

nowhere

*In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,
In the bleak midwinter, long ago.*

- Christine Rosetti, 1872

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We are a young collective of artists, curators and writers, based *nowhere* but being here and how, at least temporarily. In this inaugural issue, we take time to introduce ourselves – as individuals and as a collective – through a series of visual and textual experiments.

The title of this issue derives from a poem, appropriated into a carol and recently revived by popular culture. While it is our way to recognise the tradition of seasonal publishing, it also indirectly connects with the matter at hand here, that is the notion of absence.

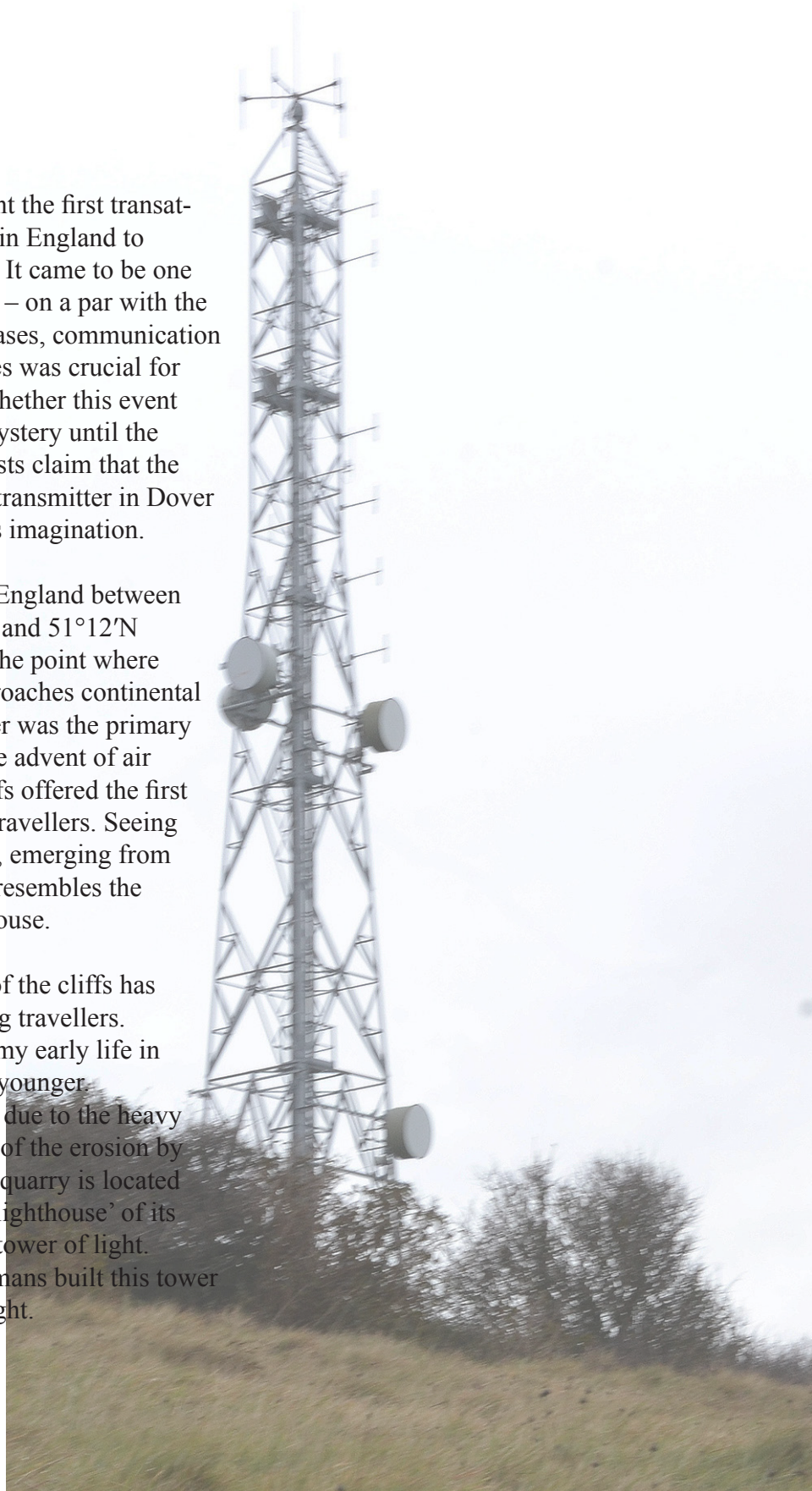
The creative and discursive potential of absence came to our attention a few months ago, while developing an exhibition project that still lingers in our minds, but remains – for the time being – *glaringly absent*. Within the framework of this exhibition, we considered absence as a process of becoming or ceasing to be – the positive and/or negative position contained in the semantic gap between anticipation and loss.

