

# *Viscosity*



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Prologue	5
On historiography	13
-31.62047;33.90880;-12.42332	21
Transformation of the Arch	29
-27.79221;30.86638;-11.12922	37
Between history, memory & identity	43
Epilogue	49
Notes	55



# Prologue





From the road, you could barely see the hotel. Hidden in a small alcove, and with the sides completely overgrown by vegetation, you really had to know what you were looking for. Approaching from the water you had to climb a few hundred feet of sharp cliff face before entering the grounds; too slippery. The only way in was over the fence. I took a quick look down the road. I was alone. I jumped.

I landed on the gravel and started running for cover. Two yellow, heavy-duty vehicles were resting on top of a pile of rubble. One of them was parked at an angle toward the road, making it possible to hide for a while. The only thing I could hear was the waves and a soft sizzling sound from the wind, dragging the fine particles of rubble past me and out into the ocean. I couldn't see this, but the sound of the soft waves caressing the rugged terrain echoed. It wasn't at all like we had been told, this abandoned hotel - the goal of our journey. It just lay there, on the edge, partially destroyed as if someone had taken a big bite out of the architecture and spat it out on the spot, unwanted. It was difficult to witness the scale of it, let alone understand where the rubble ended and the cliffs started.

The two machines were sisters, equipped with powerful percussion hammers; powered by an auxiliary hydraulic system, they had jackhammered the site to shreds. Blasting through every floor of concrete, they had dug into this abandoned brutalistic corpse, transforming its guts into gravel. The machines were still standing there, fixed in the motion of destruction while the driver was taking a break. I placed Dory on a small mound of rubble in-between the two machines. Dory is my terrain scanner. She measures three-dimensional coordinates using an infrared sensor. The mass of data is compiled and archived in her memory, stored again and again: RUIN1, RUIN2, RUIN3; but it's all the same.

On top, as a part of the scanner, a small LCD display was mounted. When turned on, the screen lights up in a blue colour with a white text.

**ready for scan..**

I had built the scanner myself. Lacking all but a basic knowledge of the required mechanics, the outcome reflected my understanding. When calculating the spatial point coordinates, using horizontal and vertical angles with the measured slope distance, it is important to make sure that the distance measured comes from the origin. In the case of Dory this simply wasn't possible. The sensor almost hovered around in a spherical motion, removed from its own origin, adding a feature onto the data that is impossible to renounce.

I imagined how it would be to be a tiny person, balancing on top of a moving ball, trying to measure things with a torchlight. Flowing through the landscape on a gigantic sphere whilst pointing my flashlight at things... it seemed extremely careless. A main part of my existence would be based on inaccuracy, but somehow that didn't seem to matter. Everything would be a surface on which I could negligently exert myself as an irrational mechanism.

I pressed start.

-57.95554;0.00000;-15.52914  
-54.08360;0.94403;-14.49387  
-45.37086;1.58439;-12.16450  
-46.30090;2.42653;-12.42332  
-49.14222;3.43636;-13.19977  
-40.42060;13.13345;-11.38804  
-40.18523;13.83688;-11.38804  
-42.66064;15.52720;-12.16450  
-43.28493;16.61553;-12.42332

-39.40599;15.92105;-11.38804  
-42.67869;18.11603;-12.42332  
-42.35602;18.85812;-12.42332  
-38.51874;17.96159;-11.38804

I sat down on what could once have been a beautifully tiled balcony for one of the hotels many apartments. Most of the tiles were cracked and partially loose. Finely ornamented with small flowers, they signified a past of splendour. What perhaps had once been the dream of a significant investment opportunity for a wealthy tycoon, seeking to purchase a luxury hotel, had been crushed by the financial crisis not too many years ago. Now it just briefly rested here, wounded and bleeding, waiting for the worker to finish his two o'clock coffee. He would arrive, take a seat in one of the two vehicles, and convert the remains into dust.

-37.33124;18.20766;-11.12922  
-36.14714;18.41788;-10.87040  
-39.31927;24.56941;-12.42332  
-38.07439;24.72580;-12.16450  
-33.63313;22.68583;-10.87040  
-34.02332;23.82339;-11.12922  
-35.16526;25.54906;-11.64686  
-37.79971;28.48412;-12.68213  
ready for scan..

