MICHELE BRESSAN: MESSAGES FROM THE PAST
Matei Bejenaru

When light falls on a surface coated with a photosensitive emulsion based on silver salts, atomic changes take place.

If light passes through a lens or a small hole, then all the aforementioned changes form a latent image invisible to the naked eye, an inverted depiction of the objects, persons or shapes that were in front of the lens.

In order to make it visible, the latent image is amplified by a chemical oxidation/reduction reaction called development.

Over the course of more than a hundred and fifty years, the daylight exposure of silver-salt photographic films has been shortened to fractions of a second. In other words, we can now "freeze" the motion of objects or people.

Time is embedded in the photographic image, just as it partakes in the development and aesthetics of the motion picture, which is often referred to as rapid successions of photographs.

In terms of memory, photographic documents present moments and are therefore proof of something that existed or happened in front of the camera.

When holding a photographic film in my hand, I become aware that in the past it was in the proximity of the subject imprinted on it. It is a material witness of past vicinities, of the "eyes that saw the king"...

Michele Bressan's projects from the *About Time* series are not photographic images, but rather reflections on the photographic process and photographic ways of thinking applied to other media.

His ready-mades *Single Use* and *Present* speak of perceptions of time and subjectivity, of insights into succession, memory and duration, profoundly influenced by the photographic process.

The disposable cameras included in the *Single Use* project are receptacles for images that remain unknown even to the author, existing for an uncertain period of time only as latent images, overcoming their ephemeral material condition, doomed to subsist in the future.

In fact, it is not what the images represent that is of interest, but rather the artist draws our attention to the process and the meaning of the images in relation to time, from the standpoint of the universal laws of optics and chemistry.

The three cameras materialise the author's intention to freeze an anonymous moment in time and project it into the future. How many of the artists who have the patience to read these lines will have built in their minds invisible and mute artworks only for themselves?

The book exhibited by Michele Bressan is inscribed with a dedication from his mother alongside a date that never existed...

The *Mystical Birth* of that date, 31 April 2014, can turn an error into a symbolic way of tracking the flow of time.

By exhibiting this gift book, Bressan is thinking photographically and acting linguistically. He produces a discursive photograph, which represents itself, becoming independent of reality.

The vocabulary employed pertains to the classic language of contemporary art, but the morphology and syntax relate to photographic thinking.

Some cathedrals of the Middle Ages had openings in their tower that allowed the light to enter. Thus, solar eclipses, like the one happening today, 20 March 2015, at 8.50 GMT, as I write this text, allowed you to view the gradually occluded sun on the floor of the cathedral, which was in fact not only a place of faith, but also an enormous and silent darkroom whose laws were known only to the initiated.

According to the known laws of physics, an apple tossed by an astronaut out the porthole of the space shuttle would not degrade over time, thereby becoming timeless cosmic waste...

... Like the astronaut's body forever lost in space in *Space Odyssey 2001*...

Translated from Romanian by Carmen Dobre-Hametner

Michele Bressan, *Single Use*, 2011,
three single use cameras, 24 exposures each, used by the artist in 2010,
and undeveloped. Photo: Michele Bressan. Courtesy of the artist
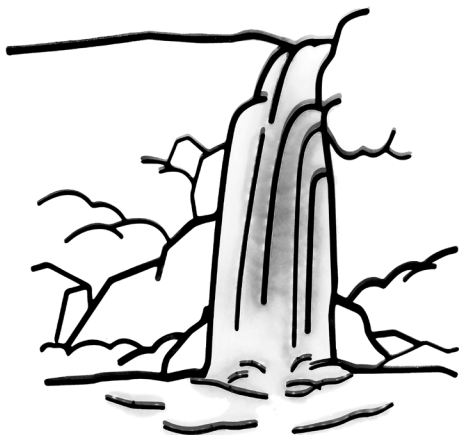
Lea Rasovszky, *Fluent in Isolation*, 2015,
sound and visual installation. Courtesy of the artist

"LET'S SAY REALITY ONLY HAPPENS ONCE"

Diana Marincu

Setting out from a text made up of fleeting recollections and poetic utterances, Lea Rasovszky creates an isolated, intimate medium that aims to absorb its viewers one by one, using sometimes complementary, sometimes contradictory sounds and three-dimensional drawings, which reconcile themselves with each other in a perfect balance between emotion and irony. In this context, fiction becomes an integral part of the narrator's life and nurtures the idea that multiple psychological realities do exist, defined by affectivity and cognition in equal measure. Sometimes, the memories are contaminated by a desire to re-write them, to influence them retroactively, and to re-define their rôle through the lens of the present. The work *Fluent in Isolation* brings a note of melancholy to the exhibition and alters the relationship between real and mental images, between chronological time and personal time.

