

STRIKE

Shannon Ebner

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AI NATI LITANIA
E NON C'È
VITTORIA
I MISSILI VICINI
CIVILISSIMI
I MISSILI
TUONO SI
MISSILI
VILISSIMI
SONO
UTILISSIMI
E LA MINA E TI
LIMITI MILITE
ANIMALE
E MALASORTE
TI CARBONIZ-

SIR A WAR IS
NOT WON
ARE WE
NOT DRAWN
ONWARD
WE FEW DRAWN
ONWARD
LIVE DIRT
UP A SIDE TRACK
CARTED IS
A PUTRID EVIL
LIVE ON
EVASIONS NO
I SAVE NO EVIL
LIVE ON TIME

2

OPACO CAPO
ESSA T'AVITA
LE RELATIVE
TASSE
ESSA M'È
LEGGERA MA
REGGE LE
MASSE
A MOLLA
FOTTERE ARTI
MASSIFICATA
CI FISSA MITRA
ERETTO FALLO
MA
AI ROTTI VECE

RISE SIR LAPDOG
REVOLT LOVER
GOD PAL RISE SIR
REVEILED DID
I LIVE SAID
I AS EVIL I DID
DELIVER SEX AT
NOON TAXES
SEX AWARE ERA
WAXES
SNUG & RAW
WAS IERE I SAW
WAR & GUNS
IS NEVER EVEN
NOW SIR A WAR

EMIT NO EVIL
LIVE O DEVIL
REVEL EVER LIVE
DO EVIL
— SHANNON EBNER

ZINOBRACI TETRO
SALAME
E LAME
AIZZARE RAZZIA
È MALE
Translated by
— ALESSANDRO GIAMMEI

STRIKE
NO IT CAN AS IT
IS IT IS A WAR
RAW AS IT IS IT IS
AN ACTION
NO IT IS
OPPOSITION
NO SIR. PREFER
PRISON
RISE TO VOTE SIR

INCURSIONE
È CORTA E
NON È SADICA
E NON È ACIDA
SE NON
È ATROCE
È CORE FEROCO
È CANE
TENACE
E CAPI DIETRO
CORTEI DI PACE
E L'AUGURATO
VOTAR UGUALE