I could hear the workers approach, but I wanted one more scan. I picked up Dory and ventured further into the hotel, out of sight and away from the road. I entered a half-gutted room; they had already started tearing down this part leaving one end of the room completely open. I could see the sea and a hint of the road in the distance. From where I stood I had a perfect panoramic lookout over the sea, broken only by a few passing cruise-liners.

Did they once sail this way?

I wondered how it happened the day it stopped. The director of the cruise liner company would have showed up at the mayors office and told him that business was dead and they were seeking elsewhere. Maybe. Maybe the hotel just knew it, I think you know when you are dying.

I placed Dory on the floor overlooking the gap in the wall and pressed the button once again.

-33.02927;26.74658;-11.38804  
-33.29739;27.93983;-11.64686  
-32.07571;27.88299;-11.38804  
-30.14855;27.14588;-10.87040  
-29.67020;27.66791;-10.87040  
-29.87764;28.85250;-11.12922  
-30.73557;30.73557;-11.64686  
-30.19448;31.26730;-11.64686  
-31.62047;33.90880;-12.42332  
-27.79221;30.86638;-11.12922  
-29.78410;34.26269;-12.16450  
-26.69806;31.81751;-11.12922  
-27.35445;33.77994;-11.64686  
-25.57138;32.72987;-11.12922  
-25.57758;33.94259;-11.38804  
-25.54906;35.16526;-11.64686  
-26.03952;37.18828;-12.16450  
-24.30624;36.03549;-11.64686  
-23.14756;35.64411;-11.38804  
ready for scan..  
ready for scan..  
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ready for scan..

ready for scan..



## On historiography

*... In that Empire, the Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied the entirety of a City, and the map of the Empire, the entirety of a Province. In time, those Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the Cartographers Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it. The following Generations, who were not so fond of the Study of Cartography as their Forebears had been, saw that that vast map was Useless, and not without some Pitilessness was it, that they delivered it up to the Inclemencies of Sun and Winters. In the Deserts of the West, still today, there are Tattered Ruins of that Map, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in all the Land there is no other Relic of the Disciplines of Geography.*

Miranda, *Travels of Prudent Men*, 1658<sup>1</sup>



In 2015 the Islamic State conquered the site of the old city of Palmyra. A site of memory not in affiliation with its own beliefs. Palmyra was jackhammered to shreds. With its destruction its most renowned asset, the Monumental Arch of Palmyra, Arch of Triumph, a world heritage monument, had fallen. Wounded and partially destroyed by the caliphate, it lay in its own dust, shrouded by the Black Standard of the Islamic State. One year later, it was yet again unveiled proudly on Trafalgar Square, London. Reproduced from its own image, the snake of originality had come around to bite its own tail.

In Baudrillard's *Simulacra and simulation*, our reality is defined as "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal".<sup>2</sup> He declares that the differentiation between the truth and the lie is a construct that does not fit within the society we live in. We have come far enough in the Miranda Allegory to reach a point where even describing the real just leaves us with yet another allegory. Moreover, we are left stranded in "the desert of the real itself".<sup>3</sup> How can we navigate the vast sea of information, with a map that is a projection of reality; Or does it really matter anymore? The art of historiography has since classical antiquity defined itself as a humanised narrative, a disguised subjective account written in order to inform and teach us about the very cornerstones of our civilisation. The role of the historian has always been one that has been put in a position of power, and this relation has of course been the focus of much controversy. The shift in trust is rooted in the development of historiography as a written account, to what is now seen as an analytical field that focuses on how this account was written. This is a development that in itself calls for a reconfiguration, for is it even possible to critically unionise a canon that works so hard to destroy the very pillars it was built upon?

