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Editors-in-Chief
Stefano Beggiora
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The Venice Journal of Environmental Humanities

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Thinking the Planet with Venice

edited by Serenella Iovino and Stefano Beggiora

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Introducing *Lagoonscapes. The Venice Journal of Environmental Humanities* Editorial

Serenella Iovino
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, USA

Stefano Beggiora
Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia

The heat is on. On September 21, 2021, the CMCC Foundation (Euro-Mediterranean Center on Climate Change), has released an important report, *Analisi del Rischio. I cambiamenti climatici in sei città italiane* (Risk Analysis. Climate Change in Six Italian Cities). Providing "the first integrated analysis of climate risk in Italy", the scientists working at the Center envision a very disquieting – and yet highly realistic – picture of the future for the most iconic Italian cities. Heatwaves will make life in Rome and Milan very hard, and Naples will be almost an appendix of Africa, in terms of temperatures and desertification. Bologna and Turin, situated in two of the most problematic sites of the peninsula in terms of pollution, will suffocate with smog and hot temperatures. The CMCC report follows another crucial document: the IPCC Working Group's report, *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis*, approved on August 6 by 195 member governments of the IPCC. As strongly as ever, the report confirms that climate change is a not a mere weather forecast for an undefined future: it is a reality, which is "already affecting every region on Earth". And it is increasing, with scenarios that include heatwaves, longer warm seasons and shorter cold seasons (+ 1.5 °C) or, worst, heat ex-

tremes that will be hardly compatible with agriculture and health (+ 2 °C). No earthly system, whether bio-chemical, geological, or social will be immune from this: that is the Anthropocene. Meanwhile, the leaders of the world's most powerful countries (we are writing this editorial in the wake of the G20 Rome summit and at the eve of the COP26 UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow) are hesitating in finding a satisfying agreement that would put limits to fossil energy and inaugurate a real era of climate justice.

The humanities, all over the world, have long been responding to this vexing situation. One of the results is the rise of the Environmental Humanities. And it is highly symbolic that Venice is becoming the avant-garde for this cultural change. In fact, the role of the city in this conversation is unique. Situated in the upper Northeast corner of our warming peninsula, and for centuries at centre stage of the world's attention, Venice plays a key role in both the context of the environmental crisis and of the cultural responses to this crisis. In fact, this hybrid artificial organism of land and water is a planetary kaleidoscope for all the dynamics that characterise the Anthropocene. Venice is a city of global exchanges and a crossroads of civilisations; a city of merchants and capital, but also a city of art, of culture, of diverse political experiences. It emerges from a biotope – a lagoon – that has been transformed, making it a human-made environment that increasingly escapes human control. Above all, however, Venice is a delicate urban ecosystem affected by global warming, extractive tourism, a paradoxical petrochemical site via its alter-ego Porto Marghera. In other words, Venice is a city that is inscribed into a nature that it has altered and from which it totally depends. Because Venice is not simply a place: it is a complex reality shaped by the interdependence with its environment. To quote Salvatore Settis and Piero Bevilacqua, whose research has inspired our work for a long time, we might say that Venice is a "thinking machine" and a planetary metaphor. And it also is in a 'trans-local' conversation with places that, from the same situation of exposure and hybridity, are called to respond to the challenges of climate change in all its repercussions on the life of people and ecosystems, as well as on the imagination of our 'uncanny' times. A powerful example of this is Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island*, a novel that was written in Venice and that, from Venice, talks about the Sundarbans in Bangladesh, biodiversity, migrating people, and new alien copresences.

The first Italian journal expressly dedicated to the Environmental Humanities, *Lagoonscapes*, is exactly animated by the 'local' awareness and the 'planetary' vision that underlie this discourse. Its title mirrors this spirit and the inescapable need to strengthen the junction between cultural perspectives and ecological complexity.

The Environmental Humanities and Venice: A Symbolic Laboratory

The Environmental Humanities are an increasingly consolidating discourse within the horizon of the 'New Humanities'. The scholarly community as well as the general public have become more and more familiar with their trans-disciplinary approach, which programmatically debunks the divide between the 'two cultures' and often bridges scholarly research and activism. In this first issue, Serenella Iovino's article will address the role and contribution of the Environmental Humanities in relation to the "Anthropocene body politic". Still, we believe that a few words of introduction will help our new readers to better orient themselves in this landscape. (In addition to this swift overview, a list of recommended readings is also available at the end of this editorial.) Emerged as a unitary field in the last fifteen years, the Environmental Humanities are based on the encounter between the humanities, the social and the natural sciences. Literature, philosophy, history, art, anthropology, geography, sociology, and political science enter a conversation with ecology, biology, climatology, and geology with the aim of providing a critical and cultural dimension to the environmental crisis, and to our relationship with the other natures. The Environmental Humanities have a strong political and ethical dimension, especially in that they advocate for forms of justice for marginalised social groups as well as nonhuman beings, from animals to ecosystems and endangered landscapes. By definition, but also without any ideology of proselytism, they bring in themselves a strong social commitment, promoting a culture of inclusiveness, democracy, and sustainability. The Environmental Humanities help us understand that the environment – with its issues of climate and energy, justice and pollution, landscapes and places, humans and animals, global networks and local needs – is always already a cultural territory, often shaped by the priorities and values of society. Being aware of the environmental dynamics in their historical, philosophical, and anthropological dimension is important to understand them in their entirety. Together, these disciplines have the power to shape our moral imagination, our historical understanding, our way to critically relate to other natures, including other human natures, and sharpen our sensibility.

The midwifing role of environmental philosophy, history, and literary criticism for the birth of this discourse has been often highlighted. Despite its influence, however, anthropology, which is one of the foundational cores of this journal, is still a rather unexplored field, one that deserves here a closer look. In fact, Environmental Humanities, anthropology of the crisis, and the new frontier of the study of human-environment relationships were born together and are closely related. Investigating the relationships between human

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beings and the environment, trying to interpret the dynamics supporting this relationship, and to compare the different adaptive techniques of the members of a given society to the environment has now become more a necessity than a trend. In addition to this, a redefinition of the category of 'nature', and of what is commonly understood as 'natural' has triggered the more recent 'ontological turn'. Scholars such as Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Bruno Latour, and Philippe Descola have shifted the scientific debate towards the recognition of the importance and permanence of local indigenous ontologies and the breaking of the recent and narrowly localised demarcation in the West between nature and culture. This also explains the importance of an ethnographic investigation in rural and indigenous contexts. Within the Environmental Humanities, ethnography reinforces the effort to understand, for example, issues related to justice and the accessibility of various communities to natural resources and the management of common goods, also in relation to the dynamics of capitalism. More recently, the emergence of multispecies ethnography, with its emphasis on co-evolutionary dynamics and social models, has consolidated this shift to a 'more-than-human' anthropology. In this context, while theorists such as Tim Ingold, Pauleen Bennet, and Roberto Marchesini have contributed to the development of 'anthrozoology' (human-nonhuman-animal studies) and interspecies relations, Eduardo Kohn, Michael Marder, and other scholars have proposed different perspectives in which anthropology and biosemiotics are coupled to shape on what has been defined the "vegetable turn". *Lagoonscapes* will thoroughly explore these conversations, starting with the next two monographic issues, which are expressly dedicated to the proceedings of the international conference *Humanities, Ecocriticism, and Multispecies Relations* held at Ca' Foscari University of Venice in September 2020.

These considerations make even clearer the philosophy underlying our journal. *Lagoonscapes* is a sort of prism through which multiple perspectives converge, turning the Venetian lagoon into a symbolic laboratory, an observatory, a forge of ideas about the global panorama of the Environmental Humanities. This journal too, in other words, aims to be a "thinking machine".

Our First Issue

In its inaugural issue, the journal includes scholarly articles and some gifts from prominent guests. We open with the salutation of the UNESCO penned from its Secretary-General for Italy, Enrico Vicenti. Far from offering a merely 'official' contribution, though, Vicenti insightfully addresses the role of the humanities in the Anthropocene, also providing a historical account of the relationship between

UNESCO and Venice, and discussing the many challenges – at once ecological, cultural, and social – that our city must stand vis-à-vis the climate crisis. Shaul Bassi's "The Environmental Humanities at Ca' Foscari: Old and New", gives us a first-hand report on the birth of the Environmental Humanities in Venice and how this discourse has been integrated into the institutional fabric of Ca' Foscari with the launching of the first Italian MA's Programme (*corso di laurea magistrale*), to which this journal owes its originating impulse. It is also worth mentioning that the former Center for the Humanities and Social Change, whose generous support was key to starting this enterprise with Bassi as its immediately past director, is now officially The New Institute Center for Environmental Humanities. After Bassi's foundational narrative, we delve into the specific features of the humanities and their role for a culture of sustainability. Serenella Iovino's article, "A Constitution for the Anthropocene Body Politic: Environment, Culture, and the Humanities in the Twenty-First Century", is a revised version of her Keynote Address at the 2021 UNESCO European Conference for the Humanities. By acknowledging the official approval of the BRIDGES Project on education for sustainability as a partner of the UNESCO Management of Social Transformation Programme, Iovino evaluates the role of the Environmental Humanities in the agenda of the so-called "New Humanities", paying a special attention to their relevance during the COVID-19 pandemic and to Venice, here taken both as a symbol and as a very concrete object of care. The lecture ends with the invitation to turn the current crisis into a constitutive moment for the "Anthropocene body politic", namely, the earthly collective of agents and of processes, both human and nonhuman, natural and technological.

After this introductory section, our readers will find the real core of the issue, which is comprised of six articles, authored by an ensemble of experienced scholars and emerging researchers. These latter have all been post-doctoral fellows in Environmental Humanities at the Center for Humanities and Social Change in 2020-21.

The conversation opens with Ifor Duncan's "The Meteorological Occult: Submergences in the Venetian Fog". Taking a night walk in a typically misty Venice, Duncan describes fog as a "political materiality", which acts as an unexpected lens onto slow forms of pollution. By delving into the sensorial intensity of what he calls the "occult meteorology" of fog, Duncan explores the forms of imperceptible pollution that affect modern environments in their predicaments of infrastructural systems, from commercial flight to petrochemical logistics. Daniel Finch-Race's "Imagining Venetian Hydro-Peripatetics with Ciardi, Favretto, Lansyer, and Pasini" proposes a sensory approach to physical and representational environments from a pedestrian perspective. With a view to bringing arts-based considerations to bear on UN Sustainable Development Goal 6.6, concerned with the

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protection and restoration of water-related ecosystems, the analysis primarily revolves around Italian and French depictions of Venice in the 1880s-90s that encompass stimuli for smell, sound, taste, and touch as much as sight. And also addressing a sensorial and very material experience of Venice is the essay written by Sasha Gora, "On Ice: Life and Lunch at Mercato di Rialto", in which the author scrutinises the multispecies and synesthetic dimension of the world's most artistic fish market. Based on personal observation and theoretical reflections, in this ethnographic contribution Gora considers "the entanglement between seafood and people, ice and freshness, and life and lunch", as she effectively put it. The fourth essay of our selection, Emiliano Guaraldo's article, "Resisting the Tourist Gaze: Art Activism Against Cruise Ship Extractivism in the Venice Lagoon", takes us to the centre of a long-standing that has opposed residents, environmental movements, local institutions, cruise companies, and port workers. The impact on the delicate balance of the Venetian lagoon of the so-called *grandi navi* (big cruise ships) seems to be here only the tip of the iceberg of the socio-ecological problems caused by a phenomenon that Guaraldo calls "extractive tourism". The grim image of the Titanic, as a fitting metaphor for consumerism in the Anthropocene, seems to have been momentarily defeated by a socio-environmental activism that drew precious energies from the works of the visual artists who inspired the paradigm of an international alternative thinking.

The problem of over-tourism, along with the 'Disneyfication' of the city that is plaguing Venice, is further analysed and developed in the article "The Role of Performance in Environmental Humanities: The case of Joan Jonas's *Moving Off the Land II*" by Gabriella Giannachi, Director of the Centre for Intermedia and Creative Technologies at the University of Exeter. The overcoming of the consumerist and capitalist logic is concretised here through a possible reinvention of Venice as an international environmental laboratory, where new cultural, socio-political, and economic practices can be envisioned and planned. The paradigm of this project is structured through the amazing installation made of mirrors, videos, drawings, and performances enacted by the New York artist Joan Jonas, which Giannachi invites us to discover. Jonas's installation was exhibited in Venice at the Ocean Space: a collaborative platform located in the former Church of San Lorenzo, which has been transformed into a place for discussion and interdisciplinary research on the future of our watery planet.

With the last scholarly contribution, we must go back to where it all began, namely, literature. The essay comes indeed from a protagonist of the ecocritical debate, the American Germanist Heather Sullivan. In her "Bodily Transformations: Goethe and Mann in Venice", Sullivan turns to two classical authors, whose work has contribut-

ed to shaping the modern imagination about Venice. Using material ecocriticism, Sullivan considers how Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* and Johann Wolfgang Goethe's *Italian Journey* portray the experience of Venice's watery boundaries as transformative both one's sense of the body as well as the body itself. Whereas Mann obsessively presents bodies in *Death in Venice* including the impact of cholera on the body of his protagonists and of the city, Goethe's bodily focus remains more abstract, scientific, and comprehensible only later in his natural writings, where the full bodily dimension of the animate world partially deflects his discussion away from more uncomfortable aspects of human embodiment.

Ideally responding to both Thomas Mann and the challenges and impulses provided by UNESCO, the closing piece is an interview with art historian and public intellectual Salvatore Settis, who is Chairman of the Louvre Museum's Scientific Council and perhaps the major exponent of the struggle for the commons and one of the most vocal advocates for saving Venice. In an insightful and dense conversation with environmental historian Roberta Biasillo mostly based on his book *If Venice Dies* (*Se Venezia muore*, 2014), Settis addresses the very concept that has inspired us in this editorial piece: thinking (with) Venice. After discussing the many faces of Venice's agony as well as its resilient power, he reminds us that Venice's complexity is the figure of the entangled dynamics of natural crises and social issues, lifestyles and clichés, and lyrically concludes: "'thinking' is throwing a stone into the quagmire. Or in the Lagoon".

Art, meteorology, climatic imagination, bodily immersions in the ecology of places, food, eco-ethnography, multimedia performance, extractive tourism, debunked clichés, and quagmires: this first issue is a sample of what we envision to be our mission, namely, to create bridges of elements, voices, and visions, facilitating encounters of theories and individual matters, and stimulating 'trans-local' negotiations along with planetary awareness.

We would like to close this first editorial with a programmatic statement on the 'philosophy' of our Journal and the way we – editors and collaborators – conceive of our work. The Environmental Humanities for us are a dialogue: a dialogue between science and humanities, between scholars of different backgrounds and countries, and most of all a dialogue between the liveliest energies of the academic world and civil society. There is no research that is not, in principle, Environmental Humanities research. To see the world in a grain of sand, you need the sand, the eye, and the capacity to imagine all the connections – evolutionary, biological, narrative, emotional, ecological – among all these elements. If, as anthropologist Eduardo Kohn maintains, forests can 'think', then also lagoons can. Our "thinking machine", in other word is alive. It is a living organism in which natures, cultures, presences, stories, and temporal di-

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mensions coevolve and coemerge. Trying to voice this effervescent natural-cultural complexity from Venice, the community around *Lagoonscapes* is delivering a message: it is necessary to think with realities like Venice to see the world.

