



THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF TOTAL DESTRUCTION, still from video. <

*If the world was created out of nothingness,  
it can also be destroyed completely, leaving no traces.*

*What harm can come of that?*

MARIANA JOCHAMOWITZ/NICOLAS RIVERA\_In the middle of the huaca.

\_PART 1 The performance was about to begin. There was almost complete silence in the room. The type of silence that belongs to anticipation and magnifies small sounds. Someone coughing, a chair creaking, your own breathing. In the middle of a room of a former German palace, raised some centimeters above the floor by a metal platform, stands a pale pink cube of compressed earth, approximately forty centimeters tall, waiting. The program read: "Brute Force by Chiara Bugatti. Classical ballet dancer and 15 kg of diatomaceous earth".

A male ballet dancer entered the room.

The ballet dancer approached the cube and climbed up the metal platform. The vibrations he produced made the cube shiver slightly. We all held our breath for a second. The dancer moved closer to the cube but never touched it. He began to perform a routine of very precise sharp movements; energetic but controlled. Striking a pose after the other, a sequence was performed and then repeated. The cube began to crumble softly. The crumbling and the dance were related but not equal. It was the vibrations of the floor and air surrounding the cube that acted over its grains of compressed earth. Sometimes the block broke into pieces, sometimes it seemed to melt down. The cube of compacted diatomaceous earth, apparently solid at first sight, now fully revealed its materiality. A strange powder, made of individual grains so fine that they appear to stick together.

As always, when one observes something, one's mind does not simply stay put on the thing going on in front of one's eyes. On the contrary, it wanders. It seems to be always shuffling and weaving different images together. And while we observed the crumbling down of the cube, a field of different images were appearing next to it in our memory. Images of other pieces of compressed earth, breaking down: the familiar sight of Prehispanic mud ruins that populate the whole coast of Peru. Our minds started going from

hundreds of unnamed huacas (that is how these structures are called) to the ruins of the cube and back again, and began to form a collection, all belonging to different scales, times, landscapes and materials, but brought together by a shared knowledge of a way of breaking down. A way of softening a sharp edge. It felt like witnessing the discovery of a hidden knowledge about a certain way in which time plays over matter.

**\_PART 2** A few years have passed since Brute Force and still Chiara Bugatti's work appears in our minds close to these huacas. Always looming around the corner, these massive compressed earth structures find a way to sneak in and share a relationship with the material essays Bugatti works out in her studio. So it seems fitting to try to conjure up one of these buildings for you and allow it to coexist with the other sculptures in the room of "Getting Lost in the Middle of a Sentence".

To bring forth a huaca is a difficult job. They are elusive to say the least. So shy that all their effort seems to be put at getting lost in the desert landscape. Far from the picturesque stone ruin which participates as a folly in the romantic landscape, the ruins of these compressed earth pyramids are easy to dismiss as a natural promontory in the desert. There is one, though, so deeply marked by a mysterious cut that not only stands out from the rest but lies open to reveal the secrets of its making and its breaking down. Thus, making it a suitable candidate for the purpose of this endeavour.

This huaca is called El Brujo (the wizard). Approximately 17 meters tall and with a diameter of 100 meters, it looks like a minor promontory in the desert when approached from the north, west or east. However, when approached from the south you will find a clean deep cut. A trench 5 meters wide that goes all the way to the center of the hill. If you look at it from above it seems as if someone had cut the hill like a

cake and took a slice out. If you are standing facing the cut, to your left, just a few meters away, you will find the ocean. The sound of the waves fills everything and you can feel the humid salty breeze in your face as you stare at the cut. Hold this image in your head for a second.

Now let's walk in. You will feel a certain uneasiness at first. The idea of everything around you collapsing and getting buried alive creeps in your head. Although the cut is wide, the proportions of the space it leaves are so vertical that it is suffocating. As you walk along, look carefully at the surface of the walls that contain you. The whole thing is made of small mud bricks, millions of rectangular blocks piled together. On closer attention you will see horizontal markings that show the building has been built in phases. This temple, like many others, was constructed by a procedure of burying and adding. When the building completed a cycle it was buried to build a new and bigger replica on top of it. Because we are inside this mysterious cut, we can see the previous smaller version of the huaca, buried and forgotten inside it, like an enormous mud matryoshka doll.

