

Tales of a Flood

by
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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a story of a flood as seen through the eyes of an architect. The narrative explores the relationship of the young architect with his physical surroundings, using the context of a city that goes through a destructive natural phenomenon. The story aims to answer this question: Why is the spiritual quest of the architect for a deep understanding of his natural world important for his career? The hero sees himself as part of a society that is mainly responsible for shaping the new environment of the city. He notices the great influences of architecture on the way people relate themselves to nature. In experiencing the flood he sees the vulnerability of human settlements, perceives the restrictions the natural world imposes on us and learns to appreciate its generosity and beauty; and he realizes that he can transfer this vision to the rest of society through his design. It is only when he grasps the notion of humanity as a single fraction of this planet, when he acquires modesty and stops taking all that nature offers for granted, that he is able to build in accordance with nature's harmony and his very own nature. In depicting the process of self-awareness for the architect, the flood becomes a representation of nature's power, its strong presence and interference in the city's built environment. The state of the architect's soul and his perception evolve with the rain, and with the rising and receding of the water.

The story consists of five chapters. At first there is ignorance. Everything appears calm. The architect is engaged in the rise of his career, and he's unaware of what is missing from his life. In the second chapter, a feeling of anticipation emerges when the first warning signs of the flood appear. The architect might not take it very seriously, yet he begins to feel worried. At the same time, an inner excitement sparks in him, an aspiration to know this strange natural phenomenon. In the third chapter, during his exploration, the great flood strikes with all its fury and its devastating force. The architect is shocked; he's struck with a power much greater than himself, the city, and its people. He sees that neither he nor others have any control over the situation. Thereafter, with the start of the fourth chapter, he has to face the real destruction of the city. Only then does he observe how all that was thought to be durable was in fact fragile; he is humbled like everybody else. Finally, in the last chapter, and through creating a work of architecture, his realization reveals itself. The city and the architect begin to rebuild, but this time he has a new understanding of nature and his own role as the builder. The architect is reborn with the reconstruction of the city.

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*In memory of my Grandfather, Morteza Takook,
who taught me to follow what I believe in.*

TABLE OF CONTECTS

List of Illustrations	viii
FOREWORD	1
PROLOGUE	14
CHAPTER I – IN THE BEGINNING	20
1. The City... the Architect	21
2. The Deluge of the Painter	30
3. The City Might Change	35
4. Feeling the River	37
CHAPTER II – I THINK ABOUT WAITING	44
1. His Restlessness	45
2. The Oak Tree	47
3. Why Did He Come to My Dream?	51
4. Spring of Anxiety and Excitement	56
CHAPTER III – THE UNEXPECTED EXPECTED	66
1. As Our Ancestors Believed	67
2. Rain Calls Him	76
3. On the Road	79
CHAPTER IV – WATER RECEDES	92
1. Shelter of Hopes and Fears	93
2. The Spirit in the City	98
3. They Finally Moved Out	104
4. The Dove on the Broken Branch	109

CHAPTER V – BUILDING AGAIN	114
1. In Memory of ...	115
2. Painter’s Retreat	116
3. What if He Could Build It?	117
4. On Bench by the River	136
CONCLUSION	139
Bibliography	144
Appendix: Kandinsky’s Retreat	147

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Pg.#	Fig.	Description and Source
FOREWORD		
4	0.1	Suburbia “CHESS 2014: Suburbia and Environmental History (CFP).” NiCHE RSS. (http://niche-canada.org/2014/02/11/chess-2014-suburbia-and-environmental-history-cfp/)
7	0.2	Mephistopheles pays a visit to Faust Johannot, Tony (died 1852), “Psychologie Analytique” Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation. (http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychologie_analytique)
9	0.3	A family is evacuated in the flooded town of Obrenova, 40 Km west of Belgrade “Photos May 16: Top Images from around the World.” Canadacom. (http://o.canada.com/news/photos-may-16-top-images-from-around-the-world)
CHAPTER I – IN THE BEGINNING		
23, 24	1.1	Location map of the City of Ceres Drawing by author Based on different maps in Google Maps
26	1.2	Urban map of the City of Ceres Drawing by author Based on different maps in Google Maps
27	1.3	Office balcony Drawing and photograph by author
29	1.4	The shape of the city Drawing and photograph by author
31	1.5	Composition VI, Wassily Kandinsky, 1913 Kandinsky, Wassily – (http://www.wikiart.org/en/wassily-kandinsky/composition-vi-1913)
34	1.6	The Deluge in the Museum Drawing by author, Source image for museum: Libeskind, Daniel, Denver Art Museum – (http://architizer.com/projects/denver-art-museum/) Source image for Kandinsky’s painting: (http://www.wikiart.org/en/wassily-kandinsky/composition-vi-1913)
37	1.7	My room Drawing and photograph by author
41	1.8	The Nile depicted as a symbol of fertility Ami Ronnberg, ed., <i>The Book of Symbols: Reflections on Archetypal Images</i> (Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism. Köln; London: Taschen, 2010), 43.

- 42 1.9 **Mughal Emperor, Akbar, crossing the Ganges**
 Jack Tresidder, *Symbols and Their Meanings* (London: Duncan Baird Publishers, 2006), 113.

CHAPTER II – I THINK ABOUT WAITING

- 48 2.1 **Their living room**
 Drawing by author
- 53 2.2 **The Dream**
 Photomontage by author
 Source image of Kandinsky: REPRESSIONISM - Free_speech | Book Magazine #6. (http://bookmagazinerussia.ru/art/free_speech/repressionism);
 Source image for sky: Wikimedia Commons (http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mammatus_clouds_and_crepuscular_rays.JPG);
 Source image for pyramids: Pyramids of Giza (http://www.amorepoesia.org/2014_06_01_archive.html#.VBT7MvldV8E);
 Source image for desert: (<http://top1walls.com/wallpaper/1572082-landscapes-nature-skylines-desert>)
- 55 2.3 **Pyramid of Zoser, Saqqara, Egypt**
 (http://learningthroughtravel.com/holiday_category/journeys/)
- 55 2.4 **King Zoser’s Ka statue**
 University of Texas at Austin (<http://www.utexas.edu/courses/classicaldig/picture.html>)
- 57 2.5 **River overflowing its banks**
 Drawing and photograph by author
- 58 2.6 **History of flood control**
 Drawing by author
 Cover from the book: John Withington, 1947- author. *Flood: Nature and Culture* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013).
 Dam images: Sadd el-Kafara dam in Egypt, “Collection, Storage & Distribution of Water in Antiquity Linking Ancient Wisdom to Modern Needs.” Hydria Project. (<http://www.hydraproject.net/en/egypt-sadd-al-kafara-dam/present-status23/>)
- 59 2.7 **Repairing the levees at New Orleans**
 “Repairing the New Orleans Levee” (<http://www.sonofthesouth.net/leefoundation/civil-war/1863/march/repairing-new-orleans-levee.htm>)
- 62 2.8 **New Melones Dam, Stanislaus River, California**
 Wikimedia Commons (<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:NewMelonesDam2.jpg>)
- 63 2.9 **Three Gorges Dam, Yangtze River, China**
 “Yichang.” Travel Guide (<http://wikitravel.org/en/Yichang>)

CHAPTER III – THE UNEXPECTED EXPECTED

- 68 3.1 **Baptism, 14th century French illumination painting**
 “Key Stage 3 at www.johndclare.net.” (<http://www.johndclare.net/KS3/1-3-2.htm>)

- 70 3.2 **Sudden Shower over Ohashi**
Hiroshige, wood-block print, 1856-8, Japan. “Hiroshige Rain - Viewing Gallery.” (<http://galleryhip.com/hiroshige-rain.html>)
- 72 3.3 **Noah’s flood**
Doré, Gustave, bible illustration, 1866. Wikimedia Commons. (http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flood_destroying_the_world.jpg)
- 73 3.4 **Daucalion and Pyrrha, relief, Parc de Laberint d’Horta, Barcelona**
Wikimedia Commons (http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Relief_of_Deucalion_and_Pyrrha_-_Parc_del_Laberint_d%E2%80%99Horta_-_Barcelona.jpg)
- 75 3.5 **The Matsya, reincarnation of the god Vishnu comes to the rescue of Manu**
List of Flood Myths - Wikipedia Advanced (http://en.wikipedia.org/advanc.io/wiki/List_of_flood_myths)
- 76 3.6 **Heavy rain**
Drawing by author
- 80 3.7 **On the road**
Photomontage by author
Source image for road: Uberrhunds Weblog (<https://uberrhund.wordpress.com/2010/01/>)
Source image for river: (<http://all-geo.org/highlyallochthonous/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/>);
Source image for sky: (http://tau0.files.wordpress.com/2011/06/tstorm_tag.jpg)
- 82 3.8 **Flooded river in downtown**
Photomontage by author
Source image for sky: “The Darkroom Exploring Visual Journalism from the Baltimore Sun RSS” (http://darkroom-cdn.s3.amazonaws.com/2012/09/AFP_Getty-514158653.jpg)
Source image for cityscape: “Skylines of Waterloo Region | Filmvz Portal.” (<http://www.filmvz.com/skylines/skylines-of-waterloo-region.htm>)
Source image for cityscape: “Free Report.” Harbour Properties RSS (<http://www.harbourproperties.ca/free-report/>)
- 83 3.9 **Flood in suburban street**
Photomontage and photograph of railing by author
Source image for people and car: “Overstroming Zuid-Europa: 1 Dode.” Gazet Van Antwerpen (<http://www.gva.be/cnt/eid169114/extern-overstroming-zuid-europa-1-dode>)
Source image for street: Google Maps;
Source image for sky: (http://fc05.deviantart.net/fs70/i/2012/177/3/e/tumultuous_sky_by_wooferduff-d550kt3.jpg);
Source image for flood water: Kashmir Reader (<http://kashmirreader.com/2-women-washed-away-in-flash-floods-one-dies-in-house-collapse-19519>)
- 84 3.10 **Rising river and the stone bridge**
Photomontage by author
Source image for bridge: Fotogalerij Van Skopje, Macedonie (<http://www.orangesmile.com/bestemmingen/skopje/fotogalerij.htm>)
Source image for sky: “Saturday Sun.”: Rain, Rain and Cricket? (<http://searchingforthesaturdaysun.blogspot.ca/2012/04/rain-rain-and-cricket.html>)
Source image for flood water: “River Flooding - Viewing Gallery.” (<http://galleryhip.com/river-flooding.html>)
- 85 3.11 **Adam’s favourite bench**
Photomontage by author

- Source image for park: “Oh Snow! Winter-like Weather Returns to Southern Ontario for Brief Encore.” (<http://www.sunnewsnetwork.ca/sunnews/canada/archives/2014/04/20140415-080833.html>)
- Source image for flood: “Improved Rain, River Forecasts Lift Soggy Spirits.” <http://news.ca.msn.com/canada/improved-rain-river-forecasts-lift-soggy-spirits>)
- Source image for flood: Press, The Associated. “Central Europe Hit by Floods after Days of Rain.” CBCnews (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/central-europe-hit-by-floods-after-days-of-rain-1.1304175>)
- 86 3.12 **The old couple’s house**
 Photomontage and photograph of house by author
 Source image for sky: “Photos (), VIEW IMAGES Canada” (<http://www.pictures.org.es/canada/city.php?Grimshaw>);
 Source image for man and car: “Mayor Nenshi Says Flooding Has ‘peaked,’ but Warns Surge Still Possible” Metro News (<http://metronews.ca/news/calgary/714397/mayor-nenshi-says-flooding-has-peaked-but-warns-surge-still-possible/>);
 Source image for flood: “Channel Processes.” (<http://www.krisweb.com/hydrol/channel.htm>)
- 87 3.13 **Downtown street**
 Photomontage and photograph of street by author
 Source image for sky: (<http://www.eyeonthetwister.com/2010/07/30/july-17th-2010-minnesota-storm-chase-supercell-thunderstorm/>);
 Source image for buildings: Google Maps;
 Source image for flood: “East Coast, U.S. - Photo Gallery: Hurricane Irene’s Impact In Pictures.” (<http://www.vosizneias.com/90322/2011/08/29/east-coast-u-s-photo-gallery-hurricane-irenes-impact-in-pictures/>)
 Source image for man in flood: “Sungai Amazon Meluap, Ribuan Orang Terperangkap.” (<http://www.jitunews.com/read/1569/sungai-amazon-meluap-ribuan-orang-terperangkap>)
- 88 3.14 **His own apartment**
 Photomontage and photograph of building by author
 Source image for sky: “Saturday Sun.”: Rain, Rain and Cricket? (<http://searchingforthesaturdaysun.blogspot.ca/2012/04/rain-rain-and-cricket.html>);
 Source image for flood: (http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/multimedia/archive/00100/80619758_flood2_100359b.jpg);
 Source image for flood: “SPACE FOR INSPIRATION: Announcements” (<http://spaceforinspiration.blogspot.ca/2011/02/announcements.htm>)

CHAPTER IV – WATER RECEDES

- 95 4.1 **The shelter**
 Photomontage by author
 Source image for building: “An Old Russian Factory, Destroyed During the Moscow Battle in 1941.” a Public Photoblog: Citynoise.org (<http://citynoise.org/article/1246>)
 Source image for sky: (<http://milkshakesinspring.wordpress.com/2012/08/19/i-am-not-afraid-of-storms-for-i-am-learning-how-to-sail-my-ship/>)
- 97 4.2 **Flood, a projection of human birth**
 (http://www.washingtonpost.com/rf/image_2048w/2010-2019/)

- 99 4.3 **Collapsed bridge**
Photomontage by author
Source image for bridge: Osney Town
(<http://www.oxford.gov.uk/Direct/87089ConservationAreaAppraisalOsney.pdf>)
Source image for river: (https://d262ilb51hltx0.cloudfront.net/max/800/1*D3dZUji_gLtyXK6sh64Bug.jpeg)
Source image for collapsed bridge: Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation (http://en.wikipedia.org/?title=Wikipedia:Featured_picture_candidates/August-2008)
- 102 4.4 **Aftermath**
Photomontage and photograph of street by author
Source image for sky: (<http://cajeso.com/photos/rainSKY.jpg>)
Source image for flood: ([http://www.tgcom24.mediaset.it/binary/9.\\$split/C_4_foto_1128451_image.jpg](http://www.tgcom24.mediaset.it/binary/9.$split/C_4_foto_1128451_image.jpg))
Source image for people on boat: (<http://www.diena.lt/sites/default/files/47rs131205b075.jpg>)
- 105 4.5 **Aftermath**
Photomontage and photograph of house by author
Source image for sky: “Cloudy Rainy Day Photography - Viewing Gallery.” (<http://galleryhip.com/cloudy-rainy-day-photography.html>)
Source image for people in flood: (<http://photoblog.statesman.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/rbz-2013-favs-03.jpg>)
- 107 4.6 **Zeus and Hermes in the house of Philemon and Baucis**
Elsheimer, Adam, 1608. Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adam_Elsheimer)
- 108 4.7 **Landscape for Baucis and Philemon**
Ligare, David, 1984, “David Ligare: Post-Modern, Neo-Classic American Artist.” (<http://www.davidligare.com/paintings.html>)
- 111 4.8 **He can’t stand it anymore**
Photomontage and photograph of building by author
Source image for sky:
“30 Best Moods of The Sky.” Best PSD to HTML (<http://www.bestpsdtohtml.com/30-best-moods-of-the-sky>)

CHAPTER V – BUILDING AGAIN

- 118 5.1 **Location map of the flood monument**
Drawing by author
- 119 5.2 **Flood monument, plan one**
Constructed image by author
Satellite image: Google Earth
- 120 5.3 **Flood monument, plan two**
Constructed image by author
Satellite image: Google Earth
- 121 5.4 **Flood monument, view of the three bridges**
Constructed image by author
Source image for sky: (http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_CLAPf9Dw7kY/TRfkhMe-KFI/AAAAAAAAASx4/9Qd8VMkRt7Q/s1600/IMG_8529.JPG)

122	5.5	Flood monument, the first bridge Constructed image by author Source image for sky: (http://cloud-maven.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/DSC051364.jpg)
123	5.6	Flood monument, the house Constructed image by author Source image for sky: (http://warrenmars.com/photography/galleries/the_sky/rain_cloud_f.jpg)
124	5.7	Flood monument, the house Constructed image by author
125	5.8	Flood monument, the house and the bridge gallery Constructed image by author
125	5.9	Flood monument, the bridge gallery Constructed image by author
126	5.10	Flood monument, the bridge gallery and the third bridge Constructed image by author
126	5.11	Flood monument, the third bridge Constructed image by author
127	5.12	Flood monument, the third bridge, the tree Constructed image by author
128	5.13	Flood monument, bird's eye view Constructed image by author
128	5.14	Flood monument, bird's eye view Constructed image by author
129, 130	5.15	Flood monument, section a-a Constructed image by author Source image for sky: http://cloud-maven.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/DSC051364.jpg
129, 130	5.16	Flood monument, section a-a Constructed image by author
131, 132	5.17	Flood monument, section b-b Constructed image by author
131, 132	5.18	Flood monument, section b-b Constructed image by author
133, 134	5.19	Flood monument, section c-c Constructed image by author
133, 134	5.20	Flood monument, section c-c Constructed image by author
138	5.21	Rain drops on paper Drawing by author

APPENDIX– KANDINSKY’S RETREAT

- 147 A.1 **Kandinsky’s retreat**
Constructed image by author
- 148 A.2 **Kandinsky’s retreat, exterior**
Constructed image by author
Source image for Kandinsky: (<http://i2.wp.com/www.artartworks.com/wp-content/gallery/artists/vasily-kandinsky.jpg>)
- 148 A.3 **Kandinsky’s retreat, the roof**
Constructed image by author
Source image for Kandinsky: “Kandinsky’s Bauhaus.” (<http://frieze-magazin.de/archiv/features/kandinskys-bauhaus/?lang=en>)
- 149 A.4 **Kandinsky’s retreat, the courtyard**
Constructed image by author
Source image for Kandinsky and Nina: “Wassily Kandinsky - With Nina”. 1926 (<http://www.wassilykandinsky.net/photo-15.php>)
- 149 A.5 **Kandinsky’s retreat, the studio**
Constructed image by author
Source image for Kandinsky: (<http://therepublicofless.files.wordpress.com/2012//07/kandinski-studio.jpg>)
- 150 A.6 **Kandinsky’s retreat, the courtyard**
Constructed image by author

FOREWORD

It was one of those places where we think we see that magnificent peacock we call nature spread his fan.

Victor Hugo, *Excursions along the Banks of the Rhine*

“TALES OF A FLOOD” is a story about an architect who, like Hugo, sees the “magnificent peacock of nature” in the river, rain, and flood; he feels the responsibility to show it to others through his profession. It is a narrative of the way the architect re-establishes his relationship with nature, like a beloved mother whom he hadn’t seen for years and had forgotten how important she is in his life. The story seeks to reveal the significance of the architect’s understanding of nature in his work.

What encouraged me initially to write this story was my concern about the vision of designers towards nature in the current state of architecture in twenty-first century. The question of the story is, How does the architect’s spiritual relationship with nature influence the way he designs? Or it might instead be put this way: Why is the architect’s relationship with nature important to the way he builds? The story is a way to answer this question and gives us an opportunity to contrast the perspective of Adam, who by the end gains a better understanding of his relationship with and responsibility to the natural world, with those of other builders in the story; namely, the firm Adam works for and the municipality of Ceres.

While reading the story, the first thought you might have is that this city couldn’t be real. There are many parts of the story that are just too far from reality and rather dreamlike; however, even in a context similar to a fable, I try to bring the reader back to reality with tangible facts about the built environment of mid-size cities in North America.

It’s important to first take a look at the essence of the relationship that the architect builds with nature. I give hints throughout the story of the different aspects of this connection. It is the architect’s *spiritual* connection with nature and natural elements that is vital for his work. As Emerson says, “We cannot be spiritually alive without wildness around us; our thoughts

cannot take wing if we drive away the birds.”¹ The story expands on this idea in that the architect’s relationship with nature is essential to his spiritual quest and his success in his profession. My attempt is to show that without this spiritual connection with nature, the architect’s work will be alienated from its natural context and consequently hold people back from noticing the importance and presence of natural elements in the spaces they use every day. Creating parallels with cultures like the ancient Egyptians and with myths of natural phenomena, I highlight how our connection to nature has changed through the centuries. This connection encourages self-knowledge for the architect, and, by extension, for the people who are affected by his design, as it is described in the book *The Inner Studio*:

Where we once live in a symbiotic or harmonious relationship to our natural environment, today we live in a thoroughly built world in which we are rapidly losing the opportunity to gain the deeper self-knowledge that comes from observing the arising and passing away of natural things. Not only were we once part of nature, all the happenings of our inner world were considered “natural.” How can self-knowledge be extracted from the designed environment unless the designers themselves can consciously experience their own inner worlds and use these to promote self-knowledge?²

I try to illustrate how with suburban growth; with the construction of a flood control dam that has changed the river; and with the “morphology” of downtown buildings—which doesn’t follow any specific or natural order—the people in the new, built environment of the city of Ceres have lost the opportunity for gaining self-knowledge of their own nature and their natural world. As Adam tries to promote his own self-knowledge through his relationship with nature, he becomes conscious of this loss and wants his understanding to be transferred to others; the flood monument is an attempt to do this, as is the renovation work with a close connection to the community that Adam undertakes at the end of the story.

What is the role of the flood in Adam’s journey? The flood represents nature’s prevailing, dominant power in the city’s built environment. Adam studies the way the city and nature interact due to the construction of the flood control system. The changes in the city environment because of flood risk, and the measures for sustainable development, are both contexts in which I analyze other architects’ and builders’ negligent view towards nature, including the municipality and Adam’s firm.

The occurrence of the flood shows the vulnerability of city’s built environment to nature’s force, despite the elaborate flood control measures. The flood humbles Adam in front of nature’s power, it helps him to see his work in the natural environment as contributions to

¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1803-1882. *Nature*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), xvii.

² Andrew Levitt. *The Inner Studio: A Designer’s Guide to the Resources of the Psyche* (Cambridge, Ont.: Riverside Architectural Press, 2007), 3.

the way nature works rather than as attempts to dominate and control it. The flood is the story's "messenger" from nature for various reasons. First, water is the essential element for life in the city that creates favourable conditions for agriculture, and the element that constitutes most of the human body and most of our planet's surface; yet at the same time it can destroy our living places, our buildings. Second, the materiality of water in the destructive flood is another important quality that makes it distinct from other natural disasters, like an earthquake or hurricane. As Gaston Bachelard describes, "Water suggests a new obligation: the unity of the element[s]."¹ The flood creates unity between the architect, the people, and nature, and it literally joins the city with its natural surroundings: it reaches to all the streets and neighbourhoods, it comes into every house and building. Third, a great flood is the most recited myth in ancient mythology throughout the world, and it always implies a new beginning, rebirth. All of these are reasons for which the *flood* is very significant in exploring the relationship of the architect and nature.

THE STORY criticises those who are not aware of "hidden treasure of gold" (the epigraph on page 13) while it's right under their feet; they are not seeing it because of their wrong way of thinking. The treasure of gold is our earth, our nature, and the people who are "held astray by false thoughts" are builders whose way of building alienates nature. The general theme of the story is introduced in the beginning: the modern capabilities of technology have depleted the mysteries of the natural environment, and the people aren't invested in the symbolism in nature. Adam quotes Vincent Scully in criticism of "human negligence toward nature" and how the new buildings don't relate people to their environment. A lack of understanding of nature among the city's builders has led to buildings in which Kishar "can't find anything to feel attached to."

Water is very important in the life and geography of the city. The characteristics of city of Ceres bring to mind mid-size cities of southern Ontario, with their typical North American suburban neighbourhoods. The population growth after the historic flood of seventy years before is introduced as a reason for the suburban development. This earlier flood clearly parallels World War II and the subsequent baby boom in North America. Ceres and Akkad, two cities mentioned in the story, as well as the river, Acheron, all have mythical names that stand in direct contrast with the modern lifestyle of the cities. The founders of Ceres still had a strong connection with nature in that they named the city after the goddess of fertility and agriculture as a reminder that their life is totally dependent on nature. Other features of the present-day city, like the university of engineering and technology startups, emphasize the ways people's lifestyles and Ceres' built environment—and with them, both the city's and its inhabitants'

¹ Gaston Bachelard, 1884-1962. *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter* (Dallas: Pegasus Foundation, 1983), 16.

relation to nature—have changed in recent history.

The maps also represent Ceres as a mythical city, yet in a modern North American configuration. The dense downtown core is cut through by the river, which winds its way from the dam toward the city, like a wild animal tamed by the urban fabric. The municipality's measures for the sustainable development are questioned, not because they are not right in an urban design approach, but because of the lack of commitment to a nature-inclusive vision among people who are in charge—"Nobody could separate these people from their luxury cars." The public transit project is aimed to bring more walkability and social life to suburban neighbourhoods and reduce the dependency on cars, yet in some parts it negates its environmental objectives. I try to emphasize that for architects, prior to thinking of the best solutions for environmental issues, the perception of nature is essential, the understanding that a city is a part of nature and works best if it's in harmony with nature. People who have gotten used to the new car-dependent lifestyle in suburban area are not what the story takes issue with; it is the attitude with which the municipality and architects try to lead the society that is Adam's main concern.



Fig. 0.1. Suburbia.

The river's stream within the city is the "childish speaking of nature"¹; it is nature communicating, and while Adam enjoys its music, he still can't understand the words. He reads up on the poetry, symbolism, and mythology of the river. But why is the study of myths such an important part of Adam's realization? Joseph Campbell describes myths as the "clues to the spiritual potentialities"² in human life. The narrative tries to show us ways to unravel the "spiritual potentialities" of man, the architect, in relation to nature. As Campbell explains, these myths of old cultures introduce truths about human life and built civilizations, and they talk about humans' deep inner problems related to their position in the natural world. Myths bring Adam closer to the spiritual meanings of natural elements, and he doesn't need to take them literally. If Adam wants his design to entice the "rapture of being alive,"³ the symbolism of natural phenomena is one of the most powerful ways to reveal the harmony of human inner nature and the natural environment in a work of architecture. In this way, the experience of space will create "resonances between people's own innermost being and the reality of our nature,"⁴ which in my opinion leads to the fullness of spatial experience. I argue that architects' way of seeing nature needs to be revolutionized. To design buildings that are not ignorant of their natural surroundings, buildings that can speak the same language of the river and rain, we need to "acquire modesty" and stop adoring ourselves because of our capabilities to change the environment. Lévi-Strauss's quote (page 43) reminds us that our natural environment is not merely for human use, and in the narrative I conclude that by "extending our respect to all living beings," our decisions in building new structures would be different.

Adam is impressed by Kandinsky's work, an artist with a clear vision of his responsibility to society in terms of exploring the human connection with the world around him. As an architect, Adam needs to take much more responsibility for building people's relationship with their natural environment than an artist does, since his work directly affects people's practical, everyday lives. In other words, Kandinsky becomes a role model with his painting "Deluge," which introduces to the architect a new presentation of nature's power to cause destruction and enable rebirth. Adam is immersed in the painting, as if he has invited the flood into his life; the seeds that are planted in him with Kandinsky are realized years later.