The authoritative figure of the historian emerges through a structure quite closely associated to that of our hyperlinked environment. In his essay *Structuring a Marketplace of Attention*, Webster indicates a duality in how agents “use structures as vehicles to exercise their agency and, in doing so, reproduce those very structures”.<sup>4</sup> His text mostly revolves around the idea of discussing the way information is dealt with through search engines, by agents such as journalists and scholars who work quite closely with its distribution.<sup>5</sup> The role of the journalist has, with the birth of the hyperlink, been closely coupled with competitive 24-hour journalism in an era of abundant distribution of information. Now articles are being written about other articles and stories are being replicated and redistributed as if they were original. The chain of originality, or representation, develops a new field of shared knowledge where it is indeed difficult to navigate.

The fragmentation of information, through hyperlinking and page-ranking, offers a subjective and user-oriented perspective on the way knowledge is constructed in the individual. Moreover, it is now evident that information is polarised and censored to fit specific enclaves. This means, that in time, the diverse share of knowledge will resort to becoming segmented into those who believe in the authentic identity and those who do not. In an era of widely distributed information, a highly complicated web of knowledge and memory is spun. The users are forced to navigate this new era using tools given to them by this structure which is positioned in a realm where the truth and the lie are equal; A place where together they make up a territory that is representative of our society. Their equality signifies a shift in what we perceive as being true and false. Society has today coined this shift as ‘post-truth’.<sup>6</sup>

The disinformation is massively distributed in society to such an extent that you cannot 'see the forest for the trees'. In *The Ecological Thought*,<sup>7</sup> Timothy Morton gave birth to the concept of the 'hyperobject'. A hyperobject is an object whose sheer largeness, through distribution in time and space, cracks open the roof and transcends into a zone of spatiotemporal specificity. The reality of post-truth and its distribution through the western media has affected the way we experience information. Hyperobjects are 'viscous',<sup>8</sup> a characteristic Morton assigns as: the more you know about the object, the more intertwined with the concept you become; thus making it impossible to escape in the end.

When we wake up and look into the mirror, our fate has already been predetermined by forces grander than ourself. The representation that we are met with resembles what you already know. Your memory of your face has not changed, but you still have this lump in your stomach that makes you believe that something has indeed changed. With the the coining of post-truth the user has become aware of the shadowy goo that encapsulates every individual within the nation-state. It comes down to the question of believing in the system or not, but in the end the odds are against us. We are dealing with a mechanism within the system so large, that it is impossible to scope its borders.

We are, as in the Miranda allegory mentioned in the start of this chapter, traveling in a territory that could have been a cartographers' map. The map is so large that its frontiers are hidden, making it seem endless. It resorts to a simultaneous perspective in which interchangeability, between representation and reality, has become its core feature. The history of a nation, the very backbone of the state's representation within the individual, is a humanised narrative that is

used to bestow deliberate memory in the individual. It is through monuments that this narrative is physicalised but the monument is so much more than a landmark. As a sculpted rock infused with a memory, it seeps through the cracks and cavities and spills onto its foundation, becoming one with its surrounding. The edge of the monument, the area that defines where the memory ends and reality begins, is diffused. Polarised by nature, it changes shape according to what angle you view it from.

In his paper *Towards a virtual archeology*, from 1990, Paul Reilly describes how the history of recording archaeological contexts has moved from being a subjective account, a line of recordings highly defined by the reporter himself, to “a description of an archaeological formation or to simulated archaeological formation”,<sup>9</sup> a dataset. He baptises this concept as ‘virtual archaeology’. In the case of the virtual it is implied that the dataset becomes a surrogate, a mere replication of the original. What happens when there is no original left? Does the version 2.0 take its place in the witness box and repeat the oath “I swear by Almighty God that the evidence I shall give shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?”

In this new age of digital representation the core of our society has been infused by new technologies. The history of a nation in its present form is shaped by how it ponders its past. The study of history, historiography, is the study of how history has been written, but with it comes a negligence for the study of the memory. With digital archaeology comes a certain taste of plasticity that seeps into and infuses the objects we so unknowingly relate to our past. These monuments have become reproducible and the context in which they were set is now a mere reproduction: a humanised narrative.

