Twenty City Tales and A Song of Despair

by

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.
I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

ABSTRACT

I have often imagined breaking free from the confines of my present life and identity, setting out for an unfamiliar city where I could begin anew. This desire has led me to drift, searching across the world for a place to belong. Yet gradually, I have come to realize that the true sense of estrangement does not arise from the unfamiliarity of the external world, but from within myself. It is the realization captured by T.S. Eliot in *The Waste Land*, an internal desert that precedes the external one.[3] Wherever I go, the flame of hope quietly fades into solitude. I cannot escape the inner wasteland. This alienation corrodes every external space I set foot in, leaving behind only emptiness, much like the protagonist of Cavafy's *The City* who discovers that the city that has worn him out is his own soul projected outward.[4] Thus arises a haunting question: if this endless act of escape continues, would I carry this void, this destruction, to every corner of the world?

This question transcends personal melancholy, reflecting a broader dilemma of our time: what Anthony Vidler has termed the modern unhomely, a pervasive sense of dislocation.[5] My own wandering, therefore, is a reflection of this collective estrangement. To confront this question and seek a form of redemption, I turn to writing. Writing, to me, is a spatial practice, a way of re-mapping the fragmented world through imagination. I conceive "writing" as a practice analogous to the "walking" in Francesco Careri's *Walkscapes*: a creative act of measuring and redrawing the world's map with one's body, an aesthetic practice through which the wanderer actively transforms space into a domain of personal significance.[6] Through the traces of language, I sketch paths of imagination in the void. Using narrative as the fundamental material, I construct cities within the territory of consciousness.

Keywords: Narrative Architecture; Fictional Cities; Allegory; Urban Experience.

1 T. S. Eliot, *Collected Poems: 1909–1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963).
2 C. P. Cavafy, *Collected Poems* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975).
3 Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992).
4 Francesco Careri, *Walkscapes: Walking as an Aesthetic Practice* (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 2002).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Back in Cambridge, on a September evening, I walked alone along the street. It was already late. The shops were closed, the lights were sparse, and the main street was almost empty. In my headphones, Ryuichi Sakamoto's Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence was playing. Everything was so quiet, so still. In that silence, a kind of deep calm slowly rose within me.

It was just a small, quiet town, with no lively nightlife. I missed New York. I missed its energy, its noise and colors. But I knew that was only the surface. Wherever I went, loneliness followed. What was it that my heart was really looking for?

I kept walking, and walking. It was too quiet. The last trace of clouds disappeared into the night. The last trace of clouds disappeared into the night. Could it have taken me with it?

Looking back on the quarter century of my life, I realized I had always been trying to escape. In Zhengzhou, during high school, I wanted to leave. In Wenzhou, during my undergraduate years, I wanted to leave. In Shenzhen, during my internship, I wanted to leave. In Cambridge, during my graduate years, I still wanted to leave. I kept thinking that somewhere else might feel different, that maybe I would become a different person there.

So what about the future? How long would this continue? Where was the place I truly belonged?

By chance, I came across the Greek poet Constantine P. Cavafy's poem *The City*. One line stayed with me: "You've destroyed it everywhere in the world." It hit me in a very direct way. I started to understand that what I couldn't escape was not a city, but myself.

The city I cannot escape is my albatross, my beast, the cross to bear, and also my haven. It follows me everywhere, never leaving my side. The life I have lived there cannot be erased, just as I cannot find a place from which to begin again. This city may never have truly belonged to me. It is the city I long to leave, the city from which I long to return to my own Ithaca. And yet, it remains the only place to which I belong.

Zygmunt Bauman once wrote, "Solitude is a beautiful state. It allows us to sort our thoughts, to reflect, and to create. Only then does communication gain its meaning."[1] Writing, for me, is a continuation of that solitude.

I have always been a sensitive person. To protect myself, I learned to shut things down and build a shell around myself. Writing brought me back to what I had hidden. It felt like uncovering ruins and monuments through a spatial archaeology of the self. Little by little, I opened myself up and faced what was most fragile.

The title of this thesis is an homage to *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*[2] by the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda. I felt that the phrase "a song of despair" deeply resonated with my attitude toward life. To me, despair is not only sorrow, but also a form of lucidity: the recognition that loneliness and wandering may never disappear. Writing allows me to remain within that solitude without being entirely consumed by it.

As a non-traditional architecture thesis, I could not have completed this work without the support of my advisor Rick. I am deeply grateful to my supervisor Eric Haldenby and my committee member Val Rynnimeri for their guidance.

Thank you to Daisy Zhang for bringing me guobaorou in the snow, and taking the time to read my stories, meant more to me than I can express.

Thank you to Ollie Zhu for reading my stories across a twelve-hour time difference. Your time and care made this process feel less lonely.

Thank you to Isabella Ieraci and many friends for reading my stories and offering valuable feedback.

Thank you to my parents for always respecting and supporting my choices.

This work is dedicated to my grandmother. When I learned of her passing this year, I was unable to return home to see her one last time. I completed this work in grief, and this is for her.

5 Zygmunt Bauman, *44 Letters from the Liquid Modern World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010).
6 Pablo Neruda, *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*, trans. W. S. Merwin (New York: Penguin Books, 2006).

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0. 1. *Frontispiece*. Collage by the author, 2025.

FRONTISPIECE

I'll go to another country, go to another shore,
find another city better than this one.
Whatever I try to do is fated to turn out wrong
and my heart lies buried like something dead.
How long can I let my mind moulder in this place?
Wherever I turn, wherever I look,
I see the black ruins of my life, here,
where I've spent so many years, wasted them, destroyed them totally.

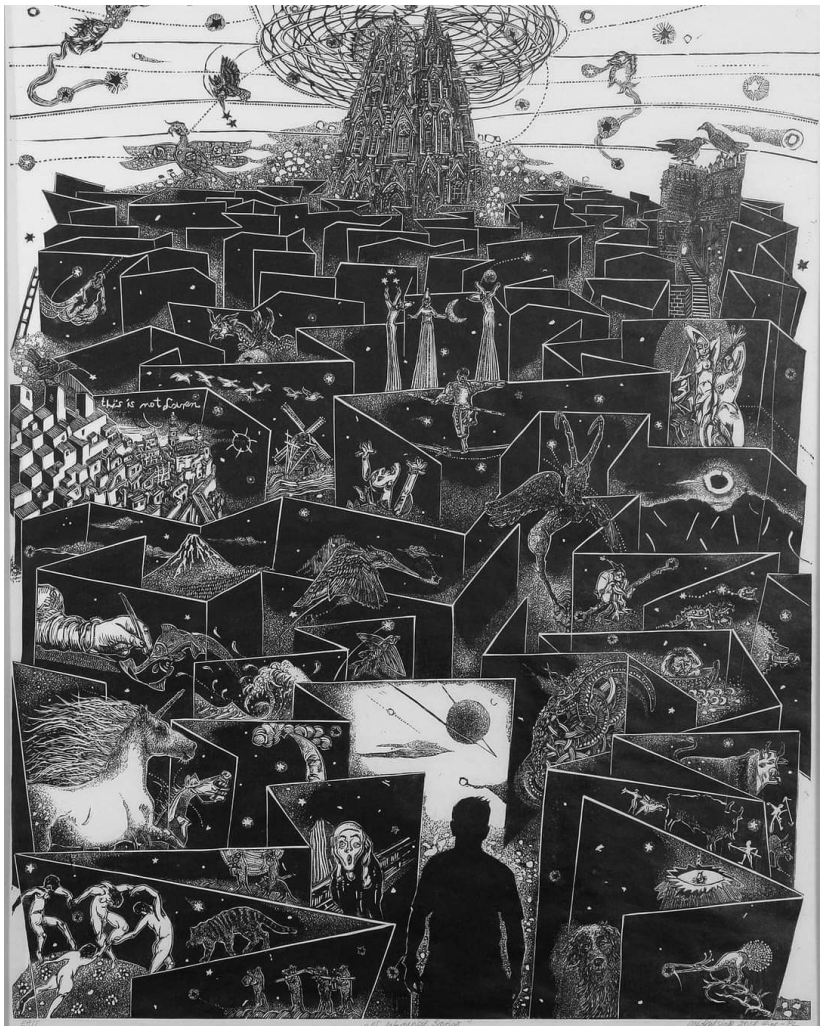
You won't find a new country, won't find another shore.
This city will always pursue you.
You'll walk the same streets, grow old
in the same neighborhoods, turn gray in these same houses.
You'll always end up in this city. Don't hope for things elsewhere:
there's no ship for you, there's no road.
Now that you've wasted your life here, in this small corner,
you've destroyed it everywhere in the world.

— *The City*, **C. P. Cavafy**

By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept…
But at my back in a cold blast I hear
The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear.
…
Shall I at least set my lands in order?
London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down
…
These fragments I have shored against my ruins
Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.

— *The Waste Land*, **T. S. Eliot**

01

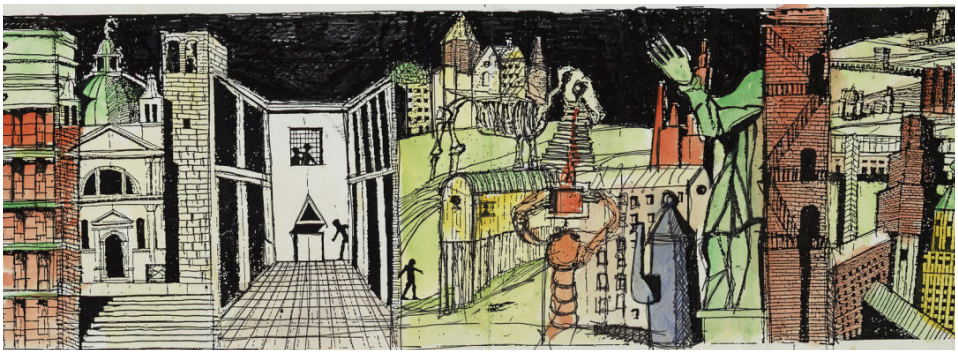


1.1. Jerzy Jędrysiak, *W labiryncie snów (In the Labyrinth of Dreams)*, 2017.

INTRODUCTION



1. 2. Illustration in *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan*, by Rem Koolhaas (New York: Monacelli Press, 1994).



1. 3. Aldo Rossi, *Architectural Fantasy with Elements from the San Cataldo Cemetery in Modena*, 1978.

METHODOLOGY

This thesis is built around storytelling and drawing as an architectural research method. It takes the form of a collection of twenty short stories, each set in a fictional city. This project draws inspiration from Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*[1], in which Marco Polo's descriptions of fifty-five fictional cities reveal themselves as mirrored fragments of Venice—a web of memory and imagination. Similarly, my three-month co-op in New York City—a metropolis that Rem Koolhaas described in *Delirious New York* as a "culture of congestion" and a laboratory of the modern condition[2]—forms the personal foundation and the seed for the growth of these twenty fictional cities, where human joys and sorrows unfold.

These fictional cities are organized around architectural principles, including typology, form, scale, space, materiality, atmosphere, and genius loci, as discussed in *Form, Space and Order*[3]. Each city becomes a symbolic vessel that evokes a specific human condition, such as desire, memory, solitude, dream, and transformation. The aim is to show how narrative, metaphor, and sensory description can reveal the inner logic of architectural existence.

