There is no inside, no mind, no outside, no conscience, nothing but the body as one sees it, a body that doesn’t cease to be, even when the eye drops who sees it. And this body is a fact. It’s me.

[Antonin Artaud]
and neutral, gaze. In an attempt to meld the conceptual and minimalist orientation of Grigorescu’s work with the secret practice of body art, the book tries to “temper” its own, deeply organic and poetic, content by placing it in a more geometric ad epic framework.

The layout of the book and the sequencing of the photographs follow a series of reiterations, where the repeated image slightly differs from the preceding one in terms of perspective, temporality and technique, as inspired by Tarkovski’s rhythm-based way of filming: within one and the same long take, the Russian director lets his camera return and close up on the same starting image while bringing in a slight yet significant mutation (1-2-4). Besides, many elements of the book are often “extracted” elements, elements taken out of larger figurative compositions and therefore capable of conveying a continuous sense of déjà-vu and of forcing the reader to stop, to go back eventually and to move back and forth inside the volume, engaging him in a reading that is just as performative: this is the case for example with the pictures taken out of a photo series, with the frames taken out of a film, or with the title of the book which derives from the verses of a poem.

To disrupt the rhythm, or else to provide it, images taken from the 1976 performance Masculin Femminin have been spread throughout the book; the performance is shown nearly in its entire form, but its original sequence has been dismantled and reassembled to allow also for a reverse reading, starting from the end of the volume. Ion Grigorescu’s actions, naked in front of the mirror or in front of the camera, come with a transcription of his nocturnal dreams from the 1970s and 80s which feature elements of the political and historical situation he was at the time confronted with. Apart from the paradoxical possibility of narrating reality through a dreamscape, these pages demonstrate how much a place that should have been intimate and personal has been contaminated by the dominating ideology. Questions of gender and of sexual identity caused by such “performative-photographic” work go hand in hand with doubts over an identification with the forces in power and with fears of an influence of propagandist elements entering dreams.

Grigorescu however worked in the secrecy of his studio, defying prohibitions and risking denunciations, thereby showing that art can be a universe which is freer than the world of dreams and which is capable of representing the true space of desire as a critical category. When we see, at a certain point in the film and through a particular cross play between camera and mirror, the artist as he holds an image of himself in his hand, we are not only seeing an affirmation of the body as an image, but also an affirmation of the image as an instrument of a subversive power.

Therefore, in the end, From static oblivion, opens with the discontinuous deployment of another important film, here considered as a kind of “manifesto”: Trap trap de potcoave contains, like an index, nearly all the themes that are developed visually and graphically throughout the book, above all the assertion of auto-representation, the disclosure of the artifice, and the reversibility of art. In this first part some of the sequences are in fact assembled in a specular way to allow, from the beginning, for a crossover-mirroring between artist and reader, capable of reactivating the performance with each reading of the book.

Functioning in the same way, like little manuals of instruction or “activity booklets” in the style of Allan Kaprow, there will be, throughout the corpus of the book, a series of descriptive and informative texts captioning the artist’s drafts, drawings and lithographies: they also call for an active participation of the reader who in turn can make the book “happen” every time as if it were an event or the 25th image of a film, the inexistent or ghost image which results from a break (“Avarie” in French) of the film strip and which we made visible in this book.

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Ion Grigorescu

Ion Grigorescu (1945, lives and works in Bucharest) is one of the most significant Romanian artists of the Post-War period and an iconic figure of the conceptual and performative art since the early 70s. He has been working on issues of sexuality, body and politics from both a communistic and capitalist point of view, based on historical changes. He is the author of numerous photographic series, drawings, paintings and collages, as well performances recorded on film, which concentrate on ritualized actions around his body and go beyond art, leading into a private and personal life.

Nevertheless, the most irritating things – doing the laundry, washing the dishes, sweeping the floor, tidying up, throwing out the garbage, standing in queues, waiting for trams, getting into arguments – seem to me exemplary and constitutive. All daily tasks are performances, art, acts of survival.

[Ion Grigorescu]