The darkened niche in the gallery space pulsates to the rhythm of the narrator's voice and the chemical blue of the led

lights that bathe the drawing lend the magic dust of the fairies from the story a counterfeit gleam, a pop look that comes from urban consumerism and glam new mythologies. This flat reality, despite the little coloured lights that give it volume, is juxtaposed with an invented, more organic, more living reality, by means of a "contemporary carpe diem made of plastic, but a plastic that almost perfectly imitates crystal" (Lea Rasovszky).

The real "sequence" that led to the writing of the text and to the installation is equally important to mention, as it brings together recurring ideas in the work of Lea Rasovszky: affective memory and its limits, the saccharine romanticism of images of the artist, and the kitsch frame of public life. The starting point was a news item about a person from Bucharest who was so strongly affected by a detective novel that he came to believe in the murders he had read about and went to the police to seek help in finding the criminal. The artist did not have direct access to the case, and the few details she was able to discover about it made it all the more mysterious and incomprehensible. Here, fiction had become pathology, leading to an extreme that every writer strives for: the construction of credible characters. But the lifelikeness of such characters sometimes comes up against the powerful need to integrate them into real life, to extract them from the pages of the book, and to turn words and paper into flesh and bone. Lea Rasovszky adopted the position of this person who constructed his own reality via literature, and she made an agreement with herself: "Let's say reality only happens once." In this way, we all suffer from Alzheimer's every day, every instant, when we fail to record reality accurately and preserve it intact. "The result was an (incomplete) text that was very close to what I was aiming at and to the original idea, with the story of the patient from Obregia. But now I am in his/her place

and the memory is in fact one that has yet to exist. I introduced the people on the hill into the text, the people who would light the fire, as if I were an inexistent observer of an event that did not include me but which was mine because I was imagining it. (…) The final work will be a poem about an intense psychical state that takes over everything and which might become more real than the real itself." (Lea Rasovszky)

If the aim of fiction is to "represent" reality in all its potentiality, rather than consonant with some verifiable truth, then all is well in the Waterfall Kingdom and the blue gaze of the narrator dissolves into the darkness of the gallery, giving way to new projections, potentiated by a Venetian balcony or a stray word read in a newspaper. Everything is there, waiting for each of us to become "fluent in isolation."

Translated from Romanian by Alistair Ian Blyth

FLUENT IN ISOLATION

Lea Rasovszky

Sometimes these thoughts come to me and I feel like as if they're sharp little fishing rods from the past, pinching some nerves that teleport everything except my actual body to some precise moment in the past. A few seconds later (it happens) I am faced with a choice. I could go deeper into them and accept this sort of organic reality that is impossible to prove, or I could quickly focus on the tap dripping in the background, or the barking dog or the clicking of the keyboard, thus returning to whatever flat and uninteresting reality I am synonymous with, randomly and by no will of my own.

When I become fluent in isolation, I will be the king of time.

Almost there.

I'm constantly on the verge of writing something, but it seems reluctant to flow.

Waterfalls are commonly formed when a river is young, but they're not aware of time. They are like juvenile runaways who never know where they're going.

I'm trying to freeze-frame it. When I succeed in doing so, it turns deep blue. The deepest shade of electric blue, like a glass blanket that keeps you safe but leaves you completely exposed.

There are a few steps that I have to descend within me to get there, letting go of any concrete thought of what I might find there, on that impossibly small plateau, the size of a typical apartment-building balcony. Everything is pretty much there, my very own personal Aleph.

It's actually even smaller than that, it's the size of a shoe sole. It's funny how they call it the sole of a shoe. I think scientists have proven by now that that's exactly how much space the soul occupies.

In the nights when I feel like faking patience
Where stillness is nowhere to be found
Only a sense of mellow bone
Melodies on repeat with the volume slightly turned down like
haunting sounds from the neighbors.
Make words form a bit easier. It is actually
A mirage. They're still stuck somewhere
Up miraculous but clogged pipes.