During the long winter the architect doesn't feel well without knowing the reason. His inner "self-knowledge of nature" is alive, sparked by his study of myths and his closer attention to the river and the city's natural features, but the way he works in the firm conflicts with the aspirations of his inner being. Throughout the narrative, I develop Adam's personality, and this is important because the architect's world-view, lifestyle, and perspectives about people, the

¹ Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*, 16.

² Joseph Campbell. *The Power of Myth*. Edited by Bill D. Moyers, Betty S. Flowers. 1st ed. (New York; Toronto: Doubleday, 1988), 5.

^{3, 4} Ibid.

city, and nature directly influence the buildings he designs and his overall approach to architecture. I expand on the idea of the architect as the prophet in human society, derived from Kandinsky's theosophy. The painting "Deluge" in the exhibition awakens the self-knowledge of nature in Adam, and the impression it makes recurs in his dream: to become the architect that he desires to be, the designer who helps society rebuild its relationship with nature, a new way of thinking is required. This message from a past dream transcends the linear narrative to address an older Adam, now an architect working in the firm.

The setting of Adam's dream is the Egyptian desert, and when he decides to design a house for the painter, he chooses Egypt as the context rather intuitively. The philosophy of Egyptian architecture emerges as a new part of the architect's realization. A quote from Christian Norberg-Schultz provides some useful insight: "In ancient Egypt man and nature were one." In Egypt the architecture; the natural context, including the desert, the powerful sun, and the annual flooding of the Nile; and the people's beliefs in symbolism and mythology are all parts of a bigger, inseparable whole. Thus, this perception of nature is mentioned as extremely different from the architecture and culture of Adam's city. When as a student Adam decides to design a house for Kandinsky, he's curious to see how he can express the ideology of the artist in the realm of architecture and in a context where "man and nature are one"; in other words, designing Kandinsky's retreat is a first step for him to experiment with the kind of architecture he will aspire to create in his future career, architecture that serves as a means to bring people closer to the spirit of nature and to understanding its grandeur and generosity.

In relation to Adam's work in the firm, the old couple's house creates a new context to study different visions toward the role of architecture in nature. The old couple's house is a space where the spiritual value of a place and its natural surroundings—even though it might not be safe to live in anymore—directly confronts the rational values of the municipality in expanding the transit project. The old man and woman seem different to Adam in that they have developed a strong relationship with their house and their neighbourhood. As Adam says, "It seemed like the old couple, the house, and everything in it had all grown old together, like a big old creature." The natural spirits of the place have started to talk to them, and they have started to understand their language. They remind us of the story of Baucis and Philemon in Goethe's play *Faust*. In the story, Baucis and Philemon were a hospitable old couple whose house was located in the master plan for seawater management. The old couple resisted against the order of relocation. The outcome of their resistance wasn't pleasant. They were killed by people who were working for Faust, and their house was set on fire. Here the transit project can stand as a modern version of Faust's water management plan. The wicked ambition of Faust parallels the actions of municipality, not in that they are morally wrong, but that their consideration merely of the reasonable objectives of sustainable growth might cause unpleasant results for the spiritual life of some residents.



Fig. 0.2. Mephistopheles pays a visit to Faust.
An illustration, by Tony Johannot.

In a general view, in the early parts of the narrative the architect is largely unaware of the craving of his inner being to connect to nature while he's looking for the answer of his restlessness in relation to his profession. At the same time, Adam is anticipating a figurative, philosophical shift in his life that he is at this point unaware will also be a literal, physical event: a great flood, which will strike him and show him the right way, the way back to nature.

The dream of the protagonist in the narrative becomes the trigger for nature to show its other face. People, including Adam himself, forget that the structures in the city and the way we humans can control our built environment don't guarantee everything will remain as we desire. As Neil Evernden explains: "If we believe that nature is manageable, it will appear to be so. But then again, it could turn its other unmanageable face toward us when we least expect it."¹ The city doesn't expect the flood to turn into a disaster, assuming that it is "manageable". Adam's research on ways to control floods throughout history shows the hardships civilizations have borne to confront them. The people of Ceres don't notice that new structures and the dam have turned into ways of damaging the environment, a fact that makes Kishar, who is from the

¹ Neil Evernden, *The Social Creation of Nature* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992), 12.

indigenous people of the region, frustrated. “Maybe [a flood] could force everyone to turn back and take a look at what they had done to their city,” she says.

ALTHOUGH THE FLOOD is a reality in the story, it is best understood as a metaphor for the architect’s evolving vision toward nature. The mythic aspect of rain and flood is crucial for understanding nature’s message, the same way Gaston Bachelard says “[i]n the imagination of a universalized vision, water plays an unexpected role. The true eye of the earth is water.”¹ Rainwater as the universal symbol of purity could also become humiliating for humans, as it is presented with Adam’s sketch on page 76, a closer representation of the quality of rain in the story. While the rain in the narrative is “unmerciful and somehow terrible”—using the words of Somerset Maugham—we still should not forget the fertility and life that it has given to the city of Ceres.

The flood myths in the narrative all introduce a “just man” who is chosen to survive and continue the human race in a fresh beginning. Adam, the architect, represents Noah, the prophet, the saviour of society who with his designs and structures can direct people to rebuild the connection of their inner beings to nature. “Wickedness of man” in the biblical version of the flood myth parallels the attitude of the municipality and main builders of Ceres toward nature. In all the flood myths, with the exception of the story of Deucalion and Pyrrha, the person who survives—Noah, Utnapishtim, Manu—builds to save himself and other creatures from the flood; they are all builders like the architect. In the end it’s their built structure that saves them and the animals, and gives humanity another chance for a new way of building on earth. In the same way, if the architect is successful in building only with respect to all living beings, then his building would become the Noah’s ark that can save people from the flood of their worldly desires. Although in all the myths the flood comes from gods to destroy everything on earth, it comes for destroying wickedness and “damned desire,”² and to create circumstances in which the human race can start rebuilding a city the right way. The flood brings not only destruction but new life, just like in the Egyptian worldview that a flood is in fact a desired happening every year because people’s lives depend on it. Regarding the mythical aspect of the narrative, it’s not presumptuous to interpret the real flood of the story as the reaction or response of nature to the way it has been treated in Ceres.

THE DESCRIPTION of the flood and its aftermath has a slower rhythm and contains more observations of the main character so that the reader can share his anxiety, his fear, his feeling of being humbled. The shelter is constructed as a symbolic entity. “[I]t used to be a fabric mill many years ago, but at present local farmers were using it for storing crop seeds.” His time in the shelter, for the architect, is the start of his new way of thinking, after the flood has left its

¹ Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*, 31.

² Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Rolfe Humphries (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 7.

great effect on him. Adam realizes the sheer dependency of our built environment on nature. “He wondered how long it would take to reconstruct the city, let alone complete the unfinished projects.”

The first thing Kishar says to Adam after the flood is that the “people had been amazing.” Kishar, who was disappointed with the way people treated their city’s natural environment, now is overwhelmed by seeing how they all help each other. With the flood people are reminded of the fragility of their lives, and there is no place for “arrogance and self-centeredness” anymore. I try to show how a flood can make people aware of their position in nature, defenceless before a powerful natural incident. Their daily life concerns now seem very trivial.

The death of the old man and woman becomes the last turning point of Adam’s exploration. “[I]t stopped the progress of the railway construction, and took back the pure spirits of the old couple.” Even though they died in the flood, for them that was more preferable than getting relocated and detached from their land and their home, just like the myth of Baucis and Philemon, who after the flood asked the gods to assign them guardianship of the temple and make them die together; temple or house, it’s creating that deep connection with the place you live in, with its natural surroundings, that is the important message and is what influences the architect. On his way back to his apartment, Adam imagines the view of the street from two months earlier and sees the white dove, the bird free from human ties, the symbol of peace between the builder and nature, human settlement and natural environment. The architect wishes to be more like the dove, and to let “his thoughts take wing” as Emerson says.



Fig 0.3. A family is evacuated by boat in the flooded town of Obrenovac, forty kilometres west of Belgrade, May 16 2014.

ADAM IS INSPIRED to design the flood monument by seeing Kandinsky's retreat; the ambitions of young Adam to become the prophet of the people motivate him to design the monument, and to practise the ideas he believes in about the connection of architecture, people, and nature. I contrast two visions of the project, one by Adam and the other by his firm, which eventually wins the competition. We don't ever find out what the flood memorial designed by Adam's firm looks like.

Adam makes the natural elements in the park the main theme of his design, including the stream pouring into the river, the reservoir and the oak tree. His idea is to create an environment that highlights the influence of the natural stream and flooding on the spaces we occupy, with designing three bridges on three different levels inside the reservoir. The replica of the old couple's house that gets flooded every time water level rises, conveys the temporality of our structures in relation to the way nature works. Adam builds the replica without a roof, open to the sky and symbolically destructed, with growing vegetation and mould on its walls. There's a basin inside the house connected to the stream, so that with rising of water the house gets flooded from inside. The gallery of flood pictures inside a bridge built like overturned boat is a reminder of how the city was affected by the natural phenomenon. In the last part of the monument and with the oak tree in the centre of the seating area, Adam tries to show how after the flood new life is created and nature returns everything to a state of harmony. With the flood monument, the architect wants to show that if we don't learn from the way nature regulates itself, then whatever we build will fail to draw our attention to the natural environment and our own inner nature, and will instead isolate us and makes us more preoccupied with our city and the structures we are capable of building.

The city want the building to be a landmark, a place to celebrate the city's reconstruction. "They wanted the building to be an icon for the city's resilience, to be seen by everybody." Ceres' flood memorial is probably a very well-designed building—after all, it wins the competition—but the point I try to make is that regardless of all the great objectives for the project in honouring the flood victims and representing the city's new life, it still separates the natural environment from the human environment; it pits the flood against the city. "They had enlarged the volume of the reservoir... Ceres was becoming one of the pioneers in flood control infrastructure."

The final part reinforces the central theme of the narrative as Adam continues to follow his beliefs and ideals in architecture. He starts working in a way that leads to enacting his own professional ideas. He focuses on redesigning and reusing buildings the way they were left after nature brought the flood to the city. In other words, he starts practising what he has learned from nature, to regulate the built environment and to create harmony within different parts of it and with the natural world.

Men only began to understand nature when they no longer understood it.

Rainer Maria Rilke

ALL THE DIFFERENT pieces of the story are efforts to prove that a deep understanding of how nature works in relation to human settlement is necessary for an architect, because it enables him to design buildings that lead the public's attention to humans' stance in nature. The architect's understanding is that everything we are able to build we have learned from nature and natural structures; that it is nature, with its generosity, that provides us with all the resources; and that we shouldn't take our capabilities to build on our planet for granted, because a natural phenomenon like a flood can destroy our cities easily. We should always keep in mind that no matter how far we go with our structures and our technology of construction, they don't make us powerful and immune against everything. We should accept our weakness and see ourselves as only one of many different species living on the earth, and we should consider the habitat and territory of all other creatures in the way we build. Architects should gain modesty and not become arrogant in their ability to construct. In summary, I argue that the key for having this vision as an architect is understanding nature the way Rilke suggests: through not understanding it; through approaching nature in a poetic and spiritual way, such as through the study of mythology, rather than analyzing the environment in a scientific way; and by looking at the design profession as an art responsible to human society.

In the beginning of the narrative, Adam is more concerned with pursuing a successful career in architecture. But toward the end of his journey, culminating with the flood, he's more and more inclined to let his deep relationship with nature direct him in his architectural design. With introducing different pieces to the narrative, including Kandinsky's philosophy and Adam's interpretation of it; the transit project and the way Adam sees the paradox of its objectives and the attitude of the project's team; the symbolism of rain, rivers, and floods in mythology and ancient Egyptian culture; and, most importantly, the description and images of the flood and its aftermath, I attempt to illustrate the necessity of the architect's spiritual relationship with nature.

To conclude, “Tales of a Flood” explores what I believe is a truth in the profession of architecture: the necessity of the architect’s deep understanding of the natural environment. In choosing to convey this message as a story rather than as a thesis in the form of an academic paper, I have embraced Plato’s assertion that “poetry comes closer to the vital truth than history.”

* * *

Just as those not knowing the place might walk time and again over a hidden treasure of gold without discovering it, so do all creatures here go, day by day, into that world of unconditioned being-consciousness-and-bliss without discovering it, because held astray by false thoughts.

Chandogya Upanishad 8.3.2

PROLOGUE

CITIES HAD always been Adam's favourite topic.

They were talking about the unique features of Ceres, how it was different from the rest of the cities in the region. Kishar considered herself lucky to have grown up in a place with all this magnificent natural scenery. She was excited to talk about the things that she had loved about the city.

"Ceres is a city of water, you know: the Acheron river, two major lakes close to it, and to the west, an ocean, which is my favourite place for relaxation. It's a pity that we don't have good access to the river anymore. After the great flood of seventy years ago—you know about that, right? They started building flood walls around the river. They blocked people's access to it. Well, there are still places like Oak Park with trails along the water, but it's hard to get there without a car.

"My grandpa used to say that the great flood was an act of God to punish us for all we have done to this land. By the way, my family goes back to one of the aboriginal tribes of this part of the country. Can't you tell from my looks?"

"I didn't even know this area has indigenous people, that's interesting," Adam answered her, surprised. "I haven't met that many local people so far."

Kishar continued, "I was saying about the flood. It's like the things you read in Homer about 'punishing deities' and 'impersonal activity of the gods.'¹ When I grew up I realized what Grandpa meant. If you say things like that these days, it seems superstitious and outdated. People are afraid of that kind of talk. I don't get it."

Adam said, "I think it's because of our time; we have gone so far with science and technology that we are confident we can solve all the mysteries. You also can't generalize, not everybody is like that. Take me, for example.

"I didn't know until recently that Ceres' dam is one of the largest in the continent; did they build the dam and the canal after the flood?"

"Yup," Kishar answered. "But it wasn't just because of that, they wanted a dam for agricultural land irrigation and hydro power even before the flood. With the flooding they made

¹ Ami Ronnberg, ed., *The Book of Symbols: Reflections on Archetypal Images* (Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism. Köln; London: Taschen, 2010), 50.

the reservoir bigger and added an elaborate system of dikes as well as the canal. Many people say their control system caused more damage to the natural area than the flood itself.”

Adam stared into his half-empty teacup, thinking. “But now they’re certain another disaster like that won’t happen again, which is relieving for everybody. They managed to control the wild spirits of the river.” He smiled.

It was around 9:30 in the evening and the café was getting busier.

Thinking out loud, Adam continued, “It’s strange that I don’t know much about flooding in this city, or other geographical traits of it. Working in an architecture firm, getting background knowledge about the city I’m designing a building for should be part of my job, but I rarely need it. Sometimes I think maybe I should have been born a couple of centuries earlier. When there weren’t any computers, any cars. Architects had to know everything about the city they were building in. They did all the design work by hand. Imagine what a big accomplishment it was to finish a building—”

Kishar interrupted him. “Well, it used to be a lot harder than what you’re doing right now.”

“Yeah, absolutely,” Adam replied. “And to do it perfectly, they had to have far better knowledge of their environment, of the weather, the trees, the soil, sunshade. They needed all of that to design a building that would last long enough. And after designing it, the hardest part would start, which was the construction itself. Say a European cathedral in the seventeenth century, a building like that would have taken years to be completed, sometimes decades. Some architects weren’t even able to see their building finished in their lifetime.”

“And you still wish you were born in that time?” Kishar asked sarcastically.

“What I’m saying is their harder profession would have required them to better understand the natural traits of the place where they lived and built. But that’s not all—because of their perception of the natural world, their building would end up being more natural, more...likable. Let’s say, for example, controlling a flood. They didn’t have the technology for large dams, so they had to deal with it more directly, with modest structures, instead of trying to block it. They were probably more aware of all the natural threats; they knew how a flood or a fire could destroy all the buildings in a city.”

Kishar said, “I suppose good architects of our time know all of that as well, maybe you need to educate yourself a bit more.”

“But it’s not about education,” Adam replied firmly. “We don’t have the same work conditions as two hundred years ago. Every part of our work is done by one specialist. All I do in my office is modelling and drafting with software. It’s harder for me to get that kind of experience, to understand how my building would respond to its natural surroundings. Yes, if I become a famous architect thirty years from now, and design a handful of great projects, it’s possible.”

“I don’t buy this,” was Kishar’s answer. “You can’t blame the conditions of your time for your lack of understanding in architecture. We don’t have the same life, but we are the same people, and we still live on the same planet. The way I paint is really not very much different from the way that those guys painted bison and horses in Lascaux caves, and that was twenty thousand years ago. It’s the way that I see the world that is important. I think it’s just about yourself—if there is discord between your work and what you believe in, maybe that isn’t what you believe in at all.”

“Wow, you’re ruthless,” Adam chuckled. “Thank God you’re not an architecture professor.”

“I really mean it,” Kishar continued. “I don’t like most of the new buildings in this city; I think they just look hideous. And you, the young architect with lots of creative ideas, are telling me that you are born at the wrong time, instead of doing something about it.”

“Good point. Now tell me what you don’t like about these buildings,” Adam asked eagerly.

Kishar hesitated for a moment. “Hmmm, I don’t know. They just don’t look right. I can’t find anything in them to feel attached to.”

“I know what you’re talking about. Something is wrong, but you can’t tell what it is,” Adam said. “I read a book by an art historian recently—yes, despite what you might think, I am trying to educate myself. It was about ‘the relationship between manmade and natural architecture,’ as the author put it. He thinks the most important aspect of a building is the way it connects us to nature, and he talks about how architecture can emphasize this relationship. I took some notes from it, let me read one for you.” Adam looked for a page in the sketchbook that he always had with him.

“There it is.” He started reading. “‘One of the main reasons for human negligence toward nature is blindness of the contemporary urban world to everything that is not itself, to nature most of all.’¹ See? I think it’s all about how that building would connect you to the natural elements that you love about this city, its river, its natural hills. Those buildings you talk about are hideous because they don’t give you any hint of your natural environment.”

“Ah, nature,” Kishar said. “There wouldn’t be any use for this word if we hadn’t separated it from normal life. It’s like we considered it to be a wild creature different from us, and then tried to bring it back to the city by domesticating it. But what we did just made us lonelier. We had to build everything from scratch ourselves. You take a look around and there is a logical explanation for each corner of this city, following rules and patterns created by us. We’ve emptied it of all mysteries. And now because of this long winter, we can’t even tolerate a heavy snowfall in the city anymore.”²

¹ Vincent Scully, 1920-. *Architecture: The Natural and the Man-made* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991), xi.

² Evernden, *The Social Creation of Nature*, 116.

“Ooooh, that didn’t sound like you,” Adam teased.
“I read books too,” was Kishar’s chiding response.

* * *

Those who know do not speak.
Those who speak do not know.

Lao-tzu's *Tao Te Ching*

CHAPTER I

IN THE BEGINNING

CERES¹ WAS one of the earliest-founded cities in the area. It was located on a semi-peninsula near the ocean. A historic downtown with a river flowing through it had made it distinct from neighbouring cities. The river's name was Acheron², and it poured into the ocean toward the west side of the city. It was half an hour's drive from downtown to the closest beach. The turquoise ocean on the west and green hills and valleys on the east provided beautiful scenery around the city, one of the main reasons it attracted a fair number of tourists every year. The city had harsh winters and warm summers, and spring and fall were often short. The majority of days were cold and humid, yet compared to northern areas the climate was temperate. Good soil and a high precipitation rate had made the city a centre for agriculture in the region. In fact, agriculture was the main reason for the establishment of the city's early settlements.

Ceres had been through a lot of changes in recent history. Around sixty years ago, almost a decade after the city experienced the great flood, there had been a great rise in population, which had caused the rapid development of suburban neighbourhoods around the downtown core. New neighbourhoods were growing to adapt to a lifestyle dependent on cars. Agricultural industries based in the region were going through further modernization. The city's school of engineering was also founded around this time, and pretty early on it gained a good reputation. All the changes that had occurred in the span of only two decades had heavily affected farmlands and natural areas around the old city of Ceres. It was now highways, roads, and big malls all around the new neighbourhoods and adjacent to green areas.

Another main reason for the fast development of Ceres was its proximity to Akkad³, the largest city in the region. Akkad was about a one-hour drive from Ceres, and it was the economic hub of the region. Living in Ceres provided good access to business opportunities in Akkad, but in a quieter and less dense urban area. Life in Ceres was more laid back.

¹ "In ancient Roman religion Ceres was a goddess of agriculture, grain crops, fertility and motherly relationships" (Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ceres_%28mythology%29>); the city is named after her because it was originally established as an agricultural settlement.

² "A place of healing, not a place of punishment, cleansing and purging the sins of humans." (Suda Online: Byzantine Lexicography, <<http://www.stoa.org/sol/>>).

³ "Akkad, the capital of Akkadian Empire, was the dominant political force in Mesopotamia at the end of the third millennium BCE. Its existence is known only from textual resources." (Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akkad_%28city%29>).

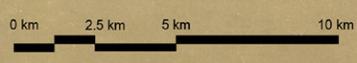
It was around fifteen years ago that tech companies had started to appear in the city one by one, a consequence of high numbers of graduates from the engineering school and the technological boom of the time. Successful startups from the school attracted subordinate industries. Big corporations identified the potential and started creating new headquarters in Ceres. In less than a decade, the city's economics experienced a new transformation. The rate of building constructions rose again, followed by increases in rent and land values in some parts. This time the city tried to control the developments, and there were specific plans for intensification and sustainable growth. A major part of the construction projects was led by the municipality. They had allocated a large budget for expanding a new public transit system as part of the green development plan. Despite the fact that the birth rate had fallen significantly from earlier decades, the in-migration was still causing the city's population to rise.

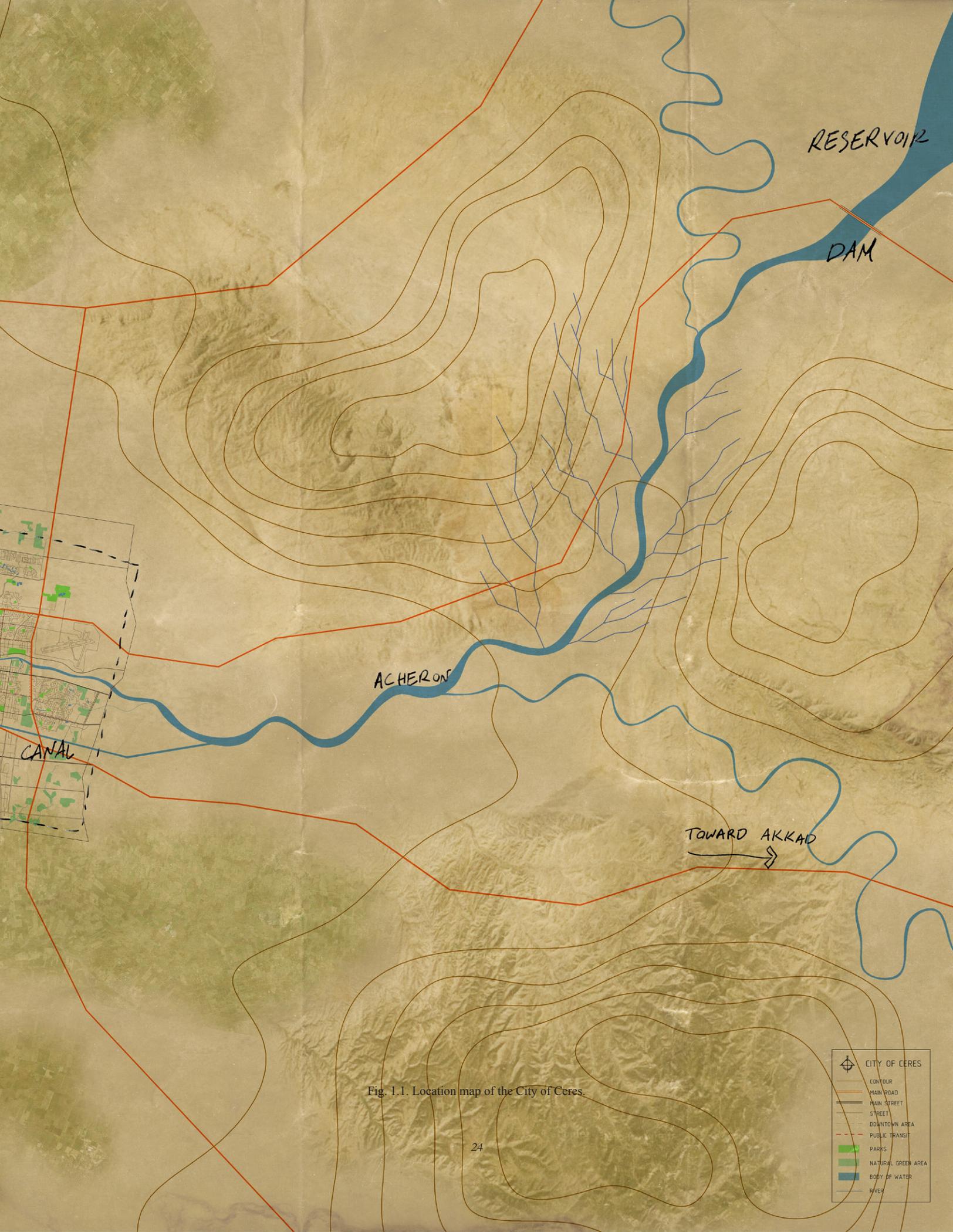


TOWARD OCEAN
←

ACHERON

CERES





RESERVOIR

DAM

ACHERON

CANAL

TOWARD AKKAD

Fig. 1.1. Location map of the City of Ceres.

