

Slow time: Romanian domesticity and the world outside in times of coronavirus pandemic

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A young man in black shirt is sited in an iron-chair at the balcony drinking beer. At his side, is an old lady wearing a black hood made of fabric, as many other old women in the neighbourhood use to. She is at the age of 60 and stares at the street. It could be an ordinary Sunday, or early night of a summer day. But it is not. It is Wednesday April 1st afternoon. As a kind of voyeur, I am in the building in front, and the landscape around me is pretty much the same. I am “locked” inside my one room apartment since March 11th together with my cat, Juan Pablo. Windows and balconies are a sort of frame to my pictures and a connection between the inside and outside worlds.

We are in the southern part of Bucarest, Romania. This is the place I live in and share with others feeling this slow time sensation. Berceni neighbourhood was the most industrialised during the communist regime, so most of the area is made out of 10 floor apartment blocks. Matching boxes. Families are separated by walls and connects through balconies, which now are sort of a relief when no one is allowed go out, except of groceries, pharmacy, or medical care.

Since the beginning of coronavirus pandemics in Europe, the governmental response is almost the same as in other European countries. First cases were reported in February and a 14-days quarantine implemented. In March borders were closed as well public gathering prohibited in a measure to slow down the spreading the pandemic. On March 16, the Romanian president, Klaus Iohannis issued the decree establishing the state of emergency for 30 days. However, as part of this slow time sensation, the decree has been periodically renewed. And so are the frames of daily life set in balconies, windows and a new language made up of “social distance”, “reported cases”, “face mask and shields” and waiting.

Two months have passed, rather quick, and in some way brought us closer to each other. In this case, through photography. Every day during this locked down period I have been going out on my balcony and just looked at how things have been moved on, trees becoming greener, streets more and more empty and discovered that more faces appear on balconies and windows of the other blocks.

For the past two months I have been capturing people in their window frames, or balcony, having beer or a smoke, talking to their partner or just having a look at the world outside that seems to have not stopped a second, but rather moved on.

This tiny project has nothing deep or was not thought on beforehand. It follows a simple rule: go with the feelings. The pictures presented here are part of my observations of the life in front. People that are my neighbours, acquaintances and with whom I shared my life as well. As so, I decided to present the pictures in a form of photo-board in order to put together shared experiences. This essay is not a study of daily life under quarantine, or how life is in a certain period of our time. It may be an effect, but not its reason. Rather, it attempts to portray life in a small-scale. Such small-scale is made up of daily routines and experiences of cleaning, talking, waiting as well as feelings of solidarity, solitude, fear and sometimes hope. It is the idea of shared experience that turns silence and waiting not as a singular experience, but a communal space, as is the daily life in a building.

about the author

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Mr. Gatlan is photographer and journalist, graduated in the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, of Iași, Romania, and master in Documentary journalism at Volda University College. He was also exchange student in the Høgskulen i Volda, Norway.

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Photo board 1: Berceni, the building and its people



