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A Place to Bury Names, or Resurrection (Circulation and Continuity of Energy) as a Dissolution of Identity: Isamu Noguchi's *Memorial to the Dead of Hiroshima* and Shirai Sei'ichi's *Temple Atomic Catastrophes*

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The dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 created an irresolvable *aporia* for artistic expression. What collapsed was not individual expression, but the locus from which expression originates and where it is received—the very place where expression is established as expression.

Consider, for example, the peculiar inscription that lacks a grammatical subject at the *Memorial Cenotaph for the Atomic Bomb Victims*, built on ground zero in Hiroshima in 1952: “Please rest in peace. The mistake will never be repeated.” Political considerations probably played a part in the omission of a subject in this phrase and, as is well known, this wording resulted in severe arguments that have still not been resolved today. Who “committed the mistake”? Those who dropped the bomb, or those who created the cause leading to its use? Who are the ones commemorating the dead, pleading for them to rest in peace? Could the subject who declares, “I have committed a mistake and I will not repeat it” and the subject who implores the dead to rest in peace be one and the same? Any argument that emerges around this phrase merely reinscribes the friction between enemy and ally that constituted the war in the first place. If the subject were to be identified, the asymmetry between the perpetrator and the victim would necessarily be emphasized. But even when the grammatical subject is concealed, this memorial will continue to harbor fissures reflecting differences between the various positions of individuals who read the phrase as long as social divisions of identities attached to this memorial and its history persist.¹

The influential historian of nationalism Benedict Anderson claimed that cenotaphs commemorating unknown soldiers constitute an exemplary representation of nationalism in modern culture: “The public ceremonial reverence accorded these monuments precisely *because* they are either deliberately empty or no one knows who lies inside them, has

no true precedents in earlier times.”² The function of the tomb of the unknown soldier is not attributed to any particular content stored therein, but rather derives from ceremonial usage. To use a term from speech act theory, it is a tomb only in the “performative” sense. In other words, to commemorate is to utter the phrase “I commemorate the dead,” much as it is to bow in front of the monument. But whether this ceremonial performance functions adequately or not, depends on the particular conditions of who utters this phrase, in what place, and to whom. The function of a performative representation is equivalent to the recognition of a certain locus wherein this adequacy is shared. Ultimately, what is confirmed performatively is none other than the community of people who mutually acknowledge the adequacy of each other.

“Who is talking?”—the subject of the utterance in question here is obviously not the dead. The discussions around memorials reveal the irresolvable difference of positions that still divide those who remain in the world of the living. While the dead no longer belong to this world, and thus transcend all mundane differences, their potential to speak out loud is denied (there is no place that will accept their claims). The words of the dead, if allowed, would freeze the problematics that bind the mortal world, without solving them. That is why the dead are never invited to talk, and their words are always sealed.

The monuments and cenotaphs of modern nation states have, in this way, served to bind and represent the sentiments (for the dead) of those who remain in the mortal world, not of the dead victims themselves. *The Memorial Cenotaph for the Atomic Bomb Victims* in Hiroshima is likewise constrained by this problematic.

1.

In 1951, the architect Tange Kenzō, who was in charge of planning the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park as a result of a competition held in 1949, commissioned the Japanese American sculptor and designer Isamu Noguchi to design the principal monument dedicated to the victims of the atomic bomb (which later became known as the *Memorial to the Dead of Hiroshima*). This commission, however, was withdrawn by the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park Special Committee at the end of March 1952, and Noguchi’s plan was officially rejected.

According to Kishida Hideto, one of the jurors for the Peace Memorial Park competition,³ Noguchi’s plan was rejected because of opposition to appointing a citizen of the country that dropped the atomic bomb as the designer of the memorial. We may also speculate, however, that objections to an American creating the memorial to commemorate the victims of the atomic bomb may have been raised by American authorities in Japan, who were still very influential at this point immediately following the Occupation, for they were committed to the belief that the use of the bomb was necessary.

In any case, as long as monuments or cenotaphs are built to represent the political order of the mortal world, the rejection of Noguchi’s plan was probably inevitable.

2.

