To Celebrate: Unfinished Notes

By Enrico Camprini

- "To celebrate" is a complex, problematic, and ambiguous endeavor. Whether in private dynamics—never truly just personal—or in collective ones—never entirely public—a celebratory intent inevitably involves grappling with time. It means concretizing, in a way handling it, and devising a strategy to bring it into focus. This process—conscious or unconscious—underpins every form of celebration, from the lightest, habitual, and perhaps trivial recurrence to the most symbolic and secularized ceremony. Any sort of ritual questions time and seeks a way, even through confrontation, to connect the past, present, and future.

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- In 1976, Alberto Boatto, perhaps the most anarchic, heterodox, and unpredictable of Italian critics of his time, conceived a project that never came to fruition. It was titled *The Celebration* and was structured as a two-part exhibition. One was mobile, where, "in a circular space," various invited artists would, in turn, present their "celebration in action, extended to public participation." The other was fixed, documenting, from a historical-anthropological perspective, the evolution of the concept of celebration in relation to contemporaneity. In the single typewritten page that briefly describes the project, one also reads: "The starting point of this journey will be marked by the beheading of Louis XVI; the endpoint, by the political demonstrations of a popular and spontaneous nature of the last decade." The note echoes the tone and themes of Boatto's writings from the mid-1970s: an abyssal investigation into the manifestation, in history and culture, of the action of the negative (*"necare," to kill*). The artistic and imaginative moment incorporates, and at the same time contrasts, a death drive: transforming it into an energetic force, and the negative itself takes on the living form of a critique of the present. Had it been realized, Boatto's project might have captured the celebration of vital, intensely shared expression—the festival—in the ripples and fractures of a temporal horizon marked by violent and oppressive manifestations: for instance, war, "with its dark aspect of waste."

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- For the last couple of ungrateful generations of guests on this planet, there seems to be no other time than the present. This is a condition of dramatic stasis: in the furrow of permanent crisis, of competition as a value and a metaphor for a consolidating warlike imaginary, history reemerges—even for those who had declared its end—but stripped of that forward-looking energy, that tension towards the future; without which we can only inhabit the world as if it were a swimming pool mistaken for an ocean. In the eternal present, there is little room for the negative. The only function of negation lies in its uncritical literalness: erasure, removal, replacement. In other words, innovation without renewal, creativity without creation; as if we believed to be speeding down a highway when the car is actually stationary and the landscapes

rushing past our eyes are nothing but the abrupt changes of a theater backdrop. A decade is not necessarily a considerable span of time. But ten years in the eternal present, with the awareness of needing to start the car and unveil the real horizon, takes on a meaning worth celebrating.

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- The world of art, its institutions, and its actors today seems to self-regulate while simultaneously seeking to escape the bubble by engaging with the overall dynamics of what lies outside—it has always been this way, after all. Yet, in the eternal present, the way the art world relates to itself and to what surrounds it seems to manifest more as communication than as a relationship. That is, in the urgency to present content with certainty and to exhibit a readiness for change and innovation that often takes place, miserably, in the description and endless decorative reproduction of a present mistaken for the future. A declarative urgency: we need statements! What may be needed instead is a willingness to embrace uncertainty. Not compromise, but contradiction—accepting it critically. To work slowly toward renewal without being undermined by the rapid need to assert and declare: the pace of progress is halting, as is our present. One possible way to look forward with momentum is to look back at oneself: to dwell on the mishap, the error, the incommunicable—something akin to the sensation evoked by the loop of telephone audio invading Matèria's space for the exhibition celebrating its tenth anniversary. Thus, to celebrate can be an escape route from the eternal present, provided it does not end with a period but traces a line, where the difficulty of renewal is preferred over the simplicity of innovation.

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- Like a magpie, I've pilfered a few sparkling ideas from Tim Ingold's latest book—which deals with generations, between past, present, and future—and tucked them into these brief, incomplete, and halting notes. Even the title of a show I curated two years ago for Matèria was borrowed from a volume by the same author. The heart of that project perhaps lay precisely in its uncertain nature: impermanent, entirely conceived within the gallery, mutable until the very end. It was a show that also dealt with time, with its relationship to sculpture, bodies, space; a significant portion of it consisted of drawings made directly on the walls. We waited until the very last moment for their formalization, when the artist resolved it by replicating the exact arrangement—holes in the walls included—of the previous painting exhibition. I was quite shocked (positively) by the operation, but only later did I realize how much it connected to the temporal dimension evoked by our project: the future was already there. Perhaps the idea of celebrating has similar traits: tracing the line without putting a period—therein lies the celebration. The line intertwines with itself and with other lines, allowing us to look both forward and backward in a single gesture and find, in each step of the journey, what will already… become. "The future is behind us."

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