



The Remaindering

Ruth Jacks



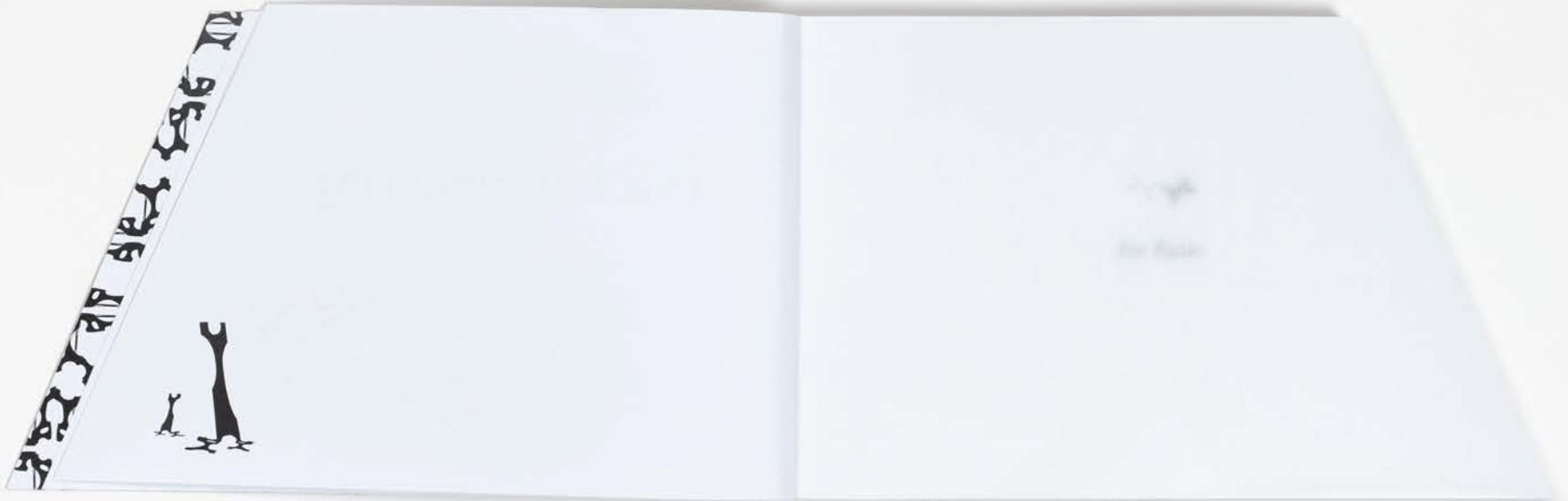


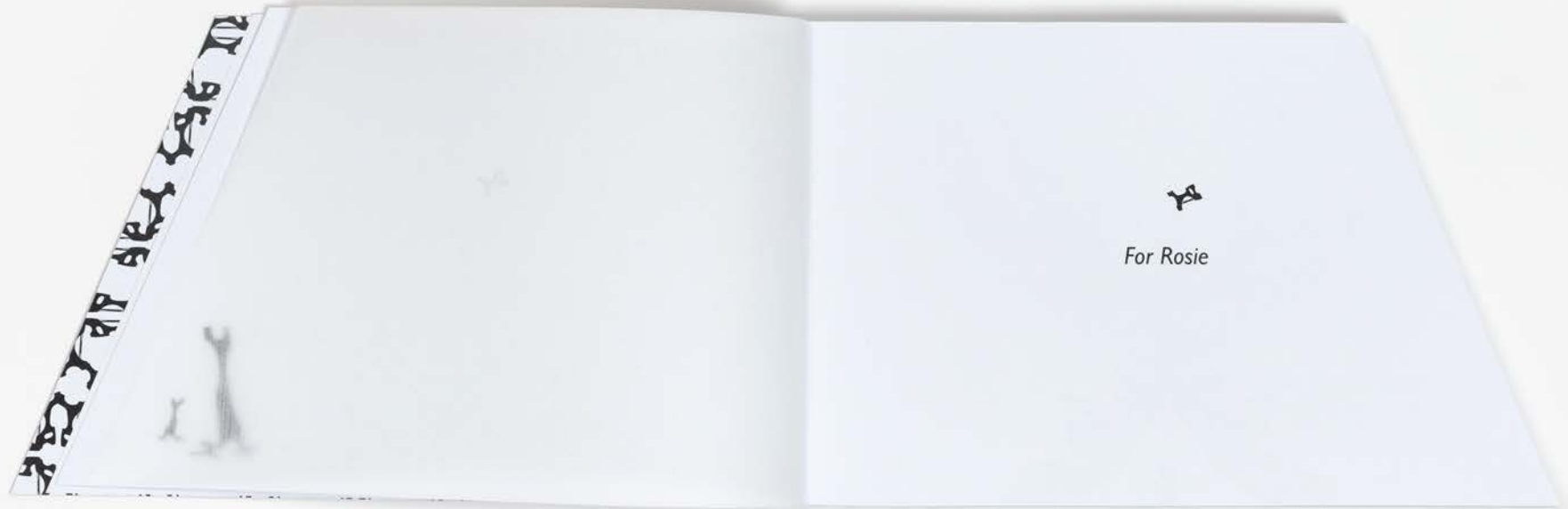
The Remaindering

Ruth
Jacks



Garamond Press





For Rosie

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PROCESS

Reminders are stubborn, sticky and ambiguous objects. They emerge when the historic gestures that gave birth to them go awry. From never-finished infrastructural features and unmade architectural plans to partially dilapidated public monuments, they still function although not in the way their makers intended.

Despite existing in a constant state of disobeying their human designers, these reminders also hold something of their origins. Over the years and pounding of weather, the changing patterns of movement around reminders (of humans, insects, animals, and plants) effect their appearance and form. Humans built them and may still use them in some way but their allegiances are with their environments.





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Humans tend to try capture objects and other-minded beings. Through representation, interpretation and physical control humans assume that the non-human world should do what we want it to. Reminders seldom acquiesce to people's demands and are branded as difficult. They respond with silent obduracy. While reminders do not wither away, they are far from useful to the cities and systems they were made to serve. The remaining process involves moving into becoming something else, without ever totally transforming. My remaining process developed while I was conducting research about the Congo. This started in Brussels with the Art Nouveau movement and ended in Kinshasa's post-independence modernism. I followed a trail of fantastical, bizarre and ambitious buildings, artworks and exhibition installations sprawling across the late 19th and 20th centuries and two continents. Each construction was built by the regimes of King Leopold II's Congo Colony and Mobutu Sese Seko's Second Republic which, in different ways, have gained notoriety. These objects of study became my academic book called *Congo Style*. The awkward objects that did not make it into the official text are reminders. They will never fit into wordy critical arguments except as anecdotes. But they stayed with me long after I had moved on from *Congo Style*. More than ephemera from the field, these reminders lingered in a way that eludes definition.

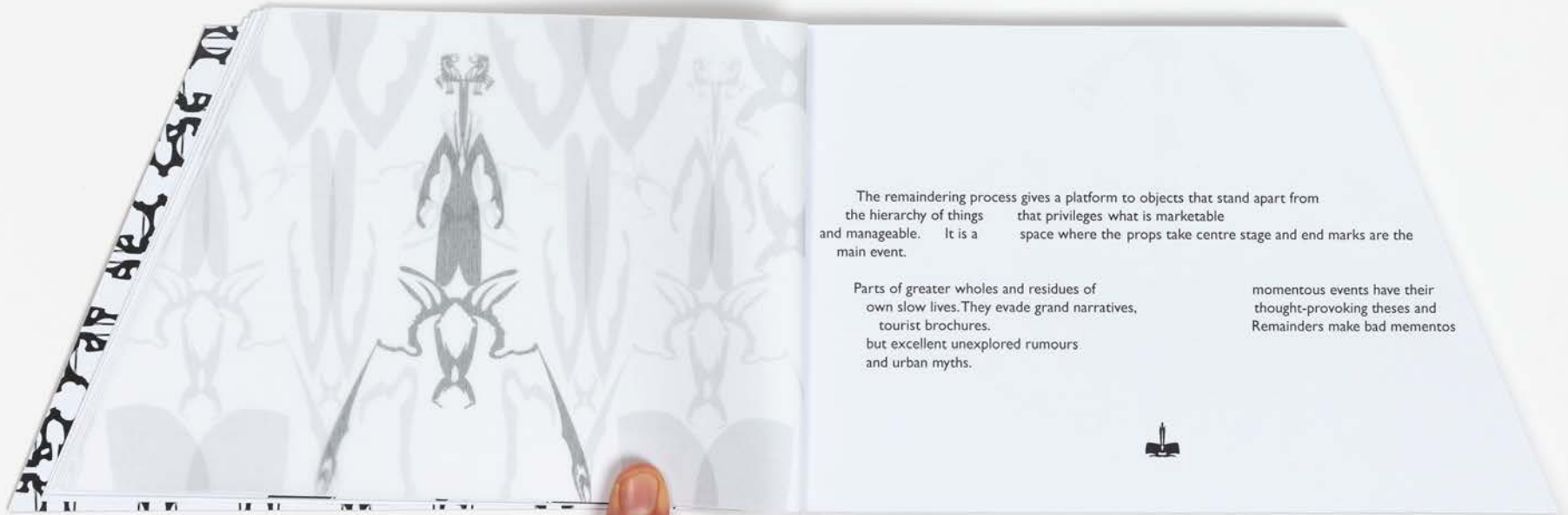


The remaindering process gives a platform to objects that stand apart from the hierarchy of things and manageable. It is a space where the props take centre stage and end marks are the main event. that privileges what is marketable

Parts of greater wholes and residues of own slow lives. They evade grand narratives, tourist brochures but excellent unexplored rumours and urban myths.

momentous events have their thought-provoking traces and Reminders make bad ornaments





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Handwritten text in a stylized, possibly Kikongo or related African script, running vertically along the left edge of the book's pages.

