

I STUMBLED UPON A JAR OF MILK AND HONEY AND I LET IT CRACK

Mythmaking and the narratives of synchronicity, George Batailles' roll of the dice, series and patterns, the associative coincidence, chaotic schemes as a method of divination, circular time, "Double Life of Veronique", nihilism and meaning

I am very worried. I am worried that anything I've ever done intentionally like dragging myself out to an art gallery, begging for a student priced ticket and holding my eyelids open with toothpicks (like Tom does to stay awake and hunt Jerry without a nights' rest) has never influenced me as deeply as the things I've stumbled on unintentionally. Like the small but firm collection of random films my mom was watching past my primary school bedtime – something about a shooting star over a stone village wall or a glimpse of a scene where some handsome man was seducing a lady dressed in a milky gown with her breast in the bushes next to a stream. Why is it that seeing something random in a newspaper can strike a chord which provokes a domino effect of other chords, sparking a fuse of amusement even in the most unsuperstitious around me because it so well elaborates some juicy present circumstance? For example, "She felt herself a perfidious profaner of a century-old sacred hospitality", that should have been the title of this thesis but I never listened to the newspaper and look at where we are now. It's not that bad. I am also worried about the fact that my (recognized) meetings with chance and synchronicity have almost disappeared since I began the writing of this thesis. I praise the uncanny similarities and accidents that we stumble upon throughout, sometimes, our whole lives and the superstitious tick that that clicks inside any more sensitive ball of hair. As I am writing this, I turn around to see a black cat descending the stairs of the museum café.

Тя се почувства вероломна
осквернителка на вековното
свещено гостоприемство



““She felt herself a perfidious
profaner of a century-old sacred
hospitality”, bulgarian newspaper
excerpt

There is a list of different definitions that could resemble synchronicity but have turned out to be very, very different: chance, accident, synchronicity, seriality, coincidence, sheer coincidence, superimposition, double exposure.¹⁴ It's important to make a differentiation between chance and synchronicity. Chance is a rootless incident, an unstable statistical probability, a throw of a dice whose causality is the separate occurrence of the motions of a muscle of a hand. The dice does not signify anything about the hand that threw it; it turns impersonally and falls unpredictably. Whatever the result from its throw, it can only attain an artificial interpretation extrapolated by the reader and can then be thrown again for a different outcome. It's happening does not manage to connect to other aspects of present reality. Nonetheless, it's a beautiful relief from meaning. Chance is also a dissociative tool – according to Bataille in his 1944 essay *Chance*, it disrupts the illusion and can liberate us of stability of “linear” life, that web that weaves itself perpetually on and on until it binds us tight enough for the spider of grumpy rationality to devour us with ease:

“The absence of poetry is the eclipse of chance. Chance is like death: ‘the harsh embrace of a lover, desired, feared’. Chance is the painful place of overlap of life and death - in sex and in ecstasy, in laughter and in tears. Chance has the power to love death. But this desire destroys death too (less certainly than hatred of death or fear of it). The path to chance is hard to follow; it's threatened by, but also inseparable from, horror and death. Without horror and death or without the risk of them, where would the magic of chance be?”¹⁵

14 Check the last essay “In The Kingdoms of Sheer Coincidence”

15 All quotes by George Bataille on this page are from his 1944 essay *Chance* (excerpted from Whitechapel Documents of Contemporary

He differentiates the two opposing forces that pull chance to their side – one is predatory, the other is harmony. One is the brutal change, a sexual act of bad luck with good luck, the sucking the life out of each other until death. The other is the wish to reflect chance and to find a pattern in it. One of the main arguments of his text is against the “anxious trembling” over shielding chance from its violent properties and from the disorder of its favorable and unfavorable outcomes, “... its light sparkles in dark obscurity. We fail it when we shield it from misfortune, and its sparkle abandons it when failed.” He proceeds with explaining the enemy of ponderousness and philosophy – chance, “To recognize chance is a suicide of knowledge”.

These two opposing forces resemble the difference between seriality and synchronicity. In 1919 Paul Kammerer, who was an Austrian biologist who contributed to the theory of inheritance, was the first scientist to try to explain synchronicity and wrote a book called *The Law of Series*. He was a sort of pattern seeker, and he collected about 100 stories of coincidences of his own and of his close ones and organized them into types - homologous and analogous, pure and hybrid, inverted, alternating, cyclic.¹⁶ He was known to make notes in parks of the numbers of umbrellas people passing were carrying or in shops, noting precise times of arrivals of clients and trying to find patterns in time intervals¹⁷. He describes seriality as waves that produce clusters of same/similar events and objects with likeness of substance, form, function, even symbols that lean toward unity, symmetry and coherence in the environment without a defined causal link between them. Like electric shocks loaded into daily life that exhaust as they travel to an aimless destination but

Art: Chance)

16 Some Considerations on Seriality and Synchronicity ; Article in BRAIN BROAD RESEARCH IN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND NEUROSCIENCE by Elena Nechita, January 2010

17 http://www.scholarpedia.org/article/Law_of_series , last opened 03.05.2023

what causes these waves to begin perpetuating? If there is a wave, does that suggest that some amount of control can be exercised in order to produce it? In this case though, unity and symmetry are the brutality Bataille talks about as their balance is beyond our concepts of virtue, therefore we perceive them as unjust. Seriality is the predator who maintains the dynamic order of the universe at all costs. This order vastly depends on the amounts of pointless murders, toes slammed against the corner of a door, praying mantises devouring their lovers with the same intensity as the frequency of people carrying umbrellas and wearing red shoes.

Allan Kaprow writes in his 1966 essay *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings* as he traces out the methods and applications of chance in the pursuit of an artwork,

“Hence, as a point of view and a technique,

Chance methodology is not only refreshing in the best sense of the word; it is extremely useful in dispersing and breaking up knots of ‘knowables’, of groupings, relationships and larger structures which have become obsolete and habitual through over-use.

