*BOTANICA FUTURA, BOTANICA NOVA*

Hortus futurus

It is seductive to think about the end of the world; to engage in predictions and speculations on all the ways it could spectacularly fall apart, whether it would happen suddenly or gradually, how many small disappearances must occur before the big one, and of course, the inevitable: what comes after? If it were not, we wouldn’t collectively be obsessed with apocalyptic scenarios and the idea of an impending catastrophe, constantly and persistently trying to figure it out and prepare for it. It’s not all that unusual. The world can burn in countless ways, but it is in human nature to desire to predict them all. Unfortunately, the fact that we continuously prepare for a major disaster does not prevent us from causing it ourselves. It seems that we are so frequently confronted with endings and cataclysms that sometimes it truly feels like we are living in a time that can only be called ultimate, yet we remain persistently indifferent, and unaware of our own role and individual responsibility. However, in that fatal passivity, we must be cautious. What is supposed to happen may have already had.

Colonialisms, financial and extractive capitalism, environmental disasters, pollution, deforestation, fuel combustion and excessive carbon production, global warming, rising ocean temperature, biodiversity of all waters seriously threatened for the first time by new, mysterious pathogens. All these are synonyms for apocalypse, which we refuse to accept and which is essentially a result of the anthropogenic factor, and it is almost impossible to find just one cause for it. In a time when the dominant model of economic interaction and exchange is capitalist, and the ideology of the free market is a *perpetuum mobile* that keeps us trapped in (self)exploitative practices, capital is the main agent that defines the dynamics of relationships and the new world ecology that connects us all. Capitalocene has brought about the dispersion of responsibilities, polymorphic centres of power, a series of intertwined cause-and-effect relationships and positions where nemesis has long since ceased to be a singular category, but is rather a machinery similar to the mythological Hydra, whose heads are impossible to fully discern.

In such a world, plastic occupies a quite special place, and its flexibility, usability and transgressive nature make it an emblematic example of blurred boundaries. For plastic is not just any material but is emblem- atic of material relations in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, showing how intimately oil has coated nearly every fabric of being, how the synthetic cannot be disentangled from the natural, and how a generalized toxicity is pro- ducing queer realities.”[[1]](#footnote-1) We are now fully living what Guattari warned about decades ago: that now more than ever, nature cannot be separated from culture, and that, in order to comprehend the interactions between eco-systems, we must learn to think transversally. At the moment when we speak about it, plastic is found in almost everything that surrounds us. It seduces us with its amorphous, sticky, smooth surfaces and the promise of sterility; it is produced in astronomical quantities[[2]](#footnote-2), it is ~~found~~ in the air we breathe, the water we drink, circulating through our bodies in its micro form, and penetrating our cells in its nano form. We are united in a synthetic that has never been so multifariously close to its original meaning[[3]](#footnote-3), and it has become almost impossible to keep a clear division between the artificial and the natural world.

Ana Vujović’s work also addresses these meetings, the disruption of clearly defined boundaries, transitional environments, and the endless series of transformations and mutations of matter, as a creative response of the still living world to evolutionary processes[[4]](#footnote-4). Her works reveal complex interdependent ecologies: social, mental and environment ecology that Guattari writes about, and raise the question of the legacy that our neglect of these ecologies has left us, but more importantly, what will be the legacy that we leave behind?

Aware of the fact that “it would be absurd to want to return to the past in order to reconstruct former ways of living”[[5]](#footnote-5), Ana, through the methodology of her previous works, unravels relationships, untangles complex influences, questions today’s conditions and the possibilities of (co)existence within them, returning from this journey with new questions and assumptions. If the reality of venturing into nature today is often similar to an experience where medicinal plants alternate with garbage in such a regular rhythm that they almost coexist in a strange game, then it is not difficult to imagine the consequences of decades of such coexistence. Humanity has left its own trace in the shift of geological epochs in an unprecedentedly destructive manner, and although we still do not know with certainty what it will entail, it is quite certain that the future ahead of us will be completely different from everything that has preceded it.

The hortus futurus that Ana Vujović is building suggests that future will primarily be a place of interweaving, of new symbiotic structures and relationships, and she takes on the role of an archivist and active speculator. Extending the belief that “the ecosophic problematic is that of the production of human existence ~~itself~~ in new historical contexts”[[6]](#footnote-6) to other non-human forms of existence, Ana constructs a garden of the future, and new forms of existence, where natural and artificial elements come into an incredibly close relationship, in which it is not entirely certain which side is trying to dominate and integrate the other. The relationship between plastic and nature exists in a seductive game of accumulation, overlapping, alternating nullification, acceptance and mutual absorption, and Ana adeptly takes it to an absolute extreme where she envisions a future in which plastic has become an integral part of the earth. Melted rubber has found its way through plant roots, infiltrating every pore, and now grows with them; silicone interpolations alter the structure of wood and replace its elements, synthetics bloom from the crevices of cracked branches, and, resilient, wild, medicinal plants are left without air, trapped in the inability to fulfil their primary function.

However, despite the dystopian atmosphere and terrifying alarmism emanating from this herbarium of the future, Ana Vujović does not leave us without hope. She confronts us with the fact that it would be inconceivable, and now certainly impossible, to return to previous patterns and systems, but at the same time, that perhaps our task has also changed along the way. Maybe it is no longer about returning to the old and resolving contradictions, but rather about learning to coexist anew, building new solidarity, new gentleness, new understanding, new flexibility, new interactions, reminding us that this also means unexpected encounters because “staying alive—for every species—requires livable collaborations survival.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Teodoro Jeremić

1. Heather Davis, *Plastic Matter,* Duke University Press, Daram; 2022, p. 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. More than 380 million tons of plastic are produced annually, of which only 9% is recycled. Data: <https://plasticoceans.org/the-facts/> ; <https://ourworldindata.org/plastic-pollution>   
   Last accessed on Feb. 9, 2024. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. A/N: The word “synthetic” stems from the Greek word “syntithenai” (meaning “to meet”). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Heather Davis, *Plastic Matter,* Duke University Press, Durham; 2022, p. 10 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Feliks Gatari, *Tri ekologije,* FMK, Beograd; 2021, p. 20 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Feliks Gatari, *Tri ekologije,* FMK, Beograd; 2021, p. 14 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins, Princeton University Press, New Jersey; 2015 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)