The monuments are in their deepest forms simulated signs of narrative. If these structures are altered, replicated, or utterly destroyed, the system becomes weightless. They are viscous hyperobjects because even when they are defaced they still simulate and dissimulate. What changes when these structures undergo this transformation?



-31.62047;33.90880;-12.42332





I looked into the sky and wiped the sweat off my forehead with an old shirt. The cloth was completely soaked and I started wringing it to extract the liquid caught by the fibres.

The drops fell down to my feet and every time they reached the ground I could hear a soft sizzling sound. It had been an extremely warm day and the ground was still radiant from the heat. Facing the sky once again, I noticed that the sun had reached the horizon to call it a day, but I wasn't done; not at all. I still had to prepare the remaining pillars. I picked up my drill, it weighed in my hands. 1,700W of force, shock-free and merciless. Equipped with a carbide tip, it was definitely not for lightweight work. The guy at the store had told me that it was the manifestation of the power of two full-grown stallions, dissected and shoved into a small container.

Hidden in the shade of my silhouette, a bucket was resting. It contained C-4 paste, a bunch of blasting caps, and a few hundred feet of white wire on a plastic spool. I picked up the bucket and went back into the building.

You feel strong when you carry on your person something that can explode and make a noise.

Walking through the main entrance, the temperature instantly fell a couple of degrees. Having gotten used to the light on the outside, I was instantly encapsulated by a cold shroud of nothingness. Slowly, the space opened up and I could glint the presence of a long wide hallway leading directly away from the entrance. A solid slab of granite made up the floor. The hallway was sequentially divided into five equal parts by archways supported by fluted granite columns. I looked up toward the ceiling, or what was left of it. What appeared to have once been a beautifully decorated limestone ceiling had collapsed on itself and left a pile of material in the hall far underneath it.

The rocky, broken, reminiscence of the collapse stood out as ornaments, small fractures, in the fine limestone roof. My eyes followed the shape of one of the fractures guiding my attention forward once again.

At the end of the hallway, another smaller archway appeared, leading into another room.

I grabbed the spool of wire and started unwinding, guiding it from the entrance to the small archway, slowly making my way around the remnants of the roof. When spooling through the passage I found myself in a space much larger than the previous. Darker than before, what appeared at first, was a hole covering at least half of the ceiling. I could see the sky once again, and how it had slowly turned much darker than before. Here just enough light was given away to reveal the space, but not enough to unravel its detail. When squinting I noticed different black silhouettes whose shapes were auspiciously outlined by the now glooming night sky overhead.

Near the small entrance, a few columns stood tall, supporting what was left of the roof. Opposite the entrance I could count at-least six different parts of columns; A small portion of what were probably the bases of columns similar to the few still standing up-right behind me. Some of them had traces of sculpture, others showed signs of inscription. Neighboring appeared what seemed to be the foundation of an altar. I walked over there.

The surface of the altar was concave, leaving a slight drop towards the middle and out to one of its sides. A drain pipe connected the edge of the top to a hole in the floor - A construction perhaps for carrying water, used in washing the surface of the altar. Behind the alter a sculptured block of limestone appeared. The winged figure of a man slaughtering a ram. Could this place have witnessed sacrifice?

Drilling seemed easy enough, the carbide tip

softly entered the rock, pulverising it and pushing the remains out of the fresh cut.

There was something very special about the surface. I had already noticed it on the first column. What seemed to be precisely mapped out patterns, cut with a fine chisel, had started to appear everywhere. They all had a strange mathematical quality to them, as if they formed parts of an overarching logic. But that was not why I was here.

I reached into my bucket and pulled off a chunk of paste. The paste had a plastic-like feeling to it and when clinching my fist around it, it was soft and malleable. The smell was strangely comforting. Like play-dough, only filled with highly combustible chemicals. I crammed the material into the narrow borehole. The last part of the plan was to connect the pillar to the system. The tip of the wire had to connect to the paste crammed into the hole, and then I had to connect the other end to the main wire I had spooled through the space. When looking around I saw the wire that had manoeuvred its way around the site, zig-zagging in between the columns, slightly getting caught in all the rubble it met in its way. In contrast to the dusty site itself, the almost fluorescent white wire seemed both strangely out of place and fitting at the same time.