Everything, the stuff of art, of daily life, the working of one’s mind, gets thrown into sudden and startling patterns, so that if old values are destroyed, new experiences are revealed. Chance, therefore, is a dramatic affair involving both our need for security and our need for discovery or risk.”¹⁸

18 Allan Kaprow, *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings* (essay, 1966) (excerpted from *Whitechapel Documents of Contemporary*

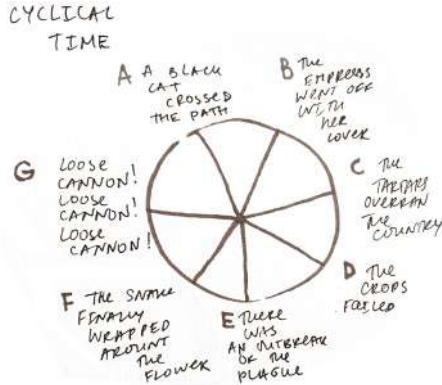
On the contrary, synchronicity and divination is the light side of that coin. It's the associative brother, the connector, rather than the disruptor. It's when coincidences allow to be linked to one to another and immortalize a moment with meaning or when the mind is in a state that allows that immortalization to happen. If you attempt to put dots on a piece of paper in a completely random manner you will soon see that avoiding the appearance of some sort of system is impossible. Coming back to *On Divination and Synchronicity*, Marie Louise von Franz begins the first lecture by juxtaposing causal thinking where the cause follows the effect to Chinese synchronistic thinking which implies that events in time unravel in so to say, fields. The question there wouldn't be what lead to something happening but it would be about *what likes to happen together*.

“So whereas we have only a kind of superstitious popular awareness of the fact that there is a tendency of certain events to cluster together, the Chinese concentrate their whole scientific attention on just that. If you read Chinese historical chronicles, they simply say in the Year of the Dragon so-and-so the empress went off with her lover, the Tartars overran the country, the crops failed, and in the city of Shanghai there was an outbreak of the plague. Then in the next year, in the Year of the Tiger so and-so the empress came back repentant and in that same year a dragon came out of the Tungting lake and had to be banished, or exorcized, and then certain other political events took place. That is how they wrote history and to them it was not just what we would

call a random collection of facts.”

She explains that the Chinese way of thinking about time differentiates from the primitive temporal conception which never made the line between the psychological and the physical.

For synchronistic thinking it's especially important to keep an awareness of these two dimensions, to acknowledge how when someone thinks or dreams about something, certain physical events happen and how they form in constellations.



In Richard Wilhelm's

introduction to the *I Ching or Book of Changes*, he writes,

“However, no matter what names are applied to these forces it is certain that the world of being arises out of their change and interplay. Thus change is conceived of partly as the continuous transformation of the one force into the other and partly as a cycle of complexes of phenomena, in themselves connected, such as day and night, summer and winter. Change is not meaningless—if it were, there could be no knowledge of it—but subject to the universal law, Tao.”¹⁹

19 Richard Wilhelm, *The I Ching or Book of Changes* (Bollingen Series XIX Princeton University Press, Translation rendered into English by Cary F. Baynes, renewed 1970 edition), pg. 88

The trigrams of the I Ching represent the continuous movements and predispositions of Change in and between Heaven and Earth. It communicates the wisdom that there are favorable times for reaping and sowing in accordance to the natural changes of the seasons. There are favorable times for certain things like falling in love, starting the filming of a movie, embarking on a journey and moving through life's situations in conscious accordance with all these transient predicaments is participating in a brilliant game. In these travels through time unfolding there is a contradiction between a sense of transcendental meaning, as if a higher intelligence is weaving out the individual and collective history, yet all this thunder, drama, peace, joy, love, murder that happens endlessly on our planet seeps into a void of a Universe that is silent.

In Krzysztof Kieslowski's film *Double Life of Veronique* (1991) meaningful synchronicity coexists with the accidentality of the dice. It follows two identically looking women – Weronika who lives in Poland and Véronique who lives in Paris. They have never met, except for a brief moment when Véronique accidentally takes a photograph of her doppelgänger amid a protest on her trip to Poland. Weronika suffers a cardiac arrest and dies while performing a musical piece by Van den Budenmayer. Her twin is suddenly overcome with grief and later decides to leave her choir as if to blindly avoid the same fate. In the end of the movie she spots her twin as she is looking through her photographs and breaks out crying. While the topic of fate and synchronicity is recurring in Krzysztof Kieslowski's films, it remains elusive and wandering. I see his chance happenings as a trembling question between the before mentioned coexistence between hyper-meaningful experiences and a happening just for the sake of its own happening, a gamble. Weronika dies in the middle of the movie while the plot continues with Veronika going through the ins and outs of the rest of her life with just a vague sense of an nearly impossible coincidence she will never decipher.

Not to be too dramatic in this day and age but the dance between Bataille's disruptive chance and its pronoiic²⁰ brother resembles the dance between our awareness of death and life. Death shakes us up from the often heavy, anxious dream of life; it can provide relief from all those connections we intertwine and muddle in unceasingly. Despite death's unpredictable refreshments, the obscurity of its coming and its procession can add a stain of cynicism. It is this exactly at this oscillation point between being in flow along strangers, cups of tea, wars, roots, metro stations, gashes of wind and what not and its nihilism that I see as the exciting character of synchronicity. It is this interconnectedness and any meaning it could carry that aren't headed anywhere, and so they serve nothing permanent; they can be blown away like a potato in the wind at any given time. Amongst many fractured parts of my psyche who need to fight for something or against something, to have a purpose and goals, to search in order to find, I encounter a whisper of a sacred drifter that does not need to thrive for anything, only for the sake of life and its joy, selflessly and with a dash of happy nihilism in his heart.