Soon it occurred to us that the notion of absence seems particularly fitted to become our first theme, due to the immaterial and transient character of our practice.

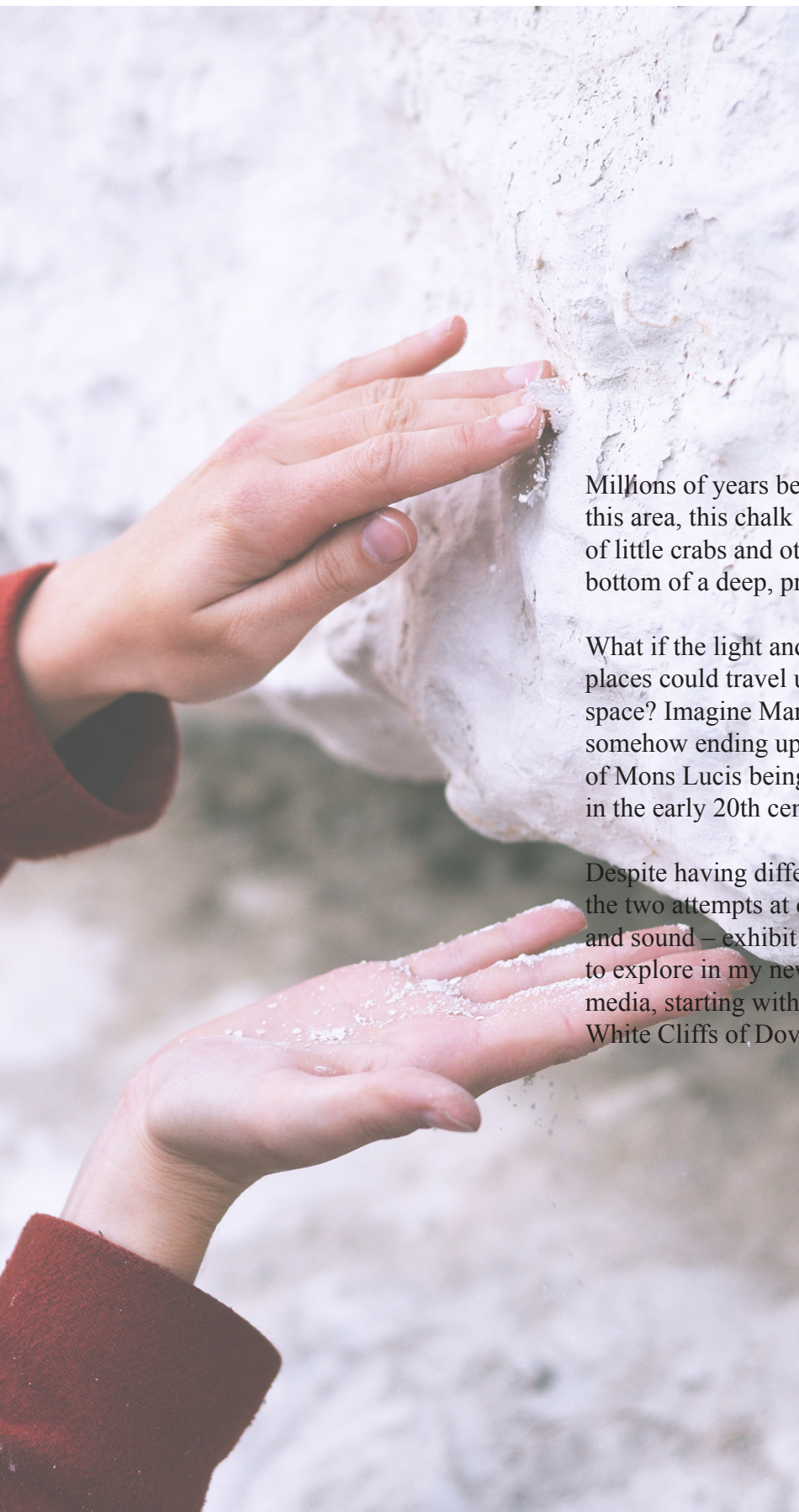
In 1901, Guglielmo Marconi sent the first transatlantic radio waves from Dover in England to Wimereux on the French coast. It came to be one of the great wonders of science – on a par with the landing on the moon. In both cases, communication through underdeveloped devices was crucial for the success of the operation. Whether this event actually happened remains a mystery until the present day, since many scientists claim that the three clicks heard on the radio transmitter in Dover might have just been Marconi's imagination.