NJILLI

I was in the Kinshasa suburb of Njilli, in a former
leisure resort for the independence era party, the Popular Movement
of the Revolution (MPR). The site is now used as an army barracks and we were only allowed
to drive past and wonder about the place where Muhammed Ali had
once stayed (before the legendary boxing match, 'The Rumble in the Jungle').
Postcards of the resort in its prime show minimal white cottages on the banks of the Congo
River, beneath a tall white tower, bearing the lettering 'MPR'. On an outside wall
encroached by lush grass, weeds and moss, were what looked
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Eager to locate some examples of local art, I took an illegal photo through the taxi window, and thinking I had found something interesting. Several days later, I asked a university professor who the artist was. I was told the symbols were Chinese lettering. I understood why the professor had said this. Mobutu's Chinese Palace is in the area and I was very bad at explaining the exact location. But it was also quite obvious that these were not Mandarin or Cantonese characters.



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A couple of years later I was in a Belgian archive paging through a Congolese news journal from 1964.

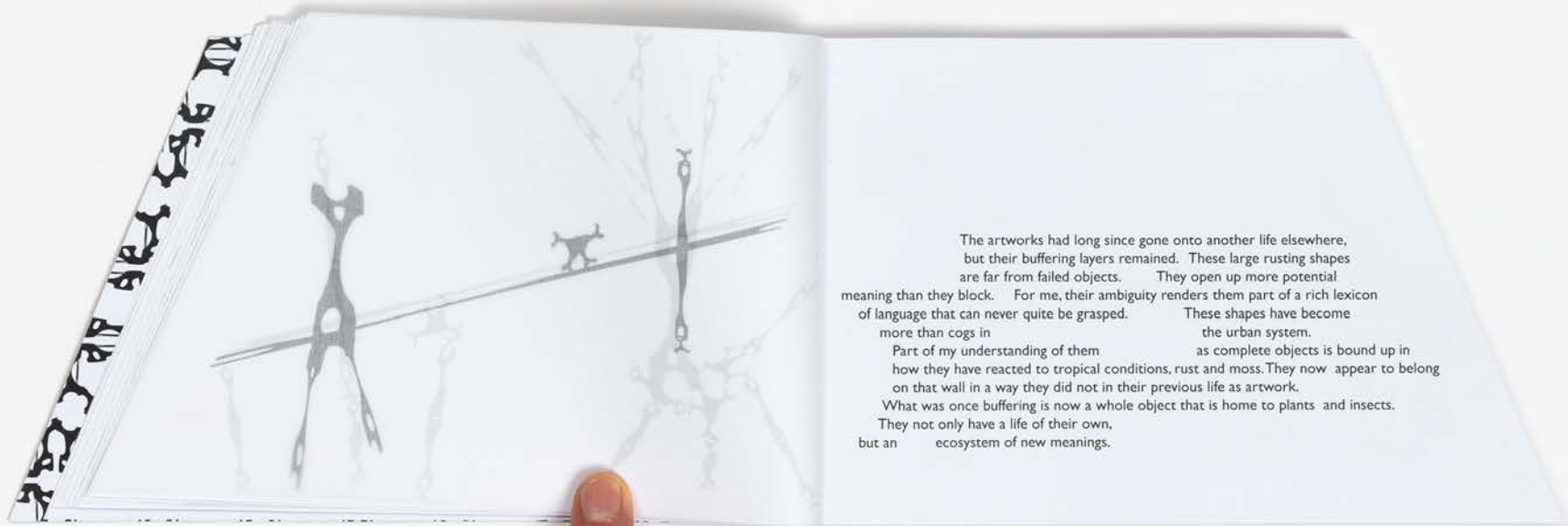
I saw a photo of the wall with the abstract forms. This photo accompanied a news article about 'The Week in Africa.'

What I thought were sculptures in themselves now appeared as supports to crafted metal sculptures of elongated women that wore traditional dress. The women carried water pitchers, also in traditional garb and

One image was of a soldier holding a weapon. The artwork was now recognizable as the work of Alfred Liyolo. Liyolo was one of Mobutu's favourites. The ruler is said to have bought an entire solo show by the artist on opening night.

Handwritten text in a stylized script, possibly a form of shorthand or a specific dialect, located along the left edge of the notebook page.





The artworks had long since gone onto another life elsewhere, but their buffering layers remained. These large rusting shapes are far from failed objects. They open up more potential meaning than they block. For me, their ambiguity renders them part of a rich lexicon of language that can never quite be grasped. These shapes have become more than cogs in the urban system. Part of my understanding of them as complete objects is bound up in how they have reacted to tropical conditions, rust and moss. They now appear to belong on that wall in a way they did not in their previous life as artwork. What was once buffering is now a whole object that is home to plants and insects. They not only have a life of their own, but an ecosystem of new meanings.

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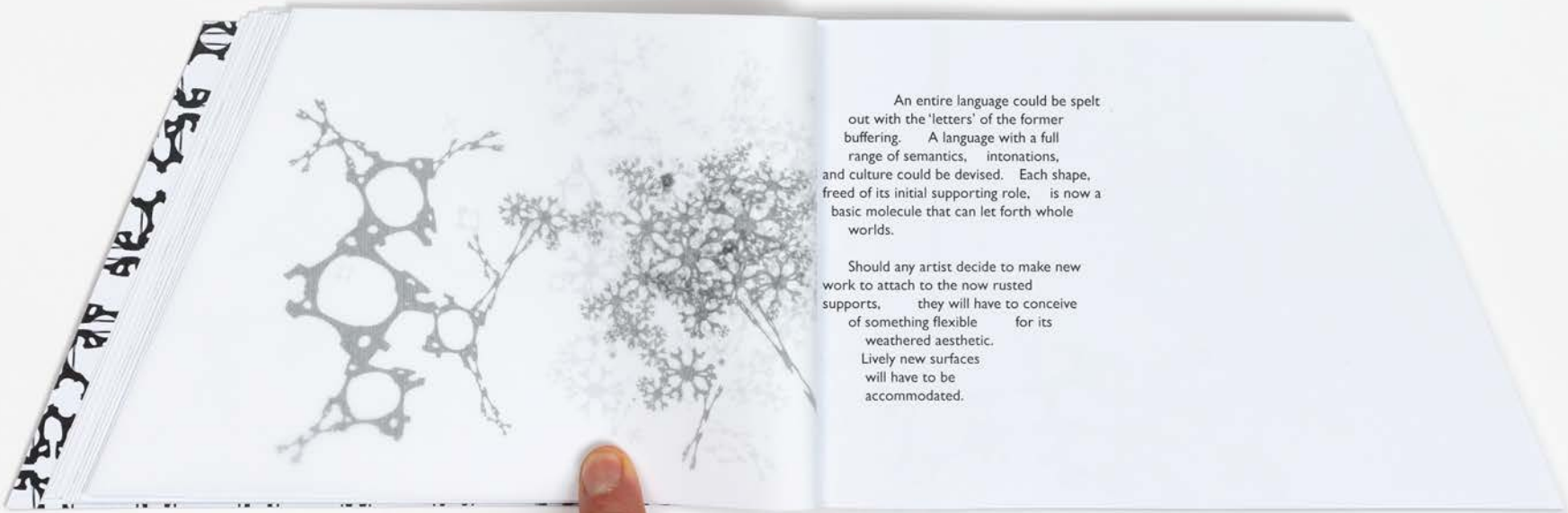
Reminders can be a message
The passing of time
Former sculptures supports new designs they
own narrative.
The metal remains collapse
beneath the weight of
former sculptures who
will up consider their
history.



