Visual Matter credits

Fig. 1 CELINE collaboration with David Kramer, Teddy Souvenir Flocked Satin Rayon “I Have Nostalgia For Things I Probably Have Never Known”. Image is courtesy of CELINE.

Fig. 2 Rumiko Hagiwara, *I want to be a shell*, Still from video, 2019
Image is courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 3 Sarah van Lamsweerde, *Cast Witnesses* (2016-17), performance series and video, coproduced with Playground Festival (STUK & M - Museum, Leuven), Beursschouwburg Brussel, Allard Pierson Museum Amsterdam
Photo: Joeri Thiry, STUK House for Dance, Image and Sound
Image is courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 4 *The spread of a crack is halted by a hole,* a residue exhibition, gestures by Sarah van Lamsweerde, Anastasija Pandilovska and Marjoca de Greef at Marmeren Hal of Tetterode, Amsterdam.
Photo by Marjoca de Greef.

Fig. 5 Aram Lee, *A Dissonance of Landscapes* (2019)HD Video, 13:50 mins, still, Archive: “Ten Export Landscapes”, series of oil paintings, Canton, China, NMVW, The Netherlands. Project supported by AFK and Framer. Framed. Image is courtesy of the artist.

Image on introduction page
Sarah van Lamsweerde, from rehersals of the performace *Sightless Seeing #5: TIN Collection, IWO Boekendepot.*
Photo by Anastasija Pandilovska.

Art Practices and Cultural Heritage: The Critical Capacity of Nostalgia

A conversation between Anastasija Pandilovska and Marjoca de Greef

This conversation took place during the preparations for the process exhibition The spread of a crack is halted by a hole. *Throughout the preliminary research period, for which we had invited artists Hristina Ivanoska, Luiza Margan, and Sarah van Lamsweerde, we reflected on nostalgia and its critical disposition.* The spread of a crack is halted by a hole *was an attempt to cocreate and to explore how artistic practices could open up possibilities for nonlinear perceptions of history. Two days before the opening of the process exhibition, COVID-19 took over and stirred instantly all movements.*

Writing a collaborative piece, especially when it takes the form of a dialogue, has become a method in itself. How should we do it? A conversation cannot be prewritten: is one of us impatiently awaiting a response or will our pace of writing align? Gaining a new relation to slowness or another approach to time is an important element for the topic we are trying to discuss.

The dialogue that follows this short introduction was perhaps written in an overcrowded bar or while sitting on a train facing backwards; after a long meeting or while drinking plain coffee on the top floor of Amsterdam's public library among a display of spices whose smell is trapped in a glass vitrine. Having a word limit changes the dynamics of the conversation, so questions like "what do you mean by this?" are invisible interludes between the exercised thoughts.

MdG: During the symposium "Hey, What Do We Have to Lose?" in Skopje, we mentioned for the first time "critical nostalgia" as a method to unlock collections

