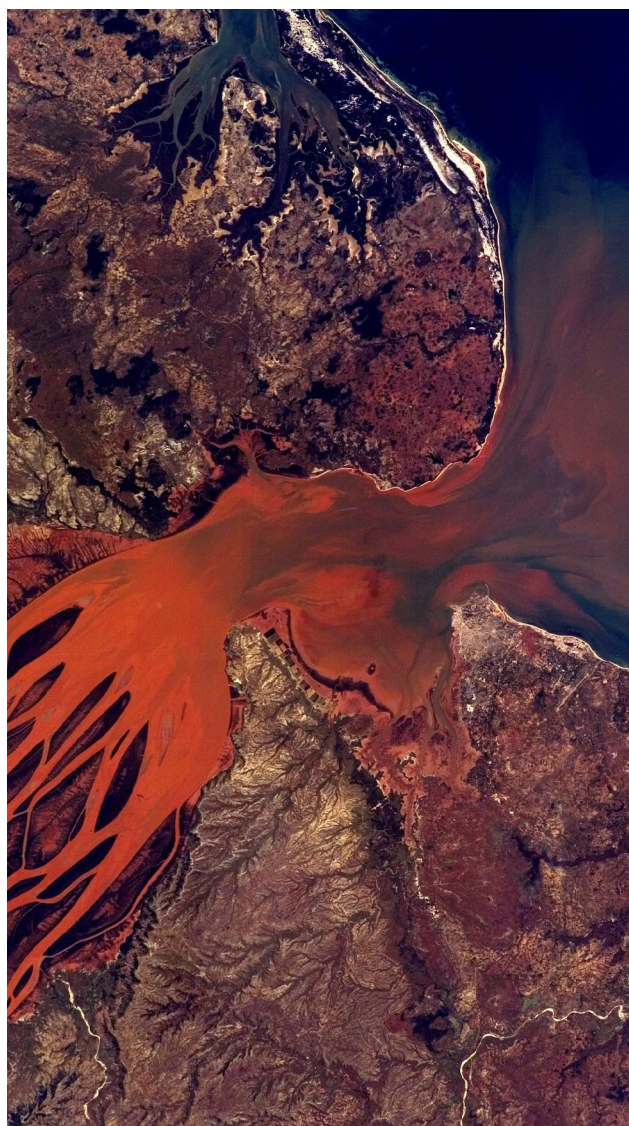




Issue #05 Accidents

Fall | Winter 2024



DU

Journal of Delta Urbanism
Delft University of Technology

Delta



When you can see the stars above, the city lights below, and the atmospheric glow blanketing Earth's horizon
By NASA International Space Station, 2025

Luisa Cortesi

Delta (noun) /'deltə/¹

- the fourth letter of the Greek alphabet
- a change in a figure or amount
- an area of low, flat land, sometimes shaped approximately like a triangle,
where a river divides into several smaller rivers before flowing into the sea.

- 1 Cambridge Dictionary, ©
Cambridge University Press 2020.
2 The font variation in italics are Tagore's
own words

ODE TO THE BENGAL DELTA AND TO ITS POET,
RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Dying. Wave breaking. Tide surging. At the end of land, the slow and intricate lace is embroidered by sweet water, and consumed by salty one. I invite the poets and I stitch them a cushion with my own hands. Once, it was the ocean who was *receding step by step, heaving and sobbing and beating its breast in despair*. Now it is the sea who is again the *sole monarch, utterly free*. Wave breaking, tide surging. I pace the sunlit terrace. *It heaves and heaves and blanches into foam*. Without silence, and yet without noise. Without walls, still continuing the echo of the songs of the sinking lands. Wave breaking, tide surging. Terminally ill, bores no stamp of taxable usefulness, thus failing to gather their gaze, disinterested, glaring at a map that wasn't but for a day.

Elusive. Bubbling over. Gliding down. *I reach this Bengal sky-full of light*, where I face my lover and my death. *Let the Earth leave her hold of me, let her free me from her obstacle of dust*. By dying in every moment, I live. Bubbling over. Gliding down. When adorned by the mangroves, the lace is thick and textured. Even at moonlight, it beams, it glistens. It grounds, and deepens. And belongs to more legs and echoes more songs. *Those delicate skins the embroidered borders of even Dacca muslins were too coarse, so that to wear muslins with the border torn off* became, for a time, the thing to do. Bubbling over. Gliding down. A map that isn't but for the pattern, without coordinates.. those legs have no address, but here, now. *Sky empty, earth empty too—the emptiness below hard and barren, that overhead arched and ethereal*.

Liminal. I would stand and gaze. *Languid with joy, sad with longing*. Breathe in the propitious wave crushing against no wall. Blades of reciprocal grass. *Overpowered by curiosity, yet in fear and trembling, I venture* where my being ends. And yet, *ever since my return from the Himalayas*, it is where I am free of all bondage, where I can let myself bare, where I let go. Those who find anguish in my nakedness aren't for this land. *Languid with joy, sad with longing*. Its thorns are its flowers. *This experience of mine has led me to dread, not so much evil itself, as tyrannical attempts to create goodness. Of punitive police, political or moral, I have a wholesome horror*.

Triangular. *Nothing but sorrow have I ever gained except when left freely to myself*. Moonbeam glancing off, legs in the clay. It is here where the path of the wind enters inland, the wandering of the cyclone. *And only since then could my nature prepare*. Shall poetry be explained? It is nothing but my smell, my essence, there is nothing to understand. *That words have meanings is just the difficulty*. Moonbeam glancing off, legs in the clay. *Ineffable days and nights*. You can moor neither myself nor you to a sandbar. *It sets me thinking of some tied-up monster straining at its bonds, in front of whose gaping jaws we build our homes on the shore and watch it lashing its tail*. Am I, instead, the monster? You can let time hold its wings still around me.

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Amphibious. Those legs inhabit us both. *Attuned to the plaintive babbling.* And the moonlight spells. *Let there be no song, no word, no sound, no touch; nor sleep, nor awakening.* Yet nothing is ever motionless here but the shadow of the fringe of the sandbar. *With here and there a streak, as of water, running across, though sometimes what gleams like water is only sand. The only breaks in the monotonous whiteness are gaping cracks which in places show the layer of moist, black clay underneath.* And what else wants to remain hidden? *Fainter and fainter in the air* the song of the tiger god sung by the fisherman, and that of the fisherman sung by the tiger. *Attuned to the plaintive babbling.* And the moonlight spells. *Stretching from horizon to horizon,* I cover it with all my colors, turbid and clear. *While I sink in the bosom of the endless night, fading away from myself, dwindling into a point. Looking ahead from land, there is endless blue above, endless white beneath.*

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