



We are an archive, a record of time. Originating from the primordial cloud, surrounding earth four billion years ago. We turned from gas to drops, for centuries descending into the basin of abysmal pools that would come to cover the earth almost entirely. A constant in presence, the same amount of us exists now, as when we came into existence. We are at once ancient and new every day. We are a body of water. Forever shapeshifting and in flux.

The cycle continues, through condensation and precipitation, functioning like a motor left running, with dark clouds, rising and falling. Circularity is at our core.

Our memory is a complex system of spiritual, historical, political, colonial, ecological and ancestral interactions that inhabit water and consequently bodies. (Ocean Archive Tabita Rezaire).

Water and time are inextricably linked to one another. Time is said to have come from the word tide, the same holds for the Dutch equivalent getij derived from tijd. Two tides a day, created by an intermix between the gravitational forces of the sun and the moon, and the rotation of the earth.

With our waves crashing on the shore, we are like a metronome.

We are a pendulum asway between freezing and flooding. Retreating and repeating.

Life ends and starts with us. On our journey through time, we have witnessed the rise and fall of organisms. Our fluctuations brought about birth and extinction. We saw life shoot into shape with the synthesis of microbial prokaryotes and later photosynthetic organisms. Air

filled with oxygen and opportunity for other life. The continuously complexifying life boiled within us for three billion years before spilling over onto newly formed land. Part of us will always reside within the bodies of these terrestrial creatures and reptiles, like you.

Regardless of the self-proclaimed importance, humans form only a parenthesis somewhere deep within the most recent paragraph of this testimony.

While you play a minor part in us, we play a major part in you: 70% on average.

It has taken time for humans to make sense. Of themselves as something other than the core. Or Culture.

On our journey through time, we have witnessed the rise and fall of numerous cities and civilisations. Some of which humans have forgotten, obscured under layers of sediment. Others memorialised, elevated under the guise of sentiment. Yet others, destroyed, dispatched, discarded.

From the endless stream of human actions, we deduced a pattern: an endless back and forth, like the Moon's steady pull on me, humans commit, construct, erase and erode. Form a movement, a wave, dip and fall flat.

They can't seem to make up their mind. If they want to come to connect or come apart.

Sentiment reveals and obscures through self-indulgence and exaggeration. One view overtakes another. Like with all stories, there is the potential for use and abuse.

We feature in the origin story the Netherlands tells itself about itself, not as a protagonist but as a subject of control. Control in the name of protection, strengthening coastlines and the construction of an intricate network of dams, dikes, canals, and drainage systems, keeping the water at bay. Without these measures half the country would be submerged, giving us the chance to reclaim it.

Location 1: ROTTA: THE DELUGE

In 2009 the remains of Rotta, the oldest traces of human settlements on the area now housing Rotterdam, were discovered. Handed down under the dirt

Housing, shoes, shards, tools, human remains, keys, coins, pilgrimage pendants. A boat

Anchoring a possible story of 10th century Rotta as a small fisher's village, located at the intersection of two rivers. The landscape in large determined by these surrounding streams was fertile, facilitating economic activity, through trade and tilling but fragile in future, due to flooding from both sides, causing death and forced displacement. Due to this instability in future housing, Rotta created elevation. Farms were built on artificial hills called *terps*. Keeping in tandem with the advancing flood line, the farms reached higher and higher to the sky. Each 15 years new farms were hoisted on top of the old ones that had either flooded or were threatened to be flooded. Over time under the soot, this system of stacking came to be the first apartment block.

In the early 13th century, after repeatedly being washed out and washed over, Rotta's faith truly seemed sealed when it was hit by the biggest flood yet, burying the village

under a layer of sediment, securing a clear stratum of the archaeological findings in 2009.

But not long after Rotta was rebuilt, secured through the construction of a dam in the neighbouring river the Rotte. This development signified a shift from controlling the consequences of living within reach of water to controlling the water directly. Additionally, the increased stability provided by the dam and its exerted control, consolidated the development from Rotta into Rotte-r-dam. The fishers' village that according to the environment perhaps never should have been, became: a hub, a city, a metropole of trade.



A most peculiar object brought to the surface at the excavation of Rotta was a boat dating from not long after the big flood. The boat was seemingly intact but misplaced. Not in the water but on the dry, located at the base of the dam in the Rotte. On closer inspection the boat kept true to its function of safety and traversing by connecting one side of the riverbed to the other, solidifying the dam. The control over the river and its water levels. The village was grew on top of a boat. Harbouring the city from the water. Enabling the village to continue to exist and expand. Imagine a future and act on it.

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The story of Rotta is not isolated. Up until the 1600s the coastal areas of now North Holland, South Holland were relatively watery, consisting only of thin land. Only coming into more definite shape through various forms of water management. These regions today house the capitol, the second and third largest city, its primary governmental organs, the international court of Justice, the stock exchange, most data centres and the Europort.