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Greeting Address for the First Issue of the Journal *Lagoonscapes. The Venice Journal on Environmental Humanities*

Enrico Vicenti
Segretario Generale della Commissione Nazionale Italiana per l'UNESCO

As human beings we have long considered nature as a place to be conquered. In time, with the birth of an initial environmental awareness, we began to consider nature as a place to be preserved in defined spaces, such as natural parks or wilderness areas but always with the same logic: humans on the one hand, nature on the other. Over time our outlook has changed again. Following the teaching of the American ecologist Aldo Leopold, "as conquerors of the terrestrial community" we perceived ourselves as its simple members. We have become attentive to the bonds and interactions between human beings and nature, in its biotic and abiotic dimensions. We paid particular attention to the connections between 'human and non-human collectives'. A logic of intertwining and participation thus prevailed, favouring a vision that is no longer anthropocentric, despite being aware of the damage caused to the planet and its inhabitants by human *hybris*, as dramatically expressed by the phenomenon of climate change.

Today the challenge of global warming appears to us of such magnitude as to seem insurmountable. On the one hand, governments are struggling to find an agreement on how to organise and share the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, on the other the human inhabitants of the planet, and es-

pecially those living lifestyles with a high climate-altering impact, struggle to reorganise their daily lives in order to help mitigate the rise in temperatures.

Awareness of the urgency of a radical change in the functioning of our economic systems is gaining momentum but is struggling to realise itself in the face of vested interests and the fear of losing millions of jobs, despite being aware of the new ones that the ecological transition could create. Another major critical aspect is the difficulty of the current technologies to ensure the green energy necessary to maintain the economic growth all governments are incapable of imagining the future of humanity without, and therefore they want it now to be sustainable. Geopolitics, fairness of transition, redefinition of entire social systems, scientific and technological research intersect each other in a complex way that looks hard to unravel.

Growing desertification, rising sea levels, melting glaciers, increasingly frequent and adverse weather phenomena, non-liveability of vast areas of the planet, increased migration, reduction of biodiversity and substantial modification of geodiversity, spread of pandemics are the main consequences, direct or indirect, of global warming and constitute scenarios of which humans, animals and plants are increasingly becoming victims. The urgency of the response necessarily requires an individual commitment by all humans. Both in changing lifestyles, through new ways of thinking and acting, and in asking for and supporting the choices of governments to tackle global warming.

For this reason, as UNESCO points out with determination, the action of formal and informal education of the younger generations and adults is fundamental for its transformative power of individual and collective behaviour. This transformative power can only be exercised through a greater knowledge of the functioning mechanisms of the planet Earth and of our role in it, focusing not only on this cognitive learning but also on the socio-emotional (empathic) and behavioural one. A challenge made even more complex by the fact that more than half of the world population lives in large urban agglomerations where the detachment from the functioning of natural mechanisms is so marked that it is difficult even to grasp the change of seasons, which seems to come suddenly, or understand that the fruit you eat has its own seasonality.

In this general framework, Environmental Humanities are of fundamental importance as an expression of scientific knowledge that intertwines human and natural sciences. Knowledge that has favoured the spread of a conception of human beings as being part of nature, recovering the vision of many indigenous societies (whose wealth of knowledge is often referred to by UNESCO). Knowledge that contributes to educational processes in a transformative key that are pursued, again within UNESCO, with its education manuals for sustainable development and the *Most* (Management of Social Transformation) programme.

This is why we welcome with pleasure the birth of the biannual magazine *Lagoonscapes: The Venice Journal on Environmental Humanities*, born out of the collaboration between the Ca' Foscari University of Venice and the Center for Humanities and Social Changes.

The Journal could not find the light in a more evocative place. Venice is in many ways a fertile and emblematic territory for Environmental Humanities. A place of choice, where you can find inspiration from the fusion of nature and culture. A link that runs throughout the history of the city and is well reflected in the UNESCO study *Save Venice*, which was published when the Organisation, in agreement with the Italian government, launched an international campaign and made a direct commitment to save the lagoon city after the great flood of 1966 (the *aqua granda*) that showed its fragility to the world.

The relationship between UNESCO and Venice continued over the years with the opening of the Regional Office for Science and Culture in Europe – the only office in the Organisation to have competences in both areas at the same time –, with the establishment of three UNESCO chairs on areas that cross heritage protection and sustainable development with regard to urban regeneration, social inclusion and water heritage, and with the inclusion of Venice and its lagoon in the World Heritage list in 1987.

This inclusion reflects the close connection between nature and culture that characterises the city. The reasons for the inclusion, in fact, refer to its artistic, monumental and architectural heritage, its intercultural ties between East and West but also to its being a unique example of a semi-lacustrine habitat in which the interaction between its inhabitants and the lagoon environment – in which the city and a significant part of its history and economy developed – is crucial.

Today Venice is in 'difficult waters'. Over the past 70 years it has seen the number of residents gradually shrink and the number of visitors grow exponentially, which has had a significant impact on the authenticity and integrity of its urban fabric. There remains the crux of the 'big ships', recently banned from the San Marco basin and the Giudecca Canal, but which in the future may navigate in the lagoon with a significant effect on its biodiversity. The Mose is on the home straight to counter the phenomenon of high water which however remains a threat in the background due to the rise of sea levels, that might potentially to lead to the disappearance of Venice. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic pushes us to reshuffle the cards, at least in part, in a city that seems to be aware of the need for economic development that does not solely depend on the monoculture of tourism.

These are just some of the challenges facing Venice and our hope is that Environmental Humanities, through the Journal that opens with this first issue, will be able to provide ideas for reflection and solutions for an authentically sustainable future for Venice.

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The Environmental Humanities at Ca' Foscari: Old and New

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The Environmental Humanities at Ca' Foscari University of Venice are both very young and very old. Institutionally, we could pinpoint one or two birthdays, which will be detailed below. More crucially, these latest developments built on very solid foundations. Ca' Foscari was a pioneer in environmental sciences in the 1990s; scholars of geography, archaeology, and economics had long engaged with ecological issues; and ecocriticism had been dealt with mostly through postcolonial studies since the days when Australia, Canada, and Africa had been main areas of investigation for literary scholars. The denomination 'Environmental Humanities' may not have been circulating widely, but surely at Ca' Foscari and in the larger Venetian intellectual ecosystem there were many environmental humanists plodding away.

Lagoonscapes is a new, felicitous chapter of a more recent history, which may be said to start symbolically on a specific day. On 17th May 2017 Amitav Ghosh officially inaugurated the activities of the Center for the Humanities and Social Change at Ca' Foscari University of Venice. Born from the partnership of an enlightened entrepreneur Erck Rickmers, and a strong internationally-minded academic leadership, Rector Michele Bugliesi, the Center was created to explore and deploy all the resources of the humanities to face the most pressing challenges of a world in crisis. The keynote lecture "The

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Humanities and Climate Change"[1] echoed Ghosh's seminal book *The Great Derangement* that pithily asserted that "[t]he climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination" (Ghosh 2016, 9) and also examined the role of Venice, a city that would feature prominently in his next novel *Gun Island* (2019). The Center went on experimenting the multiple directions of the humanities can take to face the crisis, and through a call open to all Ca' Foscari scholars funded twelve research projects that in turn have produced important academic publications as well as a number of public engagement programmes. Afrophobia, the analysis of fake news, the future of the labour market, the representation of blackness in literature, Medieval economic discourse, the ethnography of Bangladeshi migrants, plantoids in India – these are just a few of the topics explored. When the need was felt to narrow down our focus and maximise our resources we first opted for 'cultural pluralism' as a general focus but the seeds planted by Ghosh were particularly deep. Many other guests who came after him also investigated the multiple ramifications of the environmental crisis. Laurie Anderson, who explored the Venice lagoon under our guidance, came to discuss her poignant memoir *All the Things I Lost in the Flood*, narrating the devastating physical and psychological impact of an extreme weather event that destroyed much of her archive. Salvatore Settis came to honour the Iraqi painter Al Kanon, whose religious paintings had been defaced by Isis members and restored by Ca' Foscari students, as a part of a project of reporter Emanuele Confortin. Edmund de Waal came to discuss the fascinating cultural history of porcelain, calling attention to the materiality of things. All along, in a stimulating and dialectical discussion with our founder the pressing question was: how can we make an impact on society? How can the theory turn into practice? How can we communicate to broader audiences while maintaining the indispensable sophistication of academic research?

The idea developed in 2018 to invest in innovative training and in the launch of a degree in Environmental Humanities. As explained above, the ground was indeed very fertile. The mapping of competencies and interests revealed that the Environmental Humanities already existed at Ca' Foscari and one had only to connect the dots. In an unprecedented interdisciplinary effort, over thirty colleagues from seven departments (out of eight!) trespassed their conventional boundaries to become part of a new programme combining natural sciences, social sciences, and the humanities. The Environmental Humanities are by definition a very malleable area of teaching and research, and it has been thrilling to see that we could actually have chemists and philosophers, anthropologists and Indologists,

1 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9EZRHuFEdmg.

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linguists and sociologists coming under the same roof and out of their comfort zone.

And, as an unwelcome wake-up call, we were forcefully reminded that no other place was more qualified to be a centre of critical thinking on the environmental crisis. In November 2019 Venice suffered the worst flooding in half a century – the aptly nicknamed *acqua granda* that showed to the world that the city on the lagoon was a hotspot and outpost of the crisis. Since the Renaissance, Venice has been represented as a paradoxical city and this aspect acquired a new dimension. We are fragile and vulnerable and yet equipped with a century-old tradition of stewarding and protecting the ecosystem; we are a small community and yet an international centre of art and culture. As Serenella Iovino puts it,

> [t]o create a city suspended on a lagoon [...] is an exercise in hybridity, not only because it mixes water and land into a new elemental combination, but above all because it is an act of hubris, a violation of ontological pacts. Certainly, hubris may have a creative function, and Venice stays as the luminous splendor of this assumption. (2016, 49)

Unfortunately, the international coverage of the flooding suggested once again that the media was perversely more interested in Venice as a place of problems rather than as a place of solutions (for itself and for other coastal cities). The world loves Venice; it wants to protect Venice; it raises funds for Venice – all these actions and rhetoric paradoxically reiterate the trope of the city as a relic from the past that needs to be preserved rather than as a living organism that provides the ideal context to bring an international community of scholars and students to observe, examine, and fight sea-level rise and its social and cultural effects. The pandemic aggravated the phenomenon: an empty Venice (a dream scenario coveted by many of its residual residents and now turned into a nightmare) mesmerised global television channels, inadvertently rehearsing old literary tropes of Venice as a place of decadence and dying. Is it yet another paradox that while Venice is historically at one of its social nadirs that it is also at its cultural and artistic zenith? It is more than that. Students and residents who can no longer afford to live in a city dominated by overtourism are an essential component for the existence and functioning of its wonderful cultural institutions that have opened in recent years. Yes, they depend on tourism and tourism is an indispensable ingredient of the economy, but if it remains the only game in town it will end up destroying its own assets and premises. And maybe the promoters of such extractivist economy are the same ones who have understood that it is better to milk every last drop from a leaner and leaner cow that is going to drown anyway in a matter of years? The

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corporations that doggedly turn palaces and monasteries in multistarred hotels maybe have calculated that they can squeeze enough out of the last days of Venice/Pompei just before they decamp ahead of the impending disaster. But environmental humanists know that apocalyptic scenarios, realistic as they can be, can also become a good excuse to grin, bear it and do nothing.

> If Venice dies – Settis has powerfully argued – it won't be the only thing that dies: the very idea of the city – as an open space where diversity and social life can unfold, as the supreme creation of our civilization, as a commitment to and promise of democracy – will also die with it. (2016, 179)

An alternative narrative and course of action is to fully embrace the potential of Venice as an international laboratory on the environmental crisis, a "thinking machine", using Settis's felicitous definition. Tradition is on our side, if we consider the century-long engagement of the Republic with its delicate ecosystem, with the whole gamut of interventions, from drastic forms of geoengineering (the diversion of rivers) to legal measures against those who tamper with water sources. And more recently the virtuous networks of universities, research centres, and cultural/art institutions indicates a vigorous and competent engagement with ecological issues, and sea-level rise in particular. So here is the key combination: a uniquely fragile place where we literally know what it feels like to live your life ankle-deep (and more and more frequently knee-deep) in water; and a uniquely rich place with more museums per capita than any other main city in the world.

In the fall of 2021, as this first issue sees the light, the International Center for the Humanities and Social Change has run its course and fully embraced its initial direction and new identity. With the transformation of its funding institution into the The New Institute, based in Hamburg, it has become the TNI Center for Environmental Humanities at Ca' Foscari, under the direction of Francesca Tarocco. The new focus makes explicit a trajectory and acknowledges a vocation. With a dedicated research centre, a growing master degree, multiple collaborations with scientific and cultural institutions dedicated to the environment, and many excellent scholars, *Lagoonscapes* adds another major contribution to the role of Venice as an international hub of Environmental Humanities. In and from Venice, but not exclusively about Venice; capitalising on the numerous themes that the city can offer to those who anxiously reflect on the predicament and the future of coastal cities, but also treasuring the tradition of the city as a crossroads of cultures and peoples, a unique vantage point on the uncertain prospects of our planet.

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A Constitution for the Anthropocene Body Politic
Environment, Culture, and the Humanities in the Twenty-First Century

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Abstract The following article is a slightly revised version of Serenella Iovino's Keynote Address at the 2021 European Conference for the Humanities, jointly organised in Lisbon (5-7 May) by the UNESCO Social and Human Sciences Programme, the International Council for Philosophy and Human Sciences (CIPSH), and the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT). The theme of the Conference Section inaugurated by this lecture was "The Humanities in the Twenty-First Century". By acknowledging the official approval of the BRIDGES Project on education for sustainability as a partner of the UNESCO Management of Social Transformation Program, Iovino evaluated the role of the Environmental Humanities in the agenda of the so-called 'New Humanities', paying special attention to their relevance during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this framework, Venice emerged both as a symbol and as a very concrete object of care, proving to be "a thinking machine" for contemporary natural-cultural dynamics, as Salvatore Settis has defined it. The lecture ended with the invitation to turn the current crisis into a constitutive moment for the 'Anthropocene body politic', namely, the earthly collective of agents and of processes, both human and nonhuman, natural and technological.

Keywords Body politic. Environmental Humanities. UNESCO. Venice. New Humanities.