20 Pronoia (n.) - a state of mind that is the opposite of paranoia; when a person feels that the world around them conspires to do them good

AT THE KINGDOMS OF SHEER COINCIDENCE

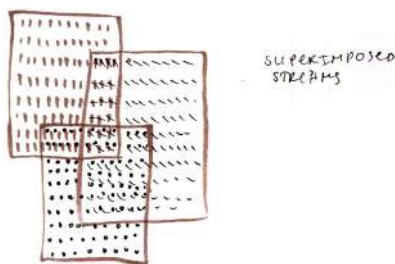
*Boris Mikhailov, new wave superimpositions, double exposures, image associations,
existential chance, meaningful coincidence*

It might be so that the pull toward overlapping, superimposing, connecting two to create a one occurs when the artist/photographer has found himself at some sort of crossroad. These crossroads occur when the continuity of the before mentioned ordinary life, the undisrupted stream, is deranged by political transitions, catastrophes, accidents, distant travelling, personal crises, falling in love and times when the inner and outer world need have a rub between each other. Superimpositions and double exposures become a way to register and discover changes in authentic moments when they are not yet visible or their visibility is for some reason concealed. They allow for what we perceive as the optically real to get textured by the persistent workings of imagination and fluctuations of collective consciousness - pulsations, distress and blemishes of emotions.

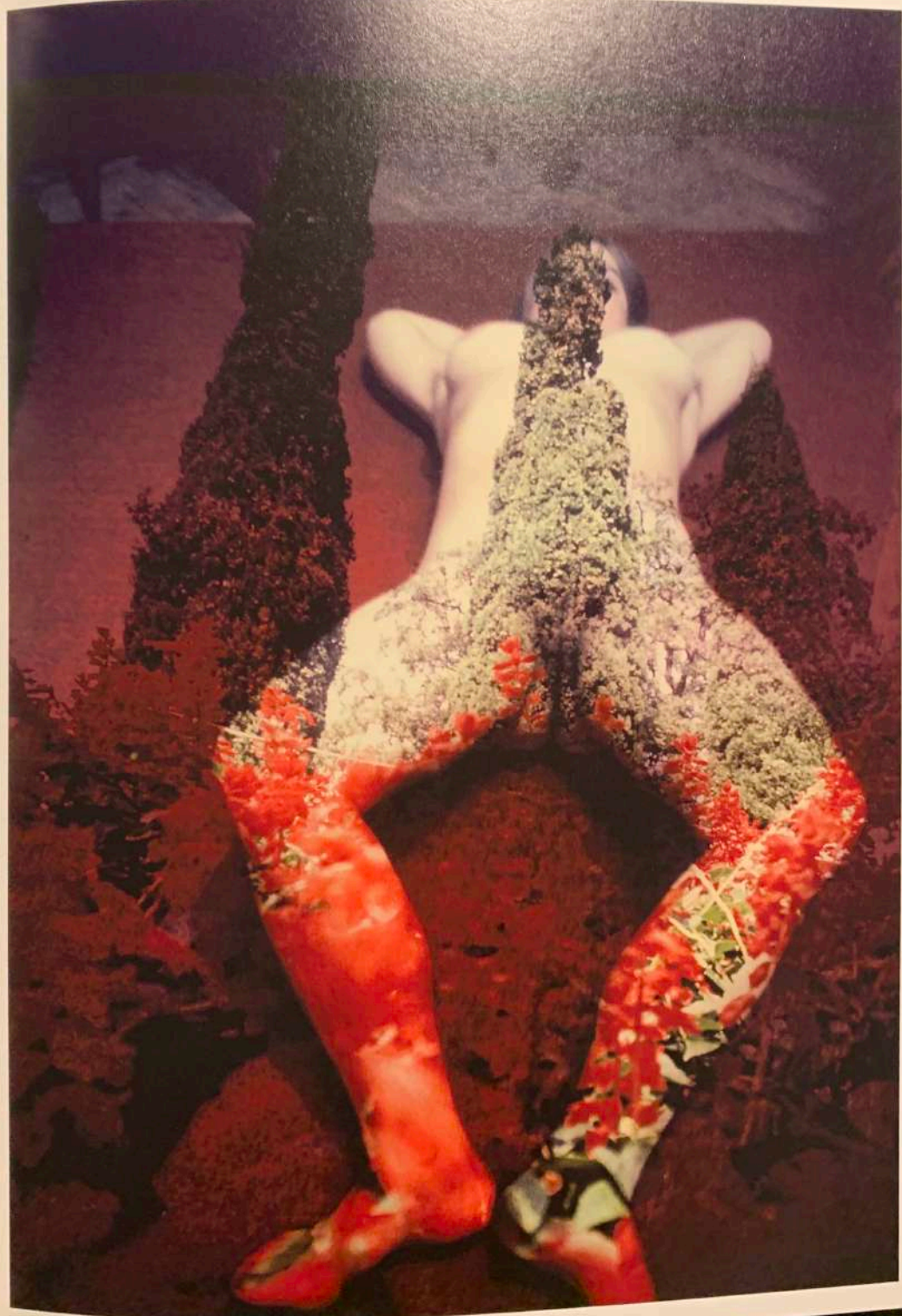
The technique of superimposition of photographic images has been in use since the beginning of photography with the daguerreotype in spirit photography where the medium was used to supposedly record what is invisible to the human eye or in other words, to reveal something that is hidden and access a world beyond this one. The evidentiality of photography as a means to test reality in order to trust it was put under question as this early form of photography started getting debunked. Later with film, which was a more commodifiable alternative, it got completely shattered and freely admitted the possibility of creating fictional worlds which could implicitly deny their own reality. Yet they were unable to avoid the inherent photo evidential impact photography carries with itself since its birth by imposing a naïve trust toward its perceiver.

In *Yesterdays' Sandwich*, or alternatively titled *Bricolage*,

Ukrainian born photographer Boris Mikhailov coagulates a portrait of the transitional era of the decaying Soviet Union which is characterized with a sense of collective generational, personal and political lostness which animated anyplace unfortunate enough to have been tangled up with the Eastern Block. His superimpositions come in harmony with the time he lived in when he accidentally threw one negative on top of another one and decided it's a coincidence worth elaborating on - erotic studio portraits of happy and pensive women above soldiers or mosquitoes, burning fields over photographs of children and families with the raw aesthetic that we find in family albums, battle wounds and street corners, cold soviet cityscapes and spiderwebs.

