

The Game with Death

a transgressive tradition of Villa Adriana

by
Shiuli Mukerjea

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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

Villa Adriana has long been hailed as poetry in architectural form. A world building project executed at the scale of landscape, it manipulated the very fabric of the earth with audacity, draining a river plain, conjuring valleys and precipices, cutting into soft tufa and drawing water like fine threadwork through the site.

Famously inspiring Frank Lloyd Wright and Louis Kahn, architects have long looked at the pieces of this game and reconfigured them in tune to their interpretations. These volumes and axes, eternally in collision, taught them to play their own games with architecture. Thus began a transgressive tradition in architecture. With Hadrian, a politically and spiritually fraught figure, began the tradition of cultural and architectural transgressions upon this sprawling site; he challenged the boundaries of context and transcended them through cross-cultural play with form. The Villa is a riddle in space, quicksand magic. Its constant movement across space and time positions it as a game best kept out of the glass box of architectural history. This thesis argues that Villa Adriana is meant to be played with, for the game is infinite and can never be lost or won.

While traversing Villa Adriana's landscape in 1947, a young American writer, Eleanor Clark, wrote in her memoir that "Hadrian's game was with Death." Comparing it with the "childish whimsies" of Versailles, she intuitively felt Villa Adriana was an entirely different game – something grave, vast, unfathomable. If Versailles was one of life's grand illusions, Villa Adriana encapsulated the very essence of it.

This thesis will use Eleanor Clark's words as a prompt to begin a world building exercise constructed using memory and phenomenological encounter, through a game in writing and drawing architecture.

Acknowledgements

When I first visited Villa Adriana, the landscape felt like an open letter, written not with words, but with form. It was a secret Marguerite Yourcenar and Eleanor Clark had whispered into my ear, a secret no one else could hear.

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Serra, Richard. "New Sculpture, West 21st Street, New York, October 26, 2013–February 8, 2014." Gagosian, April 12, 2018. <https://gagosian.com/exhibitions/2013/richard-serra-new-sculpture-new-york/>.



Fig 1.1 Medieval gameboards found in southern India. Shows the four directional gameboard and variations of it.

The Game

“The game is in some sense equal to the cosmos, both a condensed expression of its process and a mode of activating and generating that process... Without the game, there would be no time, perhaps no space as well.”

- David Shulman, *God Inside Out*, 4.

The game is the perfect foil to Villa Adriana. It is a literary device that activates the site and changes its perception radically through narrative. The ludic metaphor is essential to understanding the narrative that will unfold in the following story: the gameboard creates a procession through the site and its rules make up the constraints. It also implies a complex process that takes place within the Self and the site, renewing the perception of the Villa and of the players of the game. While configuring the format of an architecture driven narrative, my first major discovery was found in Eleanor Clark’s travel memoir of the Villa: she compared its ambition with the “childish whimsies”¹ of Versailles, and went on to compare it with mortality itself: she wrote, “Hadrian’s game was with Death.”² My interest in this spatial awareness of mortality led me to perceive Death as a character moving through the site, signaling dissipation and entropy in the site. Clark’s intuitive analysis of the Villa conjured up an image of the character of Death watching the both of us, like a ghost absorbed in the site. In this thesis, a literary exploration of the Villa is written through the eyes of the players, of whom one is Death, and through the eyes of the pieces on the gameboard.

The Gameboard

The game itself is modelled on the dice game called *chaupar*³ where all players start at the outer edges of a four directional gameboard and strive to reach the center. The game was invented in medieval India and consists of a gameboard made of cloth, so it is unrolled when the game begins, and contains two intersecting axes that meet at an empty square at their central meeting point.⁴ Each player gets four pieces and they must start at an arm of the gameboard, that is, at one end of

1 Eleanor Clark. *Rome and a Villa* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2015), 138.

2 Ibid.

3 (“The Mahabharata by Peter Brooks”, 2:10-2:45) *Chaupar*, literally translates to four directions, was the dice game played by the Pandava brothers against the Kauravas in the Mahabharata.

4 David Dean Shulman and Don Handelman. *God inside out : Śiva’s Game of Dice*. (New York: Oxford University Press. 1997), 32. The player’s ‘self’ refers to the Jungian archetype that represents the unification of the conscious and the unconscious. In this text, the archetypal self undergoes the process of individuation through the game.



Fig 1.2 Chapar, the four directional gameboard, similar to the one that will be played with in the story.

the axis, and have to move around the perimeter of the board; if one piece manages to make this ambulation without getting blocked or returned to the beginning, they reach the same axis where they started and move toward the center, winning the first round of the game. The players can remove the other's piece during this ambulation by landing on the same square, which results in the player's piece being sent back to the beginning of the ambulation, and the player can block the other's piece by gathering two pieces on the same square, then it effectively blocks the opponent's pieces from going forward.

The Player & his selfhood

The game ultimately becomes a metaphor that causes rupture within the player's self⁵, initiating the process of reassembling and reconstitution that is inherent in the state of play, with obstacles, losses and wins. The hero's journey is thus sublimated on a spatial gameboard. Reaching the center of a space is especially metaphorical here for "the game progresses via the radical dispersions of fragmented self-representations"⁶ made evident through each round of the game where a challenge is presented. In other words, every round of the game causes a change in the state of play: the stakes are subject to change, the circumstances change according to the situation and location of the player and the pieces. In states of loss, the player's self begins to physically disperse all over the gameboard and in subsequent states of victory, the player reconstitutes his self in light of the initial losses and continues the game with a fragmented self. In the dice game, movement is always centripetal in an effort to reorganize parts of the player's self; it is equivalent to reaching a "point of ultimate reintegration in the empty central space."⁷ This centripetal force can be equally powerful in its counterpoint - when the gameboard becomes the site of the villa, when the effort to reconcile and integrate the Self becomes an outwardly radiating puzzle. Thus, the game becomes centrifugal, and the goal is to move outward, to entropize, to win the game.

The completeness of the number four is another interesting aspect of the game: four arms intersecting at one center, four pieces ambulate the edges of the game (a multiple of four). Every move signals a move from a state of completeness (when the player has four pieces in his palm) to a state of fissure (when the player's pieces move away from him and ambulate the gameboard). During

5 Carl Gustav Jung, Joseph L Henderson, Marie-Louise Von Franz, Aniela Jaffé, and Jolande Jacobi. *Man and His Symbols*. (Cheshire, UK: Stellar Classics, 1964), 37.

6 David Dean Shulman, and Galit Hasan-Rokem. *Untying the Knot*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 115.

7 David Dean Shulman, and Don Handelman. *God inside out : Śiva's Game of Dice*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 33.



Fig 1.3 Scene from the Seventh Seal, directed by Ingmar Bergman, showing a medieval knight playing a game of chess with Death.

this process of division, the player abstractly becomes the pieces.⁸ His selfhood becomes tied up with the pieces, and all his pieces either move to the center, to that deep core of self-knowledge or completeness to win the game, or they move toward further fragmentation of the self by being blocked or being returned to the beginning. The gameboard, being the physical environment of the story, reflects the psychological state of the player, much like the architectural set that unfolds around the character of Poliphilo in *Hypnerotomachia*.⁹

Parallel Games

Layering upon this ludic strategy in space, a parallel game will be laid out in words. The character of Death will pose several literary and architectural riddles that will act as obstacles, points where the player confronts parts of his self (an infinite game as there will be no precise answer)¹⁰. The consequences of answering the riddle incorrectly will begin to unravel and divide him from parts of himself, that is, he will be forced to give up his pieces in the game. These fragmented pieces of himself will eventually fuel the need to recompose and alchemically reconstitute his selfhood. They will mark points of fluctuation and challenges that are thrown in the way of the player who is simply trying to play the game and ambulate the site in order to reach a state of wholeness.¹¹

All games and riddles come with the threat of death; there is never an escape, otherwise no sane person would risk play. The stakes are always high, and the razor's edge is always inches away from the player's neck. Ingmar Bergman's film, set during the black plague, is similarly situated upon this short distance between life and death, the distance encompassed by the chessboard, the space between the players. The *Razor's Edge* by Somerset Maugham also does this more abstractly, through the initiation¹² of a character and his unravelling, shown over the course of some years, where he becomes increasingly aware of the razor's edge and the power of beauty: "The

8 David Dean Shulman, and Don Handelman. *God inside out : Śiva's Game of Dice*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 53.

9 Francesco Colonna, translated by Joscelyn Godwin. *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), 55. *Hypnerotomachia* is an architectural treatise written in the 15th century where the character of Poliphilo falls into multiple levels of dream, losing himself in a maze of ruined antiquities, pyramids, theaters, temples and caverns in pursuit of his love, Polia.

10 David Dean Shulman, and Don Handelman. *God inside out : Śiva's Game of Dice*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 46.

11 *Ibid*, 37.

12 Carl Gustav Jung, Joseph L Henderson, Marie-Louise Von Franz, Aniela Jaffé, and Jolande Jacobi. *Man and His Symbols*. (Cheshire, England: Stellar Classics, 1964), 97. Initiation here refers to the hero's individuation process cited in Jungian psychology. The initiation ceremony may be under the guise of a violent, Dionysian 'thunder rite', an awakening ritual that must reactivate a dormant/ contained subconscious. The initiate must be prepared to die, and though the token of this may be mild or agonizing, the goal is to create the symbolic mood of death to create the symbolic mood of rebirth.



Fig 1.4 A collection of objects that have been layered upon a light table based on the alchemical search for materials and signposts required in the act of storytelling.

sharp edge of a razor is difficult to pass over; thus the wise say the path to Salvation is hard.”¹³ Therefore, the player’s transformation happens at this very edge between life and death, at the bridge of logic connecting the riddle and its answer.

The riddle embodies this ontological quandary, and the question of whether, “by conflating domains, [can a riddle] actually create a new reality.”¹⁴ The game will embody this “new reality” within the story and it will act as a “fusing of levels, implying a cultural vision of the world as including, within a single system, multiple related, if unseen, worlds.”¹⁵ These multiple worlds will come in the form of microcosms tucked within the gameboard itself: each of the buildings will constitute these disparate, yet parallel, worlds, which at the end of the story will fuse levels through a process of pulling the gameboard “inside out.”¹⁶

The third layer is the game in narration, created using a literary strategy borrowed from a musical one, namely from Bach’s fugue. This technique will be key to understanding the logic of the story: a fugue in music is “a composition in which one or two themes are repeated or imitated by successively entering voices and contrapuntally developed in a continuous interweaving of the voice parts.”¹⁷ First, let me set your mind at rest, I am aware that only music can be truly polyphonic, and the text does not verge on the absolutely absurd, but this strategy of adopting various voices allows a murder-mystery like unravelling of the story and allows me to move fluidly from the voice of the player, to the voice of Death, to the voices of the pieces. It also allows me to move freely from one writing style to another while the game unfolds in the background. The baseline theme is set with an introductory story, from which the voices begin to differentiate into the characters. Thus, the spontaneity of the game will be kept intact as you, the reader, will have to constantly shift gears from character to character as you read the text.

Another major part of gaming in the story will be to create a myth that dilutes the reality of the site: this will be a myth that begins with an erasure of a kind. It will seek to ignore some of the existing narratives that have been part of the site and the culture it is embedded in. The intention of this erasure will be to create a palimpsest of myths, lies if you will, that intersect at the Villa, but arise from a distilled understanding of the architecture of the site and by placing it within an interconnected network of meanings derived from it. Since all good literature is embedded with as

13 William Somerset Maugham, *The Razor’s Edge* (New York: Vintage International, 2003), 72.

14 David Dean Shulman, and Galit Hasan-Rokem. *Untying the Knot*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 5.

15 Ibid, 19.

16 Niklas Frank. *The Father: A Revenge* (Biteback Publishing, 2021), 387.

17 Margot Singer, “Can a Novel Be a Fugue?,” *The Paris Review*, August 8, 2017, <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2017/07/31/can-a-novel-be-a-fugue/>.

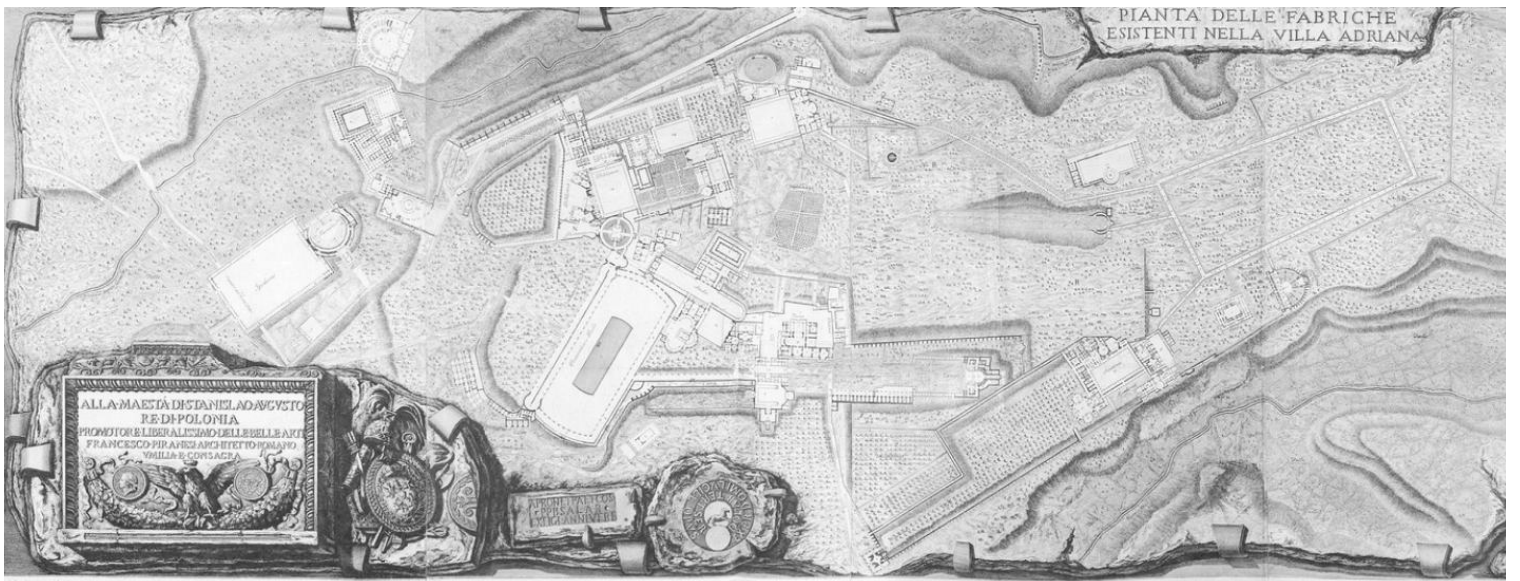


Fig 1.5 *Plan of the Existing buildings at Hadrian's Villa.* Etching by Piranesi, 1781.

many references as a writer can muster,¹⁸ collecting stories will be crucial to my development as a writer and will serve as an agglomeration of many threads that are produced through research and reference. This game in referencing will be played with both western and eastern modes of looking. This phenomenon of agglomeration, of encrustation, can be compared with all good weeds that extend their tentacles into foreign soils; this site may be seen as the soil, as the backdrop to my tale. The deliberate act of forgetting its origin and creating a myth that redefines the site of the Villa will allow a retelling of the story of the villa, and consequently, a redefinition of it.

The Gameboard as Landscape

The word ‘landscape’ can be understood both as a static painting (*landskap*), and as the living, breathing exercise of acting upon the land (*landschaft*). Within the game, the Villa is a world-building exercise executed at the scale of landscape based on both these definitions: the procession in the site is constantly morphing through the manipulation of scale and form, and the very construction of the Villa was an act of pulling the fabric of the earth inside out. The flat river plain, hot, dry and rife with mosquitoes, was manipulated heavily to create a fabricated landscape: a facsimile of the Nile was squeezed into a valley, precipices in the soft tufa froze when cut¹⁹ and was stoppered with sprawling architectural forms. Underground tunnels and water channels were woven through the land like fine threadwork, drawing water from mysterious aqueducts, whose precise connection to the site has never been found. Only such a sprawling, flat site would allow such a large incisions to be made with earth upon its body.

Villas are usually designed around natural landscapes that afford vistas,²⁰ but this one was transgressive in its very choice of site. Located in the most uncomfortable and flat river plain, cold in the winter, hot and dry in the summer, full of mosquitoes, it was almost hidden from views altogether. Instead of being on the crest of a mountain, Hadrian chose this site most likely because it would allow him to orchestrate this sprawling game, for his architectural ambition could not, perhaps, be balanced delicately on a hilly terrain like the tip of a needle.²¹ Yet, it was pragmatic: it was situated below the nearest aqueduct to fulfill his watery obsessions and beside quarries that would supply supply all the materials that populated the Roman world - travertine, lime, pozzola-

18 Ronald Christ, “Jorge Luis Borges: The Art of Fiction No. 39”. *The Paris Review*, March 30, 2020, <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/4331/the-art-of-fiction-no-39-jorge-luis-borges>.

19 Tufa is a soft, porous limestone found in the bedrock of Italy. It hardens once it is cut into and was perfect for use as building foundation and other structural materials.

20 James Ackerman. *The Villa : Form and Ideology of Country Houses*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), 64.

21 Eleanor Clark. *Rome and a Villa*. (New York: Harperperennial, 2015),133.

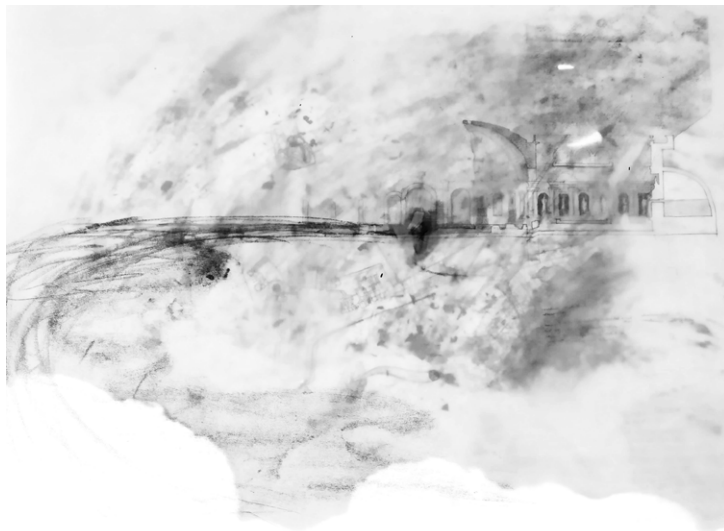
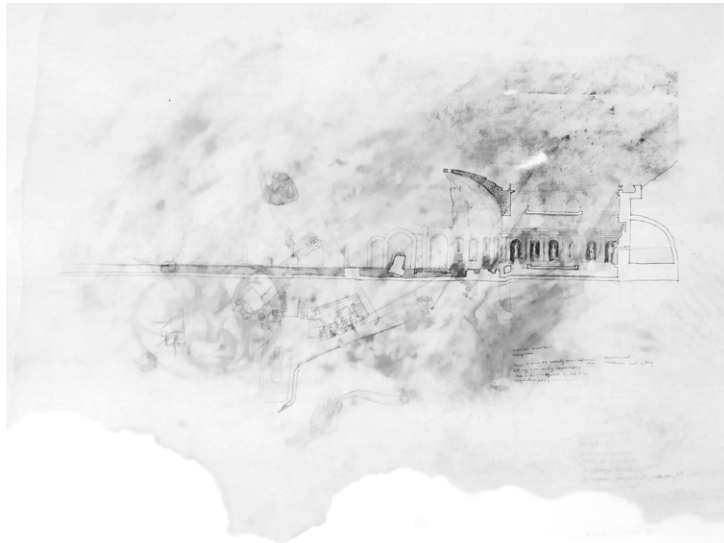
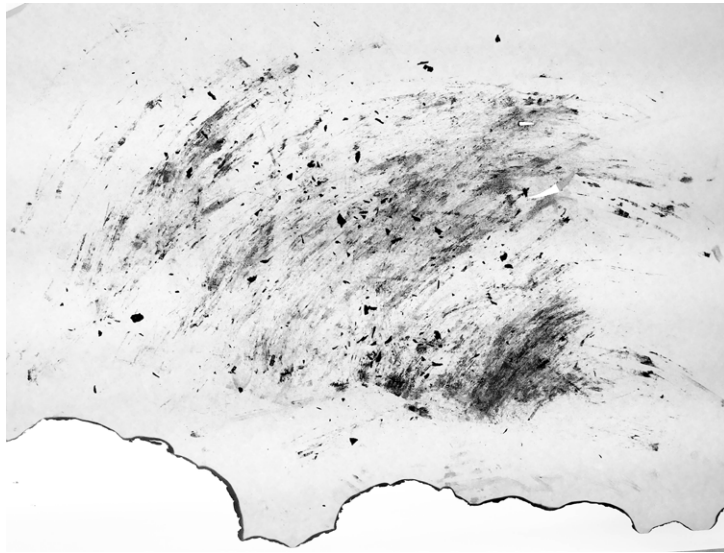


Fig 1.6 A sample of the drawing process in layers.

na. This site with sprawling, grand earthwork, with axes torn hither and thither by the natural and fabricated contours of the site, could be infected with the architectural ambition that was essential to the exercise of world building he aspired to.

At the end of the story, the body of this landscape will again be turned inside out, as the gameboard reconfigures itself. The landscape itself is given agency to break apart, to shake off Hadrian's fabrication, and to restart the infinite game.

Methodology

The methodology of this thesis explores the practices of *writing architecture* and *drawing architecture*. For an architect is both poet and healer (*iatromantos*),²² and in this sense, the tools that allow the body to be engaged in the architectural experience are best expressed through the means of communication that allow the reader to go beyond what meets the eye and to find a means to record what meets the body and the soul. My writing process began with reading literature that was specifically designed around an architectural space. Texts such as *Alice in Wonderland*, Jorge Luis Borges' short stories, Umberto Eco's writing, *Metamorphosis*, Dante's *Inferno*, *Hypnerotomachia* and its contemporary interpretation in *Polyphilo: The Dark Forest Revisited* were pivotal to my research. They all are world building exercises in literature and introduce their own set of rules and absurdities that make them all the more interesting to visualize with an architectural lens. These worlds are intrinsically tied to the narratives that unfold within them for the geometry and materiality of the space coheres with the narrative to reflect the inner state of the character.²³

The second strategy in my writing process has been to visit the site and absorb it by immersing myself in it. Writing based on phenomenological encounters and memory is essential to this process: deciphering the space with all my senses allowed me to be able to begin the world building exercise in the game. The role of imagination while in the space was also important; this was where I entered the character as a (very anxious) writer and I walked through the spaces to experience it physically, indulging all my senses in the garb of the characters of the player and of Death. Phenomenology, in this context, becomes incredibly valuable as a tool that gives permission to privilege the senses and translate these phenomena into the hard language of poetry, prose and architectural sectioning (sections and plans).

The logic of the fugue in writing requires each character to offer a slightly different perspective, like suspects in a murder mystery story. As I deciphered the narrative and made sense of each

22 Alberto Pérez-Gómez. *Built upon Love : Architectural Longing after Ethics and Aesthetics*. (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2008), 18.