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To speak about the Humanities in the twenty-first century means above all to question what 'human' and 'humanity' mean. Being human, in the twenty-first century, signifies more and more to experience a condition of vulnerability, exposure and co-presence, a condition of different opportunities. Illnesses that intersect with social habits, cultural visions, and geopolitical balances; new media that interfere with our cognitive and ethical realms, the need to relate to an environment and a climate that we threaten and that threaten us in turn; the uneven repercussions of these dynamics: all this is a challenge to our cultural and political imagination. As an Environmental Humanities scholar, who has been involved in UNESCO activities since the decade of the Education for Sustainable Development (2005-14), I find it inspiring that the BRIDGES Project, which is explicitly dedicated to education to sustainability, is now an official coalition partner of MOST, the UNESCO Management of Social Transformation Programme.[1] In my view, the inclusion in the UNESCO policy map of the Environmental Humanities is a remarkable step for both parties: for the UNESCO community, which acquires an important 'epistemological reservoir'; and, certainly, for the Environmental Humanities community, which acquires a partner that will give institutional relevance and a more concrete impact to the work that humanities scholars have been pursuing in tandem with environmental scientists throughout years of research and activism in 'cognitive democracy'.

The Environmental Humanities is a typically twenty-first-century humanities field. Indeed, it came about after the concept "Anthropocene", around the year 2000, entered the scientific debate.[2] And the reason why the Environmental Humanities started taking shape is

1 BRIDGES is a UNESCO initiative meant to promote a human-centred and humanities-driven education for sustainability. It works in partnership with UNESCO's MOST (Management of Social Transformations). The goal of the BRIDGES-MOST coalition is "to better integrate humanities, social science, and local and traditional knowledge perspectives into research, education and action for global sustainability through development and coordination of resilient responses to environmental and social changes at local and territorial scales" (see https://ihopenet.org/bridges/). The BRIDGES initiative is also a partner of the Humanities for the Environment Observatories (https://hfe-observatories.org). An introduction about the BRIDGES Project at the *2021 European Conference for the Humanities*, held by Steven Hartman, is available on YouTube at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UesQX_wUpTU

2 The first official proposal to call "Anthropocene" the last phase of the Quaternary is by Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer (2000). As of July 2021, the hypothesis is still being evaluated by the International Commission on Stratigraphy (ICS) and the International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS). However, on 29 August 2016 the ICS Anthropocene Working Group (AWG) presented a formal recommendation oriented towards recognition at the International Geological Congress. In May 2019, the AWG voted in favour of submitting a formal proposal to the ICS by 2021, situating the Golden Spike around the mid-twentieth century (beginning of the atomic era). Data available on: http://quaternary.stratigraphy.org/working-groups/anthropocene/.

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that certain questions prompted by the idea of humans as a 'geological force' could not be answered by geologists, climatologists, or environmental scientists alone: questions about responsibility and historical roots, about anxiety and loss, social behaviours justice, even ontology – and questions about how to "think the unthinkable", as Rosi Braidotti (2013, 160) wrote anticipating Amitav Ghosh (2016).

This is a point worth mentioning. The crisis of the humanities in the "neoliberal university ruled by quantified economics and the profit motive" (Braidotti 2016, 11) is a fact. The humanities are at risk, and the UNESCO World Humanities Report will soon tell us how grave this risk is. Of course, after one-and-a-half year of COVID-19, this risk becomes more and more concrete, and for a paradox: the funds earmarked for research have never been so conspicuous in both President Biden's Stimulus Plan and the Next Generation EU Recovery Plan. But 'research' means here exclusively scientific and technological research. This, once again, potentially reduces the humanities to a merely ornamental role. Yet, also during the pandemic, the humanities have been very much alive. Like never before humanities scholars have experienced the thrill of being ubiquitous, restless, and public. COVID-19 has proven not simply what the humanities can be, but also what they cannot *fail* to be: the humanities cannot *not* be digital, public, biomedical, intercultural, and environmental (I am quoting these partitions from the Network of the European Humanities 21, also supported by UNESCO).[3] During these months, we have seen a need for stories and creative coalitions, but we have also been called to reflect on the sustainability of old and new practices. And we have discovered that many of them, including our 'virtual' technological experiences, impact on ecosystems and reverberate differently on society. This gives the Environmental Humanities a *certain* relevance.[4]

But let me frame my standpoint for you: I am a European Humanities scholar teaching in an American public University – a 'Research' University. Here, too, the humanities face their crisis – and yet I found here the possibility of an academic appointment that combined my two research fields: Italian Studies and Environmental Humanities.

From this standpoint, I will try to answer these questions:

1. Why are the Environmental Humanities so relevant now?

3 See https://neh21.net.

4 Even though this issue has become increasingly popular during the pandemic outbreak, the Environmental Humanities have been exploring this issue for a long time. See, among others, Parikka 2015 and 2018, and Iovino 2019. Also very useful is the article "Why Your Internet Habits are not as Clean as You Think" in the online BBC *Smart Guide to Climate Change*, available at: https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200305-why-your-internet-habits-are-not-as-clean-as-you-think.

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2. How do these two – Italian Studies and Environmental Humanities – go together?
3. How does this involve UNESCO?

Internationally, the Environmental Humanities are an increasingly consolidated discourse. The leading example is the web of Observatories of the Humanities for the Environment global network. With hubs in North and Latin America, Europe, the Arctic, Africa, East Asia, the Pacific, and Australia, all these observatories are specifically dedicated to framing local matters from a global perspective. From the Arizona desert to the North Pole and the Pacific, issues of indigenous ecologies, coral reef biodiversity, 'native science', island aesthetics, post-nuclear landscapes: all these foci form a huge cultural and scientific conversation finalised to protection, conservation, and development of eco-political strategies.[5] This is valid for all Environmental Humanities projects: for example, my university, UNC Chapel Hill, is part of the consortium "Coasts, Climates, the Humanities, and the Environment" funded by a conspicuous Mellon-grant. Here scholars, scientists and local communities build together "Coastal Climate Archives", which will help study the history and impact of storms and tidal waters.[6] The examples in the US are too numerous to be quoted, but the Environmental Humanities are also thriving in Europe: in research centres (the Rachel Carson Center in Munich, the Environmental Humanities Lab at the KTH in Stockholm, the Long Room Hub at Trinity in Ireland), master's programmes and variously articulated initiatives in Turkey, at Cappadocia University, with an international journal, *Ecocene*, in Holland at Amsterdam's Vrije Universiteit, where they specialise in environmental history, at Aarhus University in Denmark, where the focus is on multispecies anthropology, in Norway at the Oslo School of Environmental Humanities, which experiments with new forms of teaching in the Anthropocene, again, in Rome at Roma Tre, with a focus on ecology and architecture, in Germany at University of Augsburg with an emphasis on cultural ecology, in the UK, where Bath Spa provides a prominent example of trans-disciplinary ecocritical studies, in Switzerland… Theories and practices are flourishing in all these places.

The Environmental Humanities are animated by the ambition of intervening in the understanding as well as in the ethical reframing of inhabiting the world. The Environmental Humanities ask: what natural forces shape cultural processes? And vice versa: how is reality the outcome of concurrent forces, both material and discursive, which intersect in the body of every living being, every territory, eve-

5 See `https://hfe-observatories.org`.

6 See `https://college.unc.edu/2019/08/mellon-cchec/`.

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ry object? What is the ecology of wars and migrations, of gender and of disability, what is an ecology of mind and what an ecology of matter? The Environmental Humanities are animated by the idea that our species as well as our planet are not 'lonely' but are always already in a deep interchange. This implies that every form of politics must take into account this mutual belonging, this multiplicity, as well as the gaps of injustice among different species, or among members of the same species: ours. The Environmental Humanities teach us how important the 'local' is and how difficult it is to 'locate' environmental phenomena – in space as well as in time.[7]

But the Environmental Humanities also fully embrace Rosi Braidotti's invitation to explore intellectual avenues in which *critique goes together with creativity* (Braidotti 2013, 11 and *passim*), turning the humanities into a field of knowledge production and the cradle for new forms of resistance.

And here let me turn my focus closer to my research on Italy – and to UNESCO. One of the things that the Environmental Humanities have taught me is that you don't need to embrace the whole world to know the world. Though unique in themselves, places can be used as concepts, categories, cognitive tools, they can become lenses that make us see the life of other places. Italy for me is one of these place-concepts. Through Italy's lens you can understand the links of pollution and politics, industrial development and biodiversity at risk, social injustice and environmental disasters, the way climate change and illegal activities impact territories and people, the bio- and necro-politics of migrations, the environmental dimension of gender, species, ethnicity. And the creativity that emerges from all this. A major element in this discourse is landscape. Italy's landscapes speak of the contradictions of this country – and of its creativity. There are landscapes with factories or waste dumps in the middle of protected areas, landscapes of social fragmentation, landscapes of struggles and crises. Cultural and natural landscapes are often islands within this ambivalent fabric.[8]

In July 2021, fifty-eight of these were UNESCO landscapes, thus situating Italy at the top of UNESCO's World Heritage list. The files that are available on the UNESCO website emphasise all the reasons why a site has deserved inclusion in the list.[9] For every place, there are descriptions, compliance with the criteria, maps, and relevant documents. And this is of course the outcome of important team research. But I believe that these landscapes must be also ex-

7 I am referring here to Rob Nixon's famous concept of "slow violence" (Nixon 2011).

8 For an exploration of these topics, see Iovino, Cesaretti, Past 2018 and Armiero, Iovino 2020.

9 See https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/.

amined with the eyes of environmental historians, of social justice theorists and activists, of philosophers and literary critics, of multispecies anthropologists and ecosemioticians, all working hand in hand with environmental scientists, geologists, climatologists. Seen through their eyes and conversations, new meanings emerge from these landscapes – meanings that can also be of inspiration for political action, both in terms of cautionary tales and of a wider awareness of the issues at stake. And, last but not least, the educational impact that this can have must not be underestimated. These landscapes, in other words, can become theories for thinking and agendas for action – also in relation to the Humanities and what they can be.

Let me quote one example: Venice. Salvatore Settis, one of the world's leading experts on landscapes as commons, has defined Venice "a thinking machine" (Settis 2016), the epitome and the laboratory of processes that take place wherever the bond between landscape, citizenship, and democracy is tested.

We do not need to explain why Venice is on the UNESCO World Heritage list. We also know, however, that its place on the list is precarious for many reasons: over-tourism, depopulation and real-estate speculation, water mobility congestion (and the big cruise ships problem), the 'shortsightedness' of the local administration and its corruption. The case of the MOSE anti-high tide dams is an eloquent instance. I am summarising and quoting from the report *Venezia, il Dossier UNESCO e una città allo sbando* (Venice, the UNESCO Dossier and a city in disarray) presented to UNESCO in 2019 (Fabbri, Migliorini, Tattara 2019).

However, many other things emerge from this landscape and this reality, if we approach them with the toolkit of the Environmental Humanities. With the Environmental Humanities, we can read Venice as a text in a larger context. This context embraces of course Venice's lagoon (as the UNESCO site's denomination also does). But this context also includes Venice's monstrous alter-ego, the Porto Marghera Petrochemical Plant, and all the issues related to it: issues of environmental justice and sustainability, ethics and biopolitics, history, and political ecology in a conversation with climate emergency, biodiversity, labour, epidemiology. The Environmental Humanities make us see, for example, that potential solutions turn out to be themselves problems (I am referring to the MOSE's impact on the Lagoon's bed and biodiversity).[10] The Environmental Humanities can invite us to consider the resonances between literature and reality, for example in the uncanny materialisation of the 'Death in Venice' trope, which becomes a narrative told by the city, the bodies of residents and workers, the

10 On this issue see Del Bello 2018 and Massariolo 2020, among many others.

ecosystem.[11] Literature even lets us see the larger plot of this narrative. I am thinking of Amitav Ghosh's last novel, *Gun Island*, in which Venice, New York, and the Sundarbans in Bangladesh are interlaced to expose the concrete faces of global warming, including migrations, sea level rise and the invasion of alien species (from tropical spiders to shipworms – a threatening reality in Venice!) (Ghosh 2019).[12] With the Environmental Humanities, we can read this landscape as a narrative, whose stories emerge from the interplay between human and nonhuman agents, the creativity of matter and the creativity of people. And we can better hear the voice of the people, their stories, understanding them in a more comprehensive way. The Environmental Humanities impact our moral imagination of the earth as a whole and as a collectivity of individuals, stimulating strategies for action. They provide us with a convivial epistemology of the commons that transforms the humanities into activism for democracy and the planet. What UNESCO can get from this is a theoretical and educational background to its policies, useful to reconfigure notions such as identity, tradition, and heritage in a more inclusive and generative way. This discourse is valid for every landscape: seen through this lens, in fact, every landscape becomes a "thinking machine".

The Environmental Humanities are already a rising presence in Venice: the Biennale never fails to host and celebrate environmentally-sensitive artworks (but let me also recall the irresistible incursions of Banksy!).[13] And, very important, the newly established University Ca' Foscari MA's degree in Environmental Humanities led by Shaul Bassi (former director of the Venetian branch of the Center for the Humanities and Social Change).[14] And a significant outcome of these efforts is *Lagoonscapes: The Venice Journal of Environmental Humanities*, which is the first international journal in Italy completely dedicated to these topics.

Ca' Foscari University has a UNESCO Chair on Water Heritage and Sustainable Development: here the Environmental Humanities discourse can – and will – be fruitfully grafted.[15]

Among the stories inscribed in the landscape of Venice, there are stories that can teach us something about our specific situation to-

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11 See Iovino 2016 for an interpretation of Venice's 'material narrative'.

12 On the shipworm invasion of the Lagoon see Tagliapietra et al. 2021.

13 Environmental issues have been regularly represented at the Biennale for several decades. See Celant 1977 for one of the first occurrences of this artistic emergence.

14 The official webpage of the MA's Programme is available here: https://www.studyatcafoscari.com/programmes/graduate/master-in-environmental-humanities/?_sp=0e7eb173-c62c-4007-b6bc-8cd7b9dccd34.1626909498549.

15 On Ca' Foscari UNESCO Chair on Water Heritage and Sustainable Development, see: https://www.unive.it/pag/14024/?tx_news_pi1%5Bnews%5D=8413&cHash=9651e0e4da3ce886c534d3e35a8279bc.

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day: the church of Santa Maria della Salute, or St. Mary of Health, for example, was erected out of devotion for the end of a pandemic, the plague of 1631.[16] The lesson we learn is simple: pandemics are cyclic cataclysms, they come and they go, which also means that they are not the only problems we are called to face.