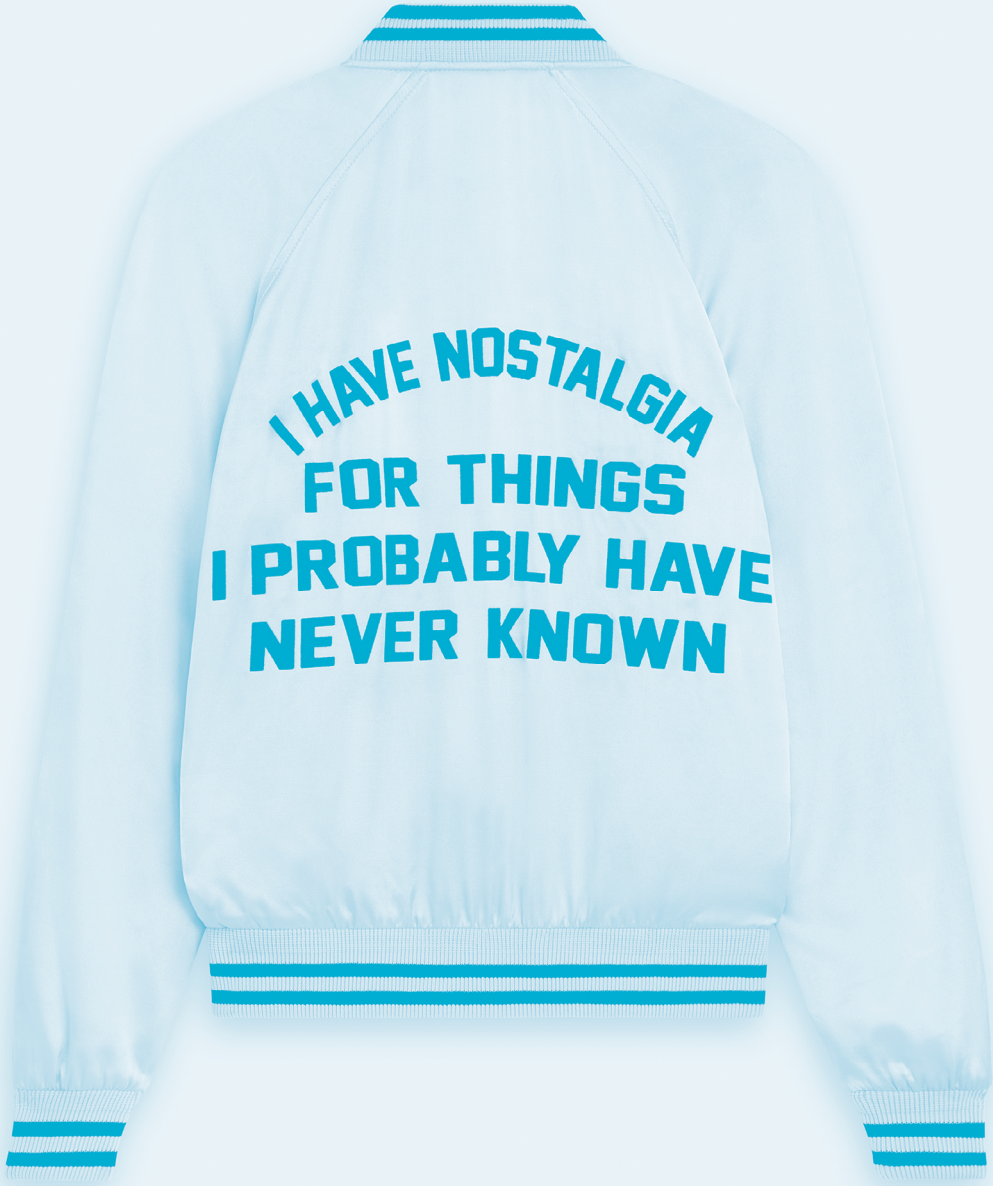

Fig. 1

and emancipate objects. What do you think evoked the negative response we received?

AP: When mentioning critical nostalgia in conversation, I have noticed that attention falls on the second word – nostalgia. In the context of cultural heritage, nostalgia, although being the most basic way to enter discourses regarding heritage, is often perceived as the most passive.

Some weeks ago, while browsing the internet, I came upon an image of a silky bomber jacket whose black bold letters on the back caught my attention. The sentence referred to the nostalgia that a generation feels for a time they were too young to experience but have heard a great deal about. Perhaps recent attempts to reject nostalgia have less to do with its passivity, and more to do with the context in which nostalgia is talked about.

MdG: Possibly. Nostalgia[1] is often described as the antipode of progress. It has been brushed aside as reactionary and sentimental by cultural critics, historians, and artists. For certain, it is used to glorify the dominant stories of the past, exploiting feelings of longing and regret. However, it is the "historical emotion" as described by Svetlana Boym[2] that interests me, the fundamental associative and sensorial relationship with heritage. Nostalgia might be generally used to boost dominant histories, but it is not shackled to these credenda of history; it could just as well be an instrument to emancipate forgotten or denied histories. I think nostalgia is a powerful tool, far too powerful to be left in the toolbox of populism.