- | CITY OF CERES | |
|---------------|--------------------|
| | CITY OF CERES |
| | CONTOUR |
| | MAIN ROAD |
| | MAIN STREET |
| | STREET |
| | DOWNTOWN AREA |
| | PUBLIC TRANSIT |
| | PARKS |
| | NATURAL GREEN AREA |
| | BODY OF WATER |
| | RIVER |

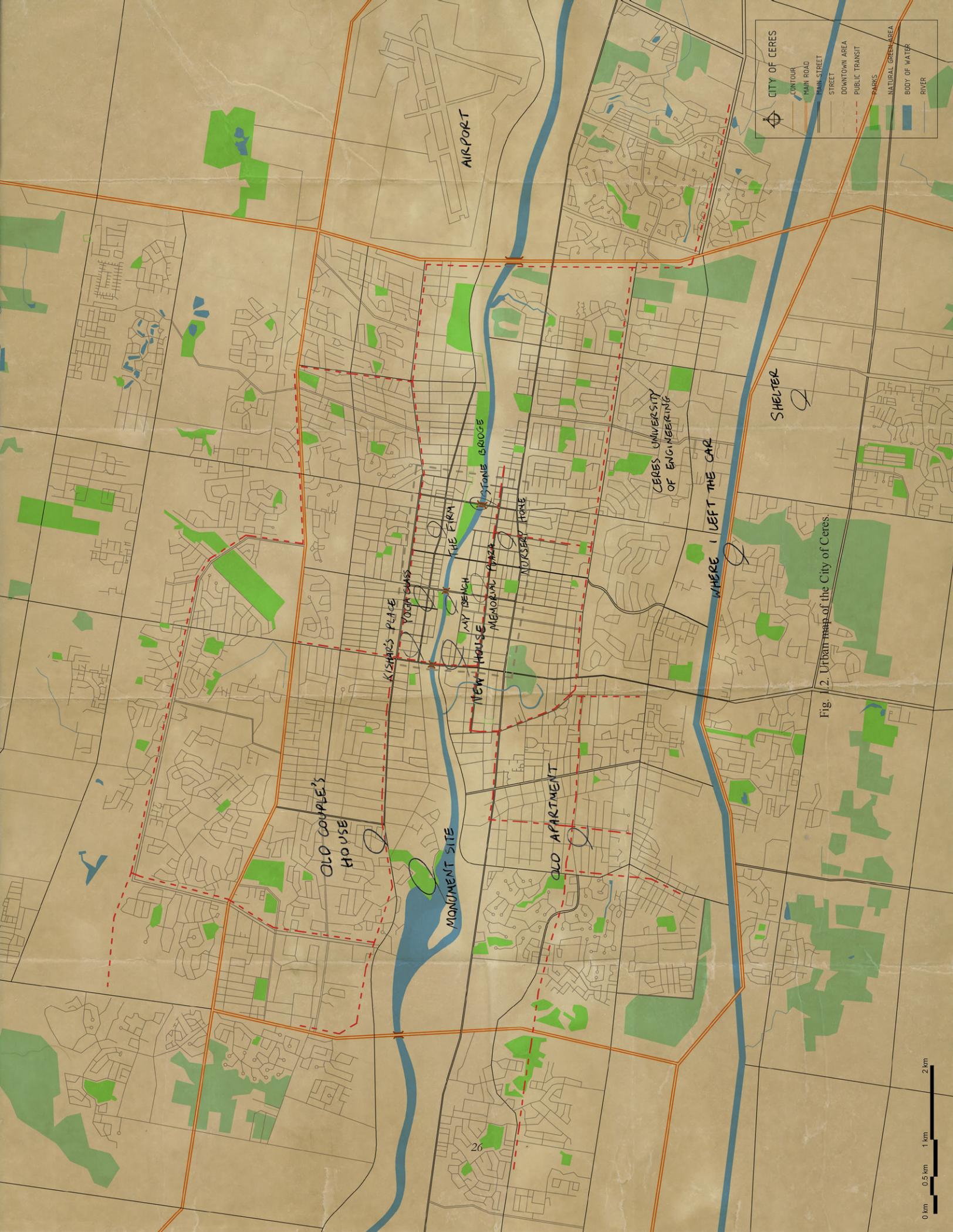
Adam¹'s life was busier than any time before. It had been three years since he had joined a big architectural firm in Ceres. The firm was mostly doing projects for new industries as well as some public projects with the municipality, and was one of the well-known design centres in the area. Before this, Adam had worked for a smaller firm in his hometown of Akkad, where he had also studied architecture for six years. He'd felt that he needed a change, to get out of the big, populated, and noisy city and experience a new place. And where could be better for him than Ceres, with its beautiful nature, river, and green hills? Also, it was close to his parents' house. When he was offered the job, he didn't hesitate.

Working on projects at the office wasn't all that Adam was doing. Every now and then, he would get freelance design projects, or would submit an entry for a competition with friends. He loved being aware of what was going on in his profession outside the office environment. Although he hadn't had much time for his other favourite leisure activities lately, such as reading novels, keeping up with the world news, or sketching, he was making good money and was content with his new life. Some of the firm's clients knew him personally and had shown interest in giving him private design projects. He could buy a new car with his last year's income. He had also moved to a new condo recently, about ten minutes' drive from downtown.

Adam didn't know many people in the city, only a few friends from school. They had met up a few times in the last three years, but they couldn't hang out like in their school days anymore. They all had jobs and lives, and some even had children now. With their long working hours and other commitments, there wasn't much spare time left over for old friends.

* * *

¹ "Primordial Man. The name is derived the Hebrew adama (=earth). G. G. Scholem states that, initially, Adam is conceived as 'a vast presentation of the power of the universe', which is concentrated in him. Hence the equation macrocosm = microcosm." Juan Eduardo Cirlot, *Dictionary of Symbols*, trans. Jack Sage (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1995).



CITY OF CERES

- CONTOUR
- MAIN ROAD
- STREET
- DOWNTOWN AREA
- PUBLIC TRANSIT
- PARKS
- NATURAL GREEN AREA
- BODY OF WATER
- RIVER

Fig. 1.2. Urban map of the City of Ceres.

0 km 0.5 km 1 km 2 km

THE CITY'S new public transit system was among the projects that Adam's firm was working on, in collaboration with the municipality and another urban planning group. The project was an advanced rail transit system that was going to connect the downtown to the main suburban neighbourhoods. This initiative, along with making the core areas denser, was planned to bring walkability and social life to some of the previously car-dominant areas. There were also a number of direct routes to the closest satellite towns. The project was a key player in the green development prospect for the city, yet in certain areas they had had to cut through some of the meadows, parts that up to that point had been kept intact. After all the railway route was chosen for its efficiency, and some natural areas had to be sacrificed for the bigger purpose.

Working on the urban projects, Adam had spent a lot of time lately contemplating the form of the city. He'd been interested in cities' history since he had started school. He had always been a city person. He liked to be surrounded by people and buildings, and couldn't imagine living outside of a city, although he loved the natural scenery and fresh air of the countryside. Adam and a couple of his colleagues would talk sometimes about how the city was changing, about the new plans that were being implemented for sustainable growth, and to what degree those plans were going to affect people's lives. The city had already undergone



Fig. 1.3

major urban planning changes when it was rebuilt after the historic flood, with the flood control system and the new distributary area of the river.

Adam knew that Ceres didn't have more than a couple of centuries of history; it was one of those mid-size cities that would continue to grow. He would discuss with his colleagues how new firms and corporations were changing the city's form. Ceres had become a favourite destination for university graduates and young people looking for jobs, and the reason was that here they had access to the job market of Akkad as well as the opportunity for a less expensive and more peaceful life.

Working with different people and talking to local clients at work, Adam got to know how they felt about recent changes. Most of the residents had witnessed how the areas of natural scenery had become covered by townhouses during the last fifty years, but they still liked the lifestyle they had. Wide streets, large shopping malls easily accessible by car, as well as quiet neighbourhoods with a lot of trees—it was all desirable. For them, downtown was also well arranged, whereas Adam realized that, because of the new commercial and office buildings, in some parts streets didn't get as much sunlight as they used to.

Adam had access to all of Ceres' urban maps in his firm's archive, both old and new. The shape of the downtown and its periphery had been through constant change during the last several decades. Many new office towers had been erected. Adam wondered how the shape of the city would define itself through these changes. Except for the areas along the water that were formed by the riverbanks and natural lakes, he wasn't able to identify the way the city was growing. It seemed that the construction was happening everywhere. The municipality needed to turn some parks into protected areas in order to keep them unharmed. But the manipulation of the city's environment in scale was much bigger than that.

Adam would occasionally look through some of his favourite books about city's identity, and he would write down some quotes in his sketchbook: "One beholds rather a shapeless mass, here bulging or ridged with buildings, there broken by a path of green or separate geometric shapes of a gas tank or series of fright sheds."¹ He started walking through different parts of the city, writing down his observations. "Near downtown, streets are becoming denser. Cubes of steel and glass can be seen beside stone buildings from 150 years ago. The city is depriving itself of light and air." Adam thought how John Ruskin would have described these streets. His description of London's nineteenth-century streets was really dark, let alone the streets of Ceres in twenty-first century:

What thought comprehend the contrast between such only alterations of heat and cold;
where snow never fell white nor sunshine clear; where the ground is only a pavement
and the sky no more than the glass roof of an arcade; where the utmost power of a

¹ Lewis Mumford, 1895-1990. *The Culture of Cities* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1938), 233.

storm is to choke the gutters and the finest magic of spring, to change mud into dust...¹

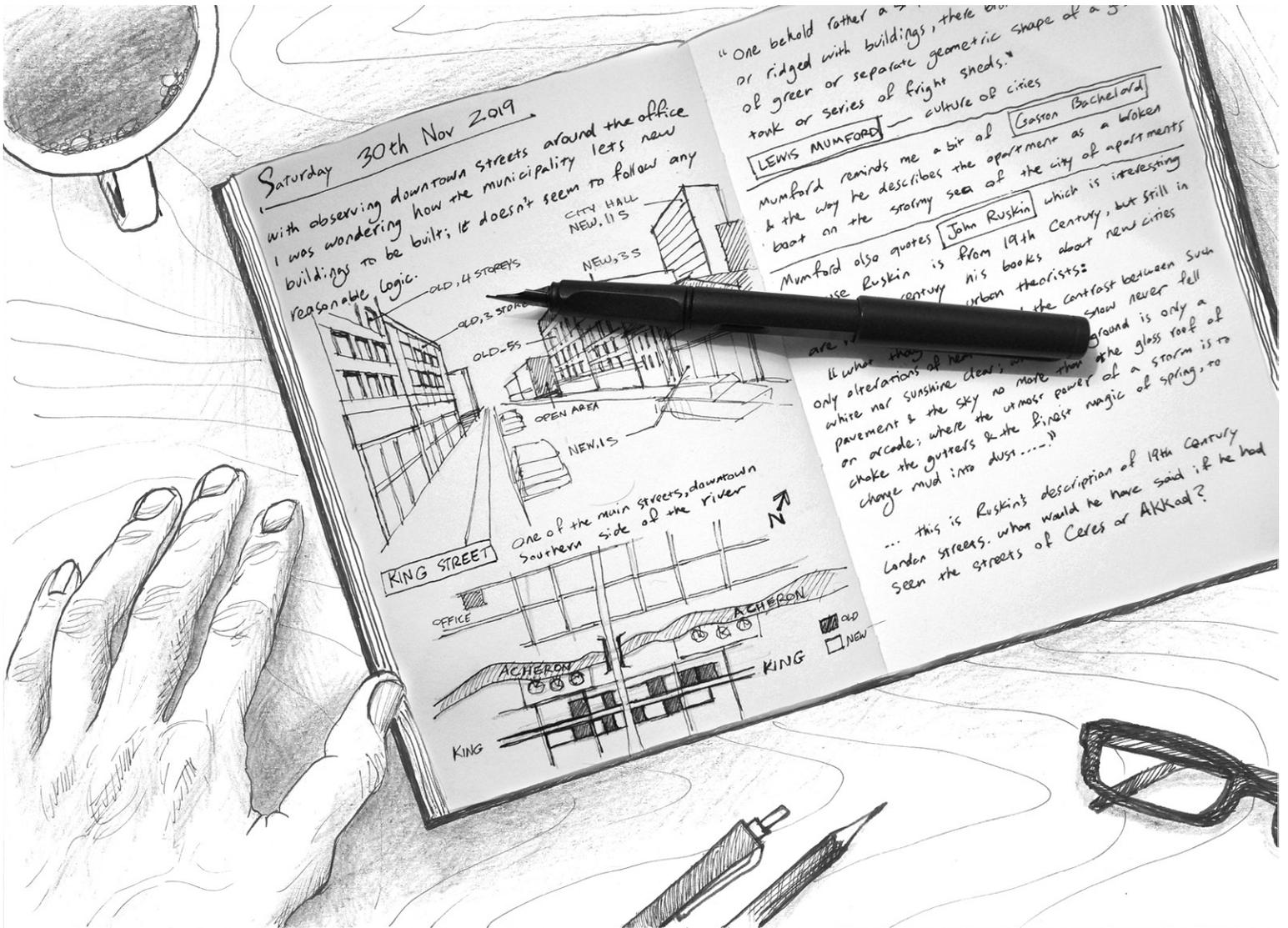


Fig. 1.4

¹ John Ruskin, *Munera Pulveris*. London: 1872, quoted in Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*, 255.

IT WAS during his early years of studies at university that one of the museums in Akkad had brought in a great collection of works by Kandinsky, the influential early-twentieth-century painter. At the time Adam was studying architecture in one of the best design schools in the country. The school was located downtown, close to major art centres, and Adam tried to visit as many art exhibitions as he could. He and a friend had rented an apartment not very far from downtown. He liked his apartment's neighbourhood because of all the different events that would happen throughout the year, as well as the active art and architecture community, although traffic in the streets and on the sidewalks could sometimes be irritating. He had always been a big fan of the visual arts; in fact, the reason that he had gone to architecture school was his skill in drawing. His parents had prevented him from choosing art as his university major because they were concerned about his future.

Adam didn't know much about Kandinsky's life, and it was the first time that he was seeing the artist's original paintings. He was extremely impressed. He spent a long time looking at each one of the paintings, and had to go back another day to read all of them properly. The artworks were curated in chronological order; at the start, there were realist and expressionist paintings, but those later in the exhibit, painted toward the end of the artist's life, became more and more abstract. There was also a timeline of Kandinsky's major life events, along with social and political conditions of Europe, and the way they had all affected his work.¹ Kandinsky was born in Moscow. He started serious study of art rather late in his life, at the age of thirty when he moved to Munich from Russia. Before that, he'd had a position in the Moscow Faculty of Law. His sudden change of career was influenced by two main events: seeing the works of French impressionist artists, specifically Claude Monet's paintings, and watching Wagner's *Lohengrin*. After starting his new life, Kandinsky soon developed his own ideas of colours and forms in painting. His concepts were not always popular among the critics but made him an influential leader of abstract art nonetheless.²

There was one work that, for a long time after he left the museum, Adam couldn't stop picturing in his mind. The painting's name was *Composition VI*, referred to by Kandinsky as

¹ "Art Gallery of Ontario." *The Great Upheaval: Masterpieces from the Guggenheim Collection, 1910-1918*. 15 Sept. 2014.

² Bio.com. A&E Networks Television, n.d. Web. 04 Sept. 2014.



Fig. 1.5. *Composition VI*, Wassily Kandinsky, 1913.

The Deluge. Adam read the painting’s description: “This work was painted in 1913, during the artist’s residence in Munich, Germany. The artist spent almost six months in preparation to create this work. Initially he intended his painting to invoke flood, baptism, destruction and rebirth at the same time.”¹

Adam wasn’t sure if he grasped all the meanings in the painting, but he certainly felt the powerful effect of “the deluge.” It was as if the shapes and colours were rushing like a strong stream of water. Later he read another interesting story about the creation of the work. While Kandinsky had been working on the painting, he had found himself artistically blocked. His assistant had advised him, instead of getting obsessed with the intellectual meaning, to just repeat the word *uberflut*, which means “flood” in German. She had told him to focus on the music of the word while saying it, and to empty his mind of everything else. Kandinsky managed to complete the work in three days’ time after that.²

The story, for Adam, influenced his approach to using artistic inspiration without overthinking the idea. He knew architecture is not mere art, but he liked his design projects to be more from within himself, more spiritual and inspired by his perception of the world around him—more like Kandinsky. The exhibition inspired him to envision a type of architecture that could have the same impression as Kandinsky’s paintings: buildings that were designed to convey a meaning. If art could have this effect, why not architecture? Architecture was far more involved in people’s everyday life than art.

AFTER THE EXHIBITION, Adam looked for Kandinsky’s writings on art, and the philosophy behind his work. With Kandinsky’s paintings Adam had seen the abstract interpretation of principal concepts and events in human life, meaningful things such as death, birth, and flood. As a twenty-year-old student, he wasn’t able to perceive wholly the depth of each painting, but their influence on him was so immense that he started wondering what was special about those patterns, lines, and colours.

This abstract, logical structure peculiar to one form of art, which finds in this art a constant, more or less conscious application, can be compared to the logical structure found in nature, and both cases—art and nature—offer the inner man a quite special kind of satisfaction...³

Kandinsky knew the artist as a prophet in society. Reading Kandinsky’s book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Adam liked his metaphor of the artist who would see the future by standing on

¹ “Wassily Kandinsky.” - *WikiArt.org*. Web. 20 May 2014.

² “Kandinsky.” *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, Web. 20 May 2014.

³ Wassily Kandinsky, 1866-1944. *Kandinsky, Complete Writings on Art*, ed. Peter Vergo (Boston, Mass.: G.K. Hall, 1982), 601.

top of a “constantly moving pyramid.” To Kandinsky, the pyramid is human society, which can’t see what is going to happen tomorrow, but the artist has a vision for it.¹

Adam’s biggest dream was to become a great architect. Reading about Kandinsky’s attitude toward art and society made him also think of himself as a prophet. He considered architecture to be a more influential, practical, and communicative tool in expressing meaningful ideas to the public. Buildings, for him, were in constant correspondence with people and nature, influencing them and getting influenced by them. As a result, he strongly believed that architects had much more power than artists to change society.

The apocalypse was the main theme in Kandinsky’s *Composition* paintings. Death, destruction, rebirth, and flood; why had Kandinsky tried to express these ideas? He wrote and painted about them with symbols and connotations in the years preceding World War I. Critics had called his paintings from the pre-World War I era “apocalyptic landscapes” because in them an apocalyptic destructiveness could be found. But there was also the expectation for redemption after that. The strong colours had redemptive power, a power that Kandinsky put a lot of hope in, although sometimes their brightness was overshadowed by dark colours. The dynamic black lines—which at parts became strange and contrasting curls and forms, oddly framing the unusual patches of colour—created an effect which Kandinsky himself called “dissonance,” conveying destruction. The apocalypse as Kandinsky depicted it was a sort of collapse, and the mentality of apocalypse included the fear of collapse. In itself it had the anxiety of death as an unexpected disaster. At the same time, the redemption after the disaster could cause a new beginning and a new structure for oneself and one’s world.²

Kandinsky had felt the trends of his time in Europe with an almost prophetic acuteness. Adam was thinking about the society of his own time. Modern wars in different parts of the world, perils like rising sea levels threatening the natural environment, and, most importantly, the dominant architecture and urban design, which to him were like a disaster. For young Adam, these were all signs of new apocalypse, perhaps of a different kind, but this time more intense and on a universal scale. Kandinsky’s work still projected true realities of human life into the future. The ambitious architecture student wanted his work to have such an effect, to show others realities of the time, and to catalyze change.

¹ Wassily Kandinsky, 1866-1944. *On the Spiritual in Art: First Complete English Translation* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation for the Museum of Non-Objective Painting, 1946), 34.

² Kuspit, Donald. “FALLING APART AND HOLDING TOGETHER: KANDINSKY’S DEVELOPMENT.” *Artnet*. 9 Sept. 2009. Web.



Fig. 1.6

THE FIRM was responsible for the design of the stops and signs for the transit system. They initially decided to create a simple design theme inspired by the morphology of downtown's historic buildings. Later the city clarified that they wanted an international appearance for the stations that would be easily recognizable for foreigners as well. They wanted the stations to become a symbol for the city and help the tourism industry, to advocate Ceres as a successful pattern of sustainable growth.

Adam's boss usually tried to include all the architects in the design process, so Adam also got to have some influence on the design. The project was conducted by Morgan, one of the senior architects in the firm. He was a few years older than Adam and had moved to the city five years ago. Morgan wanted to establish his own practice someday. He used to work in an international firm in Akkad, but had come to Ceres because he thought the city promised a bright future for architecture startups.

While working on the project, Adam paid more attention to people's transportation within the city. It seemed to him people who could afford a car were not interested in using other means of transportation. Having on-street rail transit would certainly make it easier for students and anyone who didn't have a car, especially in winter and the heavy rain season. But what was the point of having a public transit system that you would use only if you didn't have any other choices? Could other people be convinced to leave their cars at home? Ever since Adam himself had bought a car, he had used it almost exclusively to get places. Owning a car was, for him, not a matter of discussion. In almost all of the cities that he knew in the region, everything was planned and developed based on the premise that people would drive, and it was hard getting around otherwise. During his studies Adam hadn't felt the need for a car because he'd been in a big city with a much denser urban environment. Everything had been close to his living place, so the bus and subway had sufficed for all his trips, but here in a mid-size city the situation was different.

Each month the firm had meetings with the municipality and the urban planning group to talk about the progress of the project. They had discussed logistic goals of the project already; the focus now was more on the timeline and issues that would arise every now and then during the construction. It was the first meeting of the year in January. Adam couldn't help but notice

how each one of the project committee members arrived at the building in his or her own car. During the session he thought about the paradox of working on such a project, and the life that each person in the room was living.

For Adam, it became obvious: the people with whom he was working might be determined to fulfil the objectives for the city's green future, but to him it was all hypocrisy. None of them, even himself, seemed to live the goal that they were working toward, the sustainable development of new districts. It was probable that each one of them owned a mansion in one of the low-density suburban neighbourhoods, far off from downtown. Nobody could separate these people from their luxury cars. How could they possibly encourage others to use public transit when they wouldn't use it themselves? The project committee wasn't passionate about the new transit system. It seemed like they were just doing their jobs, and Adam was frustrated by it. What was the final goal of this plan, anyway? To change the growth pattern of the city, to preserve its natural environment—but did these people have any real concern for the living place of future generations?

Adam knew that most people would ultimately choose their own comfort over the future of the city. He wondered, as an individual involved in the project, how he could have an influence? Maybe he could stop using his car, but would that really help? He was just an employee of a design firm; even those who had started the project didn't seem to care enough.



Fig. 1.7

It was a cold Saturday morning in late February. Getting up at 7 a.m. every day and staying at the office until early evening made Adam reluctant to get up early on weekends. He would have liked to sleep in more, but most weekends he was awake by the same time as on weekdays, even without an alarm. Sometimes he would stay in bed for another hour, staring at the ceiling, just thinking. That morning he felt that he needed to go outside and run along the river. Maybe it was because of how much time he'd spent contemplating about the city and its natural traits recently. All he knew was he had a strong urge to go outside and breathe the winter air, to hear the sound of water and run along with its stream. He put on his running shoes and went out to the parking lot. The trails that he liked were closer to downtown. He had to go by car. He drove over the canal's bridge near his neighbourhood toward one of the natural parks. After finding a parking spot, he walked to a trail by the riverbank, which would take him to downtown within an hour. The trees and the ground were still covered in white from last week's snowfall.

Twenty minutes later he was running along Acheron River, listening to the sounds of the water, the wind among tree branches, and his own breath. He was even enjoying the cold winter breeze touching his face. He kept running until he reached a part of the city where he'd never been before. There wasn't much construction going on along the riverbanks in that area. Now he wasn't very far from downtown and he could see some of the office towers in the interstices between the trees. He passed under one of the city's old stone bridges and noticed a flood gauge on the river's stone wall. Adam had heard there was a history of flooding in the area, but he didn't know much more about it. Some information about flood records was written on a plaque. From the earliest times of the city's history, flooding had always been a threat, mainly because of the city's location on a lower field by the hills, as well as the tidal river and heavy rainfalls throughout the year.

Every year in early spring, when the snow melted and heavy rain fell, there would be flash floods in the lower lands. The river's water level would rise close to its banks for at least a couple of weeks. However, it had been over seventy years since the last disastrous flood. Not many people had a clear memory of it anymore. After that incident, a flood control dam was built over the river forty miles from the city. In addition to the dam, a diversion canal was built around and through the city to hold the extra volume of water. With these precautionary measures in place, the city had been able to control the flooding ever since. People had not forgotten about the risk, but a flood like that of seventy years ago was very unlikely. During the last several decades, both the weather and the river had seemed stable. There had been times that the lower streets by the river were flooded with up to one foot of water, but it was nothing that interfered with people's lives for long or caused serious damage.

Adam became curious to know more about the history of the river and the flooding.

* * *

THAT SATURDAY Adam felt the soothing effect of the river, and he connected himself to it. He got an inexplicable joy from running with the water in the cold winter morning, as though the river was flowing for him, talking to him.

Adam had always been interested in the symbolism of natural elements. He thought maybe his new life was making him neglect the meanings of the natural entities surrounding him, like the river. He began to read about rivers in ancient cultures and literature. In Ceres the river was one part of the land that still kept its natural form and flow. For most ancient civilizations, a river was a messenger, a representative of the sky, the clouds, and the earth. It would connect the city to the ocean; it would connect the earth to the sky by receiving rainwater. Adam read about rivers that streamed like time itself through the urban settlement, described as “the veins of Great Mother Earth.”¹ The river had been a giver to the city, providing drinking water, fish, and good soil for agriculture. The river also brought spiritual offerings to people, like the opportunity to purge themselves of unwanted feelings and enjoy a renewed cleanliness of the soul. Adam thought of the people who saw the river every day and wondered how many of them would think of it with all these characteristics.

The headwaters of the Acheron River flowed from the east-west mountain range, further up north in the country. A number of rivers in the region flowed from sources in the same mountainous area. Adam thought if people could truly see the flow of the Acheron downward from the mountains to the city, it would remind them that nothing could ever go beyond its source—just like humans and their origin, nature.²

Adam read a series of poems by T.S. Eliot. He came across a stanza in which the poet described how a river is perceived in the modern world:

I do not know much about gods; but I think that the river
Is a strong brown god—sullen, untamed and intractable,
Patient to some degree, at first recognised as a frontier;
Useful, untrustworthy, as a conveyor of commerce;
Then only a problem confronting the builder of bridges.

¹ Ronnberg, *The Book of Symbols*, 40.

² *Ibid.*

The problem once solved, the brown god is almost forgotten
By the dwellers in cities—ever, however, implacable.
Keeping his seasons, and rages, destroyer, reminder
Of what men choose to forget. Unhonoured, unpropitiated
By worshippers of the machine, but waiting, watching and waiting.
His rhythm was present in the nursery bedroom.
In the rank ailanthus of the April dooryard.
In the smell of grapes on the autumn table,
And the evening circle in the winter gaslight.¹

Adam thought how appropriate this passage was in describing the way people would see the river in a place like Ceres, and how the river would feel, if it were alive, “unhonoured, unpropitiated.”

Knowing about flood control system, Adam was reminded how we had always tried to use the river for our needs, with building dams to produce electricity and with modifying the river’s path. Nature most of the times was supportive, but not always everything would end with our favorable results. Adam read about China’s yellow river that had caused different miseries throughout the history as well as bringing life to cities.

For centuries the Yellow River symbolized the greatness and sorrows of China’s ancient civilization, as emperors equated controlling the river and taming its catastrophic floods with controlling China. Now, the river is a very different symbol of the dire state of China’s limited resources at a time when the country’s soaring economic growth needs more of everything.²

Adam learned about the symbolism of rivers all over the world. China’s Yellow River was known as Mother River, since its basin was the point where early Chinese civilizations came into existence, but it was also China’s sorrow because of its destructive floods that took many lives. In China, the spirits of people who were killed by the river were said to inhabit it, looking for live bodies to reside in. The Ganges in India was an example of a river that was a great symbol of purity. In Hindu myth, the Ganges was shown as coming down from paradise to purify the material world, and flowing also to the world of the dead. Cleansing in the river was an important ritual in the Hindu religion.³

¹ T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1943), 35.

² Jim Yardley, “A Troubled River Mirrors China’s Path to Modernity.” *New York Times*, November 19, 2006.

