









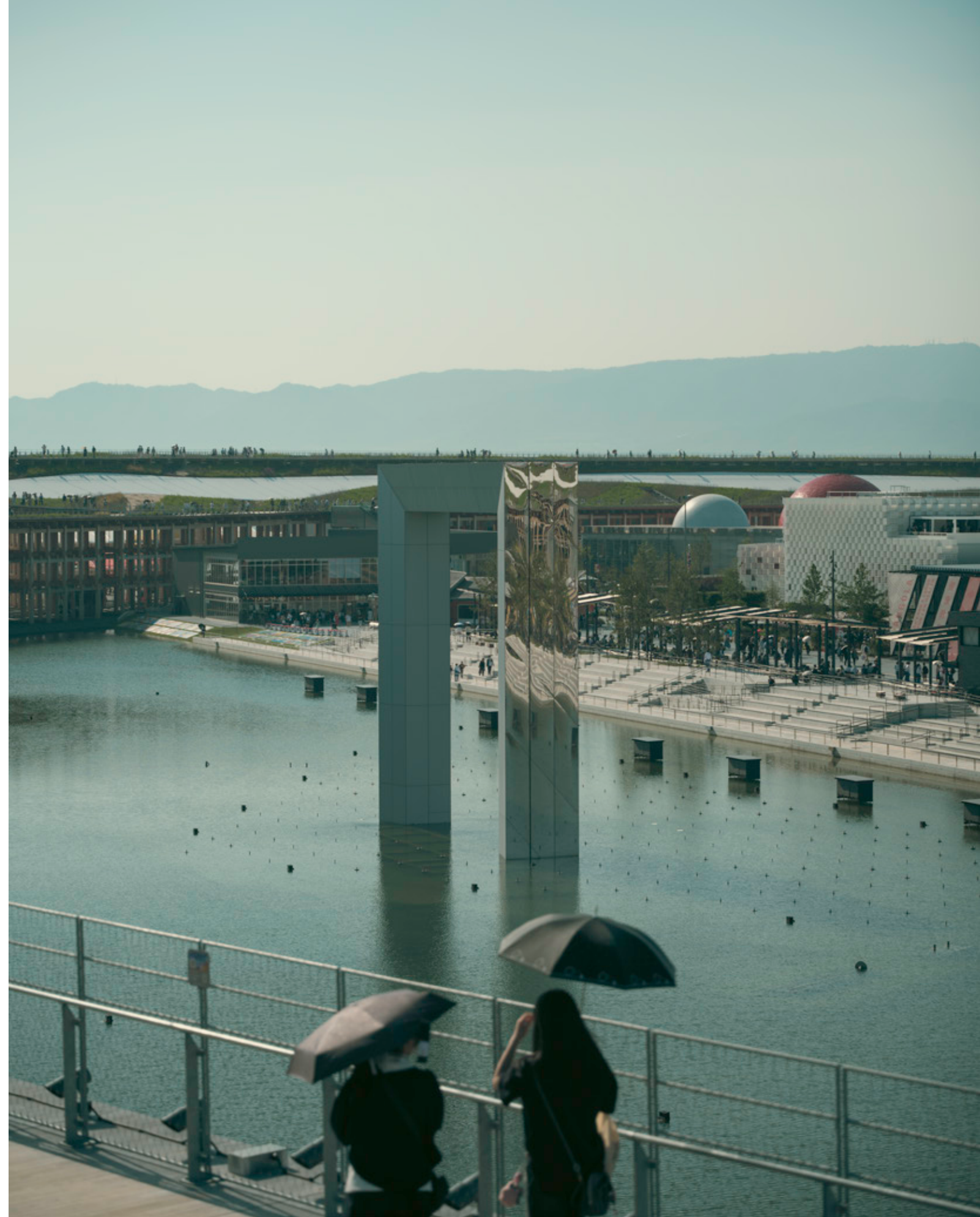














Visiting the Osaka World Expo

146 Notes from a Constructed World
Charles Weinberg
Shai Ben-Ami

238 A Conversation in Six Parts
Charles Weinberg
Shai Ben-Ami
Justin Agyin
Noam Levinger

245 About the Contributors

247 Acknowledgements

WEINBENAMI

Charles Weinberg & Shai Ben-Ami

MER. Books

Notes from a Constructed World*

by
Charles Weinberg
Shai Ben-Ami

What follows are fragments: observations, situations, and small scenes recorded while moving through the Osaka World Expo 2025.

Together they sketch the strange ecosystem of a world’s fair, a place where futures are rehearsed, identities are staged, and control is carefully performed.

These observations move freely across our days at the Expo. Some belong to first encounters, others to later moments, when certain patterns slowly begin to emerge.

* Note on voice
Throughout this publication, the word ‘we’ sometimes refers to the two of us, Shai and Charles, as observers, spatial designers, creative directors, and collaborators. At other moments, ‘we’ expands into something broader: a collective voice, a shared human condition. The line between the two is intentionally fluid, mirroring the blurred position between us as observers and us as participants, engaging with the environment.

出発前

It has already been a year since we began circling around and diving into the research theme of the “Illusion of Control”. The idea that we, as humans, believe we have control over our surroundings, our beliefs and identities, over the stories we tell ourselves about our past and the futures we imagine. Control over who we are becoming. Over outcomes. And over so many other things we’re probably forgetting right now.