At some point the building stopped growing and was abruptly abandoned. According to archaeologists this happened around the year 800 A.D. and coincides with a major El Niño phenomenon. We might think of this point in time as both the climax of the structure and its first mayor washing down. After this, the huaca entered a much longer process of forgetting marked by the cyclic melting down of the structure by rains, wind and flooding throughout several centuries. At times, it has happened slowly, almost lovingly. At others, like when El Niño hits, it has been rough and brutal.

Look up at the edge. The fine line where the bricks have been softened out by the rain and wind. How much drama is inscribed on this line! It is a tireless performance played between the geometry of the man made structure, the mineral composition of the

mud and the passing of time. In this case, time is executed by the repetition of events that dampen, wet or drench the compressed earth making it swell, displace and sediment.

Now walk back outside. We have been looking at the wrinkles on the surfaces of El Brujo but it's time to question the gash in its body. The first written record we have of this huaca is from 1868 by Italian naturalist Antonio Raimondi. There is a short and uneventful description of the dimensions and location of El Brujo in his travel diaries, but no mention of a cut. After that, the next known recording of the huaca is in some photographs from the 1920s where the scar is already showing, making it safe to assume that this major subtraction event happened somewhere around the turn of the 20th century. We have forgotten what happened but it was without a doubt an organized, large and complex attack involving several people and tools. Some argue it was a deed done by treasure hunters trying to find some bounty hidden in the deepest core of the pyramid. But others think the precision of the cut suggests the pyramid was used as a quarry, to extract material to build something else. If so, it means that some structures around the area are about 100 years old constructions made with bricks shaped around 1500 years ago.

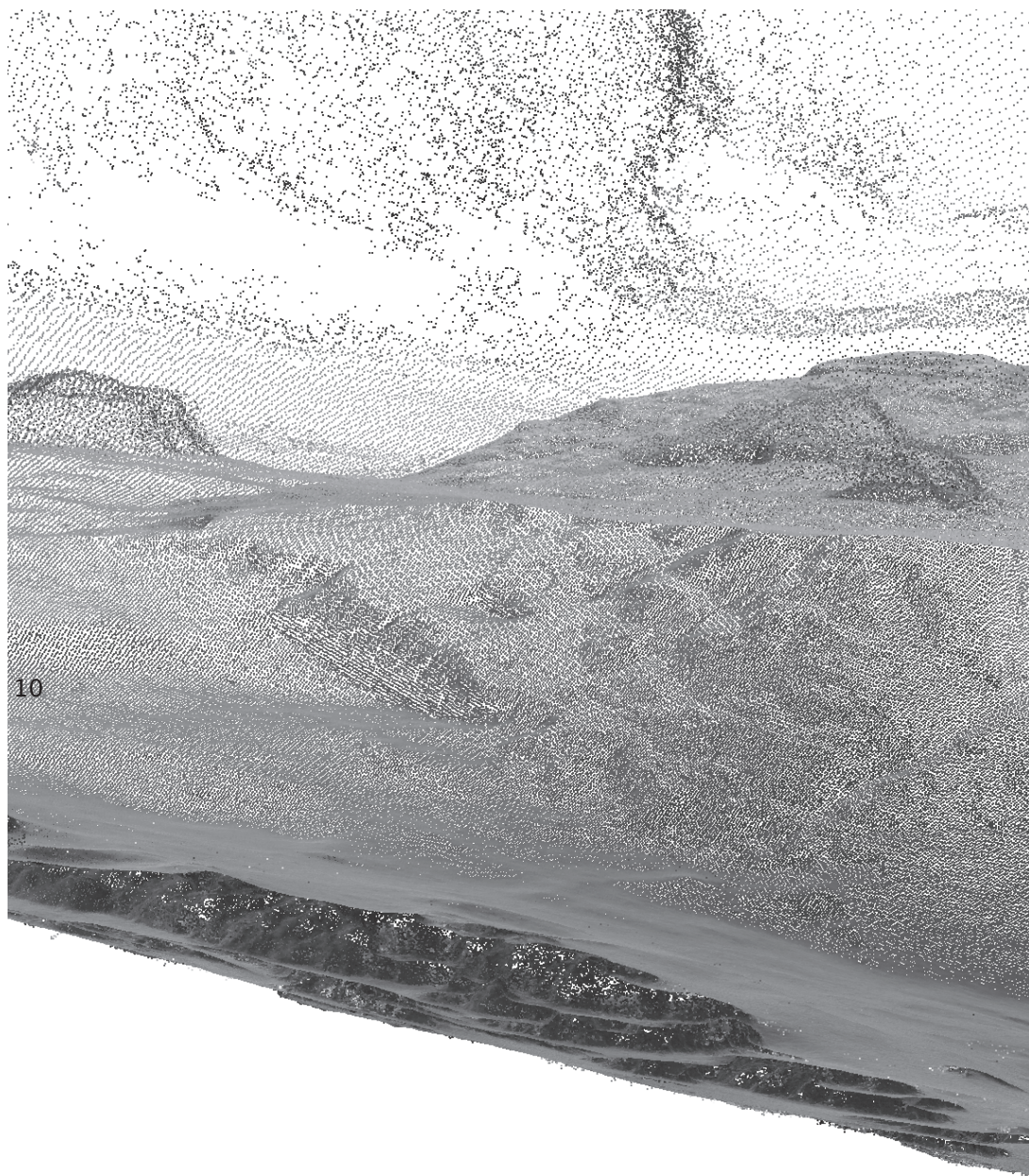
Look to your left, where the ocean is. Raimondi noted that it is strange to find Moche pyramids so close to the sea. He speculated that most probably the coastline has been moving closer to the huaca through the past centuries. If his hypothesis is correct, and indeed sea levels are rising, it is not hard to imagine the huaca as an island in the future. Then, its procedures of melting down will enter a new and accelerated phase. Think about the cut one last time, completely full of salty water. The nooks and crannies of its walls are now the home of spider crabs, razor clams and sea snails.