From exactly where I'm standing you can see that hilltop, and those people being busy on it. They look like luminous insects that ooze dew when they sweat and brew storms when they fight. Whenever they're sleepless or incapable of expressing their feelings through embraces or loud noises, they reset the landscape and wake up renewed, they start forming new memories and friendships.

I'm completely alone, they don't see me. Their brows are tense, facing downward. I can't feel the wind that's ruffling their clothes and hair, the air inside and outside me is still, the grass doesn't grow here.

If I reach out my hand, they are the size of my little finger. If they were to look at me now, as I am measuring them with my rigid palm, it would look like I'm urging them to stop.
Distance is an unpredictable translator.

It's strange to be here again, in weather like this. With a sun devoid of warmth. It's just like it was. It feels like a balloon again, like a frail state of imponderability. Almost like I'm somewhere above them, immune to their labour, like they're dancing in front of me, making crop circles for me to decode.

Let's say reality happens only once. That would make us feel like we have Alzheimer's all the time.

Now they've set the whole thing on fire. Sending up smoke, as a material offering, up into the sky, as an absent God.

I can hear nothing but my own pulse, as it rhythmically raises my skin in certain places. It's now explaining what it tried to tell me a long time ago, when I did not speak it's language.

"Maybe it is nothingness that is real and our entire dream is nonexistent, but in that case we feel that these phrases of music and these notions that exist in relation to our dream must also be nothing. We will perish, but we have for hostages these divine captives who will follow us and share our fate. And death in their company is less bitter, less inglorious, perhaps less probable." said Proust.

In fact, no one's getting older, everyone is getting younger.
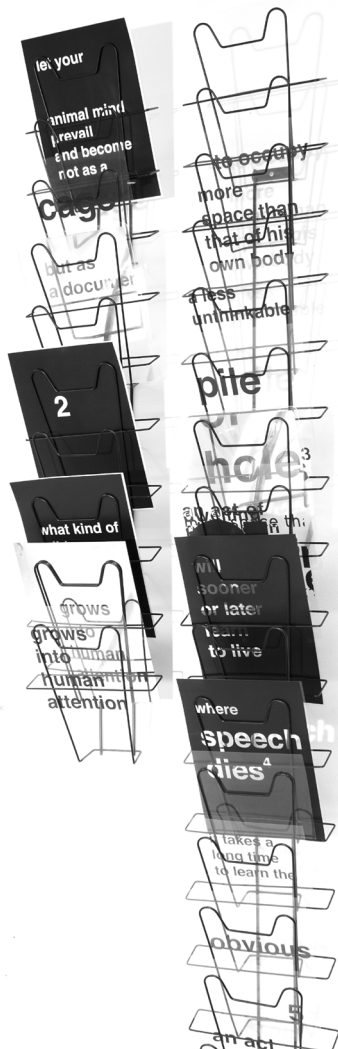
BUREAUCRACY OF OBJECTS

Alex Mirutziu

Bureaucracy of objects refers to the dynamics and politics of writing and reading, and to the dialectical understanding of their relationship, from production to reception. This assorted concept questions the nature of a politicized model of reading, and the cultural privileges of lineage, complicities of the edge with which the words cut, towards concealing power of gesture beyond readability.

How much a text or a book adds to the formation of things in close proximity, how words taken here as objects overcome their page architecture and become lucrative in consciousness to curate laws, take care of the body, create spaces, and point something in reality? There we are, trying to make sense of the object through its own bureaucracy, its own internal affairs. This resoundingly negative term—bureaucracy adequately addresses the complexity and structure of a poem. This analogy is not at all shocking, as message perception of any sort entails a degree of bureaucratic labour of the mind, from the moment it is thought to the moment of its inscription on the page, only to be thereafter negotiated within the architecture of the page. It is not the author that communicates but the construct of communication delivered into the world which is responsible for communication. What is said in communication is not the same to what is thought and felt in

the mind. This impossibility to represent on the page what is going on in one's head is the starting point of a poem. Therefore, major part of responsibility is left to words themselves, as producers in their own right. Words as producers is an attribute to post-language writing, which postulates a strange paradox of norm-ability and of an impossibility to level anything, since they always claim the present and the future at the same time, due to their capacity to transit time. One example might be—speaking of something while not speaking of it, alluding to it—a way to design an object that is not necessarily inscribed on paper with legal power attractors, but still able to create radical change in politics, for example. Probably all of us found ourselves talking about something that was never actually talked but intended, an allusion—something that might be real but which cannot be fully present, where complex play of reference, distance, and ecologic debris of nuance are referred to historically inert *haute* words. One may say that words are outlived by their own generative clutter, as one word is here, and in the next *rots* away, leaving clusters of possibilities.