Located along the coastline of England between approximately $51^{\circ}06'N$ $1^{\circ}14'E$ and $51^{\circ}12'N$ $1^{\circ}24'E$, the White Cliffs mark the point where Great Britain most closely approaches continental Europe. Since crossing at Dover was the primary route to the continent before the advent of air travel, the white line of the cliffs offered the first and the last sight of Britain to travellers. Seeing the white cliffs from a distance, emerging from the darkness of the North Sea, resembles the feeling of approaching a lighthouse.

For centuries, the white chalk of the cliffs has symbolised 'home' for returning travellers. The chalk I used to see during my early life in the area of Maastricht is much younger. Artificially exposed to sunlight due to the heavy mining industry, it shows none of the erosion by sea and wind. Even though the quarry is located nowhere near the sea, it has a 'lighthouse' of its own, named Mons Lucis – the tower of light. According to the myth, the Romans built this tower to send light signals into the night.







Millions of years before the Romans set foot in this area, this chalk was created from the remnants of little crabs and other sea animals, sunken to the bottom of a deep, prehistoric ocean.

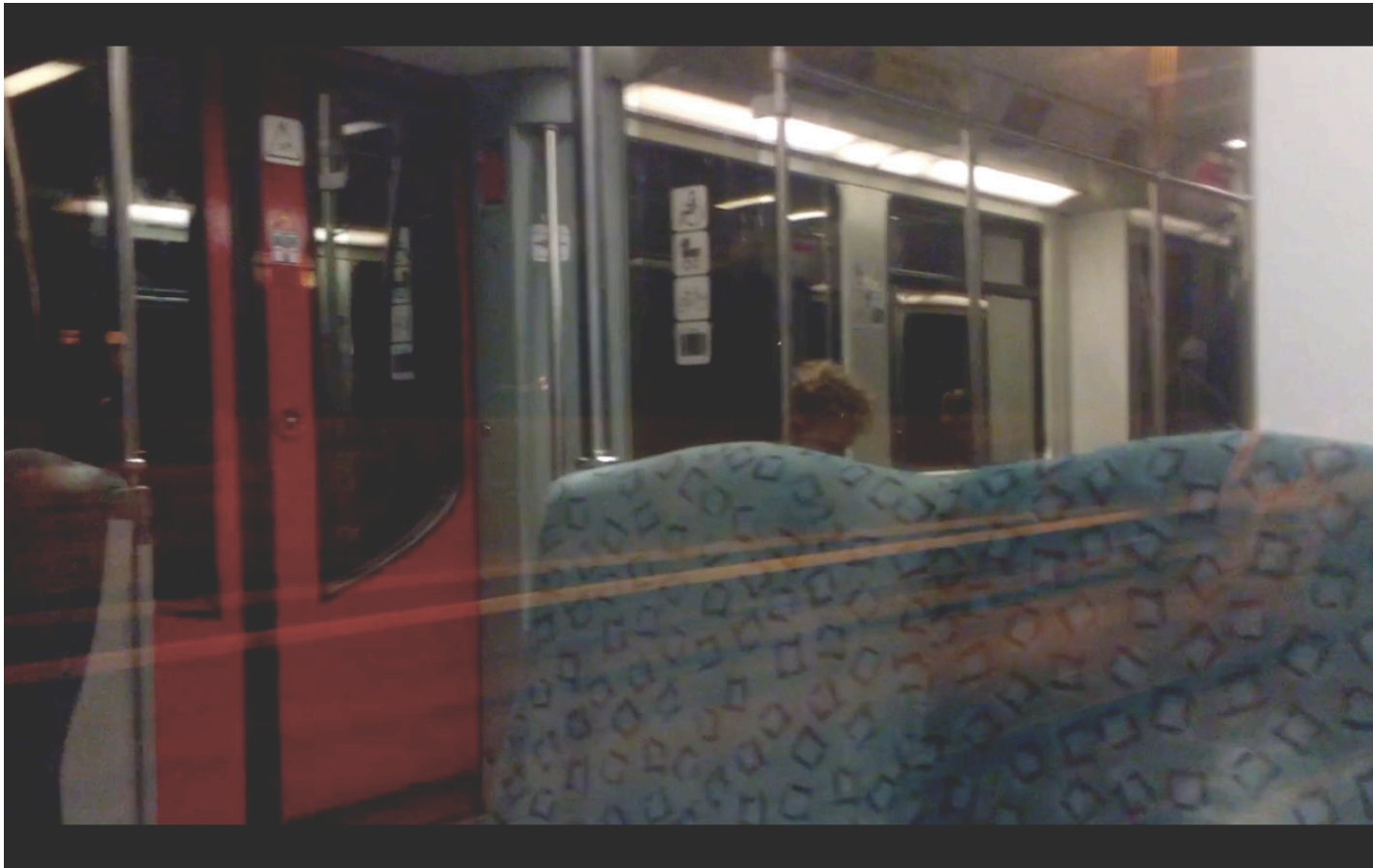
What if the light and sound sent from these two places could travel unlimited through time and space? Imagine Marconi's radio transmission somehow ending up in ancient Rome, or the light of Mons Lucis being seen from the coast of Dover in the early 20th century.

Despite having different meanings and histories, the two attempts at communication – through light and sound – exhibit striking similarities that I want to explore in my new work, through different media, starting with the chalk collected from the White Cliffs of Dover.