I sat down with my back resting against the front of the altar. I was tired. The drill, now more worn than before, was laying on a small dusty mound of rubble close to the altar. It made me think of the guy in the store. I remembered his name: Herostratus. Such a strange name. He said his mother had named him after the one who had wanted to become famous and so he eradicated the temple of Ephesus, one of the seven wonders of the world. He also said that his mother was a historian who had passed a few years ago.

I didn't really care. However, he didn't remember who had built the temple in the first place. He only remembered Herostratus.

I glanced toward a dark corner in the opposite part of the room. It was dead quiet and shivers started travelling down my back. I felt sad, knowing that my encounter with this building would be its last. Soon it would all be over and the new era could begin. I knew it, and somehow the building knew it too.





## Transformation of the Arch

*Look at us here, praise be to God, we are  
destroying all statues and monuments.*

Islamic State, 2015<sup>10</sup>



In the land of the Levant, neighbouring the Syrian Desert, the ancient semitic city of Palmyra grew out of sand as a small mirage settlement. Serving the merchants travelling along the Silk Road, it slowly became a leading trade city. With its importance, came its wealth and a rich culture of development through which many of its archeological landmarks were established.

During its long history filled with countless attempts and successes of conquest, it went from being a city under the Roman Empire in 14 A.D. to the Persians temporarily establishing control during the second century. When reconquered by the Roman emperor Aurelian in 273 A.D it was destroyed and only later rebuilt. Established as a Christian city under the Byzantine Empire for 400 years, it was followed by a period of rule under different, smaller Arab caliphates. In the early 1400s it was destroyed by warlords from the Tuco-Mongol tribes of the Timurid.<sup>11</sup>

In 2015, the ancient ruins of Palmyra in Syria were booby-trapped by soldiers of the infamous organisation ISIS. Among the different important ruins in the city was the Monumental Arch of Palmyra, the Arch of Triumph. Their crusade under the Black Standard had come to take hold and, yet again, were they to destroy a monument closely affiliated with beliefs not of their own. After a few weeks, Khaled Al Homsi, a Syrian activist under the twitter name PalmyraPioneer, stated that ISIS now had in fact destroyed the Arch.<sup>12</sup> Knowing the cultural importance of the site, shared with the ferocity of ISIS as portrayed by the western media, this story could do nothing else but blow up.

In *Palmyra will rise again. We have to send a message to terrorist*<sup>13</sup> Syrias director of antiquities, Maamoun Abdelkarim, states that “We will not leave the temples destroyed (...) we will assess how much damage the stones suffered and we will re-use them

in order to scientifically put back the temples". The plan was to replicate the site as if ISIS never happened. On the contrary Jonathan Jones, Art Critic at The Guardian, writes in the article "Palmyra must not be fixed. History would never forgive us", that, "Palmyra must not rise again, (...). It must not be turned into a fake replica of its former glory."<sup>14</sup> He indicates that the site was a ruin before ISIS came and the site would still be a ruin when they leave. In contrast Abdelkarim acknowledges that there are parts of history that can be censored and removed if harsh enough, and/or not fitting within the state-explicit cultural heritage.

By removing the barbaric onslaught, the idea of the monument as a speaker for historical events and heritage becomes politicised and the very framework onto which historiography is being positioned is questioned. The ancient city of Palmyra was a cultural, archaeological, and historical monument. The day ISIS claimed it as being unworthy and sacrilegious it was transformed. The Islamic State converted what had once been a ruin, a monument claimed by the commonwealth of all humanity as our cultural heritage, into yet another ruin endowed with the ideals of the caliphate.