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1 David Lowenthal traced the term *nostalgia* back to 1688, when the Swiss medical student Johannes Hofer coined it in his thesis, combining the Greek words *nostos* (return to the native land) and *algia* (suffering or grief). During the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, it remained a medical term. In the nineteenth century, nostalgia was gradually used in a more political and epistemological context. According to Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase, the present usage of the word is distinctly modern and metaphorical. "The home we miss is no longer a geographically defined space but rather a state of mind" (*The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia* [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989]).

2 Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), xvi.

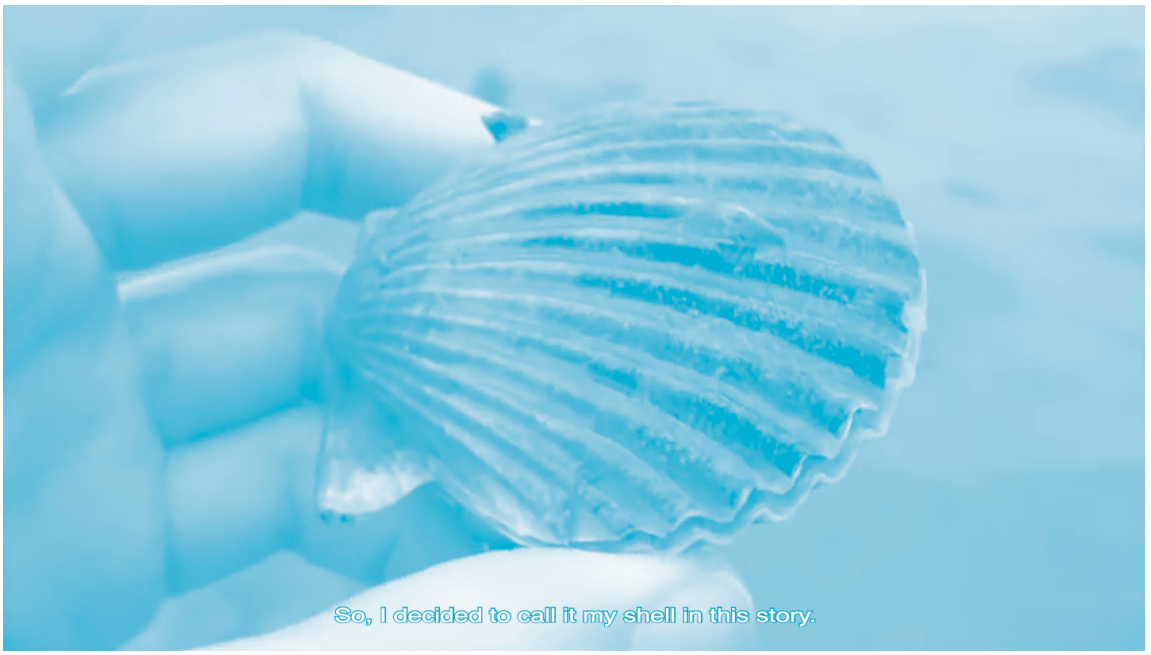

Fig. 2

AP: The idea that nostalgia reverses progress is only conceivable when we approach history as a continuity of progression. If we acknowledge that historical achievements, especially those of modernity, are contingent and have sometimes become consequential failures, then perhaps we can see a possibility for transforming conservative nostalgia into progressive nostalgia. Do you think there is a specific moment when nostalgia gains a critical capacity?