Noguchi started working on his bold plan after receiving the commission from Tange. Unfortunately, there are only photographs that give us a glimpse of the entirety of his project as it was conceived for the proposal. Other than that, there remains only the dismantled model of the proposed monument, which was discovered in storage at the Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura.⁴ I completed a detailed reconstruction of Noguchi's original proposal and produced a large-scale model of it in 2013 by carefully studying all of the remaining photographs and other evidence with the collaboration of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and the Musashino Art University Museum & Library.⁵

The most distinctive feature of Noguchi's project is its underground space. The monument that can be seen above ground is merely the upper part of an arch that rises from below the surface. Noguchi described his unrealized proposal for Hiroshima as follows:

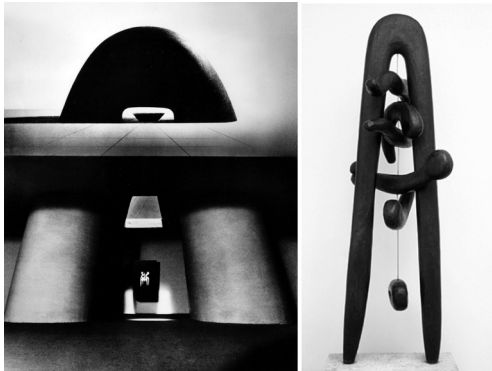
The requirements specified that the core, or repository of names, should be underground. A cave beneath the earth (to which we all return). It was to be the place of solace to the bereaved—suggestive still further of the womb of generations still unborn who would in time replace the dead. Above ground was to be the symbol for all to see and remember.

A challenging subject. I thought of sculpture (not so much as an object but rather) as a concentration of energies. My symbolism derived from the prehistoric roofs of "Haniwa" like the protective abode of infancy, or even equating this with birth and death, the arch of peace with the dome of destruction.⁶

In Noguchi's proposal, a black granite sculpture with an impressive form can be seen crouching down like an animal above ground, on the podium and isolated at a distance from the altar (fig. 1.1). Noguchi, however, claimed that this sculptural form was not necessarily important "as an object." The two legs planted in the ground plunge through the podium down into a subterranean space (fig. 1.2). The stairs leading down from the podium would allow one to descend to a nearly empty cube-shaped underground cave, where two giant legs stood, far larger in girth than their extensions above ground. A coffer with the names of the victims was to have been installed between these columns.

In the passage quoted above, Noguchi describes this underground chamber for the dead as a "womb of generations still unborn," and further as a "protective abode of infancy. . . equating this with birth and death." Thus, the space of the dead (represented by the repository of the names of the victims) also serves as a shelter that protects children and an incubator for unborn generations. What is the significance of this leap from death to birth?

This question may be addressed by referring to Noguchi's sculpture *Cronos* (1947), a striking prototype for the ambivalent space that he conceived for his *Memorial*



1.1
 Left: Isamu Noguchi, photocollage of model for *Memorial to the Dead of Hiroshima*, 1952. Unrealized. Right: Isamu Noguchi, *Cronos*, 1947 (cast 1986), bronze.

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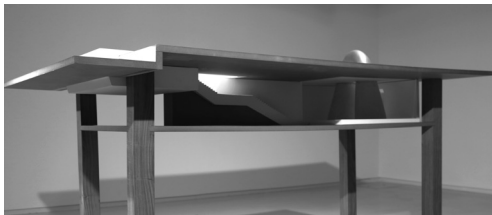
to the Dead (fig. 1.3) The upper portion of *Cronos*, which takes the form of an upside-down U-shaped arch, is almost isomorphic to the above ground portion of the Hiroshima monument. Various sculptural fragments hang like bones in between the two extended legs of *Cronos*, and, as we shall see, they correspond to the Hiroshima victims commemorated in the subterranean chamber of Noguchi's *Memorial*. The hanging objects in *Cronos* are readily identified by reference to the title, for Cronos is the god of Greek mythology (Saturn in Roman mythology): they are the bodies of Cronos's children dismembered and eaten by their own father.

In a photograph that documents the lost model of Noguchi's Hiroshima monument, a stone sarcophagus and a relief containing the names of the victims mounted above appear centered within the underground chamber. These fragments correspond in their placement and, as we shall see, significance to the five figures suspended in the sculpture *Cronos*.

As is well known from Goya's gruesome painting of this subject, Cronos is the god of agriculture who, fearing the prediction that he would be killed by his own children, devoured them one by one as they were born. It is a grotesque story, but when Cronos himself was a child, his father Uranus had confined all his children in Tartarus (an underground womb, or the netherworld), and his grieving mother Gaia let Cronos escape with an ax, only to return later to cut off his father's penis as his parents tried to have sex. Cronos feared that the same fate awaited him, and started eating his own children in desperation.