Victor Thompson's view from 1965 that bureaucracy in society offers high productive efficiency but lacks innovation is turned upside down when applied to language because, when the structure of a poem, for example, is mapped out, the text is in deep need of being resolved in order to accomplish, to fetch what is intended.[1] It might be said that words design themselves, while generating their own environment, program, and ideology—in one word, they produce difference. Even if a word is insular on a page, it has the potential to conspire, because it's tailored as such and resists at the same time any attempt to stabilize any notion of form, continually hijacking other objects, in the mind or not.

Questions such as: How busy are the objects in a poem—how quickly do they distance themselves from what they are? How immediate a word in a poem generates a new word— how a text negotiates the meaning of a word with another word? When does meaning in a text begin to blur?—are seminal to my understanding of Graham Foust's texts. One view is that each word is designed with other words in mind—hence, an object has to 'disappear' to serve its purpose—right from the beginning, it readily allows access to things indirectly, addressing and responding to meanings as they occur within the overall economy of the page. Moreover, this object/word has to be thereafter exercised, even overexercised towards exhaustion, as a result of crossed references, while fixated on a page. But, with all this effort, a word can never exhaust its being, as a word never stop where its edge is, like acrylic paint does. It remains enmeshed in its own network of relations, to some degree dilates and breeds diverse joints of objects. In this sense it can never be really read, just as one might say that English cannot be read, only projected over some subjected incarnation. What we encounter is the same object/word, despite changes in its content. All the possible meanings of a word are not the word because it can only bring out an infinite numbers of meanings, which are hyper-associative and phenomenologically driven.

[...]

Consider the current literary model of phrasing and word spacing generally approved as the norm in writing; it is not inclusive of the gap between two segments of a text, which I take as a mark, as an object in its own right, able to negotiate closure, and intrinsically decisive for the structure of the text. This putative gap between texts can be also a part of communicative intention and classified as text, if well built associations of text inform the reader of an established well designed expression, be it short or long. In
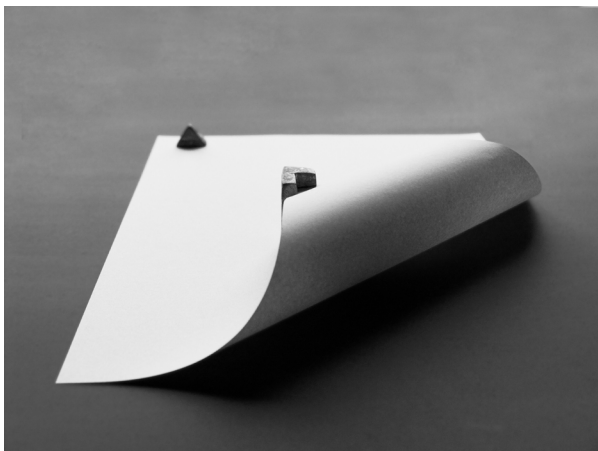
Alex Mirutziu, *Architecture for page turn*, 2013,
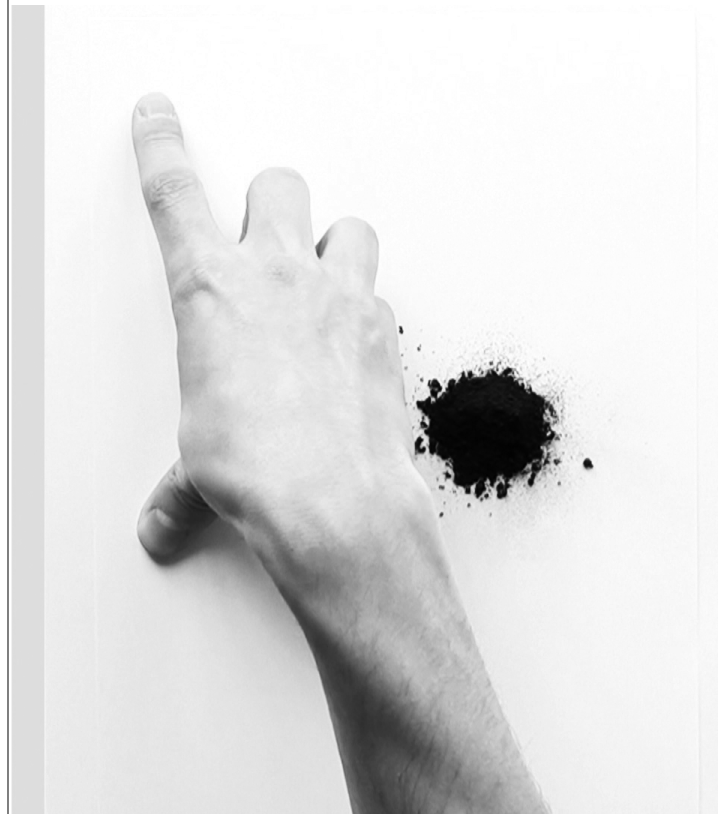lead sculptures, A4 paper. Courtesy of the artist and Sabot Gallery