23 Francesco Colonna, trans. Joscelyn Godwin. *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), 73.

character in the game, it made sense to separate the voices of the characters by setting up different rules for each of them. Therefore, the voice of the player is written in a rather objective mode, based somewhere between observation and analysis. The words help build the space objectively and clearly, much in the same way that still life drawing builds detail with pencil strokes. The next rule was that the player's voice would always be in prose so that how he enters this alien world and how he is encountering the space, in dark or in light, in compression or release can be described dispassionately. This style of writing makes up the bare bones of the physical world that is being built around the characters; it includes thick descriptions of the built spaces, being specific about structure, color, materiality and geometry.

The second voice, that of Death, is in poetic form which is especially useful in weaving together the intangible and tangible in order to create a renewed gaze effected through words. Most of the writing in this portion was written directly on site and therefore bears the stamp of urgency and a subconscious yearning to pin down something ungraspable. There is an attempt to combine the analytical and the intuitive so that the space is not only encountered in the flesh, but also through the third space of the *chora*. The *chora* "is like the substance of our dreams, and we may conceive it only indirectly through spurious reasoning."²⁴ Complexity is added to the simpler voice of the player by describing the peripheral, the ungraspable elements within the landscape of the Villa through this abstract assemblage of words and myths that poetry represents. This venturing into the ungraspable, into the *chora*, can only be guided by the architect or by the poet. The architects' and poets' ability to open up this third space with the means of words or form comes by harnessing the power of the intangible, the ungraspable.

The third strategy of drawing architectural space is explored parallel to understanding the space through words. For one can explore beyond the landscape of what is seen through the eye and break that membrane that contains the subliminal through dissection of the site and the peeling away of layers.²⁵ The "violence and misprision"²⁶ that is essential to the task of finding what is ailing in the body can be equally useful in finding what a space contains - what the crystal of intensity is - that is drawing one to the scattered centers that Hadrian's villa encapsulates. Therefore, every drawing began with a ritual (with a group of 3-4 people) and an opaque sheet of paper. A verse

24 Alberto Pérez-Gómez. *Built upon Love : Architectural Longing after Ethics and Aesthetics*. (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2006), 18.

25 Andreas Vesalius. *De Humani Corporis Fabrica, Or, Andreae Vesalii Bruxellensis Scholae Medicorum Patavinae Professoris de Humani Corporis Fabrica Libri Septem* (Basilae, Switzerland: Leopold Publishing, 1555). 190.

26 Timothy Morton. "Beauty Is Death." Academia.edu. Accessed December 15, 2022. https://www.academia.edu/16053793/Beauty_Is_Death.

from the *Atalanta Fugiens*²⁷ is selected in accordance with the theme of the space, to create the beginnings of an alchemical renewal in the perception of the site, and was recited during the performance of drawing. While this verse is being recited, the ritual of drawing and dissecting the microcosm of the site is enacted using fire, charcoal and in some cases, pine bark and olive wood brought directly from the site. The purpose of this concocted ritual was to gather a community around a burning ritual, but mainly to ground the artist to gain a renewal in vision, to see the space differently than it appears.

Dramatis Personae & Instructions to read the game

To establish the game, introducing the characters of the players and the pieces is necessary. Playing a part comes with adopting a mask, the skin through which the voice of the character becomes real and is given agency. In the game of the fugue, each character will narrate their version of the story in first person, where the backdrop is the gameboard of the villa. The icons listed below will be at the beginning of every story – the left margin will indicate who the narrator is, the plan at the center of the page will indicate the location of the narrator and the sequence of the move will be indicated by the chapter title. Each move will contain the voices of the player, of Death and of one piece belonging to the player. Notes referenced by page number are provided at the end of the story to clarify allusions where needed.



PLAYER

The Player's voice will always be in prose and will create an objective procession in the space. His character will be developed throughout the game using obstacles, in the form of riddles, and his belongings i.e his pieces will be staked during play. The afterword reveals a more thorough account of his character, which should be read after the story.



DEATH

Death's voice will always be found in the format of poetry. She is the opponent, but she is also more aware of the game and its consequences than the player. In this text, the character of Death is a metaphor for the feeling of mortality and the passage of Time that is reflected in built space. She is proud and sincere, representing, on the one hand, Justice, the great force of egalitarianism, and on the

²⁷ *Atalanta Fugiens* by Michael Maier is a European alchemical emblem book from the 17th century, containing images, verse, poetry and song. It is a guide for alchemists and contains many myths, that are decoded by the academic, H.M.E de Jong.

other, she is the Empress, a graceful harbinger of relief, a voice resounding in the subconscious persistently, entreating humanity's attention. The character of Death is viewed with a lens of cyclicity and is oriented away from a punitive one. The cosmos and the player's self are constantly fragmenting and repairing. Similarly, dissolution and losing the game is perceived as a temporary condition, for Death, as a character, is also constantly fragmenting, consuming, and becoming whole through the game. The voice of her character is derived from the literary ideas of Shakespeare, and Somerset Maugham's haunting tales of isolation, degradation, and the final release of death.

Her character is also based on the player's Thanatos²⁸ for he is in constant search of her during play, just as Poliphilo was in search of Polia.²⁹ This dichotomy between Eros and Thanatos is where her character can give voice to many complex thoughts, for love and death affect the body and the psyche in similar ways: love comes "as if on wings"³⁰ and infects every region of the body, infusing a primordial madness and uncontrollable energy. This membrane between the mythic worlds, the membrane between the body and the psyche, also contains the "subtle body...the body that is in me but is not in me"³¹, the senses that are contained in the *chora*, the third space. Architects and poets can inspire such interpenetration between the domains of life and death, for they have the knowledge of the subtle body and they can access the *spiritus mundi*, the space that contains dreams. They can perform an act of love, an act of healing, through their work.

Her voice is also a vehicle that allows the healing of a fracture inside the psyche that has disconnected the player from the body of life. The menace of death is felt viscerally by the body in spaces that inspire the terror of beauty or love.³² The body registers the simplest seismic plate shifts to the minutest change of materi-

28 Sigmund Freud. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. (Mineola, New York: Dover Publication, Inc. 1995), 112. Thanatos here refers to Freud's theory of orientations that make up our psyche leaning toward Eros, the drive toward unity of the conscious and subconscious, or toward Thanatos, the death drive.

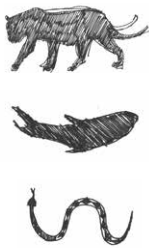
29 Colonna, Francesco, trans. Joscelyn Godwin. *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), 45.

30 Timothy Morton. "Beauty Is Death." *Academia.edu*. Accessed December 15, 2022. https://www.academia.edu/16053793/Beauty_Is_Death.

31 Pérez-Gómez Alberto. 2008. *Built upon Love : Architectural Longing after Ethics and Aesthetics*. (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2008), 45.

32 Timothy Morton. "Beauty Is Death." *Academia.edu*. Accessed December 15, 2022. https://www.academia.edu/16053793/Beauty_Is_Death

ality that touches its periphery. The environment may not even need to touch the body, tactility becomes a given; the eyes want to caress, and the mouth wants to encompass a piece of fleshy marble, pink and grey in its layers of venation, echoing the contents from within the body itself.³³ A physical space or a landscape can become an edifice that swallows, making one feel buried under the earth or causing one to ascend beyond what is within the physical reach of a human being;³⁴ it can cause the body to reach a state where one is tempted to jump off a cliff, fly into the sky or fall into the womb of earth. Thus, her voice is almost a manifesto in architecture. The voice of Death speaking in the language of poets and architects is significant for it gives access to the *chora* by “harmonizing the mental system with the body system”.³⁵ This engagement with the body and its senses is the antithesis to modern alienated spaces that rob the body of its natural search in finding congruencies between itself and built spaces. Architectural details that acknowledge the proportions of the human body are one of the ways that this gap between the mental system and the body system can be bridged.



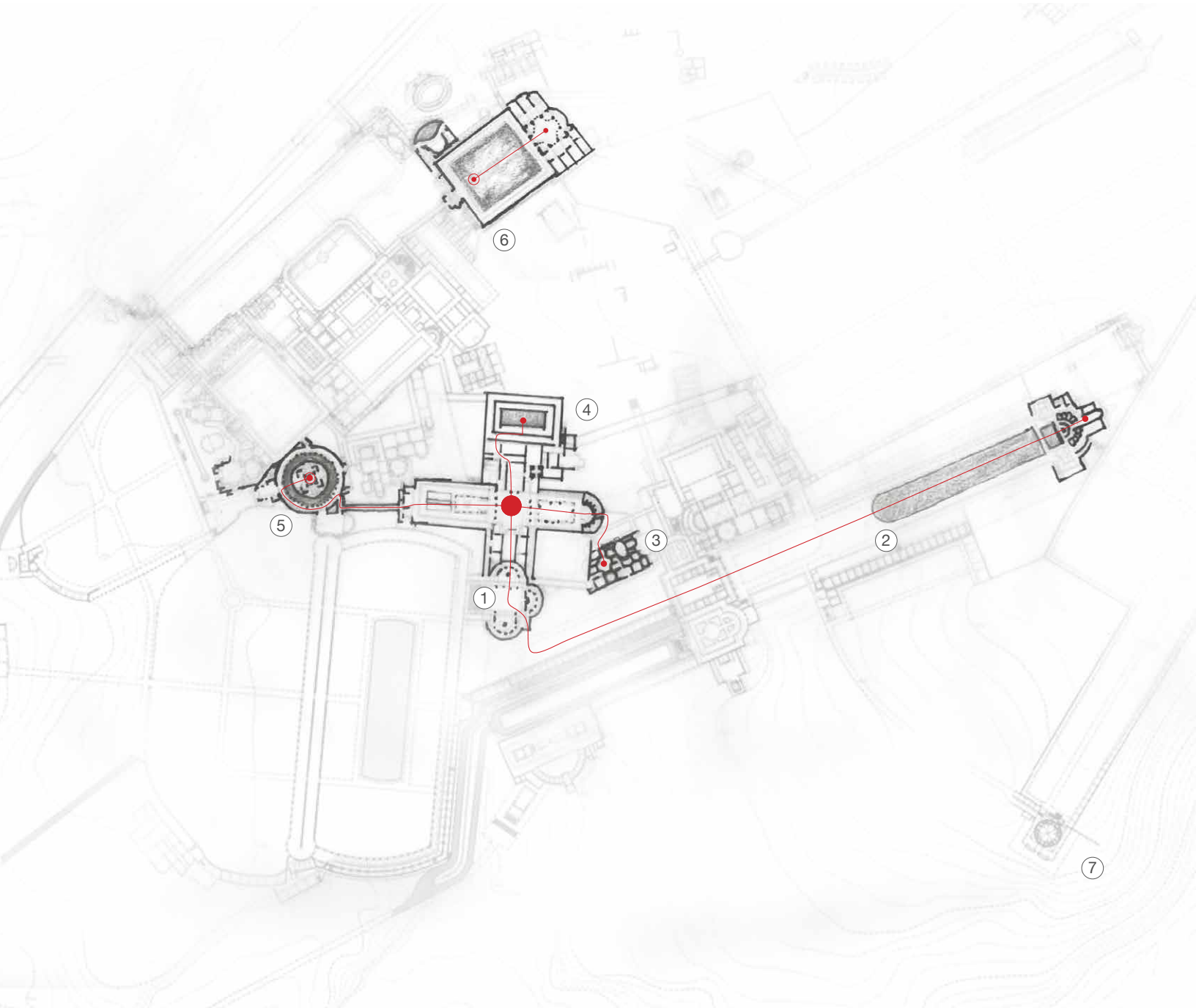
The Pieces’ voices (the fish, the snake, the tiger) are intermittent and are somewhat freer. They create an objective procession through the space, but they employ their own unique fears and explore the spaces using their specific physical abilities. Some pieces (the moon, the stone) do not have a voice, for they are unable to move as freely as the other pieces.





33 Pallasmaa, Juhani. *The Eyes of the Skin*. (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 1996), 45.

34 Ibid, 62.

35 “Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth | Ep. 5: Love and the Goddess” www.youtube.com. Accessed November 27, 2023. https://youtu.be/v_2DhV4BdOo?si=dxccSo43KI11JreO.

The Gameboard & Moves of the game



-  CENTER OF GAMEBOARD
-  TRANSFER POINT
-  ARM OF GAMEBOARD
-  MOVE OF GAME

The Players & the Pieces



PLAYER



DEATH

PLAYERS



TIGER

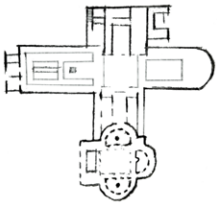


FISH



SNAKE

PLAYER'S PIECES



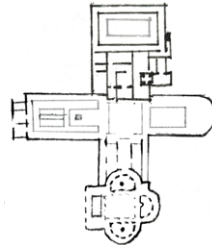
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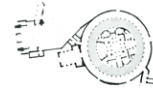
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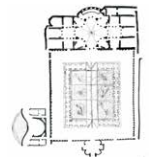
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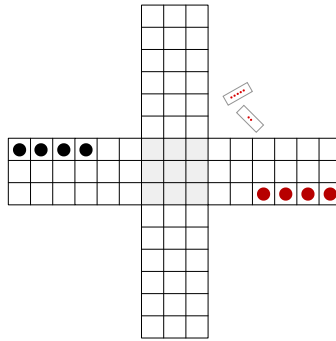


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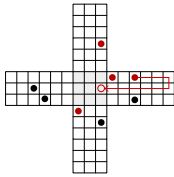
DEATH'S PIECES



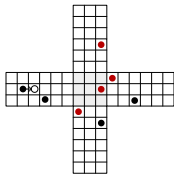
The First Game

The player had started the game with glee. He had unrolled the four directional gameboard upon the floor, three dice rolled out of nowhere. He had picked out eight cowry shells for pieces, four for her and four for him. His opponent sat across from him, pouting slightly. His dice had rolled him close to victory in the very first round of play. She was looking intently at the game board, brows furrowed with concentration. This was the second round of the game, her cowry shell was ten squares away from winning, his was five squares away.

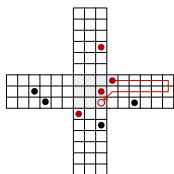
She bit her lip and twirled her hair between her fingers. She then picked the dice and cast them carefully; they rolled away, clanging into an abundance of red dots. With a delighted cry, she moved her cowry shell ten squares and planted it at the center of the gameboard, declaring her victory. Stretching out her hand, she demanded her prize: his jewels, cut in winking diamonds. He was perturbed, but carefully unclasped his jewels, smiling, and gave them to her.

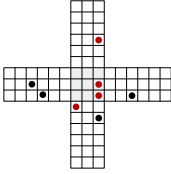


His turn: the dice clattered in his hand and fell in a graceful arc upon the game board. He counted a single red dot between the three cubes. His cowry shell moved one square closer to the center.

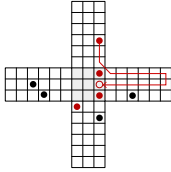


Her turn: another abundance of red dots, she counted twelve squares to the center; another tinkling laugh, another outstretched hand. The silver moon quivered in a crescent upon his head as his knotted hair fell undone around his shoulders. He removed it to give it away as his stake in the game.

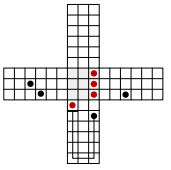




His turn: Gone was his cool manner. His toes tapped against the floor. His brows knit into deep furrows as he rolled his dice agitatedly. No red dots; all faces of the wooden dice were blank.



Her turn: another clatter of dice, her cowry shell moved seventeen paces to the center; he tenderly uncoiled his snake, Vasuki, and gave him up.

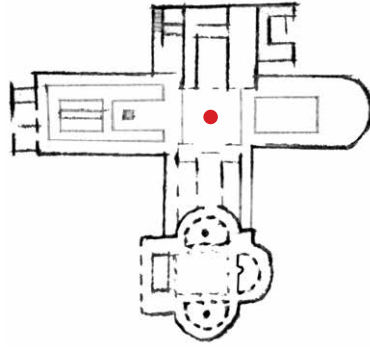


His turn: a clatter of dice, sixteen red dots. He reached for his piece but found it blocked by hers. His hand shook with rage as he returned the cowry shell to the first square, the beginning.

And thus, the game continued; his pieces were thwarted, subverted by hers, chasing and being chased around the board. Soon, all his pieces, but one, were banished to the beginning of the game, to its outer edge, while all her pieces stood triumphantly at the central square. The striped pelt of tiger skin, procured by him in the forest of pine, now adorned the soft shoulders of his opponent; his garb of fish skin now lay by her side. His jewels now lay warm against her chest. Ash smeared upon his forehead was sweating away as he handed over his obsidian black stone.

Naked and humiliated, he rose in a fury. He exclaimed the game was rigged; she must return everything to him for it was won unfairly. She stoically refused. He tried pleading with her, ‘You have no use for these mere fragments,’ he said, ‘you may as well return them to me.’ When he would brook no refusal, she mocked and cajoled him. ‘You had walked into the pine forest, clothed in nothing but space, entertaining the wives of the sages. I am sure you can bear to part with these pieces, these fragments of yourself, again. After all, I have won the game.’

The defeated player could no longer hold his fury; the third eye on his forehead opened and all his features contorted with rage. At this violent display of wrath, she gave up all pretense,
 ‘You may embroil me in your three eyed stare,
 but I can return nothing I take,
 for I am nothingness, I am Death.
 I am as empty as these dry cowry shells.’



The Challenge



I slept fitfully that night. I tossed and turned, shivering upon my hard bed. One moment, I felt overwhelmed by the indignity of it all, of being robbed of all that covered my naked self, the next, I was ruining my naivete for falling into the trap and at my humiliating defeat. I closed my eyes and found myself at the four-directional landscape of the game again. I saw the unrolling of the board, the dividing of the pieces, four mine and four hers.

My piece began its first ambulation around the perimeter of the board, oriented toward the center of the game, then my opponent moved her piece. Both of us were waiting for a decided change in the fate of the game; as I rolled the dice and made my next move (seven squares ahead, ten from the center), the gameboard began morphing and frothing into a fiery container, into the vessel of a dream. I entered a newly formed gameboard: its four axes rolled away from me as the game began. My body was at its center and the pieces had melted away.

One axis ended with a rounded wall, its opposite end was flat like the gameboard; its structures, were in broken linear striations and crumbling, sectiled walls. Rows of squares on the gameboard were sprawled like linear gardens, wild finocchio and bushes of willow sprouted between their rocky rows. The intersecting axes of the gameboard held squares that rolled away from me horizontally and vertically, along each of the four arms of the game.

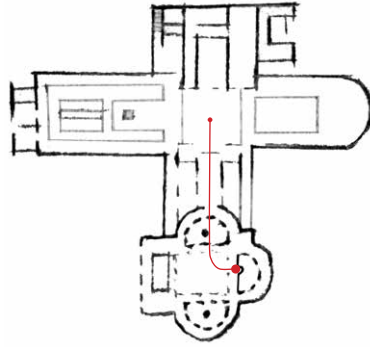
At this juncture of beginning the next game, Death appeared, as though she had always been there, waiting to make her move. Swaddled in silken fabrics, she stood at the center of the simulacrum and looked directly at me. I quailed in my nakedness, having lost all that belonged to me. She cajoled me with a soft whisper, declaring her second challenge,

‘Let me tempt you to play again
With a somewhat sly device; I promise
You will be made whole again;

Your fragments will be no longer divided
All that you lost will, again, be yours,
If you dare take another chance.
If you dare enter this landscape with me,
and begin another game of dice.'

I listened suspiciously, for it sounded disingenuous, as though the truth were being twisted to make a trap for a fool. But the temptation of recovering all that I had lost was overwhelming and I agreed to play again. She smiled warmly as I accepted the challenge,

'Now that you will begin the game again,
know the rules are not the same;
you will start at the center and move outward,
not inward, to effect a change.
The dice will no longer dictate your step,
And we each will be the piece and the player in the game.
You will return to the center at every loss,
And begin the game again.
However, if you win, you must ask for nothing, for
all that I have, I devour,
all that I create, I kill.
Therefore, I have nothing to give.'



The First Move



All I had lost was restored to me. Vasuki was coiled comfortably around my neck, my jewels and hides were warm against my skin, the moon was, once more, perched upon my head. I was at the center of the four directional game-board. Its square units stretched away from me along every arm, horizontally and vertically. Tinkling laughter and a distant clinking of glass upon glass reached my ears. Hints of flickering silver light came from within the structure on the western arm of the game. I hurried toward it. Light was at the precipice between night and day when I began the first movement: I stepped under the arch, looking for the source of the light and sound. I wondered if I would find her in the thick of it all, luring me into a trap.

The first chamber I entered was empty. It had no roof and was lit by the stars; another arched entrance offset from the first lay ahead, silhouetted against the light. I hurried toward it and felt a cool, soft floor, made rich with mossy growth, under my feet. Reticulated tiles were tucked here and there in this palimpsest-like floor; strokes of viridian and porphyry stood out with blobs of glowing marble. As I walked in this dark space, faint light refracted from the chamber beyond and danced on the walls. Suddenly, I caught sight of her luminous form slipping through an opening and into an adjacent chamber. I chased after her; I ran through one opening, and then another. I saw her at last: standing still, leaning at an opening in the brick wall. I walked softly on the mossy surface, getting closer and closer to her form. Another step, and with a jolt, my eyes watered as pain tore through my head. Crumbling brick and wet moss dusted into red particles in my mouth and nostrils. Sputtering, I fell back and looked ahead of me. The path was clear, no walls blocked my way. Yet when I stretched out my arm, there it was - a crumbling brick wall, like all the rest in the dark space. And she stood undisturbed on the other side of the invisible wall, standing still, with dancing silver light reflected upon her face.