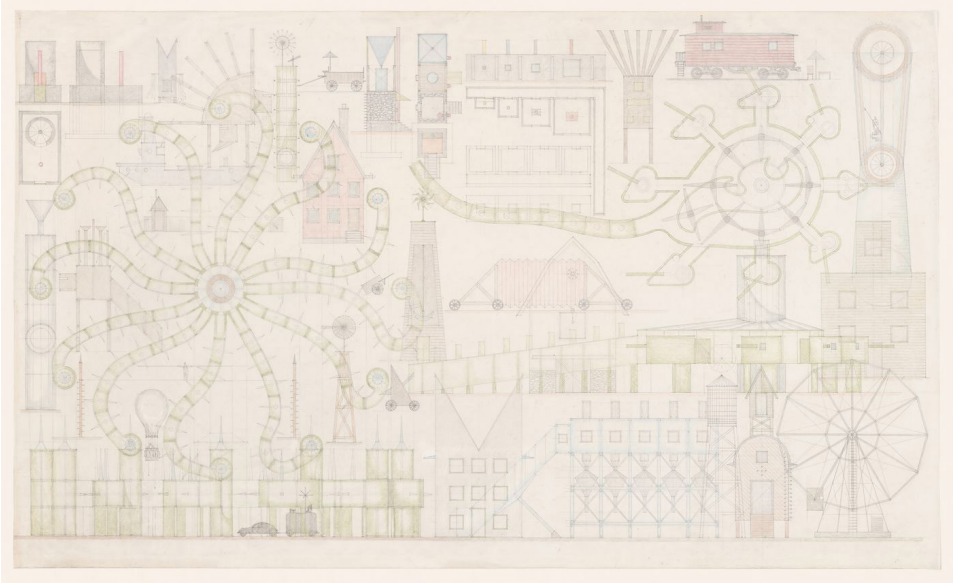
This way of working relates to *Built upon Love: Architectural Longing after Ethics and Aesthetics*, in which Pérez-Gómez articulates architecture as a fundamentally ethical and poetic act. He argues that "architecture, like a poem, is received out of time, enabling us to discern the past of the present and the future of the present… Fiction reveals what is essential for humans in recognition of our mortality and transcendence, and thus opens up potential realities for culture."[4] In this way, architecture is understood as a narrative and mnemonic engagement with the world, and emerges from love, memory, loss, care, and gains meaning through storytelling and lived experience.

Pérez-Gómez further emphasizes that architecture's ethical practice lies in its poetic and critical capacity. "At once poetic and critical," he writes, "the work of architecture provokes its interlocutors' imagination, destructuring the mechanisms that merely fulfill pragmatic needs." Through the poetic image, architecture opens a space of desire in which fiction is interwoven with human action, enabling people to engage desire without being destroyed and to confront, rather than conceal, the conditions of mortality. Like literature and film, architecture addresses questions

1 Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, trans. William Weaver (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978).
2 Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1994).
3 Francis D. K. Ching, *Architecture: Form, Space, and Order*, 4th ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2014).
4 Alberto Pérez-Gómez, *Built upon Love: Architectural Longing after Ethics and Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).



1. 4. Illustration in *How Beautiful Are Your Dwelling Places, Jacob: An Atlas of Jewish Space and a Synagogue for Babyn Yar* (Spector Books, Leipzig, 2022).



1. 5. John Hejduk, *Le Masque Lancaster/Hanover*, 1992. Drawing. Centre Canadien d'Architecture (CCA).

that truly matter for human existence in culturally specific ways, revealing the enigmas hidden in everyday events and objects.

The final format of the thesis is inspired by the material structures of *How Beautiful Are Your Dwelling Places, Jacob*[5] and *Correspondences: A Poem and Portraits*[6]. The reader's experience will be choreographed: turning a page reveals a hand drawing; turning the next page presents the text. This deliberate juxtaposition creates an immersive reading experience, encouraging a pause and inviting the reader to enter the dialogue between image and text.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In *The Architecture of the City*, Aldo Rossi defines the city as the primary locus of collective memory.[7] Its monuments and urban fabric become palimpsests of collective identity. It is in *A Scientific Autobiography* that the methodological foundation for this thesis becomes clear. Here, Rossi juxtaposes his personal suffering, illness, and introspection with the permanence of the city, transforming his own life into a microcosm of urban memory.[8] Through writing, he turns memory into spatial imagination, which reveals that "writing as a process of design". His work demonstrates thinking about architecture through recollection and constructing new worlds through introspection.

John Hejduk's architecture, by contrast, transforms structure into allegory and narrative. In works like *The Lancaster/Hanover Masque*[9] and *Victims*[10], Hejduk conceived of buildings as living characters that act, speak, and feel, and the city becomes the theater for these characters, exploring themes of death, sacrifice, memory and transformation. These works show how architecture can engage with myth, narrative, and imagination. His drawings abandon precision in favor of incompleteness and ambiguity. This form evokes a surreal melancholy, resonating with the poetic sadness found in Rossi's drawings. Both masters, through their drawings, reject architectural realism, inviting me into a more introspective, essential realm. Their works reveal another methodology "drawing as a process of thinking".

5 Robert Jan van Pelt, Mark Podwal, and Manuel Herz, *How Beautiful Are Your Dwelling Places, Jacob: An Atlas of Jewish Space and a Synagogue for Babyn Yar* (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2022).
6 Anne Michaels, *Correspondences: A Poem and Portraits* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2014).
7 Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the City*, trans. Diane Ghirardo and Joan Ockman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984).
8 Aldo Rossi, *A Scientific Autobiography*, trans. Lawrence Venuti, reissue ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010).
9 John Hejduk, *Le Masque Lancaster/Hanover* (Montréal: Centre Canadien d'Architecture, 1992).
10 John Hejduk, *Victims: A Work* (London: Architectural Association, 1986).



1. 6. John Hejduk, *Bovisa*, 1982. Drawing. Centre Canadien d'Architecture (CCA).

Building upon these theoretical foundations, this thesis situates itself within the academic context of the University of Waterloo School of Architecture, where narrative-based research has become an established mode of architectural exploration.

Selina Deng's *Under a Willow Tree*, which tells the story of a granddaughter's care and mourning for her grandmother, demonstrates the potential of creative writing as a tool for architectural design.[11] Melissa Shea's *The Adventures of Goat* employs a children's book format about a goat and its friends' adventures, and explores the role of imagination in architectural thinking.[12] Together, these thesis demonstrate that storytelling can function as legitimate and rigorous architectural research.

It is worth noting that while *Delirious New York* looks back at Manhattan and reinterprets it through a retroactive narrative, turning historical facts, urban artifacts, and programmatic logics into a coherent manifesto.[13] This thesis takes a different approach. It asks what remains when desire is no longer expressed through physical form, but lived as experience, shifting the focus from analyzing the metropolis to constructing an inner, narrative space.

Grounded in this theoretical framework, the fictional cities in my thesis are conceived as ethical constructs rather than merely literature. Through spatial narratives, these fictional cities articulate estrangement and longing while holding open the fragile possibility of reconciliation. In this sense, storytelling becomes an alternative architectural practice, critically and poetically, that is built upon love, memory, desire, and the search for belonging.

11 Selina Deng, *Under a Willow Tree: Demonstrating the Use of Creative Writing in Understanding Architecture* (master's thesis, University of Waterloo, 2024).
12 Melissa Shea, *The Adventures of Goat* (master's thesis, University of Waterloo, 2015).
13 Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1994).



1. 7. Robert Bresson, *Four Nights of a Dreamer*, 1971. Film still.



1. 8. Alain Resnais, *Last Year at Marienbad*, 1961. Film still.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How can writing and drawing become generative processes of architectural thinking and spatial design?

2. How can narrative express the intangible aspects of urban experience, such as memory, solitude, and desire?

CONCLUSION

Looking back, this entire thesis—the writing, the drawing, and their dialogue—constitutes the answer to the question that initiated my escapes. The twenty cities I construct are the destinations of my twenty escapes. They are the tangible projections of my inner world, the ruins and monuments unearthed through a spatial archaeology of the self. In the end, wandering was never about leaving. It is a way of using imagination to understand, to articulate, and finally, to settle the self that perpetually wanders.

02



2.1. Design Earth, *Can Quarantine Propel Us Toward Planetary Sanctuary?* From Cosmorama: Pacific Cemetery, 2018.

TWENTY CITY TALES

City of Lost

He could no longer remember when the forgetting began. It came gradually, carried in by the city's constant motion. His name was a leaf caught in the current, carried out of reach. His identity was a river moving past him, no longer one he could step into. As for the reason he had come to this city, it had thinned out, worn away by days.

Looking at the half-dry paintings propped in the corner of the room, he thought, *Perhaps I am a painter*.

Looking at the piano resting in another corner of the room, he thought, P*erhaps I am a musician*.

Looking at the stack of drafts on the desk, filled with scattered lines, he thought, *Perhaps I am a poet*.

Looking into the mirror, he saw a young man with eyes tinted by unease. "Who am I?" he whispered.

He put on his trench coat and stepped into the night.

He walked slowly down the street, dissolving into the noise of the metropolis. Windows glowed on both sides, their light spilling across the pavement. People brushed past him with hurried steps, each absorbed in their own concerns. He looked at the unfamiliar faces around him. "Do you all know where you are going?" he wondered, though no one turned back.

At a street corner, abstract paintings rested behind the glass. Across the street, performers played; drums and guitar drifted through the air. He stood there for a long time. If he were a painter, why did these colors not stir him? If he were a musician, why did the melodies awaken nothing? If he were a poet, why could he not recall a single line?

He walked on. The street widened. Above him rose a steel structure where vehicles passed overhead, their distant rumble echoing like tides. Neon washed the steel beams in colors, while a streetlamp cast his solitary shadow across the ground.

He stopped and stared at it. Something stirred within him:

Perhaps I must lose myself first
before I can know who I wish to become.

Architectural principles · Disorientation · Identity · Reflection

The protagonist is essentially a projection of my inner self. His loneliness, confusion, and inability to find his place in the world, leaving him clueless about his origin and destination. Painter, musician, and poet are not his real identities, but reflections of my inner world. I play instruments, I paint, I write, yet I have never fully determined what kind of person I wish to become. This uncertainty shapes who he is.

The second reason for his amnesia lies in the narrative structure. As the twenty stories unfold, his inner world gradually becomes richer, creating a contrast with the initial emptiness.

I have wandered through many cities, yet never truly felt a sense of belonging, not even in my own hometown. In this sense, both the protagonist and I resemble Walter Benjamin's *flâneur*: a figure who drifts through the urban labyrinth, observing, being swallowed by the world, and then briefly reborn in its hidden crevices.[1] This condition of drifting, this alienation, and this perpetual search for something, form the core of the protagonist and establish the emotional ground of the twenty stories.

The twenty cities I construct are the destinations of my twenty escapes; they are tangible projections of my inner world, the ruins and monuments uncovered through a spatial archaeology of the self. In the end, wandering was never about leaving. It is a way of using imagination to understand, to articulate, and finally, to settle the self that perpetually wanders.

1 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999).



2.2. *City of Lost*. Watercolor by the author, 2026.

City of Lovers

They say that whoever steps into this city will meet their destined love. And so, every weekend, it is crowded with couples strolling hand in hand, hope on hope, and a sweetness lingers in the air.

He came alone.

Along the avenue, rows of elm trees cast dappled shadows, heart-shaped patches of light dancing upon the ground. The paths opened at times into wide lawns, at times narrowed into enclosed passages. The winding paths led to secluded spaces, held by walls of greenery. Benches curved like an embrace, as if anyone who sat down might naturally feel another's warmth beside them. Plane tree canopies were trimmed into perfect forms, casting a gentle shade for the lovers below.

He lifted the recorder in his hand and let the tape begin to turn.

He recorded the lovers' whispers beneath the stone arcade, its vaulted arches opening toward the lake, holding laughter within their curves. Behind the arches, a fountain stood at the center of the plaza with an Angel rising above. He recorded how the water, falling softly into the basin, gathered laughter and whispers into a low wash of sound. From a nearby picnic blanket came the fizz of champagne bubbles, followed by the cheer and delicate clink of a toast. From farther away, the faint chime of wedding bells drifted from a chapel, ringing for another pair of strangers who had found each other.

As the sunlight began to tilt, the glass forest in the distance was set aglow. Thousands of windowpanes lit up gradually, shimmering with a warm, star-like brilliance. It was the city's call home, the very picture of life in pairs.

And so, he turned back toward his dwelling. A bed. A chair. A desk buried beneath clutter.

He slipped off his trench coat and collapsed onto the bed. The room was silent. Unfinished portraits of women covered the wall, watching him in their stillness.

