

All is Fair in Dreams and War

Andro Wekua

At the time of a radical event, such as a war or a catastrophe, reality disintegrates. So does the time that we live in. Experience of devastation, death, and loss dismembers the sense of life's wholeness. A clear vision of the entire picture renders us into insignificant particles. What happens after? As things fall into places, memory seeks to revive the reality. It is in this process that trauma manifests itself between the past and the present, a trauma that makes it impossible to resuscitate the lost reality. This trauma encapsulates the fear of another destruction, making it hard to restore the past. Each new attempt to rebuild becomes a nightmare.

In times like this, there is always a force that pushes us to abandon everything. It pushes us to stand apart from the events, the reality, the past, and to disappear. If anything is fair in a war, if war ruthlessly obliterates significations, then in opposition to it we could talk about the violence of imagination that justifies abandoning oneself, one's identity, society and origins – everything that retains memories of misfortune, defeat, and devastation.

[However,] one thing that the war cannot touch is the memory of the war itself, and its eternal reiteration in our imagination. Everything could fall apart; we could lose the past yet as a genuine experience, a war remains a war – a catastrophe that gave birth to an unfillable void separating us from our inner selves, an event that fractures the fullness of our existence. In times like this, our imagination is completely justified to seek leaving everything behind. It might not be right yet it is the most appropriate response to the terror of war, the imagination, and the past as incomprehensible phenomena.

This is only one side of the work, a chronometry: memory – trauma – memory. Still, it does not explain everything. It only simplifies the subject matter. If we say that a flaming palm tree is the trauma, and the whole affair is an attempt to escape the past, to get rid of it, then we only write a simple script that has nothing to do with reality (on the contrary, we always see close-ups that unveil the full potential of disjointed memories). However far we might run from our memories, leaving our past and history behind, they will always reappear and endlessly reiterate their ruinous nature, their insignificance. They reveal themselves in the form of loss and destruction. No war or catastrophe can escape this certainty. For this reason, no war is ideal. It continues into eternity as long as its memory lives. A demolished city that has been rebuilt is perennially haunted by the phantom of annihilation; a lost love that reappears is incessantly plagued by the memory of loss, and so it goes on. In the same way, substitution of old history with a new one is always threatened by previous fiascos, and the terror is stronger when the catastrophe is unfulfilled. Therefore, the pervasiveness of vestiges and ruins further aggravates the burden of trauma, fueling the desire to escape it.

Wekua's solution is inventive. One could argue that it is the boldest way of interacting with memory and history – by presenting images of the past in their full light and enigma. They say nothing beyond their eternal transformation and eternal (de)formation. Asynchronous memories burn like the palm tree. In the process, they disentangle and free themselves from the past, from recollection and information, and maybe even from their own selves.

One more modifier becomes relevant. In the contemporary world, simulation makes it possible to repeat memories in their exact form. This flow of information symmetrically and faultlessly replicates the past. We could essentially perpetually reproduce the events of September 11. This, in turn, creates the illusion that the past has disappeared. To an extent, it certainly ceases to exist as an authentic occurrence (loses its singularity); nonetheless, the shadow of September 11 lingers since the threat has not been eliminated (the image itself represents the event with minimal potential). The process is still ungovernable; its endless repetition cannot eradicate the trauma it has caused. On account of the fact that the digital world retains catastrophic memories and consumes their potential, the digital representation (an image) itself becomes an agent of the catastrophe, a target for mass exaltation and annihilation. As a ruin without a war it further aggravates frustration and uncertainty.

This quality of an image in Wekua's works – that fills the replica of an event with a stream of information, becomes a part of war and imagination. The war migrates from the horizon of history to the horizon of representation. It is no longer enough to stand up against the war, one needs to tackle the medium that becomes an agent of war. Speed framing, cultural memory, random scenes, a casino, a flaming palm tree – they all seek to evacuate the image. Thus, it is a mistake to simply focus on individual events. Resistance to the memory of a tragedy is less significant than confrontation with its closest agent, the image. It is in this decisive battle that information that gave birth to abstract horizons starts to burn.

In all likelihood, beyond the dramatic radiation of the red, digital body of the setting sun, lies peaceful and serene relaxation under its solar rays. This condition is devoid of images, it is a condition that is a future image itself, bizarre and empty yet free and feasible. This could be an unfamiliar past or a familiar future where we find our own insignificant doubles. Like the flaming palm tree, now we approach the triviality of our doubles with a sense of calm; in exchange, it offers foreign and unexplored horizons.

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