9

HUACA EL BRUJO, PERU. Ph. Chiara Bugatti (2022).



10







Still from footage, drone survey. Chiara Bugatti+EJR (2022).



MANUEL SCHWAB-THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF TOTAL DESTRUCTION (TRANSCRIPT FROM VIDEO)

Friday,

What was it that you told me that afternoon in the old city, right before I told you I loved you, and you fell off the back of the statue and broke your teeth on the marble steps? I've forgotten, but you were wrong, and I should have told you that many times over the years, but the timing was always off.

Your teeth won't grow back just because you're leaving me, you know.

They've been shelling the seaside for the better part of the week. (I'm fine by the way.) You can see the craters through the break in the tree line from my study below the terrace garden, where we used to catch the trolley to collect sea dollars, and harvest razor clams at the shore. I went down yesterday, in the late afternoon, when the fog comes off the water and the decks grow quiet, all the soldiers on their lunch break.

The town can only take another week of this and all the gargoyles in the old cathedral will be reduced to sand. It's been raining, too, and you are off, defending the future in the mountains.

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*I have been reading the letters that I kept when we cleaned out your flat and burned a pile of your city clothes, the furniture no one wanted, and the rest of the books. I remember the spring five years back when my mother called me and told me that you had died. You only had a few years left, she said, and hopes of early release. It's hardly fair you did so much time, she said, and for what? For making the statues that are now forbidden?*

*I told her I had outgrown us. I say nothing of the collection of seashells.*

*When you first left, I circled around the needlepoint of your absence in fixed circles, like with the compass at school. But there is only so much focus a single hole in the world can take before the line we trace lays siege to the memory, graphite piles up like rubble at its outskirts, and all those who reside there are forced to flee.*

Wednesday,

I'll be leaving for the inland within the week.  
I don't have room to take your notebooks with me.

The cathedral is gone, and the gargoyles are washing down the gullies to the shore, taking every confession they overheard with them into the depths. I don't know if they remembered much of you, though I came every Sunday since you left to see the priest and tell him your secrets. I hope it wasn't him who turned you in.

Perhaps something has changed your mind about leaving? I'll stay in the valley as long as I can. But you should know, the sailors on the ships have started to come to shore, and they are keeping notebooks on everyone who went up the mountains.

Everything I told the priest about you, I hope he has forgotten.

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*They declared a general amnesty yesterday, and the new priests are talking about the veil of forgetfulness that will come to us by the grace of God. I should have been more careful with the wishes I wrote you just after you left.*

*I will go back to our house by the seaside in the spring. Apparently, the soldiers who quartered there left behind a labyrinth in the lower garden, something they built from the rubble just to pass the time. Otherwise, my mother assures me that its condition remains undisturbed.*

*When I left, I followed a single line out through the valley, to the northern ports, where the ships were waiting to take us someplace neutral.*

*It isn't there anymore, the valley. They filled it with the remnants of the city, everything that didn't wash away. My mother says it's a mountain now, overgrown with wildflowers and new kinds of mushrooms. The new city lies in its shadow. When they return, people go there to gather loam for their gardens.*

*Everyone is secretly afraid that we are not quite ready to forget.*



Monday,

The people have taken all the figs on their way to higher ground.  
They even stripped the unripe avocados from the tree outside the  
kitchen window.