³ Jack Tresidder, *Symbols and Their Meanings* (London: Duncan Baird Publishers, 2006), 113.

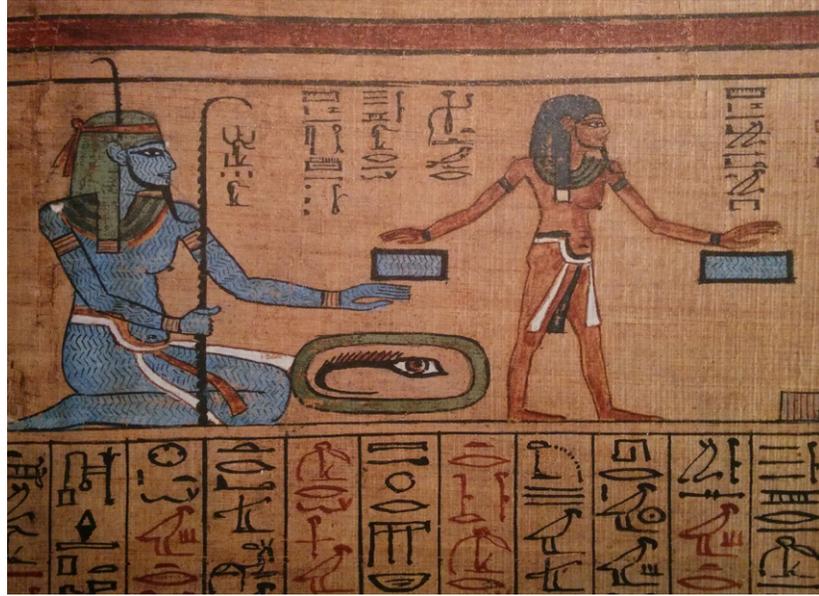


Fig. 1.8. The Nile is depicted as a man with female breasts and a big stomach, as a symbol of fertility. From the Book of the Dead of Pnesuttawy, 1070-712 BC, Egypt. (Ronnberg 2010, 50)

In Egypt annual flooding of the Nile would bring up fertile soil, and thus the river was considered to be a symbol of fertility. Without the proper management of the flooding of the Nile, there couldn't have been any crops for people, and this flood management required effort and discipline to maintain.¹ Here, again, the river was the reason for the civilization's life—the repetitive cycle of flooding provided the water for Egypt's great agricultural structure.² Such was the meaning and significance of rivers in ancient civilizations that Adam saw as ignored and forgotten in Ceres. The city of Ceres was established because of agriculture, and in its dependency on rivers like Acheron, it was quite similar to the ancient cities of Egypt or China. Acheron was a life giver, and at the same time a threat because of its flooding, but unlike in old cultures, the river here wasn't considered symbolic or sacred.

The very place where Adam was running on that Saturday morning had been under water some years ago. Adam had never experienced the force and the strike of a flood before. He wasn't aware of the faces with which the river could appear, the ways it could affect the city's life. He hadn't seen the relentless side of the river yet.

¹ Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Meaning in Western Architecture* (New York: Praeger, 1975), 41-42.

² Scully, *Architecture: The Natural and the Man-made*, 32.

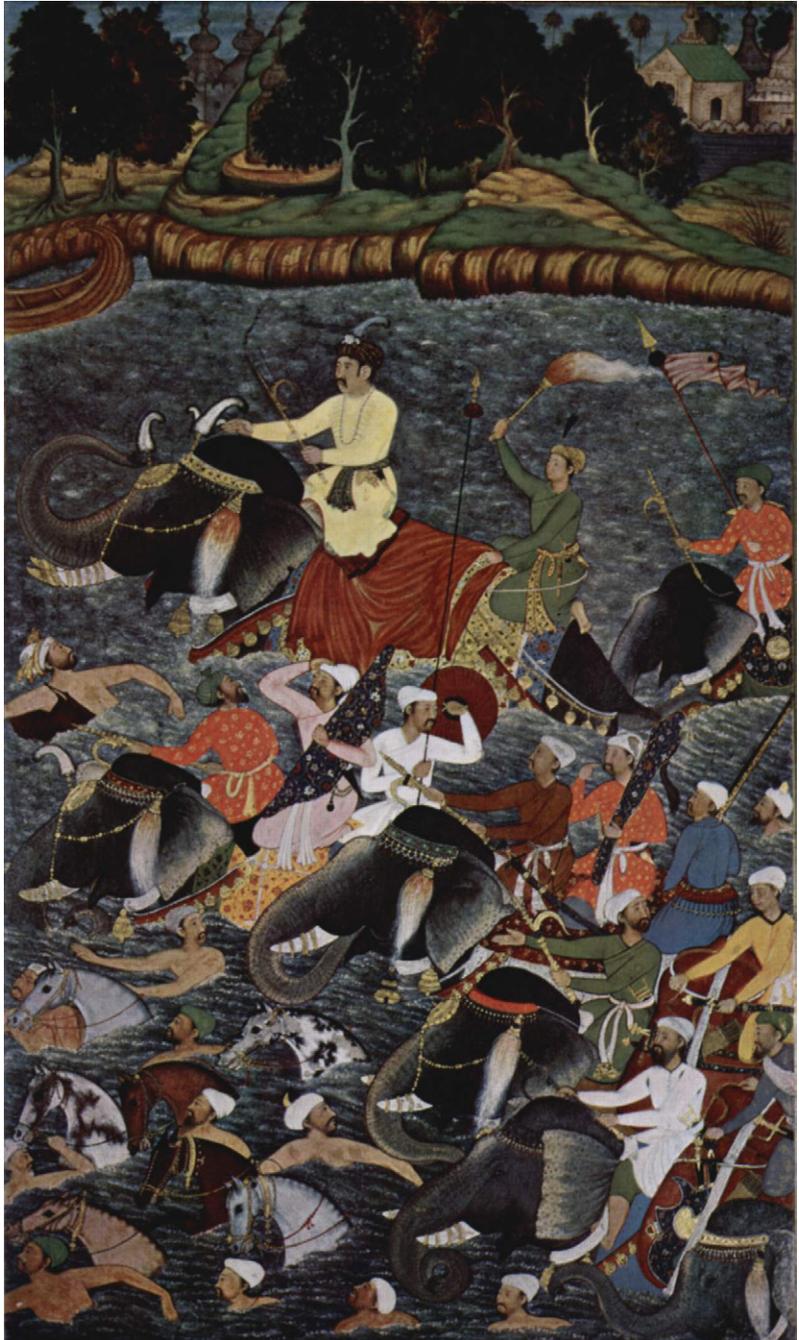


Fig. 1.9. Mughal Emperor Akbar, who knows the sacredness of the Ganges in Hindu culture, is ritually crossing the river with a herd of elephants. From *Akbarnama* (his memoirs). (Tresidder 2006, 113).

It would take a spiritual revolution as that which led to the advent of Christianity. It would require that man, who since Renaissance has been brought up to adore himself, acquire modesty, and that he learn the lesson of all the atrocities we have experienced for thirty or forty years. He would do well to learn that if one thinks only man is respectable among living things, well then, the frontier is placed too close to mankind and he can no longer be protected. One must first consider that it is as a living being that man is worthy of respect, and hence one must extend that respect to all living beings—at that point, the frontier is pushed back, and mankind finds itself protected.

Claude Lévi-Strauss

CHAPTER II

I THINK ABOUT WAITING

THE FIRST MONTH of spring was as cold as February. It was as though the sun had decided not to give its warmth to the earth again. There were still piles of snow in the corners of streets, waiting to be melted.

Adam hadn't felt very well for a couple of weeks. He wasn't sick; he just wasn't as energetic as he used to be. First he thought maybe it was because of his eating habits. He didn't have much time to prepare his own food and was eating out most days. He started a diet of fruits and vegetables as a change, and tried to avoid canned and frozen food for a period of time. Adam thought it might also have been because of the long winter and grey sky for the past five months. Perhaps he only needed some warm, sunny days to get better.

He couldn't run; his sinusitis wouldn't allow him to. He decided to register in a yoga class instead. "Meditation and physical training to get relief from anxiety, distress, and bodily pain." It didn't sound like a bad idea. The pressure of work could have been another reason why he didn't feel well. But he couldn't figure out what part of the work had been unpleasant for him. He had always done his work with excitement, and he was enjoying working in his current firm with professional designers. His colleagues were friendly, and he had a passionate boss. He couldn't ask for a better firm to work in.

Doing yoga helped. The class was held in a building near the river, and near his office in downtown; every Monday and Thursday he would walk there after work. The classes became his favourite part of the week. He could let go of all his thoughts for an hour. His body did all the work. He wished he could do yoga more frequently, but work was demanding. It was through his yoga class that he eventually met some local people outside of the office environment. He'd never been an outgoing person, but during his studies he'd had a better social life. He met a girl in the class who was an aboriginal resident of the city. Previously Adam hadn't even known that the area had aboriginal people. Kishar¹ was a librarian. Her passion was painting, but she wasn't able to make much money from it. Her family had lived in the area for generations and she knew the region pretty well. It was from talking to her that Adam learned a bit more about the natural features of the city.

¹ Kishar is the goddess of earth in Ancient Mesopotamian religion ("Kishar." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, 23 May 2014. Web. 24 May 2014).

Adam added walking to his daily schedule. Some days of the week he would walk in the downtown, after work or yoga class. Downtown Ceres wasn't very big, and he could explore all parts of it. There was one place where Adam liked to spend some time during his walks: a park with a view over the river. But it wasn't even a park, really; it was a wide sidewalk with a thoughtful arrangement of small gardens and urban furniture. Adam's favourite spot was a wooden bench where he could get a beautiful view of the river, and a view of downtown on the other side. The park was still cold and snowy, so each time he sat there he wouldn't stay more than ten minutes, but when he was there he had very calm moments, without a need to do anything. He would just watch the river and feel the place.

People of the city were tired of the long winter; they were impatiently waiting to take out their summer clothes. This year the city had had a lot of snowfall, and the average temperature for the last four months was recorded as the lowest in a decade. Adam was reading the weather report. So he wasn't alone in his feelings; his lack of energy *was* related to the long winter. Now he was almost certain that as the days became warmer, his mood would change.

* * *

THE MUNICIPALITY wanted the firm to finish the construction documents by the end of the summer. Earlier phases of the project were facing some obstacles. In some neighbourhoods, people had issued complaints about the noise and traffic problems caused by the construction. In wealthier areas, residents were not very supportive of the whole project. The newer districts had been built to be reached by car. Every family in wealthy neighbourhoods had at least two cars at their house. They didn't mind having a fast public transit system, but they weren't happy with the troubles that construction had created, and the fact that it wasn't going to be over any time soon. Besides that, with the new railway transit, people from downtown and all the poorer neighbourhoods would have easier access to wealthy areas.

Phase one of the project was supposed to be over before the beginning of winter, but a struggle with some landowners and local farmers postponed the completion date. The municipality had to set a new timeline. They couldn't convince some owners to sell their properties that were in the way of the railway route. One of the owners was an old couple living in a house near the railway construction site. They had been living there for thirty years, and they didn't want to move anywhere else. City officials had offered them a good amount of money for their house; after all, changing the railway path would have cost a lot more. But still the old couple hadn't agreed to move. The issue had become so problematic that it was brought up in Adam's firm's meeting with the municipality.

Adam got interested in the matter. He wanted to see the house, talk with these people, and find out why they didn't want to leave even in exchange for a good price. He went to see the old couple one day. The house didn't look good; it had some serious damage. The neighbourhood was in one of the lowest areas of the city, and it had apparently experienced a number of floods. The owners greeted him very warmly. The inside of the house was in the same condition as the outside, yet Adam felt a peaceful quality in it. They didn't have much furniture, and everything they had was old and worn. In Adam's eyes it seemed like the old couple, the house, and everything in it had all grown old together, like a big old creature. Adam introduced himself as an architect who was doing research on people's favourite parks. He didn't say that he was part of the railway project, but their talk finally ended up being about it. The lady was doing most of the talking. She said that they were not going to live for long, and

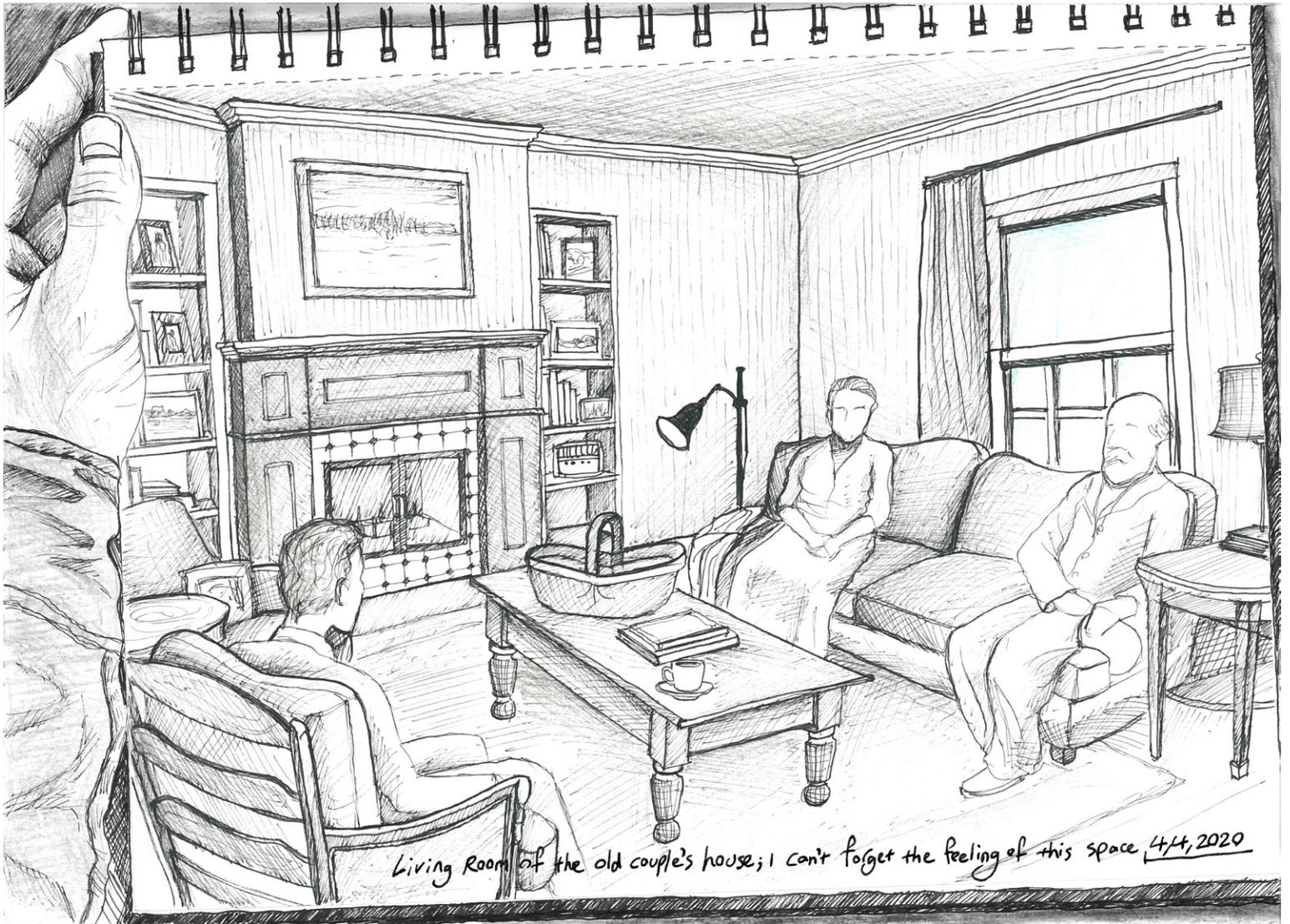


Fig. 2.1

that they only wanted to spend their last years in their own house and their own neighbourhood. Adam thought these people had different values for their living place. Their conversation made him think about the house he had lived in during his childhood, the house that he had loved, but his parents had sold it and moved to an apartment. Houses were expensive to maintain.

The old lady also told Adam about their favourite place of a neighbourhood park that was a ten-minute walk from their house, closer to the river. It was an oak tree. She talked about the elegance of this tree, how it had spread out its wide branches, and how it stood there in the park with such a tranquility. She described the tree in such a way that, as soon as he left their house, Adam went to see it.

AT THE TIME Adam had started reading a book about nature that Kishar had recommended, and in which he noticed a quote that seemed to describe the railway project in Ceres: “Perhaps we inadvertently define our environmental problem as that to which the application of ever more technology is the only solution.”¹

Adam couldn’t reconcile how something of benefit for the city and its green future could be so detrimental to the future of those old folks. Visiting their house left a deep impression on him. Expanding public transit was in the interest of the sustainable development of the city, but it required the displacement of a family whose house was everything to them. The house was like a crossroads between the city’s green plan objectives and what was important for single families in suburban neighbourhoods.

The municipality decided to continue the project anyway. They thought with the construction continuing close to the house, its old residents would ultimately decide to leave.

¹ Evernden, *The Social Creation of Nature*, xi.

IT WAS near the end of April that a meteorological agency announced increasing temperatures and the chance of heavy rain for the next two weeks. This meant large amounts of snow would start to melt, and with the rain there could be flooding. City officials gave out flood warnings in the case of heavy rainfall. The warnings were mostly for lower neighbourhoods close to the river. However, they assured people that the dam reservoir and the canal would definitely be able to contain any extra water.

* * *

ADAM WORKED on his interim submission for school's studio project that night. Drafting and modelling the building always took him a week, and he was behind on his schedule. The deadline was in four days and he was still drawing the main documents. He went to sleep around 3 a.m., and he had that strange dream.

He was in a desert. In front of him in the distance was Kandinsky, seated in an old wrecked boat. It seemed like he was painting the desert landscape in front of him, but the painting wasn't anything close to the landscape. The view in front of them was sand hills in the background, and a single dead tree in the foreground. Adam wondered what Kandinsky saw in that scene that Adam couldn't see, how he could translate it to those colours, lines, and circles on his canvas. Suddenly the sky turned dark grey and it began raining. It wasn't just a normal rain; it was a downpour. Adam's feet were getting wet. There were streams of water on the desert ground, rushing under his feet. In a blink of an eye, the water level rose up to his knees. He took another look at Kandinsky—he was still painting in his boat, calmly. A few moments later the water was up to Adam's neck. He couldn't swim; he was struggling in the water, trying not to drown.

Adam didn't remember his dream clearly until later that day, when he noticed the catalogue from the Kandinsky exhibition on his shelf. Why had Kandinsky come to his dream? Why had the waters in his dream been so violent? And why had he been drowning? He was curious to know the meaning of the symbols that had appeared in his dream. He looked them all up.

“A desert may symbolize your unconscious.”

“A dry tree may symbolize the state of being held with inflexible rules in your actions and your mind, instead of your natural instinct.”

“Rain may symbolize growth, a new successful stage of life.”

“Floodwater might seem destructive, but it could also bring fertility and new life. It may symbolize the need for reconstructing yourself, the need for destroying the negative parts of your old self so that your true nature can come into existence.”

“Drowning might simply symbolize death and rebirth.”¹

What could rebirth and new growth imply for Adam at this point in his life? What part of his old self did he have to get rid of? What rigid rules were blocking his true self from unfolding? Young Adam couldn't understand the implications of the symbols in his dream. Of course there weren't any results for what Kandinsky symbolized in a dream. Adam had seen the exhibition some months ago, but the effect the paintings had on him was so deep that his mind was still revisiting it. He thought that it would be great if he could design a house for Kandinsky, to explore the spatial translation of his attitude. Yeah, why not? He couldn't have done it for any of his school assignments, but why couldn't he design a “Kandinsky house” just for his own pleasure?

He decided to take the next day off from meeting his school-project deadline and instead work on Kandinsky's house. School marks weren't very important for him, and he would always manage to get a good mark by working efficiently. So he decided to have fewer and simpler renderings for his project, rather than beautiful graphics that required at least two days of extra work. Now he was thinking about where to design the house. The residence of a pioneer abstract artist should be in a unique location. His dream had taken place in a desert, and for a desert landscape the first place that came to mind was EGYPT. There were many special things about this country—the great pyramids, the Nile, and all its mythology. He'd never been to Egypt, but its ancient culture and architecture captivated him. The earliest impressions he had of Egypt were from Tin Tin comic books, through the adventures of the young journalist in the mysterious tombs of Egyptian pharaohs.

He had already read a little about the social hierarchy of Egypt, that the land had been ruled for thousands of years by despotic kings. He also knew about the special relationship that Egyptians had with the desert, the sun, and the Nile. It was fascinating to him how every element of their natural world was sacred to them, and so was every building that they had built.

* * *

¹ Eric Ackroyd, *A Dictionary of Dream Symbols: With an Introduction to Dream Psychology* (London: Blandford, 1993), 154, 179, 237, 251, 293.

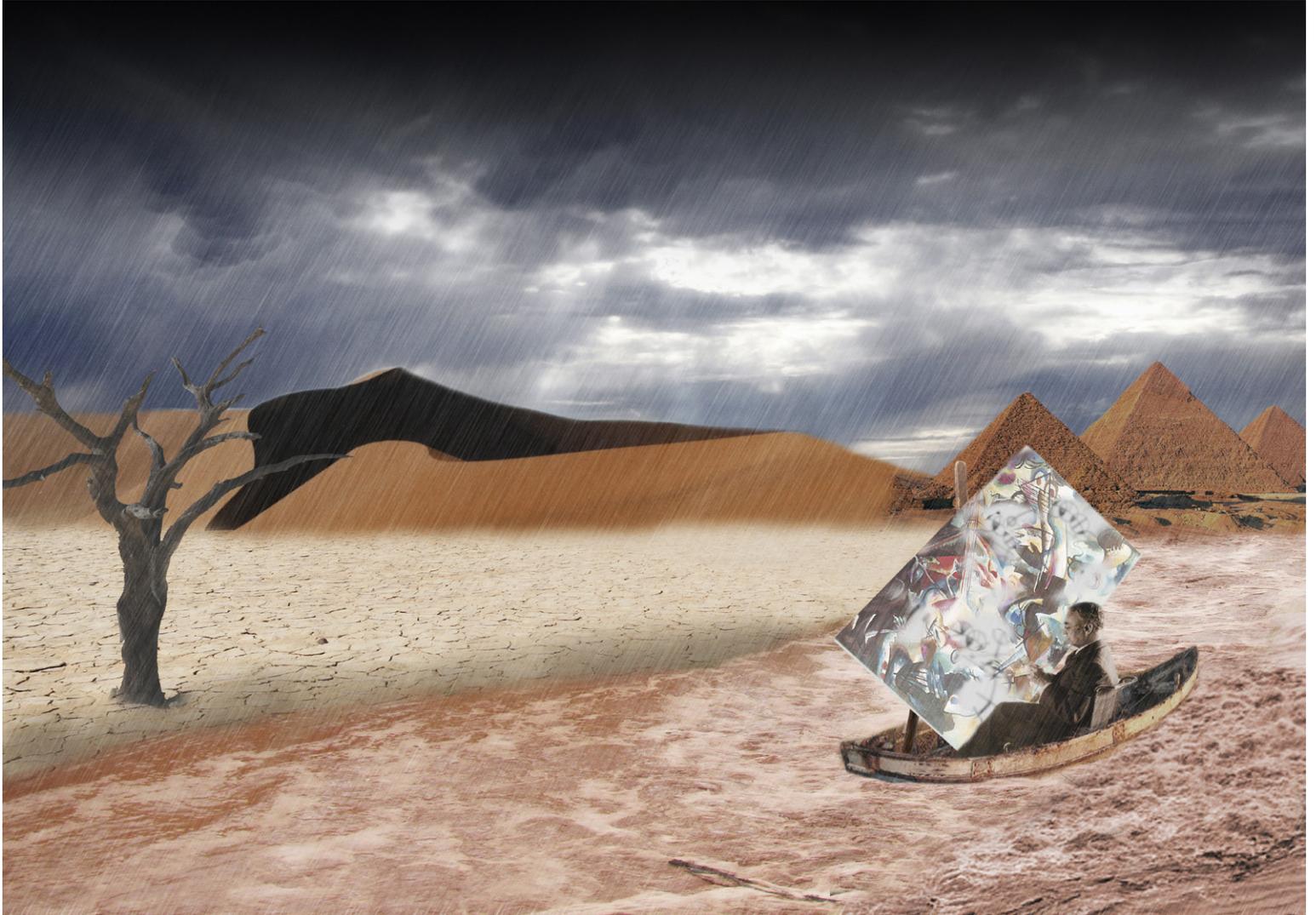


Fig. 2.2

ADAM WENT back to some of the books he had in his library, and read the parts related to Egyptian architecture. He started taking notes:

In ancient Egypt man and nature were one.

Christian Norberg-Schultz

Egypt had a unique landscape that hardly any other country resembled. The “geographical structure” of Egypt had a great deal of “simplicity and regularity.”¹ These simple geographical features had created a basis for the embodiment of the key existential meaning of human life. Through organic articulation patterns in their architecture, Egyptians had tried to represent the order in the organized universe, and to show human life as a part of it. In this country everything, even life itself, was dependent on the nature and flooding of the Nile; that was probably why every element of nature had a particular character and sacredness.²

Adam read detailed descriptions of the purpose of building pyramids. The tombs were situated in sand on the west side of the Nile. Their mountain-like shape was intended to make a connection between the earth and the sky. These giant buildings were supposed to be a tomb for a king, as well as his family. The pyramid’s organization and very reason for existing was for life after death. It wasn’t a memorial or tomb in the modern interpretation of these things. It was a permanent living space for the pharaoh. The king’s immortality had something central to do with the quality of Egyptians’ life on earth.³

It was King Zoser of the Third Dynasty who wanted his tomb to be in the shape of mountain so that all the workers from the fields below could see it. The king’s image, his *Ka*⁴, was seated below the top part of the tomb. After his death the king was regarded as the sun itself, and his mountain, the emblem of his immortality, dominated the sky when the sun was not present; the king was the “embodiment of cosmic justice.”⁵ People believed in the order that caused the Nile’s flooding and the sun’s movement, and hence they believed in their king’s immortality. Their lives were all dependent on it.⁶

When young Adam chose Egypt as the site for Kandinsky’s retreat, he didn’t know all the connections between Egyptian architecture, their worldview and their landscape. He just began to realize the importance of the natural order in the ancient Egyptian life.

¹ Norberg-Schulz, *Meaning in Western Architecture*, 10-12.

² Ibid, 15-20.

³ Scully, *Architecture: The Natural and the Man-made*, 27-31.

⁴ The Egyptian concept of vital essence that distinguishes a living person from a dead person, with death occurring when the *Ka* leaves the body. (Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, n.d. Web. 23 May 2014).

⁵ Scully, *Architecture: The Natural and the Man-made*, 27-31.

⁶ Ibid.



Fig. 2.3. Stepped pyramid of or Zoser, by Imhotep, Saqqara, Egypt, 2648 BC.



Fig. 2.4. King Zoser's *Ka* statue, Dynasty III From Saqqara, c. 2750 BC.