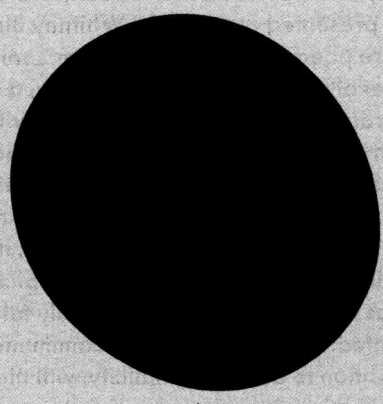


fig.7

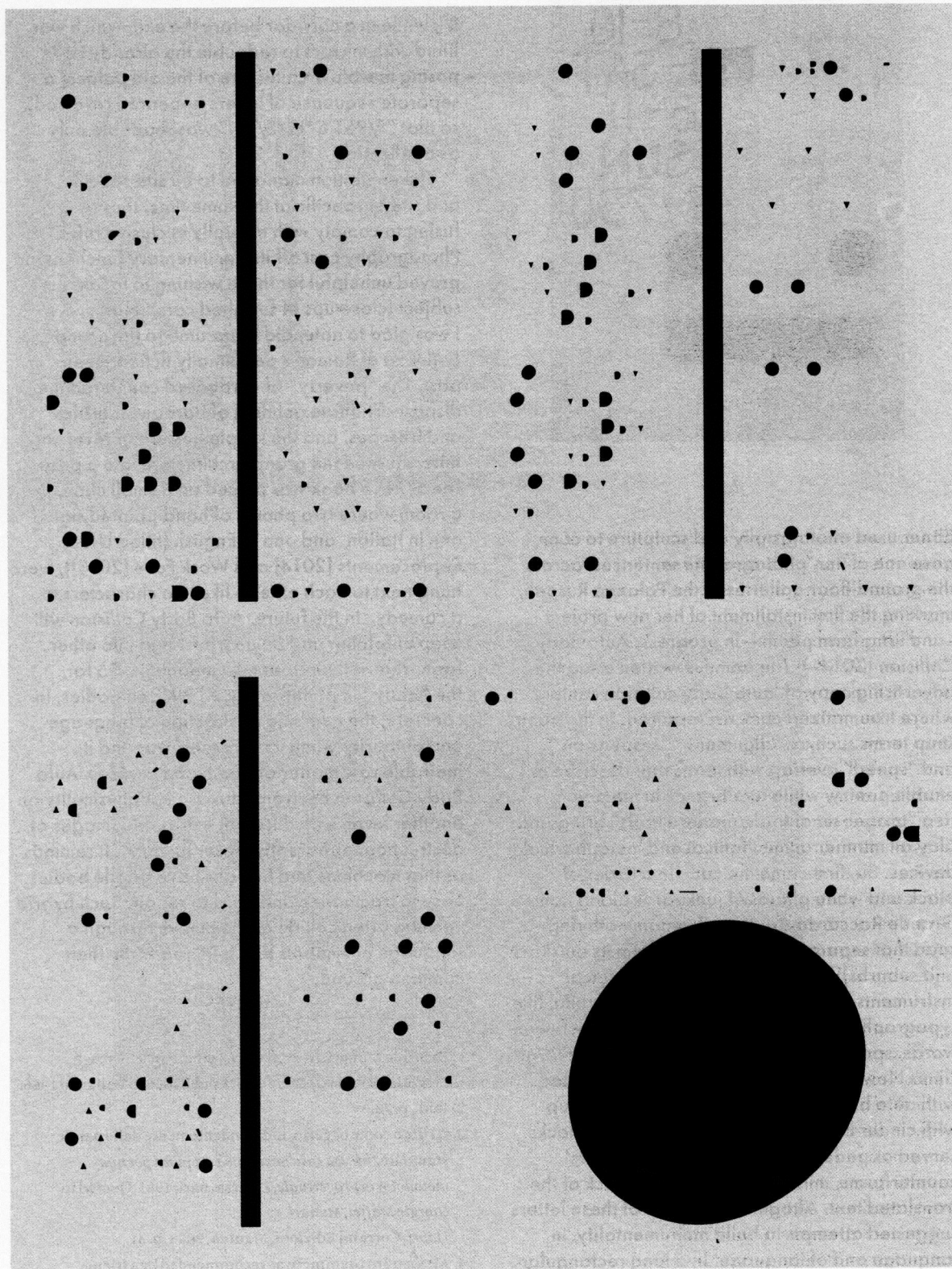


fig.8

VERSO

A Note On The Translation

Alessandro Giammei

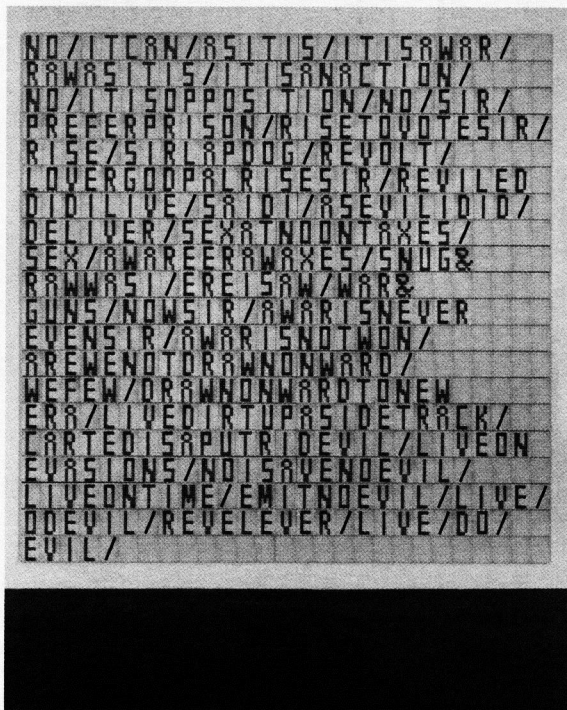


fig.16

STRIKE arrived electronically, encoded in two digital forms: a text document and a photograph. The assignment, as I thought, was to translate a poem, so I opened the document and tried to decode it just as I would any other text: I read it. But my usual decrypting tools only took me so far. I looked to the image for help, where the words were spelt out in an alphabet made of cinder-block letters. The text itself, a succession of palindromes on my screen in 24-point Arial, could not be reduced to its words, their literal content, or even their shape. Besides, the image was also a proxy for the photographed objects: the text itself was already a translation.