1.2
 Reconstruction of Isamu Noguchi's 1952 *Memorial to the Dead of Hiroshima* by Katō Ken, 2013. General view.



1.3
 Reconstruction of Isamu Noguchi's 1952 *Memorial to the Dead of Hiroshima* by Katō Ken, 2013. Section view.

Cronos's wife, Rhea, was thus burdened by the same grief as Gaia, so she disguised a big rock as Zeus, one of their children, and tricked Cronos into devouring it instead. Thanks to this stratagem, Zeus survived and later returned to release his five brothers, who had been confined in the belly of their father. The five forms hanging in Noguchi's *Cronos* can therefore be read as representing the five devoured children, while the lowest of these forms, an ovoid hanging at the bottom, must be the rock that was substituted for Zeus. In a highly suggestive gesture, Noguchi inscribed his own name on this ovoid rock.

Noguchi's father Yone Noguchi died in 1947, the same year that *Cronos* was made. It has frequently been pointed out that Noguchi projected his complicated feelings for his father, who had abandoned him and his mother Leonie, onto his sculpture of Cronos. Isamu, who first revisited Japan after the war in 1950, inherited his Japanese identity from his father, but also identified with his mother, who belonged to the country that had won the war against the Japanese and was now occupying Japanese territory.

The hanging figures we see in *Cronos* is a motif that had recurred in Noguchi's work since his 1934 *Death (Lynched Figure)*, and most of his work with this theme dealt with the subject of death.⁷ It has been speculated that the grisly *Death (Lynched Figure)* may reflect Noguchi's sense of dejection at the rejection of his public sculpture *Play Mountain* (1933), a radical concept of sculpting the earth that he had confidently proposed to the American government (Works Project Administration) earlier that same year. By addressing the social problem of lynching in this work, which was his only attempt to deal with this fraught issue, Noguchi denounced the cruel consequences of the rigidly enforced narrow values of the American public sphere in the 1930s. Criticism, at this time, of Noguchi as "a semioriental sculptor who proposes to build in the United States"⁸ would haunt the artist's efforts in public projects throughout his subsequent career.

Returning to Noguchi's Hiroshima Memorial proposal, not only does the inverted U-shape arch repeat the structure of *Cronos*, but a series of small mother goddess figurines that he fashioned from similar inverted U-shaped coils of clay while working on the Hiroshima plan prompt an anthropomorphic reading of both *Cronos* and the arch of the Hiroshima Memorial. The fragments of bodies suspended within the arch of *Cronos*, that is, within Cronos's body, would seem to have no counterpart in Noguchi's design for the Hiroshima memorial. Nevertheless, since the subterranean chamber in Noguchi's plan was to be the site of a coffer intended as the repository of the names of the Hiroshima victims, it may be seen to resemble Cronos, whose body was similarly the repository of the victims he consumed. Moreover, mounted above this coffer, Noguchi had planned a relief—perhaps to be placed on the wall of the subterranean chamber—featuring a composition resembling disaggregated parts of a body, the identity of which I shall have more to say below.

3.

→ What is important here, however, is the connection between two generative modes — sculpting the earth and suspended sculptural forms. Noguchi, who worked as an assistant to Constantin Brancusi in Paris for six months in 1927, is often associated with the surrealists and was particularly influenced by Alberto Giacometti, a leading proponent of surrealist sculpture. Hanging forms and forms emerging from the earth were both sculptural concepts that Giacometti explored in the 1930s. Surrealism attempted to rise above the assumed reality of the ground itself and leave behind the constraint of reality that detains, situates, and makes comprehensible all things, including human beings, thereby accomplishing a transposition to a different phase. Noguchi's sculpture also aimed for this sort of release and shift from objectivity that was regulated and confined by the locus of reality and also attempted to achieve a sublimation of the figure.