COVID-19 has disrupted millions of lives. It has created an historical watershed. And it has been literally an apocalypse: a revelation. Very banally, it has revealed that humans are exposed – and that a microscopic agent can tell us that the emperor is in fact naked. All this requires immediate action, of course. Yet, this urgency involves a risk: the risk of turning the Coronavirus into an *absolute*. In other words, focusing exclusively on the virus, people (and governments) might end up neglecting that many of the issues at stake are environmental. This is a risk that we cannot afford: COVID, in fact, is not *the* ultimate catastrophe but *one* chapter in a bigger narrative: it is an epiphenomenon of a larger picture.[17]

The Environmental Humanities allow us to see the connections between the chapter and the bigger narrative.[18] They allow us to see the elements that shape the pandemic's ecology: an ecology of causes and effects ramified in space and time made of evolutionary pathways and crossings, endangered habitats and biodiversity, decades of neoliberal economy and centuries of colonialism, the maps of globalization and pollution, the ecology of contagion and cure, which is an ecology embedded in social, gender- and racial justice, and again the interlacement between power and the life of indigenous communities and their lands (as the case of Bolsonaro's Brazil tragically shows). Pandemics are also powerfully connected to climate change. Many tropical viruses are already thriving and spreading due to warmer climates. Scientists also believe that rising temperatures might free pathogens that have been trapped in the permafrost for millennia.

All this means that we cannot face the Coronavirus crisis while keeping the global ecological crises out of the picture. And we need a culture for this. We need the humanities to read this planetary narrative and to interpret its signs: signs are important, because they can indicate directions that must be taken. And here let me quote a great Italian poet, Andrea Zanzotto: reflecting on the wounds that surround us – the wounds that affect our landscapes and our body politic, and Venice in particular – Zanzotto (2013) states that we must be able to *turn the evil into a sign*: in his words, we need to move fur-

16 See Ben-Ami 2021.

17 On this, see Iovino 2020a and 2020b.

18 For an Environmental Humanities response to COVID-19, see the articles in *The New Normal? An Environmental Humanities Response. Bifrost Online*. Available at: `https://bifrostonline.org/`

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ther, “toward a never-seen where even evil could be stopped, emptied of its power, and rehabilitated as a sign, a trace, a form” (Zanzotto 2013, 104-5).[19]

Turning the evil into a sign means transforming it into something we can read, and understand, and overcome. This is what the humanities are all about: the transformation of wounds into signs, of crises and emergencies into turning points and opportunities.[20]

This presupposes a precise assumption: there is no way back. The past has known many crises. But these crises have acquired a meaning only when, instead of restoring the old order, they were conducive to a new one. In other words, we do not need a restoration here – less than ever one modelled on the grand Restorations Europe has known.

Rather, we need a constitution. A constitution is the system of principles according to which a body politic is formed and ruled. It is the action of establishing an order – in this case a new order. Let me put the focus on this concept: body politic. If humans are a geological force, then the body politic of our time stretches beyond the human social body: it includes cities as well as forests, bodily cells as well as vegetation and fauna, animals in industrial farms and melting glaciers; it includes climate and the oceans, it includes our media and technological devices, it includes our waste. This body politic raises issues of political freedoms and individual wellbeing, issues of energy democracy and global pollution, issues of non-anthropocentric values. In the Anthropocene, ‘body politic’ is a collective of agents and of processes, human and nonhuman, themselves resulting from collective dynamics and cycles. In the Anthropocene, this body politic is the earth. And it is all the invisible, non-hegemonic beings that are left in the shadow by the emergencies dictated by neoliberal politics.

The Environmental Humanities are able to shape the culture necessary for this constitutional moment; they can give us not only the coordinates of the many landscapes that we are called to read, but also the necessary road map for sustainability that human cultures – the Humanities – must develop in the twenty-first century.

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20 I have extensively commented on this passage by Zanzotto in Iovino 2016, 72-3.

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The Meteorological Occult: Submergences in the Venetian Fog

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Abstract Blinking away fog as it collects between eyelashes – this article begins with a night walk in Venice and a reflection on an embodied encounter with countless suspended water particles. Here I consider fog as a political materiality in an expanded cultural and meteorological context, where, rather than simply limiting visibility, fog acts as an unexpected lens onto slow forms of pollution. In doing so, I turn to the scientific term 'occult deposition' – the settling of unsensed pollutants carried by fogs, mists, clouds, dew, and frosts onto surfaces, vegetation, and skin – and adapt it to develop the concept of 'occult meteorology'. By doing so, I work towards reorienting the cultural significance of the occult. With this reorientation, instead of limiting human sensing, or harbouring unknown and threatening supernatural presences, fog is the intensity of sensing, relationally mediating through eyes, mouths and skins. Here bodies are submerged in everyday and imperceptibly polluted environments even above the surface of water, while fog disorients vast infrastructural systems, from commercial flight to petrochemical logistics. Thinking alongside Esther Leslie and Craig Martin, this article brings earth sciences into encounter with literature and cinema to attend to fog as both metaphor and materiality in the context of environmental degradation.

Keywords Weather. Embodiment. Submergence. Meteorology. Environmental media. Venice. Environmental sensing.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Part I: Submergence and Reorientation. – 3 Part II: Mediation. – 4 Part III: Interruption. – 5 Conclusion.

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1 Introduction

> *They weren't tears that I felt between my eyelashes. My face was soaked as though I had been walking through heavy rain. Venice's famous fog, 'nebbia', or what the locals call 'caigo', was forming into droplets on the surface of my eyes. Trying to blink it away in the attempt to see I realised that what I was looking at – fog – was touching me. Walking home late on that October night, enveloped by water droplets suspended in air, fog presented itself right at the interface of the eye with the world. Through experiences such as these, fog is a crucial element for thinking and perceiving the mediation of pollutants within space and into embodiment through eyes, mouths, noses, ears, and skin?*[1]

Fog is a cloud that is in contact with the ground. Formed by suspended water droplets lighter than air, it is commonly classified by its effect on visibility. Different classes of fog indicate the distance at which a human eye can see: very dense fog (less than 100 metres), dense fog (101-250 metres), medium fog (251-500 metres), light fog (501-1000 metres).[2] Such classifications are constructed for road and air travel as well as for military purposes, and often assume that the

I am grateful for the time, expertise and generosity offered separately by Marcello Cerasuolo and Axel Friedrich. I am also thankful to Lodovica Guarnieri for our time thinking together about the watery continuities of Venice and of course my colleagues at the Centre for the Humanities and Social Change at Ca' Foscari University of Venice: Heather Contant, Daniel Finch-Race, L. Sasha Gora, Shaul Bassi, and in particular Emiliano Guaraldo, for leading me to *Il Deserto Rosso*, and Barbara Del Mercato for her insights and generous lending of books on all things related to *nebbia*. I also acknowledge Kimberley Peters for suggesting Craig Martin's 'fog-bound' article and Wood Roberdeau, whose paper on fog I found inspiring at the *Postcards from the Anthropocene conference* in Edinburgh in July 2017. I am also very grateful to the two reviewers of this article for their interest and generous suggestions.

1 It is necessary when writing about weather to state that I continue to find theoretical inspiration in the vital literatures of critical race, eco-feminist and queer studies. For example, in her influential book *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Christina Sharpe conceives of the total weather of antiblackness as the everyday racist violence that is so ubiquitous as to be like the experience of weather. This includes cases where lived weather conditions have become unevenly toxic in black majority neighbourhoods (2017, 106). My intention is not to appropriate these critical lineages but rather to acknowledge that their influence has crucially informed my thinking, even if issues of race are not immediately present in the current text. Elsewhere, however, I consider weather and race in a separate book chapter on rain and the memory of marronage in Dionne Brand's novel *At the Full and Change of the Moon* (forthcoming in Bond, L.; Radstone, S.; Rapson, J. (eds). *New Directions in Memory and Literature*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan). In the present article the eco-feminist influence becomes evident in my reading of the character of Giuliana in the film *Il Deserto Rosso*.

2 The image is taken dataset from the FROSI (Foggy Road Sign Images) database: `http://www.livic.ifsttar.fr/linstitut/cosys/laboratoires/livic-ifsttar/logiciels/bases-de-donnees/frosi/`. Also see the definition of fog in the world me-

seeing subject is standing outside rather than being immersed within the fog. Fog is considered an optical phenomenon measured by instruments such as the 'transmissometer,' usually found on runways, which uses modulated light (or laser beams) to measure visibility. Here, however, I consider fog not only as a hindrance but as visibility made manifest. Fog is dense with information about local atmospheric conditions and pollution; rather than limiting sight, it is the trans-corporeal made tangible in thick space.[3] By inverting the assumption that fog reduces visibility, I ask how relationality with the material world can become, perhaps paradoxically, more perceptible when shrouded in fog.[4] In addition to this, I will consider how fog in its multiple physical and cultural forms can function as a political materiality, a medium of shifting meanings and matters that make sensing otherwise unperceived environmental degradation possible.

Fog as a metaphor has long signified a sense of uncertainty and disorientation, or the obscuring of an object, memory, action or movement. In other words, it is what the theorist of political aesthetics Esther Leslie identifies as "an image of our being lost" (2021, 98). Between substance and metaphor, I propose that from the position of being lost an embodied encounter with fog can be a heuristic experience to perceive invisible yet reciprocal relations with political, cultural and environmental conditions (Jefferies 2018, 68). In the natural sciences, when fog touches and leaves a trace on a surface or on skin this phenomenon is curiously called "occult deposition" (Unsworth, Wilshaw 1989). Science classifies fog as 'occult' in the endeavour to identify what is present but undetected by human senses. In short, occult deposition is the settling of polluting or toxic materials on organic and inorganic surfaces left exposed to atmospheric conditions such as rain, mist or fog (Fassina, Stevan 1992). To understand the occult presences within such environments requires looking within and through fog as being in physical contact with all that it holds. This is reminiscent of Leslie's concept of "Turbid media" from the use of the term in physics to refer to "muddy water or particularly polluted air in which the particles of poisonous dust are so dense as to be visible" (2021, 104). She goes on to ask whether thinking through fogs, froths, and foams is "a scientific or a poetic endeavour?" When I read the word 'occult' in scientific literature my mind immediate-

teorological organisation's International Cloud Atlas: https://cloudatlas.wmo.int/en/fog-compared-with-mist.html.

3 Stacy Alaimo conceives of the trans-corporeal as the material interchanges that take place between human and multi-species bodies and the material environment. She does so in her pioneering book *Bodily Natures* (2010). See also Gómez-Barris 2017, xvi.

4 Here I am particularly thinking of the post- or more-than-human relationalities mediated with and through waters in Astrida Neimanis's seminal book *Bodies of Water* (2017).

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ly begins to draw connections of meaning between the scientific and the poetic. Where Leslie's turbid particles identify the threshold of the ephemeral becoming perceptible, occult deposition suggests that, despite this visibility, what is mediated by fog nevertheless remains concealed, not divulged, or as early definitions of the term imply 'beyond the range of understanding'. We perceive the fog, but are we immediately aware of what it contains and leaves behind?

Starting from the context of Venice, this paper traces a material politics of fog that goes beyond the confines of the lagoon city. Adapting Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann's material ecocriticism methodology that "examines matter both *in* texts and *as* a text" (Iovino, Oppermann 2014, 2; emphasis in the original), here I draw together a fog of encounters from literary and cinematic representation, through meteorological sciences to embodied reality, and from the *caigo* itself to discussions with Venice-based meteorologist Marcello Cerasuolo and the German chemist Axel Friedrich. Thus, the intention here is to bring both text and materiality into contact, not to remain with one or the other but in the thick space of fog. Such an approach is necessary to meaningfully orientate within sometimes disorienting social, material and cultural spaces. I begin by asking whether fog can offer a space of spatial *reorientation* that instigates a more nuanced perception of unperceived depositions onto surfaces and bodies. Perhaps paradoxically, I argue that this perception instils an awareness that a subject is submerged within visible and non-visible airborne waters even on the clearest day. This is followed by a reading of fog in Michelangelo Antonioni's 1964 film *Il Deserto Rosso* (Red Desert) as a complex *medium* entangled in both embodied and psychological registers. The final section shifts from fog as a medium that bears pollutants produced by unregulated petro-capital to considering how fog can become disruptive for logistical systems entangled in extraction and pollution.

> *Without knowing it, that night in Venice's 'caigo' my eyes became the surface of an occult deposition.*[5]

Venice is north of the Po delta, a river famous for fog that submerges the entire river catchment from west to east across northern Italy **[fig. 1]**. It is an important starting point for this study because it is a truly amphibious urban environment. During Venice's *caigo*, the amphibious nature of the city becomes increasingly evident: a watery continuum that links the very bottom of the lagoon, the city's buildings (and foundations), and importantly the air above. The unique en-

5 In the LA photochemical smog of 1943 "eye pain, nausea and vomiting" were reported (Gupta, Elumalai 2018, 396).

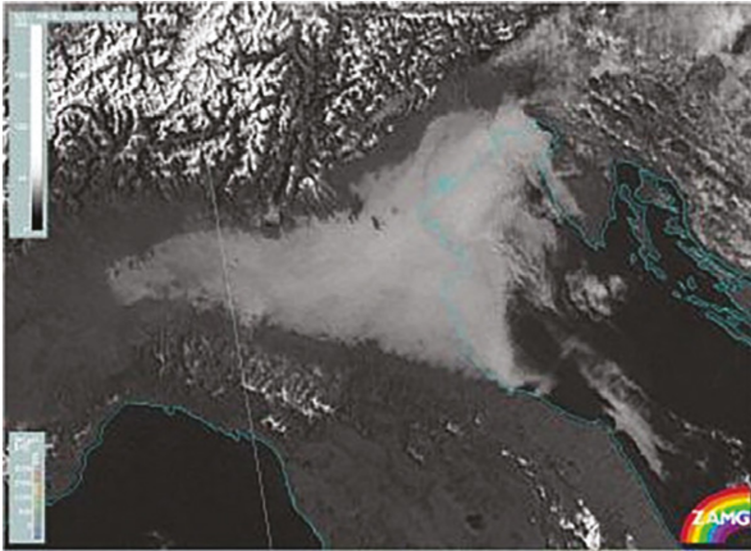

Figure 1 EUMETSAT. 2006. Meteosat 8 HRVIS image 20 January 2006/09.00 UTC. http://www.eumetrain.org/satmanu/CMs/FgStr/navmenu.php

vironmental challenges posed to Venice have meant that it has long been a laboratory for cultural conservation as well as techniques to withstand sea level rise. For example, the study of fog water composition has been a concern for practices that safeguard the architectural heritage of Venice, with the risk that occult deposition erodes the very stones for which Venice is famed.[6] In one case sulphuric acid has bitten so deeply into the four bronze horses of the Basilica of San Marco that they have now been replaced with replicas (Vittori, Mestitz 1976, 70).