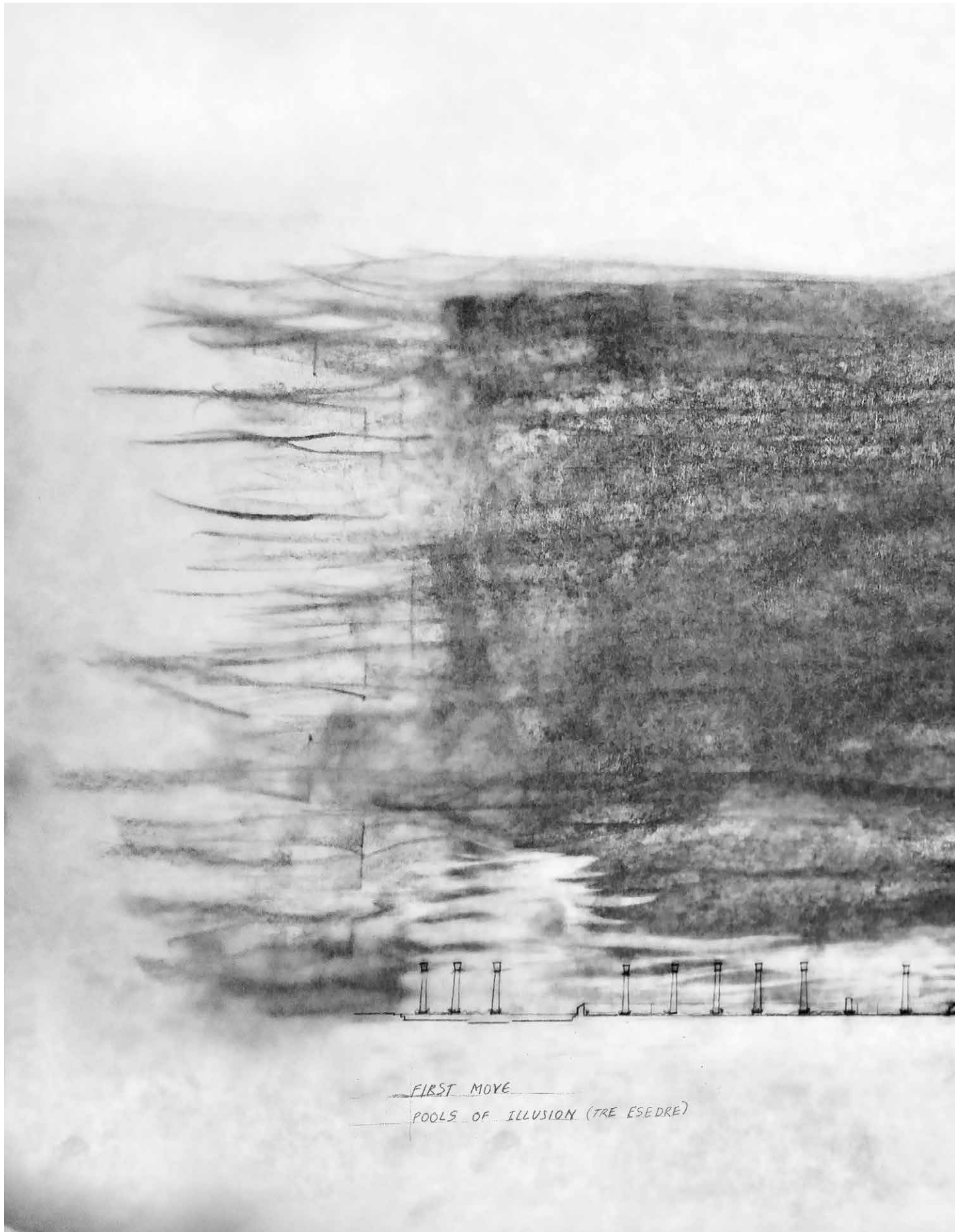
An angry lump rose to my forehead, and I saw her again, moving swiftly into the

chamber bathed in light. I cautiously retraced my steps and reached the second arched opening; with my arms stretched out before me, I felt the airy emptiness of the opening in the brick wall before crossing its threshold. At first glance, I thought I was in a garden filled with light. Strange creatures, bathed in an effulgent glow, were scattered in knots all around the space. I looked everywhere for a sign of liquid light, the source of the spangled reflections, yet nothing shone into my eye, even though reflections caught in the water were dancing upon all the walls. Naiads and cnidarians glowed softly in the bluish white light, their ballgowned trimmings floated about, all delicately spun vessels for light. They swirled, as though caught in a phosphorescent ocean floor at night, holding light, weaving in and out of focus.

Semi-circular spaces were unfolded around a central square, columns jiggled around their edges, offsetting from each other; nodules of vegetal muscle wove at the bases of columns. I continued weaving through the knots of creatures, looking for the shape of Death. Crossing a waist-high threshold at the edge of the square, I approached a knot of cnidarians that were gathered at the semi-circular enclosure. Lambent threads of watery reflections were weaving around them. A naiad broke away from the group and plucked a blooming flower from the vegetal base of a column. Red juice spilled from her lip as she bit into it. Her white gown was stained with nerves of blood red. I plucked one from the abundant base of the column and ate the sweet flower.

All directions of the game were temporarily dissolved as my mind swam in scarlet sap; a haziness wove over my eyelids. Brilliant shapes wove in lambent threads around me. I walked around the semicircular enclosure and felt a strange liquid accumulating around my feet; I did not see the pool of water, yet my feet were wet. I took another step, and another, pushing the unseen liquid, swishing it with my toes. As the haze of the sweet flower wove upon my eyes, a blinding light filled the semi-circular pool under my feet. I looked around and suddenly the space was filled with pools of light: semi-circular in shape, they were placed around the square and glowed brilliantly, as though three half-devoured moons were strewn upon the ground.

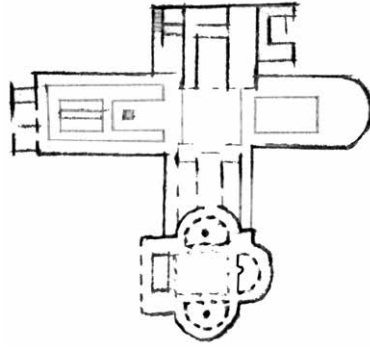
A fountain flowed softly in the center of the pool. Its edges were broken marble channels, brimming like an overfilled cup. As I lifted my feet out of the pool, lambent threads of bluish light dancing softly inside the pool seemed to gather around my ankles like metallic jewels, tightening their grip upon my feet.



FIRST MOYE

POOLS OF ILLUSION (TRE ESEDRE)





The first move was thus laid out.
In fountains of such fallacy,
Feet submerged
in a pool of lambent light.
Fluid cosmologies in
The half circles, illuminated, knit and knit
into folds of the lotus, locked
Between pleasure and pleasure.

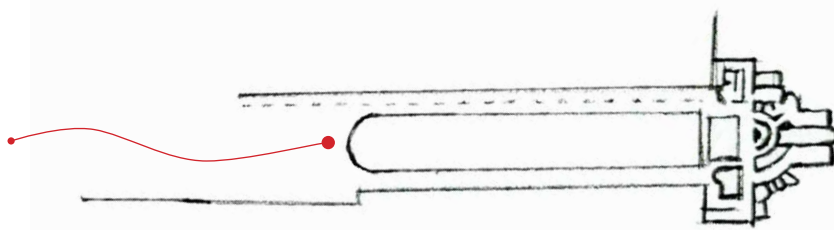
You play the game
of bisected circles, of semicircular mirrors,
Crocheting watery delights. Delicate, delicate.
Fractal, cordial. Oozing and spilling. Sometimes frothing
In silver fronds. A toss and a turn,
a silver floor. Packed and tightly corded,
Beribboned columns in frothing knots.
Plants, or the impressions of them,
Frozen in papery marble.

The passing of the hour was
Hardly recorded, for sheer pleasure bound you in,
Hemmed in by desire and by the shape of things.
You were trapped in the palace of illusions
Where your thoughts became real.
Deconstructed circularity will
bind you, delight you. With
gyrating nymphs and cnidarians,
You will join the lotus eaters' parade.
Threads of light, bound up in water,
Were reflected in the night skies,
Yet nowhere to be seen.

It was the blooming of a gentle ruse,
For, if your answer to my riddle
Be not correct, you shall
be trapped between semi-circles.
Your delicate, bejeweled feet will be caught
In these procrustean threads, and
the crowning crescent upon your head
Shall be mine to have.

In realms of triple realities,
(your vision tripled in space)
Can you answer me this - what happens when
Three pools sewn in semi-circularity
Meet in congruence?
What happen when the split heals,
when the circle becomes complete?

After a moment of unrest,
You answered,
'When the fragmentation ends,
and the full moon is no longer
bisected into liquid light.
When the wine has spilt in a swirl of disorder,
Lambent threads with blood red,
The circular chamber, the nerve center,
the moated enclosure of the mind,
asserts itself. Entropy, tiredness
and dearth come to this chamber
to find their rest.'



The Second Move



The tinkling voices died down as the bejeweled threads around my ankles unwound and dissolved into the pool, leaving delicately bleeding lines on my skin. The fluid was losing its luster now, effulgent vapors were fast dispersing into the air. Stars were fading in the lightening sky, and I clutched at the moon to make sure it was sitting securely upon my head. Marvelous shapes were still weaving threads of light upon my eyes as I stepped out of the pool. I moved further into the game in pursuit of her form, past the semi-circular pools and onto the path lined with olive trees. As I walked on, I heard the lapping of water in the distance. I emerged at the shore of a wide river, babbling on smooth stones. Further on, a boat was at the water's edge, swaying softly. I was sure to find her where this thread of water began; I climbed into the wooden vessel and untied it from its anchor. It moved of its own accord, against the current, as though Death herself was the guide, taking me into her lair.

Stairs rose along the shores of the river as dawn broke in the skies. Fires burnt in fits and starts along its winding steps, and the acrid smell of burning was hanging heavily in the air. A lament sounded in the distance: it was a measured song that had the gravity of a chant, but no words were spoken. Each ephemeral note was held for an eternity and broken gently upon the surface of the water. As the boat moved along, the shoreline became verdurous and fertile; it was moving toward the mouth of a valley.

The river became narrow as the boat swayed. Its tangled shore was now stitched with slender concrete seams and surrounded by entrails of broken columns. Alive bodies, frozen in space, passed by as the swish of oar propelled the boat forward. The tight dimensions of the river's surface was broken only by soft ripples and the visceral touch of prickly reptilian skin that reached the boat every now and then. The song was still carried upon the water in soft echoes, multiplying, resembling, at once, complete movement and complete inertia.



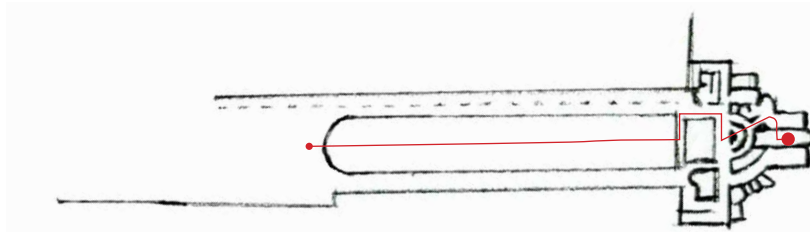
You were on a boat once, gently swaying
With the tides of the river.

It was no narrow business then;
Sprawled upon a field, flooding and breathing,
Then retreating into dryness, into nil.
It rose again, holding gently the threads of rain,
Falling and swelling, it was a monster in spate.

Before this cinching and sewing
began, the air was filled with acridness
of bones and crushed mineral,
Of the paraphernalia of wakefulness,
Of half solid ghosts in darkness.
The shore, ever ephemeral, was strewn with
Ashes, craters of white substance.
Cinders flew against a blood red sun,
Motes in the eye of a brewing storm.

Then all was domesticized, sewn into seams,
An artificial subtraction to cut and site,
It was a hunt for madness, of axes, for insight.
Cinched into half-buried fantasy; it was
Longer than an unrolled scroll,
the length of a nerve ending, no more.

You move to the mouth of the cave
For it contains eternal repose.
It is the refuge after long battle,
It is the fugue that will weave upon your tired soul,
In measured rhythm, the ephemeral notes
Hold eternity. And once you hear them
Inside the floating chamber embedded deep in the cave
The goddess will emerge and heal your fractured state.
But if your instinct in play be not true,
If you stray too far or too near, you will
Melt in nighttime sun and swirl in liquid moon.



The sun was blazing high in the sky. My head felt light under its scorching rays and in the heavy, humid heat that enveloped me. I went deeper and deeper into the valley. The end was now visible, the dark mouth of a cave emerged in a haze where the valley ended. The heat was unbearable, I writhed in the boat and drifted into a state of half wakefulness. Soon, long shadows yawned in the valley as the sky was shot with fiery red. As I approached the cave, echoes of the measured song were carried upon the surface of the waters and reverberated inside the valley, along with a deep rumble of voices from underwater creatures. The cave burnt like a beacon at the end of the narrow, linear body of water.

The mouth of the cave was growing larger: its edges stood out in crooked teeth, and I could make out the illuminated ribs that expanded into a dome, all tear stained and wrinkled with age. The nose of the boat hit against a strip of land, and I climbed out of it. A calm pool was on the other side of the mouth of the river, reflecting the purple sky. The pool was domestic in size; a colossal fragment of what must have been part of the cave was submerged in it; shimmering argent scales shot across its shallow waters. Night fell as I moved under the half-dome, half-cave. Crumbling columns on either side of it held up its imaginary edge. I moved across a set of semi-circular thresholds in the outer cave: a semi-circular reservoir was at the center of it, directly under the dome of the cave. Crossing it, I reached an elevated platform threaded by a vein of moving water around it. I could feel the pulse of the river under the ground; its roar, though distant, coursed through me like a memory.

Mossy doorways and stairs were carved into the outer cave on either side of a high arched opening, aligned to the center, to the river. I moved closer to its dark center; a volume was buried inside the cave beyond its high arched opening. Its back was rounded, in a U-shaped vessel. I caught glimpses of the night from its back. Its ceiling floated, as though this half open vessel had been lowered from the skies and inserted behind the cave. I drew closer to this chamber until its floor was level with my eyes. As I looked on, a sheet of water shimmered in the darkness and folded neatly under the floor, disappearing into the underground river. A mossy opening on the other outer cave gave me entry into the cave through a dark tunnel-like space. A small opening was at its end, it was the only source of light in the pitch black; I ascended three steps, climbed through it and reached the inner chamber of the cave.

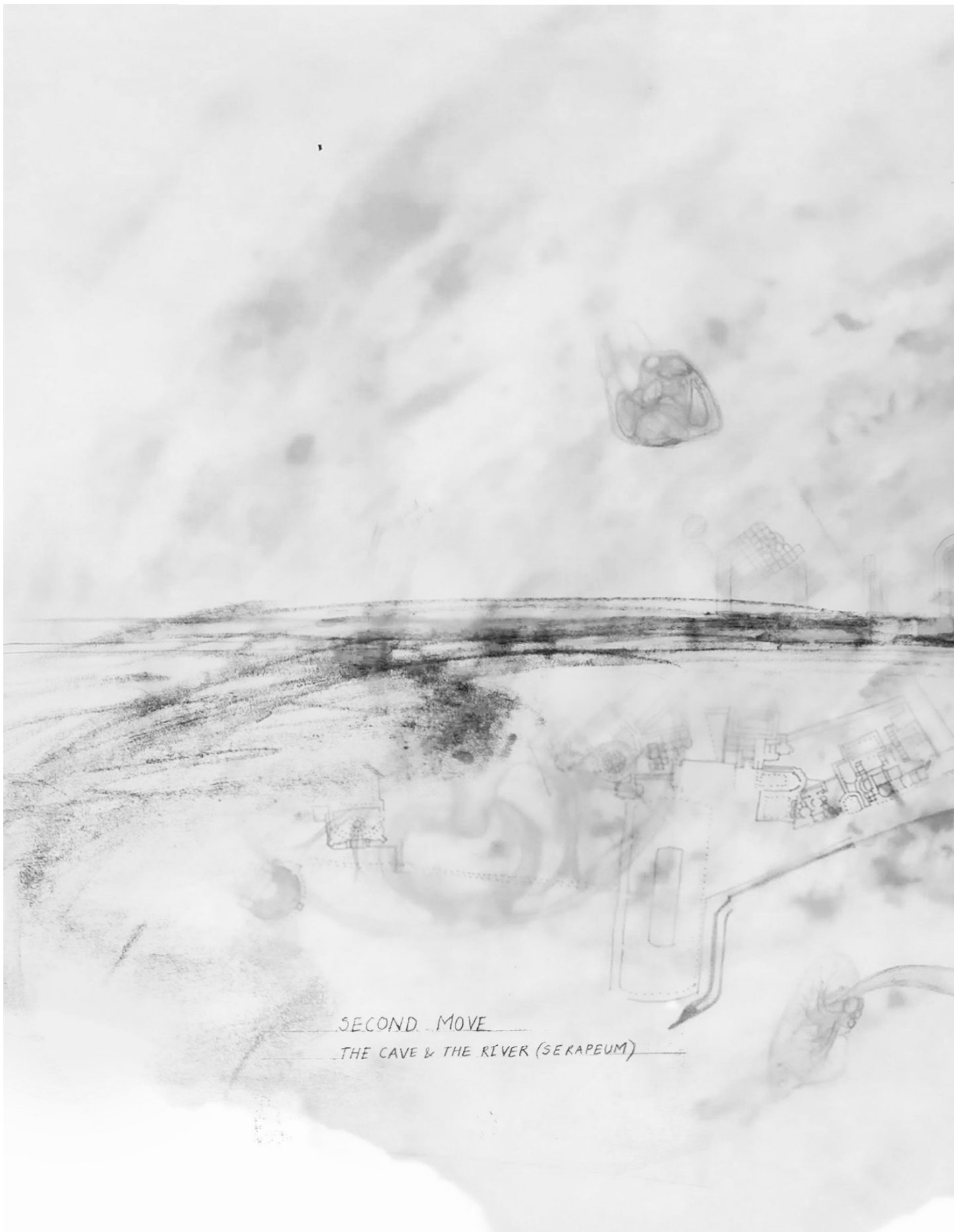
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The night had grown dark and deep and no clouds hid the planets. The faint light from the sky entered the inner chamber of the cave: it was narrow and high, compressing upon my temples. The measured song was carried upon the waters and echoed inside the inner chamber of the cave. The ceiling was perched at the center, as though it was floating in the air, but so was the floor: a sheet of water was flowing from the very depths of the chamber to the front, and the floor was perched at the center, as though floating upon water. A dark niche was at the very back of this chamber from which a meager trickle of water was threading its way down to the underground river, smoothing into the twisting sheet under the floating floor.

As I approached it, a sudden clap of thunder echoed in the skies. A blinding light. A golden haze flooded the chamber. I could scarcely see through its density. A strange restlessness was coursing through me, as though I had absorbed the fire of the sun through my skin. My limbs shook in a heated frenzy, and I moved as though caught inside the eye of flame.

The inner chamber of the cave was bathed in the glowing golden light that poured in. Arched niches, studded along the walls of the vessel, were revealed in gilded form; *apsaras*, frozen inside them, with delicate wrists and slender bodies, came forth, as though they too, had absorbed the fire. Their thumping feet moved to the rhythm of drums and the quickening of verse. Having caught the fire in scarlet clay cups, their gyrating bodies moved in circles and semicircles upon the stage, while ribbons of white smoke curled up from the smoking cinders. Veiled in thick smoke, they were caught in gold swirls of viscous light. My legs were anchored into the vessel by the shaking frenzy that surrounded me. The water flowing from the back of the chamber was no longer a trickle; a veritable stream of water gushed through the edifice. Rolling water fell through the carved doorways and stairways in the outer cave. I was engulfed, caught in the deluge of moving bodies and rushing waters. The sounds around me layered into a fugue, with the *apsaras*' anklets keeping pace with the underground river, with the delicately held notes of the lamenting voice and with the threading, rushing and folding of the water.

Past the golden light and the curling smoke, past the frenzy of the *apsaras*' thumping feet, in the farthest niche of the vessel, still in the dark, stood a goddess. Her form, frozen in stone, was blackened with moss and age. It was then that I saw Death, in the garb of a shadow, sitting in the niche with the goddess.



SECOND MOVE

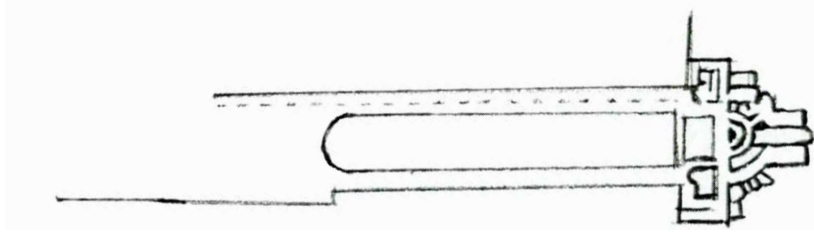
THE CAVE & THE RIVER (SERAPEUM)



irreversible composition &
recomposition

human & divine are mutually embedded in each other
each only in far reaching interpretation
which is itself a definition of ideal & the
imaginative act (of dance + theater)

interconnected
simultaneous made of Being



The second move was thus laid out,
In demi-domes and semicircles,
Through thresholds of delay,
Where river met mouthwatering cave,
In shifting plane upon plane.

Cinched into a delicate throat,
the river diffused in fissiparous veins,
pulsing, pulsing. In muffled roars, it threaded
Broken droplets to smooth veins of water;
Tiptoeing, crackling and roaring surfaces,
that are then quelled into
folding sheets and shimmering planes;
Liquid defied its matter in ductile shapes.
You can see the cavity of the mouth,
Alabaster soft, cooled, hardened.
Endlessly melting, annihilating
At every swallow, wrinkled with
matted furrows, stained with mossy seams,
the temple wept the tears of a cave.

In a flash the rays of the sun struck,
Reaching through the folds of a dark night,
And a madness engulfed you, a blinding rage,
As though your body and the vessel
Had swallowed the sun and filled with fire.

You heard the *apsaras*' thumping feet,
their anklets fitted with brass bells were
little vessels of direction and friction,
conjuring the muffled roar of the river.
Light trapped you, and weaving dancers,
Invigorated, gyrated in circles upon the
Floating stage, their hands cupping fire.
Ashes and rosy cinders glowed on
the floating stage and you were prisoner
in your own body, trapped in the glowing vessel.

To escape this damnation, these heated
Restraints, you must answer my riddle; but beware,
for if your answer be not correct,
Your snake will be uncoiled from your neck.
And thus, the goddess will awake
In stormy rage and your throat will be wrapped
in poisoned veins. In this palimpsest
of trickling and gushing, of roaring oceans
held in anklets, of unwinding voices, spiraling in a fugue:
What would tempt the latent goddess to wake?

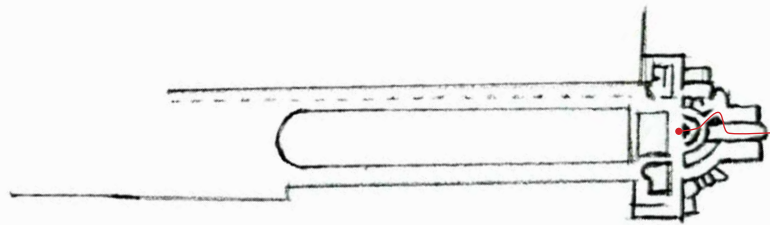
With shining eyes, you looked as far into the volume
as you could, and answered,
'When the place of shifting plane upon plane,
Watery plane and solid plane, converge
to align in the orchestrated womb
(A stage for a temple or a temple for a stage?)
Unseen niches will knit and knit
in its sides, all around. When these arrays
of darkneses are gently lit, at critical angles,
when solid shadows meet liquid light,
the goddess will gently uncoil.'

I smiled and shook my head,
For liquid light was not the answer.
'Everything floats in a state of half undoneness,
Semi-circles and silky planes of water, gushing, gushing
Drawn from unknown places, twisting and flailing,
rise the garments of the goddess.
She moves with the rhythm of the fugue;
As you coax the nighttime sun and
swirl in liquid moon, the goddess will rise
Between note and note.'

Your snake uncoiled and slithered toward me;
As he entered my niche, at the last watery vein,
the goddess' mineral skin broke into fleshy pain.
Her shimmering liquid spilled like blood
Through the cistern, into the cinched river;
And what lay within was the moon distilled.

All was caught in a maelstrom, where
liquid moon split watery nerves.