On April 19th, a few weeks after Jones shared his outcry, a recreation of the Arch of Triumph was unveiled in Trafalgar Square in London. It was by order of the British state, on behalf of the rest of the world, that Boris Johnson, former mayor of London, said that this replication had been done "in defiance of the barbarians who destroyed the original".<sup>15</sup>

Oxford's Institute for Digital Archeology (IDA), who stood behind this replication mentioned that "Without reconstructions, destroyed sites will, in time, be swallowed by the sands and forgotten, and with them the history for which they provided the last

remaining visual cues.”<sup>16</sup> IDA had, through modern computational and archeological tools such as Anastylosis and Photogrammetry, created a model of the arch in perfect concordance with the vast archive of documentation related to its appearance. It was through the image that the team could then plot the model and then materialise it in Italy from Egyptian marble. The data findings of their endeavour was never made open-source, and to this day the ownership of this new original remains questionable. The plan was that the model should travel the world, to be shown in different capital cities, and thereafter return ‘home’ to Palmyra.

The digital model from-which the Arch had been printed was never made public. Only when MyMiniFactory, an independent public archival project, focused on sharing cultural heritage with the public, had gone to London to scan the 3D-printed model was the whole project made open-source.<sup>17</sup> Through numerous transformations the Arch travelled through various nodes of originality until it finally found its resting place. It had become a surrogate, an archaeological formation defined by a vicious dataset.

Born out of the Syrian desert, this mirage-like structure had for decades passively travelled through different modes of aggression. It had survived the bloody conquest of the Roman era and exceeding this, converted into a monument of Christian belief and later a temple for various islamic caliphates.

Travelling through the different stages of history it has acted like a passing cruise-liner on an endless journey, never reaching shore - only experiencing mankind from the horizon. With the surfacing of the reproduction it finally sank. Suddenly the structure had disappeared from the horizon and dived into the dismal waters of memory. When sailing in the

territory around its resting-place, the believers could briefly, through small glimpses of light, see parts of it resting on the ocean-floor far underneath them. But the water was murky from the wake of the media, who made it difficult to clearly assess the remains let alone navigate the sea itself. Soon it became evident that the old city, and specifically the Arch of Triumph, would be raised from the depths and re-emerge on the horizon of the past. The Black Standard of the Levant had quite possibly achieved Herostratic Fame.

As a part of The Eighteenth Horst Gerson Lecture, held at the University of Groningen on the 8th of October 2015, Art Historian, James Cuno did a lecture called *ISIS and the Threat to Our Cultural Heritage: What Can the World Do? A Five-Point Proposal*.<sup>18</sup> In his lecture he discusses the United Nations' response to the destruction of cultural heritage in relation to the Crusade of ISIS.<sup>19</sup> He outlines the eight resolutions adopted by the UN Security Council. The resolutions were made to affirm "the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria and Iraq"<sup>20</sup> and condemn "ISIS and its destruction of cultural heritage".<sup>21</sup> On April 13, 2015 the Director-General of UNESCO, Bokova, appealed to protect cultural heritage and to "respond by claiming our cultural heritage as the commonwealth of all humanity".<sup>22</sup>

James Cuno makes a very interesting point further on in his lecture; The language in both the resolutions proposed by the United Nations and the appeal by Bokova show no distinction between what cultural heritage is owned by the nation and what is owned by humanity. There is no way of distinguishing between "claims of identity made on cultural heritage produced during historical eras (...) and by living cultures".<sup>23</sup> In the end, the cultural heritage of Syria travels into a limbo of belonging, but to whom does this restored and reproduced arch belong?

In a video depicting the Islamic State destroying the Ancient city of Nimrud, one of ISIS' numerous targets in the land of the Levant, an ISIS warrior is quoted as saying "Look at us here, praise be to God, we are destroying all statues and monuments". With the force of the hammer and the powertool they disassemble decades worth of cultural importance and historically bestowed ruins. What is interesting, in the case of this naive warrior, is the double sided level of truth in his voice. Yes, they were indeed trying to destroy statues and monuments, but having now witnessed their reproduction, they might not have been the ones to finalise the destruction.

With the Arch of Triumphs new unveiling in London, came the birth of historical simulation - the objective datafication of our identity.



-27.79221;30.86638;-11.12922





I had been walking in the desert for longer than I could remember, quietly following the endless horizon.