One stop after the main station, the S-Bahn arrives—emptied of people. I enter. The air stands still in the wagons, warm and humid like a Beuysian Fettabguss. It is the imprint of commuters on their way home after a long day of work, hanging lethargically in the air and rendering it tangible. Despite the emptiness, I have to force my way in. Carrying the crisp and earthy scent of the nearby park, I step into the remnants of the odours of Berlin's commuters. With one foot in the doorway, it is the warmth that surrounds me first. Yet, this is not the kind of warmth that wraps you in a protective manner. Instead, it penetrates the body, manoeuvres its way through the nostrils and all the unprotected openings of the face, to finally settle in your cheeks. It is exhausted air, consumed by former travellers, carrying a dense residue.





My body starts to revolt; it doesn't want to inhale the air all the way down into the lungs. The odour thus stays in the mouth and on the tongue. I notice how it starts to settle and mix with my spit, and slowly but steadily dries out my mouth. The disgust makes my eyes watery, as I start to actually taste the air. Emanated from the hands, mouths and hair of the commuters, subtle nuances of smoke from different cigarette and cigar brands become distinguishable. I also discern something sweet, though not fruity nor sugary, but rather old and depleted. Occasionally a breeze of shampoo, soap, aftershave or perfume crosses my nose, without me being able to point out anything specific – just like the residues on a painter's palette after the canvas is done. When mixed together, the paint becomes a colourless, drab and dreary mash. While the greasy air surrounds me, I lose the memory of the earthy winter breeze. As it permeates me, my odours mix with the air's, until there is no distinction anymore between mine and them. When I get off the train I've added my own scent, and while I breathe fresh air again, the Fettabguss awaits the next traveller to absorb.

what if I told you I was searching for love



In deep dark forests
and gruesome tales,
the absence of love
is one hard to prevail.

