Non-Conceptual Negativity: Damaged Reflections on Turkey

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Art had been able to keep its “onto-terrorist” origin a secret for ages, yet it would get into deep trouble in the nineteenth century. Although it could cover its incessant claim to be unmediated with aesthetics until then, the pangs of a return to formless though still in the form of a form had commenced to call back the ghosts of onto-terrorism into the scene. Jacques Aumont, opposing the materialist theoreticians who locate the origin of the modernist image in the opening of single point Renaissance perspectivism to multiplicity, argues that at the origin of the photographic and cinematic image lies the difference between “the ébauche” and “the étude.” The ébauche is the detailed draft that the artist draws on the canvas before painting, whereas the étude is the first impression of a scene which the painter scribbles away in immediacy in its transience, in its momentariness. The étude, rather than brimming with keen aesthetic concerns, is an attempt to capture the fleeting moment of a subjective experience as it would subsequently be crowned by modernism. At this juncture Classical art’s acceptance of form as the mediator collapses and gives way not only to the unmediated, the formless, the momentary but also to a yearning for representing movement much in line with changes in perception—in line with Benjamin’s consideration of the daily shocks in a metropolis—occurring in the metropolitan subject. It all seems as if it is

a matter of time now for art to reclaim its power to affect without a mediator. Baudelaire’s *The Painter of Modern Life* (1863) in this sense is a paean to modern life where he concentrates on movement and speed, with Constantin Guys in view: “Our strange artist expresses both the gestures and attitudes, be they solemn or grotesque, of human beings and their luminous explosion in space.”

Explosion? Without doubt, it is a reference to photography’s capacity to capture, to represent life in its luminosity and movement, that is, the magnesium powder which is the basic element of flash that will hit the market in the 1880s.

All this points to the fact that by the time Niépce produced the first photograph in 1826, the photographic perception of the world had already been well rooted in the art world, as the introduction of études into halls of exhibition bears witness. The newspaper delivery boys who discuss the bicycle races leaning on their bicycles are yet unaware of the things to happen to Benjamin in the near future but they keep enjoying the “information” made possible by the newspaper pages, illustrated first by lithographs and then by photographs, to capture, to represent the “reality” of the events in their immediacy which art, wishing to reunite with the Sirens’ Song, had yearned for hopelessly until that day. The terror of explosion, traversing the onto-terrorism brought along with immediacy, submits the photographic image first to the service of the newspaper, and then to the cinema and the media, and re-contaminates the arts with the deception of being unmediated — zombie-art — with the invention of installation and video art as repudiated by Virilio.

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