In a conversation about Dutch identity formation my friend Martin Crasborn told me he had observed a sense of pride in the way Dutch people talk about their relationship to water, as if they have mastered it. But that is the thing; it is impossible. One of waters prime characteristics is that it cannot be contained. It is a misplaced arrogance. It is a myth.



[audio piece martin]

A variety of versions of this story and structure saturate Dutch creation discourse; we as a nation have been birthed, risen, from the water, our control and eventual conquering of it.

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The boat, harbouring Rotta from flooding rings familiar and mythical.

A red thread throughout the various existing flood myths is the underlying idea that the Flood is a form of divine retribution, destroying a world and its disobedient civilisation while blessing a single person or small minority with foresight and instructions for survival. The Biblical Deluge and Gilgamesh both follow such a narrative structure. In the Bible it is Noah and his wife with a male and female of each animal species that survive, in the Gilgamesh it is Utnapishtim and his wife. In these myths, a constant: a ship, an ark, a cradle, carrying the blessed away from the blasphemous, bringing a new civilisation into being at the expense of another. It is a form of creation in destruction that associates water – the bringer of life - to purity. The flood becomes a sweeping force that clears the ground for a “clean new” life.

These flood myths, and the Biblical Deluge in particular, helps to explain and contextualise the persisting idea that the border between land and sea has historically in Northern Europe been associated to the gothic and sublime. The liminal space separating land from sea with its rocks and cliffs was perceived as a remnant of the deluge, inciting fear, rendering coastal areas inhospitable places. The sea itself, was connected to the unknown and sea creatures.

The Rotterdam International Architecture biennale of 2005 was called ‘the Flood’ and focussed on the relationship between water and urban design, zooming in on the Dutch context and Rotterdam specifically, but extending its scope to include other places in the world as well. In the introduction of the exhibition catalogue, it reads: "the [Great] flood is a metaphor for The Netherlands as a phenomenon: for the culture, for the landscape and for the architectural and planning traditions" (Geuze p. 8).

To equate the Netherlands to the Great Flood is to place the nation in the belly of a “godly” voyaging vessel. Connecting survival to expansion and “furthering” God’s work of “exporting civilisation”.¹

The Nation(al) myth

Integral to attempts of nation building are drafting up a story of origin, belonging and destiny. Nationalism or nation-building is not a process of achieving national self-consciousness. It is an act of imagining and conjuring up (Anderson, p. 7). Authority in modern nation states is connected to popular or majority rule and one way in which majorities are constructed is through nation-building (Mylonas Harris 2012, p. 17). This process of construction relies on the application of mechanisms of exclusion in the name of creating inclusion.

Translating into a fixation on fixed boundaries, separating an in-group from an out-group, the blessed from the blasphemous, citizens from strangers, passports from refused asylums. Like in any dichotomy, the definition of one identity is dependent on that of its negation. Stories like these are ritual and repetitive to the point of no surprise. Generating a superficial stillness against the backdrop of a world in constant transformation. These stories draw into

¹ The myth of exporting civilisation is further scrutinized in the next section of the thesis

an image, clear and comprehensive, precise in ambiguity. But stories turn beliefs, turn politics, turn (border) policies and police.

With the last governmental elections in the Netherlands, it became clear that the radical right-wing parties won a lot of ground. Cumulatively JA21, FvD and PVV won 28 seats of the 150, bringing them 2 seats ahead of the left. Political theorist Matthijs Rooduijn in an article for the Correspondent compares the radical right-wing party agendas. The stark similarity concerns ideas on immigration and integration, formulated in their nativistic views combined with an emphasis on security, law and order, which translates into the protection of the native nation and its homogeneity against destabilizing or threatening forces (Rooduijn 2021).

Sylvana Simons the face left-wing party BIJ1, pointed out this tension when she said ‘Dutch people use the word “integration” they actually mean “assimilation” (Micner 2016).

This train of thought clearly construes an inside and outside, bypassing the idea that the existence of borders as permanent and natural is a fiction.

Migration-related news is often articulated through water semantics; refugees continue to *stream* into Europe as migrant crisis intensifies; refugees *pouring* through European borders; thousands of refugees to *flood* Europe, to name just a few. The significance of this framing is two-fold. First, this framing merely addresses one form of migration, aside from sea-routes such as the Mediterranean, a significant number of migrants travel to Europe by air. To travel by air one needs to be in possession of a valid visa, as the costs for transporting someone without the valid documents back is on the air lines, those without these documents or from lower-income countries resort to migration by boat. (REF)

When the world is flooded, the last remaining ships are islands on the horizon.