He turned on the recorder. The tape hissed softly—*ka-zzt*, *ka-zzt*. He murmured:

"In the park we walk together hand in hand. Hoping and losing hope."

He had no strength to continue. His thoughts could no longer keep up with the wave of exhaustion. His eyelids slowly fell, shutting out the light and sound of the outside world, leaving only the recorder running.

Architectural principles · Intimacy · Enclosure · Spectatorship

"If you were a character in a film, who would you be?"

This is a question I often ask the people around me. As for myself, the answer comes without hesitation: I am the art student from Robert Bresson's *Four Nights of a Dreamer*. Like him, I live within the imagination of love, forever constructing fragile stories and searching for beauty from a distance. This realization compelled me to write City of Lovers.

Though the title suggests a place of romance, my protagonist is profoundly alone. He is the art student from the film and reflects my own inner self. The emotional core of the story is captured by a line from the film: "Hoping and losing hope." It perfectly expresses a condition suspended between longing and withdrawal, between the desire to connect and the fear of loss.

The park in the story is drawn from Central Park in New York City. The "glass forest in the distance" is the skyline of Midtown towers; the "stone arcade" is Bethesda Terrace; the "fountain with an Angel" is Bethesda Fountain. I remember my first visit, about two months after arriving in New York, strolling through it one evening with a boy. He looked at me in surprise and asked, "You've never been to Central Park? How is that possible?" When I returned later, all I noticed were couples holding hands. Amid the bustling crowds, I felt a deep solitude, a deafening silence that I could not shake.

In the end, this story explores a paradox: in a space designed for connection, one can feel intensely alone. The protagonist records the sounds of others' love, just as I observe the couples around me. In both cases, we become spectators of our own lives.



2.3. *City of Lovers*. Watercolor by the author, 2026.

City of Drift

A city was divided into two shores by a wide river. On the western bank, time rushed like a waterfall; on the eastern bank, it moved slowly, viscous like honey. Between the two shores, a long, narrow island floated at the river's center. Only those who remained there could briefly share the same time.

A boy from the eastern bank and a girl from the western bank met here.

"Do you think time has a physical form?" the boy asked.

"Yes," the girl said. "It's like this river. It appears calm but hides unseen whirlpools. When you stand on the water, it's easy to forget you're being carried away."

"But isn't the island still?"

"The island is just another vessel," she said. "It drifts within the river of time as well."

They stayed as maple leaves fell, then snow covered the ground. In early spring, an urgent letter called him back. The boy had to return home for a while.

"At most a month," he promised.

She did not try to stop him. She turned her gaze toward the river and, after a moment, said, "If you come back, bring me a bouquet of flowers from this season."

He believed the island would hold this time in place for him. He did not realize that the moment he turned away, they had already begun to drift apart.

After he left, she remained on the island, in between the flows.

Watching rain carve shallow hollows into the stone steps, moss inching up the wall. Watching morning fog swallow the docks, then withdraw by noon. Watching the cotton cloth by the window shift from heavy to light, its color rinsed again and again by sunlight. Watching firewood move from crackling bursts to glowing silence, and finally to cold ash.

A month later, he returned by cable car, a bouquet of cherry blossoms in his arms. As the cabin neared the ground, he froze.

The coal smoke of the steam age had been replaced by pungent exhaust fumes of automobiles. He followed the routes of his memory, yet lost his way again. Asphalt covered the carriage tracks; fresh paint sealed old marks; lawns buried the soil; glass curtain walls replaced wooden houses.

He asked after her on the island. No one recognized her.

He had only crossed the river, yet in this city, that was already enough for an entire world to be completed.

The cherry blossoms he brought were meant for the first spring of their meeting. Her spring, however, had long since passed, across seasons of blooming and falling alone.

Architectural Principles · Temporality · Irreversibility · Threshold

The city is inspired by Roosevelt Island, located between Manhattan and Queens. Occupying an in-between condition within the urban structure, the island is a long, linear space suspended within the flow of the East River. Access via its iconic cable car detaches arrival from the continuous rhythm of the city. This spatial condition forms the basis of the "middle island" in the story, where time appears to pause not because it stops, but because it is experienced as drifting more slowly.

Another inspiration is Heraclitus's proposition that *you cannot step into the same river twice*. Crossing the river seems like a reversible action, but it triggers irreversible effects. The boy believes he is repeating leaving and returning, but the same movement does not lead back to the same world. What seems like a return is, in fact, an entry into a different temporal state.

He lost her not by leaving, but by believing he could return.

Through this tragic relationship, City of Drift examines time as a spatial condition in the city, including how it is distributed, slowed, accelerated, and how it determines the possibility of relationships. In a city governed by drift, even the smallest movement across a threshold is enough for an entire world to be completed.



2.4. *City of Drift*. Watercolor by the author, 2026.

City of Density

You move to a city constructed as a machine.

The entire city is a single enormous building. At the bottom are the shopping mall and grocery store; in the middle are the hospital and police station; higher up, cell-like dwellings are stacked one above another. These layers form the world you inhabit, where elevator buttons become your coordinates.

In the elevator, interaction is reduced to a single gesture: a finger extends, then presses. No names are exchanged. You may smile, nod, or hold the door for someone, but in the end, everyone withdraws. For a moment, several lives share the same vertical movement, then separate at different heights.

Density is the first scale you feel each day. Corridors stretch endlessly, doors repeat without distinction, each quietly enclosing a life inside. You quickly learn the rules: do not linger, do not disturb, do not extend any encounter. Courtesy becomes efficiency.

Even in a system designed for efficiency, small gaps remain.

Someone lives above you. He always returns later than you. When you sit in the kitchen, eating a chopped cheese sandwich for dinner, heavy footsteps echo from above, followed by the dull slam of a door. That is how you know he has come home.

You do not meet him until the day he knocks. The knock is abrupt, almost improper. You open the door and see his shy face. He seems to be about your age. He explains his situation in a hesitant voice. You laugh and let him in.

He follows you into the bedroom. Letting a stranger enter your private space is a subtle thing. Outside, the fire escape connects your room to his. From there, he can reach his window and climb back into his room. He has forgotten his key.

As he climbs over your bed toward the window, you begin to wonder where the boundary between private and public truly lies. He leans out, murmurs a quiet thank you, and disappears.

It happens again, and then once more. He knocks. You open. He crosses your room, climbs over your bed, and vanishes outside the window. After the third time, you begin to think that perhaps you should ask him to stay for dinner. Next time, you tell yourself with a smile.

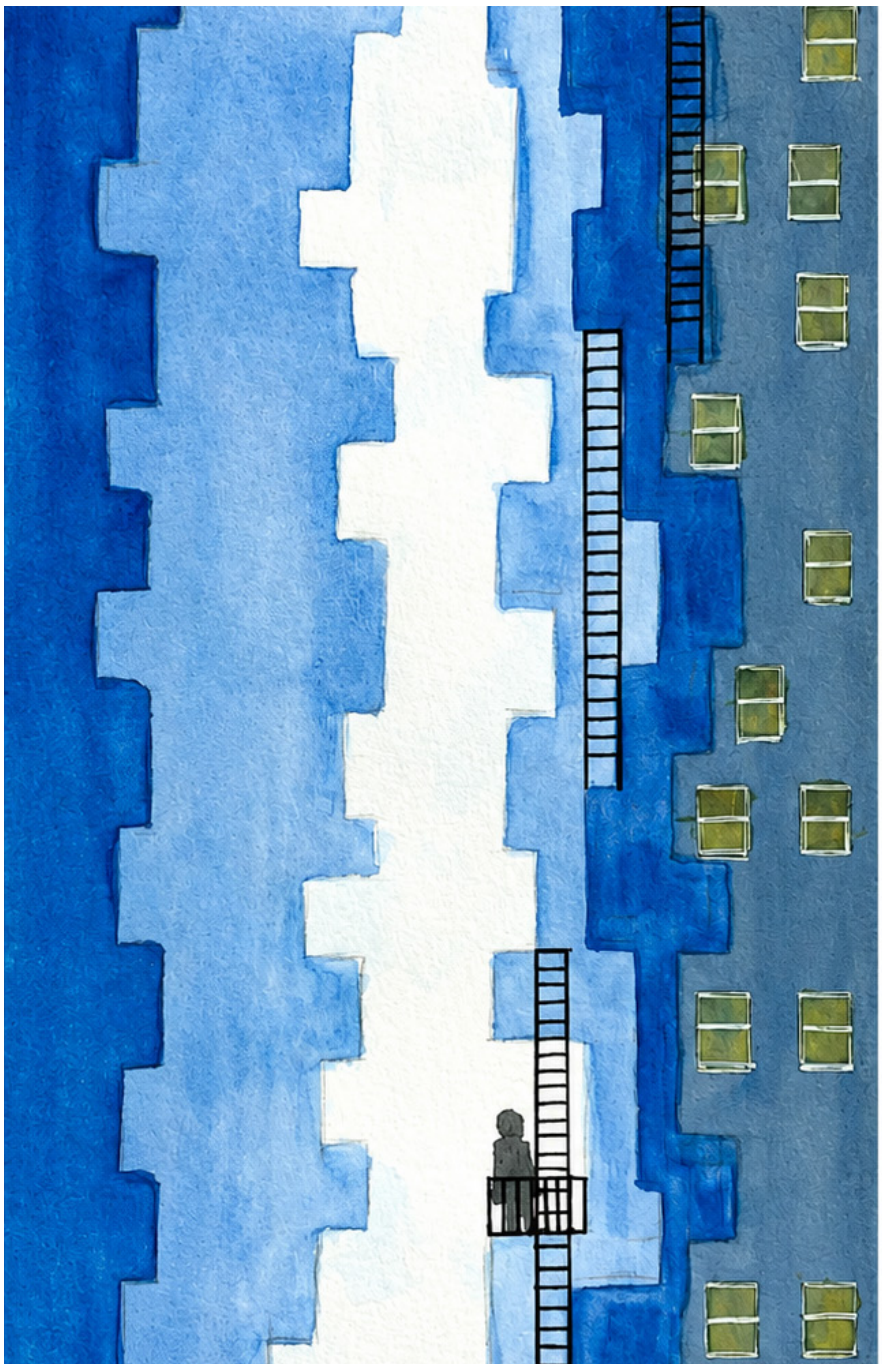
But he never comes again. Until much later, when you notice that the heavy footsteps above have disappeared, and the door no longer slams.

One evening, sitting in the kitchen, eating a chopped cheese sandwich for dinner, only then do you suddenly realize that you never knew his name. Those brief encounters never entered the system's record.

Architectural Principles · Anonymity · Proximity · Repetition

This story explores a particular state of being in New York: a collective, tacit understanding formed under extreme density to protect personal space; a form of survival wisdom that absorbs a massive, machine-like social structure into everyday behavior; and a tender, melancholic urban rhythm in which brief encounters are destined to disperse. It also explores how the countless invisible "units" that constitute the city pass through their days and nights, closely connected yet fundamentally alone, within a vast system.

City of Density draws from Midtown Manhattan: dense, vertical, efficient, and largely indifferent to individuals. This reflects my own experience of social relationships there. The story is written in the second person, a narrative mode I often use in my fanfiction writing. It creates ambiguity. Here, "you" are not a character with a clear personality, but a unit placed within a system. The third person would make this position feel personal, while the second person keeps it anonymous. In this way, the story works as an architectural experiment, inviting the reader to experience density and loneliness.



2.5. *City of Density*. Watercolor by the author, 2026.

City of Bridges

This city is made of bridges.

Hundreds of them span uneven ground, rivers, and ruins. Shorter spans are built of stone and wood; longer spans are built of iron and glass. On the famous bridges, the railings are crowded with love locks, and ribbons are tied along the handrails. Wind passes through the bars, setting the accumulating metal and fabric into motion, producing a thin, persistent sound.

People live, meet, and part in a state of sway and suspension. They rarely arrange to meet at one end, but rather say, "on the bridge." A man and a woman separate on the bridge, turning in opposite directions. A grandmother and her granddaughter meet on the bridge, finally reuniting in midair.

