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Pharmacopoeia

Anetta Mona Chişa
& Aleksandra Vajd

A beginning is a very delicate time...
Fast rewind
In the beginning, there was darkness
till the big explosion occurred.
Too far
Fast forward
In the beginning, there was a hand,
softly lit, who took a small black
rectangular object from a light jeans pocket,
and two years later, Instagram appeared.
Fast rewind
There was a monolith,
and a hand, and a bone and
so the struggle commenced.
Wrong again
Forward
There was Daguerre, and Benjamin,
and Diane Arbus, and Hitchcock,
Antonioni, Marker, and Laura Mulvey
and, suddenly, we were all posting
our Insta Stories till some strange
metaverse took over.
Too fast
A cave. A light source.
Reflections.
So hard to navigate
Origin myths. Projected onto
various surfaces. A rock, a piece
of fabric, a paper, a screen,
collectively networked minds,
a single mind, a multiplicity
of minds.

To search for a beginning is a task of fiction, speculation, and creative interpretation. At a certain point, all the layers and strata exist in one space and time, merged together, mimicking each other without much possibility or willingness to be fully untangled, analyzed, and re-narrated individually.

There is light piercing through colour foils, and segments of caves, or rather their exteriors, craftily concealing the imagined content beneath their surfaces, surrounded by sediments of various chemical and mineral substances dispersed on nearby walls forming an enigmatic record of time passing: a mural of abstracted representation leading towards some unintelligible image, or maybe, an amalgamation of all images ever taken. The light travels back and forth, first from the natural source outside and later, emanating from artificial sources of backlit pixels set to monochromatic fields. The time lacks any significance in this scene of encounters of acting and counteracting agents.

It seems almost counterproductive to think about the history of photography at the point when a digital representation through the means of technical media forms a new reality in its own right. A reality in which we tend to get lost, a reality without an adequate evolutionary period to grow and become comprehensible, a reality composed almost automatically by the technology itself rather than its critical evaluation, necessary mastery of means and processes, and certain educated distance. All of this has happened so fast. The whole new reality, shorter than a gap between the original Matrix and Matrix Resurrection. And the pace keeps accelerating. Our feeble attempts to catch up, get a gist of what has transpired with our collective ability to stay in focus, be attentive, show compassion, and relate to one another with full presence are being deflected by the media bombardment from the omnipresent screens. And here we are, following the endlessly branching wild stream of data, shattered identities, and the long-lost illusion of The Truth. Why go back in time when there is so much to entangle right here and now?

Well, we seem to love origin myths. All the time religious people quote some eclectic old scribbling. Politicians are constantly referencing outdated, for our times totally unfitting, centuries-old constitutions which groups of long-forgotten men put together with similarly faded vitality as their own legacies. Yet, do we need to formulate a new narrative to help us navigate the present? Since our primary goal at this point is instead to deconstruct

them? Maybe what we need is a different methodology for formulating new narratives. Perhaps the answer is in focused attention to little things, details, and niche subjects. However, how to draw a map for the complexities of media reality through a simple deconstruction of the photographic process? ...a beginning is a very delicate time, and its primary source of potential is in a future interpretation. So there it is, a new Chauvet, a new platonic cave, a newly coded VR, an environment that doesn't lay pins on a map but instead renders the map empty so it can be redrawn. Paper meets pixels; paint meets emulsions, fixers, and toners; light meets a color membrane; various elements are not mixed. They simply exist next to one another as actors in a fully abstracted drama. Or as a pharmacopoeia listing all the elements needed to create the suitable catalyst to kick start a new story.

A: Photography as an image - photography as an object - photography as the immersive spatial situation - space as a treatise of chemical substances used in the photographic process - space as conjointly poisonous and curative topo-graphy, where image, body, and the natural world collide. The circle closes while producing visibility for something that lacks its own embedded visual status. Complexly embodied somatic act highlighting underlying pathways between brain, body, light, and chemical sensitive substances - the gallery space becomes an organism of (classical) photography.

Erasing the ontological separation between the material/ natural world and the cultural world forms an agency of anti-representation - a series of patterns as entanglements of the flow of hardly graspable forces - from being to becoming - from entities to relations. Action, reaction, complementarity, fixation, stabilization, crystallization, entropy. All in motion. An archeological dig site.

A: All the matter is active; breathing, growing, shrinking, and evolving - engraving a chart, a map, or a drawing of the evolution of the used materials. The effect of time becomes integral to the resulting work. Empathy towards the materials is the key - to unlock the doors of memory, science, history, imagination, and speculation - to understand our technological advances as means to experience the physical world. The digital vs. face-to-face. A new universally applicable language, literacy. Perception as reciprocity - ongoing exchange between our bodies and surrounding entities. The body is the protagonist, not our minds. Unconscious projection of psyche into objects and materials. The origins of photography lie with the discoveries of chemical means to fix the latent image, all the optical phenomena already existing for hundreds of years prior to the first photograph. The layering of historical prerequisites. The embodiment of physical exertion, labour. Analog and digital ontologies lead to anxiety from the loss of material presence - current interest in object-hood. Transcending these categories by mediating an encounter across the timeline. We look back at analog processes while overcoming their limitations. We look at the digital while dissolving its painful borderlessness. And at the end of the day, a photograph is always invisible.

J:

Anetta Mona Chişa & Aleksandra Vajd & Jen Kratochvil

ANETTA MONA CHIŞA, born in Nadlac, Romania; lives and works in Prague. Her individual works and collaborative projects have been presented at Galerie Rudolfinum Prague, Gesellschaft für Aktuelle Kunst Bremen, Cukrarna (Ljubljana), n.b.k. (Berlin), Karlín Studios (Prague), Kunstraum Niederösterreich in Vienna, The 8th Floor in New York, Lunds Konsthall, Haifa Museum of Art, Anca Poterasu Gallery Bucharest, Museum of Contemporary Art Wrocław, Bozar in Brussels, KINDL Center for Contemporary Art in Berlin, MoCA (Miami), MuMoK (Vienna), The Power Plant (Toronto, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, at the Venice Biennale, Taipei Biennale, and the Moscow Biennale among others.

ALEKSANDRA VAJD, born in Maribor, Slovenia; lives and works in Prague and Ljubljana. Her individual works and collaborative projects have for example been presented at Galerie Rudolfinum in Prague, Cukrarna in Ljubljana, the Astrup Fearnley Museet in Oslo, Glasgow's Street Level Photoworks gallery, Prague City Gallery, Kyoto's Zuiun-an-Art Project Space, Museum of Contemporary Photography in Chicago, the City Gallery in Ljubljana and the < rotor > centre for contemporary art in Graz. Vajd has also participated in several photographic festivals and biennales, including the Photo Festival in Krakow, Leipzig, Liège, and the 9th Triennale of Contemporary Art U3 in Ljubljana

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