

Editorial

01/02

The “Atoms for Peace” exhibition traveled to Tokyo in 1955 and on to Hiroshima in 1956. The items on display covered topics like isotopic testing on the tread of bicycle tires and factory products, atomic power’s applications to the petroleum industry, and radiation’s effectiveness in removing facial moles. 2.6 million people visited the exhibition between stops in eleven Japanese cities. When the show was installed at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, its attendance numbers exceeded the annual attendance of the memorial museum itself. The previous year, that same memorial museum also hosted the First World Congress Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs.

The United States’ “Atoms for Peace” exhibit was a touring campaign, allegedly supported by the CIA and the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, one of Japan’s largest national newspapers. Its landing in Tokyo and Hiroshima aimed to rebrand nuclear energy. US President Eisenhower, who delivered a UN speech of the same name in 1953, delivered a message for the exhibition’s 1955 opening in Tokyo: “The exhibit stands as a symbol of our countries’ mutual determination that the great power of the atom shall be dedicated to the arts of peace.” Especially on its second stop in Hiroshima, the expo’s audience consisted of survivors of the atoms detonated over the same city to deathly devastating effect less than a decade before, in 1945.

Thinking about this half-century-old case of spin and circulation from the perspective of 2019 resonates not in content, but somewhat in context, with conversations around the current Whitney Biennial. This year, there are calls by artists both inside and outside the exhibition and institution for the resignation of Warren Kanders, vice chair of the Whitney board. This visible figure is also an executive at the Safariland corporation, whose weapons and teargas products enact state violence on the bodies of refugees, protestors, and victims of police brutality.

In this issue of *e-flux journal* – number 100 – Liam Gillick takes up Duchamp’s provocation that artworks should be considered in terms of twenty-year time spans. For Gillick, the twenty-year scale reveals points of change more effectively than decades: “Twenty years is enough time to understand the development of a new technology through to its application. Twenty years is enough time for new educational models to take effect – both negatively and positively. Twenty years is still enough time to wonder whether a set of ideas within the art context retains any relevance or needs

e-flux journal #100 — may 2019
Editorial

reconsideration.”

This year there is a macabre offering on display at the Venice Biennale, placed in the Arsenale without a label or identifying information. A boat in which 800 migrants died trying to reach Europe was floated back and moved to Venice at enormous expense. Since the Biennale opened, the ship has been presented as a hybrid of a monument (to what?) and a Duchampian readymade. Now, the festival’s curator spins the narrative, claiming the boat is not art. “It’s not art,” he declares, “but it’s an artist who initiated this presentation ... taking something real from the world, something associated with tragic death and is putting in the context of an artworld to ask questions.”

In 1960, Luis Camnitzer, as part of a generation of rebellious students working to change the curriculum of the art school in Uruguay, was assigned the task of informing an art history professor and poet at the school that the students no longer needed their services. The young Camnitzer approached the professor and poet to explain the students’ position: “We feel that you reduce art to only two topics: love and death.” Puzzled, the professor and poet replied: “But, is there anything else?” Camnitzer still grapples with this exchange and all its implications, as he details in his essay in this issue, “Where is the Genie?”

Koichiro Osaka’s text for this issue begins at the Sunshine 60 skyscraper in Tokyo. According to myth and a historical reading, the skyscraper is named for the sixty Japanese war criminals executed in 1948 in what was then Sugamo Prison. In 1978, the former prison became the tallest skyscraper in Asia. As Osaka explains, Sunshine 60 may be the largest war monument ever built. The building serves at once as a haunted gravesite and reassurance of the ongoing sunshine of fascism and capitalism.

Also in this issue, Françoise Vergès describes a daily ritual in multiple urban centers where thousands of black and brown women invisibly “open” the city. Vergès describes how middle-aged, often immigrant women who do the dirty work – the cleaning work – without being seen, so that younger, generally paler neoliberal bodies can perform visible work in those same spaces. Vergès details the hours in the morning when maintenance workers, exhausted, return from their twilight-hour work on public transportation, while the working bodies of the business world begin their pre-work routines and commutes.

02/02

In an essay exploring “What Lenin Teaches Us About Witchcraft,” Oxana Timofeeva outlines a vision of camaraderie: one that transcends the borders of humanity and places theories of the comrade (such as Jodi Dean’s from this journal, among others) in a long line of sorcery and witchcraft – a line from which Lenin himself may have descended. Timofeeva writes that comradeship is not easy. “Along with sorcery,” she says, comradeship “can evoke forces that an individual cannot control.” She relays Goethe’s 1797 poem “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice” to illustrate how these forces can be destructive. With the master sorcerer away, the apprentice casts a magic spell. The process goes awry, wreaking a level of havoc. But the apprentice, panicking, has neither skill nor power to stop it alone. Timofeeva explains that “Georges Bataille links this figure of the sorcerer’s apprentice to art: ‘The sorcerer’s apprentice, first of all, does not encounter demands that are any different from those he would encounter on the difficult road of art.’”

Concluding issue #100, Franco “Bifo” Berardi writes that “The contemporary subconscious is marked by two powerful gravitational pulls: extinction and immortality, which feed into each other.” Berardi admits that the answer to the question of exactly what extinction he is talking about is not clear to him. At the end of the essay, he asks: “Is crime the inducer of Chaos, or the generator of Order?”

Berardi speaks to an even larger current condition, one of climate change, near incomprehensible inequalities that mark wealth distribution of our current time, and the panicking predators thereof and therein.

“Is there a way out from this end?” Bifo asks in a coda to the essay. “Yes, of course: it is you, the unpredictable.”

– Editors

x

e-flux journal #100 — may 2019
Editorial