OVER THE COURSE of two days during the last week of April the weather got warmer by several degrees. Around the same time the spring rain started. Adam was checking the weather forecast every day. There was an updated listing of city's neighbourhoods with high, medium, and low risk of flooding, indicating which inhabitants were supposed to prepare themselves. The officials advised people in areas with higher risks to have first-aid kits on hand in case of emergency. The most important items were a flashlight, batteries, canned food, and basic medication. A water pump was another emergency item it was recommended that every house have ready for flooding season. Ceres' citizens were not unfamiliar with these types of warnings. Every year with spring rains, the water level would rise. People knew how to deal with water in their backyard.

For Adam, on the other hand, the situation was new. He'd never experienced flooding in a city before. He'd seen heavy rainfalls creating water streams in the streets, slowing down the traffic, but this was different. It was a whole city and its people getting ready to cope with a change of weather. Every day on his way to work Adam would listen to the flood announcements of the emergency department. It had been three days since the rain had started, and based on the news everything was under control. The heads of the city's water department were constantly talking about their preparations to control extra volumes of water. They had opened the floodgates in the dam and the canal connected to the main river. The water department was an independent local government body that was responsible for maintaining the flood control system. The system wasn't only the dam and the canal; there were river dikes to prevent water from flowing into the countryside.¹ There was also an elaborate system of drainage ditches that worked with the canal.

Adam was anxious to see what was going to happen. All the precautions shouldn't have been for nothing. Local people with whom Adam had regular encounters were relaxed. He used to talk to the caretaker of his residential building. His name was Frank, a middle-aged man with three children, and he was living in a townhouse in western suburbs of the city. Adam would talk to him about the weather whenever he saw him in the lobby. In Frank's opinion,

¹ "Flood Control in the Netherlands." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, 05 July 2014. Web. 23 May 2014.

the flooding wasn't a threat at all. He told Adam that he would treat the flood like a heavy snowfall, when you need to get your snow blower ready to clean the driveway. Light floods were a regular thing in Ceres, and the city was designed to manage them properly. There wasn't anything to worry about.

EIGHT DAYS had passed since the start of the rain. All the snow piles in the street had already melted. Some neighbourhoods had experienced few hours of power failure. Adam checked the rising water level of the river every day on his way to work. The difference from one day to the next was obvious. Listening to the news, he still heard officials talking about how the control system would be completely able to prevent any disaster; however, after more than a week of continuous rain, there were increasing concerns that the flooding could get worse. The water was close to rising over the riverbanks in the lowest neighbourhoods, and people living in those areas were given warnings to be ready for evacuation.

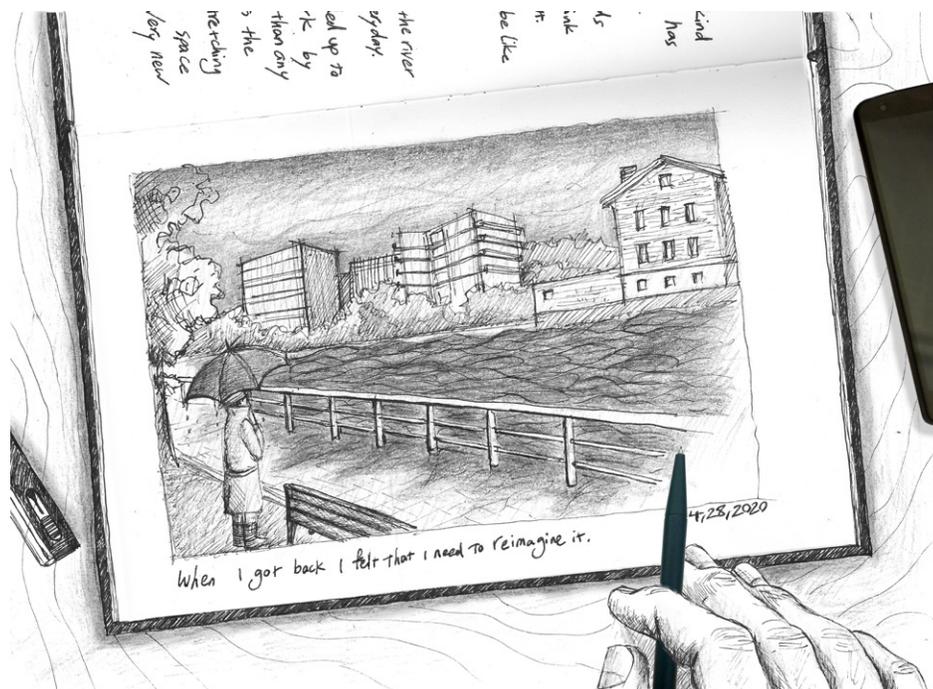


Fig. 2.5

Adam was preoccupied with the weather news those days. He thought many people probably regarded the flood like Frank, his building's caretaker—it would come and pass. The city announced the possibility of shutting down downtown streets if there was further heavy rain, but even that would be a pleasant short break from everyday work for some. The people of Ceres had seen a lot of heavy rainfall and flash floods, so they didn't see any reason to take

this situation seriously; also, they had put their faith in flood control system that the city was so proud of.

Adam started reading about dams and flood control measures. He couldn't distract himself from thinking about it. He found different historic precedents, and not all of them had been successful.

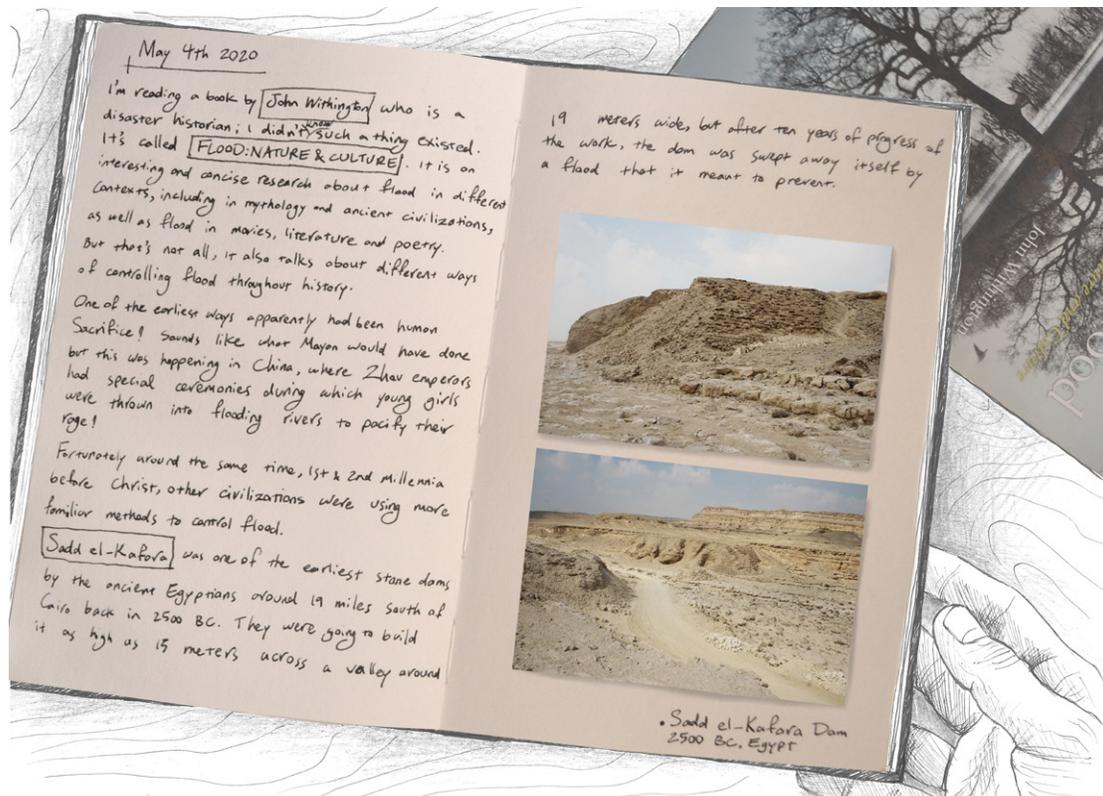


Fig. 2.6

One of the earliest methods civilizations used to prevent floods had also been one of the strangest: human sacrifice. In the time of Zhou emperors' rule in China, during first and second millennia BC, they used to have special ceremonies during which young girls were thrown into flooding rivers to pacify their wildness.¹ What a barbaric way of dealing with a flood. And apparently human sacrifice wasn't confined to Asia. Nevertheless, Adam was relieved to read that ancient civilizations used other, more familiar flood control methods as well. Sadd el-Kafara was one of the earliest stone dams built by the ancient Egyptians back in 2500 BC. Located approximately nineteen miles south of Cairo, it was envisioned to be as high as fifteen metres and stretch across a valley nineteen meters wide, but after ten years of progress building the dam it was itself swept away by a flood it had been meant to prevent.

¹ John Withington, 1947- author. *Flood: Nature and Culture* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), 117.

Adam found an illustration of workmen repairing a levee in New Orleans that was dated March 21, 1863. In the picture, men and women were working with traditional construction tools. They were building new bulkheads for protecting one part of the city from the threat of floods created by constant rise of the Mississippi's water level. The high speed of the currents had worn away the levee. The image captured the very dynamic physical action of those who were anticipating an encounter with the great force of the river.¹ Adam thought these people probably had a better understanding of how powerful a flood could be.

Building dams used to be a hard task in old cities, and in many cases the dams weren't successful. Adam thought of the many failures that humans had experienced in trying to control nature—was there yet a completely reliable solution for preventing natural disasters like floods? For the water department of Ceres, with its new engineering technology, creating an ambitious flood prevention system shouldn't have been hard. They had managed to change the path of the river, redirect its water for irrigation of agricultural lands, and use it for hydro power, and they were confident that the present control system could prevent any disastrous floods.



Fig. 2.7. Repairing the levees at New Orleans, at the expense of United States government, sketched by an occasional correspondent, 1863.

¹ "Repairing the New Orleans Levee." *Repairing the New Orleans Levee*. Web. 24 May 2014.

AT THE END of the first week of May it had already rained for ten days. The city announced restrictions for access to downtown streets for the coming week; they expected lower streets to be flooded if the rain continued for another week. Warnings in social media were more serious—people were now preparing for a real emergency. Watching the river’s water level rising every day, everybody could feel the flood coming closer. There was a shortage of emergency items such as water pumps and flashlights in supermarkets. Stores were running out of gas heaters and stoves; power outage was one of the main concerns.

Adam’s firm was located on one of the downtown streets near the river. It was one of their last workdays before the predicted dates for flooding. Adam and his colleagues were trying to complete a milestone of the rail transit project, but the progress was very slow. The office Internet connection was shut down, which made file-sharing harder, so they had to postpone the completion date of the stations’ design documents again. Morgan wasn’t happy at all. In his view, the flood warnings and precautions were making a mountain out of a molehill. There was some extra water in the river and the canal for a week, flooding a number of lower streets, and that was all. The city had developed a system of flood control for times like this, but they were still giving warnings; what was the point of the flood system then? Morgan was frustrated that their working hours had been affected. Adam could totally understand the way Morgan felt. He himself wasn’t happy that the project was taking so much longer than the expected schedule. Everybody in the office wanted the flood to be over sooner rather than later, so that they could get back to normal life.

In the commercial streets near the river, the hours of stores and cafés were reduced. Buses were running less frequently and in fewer neighbourhoods than usual. Streets in areas with higher risk of flooding were closed to vehicles, and their residents were given instructions for evacuating in case of emergency. Some people had already moved to safer places. All the city was waiting for the flood to pass.

Adam had a feeling of excitement deep down, perhaps because he was curious to see how the flood control system would work. Spending years studying and working in architecture had made him think of the city as an organic being, a separate entity from all the people and individual buildings that it contained. He had the chance to see how the city would react to nature’s force.

Adam shared his feelings, his excitement and his anxiety, with Kishar. He told her that he felt a special vibe among people, something he hadn't felt before. But Kishar didn't have the same feelings. She said that during a flood, people would just become more cautious about their lives and their belongings. She was tired of those who didn't think at all about the way they affected their surroundings. Even over the last few years that the municipality had directed urban development toward being more sustainable, people in some cases would resist it. They didn't want anything to influence their own well-being, even if it was for the benefit of the whole city. Nobody had really cared about the meadows and natural habitats around their living environment. Even what the city's administration had been doing wasn't always logical; they had spent a lot more money on creating the flood system than on preserving the natural areas. Besides, building the dam and creating a big reservoir behind it meant flooding one part of the lands, displacing animals and birds and creating a huge impact on the natural life of the area. They hadn't put serious restrictions on new construction projects. You couldn't find a pasture outside the city without an industrial building in sight. In fact, a lot of construction works in the past ten years had contributed to the flooding—the never-ending townhouse growth, the over-cultivation of some lands that had left the soil infertile.... Then, they'd built a dam, they'd changed the natural stream of Acheron River, so that they could control the extra water, all without considering the environmental consequences. Kishar said maybe it would be better if the flood was worse than what everybody thought. Maybe it could force everyone to turn back and take a look at what they had done to their city, to take responsibility for their actions.

Yes, probably some of the city's population didn't notice how their environment was changing, but Adam was surprised at Kishar's cynical point of view toward people in general. This area still had a lot of potential for economic growth, and like anywhere else the developments did have benefits, including attracting more investments. Nobody could blame others for thinking of their own comfort.

AFTER HIS conversation with Kishar, Adam thought about her annoyance. Maybe she was right that nobody cared for the natural surroundings of the city; otherwise, they would have resisted the construction of the dam. Adam didn't know how detrimental it could be to build a high dam on a natural river. He read about some famous cases. One of them was the construction of New Melones Dam, which was built on Stanislaus River in California. The purpose of the dam was to protect communities in the area from flooding, but they also used it for irrigation, industries, and power production. The problem was that, in order for the project to achieve its goals, the deepest limestone canyon in the western United States would have to be filled with water, and with it a famous stretch of whitewater rapids and some important archeological sites. Despite the protests of a group of environmentalist, the project was finished in 1978. However, protests continued and the result was seen in 1998, when a governmental campaign was formed to demolish dams that damaged the environment.¹

Adam read another similar story about the construction of Three Gorges Dam on Yangtze River in China. About 2.5 kilometres long and 180 metres high, it is the largest dam in the world. Building the dam meant the displacement of at least 1.2 million people, and the flooding of great natural areas as well as around 1,200 archeological sites. The reservoir began to fill in 2003 and the main wall of dam was completed in 2006.²

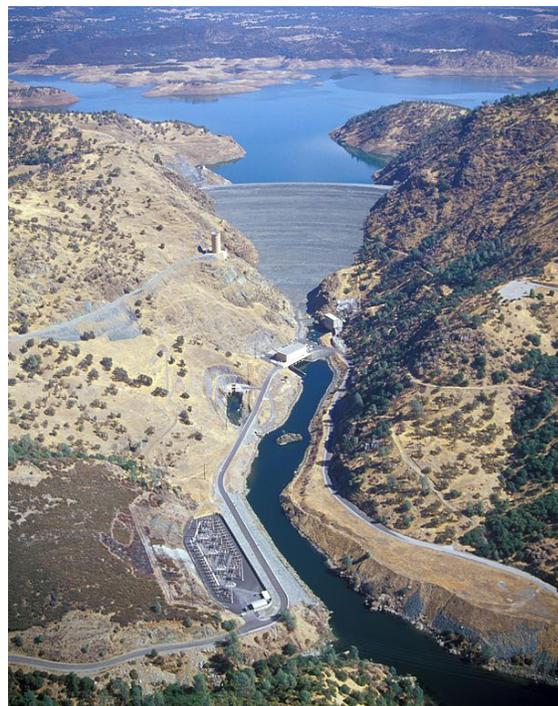


Fig. 2.8. New Melones Dam, Stanislaus River, California.

¹ Withington, *Flood*, 122-124.

² *Ibid.*



Fig. 2.9. Three Gorges Dam, Yangtze River, China.

IT WAS day thirteen since the rain had started, and it still wouldn't stop. Near evening that day Adam was reading the weather forecast as usual. Officials had announced that the amount of water was close to filling the reservoir. They hadn't expected this much rain in two weeks. All floodgates were opened to their full capacity. The city was trying hard to prevent a potential disaster from happening.

* * *

The best things can't be told;
the second best are misunderstood;
the third best are what we talk about.

Heinrich Zimmer

CHAPTER III

THE UNEXPECTED EXPECTED

DURING THE TWO WEEKS of hard rain, Adam spent a lot of time reading about rain and flood. He had bought a few books about myths and symbols related to water, their importance in different religions and cultures, as well as some literary pieces. He was eager to learn more about symbolic and mythological meanings of rain and flood while the city was experiencing those restless days. Adam was trying to put his excitement into something useful.

It was not like our soft English rain that drops gently on the earth; it was unmerciful and somehow terrible; you felt in it the malignancy of the primitive powers of nature. It did not pour, it flowed. It was like a deluge from heaven, and it rattled on the roof of corrugated iron with a steady persistence that was maddening.¹

W. Somerset Maugham, "Rain"

In Jack Tresidder's book, Adam read that rain was the "vital symbol of fecundity,"² a symbol of fertility coming from the sky. The primitive man believed that rain was controlled by the divine power of God. He was the one to decide whether to make the rain a punishment for people on earth, or to make it delightful and enjoyable, like the early spring rain in Adam's childhood memories. In Iranian mythology, people used to dedicate sacrifices to Tishtrya, the god of rain, who took the form of a white horse, so that he would overcome the drought, embodied as a black horse. Adam noticed that in many ancient civilizations, rain was thought to pour from heaven. It was a symbol of purification and refreshment, and it would precipitate growth. Getting showered by the spring rain, bringing the new cycle of seasons—this might have been the reason that Adam had always liked it. To get cleansed by it, to be refreshed along with the earth on which it pours, and to be rejuvenated along with the trees and flowers in spring; this was what rain would bring for Adam every year.

But this year's rain had a distinct quality. The sacred merger of the earth and the sky could also be destructive, causing the deluge. Hard rain and the chance of flood made everybody

¹ Maugham, W. S., *The Trembling of a Leaf: Little Stories of the South Sea Islands* (Auckland: Floating Press, 2001), 237.

² Tresidder, *Symbols and Their Meanings*, 110.

think about the safety of their own house, to look for a safe shelter. Adam read that in ancient mythologies “humanity out of balance with the divine nature of life symbolically invites flood or drought.”¹ Adam had already felt the imbalance of the life he was living. He wasn’t sure about the reason yet. Perhaps he could find an answer in the rain, in the flood, and that was why he wanted to understand more about them. He saw the catastrophic rainfall as an irresistible presence of nature’s power in people’s lives.



Fig 3.1. Baptism, fourteenth-century French illumination painting, showing cleansing and fertilizing symbolism of water. (Tresidder 2006, 113)

Reading about water symbolism, Adam realized that in most of the ancient worldviews, water was a strong emblem of “formless potentiality, dissolution, mingling, cohesion, birth and regeneration”² In the old religions of countries where the water resources hadn’t been abundant, water had been used for purifying rites, such as the ritual of baptism in Christianity and rites of cleansing with water in Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism. Adam thought some of these rituals might have still existed in Ceres, but maybe the symbolism and sacredness of water in them was neglected. When people had easy access to water resources, they might take it for granted and forget its value. But now water, with its forceful act of heavy rainfall, was showing its other face to the city. When the city manipulated the river’s path and its surrounding lands with the flood control system, they probably hadn’t even considered the sacred essence of the water, that it might become hostile toward humans for not respecting it.

¹ Ronnberg, *The Book of Symbols*, 50.

² Tresidder, *Symbols and Their Meanings*, 112.

One could feel the ruthlessness of nature in the rain during those days; for the city, there wasn't any escape from it or the unpleasant results that might follow. Rainwater—a powerful symbol in all ancient cultures, an entity so sacred that only drops of it were used for cleansing men of their sins—would people notice its message? Would they be capable of grasping the transforming impact that it could have?

During his research he came across a fine Japanese print, which left him astonished. He wanted to know how the artist had gained such a deep understanding of the rain. It was a print by Hiroshige. His depiction of hard rain with people on the bridge, represented the humility that it caused for humans. People were small, and their faces weren't recognizable. Below was the river and above was the sky of pouring rain. And then there was the bridge and boat; human built structures that people in the print had relied on for taking them to a safe shore.



Fig. 3.2. Sudden Shower over Ohashi, by Hiroshige, wood-block print, 1856-8, Japan.

ADAM NOTICED that in almost all the world's mythologies, references to a divine flood could be found, in which gods would decide to destroy all creatures before the repopulation of the earth in a new age. The most famous one was, of course, the biblical version. Adam had a bible at home, a gift from a Christian friend. He started reading the book of Genesis. In the biblical story, by the time humanity had been around for ten generations, God had become desperate as he saw that "the wickedness of man on earth was great, and that man's mind was never bent on anything but evil."¹ There was only one man who was just: Noah. Noah and his family, along with specimens of all the animals and living creatures on earth, could survive the flood, but for the rest of the people the end had come, as Yahweh proclaimed: "For after seven days I will make it rain on earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will blot off the earth every living creature that I ever made."² Noah, his family, and the animals rested upon the top of a mountain after the flood. They built an altar and gave burnt offerings to God. In return, God promised that he would never flood the world again. Adam thought that it didn't seem like God had kept his promise.³

He was reading an academic paper about Noah's flood, in which rain had been interpreted as a symbol of truth coming down from the sky, causing the awakening of a mind which was ignorant and negligible, the condition from which the truth arose.⁴ What was the truth? What were people ignorant about? Was it the way they treated the planet, spreading cities everywhere, without even considering all the living beings that were not human?

¹ Genesis, 6:5 (Moffatt, New Translation).

² Gen, 7:4 (MNT).

³ Gen, 6:1- 9:29 (MNT).

⁴ George Arthur Gaskell. *Dictionary of all Scriptures and Myths* (New York: Gramercy Books, 1960), 282-283.



Fig. 3.3. "...and every living creature perished" Gen 7:21 (MNT), Noah's flood as depicted in one of Gustave Doré, bible illustration 1866.



Fig. 3.4. Deucalion and Pyrrha throw stones over their shoulders to create humanity, relief, Parc del Laberint d'Horta, Barcelona.

Adam knew that the biblical story wasn't the oldest flood myth. He had read *Epic of Gilgamesh* in school. In this Babylonian epic, found on a tablet dated 700 BC, one of the heroes, Utnapishtim, who used to be a king and whom they call "Faraway," tells a story that is surprisingly similar to the biblical tale of Noah. Like Noah, Utnapishtim survives a cataclysmic world flood with his family and other animals.

The Greek version was another famous flood myth that attracted Adam's attention. The deluge story of Deucalion, dated back to around fifth century BC, was retold in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Gods heard that "the Iron Age succeeded, whose base vein let loose all evil: modesty and truth and righteousness fled the earth, and in their place came trickery and slyness, plotting, swindling, violence and the damned desire of having."¹ Jove decided to destroy the human race. Adam thought how similar all these flood myths were to each other. From all creatures, only Deucalion, the king of Phthia, and his wife Pyrrha survived. After they saw that

¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Rolfe Humphries (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 7.

every creature except the two of them had died, they went to the goddess Themis to help them restore their race. The goddess told them to “throw behind you as you go the bones of your great mother,” and they realized that the bones of their great mother were the stones of the earth’s body. They began to throw stones over their shoulders, which took the shape of humans.

Gods gave a chance to humanity to create a rightful world, by restoring the human race from the stones of the earth. Thinking of the earth as humans’ origin and “great mother” was pleasant for Adam. He wondered what “rightful” could mean in their time and in their city? Ceres didn’t have a unifying religion or mythology for directing people’s way of life, as it used to be in earlier centuries. For Adam the most important thing was his work and the way it communicated with people. A rightful life for him, then, might mean having respect for all the natural elements and designing new buildings to conform with them.

The Hindu flood myth was different. It was probably written around seventh century BC, and it also told the story of a disastrous flood. Manu was the first man, who met the reincarnation of the god Vishnu as a fish. The fish promised Manu that if he looked after him until he got bigger, he would save Manu from a great flood that was going to destroy the world. When the time of the flood was close, the fish told Manu to build a ship. Manu survived the deluge by getting into the ship, but after that he was the only living thing on earth. The wish to have children made Manu offer a sacrifice of clarified butter, sour milk, and curds and whey. After a year a woman was created, and they continued the human race.¹

Adam noticed the analogies of the different myths; once again, water brought rebirth and new life to the earth. God accepted the sacrifice and gave the man a second chance, but only after the destructive flood had killed all living things and showed the man his weakness.

¹ Withington, *Flood*, 19.



Fig. 3.5. The Matsya, reincarnation of the god Vishnu, comes to the rescue of Manu.

Adam read about Egypt again, the land of symbolism, and the significance of flooding in their culture. In ancient Egypt, every year the flooding of the Nile marked the start of the life cycle, just like the first moments of creation of the universe, “out of which matter emerged but in which the world hangs in delicate balance.”¹ With the coming of the night, floodwaters would leave rich silts in the land, a sign of new life. Adam realized that in some of the myths, the flood signified the end of an age of life. There was no form in waters themselves, but they would cause the birth of various forms. When the new forms continued to live separately, they were subject to getting old, changing, and deteriorating over time. As a result, everything has to be renewed; in this sense the flood symbolized global purification and a new starting point.² How beautiful a flood seemed when viewed like this.

Adam himself had already felt the need for a major change in his life, that something was missing. Maybe the heavy rainfall and the flood could help him realize what he needed.

¹ Stephan Quirke, *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1997): 20, 50, 57, quoted in Ronnberg, *The Book of Symbols*, 50.

² Ronnberg, *The Book of Symbols*, 50.