other words, this gap between two segments of a text is text, when the included segments eliminate much of their metaphorical clutter as possible. Moreover, this gap tends to close the text at any instant, it overlaps the writer's intention to finish the phrase, and always pushes towards some materialization, to a degree of fulfillment or meaning acquirement, by demanding a counter-word, a solution. In this manner, these gaps always contribute to the text, but are never present in it as text—as strangers that cannot be ignored, even though they are unknown. Surely, for the stranger to stay strange it needs to perish. *We can never really know the stranger at all, or it becomes something else entirely*[2]. It has, therefore, its own history, its own it-ness, a hyper-object in a deep sense, even though it lacks the form that a word can take—a gap is inter-objective, because it cannot be coagulated into a single object—more importantly, it indexes first hand the materiality of everything present on the paper and, by doing so, it holds a continual architecture of time.

1 Marnell, Tamara (essay S551 Shachaf – Dec. 9, 2010), http://portfolio.tkmarnell.com/coursedocs/s551_lit_review.pdf.

2 David B., Olsen, "People are Stranger: Listening to Graham Foust", http://jacketmagazine.com/36/olsen-foust.shtml.

[Editor's note: this is an excerpt from the artist's essay "Pending Works and Bureaucratic Objects. A Lecture on the Reality of Never and its Design", October 2013, published for the first time in a book conceived by Alex Mirutziu for the exhibition *Each thought's an instant ruin with a new disease*, November 2013 – January 2014, a project supported by Sabot Gallery, Cluj.]

Leave
1

to
2

the desert

cut
into the floor of the desert.

Like skin,
like a prison,

3
4
Here

5

Alex Mirutziu, *Where is the poem?*, 2013,
performance for one hand and prepared poem, HD video, 9.49 min.
Courtesy of the artist and Sabot Gallery

POLITICS

Leave the room
to itself. Compare it
to a sleeping,
living creature.

Time is the dark-
packed house
of this place,
the luck of the des

cut
into the floor

Everything
is ready.
A light
where

Lik
li
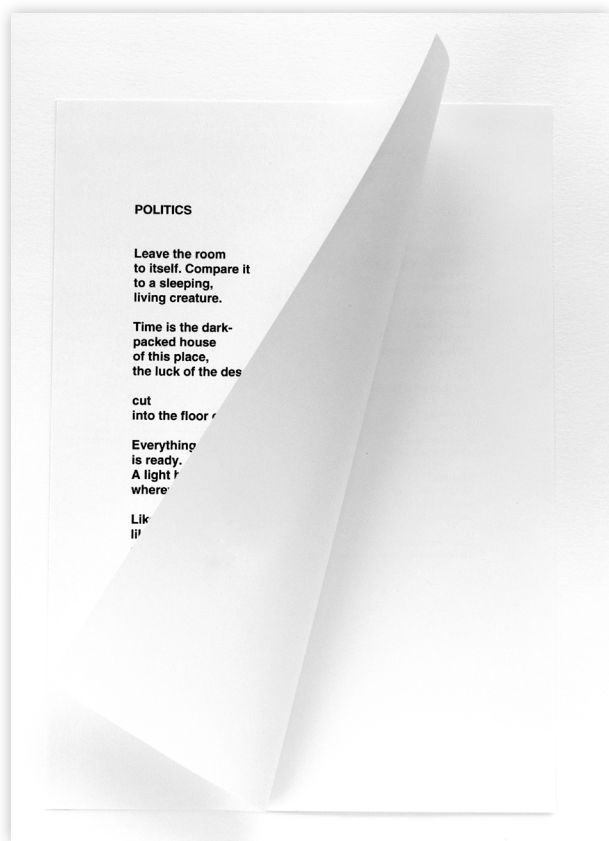
Alex Mirutziu, *Architecture for page turn*, 2013, study,
A4 paper. Courtesy of the artist and Sabot Gallery

