

Editors Editorial

01/02

The critique of bureaucracy slithers like a sewer – hidden, warm, and necessary – beneath the aging towers of the twentieth-century intellectual metropolis. Arising first as one answer to The Question – namely, what happened in the USSR? – bureaucracy eventually came to replace the bourgeoisie as the preferred explanation for why everything was the way it was. To this day, pseudonyms for bureaucracy remain highly fashionable pieces of conceptual hyperbole. Any characterization of instituted sociality as uniform unfreedom – the spectacle, the body without organs, libidinal economics, Empire, Bloom – has its origins in the bureaucratic obsession with control, as distinct from the bourgeois obsession with ownership.

In “The Great Accelerator,” Oleksiy Radynski narrates the story of Soviet scientist Viktor Glushkov, whose efforts to develop an early version of the internet were an attempt to overcome bureaucratic inertia from within the Soviet system itself. Cybernetics, it would seem, represented the solution to the bureaucratic problem of the social as such. If technology is one signifier for anti-bureaucracy, art is another. In “The Poetry of Feedback,” Jasper Bernes examines the impact of cybernetic theory on the development of postwar American art in general and the work of Hannah Weiner in particular. Like technology, art can be seen as either undoing bureaucracy or reinforcing it.

As Boris Groys discusses in “Art, Technology, and Humanism,” Martin Heidegger saw technology as the essence of bureaucratic alienation, something to be undone or counterbalanced by art. Groys argues that “art” and “the human” name two distinct centers of gravity around which technologies of preservation orbit. This is why many of the revolutionary, avant-garde museologists discussed by Arseny Zhilyaev in “Tracing Avant-Garde Museology” looked to the museum as a factory of resurrection. Eventually, technology merges the two forms of preservation into one. Nevertheless, technology is fundamentally split, as Gilbert Simondon postulates in “The Genesis of Technicity.” The unity of the magical world cleaves in two, with technical objects falling on one side, and religious subjects on the other. Art, science, and ethics spring up like flowers growing in the canyon that results from this divide.

Whatever its origin, any ethics should be capable of responding adequately to what Irmgard Emmelhainz calls “the colonial blind spot” that she sees distilled in the work of Juan Rulfo. A writer, filmmaker, and agent of the state, Rulfo recognized the violence of modernization even as he participated in it. Is it fog that blinds

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us? Or smoke from a village that we have already forgotten is burning? In the matter of complicity and participation, Dena Yago considers the work of profane divination in art production and commercial branding following an apocalyptic collapse in brick-and-mortar retail. How does art respond when commodities merge with their contexts and creativity is the watchword of a revived national corporatism? Finally, Anton Vidokle and Hito Steyerl discuss the limits and possibilities of the latest returns to sun-centered cosmology in a conversation entitled “On Artificial Elegance and the Production of Time.” What future for the sunlight that gathers, relentlessly, under our collective power?

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