Noguchi's *This Tortured Earth* (1943) and *Sculpture to Be Seen from Mars* (1947) both deal with the horizontal ground plane of the earth and originate from the experience of World War Two. The former addresses the destruction of the ground; it is said that Noguchi dreamt of sculpting this work using war machines—that is, by bombardment. The latter is a sculpture that can only be seen at a vantage remote from the earth. *This Tortured Earth* evokes human torture, a condition of confinement producing inescapable pain, while *Sculpture to Be Seen from Mars* portrays a smile that only becomes visible from a vast distance. Suffering and salvation—what separates, as well as unites, these two places?

The plan for the *Memorial to the Dead of Hiroshima* is positioned in the intersection and synthesis of two series of concepts in Noguchi's oeuvre: hanging figures as in *Cronos*, and sculpting the earth itself as in *This Tortured Earth* and *Sculpture to Be Seen from Mars*. As is clear from the model of Noguchi's Hiroshima proposal (to the extent my colleagues and I have managed to reconstruct it), the monument was designed to look like a human face when seen from above. More precisely, from an aerial vantage Noguchi's *Memorial* would have looked like a human skull.

4.

would not The details of Noguchi's creative process for developing his Hiroshima plan have not survived, but the architect Ōtani Yukio, who worked in Tange's office where Noguchi built the model of the memorial, recalls that when Noguchi modeled his preliminary form in clay, "It looked like he was pulling out the intestines from the chest of a dead person."⁹ He adds, "I thought this plan **could** not gain sympathy from the Japanese, since the artist . . . was directly expressing the agony that the bombed citizens and the dead victims had to live through." In addition, Ōtani also recalls, "By supporting Tange's plan (which was hastily adopted after the rejection of Noguchi's), I thought we could express our feelings of shame for not having been able to lend a hand to ease the pain of the victims."

Tange's aim in his plan for the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park was to bring a vast number of citizens to the plaza and give them a strong feeling of belonging to one space while assembled there. This was accomplished by orienting the plaza on a central axis. Later in the design process this axis was realigned to the Atomic Bomb Dome and Hiroshima Castle, but Tange's initial plan called for an axis leading all the way to Miyajima, the Shinto shrine on an island in the Inland Sea near Hiroshima. This axial alignment for Hiroshima closely followed Tange's own earlier unbuilt proposal for the *Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere Memorial Hall* (1942), which had won a major architecture competition during the war. This wartime work sought to synthesize national lands using a similar axis line from Mount Fuji. Tange's thinking in his postwar Hiroshima project, much like his wartime Mt. Fuji plan, was based on the same problematic as the tomb of the unknown soldier articulated by Benedict Anderson—the conceptual representation of an entire nation state through architectural design.

The idea of creating an underground space for a commemorative chamber may have already been included in an earlier Tange plan before Noguchi took on the project, albeit in a smaller scale. Nevertheless, Noguchi's plan is a bold departure from Tange's concept. Tange aimed to represent and synthesize the above-ground order, uniting the nation and the will of all of its regulated citizens. This synthesis was to have been created by the axial line that would unify gaze and action. In contrast, Noguchi's plan presents another space that erupts vertically into the surface order of representation established by Tange's horizontal axis.¹⁰

The incommensurability of this vertical rise from the underground space of the dead with the surface order of representation evokes such precedents as Giacometti's horizontal relief sculpture *No More Play* (1933). In orthodox thought, sculptural form must be properly installed in the above-ground world, for example, on top of a pedestal. Surrealism cast into doubt the very site and context that provides meaning to form, and Giacometti's work represents this outlook clearly. He focused on the emergent potential of place prior to becoming place, and floating motile forms that cannot be situated in any place. In *No More Play*, form is closed within a tomb, taken out only when a game is played. What Giacometti created is neither phenomena nor game; his subterranean space is conceived of as a latency that makes the game possible, but that has not yet manifested. The subterranean space of the Hiroshima Memorial, which Noguchi said held greater significance than the structure above ground, is likewise a space pregnant with latent potentiality.

5.