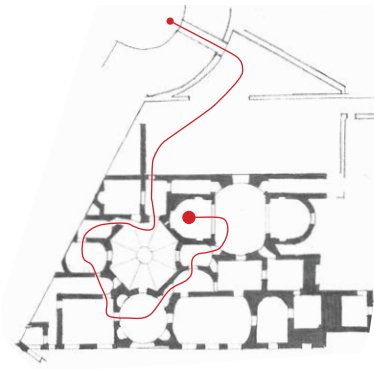
Caught in the fray, the divided tongue of your snake
Flew in all directions; blue poison dislodged
From its throat and floated through the air in
Churning cold spittle. You cried out in pain,
For your throat was thus laced
With spangled blue veins.



A web of darkness wove around me as my sinuous form lay coiled upon the player's neck. I sniffed at the air; it was heavy with damp. I made out the edges of a rocky cave as we went deeper into the darkness. I raised my head and my single spine uncoiled as my heavy muscles pushed against his warm skin. My nostrils tingled with interest as I recalled my mineral birthplace in the cave. We were in the deepest part of the cave and the blurred outline of the sky was above us. No sooner had we reached this comfortable darkness, in the humid depths of the cave, than a blinding light, fiery and golden, struck against me. My entire body shrunk away. My eyelids burnt. My skin was desiccated by the brightness, by the heat of the light. I gently wound around the player's neck, seeking the shadows in his body.

Smoke rose around me, and ashy particles clung to my smooth body. A thousand brass bells were vibrating inside the cave, ringing through my muscles and through my spine. The player shook with a heated energy and his body moved in a whirl. A shudder ran through me when I heard her voice. Her soft, white garments and her deathly smell were close to me - I was staked in the game this time. When the player failed to answer, I uncoiled and contracted my body, still stinging with heat. I lowered myself onto the perilous stage, slithering between burning cinders and the thumping feet of the dancers. Reaching the front of the stage, I dove into a silky plane of water. Threads of water broke in ripples around my sinuous form as I moved against the current, toward the form of Death.

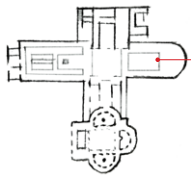
Cool waters held my skin in an embrace, and I was swiftly moving through the underground river. My single spine undulated, and my muscles moved vigorously, like a liquid ribbon underwater, contracting and tightening rapidly. I moved under the floating plane of the stage, covered in darkness, and swam to the innermost niche of the vessel. Climbing upward, against the current, I reached the feet of the goddess. An opening, as wide as my body, was the last threshold I crossed; slithering through, I reached a chamber filled with a pearly liquid. I probed its shimmering depths with my divided tongue. Suddenly, the water rumbled and whirled; my body was caught in a twisting maelstrom. I struggled against the crushing waves. The player reached for me and slipped at the edge of the pool. We both were writhing in the maelstrom, when dark blue venom escaped my throat in alarm. It flew into the rushing water and a second later, the player was no longer struggling against the currents. Blue veins were radiating from his neck, and he clutched at his throat desperately.



The Third Move



My fall echoed all around the open gameboard. Sputtering and soaked, I was thrown, headfirst, from the middle of the churning waters to the center of the game. Rolling over, I saw stars flickering in the dark sky above me. A spasm of pain shot through my neck - a spangled blue net was radiating from my throat and swelling around my neck. Breathing fast, I hoisted myself up and assessed my position with the four arms of the game unrolled around me: the first, with its arched entrance, lay the same as when I had entered it before, but there were no lights swimming inside it this time. Knowing I had to thread my way around the gameboard to win, I moved due south, toward the adjacent arm of the gameboard.



No tall structures were upon it, except those that held its edge with stone walls. At the far back of the linear space, a rounded structure was stitched, rising in tiers. The ground became more and more uneven as I stumbled forward, linear structures were pushed into the soil, hinting at substructures, at hidden patterns. As I approached the rounded structure, a small gap at its center grew into an arched passage. I looked inside it, trying to decipher the darkness; something stirred beyond, in secret. Her shape loomed in the darkness of the night, silhouetted and hidden. I rushed forward, but she moved swiftly through the passage and disappeared into a grove of olives beyond. I followed closely behind. As I made out the shape of her shadow among the gnarled silhouettes, she descended a slope, moving toward a small structure folded into a corner, as though crouched inside the earth. She glided in through a small opening tucked behind a wall.

Close behind her, I stumbled on the steps at the opening and fell hard on a damp, uneven floor. It was a narrow, vestibular space. I adjusted my eyes to the cracks of night sky that pierced the structure from high windows in chambers beyond and looked as far as I could. She was nowhere to be seen, yet I felt her presence hanging upon the heavy air, as though she had dissolved into it.

Delicate lines of vermillion paint outlined the low arched roof of the narrow, vestibular space. As I took a step forward, a colossal crack resounded, echoing through narrow hallways and multiform chambers. A searing pain shot through my heel. A jagged line had cracked the smooth mosaic upon the floor; its swirling yellow center and radiating triangular spokes in marble were stained a deep crimson with blood. Wincing, I crossed the threshold into a large hexagonal space with high windows. Each face of the volume met the other like folding curtains, alternating, with one face curved and the other straight. Soft light from twinkling stars poured in through the broken dome of the ceiling and the high windows onto the varied reticulations of crumbling brick walls and upon the disturbed surface of the floor. My wound stung while I carefully stepped upon the many cracked layers of floor and substrate that lay sharp as broken boulders, leaning on the uneven walls for support; their pockmarked surfaces crumbled into a fine dust in my hands. A muffled step echoed and multiplied in the chambers. My eye roved the chamber, yearning for her form, searching for her shape. Seven openings, large and small, pierced the alternating faces of the chamber; some angled away from it, pressed into a corner; some opened straight onto it; and some held tight, twisting stairs. I turned sharply around and caught a glimpse of her.

Without a moment to lose, I jumped the four steps up the twisting stair and reached a capsule shaped chamber. Inside its small, compressed shape, I saw neither her shadow nor her form. It had a broken roof, through which the starry light illuminated a four feet deep substrate under a collapsed floor, and a small opening in the shape of a doorway on the adjacent wall. I crossed its threshold to find another capsule shaped chamber, much the same as the last one and equally empty. I moved through the next opening into another capsule shaped chamber, but it was narrower, more clandestine. Its plaster ceiling, with ornate red lines painted upon it, was almost brushing my head. I did not see her, yet I felt her presence more keenly. I looked far into the dark corners, to see if she was folded somewhere hidden. Finding no sign of her, I crossed into another synonymous opening on the adjacent wall. Thus, I moved from one chamber to the next, propelled through the space like a crystal moving through an endless landscape of capillaries and capsules.

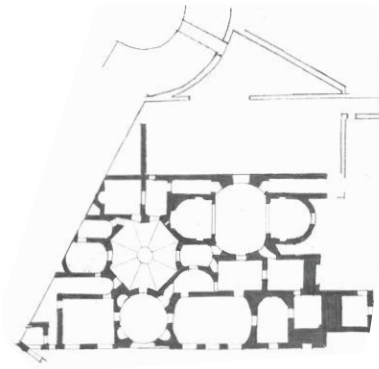
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My breath rose in a cloud in the airless chamber. Its clandestine proportions were stifling, and the icy damp was rising through its broken floors. Seeing no sign of her presence, I crossed the threshold into the adjoining space. Faint light from a cloudy night sky diffused into the circular chamber through a tight, arched window. A pool of water that had flooded the floor shone at the bottom. Vapors from its surface curled up into the dome sitting above my head. Four tall, round-

ed niches were at every corner, and between each of them, there was an opening into other chambers. While I stood there, pondering which opening she had slipped into, a shimmering shape moved from the niche into the darkest corner. I splashed through the hot water in her pursuit. Yet, there was no niche in that corner; the bricks turned at an angle and opened into a hidden inside passage, as though an axe had hacked at it discreetly. It led me into a low, winding channel. The brick walls were pressing in on me, its red dust mixed with the watery particles as I breathed.

I had reached another chamber; it was much tighter, and its edges were blurry, as though the vapors had been trapped here. Suddenly, I held my breath, for I could feel her moving. I reached into the dank, dark space blindly; something warm and fluid touched my fingertips. In a flash, the vapors knit around me thickly and her shadow shrank away - she slipped out through another opening. I ran after her, through more synonymous chambers and openings, until I saw a corner of her soft, white garments disappearing into a portal far ahead of me. Gasping, I reached the chamber and crossed its threshold. The grandness of it arrested me for a moment. A high roof was above me in the shape of an elongated dome; two half-domed spaces hung off on either side of it. Watery nerves circulated along the edges of the floor and poured into pools, brimful of cool water, inside the radiating demi-domes. I reached the center of the chamber and saw her shape in the darkness of the pool, her white garments blossomed like a flower under its black surface.

I jumped into the pool - icy water numbed every part of my body as I reached out to touch her elusive shape. Her white garment was stained scarlet as my foot bled and burnt in the cold water. As I got closer to her warmth, an entrancing dream arrested me in delicate blue light; I fell deep into a dream.



The third move was thus laid out.
In the measuring of dew drops on your tongue
an encapsulation ensued; embedded
in indecipherable chambers
Echoing, echoing into a
measured infinity, into an infinite mire.

Capsules and capillaries bound fluid edges,
In deeply woven fantasy, in dark cellular intricacy.
Endless, endless. Snake-like digging and
trawling at the edges; the perimeter swells,
and a tightening ensues around the throat.

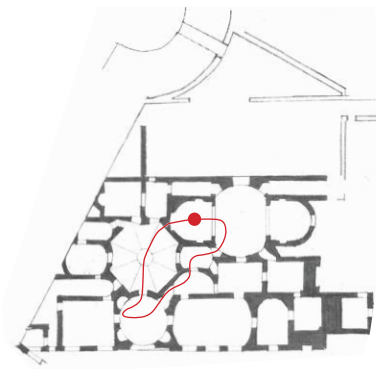
Entering through the first capsule,
Pitched at a diagonal, your head spun
In the hexagonal chamber. Pinching and pinching,
between plane and plane, you are caught
in a glistening, crystalline shape.
Arches rise as curtains fall, in endless movement,
In a twisting array. With openings everywhere,
your body is delayed, caught between
an eddy and a snare
(an asynchronous chanting, never the same again).

And in a chamber hidden away in darkness,
A caramel sun cracked open like an egg at your heel.
A mighty crack and a bloody floor.
Entranced, entrapped, you may try to grasp
My substance, yet I live between points of diffusion,
between air and air,
Circulating through osmotic membranes,
between portal and portal,
Between wall and wall of swirling matter.

In the depths of shadows where
mosquitoes sing their secret song,
A shaft of light like the hand of some intrusive god
Forced its way into this maelstrom.
And I had woven this room to the other, to the other,
Like a thousand sons borne of an imploding delight.
And none were similar to the other
Their proportions varied in sensation and delight,
Yet each held a whisper, a connotation of love,
Of attending pleasure and impending doom.

I am illusion and elision, and I have caught
You in manifold snares. Nothing can be
Undone, unless you undo it yourself.
The riddle is the illusion, the space is the snare.

And if your answer to my riddle
Be not correct, you will not reach that vanishing point,
That nadir, for which you have been so desperate.
The crescent moon perched delicately upon your head
Will be staked in the game. And you
will remain in utter diffusion,
between chamber and chamber,
Riddled and outriddled by this endless space.



I was suspended in slumber when I entered the dream. Silver scales grew upon my warm skin, my toes curled upward into a tail and my throat lost its blue hue to become a burbling gill. A shaft of sunlight refracted at its surface and threads of gold broke inside the curve of the pool as I swished through the cool water. I continued my search for Death under the surface of the water; she was reduced to a phantom in my dreams, eluding every attempt to hold her, avoiding me at every turn. Transforming into a creature of water, I attempted to overtake the game, by solving the riddle through parallel means.

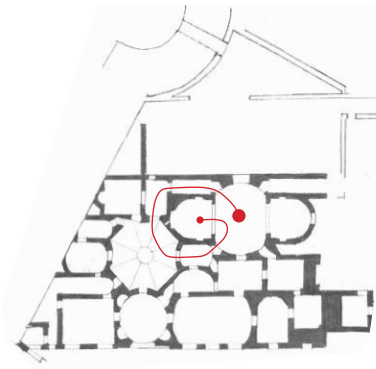
I slipped through a dark opening at the corner of the pool and was pushed through an open water channel, circulating around the capsule of the room. The netted sunbeams were reflected upon the radiating half-domes above me, making them shine like the calcite inside of a pearly shell. The channel circulated once around the room and then reached a central nerve; I was in the dark now, under the tiled floor. I was sucked through another opening and entered an underwater chamber full of columns. My silver proportions barely fit into the space; my gauzy tail brushed the rows of burnished brick.

The temperature rose as I moved deeper into the space, chinks of light broke through the surface above and I felt a sharp wave of heat convulsing through the waters. Another corner, another turn; the water was now boiling hot. Vapor rose through the tiled floor; the metallic silver scales upon my skin were growing transparent, the movement of every heated molecule was caught in it. A hot haze clouded my vision and my swishing tail slowed in the scorching waters. Welts were rising upon my slippery skin.

I moved desperately through winding channels, until I saw a light through a chink at the end. I moved toward it, dizzy and exhausted, and emerged into an open channel. Waves of heat flowed with me into this half-circular chamber, an azure sky winked from a crumbling broken roof; another winding channel and I was in a fully circular space, the dome above was glistening cool, like rock at the shore. A large beam of sun was caught in the water, threads of woven light

danced upon the dome, diffusing into the niches tucked in corners.

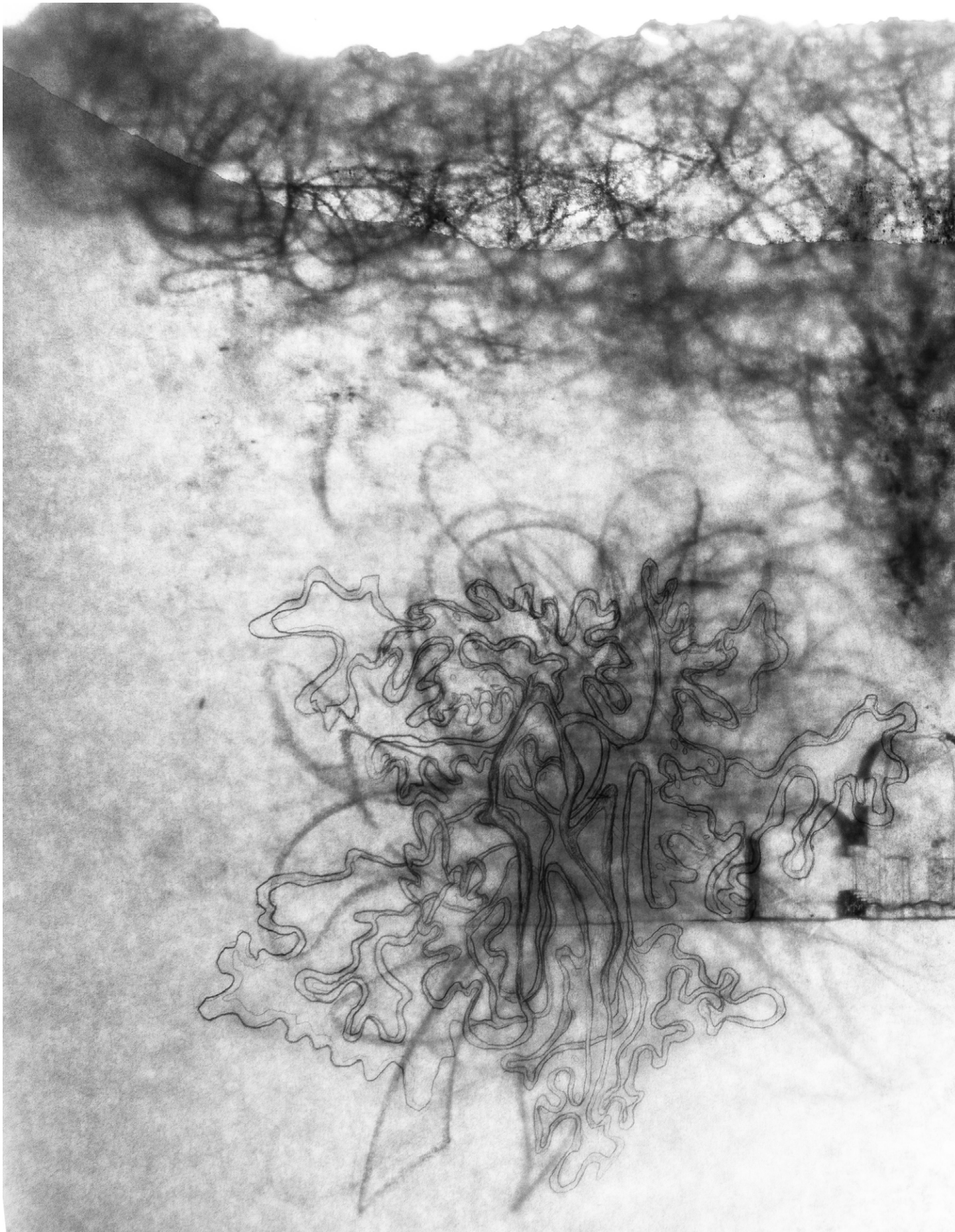
I moved into another dark opening to escape the sun's heat caught in water and emerged into an underwater chamber. The boiling, hazy space was full of columns of brick, covered with moss and mold, about the height of my dorsal fin. The waves of heat became less severe the deeper I moved into this space. I moved slowly toward its dark edges; it was a hexagonal chamber with twenty-six columns holding up its floor. I swished around its proportions, looking for an escape. I finally felt an opening in the wall and squeezed my way through it, twisting and bruising my scales. I fell in ice cold water. The radiating half-domed roof above me shone in pearly, calcite hues.



My dream broke like the shattering of glass. I woke gasping, with water up my nostrils and inside my eyes. The pool was as black and impervious as it was earlier. Blood rushed back to my cold limbs as I waded to the edge of the pool and sat shivering at its edge. The wound upon my heel had stopped bleeding and stood out in a jagged crimson line on my wet skin. I felt my constricted throat; the blue net had risen in a threaded swelling all along my neck, wounding round and round.

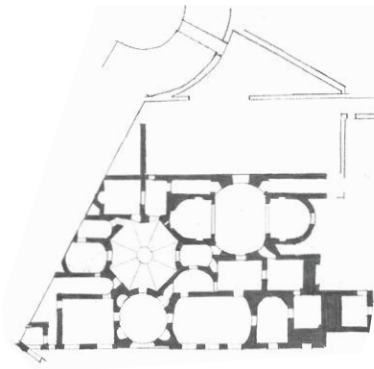
No sunbeams shone into the curved vaults of the half-dome now; its dusty bricks were stained with weeping lines of black moss. As I stood up, I felt a rush in my head and a ringing filled my ears as the endless space of the riddle unrolled around me. The elongated dome above me shook a little as the floor under my feet seemed to slip away like sand under a wave. I rushed into the opening at a corner of the chamber, anxious to keep the floor under my feet, and reached a small, vestibular chamber in the shape of a capsule. Gaping mortar on the stone floor twisted away into the shape of the chamber in miniature. I ran into the next chamber: it was a crystalline, hexagonal chamber, its walls were pushing into the chamber and away, alternately moving toward me and away from me. Its floor was cracking open into boulders as I ran from corner to corner. Its roof was swelling into windows, meeting at the edges, locking their arms and swaying, like tall grasses waiting to meet the rains. My head in a whirl, I moved to one of the seven openings and reached a similar vestibular chamber. In the dark, I felt a smooth, hard rock at my heel. A molten yellow center of a mosaic, swirling in solidified sun, was congealed with blood.

I moved toward the next opening and reached the chamber with the elongated dome, its transverse half-domed chambers still brimming with cold water. I exited it through another opening (there were four at each corner) and felt the floor slip away from me completely - as though my senses were out of joint - for I was in the same vestibular chamber, capsule-shaped, with the twisting mortar on the floor mimicking the shape of the chamber in miniature. The continuous web of the riddle echoed and echoed in these proportions, one larger space and several small, all attached to the other, endlessly, directionlessly.





THIRD MOVE
INFINITE CHAMBERS (PICCOLO TERME)

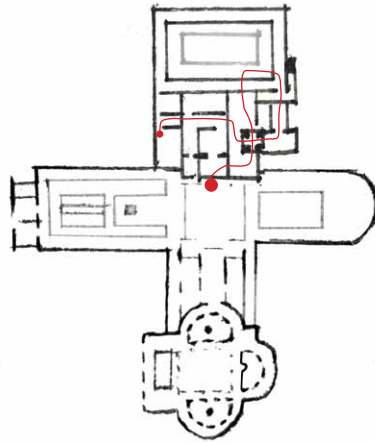


You were drawn into this multiplicitous lair,
Trapped between gossamer lines of blood,
all capillaries and capsules, pulsing, pulsing.
From temple to heel, circulating,
imprisoned between chamber and chamber.
Thus, lost in the riddle, I will claim
The silver moon upon your head
As my prize. Embedded in these
endless chambers, the crescent floated
from one opening to the next
in osmotic motion; morphing and weaving,
it held threads of delicate light, suspended
In its brittle sphere.

Then, a colossal crack.
Echoing, echoing
In imaginary hexagons, endless
hallways and multiform chambers.
Caught in deja-vu whispers. In a daze,
I had seized the alien object and shattered it
Upon the torn bedrock, the rocky substrate.
The moon broke in a thousand shivers,
Dusting the heavy air with suspended silver,
Strewn endlessly between chamber and chamber,
Scintillating and flickering, illuminating
Frigid waters and heavy vapors.

Hexagonal chambers and capsules,
Connected with vestibular capillaries
and shining demi-domes, were caught
in netted silver dance.
Your senses, rendered out of joint,
sang in your ears and shook floor and wall.

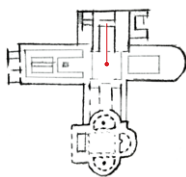
Until you could not distinguish between either.
The gossamer thin membrane between your
Body and this endless matrix was violated;
Each petal and particle of light blossomed
upon the heavy air, like flowers formed with
Crescent shapes and darkness.
Alas, you floated away with them,
Still searching for the crystal of intensity,
For it is neither here nor there.



The Fourth Move



Scintillating petals of light were still conjuring phantom shadows behind my eyelids. I looked up at the dark sky above me, heavy with clouds. There were no stars upon it now. A rawness stung my eyes, as though my retina was stretched into an ordained, unblinking wakefulness. As the ritual of the game dictated, I was again at the center of the gameboard, and I looked eastward, toward the third arm of the game. The units of the board had grown vertically in a sprawling structure five times my height. Its high arched entrances stood as though waiting for the gods to descend from the skies and enter it. It was the most forbidding, the most impenetrable of all rows of the game, and I was sure I would find Death buried deep inside it; I had only to be patient.



I jumped over the high threshold, landing hard on a dusty floor. Darkness was as a vapor in this space; the edges of mortar and corners of the red brick had reduced to dust and swirled about like scarlet ghosts. As I adjusted my eyes to the darkness, many tall columns filled the high-ceilinged space. Walls with arched openings were packed tightly into the back of the space. The smell of damp earth grew stronger the deeper I went into it. Tucked into a corner was a crumbling flight of stairs: I ascended one flight and then another, each floor was packed like a stack of cards into what smelled like a stifling earthy womb.