We long for and miss that
which is not there.
Searching for something
out of pure despair.

Surrounded by fears and
creatures of night.
This forgotten love,
will be hard to find.

But what is it we want
in this search at all,
obsessed with a feeling
that is bound to enthrall.

We want to escape
these fears we abide
and instead be held
by a warmth from inside.

So we wander around,
with heads tilted low,
hoping that soon this love
will come to show.



But a sadness does usually
not last as long,
as a longing for that which
has come and gone.

We continue to search
in the depths of the night
and hinder the fears
that surround us with fright.

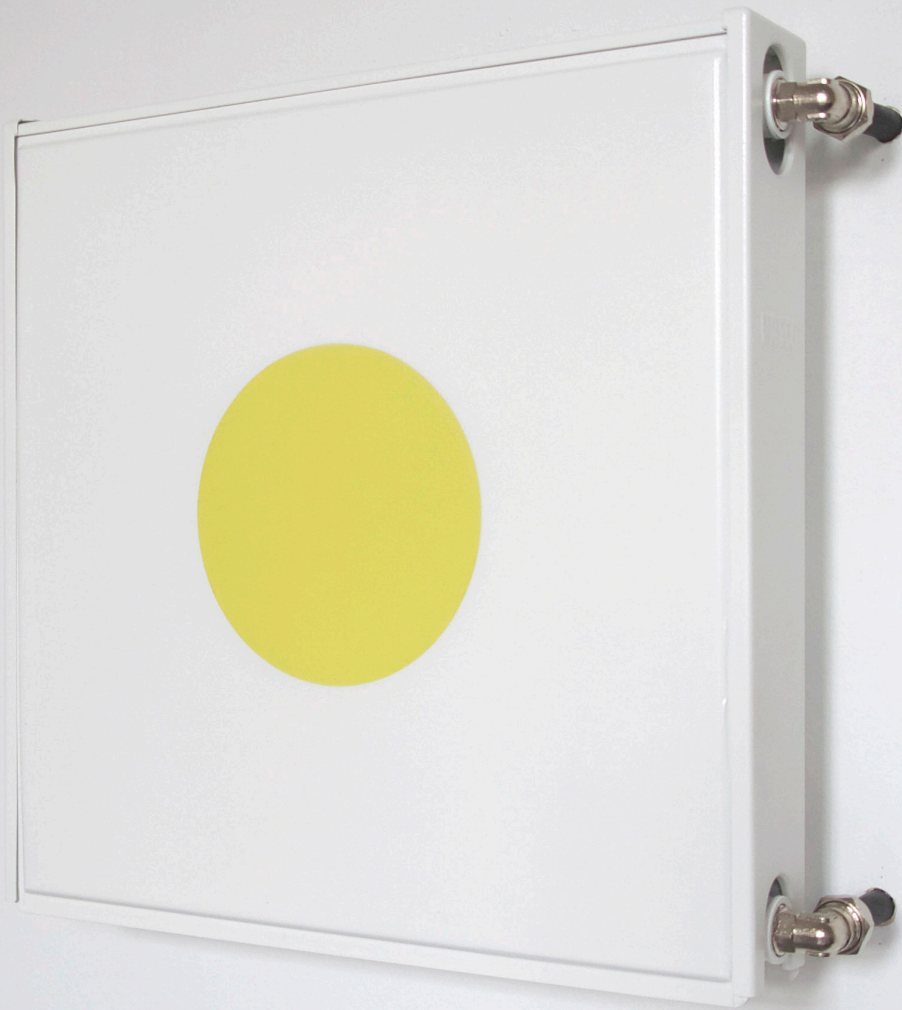
At the end we have reached
almost nothing at all
into sadness and fear
we begin to fall.