The myth of Cronos has often been read as a story of resurrection. According to a similar East Asian myth, Hainuwele gives villagers food based on what she has excreted from her body, but is later hated for this and killed. When her dismembered body is scattered over the earth, however, potatoes, which constitute the staple diet, start growing all over the

place. Japanese variations of this narrative include the myth of Ōgetsu-hime, recorded in the *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters), and the story of Ukemochi, the goddess of cereals, in the *Nihon shoki* (The Chronicles of Japan). Ukemochi, much like Hainuwele, gives her own excrement as food to the people, causing her to be despised and killed. And the scattering of the pieces of her body produces a fertile field from which rich crops grow. This story of sacrifice became a covert but widespread subject aptly reflecting the strained psychology of Japanese people during World War Two. For example, a 1944 painting by the noted Japanese Nihonga painter Yasuda Yukihiro depicts Ukemochi playing in the fields oblivious to her imminent death. Tracing the Japanese genealogy of Hainuwele-type figures further back in time takes us to the Jōmon Period (11,000 BCE – 500 BCE). The goddess-like clay figurines (*dogū*), which are famous among Jōmon artifacts, are usually found broken and scattered in pieces. This was because they were endowed with a function similar to that of Hainuwele: a plea for resurrection.¹¹

After World War Two, a heated argument known as the “dispute over tradition” (*dentō ronsō*) developed around the issue of whether the prototype of Japanese culture existed in the Jōmon period or originated in the period of Japanese prehistory that followed, the Yayoi period (500 BCE – 250 CE). Jōmon culture, which was regarded as having been repressed by Yayoi culture, was viewed by many as the origin of the homogeneous culture that covers Japan today. Noguchi’s works have often been regarded as corresponding to the more sophisticated cultures of the Yayoi and Kofun (250 – 710 CE) periods, the latter famous for its earthenware tomb figurines known as *haniwa*. The repression and sacrifice of the heterogeneous Jōmon culture has been continuously researched since before World War Two, and it can be assumed that Noguchi, who had a strong interest in ancient myth, was aware of the layered mythological constructs of prehistoric Japan. Even the magical nature of the *haniwa* figurines that interested Noguchi, actually followed the function of the Jōmon figurines—to be buried as a sacrifice for resurrection. Moreover, given Noguchi’s intense interest in myth as a process of creating life, worlds (and nations), as well as the pressures and contradictions emerging from this process, he surely would have been deeply interested in Jōmon culture too.

In any case, much like the myth of Hainuwele, the myth of Cronos articulates a materialistic connection between destruction and resurrection. The devoured children are absorbed and assimilated into the body of their father Cronos, to shelter themselves in the safest refuge until their resurrection (this is why Cronos was the god of agriculture). Matter, which decomposes and loses its form, permeates through the body of the mother earth Gaia, until it is reborn in a different form. That which is rebuilt and reborn is not only physical shape, but also the very place of resurrection, the earth itself. This materialistic association, or the metabolism of vital activities, easily sublates the opposition between enemy and ally, since being eaten by one’s enemy ultimately means rebuilding the enemy’s body with one’s own flesh. This is why Noguchi’s underground space for Hiroshima was, to cite his words again, “like the protective abode of infancy . . . even equating this

with birth and death,” as well as “a cave beneath the earth (to which we all return). It was to be the place of solace to the bereaved—suggestive still further of the womb of generations still unborn who would in time replace the dead.”

In the subterranean chamber, any attribute that individualizes an object is dissolved. All things remain there in a potential state, as if eternally temporary. In this state, the question of which side or nation one belongs to no longer applies; it is a place that belongs nowhere. Only energy devoid of individuality (and allowing change and resurrection) is preserved in this space.

6.

A surviving photograph of Noguchi’s original model indicates a figure, presumably to be inscribed on a plaque mounted above the stone sarcophagus containing the names of the victims in the underground space. This figure resembles the dismountable figures that Noguchi had been using for stage props in his collaboration with the choreographer and dancer Martha Graham. The sculptures Noguchi made for Graham could be “decomposed” into parts and reassembled into different configurations, like body parts or bones. These forms, however, also resemble *kanji* (characters) or *kana* (Japanese syllabary), which convey different meanings according to how they are composed.

But the people who had seen Noguchi’s catalogue *NOGUCHI* (1953) would have easily recognized the figure he incorporated in his Hiroshima Memorial, because the catalogue’s back cover featured a more detailed rendition of the same figure, making it clear that this was the artist’s brushwork for the *kanji* character of his name, “Isamu.” In effect, this was the artist’s signature (fig. 1.4).¹² The design above the sarcophagus in the Hiroshima proposal was thus the character for “Isamu,” albeit written in a form of calligraphy called “variant character” (*itaiji*), which decomposes the component parts of the character (as if it were a body) and lays them next to each other; 勇 (Isamu) is thus decomposed into 甬 and 力. 冫田 can be seen as visually suggesting the vessel of the body, and the word for “courage” (勇氣), written with the character for Isamu, looks like something that jumps out from the interior of that body. In this way, Isamu’s name retraces the form of his sculpture *Cronos*.