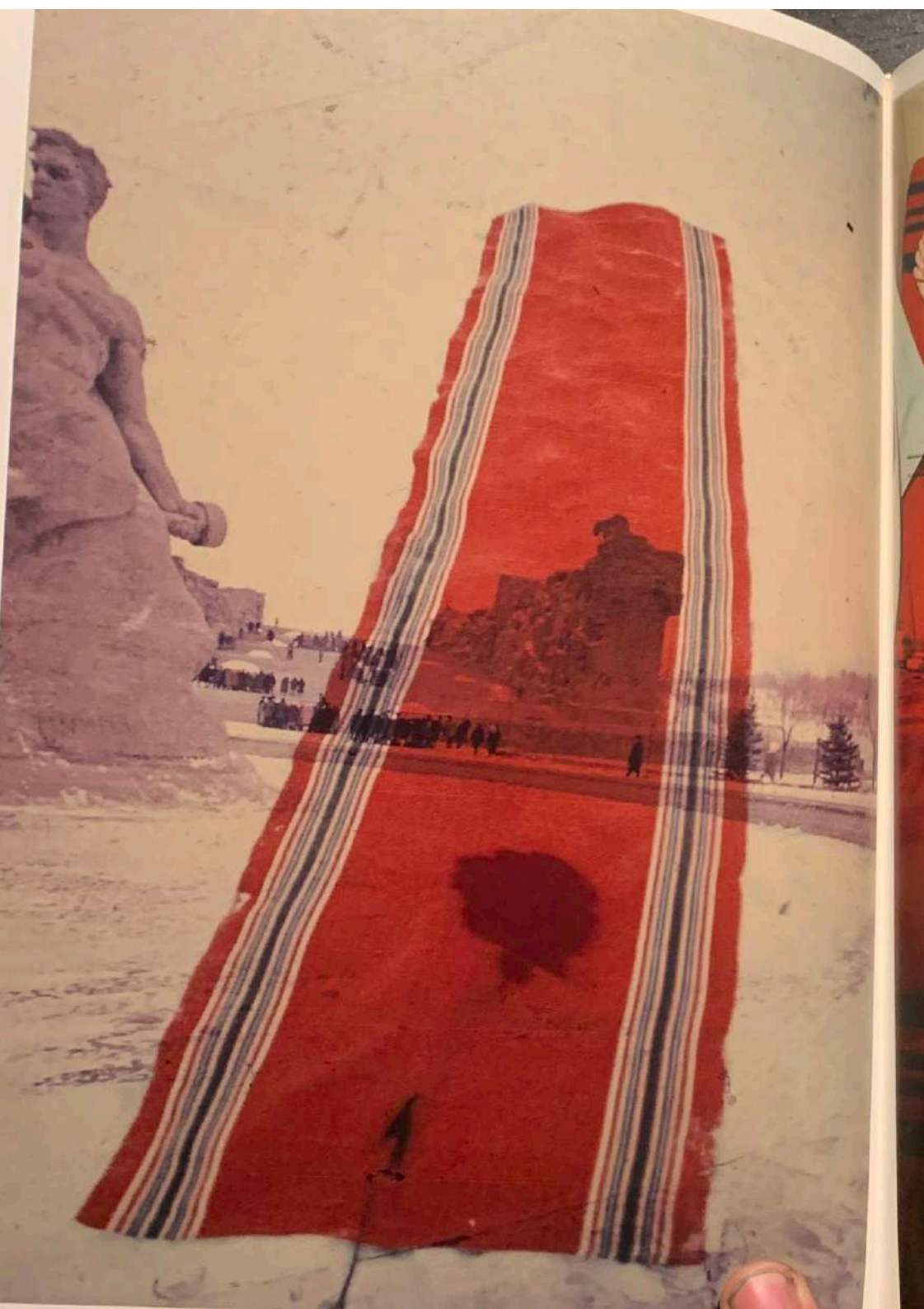


On the one hand there is the juxtaposition between personal sensuality and the distantly social. I think of the distorted dreaminess of a child in these many places and times where