Another flight of stairs and there was a sudden release in the atmosphere. A whiff of cold night air filled my lungs. I had emerged upon a terrace. Tall, brick walls with arched openings were everywhere, crumbling and half-present, as though they held a phantom roof in the shape of the sky. Waves of warmth reached the tips of my dusty toes; heat was rising through the floor as I moved through the many arched openings, some small, some of godly proportions. I crossed the threshold of a small, dark opening and reached a tight little chamber. It was rectangular with a curved high ceiling. A rectangular oculus floated overhead, and

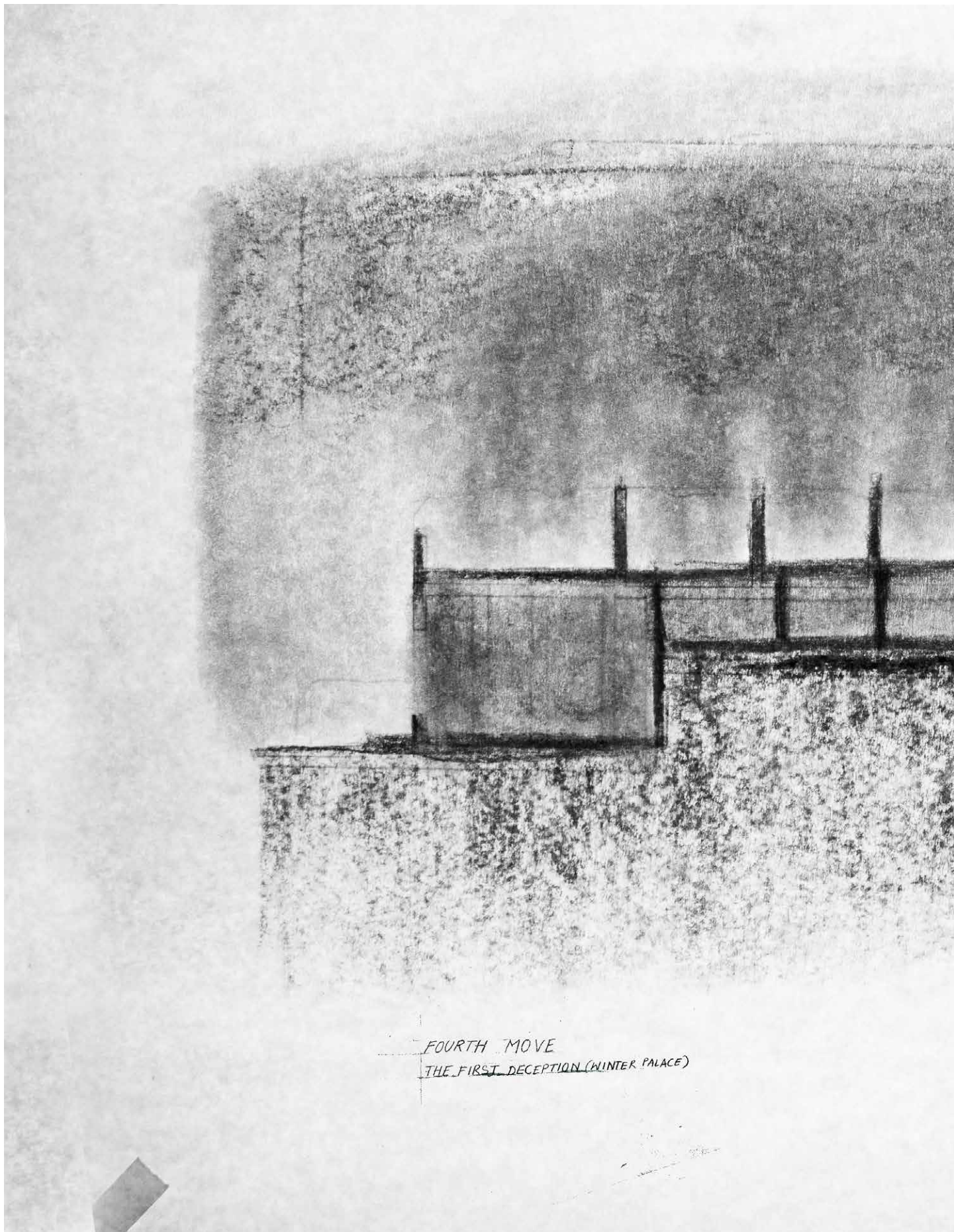
the darkness of the sky above was complete. Suddenly, unseen hands touched my eyelids. I cried out in surprise and moved sharply away. I looked everywhere for a sign of her, but no luminous figure shone through the maze of crumbling walls.

I stumbled out of the tight little chamber and crossed the threshold of another arch, and reached a large, rectangular space. A rectangular vessel was inserted at its center, almost two fathoms deep. A container rose in its center, brimful of steaming water. The outer walls of the container were adorned with niches, now semi-circular, now whole; water curled in wisps of vapor at the lip of the container. I took a step further, as though I could reach out my arm to the warm, curling vapors and delay them in my hands. As I did so, I felt it again; the brush of dark hands against my eyes, a complete occlusion. A slip and a crashing fall. I had fallen headfirst into the vessel. My fingers turned blue as I arrested my fall against the freezing cold surface of its floor. My head hit a corner of the niche and hot blood rushed to my forehead, ringing inside my eardrums as I lost consciousness.

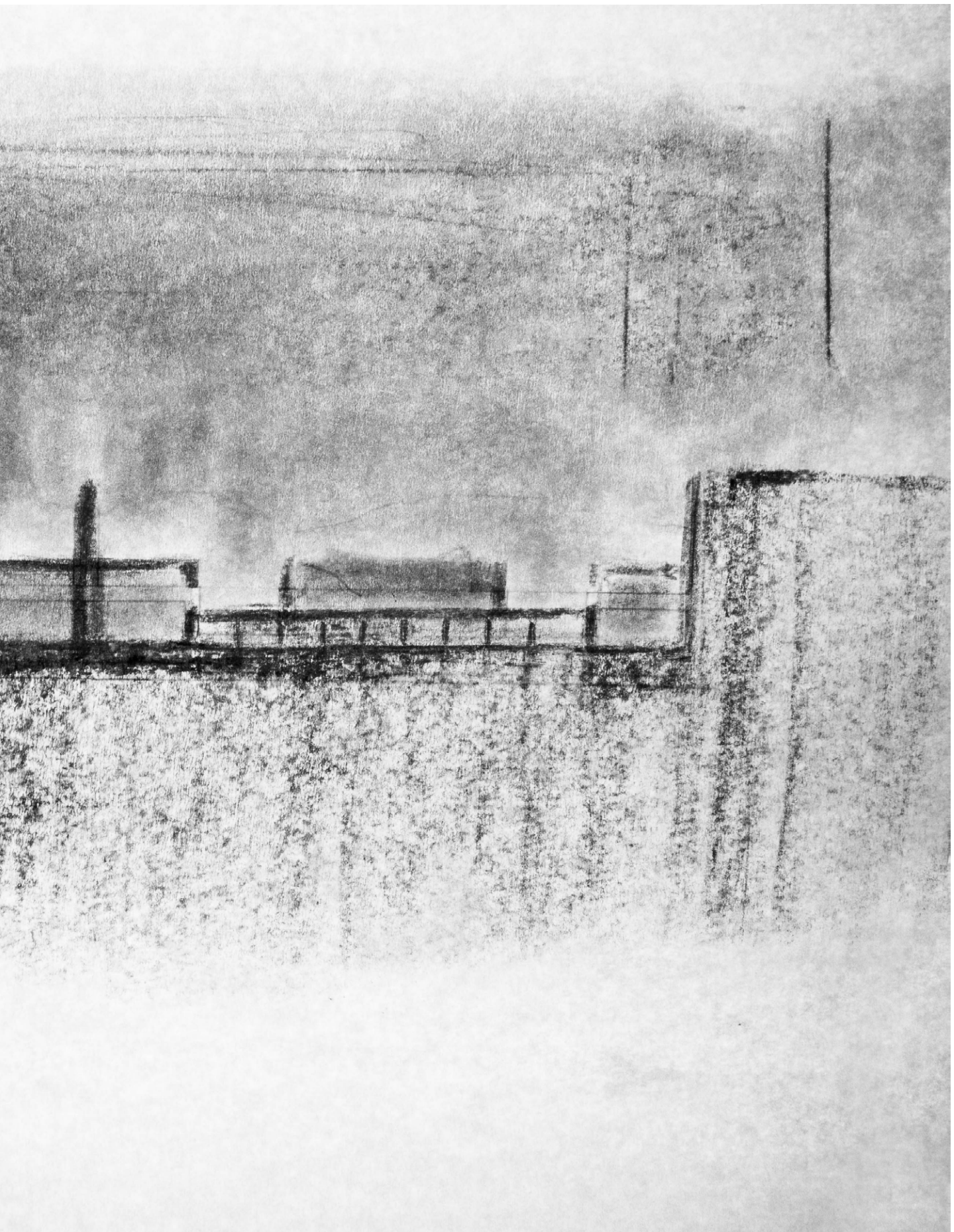
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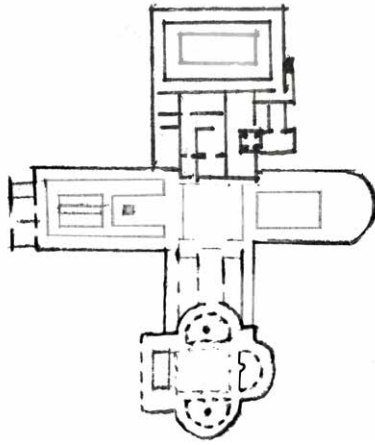
I awoke, sweating and clammy, and looked up at a rectangular oculus inside an eggshell shaped ceiling. The curtain of clouds had lifted, and stars winked down at me. The heat from the floor was comforting for a few moments, until a colossal wave of heat seemed to rise through the broken tiles; I pulled myself up, dazed, and moved into the open air. Yet, something was surely moving under the floor, some creature of heat. I leapt into the air as it seemed to grow fiercer, roaring silently, as though through a bellowing furnace. Heat rose from my feet to my limbs, until my entire body was enveloped by its oppressive vapors.

Fast and sharp sparks singed my skin as I ran desperately toward the edge of the terrace. A numbness was spreading through my limbs from my extremities, and I ran as though caught on the chariot of the Sun driving toward the sky. Reaching the precipice, I leapt toward the cold stars.



FOURTH MOVE
THE FIRST DECEPTION (WINTER PALACE)





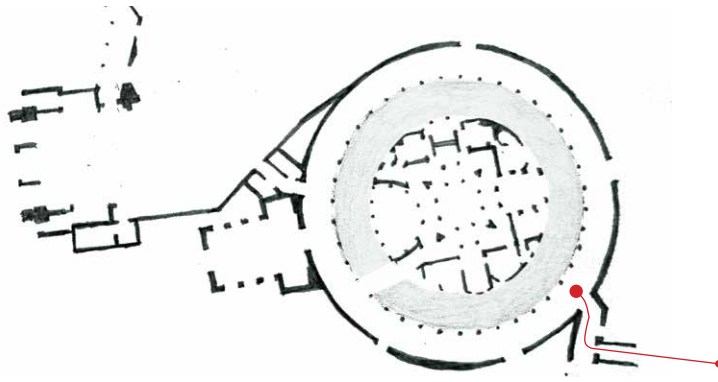
The fourth move was thus laid out,
In rooms that weave and weave,
With tunnels and planes crammed into
The bowels of earth. In vessels and
containers, brimful of steam,
curling and curling into niches.
And in surfaces that held
the coolness of the night, and trapped monsters
inside volumes, bellowing heat, out of sight.

Once, the tufa had stood out a bloody
Shade of red, freshly sliced,
it waited for the vessel to insert
Itself into the folds of fleshy, solidified soil. A cut,
A fall, a curdling density. Mineral inertia.
Yawning gaps closed as the breathing of soil
Slowed into rock; the damp darkness was burnt out
With meandering heat circulating through
Walls and floors. Then, an oozing cool,
A watery container, spilling over.

Entry through the gameboard
Is foreboding; the darkness here is a vapor
And a veil. Crumbling bricks dust and swirl
In this house of cards, silent as scarlet ghosts.
Thus, my hands occluded your eyes
In the frolic of play; in the ensuing chaos,
This was the first deception of the game,
The first you were fooled by my hand.

And thus, the riddle this time
was less obvious, for you were unprepared:

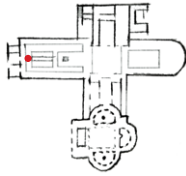
You fell into the trap of my hand,
And like Phaethon, the charioteer's son,
Your arrogance blinded you, and
subjected you to fire and freeze:
To dance upon the belly of a boiling creature,
And to freeze in the light of the cold stars.



The Fifth Move



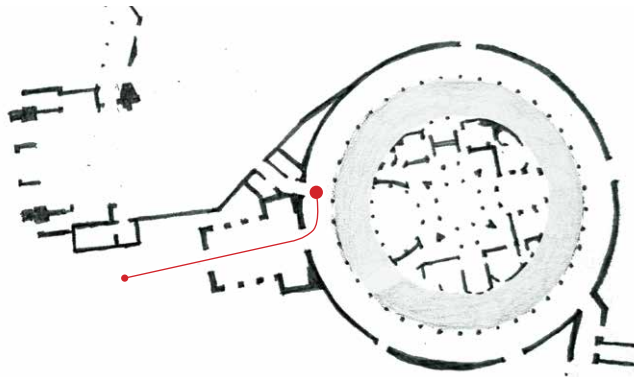
Wind rushed through my lungs and rang inside my head as I fell. The heat of the simulacrum I had just escaped still burnt on the soles of my feet as I hit the hard surface of earth at the center of the gameboard. Collapsing at the edge of the central square, I took a moment to breathe deeply and to realign myself to the gameboard, to its four axes, to the slowly breaking of dawn above me. Turning my gaze toward the north, I looked across at the fourth and final row of the gameboard: linear gardens marked the squares of the game in crumbling sectiled walls, rows of wild finocchio and willow sprouted untidily at the edges. Light-headed, I stood up and started toward the linear gardens. As I moved through them, a soft swish of water broke the silence. Kneeling at its edge to find the source of the sound, my fingers grazed the surface of water flowing under tall grasses: a glint of silver scales was startled in its shallows. As I stood back up, the verdurous rows on either side of me pulsated, as though intoxicated, and a hazy form in silk garments shimmered in the distance. Our eyes met; her dark orbs looked at mine and a warmth spread through my body. Weaving through crumbling walls, she led me to the edge of the gameboard, to a stony wall that held the earth, she waited for me at the threshold of an opening, beckoning to me.



Her silver garment flowed elusively ahead as I followed her through the tunnel. Channels on either side of it were pulsing with water moving back and forth. The deeper I went into this bowel of earth, the brighter her light shone. Soon-too soon- a shaft of golden sunshine cut into the end of the tunnel. She rose up the stairs and as I adjusted my eyes to the rays of sunshine, she dissolved into its light. Her step grew faint and soon I heard nothing; it was as though all sound was swallowed when I had emerged under the low arched portal. Crossing its threshold, I entered a circular vessel. Its sectiled brick wall, wrinkled and marked with rain, circled an azure sky, and was almost three times my height. Seven openings punctured the perimeter of the wall. The hard, stone floor was broken by a smooth, circular moat of water that cleaved the space in two: the internal

circle and the external circle. At the edge of the moat, along my path, the base of broken, uneven columns lay at regular intervals.

The central, internal space was an enigma for I could not quite make out what it contained; I walked on the path around the moat, deciphering the shape of the angled red brick walls inside it, half crumbling, half steady. Columns inside the island defied organization, their arrangement seemed as random as it was clear. At moments, they joined in a semi-circular or square-like order, then as I moved past, the order diffused, for no shape seemed to be complete, as though no absolutes were decided upon during its creation. As I roved around the vessel, intent upon the island, I felt a stirring in the portal directly opposite me. Hoping to see my opponent again, I looked up eagerly. In an icy moment, hackles rose along my spine and the island clarified into order, as though a line was struck through it. A creature with a pair of burning amber eyes was staring at me. Its body, striped in fiery orange and black, was arrested in motion; its sinews were clutching at electric muscles, waiting to pounce.

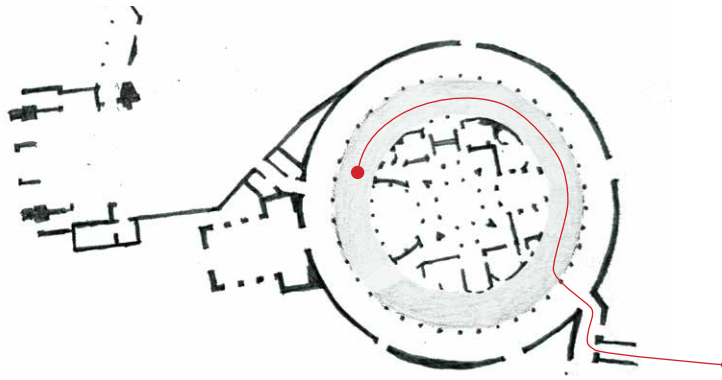


I was once in the garb of a majestic creature. My eyes burnt bright and I was in fiery body, striped with twisting blades of black and orange radiating from my torso. My limbs had shortened into a muscular assembly of steely sinews. My heavy shoulders moved in a stealthy whisper, (paw upon paw, sheathed claws) prowling this alien land. I was moving through the towers, their tall, poised structures, in turrets of sun-bleached brick, rose all around me, half crumbled, and with yawning gaps. Their proportions were high and narrow, like overgrown smokestacks, composed of congealed dust and ashes that had accumulated over centuries. Rainy tears had stained the winding walls black in patches and corners. Through the yawning openings in its walls, I saw her, dissolved heavily in the caved-in chambers. I growled impatiently as I felt her presence all around me but I could not make solid substance of her.

The soil was hard and draughty, segments of the smoky rungs lay broken upon the ground, strewn like meteors on a red, ashy surface, akin to Mars. My mantle grew tiresome as I walked through the towers; a rumble of hunger spasmed through my body and a maddening heat was growing inside my gut. Thirst plagued me, and I sniffed the air hopefully for a sign of water. A long, narrow pool ran at my side as I moved through the towers, yet it was parched dry. The stacked volumes were angled around me, suggesting an enclosure, suggesting a center. I felt watched by her as she watched me.

I pawed the ground, hoping to feel some moisture, some wetness under the skin of earth. As I reached the other end of the dried pool, the sun was setting and a flock of birds took off after it, chasing its ripe redness, from the top rungs of the smokestacks. I licked my lips as I smelled their blood. Past the last twisting turret, I folded my limbs under the silver green shade of an olive tree. Just as I was about to shut my eyes, exhausted in the heat, something stirred at an opening far away, tucked behind the tower. A torso appeared above a half-broken column, his skin was dark like burnished copper; a blueness seemed to radiate from his neck to his face and chest. In another blink, he disappeared behind the vertical trunks of the columns.

All my senses were stretched alert. I flattened myself against the brick wall leading toward the entrance of the chamber. My paws did not displace a single particle of dust as I neared the entrance; every muscle in my body was alert to his movement. I crouched in wait a few feet from the entrance and heard his footsteps pacing inside the chamber. A wetness had risen in the air and the metallic smell of blood was overpowering as I approached the entrance.



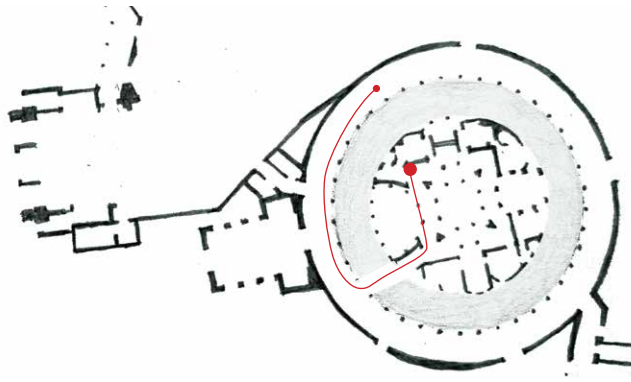
I travelled through dark watery channels, swishing my gauzy tail and my silver scales, in pursuit of a crystal of intensity submerged in the cool waters. It was a shard of the shattered moon and had fallen with a plop upon the water's surface at nighttime. It had lit my underground simulacrum with a soft white light. It guided me out of the hexagonal maze, into dark watery channels and through submerged leafy gardens. I propelled myself into another tunnel, following its light, pushing against the current, and I emerged onto an open basin. The moon shard melted away in the refracted sunlight that shone underwater, the sky above was fiercely blue, but there were hardly any ripples upon the surface of the water for almost nothing moved.

It was a deep basin, deeper than it was wide. Vertical structures were growing above me on both sides, striving toward the sky. A tapestry of multicolored moss and weeping black tears stained them, a strange richness grew in this sterile, stony environment. Hairlike tendrils grew along the edges of the basin, waving their green fingers softly as I swished through. I moved along the basin, encountering no obstacles, until I realized I had reached the same portal through which I had entered it. Another ambulation, and it was clear that I was on a circular path.

As I traversed in the shallows, staying close to the surface of the cool water, feeling the warm sun reflect off my silver scales, a fiery apparition hovered above me. Its orange and black stripes glistened in the sunlight; its muscles rippled softly as it came to a still. With a shiver of fear, I plunged deep into the water. The creature stood stock still, holding a position of intense concentration. I continued to the other side, moving cautiously under the veil of the dark waters. A hazy outline of a human appeared at another point of the circle; his skin was dark like burnished copper; his upper body was a striking deep blue like the depths of a river in spate. He was equally still, equally intent upon the horizontal game that was being played above me. The shadows playing inside the water stretched as the day waned, but both creatures held their stance resolutely.

That moment when precisely half my circular path was caught in shadow, an al-

tercation arose; the fiery creature pounced upon the blue one. I saw an arm clutch at a mossy vertical structure above me and I went even deeper into the pool in alarm. However, I soon had to return to the surface of water for the depths of the pool were stale and airless; nothing broke its continuity, nothing had changed its state of inertia. As I came up to the surface, the fiery apparition loomed over me, and this time, its eyes were transfixed upon me; I instantly dipped deeper into the channel. I heard a splash above me. Steely claws were brandished underwater for a moment. I stayed under the cover of the darker waters, twisting my body away, propelling myself around the circle.



Every muscle and every breath in my body was held in tense anticipation as I waited for the creature's next move. Its eyes were burning embers, fixed upon me unwaveringly, its legs stretched taut. Shadows lengthened around the circular vessel. Every moment was protracted while we assumed this stance. Crumbling nerves along planes of bricks were reflected upon the unmoving water, and a cloud moved across the sun, diffusing the sharp shadows. In a flash, the creature was upon me, its claws sharp and alive. Its putrid breath filled the air as it pinned me to the ground, its jaws inches from my throat. A wave of adrenaline coursed through me and I grabbed the nearest broken pillar, desperately pulling myself away from the clutches of the beast. I gasped as its teeth tightened around my leg, sinking deep in my flesh.