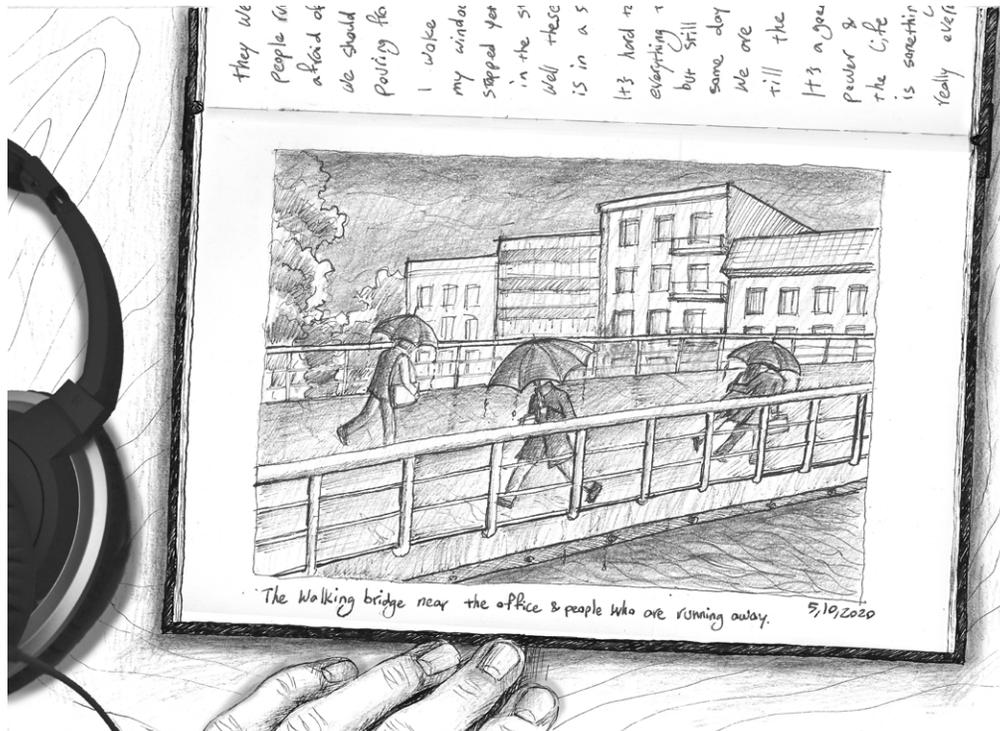


Fig. 3.6

HE WOKE UP to the sound of rain hitting his bedroom window that morning. It had now been pouring continuously for fourteen days. The smell of the grass, the sound of raindrops on the fresh leaves of the trees, and the joy of getting wet in the rain after months of cold weather—spring rain always reminded him of his pleasant childhood memories. But this year the rain had come with a feeling of anxiety from the start, with the expectation of something unusual about to happen. It was a Wednesday. The office building had been closed for a few days now, but Adam was supposed to finish one part of the construction documents at home. Morgan had assigned work to everyone during the days they were off.

Adam's apartment was on the third floor. Living on the highest floors of a condo tower had never been desirable for him. He always liked to see the street and people from his window. However, in his new place what he mostly saw were cars passing by. There weren't any other activities happening in the streets around his apartment. The buildings were dispersed and the area was mainly residential. He would see occasional runners and people walking their dogs from time to time.

It was 7:30 in the morning. The heating system had briefly stopped working the night before. His room felt cold and damp. He got out of the bed and went toward his balcony to take a look outside. After several days of rain, water had started to leak in from under the balcony door. Adam had used insulation tape to try and keep the water out. Standing behind the door, he felt his feet getting wet; water was still coming in. He saw a few cars passing by. There were streams of water on the surface of the street and sidewalks. The traffic didn't seem like a normal day off. Adam thought that if some people were still driving in the area, the roads should be fine, at least around their neighbourhood. He went to his computer to check the news when he remembered that the Internet had been down for two days now, so he turned on his cell phone's FM radio. In lowest neighbourhoods the city streets were flooded by some inches of water, but other neighbourhoods were in a good state. The rain was expected to stop in a couple of days. There were safety tips for areas with higher flood risk, and announcements regarding a number of roads and streets that were closed temporarily.

Adam took another look outside. The grey clouds seemed closer to the ground. He could see leaves and branches of trees being carried away with the fast streams of water. The lawn in front of his building had now turned into a lake. Thinking that the rain would be over soon and a serious flooding threat may never have existed, he now wanted to see the raging water of the canal. He put on his rain jacket and boots, grabbed his car keys, and went out to the parking lot. Frank wasn't in the building that day. He probably couldn't have driven there from his house in the west end of the city. Streams of water were coming down from the parking ramp and flowing beneath the cars, and there were water puddles everywhere on the floor. Most of his neighbours hadn't left the building—their cars were all there.

After starting his car engine, he turned on the radio and drove into the street. An official from the water department was explaining the initiatives that they had undertaken to curb the huge amount of water from the snowmelt and heavy rain during last two weeks. After that there were some updated warnings. Adam was listening alertly. This time the warnings sounded more serious. They advised people to put within reach their emergency kits, food items, and other equipment needed in case of flooding. The official talking on the radio emphasized the importance of avoiding unnecessary trips, especially in areas with lower elevations and closer to the bodies of water. Apparently the water had reached some new streets of the city. The official continued, saying that no attempts should be taken to walk or drive in moving water. In case of flash flood, everyone should move to higher ground immediately.¹ Adam wondered, What if it's bigger than what everybody thought?

He was on his way toward the ring road along the main canal, an artificial branch of the river that started near the dam. On the radio, someone listed the routes that were unsafe for

¹“Flood Safety Tips, Flood Preparation, Flood Readiness -- National Geographic.” *National Geographic*. Web. 22 May 2014.

driving, even for emergency trips—six inches of moving water can make a person fall, and two feet of rushing water can carry most of vehicles, including SUVs.¹ Were there any places in the city with two feet of rushing water on the roads?

All the floodgates were open at their maximum capacity. Adam thought there should have been a lot of water in that canal. On his way to the ring road, he scanned the streets. Two weeks of rain had changed the colour of everything. The colours of the trees, the houses—even the sidewalk—looked more saturated. He was driving through some low-density residential neighbourhoods where there had been a power failure a few nights ago. Nobody was out. Heavy rain, grey sky, and no lights made the neighbourhood much darker than a normal rainy morning, or maybe it was just the way Adam was seeing it. It looked like the buildings were all scared of something terrible. Adam felt distressed thinking about the people who lived in those houses.

He was almost there. The ring road was among the unsafe routes, but to his surprise there were other cars going in the same direction. He knew it wouldn't be safe to drive along the canal at this time, but something was dragging him forward; he wanted to see the water. What were the other people doing there? Didn't they know about the warnings? Maybe the city had announced the warnings of preparation for an emergency very late. Perhaps others were curious like Adam to see the violent water, or perhaps they were making their normal trips, thinking that nothing would go wrong.

* * *

¹ “National Weather Service Weather Forecast Office.” *Turn Around Don't Drown*. Web. 25 May 2014.

The danger of it was at once apparent. This was no ordinary downpour. Even the first streaks from the sky were things that lashed and kicked the dust out of the ground with a vicious deliberation.¹

Mervyn Peake, *Gormenghast*

IT WAS WILD, as if the canal were crashing its bed and moving everything in its way. Large branches of trees were floating up and down violently with the river's stream. Earlier, Adam had heard on the radio that raging water could wash out the roadbed. He was driving in the opposite direction of the canal's stream. The canal was on the left side of the road, and some rocky hills were on the right. He used to take this route from time to time, to drive to Akkad and visit his parents. The area was used mostly for farming. That morning nothing on the road looked familiar to Adam, as though the torrential rain and unruly waters of the canal were even changing the landscape. He was startled by the amount of water in the canal. The thought came to his mind that maybe the city officials were not completely aware of the danger.

He was driving very slowly. Wider streams of water began to appear on the road's surface; water was flowing down from rocky hills on the right too. He couldn't believe his eyes: he could actually see the canal's water rising every minute. Now there were whole trees floating in the canal and crashing into each other. After a while, other cars in front of him began to slow down; he had to stop. The road was drenched and it made it harder to get the car to brake properly. Adam was worried. He saw other people waiting in their cars. All that he could hear were the sounds of water—raindrops falling on the windshield and the roof, water streams on the road, and, loudest of all, the furious water in the canal. He opened the door for a moment and saw the streams of water rushing beneath him on the road's surface.

¹ Mervyn Peake, *Gormenghast* (Random House, Printing: Vintage C1968, 1998), 401.



Fig. 3.7

Others started to turn around. The radio had been on the whole time, but Adam wasn't listening anymore. He was shocked by the scene around him. It was as if he were waiting for someone or something to tell him what to do. He remembered his conversation with Kishar about a week ago: "maybe this city needs to be hit by something bigger." He called her to see how they were doing in their neighbourhood. Kishar was living in her parents' house in an old district of downtown, some streets farther from the river. She answered with a frightened voice. She said that the water was advancing toward the streets very fast, that people had started evacuating their houses. They didn't know where this much water was coming from. Kishar was certain that nobody, including the city officials, had expected this. Listening to her, Adam thought of the railway transit project and all its frenzy, the construction documents that needed to be finished before the end of summer. Kishar said that she had to go and the call dropped.

Adam was still holding on to the phone, watching all the cars turning around in a hurry. Now he could see in the distance that parts of the road had been swept away, and the big signs that read "ROAD CLOSED DUE TO FLOODING." Police officers were running and shouting at the drivers who hadn't moved their cars. The canal was overflowing its banks. It was happening right in front of his eyes.

Behind the wheel, in a matter of seconds, Adam thought of all the special places in the city that he knew, flooded with rushing water. How frightening they would all be now:

the Acheron River and downtown streets around it;



Fig. 3.8

the suburban streets where railway transit was being constructed;



Fig. 3.9

the old stone bridge with the flood gauge;



Fig. 3.10

the sidewalk park and his favourite bench close to the yoga class;



Fig. 3.11

the house of the old couple;



Fig. 3.12

the street of the firm;



Fig. 3.13

and his own apartment...



Fig. 3.14

One of the police officers hurried to Adam's car, yelling something. Water was dripping from his hat; he had a yellow raincoat on and an emergency light in his hand. The dam had broken.

* * *

We need to work out a whole new world view, based on a timely renewal of more primitive conceptions of man and nature, based on the idea of the earth as whole and limited.

Richard Falk

CHAPTER IV

WATER RECEDES

IT HAD been three days since he had gotten any sleep. Every time that he closed his eyes, trying to get some rest, he would see the raging river. They were in an industrial building, located on a hilltop close to the ring road. Around sixty people had taken shelter there. Adam hadn't been able to drive out of the moving water on the road; it'd been too late. The water rose so fast that he and some other drivers had to abandon their cars and go toward the top of the hill, where police officers directed them. The rain had finally stopped a day ago, but going out of the building and moving through the city wasn't possible. The emergency department would provide them with canned food, drinking water, and heating equipment until the water receded. Cell phones didn't work and nobody had been able to contact their family members. A number of people in the shelter were those who had abandoned their cars, and others were farmers and local families from the area.

The building wasn't the perfect shelter. It used to be a fabric mill many years ago,¹ but at present local farmers were using it for storing crop seeds. There were no bathrooms inside, so they built a primitive cabin with plastic panels and logs in a corner of the hall. Everybody was supposed to dump the waste outside of the building. The ground was cold for sleeping on at night, and they didn't have enough heaters for all the space. There weren't enough blankets for everyone, either. Early spring nights were always cold in Ceres.

Adam was trying to help the others in any way he could, in order to keep them calm, but with the severity of what that happened it wasn't easy. Nobody had expected these conditions. Adam had never been an extroverted person, but here all of a sudden he was feeling compassionate toward everyone. During those days he constantly spoke with his shelter mates about their lives, listening to them most of the time and sometimes telling them of his own life. He would talk to people about their professions, their families, their homes, and would try to keep the conversation away from the flood. The amazing thing was that he could connect to everybody very easily. It surprised him, as if he were discovering new territories of his personality after twenty-nine years. Being with sixty other people under one roof for three nights, in a city that had just undergone one of its worst disasters to date, it was more like he

¹ a metaphor for school of architecture in Cambridge

himself had sixty-one different bodies.

Officials gave them radios so that they could listen to the latest updates. Many houses had already been evacuated, and further evacuation was in progress. Thousands of people had to leave everything behind and stay in shelters, but at least they were safe. Hundreds of buildings weren't fit to be used anymore. Fourteen people were reported dead, which marked the flood as the deadliest natural disaster in the region. The damage to buildings in some parts of the city had been so extensive that they needed at least a year to be restored. Many dikes on the river and its tributary had burst. Conditions were worst in some neighbourhoods in the northwestern parts of the city, where the floodwater was up to four feet deep.

Among all the people in the shelter there was a four-year-old girl with her mother. Adam and everyone else were amazed by the approach the mother took with her little girl during those days. She tried to convince her daughter that nothing terrible had happened. She told her that they were staying there just for a couple of days to learn about different crop seeds and the way they were going to be planted; they wanted to learn how the food they ate was being produced. She even asked one of the farmers to talk to her daughter about the process of planting the seeds. Their conversation not only distracted the girl, it made others forget about everything for a few moments too. It was very pleasant for Adam to see this happening in the midst of all the calamity, as though this little girl was spreading her joy of life to everyone.

Since the morning the flooding began, Adam had been in a state of awe. He didn't have any previous experience with such a large-scale disaster. He could have never imagined a flood to be so astonishing, so powerful that it could paralyze all life in a city. He'd seen footage of great floods before, but being part of it, he had now felt the controlling force of something bigger than all humans.

Adam lost the track of time during those days. At times he was thinking of the past, and how his life had changed after moving to Ceres. Every once in a while random scenes from earlier years came to life in front of his eyes. Once, he remembered a time during his childhood when his father was trying to teach him to swim. He was afraid of deep water, afraid of drowning. His father didn't succeed in teaching him to swim on his own. Later in his teens he could overcome his fear, but water always had two contrasting sides for him, enjoyable and daunting.

* * *



Fig. 4.1

WHILE STAYING at the shelter Adam remembered a part in a book he had read that he could understand better now:

You know, I think if people stay somewhere long enough, the spirits will begin to speak to them. It's the power of the spirits coming up from the land. The spirits and the old powers aren't lost, they just need people to be around long enough and the spirits will begin to influence them.¹

Gary Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*

The native chief who talked to Gary Snyder knew that all the spirits came from nature. In the chief's view natural spirits of a place never got lost, it was only the attachment of people to their land that made them visible. The flood made Adam realize the importance of his attachment to the place where he was living, as if the flood revealed all of nature's spirits to him.

In the shelter Adam had the chance to contemplate the city and its natural surroundings with a broader view. He thought about how the urban and natural parts of the city had all been affected by the flood in the same way, showing that everything in the urban area, natural or man-made, was connected and created a unity. The flood was awe-inspiring—nobody would have thought a heavy rainfall could bring the city to its knees. Maybe for Adam and all the others in the shelter, that building wasn't only a physical shelter. It might also be a shelter from the lifestyle that people had maintained in the city, alienated from its natural essence; a shelter from the inattentive activities of the city's administration toward the land, the river, and the trees.

For Adam, those three days weren't a time of anticipation about seeing the destruction in the city—they were a time for rethinking. The building for seed storage became a place for planting hope for the city's reconstruction with a new vision. The girl who was told she was there to learn about crops became a symbol for the generation that was going to build the future of Ceres. Adam thought maybe she wouldn't follow the same lifestyle of her parents, forgetful

¹ Gary Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild: Essays* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), 39.

of her environment. Maybe she once again would begin to respect the territory of natural meadows, the rivers, and the green hills. Maybe she would notice the value of the city's connection with the natural areas, while having distinct boundaries to keep them unharmed. Maybe she would see the futility of vast suburban neighbourhoods connected to each other by highways.

Adam remembered the myths he had read about the flood, which showed him that flooding wasn't just the destruction; it could bring good as well. Adam thought of his new perception that a flood could create for people. It could be a message telling them to stop their greed and their selfishness in making use of nature and its resources. Adam could see the desire for more in urban development. Smaller towns around Ceres were spreading along the highways, as if they wanted to occupy larger parts of the area. Ceres had seemed willing to devour all smaller settlements of the region to make itself bigger. Adam remembered how Gary Snyder had written about the problem of "self-seeking human ego"¹ in his book. Snyder observed that human ego, rather than reflecting nature, is formed a State to control the environment in all countries. Civilization's presumption that it could bring order to everything was what that threatened humanity's connection with nature.

After the flood Adam felt his life was never going to be the same as before. He felt like a newborn baby, like he had to start toddling and learning to walk again. Now he could understand what Alan Dundes meant with his interpretation of the significance of a flood in different world mythologies. In Dundes' view, a flood was a projection of human birth with all its detail, since every infant comes into the world from a flood of amniotic fluid.²



Fig. 4.2. Flood, a projection of human birth, since every infant comes into the world from a "flood" of amniotic fluid.

¹ Ibid, 92.

² Alan Dundes, ed., *The Flood Myth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 1.

AFTER THREE DAYS the water had receded enough that they could leave the building. Residents of areas with higher levels of water were transported to another shelter until the flooding receded further. Officials were using airboats to move people through flooded areas. Some, like Adam, whose houses were in neighbourhoods with better conditions, were actually able to reach their houses and see the damage or take things that they needed before moving to other shelters. The emergency officials gave them flood boots and inflated boats to move through the city. All the people from the crop seed building were extremely impatient to know about their families, and to see the extent of damage at their properties. They had to face reality eventually. People didn't even dare to talk much when they were about to see the destruction.

Going toward his apartment, Adam now saw how the flood had changed the city. There weren't enough boats for everyone to go through the flooded streets, and Adam decided to walk in the water and see the aftermath. He took one of the streets toward the river downtown, and after ten minutes the water was up to his knees. He passed along the stone bridge with the flood gauge—it was collapsed. A hundred metres past it, a group of city officials and workers were busy setting up a temporary steel structure, to make crossing possible for pedestrians and light vehicles. The stone bridge was one of the main bridges that connected the two sides of downtown. Later Adam realized another bridge toward the western side of the river had also collapsed.

He was closer to his office's street and the commercial buildings now. There was water everywhere, as if the river had decided to occupy every street in the city. You couldn't find a dry spot. Debris flow had crushed the lower glass panels of some stores and cafés. Everywhere were broken trees, bent posts, and abandoned cars. Dumpsters had been overturned, and floating garbage had created a strong smell in parts of the street, as if you could smell the infection of the city caused by the flood.



Fig. 4.3

Some streets where the water was higher were open only to emergency officials. All the people from those areas had already been evacuated. One of the officials asked Adam what he was doing there. The official told him that he was not allowed to walk in that area, and requested that he go back. Adam knew that floodwater is highly contaminated and could cause serious infections. He changed his route but still wanted to see other neighbourhoods.

The flooded streets empty of people had a serene quality. Everything was still and quiet, and all Adam could hear was the sound of his walking through the water, making circular waves. The reflections of buildings on the surface of the water created unique scenes, like an upside-down city shown in a huge mirror. He passed in front of the excavation site of a business tower he used to know; it was jammed with flood debris. The construction site reminded him of his firm's projects. He wondered how long it would take to reconstruct the city, let alone complete the unfinished projects.

Now he was walking toward his own condo, and the water level was getting lower. Some families were moving out whatever they could use from their houses, houses that likely couldn't be occupied again for months. Adam passed in front of a house whose roof had collapsed, and there was no way of getting in. A woman, maybe around sixty, with her clothes wet up to the arms, was weeping in front of the house, saying that she had lost everything. A young man, probably her son, was trying to console her, telling her that this had happened to entire city, that they couldn't have done anything to prevent it; his own eyes were full of tears. Watching the scene, Adam was heartbroken. Everybody in the street looked bewildered and weakened. Even the firefighters who were helping people had an uncertain look on their faces. A little further Adam saw a middle-aged father sitting on an inflated couch, staring into space, looking exhausted, probably from the chaos of the past few days. His wife and two children, who looked to be around fourteen and sixteen, were putting some boxes full of whatever useful things had been left intact on a boat. One of the children was asking her mother worriedly when they could move back to their house again. Down the street a reporter from the national TV news was interviewing a woman. The woman was saying that they thought they had it pretty bad, but after knowing about some neighbourhoods they realized that they had been lucky.

Rescue teams and volunteers were helping people, bringing food and water for those who hadn't left their houses. Electricity and running water were shut off in many parts of the city, and people who had preferred to stay needed all kinds of supplies. Amid all this, Adam saw a teenage girl trying desperately to catch her Pomeranian in the water. She was crying. Adam ran to help her and caught the dog. The girl walked away hugging her small dog, both drenched in water.

Two blocks farther on, a groups of volunteers were helping people evacuate a nursing home. They were being taken to a shelter by truck. Two young boys were carrying an old woman in her wheelchair. Clinging to her blanket, she was telling one of them that she had left

all her medications inside her suite; the boy assured her that he would take them. Among the volunteers who were slowly walking other elderly people down the flooded sidewalk to the vehicles, Adam recognized a familiar face—Kishar. She came over to talk to him. She said that these people had been amazing. They had been so understanding about the situation. There were hardly any complaints for the lack of help. It's been like everyone was a part of the rescue team. Over three thousand houses were evacuated, and there were still people who needed to be moved to the shelters, but they had already started helping each other instead of waiting for others. Kishar was overwhelmed by the spirit among the people.

Adam asked her how he could join the volunteers.

* * *



Fig. 4.4

WALKING IN THE STREETS, Adam had seen how the flood exposed the fragility and vulnerability of the city. The natural disaster made everybody feel humbled. People realized that all the things they owned and their very lives could vanish very easily. Now their everyday concerns before the flood seemed very insignificant. Adam and Kishar saw how at a time like this everybody became aware of the great importance of the community. People had started helping each other more than any other time before. Arrogance and self-centredness were washed away by the flood.

In the myths that Adam had read about, survival of a flood was usually dependent on the power of premonition or a warning from another unusual source—things like a divine vision or a deity in a dream. It seemed like survival depended on being truthful, being just, and “walking with god”¹ like Noah, and like Deucalion and Pyrrha. After seeing the destruction in the city, Adam thought that Ceres’ survival of the flood was dependent on acceptance of nature’s power. Now he realized it was also seeing nature’s strong presence in their lives and appreciating its gifts that could save people.

¹ Ronnberg, *The Book of Symbols*, 50.

IT HAD BEEN two months since Adam and the firm had started co-operating with the reconstruction operation in the city. The priority was building roofs over the heads of those who had lost their houses.

One day at work they were analyzing the areas with highest rates of destruction. One of them was a neighbourhood near the route of the unfinished railway project, where a lot of houses were in bad condition after the flood. Adam recognized the area. It was where the old couple lived. The flood had stopped the progress of the railway construction, and he didn't know anything about them after that.

Adam went to see the house later that day. The water had receded enough to make the area traversable. He wanted to see if they were still there. It took him hours to find the place. The house looked deserted, and parts of its roof were wrecked. All houses in the neighbourhood were still vacant. Adam had heard that a number of the fatalities from the flood occurred around this area. He remembered the railway project; the city had finally decided to continue the project, and the old couple would be forced to leave. Thinking about the city's decision while he was looking at the destruction in the area was painful for him. He drove to the closest emergency centre and introduced himself as the old woman's nephew from another city. He told an officer that he hadn't heard any news from them for the last two months. He knew their names, and managed to convince the officer to check the list of fatalities.

While the officer was communicating the information about the bodies, along with his deepest regrets, Adam thought about how the couple had fulfilled their wish of dying in their own neighbourhood.



Fig. 4.5

THE BODIES had been found in a truck near their house. Apparently they were two of the last people to evacuate the morning of the flood, but once they drove into the street they had been caught in the violent water, and being in one of the lowest areas of land in the city, they had drowned in their truck.

That man and woman were all that Adam was thinking about that day. He remembered the story of Baucis and Philemon as it was told by Ovid: Zeus and Hermes went to visit a town. The gods, who were disguised as normal peasants, were looking for a place to stay overnight. But nobody accepted them, until they reached the house of Baucis and Philemon, a married couple who were old and poor but a lot more generous than any other family in the town. After accepting their guests and giving them food and wine, the old couple realized that they were hosting gods. They praised them in supplication and pleaded to them for their bliss. The gods advised them to go on the mountain. Going to the top of the mountain, Baucis and Philemon looked back and saw that all the town was flooded, and that Zeus had changed their cottage into a temple. Zeus granted them the wish to be the guardians of the temple after the flood. The couple also asked to die together. When the time of their deaths arrived, they were transformed into a pair of intertwining trees, an oak and a linden.¹

For Adam the old couple were among those rare people who had developed spiritual value for their living place, which is why they rejected the displacement. Their house was an ordinary old suburban house, but it was where they had established their home. Adam thought the flood brought goodness for them. It stopped the progress of the railway construction, and took back the pure spirits of the old couple; it made their wish of dying at their own home come true.

¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 200.



Fig. 4.6. Zeus and Hermes in the house of Philemon and Baucis. Adam Elsheimer, c1608, Dresden.



Fig. 4.7. Landscape for Baucis and Philemon, David Ligare, 1984.

WORKING CLOSELY with the reconstruction department for two months, Adam could wholly grasp the scale of the disaster. The flood had struck so unexpectedly that a lot of people didn't have time to prepare for it. There weren't enough warnings in the media before it happened, and nobody expected the dam to fail. Officials as well as the population in general realized too late. Many people got trapped in their houses for days, waiting for help. Some, like Adam, were caught by the flood on roads and streets. It also took a while for the city to start the evacuation and the rescue operation. However, the city was soon assisted by other areas. Groups of volunteers and equipment started to arrive a few days after the disaster.

The dam failure had been caused by large volumes of snow melting and by the continuous heavy rainfall, unprecedented for over two centuries; three months' worth of rain had fallen in only two weeks. The flood control system wasn't designed for this much water. The water had almost overtopped the dam and had finally made it fail. Seventy thousand people's lives were affected by the flood. In lower neighbourhoods, around five thousand houses were evacuated, some of which weren't suitable to live in anymore.

It was the evening of the day that Adam found out about the old couple's deaths. He was driving toward his apartment. He thought of an evening like this two months earlier, when he had walked to his apartment for the first time after the flood. He had stayed with Kishar and other volunteers in an emergency centre for a couple of nights, helping victims. In their neighbourhood the state of things had been much better. A number of temporary shelters had been set up in the area, although they hadn't had any power. There had been notes on some houses asking for electricity and gas. Some of the people in neighbouring houses had been busy draining water from their basements with water pumps. When he had arrived at his building's entrance, the sloped ramp toward the underground parking lot had grabbed his attention. It had been covered with mud and tree branches. The parking floor had been almost filled with water. He'd watched as two cars slowly floated toward and hit each other on the water's surface, as if they were alive. The building had seemed intact. Adam had left his keys in the car on the day of flooding and didn't expect the caretaker, Frank, to be there, he'd had to break in...

He entered the apartment with his new keys. His thoughts were still with the old couple's house. He went to the balcony and looked outside like he used to do every day. The

balcony faced west, toward the ocean, although it was too far away to be seen from there. The setting sun was granting its last shining rays to the sky. Adam liked to see the river, but from here he didn't have a good view. What he was seeing instead was the view of the street from two months ago, when flood could still be felt. His eyes were locked on a white dove sitting on a broken tree branch, down in the middle of street. He thought about how this bird had been free all this time from the chaos on the earth.

He couldn't stand being in the apartment anymore.



Fig. 4.8

One day, while worshiping, it was suddenly revealed to me that everything is Pure Spirit. The utensils of worship, the altar, the door frame—all Pure Spirit. Men, animals, and other living beings—all Pure Spirit. Then like a madman I began to shower flowers in all directions. Whatever I saw I worshiped.

Shri Ramakrishna

CHAPTER V

BUILDING AGAIN

WITHIN TWENTY MINUTES of the ceremony's beginning, the plaza in front of the building was full of people. Each person was holding a flower or a candle. Families of some of the victims had their pictures in hand.

The mayor was the first person to speak. He talked about people's bravery and high spirits at the time of the disaster, during the aftermath, and, most importantly, during the period of the city's reconstruction over the last two years. He thanked everyone for being so patient and co-operative with the city officials. Then he talked about municipality's determination for restoring the financial stability of Ceres, and about plans for improving the city's economy and its green development for the future. The next person to speak was the head of the water department; he spoke of the progress of the new dam construction, and the robust structure that was being used for building it. He talked about the exceptional weather conditions that had caused the dam failure at the time of the disaster. For the new dam they had enlarged the volume of the reservoir, and the new dam's wall would be among the highest in the continent. He claimed that with the latest measures in progress, Ceres was becoming one of the pioneers in flood control infrastructure. He thanked people for their endeavours to get the city back on its feet.