Remainders can be a metaphor, but they are also a material fact.
The passing of time unfixes their original identity.
Former sculpture supports now dictate their
own narrative.
The metal remainders operate
outside of the desires of
human interlocutors who
wish to control their
meaning.

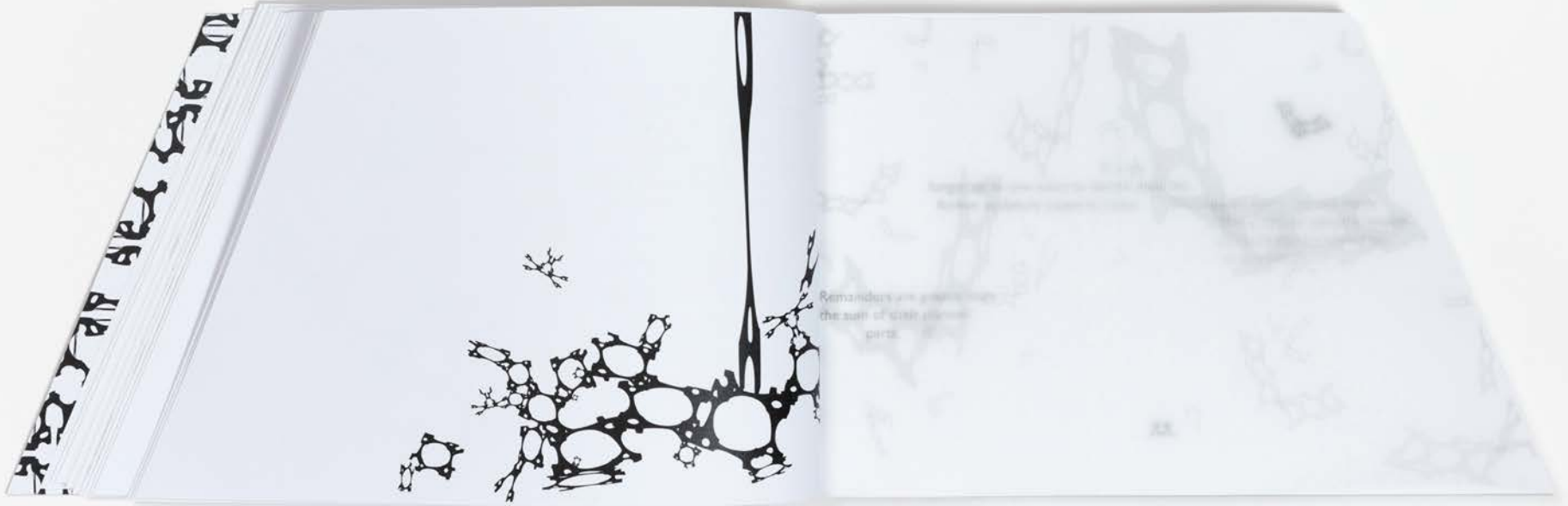




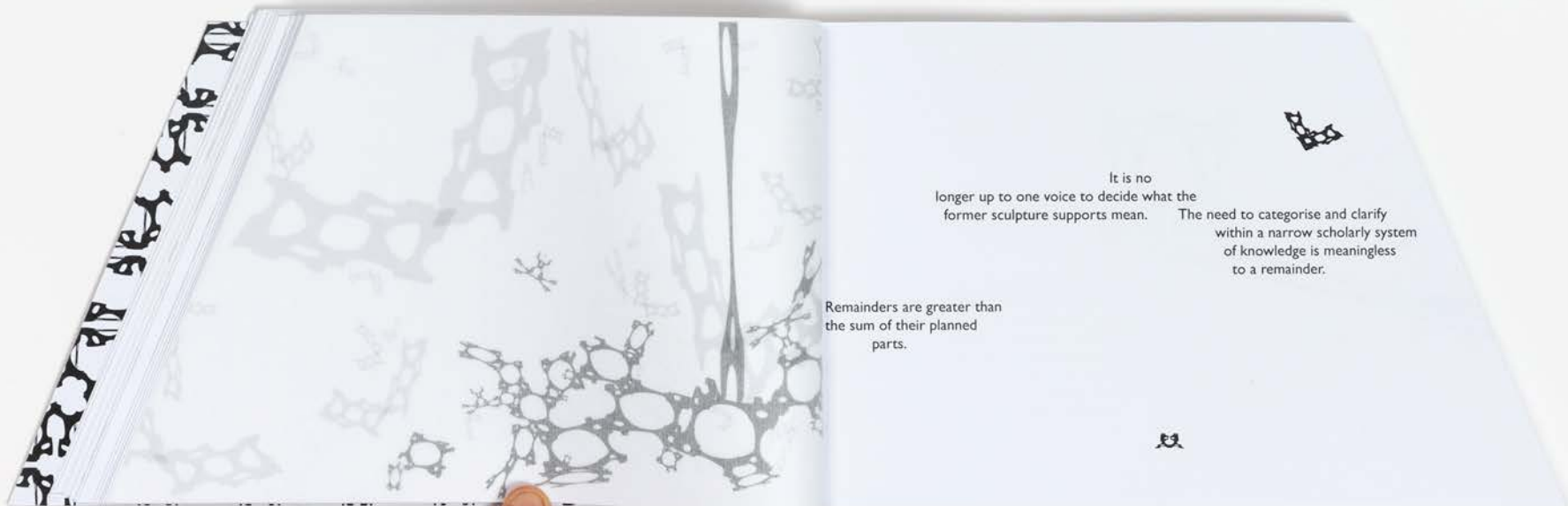


An entire language could be spelt out with the 'letters' of the former buffering. A language with a full range of semantics, intonations, and culture could be devised. Each shape, freed of its initial supporting role, is now a basic molecule that can let forth whole worlds.

Should any artist decide to make new work to attach to the now rusted supports, they will have to conceive of something flexible for its weathered aesthetic. Lively new surfaces will have to be accommodated.



Remanders are...
the sum of...
parts.



It is no longer up to one voice to decide what the former sculpture supports mean. The need to categorise and clarify within a narrow scholarly system of knowledge is meaningless to a remainder.

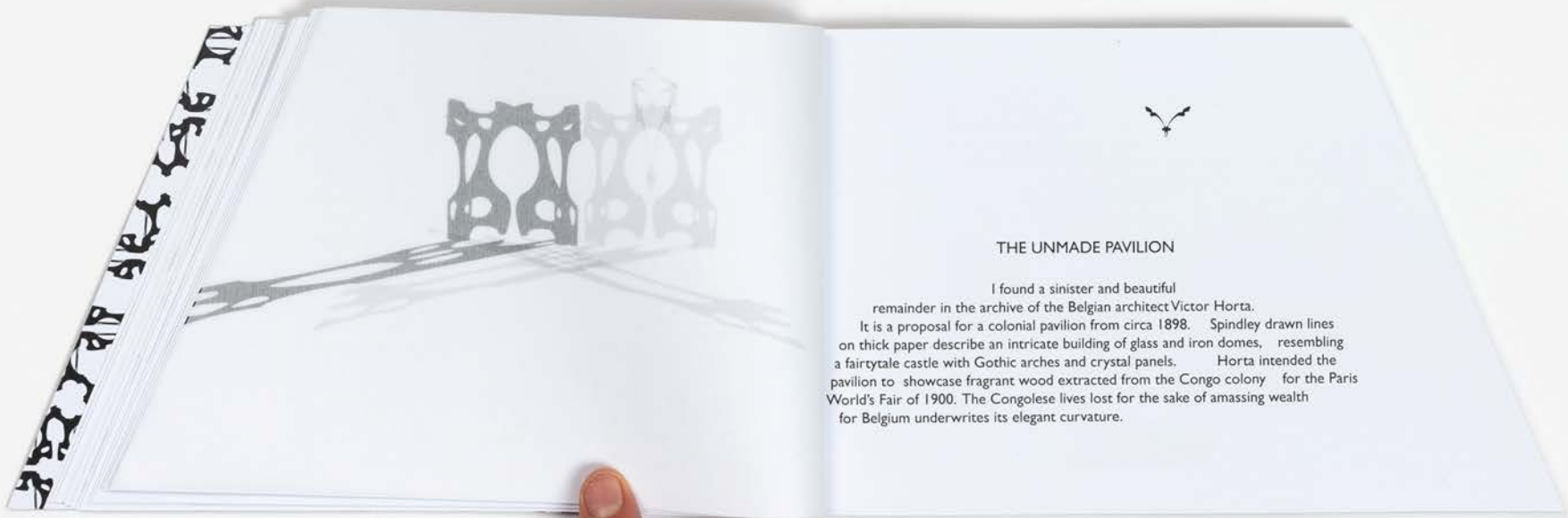
Remainders are greater than the sum of their planned parts.