Some linger there for years, never arriving. They share rooms that feel borrowed, lives that seem to belong elsewhere. Buying a home, getting married, having children. These milestones belong to another spatial logic.

In this city, one may become interested in anything. A certain music, a certain craft, a certain sport. For a time, it feels real, as if it could take root. Once they leave the city, it fades. What once seemed a passion is something briefly inhabited, suspended, then left behind.

Below, traffic flows endlessly; buildings are constantly renewed; water runs day and night, carrying away memory like time itself. Only the bridges remain in place, bearing repeated crossings and brief pauses, slowly aging through their faint vibrations.

Architectural Principles · In-Between · Suspension · Relational Space

During my time in New York, I was introduced to baseball for the first time. I joined a company team and played several games over the summer, gradually developing an interest in it. However, after leaving New York and returning to Cambridge, the interest quickly faded. Without a shared context or companions, the activity no longer held the same meaning.

This experience made me realize that interests, relationships, and identities can emerge only temporarily within specific urban conditions. Once removed from that environment, these attachments dissolve. The city therefore is a spatial framework where life experience is fragmented into moments that appear and disappear.

In the story, this condition is translated into a city defined by bridges. By concentrating encounters onto bridges, the city shifts intimacy from stable interiors into transient spaces. Meetings no longer culminate in arrival but remain suspended within movement. The city becomes a spatial metaphor for a state of transition. It is neither departure nor arrival, but a condition in between.

In this story, time is understood as continuous flow. Within this flow, human meetings and separations are brief and fragile. The story proposes an architectural ethic in which permanence belongs to structures, while human life remains temporary, suspended between meeting and farewell.



2.6. *City of Bridges*. Watercolor by the author, 2026.

City of Fifty Pounds

No one is allowed to enter the city carrying more than fifty pounds of luggage.

No one is allowed to leave the city with more than fifty pounds either.

No one really knows where the law came from.

Some say fifty pounds was considered the maximum weight one person could carry alone. Others say the city was built by immigrants, refugees, laborers, students, and runaways. They crossed oceans and borders at a time when fifty pounds was considered enough for a new life. Over time, the limit became law.

Over time, two unusual industries grew around the rule.

People arriving for the first time are quickly drawn to the second-hand markets. Sofas, floor lamps, vinyl records, and porcelain tea sets can all be bought cheaply or picked up by the curb. Folding furniture is especially popular. Tables fold into walls. Beds lift upright. Chairs stack into one another. Houses begin to look like the furniture inside them: light, temporary, and easy to leave. People try not to own too many things, because everyone knows they will pass through the weighing halls again.

The other industry belongs to people preparing to leave. Storage warehouses hide beneath elevated train tracks, beside abandoned factories, or deep underground. Long hallways glow beneath fluorescent light. Rows of metal doors stay shut, like lives paused in the middle. People leave behind furniture, clothes, books, and other things they cannot carry away, believing they might return the following year. Some do. Others leave their belongings there so long that they forget what is inside.

Some stay here for too long. Another season passes outside the window. The plants outgrow their pots. Eventually, leaving requires more than fifty pounds.

Others do not want to stop in one city for too long. So they hand their keys back to the landlord, repack and continue on.

Show ticket stubs, souvenir magnets, postcards bearing city images, beautifully designed posters, candles made by friends, sweaters knitted by a grandmother... Little by little, they fold away their lives. Little by little, they compress time itself. Until the rooms grow emptier, and the memories grow fuller.

Diplomas, certificates, unfinished painting, letters never sent, recipes in a mother's handwriting, the cast-iron pot bought with a first paycheck... Little by little, they sort through their belongings. Little by little, they abandon their memories. Until the luggage grows lighter, and life itself grows heavier.

Even at fifty pounds,

life is still too heavy to carry.

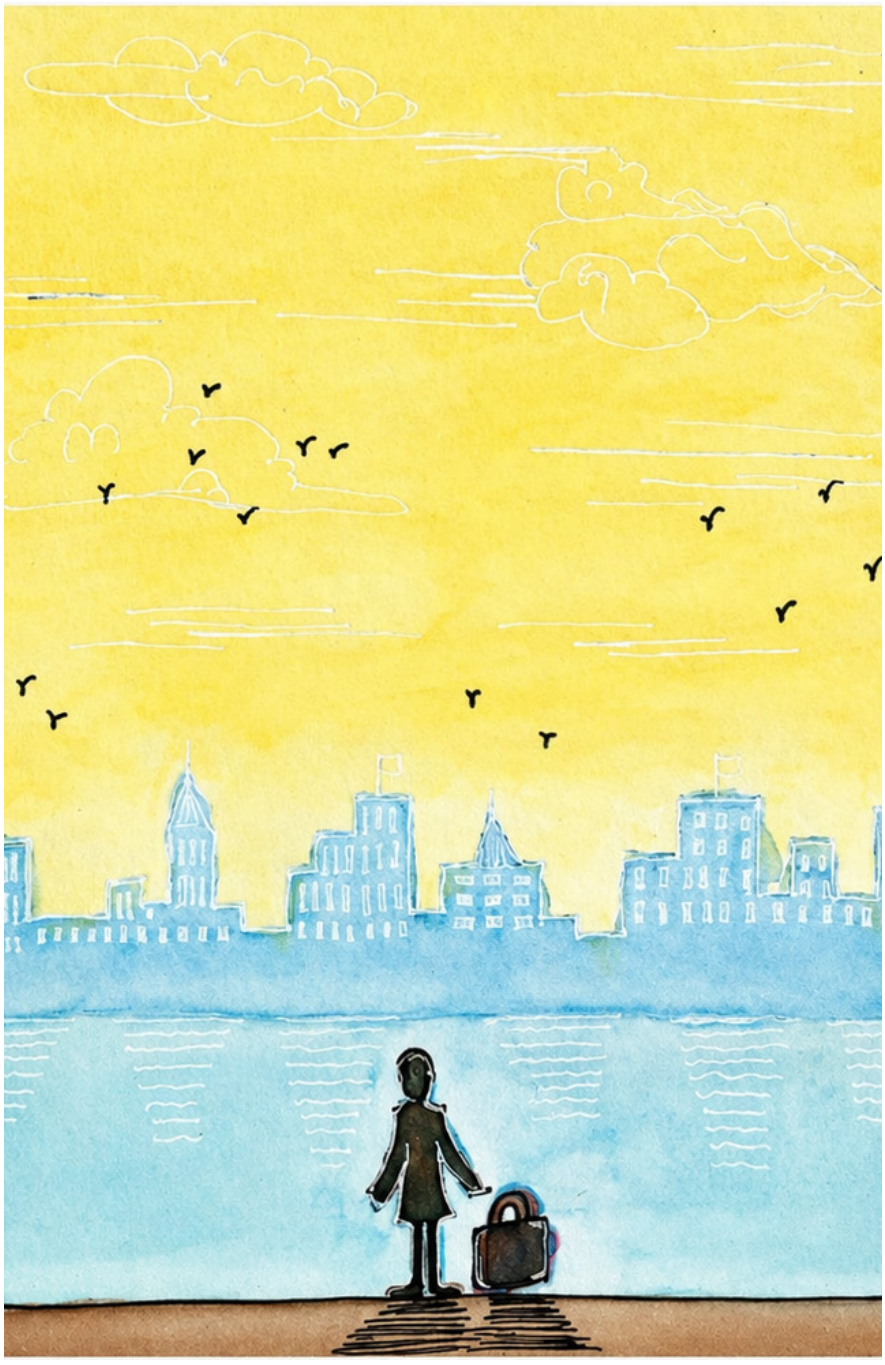
Architectural principles · Mobility · Transience · Accumulation

Whenever I fly to a city, airlines set a fifty-pound luggage limit, aside from additional checked baggage. The number comes from the maximum weight airport workers are expected to carry safely without injury. I became fascinated by this number because it represents a compromise between the human body, global mobility, capitalism, and infrastructure. It made me wonder: if a life had to fit within fifty pounds, what would you choose to keep?

To me, packing luggage is also an act of organizing one's life. We decide what is important enough to carry forward. The things that matter most often cannot be weighed: memory, relationships, belonging, identity. Airport scales can weigh a suitcase, but they cannot measure the emotional weight of a wandering life. This reflection inspired this story and eventually replaced my original story City of Theater.

New York City is shaped by migration, instability, and mobility. People arrive searching for another life, linger in uncertainty, and leave with memories heavier than their luggage. Objects circulate between strangers. Entire lives can be packed into boxes, stored in lockers, abandoned on sidewalks, or carried across oceans.

The story reflects the experience of drifting through contemporary cities: constantly moving, constantly starting over, while never fully escaping the past. With every departure, the luggage fills with accumulated years and memories. Even when the luggage remains at fifty pounds, life is still too heavy to carry.



2.7. *City of Fifty Pounds*. Watercolor by the author, 2026.

City of Lure

At midnight, when everyone has fallen asleep, there is a pulse deep beneath the ground. Hush—go to sleep. Do not listen to the invitations rising from brick and stone. Hush—do not wander. Beware the spirits that linger in the shadows and lure you toward an underground city.

By day, the entrances are inconspicuous. They hide behind graffiti-covered access doors, or in the blind ends of cable trays, where only rats pass through. Yet when the midnight bells strike twelve, the ground begins to turn over, like a map folded back upon itself.

Space begins to grow.

Walls emerge from concrete, low and inclined. Entrances and exits are misaligned, like a scrambled puzzle. Pipes branch and spiral, clinging to the structure like darkened vines. Stair flights lose continuity, collapsing into staggered landings. Above, the arched dome is adorned with mosaics depicting star trails, awakening under dim amber light.

Spirits are neither visible nor audible, but merely the name given to the spatial response when people lose their way. Spirits lure the sleepless, the insomniac, the heartbroken, the lost; those wandering the streets after drinking, those exhausted after parties, those dragging their bodies after working overtime, persuading them that these spaces were made for lingering.

Lost souls who intrude here behave differently: some sing, some run, some curse at the air, some whisper prayers, and others simply collapse into sleep.

This underground city continuously recalibrates itself through their presence, for every intruder triggers a subtle adjustment: a corridor may extend, a corner may disappear. Through such incremental growth, the city extends through abandoned passageways, folds beneath water-stained ceilings, and replicates itself beneath newly laid floors.

But beware—

When the morning light reaches the first step, those who remain will become new bricks in the maze. Their final heartbeats will dissolve into the rhythmic click-clack of the rail joints, echoing softly with every passing train.

Architectural principles · Seduction · Disorientation · Spatial Agency

The inspiration for this city comes from the New York subway, and it incorporates my own experiences at night: the sleepless, the insomniac, the heartbroken, the lost; those wandering the streets after drinking, those exhausted after parties, those dragging their bodies after working overtime.

Using the tone of an urban legend, I imagine a city that appears when the ground turns over "like a map folded back upon itself," emerging at midnight and disappearing before morning. This time-based framing places the city between myth and infrastructure, where poetic imagination and a sense of harshness exist at the same time.

In this city, space itself is the only protagonist. The "spirits" are a name given to the moment when people lose their sense of direction and space begins to react to them. When people are tired, intoxicated, or emotionally vulnerable, their perception of space changes. This challenges architectural ideas of safety and efficiency; instead, it proposes seduction as a design tool, one that responds to psychological conditions and shapes human behavior.



2.8. *City of Lure*. Watercolor by the author, 2026.

City of Compression

There are two ways to enter this city. If you arrive above ground, whether by the light chime of carriage bells, the gentle sway of streetcars along the tracks, or the low breath of automobile engines, you will see a green goddess lifting her torch in greeting, and a bronze bull lowering its head, ready to charge.

If you enter from below, everything changes. Footsteps, the rush of arriving trains, and the scrape of metal gather in the narrow space, pressing against the walls and returning on themselves. Above ground, the city is measured in distance. Below, it is measured in stops.

You no longer read the city through its streets or buildings, but through those who board the train. In one car, suits are sharp and the air is quiet; in another, bodies slump together, asleep; farther down, tourists grip the poles and look around, while vendors drift through the aisle, selling chocolate bars and roses.

