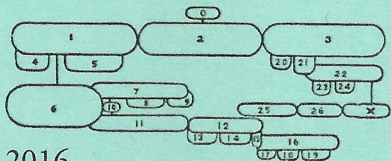


Security

(Confessions)

by Toby Altman



2016

A Present Tense Pamphlet

Security Theater
Confessions

“I stole your stupid boxes that you call poems and threw them away” – Alice Notley

1.



Scene: I keep no record of what I write. The poem is squandered language. I remember only the fact of confession: that I stood at my desk and wrote unbearable things. Things beyond which I bend into confusion. I fold the paper and put it in the box. I intend the opposite of persistence.



Scene: in the park, I gather spent coals and stuff them into a plastic bag. I do it quickly, even furtively. This is a performance that no one can see. I perform alone, in the solitude of a rented space. I stand in the kitchen and bury my poem in trash. I cut dry flowers from a bouquet I bought my wife last summer. They are still purple and crisp. I would like them to decay. I would like to poison the poem with charcoal briquettes and vegetative waste. I would like the poem to happen without me.



Scene: after I've buried the poem in coal and flower and coal, I carry it out on the porch and leave it there. Finally, the poem can begin. The poem lives in the manner of a corpse. That is, its substance is decay: the casual damage inflicted by being in the space. The poem teaches me how to be diminishment, the site of ongoing loss. I experience this as a kind of theater. The stage continuously recedes. All winter, it is busy unbecoming. In the spring, I plan to excavate it from its cradle in the trash. Then we'll know what part of a poem lasts.

2.



Scene: I go to a thrift store and buy a wooden box. Because I want to make trash. Because I want to make trash visible. The scene is an ordinary apartment with all its valves and windows closed. The scene is an ordinary apartment built on an embankment of trash. The scene is the cunning layer of grass and trees planted by the opaque arms of the city to make the trash into land. A park. A bird sanctuary. A beach. A pleasant pastoral retreat. In the apartment the trash accumulates like the internet. Like carbon. Like credit. When the stage is suitably dense with it, the author enters. He removes the lid of the box with a screwdriver and drops it into the trash. He pushes thumbtacks into the soft interior to make a set of anchors. He strains his thumb doing this. He is more fragile than he admits and as he acts his fragility invisibly accumulates. This is just a memoir. All it says is how damaged and desperate a poem is. Is the poem happening yet?



Scene: I ask these questions because I can. Because someone keeps giving me debt. I string white thread across the cavity, the absence that the box is. Was. Now it is a harness. Now it is a place for a poem to begin. Now it is a net for catching language. It is important that the author punctuate his actions by taking photographs. In a sense, these photographs are the performance, so he should make them awful, immense, an intolerable happening. He slings the white thread of his ear buds over his shoulder and carefully positions his iPhone so that he casts no shadow. He waits for the lens to focus. The audience should be punished for looking, just as the author should be punished for making. The punishment is:





Scene: I gather a bag full of ginkgo leaves in the park. They are bright and exposed, gold and green. When the poem is ready, I seal it in saran wrap. Then I cut a narrow flap in the center of the plastic. I want to make a hole where the world can enter. I want to think about the poem as a failed container. I want to make sure the poem has already failed before it begins. I say to no one in particular: "actually there are no ideas in things." Then I leave the box on the porch for the winter. Where is the author now? He is somewhere in the house, warm and unconcerned. He is watching Netflix with the sound turned down, out of concern for the neighbors. He is walking the dog and listening to an audiobook. He is in the shower. He is worrying about how many twitter followers he has. He is trying to be elsewhere. He finds no refuge.

3.



*Scene: I fill a glass jar
with berries and rocks.
The poem exists between
hard persistence
and its opposite.
Didn't it ever?*



*Scene: I am reading
in a busy classroom.
I am stuffing a jar
full of dead grass.
How did I learn
that reading is conscious
uncoupling from the world?
Why did I seek isolation
and find it in books?*



*Scene: the world is
not my home. I un-
earth the thing
the thing that's left
and carefully photograph
it. Hello funeral city
it's April and no one
is there. I lie on the couch
and wait for exhaustion
to pass. Whatever
survived the winter
I dump in the trash.*

1.