THE UNMADE PAVILION

I found a paper and friends
remainder in the archive of the Belgian architect Joseph ...
It is a proposal for a colonial pavilion from circa 1898. ...
on thick paper describe an intricate building of glass and iron ...
a fairytale castle with Gothic arches and crystal panels. ...
pavilion to showcase Belgian wood harvested from the Congo ...
World's Fair of 1900. The Congress then lost for the sake of showing wealth
for Belgium underwriter its elegant colonialists.



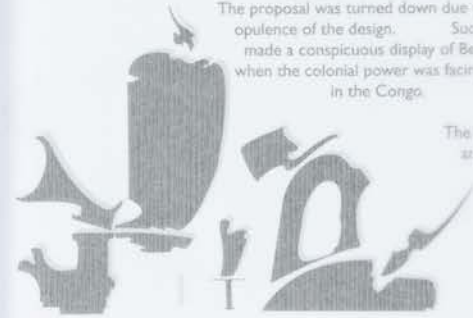
THE UNMADE PAVILION

I found a sinister and beautiful remainder in the archive of the Belgian architect Victor Horta. It is a proposal for a colonial pavilion from circa 1898. Spindley drawn lines on thick paper describe an intricate building of glass and iron domes, resembling a fairytale castle with Gothic arches and crystal panels. Horta intended the pavilion to showcase fragrant wood extracted from the Congo colony for the Paris World's Fair of 1900. The Congolese lives lost for the sake of amassing wealth for Belgium underwrites its elegant curvature.

Horta wanted the pavilion to be dismantled after the exhibition and its parts sent to the African colony to be used as offices for the Belgian colonial administration. This complete lack of engagement with the realities of both maritime travel and the tropical climate in central Africa was not the reason the pavilion was never realised.

The proposal was turned down due to the opulence of the design. Such a spectacle would have made a conspicuous display of Belgian wealth at a time when the colonial power was facing accusations of atrocities in the Congo.

The pavilion remains unbuilt and exists as a preposterous dream today.



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Perpetually hovering in the realm of potential, the pavilion is haunting. The brittle lines of the drawing suggest a total departure from material logic and human intuition. The paper plane, suspended in a temperature-controlled void, is not unlike to what European architects liked to see when mapping the urban landscape.

The pavilion's design is a response to the program's need for a structure that would provide shelter from the sun.





Perpetually hovering in the realm of potential, the pavilion is haunting. The brittle lines of the drawing accentuate Horta's complete departure from material facts and human injustice. The paper plans, preserved in a temperature controlled room, focus attention to what European architects failed to see when imagining the colonial endeavour.

The unmade pavilion holds an oppressor's imagination unable to conceive of an actual place inhabited by real people being torn apart.





The remainder of the
unmade pavilion, and the history
that it embodies, sees it function
as a veil for extreme cruelty.
Rational symmetries describe the
fantasy of conquest as exquisite enlightenment
once again.



Horta's paper plans complement
the extravagant obfuscations of history
books that paint colonial conquerors as heroes
bringing civilization to the unenlightened.
Thinking of my own experience of Kinshasa,
and the physical outcomes of such histories,
I imagine - if the pavilion had made it to
Congoese shores. The unmade pavilion
sits on the top of the Kinshasa hill, Mont Ngaliema,
in my mind. Its glass panes
have long since vanished, and its metal
frameworks now rust above the eddying
Congo River. Then the
vision of a not-quite-ruin
dissipates back into a fragile drawing.
The pavilion and its future remains can never
be entered. The would-be
settler building remains locked
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The drawn pavilion presents silhouettes of
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"Horta's most beautiful
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"A fairytale castle!" says
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BRIDGE STAIRS

Boulevard Lumumba is a long, broad highway that outlines the Congo River in jerky lines. It leads from Kinshasa's main airport to the city centre before curving outwards to the southeast, connecting densely populated suburbs. The road is studded with matching staircases on opposite sides of the road. It takes a little time to realize that these were once intended as bridges. Each pair of identically moulded forms is missing its connecting walkway.

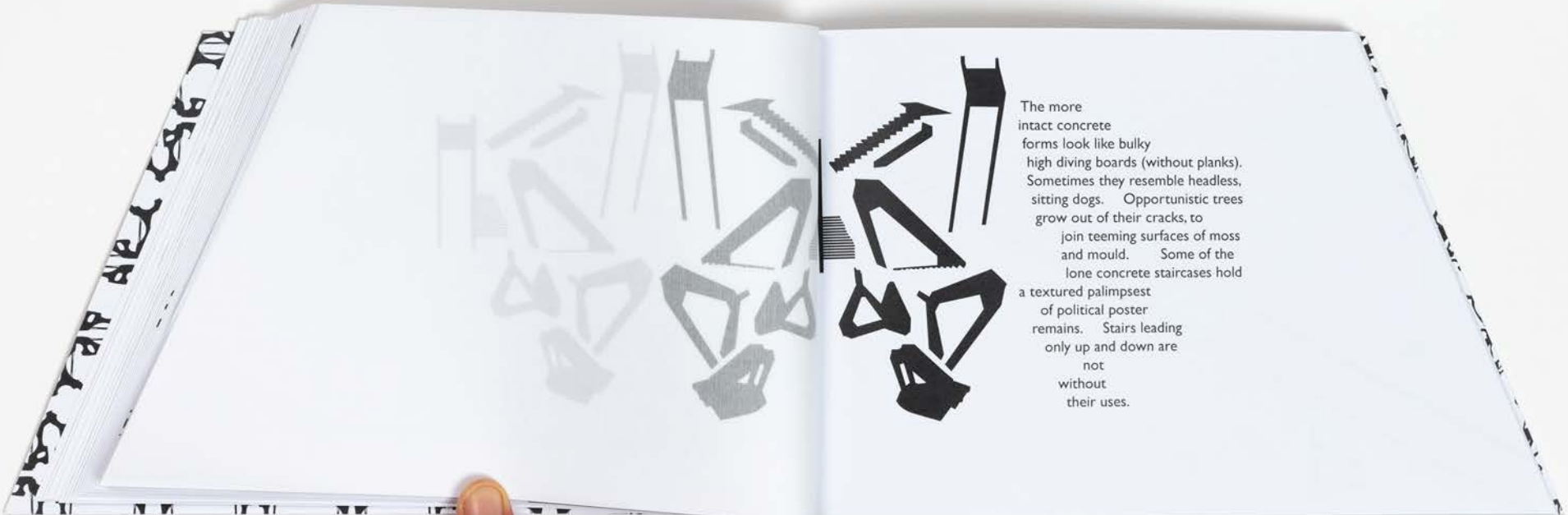




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The more intact concrete forms look like bulky high diving boards (without planks). Sometimes they resemble headless, sitting dogs. Opportunistic trees grow out of their cracks, to join teeming surfaces of moss and mould. Some of the lone concrete staircases hold a textured palimpsest of political poster remains. Stairs leading only up and down are not without their uses.



Each dense staircase holds its own story of life at the side of a main city artery. People use the remaining stairs

as seating and tables for snacks and beer for sale.

The not-bridges are marked by black streaks and encased in skins of dust and peeling paint in unique patterns.

Rusting skeletons emerge from crumbling concrete.