So instead of starting with an Italian approximation of the meaning of the words, I turned to Ebner's original process and tried to reproduce it in my language. I discovered that English affords a variety of elegant

palindromes, while Italian ones often necessitate outdated words, strange interjections, and an unabashed use of anacoluthon or other subversions of natural syntax. Most of my homemade palindromes sounded like a Puccini recitative and in the end, despite my efforts, some archaic vocabulary made it through to the final version (core, for example, is a poetic form of the common word cuore – "heart" or "core" – whose diphthong prevents it from being used in a palindrome). The shape of the bricks at my disposal was constitutionally different from the one of the original modules, so I couldn't possibly find an acceptable palindromic translation every single time. I gave up the idea of transforming the English text into an Italian one and instead tried to barter a selection of Italian palindromic objects with the ones that Ebner chose for STRIKE.

Parts of this barter system were structured by the different politics of Italy and the USA, and by the different public and cultural reactions to them. Ebner conceived STRIKE during the Bush era, while the Italian experience was with Berlusconi. And of course the gap between the two languages invited an antagonistic approach. I displaced the ambiguity of the original object with the semantic specificity particular to my language. STRIKE's voice is often addressed to – or against – a 'sir' but no Italian lexical counterpart was suitable for a palindrome, so, in place of Ebner's antagonist, I offered a passive character (an animal-soldier, *milite animale*) and his lackluster leader (*opaco capo*). This opaque boss is also a gloomy salami – which in Italian means a brooding idiot, a solemn but incompetent and clumsy moron – because, even if the word *salame* sounded a bit too funny at the beginning, it evokes Salò, the Fascist republic that inspired Pasolini's infernal masterpiece. Salami is also, of course, a ridiculous phallic symbol (it interacts with *missili*, *razzi*, and *mitra*, or missiles, rockets, and guns: phallic weapons compensating for the impotent virility that I glimpsed under STRIKE's "lapdog"), and phallogocentrism was a fundamental object of the trade between the two versions of the text. Almost every Italian noun is gendered, and most of the palindromes that I ended up choos-

ing have a feminine subject. This female could be the strike itself, politics in general, the generation that led the people to catastrophe, the catastrophe itself, or war: incursione, politica, generazione, castrofe and guerra are all feminine. The pronoun that identifies her, *essa*, is bartered with the word "sex" in the original version, just as the verb *è* ("she is") replaces the repetition of "no" and the conjunction *e* amplifies the anaphora. I traded my palindromes about her and her salamis with those in *STRIKE*, seeking a visual balance. I wanted the final Italian object to weigh the same as the English original, and I wanted it to slow down the image-reading to a similar degree. The translation is not independent of the original text, but each palindrome confronts its counterpart in the other language, with a blank, black trench in the middle. The defensive lines are breached by a single word ("not"/non) that disrupts the chain of perfect palindromes and produces a disequilibrium. The most difficult task of my translation was to create that defective verse without using the word *vincere* (to win), which is a Fascist motto. The result tells of an *essa* who reigns in place of those she has broken and sings narcotizing lullabies to newborns, but it also prevents her from winning (or being won), just like the voice in *STRIKE* shouting "no" to its sir because "a war is not won."

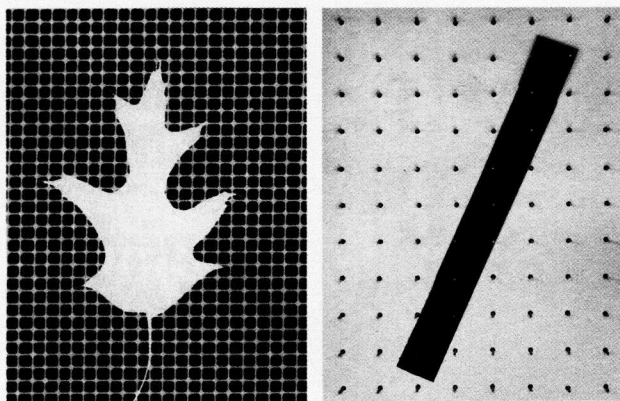


fig.17

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Installation view photography by Andrea Rossetti, Milan
All images by Shannon Ebner