The scope of the abysmal dusty plain lay flat, toward what seemed to a complete monochrome sky. There were no stars, only an uninterrupted mass of dark azure colliding with the redness of the sand. The imaginary path ahead was endless and the goal was to reach that dark dot in the horizon. On the edge of the sky and the sand a small black dot had surfaced. What at first glance seemed infinitely small was slowly growing the closer I got. Without a reference point, the scale, of what I could only presume was an object, seemed limitless. Step-by-step the dot grew until it transformed itself into a rectangular shape. The shape seemed to slowly grow out of the sand around it - As if it was being pushed out of the ground, controlled by the speed of my walk. I picked up the pace, steadily accelerating toward it.

Gradually, I had come close enough to see that it had started to evolve. It had a megalithic feeling to it, with a rough rocky surface only broken slightly by small irregular crevices. The shape stood tall, but still it was impossible to understand the scope of it. The horizon was slowly breaking up, and a storm was appearing in the distance. Towering above me, the huge structure reached toward the sky, almost gasping toward the abyss, tall enough that when trying to discern the pinnacle it seemed as if it was on the verge of falling toward me at any moment. But it wouldn't, it seemed way too stable to fall anywhere. A lost black giant.

I couldn't help but wonder how it came to be here, probably the same way that I had, but the scale of it made that thought impossible. It was unnatural in its build, the extremely sharp uniform faces of the structure appeared manmade but on the other side no physical traces indicated how, nor by whom it was built.

It seemed as if it had just suddenly emerged. The crevices appeared to be traces of an unfamiliar language, and I understood that if I was able to read this, then I could unlock its secrets. They had a certain authority to them, almost as if someone had inscribed a message that would never be forgotten. A historical record of some sort, probably there to define a moment in time that was important to the maker - if there ever was one.

As an island in the middle of this vast sea of sand, the monumental structure stood out, towering above everything else, almost out of a necessity to memorise a certain event in history. With its scope it was definitely eligible as a representative of a common understanding. At a certain time, centuries ago, this majestic monument had acted as a symbolic surrogate that could have defined the foundation of a great nation. But still I was clueless. The storm had moved closer, forcing the desert into the dark sky creating chaos.

Suddenly it was impossible to see more than a few feet ahead and the horizon was violently being absorbed by the sand thrown into the air. The red plain and the dark azure sky had become one. The monument didn't stand out anymore. The contrasting lines indicating where it once had ended and the desert began had started to pulverise, transforming it into a mirage-like shape.

It was at this point that I noticed that the structure had transformed, still completely engulfed by particles it both appeared and disappeared within the glimpse of an eye.





## Between history, memory & identity

Pope Gregory the First, 16th century<sup>24</sup>

*Do not destroy the pagan temples but the idols that they harbor. As far as the buildings themselves are concerned, be content to sprinkle them with holy water and place your altars and relics in them.*

The map has exceeded the territory on so many levels that when we speak as such we have no recollection of its impact. With the birth of historical simulation, the presence of authentic memory in the individual has been tampered with and all that is left is a mass of bits and bytes flowing through our veins. Franco Berardi speaks of 'datafication', a concept he uses to define how, in the age of technological transition, the individual's identity has been objectified by data.<sup>25</sup> The mirror we once stood in front of, the surface on which we could identify ourselves, has been replaced by the screen. This interface guides us in such ways that no maps are needed but the GPS. Still acting like a mirror, it creates an eternal flow of information between the user and the interface, creating and recreating information it develops a mirror-state. This state is a reification of the self,<sup>26</sup> but it is a dubious one.

Berardi builds onto his theory that identity is gone and only processes of identification exist.<sup>27</sup> Instead of knowing who you are, you identify your traits in the screen, because this screen already knows everything about you. The very core of identity, memory, perished with it - for how does one translate feelings through data transfers? Feelings, the real unviolated memory; Berardi refers to this as "aggressive forms of differentiation from the environment".<sup>28</sup> When the self reaches a state of reflexive consciousness by reification of the screen, we reach fascism, "the obsessive and aggressive enforcement of that provisional stabilisation".<sup>29</sup> Spiralling down, the reality we perceive becomes a stabile, objectified version of what once was.