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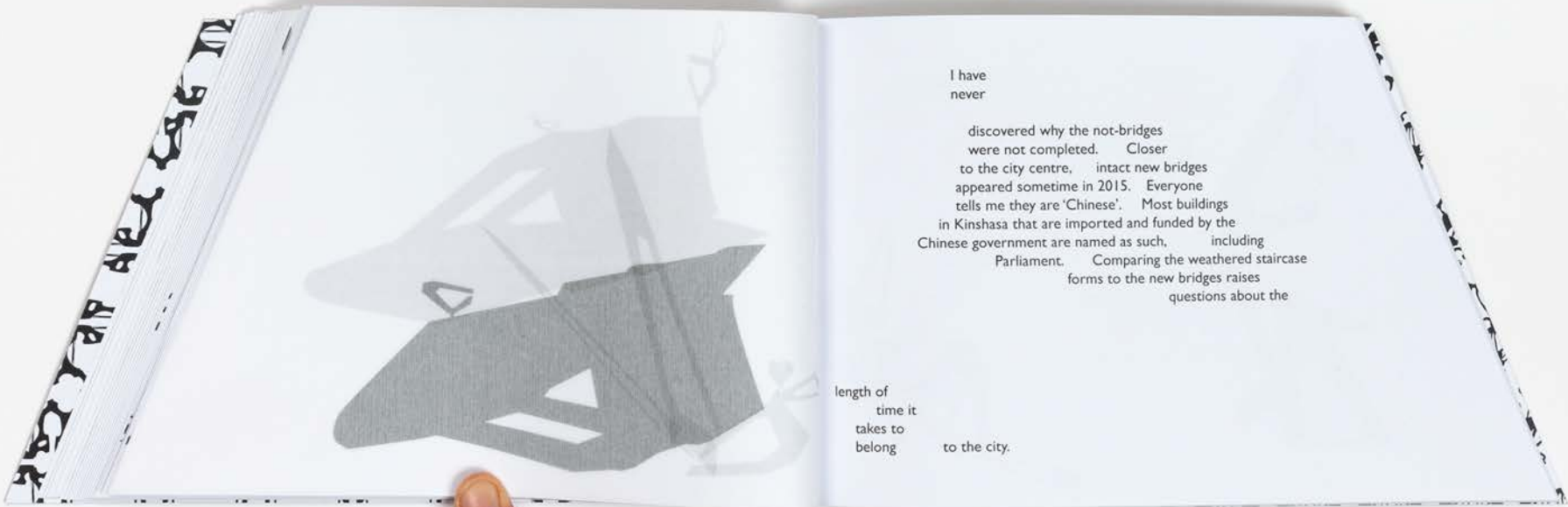
Rusting skeletons
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I have
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discovered why the not-bridges
were not completed. Closer
to the city centre, intact new bridges
appeared sometime in 2015. Everyone
tells me they are 'Chinese'. Most buildings
in Kinshasa that are imported and funded by the
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Parliament. Comparing the weathered traditional
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The preassembled Chinese bridges
evidently arrived in composite parts.
They have a clear narrative of national
agreement and inarguable
function. Comparatively,
the open-ended
staircase forms have

multiple
meanings.

Their
present a
and a lack
bulk

missing parts
proposition

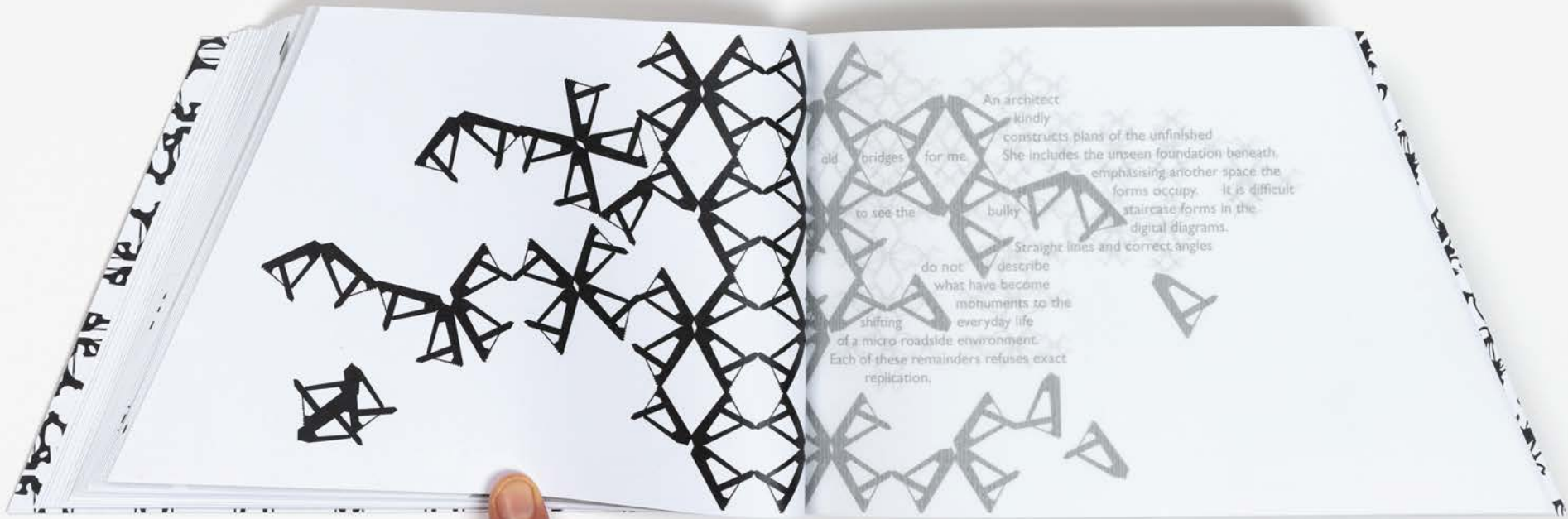
The concrete
of the lone
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attention
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between.



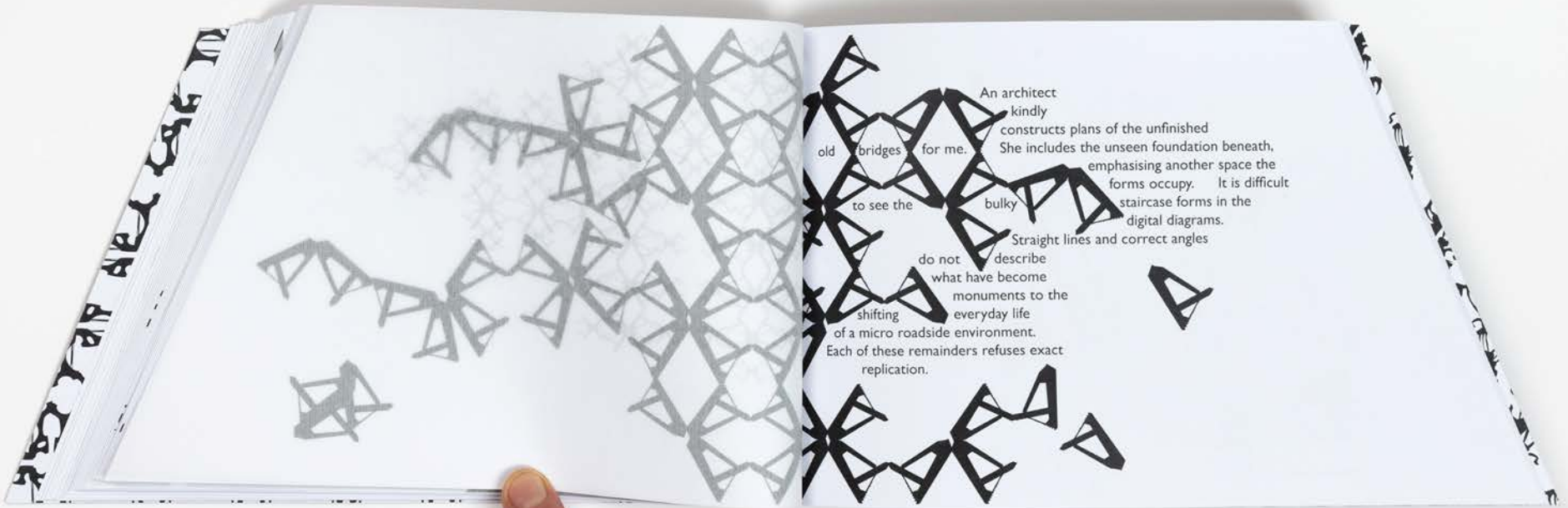
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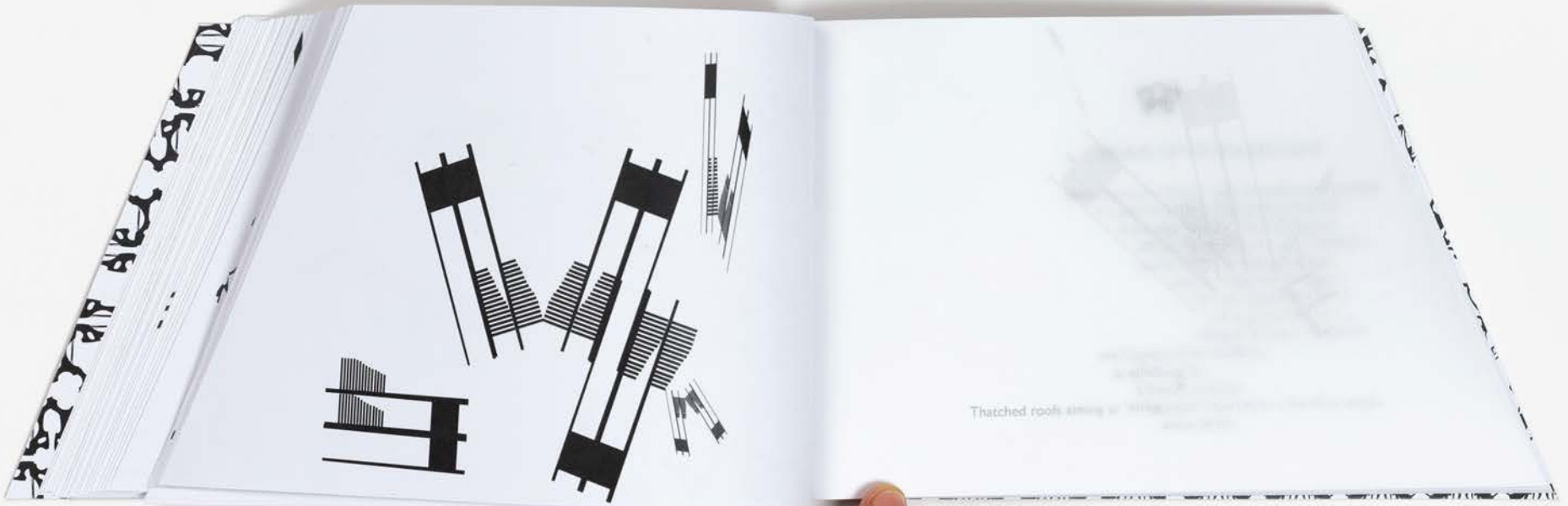
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She includes the unseen foundation beneath,
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Straight lines and correct angles
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Each of these remainders refuses exact
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Thatched roofs among the traditional houses of the village of...