So the cycle repeats
with this absence of love
we are left once again
to only dream of.





would the sun by any other name shine as bright?



*With an inked brush he marked everything
with its name: table, chair, clock, door, wall,
bed, pan... he realized that the day might
come when things would be recognized
by their inscriptions but that no one
would remember their use.*

Within an exhibition
 space, any square colour-field, placed on
 eye level is bound to be interpreted as an abstract
 painting; in this specific case – an example of geometric
 abstraction.

Only by coming closer and engaging not merely our visual but also
 tactile sense, do we realise that the image *is* what it *represents* – a source
 of warmth.

On the level of superficial structure, the work is very simple – it pertains to
 the absence of the sun during long winter days; on the level of deep structure – it
 remains simple, showing how missing meanings are constructed in the process of
 visual communication.

As such, the work plays with the tension between representation (the signifier) and a
 certain extra-linguistic reality (the signified) and encourages us to consider the benefits
 of different types of communication – visual, textual and haptic.

Is the yellow circle, an *icon*, a more efficient communication device than the word
 ‘sun’, of which relation to the signified remains purely symbolic?

This arbitrary relationship between words and their meanings has been
 beautifully portrayed by Gabriel Garcia Marquez in *One Hundred Years of
 Solitude*. The novel describes a condition close to semantic dementia,
 and implies that the dissolution of meaning would eventually
 lead to the loss of function of objects.

Would the Sun by any other name
 shine as bright?

sometimes, the condition of missing is more important than the missing thing itself

The notions of ‘disappearance’ and ‘remembrance’ are fascinating because of the incompleteness inherent in their definitions, which never fails to arouse our curiosity.

My country was not the first one to disappear from the map, but it was one of the few to recover in different time and space. Disappearance is linked closely to the two opposing mechanisms of forgetting – active and passive; wherein the first requires an intentional act of erasure and the latter can be a non-deliberate process of dispersal (cf. Aleida Assmann, *Canon and Archive*).

This is why, disappearance and remembrance can be considered personally and, at the same time, politically charged conditions.

I adore how a laconic anecdote evoked in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* reflects this duality of memory. Kundera makes use of a telling synecdoche to draw the attention to what is not there (‘nothing remains of Clementis but the fur hat on Gottwald’s head’).

What is the difference between the states of disappearance and of non-emergence?

Strikingly, these two ends seem to often meet. When things missing for a long time re-emerge, they trigger excitement tantamount to the thrill of a new revelation. This thrill is what urges us to research further, dig deeper, and try to uncover a full image. In case of matters as fragile as past, the strive to fully unravel, or rather tame them, may lead to more or less fortunate distortions. When on the turn of the

20th century, Arthur Evans publicised his findings on Minoan culture, it had been widely disputed whether they should be considered an archaeological discovery, or rather – an artistic invention.

Once the images of astoundingly familiar architecture of Knossos and vivid frescoes entered the circulation, they became yet another misattributed, decontextualised and strongly fictionalised source of inspiration for modern artists. The case of Knossos is an example of history so distant in time that it became exoticised. The controversial reconstruction of this half-mythical city represents a misalliance between past and present, authenticity and imagination. This is not a kind of relationship we witness often nowadays.

In the last century, western policies of heritage conservation have leaned towards hindering further damage, or – phrased more poetically – salvaging the pieces. A brilliant example of a renovation not shying away from foregrounding the damage has been David Chipperfield’s realisation of the Neues Museum in Berlin. Never before had the conservation practice come so close to the subtle but telling art of *kintsugi*. This visual essay was driven by an aspiration to document a research process. This attempt, however, has been bound to fail, since the process is too volatile to be fully preserved, let alone transmitted. What it has resulted in, is a highly subjective selection of fragments of texts, images and/of works which relate to the notions of disappearance and remembrance.