Photo board 2: the language of waiting



Photo board 3: Alone together



Photo board 4: Daily life inside: cleaning

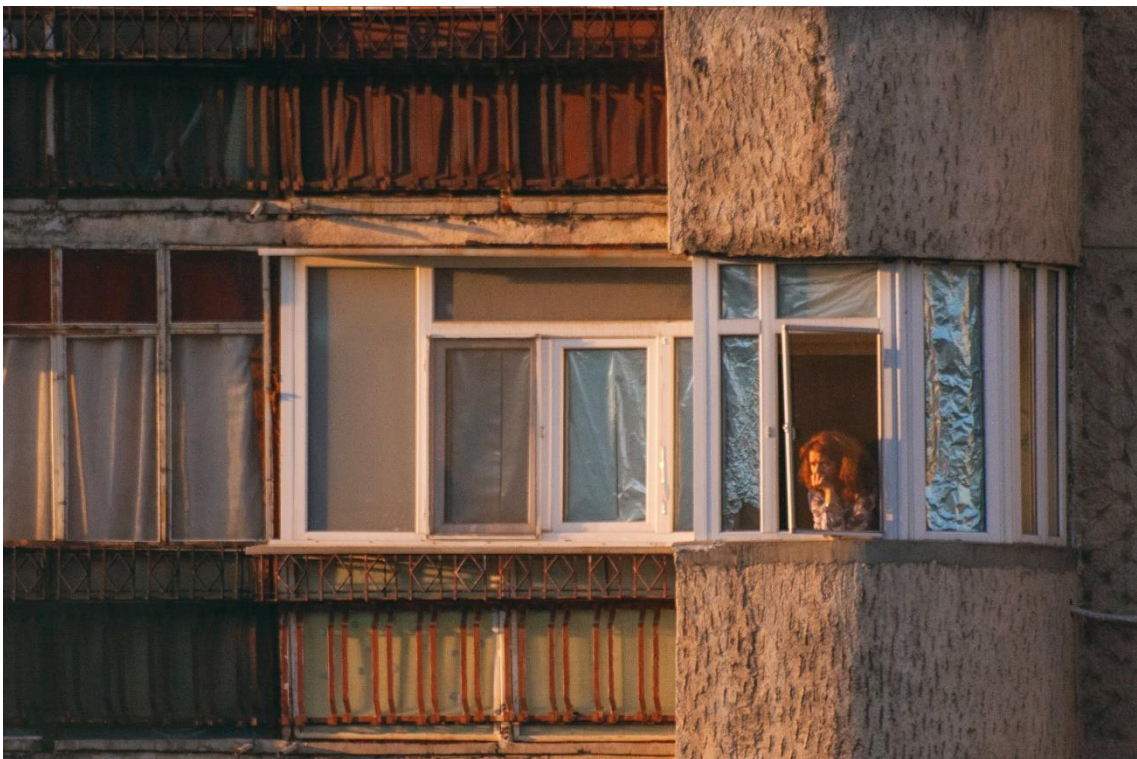


Photo board 5: balconies and windows



Photo board 6: learning to see

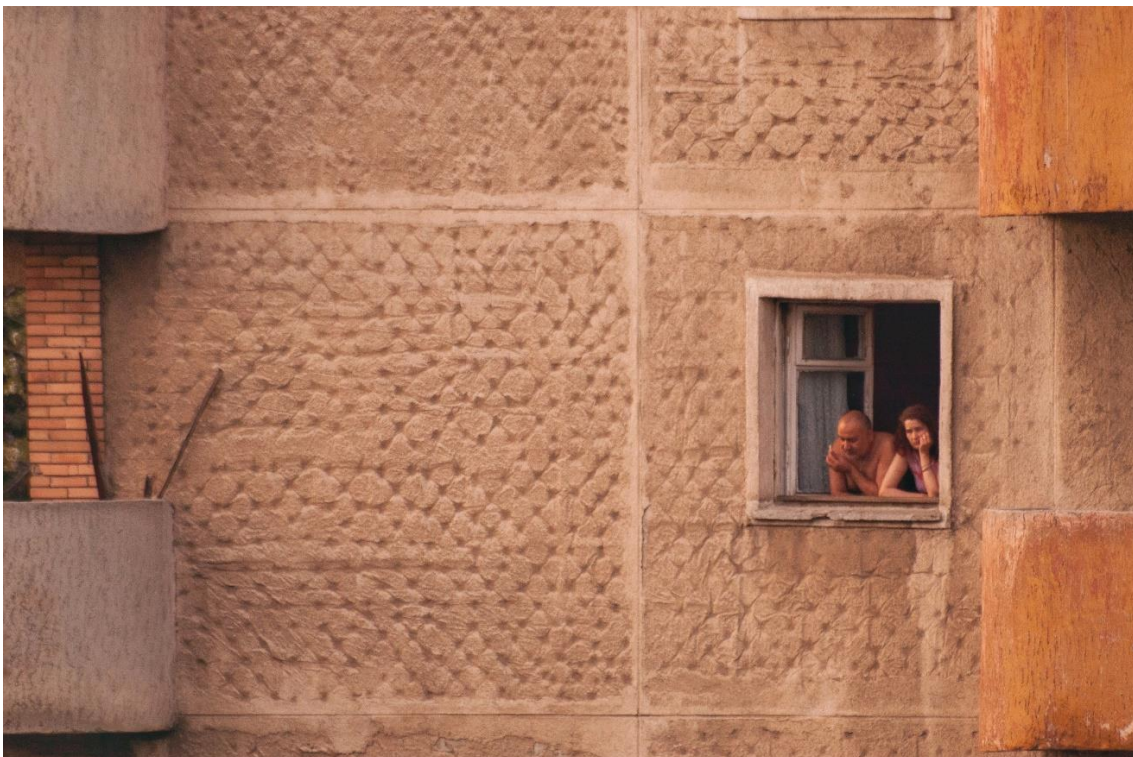


Photo board 7: communicating