With a tremendous effort, I extricated myself from its jaws and ran flat out. The uneven pillars blurred as I ran in the circular vessel. The beast was at my heels, its jaws snapping furiously. I saw a drawbridge through the corner of my eye; before I knew it, I was across it, frantically cranking the lever. The beast came roaring after me, its claws tearing and scratching at the edge of the bridge. Breathing fast, I let go of the lever and the drawbridge fell with a thud into the internal circle of the island. Our eyes met over the water, its mouth bloody, its muscles alert.

I cowered and moved deeper into the island, looking for a place to hide, to enfold myself. Finding an inner corner of a brick wall, I nestled inside it, clutching at my wound, watching the blood pour. The world was becoming dizzyingly finite inside the island. Just as I was about to give in to exhaustion and go into a dreamless sleep, I felt a pair of amber eyes upon me: the creature had found a point along the external circle where it could reach me with its eyes. I broke into a cold sweat. Flattening myself upon the floor of the circular vessel, I crawled to the other side of the island. I heard the tiger moving around the moat, roaring softly. Peering at it through a chink in the wall, I saw it submerge its heavy claws inside the water, testing its depths; suddenly, a silver glint of fish scales, a resounding splash and a frustrated growl.

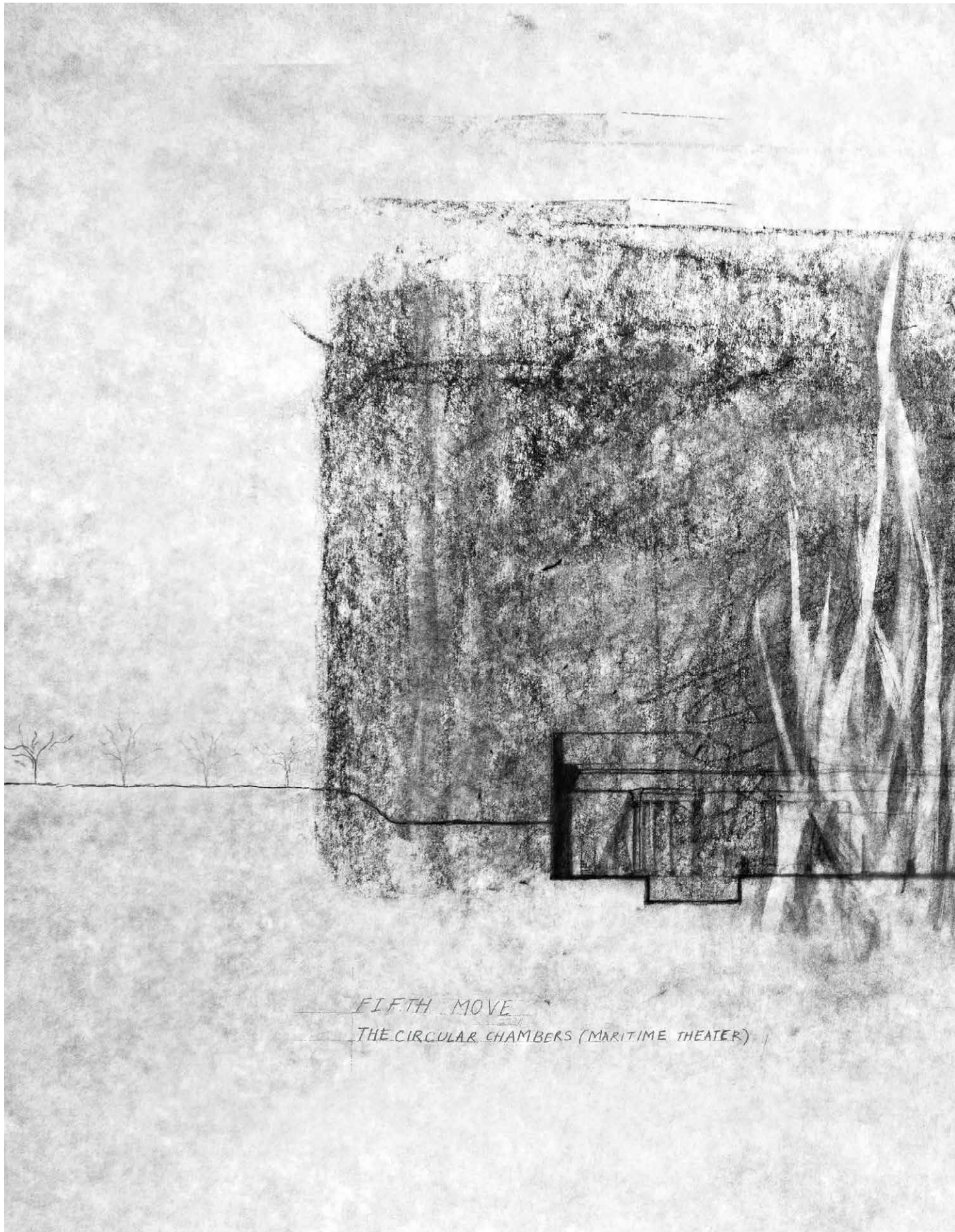
Soon, it had found my clandestine corner and was sniffing at my blood, separated

from me only by the moat. I could still smell its foul breath upon my skin, its claws had cut deep ridges on my arms and my torso. Bloody red gashes were all over my body, as though its grip had never left me. As I looked through the half-broken planes of brick wall inside the internal space, I knew it would eventually find its way into the internal circle, the moat would not dissuade it for much longer.

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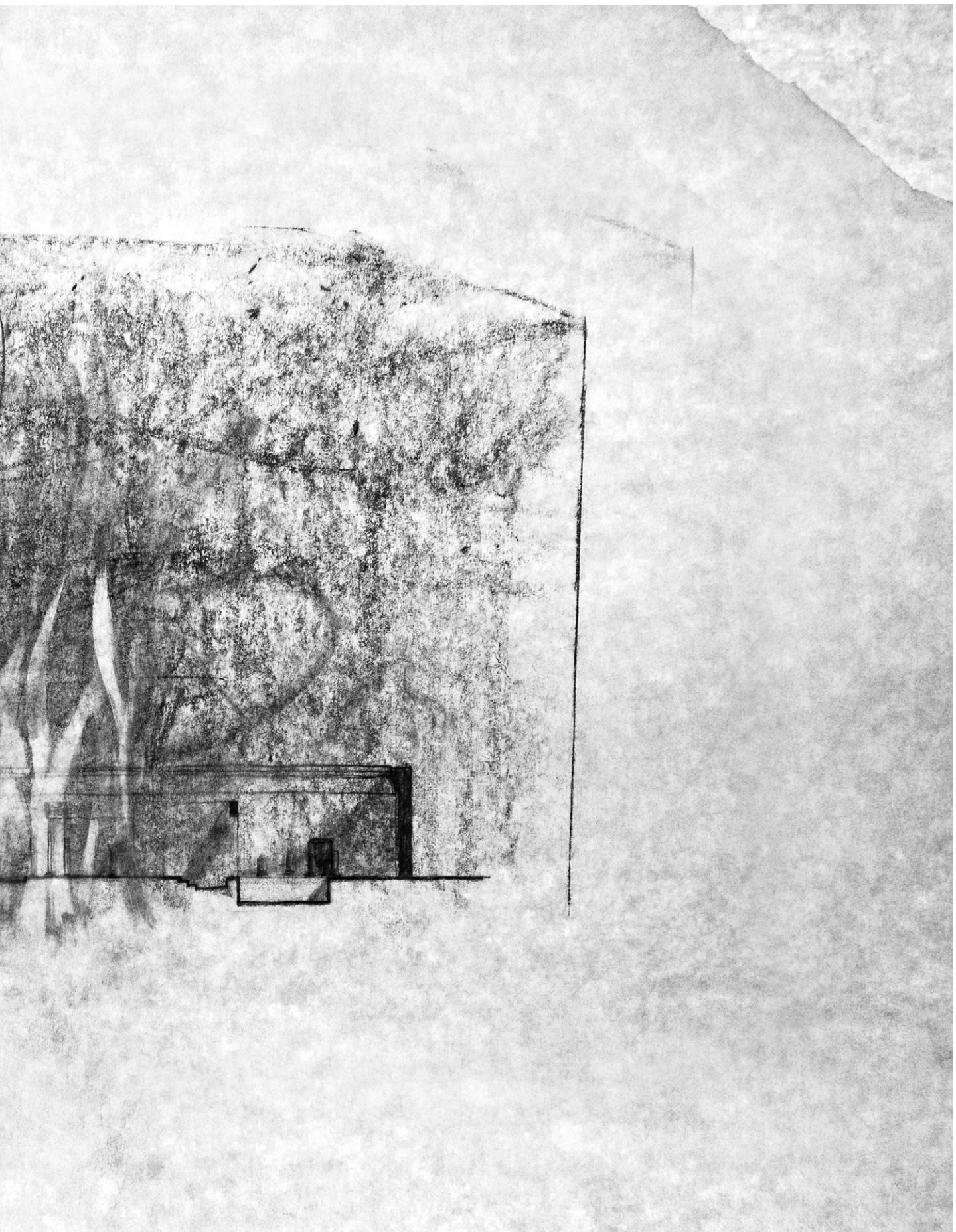
My head was swimming in the heat and in the prison of the circular vessel. The bleeding from my wound had slowed to a trickle, but I could find no way out of this island without falling prey to the beast. Its amber eyes still lingered upon me hungrily; what it desired, above all, was my flesh. Unable to bear it any longer, I extracted my knife from my possessions and emerged from the corner. The beast assumed an alert pose, its ears and eyes trained to every movement in my body. Slowly, I cut away at my wound, cleaving skin and flesh from bone. The creature prowled in excitement at the pungent smell of blood. I cut until I saw the pinkish white of my bones. With shaking hands, I threw my flesh over the moat, to the external circle. In an electric second, it was devoured, leaving a fresh bloodstain upon the ground. Piece by piece, I cleaved my flesh, and threw it over the water. As I continued removing the contours of my body, the flesh clung even more strongly to the bone, anticipating the razor's edge. I cleaved and cleaved until I was reduced to bone and sinew. The tiger sniffed at the air, waiting for more, but the smell of blood was evaporating quickly. It made one final ambulation of the external circle and retreated toward the opening it had come from.

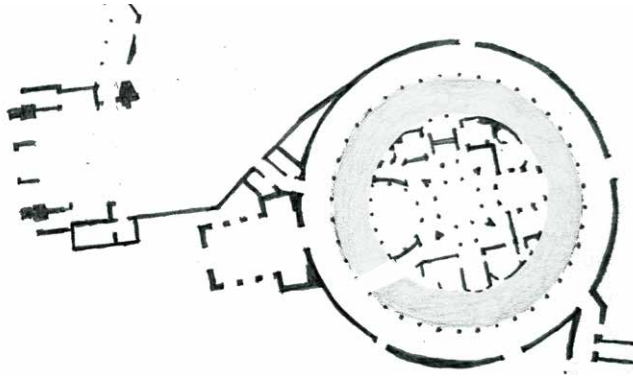
I heard its measured steps becoming fainter and fainter, moving away from the circular vessel. I drew in a stertorous breath, but nothing held it or circulated it. I moved toward the center of the island, where the bases of crumbling columns met in four bisected circles, concave and pinched at the corners, like a circle turned inside out. Heat was weaving upon me in a numbing haze, from the tips of my fingers and toes, to my very center. I reached the center of the island and collapsed, exhausted. Every ray of sun beating upon me felt like a spear upon my naked shape. In this mirage of heat, I felt my bones melting: every rib upon my chest softened into flutes and my bones boiled into a circular array of crumbling columns in the circular vessel.



FIFTH MOVE

THE CIRCULAR CHAMBERS (MARITIME THEATER)





The fifth move was thus laid out;
but you bettered the instruction.
Caught in a sieve of your own Thought,
You reached the nerve center, the distillation of the game.
You passed the outer membrane, laced with the riddle,
The imminent threat, to hide in the circular
Apparatus, churning and chafing, its
Intersecting planes and vacillating portals
In radial, independent motion, mapping
The skies in angular spaces.

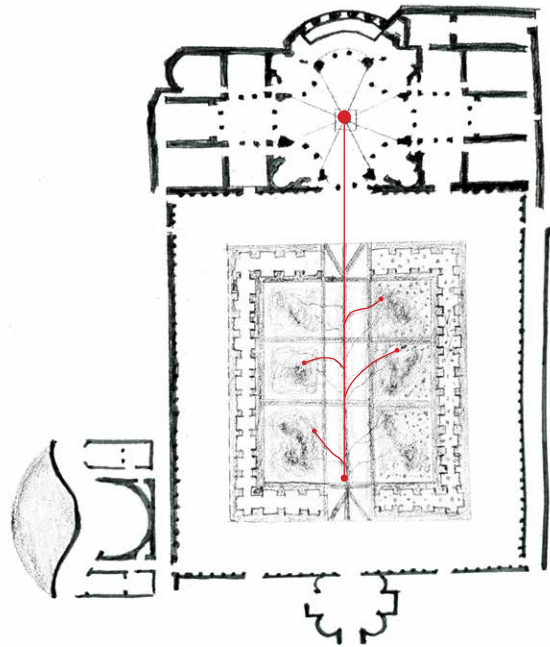
In realms of such concentric madness,
you can either be damned in
a vindication of reality, a vicious spiraling into
The earth, or you may be embedded in constellations,
as ascending atomies in the atmosphere.

Yet you answered the riddle with a
Sublimation; born from eyes that
were once covered by her hands,
you had emerged out of a total darkness.
In that density of your being, gaps arose,
in the moat between circle and circle,
You were cleaved apart. Your madness sated,
You moved to the center, all decimated, emptied out,
between dissected circles,
All pinched and pressed, embedded
in an incomplete square.

The razor's edge met with the rays of the sun
And you were impaled upon multiple spears
born of your own heat. Your bones
Hardened into a misshapen solidity, into

Vertical and inert columns, half broken.
And what was left of you was held
in the eye of fire, at the center of the circle.

Until the dome swelled above the circular vessel,
half held by the gods and half by me. Within
It, you found the salve of release:
You traversed it, coffer by coffer,
Until you rose up in smoke
Through the golden rim of the oculus.
Thus, you ascended the horizon of the skies;
In unison, your particles, flaming, met the
ripeness of the dusk. Such was
your construction in the celestial realm,
That the planets in their acidic humors, wispy veils,
All covered in ether, adopted your pieces
to embroider the skies.



The Final Move



The clouds, heavy with rain, rolled and unrolled impatiently upon the dark skies. In the garb of a sinuous creature, I emerged onto the surface of a curved pool. My shimmering silver form undulated like a liquid ribbon upon the water; my spine moved vigorously, contracting and tightening rapidly. When the wrath of the goddess had been unleashed in the cave, the moon substance had spilled into the water and had caught me in its maelstrom. Once the chaos had calmed, I had retreated into the cistern. Minutes became hours in that liminal space. My smooth, black skin shed in wrinkled layers as I lay coiled in the dregs of the moon substance. Sliding out of the cracked folds of skin, my body was encrusted with speckled porphyry in obsidian rings.

Exiting at the other side of the cistern, I had slithered many miles under the skin of the earth in search of the player. Borne on the currents of water, I had travelled along the rising and falling contours of the land, until my cold-blooded body was numb and bruised. Through countless underground tunnels, wide as streets, and narrow water channels, hardly wider than my slender body, I had reached the end of a tortuous journey at this shallow, curved pool. The mountain air sat serenely here. I swam on the surface of the water, drawing in cold air through my slits of nostrils. Rainclouds moved back and forth, occluding and revealing the stars in turn. Soon, humidity swelled in the air and thunder crackled across the skies. In one swift motion, I retreated into the lip of the pool and coiled into its clandestine niche, out of sight.



I sat silently, perched among the stars. Heavy clouds, pregnant with desire, moved around me and veiled my burning particles; they rumbled darkly and continued their lusty performance, waiting to meet the surface of the earth. As the night grew darker, I was inundated by them; humidity encased my ashy particles, invading into my lightness. I fell through the skies, inside droplets of rain, and into a rectangular simulacrum at the center of the earth. As the first droplets fell into the marshy gardens, drums sounded in the distance. In my disembodied state, I could not tell where it came from nor who beat it to the rhythm of the rumbling skies.

The rectangular simulacrum, marshy and chaotic with pulsing nerves of water, rippled silver as my droplets fell into it. Crumbling volumes radiated away from the rectangular gardens; my droplets trickled into the intricate folds of their miniature columns and tight arches that were arranged in endless repetition around the watery vessel as though the space was once set in glittering gems. Half of my droplets gathered at a central nerve of water that cut through the rectangular space: on one end was a cavernous structure, its brick laid niches were round and supple, stained with weeping lines of black moss. The other end was a tight space, filled with slender columns, an unfolded living room full of crumbling walls and sinuous curiosities. Its center was drenched with rain and a carpet of moss glistened inside it; mapped in eight bisected circles, four concave and four convex, it was surrounded by columns that wove in and out along this curve (compressed into concave curves along the diagonals and released into convex curves along the central nerve). As my drops threaded through the fluted carvings of the slender columns, they shone like newly hewn stone. My particles dawdled in the crevices of their upside-down volutes and their miniature marble faces, contorted in mirthful laughter. It was the beginning of *lila*, the last act of the game.

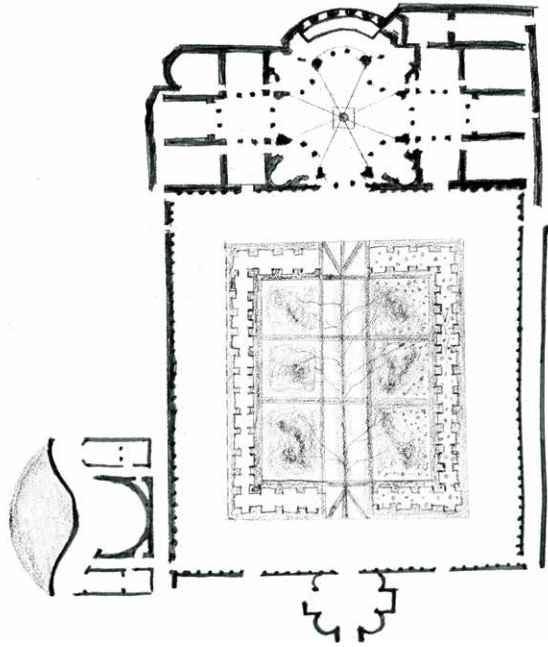
The droplets, filled with my particles, tingled with the energy of an imminent thunderstorm. Fine drops of rain drizzled lightly and a blanket of mist covered the space. Half of my droplets circulated through ornamental veins of water in the rectangular simulacrum, through chevron shaped offshoots and small kinetic nerves siphoning water. Within its proportions, tucked between these nerves, water had mingled with earth in chaotic ways: an accumulation of liquid had created a landscape of marshes, pulsing and holding liquid silently, between fronds of sedges, of swollen cattails and wild paddies. Wide plates of lotus leaves floated here and there with white, unopened buds.

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My droplets circulated this simulacrum, from one nerve of water to the other. Some particles settled to the bottom, some were absorbed into the tissues of

the delicate green stems in the simulacrum. They pulsed through sturdy, upright stalks, and reached the milky interior of a golden vessel inside the paddy plant. The embryotic seed chamber swelled, for the goddess lay raw within it, still asleep. She grew heavy and broke the golden husk of the chamber, and soon fell into the simulacrum of the marsh, releasing my particles from within her golden chamber into a nerve of water.

My droplets were siphoned through small kinetic nerves into the central nerve of water. The skies were growing restive again, and my droplets, in their closeness, gathered momentum: through the central nerve, they flowed into a dark channel toward the sacred center of the game, between columns curving inward and outward.



In the simulacra of Cura,
 The waters fell and swilled softly.
 Your body formed of starry matter, of ore-like droplets,
 diffused in the depths of the furrowed clouds.
 Tucked between its velvet sheets, between
 The darkness of the night and vaporous matter.
 you rained upon my land again,
 Like the fingers of love that want to caress
 Deeply, deeply.

You soared through the skies, wielding
 Your celestial particles, softened and liquified, they
 Circulated in my pulsing, marshy waters.
 Thus, you defied the confines of your body,
 coursing through nerves of my watery vessel,
 coursing through my delicate stems and
 into the lair of the sleeping goddess,
 Where milky seeds germinated, intact.
 Your particles passed her golden
 Chamber, invigorated with her substance,
 And you returned to the substrate, into the limn,
 where water met earth in chaotic bliss.
 Tingling with energy, your particles move like
 Blood into the central vein. And through the axis,
 they reach the center, strings of droplets ribbon into

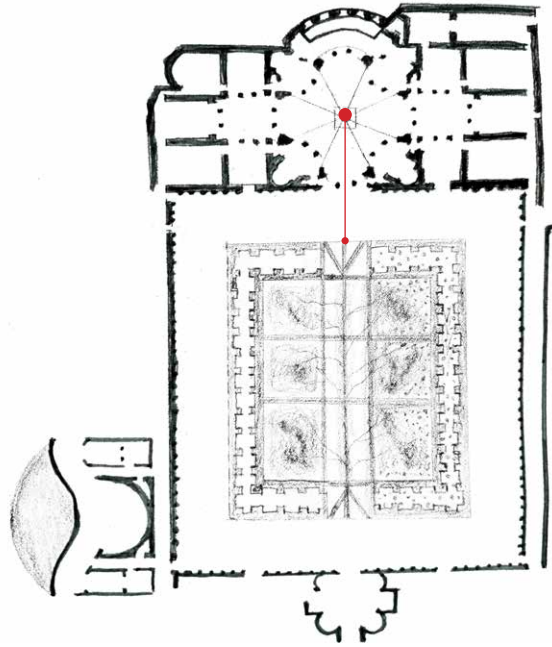
your body, wounding round and round your bony form.

Once materialized, your faculties united,
You must answer the riddle, or be caught
In a frenzied dance, that would forcibly mingle
Pleasure with madness. Thus, your form, newly minted,
Will become more solid than you would like:
Earth, water and fire will mix at the center,
And your fleshy form will crystallize in mineral matter.

In realms of such cajoling,
Between curve and curve, weaving and weaving,
Can you answer me this: where, upon this gameboard,
Perched on what cloud, trapped in what space,
Do you imagine you will find that
Crystal of intensity you search for?

‘At that singular instance when
thunders would roar with fury,
And when the drums swell to a crescendo,
And the rainsong issues from the
very tissue of the earth in greeting to its lover,
I will reach the center and find
that moment of crystalline perfection,
Between bisected circle and circle, tucked with precision.

At that moment, her white garment, nestled in milky vapor
Will add flesh to my cadaverous being.
When I am held delicately in the balance,
these sinuous shapes would hint, no more, than at
Being held in an embryotic enclosure and at
Being freed in the same breath.’