There is no hierarchy, nor order within the essay; text is not a label and no image is intended to function as illustration. I hope, therefore, that the essay will become a resource for unbounded meaning-making and that the existing gaps will be, in Ingarden’s spirit, completed by individual ‘concretisations’.



sometimes the absence
speaks louder
than the presence

In February 1948, the Communist leader Klement Gottwald stepped out on the balcony of a Baroque palace in Prague to harangue hundreds of thousands of citizens massed in Old Town Square. That was the great turning point in the history of Bohemia. A fateful moment of the kind that occurs only once or twice a millennium. Gottwald was flanked by his comrades, with Clementis standing close by him. It was snowing and cold, and Gottwald was bareheaded. Bursting with solicitude, Clementis took off his fur hat and set it on Gottwald's head. The propaganda section made hundreds of thousands of copies of the photograph taken on the balcony where Gottwald, in a fur hat and surrounded by his comrades, spoke to the people. On that balcony the history of Communist Bohemia began. Every child knew that photograph, from seeing it on posters and in schoolbooks and museums. Four years later, Clementis was charged with treason and hanged. The propaganda section immediately made him vanish from history and, of course, from all photographs.

Ever since, Gottwald has been alone on that balcony. Where Clementis stood, there is only the bare palace wall. Nothing remains of Clementis but the fur hat on Gottwald's head.

other times it is silent
but persistent



Concrete Knossos may be the most eccentric archaeological reconstruction ever to achieve scholarly acceptance. Evans's romanticism was made possible by his family's industrial fortune. He bought the land and paid for the excavation out of the proceeds of his father's paper mill, and he supervised the dig in a fine aristocratic fashion, floating down to the site in the evening to bestow mythological titles on the rooms and objects that had emerged that day.



His methods were distinguished by a delirious interpretative incontinence that seemed to owe more to spiritualism than to science, and his self-fashioning—as an archaeological prophet and magician—was correspondingly grandiose. Evans embodied all the contradictions of modernism. He used industrial methods and materials to reinvent the myths of antiquity; he was a racist who argued for the African origins of Western civilization, an ageing Boy Scout who championed the theory of matriarchy (...) But despite, or perhaps because of, their paradoxes and delinquencies, Evans's Minoans left their footprints all over the wilder shores of modernist thought.

as the future



A PARIS

chez

GUILLAUME DELISLE

Premier Geographe du Roy

de l'Academie Royale des Sciences

Sur le Quay de l'Horloge

Avec Privilege.

1744


does a place without a name
cease to exist?



a negative space is not
an empty space



things can be defined by



The aesthetic that embraces insufficiency in terms of physical attributes, that is the aesthetic that characterizes mended ceramics, exerts an appeal to the emotions that is more powerful than formal visual qualities (...) the vicissitudes of existence over time, to which all humans are susceptible, could not be clearer than in the breaks, the knocks, and the shattering to which ceramic ware too is subject.

A Sakai tea man chanced to find a Chinese tea jar of magnificent shape and glaze. He marveled over the beauty of his find as well as his own good taste, and decided to invite Sen no Rikyu for the debut of his chaire, eagerly anticipating what words of praise would fall from Rikyu's lips. At last the day came, and the host began to prepare thick tea for Rikyu and his fellow guests. To the host's amazement, Rikyu appeared not to notice the jar in the slightest, nor had he any words of praise. After the gathering the bitterly disappointed host threw the chaire against an iron trivet. A few remaining guests salvaged the pieces and mended the chaire with lacquer.

These friends then invited Rikyu to a gathering where the mended jar was used. As soon as it emerged from the cloth Rikyu exclaimed, "Now, the piece is magnificent."

(...)