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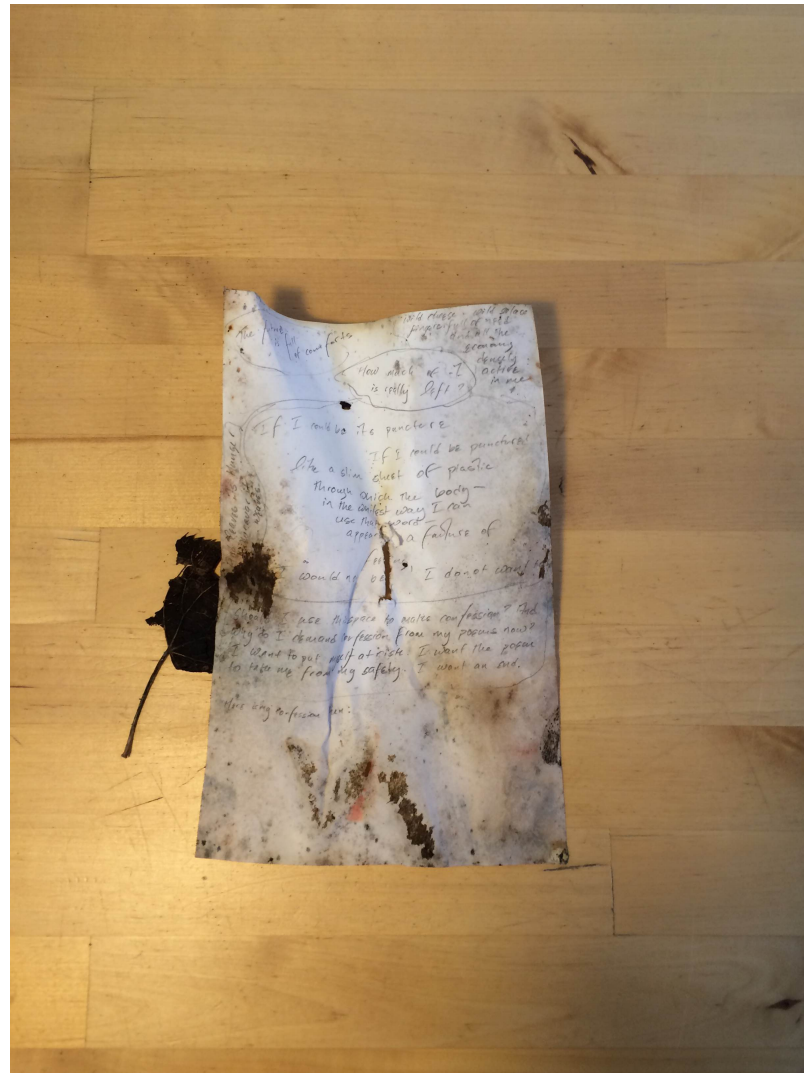
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2.



3.



Keep the piece of paper from any aspect not being carefully
looking at the left over edge of the drawing doesn't really
showing much in these kinds of case. The artist usually
the artist usually that it seems one is looking at the
to see it as an art. I am trying to write down
material and write into the it. Sometimes when I am
writing I find myself in the last imagination as any kind of
thing that the paper becomes the form of my fantasy, then I am
there for writing operation. A way of writing as any kind
of aggression, a way of proceeding the way of writing cannot be
in public. The reticent, the reticent, which is the writer's
thing. I am the spirit and the spirit of the writer.
thing. And the entrance is going out into the world. It becomes
the thing of power. Don't say all. While I am writing the dog I come
up with the words and I am writing the way that I
keep writing. All my friends are looking pictures of
Couch. That is, when you're done.

Acknowledgments: section 1 will be published, eventually, in the Romanian journal, *WritingACT*. Thanks to Andra Rotaru. I stole the epigraph for this chapbook from Carrie Lorig's twitter feed, all hail.

Mashinka Firunts & Danny Snelson, eds.
The Block Museum | Northwestern University
Department of Art History | Mellon Dance Studies
The Alice Kaplan Institute for the Humanities
<http://sites.northwestern.edu/present>