Air quality and meteorological conditions are inextricably related (Gupta, Elumalai 2018, 396). In the composition of fog, the size and weight of water droplets matter. Smaller in diameter and volume but with a far larger combined surface area than rain, fog is not able to dilute sulphur dioxide (the main element of acid deposition) and other pollutants to the same degree, and it is particularly reactive in ac-

6 For fog deteriorating Istrian marble, see Maravelaki-Kalaitzaki, Biscontin 1999. With the generous help of Marcello Cerasuolo, I was able to source and decipher research on acid fog that was in the form of an old file requiring decoding: Hahn, LaPrade, Marcotte 1990. See also designer and researcher Lodovica Guarnieri's ongoing project, *Amphibious Geologies*, which explores the Venetian lagoon as an "amphibious chemical, biological and geological ecosystem". She draws lines of connection between the degrading shells of lacustrine organisms with the impact of contaminated fogs degrading marble (Guarnieri 2020).

cumulating other dangerous airborne pollutants. For this reason, fog holds a higher concentration of contents and acid fog can be up to 20 times more acidic than acid rain.[7] This is a question of scale: while fog as a mass of millions of water particles is itself perceptible, what it contains – its occult contents – are almost imperceptible. When fog occurs, it lingers close to water level or the ground, and to emission points, and is exposed for longer periods to pollutants that might be produced locally or travel on wind currents for long distances from power plants far afield. It is thus a unique spatio-temporal substance, whereby the enduring visible presence of water turns air into a media that holds, carries, and can multiply the effects of unseen contents.[8]

Concentrations of particulate matter increase in foggy conditions near major roads: they are gathered by the electronic charge of the suspended waters (Gupta, Elumalai 2018, 397). Despite having no roads, particulate matter is a problem for Venice. Marine fuel is used without filtration systems by the *vaporetti* (water buses), other private vehicles, and by the controversial cruise ships that dwarf the city. All lead to high levels of particulate matter in the atmosphere.[9] Despite EU directives and claims that air pollution will be reduced through 'voluntary agreements' under the 'Venice Blue Flag' scheme, made between the Port of Venice Authority and cruise chip companies (Terranova, Citron, Parolin 2016), studies continue to find that the fuel from cruise ships, while harbouring in the city, has a sulphur content 100 times higher than that of the diesel used for trucks and 500 times the concentration of ultra-fine particles found in open sea air (Friedrich 2017). While the smog that shrouds global metropolises is a well-known environmental threat (an anthropogenic assemblage occurring when the airborne particulates and sulphur dioxide rise to dangerous levels), fog is seen as a naturally occurring phenomenon, as passive. Consequently, I stay with fog as a non-exceptional insidious state that allows for a greater awareness of the ongoing presence of harmful particulates even on clear days. My intention is not to disambiguate fog but to re-attune to it and move towards an awareness that, when in fog, a subject is part of a gathering of dense material contents and of beings inhaling and exhaling

7 From the 1970s onwards, acid rain and fog were a major environmental concern in Europe and North America; this has subsided due to successive air quality measures, however, in parts of India, China, Africa and Latin America it remains a serious environmental concern (Breault 2018).

8 Here I use 'media' as it is thought by authors such as John Durham Peters (2015) whereby the term not only infers orthodox forms such as photography, radio, or digital media but also considers the environment itself as a form of media.

9 In July 2021 a ruling was passed that is hoped to ban the cruise ships for good; however, such rulings have been made before, so the situation still needs to be watched closely.

together.[10] I thus conceive *occult meteorology* as a lens to perceive a lived world thick with matter, and a complex spatio-temporal condition in tension with environments degraded by the everyday collateral impacts of environmental exploitation.

2 Part I: Submergence and Reorientation

In the opening passage, adapted from my journal, fog is not only a limitation to sight but the dense presence of sight itself. Like the all-encompassing digital cloud, the blurred and edgeless density of fog emphasises how subjects do not look *at* a landscape or the sky; rather their visual experience is itself a process of submergence – with sight and other modes of perception positioned within rather than without. The received understanding of being outside of the perceived world can contribute to the perpetuation of self-interest and social detachment, while a situated understanding of being within a complex environment of relations can prompt increased socio-environmental awareness. Following such a re-calibration, Leslie calls for a critical mode of understanding where everything is imbricated in a

> multifaceted totality in which metaphor bleeds into and out of science, in which technology and materials emanate thought, in which thought turns material or can conjure a mood, in which language generates a fog of ambiguity, a condensation of reference. (Leslie 2021, 112)

For Leslie it is necessary to learn to "negotiate in the fog" (113). In other words, perception must become attuned to the overwhelming density of information, and the entangled fields of causality that are often too overwhelming to comprehend let alone communicate. Her 'negotiation' is what I call '*re*orientation', to resist becoming overwhelmed or lost within these material and metaphorical environments but, instead, to re-position the self within this lostness and understand it as a politically 'operative' space of immersion (Leslie 2021, 98). Rather than a sense of disorientation, fog can *re*orientate a subject to their own relational condition immersed or submerged within their environment (even and especially above the surface of water). Such a mode of perception re-arranges the sensible world as one of relationality, where human sensory organs are connected at degrees of separation and co-constitution with the objects and spaces that are perceived. When this perceived limitation is reoriented,

10 In the next section, I will discuss the idea of gathering in more detail in dialogue with Craig Martin's article "Fog-Bound" (2011, 63).

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fog becomes instead the excess of the visible. Put another way, rather than thinking that fog reduces visibility, it is productive to think that what is seen *is* the fog itself – an airborne ocean of densely suspended water droplets.

This reorientation starts from the understanding that space is volumetric, and people are submerged within atmospheres saturated with varying degrees of water vapour. This reorientation questions what submergence means; for example, walking through either rain or fog is itself a type of submergence within airborne waters, or even an emergence into an awareness of existing within an ever-present watery world. British anthropologist Tim Ingold provides some clues to this state:

> No more than the wind is the sky an object of perception. It is not something we look at. On our walk in the countryside we could see all manner of phenomena, thanks to their illumination by the sunlight. The sky, however, was not something we saw in the light, it was luminosity itself. Just like the feeling of the wind, the light of the sky is experienced as a commingling of the perceiver and the world without which there could be no things to see at all. As we touch in the wind, so we see in the sky. (2007, S30)

Echoing Ingold, to see in the fog, where light transmission changes, is to touch what you are seeing. To touch what is seen is to simultaneously be within it, or to see in contact with occult deposition.[11] In this way, and thinking back to my night walk, fog is both an object and a medium and it makes acutely clear Ingold's claim that the perceiver does not see the sky but sees in it. This sense of being physically implicated within this watery continuum gets stronger when degrees of visibility reduce: 501-1000 metres, 251-500 metres, 100-250 metres, less than 100 metres, 0. These categories do not only indicate a lateral distance but are a measurement of submergence. If we reverse this submergence, receding by each degree of visibility, fog reminds us that even when visibility is high there is a material connection between perceiver and perceived. In this way cultural geographer Craig Martin suggests that fog "entangles near and far" (Martin 2011, 462). Here submergence has both social and material significance: fog helps to imagine the world as amphibious beyond the littoral, or at the interface of water and land, involving liquids, airs, and earths. *Caigo* is thus not an absence, it is in its own way an occult presence of the lagoon as a watery material continuum.

11 Proposing the theory of 'haptic visuality', feminist film theorist Laura Marks has argued that touch, as well as other senses, plays a part in vision and even offers understandings of cultural phenomena unavailable to sight alone. I would argue that such a haptic visuality is well attuned to the ways that meteorological elements are a media, as well as the ways they are mediated (Marks 2000, 22).

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When water forms on skin or eyes, as with my immersion in Venice's *caigo*, Martin points towards a reciprocal relationship where the "body gathers fog, just as the fog gathers the body" (Martin 2011, 463). This is an example of reorientation within a space gathered by the body/fog encounter. This is evident in the work of poet Josef Brodsky. He visited Venice over the course of many decades, usually during winter when fog is most prevalent. In his autobiographical reflection on the city, *Watermark*, he wrote that fog:

> obliterates not only reflections but everything that has a shape: buildings, people, colonnades, bridges, statues. Boat services are cancelled, airplanes neither arrive nor take off for weeks, stores are closed, and mail ceases to litter one's threshold. The effect is as though some raw hand had tuned all those enfilades inside out and wrapped the lining around the city. Left, right, up, and down swap places, and you can find your way around only if you are a native or were given a cicerone. The fog is thick, blinding, and immobile. The latter aspect, however, is of advantage to you if you go out on a short errand, say, to get a pack of cigarettes, for you can find your way back via the tunnel your body has burrowed in the fog; the tunnel is likely to stay open for half an hour. (1992, 59)

In Brodsky's description fog is violent, in the way it precludes travel and eviscerates the architecture of the city, turning it inside out like a flayed figure. Likewise, he suggests that habitual directions, such as up/down and left/right are reversed. Brodsky, however, also identifies the role of local knowledge that does not rely on sight but speculates that fog moulds to his shape as a tunnel for the return journey. How grounded this tunnel is in reality is inconsequential, what is important for my reading is the way Brodsky sees fog as an advantage when moving through space at short distances. For those, like Brodsky, who are guided or know where they are going, fog does not dis-orientate but instead allows them to recall their previous route even when their compass is inverted. Fog is thus particularly disorienting for the stranger who cannot resort to prior situated knowledge of the local environment.

The literary authors that I have considered mostly contemplate fog from the perspective of the individual subject.[12] However, rather than simply isolate, fog also gathers a community of subjects repeating similar processes of reorientation and taking care of where their body is and how they move within uncertain space – how they are required to change pace. I do not naively evoke community as a

12 In addition to Brodsky these include Gabriele d'Annunzio's *Notturno*; and Ippolito Nievo's *Confessioni di un Italiano* (Cesarini, Eco 2009).

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flattening condition, ignoring uneven racial, social, gendered conditions. Instead, fog is productive as a gathering force not only of space, as Martin suggests, but also of subjects that reveal broader environmental conditions and cast present inequalities into embodied relief.

One canonical example of the use of fog to incorporate these inequalities can be found in Charles Dickens's use of fog as a scene-establishing device in *Bleak House*. Fog acts as a device for assembling London and the Thames estuary as a geography of socio-political implications including the economics of the river, the ships of colonial trade, and the bodies of its inhabitants:

> Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier-brigs; fog lying out on the yards and hovering in the rigging of great ships; fog drooping on the gunwales of barges and small boats. Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners, wheezing by the firesides of their wards; fog in the stem and bowl of the afternoon pipe of the wrathful skipper, down in his close cabin; fog cruelly pinching the toes and fingers of his shivering little 'prentice boy on deck. Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all round them, as if they were up in a balloon and hanging in the misty clouds. (1993, 3)

London's fog was a suffocating presence until new regulations were enforced after the fatal smog of 1952 that killed 4,000 people due to a combination of heavy fog and air pollution (Bell et al. 2004). A century earlier, Dickens lured his reader from the estuary into the midst of the city as the location of his narrative – from Essex and Kent into the corrupt chambers of the chancery court. With his fog refrain multiple political and social elements are gathered within the physical and metaphorical fogs of the colonial metropolis. Lingering in the rigging and with the freezing appendages of child sailors exploited by commercial and military fleets, fog draws lines of travel from the city to the empire. It is also embodied: in the eyes and entering the mouths, and, in Greenwich hospital, down the throat into the physical bodies of retired naval seamen. Dickens reorients his reader to perceive the subjects of the city, from the ship captains and judges to the downtrodden elderly and child labourers, not as dispersed and individuated figures but always in relational community. This is an eco-political and embodied state where, rather than only gathering space, fog also gathers what it contains including social formations. In doing so, fog engages a community – not just the individual as in Brodsky's tunnel – in the process of exchanging atmospheres. Thus,

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Figure 2 *Vaporetto* at Madonna dell'Orto October 20, 2020, 09.06 am. © Author

what was made uncertain or 'obliterated' by fog is physically and socially embodied as a gathering force or mediating element of political matters across geographies and through wheezing bodies. A similar scene can be imagined drawing bodies into trans-corporeal connection in Venice. In this way Dickens mobilises fog as both a metaphorical and a very material condition of meteorological connection and social awareness. From this socio-environmental gathering-force, I turn towards what is mediated by fog, both physically and psychologically, in the cinematic treatment of toxic airs.

3 Part II: Mediation

> *The sound of the engine and slapping waves comes long before the boat. The 'vaporetto' assembles in physical form at the blurred boundaries of millions of suspended water droplets. Waiting for the 'vaporetto' I wonder whether there is a word to better express this emergence within fog? Rather than dissipating or concealing, does an object assemble or thicken within fog?*

The reorientation to and, more importantly, within the opacity of suspended water droplets explored so far, fosters a mode of perception that makes sensible the complex and toxic processes that constitute local environments. When the *vaporetto* emerges from the fog it leaves behind polluting particles from marine fuel **[fig. 2]**. *Vaporetto* engines are equivalent to buses and lorries, the difference being that they have no filters. Air quality is low on a vaporetto ride

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with its exhausts expelling 30,000 units of fine particulate matter, by contrast a major road discharges 20,000 units. Landing stations have particularly high levels because a *vaporetto* manoeuvres, reversing and accelerating to hold itself so passengers can board. In April 2016, at the Ponte degli Scalzi, which links the train station across the Grand Canal to the sestiere of Santa Croce, 62,400 units were found. Cruise ships, less frequent than vaporetti, also contribute vast quantities of particulate matter. For example, 133,000 units were recorded when the MSC Musica passed Zattere on April 17th, 2016.[13] Workers on boats, as well as people living and visiting Venice, inhale these pollutants.

Such processes are occult because they operate at the scale of the particulate and, apart from the sometimes visible smoke billowing from *vaporetto* exhausts, remain undetectable to human perception. Literary scholar Jennifer Scappettone addresses this when she relays John Ruskin's dismissive, even offensive, writing on the arrival of trains and steam travel to Venice as a poisonous smoke that begins to compose the bodies of the city's inhabitants; as she reflects on his writing: "it is beginning to constitute both figure and ground" (Scappettone 2016, 79-80). Returning to that night in October, with fog in my eyes, I also thought, as Leslie does, that media is not just what is communicated, what is placed between a viewing subject and a perceived object, but it is an all-encompassing "medium of what is seen" (Leslie 2021, 104).

> *On another foggy night, shafts of light from street lamps were cast at 45 degree angles from the 'sotoporteghi' (tunnelled passages sometimes ending in canals). The light could be seen to dissipate into the fog after around 2 or 3 metres. It appeared to have a visible granularity, as though each illuminated water particle came in and out of focus like a thousand tiny film projection screens.*[14]

In literature and cinema, fog usually harbours an unknown threat, it contains something that might harm you, and even kill you. In Steven King's widely adapted novella *The Mist*, fog descends on a quiet

13 These measurements were taken by the German chemist and environmentalist Axel Friedrich who has been invited on numerous occasions to Venice by activists (NoGrandiNavi and AmbienteVenezia Association). I spoke with him in July 2021. Recordings he has taken in harbours around the world, including Venice, can be found on the website of Naturschutzbund Deutschland eV (NABU): https://www.nabu.de/umwelt-und-ressourcen/verkehr/schifffahrt/messungen/index.html. Another measurement of a cruise ship taken 2 km away, from a rooftop at San Barnaba, recorded a level of 40,000 units.

14 The International Cloud Atlas describes fog thus: "[w]hen illuminated, individual fog droplets are frequently visible to the naked eye and are seen to be moving in a somewhat turbulent manner".

