

*N is for nothingness*

From *A—Z with Edmund de Waal*

*Monokultur*: Relating to *Atemwende*, I have another quote of you saying that you ‘wish for your creations to vanish into nothing’ Someone who makes objects which are physically present wants them to vanish?

*Edmund de Waal*: It’s like giving you a shard. And this last book, *The White Road*, was a journey through shards, broken objects, and dust. White dust. Which is how porcelain is made—white dust—and how porcelain ends up again eventually. I have no expectation that things survive. I’m making things that won’t last because they’re fragile. That’s not a bad thing. I’m not anxious about that, not in the slightest bit. I think it’s rather terrific to have a practice where things disappear.

That process of things disappearing has two contrary sides—one is to bring things back to life; the other is to let things go. To bring back to life is connected with fragments and objects and attempting to tell their stories, or trying to tell the story of my family, which had disappeared.

Then there’s the process of disappearing into the shadows. It’s a serious idea for me. Shadows are an important part of my installations. And that’s one reason for my unhappiness with museums and galleries sometimes: how brightly lit everything is, how deadened, how deadly. How wonderful it is to have things just in natural light!

And to let things go, like this piece I did in Vienna in the Theseus Temple there, called *Lichtzwang* [meaning ‘constraint of light’]—there was no electric light. So you had to come during daylight—which was for millennia the common human experience. But it’s not a trick; it’s just that with some things, as the light changes, they become more beautiful. They change, their relationship changes. And your breathing changes, your whole somatic experience of where you are changes.

So, what’s there not to want?