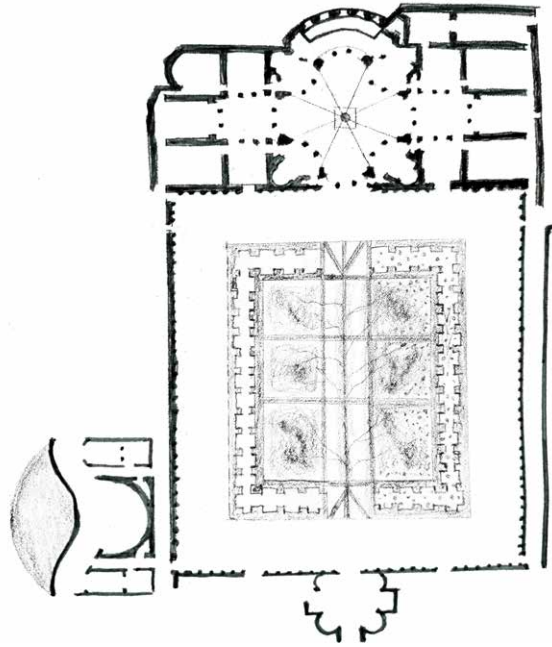


The drums swelled to a crescendo as the clouds burst forth. Sheets of rain poured into the rectangular space with dizzying energy; the song of rain issued from the very earth, the dulcet notes resounding inside the crumbling vessel. My droplets, pulsing under the carpet of moss, flooded the sacred central space, between bisected circles. Strings of pearly droplets were coagulating into fluid proportions; my skin swelled and frothed as cool fingers of rain constructed my face, my torso, my limbs. The bony proportions of my body rolled from liquid waves into flesh. The congealment was broken by no wound. My skin was tinted blue, discolored by Vasuki's poison. A metallic luster was upon it, as though the ashes of burnt material were flicked upon my body. I bent my now supple knees and felt a tingling warmth spread from head to toe as my shoulders lifted from the watery scaffold around me.

The frenzy of the clouds moved into my feet and electrified my arms: I moved between concave and convex circle, moving between the points of their intersection to each of their centers, with eyes softly closing. A crack of thunder flashed across the skies and its roar echoed all around the earth. The pace of drums quickened with my thinking feet; I returned to the center and broke away again. The sinuous volumes approached and curved away. The string of columns came in and out of focus, their bases weaving in curves, moving inward and outward, in alternating concavity and convexity. As I danced, the memory of pressed and pinched half-circles, cadaverous in their concavity, unfolded around my feet: it was where the fiery spears had once struck me.

As I danced, the wounds that had once cleaved my body burnt and swelled. An

encrustation was forming upon my skin, as though something hard was pushing out solid, crimson veins into my flesh. Whorls and ridges formed upon my skin, breaking into rubious spinels. Droplets of water sizzled upon my skin as glittering gneiss covered me in a corselet. The tips of my fingers radiated into winking reds, from ochre to scarlet, and reached tendrils all the way up my dancing arms. My limbs grew heavy with grey granite, and my hips rolled smoothly in their heavy sockets, shaking the ground as my frenzied dance continued. Large gashes of labradorite hardened at my throat and radiated around my neck. A necklace of veiled, multicolored swellings, broke through skin like eyes from closed lids, around my collarbone and my forehead, where my jewels had once rested warm against my skin. As I pranced between the center of another concave curve and its intersection, the heaviness spread and weighed upon my lungs. Breathless, I reached the center of the bisected circles, the center of the earth, and spread my arms in a dancing embrace of wind and lightning, as my body froze into stone.



The final move was thus laid out.

Again, you returned to the center with frenzied body,
 where your decimated body had once been
 Caught between pinched circles, rained upon
 By fiery spears. Congealed in watery droplets, you
 Formed between inversed circles, swelling,
 around your being; your madness swooned
 in such abundance. Dithyrambic, delirious,
 Your limbs moved with abandon.

The skies rumbled and rumbled into a chorus:
 the thunder's sound, deep and reiterated
 rolled around, loud as a hundred drums.
 With thinking feet, you moved to the center
 Of the moving circles, to their intersections
 And back, threading, threading, caught in its eddying
 bays. Caught in half delight and half frenzy,
 you search for that crystal of intensity,
 which was neither here nor there.
 It was caught inside your being, growing from
 Pulsing liquid to congealing flesh,
 From poisoned throat to mineral veins.

Your insides spun in gathering fury,
 The wounds and chasms in your cleaved being
 Swirled into stone; your blue throat was encrusted

with brilliant gashes of azure; glittering gneiss
erupted upon your torso in whorls. Fiery opals
Broke your skin like eyes from closed lids:
Liquid yellow, striped orange and obsidian black,
delicate rings of fire were buried inside your being.

Thus, frozen in mineral matter,
The final devolution was staged.
But the spell will be broken soon
For your form will be plied in oscillation
In weaving forth and weaving back.
The gaps and spaces in your being
Will unravel and unsettle again,
For the last game is yet to be played.



FINAL MOVE
RECTANGULAR SIMULACRUM (ORO)



The Last Game



I sit perched upon the edge of the gameboard,
my vision clear as the rising sun, and
my garment spread around me,
Wide and moving as an ocean.
I see your decimation from this edge,
your fragments strewn across the gameboard.
Thus, your devolution ends, and mine begins.

As I consume your selfhood, mine unravels,
For my pieces of the game, are not as clear
As yours. They exist in a parallel plane
and take shapes that echo your thoughts.
For I am the pieces and I am the gameboard;
and I must fracture my being, my whole,
At the nerve center, where all the universe
is concentrated. It is the point from which
I had petered out and the point where I was born.

For there was nothing here in the beginning,
All was covered with my formlessness,
with eternal hunger. In this circular vessel,
I had made a mind for myself: I had shone,
luminous with light, and from
my circular radiation, water was born.
In its frothing tides, the water solidified
And became the shore of earth –
thus was formed the outer circle.
I had exhausted myself upon that shore,
and out of me had arisen the brilliant flux of fire;
circular and cooled – and thus
Was formed the inner circle.

Precipitated in these circular waters,
latent in the island, in its constant circularity,
in its radiating inwardness, I am at the
epicenter of my hunger, at the navel of my being.
And this is where my devolution ends and begins.
With a pinch at my navel, I wrench myself inside out;
my pieces lurch forward as the fabric of the land,

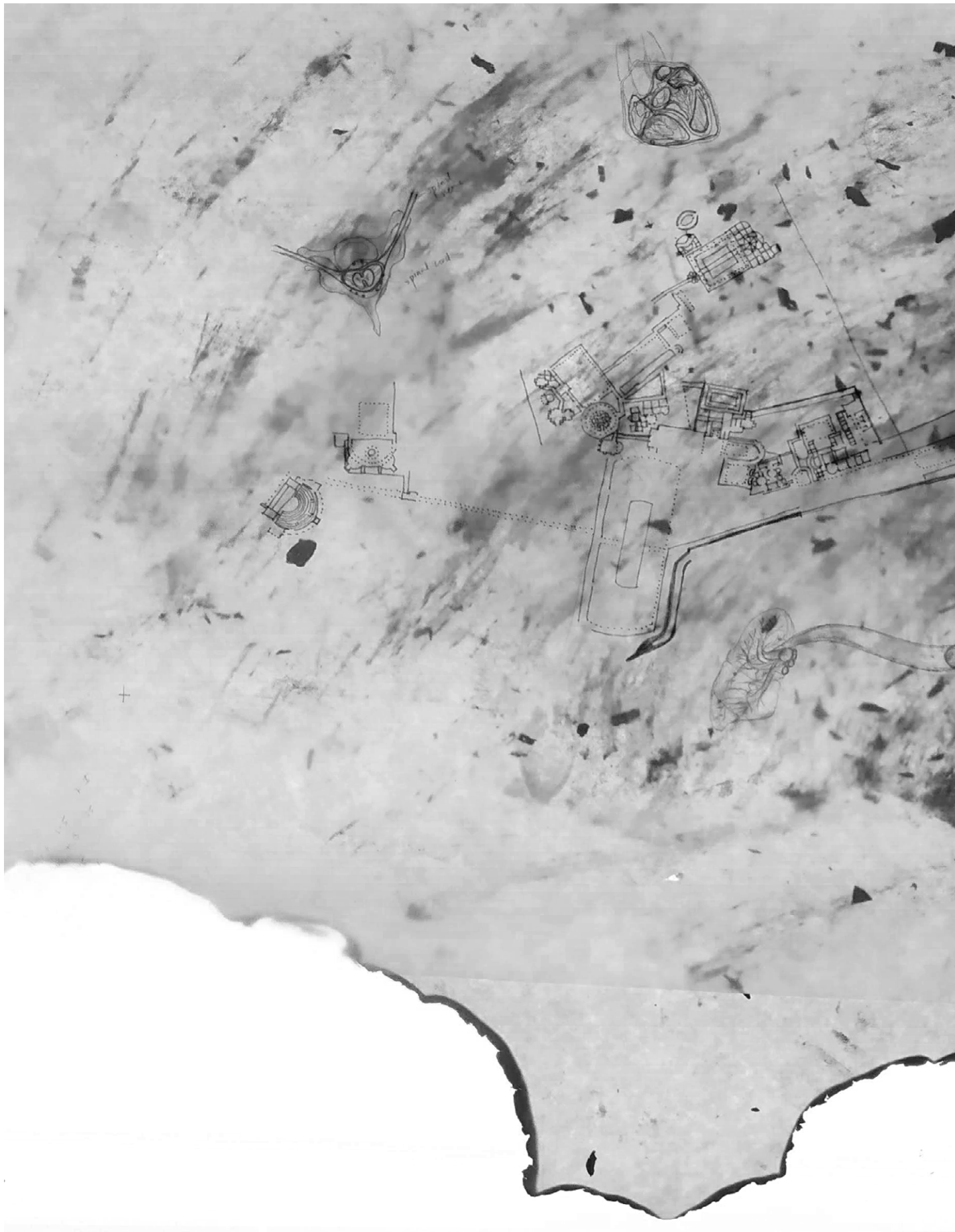
the thin veneer of reality, is yanked away
sharply, like skin parting from flesh.

The capsules contained in my infinite chambers,
Hexagonal, hexagonal, elongated, unstable,
break into paroxysms of violent delight,
As they are pulled out, splayed like
bloody intestines upon this new ground,
Upon this no-skin, no-earth. All pockmarked voids,
Untouchable, untouchable; in pernicious rupture,
The fleshy tufa tucked behind the house of cards
Is breaking loose, clods of soil and dried blood,
Are rolling forth. All is loosening in this
passage of wrenching Time, as the game
And the board are rent apart.

Thus, the unravelling begins:
the cinched river held in my throat
erupts in spate- it moves like a creature caught in
Infinite space. The mouth of my cave crumbles
like glassy shards inside my neck; its meteoric fragments
Echo in the valley with breath-stopping
crash upon crash, upon water and upon land.
The primly contained valley, in its sartorial restraints,
Burst at its seams, sliding into chaotic realms. Thus
my throat is ripped inside out, and water blasts into light.

The rectangular simulacrum, its nerves
torn and stretched, breaks out of its linear constraints,
As scarlet blood mingles with water. In this violence,
This misprision of skin from earth, of organ from body,
Of vessel from earth; time and space
Are cleft in two, one the slave of the other,
And I, the creator of both. For all that I have, I devour,
All that I create, I kill.

But how can I effect destruction
Upon this circular game, upon Thought itself?
Thus, I, Death, must be ripened into being
Again, and all the pieces I swallow will
Reform into another strange precipice,
Into another game in space.



Notes on the Game

19 “A game board, usually made of cloth, consists of two intersecting axes with a large empty square at their central point of meeting. Each of the four arms of this cross has 24 squares, in 8 rows of 3. Players move their pieces [...] counterclockwise around the board in accordance with the throws of the dice.”

Shulman, *God Inside Out*, 32.

20 “Who am I? And who is Siva? You certainly don’t know...Then Parvati removed with her hand the snake Vasuki that Siva wore around his neck, along with many other ornaments of his - the crescent moon, the elephant’s hide, the serpents Kambala and Asvatara and, finally, tricking him with words, his loincloth.”

Kedarakhanda 34-35 cited by Shulman.

22 “And everything he [Death] brought forth, he began to devour.”

Satapatha Brahmana cited by Shulman.

The First Move

23 “It was the Palace of Illusions where thoughts become real. Those streaks of sunlight are golden beams. I ran into an invisible wall, the wall appears – a pool – I don’t see any pool yet my feet are wet. I run, I see a door, there’s no door. I ran into a wall.”

Mahabharata, Dir. Peter Brooks, 1989.

24 Any crewmen who ate the lotus, the honey-sweet fruit, lost all desire to send a message back, much less return, their only wish to linger there with the Lotus-eaters, grazing on lotus, all memory of the journey home dissolved forever.

Odyssey 9:82

The Second Move

29 “Come o’er the water towards us at that moment,

Under the guidance of a single pilot,

Who shouted, ‘Now art thou arrived, fell soul?’”

Dante, *Inferno*, 8:99

30 Referencing the shores of the Ganges in the city of Varanasi, where the river becomes as wide as the Nile, and the steps upon the shores are burning grounds for the dead.

30 The measured song is a *dhrupad*, a variant within the Indian classical music tradition, similar to the model of Bach’s fugue. It directly translates to a measured poem, and is a slow chanting of notes, either with a single repeated word or no words at all.

32 Reference to dhunuchi, a form of frenzied dance form offered as prayer to the goddess, originating in eastern India. The fire in the dancers’ hands are contained in clay cups lit with burning coal and slow-burning coconut husk.

36 “According to the poet Lakshmidhara, this exactly replicates the movement in the human body as the goddess at the base of the spine is awoken when the sun substance, the heat of breath, is momentarily withdrawn to let the reservoir of moon substance, the frozen ambrosia, to diffuse.”

From Shulman’s lecture titled How to put together a Goddess out of Musical scales.

37 Reference to the myth of the churning ocean where the devas and asuras are in search of ambrosia that would maintain their immortality. It is buried deep within the earth, at the bottom of the ocean, and the gods use a mountain as a fulcrum to extract it. Siva’s snake, Vasuki, offered to act as pulley. Thus, the devas and asuras play a game of tug of war, churning the mountain into the depths of the ocean. However, before releasing the ambrosia, poison escapes Vasuki’s throat and Siva swallows it and stoppers it in his throat, making it turn blue.

38 In myths, Vasuki, along with the kingdom of snakes, was born in the liminal realm located inside a cave that was flooded with water. Minerals and gems in the cave imprinted

upon his body and gave him his speckled skin.
Pattanaik, Garuda Purana, 9.

The Third Move

39 “I have just written the word ‘infinite’. I have not included that adjective out of mere rhetorical habit; I hereby state that it is not a logical to think that the world is infinite. [...] The library is unlimited but periodic. If an eternal traveller should journey in any direction he would find after untold centuries that the same volumes are repeated in the same disorder-which, repeated, becomes order: the Order.”

Borges, Library of Babel.

43 “This kind of cosmos is organized hierarchically in terms of two axes: one may be called vertical, extending from the zenith of the cosmos to its nadir; and the other, horizontal, extending from the innermost being or middle of the cosmos to its outermost externalizations. Within the cosmic whole, these two axes often are isomorphic to one another, so that the apex of the cosmos is equivalent to its innermost contracted middle and its nadir is equivalent to its most externalized and expanded manifestations.”

Shulman, God Inside Out, 46.

44 Matsya, is a creature that lives submerged underwater as a fish and, according to myth, became Shiva’s first disciple. The symbol signifies flexibility and nimble movement, it is related to the unconscious, to knowledge sought from the abstract.

49 “The universe (which others call the Library) is composed of an indefinite, perhaps infinite number of hexagonal galleries. In the center of each gallery is a ventilation shaft, bounded by a low railing. From any hexagon one can see the floors above and below - one after another, endlessly.”

Borges, Library of Babel.

50 The moon is a symbol of the unconscious, it turns tides, it holds light parceled in phases (of time). Within the story, the brittle-

ness of the moon is synonymous with the brittleness of its light and with that of time and space.

The Fourth Move

51 “an act of occlusion and self diminution, as if the God we’re being squeezed into an inner gap, a dark space opening up within him”.

Darkness as the blinding force from Andhaka’s myth. Shulman, God Inside Out, 121.

52 “But all at once a male was there, born, eyeless, from You, the Ancient Male,

like a seed germinating in the

darkness that the Black Mistress of Night Breathes out to kill”

Foreshadowing Andhaka’s ritual of self-mutilation in next move. Shulman, God Inside Out, 122.

56 “And Phaethon sees the earth on fire; he cannot

endure this heat, the blast of some great furnace.

Under his feet he feels the chariot glowing

White hot; he cannot bear the sparks, the ashes, the soot, the smoke, the blindness. He is going somewhere, that much he knows, but where he is he does not know.”

Metamorphosis 2:226-232

The Fifth Move

58 In myths, a naked Siva, anointed with ashes, had once been tricked into a circular pit with a hungry tiger. There, he had defeated the creature and had emerged with its skin as trophy.

59 “This cell is deep and made of stone; its shape is that of an almost perfect sphere[...] a wall divides the cell down the center. At the shadowless hour a small door opens above us, and a jailer operates an iron pulley, lowering to us, at the end of a rope, jugs of water and hunks of meat. Light enters the vault; it is then that I’m able to see the jaguar. [...] Amid those keen imaginings was I when I recalled that one of the names of god was jaguar- tigre. I imag-

ined to myself that web of tigers, that hot labyrinth of tigers bringing terror to the plains and pastures in order to preserve the design.”

Borges, *The Writing of the God*.

64 “Andhaka went away to a desolate place to perform tapas; he stood on one leg, fasting, his arms raised above his head, for ten thousand years. Every day for a year he cut off pieces of his own flesh, covered with blood, with the sharp knife and offered them into the fire. Finally there was nothing left but sinews and bones; all his blood was gone.”

Shulman, *God Inside Out*, 125.

65 “The Gods bade me brook pain and break faith

They charged half my spirit to hold up this Dome on Earth.

The other half is held by the Gods themselves in quivering submission to the will of mortal Hadrian.”

Author, *The Song of Death*, 4.

67 The Antikythera, a complex mechanism that calculated the positions of the planets, was discovered to have been designed before the Maritime Theater. One of the hypotheses is that the Maritime Theater was designed around this astronomical model of the machine.

Stierlin, *Hadrien et l’Architecture Romaine*, 137.

68 “At the touch of fire, in the eye of its flame”.

Tagore, *Collected Works*, 132.

68 “At last, pacified and extinguished, he was pierced through the heart by Siva’s trident; he dangled there in the sky like a pillar [or like Siva, the Pillar]. Half his body was burned dry by the sun, and half drenched in rain; still, he did not die, though his form was like snowflakes in the face of the cruel sun.”

Shulman, *God Inside Out*, 128.

The Final Move

71 “First the rice shoot develops a ‘stomach,’; this turns into a ‘big stomach,’ out of which a ‘backbone,’ emerges and flowers. The critical stage in flowering is a milky self-impregnation; if you squeeze the shoot, a slight

white liquid comes out. This stage is analogous in every way to human pregnancy (we, the astronauts, know that rice is wind fertilized; but the language the farmers use points to female self-impregnation, conception and gestation). Out of the milk pregnancy comes the soft seed, ginja, which eventually hardens to the point of ripeness. When the stalks are heavy with ripe seed, bent under their own weight, it is time for the harvest, in late October or early November.”

Shulman, *Spring, Heat & Rains*, 80.

73 “The field and the cloud are lovers
And between them I am a messenger of mercy.
I quench the thirst of one;
I cure the ailment of the other.”

Kahlil Gibran, *Song of the Rain*.

75 “...pushing out ruddy veins into my flesh, I felt whorls and ridges, sharp edges forming upon my smooth skin. Blue nerves along my legs broke into rubious spinels. Jagged flakes of silica and nodes of basalt were wrapping my torso like a corselet. The tips of my fingers radiated into winking reds, from ochre to scarlet, from garnet to cinnabar.”

Byatt, *A Stone Woman*.

77 “Amidst the darkness palpable that shrouds, deep as the touchstone’s gloom, the night with clouds, with glittering lines of yellow lightning break, and frequent trace in heaven the golden streak: to those fond fair who tread the royal way, the path their doubtful feet explore betray, those thunders hushed, whose shower-foreboding sound, w o u l d check their ardor, and their hopes confound.”

Kalidasa, *Meghdut*, ed. translated by Horace Hayman Wilson, 115.

The Last Game

81 “Death, on giving birth to life, is tempted immediately to swallow his offspring, assuaging his own hunger and reinternalizing his son. Yet as Death comes alive through the creation of his own otherness, of holes within his cosmic being, his hunger increases. [Nothing] is sufficient to fill the holes in Death’s cosmic

being, thereby satiating his selfhood. Therefore, that externalizes and tears open more and more holes within himself. These descending levels of otherness are increasingly finite and solid, forms of increasing thingness, rather than nothingness. He devours them ceaselessly, trying to fill, and fulfill, himself. This is the world that human beings know - the hole, within our own being, and to which we, too, inevitably fall. [...] Death wants life in order to nullify it and, thus, to fill himself. Death cannot succeed. Seeking life in order to devour it, he kills it. Killing life, he empties it.”

Shulman, *God Inside Out*, 193.

82 “And now the arm of God reaches down from heaven, the arm in whose millions of little hairs screaming bodies are entrapped like Captain Ahab in the body of Moby Dick, and His arm is plunged into your mouth, down through your throat, through your stomach. And there God’s fingers grab hold and then He, Supergod, begins to pull His arm back, slowly, very slowly, and He turns you inside out, skin side in, with a squishy sucking sound, so that I, amazed by this spectacle of flesh, come down to you from the judges’ bench and watch your organs wriggling on your outside; your face has disappeared inside your head. Your eyes are gone. I come closer and see your heart anchored to its tough arteries and veins; it’s beating like crazy. You are turned upside down and inside out now, hanging head downwards.”

Niklas, *The Father: A revenge*, 349.

82 “But doesn’t that make life a kind of being toward death? Just because time has to make death grow to fruition and because in that process it’s pure temporality becomes transparent, isn’t there for the real dimension of being human precisely the future as time?”

Amery, *On Aging*, 16.



Fig 3.1 Siva's game of Dice, on a chaupar board, with Durga, his consort. She is taking his jewels after having won the game. Part of a series of paintings illustrating the Rasamanjari (Essence of the Experience of Delight), a fifteenth century love poem by Bhanudatta, by artist Devidasa of Nurpur.

The gods & the Game

“If one is god, there is, finally, no other game. All the more shocking, then, is the fact that he must lose. No wonder that he is sometimes more than a little reluctant to play”

- David Shulman, *God Inside Out*, 5.

The reluctant player of the game of dice is none other than Siva. He is the alien godhead that is perpetually discombobulated by the game that is played between him and his consort, Durga, yet he cannot resist the temptation of meeting the challenge once the gameboard is unrolled. In this infinite game, Shiva being the player is of consequence because the devolution of his Self is necessary. “As gaps open up inside him, pieces of him begin to freeze into solid objects that exist in time.”¹ Thus, time and space, and their relationship to each other are sublimated in the microcosm of the game. In many myths and tales, he is known as the innocent, or lost, godhead for the cosmos would dissolve without the cyclicity, the constant disruption and reabsorption that the game causes. That is precisely the reason he and his consort are constantly challenged to play the game. In the myth of the churning ocean, he is trapped in a game similar to tug of war, where the fulcrum, so to speak, is a mountain, the pulley is his snake, Vasuki, and the ocean is being churned. At the end of this myth, poison is accidentally extracted from the ocean floor. Shiva swallows it and stoppers the poison in his throat. In such stories, he holds the powers of integration and disintegration; he embodies the frolic of the game and the gravity of containing the powers of complete death and destruction within his body.