When the dwindling of autumn's abundance, the inkling of winter's austerity are strongly felt, persons whose hearts incline to the Way of Tea gather in a small hut to engage in this special sensitivity. The scroll sets the tone, often a scrap of writing by a particularly beloved figure who is no longer in the world. Words quickly brushed in a moment with no thought of their preservation have been mounted as a scroll and placed in the tokonoma. Their very ordinariness is what poignantly conjures the memory of that person. Then too, the year's supply of tea that had been brought out for the first time the previous November is running low. While only enough thick tea for three guests may be left, five are invited. And with deep gratitude and pleasure, they make sure the amount of tea offered in the single bowl is sufficient for each one to savor what remains of that year's tea. This is the strongest expression of nagori – the intense beauty of a communal impulse to cherish and to share that which remains. Mended ceramics teach us this lesson and this beauty.



- p. 16 **Chaim van Luit**, *Entartet*, 2015; 16 paintings, various dimensions, lime pigments on raw linen. Courtesy of the artist.
- Chagall, Marc. Die Prise (Rabbiner), 1911/12; 132 x 93 cm
 Kirchner, Ernst Ludwig. Selbstporträt als Soldat (Soldat mit Dirne), 1915; 69 x 61 cm
 Mondriaan, Piet. Farbige Aufteilung, 1928; 41,2 x 32,9 cm
 Pechstein, H. Max. Stürmische See, 1919; 88 x 62 cm
 Feininger, Lyonel. Die Türme über der Stadt (Halle), 1931; 88 x 124,5 cm
 Nolde, Emil. Gartenbild mit Figur, 1918; 70 x 90 cm
 Beckmann, Max. Blick auf das Meer, 1928; 80,2 x 45,3 cm
 Dix, Otto. Sonnenaufgang. 1913; 51 x 66 cm
 Schlemmer, Oskar. Konzentrische Gruppe, 1925; 97,5 x 62 cm
 Klee, Paul. Sumpfliegende, 1919; 47 x 41 cm
 Kandinsky, Wassily. Die Kreuzform, 1926; 52 x 42 cm
 Lissitzky, El. Abstrakte Komposition, 1923; 66,5 x 50 cm
 Felixmüller. Conrad. Das Paar (Glückliche Ehe), 1922; 67 x 58 cm
 Eberhard, Heinrich. Vision, n.d.; 45,5 x 45 cm
 Mueller, Otto. Badende Frauen, n.d.; 84,5 x 98 cm
 Kokoschka, Oskar. Die Freunde, 1917/18; 102 x 150 cm
- p. 16–17 **Milan Kundera**, 1983, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, King Penguin, new ed., p. 3
- p. 17 **Yuki Okumura**, *Measuring Roman Ondák*, 2015; performance, wall label with text. Presented at WIELS, Brussels, 2015. Photo: Jakob Argauer. Courtesy of the artist and MISAOKO & ROSEN, Tokyo.
- p. 17–18 **Cathy Gere**, 2009, *Knossos and the Prophets of Modernism*, University of Chicago Press, p. 5
- p. 18 **Emile Gilliéron**, Reproduction of *the Ladies in Blue fresco*, Dodge Fund, 1927.
- p. 19 **Guillaume de Lisle**, 1724, *Hemisphere Occidentale*, Paris: Guillaume DeLisle, Quai de l'Horloge, author's photograph.
- p. 20 **Sanne Vaassen**, *Terra Incognita*, 2013; HD video, 01'49'44, globe, paper. Courtesy of the artist.
- p. 21 **Inga Danysz**, *Insufficient Funds*, 2017; installation images, Kunstverein Reutlingen. Courtesy of the artist and Kunstverein Reutlingen.
- p. 22 **Emile Hermans**, 2018; image.
- p. 22 **Christy Bartlett**, 2008, 'A Tearoom View of Mended Ceramics', in: *Flickwerk, The Aesthetics of Mended Japanese Ceramics*, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University Ithaca, Museum für Lackkunst, Münster, p. 11.
- p. 23 **Idem**, p. 8, 13.
- p. 24 **Inga Danysz**, *Insufficient Funds*, 2017; installation images, Kunstverein Reutlingen. Courtesy of the artist and Kunstverein Reutlingen.

Contributions by Joris Burla, Emile Hermans, Cira Huwald, Eline Kersten, Alicja Melzacka and Miriam Sentler.

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