American town conjuring paranormal events and deadly creatures (King 1980). Elsewhere it is not so much an external threat that fog poses but one that has been internalised. Fog produces an existential crisis in Michelangelo Antonioni's 1964 psychological thriller *Il Deserto Rosso*. Produced at the cusp of the acid rain crisis of the 1960s and 1970s, the film is characterised by luridly yellow clouds of sulphuric pollutants in the port city of Ravenna, at the southern end of the Po delta with Venice in the north. The film delves into the impact of these pollutants on the life of its protagonist Giuliana, played by Monica Vitti. She is recovering from an accident and experiences prolonged anxiety within the context of an unfolding ecological disaster. With the entanglement of airborne pollution and psychological stress, *Il Deserto Rosso* is a film in which the occult of indiscernible material environments intervenes in the internal life of its protagonists.

In *This Contentious Storm*, feminist Environmental Humanities scholar, Jennifer Mae Hamilton proposes the concept of "meteorological reading". She does so within her study of the performance history of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, as it has changed over time in line with cultural interpretations of weather: from metonym to 'literal' meteorological conditions in response to an increase of extreme weather events (Hamilton 2017, 16). Hamilton's "meteorological reading" theorises literal interpretations of the storm in the play as historically circumscribed and always more than this: a metaphor for inner turmoil and a metonym for the broader political situation. *Il Deserto Rosso* can be read in a similar way. Indeed, the choice of Ravenna for this eco-psychological thriller must be read in the wider context of rapid industrialisation of Italy in the post-war period.[15] Discussing the film, Elena Past suggests that Giuliana's terror of an impending ecological disaster is reminiscent of eco-feminist theorist Stacy Alaimo's conception of the trans-corporeal as the porosity of the human body that is not discrete from the flows of substance of a polluted world (Past 2019, 27).[16] This trans-corporeality in Antonioni's film results in both bodily and mental reaction, a consciousness of environmental degradation manifesting as inner turmoil. While this is certainly evident, something occult can also be extrapolated from Giuliana's character.

While her external world of 1960s Ravenna is shrouded by toxic air and sea fog, Giuliana's mind is likewise fogged, or weathered. How-

15 Like Leslie's provocation that fog collapses the boundaries between poetry and science, *Il Deserto Rosso* encapsulates one of the central contradictions of cultural production and, more than this, society as a whole. Past identifies how the film is simultaneously critical of pollution while leaving its own polluting trace – "both industrial by-product and critical of the industrial world" – walking "the threshold at the encounter of art and industry" (Past 2019, 47).

16 For Alaimo see *Bodily Natures* (2010); and "States of Suspension: Trans-corporeality at Sea" (2012).

ever, the misogynistic dismissal of Giuliana's responses as hysteria, including by her husband who is a factory manager, suggests that, to the contrary, her mental fogging is itself an attunement to the environment within which she exists. Her altered mental state reflects her own perception of the slow and pervasive airs of the changing world and her own place within it. Indeed, she perceives these tangible yet insidious changes, also experienced by Antonioni's audience, with greater clarity than any other character in the film. Consequently, through Giuliana, Antonioni's film is an awakening to what is concealed as occult, within the degrading world of petrocapital. The film produces such an awakening through what Past describes as Giuliana's extension of "her subjectivity to encompass the 'things around her'" (2019, 40). Consequently, echoing Hamilton, the fog as metonym for rapid industrialisation must be read alongside its role as a metaphor for Giuliana's mental state.

In another scene, set on an oil platform in the Adriatic, she declares her illicit love to the industrialist Corrado (played by Richard Harris), her husband's boss, "now you are part of me – part of what is around me, that is". In this quotation Giuliana collapses the division between her sense of self and other, her sense of self and her surroundings. Giuliana's words – "part of what is around me" – echo Martin's fog that gathers space and what occurs through this, namely the gathering of what is contained within those water particles.[17] Giuliana and Corrado are porous figures whose romance is implicated in the politics of pollution and toxicity that pervade Ravenna. Elsewhere in Italy, Serenella Iovino characterises Naples as a porous city formed at many levels, from the social to the architectural, of myriad porous bodies and matters (Iovino 2014, 101). In this context she posits that knowledge itself is a form of embodied porosity:

> To say that knowledge is 'embodied' means that [...] knowledge comes from the give-and-take between bodies and the world. It materializes the porous exchange of inside and outside, the progressive becoming-together of bodies and the world, their intra-action. (103)

The toxicity Giuliana and Corrado encounter is both part of them and around them. More than this, Corrado harbours neo-colonial fantasises about expanding operations to Patagonia and thus transport-

17 The transdisciplinary *Weathering* research project engages with the embodiment of climate change where "bodies are archives in an ongoing gathering of climate-time". They do so with the intention of developing new imaginaries, linking the vast scale of planetary processes with the everyday lived experience of weather (Giggs et al. 2016). Elsewhere, Neimanis and Hamilton refer to this as the "inter-implication" of bodies, places, and weather in a world of changing climates (Neimanis, Hamilton 2018). Such inter-implications are racially and socially imbalanced.

ing these toxic airs to un-exploited parts of the world. Framed by their romance, this equates to the reproduction of what is around them as a toxic colonial expansion of the toxicities that are reciprocally colonising them. Her awareness of the boundless interrelation of the toxicity she embodies leads to the very externalisation of herself. Through her partial perception of these toxic elements, Giuliana practices an occult form of Iovino's 'embodied knowledge' of the intra-actions of body and world, one that threatens to spill out of their romantic inter-actions to the wider world.

The film is bisected by one of its most haunting scenes at the docks where a flirtatious group congregate in a shack. They play on a bed, begin to pull the shack apart, and discuss whether they had heard a scream. One of the men who is sceptical of Giuliana's claim admonishes her: "Giuliana, who could have screamed? There's only the sea!" When a boat enters the port and raises a flag, indicating an epidemic on board, they leave the shack. What follows during the dock scene are shots of the group running into and out of the fog. When Giuliana loses her bag, the camera takes her perspective. As she looks at the tableau of the gathered group (except Corrado), the fog slowly covers them all. She runs past them and into the car driving off down the jetty and, again, into the fog. They find the car perched right at the end of the jetty having stopped just in time.[18] When her husband Ugo berates her, she says that: "all I wanted was to drive home. It was the fog, it confused me and I made a mistake". Here fog plays its usual disorienting role.

Giuliana's near-death experience is prefigured when, earlier in the shack, she looks out of the window at the fog and says: "What should I look at?" ("Cosa devo guardare?") – "I feel like my eyes are all wet. What do they expect me to do with my eyes? What am I supposed to look at?" Past suggests, citing Alaimo and Rachel Carson, that the wetness of human eyes and tears are evolutionary inheritances from oceanic sea creatures and that "Giuliana's observation about wet eyes underscores the formal constitution of every cinematic viewer, not just her own troubled vision" (Past 2019, 38). Past points to the form of the eye, but only gestures to the watery continuity between eye and world that fog forges. Indeed, the film that covers the cornea and the eye is composed of different liquids. More than this, however, I argue that her eye is actually made wet by the fog, as it formed that October evening between my own eyelashes. Rather than the evocation of a deep evolutionary inheritance, the trans-corporeality of fog and water suspended in the air occurs in her very encounter

18 In Venice, security vehicles have been known to drive off the edge of the wharf at the petrochemical port of Marghera, showing the dangerous role fog can play as it forms the continuity between land and water.

with fog. It is thus through a polluted atmosphere that people see and sense: content and medium, metaphor and material. Giuliana's confusion is framed by an awakening to the wetness of her eyes and the world these eyes are in contact with. In the polluted environment of 1960s Ravenna, sea fog limits their understanding and makes them question what they had heard, and when she opens her eyes the polluted fogs of the film are touching them. With the physical contact between her eyes and the world, Giuliana's question "What should I look at?" reflects her consciousness of being a part of the world that she perceives. In other words, what should she look at when all that is around her is a part of her (Past 2019, 48)?[19] Here her embodied knowledge of pollution is perceived through the physiology of the eye. This leads to the discovery of a continuity between the self and the outside – a discovery that is full of meaning, which leads her to question her position in the world.

Giuliana's 'mental weather' is an awakening to the relationality of toxicity symbolised and physically mediated through a wet eye beginning to orientate to the presence of fog as a meteorological occult. The seminal land artist Robert Smithson evokes the phenomenon of wet eyes under his concept of "The Climate of Sight", in his 1968 essay "A Sedimentation of the Mind", evoking changes to sight "from wet to dry and dry to wet according to one's mental weather" (Smithson 1968, 88-91). Smithson, with the rest of the land art movement, was part of a wider cultural environmentalism occurring at roughly the same time as Antonioni's film. However, rather than Smithson's suggestion that a wet eye is enamoured by the actions of water in its changing states – "melting, dissolving, soaking […] gaseousness, atomization or fogginess" (1968, 88) – Giuliana's wet eyes are discontented, perturbed by these foggy, soaking environments even before she is fully aware of their ramifications. Towards the end of the film she says to her son that birds have adapted their flight patterns to the sulphurous yellow clouds spilling from the city's factories. Through this observation, Giuliana identifies the multi-species disruption these polluted airs cause. However, it is not only animal routes that dense airs interrupt. When fog is thick, it can also produce an ephemeral interruption in the mobility of logistical systems that Corrado imagines transporting materials from Ravenna to Patagonia.

19 Karen Pinkus makes a similar argument with regards to Giuliana being a part of the surrounding environment (2011, 270).

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4 Part III: Interruption

> *When I began learning to row in the local 'voga' style I remembered that someone had once told me that the word 'caigo', fog in Venetian dialect, means to tie up boats when visibility is low. In my subsequent research I found no further trace of this and dismissed it as something I had imagined or dreamt. When I asked a Venetian friend, she mobilised her local networks: the response arrived on my phone: "so, apparently: 'caigo' comes from 'ca me ligo' (here I tie up my boat)".*

This etymology is, perhaps correctly, dismissed by most academics who point to the root of *caigo* in the Latin word for mist: *caligo*. Nevertheless, the fact that some Venetians continue to say that the term comes from the disruption fog causes to boat journeys reflects fog's historic importance in the general movement and commerce of the city. Here I am thinking of the cancelled boat services in Brodsky, or, as recounted in a meeting with meteorologist Marcello Cerasuolo, how fog interrupted the telling of time from the Patriarchal Observatory in Venice: beginning in the 1880s, a red balloon or flag would be raised to indicate midday, and to account for the frequency of foggy days they would also fire a cannon. Despite innovations such as horns and lamps, fog continues to disrupt and disorient the circulations and mobilities of resource logistics and even cruise ships. In this way, fog is a political actor, disrupting systems of power while simultaneously being adopted as a metaphor for these complex systems.[20] This interaction of globalised systems equates to the occult in the fog of things.

Leslie shifts between meteorological and digital fogs, stating that as "the internet of things come down to earth", fog "that was once meteorological is now also technical" (2021, 90). For example, the *cloud* of digital and computer memory – like meteorological fog – tightly hugs ground level through the continual messaging between devices, as well as the increasing environmental impact of 'cloud' storage infrastructures. From within these imbricated processes, Leslie suggests that what is often so confusing about fog can become operative (98). With this in mind, fog is not only becoming operative as a mode of reorientation, but it already intervenes within logistical systems. In other words, airborne water particles themselves interrupt fogged systems to offer moments of reprieve from relentless circulations of petrochemicals and cruise ships – meteorological fog *fogging* logistical systems.

20 Brani Brusadin uses the metaphor of "the fog of systems" to identify the deeply entangled world of networked physical, logistical, and digital infrastructures (2021).

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Figure 3 Tweet from @abc13weather, December 19, 2017

Fog regularly halts shipping traffic. Taking the port of Houston as an example, in January 2009, February and December 2011, April 2012, February 2014, and December 2017 fog prevented ships from entering (37 vessels) or exiting (13).[21] Echoing the shrouded port in *Il Deserto Rosso*, sometimes heavy sea fog holds part of the gulf coast in stasis for weeks on end. In this weather map from a tv broadcast in December 2017 visibility is reduced to zero **[fig. 3]**. Countless hours of petrochemical circulation are put on hold as ships are forced to a standstill. In maritime navigation protocol boats should not enter port if visibility is less than the length of the vessel itself. This is a navigational translation of the erroneous *ca me ligo*: when fog suspends, even if only briefly, the networks of petrochemical trade. A trade that also supplies the marine fuel of Venice. What if Venice were shrouded in fog for long enough that the cruise ships stopped or the oil tankers stood still? This, however, raises other issues regarding the employment of workers in the cruise ports and service industries. The fogs of systems teaches that things are always nuanced and interconnected, and extraction and logistics produce other dependencies that complicate resistance to them. Where local economies are reliant on processes that deplete local ecosystems, labour and environmental movements are at loggerheads. Here suspended water droplets – an ephemeral presence – if only temporarily halt the flows of capital, and thus it is not only the body that must re-orientate but even these satellite navigated vessels, with their economically val-

21 Reuters (2017). "Fog halts inbound Houston Ship Channel traffic: U.S. Coast Guard". December 19. `https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN1ED21C`

uable and environmentally damaging contents, must slow, halt, and wait while they are gathered within an ocean in the air.

5 Conclusion

The complex physical presence of fog touches the skin, enters the mouth, forms tears between eyelids, while preventing planes from flying, or oil laden ships from leaving port. To consider fog or rain or snow and other atmospheric ephemera in such a way prevents it from being dismissed as merely a thing of curious beauty or a supernatural threat. Instead, fog can be perceived as a very tangible element with very real effects. Returning to where I began, walking in Venice's fog is itself a submergence, an entrance into the hydrological continuity that defines the city's lagoonscape from the benthic, through its surface to the atmospheric moisture forming on walls. Walking through this fog is itself a form of wading, not through the shallows or sand banks but through air itself as the lagoon above the surface; a city that is as much airborne waters as it is stone and marsh. When fog forms so densely, it can trigger a further questioning of what imperceptible contents fog in Venice might contain – an embodied reminder of atmospheric complexity.

By thinking in and through the amphibious urban space of Venice, a greater sensitivity is possible for understanding how we are submerged even when above the water's surface. With this I mean that, even when far from a body of water – a sea, a river, a lake – the atmosphere contains varying degrees of moisture, and the land itself is constituted by waters that shift and seep – all in processes of submergence that can be equally nurturing and toxic, or somewhere in between.

Thus, to sense the ephemeral through the residues of occult depositions offers a mode of thinking that troubles discreet boundaries between body and world through an occult perspective on the imperceptible processes of degrading environments.

To conceive of fog as a heuristic enables an encounter with it not as inherently disorienting, reducing visibility, or as a metaphor of becoming lost, but also one of *re*orientation in a world always shifting between intensities of suspended matters. An occult meteorology negotiates the porous threshold of the turbid and the ephemeral – of visibility and the limits of visibility. This can help to garner a greater awareness of the inextricable connection, and co-constitutive relationship between subject and environment – perhaps even a sense of solidarity with others who have yet more fog in their eyes, throats, and ears. The meteorological occult is a reorientation towards the meaning of what is in the fog of things, an occult awakening to the very real and embodied pollutants of environmental degradation.