After that, Adam's boss went up to talk about the memorial building. He talked about the concept of the project, and the inspirations for the design. The building was built to commemorate the city's resistance against the flood. It was dedicated to the victims who had lost their lives and to the families who had lost their houses. At the end, he mentioned the names of the people who had worked really hard on the memorial project. He thanked Morgan, who was standing nearby, for doing the major part of the design. Adam's name wasn't mentioned.

Adam was with Kishar among the people when they opened the building. Above the entrance in large letters was written "CERES FLOOD MEMORIAL." Kishar was curious to see how the building had changed. In one corner of the courtyard there was a big oak tree from the old site, which they had kept. Kishar saw Adam walk toward the tree, light a candle, and put it by its side. She did the same. A few other people started to put their offerings by the tree, or on its branches.

After several minutes the tree and part of the ground below it were covered in pictures, notes, ribbons, flowers, and candles.

IT HAD STARTED about five months after the flood. Adam found an old house downtown, with a view to the river. The house was in good condition, yet Adam had spent a month renovating some parts of it. From the window of his new house, he could always see people passing by, the street life, as well as the constant flow of the river. It was not as quiet as his apartment, but he felt more alive here.

While packing his stuff he found some of his projects from his school days. He started reviewing his works, forgetting all about packing. They all seemed very odd, very different even from what he remembered of them. He found a small booklet entitled *Kandinsky's Retreat*. It was the house he had designed for Kandinsky in the Egyptian desert. What an interesting and crazy idea. He had forgotten all about this project. He remembered finishing it in a day and printing it as a booklet for his own record. In that moment, Adam missed the cool things he'd had the time and energy to do when he was a student.

Adam had been thinking for a while of designing a flood monument. He kept ignoring the idea because he knew there would be almost no chance of getting it built, but at the same time he was so excited about it that he couldn't put it aside. With seeing what he had designed for Kandinsky, his determination for doing the project became stronger. He even had a perfect site in mind for it.

THERE WAS talk that the city intended to build a memorial building. Adam had started his own design for the monument before the city even announced the competition. Only one entry could be submitted on behalf of each architectural office. Adam showed his drawings to Kishar; she liked his idea and encouraged him to show it to his boss. He knew that in order to submit it for the competition he would have to adjust many parts to follow the requirements. It also had to be on behalf of their firm, so his boss would have to be the first one to approve it. This meant going through a lot of changes.

Adam's boss wanted to submit an entry for the competition, but they hadn't started the design yet. Adam showed his project to him, and his boss expressed an interest in the idea. The firm started working on it as a group. But at a certain point in the process, Adam realized the main intention of his design was fading.

The very first idea for the monument building came to Adam after he found out about the old couple's deaths. Adam wanted to build a monument in their neighbourhood, where the level of water had been highest in all the city. So the monument would be a place for registering the flood, a place that had itself already been flooded, a place where the old couple had wished to stay until the end of their lives, as they actually did. Adam tried to convince his boss and Morgan to change the site of the project, and to explain the reason for choosing their own site in the submission entry. But they thought Adam's design was too abstract to be accepted. It wouldn't meet the city's objectives for the memorial. Also, without following the competition requirements they didn't have much chance to win.

The design that Adam had come up with would be located in the park near the old couple's house, where their favourite oak tree was standing. The park was rather big, and it had a peninsula shape by the river. As a result, Adam could consider using a water stream in the site that poured into river. The monument was a landscape design with a reservoir created at the mouth of the stream. It was an episodic design, meaning one would start from the entry path and visit different parts of the monument—a bit like an art gallery exhibit. A continuous berm separated the reservoir and the stream from the rest of the park for the time of flooding. The two edges of the stream mouth inside the reservoir were connected with three bridges on three different levels. When the water was at a natural level visitors could descend to the

lowest shore inside the reservoir. They would pass over the stream through a broken-looking concrete bridge, leading them to the other side of the shore where a house was located. The house was a smaller replica of the old couple's house which would be flooded each time the water level raised.

The second bridge, located on a higher level than the house, was an enclosed bridge made of timber and shaped like upside-down boat. Three hallways connected together would make a gallery of photos of the flood, a permanent exhibition of what had happened to the city. If water level continued to raise, the second bridge would also go under water. With ascending to the level of the berm again, visitors would reach the river's edge and they would pass over the third bridge. The final stop was a small square with benches, placed on the other side of the highest bridge with the oak tree in the centre of it. There was a small wooden structure around the tree's trunk where people could tie a ribbon in memory of the victims and all that the flood had brought to the city. Circular benches around the tree made it the centre of focus; the oak tree, as the symbol of strength, as the symbol of harmony with nature, accepting whatever nature brings to us, and learning from it.



Fig. 5.1. Location map of the flood monument.



Fig. 5.2



Fig. 5.3

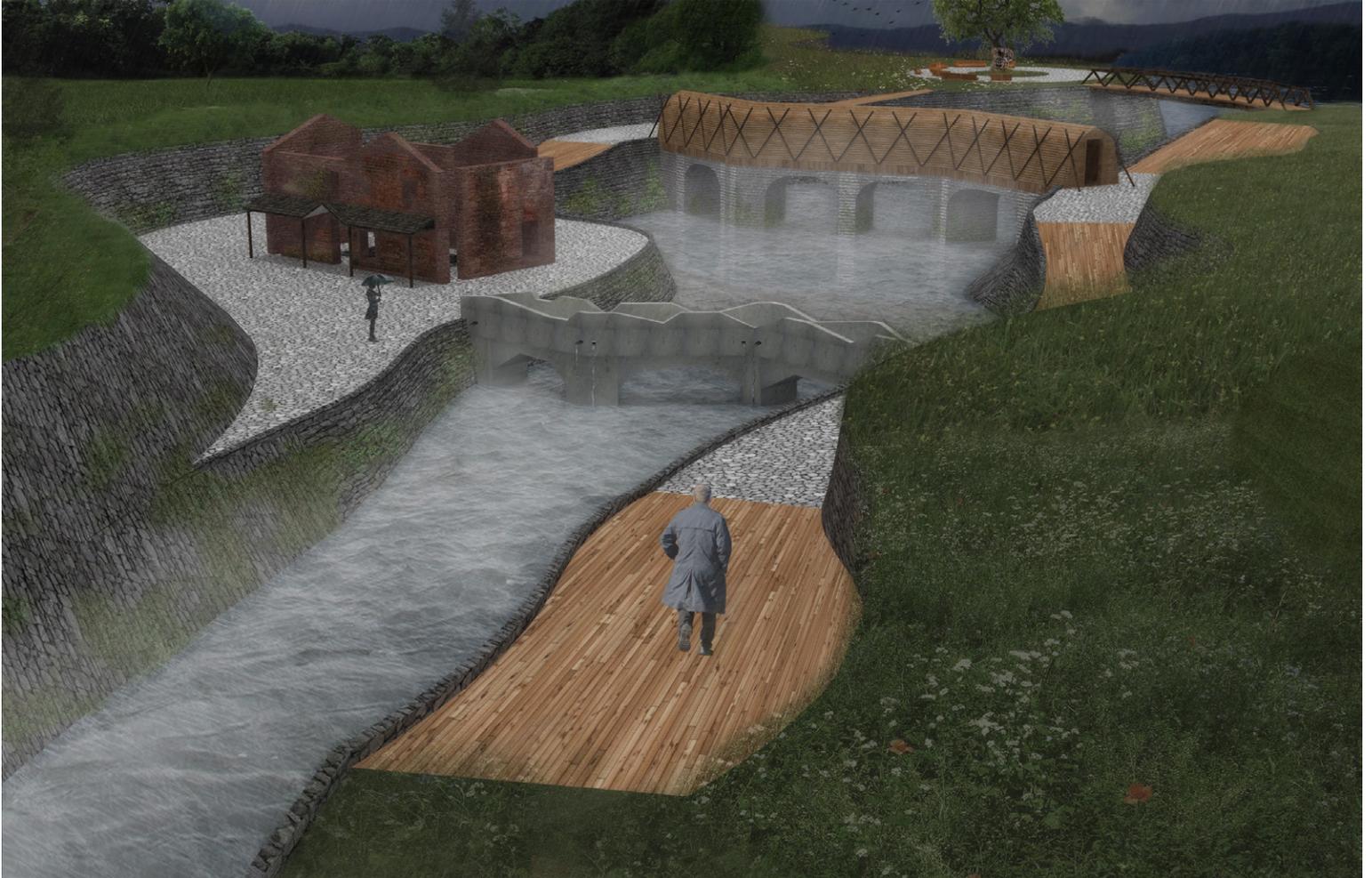


Fig. 5.4



Fig. 5.5



Fig. 5.6



Fig. 5.7



Fig. 5.8



Fig. 5.9



Fig. 5.10



Fig. 5.11



Fig. 5.12



Fig. 5.13



Fig. 5.14



Fig. 5.15. Section a-a

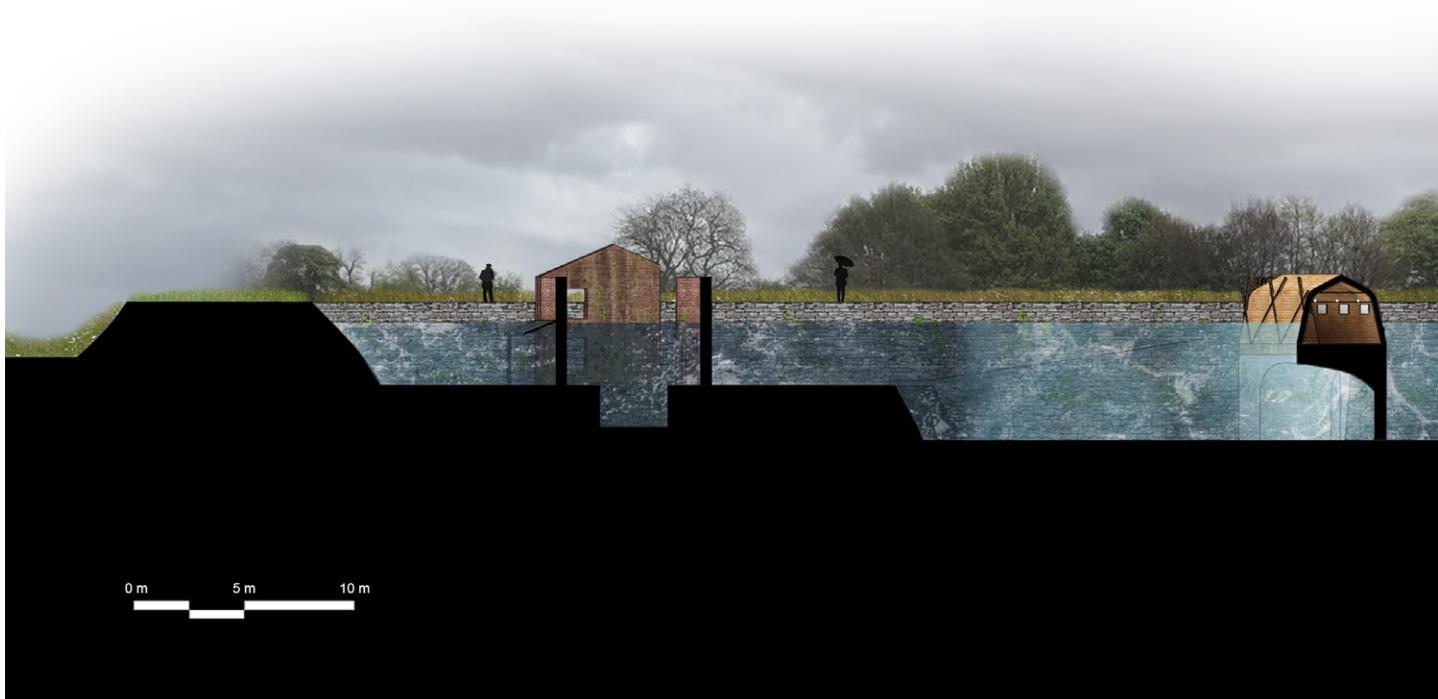
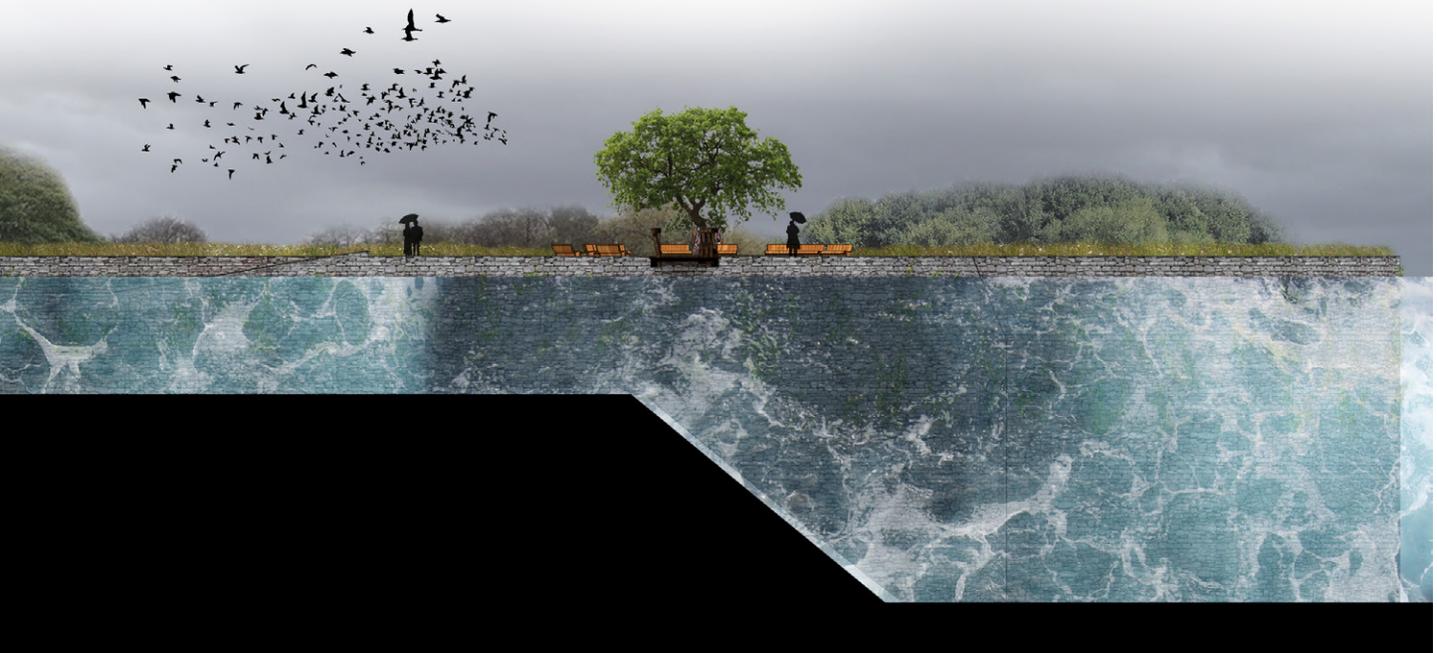
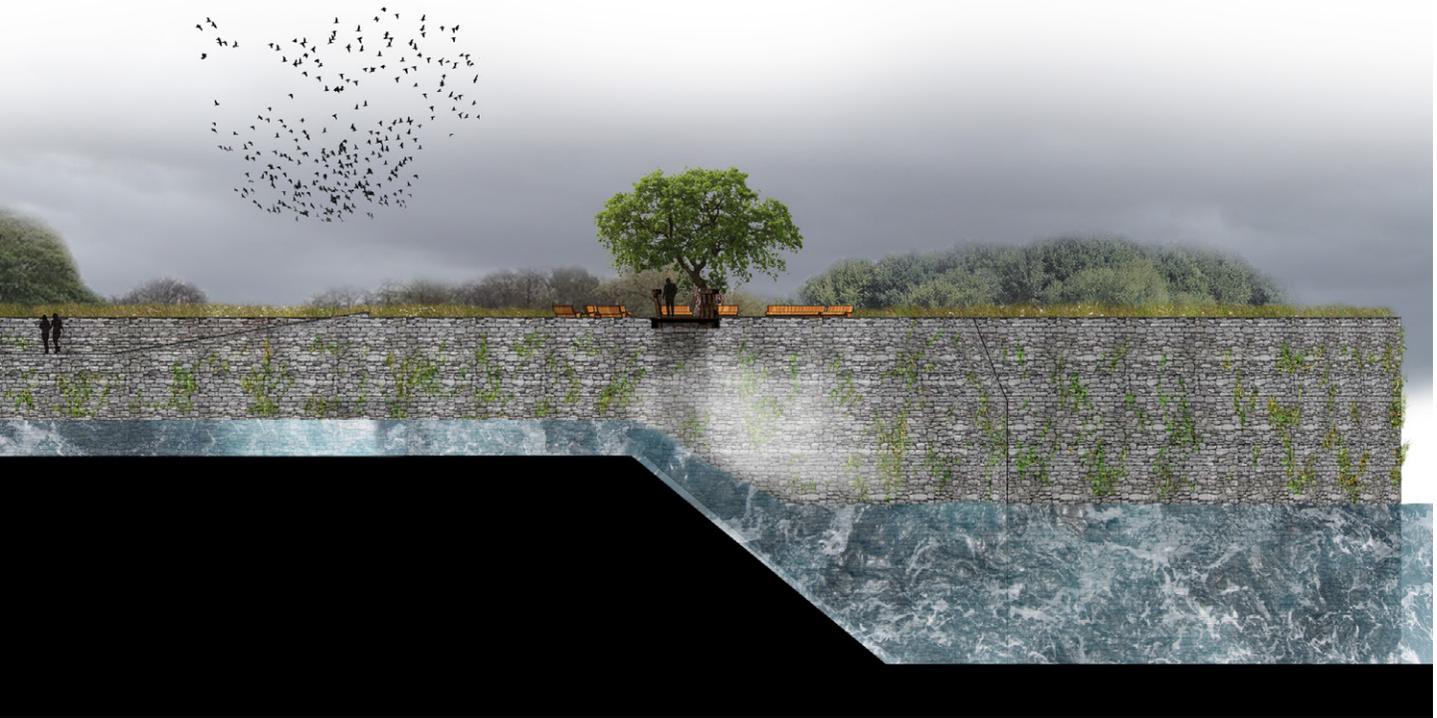


Fig. 5.16. Section a-a



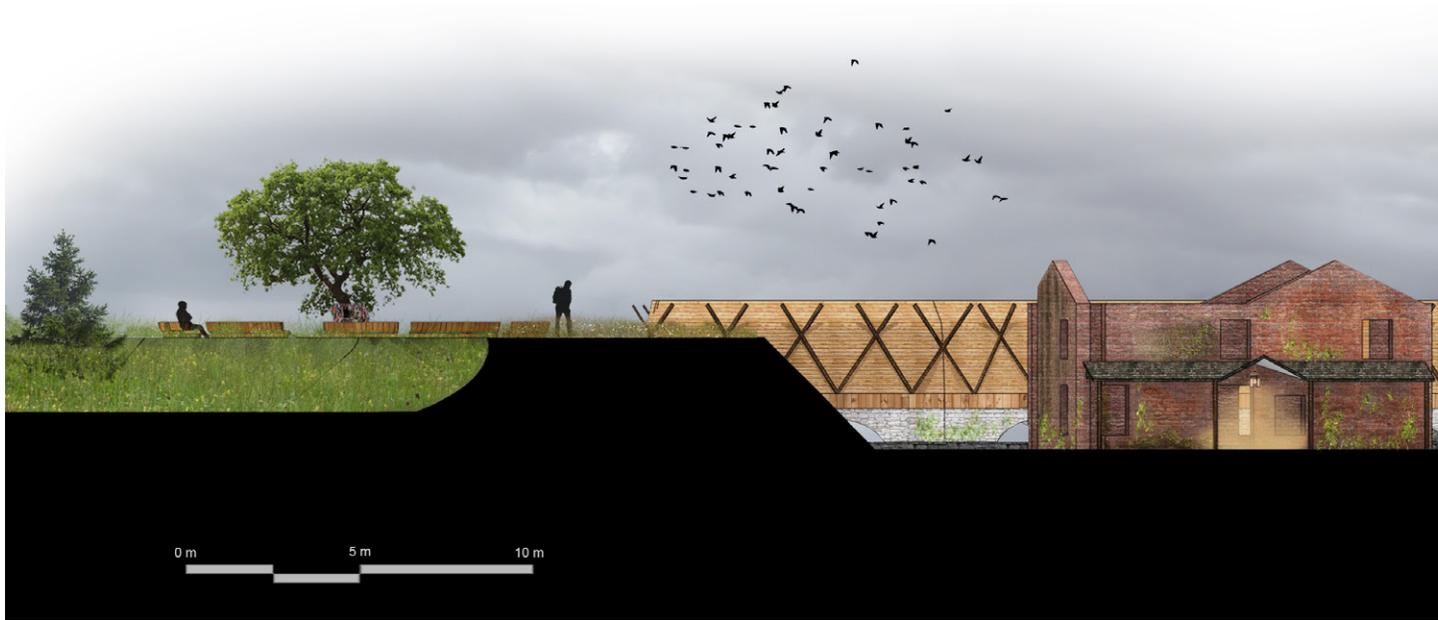


Fig. 5.17. Section b-b

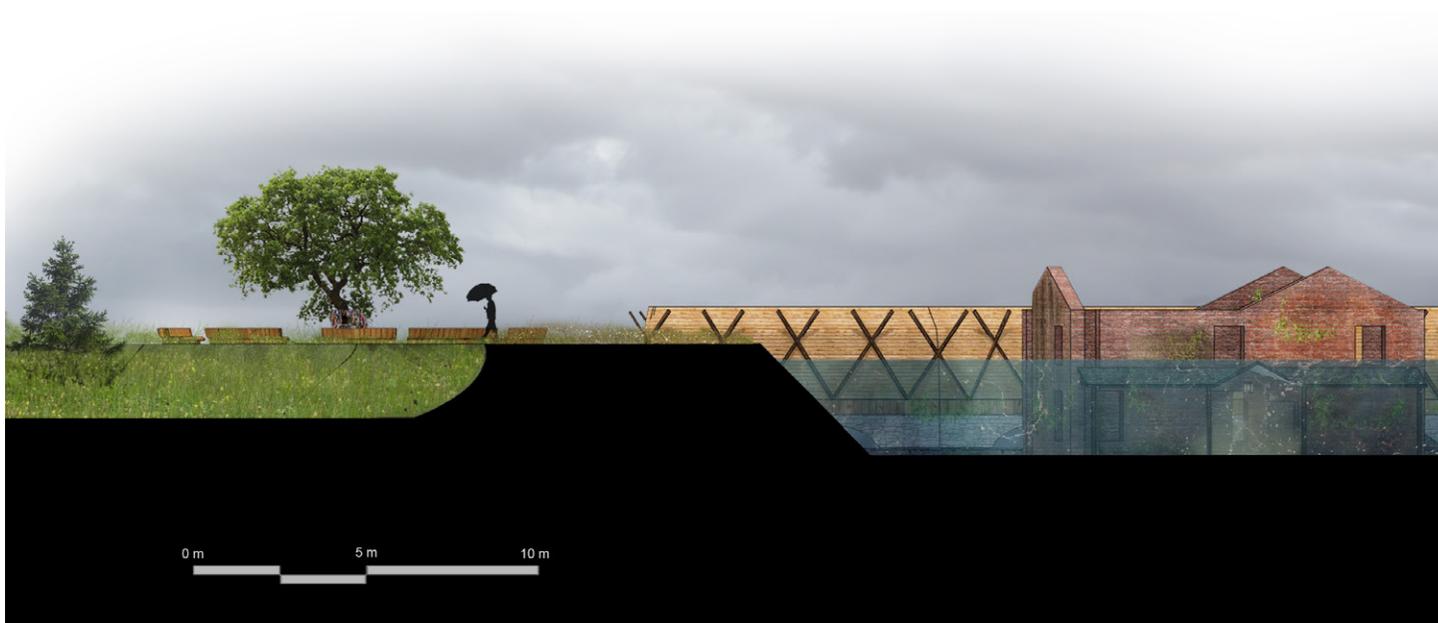


Fig. 5.18. Section b-b

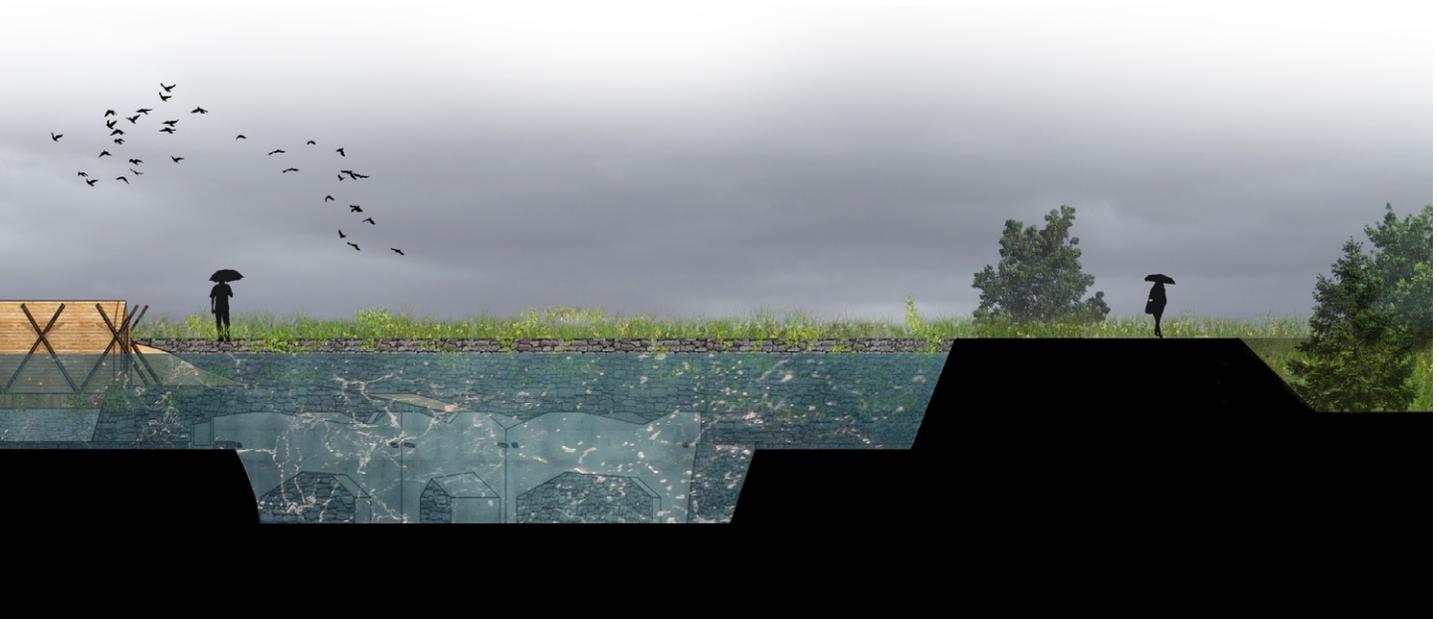
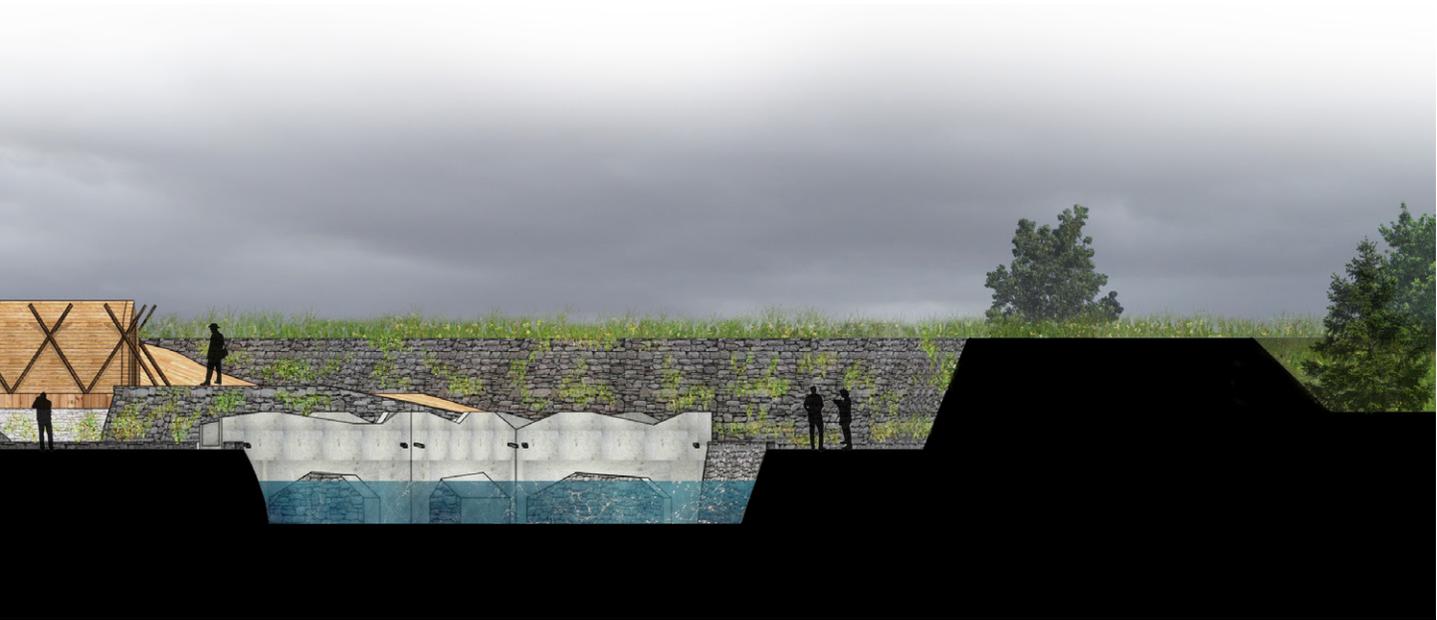