At transfer stations, shoulders brush within inches, and hands overlap on the same rail. A homeless man huddles at the end of a seat, a banker stands beside him absorbed in the page, and a delivery worker sways with the motion, his eyes heavy with exhaustion. They are folded together, then gently separated at the next stop.

The map of the city hangs on the wall. Every line leads everywhere, or so it seems. Some people spend their entire lives moving back and forth between familiar stations, or wandering long corridors in search of an exit. Others keep transferring, moving from line to line, as if somewhere in the network there might be a place that feels different.

Yet you never arrive elsewhere. The city only folds again, and returns you to where you have never left.

Architectural principles · Stratification · Circulation · Compression

This story developed out of an earlier piece I wrote about the subway. That one focused on late-night trains, showing insomniacs and the heartbroken, with a tone close to an urban legend. This one turns toward an urban allegory, shifting from emotional experience to a critique of social structure. Together, they form a contrast: in the first piece, the subway is a container of emotion; in the second piece, it becomes a machine of society. This shift reflects the main idea of the story: urban space is a system that quietly assigns positions and shapes people's paths.

During my internship in New York City, I took PATH every day, often experiencing that feeling of being "folded together, then gently separated at the next stop." I would stand in a discounted Uniqlo T-shirt beside a Wall Street trader wearing a Rolex. In the same car, there was a mother selling candy with a baby strapped to her back, performers dragging a speaker while singing, and a man holding a cup and a cardboard. People stood close to one another, but rarely made eye contact.

As I watched the mother, a thought came to me: we are all just trying to make a living.

This sentence is simple, but it reveals a deeper structure. Bankers, street vendors, the homeless, interns all try to make a living in different ways, with different levels of difficulty, and from different positions. The subway is where these differences are compressed into the same space. In this moment of folding, social separation collapses, only to be restored again at the next stop.

The imagery above ground is also intentional. The Statue of Liberty represents freedom and possibility, while the Charging Bull represents competition and capital. Together, they convey a clear message: the city welcomes you, but it also tests you. It promises opportunity, but also creates pressure.

What appears above ground, however, is only an invitation. It tells you that you may enter, but not where you will end up. The answer lies underground.



2.9. *City of Compression*. Watercolor by the author, 2026.

City of Ascent

In this city, construction never ends. The arms of cranes turn in the wind, concrete hardens through the day and night, and scaffolding glimmers under the floodlights. No one remembers when the first tower was built, and no one has ever seen the last one completed. The sounds of pile driving, clashing steel bars, and concrete pumping have merged with the city's pulse.

She works on the sixtieth floor of a glass tower. As a trader, her job is to predict ascent. Here, every desire must rise. Money. Power. Faith. Time. To stop is to fall.

As capital flows, the structure of the city changes with it. Money becomes a building material, raising new floors on invisible levels. Every rate, every speculation, every transaction inscribes itself onto the skyline, turning value into height and data into façade.

The ground below grows darker each year. The narrow streets of the old districts have sunk into shadow. Red-brick warehouses, cast-iron windows, and painted ghost signs are sealed within new foundations. What was once surface has sunk into structure, replaced floor by floor, lot by lot.

At night, the towers illuminate. Every window joins a continuous façade of light, forming a field of artificial day that defines the horizon. Steam rises from vents, and the hum of air-conditioning replaces the wind.

From her office window, she watches another plot of land by the docks fenced off with blue barriers, machines carving a new foundation as cranes blink red in the fog. The city extends itself through glass, steel, concrete, and capital, an organism that repeats itself.

Suddenly, she recalls a structural report she once read on the city's foundations: "*Alluvial layers in continuous compression, subsiding at 5.0 millimeters per year.*" The number lingers in her mind, strangely aligned with the fluctuations on the trading charts.

The city will stand higher than ever, balanced on a ground that has been sinking all along.

Architectural principles · Verticality · Accumulation · Capitalization

At first, I intended to title this story City of Desire, but eventually I chose City of Ascent, as it better captured the essence. Yet I know that one day I will write another story called City of Desire, since desire and ascent can never truly be separated.

The inspiration came from my internship experience on Wall Street. Each morning, as I came out of the World Trade Center station, I passed through corridors of scaffolding, glass façades, and towers still under construction. Crowds of office workers hurried through the narrow streets, their steps echoing with the cranes that kept turning overhead. It was here, in the heart of the Financial District, I began to see how deeply the idea of "rising" shapes both the people and the architecture of the city. Here, to stop meant to fall. It was that feeling that let me name this city Ascent, because on Wall Street, everything is compelled to rise: money, power, faith, and time.

From these daily observations arose a question: what if architecture itself had become an extension of capital? This story reinterprets architectural typology through this idea, suggesting that in the context of late capitalism, buildings are generated through economic forces. The skyscraper becomes a spatial structure and a product of accumulation, reflecting the logic of the market even as it shapes the city's horizon.

Another inspiration came from real geological reports. Multiple studies have confirmed that Manhattan is gradually sinking, with the Financial District subsiding most rapidly.[2] I was fascinated by this paradox: the higher the towers reach toward the sky, the more silently the ground beneath them sinks. This dual movement of ascent and descent reveals the fundamental contradiction of modern society: the higher we rise, the deeper we fall.

2 Virginia Tech, "Study: From NYC to D.C. and Beyond, Cities on the East Coast Are Sinking," *PreventionWeb*, January 2, 2024, accessed May 1, 2026, https://www.preventionweb.net/news/study-nyc-dc-and-beyond-cities-east-coast-are-sinking.



2.10. *City of Ascent*. Watercolor by the author, 2026.

City of Desire I

They arrived by ship.

The ships set out from different shores, carrying different languages, faiths, and names, and converged on this new land. They intended to build a city that could stand shoulder to shoulder with the Tower of Babel, not to reach heaven, but to proclaim brilliance.

The city quickly answered this desire. Tall brick and stone buildings rose along the riverbank, their façades dense with arched windows and cast-iron balconies. Streets were straight and broad, and the wheels of carriages struck a steady rhythm against the paving stones. Gas lamps were lit one by one, their golden glow tracing cornices. Factory chimneys, church spires, and museum domes piled upon one another, the sunlight sliding across their heights. Guidebooks published for the World's Fair listed the city as a must-see destination, and postcards bearing its image were printed again and again, mailed to places far away.

The splendor of daylight concealed another order. In the back alleys, sewage crept through the cracks between stones, mingling with coal dust and bloodstains. Behind shuttered doors, within private rooms, and across polished dining tables, other transactions took place. After nightfall, fights, extortion, smuggling, bribery, and murder unfolded in the shadows. Bodies were sometimes pulled from the river, sometimes left to sink to the bottom, sometimes sealed together with rubble and mortar into foundations. All that had been devoured by desires became part of the city's foundations, anchoring its rising brilliance.

Humanity finally learned to coexist with its own shadow, beneath this Tower of Babel that no longer needed to challenge God.

Architectural Principles · Erasure · Complicity · Permanence

"How many bodies are found in the Hudson River every year?" A question from my former colleague that inspired this story. As I looked at the magnificent office buildings and the majestic skyline of New York City, I couldn't answer her question, so I wrote this piece.

The story describes a city built by immigrants from different countries, united by a shared desire. The reference to the Tower of Babel is a reinterpretation: the city does not seek to reach heaven, but to assert its own value through scale and permanence. In the story, violence, crime, and death are integral to how the city functions. Bodies are absorbed into the city's base, becoming part of its architecture. These foundations make the cost of brilliance tangible, embedding violence into the soil from which the city grows.

More importantly, City of Desire I offers no moral resolution. The city does not collapse, nor is it punished. This results in a state of collective complicity, in which no individual is held solely responsible. Through everyday participation—building, working, inhabiting, watching, and admiring—the city continues to advance, until crime and death become part of its ordinary condition. Living in a post-Babel time, humanity no longer attempts to challenge God, but accepts the darkness as part of the city's architectural ethic.



2.11. *City of Desire I*. Watercolor by the author, 2026.

City of Desire II

Every weekend, they wander the streets.

They meet in different cafés, ordering the same bagels with cream cheese. Afterward, they stroll along the streets, passing boutiques, clothing stores, and furniture shops. At times they pause before display windows, and at others they step inside to examine the shelves, including agate, silver cutlery, finely crafted glass, cashmere shawls, and handmade chocolate. If they like something, they buy it at once. If it is out of stock, they ask whether it can be transferred from elsewhere. Most of the time, they get what they want, just a few blocks away.

The city is known for its material abundance. Goods across the world converge here, and nations are bound together through trade. Treasures from the four seas gather in its marketplaces, and flavors from across the world find their way into its kitchens. At night, they bring the day to a close with an elegant dinner or in the dim light of a bar.

After some time, weariness begins to spread. They feel themselves slowly submerged, as though sinking into thick syrup. They begin to question the daily life wrapped in commodities, the glittering prosperity that surrounds them.

"This is not real life," they say. "We should go elsewhere."

And so, wave after wave of people leave, just as their ancestors once arrived from afar.

No one knows how many years passed before new cities grow in other places. There too, people wander the streets, linger before stores, and raise glasses at night. They believe they have arrived at a new life. Yet the shopwindows still instruct them what to admire, the rooms still teach them how to appear, and desire finds them again in forms already shaped.

They may not realize that what they have reached is nothing more than the same city, in a different location.

Architectural Principles · Consumption · Homogeneity · Reproduction

In City of Desire II, architecture is produced through everyday behavior: walking along the streets, pausing before shop windows, entering stores, and purchasing goods. Over time, these actions organize the city into a continuous cycle of circulation, where desire is constantly triggered but never fully satisfied.

Material abundance is the city's most important feature. The description "Goods across the world converge here, and nations are bound together through trade. Treasures from the four seas gather in its marketplaces, and flavors from across the world find their way into its kitchens" comes from Meng Yuanlao's *The Eastern Capital: A Dream of Splendor*[3].

This story is also inspired by Georges Perec's *Things: A Story of the Sixties*[4], and Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*[5], which describe how consumer culture and images reshape everyday life and mediate desire. In this city, the growing sense of emptiness is produced by a spatial system that generates desire without allowing it to reach an end.

Leaving the city does not break this condition. When people move elsewhere, they do not invent a new way of living, but reproduce the same urban model elsewhere. Shops, streets, and interiors continue to shape behavior in similar ways. Within this structure of repetition, desire persists precisely because it is never fulfilled.

3 Meng Yuanlao, *The Eastern Capital: A Dream of Splendor* (Seattle: Amazon Digital Services LLC, 2025).
4 Georges Perec, *Things: A Story of the Sixties*, trans. David Bellos and Andrew Leak (London: Vintage Classics, 2011).
5 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994).



2.12. *City of Desire II*. Watercolor by the author, 2026.

City of Tides

When the first breeze of autumn brushed the sea, the blue waters drew back to both sides, and the city that had slept for a year emerged from the depths. Cursed by the gods, it returned on this single day, remade as a joyous amusement park.

The air was thick with the scents of cotton candy and popcorn, sweet and salty like the sea breeze itself. The Ferris wheel, draped in seaweed, began to turn again. The carousel, inlaid with shells, played its cheerful tune. The roller coaster roared toward the sky, leaving behind a trail of exhilarated screams. Every structure was temporary, yet in their fragility they formed a typology of joy, an architecture rebuilt each year from the memory of longing.

Many who had come from afar were enchanted by this fleeting splendor, or perhaps, weary of life's trivialities, willingly surrendered themselves to the one-day carnival.

"Look," the girl said, pointing toward the mermaids singing on the rocks. "Aren't they free?" The city's natives, the mermaids, waved gently at the visitors. There were no words in their song, yet it seemed to tell of eternal freedom, a life untouched by sorrow.

"It's only a dream that lasts twenty-four hours," The boy said.

As twilight deepened, the first fireworks blossomed across the night sky.

At that moment, she slipped from his hand and ran toward the breakwater, leaping into the water. He saw her legs transform, as she touched the water, into an ice-blue tail.