In the spring of 2021 while living in Venice, and only a few months after the occult encounter between the 'caigo' and my eye, I developed an eye infection, hindering my sight for some weeks. Diagnosed as a common yet chronic condition called Blepharitis there was something, nonetheless, uncanny about thinking fog through my eye as a physical surface and then contracting an eye illness. While I do not believe the two are connected, I am nevertheless all the more conscious about the surface of my eyes and the possibility that they are always in direct contact with the occult mediation of pollutants.

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Imagining Venetian Hydro-Peripatetics with Ciardi, Favretto, Lansyer, and Pasini

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Abstract This article proposes a sensory approach to physical and representational environments based on a pedestrian perspective. With a view to bringing arts-based considerations to bear on UN Sustainable Development Goal 6.6, concerned with the protection and restoration of water-related ecosystems, the analysis primarily revolves around Italian and French depictions of Venice in the 1880s-1890s that encompass stimuli for smell, sound, taste, and touch as much as sight. Close readings are undertaken to highlight hyperlocal elements that merit consideration when determining courses of action for the long-term good of the lagoonscape.

Keywords Art. Blue humanities. Nineteenth century. The senses. Walking.

I am grateful for comments and questions about my presentations during April-June 2021 within the seminar series of the Centre for Environmental Humanities at the University of Bristol, the conference on *Mobilities in the Early Modern and Contemporary Mediterranean* at the European University Institute in Florence, and the joint seminar series of the European Centre for Living Technology and the Center for the Humanities and Social Change at Ca' Foscari University.

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How can flooding extend dimensions of knowledge? The following ruminations are rooted in a walk from northern Cannaregio to southern Dorsoduro on the public holiday of 8 December 2020, when an instance of *acqua alta* reached 138 cm without the 78 tidal barriers of the Modulo Sperimentale Elettromeccanico (MOSE) being able to respond in time. When moving through knee-high water in waders, a peculiar sensory mode arose to do with elements such as the sight of semi-submerged shops and homes, the sound of splashes echoing through practically deserted streets, the smell of lagoonal matter, the taste of saltiness in the air, and the touch of liquid lapping at shin level. On the basis of such a distinctively Venetian event, I propose to engage immersively with paintings of places off the hydropolis's beaten track that were produced during the nineteenth century's closing decades. My analysis here revolves around pieces of visual culture with Italian and French roots, not least two works from the International Gallery of Modern Art at Ca' Pesaro: 1. a photograph of December 8th in *Il Fatto Quotidiano*; 2. Guglielmo Ciardi's *Fondamenta di Venezia* (1890); 3. Giacomo Favretto's *Veduta di Venezia* (1884); 4. Alberto Pasini's *Canale di Venezia, effetto di alba* (1885); 5. Emmanuel Lansyer's *Venise, mur de couvent et vieilles maisons en briques au bord d'un canal, aux environs de l'église San Sebastian* (1892). My form of "critical hydrography" (Baucom 1999, 307) seeks to offer a volumetrically inclined exploration of paintings – inventively focusing on height, width, depth, and time inside them – with reference to United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 6.6, which revolves around

> protect[ing] and restor[ing] water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes.

A particularly high degree of care is required in the case of the Venetian Lagoon, where islands make up barely a tenth of the surface area, primarily composed of salt marshes, mud flats, and open water. In this place, ecological losses have gone hand in hand with flows of hazardous chemicals and non-biodegradable waste since a relatively early stage in the colonisation of the aquatic environment by people fleeing mainland dangers.

In 2021, on Venice's 1600th anniversary, an unstable relation between water and land constitutes the foremost source of endangerment for the way of life implanted at the Adriatic Sea's northwesternmost reach. For Serenella Iovino in *Ecocriticism and Italy*, there is no overlooking the degree to which "Venice […] breathes tides" (2016, 47). Given that a tide of 80 cm is enough to inundate the entrance of St Mark's Basilica, and more than half of the historic centre is engulfed when surges reach 140 cm, it is hardly surprising how many residents and workers in the six *sestieri* are given to measuring tides

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against personal markers like a *palazzo*'s flight of stairs, or a window in a narrow *calle*. Even with MOSE as a decades-in-the-making technological stopgap, the current state of affairs is far from secure. As highlighted by the activism-oriented think-thank We Are Here Venice under the leadership of the environmental scientist Jane da Mosto, plenty needs to be done to achieve "a more resilient, better-understood Venice" (2020, par. 7). My goal in this article is to outline a framework for better understanding the hydropolis from a pedestrian's perspective, not only because my familiarity with the districts in question largely derives from being there on foot, but also because walking is essential to accessing most areas at a remove from Venice's navigable waterways.

The significant flooding in December 2020 proved to be doubly headline-worthy due to thwarted expectations of a new kind of safety based on the success of MOSE two months beforehand. In the light of an all-too-familiar Venetian disaster iconography, the world had to process the fallibility of a longwinded and pricey strategy to engineer a dry city **[fig. 1]**.

Figure 1 Giuseppe Pietrobelli, "Il Mose non è attivo, Venezia finisce sott'acqua". 2020. Digital photograph. *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 8 December. www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2020/12/08/il-mose-non-e-attivo-venezia-finisce-sottacqua-lavori-non-ultimati-e-previsioni-sballate-ecco-perche-le-paratoie-non-sono-state-alzate/6030345. © LaPresse – Anteo Marinoni

This scene brings out Venice's aquatic character, on account of the positioning at water level, as well as the single-point perspective that leads from the raised walkway in the left foreground to Fabrizio Plessi's *Natale Digitale* between the columns at the lagoonal end of Piazzetta San Marco. There is a sense of a watery continuum stretching towards the *bacino* past the LCD-fashioned tree, sandwiched between the Doge's Palace and the Campanile. Thanks to the unconventionally low viewpoint, pride of place is afforded to the *hydro-* at least

as much as the *-polis*, even if water occupies barely a quarter of the image. Here, as conjectured by the architect Cecilia Chen in *Thinking with Water*, "waters are situated, lively […]. Waters take place" (2013, 275). In the foreground, the figure girded in bright waders and a dark anorak is emblematic of a heavy-duty response to an extreme *taking-place* by lively waters, all suggesting worse to come for the beleaguered community. Counterparts to this benchmark of disaster are the figure in black to the right and the two figures to the left beneath the Basilica's main portal, complete with its mosaic of the Last Judgement. Besides doom-laden visual cues, the photograph conjures up sensations of touching thigh-high water, hearing the splashing of passers-by, smelling wrack, and tasting a bitterness in the air. Such was my experience, mediated through gumboots, waterproof trousers, an anorak, and a surgical mask necessitated by COVID-19. What could transpire in terms of action and policymaking if it were possible to establish a collective sense of standing in a waterlogged site epitomising the human ambition to carve out a place in the world?

Venice's plight is symptomatic of the Global North's insufficiently rationalised landscaping choices over centuries. In the introduction to *Italy and the Environmental Humanities*, Serenella Iovino, Enrico Cesaretti, and Elena Past highlight that

> the lack of a bond between cultural identity, social awareness, and environmental protection is indeed at the core of the ecological crisis. (2018, 8)

It is not just that the renowned locale of the Doge's Palace is a paradigm of how the climate crisis is threatening heritage recognised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation; there is also the fact that the hydropolis's identity is the product of human-led environmental alterations associated with a social preference for protecting a certain kind of stability – a highly unnatural concept. After all, the Venetian Lagoon has been experiencing *acqua alta* for one-and-a-half millennia, but preservation efforts have ratcheted up a notch in the light of particular notions of what is being imperilled:

> there is […] the worry that […] on account of natural forces […] Venice will disappear into the sea. (Hom 2010, 378)

Anxiety is growing about time running out for the prestigious site at graver and graver risk of being overwhelmed by more-than-human occurrences. Precious little of anything 'natural' defines the forces gathering steam across our planet, however.

A definitive submersion of Venice would be the outcome of an increased risk profile arising from social choices about matters such

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as excavating deep channels in the mud flats for the sake of heavy freight and cruise ships. There is a strong case for thinking in terms of city-with-water as opposed to city-or-water:

> Venice, just like its disaster risk personality, is much more of a social construct than a physical construct. […] The aquapelago of Venice could take many forms, with the form currently chosen being socially constructed to accept water but not floods. […] [N]on-structural approaches to flood risk management tend to have the best long-term successes in averting flood disasters, including in aquapelago cities. For Venice, implementing only non-structural approaches would increase the long-term potential of the city no longer being dry, making aquapelagality more water than land, rather than the structural approaches which make aquapelagality more land than water. […] That is, flooding can define the aquapelago, at least for Venice, if this choice is specifically made. (Kelman 2021, 89)

To engage with Venice as more water than land is to open up the possibility of a multi-layered hydropolis not circumscribed by an inclination towards dry territory as an indicator of cultural longevity. Instead of handwringing over expensive yet fallible barriers or rerouting technologies, an enduring version of the lagoonscape ought to be rooted in an accommodation of wetness. Indeed, a less risky future would require a social reconstruction of the traits constituting *venezianità*, aligned with the intricacies of aquatic ecologies in their plenitude, without losing sight of the importance of tackling the climate crisis more broadly, so as to avoid non-viable conditions overall.

With respect to an embodied appreciation of Venice's watery identity across space and time, I wish to propose a method of hydro-peripatetics. This technique entails paying heed to water in all its forms while walking through a locale, whether in the physical world or as a psychogeographical extrapolation of a creative work, as will shortly be demonstrated with late nineteenth-century Venetian paintings. In essence, I am looking to highlight how the process of wandering around a place is historically and environmentally contingent, not unlike going through documentation from a bygone age. The environmental historians Roberta Biasillo and Claudio de Majo introduce a German-Italian collection of articles on "Storytelling and Environmental History" by emphasising

> the myriad of ways in which historical translation – even in our everyday actions – takes place, whether strolling the streets or trolling the historical archives. (2020, 6)

This comprehension of situatedness affords pride of place to translation, in an expanded gist of values "carrying beyond" (*trans-ferre*) one

milieu to another. Understanding a route from place to place, moving between contexts, setting out a path for others to follow – each of these deeds is integral to both walking and research, so it is fruitful to dwell on the degree to which a joined-up approach can be mutually enhancing. According to the urban architect Filipa Wunderlich in "Walking and Rhythmicity",

> walking is an elemental way of perceiving […] places and develop[ing] feelings and thoughts for them. […] The walking experience is multi-sensory. […] Beside the aural, the olfactory, the visual, and touch, even taste is occasionally […] contributing to the process of retaining a sense of place. (2008, 128)

The key sense involved in walking is touch, due to a push against a resistant surface that leads to motion, in addition to encounters with elements like air currents in the space through which a pedestrian moves. Vision and hearing tend to be the next most significant senses because their role in translating stimuli allows the computation of a route to a destination, with avoidance of obstacles where necessary. Smell and taste enrich a walker's experience of a place in relation to activities and identities, especially organic ones. These factors can be felt in the aforementioned photograph in ways similar to the physical encounter with the flooding that I experienced at more or less the same time.

Vis-à-vis wetness, touch is the chief means of appreciation, since the other senses are less suited to gauging moisture:

> *wet* names a time-bound condition or sensation keyed to […] perceptual limits. (Yates 2015, 187; emphasis added)

Perceptions of water's impact are fundamental to appreciating the Venetian Lagoon's state at a given moment. Has due credit been given to how aquatic presences are diversely folded into life in the hydropolis, though? The image in *Il Fatto Quotidiano* privileges St Mark's Square as a highly recognisable and poignant emblem of *high culture* on the verge of slipping beyond reach, but everyday *venezianità* is about many more qualities than the nub of the historic centre, right down to the hyperlocal concerns of Campo San Polo or Fondamenta della Misericordia. When concluding *Waterways and the Cultural Landscape*, the geographer Francesco Visentin is at pains to point out the extent to which

> vast intangible cultural heritage […] can emerge from the waterscapes populated by small lives, facts, stories and traditions still latent. (2018, 248)

In the coming pages, by setting aside the grandeur of the Campanile and the Doge's Palace for the sake of painted stories encapsulating the heritage of Venice's less recognised waterways, I shall endeavour to augment the palpability of things that are valuable owing to their seemingly small magnitude.

Ways of approaching the hydropolis are legion. In the words of the architect Sophia Psarra's *The Venice Variations*,

> the casual visitor finds in Venice a fantastic array of alleys, canals and palaces. […] For artists and writers, Venice reveals itself as a water-city of mirroring and inversions. […] Turner came to Venice to paint […] an atmospheric city of light effects reflected on water. Light, surface and atmosphere epitomised Henry James's Venetian visions. (2018, 12)

A considerable part of the joy of walking through Venice comes from stumbling across less frequented water- and byways, which might be just a few steps from a major route like Strada Nova. In tandem with the aquatic and lustrous fascinations experienced by visitors, the depths of Venetian life have long been the preserve of born-and-bred painters and authors. In the era of Google Maps and the aforementioned photograph, materials including paintings from the 1880s-1890s can be helpful for dipping beneath the surface of the locale that – akin to water – is at risk of being taken as shallower than it really is. Ultimately, I am intent on a hydro-*graphy* of Venice that translates the unique sense-scape of watery ecologies, on the basis of the idea of walking through a painting.

Among Venetian artists of the second half of the nineteenth century, Guglielmo Ciardi (Venice, 1842-Venice, 1917) is a towering figure. His eye for local vividness comes to the fore when depicting spots like a pedestrian route between a waterway and a row of buildings, very much along the lines of the Impressionists or the Macchiaioli **[fig. 2]**.

The setting calls to mind Castello *basso* or the Ghetto's surroundings, detached from the trappings of industrial modernity sprouting along the Giudecca Canal. According to Nico Stringa in *Ottocento veneto*,

> Ciardi […] conferma anche nella fase matura della sua produzione la sua totale idiosincrasia per la modernità. (2004, 64)

The artist certainly provides an idiosyncratic composition that is two-thirds water, with land-based human figures relegated to the background. How might the moment have been experienced by those fleeting presences evoked through suggestive contours as opposed to sharp lines? The canal occupying the bulk of the fore- and midground – especially striking due to the sweeping strokes of col-

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Figure 2 Guglielmo Ciardi, *Fondamenta di Venezia*. 1890. Oil on canvas, 22.3 × 34.8 cm. Ca' Pesaro, Venice. © Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia – Archivio Fotografico

ours ranging from white to black – could well have echoed the hum of conversations, or carried scents and tastes of suspended matter at high tide. In the left midground, the boats might have been seen rocking on the rippled waters, heard dipping into the fluid surface, and smelt as moist wood. Regarding the built structures in the background, with masonry mottled in an array of brown and cream dabs, the facades would most probably have shimmered with reflected light, and been rough to the touch of someone leaning for a rest. Given the plentiful possibilities for sensory galvanisation arising from the painting's rich textures, it is little wonder that Ciardi's oeuvre is considered an evocative apex. In the words of Denys Sutton's contribution about "Il fascino di Venezia" in *Venezia nell'Ottocento*,

> Ciardi [...] dipinse molte deliziose vedute che possono aver influenzato pittori stranieri più di quanto si possa credere. (1983, 262)

Such an abundance of experiential and technical knowledge is as compelling today as it was for the painter's peers and audiences spread across the world a century ago. This degree of thrall is indicative of the potential for nineteenth-century Venetian art to act as a

channel for public engagement with issues of water quality inherent in UN Sustainable Development Goal 6.6.