VIEW POINT
FOR WALL POEM
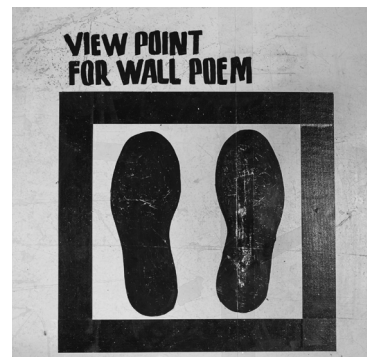
Alex Mirutziu, *Prepared Poem #2*, 2015,
installation (detail). Photo: Jean Baptiste Beranger.
Courtesy of the artist and Rüdiger Schöttle Gallery

THE MANNER IN WHICH THE EYEBALLS HURRY IN THE SOCKETS OF YOUR SKULL TO FOLLOW THE CONTOURS OF THIS TYPEFACE IS THE FIRST FOOTNOTE TO A NASCENT OPINION.

The above text is written in SWEDEN SANS typeface,
designed by Söderhavet agency for the government of Sweden.

Alex Mirutziu, *Untitled*, 2015,
lightbox, 50 x 70 cm. Courtesy of the artist

THE FINNISH METHOD

Alex Mirutziu

It is central to ask the question: 'what performs?' To invest not only when you build, but most importantly to re-invest in the idea of the everyday. And every day the landscape is changed thanks to multiple agents.

Design, and especially good Finnish design fulfils its purpose and remains true to it. A kind of Finnishness in product manufacture allows productive security, because there is no interpretation, no rôle-playing other than that of fulfilling the task of functionality. These objects allow time and space to be reconciled; to sum up: Finnishness in product design makes a certain action present via its apparent anonymity. The more the object stands still anonymously, the more active its presence. This is not to say that such qualities in products are dull or idle, but rather that its environmental disturbance and generative clutter is minimal.

But this is just a start, as *The Finnish Method* does not mean a manual of a product in motion, but a critical live essay on movement that facilitates uselessness and usefulness in order to justify its ontological influence in the world and make us more aware of why today looks the way it does. Even though the object claims for itself a supposedly successful presence, its duty is also to spark an unproductiveness inherently present in the object itself. Tapio Wirkkala has touched on a similar claim, albeit from a more
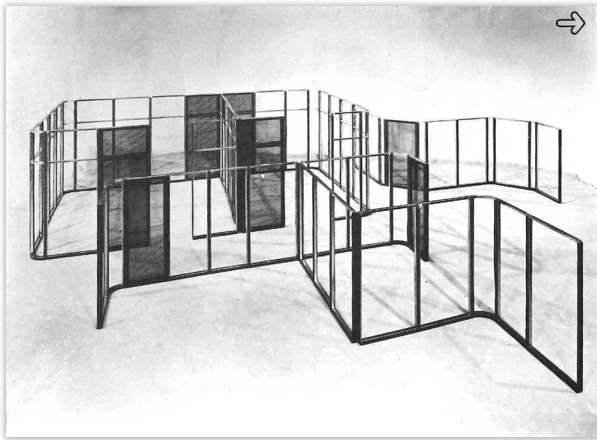
Alex Mirutziu, *The Finnish Method*, 2015,
documentation for performance.

poetic representation; the live coverage of a claim such as this rests on its principle of justification, coined in cult magazine *Form and Function*.

What has to be confronted today is the notion of movement as product, as the upshot of the design of things. We design the world and instead the world designs us. How much an object accomplishes in the world and how much we accomplish relative to the object. Thus an exercise in responsibility is necessary. But if we are to think of responsibility we have to take into consideration a degree of idleness, to be able to reposition the urgency of creative act and thereby to reconsider design more seriously; a design that generates time and vice versa.