Noguchi thus inscribed his own name above the sarcophagus that would have contained the names of the victims of the atomic bomb, dismembering the letters—as if Isamu himself were one of the



1.4
Left: Isamu Noguchi’s signature in variant characters as printed on the cover of his 1953 catalogue. Right: Detail, Isamu Noguchi, photocollage of plaster model for *Memorial to the Dead of Hiroshima*, 1952. Unrealized.

Fig. 1.1 left.

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victims.¹³ The dead do not pertain to any identity in the world above ground. The attributes of this world are dismembered into pieces, thereby enabling resurrection into the world.

7.

Noguchi's plan constituted a bold gesture; he proposed constructing an underground space at the epicenter of the atomic bomb blast, where rubble and probably bodies of the nuclear dead still remained. In fact, this part of the city was also known to have formerly been a graveyard. Even if Noguchi's plan for the Hiroshima monument had not been rejected, its construction would have probably provoked strong opposition. But as Noguchi himself was aware, the ultimate potential of his Hiroshima monument rested with the capacity of its underground space to dissolve all the differences and conflicts in the world above ground, including the opposition to his plan.

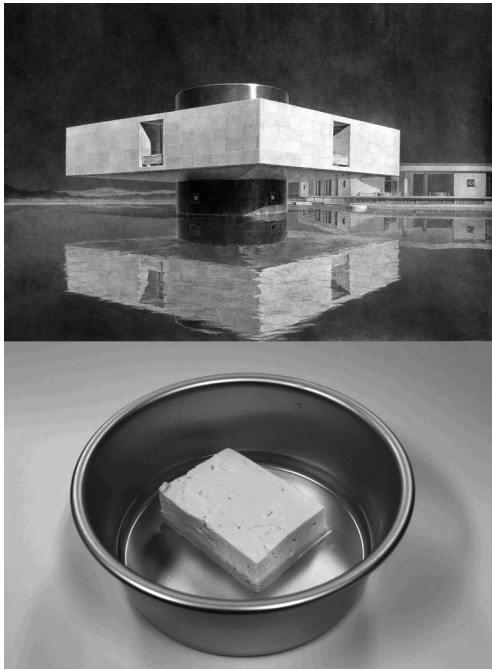
As the myth of Hainuwele implied, the materialistic linkage of life to death and death to life unites destruction with resurrection by the transmutation of energy. To cite Noguchi again: "I thought of sculpture not so much as an object, but rather as a concentration of energies." The grid inscribed on the podium in his proposal is bent as if pulled by magnetic forces emitted by the monument itself traversing above and below ground. Parallel lines in a non-Euclidean geometrical space are deformed and converge into a gravitational field.

The differences regulating the representation of the time span of nuclear energy are simply transient, trivial issues of fleeting politics. Like many artists of his time, Noguchi was surely aware of this fact. It is because of this that he opposed the material circulation of life against the production of nuclear energy. Individual identities are resurrected repeatedly precisely through being dissolved or killed. Thus, following the myth of energy circulation, Noguchi buried "Isamu," his own name, before everything else.

8.

In 1953, around the same time Noguchi's plan was rejected, the architect Shirai Sei'ichi published a plan for what he called the *Temple Atomic Catastrophes*, another architectural project that thematized nuclear catastrophe. Since this proposal was not for a commissioned project, there was no prospect for its realization. It stands, however, as a dramatic antithesis to Tange's Peace Memorial Park.

Like Noguchi's plan, the treatment of subterranean space was highly significant for Shirai's *Temple*. The line that rises from beneath the ground up through the temple elevated above a pool of water makes the building itself seem like an infrastructural device with a specific function. Indeed, this building resembles a nuclear power plant. Shirai's plan was not merely a monument about the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; it was his response to contemporaneous campaigns for the peaceful use of atomic energy. Support for atomic energy was gaining momentum in Japan, in part due to President Eisenhower's "Atoms for Peace" speech in December 1953,



1.5
 Above: Sen'ichi Shirai, *Temple Atomic Catastrophes*, 1955. Unrealized. Below: Image of “tofu in a bowl.” Photograph by the author.