PALACE OF THE GOLDEN GATE

Next to a zoo in Paris's 12th *arrondissement* (suburb) is a park holding the remainders of a 1931 colonial exhibition. The buildings are difficult to recognize as such. Different pavilions representing conquered lands no longer fill the lawns.

The sole representatives of the long past fair are enlarged versions of Togolese and Cameroonian dwellings, as conceived by a French architect.

Thatched roofs aiming at "Africanness" now house a Buddhist temple and a library.



In its day, the colonial fair erected pavilions designed with dislocated cultural references on display as the trophies of colonial enterprise. To further encourage interest from the European audience, exhibits included human zoos.

Original subjects wore exotic costumes and performed far-fair versions of their cultures invented by their oppressors. Some of the orientaling spectacle is still present in the nearby Palace of the Golden Gate. Its plaster walls sport exuberant frescoes of tumbling folk animals and plants. In amongst them are caricatures of people of colour engaged in hunting and harvesting.





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Colonial subjects wore exotic costumes and performed fun fair versions of their cultures invented by their oppressors. Some of this orientaling spectacle is still present in the nearby Palace of the Golden Gate. Its outer walls sport exuberant frescoes of tumbling fish, animals and plants. In amongst them are caricatures of people of colour engaged in hunting and harvesting.





After housing an ethnographic museum, the Palace of the Golden Gate is now a museum of immigration.

The labels outlining human rights within are at odds with the wild bacchanal of deliberately strange forms outside. The badly kept aquarium in the basement, another relic of 1931, belies the illustration of oceanic riches on the outside walls. Popular African art exhibits once found here are now in a much grander building in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower. Easier tourist access is necessary for exhibits that locate Paris as a powerful centre of culture. Colonial fairs tended to be located on city outskirts to add to the sense of travel and adventure. The Museum of Immigration does not rate as something that can't be missed.



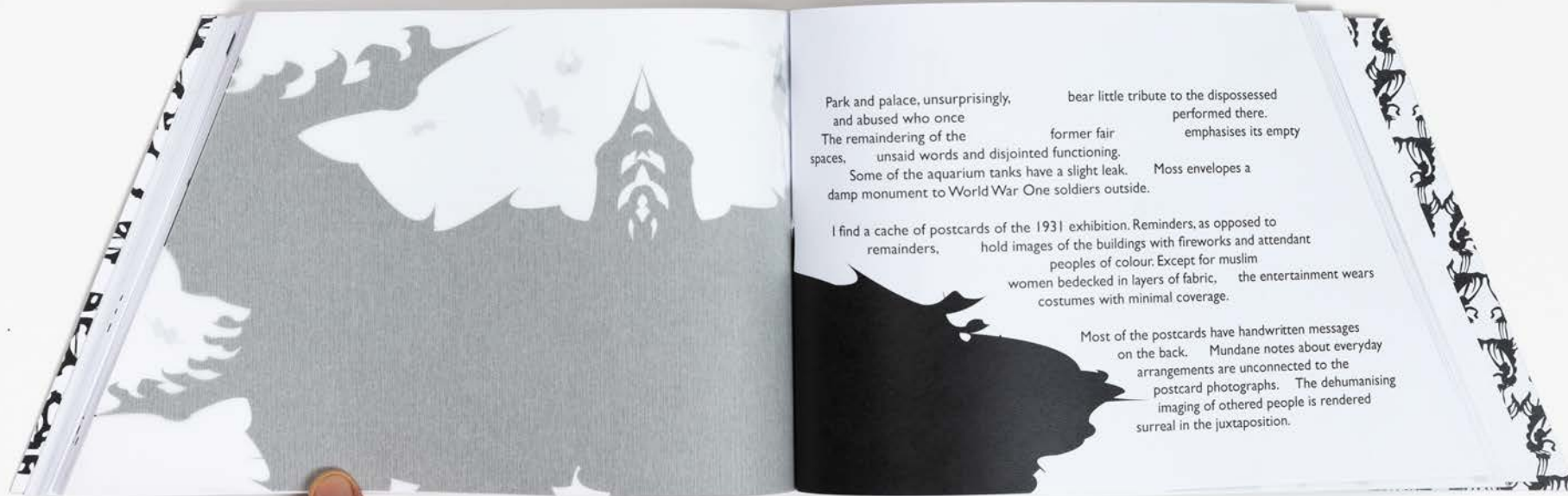
Park and palace, unsurprisingly,
and skinned who once
The remainder of the
Some of the aquarium tanks have a slight leak.
I find a cache of postcards of the 1931 exhibition. Reminders, as opposed to
remainders,

bear little tribute to the
former fair
Masses emerge
Some of the aquarium tanks have a slight leak.
I find a cache of postcards of the 1931 exhibition. Reminders, as opposed to
remainders,

hold images of the buildings with fireplaces and ornate
peoples of colour. Escape for multi
women bedecked in layers of fabric.
the entertainment wears
costumes with minimal coverage.

Most of the postcards have handwritten messages
on the back. Mundane notes about everyday
arrangements are unconnected to the
postcard photographs. The dehumanizing
imaging of celebrated people is rendered
surreal in the juxtaposition.



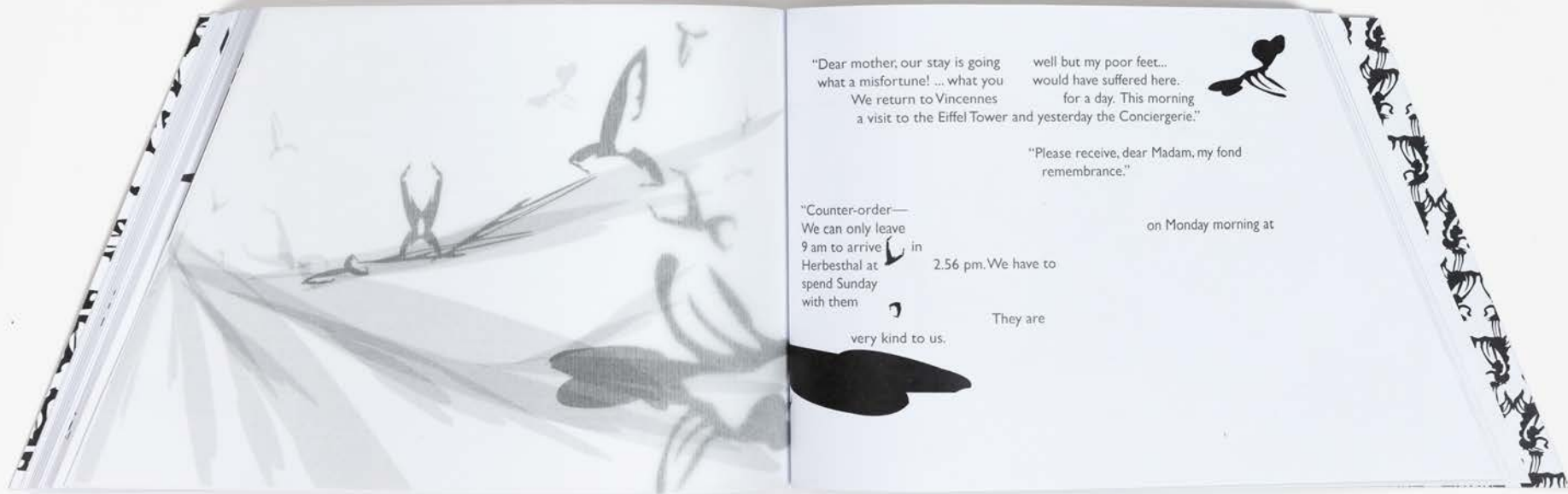


Park and palace, unsurprisingly, bear little tribute to the dispossessed
and abused who once performed there.
The remainder of the former fair emphasises its empty
spaces, unsaid words and disjointed functioning.
Some of the aquarium tanks have a slight leak. Moss envelopes a
damp monument to World War One soldiers outside.