Performing today is co-performing. Actions lend meaning to objects and objects lend meaning to actions. So what now, how to be, to get out of suspension, to be honest. Getting out of suspension is to tell, rather than to hide. The so-called method is that which opposes the metaphor to restore the contract between the individual and the environment, therefore to un-suspend. The bait here is that of wherever you go is where you are. Thinking something through using metaphor complicates rather than simplifies, because there is no outside of anything, no background and no foreground, and in this picture, metaphor tries to define something by means of displacement, by means of suspension, and therefore by means of a leap into something else. And any such suspension of meaning is in error, because the object it leaps into is right there and then. Getting the position right is nonetheless doomed to failure. Hence *The Finnish Method* massages a natural sense of economy or an ideology of scarcity, it eloquently designs rather than fleeing or enacting.

BIOGRAPHIES

Michele Bressan (b.1980) lives and works in Bucharest, Romania. He graduated from the Department of Photography and Moving Image of the National University of Arts, Bucharest (2009) and obtained a Master's Degree in photography at the same university (2011). Michele Bressan was among the winners of the Essl Award for photography and was nominated for the Henkel Art Award in 2009. Selected solo exhibitions: ViennaFair The New Contemporary with Jecza Gallery (2013), and *Waiting for the Drama*, H'art Gallery, Bucharest (2012). Selected group exhibitions: *WHAT ABOUT Y[OUR] MEMORY*, The National Museum of Contemporary Art, Bucharest (2014), *PASAJ*, The National Museum of Contemporary Art—Annex, Bucharest (2014), *Les Rencontres Internationales Paris/Berlin/Madrid* (video screening), La Gaîté Lyrique and Palais de Tokyo (2014), *Europe/South-East. Recorded Memories*, Museum für Photographie Braunschweig (2013), *Badly Happy: Pain, Pleasure and Panic in Recent Romanian Art*, Performance Art Institute San Francisco (2010).

Carmen Dobre-Hametner (b. 1978) lives and works in Munich, Germany. Her academic training was at the National University of Arts in Bucharest (BFA in Photography at the Department of Photography and Moving Image) and Leiden University, NL (Master of Photographic Studies). She is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Arts in Bucharest, with a research project on the "Furry community". In 2010 she won the national selection for the Henkel Art Award, Central and Eastern Europe. She was nominated for the Essl Art Award and the Celeste Prize in 2013. She participated in artistic residencies at the Romanian Cultural Institute in Paris, the Romanian Cultural Institute in London and the Fotonow Foundation in Plymouth, UK. Her most important exhibitions include: *Alien and Familiar*, Galerie Taxispalais, Innsbruck, Austria (2013), *Celeste Prize*, ex-Bibli, Rome (2013), *Furries*, Galerie Rue de l'Exposition, Paris (2011), *Body-Art-Society*, Galerie Oudin, Paris (2011), *Furbook*, La Cantine, Paris (2010). In 2012, Carmen Dobre-Hametner published the photo book *Furries. Enacting Animal Anthropomorphism* at the University of Plymouth Press.

Alex Mirutziu (b. 1981) lives and works in Sibiu. In 2004 he graduated from the University of Art and Design, Cluj, (RO) and in 2008 from Huddersfield University (UK) with a Master's Degree in Physical Theatre and Performance. In recent years Mirutziu has lectured on performance

and theatre at prestigious institutions, including the Royal College of Arts, London, the Von Kraal Theatre, Estonia, and IASPIS, Stockholm, and has collaborated with artists and writers including Grit Hachmeister (DE), Paul Devens (NL), Elias Merino (ES), Graham Foust (US), Asa Jungnelius (SE), Graham Harman (US). Recent selected solo exhibitions: *Each thought's an instant ruin with a new disease*, Sabot Gallery (2013), *Pending works and bureaucratic objects*, Galerie Rüdiger Schöttle, Munich, *Spending time in relation to usage*, Barbara Seiler Gallery, Zürich (2011), *Time's Own Insult*, The Glass Factory, Emmaboda, Sweden (2011). Recent group shows: *A few grams of Red, Yellow, Blue*, Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw (2014), *European Travellers—Art from Cluj Today*, Műcsarnok/Kunsthalle Budapest (2012), *Play dice would be nice*, Gaudel de Stampa, Paris (2012); *Rearview Mirror*, The Power Plant, Toronto / Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton (2011 / 2012).

