

The Rest of Now

Raqs Media Collective

1.

A hundred years ago, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, artist, poet and high priest of a muscular industrial aesthetic, was seriously injured in an automobile accident on the outskirts of Milan. During his convalescence, he wrote a passionate paean to speed, the very force that had so recently threatened his life. His words, clad in the brash cadence of the first Futurist Manifesto, ring out as a fanfare to the velocity of the twentieth century.

"We declare that the splendor of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed... We are on the extreme promontory of the centuries! What is the use of looking behind at the moment when we must open the mysterious shutters of the impossible? Time and Space died yesterday. We are already living in the absolute, since we have already created eternal, omnipresent speed..."

A hundred years later, standing inside the disused Alumix factory in Bolzano/Bozen, which for five decades had been dedicated to the production of Marinetti's beloved aluminium, hindsight suggests that we consider a different rhythm. Not the speeding regularity of *architettura razionale*, but the soft, syncopation of desuetude. Let us rest for now, between an odd and an even beat, and consider what remains from a century devoted to the breathless pursuit of tomorrow's promised riches.

An empty factory, which once produced aluminium – the substance of bombs, aeroplanes and coffee percolators, the metal of speed, death and light – is the stage and provocation for us to invoke that which is left behind when value is extracted from life, time and labour. Aluminium, which as tinfoil and scaffolding is used for the cladding of everything from sandwiches to building sites, is also what is thrown away the moment the sandwich is eaten and the building finished. Mountains are flattened to mine bauxite, the main aluminium ore. Mountains of aluminium waste may eventually take their place. The Alumix factory, like its counterparts all over the world, is a monument to its own residue.

Turbines, transformers, motors, smelters, furnaces, production targets and megawatts of electrical power have long since vacated this building. Marinetti's "great agitation of work" has departed to other continents, making room for dust, fungi, and the anticipation of resurrection. Manifesta 7 enters the building in this moment of pause, stealing in between the downtime of industrial abandonment in the core of Europe and the overture of global capital's next move.

The "rest of now" is the residue that lies at the heart of contemporaneity. It is what persists from moments of transformation, and what falls through the cracks of time. It is history's obstinate remainder, haunting each addition and subtraction with arithmetic persistence, endlessly carrying over what cannot be accounted for. The rest of now is the excess, which pushes us towards respite, memory and slowing things down.

Remembering what has departed, recognizing what is left behind and preparing for what is yet to arrive means making sense of the relationship between living and having lived. It means reading the things that almost happened, or didn't quite happen, or that were simply desired, against the grain of that which is occurring or has taken place. Residue is a space of open, uncharted, alterity. The residual and the imminent share a paradoxical working solidarity.

In "Lance," a short story about time and space travel, Vladimir Nabokov wrote, "the future is but the obsolete in reverse," suggesting that even the impulse to hurtle into futurity is always, already, shadowed by its own imminent obsolescence. The Alumix factory, like so much of the twentieth century's heroic and tragic dalliance with the future is now a repository of the residual. What better place can there be for the rest of now?

2.

An exhibition is a design in space. "The Rest of Now" is also a figure in time. In Bolzano/Bozen, the ex-Alumix factory sits nestled between the elevations of the Dolomite mountains, whose every fold is a reminder of the fact that industrial time is only a faint ripple on the surface of geological time.

To draw a figure in time is to inscribe a mark on a difficult and slippery surface. As time passes, the reasons to remember grow stronger, but the ability to recall is weakened. Memory straddles this paradox. We could say that the ethics of memory

have something to do with the urgent negotiation between having to remember (which sometimes includes the obligation to mourn), and the requirement to move on (which sometimes includes the necessity to forget). Both are necessary, and each is notionally contingent on the abdication of the other, but life is not led to the easy rhythm of regularly alternating episodes of memory and forgetting that cancel each other out in a neat equation that resolves to zero.

Residue is the fulcrum on which the delicate negotiation between memory and forgetting is undertaken, because it is the unresolved, lingering aftertaste of an event that triggers the task of retrieving and dealing with the difficulty of its recollection. The question of what is to be done with residue – should it be burned, buried, frozen, embalmed, mourned, celebrated, commemorated, carried over, forgotten or remembered – haunts us all the time. It haunts us in our personal lives as much as it haunts the larger histories we participate in and draw from. To draw a figure in time is necessarily to encounter and reflect on the difficulty of the residual. There are no easy answers to the questions posed by residue.

Images are not always the most reliable allies against forgetfulness; words play tricks with memory. Oblivion is easily accomplished, especially with the aid of what is usually called restoration, which makes it possible to ignore or cosmetically invert the action of time on a physical surface. Monuments, contrary to the stated intentions of their construction, abet forgetfulness. Sometimes the *work* of art can be a matter of ensuring that the time it takes to think and recall difficult questions be given its due; that instead of purchasing the processed and instant sense of time mined from a monument we explore the option of accessing the potential of even a modest memento to destabilize the certitude of the present.