"See you next year, won't you?" Her voice came with the waves.

At midnight, the city began to sink. The sea rose over the glass roof of the carousel, swallowed the roller coaster's tracks, and carried the Ferris wheel back into its long sleep.

Visitors boarded boats and departed, some excited for the next year, others wiping away tears. The boy stood alone on the beach, still holding the melting ice cream he had bought for her. Droplets fell one by one onto the sand.

Over the next three hundred and sixty-four days and nights, he would realize the city wasn't sinking but practicing another kind of architecture, one that understood some spaces must be earned through waiting, some structures built from longing.

Until the next beginning of autumn, when the ocean once again offered its brief, dreamlike gift.

Architectural principles · Cyclicity · Temporality · Longing

In Chinese myth, there is a romantic yet sorrowful tale called *The Cowherd and the Weaver Girl*. It tells of two lovers, separated by the Milky Way, who are allowed to reunite only once a year at the Qixi Festival. What fascinates me is the underlying philosophy: the long, eternal waiting compressed into a single, fleeting moment of joy. That rhythm of distance and reunion shaped the emotional core for City of Tides.

For me, the story is also a love letter to Coney Island, New York. Because of the long journey and my hectic schedule, I have only been there once, but that single visit left a dreamlike impression. I shared the Nathan's Famous hot dog and melting ice cream with a girl. We rode the Ferris wheel, and from its highest point saw the skyline of Manhattan in the distance. We screamed on the roller coaster, its violent twists nearly turning our stomachs inside out. All these sensory fragments became the raw material of my story.

Once, yet eternal.

Coney Island's annual Mermaid Parade gave the story its metaphor. Watching people dressed in shimmering costumes, dancing freely under the sun, I could not help but imagine: if I could become a mermaid, could I escape the gravity of everyday life and leap into a realm untouched by sorrow? But of course, that is impossible. Dreams fade, and life on shore continues. That's why the boy stays on the beach, watching the ocean swallow the city and carry the girl away. It's an acknowledgment that some longings must remain unfulfilled.

Even so, like the eternal promise that brings the Cowherd and Weaver Girl together at the Qixi Festival, I couldn't let the story end in complete loss. I left a thread of hope: "Until the next beginning of autumn, when the ocean once again offers its brief, dreamlike gift."



2.13. *City of Tides*. Watercolor by the author, 2026.

City of Sediment

Before the city arrived, the land was already an island.

Two rivers ran along its sides. The tide rose and fell around it twice a day. Salt marshes shimmered in the sun, and oysters clustered along the shoreline into reefs. The hills rose slowly from the ground, their rocky backs exposed to light and wind.

Before the city, there was forest. Before the forest, there was glacier. Before the glacier, there was sea. Before all of this was named, there were people who lived with the land. They moved with the seasons, listened to water and wind, and cared for what was given.

Then one day, cannon fire crossed the harbor, and gunpowder mixed with the air. Some bodies fell in the mud. Some bodies were buried in haste. Some bodies were left in the trenches, sinking with the rain.

Victory was declared. The land was won.

Years passed. Trenches filled with wild grass. Wildflowers bloomed across the battlefield. Round stone forts became lookout points. Iron cannons were polished into memorials. Graves were leveled and sealed beneath asphalt.

Sunlight settled on park benches. In the afternoon, people bit into bread, crumbs scattering into the grass. Pigeons lifted into the air. Children ran. One child paused to pick up a stone, unaware of what it once marked. Beneath their feet, under the ground —

A layer of shells. A layer of silt.

A layer of charcoal. A layer of broken pottery.

A layer of rusted iron. A layer of bone.

A layer of war. A layer of peace.

One layer pressing upon another, until it hardened into the land you stand on.

You say you bled for it. Blood is only salt, and salt returns to the sea.

You say you gave your life for it. Bones are only minerals, and minerals return to the earth.

You say you own it. The tide returns.

No one owns this island.

In its long memory, they settle into a thin layer of dust.

Architectural principles · Stratification · Deep Time · Transformation

I have been thinking about what existed before the city.

Before New York City became New York City, it was a British colony; before that, a Dutch colony; and before both, the ancestral homeland of the Lenape, particularly the Munsee Lenape, whose relationship to this land persists despite histories of displacement; before that, an island of hills, forests, and wetlands; before that, a landscape shaped by glaciers; and before that, a vast sea. Moving backward through these layers of time, the identity of the city gradually dissolves, revealing a landscape that far exceeds the scale of human history.

Many people fought over this land, and sovereignty changed hands multiple times, such as during the 1776 Battle of Long Island and the Battle of Harlem Heights. These events exist within human time. In the scale of geological layers, ownership is temporary and fragile. This idea resonated with me when I read a quote from Goodreads: "When the blood in your veins returns to the sea, and the earth in your bones returns to the ground, perhaps then you will remember that this land does not belong to you, it is you who belong to the land."[6]

Architecturally, this story questions the idea of permanence. Asphalt, memorials, and forts seem solid and lasting, but they are temporary surfaces covering deeper layers of sediment. Architecture does not stand outside of time; it becomes another layer added to the ground. Philosophically, the story shifts perspective from human-centered time to deep time. The island existed before the city and will continue to exist after it. What we call history is only a brief moment within a much longer geological memory.

6 "When the blood in your veins returns to the sea… you belong to the land," *author unknown*, often attributed to a "Native American proverb," Goodreads quote page (accessed May 1, 2026).



2.14. *City of Sediment*. Watercolor by the author, 2026.

City of Becoming

Every night, when the moon rises, the beasts of the city awaken.

Look!

They spill out of apartments and subway exits, out of bodies that have been sealed shut all day. Horns gleam under moonlight; fur ripples in the wind. The city yields its right of way, surrendering the night to those who do not belong to the day.

Listen!

Techno, drumbeats, and screams spiral upward, weaving through tunnels and the narrow voids between buildings. Feet pound the pavement as laughter follows. Music tears the crowd apart and sews it back together. Direction collapses, and only rhythm remains.

Smell!

The night ignites the air. Smoke, sweat, and perfume intertwine, drifting from clubs and bars, from bodies pressed too close. Sidewalks thicken into shared rooms, spreading into the night until the air turns thick.

Taste!

Alcohol and blood spread across the tongue, sweetness and rust flaring in turn. Kisses blur into one another. Human language melts into shared breath, carried through dense rooms and narrow passages, absorbed into warm, animal murmurs.

By day, the city tightens itself. Turnstiles snap shut behind tired backs, while hurried cups of coffee pass from counters to hands. Time presses bodies into hunched shoulders and quick steps, teaching them how to move without friction, how not to take up too much space.

By night, the city releases itself. Former industrial spaces such as lofts and vacant rooms remain unfinished and open to occupation. Streets fill with bodies that have nowhere else to go but forward, dancers, actors, artists, filmmakers, lovers, the almost-famous, the not-yet-anything. The beasts do not flee the city; they surface where it briefly allows itself to breathe.

The deep night has not yet ended, and dawn has not decided to arrive. Some sit on rooftops, drinking and smoking; some keep dancing against red brick walls. In these spaces, the body is no longer required to align with a single identity. Young souls are exhausted but awake, like the city itself—rough, unfinished, still in the process of becoming.

Architectural Principles · Release · Rhythm · Transience

The story draws from my observation of Brooklyn's nightlife, an atmosphere shaped by energy, diversity, and incompleteness. Many people who gather here exist in transitional states: almost-famous, not-yet-defined, or unconcerned with recognition. Individuals with strong personal styles form a condition of "becoming."

Within this context, my friend and I also discussed the strong presence of LGBTQ culture in Brooklyn. Lady Gaga's song Born This Way, with its message that there is no need to be afraid of who one truly is, captures this spirit. My focus lies in the spatial conditions that support this form of expression.

In this city, rooftops, streets, tunnels, clubs, and former industrial spaces such as lofts and vacant rooms become informal stages for gathering and expression. They support different forms of presence through their openness and incompleteness. At night, these spaces begin to overlap. Interiors spill into the street, circulation becomes unpredictable, and the city reorganizes itself through movement.

From this spatial condition, the "beast" represents the self that is suppressed during the day by social norms, as well as individuals who do not fit into mainstream culture. Through the shift between order in the daytime and its release at night, the city becomes a carnival in which socially acceptable appearances are shed, allowing people to briefly be themselves.



2.15. *City of Becoming*. Watercolor by the author, 2026.

City of Memory I

Many years later, as she flipped through the photographs, she was to remember the afternoon when she had first arrived in a city famous for its sunsets.

That day, the smell of frying oil from street carts had drifted through the air, warm and faintly burnt, mingling with the metallic salt that had risen from the river. The surface of the water had been tinted copper, ripples carrying the light slowly toward the shore.

The sunset spread across the streets, laying a thin veil of gold over buildings and passing faces. Somewhere in the distance, vehicles crossed the bridge, their sound traveling along the steel cables, arriving late.

Back then, every visitor to the city raised their cameras, pressing shutters at intersections, on bridges, by the riverbanks. They captured light and shadow, buildings, fleeting selfies with the city, as if only by sending these moments elsewhere could the present become real. Between clicks, they paused for an instant before rushing to the next spot.

She took photographs too. With each capture, something fell away, quietly. She lowered the camera. Beneath her feet, the river kept flowing, carrying the last of the copper light away in its silent current. The surface faded into gray. One by one, the streetlights turned on.

Many years later, looking at those photographs, she could recall the colors, the buildings, the position of the sun between them. But the thickness of the air, the weight of the sunset, and a dull pain in her chest did not return. The dusk she remembered was one she would lose again.

The dusk she carried with her was no longer there.

Architectural principles · Ephemerality · Mediation · Loss

"Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice."[7]

The opening of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* has always stayed with me, especially the way García Márquez blends different tenses so that past, present, and future seem to occur at the same time. When I began writing City of Memory, I realized that this structure fits my story very well. Since it's about how time changes our experiences and how memory slowly fades, I wanted the opening to signal that the narrative would not follow a chronological order.

The biggest challenge I faced was using English tenses correctly. I rarely use the past perfect in my usual writing, but this story required constant shifting between the past perfect, the future-in-the-past, and the simple past. I wanted the movement between tenses to create a sense that time was collapsing, similar to how memory works, sometimes clear, sometimes blurry, and often unreliable.

This story explores a paradox: that the more carefully we try to record something, the faster the real experience slips away. High-quality photos may preserve what a moment looked like, but not what it felt like. In the story, the girl takes many pictures, but instead of feeling more connected, she feels distant, as if the scenes belonged to someone else.

Another inspiration for this story came from watching "Manhattanhenge" in Manhattan. Every July, crowds gather to photograph the sunset hanging perfectly between the buildings. This event is widely marketed as a spectacle to be recorded and shared on social media. Standing amidst the crowd, I was struck by a profound sense of melancholy. People were so focused on taking pictures that they barely experienced the moment itself.

7 Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).



2.16. *City of Memory I*. Watercolor by the author, 2026.

City of Memory II

At dawn, only when the fog thickens does an abandoned railway reveal itself. If you climb along its path, you find yourself stepping into a city lifted above the ground.

It began as a single path preserved at a disused elevation, a memorial to a function that has long since failed. At some indeterminate moment, the city began to grow along this line. It has no fully formed houses: no continuous walls, no enclosed roofs, no clearly defined floors. Benches and railings gather where loading docks, warehouses, and stations should have been, then abruptly end where streets ought to continue. In the cracks of the sleepers and the rusted gaps of the rails, blood-red holly berries appear; plumes of fountain grass tremble in the mist; silver-white tassels of miscanthus drift down.

Within the fog, glass curtain walls slowly surface, layering the figures walking above with the flowing streets below. Standing here, one's gaze slips into the past: tavern signs flicker at a street corner; clothes hang from a fire escape; workers walked beside a train, unloading meat and milk. In the distance, a graffiti-covered water tower stands on a rooftop, while on the river a cargo ship turns slowly. Everything enters the field of vision, yet remains beyond reach. The railway continues into the mist, but no longer leads to any form of life.