MdG: Nostalgia's critical potential is multivarious. It can be critical on different levels. Sometimes it is used to voice an unheard or alternative history and some artists use nostalgia as a wedge, to break into a hard-boiled or complex story, as Rumiko Hagiwara did with her video installation *I Want to Be a Shell* (2019). She lures the viewer into a story of transformation in which a common seashell travels from the beaches of her homeland Japan to Europe. Over time it loses its shades and mutates into the contemporary shadeless corporate logo of Shell. She intertwines the story of the shell, which along the way has become *her* shell, with the story of the Western shades and shadows which traveled in the opposite direction, to inflate the clear-lined images of Japanese paintings. It all relates to her own travel from Japan to Europe and the confusing cultural translations she encounters and explores. Her attempt to bring back the shell's lost shadows is a nostalgic gesture that opens up a narrative of a frail seashell that has grown into a representational icon of the world's largest oil company. Hagiwara uses nostalgia to evaluate both the notion of origin and the notion of progress.

AP: Regarding nostalgic gestures, a couple of images of Sarah van Lamsweerde's work remain in my memory: a body facing and mimicking the gesture of a woman's statue and multiple bodies trying to adjust their body parts to plaster casts of disjointed limbs. Even when incomplete, and with missing parts, these sculptures which participate in Van Lamsweerde's performance *Cast Witnesses* foreground the bodily idealizations that have occurred through time. Especially when considering that such statues are very often related to mythological beings that have always been perceived as perfect in the eyes of mortals. Although we have moved away from such myths, these fragmented sculptures are still being replicated and used as anchors when addressing historical images of bodies. What happens in the performative guided tours in the work of Van Lamsweerde is that

Fig. 3

through the tactile and textual interactions, guided by mediators amid the sculptures and their disjointed counterparts, there is a moment of relief from the historical tension. Two imperfect bodies meet and mutually heal each other. Critical nostalgia unknowingly weaves into her work. She uses replicas as proxies in her performance as a way to call in the past and heal the present. Reproduction, imitation, and reenactment as methods are linked to nostalgia.

MdG: Yes, the healing capacity of the work of Van Lamsweerde is what we both love. I very much like the way you refer to the use of proxies as tools "to call in the past and heal the present." Boym's "historical emotion" as well as the sensorial relationship with heritage connects Van Lamsweerde with our other artist in residence Luiza Margan. They both use bodies as vehicles for time travel and settings of meaning. Margan's video *Anatomy of the Bow: Speakers*, shot during a residency period in South Korea, shows archival images of Korean women struggling for equal rights, yet "their voices remain silent." The voice-over recites a radical corporeal description of speech by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. The words heard in the video refer to some of the most quoted words of Cha, in which she explains her ambition: "looking for the roots of the language before it is born on the tip of the tongue." This phrase not only makes the tongue a place of birth, it gives language a bodily presence by birth. The tongue as a breeding place returns in Margan's *Hairless Tongue*; it lies on the ground ripped from its roots. The point of the tongue, barely lifted by a stack of books, is held down by a one-sided barbell anchored to the soil. The tongue seems exposed and powerless; however it gives voice by being a stage as well.

AP: Wandering limbs becoming tools is an engaging image: a sense of proximity and readiness is attached to tools. When carving marble a sculptor becomes aware of the potentiality of the knife while feeling it bending under the pressure applied. Understanding a tool is only possible through praxis. But how do we employ something that is already in use? Nostalgia is linked to our emotions and therefore perpetually present at hand. Maybe this is why traces of nostalgia latently emanate from works of art.

I would like to return to the idea of reenactment as a practice that is associated with nostalgia because it resonates with something that Hristina

Ivanoska and Luiza Margan are preparing for the closure of their residency program in Amsterdam. In soft daylight, the empty room – which for some time is inhabited by the two artists – becomes a space where different histories are superimposed and merge. Different gestures of resistance fill up the room. The voices of the female poets Catharina Questiers and Cornelia van der Veer begin to coincide with the words of the artists. Ivanoska's hand touches the folds of a velvet curtain, explaining the unseen meanings, the holes, in imagined embroidery while instinctively pointing in the direction of the Oude Kerk where Catharina Questiers' body rests in the dark. Bringing forth histories of women as a way to reclaim female histories is an important element in Ivanoska's work. If we look at her research performances linked to *Document Missing: The Intricate Sense of Truth in Oral Histories* we see how she becomes a malleable entity through which forgotten identities are brought back to life.