This illusion is reinforced, paradoxically, by the sophistication of the systems we live within. As the world becomes more technologically advanced and interconnected, we tell ourselves, implicitly or explicitly, that we are in control. That we are the designers of our realities. That we are safe.

And yet, there is this persistent sense that we are not truly agents of our own fate. That so much of what happens around us is beyond our grasp. It is precisely this illusion of control that makes us feel okay. It comforts us, sedates us. It tells us that tomorrow is certain.

But lately, the world feels increasingly fragile, volatile, polarised. And so the illusion becomes more visible. Not the control itself, but the illusion of it. It becomes palpable.

When we look more closely, we see that countless systems and infrastructures are built to sustain this feeling, to stage it, nurture it, and package it as reality.

A recurring reference in our practice is the Tower of Babel. The myth of humans building upward towards the heavens,

towards immortality and glory, driven by the belief that they could shape their own destiny through unity and ambition. But this unity collapses. In the story of Babel, God scatters their languages, their ability to communicate, to collaborate. Hence the word *lebalbel* in Hebrew, which means “to confuse”. It is a strange tale when you begin to pull it apart.

A striking contemporary parallel appears in the upcoming World Expo in Osaka, the same city that hosted Expo '70 Osaka 55 years ago, remembered as a moment of optimism and technological belief. We have long been fascinated by world fairs and expos: synthetic microcosms where nations gather to perform their narratives, project aspirations, and imagine possible futures. A kind of ephemeral Tower of Babel.

Over the past few months, the Expo has kept returning to us. Not as a destination, but almost as a consequence of the questions we were already asking.

So in June, we're going there.

Not only to see it, but to inhabit it. To witness, document, feel, and absorb.

We expect spectacle, but also friction. A strange coexistence of global togetherness and competition. Countries standing side by side, while subtly, or overtly, trying to outdo one another. Who has the strongest message, the most cutting-edge technology, the most utopian vision?

For us, as lovers of simulacra, synthetic environments, and temporary architectures, it feels like entering a constructed world: part playground, part experiment. Beneath the optimism, we expect some kind of tension. A battle of representations.

And maybe this tension mirrors how we feel in the world right now.

We are interested in giving form to these feelings, this disorientation, this unease. Not only at the Expo, but across the wider landscape of our time. Media saturation. The rise of AI. Ongoing conflicts. The lingering shadow of the pandemic. The sense that we live in a reality that is increasingly mediated and difficult to grasp. It's a lot.

We don't really know what we will find there. Maybe that is precisely the point of going.

Maybe our work, our questions, our research can invite a pause. A moment to look again. To ask: What is actually happening around us? Where are we heading? What reassures us? What are we participating in without noticing?

What if control is only a story we tell ourselves to keep moving forward?

What if we are all living inside our own constructed narratives, never fully knowing how the person next to us experiences the same world?

We're becoming existential.

But that's fine.

This is a diary, after all.

Osaka City

OSAKA, 31 MAY 2025

大阪市

It's our first time in Osaka. Initial impressions: a vast, sprawling city, quieter than we expected, at least in the district where we first arrive. It's less dense, more breathable than Tokyo felt back in 2016, when we last visited Japan.

We're staying in Shinsekai, just a few metres from the metallic observation tower Tsutenkaku. This post-war reconstruction is based on an earlier tower that once stood here, itself inspired by the Eiffel Tower. Its soft glow at night lends the neighbourhood a cinematic quality. Although rebuilt in the 1950s, it carries the spirit of its predecessor, a local monument shaped by global ambition. Given that the Eiffel Tower was also built for the 1889 World Expo, it feels like a quiet full-circle moment to be sleeping in its shadow during Osaka's own Expo, despite the obvious differences in scale and context.

The neighbourhood feels as if it has been paused in time, but not frozen. Old signs and sleepy arcades line the streets, and the scent of fried food lingers in the alleys. It is a gentle kind of nostalgia, with just enough noise to remind us that it's still alive.

The World Expo is here somewhere, but it's not something we feel in the streets, not in the way we imagined a city would usually carry such a global event. There are signs, yes. Posters, mascots, the Expo logo. Myaku-Myaku, the red-and-blue amoeba-like creature, appears in metro stations, on vending machines, and on the occasional banner. Expo-themed navigation runs through the train system. But the Expo itself, its presence, its impact, does not ripple through the city in any





immediate way. It feels slightly detached, floating somewhere else. Like a broadcast no one is fully tuned into.

Still, there is a comfort in being back. The Japanese aesthetic pulls us in again: narrow streets without sidewalks, the attention to detail in storefronts, beautifully curated shops filled with eyewear, hats, books, clothes, perfume. Everything feels considered. Even the convenience stores feel familiar, evoking a Japan we remember from years ago, less globalised, less translated, more inward-facing.

At one point we reach Namba, and the quiet dissolves. The streets are suddenly packed, and we find ourselves surrounded by people playing Pokémon Go, moving in clusters, heads tilted toward their phone screens. It feels like walking through a game we are not part of.

Earlier in the day, we dropped off our bags at a nearby luggage storage spot. The man working there kept giggling every time we returned, because, of course, we kept forgetting things and coming back again. There was something reassuring about that lightness.

We have just checked into our aparthotel. The room is spacious and spotless. We're both completely exhausted, jetlagged, underslept, but there is a gentle buzz of anticipation. The real visit begins tomorrow. We still don't know exactly where the Expo starts.

But we will find it.