It is at this height that residents begin to withdraw from the city. The city erases their departure, little by little: coffee drifting from early cafés, the frying oil of street carts, the warmth of dinner in the evening air. Did they choose to leave, or were they driven out by some stronger will? Such distinctions no longer matter, for space itself seems to have made the decision first.

Just as this unresolved melancholy reaches its peak, what reaches you is nothing more than the wind brushing against glass. As you turn to return to the world, you suddenly realize it is a clear, ringing laugh—rising from the depths of memory.

Architectural principles · Erasure · Representation · Displacement

This city is based on my experience of walking along the High Line in New York City. I was impressed by its beauty and careful design, but at the same time I felt uneasy. Visitors are encouraged to keep moving rather than stay, and the project has contributed to gentrification and the displacement of residents. With these mixed feelings of admiration and discomfort, I wrote this story.

Through this story, I reflect on how contemporary urban projects may preserve the image of memory while withdrawing the conditions that allow memory to be lived. This process echoes Aldo Rossi's concept of the city as a locus of collective memory. In City of Memory, one may remember, yet retrieve nothing that is remembered; one may feel longing, yet find no definite object for that longing. What remains is not the city that once existed, but a surface arranged for its recollection.

I like the laughter at the end, which feels like a decisive moment. It lingers as the last trace of memory after the city has lost its capacity for dwelling. Memory moves away from physical space and continues as an echo of emotion.



2.17. *City of Memory II*. Watercolor by the author, 2026.

City of Shadow

Another rainy day. My basement room has flooded again.

I can't be bothered to walk several blocks, stepping around puddles, to the laundromat. So I carry the wet clothes upstairs and hang them, one by one, illegally on the tenement rooftop. I light a cigarette and look up at the sky. No matter how hard I try, I can't find a trace of the sun. All I see are dense towers, slicing the sky into fragments.

In this city, light is not evenly distributed.

My first job is during the day. I'm secured by two ropes as I hang in midair, moving along glass curtain walls. These façades are vertical boundaries that divide the city into the visible and the invisible, the illuminated and the shadowed. Only by climbing upward can I enter the zone of light, as if briefly crossing an unseen line.

Suspended sixty stories above ground, the world feels far away. A strange weightlessness rises from my feet. That distant, burning sun can only be approached at the risk of my life.

I clean windows—moving along that boundary.

The rooms up there are always empty. Sunlight falls across polished marble floors and untouched leather sofas. Floor-to-ceiling glass traps the light in place. Apartments are bought and held, but never lived in. I polish the glass so they continue to shine.

My second job is at night. I wash dishes in the back kitchen of a restaurant. There are no windows here, only artificial light, from wires and switches. At ten, I take out the garbage. There are always a few figures by the bins, searching through discarded food. By the rules, I should drive them away, but I never do.

On my street, people pitch tents along the sidewalk. These temporary structures cling to the edges of the street. Tarps, plastic sheets, and cardboard do not belong to architecture, yet persist against it. I keep my head down, quickly unlocking the street-level door leading down to the basement, climbing down, and closing it behind me.

I look at the clothes I brought in from the rooftop. I hang them inside. They are dry, but their edges are stained with street dust.

I suppose I am lucky. I still have work. I still have a place I can call shelter.

And yet, I know we are not so different. Above, they raise their glasses in the light, their laughter falling from overhead. Below, we remain out of the light.

We live in shadow.

This city is built of shadow.

Architectural principles · Inequality · Invisibility · Division

The key image in this story is “shadow,” which has two meanings. Literally, it refers to the way tall buildings block sunlight. Metaphorically, it describes a form of social inequality: the rich push the living space of the poor into darkness.

New York represents an extreme case of financialized urbanism. Many luxury apartments are purchased by speculators as investments and left vacant. Entire floors remain empty. Meanwhile, homeless people are common on the streets. Rent is extremely high, yet developers continue to prioritize luxury housing over affordable housing. Many people in their thirties still share apartments, with very limited personal space.

I also included my own experience in this story. During my internship, I was not allowed to take rope access training, which became a regret for me. I was drawn to that position because it combines danger and beauty. This unrealized experience is transformed into the protagonist’s job of cleaning windows as a way of “chasing the sun”. Other elements of the story are also drawn from my personal experience.

In terms of structure, the story is organized into three parts: moving upward without reaching the sun, looking downward without seeing life, and returning home at night without rest. Time shifts from day to night, while space moves from high to low. The protagonist remains in an in-between condition, between ground and sky, between labor and survival, and between myself and others.

City of Shadow is an allegory about the right to dwell. It asks: when sunlight falls only on vacant assets, when workers live in flooded basements, and when the idea of “home” becomes an investment, who does the city really belong to?



2.18. *City of Shadow*. Watercolor by the author, 2026.

City of Tops

When the city began to sink, some said it was a curse from the gods, while others believed it was nothing more than the settling of the ground beneath its foundations. Year by year the water rose. It crept across the outskirts, then over the dirt roads, until at last it reached the city walls. So people began to raise the city. New districts were built higher up, above the old ones. At the time, they believed that if the city kept growing upward, it might escape the pursuit of the water. Yet many years later new districts had become old, and the water was still rising. The land routes disappeared, and in the end, people could only leave by boat.

Year after year, wave after wave of people departed. Yet he remained.

He lived in a penthouse atop one of the tall buildings. From there, the entire city seemed reduced to rooftops. The old streets lay beneath the water now. On clear days, through the faint rippling of the surface, one could still see the blurred pattern of paving stones, like a map slowly being erased. He knew which stretch of road once led to the old bookshop, and which led to the shop that made custom rings.

Shop windows, factories, museums, and theater had long been submerged. Only the upper halves of the buildings remained above the water. Verdigris domes, ornate gables, stone goddesses, and colonnaded towers faced one another through the mist. Rooflines that once proclaimed wealth and glory now formed the last horizon of the city, like an inverted skyline.

The heights of the city had become its new streets. Long ago, people built hundreds of bridges linking one rooftop to another. They once walked between spires and met each other between towers. Now, only the wind remains. It moved across the domes and through the empty halls, sometimes carrying echoes from another time: music drifting from a ballroom, the heavy rhythm of printing presses in a newspaper office, and the distant thunder of the elevated railway passing through the city.

The doorbell rang again. It was probably someone coming to urge him to board the evacuation boats. But he did not move.

He often stood on the terrace overlooking the city, watching what remained of it grow quieter with each passing year.

If the city must eventually sink, he thought, then let me become a mermaid.

Then the streets would become waterways, and the squares would become shallow bays. The domes of tall buildings would become coral beneath the sea. Fish would swim among the colonnades, and seaweed would cling to the stone pillars. The statue of civic fame would still stand on the roof, facing east, her laurel wreath lifted high, as if she were still crowning the city.

And he would become a mermaid, swimming freely through the sunken city, never needing to leave again.

Architectural principles · Verticality · Belonging · Transformation

This story is inspired by the skyline of New York during the Gilded Age (1870s-1890s). Verdigris domes, ornate gables, stone goddesses, colonnaded towers, and the statue of civic fame are architectural elements that best represent the city's civic pride. In the story, they remain as the final architectural traces of a city that is gradually disappearing. Therefore, City of Tops can be understood as a story about urban residue. The "tops" were once the architectural crowns of the city, but now they have become the city itself. The story asks a question: when the ground no longer exists, can the upper parts of buildings become a new urban layer?

At the same time, this is also a story about belonging. Most people choose to leave because they still belong to the land and to the possibility of rebuilding life elsewhere. The protagonist, however, stays. By imagining himself as a mermaid, he adapts to a city that no longer belongs to the land. In this sense, belonging is no longer about possession or permanence, but about accepting the changing fate of the city.

Within the framework of the thesis, this story also weaves several narrative threads. It echoes the unstable foundations hinted at in City of Ascent, the elevated and abandoned city in City of Memory, the submerged city and the mermaid image in City of Tides, the bridges in City of Bridges, the prosperous city in City of Desire, and the long-term transformation in City of Sediment. Similar images appear across different stories, creating a sense of recognition.

Through these connections, the larger ambition of the thesis begins to emerge. Although the twenty fictional cities appear independent, they all describe the same city at different moments in time. Each story represents a different stage in its life, from birth and growth to prosperity and eventual disappearance. However, the timeline is deliberately disrupted and overlapped so that different moments coexist within the narrative.

In this sense, the structure of the thesis is similar with the editing style of Quentin Tarantino's films. His films do not unfold in a linear sequence but overlap fragments from different moments in time. This thesis reconstructs twenty stories along the imagined timeline, allowing readers to move between pieces and gradually assemble the history of a single city: New York.



2.19. *City of Tops*. Watercolor by the author, 2026.

City of Found

If you sail from the far side of the sea for three days and three nights, following the routes where warm currents meet cold currents, you reach the City of Found.

Whether it is a photograph once lost, a letter never sent, a dream left unrealized, or a success still out of reach, everything is said to return here. And so travelers arrive from distant lands, one after another, carrying the same promise in different forms: some anxious, some desperate, some simply curious.

At first, this land is nothing more than an open coastline. Travelers from afar build plazas, inns, churches, libraries, and tunnels in those places where they remember the moment they left it behind. The city gradually takes shape as a map of absence, a careful layout of possible paths where the lost might one day return.

Travelers settle down, waiting for that day to arrive, hoping that the lost item will appear at the end of the street they have built. As years pass, they gradually forget what they have lost, remembering only that the city must be maintained and expanded.

So the streets extend, walls are rebuilt, foundations are corrected, as if constructed from a shared sense of regret. The city stretches in layered grids, a labyrinth: gate behind gate, corridor after corridor, tower after tower, block after block.

But nothing returns.

What travelers bring with them begins to fade. A dream once imagined. A success once pursued. A life once believed. For a time, these feel close, as if they might take shape within the city. Yet the longer they remain, the less these can be named.

Among so many others waiting, they become difficult to tell apart, even to themselves. New travelers wander the labyrinth and ask: What draws them here? Is it to find what was lost, or to face what they once left behind?

Only the city remains, holding what cannot be recovered, and what was never meant to return.