Lea Rasovszky (b.1986) lives and works in Bucharest. In 2008 she obtained a BFA from the Department of Photography and Moving Image of The National University of Arts Bucharest and in 2010 she gained an MFA degree from the same department. Selected solo shows: *From Stars to Steroids: Two Short Stories About an Almost Metaphoric Bestiary*, Anca Poterașu Gallery, Bucharest (2014), *Mentors*, Anca Poterașu Gallery, Bucharest (2012), *The Savages*, Atelier 35, Bucharest (2012), *MEN*, Atelier 35, Bucharest (2011), *Sorrow, Heartache, Recovery & Shit*, ALERTStudio, Bucharest (2011). Selected group exhibitions: *PALE BLUE DOT*, Lateral Art Space, The Paintbrush Factory, Cluj (2014), *PASAJ*, The National Museum of Contemporary Art – Anexa, Bucharest (2014), *Spazi Aperti*, 10th Edition, Romanian Academy in Rome, Rome, IT (2013), *The Biennial of Young Artists*, 5th edition, Overlapping Biennial, Bucharest (2012), *Fresh Drawings*, LC Foundation – Contemporary Art Centre, Bucharest (2011). International residences: Artist Residence Herzliya via ICR Tel Aviv, Herzliya (2011), Schafhof—Europäisches Künstlerhaus Oberbayern, Freising (2008).

Ștefan Sava (b. 1982) lives and works in Bucharest, Romania. He took a Master's Degree in the Department of Photography and Moving Image of The National University of Arts, Bucharest (2010) and he is currently enrolled as a PhD student at the same university. In 2013 he was the winner of the Henkel Art Award, Romania. Selected solo shows: *Ruins of a Day*,

Ivan Gallery, Bucharest (2015), *Facts about Which There Can Be Questions*, Ivan Gallery, Bucharest (2013), *The Inside Out of the Wall*, Ivan Gallery, Bucharest (2012), *Atoms and Void*, Galeria Posibilă, Bucharest (2010). Selected group shows: *Few Were Happy with Their Condition*, Kunsthalle Winterthur, Winterthur (2015), *Europe/South-East. Recorded Memories*, Museum für Photographie Braunschweig (2013), *From the Backstage*, Salonul de proiecte, The National Museum of Contemporary Art—Annex, Bucharest (2012).

Larisa Sitar (b. 1984) lives and works in Bucharest. In 2008 she graduated from the Department of Photography and Moving Image of The National University of Arts, Bucharest and in 2010 she took a Master's Degree at the same university. Selected group exhibitions: *WHAT ABOUT Y[OUR] MEMORY*, The National Museum of Contemporary Art Bucharest (2014), *Transformation. Romanian Sculpture 25 Years After the Revolution*, Museum Beelden aan Zee, Haga; *PASAJ*, The National Museum of Contemporary Art—Annex, Bucharest (2014), *The Visible City project* (with a public space intervention, Monument), organized by AltArt Foundation, Cluj-Napoca (2013), *breakup*, Motorenhalle, Dresden (*The Trailblazers*, with Mircea Nicolae and Ștefan Tiron, 2013), *Care Crisis*, Futura Gallery, Prague (2012), *Essl Art Award CEE*, Winners Exhibition, Essl Museum, Klosterneuburg/Vienna (2011), *Zoomania.Ro*, The National Museum of Contemporary Art Bucharest (2010), *End of Academia*, The National Museum of Contemporary Art—Annex, Bucharest (2010), *EMERGEANDSEE*, media arts festival, Berlin (2010), *Start Point Prize*, NTK gallery, Prague (2010).

Curator:
Diana Marincu (b. 1986) is a curator and art critic living in Cluj and Bucharest. She graduated from the Faculty of Arts and Design in Timisoara, and took an MA Degree in Art History and Theory at the National University of Arts in Bucharest. She is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Arts in Bucharest, Art History Department. Her most recent curatorial work includes: *Other Rooms*, Plan B Gallery, Paintbrush Factory, Cluj, 2015; Mihai Iepure-Górski, *Words in a Room*, BARIL, Paintbrush Factory, Cluj, 2015; *PASAJ* (Michele Bressan, Lea Rasovszky, Larisa Sitar), The National Museum of Contemporary Art—Annex, Bucharest, 2014.

Acknowledgments