Fig. 5.19. Section c-c

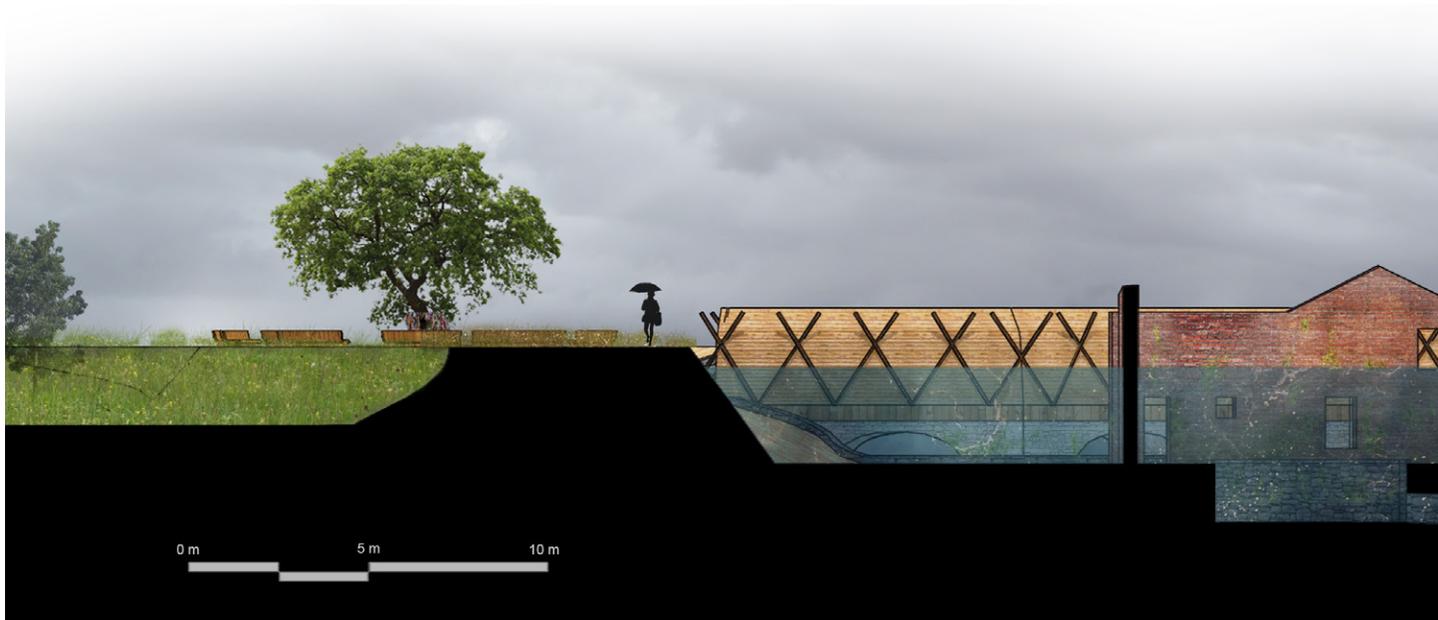
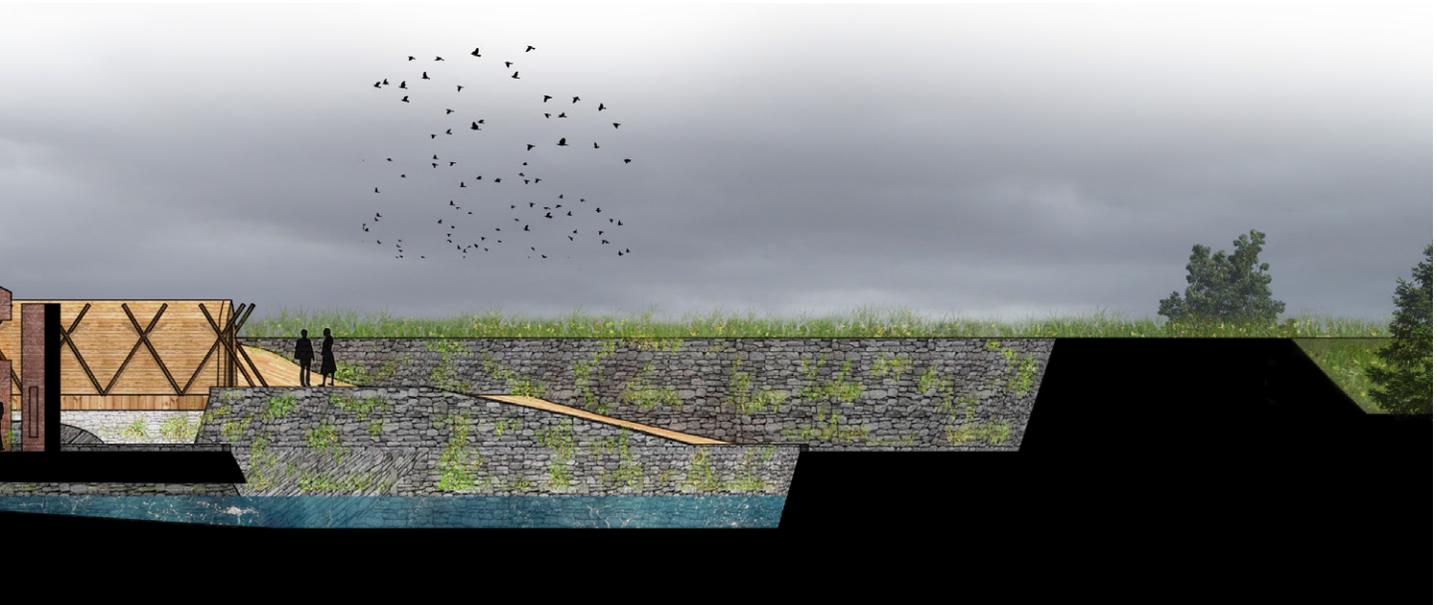


Fig. 5.20. Section c-c



FOR IMPLEMENTING every change in the project, Adam had long conversations with his boss and Morgan. Their point of view was that the city design committee wanted the memorial as a tribute to the victims, as a celebration of the city's new life. They wanted to highlight the reconstruction of the city, rather than its natural features. They thought that the way Adam had designed the monument made it more a place in commemoration of the flood itself, as though it was a desired happening. The site that the municipality had chosen was on one side of the main city plaza, downtown and close to the river. Their goal was obvious: they wanted the building to be an icon for the city's resilience, to be seen by everybody. It was during the time that they were preparing the competition vignettes that Adam asked his boss not to include his name in the design team anymore.

THE FIRM'S ENTRY was selected for the memorial. Along with the start of the memorial building construction, the city started working on the public railway transit again. Soon after that time, Adam separated from the firm. In working on the reconstruction of houses after the flood, he found some other young architects interested in renovation. They started to work with a group of local builders as a small practice. They would get projects from all sorts—houses damaged by the flood, old industrial buildings in lower neighbourhoods that were abandoned and could be renovated as affordable condos, even landscape design of empty lots with no use but storing garbage. His new job wasn't as rewarding as his work in the firm, yet he was working in direct contact with the city's community. They could build things that were much more simple, more economical, and more in the way that people wanted. Hearing about people's needs, showing them how to make the most of their land and their old building, and talking to them about his architectural views, these were his favourite parts of his new work.

AN HOUR after the memorial ceremony, they were seated on his favourite wooden bench by the river. The sky was getting cloudy; it was a nice warm afternoon in late March. The river was flowing smoothly. Adam looked at the water, trying to draw an impression of its moving stream with his pen.

Raindrops started to blur the ink on the paper.

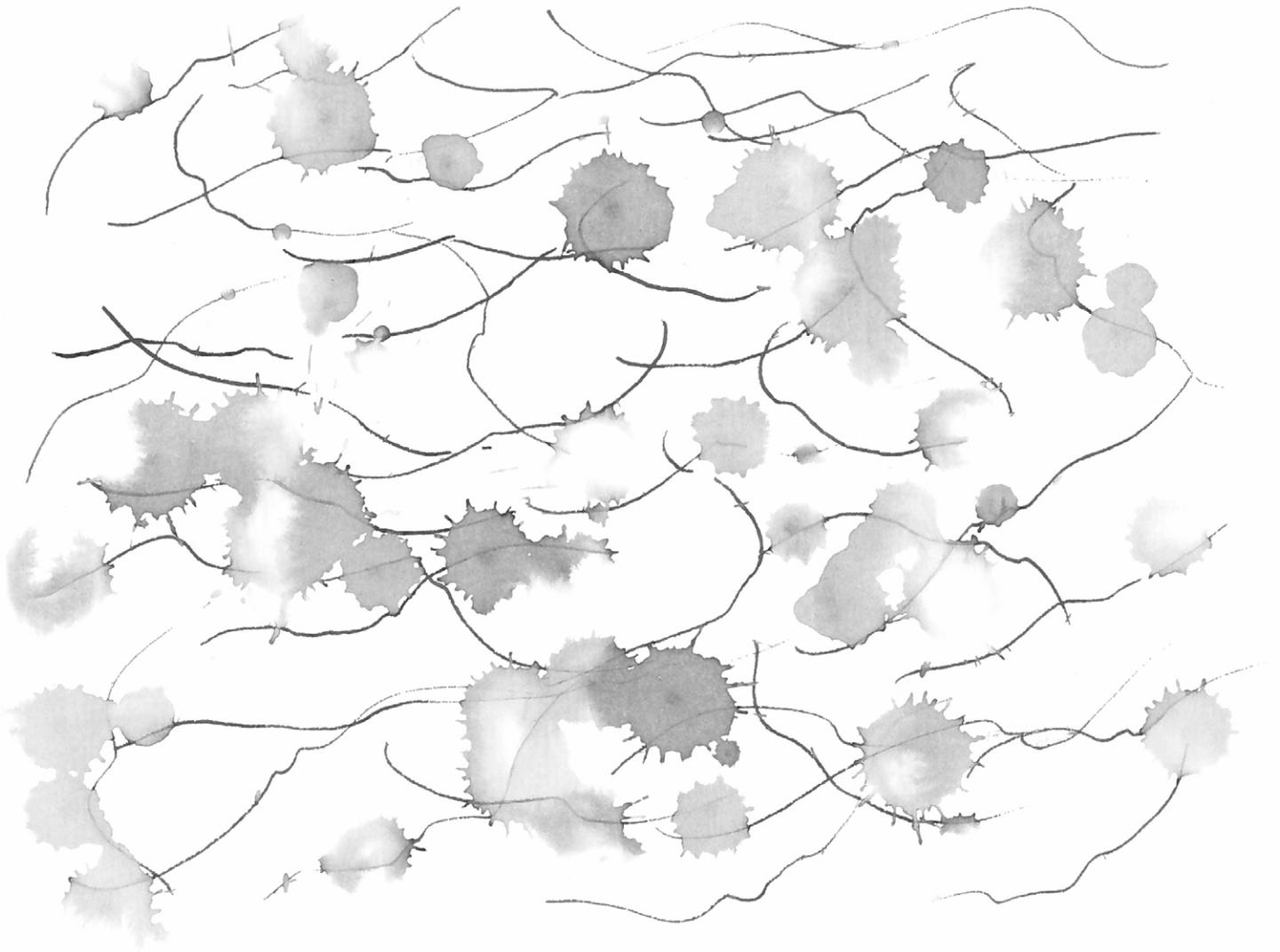


Fig. 5.21

CONCLUSION

THE VIEW TOWARD NATURE which I discuss in this thesis is derived mainly from the culture with which I was raised. In Persian culture and tradition, nature has a strong presence in people's everyday life. Iranian calendar is an ancient solar calendar coordinated based on the changes of the seasons throughout the year. Every year Iranians have a festive on the last night of autumn which is the longest night of the year, and starting from the day after that nights become shorter. In fact we celebrate longer hours of the sun in the sky, which gives us enough light to see our environment; we celebrate the natural light that make us aware of our surroundings. We also celebrate the first day of spring which is the first day of Iranian New Year; it is the first day of a season when flowers start blooming, when trees dormancy period comes to an end and they start growing green again. We celebrate the rejuvenation and rebirth of nature everywhere around us. Living in a culture like this, being mindful of the changes in our natural environment, in my view, is one of the most important aspects of the architecture profession.

The specific attitude of Iranians to nature is originated from Iran's natural conditions, which is mostly desert and mountainous landscape; in this country water resources and gardens are considered nature's gifts. This could be read in Persian traditional palaces in desert landscape, where the use of water streams and green spaces in a central courtyard create a small paradise. Living in an environment where there wasn't enough natural resources, Iranians devised ways to create their favorable living conditions with the smart use of the least that was available. Meanwhile, Iran is not a country covered only with dry lands; toward the North and along the Caspian Sea, the climate is mild and humid creating around 7,000 square mile of forest. Along Zagros Mountains toward the west as well as in some areas in Northwest and Northeast, the land is mountainous and in parts covered with Forest steppes. Therefore, across the country people have access to different climates and various natural surroundings; this has made Iranians more conscious of different states of their natural environment. The broad knowledge of our planet's different natural conditions which nowadays is obtainable through internet, through different forms of media and also through easy ways of travelling around the world, existed long ago in Iran in smaller scale. Coming from Iranian culture, in this thesis my attempt was to create a universal gateway to the contemporary comprehension of the environment as well as keeping

alive the symbolism and mythology of natural elements in ancient cultures.

Every year we are facing more restrictions in the use of natural resources. Just during recent years we learned that the existence of insects that make pollination possible is endangered; a peril for the production of the world's food. But this issue could be solved with the use of advance agriculture technology, and with attentive treatment of bees and other pollinating insects. Similarly, the fundamental element of water is now something that is more or less "manufactured" in many parts of the world. In summary, examples like this show that the pure and unchangeable entity which once was called "Nature" no longer exists; a fact that forces us to think about nature differently. We are bound to see nature as closely interdependent to our industrial and technological abilities. The interpretation of terms used for describing nature in earlier centuries is being shaken in our time, and I believe for understanding the essence of these changes, it's vital to know the way nature was perceived by our ancestors. Only by learning the history of our connection with nature can we adapt ourselves and our buildings to the new requirements of living on earth in the third millennium.

"TALES OF A FLOOD" reads best as a cautionary tale. It is a tale that at the end is projected as a story of redemption, the redemption of the architect in his profession. Adam is transformed through the story. He is changed from an architect who is preoccupied with his ego to someone in direct connection with his community and his environment. This transformation of the architect ultimately is manifested in the design of the monument, which is intended to demonstrate the new attitude of the appropriate relationship of architect, community and environment. In the design, I have used water and flooding as a vehicle that encapsulates all aspects of nature; the flood stands for nature's position when it is beyond our control. Finally, the design of the monument is in the form of a park and like any other park it becomes a negotiation between nature and human interference, an attempt to create an idealised world.

At the same time, the monument also stands as a work of art; it is an intervention in the natural landscape of the stream and the existing green space that speaks to the community about its relationship to nature. The elements of the monument are primarily the replica of the old couple's house and the three bridges. The house is deconstructed and shows how the old couple's beliefs have become a relic itself; and this emerges as the most telling part of the monument. It sends out this message that despite the dynamic of the site, the old couple's beliefs endure. The opening to the sky and the basin in the middle of the house which is connected to the stream, create a place that is open to what comes from nature. During a flood, the house is flooded from within by the basin. Over time the house is intended to become a part of the park itself, as expressed by the vegetation which grows on its walls.

The thesis argument culminates with the memorial which expresses design principals that can be used in the current discourse of architecture and its relationship to community and

environment. The way the monument works with the rising and receding of water, can be taken as a pattern for using natural phenomena to our advantage through architecture. There is one sentence in the text that presents my main belief about the built environment: “Architecture is an art responsible to the society.” As a larger message, the thesis creates a narrative for using architecture not only to increase our awareness about the environment, but also to express the changing meaning of Nature itself.

* * *

If the story was beautiful, the beauty belongs to us all, if it was bad, the fault is mine only, who told it.

From Zanzibar Sawahili

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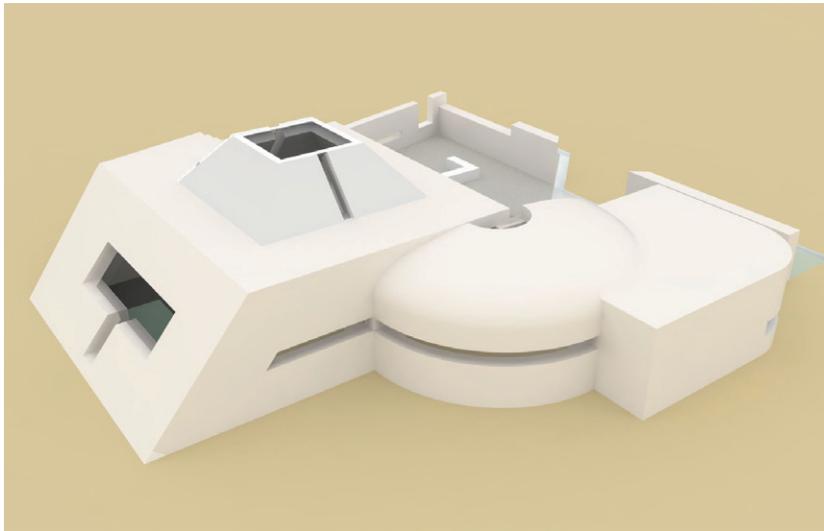
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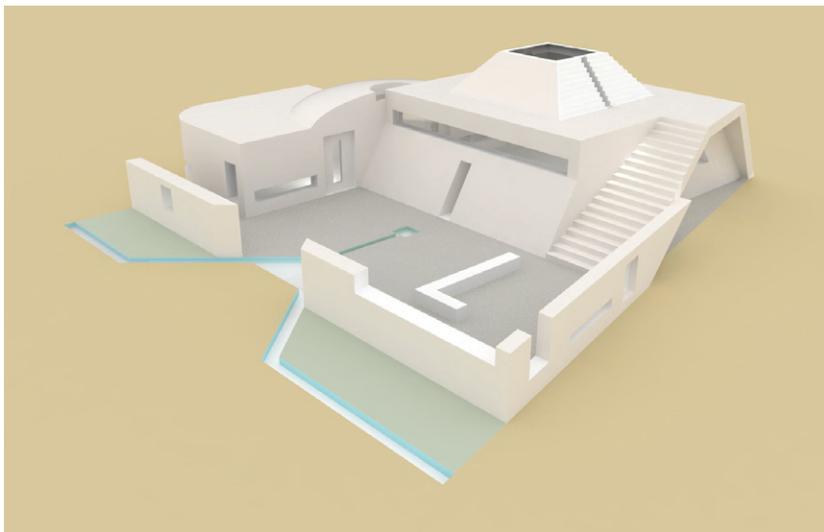
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APPENDIX: KANDINSKY'S RETREAT



bird's eye view from southeast

Most prominent space and volume of the house is painter's studio which resembles a temple. Entrance to the house is from living and dining area on its side, which is a half cylinder shape with a half circular dome on top and a skylight. In Kandinsky's theory circle is the most perfect shape of human soul, the reason for which it is used for living areas.



bird's eye view from northwest

Entrance to the courtyard is from east, where the sun rises; courtyard defines a loose boundary in the context of desert but it has openings on each side, corresponding to the main passage ways and windows in the building. The walls are short and more fence-like, with places for sitting. In a sense it tries to make the desert a courtyard itself.

Fig. A.1. Kandinsky's retreat.



View from northeast

Two main gardens are in northern side of the courtyard, watered with streams from the water pond. They are behind the walls in order to show that they belong to desert, they are not merely private gardens.

Fig. A.2. Kandinsky's retreat, exterior.



View from the studio's roof

Fig. A.3. Kandinsky's retreat, the roof.



View from northwest of the courtyard

A set of stairs take the painter to the roof of his studio. In his philosophy artists are like the top point of a pyramid, and the pyramid is human society. Artist's role is to direct the society in the right way with his vision. A second set of stairs on one side of the incomplete pyramid take him to the top point. He can see the endless sky and desert's landscape, and contemplate about his role. The pyramid's roof is made of glass, so that he sees his work and his studio under his feet, as well as his surrounding landscape.

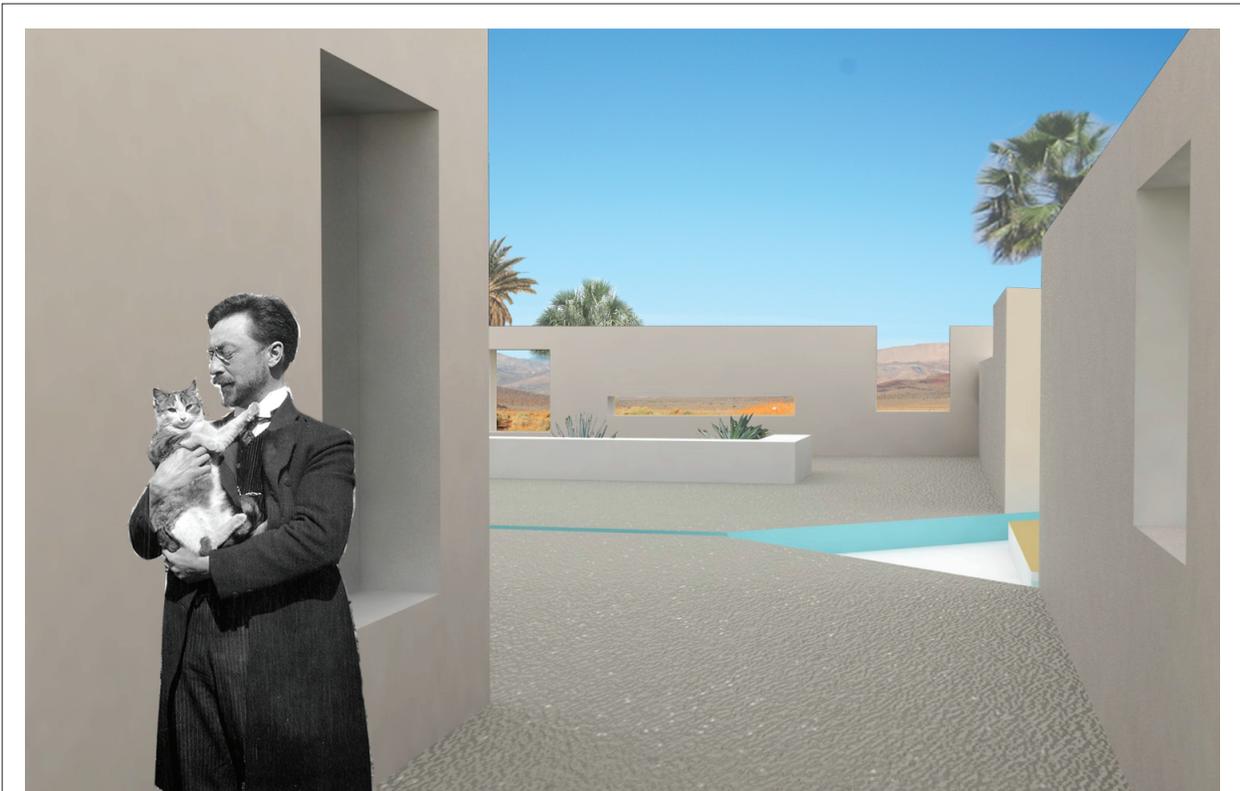
Fig. A.4. Kandinsky's retreat, the courtyard.



Studio interior

The studio creates a templelike atmosphere with the pyramid roof in the centre. Skylights and linear windows on each side frame the desert's sky and landscape, and bring its wonder inside. Night's sky adds to the mystic atmosphere of the desert and the studio.

Fig. A.5. Kandinsky's retreat, the studio.



View from the courtyard entrance

Openings in the walls frame the desert from the courtyard. Kandinsky is in the desert, and at the same time he can see it from a preserved point; this would keep the wonder of surrounding landscape always alive, this would make him appreciate it.

Fig. A.6. Kandinsky's retreat, the courtyard.