Architectural principles · Absence · Waiting · Dissolution

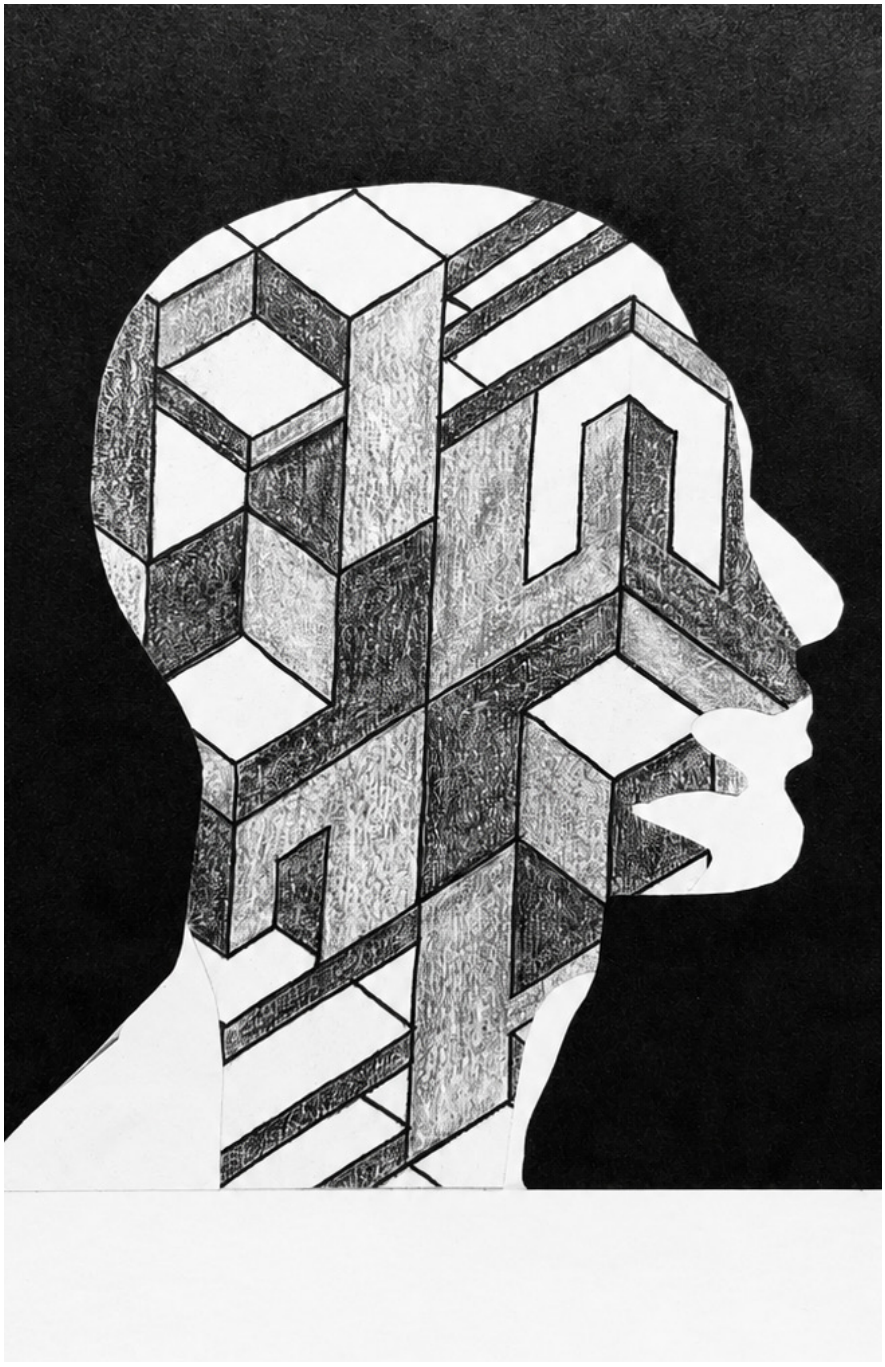
This story explores a city built around what has been lost, imagined, or left behind. Architecture here does not hold real objects or events, but the hope that they might return. In this condition, memory becomes a generative force. Travelers build streets, plazas, and buildings according to where something once belonged or might reappear. The city takes shape as an accumulation of individual recollections and shared desires.

Many people come to New York driven by ambition and dreams. Yet within the density and repetition of urban life, these motivations gradually lose clarity. What once felt important becomes difficult to name. Over time, individuals may lose not only what they sought, but also a sense of who they are.

This city is inspired by the intricate street network of Lower Manhattan, described in the story as a labyrinth. It appears legible yet cannot be fully grasped. People believe they can find a way, only to become lost within it, gradually losing memory, desire, and a sense of self.

In terms of narrative, this story is inspired by Italo Calvino's *Cities & Desire V*[8].

8 Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, trans. William Weaver (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978).



2.20. *City of Found*. Watercolor by the author, 2026.

City of the Same

You asked me, after traveling through so many cities, whether there was one I had never told you about. I did not answer right away.

For a third of the year, the city lies under snow; for another third, it is given over to rain. The eaves tilt slightly, and water slips along the gutters. Steam rises from the underground, heavy with dampness. In the distance, sirens drift between buildings.

Once, a young man stopped me on the street. "Could you tell me what city this is?"

I said, "How could you not recognize it?"

"Please don't mind me," he replied. "I'm a poet, walking between sentences; I'm a painter, drifting among colors. So I often forget where I am. Tell me, how do you recognize this city?"

I raised my hand and pointed farther: Six friends crowd onto a sofa in an apartment, talking and laughing; five friends sit in a booth at a bar, deep in conversation; four high school students linger on the museum steps; three women gather around a table in a restaurant; a girl holding new clothes rushes across the street; a boy runs across the rooftops, leaping from edge to edge; a man dances on a narrow stairway between two buildings; a man with a cane walks his dog past the library; and a little girl, with her nanny, boards a train heading south.

"Though this is my first time here, everything feels familiar," the poet and the painter said, following my gaze. "As if I have lived endless lives in this place."

Many years later, I traveled through more cities and crossed more continents. One day, I found myself moving between rows of brownstone townhouses until I lost my sense of direction. I stopped a passerby and asked, "Could you tell me what city this is?"

"I don't know," the passerby replied. "I've been wandering these streets for years and still haven't found a way out."

I recognized him, though his hair had turned gray. He was the same poet and painter.

"That cannot be!" I shouted. "I entered a city once. I don't even remember when. I have gone on ever since, going deeper and deeper. But that was another city, far away from here. How could I have come here?"

"The places have mingled," he said. "Everywhere is this one city."

I looked at the repeating streets and windows, and suddenly understood—

I had not passed through nineteen cities, but through nineteen states of a single city. And that city was myself.

"Every time I tell of other cities, I am already losing it, piece by piece," I said.

"That is how a city exists," you said. "It fades as it is told, and returns in its repetition."

Architectural principles · Repetition · Recognition · Dissolution

If readers have ever wondered who the "I," "you," "she," and "he" are across the twenty stories, this last story offers an answer. These figures are not separate individuals, but the same person, the same self. The last story begins as a dialogue with myself. The two figures who lose their way are both me. I spend my life circling within the same city, unable to leave it. This is New York City, and it is also a reflection of my inner world.

The city I cannot escape is my albatross, my beast, the cross to bear, and also my haven. It follows me everywhere, never leaving my side. The life I have lived there cannot be erased, just as I cannot find a place from which to begin again. This city may never have truly belonged to me. It is the city I long to leave, the city from which I long to return to my own Ithaca. And yet, it remains the only place to which I belong.

The city had already taken shape in me long before I arrived. New York has been portrayed in countless writings and on countless screens, so when I first arrived, I felt as if I had already lived countless lives here. The last story is also a way of acknowledging the films and television set in New York that introduced me to the city long before I ever set foot in it.

"Six friends crowd onto a sofa in an apartment, talking and laughing" refers to *Friends*; "five friends sit in a booth at a bar, deep in conversation" refers to *How I Met Your Mother*; "four high school students linger on the museum steps" refers to *Gossip Girl*; "three women gather around a table in a restaurant" refers to *Full Moon in New York*; "a girl holding new clothes rushes across the street" refers to *The Devil Wears Prada*; "a boy runs across the rooftops, leaping from edge to edge" refers to *Spider-Man*; "a man dances on a narrow stairway between two buildings" refers to *Joker*; "a man with a cane walks his dog past the library" refers to *Person of Interest*; and "a little girl, with her nanny, boards a train heading toward the edge of the city" refers to *Uptown Girls*.

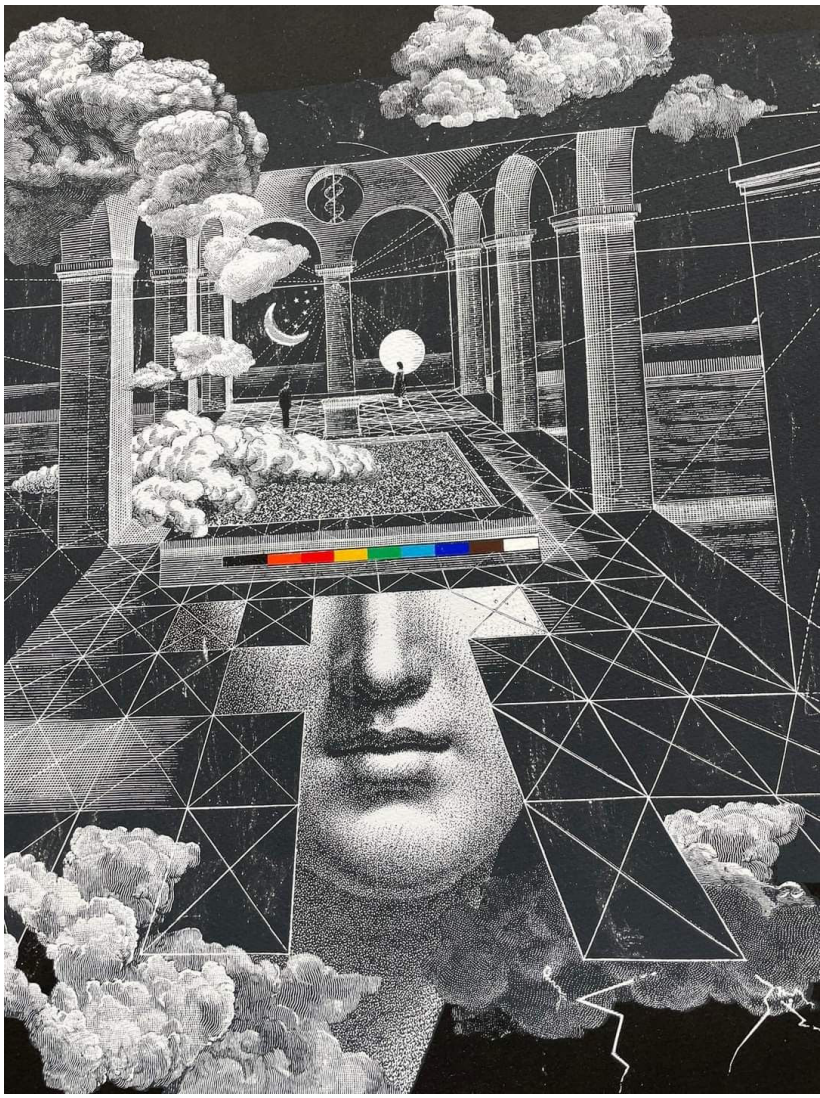
In terms of narrative, this story imitates Italo Calvino's *Continuous Cities IV*[9].

9 Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, trans. William Weaver (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978).



2.21. *City of the Same*. Watercolor by the author, 2026.

03



3.1. John Karborn, *The Seeker of Digital Chaos and Harmony*, 2023.

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Antonioni, Michelangelo, dir. *The Passenger*. 1975.
Antonioni uses architecture to frame lost identity and emotional distance. The Gaudí sequences show how a city can mirror a character's internal transformation.

Antonioni, Michelangelo, dir. *La Notte*. 1961.
The film portrays emotional distance and quiet exhaustion within modern urban life. Architecture frames a city where connection weakens and meaning slowly dissolves.

Bresson, Robert, dir. *Four Nights of a Dreamer*. 1971.
Bresson presents Paris through restraint and silence. The city becomes a landscape shaped by longing and introspection. His minimal approach influenced my use of sparse architectural detail to evoke emotional states.

Bresson, Robert, dir. *The Devil Probably*. 1977.
Paris was filled with ecological anxiety and existential exhaustion. The film shaped my understanding of the city as a reflection of social and psychological pressure.

Debord, Guy, dir. *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni*. 1978.
Debord reflects on drifting through the modern city and the erosion of meaningful life under spectacle and consumption. Through fragmented images and narration, the film presents the city as a space of wandering, memory, and alienation.

Resnais, Alain, dir. *Hiroshima mon amour*. 1959.
The film examines how memory interrupts linear time. Trauma becomes embedded within the ordinary spaces of the city and changes how those spaces are experienced.

Resnais, Alain, dir. *Last Year at Marienbad*. 1961.
Resnais uses repeating corridors, gardens, and interiors to construct uncertainty and fragmented memory. The film influenced my use of recurring spatial motifs to shape psychological space.

Tarkovsky, Andrei, dir. *Nostalghia*. 1983.
Tarkovsky merges architecture with emotional and cultural displacement. His work influenced my attempt to construct cities from memory, longing, and estrangement.

Wenders, Wim, dir. *Paris, Texas*. 1984.
Wenders links vast landscapes with emotional revelation through sparse architectural settings such as motels, highways, and the peep-show booth.

Wenders, Wim, dir. *Wings of Desire*. 1987.
Wenders portrays Berlin as a city shaped by memory, longing, and quiet observation. Through wandering angels and fragmented encounters, urban space becomes a poetic landscape of collective consciousness and emotional solitude.