How can images and objects be brought together in a manner that helps etch a lingering doubt onto the heart of amnesia? How can concepts and experiences that sustain an attitude of vigilance against the impulse of erasure be expressed as tools to think and feel with, to work with in the present? How can we remember and reconsider the world without getting lost in reverie? How can a meditation on history avoid the stupor of nostalgia? What work must memory be put to, in order to ensure that we erect, not memorials that close the roads to further inquiry, but signposts that ask for more journeys to be undertaken?

“The Rest of Now” is an occasion for the asking of these questions. It offers both the building blocks of an argument and a disposition to be alert to the material, cognitive

and emotional consequences of temporal processes. Underlying the argument and the disposition is a hunch that the after-image of residue may be a critique and an antidote to the narrative conceit of progress. We can move on only if we understand that the debts we owe to the past are a long way from being settled, and that we are required to carry them with us into the future. We can move on only if we understand that the future is constituted by the debts we incur in the present. Residue is an unlikely, but effective, engine.

The artists we have invited to “The Rest of Now” have responded in a variety of ways to our proposition. Coded within their responses are entire archives of forgotten, retrieved and imagined worlds, exemplars of practices of persistence and refusal, instances of play, investigation, questioning and speculation. Looking out with them, out of the factory, towards the mountains, this exhibition layers, leaches, and addles time. It arrests and thickens time, sows time’s seeds in a garden, bores time’s holes in masonry, scrapes time’s dust off a wall, build’s time’s bridge to nowhere, measures time in terms of detritus, tells stories about the stubborn persistence of things, people and ways of life that refuse to admit that either their time is over or that it hasn't yet come. This exhibition takes time, and lays it across a long table, makes it climb a high tower, skip a heartbeat in a tap dance, rise like mist and fall like sunlight, run like an engine and dance like a worker, sleep like a hill and wake like a factory, shine, escape and elude capture like the enigmatic memory of a dead grandmother.

3.

The extraction of value from any material, place, thing or person, involves a process of refinement. During this process, the object in question will undergo a change in state, separating into at least two substances: an extract and a residue. With respect to residue: it may be said it is that which never finds its way into the manifest narrative of how something (an object, a person, a state, or a state of being) is produced, or comes into existence. It is the accumulation of all that is left behind, when value is extracted...There are no histories of residue, no atlases of abandonment, no memoirs of what a person was but could not be.

- “With Respect to Residue,” Raqs Media Collective, 2005

When faced with any apparently “abandoned” situation, it quickly becomes clear that a lot remains. Even the walls of a shut-down factory teem with life forms, only some of which are visible to the eye. To recognize this is to encounter the fecundity of residue.

In 1855, the English botanist Richard Deacon published a botanical study of the ruins of the Flavian amphitheatre in Rome, "The Flora of the Colosseum." His meticulous and monumental account catalogues the 420 species of vegetation growing in the six acres of the ruined edifice. These included several species so rare in Europe at that time that Deacon speculated that they must have been transported as seeds in the guts of the animals and slaves imported into Rome from Africa and Asia for the staging of gladiatorial spectacles. Deacon speaks of these rare plants with affection and awe, saying that they "form a link in the memory, and teach us hopeful and soothing lessons, amid the sadness of bygone ages: and cold indeed must be the heart that does not respond to their silent appeal; for though without speech, they tell us of the regenerating power which animates the dust of mouldering greatness." By 1870, the Colosseum in Rome had experienced the first of several modern attempts at "restoration," and the ancient cosmopolitan exuberance of vegetation that had been the botanist's consolation had begun to give way to naked stone.

The vocabulary of contests and gladiatorials has not changed much in the last two millennia. Speed and prowess matter as much as they did when prisoners, slaves and beasts fought it out in the Colosseum's arena. If anything, the Olympic virtues, "citius, altius, fortius" (faster, higher, stronger) have become the governing maxims of the contemporary world - the pace of life and labour gets faster, profits and prices rise higher and armies get stronger. Our societies are Colosseums reborn. We are spectators, gladiators and beasts.

The late Alexander Langer, autonomist activist, thinker, maverick European Green politician, and native of South Tyrol, with his interest in the residual and his ecological emphasis on slowness, provides us with an interesting late twentieth century counterpoint to Marinetti's cult of speed and the gladiatorial imperative. He proposed a challenge to the "citius, altius, fortius" maxim with a call to consider an alternative trinity of virtues - "lentius, suavius, profundius" (slower, softer, deeper).

For quite some time now, the Olympic virtues have been defended with armed police pickets all over the world. It becomes necessary, at times like this to consider a few good reasons and methods to slow things down, to reclaim the stone with wild seeds.