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which argued that the scourge of nuclear destruction should be transformed into a great benefit for mankind in the form of nuclear energy. As attested by theoretical physicist Yukawa Hideki, who received the Nobel Prize soon after the war, discussions about developing atomic energy had been underway in Japan during the war. Due to his personal ties with individuals in the milieu of the Kyoto School of philosophers, including prominent scientists, Shirai was familiar with this Japanese nuclear initiative, and was also aware of the dangers of atomic energy. Since nuclear waste remains unstable for hundreds of thousands of years, atomic energy requires continual maintenance for this fantastic length of time. Without some way of managing this process for a length of time that greatly exceeds human history, a recurrence of catastrophe is inevitable. Shirai grasped these problems and thus predicted the dangers of nuclear power plants.

Shirai felt impelled to design the *Temple* due to Japanese public opinion that favored the peaceful use of nuclear energy less than ten years after the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs. In a famous essay written around the same time he was working on his design for the *Temple*, Shirai claimed that endless maintenance and continuity of action was necessary to preserve the seemingly geometrical form of a block of tofu (bean curd).¹⁴ The minute particles that constitute a piece of tofu never stabilize. They must be regulated by technology and unceasing acts. Shirai wrote: “All the good will of life that permeates throughout the universe cannot be grasped by the mind. Reason is indispensable, yet insufficient” (fig. 1.5).

Since the form of *Temple Atomic Catastrophes* recalls the cubic form of a piece of tofu, this essay has been understood as explaining the concept of the *Temple*. Tofu, however, having a form that can barely be sustained in a basin of water, rather reminds one of the infinite maintenance needs of a nuclear power plant on a daily basis. Shirai’s essay on tofu was thus probably a warning against the notion of peaceful uses of nuclear energy, for “reason is indispensable, yet insufficient.” Even scientific technology cannot be autonomous from the actualities of production process, the process of everyday actions.

This understanding follows the critique of technology by the Marxist philosopher (and philosopher of science) Tosaka Jun, who was a personal friend of Shirai. The peaceful use of nuclear energy takes as its premise the continuity of daily actions of maintenance over an extraordinarily long period of time (several tens of thousands of years!), during which the danger of nuclear substances persist. Both reason and good will are supported only by such continuous daily actions.

The plural form of Shirai's title, *Temple Atomic Catastrophes*, suggests that his concern was not limited to the effects of atomic bombs that had already been detonated. The term "temple" signals a realization that as long as people continue to use nuclear energy, the only hope and possibility for controlling this power lies in the disciplined maintenance humans must sustain everyday *ad infinitum*, and that such continuity of conduct indicates religious activity. Shirai's atomic temple building is designed to resemble the unstable neutrons given off in nuclear fission as well as the structure of a nuclear power plant. The only way to sustain equilibrium in the highly unstable process of nuclear energy production is for humans to commit eternally to a practice of management that resembles the daily life of asceticism and prayer in a temple.

Shirai's plan for the atomic temple published in 1953 provides a strong antithesis not only to the architectural thought of Tange, but also the young avant-garde architects who followed Tange and would lead Japanese architecture during the high growth period of the Japanese economy, the so-called Metabolist group. The term "metabolism," referring to materialistic linkage, appears in Frederick Engels's *Dialectics of Nature* (1872-82). Engels saw in materialistic linkage the possibility of sublating the opposition between subject and object, enemy and ally. His reasoning was based on the observation that the animal that seems to have "won" by eating the enemy hunted to death, actually ends up being constituted by the body of the enemy consumed. This is the same principle as the myth of Cronos or Hainuwele. While Engel's notion of metabolism was important for Marxist intellectuals in Kyoto such as Tosaka and Shirai, this philosophy was trivialized by the Metabolist architects, who did not aim for an exchange between the subject and object, but rather came up with a mechanism that endlessly replaced peripheral expendable buildings, so that the central core, the place of the central subject, could be perpetuated as if the building lived on a continuously replenishing diet.

Shirai criticized the Metabolist architects, pointing out, "A metabolism that does not exchange the subject itself, is not metabolism."¹⁵ An irreplaceable core, fundamental to the structure in Metabolist planning, is associated with the government, as well as infrastructures related to energy and transportation networks. The ultimate example of this core for the Metabolists was the nuclear power plant that they envisioned as the future source of energy. This was something that could not be so easily "metabolized." Once built, a nuclear power plant is used far beyond the thirty years of its presumed span of durability, because the methods of its decommission are uncertain and its operation demands an almost infinite engagement.

