

## FIGURES OF EVANESCENCE

In the spirit of a remark by Adorno, perhaps all modernity can be understood as the logic of disintegration inherent to the spirit of capitalism. The following premise given by Marx in *The Communist Manifesto* is a useful starting point for this logic, namely, that of the constant revolutionising of production, with the effect of disturbance of all social conditions and of everlasting uncertainty under a regime of infinite circulation.’ The capitalist machine breaks “all fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and vulnerable prejudices and opinions;” they “are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned...” (Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Samuel Moore (Pluto Press, 2008), p. 38) If this process of disintegration is also inherent to modernity, Zygmunt Bauman’s claim that modernity has indeed been liquid since its beginnings sheds light on one of the essential elements of this logic. Bauman’s observation has important implications as it points out the almost imperceptible shift of focus from space, as characteristic of solid’ panoptic capitalism, to time, as an essential feature of postpanoptic liquid modernity. It is possible to entirely ignore time in the case of solids, whereas omitting time when it comes to that which is liquid would be a serious mistake. Thus, the moment of (all relations) becoming antiquated as observed by Marx, typical of the rapid acceleration’ as seen in the period after the Second World War, grows in importance. Thanks to the logic of disintegration, it is words and objects, as well as subjects, that become antiquated. Dumpsites and landfills are full of discarded things in a way similar to how discourses swell with zombie notions, and how subjects are stranded in some long forgotten worlds.

Finally, this logic is emphatically traced in Benjamin's claim that with the advent of mechanical reproduction, especially film, one petrified world inexorably crumbled before our eyes. "Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go traveling." (Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 236). This roaming and travelling, our inability to comprehend the meaning of the whole, to respond to specific situations, are an essential feature of the subject in postwar circumstances. This implies a different relation to the debris left behind by the inescapable process of disintegration and obsolescence. Therefore, Benjamin's *The Arcades Project*, as a vast compilation of documents, fragments, quotations and images, whose ever new and different cross-connecting can outline the contours or matrices of a new society, is actually an attempt to recognise the possibility of redemption as present in this very logic of disintegration. This possibility announces a logic of multitude whose contours are barely made out as the worldnetwork emerges, which inevitably replaces the era of the image of the world.'

If all of avant-garde art is but blurring the boundaries, especially those between art and life, then postmodern art blurs, or even erases, the boundaries between art and popular culture. Today, such a statement is commonplace, even naive – perhaps only an effect of the inertia of liquid modernity. However, the persistence of this blurry quality produces some rather diverse effects. On the

one hand, this insistence exposes the hidden boundaries which continue to delineate the topology of the social field, masking an array of manifestations of inequality, privileges and power nodes. On the other hand, it creates the conditions for perceiving, interpreting and comprehending this emerging world-network as a possibility to differently connect these ‘antiquated’ and forsaken fragments, which are now turning into the nodes of new networks. However, on the margins of modernity, outside major arts hubs, these fragments become testimonies to the passivity and dullness with which connections are established – or even the inability to make any connections at all. As something to which the world has become oblivious, they trace the outlines of those enclaves where there are no more moulds/patterns of solid capitalism, or endless modulations of the postpanoptic world. Most of all, they can be spoken about as melancholy objects, fragments and documents of discontinuance, out of which are created figures of evanescence.

In the capitalist machine at the beginning of the 21st century, becoming is nothing more than an “anarchy of more or less regulated, more or less coded fluxes, wherein money, products and images are exchanged.” (Alain Badiou, *Infinite Thought* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2005), p. 34) This world is operated under a regime of infinite circulation, of regulated or coded fluxes that create a sort of loop – causing it to circulate senselessly. Discontinuance thus means falling out of this regime of infinite circulation, which is one of the dominant axioms of becoming inside the capitalist machine. Whatever falls out of circulation – be it people, objects, images or symbols – it is condemned to obsolescence and disappearance. This set of heterogeneous entities delineates the boundaries of a community of memory that will be excluded from the dominant narratives of anyone history owing to the logic of disintegration. Each of the elements of such

sets is condemned to detachment, or rather the impossibility to connect, to the slow process of disconnection from networks of memory and history. It is the kind of evanescence where it suffices to remove the links connecting fragments into a narrative, into a configuration that makes facts fit together and allows them to be presented as a meaningful whole.

Artists are those who are still trying to re-connect those pieces into a whole, to preserve some of their potential as sapped by the logic of disintegration. Thanks to interventions of this kind, those fragments are increasingly less often historical documents; instead, they are more and more frequently melancholy objects trying to preserve some of their potential amidst the hysteria of everyday life. An Introduction to the Study of Discontinuance documents precisely these vanishing connections, as constitutive moments of micro-narratives, discarded objects, fragments of memories of perceptions of situations as well as of things and people. Those photographs draw melancholy maps of discontinuance as an inexorable process of merging the obsolescence and disappearance of those entities which are condemned to their connections being severed and to falling out of the regime of infinite circulation'. The organisation of these images in space evokes lost connections, stories that can no longer be told. Their arrangement is not an attempt to reconstruct the lost narrative; rather, it points out impossibility as a constituent moment of discontinuance.

With the new spirit of capitalism, art is increasingly being reduced to the melancholy cartography of collateral effects of the logic of disintegration. Artists safeguard a utopia or a dream of the virtual potential of these entities as that which eludes the axioms of capitalism. Thus, the melancholy quality of these objects does

not mean a kind of regret for some moments that are irretrievably gone, but the awareness that at some point each and every fragment will fall out of the circulation regime, that it is condemned to falling out in advance', and that it inevitably means obscurity and obsolescence. This kind of approach serves artists to produce the first outlines of a logic of multitude that has its origins in Benjamin's The Arcades Project, where redemption implies a nonlinear concept of time, as a possibility to differently connect the constituting particles of events.

Jovan Čekić