Society today bears no witness to real memory, it has been so busy archiving and cataloging real sites of memory, the places where the monuments seeped into the ground, that we only now see that we are dealing with second-order memory:

A memory that observes the shape of the real but has no actual substance.

Pierre Nora in his text *Les Lieux de Mémoire*<sup>30</sup>, argues that with the development of mass culture and democratisation, memory has become an object of critical history through its disassociation from history. The study of history has developed toward a total mirror-state where history is written about history. It seems that with the invention of a history of history,<sup>31</sup> or historiography, the sensuous glimpse in the heart of the individual, the subjective historical artefact called our 'memory' has been destroyed. And so it is, we have guided ourself to historical simulation. We pushed our own history in to the murky waters of simulation and with it, tied with a gordian knot, the monument fell. Monuments are "lieux de mémoire" or "sites of memory" because they are no longer "milieu de mémoire", real environments of memory.<sup>32</sup> But do these exist in the digital realm?

When the old city was eradicated, society was left intact. It was only when the monument was reborn as a surrogate that it collapsed on itself. With the passage in to the abyss, memory, or identity, has been swallowed by the acceleration of history. The borders of reality have been erased, leaving no actual distinction between the real and the unreal. Whether still standing or shrouded by the storm, it is now all the same.











The blast had knocked me over making me land on my back; All I remember was running for cover and then the explosion itself. Something had gone terribly wrong, it just didn't make sense. Running from the site, the noise from the blast had started as a crackling sound accelerating and bulldozing toward me — until it had reached a violent low-pitch. It had ripped a huge gash in the atmosphere making all the oxygen escape briefly, leaving an absolute vacuum.

Following the violence came silence. Suddenly all the air pushed through the gash once again, forcing everything out of equilibrium. Then darkness.

Opening my eyes I was met by the early dawn. Just light enough to distinguish the horizon from the sky, but dark enough to showcase the stars above. I felt nothing.

When forcing myself upright, I expected a slight sensation of the previous impact, but there was nothing. Looking around it became apparent that I was nowhere near the site on which I had fallen. I was on a beach. A salty taste was in the wind, overlaid by the sound from the waves attacking the beachhead. I started walking, dragging my feet through the sand. From what I could hear I was moving along the beach, following the sound of the water on my left.

The landscape seemed endless, nothing differentiated from moment to moment, mile to mile, all the same. With the sun slowly reaching civildawn, the nocturnal path ahead was gradually appearing. Fine sand particles hinting different earthen hues stood in contrast to the underlit black ocean. The water was viscous and slowly stirring itself. A few hundred feet away something was laying, partially disguised by the sand, unveiled only where the waves had licked its surface clean. Stranded. Already enormous in its size, the stern of a ship expressed the magnitude of the remnants still covered by the sand.

Approaching the wreckage, it unveiled its true nature.

This was no ordinary ship. From a distance there was an almost perfect contour of the hull. Getting closer it appeared to gradually dissolve, pixelate and show signs of diminishing resolution. Some parts of the ship were partially opaque, crystallised in a mesh-like fashion — some parts just weren't there, gaping holes surrounded by an uneven edge. The nature of the crystallised texture created an unevenness in the presumed smooth surface of the stern. Was this ship capable of sailing?

The crystallised texture was polygonal where the crevices and cliffs simulated edges, faces and vertices. The sun had slowly started to appear on the horizon, pushing the remaining stars out of focus. The rays hit the the crystal hull rendering its depth steadily in real-time. It almost seemed surreal, the depth induced a brightness response and made the edges briefly collapse as if the light rendered them invisible. Pulsating in concordance with the dawn it appeared and disappeared, almost glitching into the sand itself.

Induced by the wind, the crystal structure seeped into the sand and vice versa, creating a thick haze of indistinguishable glutinous material.

Like a stranded whale it rested there on the beachhead itself. If it had ever sailed the sea it surely didn't seem to matter now; it had found the site to which it belonged. Out of bounds and substance, its predecessor had ended its fare of the world, bringing it here. Born out of its own image, disconnected from itself, it would be forever lost in its own shadow.











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