Do they hurt, your teeth, up in the mountains?  
Good. You should never have left.

We read about the mustard seed in the church yesterday. I thought  
of you, faithful to everything but to you and I. I've grown angry as  
the world closes in. Forgive me.

Were the universe to pull itself back together into a single grain,  
we could be together ... you and I, and our enemies and the traitor  
priest.

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*The priest said all of you went dead together and left a single letter. It  
read, "bury me with the city far from home." Then he handed me a  
map, with an X where they laid the rest of you at the foot of the slope.*

*I hear you calling me when the tide comes up, though it's probably the  
gargoyle sand in the water, spreading your secrets, making waves.*

*These ham-fisted gods didn't bother to mute the stones and left all our  
history to shuffle across the ocean floor. I can forgive them. The priest  
and his trespasses are another matter.*

*The rubble mountains will start to wash away soon, after the fire season  
comes through.*

*What will you do, if indeed they buried you there? Today you might  
be caught in the gravity of our hometown piled in the dried riverbed.  
When the wildfires throw you skyward, will you come back to me?*

Saturday,

The priest came by today on his way out of town to ask for my forgiveness. He said he had no choice, and wept. He told me that he knew he would never forget what he had done. In my heart, he will remain a traitor priest, though I was the one who told him the secrets.

I cannot wait any longer, my love, and I don't know if I will find the strength to forgive you for choosing the mountains, like I always knew you would. I need to forget you.

My mother told me there is a technique and yesterday I decided to try. I carved a statue of you into the trunk of the fig tree, after burning away the living branches. I gave him back the teeth you lost when you fell into the marble ground. In his belly, in the nesting cavity of the yellow birds that fled when the shelling began, I placed the black curled mane we shaved from you the night before you left. I plugged the hole with a sand dollar and covered it in clay. If you make your way back home, you will find yourself in my absence.

At least one of you will have teeth.  
At least one of you will have hair.

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*I have been to our house. The door was rusted ajar, and every room was purged of the traces of us, as though the illegal past was congealed into every trace we left behind. But in the backyard is the labyrinth, and at the center is the statue.*

*The hole in your belly has cracked open with time, exposing a few curled locks. From your flattened mind, branches have re-emerged, and the figs of your unfulfilled ideas fall at your feet and take root, not far from where I burned the notebooks all those years ago. But after all this time, my love, you still have your teeth.*