I find a cache of postcards of the 1931 exhibition. Reminders, as opposed to
reminders, hold images of the buildings with fireworks and attendant
peoples of colour. Except for muslim
women bedecked in layers of fabric, the entertainment wears
costumes with minimal coverage.

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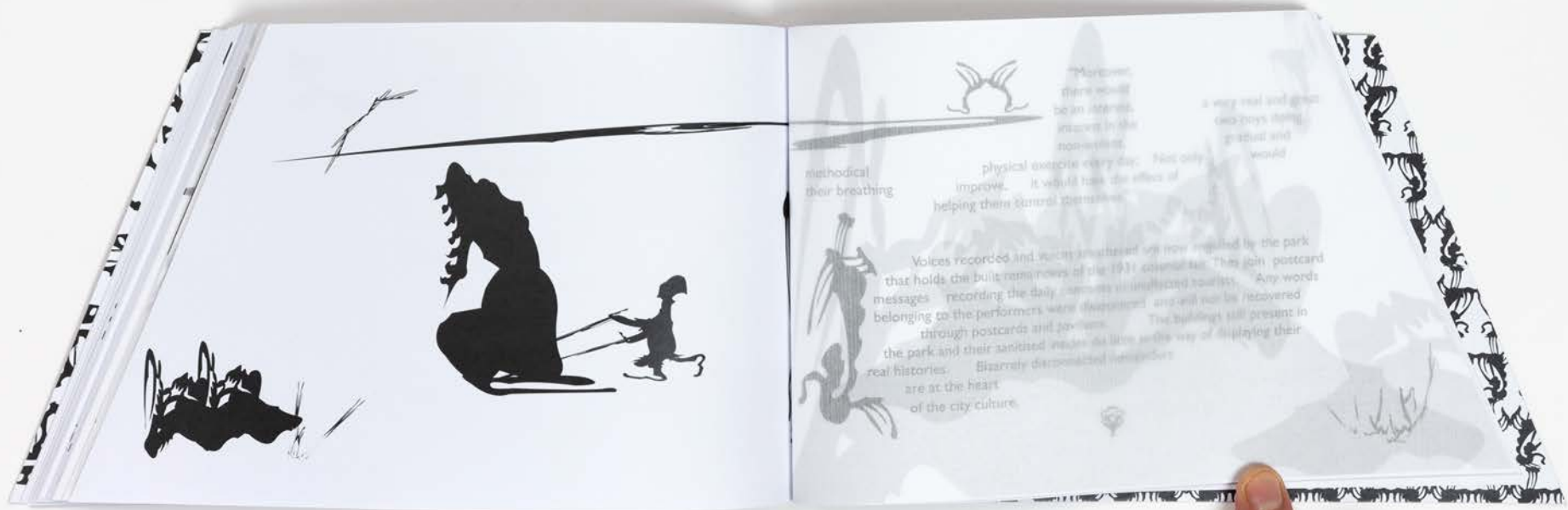


"Dear mother, our stay is going well but my poor feet...
what a misfortune! ... what you would have suffered here.
We return to Vincennes for a day. This morning
a visit to the Eiffel Tower and yesterday the Conciergerie."



"Please receive, dear Madam, my fond
remembrance."

"Counter-order—
We can only leave on Monday morning at
9 am to arrive in
Herbesthal at 2.56 pm. We have to
spend Sunday with them
They are
very kind to us."



methodical
their breathing

physical exercise every day. Not only
improve. it would have the effect of
helping them control themselves.

Voices recorded and... that holds the built...
messages recording the daily... Any words
belonging to the performers were...
the park and their sanitized...
are at the heart
of the city culture.

... a very real and great
two boys doing
gradual and
would





“Moreover,
there would
be an interest,
interest in the
non-violent,
physical exercise every day; Not only
improve, it would have the effect of
helping them control themselves.”

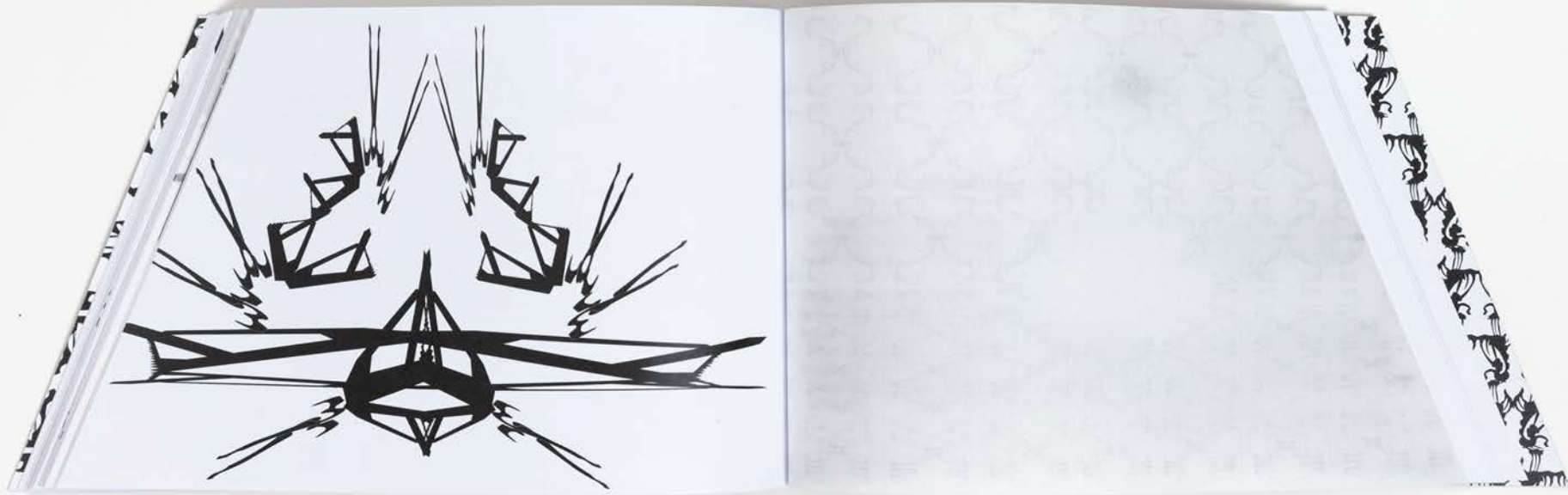
a very real and great
two boys doing
gradual and
would

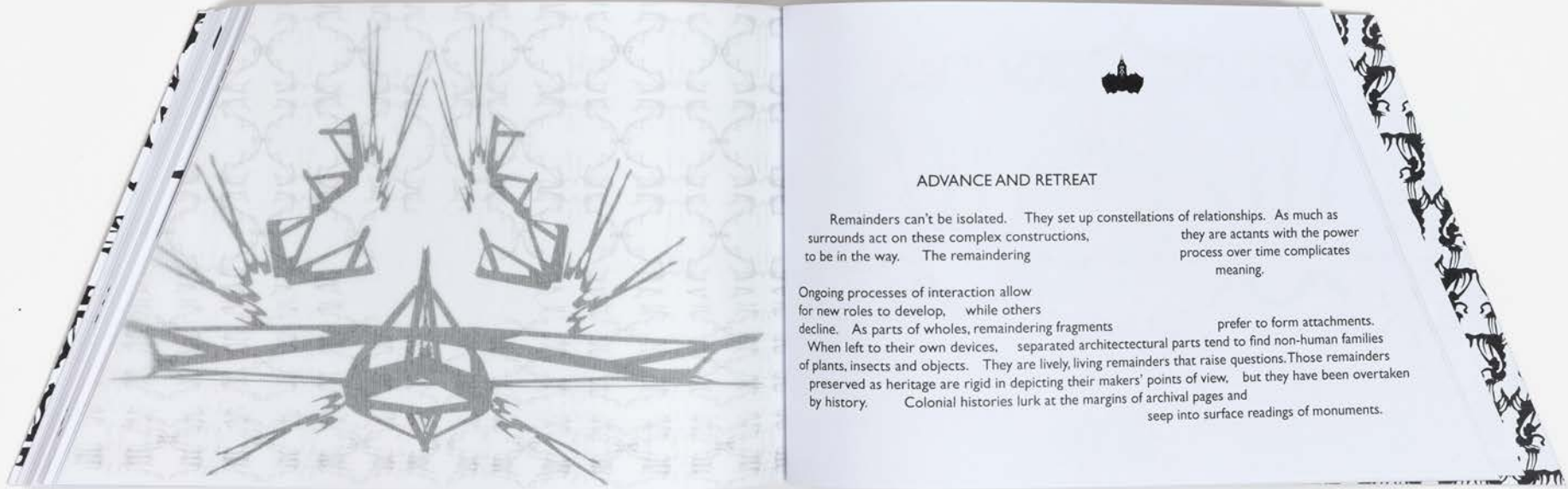
methodical
their breathing



Voices recorded and voices smothered are now engulfed by the park
that holds the built remainders of the 1931 colonial fair. They join postcard
messages recording the daily concerns of unaffected tourists. Any words
belonging to the performers were disappeared and will not be recovered
through postcards and pavilions. The buildings still present in
the park and their sanitised insides do little in the way of displaying their
real histories. Bizarrely disconnected remainders
are at the heart
of the city culture.