9.

The core of Shirai's plan, like Noguchi's, addresses the paradox of nuclear energy: the vast time span across which nuclear substances persist far exceeds the impetus of its construction — the *raison d'être* of the nation and the limits of human reason. In nuclear temporality, all nation states and all secular identities lose their meaning. What remains is solely the continuity of the exchange of energy (and exchange of life and death/subject and object) that goes on indefinitely.

Obviously, any form of expression, along with the order that establishes and positions it as representation, is utterly ephemeral compared to such a vast time frame. The significance of ritualistic or performative meanings inscribed in tombs or monuments would dissipate immediately. The premise for a performative speech act is the existence of an adequate group of people to receive it, and there would be no one left to adequately receive them. For the time span of nuclear energy, the differences regulating representation are simply transient, trivial issues of fleeting politics. Consideration of this temporality exposes the absurdity of all plans to convert the Fukushima nuclear power plant disaster into a memorial. The danger of nuclear energy persists much longer than any memorial. At most, the time span of a memorial might be 1000 years, although its significance collapses probably just after 100 years. Long after the memorial has disappeared, the nuclear substance that remains will continue to be dangerous and damaging to bodies, obviating any need to commemorate. Dangerous radioactive rays will continue to be released; matter will not be forgotten. Noguchi's *Memorial* and Shirai's *Temple* remained unbuilt, but were nonetheless conceived with this awareness. While these plans have not yet been realized, the philosophy embedded in them has become increasingly significant, for they harbor a prediction of Fukushima.

Notes

1.

Bert Winther-Tamaki has pointed out that the discussions around Isamu Noguchi's *Memorial to the Dead of Hiroshima* were ultimately staged upon the distinction pertaining to nationalism between "our side" and "the other's side." Winther-Tamaki, *Art in the Encounter of Nations: Japanese and American Artists in the Early Postwar Years* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 117-30.

2.

Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, Revised*

Edition (London: Verso, 2006), 9.

3.

Kishida Hideto, *En* (Veranda) (Tokyo: Sagami Shobō, 1958).

4.

Although Noguchi later reconstructed the over-ground part of the monument, the reconstruction ~~had a~~ distinctly ~~different~~ form from the original conception ~~as it~~ did away with the underground section.

5.

The reconstructed model was shown at the exhibition *ET IN ARCADIA EGO: Haka wa kataru ka* (Et in Arcadia Ego, The Hidden Place Called "Sculpture"), held in 2013

at the Musashino Art University Museum in 2013 in Tokyo.

6.

The English version of this text omits the phrase "not so much as an object but rather" in the Japanese version, included here in parentheses. Isamu Noguchi, *A Sculptor's World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 164 and *NOGUCHI* (Tokyo: Bijutsu Shuppansha, 1953.)

7.

The Monument to Heroes (1943), constructed during the war, is composed of the same body parts that would later be hung in *Cronos*, bones (of the dead).

8. Henry McBride, "Attractions in the Galleries," *The New York Sun* (2 February 1935), 33.

9. *Journal of Architecture and Building Science*, no. 8 (Architectural Institute of Japan, 2012).

10. The present Hiroshima Peace Memorial designed by Tange's office after Noguchi's plan was rejected, nonetheless follows the general groundplan first formulated in conjunction with Noguchi's proposal. The raised

altar maintains the same height and width as Noguchi's plan. The stairs descending to the underground space has been converted into a pond, in which Tange's monument floats like an island.

11. Yoshida Atsuhiko, *Hōjō to fushi no shinwa* (The Myth of Fertility and Immortality) (Tokyo: Seidosha, 1990).

12. I was informed of this signature by Kitazawa Tomoto and Ichizen Toshiya.

13. It is assumed that Noguchi inscribed his name upon the stone sarcophagus after his plan was rejected.

14. Shirai Sei'ichi, "Tōfu," *Ribingu dezain* (Living Design) (October 1956).

15. See this quote in "Roundtable Discussion," in *Gendai Nihon kenchikuka zenshū* (Collected Works of Contemporary Japanese Architects) (Tokyo: San'ichi Shobō, 1970).