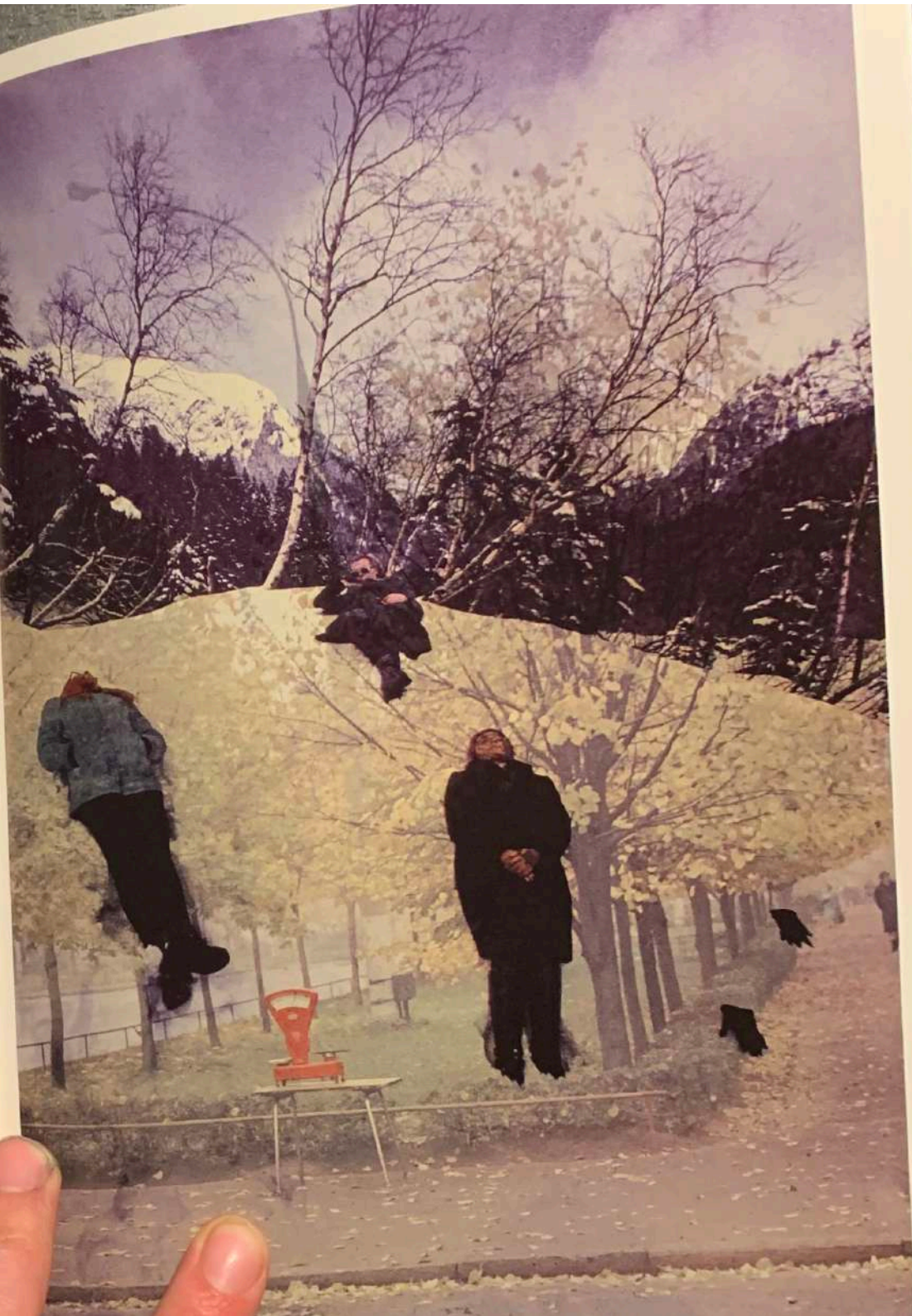


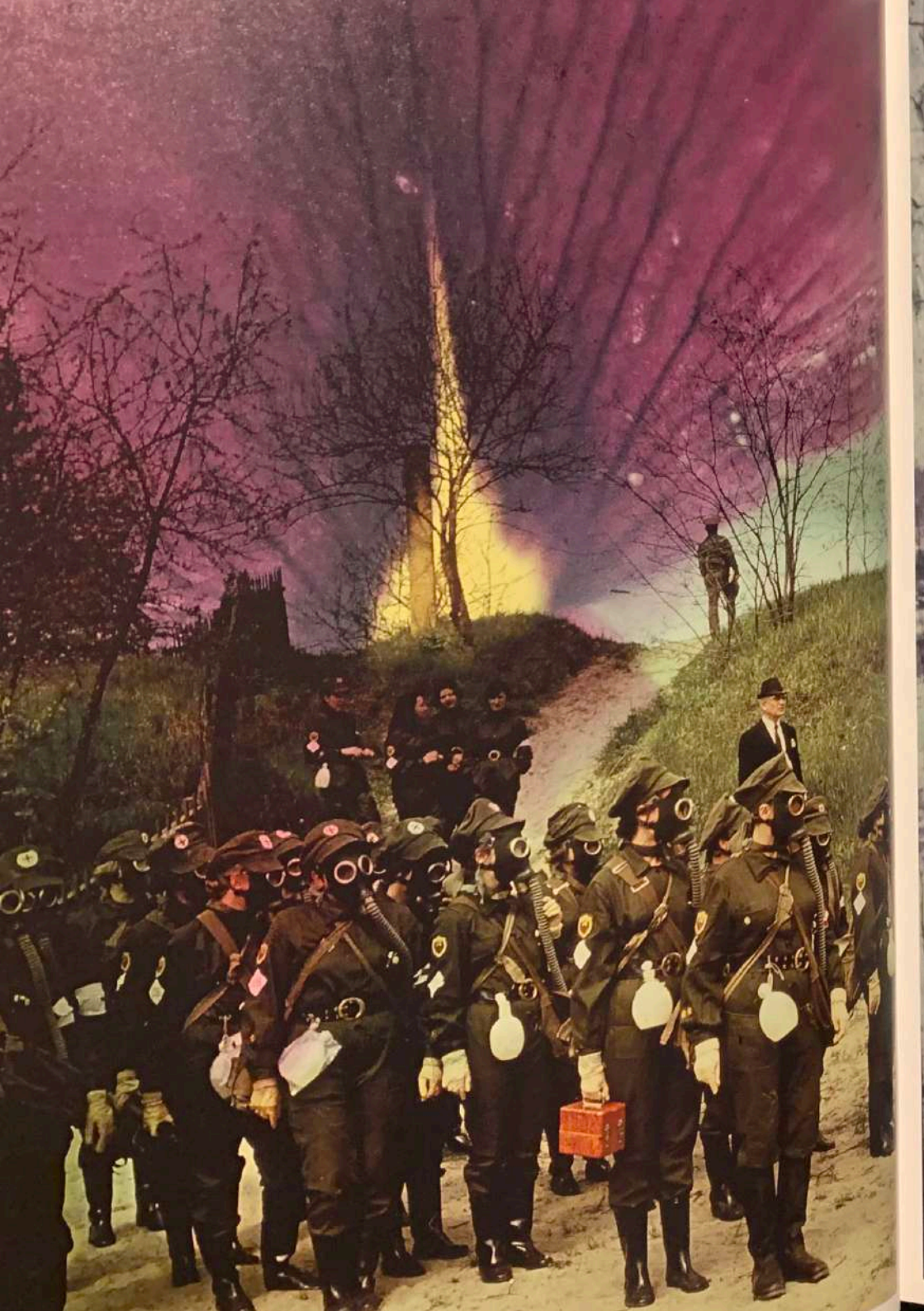


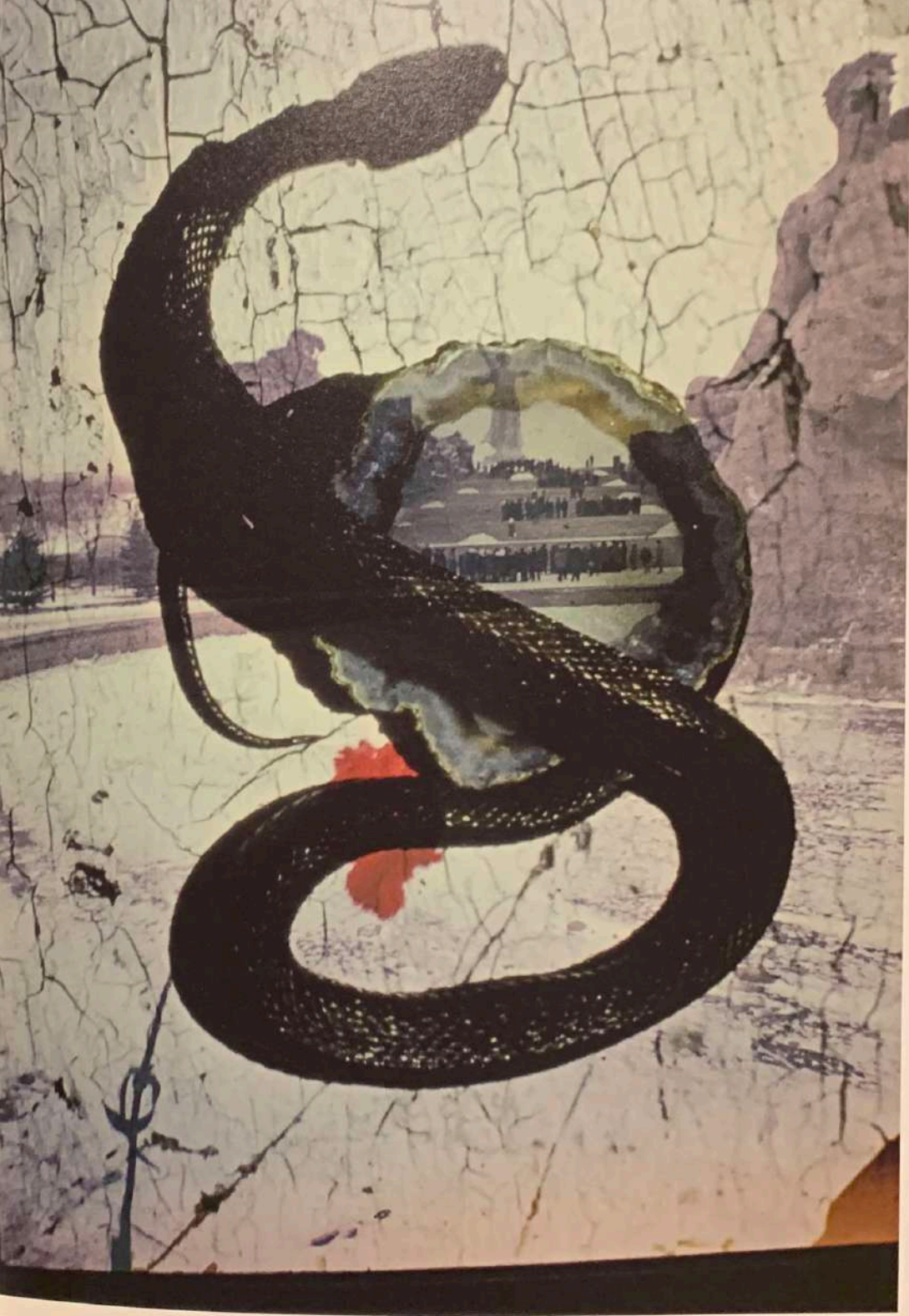


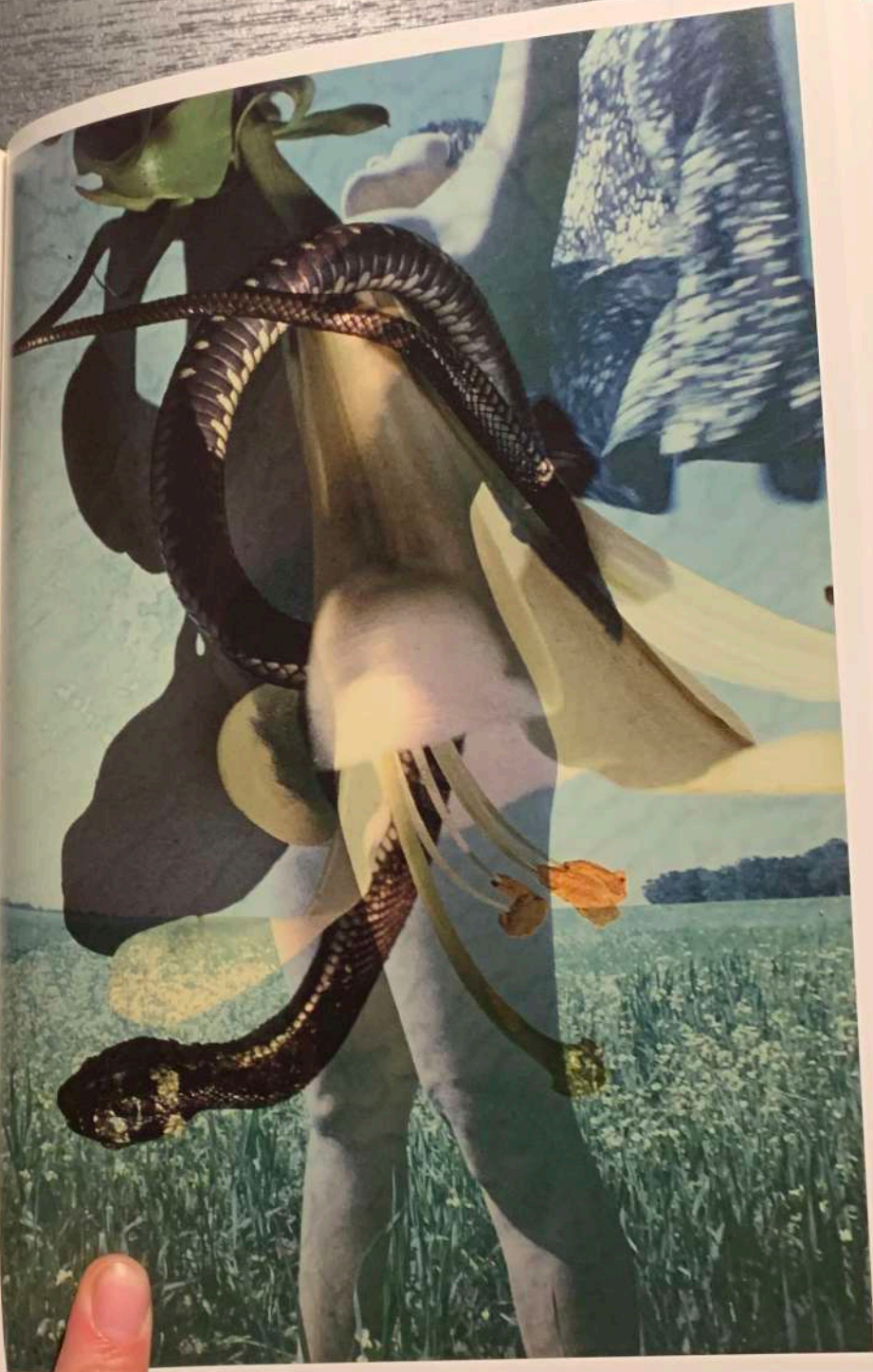












the adult population of the world is tortured by protests, wars, famine, death but that reality is kept safe from the child as he's encountering all the bright exciting things naturally that happen for the first time – seeing a naked woman's foot for the first time, killing frogs in puddles, climbing on plum trees and throwing chicken bones at trams. But the child always feels the impending danger hanging somewhere above his head and accidentally stumbles upon worried looks and anxious arguments only to quickly be tucked away back into bed. *Yesterday's Sandwich* asks the question of how much the inescapability of the political and cultural environment we bathe our days and nights in produces what we find deeply sentimental, precious and personal. That is framed very well in the forward essay to the book titled *Toward Stratified Spaces* by Vitaly Patsyukov:

“In the Spaces constructed by Boris Mikhailov we continue to realize our tragic choice between the personal and the social, remaining forever in a metaphysical suspension and balancing between recognition and non-recognition of oneself. The stratified and at the same time integral phenomenality of his Bricolage is immersed in a suspenseful anticipation of trouble, in the immortality of the photo evidence from which you cannot distance yourself. It belongs to the continuity of time, to the knots of life, to all the humankind, where the personal is always threatened with the temptations of the social environment.”