I see the word limit approaching, so, although abruptly, I will stop here. We will continue the conversation someplace else.

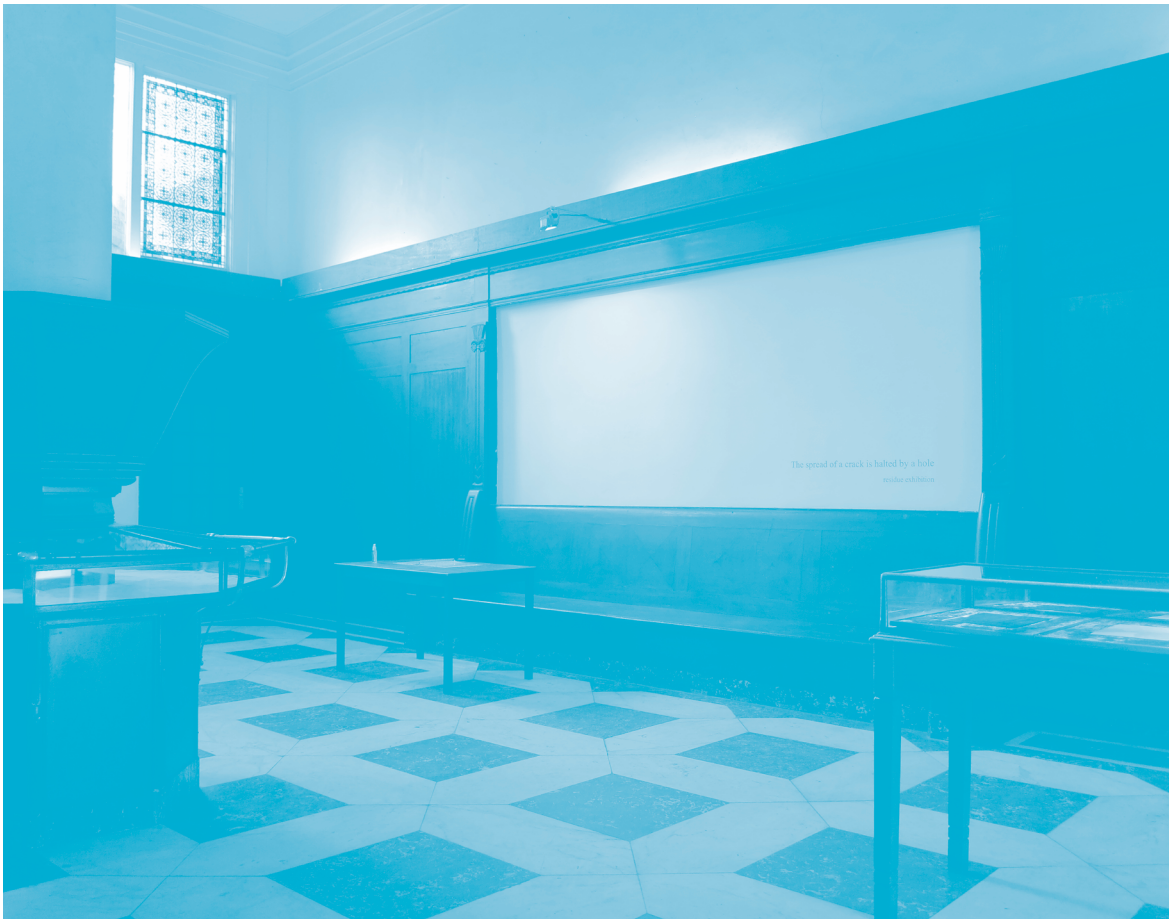

Fig. 4