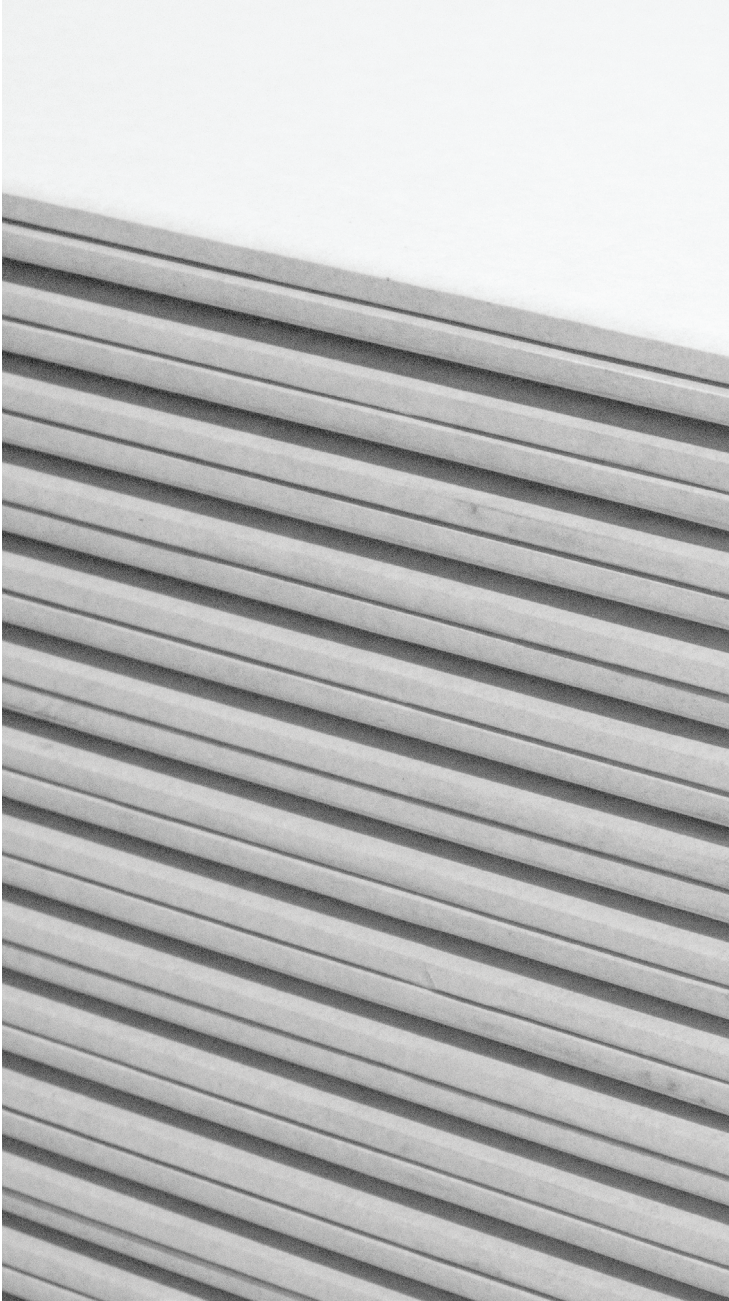
Thursday,

I have come inland.  
I will put away the memories of you.  
The town is all here.  
We will lose.  
We will lose each other.

The ground is littered with mementos from the coast: the razor clams and the spiraled snails. It seems that the birds are following us on our long migration north. On their way inland, they drop the shells at our feet. The foothills are strewn with the world we left behind. The next sand dollar I find I will give to the men who traffic in our forgetting and have them drive me away.

If the world was created out of nothingness, it can also be destroyed completely, leaving no traces. What harm can come of that?

What was it that you told me ...





BIOGRAPHIES

CHIARA BUGATTI (IT) is a visual artist based in Stockholm. She works with sculpture, time-based installations and video to explore the narrative potential of materials. Between construction and decay, and within these processes of transformation, materials become mediums for investigating the space we inhabit and revealing its complex and vulnerable structure. She is trained in Fine Arts at the Art Academies in Venice and Umeå and she has a post-master's degree from the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm.

MANUEL SCHWAB (DE/USA) is a writer, professor and anthropologist based between Cairo and Berlin. He writes nonfiction on humanity as a strange form of equivalent, and the role of violence in forging our encounters across space and time. His fiction tends to think about objects that have a more vibrant social life than most people can hope for, from manuscripts seeking refuge in the world to currencies to congealed time. He is trained in both Anthropology and Comparative Literature at Columbia University in New York.

ESTUDIO JOCHAMOWITZ RIVERA (PE) is an architect-duo based in Lima. Mariana Jochamowitz and Nicolas Rivera combine their design work with teaching. Their practice is focused on the relationship between the building and its inhabitation, specifically in the Peruvian territory. Their projects share a desire to measure and find the materiality of this relationship in the buildings they design, find or remember. They work through a variety of media including buildings, drawings, textiles and texts. They are trained in Architecture at the Pontificia Universidad del Peru and at Bartlett School of Architecture in London.

GETTING LOST IN THE MIDDLE OF A SENTENCE is a solo exhibition by Chiara Bugatti at Haninge Konsthall (SE). Departing from the chemical element calcium, in the form of everyday materials that are both inside and around us, she creates a spatial magnifying glass that focuses on our body and our surroundings and on the ongoing process of transformation we are in.

GETTING LOST IN THE MIDDLE OF A SENTENCE

/Att gå vilse mitt i en mening

OPENING 16/09/2023 CLOSING 19/11/2023

Konsthallen i Haninge kulturhus, Poseidons tong 8, 136 46 Handen. Book an appointment for a press tour with curator Sarah Guarino Werner at [sarah.guarinoghanninge.se](mailto:sarah.guarinoghanninge.se), or call 070 606 48 89.

WEB <https://www.hanninge.se/uppleva-och-gora/kultur/konsten/konsthallen/>