¹ On this, I project my own refusal of the notion that everything is political whether out of despair or hope that there are indeed areas of life that exist beyond thought and therefore politics.

The thing I enjoy most is to speculate on the process behind finished works which I find elusive and that I feel were aided into becoming by a hand other than the artist-makers'. I know very little about the making of *Yesterday's Sandwich* and I'd probably have to have a long conversation with Boris Mikhailov on some couch in order to really understand it. For

¹ Boris Mikhailov, *Yesterday's Sandwich*, (Super Labo, Japan, 2019), Introduction, pg. 2

now, I imagine Yesterday's Sandwich was made intuitively and Boris Mikhailov didn't have the questions prepared point blank within his mind before or during the making of the book, they eventually rose organically as an urgent reflection on the loosening of the authoritarian grip on Ukraine. I think the making of a project that has synchronicity and association as a method for its becoming provokes a process parallel to the development process of a photograph. An image is unconsciously caught by light sensitive particles, kept in the darkness until its ripening (the capturing of 12/24/36 frames in time) and is then developed from out that same darkness, reversed and often disfigured. The problematic of the generations that were caught in those years of transition was already present in the unconscious but as I mentioned in the previous essay, a chaotic scheme can be used to bring them forward and formulate them into consciousness. The way I continue to dream about it in the case of Yesterdays' Sandwich is that the initial chaotic scheme was carved out by the fragmented moments of different times, subjects and places and they found contact through the intuitive assembly of the photographer.

Boris Mikhailov has had access to an awareness of the content of the material he was handling, while double exposures made directly on film when the photographer still relies on blind chance to make the images and is in a way in the hands of God or a yellow gnome living in their camera. I can mainly give the example of the double exposures I made in Japan because I've given a lot of thought toward my approach in their making and my current relationship to them.

In that sense double exposures relate to direct experience and sensual excitement, comparing and recording transience in different passing phenomena and superimpositions such as Boris Mikhailovs' belong to questioning, deconstructing and reconstructing ideas because it already has the necessary array of images to play with.

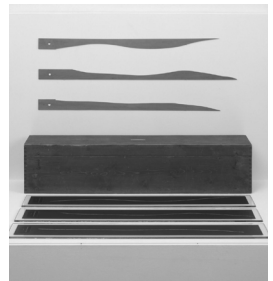




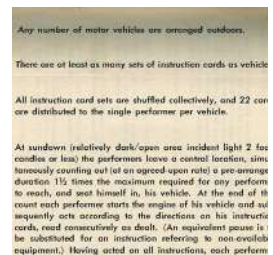
Polaroid Double Exposure 2023

Double images relate blindly collected moments on top of each other to that part of the psyche which, while introspecting about its direct existence, does not say much about the author, the place, its culture and other objects of time, only time speaking of itself through photography which owes time its existence.