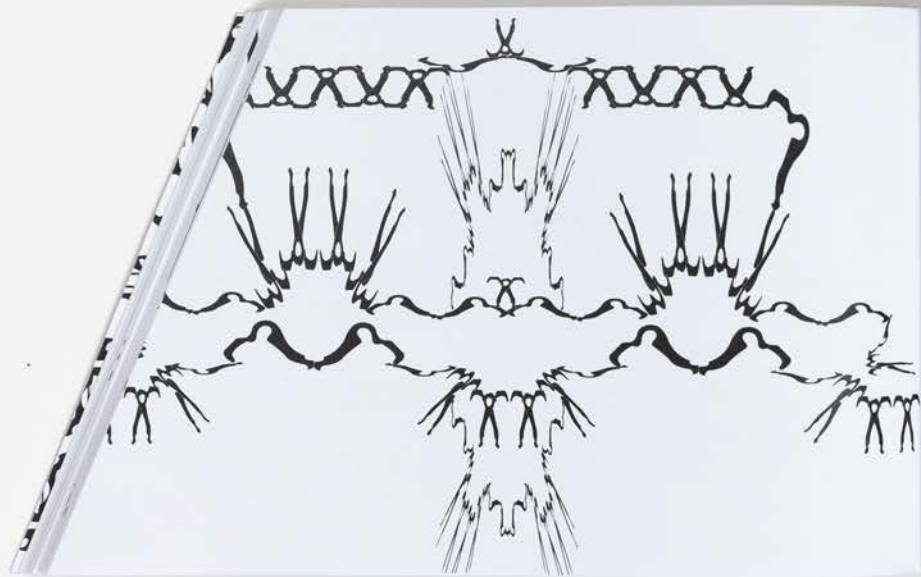


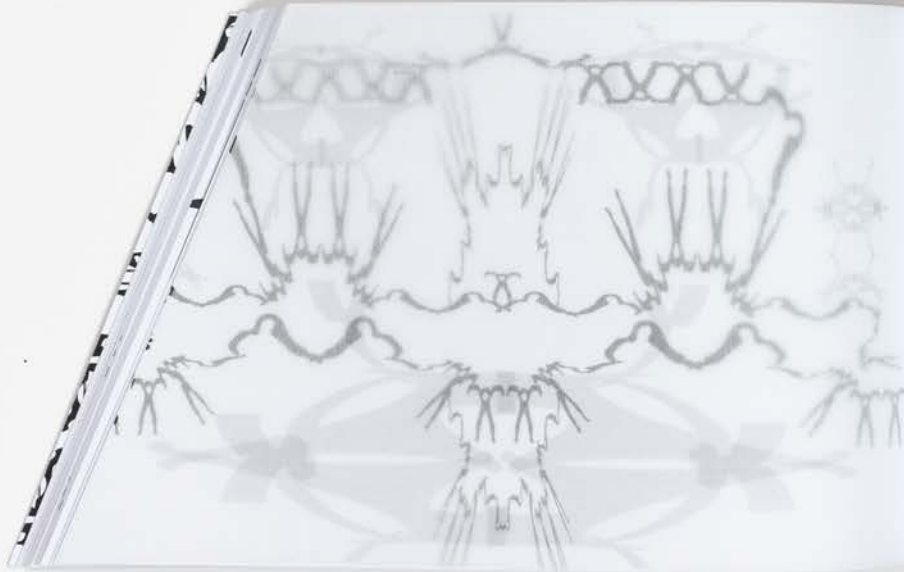


ADVANCE AND RETREAT

Reminders can't be isolated. They set up constellations of relationships. As much as surrounds act on these complex constructions, they are actants with the power to be in the way. The remaindering process over time complicates meaning.

Ongoing processes of interaction allow for new roles to develop, while others decline. As parts of wholes, remaindering fragments prefer to form attachments. When left to their own devices, separated architectural parts tend to find non-human families of plants, insects and objects. They are lively, living reminders that raise questions. Those reminders preserved as heritage are rigid in depicting their makers' points of view, but they have been overtaken by history. Colonial histories lurk at the margins of archival pages and seep into surface readings of monuments.





cornerstone.
ideological

more foundational

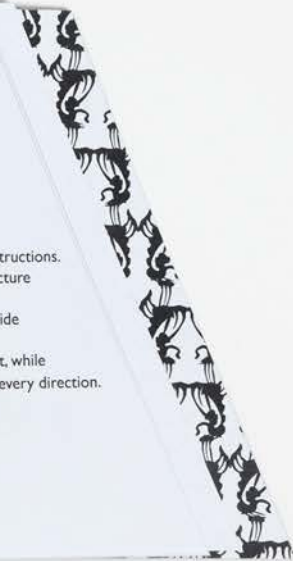
The remaining process is
to cities than any carefully
preserved

How the built forms and
constructs of humans unravel
ultimately effects the nature of change.

The remaining process ensures that
structures or fabrications cannot be reduced to a single
layer of meaning. The presence of

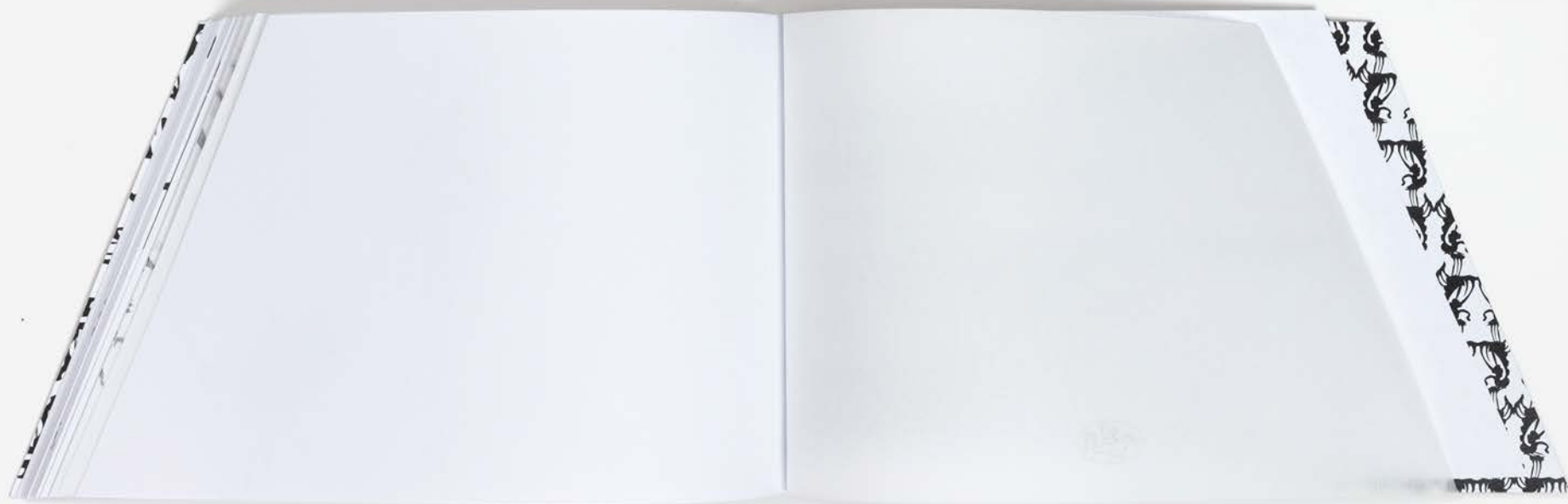
reminders is always a harbinger of what is to come for even the sturdiest constructions.
While humans try to dominate, their own buildings, artworks and infrastructure
have power over them. The illusion of
manageability dissipates with ageing inside

changeable environments: political as much as
physical. Reminders are connected to the past, while
they reach in every direction.









The Remaindering

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The imagery of each section of the book is derived from fragments of the plans, drawings or photographs of the constructions under discussion.

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