The god & his losses

“The spaces are themselves gaping externalities, sucking innerness outward toward slower and less subtle existential modes. The deeper issues of the dice game are located precisely here, [...] where it is the holism of the inside that, ultimately is at stake.” - David Shulman, *God Inside Out*, 25.

So, why must god lose? Beginning the game is the eternal weakness of this flawed godhead. He never wins the game, yet he is always vulnerable to it and open to deception when he is in it. “Al-

1 David Dean Shulman, and Don Handelman. *God inside out : Śiva's Game of Dice*. (New York: Oxford University Press.1997), 24.

though god is omniscient, he understands nothing at all [from within the game]”²; he is always incomplete and is continuously defeated, for he is continuously fragmenting and dividing as long as he is tempted to play. In this game with Death, the loss of the player is directly connected with his devolving existence upon the gameboard of the villa. During the course of play, he devolves into multiple states of his being, into pieces of himself (the fish, the tiger, the snake) that are connected with pieces upon the gameboard. Once he devolves into his last piece (the stone), the gameboard itself devolves into nothingness, into Death; for all that ‘she creates, she kills’, she is hunger personified.

How does the godhead lose? The player’s devolution throughout the game relies on the gameboard and on his movement within its spaces. Thus, the spaces on the gameboard begin cracking his insides, each riddle challenges his holism, by demanding a piece of his self. Each of these pieces are significant and allow a new myth to be born in each space, while making the cracks within him deeper. Finally, the player devolves completely into these pieces and the spaces and gaps within him open up completely; an alchemical transformation takes place that forces his selfhood and that of the gameboard to explode, by opening up thousands of gap for these “spaces are themselves gaping externalities, sucking innerness outward.”³

The Self & the Stone

“to freeze into form is to become externalized, to cross the newly formed border that now separates the god’s inner being from what has poured out of him via the spaces that have opened up within his prior density”

- David Shulman, *God Inside Out*, 25.

The final piece that the player devolves into is the stone. The stone is an essential symbol for this godhead; one can imagine it being both inert and completely activated. It transforms from the inside out: it is the ultimate congealment for it fills wounds and gaps within the self and takes the soft mass of body that was cleaved away in the earlier move and makes it whole again. It represents a “total absence of discontinuity.” In such devolvement, such freezing into form, the stone becomes the “nuclear center of the Self”. The soft matter of being is contained in this stony exterior; the shell of the player’s body transforms from inside out. According to Morienus, an Arab alchemist, “the philosopher’s stone is extracted from you; you are its mineral”.⁴ The alchemical

2 Skandapurana. *Skandapurāna 4 [Kāsīkhanda]* 5-12. as cited in Shulman, 1997.

3 Handelman, Don, and David Dean Shulman. *God inside out : Śiva’s Game of Dice*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 25.

4 Carl Gustav Jung, Joseph L Henderson, Marie-Louise Von Franz, Aniela Jaffé, and Jolande Jacobi. *Man and His Symbols*. (Cheshire, England: Stellar Classics, 1964), 207.

stone symbolizes “something that can never be lost or dissolved, something eternal.”⁵ In Icelandic myths, trolls frozen as stone or boulders in deserts or riverbeds stirred to life with an earthquake, or an eruption; or their forms froze when touched with the light of day.⁶ This metamorphosis is a common punishment for those who cannot answer the riddle or are caught in the beam of light (or of someone’s gaze). However, in this story, the player who answers the riddle correctly is frozen into stone as a form of release, a congealment of his selfhood. His physical healing and subsequent freezing points to the “simultaneity of time and space”⁷ and the melting of the multiple chasms that were wrought in his selfhood throughout the game so he could become whole.

The Unseen piece

“But all at once a male / was there, born, eyeless, from You / The ancient male / Like a seed germinating in the darkness / That the black mistress of night / Breathes out / To kill”

- David Shulman, *God Inside Out*, 122.

The less acknowledged piece that the player devolves into, before becoming stone, is closely tied with the myth of Andhaka. This character, according to myths, represents darkness and inert masculinity and is a fragment of Siva that he himself destroys in the course of finding his wholeness. *Andhaka*, derived from *andhakar*,⁸ is born when Durga playfully covers the eyes of Siva with her hands. The universe is plunged into darkness, and from the sweat of his eyes, a monster arises, hirsute and with contorted features. This offspring is a repulsive creature that is a concentrated form of Siva’s masculinity; it is as though he is squeezed into a gap within his selfhood that caused this darkness to become externalized. This dark part of himself “clearly constitutes a threat - to the godhead, its wholeness, its potential for seeing itself and others [and will germinate to] create conditions of increasing porousness within him.”⁹ This dark gap within his selfhood becomes a yawning chasm that, externalized and personified, fights against him, forcing him to confront his self during play.

In a following myth, Andhaka, deep in a meditative ritual, cuts off pieces of his flesh with a knife and offers them into a sacred fire until nothing but bone and sinew are left. The gods granted him a

5 Ibid, 205.

6 Antonia Susan Byatt. “A Stone Woman.” *The New Yorker*. October 6, 2003. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2003/10/13/a-stone-woman>.

7 David Dean Shulman, and Don Handelman. *God inside out : Śiva’s Game of Dice*. (New York: Oxford University Press.1997), 75.

8 *Andhakar* in Sanskrit translates to darkness.

9 David Dean Shulman, and Don Handelman. *God inside out : Śiva’s Game of Dice*. (New York: Oxford University Press.1997), 123.

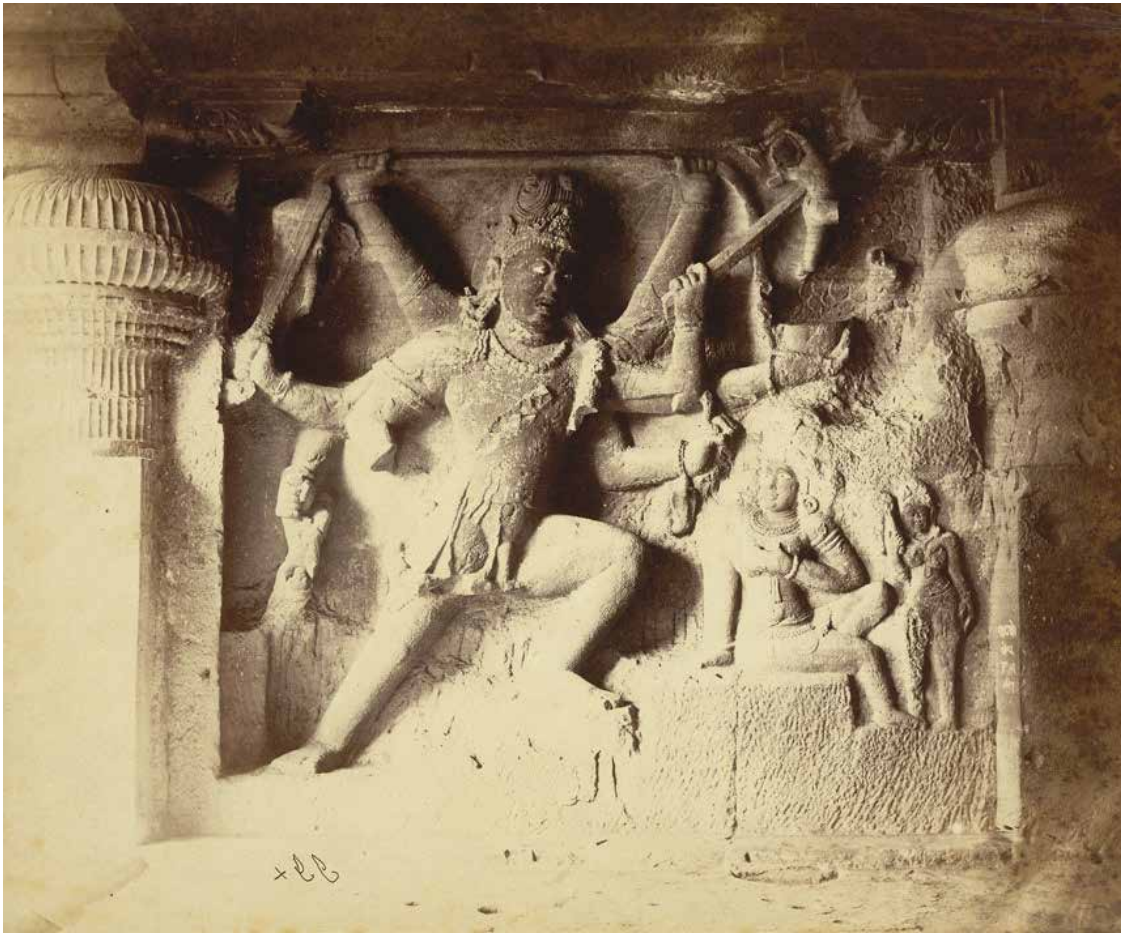


Fig 3.2 Panel of Siva impaling Andhaka upon his trident at the Ellora caves, Cave 1.

boon; he asked to be all-powerful and to be immune to death until he desired a woman that had the qualities of his mother. At the end of the Oedipus-like myth, he does come to desire his mother, and is vanquished by Siva by being impaled upon by his trident. “At last, pacified and extinguished, he was pierced through the heart [...] he dangled there in the sky like a broken pillar. Half his body burned dry by the sun, and half drenched by rain; still, he did not die, though his form was like snowflakes in the face of the cruel sun.”¹⁰

The occlusion of Siva’s eyes, as the first act of creating the fissure in his selfhood, signifies being completely isolated and folding within oneself. This symbol of occlusion, of fissure, is part of the fourth move of the game, in the Winter Palace. It is a precursor to the confrontation that takes place in the circular chamber, the Maritime Theater, where the player’s cleaved body burns at the center of the island, his bones becoming pillars in the space. This bloody transformation, becoming bone and sinew, is symbolic of the death of a dark part of the player’s self. When he finally devolves into this space, his pieces and those of Death, coincide for a moment, until the vertical movement of smoke through the dome of the Pantheon, which fits the circumference of the Maritime Theater perfectly,¹¹ causes him to move to ‘celestial realms’.

Siva & Death

“Then there was neither death nor no-death/ no sign of night or of day. / The One breathed, breathless/ through its own impulsion/ and there was no Other of any kind.”

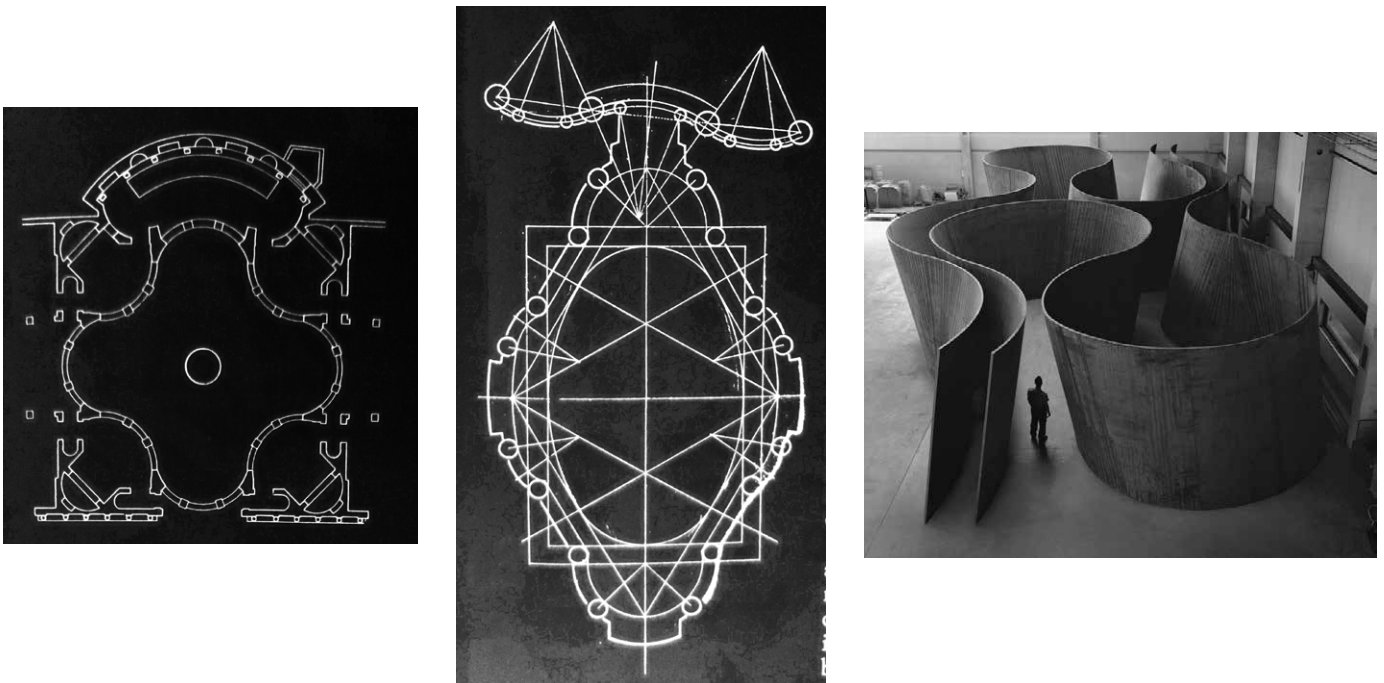
- David Shulman, *God Inside Out*, 46.

Now, the only question that remains is how Siva is different from Death; what sets the two players of the dice game apart? Siva’s cosmos relies on evolution; as spaces open up within him and his selfhood fractures, he falls into these gaps inside himself, descending levels rapidly. It is no coincidence he is called the innocent or lost godhead, for the lower he descends into these gaps within himself, the more human he becomes; fragmented, more open to seduction and manipulation within the game. As the game progresses, he evolves to seal the gaps within his selfhood and returns to a state of cosmic homogeneity and wholeness; as unfragmented, smooth and undifferentiated as a stone. Yet, if he remains in this state of wholeness, of inertia, then the game stops and so does the evolution of the cosmos. Therefore, this brittle god must constantly be enticed into the game.

Death, on the other hand, relies on devolution. She cannot escape the paradox of her being; she is at once hungry, wanting to consume all that she creates, and desirous to begin the game, to create

10 Śivapurāna, Rudrasamhitā 5.42-49, as cited in Shulman, 1997.

11 Henri Stierlin. 1984. *Hadrien et l’Architecture Romaine*. (Payot, 1984), 191.



Figs 3.3, 3.4, 3.5 Plan of Piazza d'Oro (far left), plan of Borromini's San Carlino alle Quattro Fontane (center), Richard Serra's *Inside Out* (far right)

new pieces out of herself.¹² The intent of the site, the gameboard, is always synonymous with the intent of the character of Death, for the narrative makes it clear that she owns the gameboard and its pieces and she is always the instigator of the game. She comes as a harbinger of relief, for she allows this devolution of one's being to relieve her own hunger. She embodies both constructive and destructive modes of the game when she plays with this brittle opponent, who is open to manipulation and seduction, but who can be devoured in cycles of disintegration for he is immortal.

Thus, Siva is not Death. Their existence is divorced from each other on multiple levels; the former relies on the game and on its evolution to have a self and the latter embodies the game by being constantly hungry, by being the instigator of devolution. They represent parallel modes of being in the game, and Death will always have the upper hand, for the pieces, the gameboard and the body of its landscape, all belong to her. She can effectively end the game by pulling the gameboard inside out by its navel – and there is nothing Siva can do about that.

The Transgressive tradition of Villa Adriana

'Transgression' refers to a situation where geological strata encroach upon each other, pushing and pulling upon each other's edges, creating an uncomfortable overlapping; it is a condition where boundaries are challenged through unconventional behavior. In returning to the gameboard, to the backdrop that instigated this game between a god and Death, I will examine the transgressive games inspired by the Villa. All thinkers of the spatial world, through generations, have been captivated by his Villa: the crystalline interiors of Borromini's San Carlino alle Quattro Fontane was modelled on Piazza d'Oro; which struck light in the eye of the young artist, Richard Serra, and made him wonder "...how can I create - how can I actually make - my misrepresentation?"¹³ Corbusier's chapel in Ronchamp was directly modelled on the inner chamber inside the Serapeum; Frank Lloyd Wright's Florida Southern College mimicked the landscape of the axes in collision; all of Louis Kahn's work was inspired by the poetry of the volumes in collision; and the work of many others, like Robert Venturi and Charles Moore, stand testament to the Villa being a point of intersection and a point of turning in the lives of many architects, writers and artists.¹⁴ (Even Eleanor Clark's novel was abandoned when she visited the Villa, in favour of researching "the game with Death.") Through practices of sketching and storytelling, they attempted to decipher the riddle of this landscape, to discover the essence that is encapsulated within it, and in doing so,

12 David Dean Shulman, and Don Handelman. *God inside out : Siva's Game of Dice*. (New York: Oxford University Press.1997), 190.

13 Lorenz Kienzle. "Serra Firma." *The Economist*. Accessed December 5, 2023. <https://www.economist.com/books-and-arts/2008/10/03/serra-firma>.

14 Claudio D'Amato. *L'Antico Come Luogo Della Memoria*. (Casa del libro editrice, 1984), 63.

they chanced upon the core of what makes us human and what makes us empathic designers: that architectural language transcends the bounds of culture, that the crystal of meaning found within these volumes in collision, are universal.

And thus, they embarked on their own transgressive games, pushing cross-cultural boundaries and creating their own players and pieces, creating their own language, and experimenting with architectural form. Hadrian himself was a transgressive figure: politically, he preferred to solidify his empire with a rather heavy hand, than by expanding it; his spiritual practices were diverse and leant toward the mythic, polytheistic, unpindownable gods and planets; his sexual preferences were equally transgressive, even for modern times, for he adopted a twelve-year Bithynian boy as his sexual partner and rued his death with the ardor of a lover. Thus, he challenged the boundaries of context and culture upon this Villa, collecting places like a child with a chocolate box, and by creating this architectural game with them, this transgressive world building exercise, that transcended the site through cross-cultural play with reference, with form, and of course, with Death.

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Jung's understanding of the collective consciousness was an important source - the processes of individuation, initiation and submission in the hero's journey were crucial to the development of the narrative and to build characters that were sufficiently convincing. The game and the process of riddling were a natural fit for a narrative that required many obstacles to be placed in order to build the hero's journey. Symbols recurring in every myth were interpreted according to this text, and were used in the stories accordingly.

Pallasmaa, Juhani. *The Eyes of the Skin*. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 1996.

Pallasmaa's writing was a constant source of inspiration and there is always a new, major discovery every time I open this book. His worldview made me aware of modern alienation, and how, as a culture, we have denied our bodies the right to feel the spaces we are inhabiting. My tool of choice, that is, writing architecture instead of always drawing architecture, is a reaction to the ocular-centrism that is rife in design culture today. This was my initial impetus to write, to privilege our neglected senses as architects and for a moment, to deny the eye.

Pérez-Gómez, Alberto. *Built upon Love : Architectural Longing after Ethics and Aesthetics*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2008.

Alberto Pérez Gómez, and Francesco Colonna. *Polyphilo, Or, the Dark Forest Revisited : An Erotic Epiphany of Architecture*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1994.

I read *Polyphilo*, Perez Gomez's modern interpretation of Hypnerotomachia, as an undergraduate student and I was mesmerized. This was my introduction to an architectural narrative, one that does not rely heavily on the characters' emoting through word or gesture, but one that does almost all the storytelling by changing the architectural environment that the character moves through. The procession in space reminded me of rituals I had seen growing up in India. The details and symbols added to the layers that built up in the story and allowed me to experience a written piece of work purely through the descriptions of its environment. This became an early inspiration, and the choice of Villa Adriana was not significant, in that the goal was always to create a surreal procession in space through poetry and prose.

On Villa Adriana

Yourcenar, Marguerite, and Grace Frick. *Memoirs of Hadrian; And, Reflections on the Composition of Memoirs of Hadrian*. New York: Farrar, Straus And Giroux, 1994.

Yourcenar's decades-long labour of love was the beginning of my journey into knowing and stepping into the shoes of the emperor, the experience of which is synonymous with getting acquainted with Hadrian's villa before I ever went there in the flesh. Her words allowed me to cross a threshold in time and place – and when I did visit the site, it was as though her writing had solidified into huge volumes in space, which only I could make sense of. Her reflections as a writer were invaluable to me whenever I found myself hesitant or immobilized during the writing process.

Clark, Eleanor. *Rome and a Villa*. New York: Harperperennial, 2015.

Eleanor Clark is a major reference as well - these two writers became points of convergence in my mind – even though they wrote about and visited the Villa at completely different times with vastly different outlooks. Her comprehensive research of the villa, along with her cryptic and extremely detailed descriptions of it, inspired me to begin this project. Her brilliant and intensely subjective view of the Villa was important in allowing me to be just as generous in making absurd, intuitive and surreal connections to the site.

Stierlin, Henri. *Hadrien et l'Architecture Romaine*. Paris: Payot Publishing, 1984.

Stierlin's educated guesses confirmed to me that no text could possibly solve the riddle of the Villa for there are so many possible interpretations, or solutions, to every enigma in the site - be it the axes, the scattered points of tension and compression all around the site, or the inspiration for the Maritime Theater. His writing gave me permission to wander among references and bring in my own set of biases, just as he had done.

Claudio D'Amato. *L'Antico Come Luogo Della Memoria*. Casa del libro editrice, 1984.

Claudio D'Amato's essay about Villa Adriana was equally influential in giving me permission to allow subjectivity to get in the way of research. His understanding of "the modules in collision" and of light, time and space answered many questions when beginning this foray into the world of Hadrianic architecture. The importance of the Villa in the western mind was highlighted by this text ("Trojan horse to modernity"). Bringing in eastern modes of interpreting the Villa allowed me to react to this text and added to the existing domain of knowledge about the Villa.

On Gaming

Galit Hasan-Rokem, and David Dean Shulman. *Untying the Knot*. Oxford University Press. 1996.

This text begins to unravel what gaming means in the tradition of riddles throughout many cultures, from the Greek to the Indian, Scandinavian, Chinese and Jewish traditions. It was instructive in the process of writing the riddles, and what it meant to formulate the correct answers and the incorrect answers; the difference between an image and an answer, and how to distract the player using details carved into words. It is similar processually to gaming, and causes rupture within the player or the one who has to answer. The common thread in all cultures is that the riddle is always located at the precipice between life and death.

Handelman, Don, and David Dean Shulman. *God inside out : Śiva's Game of Dice*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1997.

This text has been pivotal in creating this thesis. I had first discovered the writing of David Shulman, a Tamil literary scholar, poet and writer at the Israel University through lectures I had stumbled upon. Then I happened to find this text about Siva's game of dice by him. The game symbolically permutes the Self and the player's state of being by creating gaps and spaces within him. The game is the cosmos, and Siva, by being the eternally discombobulated player keeps the flux of the game, the cosmos, in motion. Through the situations laid out in the game, the player's Self is continuously cleaved and recomposed through violence of a kind. The game became a process of externalization, a bringing forth of inner elements of the player's self onto a physical gameboard.

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