The most important comparison I want to make is between an approach of “exploiting” synchronicity like Marcel Duchamp’s 3 stoppages etalon [3 Standard Stoppages] where he made images by dropping a three meter long thread on a white canvas and varnished it into the chance form it fell in or Hans Arp and his collages by shuffling and gluing down pieces of paper wherever they fell as opposed to having chance and synchronicity work “behind the scenes” to make a work without having a direct portrait of itself taken like in Tristan Tzara’s Dadaist poems compiled by words drawn out of a hat or Boris Mikhailov’s superimpositions. The first one resembles Frottage (the technique of putting an object below a piece of paper and using a pencil to sketch it out), it makes a direct imprint of synchronicity’s passing while having the artists orchestrate it in some, making a caricature of it or a purely representational portrait. The second resembles a game of ‘exquisite corpse’ where the chaotic cause that led up to the finished image get lost in the process and give way to something new, unburdened by its process, only keeping it in its DNA. George Brecht’s event scores are some other story in which he manages to be both the behind the scenes operating chance while at the same time being the relieved of all responsibility receiving end of chance like in Motor vehicle sundown (event), 1960 where he dealt written instruction cards with 22 events and 22 pauses between the performers to be executed by vehicles at sundown (opening and closing windows, operating windscreen wipers, turning on and off radio, headlights on and off, parking lights on and off, sound horn, sound siren, sound bell(s), strike window with knuckles, accelerate motor, open or close door (quickly, with moderate speed, slowly), open or close engine hood, and pause). The chance process always

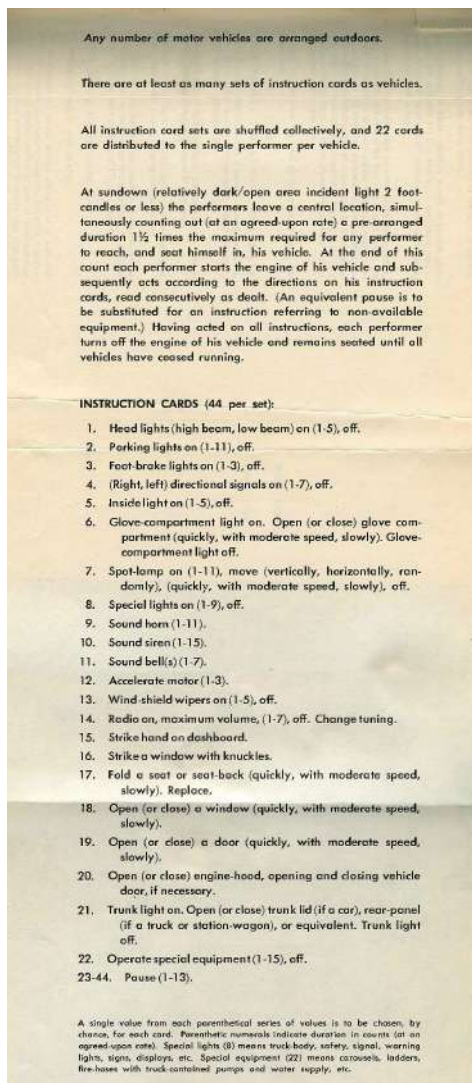


3 stoppages etalon (3 Standard Stoppages)
 duchamp.jpg1913-14, replica 1964



Vehicle Sundown Event, 1963. Concept
 by George Brecht; Curators: Stephan Joy
 & Roman Verosko., St Vincent College.
 Event staged behind Sportsman Hall.

gives a specific charge in its appearance into physicality and doesn't have to make itself known by being demystified by the having a finger pointed at it.



George Brecht Motor Vehicle Sundown (Event) 1960,
Letterpress, 56 x 21.7 cm

The conclusion of this thesis is spending two weeks in the house in Tyulenovo, Bulgaria that gathers our big circle of friends and artists every summer to film a movie about a young woman who disappears and meets a group of roaming soldiers during an apocalypse among cherry blossoms, existential landscapes and blind dogs as her friends search for her. We did acid for five days and played with synchronicity within the story and in the process of filming. A fog came down and lifted at our disposal. There seems to be a great deal of walking aimlessly in nothingness when it comes to synchronicity. Its antagonist is searching, there's a great deal of that as well. Everything went well except for a finger that got broken. Unfortunately, no one filmed it.



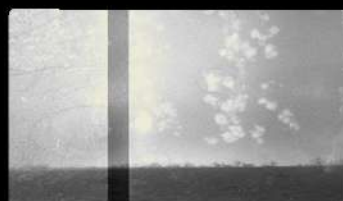
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ANTHOLOGY OF EXERCISES

Meditate with open eyes. Try to blend the contours of what you see and don't differentiate objects. Try to see everything as a play between shadow, light and colors. Listen to sounds. "New music: new listening. Not an attempt to understand something that is being said, for, if something were being said, the sounds would be given the shapes of words." - John Cage. Listen to talking people. Try to separate their words from their meaning. Go to that small space of a split second where of hearing before sounds get transcribed to words and make it bigger.

Try to observe where thoughts appear from and where they go as they pass before the darkness of your eyelids.

Write a stream of consciousness for a set time duration:

- After looking at an egg or meat or some Jodorowsky film, or any other visually charged symbolic piece of food, makes things easier, for an amount of time that brings discomfort

- While on the train

- While or after crying

- After looking at water

- In the morning

- In the middle of the night

- After a film moved you

- When you haven't eaten in a few days

- After looking at a very big image for a very long time

- After carrying a small log in your bag for a decent amount of time

- After you move out of your house

- After you stop speaking to

someone for an undefined amount of time

Try to switch handwriting while at it.

Douglas Harding suggests to replace your unquestionable possession of a head with whatever you optically see and experience and let whatever that its take its place. With the same mind, watch a film and notice what happens. Notice how being filled with different scenes of horror, love, nature, color affect you. If there is one, try to make the mediating glass shield between the self and the film minimal.

Switch the seat of your conscious attention to the bottom of your feet. Notice if you are continuing to observe them stretched out from your head or if you can get teleported there. Feel the space above your head and exist from that cloud.

Go out on a walk and channel all your mental desire into stumbling into something that you need or the formation of an interesting situation appearing from the infinity possibilities of that walk. Write me a letter with what you found out : *Sofia, Bulgaria, bul. Arsenalski 45, ap. 3 / siyanashishkova@gmail.com.*

Carry something scratchable, fragile or just an empty piece of paper in your bag for day. Try to connect the creases, scratches, dust, dirt that gathered on top of it. Go along with that and see what starts appearing. There can be many variations in this.

Aldous Huxley says that perception is thinking actively about what you are experiencing sensually. Consciously perceive and see what is the difference with merely looking.

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Thesis supervisor: Alena Alexandrova

god loves you
but not enough to save you