Questions of overcomplexity have bedevilled the fight against Venice's ecological endangerment (to say nothing of the rest of our planet). Without doubt, scientific knowledge provides important insights, but concepts and modes of expression are not always accessible for non-specialists. The efficacy of diverse forms of evidence about the climate crisis is addressed in a pilot study by the climatologists Saffron O'Neill and Mike Hulme:

> non-expert icons were […] considerably better understood than the expert icons, and interest was higher in the non-expert icons than in the expert icons. Indeed, in some cases the expert icons may have actively disengaged individuals, because they invoked emotions such as helplessness or boredom; and […] were too scientific and complex to understand. (2009, 408)

With "expert icons" including graphs and time-lapse projections, there is a risk of disengagement resulting from insufficient understanding or emotional stimulation. By contrast, a piece of art or a similar "non-expert icon" can appeal to emotion before logic in intricate respects, which paves the way for a deeper encounter.

The deep impact of the pictorial is made plain in the political economist Jacques Attali's *Bruits*, on the basis of the sixteenth-century compositional style of world-landscapes (*Weltlandschaften*):

> l'art […] ne donne pas seulement à voir, mais aussi et surtout à entendre le monde. (2001, 40)

It pays dividends to bear in mind how far a painting can resonate beyond the visual nature of oil on canvas, as we have seen with Ciardi's *Fondamenta di Venezia*. In fact, the polysemy of "entendre" suggests a manner of understanding the world through hearing, which can be expanded in the direction of *sounding* the depths of water. In the light of volumetrics, I am proposing that visual culture can be sounded sensorily, compositionally, historically… What is entailed in feeling through a piece's layers of associations, even the brushstrokes left by an artist at work in the world? Representations of Venice-as-hydropolis from the 1880s-1890s seem to abound in opportunities to take in the sort of phenomenon described by the physicist Jan Koenderink in an editorial for *Perception*:

> the nature of [a] reflection, its extent and granularity, reveals the microstructure of [a] surface. It is one of the signs by which we easily distinguish apples from oranges, or the weathered skin of old sailors from that of babies. (2000, 133).

A stroll through physical or painted Venetian scenes is replete with water-produced tricks of the light that draw attention to the weathering of buildings, people, and much beyond the optical plane.

Besides having affective and phenomenological aspects, a painting can function as a potent archive of ecological data in terms of its subject and material form, just as water serves to archive biochemical presences. With reference to the geohistorical merits of portrayals of flooding in late nineteenth-century France,

> tout paysage peint montre un temps qu'il fait. En y traquant des éléments atmosphériques, des comportements humains ou des états végétatifs, le spectateur décèle autant d'indices d'un type de temps comme figé sur la toile à un instant *t*. […] [L]es artistes parvenaient à rendre compte de situations météorologiques fidèles à ce qui aurait pu être photographié. (Metzger, Desarthe 2017, 119)

Art with a measure of verisimilitude is in effect a precious index of climatological conditions, social habits like attire, and more-than-human presences. Such types of meaning are palpable well before the advent of albumen photographic prints and the apogee of naturalism, of which Ciardi was a prime exponent. In "Sixty-Cm Submersion of Venice Discovered Thanks to Canaletto's Paintings", the climatologists Dario Camuffo and Giovanni Sturaro substantiate the scientific and cultural worth of depictions from the mid-1700s:

> paintings […], in the particular case of Venice, […] can be used as proxy data for a quantitative evaluation of the R[elative]S[ea] L[evel] rise. In a number of paintings, the brown-green front left by algae is […] a precious biological indicator of the average high-tide level. (2003, 334)

It is in the spirit of this cultural and scientific crossover that I am exploring the complexities of art produced in Venice some 150 years after Canaletto's reproductions of organic tide traces. In particular, the ecological markers inscribed by Ciardi and his contemporaries are a proxy for the hydropolis's long-term evolution.

Half a decade prior to Ciardi's *Fondamenta di Venezia*, a slightly younger Venetian artist was busy capturing similar views in a rather different style. Giacomo Favretto (Venice, 1849-Venice, 1887) provides a hint of the interplay of the lagoonscape's human and more-than-human components from a perspective intimating Venice's numerous bridges and scarce flora **[fig. 3]**.

The emphasis on verticality and depth here provides a contrast with Ciardi's horizontally inclined depiction, which goes without the least trace of sky in favour of a relatively immediate watery and earthly plane. For Favretto, Venice appears as a somewhat slight strip

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Figure 3 Giacomo Favretto, *Veduta di Venezia*. 1884. Oil on wood, 172.5 × 69.5 cm. Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Milan. © Comune di Milano – Umberto Armiraglio

of land sandwiched between water and air, in a fashion that signals a measure of transience in the society responsible for colonising the wetland. Indeed, the setting – reminiscent of the vicinity of Fondamenta Sant'Andrea or Campo San Giacomo – expresses the routine workings of an aquatic community, rather than dramatic buildings or people. Nico Stringa's contribution to *La pittura nel Veneto* on "Il paesaggio e la veduta" states that

> Favretto […] non esce neppure dal centro storico […] per […] motivi […] assolutamente intrinseci alla sua poetica di pittore 'urbano'. (2003, 616)

This modestly sized canal twisting alongside a handful of buildings and foliage encompasses concerns away from the oft-trodden paths around the Rialto Bridge and the Arsenal. Sparse walkers – small in scale next to the moored boat or the tree in the midground – have the air of passing through the locale without paying great heed to the scent of moist earth at the water's edge on the right, to the rustling of the trees and the echoes of footsteps on the bridge's stones in the centre, or the play of sunshine and shade on the multistorey facades in the background at top right. According to Margaret Plant in *Venice*,

> Favretto was […] attending only to his city, its urbanity, its indigenous life. (2002, 193)

Undoubtedly, the artist is accomplished in documenting the exceptional in the everyday, which might seem to elude the figures peppering the snapshot of the mid-1880s, and is still an issue today. How much more rounded an approach to UN Sustainable Development Goal 6.6 might result from elevating hyperlocal quirks to the stature of the frescoes in St Mark's Basilica on the international agenda?

Since there is no lack of scientific and cultural material to furnish understanding of the centuries-long path to the current state of affairs, the imperilment of the UNESCO World Heritage Site can feel all the more disconcerting to a person getting to know it on foot. The historian Piero Bevilacqua specifies in *Venezia e le acque* that

> Venezia […] ha sempre accompagnato i fenomeni del suo habitat lagunare facendone continuamente la storia, interrogando diuturnamente il passato per compararlo al presente, per scorgere i mutamenti nel frattempo intervenuti, e trarre auspici e consigli per l'avvenire. (1995, 3)

The stories and data arising from the hydropolis's vicissitudes provide a considerable bank of knowledge from which to draw conclusions about strategies that might be deemed successes or failures depending on a perceiver's position in- or outside a particular community/area. A multi-layered view of the Venetian Lagoon should permit a broad range of futures for the common good, though acting on 'omens' has rarely been straightforward due to interests ranging from the political to the commercial.

A big question now looks to be whether the collision of more-than-human forces and human desires is going to give rise to the latter being ousted, despite a glut of technological endeavours aimed at keep-

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ing people strolling and boating between major sites. In the words of the hydrogeologist Andrea Rinaldo in *Sustainable Venice*,

> it is impossible that the intertwined ecosystem that includes the city and its environment can survive as it is now, largely because it is the artificial byproduct of [a] coevolution of human interventions and natural tendencies […] continuously reorganised throughout the centuries in order to adjust the requirements for Venice's life and prosperity. […] Venice is disappearing rapidly, in the physical sense and socially. (2001, 82)

Each intensification of the artificial nature of the wetland – however well intentioned – triggers chain reactions that can pose risks to the wellbeing of the ecosystem and the populace. Indeed, a number of disappearances have perversely occurred over the long term due to efforts to maintain a certain type of *venezianità*, based on what was deemed most appropriate for the coherence of physical and social geographies at a certain juncture.

In the second half of the 1800s, during the youth of Ciardi and Favretto, notable parts of Venice underwent wholesale changes in quick succession. In line with a burgeoning industrial identity, swathes of Cannaregio, San Marco, and Santa Croce came to be reconfigured in ways occasioning a new phase of navigability by land and water:

> Strada Nova (1867-72), calle Larga XXII Marzo (1870-75) e bacino Orseolo (1869-70), il nuovo porto a Santa Marta (1883), gli edifici industriali alla Giudecca e in prossimità della stazione ferroviaria sono i segni eloquenti che caratterizzano [un] processo di profonda trasformazione dell'organismo urbano. (Favilla 2006, 170)

A walk through the historic centre is scarcely possible without being exposed to one of these locations, which have become fundamental waypoints over 150 years. Such quantum leaps in the urban fabric continue to be decisive for the identity of the tourist-inundated hydropolis, perhaps even more than in the time of Turner and James, because they get marshalled into arguments about the aspects of Venice needing to be preserved. It is nevertheless vital to recognise that those very constructions replaced buildings and ways of life with a value of their own, once people in high places had decided to afford prestige to one set of affairs ahead of another. The historian Maurizio Reberschak outlines the economic backdrop of the remodelling works:

> nel primo quindicennio dopo l'unità, si nota con tutta evidenza il prevalere delle attività 'artistiche e marittime' di impostazione artigianale. (1997, 373)

The vigour of the artistic sector went together with an influx of creative practitioners set on capturing the essence of the lagoonscape freed from the strictures of the French and Austrian authorities who had set up camp in the wake of the 1100-year-old Republic falling to Napoleon Bonaparte in 1797.

The heads of people from near and far were turned by the ambiance of a locale seeming to vacillate on the threshold of modernity. Nico Stringa, contributing to *La pittura nel Veneto* about "Venezia dalla Esposizione Nazionale Artistica alle prime Biennali", brings up how

> Venezia, oltremodo pittoresca nei suoi luoghi e modi di vita, non poteva che essere vista e resa sotto il segno della continuità antimoderna; […] lo sguardo al passato era parte integrante della visibilità stessa della città e del suo senso di esistere. (2002, 95)

The fascination of yesteryear-leaning places and lifestyles is evident among painters from regions and countries in proximity to the birthplace of Ciardi and Favretto, especially France and Germany in the age of Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Karl Heffner. Indeed, form became as powerful as content in expressing dissonance associated with things appearing out of time, whether down to a setting, a figure, a palette… For Giovanni Soccol in *Ottocento veneto*,

> a Venezia il nero e il bianco sono […] due colori fondamentali, al pari del giallo, del rosso e dell'azzurro: il primo prende forma nella gondola, il secondo nella pietra d'Istria. (2004, 82)

Constancy seems encoded in the hydropolis's visual identity due to the black of gondolas and the white of Istrian stone during the nineteenth century and beyond, notwithstanding the ephemerality of such elements in relation to the wetland's ecological dynamics. Many depictions of Venice seem to intersperse the tenacious and the transitory by way of water in diverse hues of blue, or buildings featuring tints of yellow and red that chime with the iconography of the Lion of St Mark, amplified in the sixteenth century by the likes of Vittore Carpaccio to mask the Republic's precarious status.

In the year following Favretto's *Veduta di Venezia*, Alberto Pasini (Busseto, 1826-Turin, 1899) produced a representation of a low-key setting that takes man-made forms as a structuring principle. With a nod to Venetian inflections of chiaroscuro, embodied by Tintoretto in the mid-1500s, the artist from Emilia-Romagna trains a wizened eye on one of the hydropolis's narrows **[fig. 4]**.[1]

1 As for **fig. 4**, Ca' Pesaro does not possess a full-colour facsimile of Pasini's painting.

Figure 4 Alberto Pasini, *Canale di Venezia, effetto di alba*. 1885. Oil on canvas, 35.3 × 27.5 cm. Ca' Pesaro, Venice. © Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia – Archivio Fotografico

Two towering dark facades to the left and the right establish the prevalence of verticality in the rendering marked by the single-point perspective at dead centre, where the building with the bulky chimney crowds the horizon ahead of the *palazzo* at a distance. The scene is indicative of the environs of Campiello dei Meloni or Campo Sant'Anzolo at morning light, when a wander through a quiet *calle* can lead to marvellous glimpses of dilapidation mixed with grandeur. In a composition dominated by the human, the sliver of sky and the canal's concentrated surface point to more-than-human ecologies

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constituting the broader lagoonscape. Due to the nigh seamless gradation between the edifices and the reflection-specked water in the foreground, there is a strong sense of "the seeping pressure of fluids on almost-solid structures" (Mentz 2017, 289). In a place where a man-made structure is only ever as solid as its pregnable foundation of timber piles driven into tidal mud, the destabilising impact of liquid motions is no small matter, whether in terms of flooding symbolised by 8 December 2020, or the slow ruin of saltwater eroding exposed wood. As observed in Rod Giblett's account of the hydropolis as "a tropical marshland, steaming, monstrous, rank",

> it is impossible to make a mark in or on water, certainly a mark as hard and fixed as a city on something as soft and fluid as water. […] The builders of Venice had to dredge the land from the water and drain the water from the land in order to make their mark on a dry horizontal surface by inscribing […] monumental buildings on that surface […] in vertical space. (2016, 86)

The painting's low-contrast foreground invites engagement with these delicate circumstances through senses beyond sight, in line with a pedestrian's experience of low light at the start of a day. In such a case, it comes down to hearing the dynamics of watery environs without a single human figure. Whereas a slightly off-putting smell/taste of *freschìn* might hang in the air, the constricted space does not appear fogged up with a break-of-day *caìgo* that could be felt as moisture on the face or the hands.

A few years after the three paintings already discussed, Venice's nooks and crannies enthralled an artist from France's Vendée. The depiction of southwestern Dorsoduro by Emmanuel Lansyer (Bouin, 1835-Paris, 1893) might appear poles apart from the Italian works in question, on account of its luminescence and limpidity, but the content is very much in keeping with Favretto's *Veduta di Venezia* – touches of greenery, a handful of boats and people, and prominent water in counterpoint to a practically cloudless sky **[fig. 5]**.

Depth is the prevalent dimension here, largely due to the tapered gap between the buildings in shades of red, yellow, and off-white that frame the vanishing point at centre-left, in familiar fashion. An idiosyncratic mixture of bell- and cube-shaped chimneys means that verticality is also important in the multistorey setting resembling the view at the point of transition between Calle Lunga San Barnaba and Calle Avogaria. To a greater extent than the representations by Ciardi and Pasini, the air feels open in the fore- and midground, as when a walker chances upon a space with room to breathe in the dense historic centre. With the cyan reflection enhancing the captivating quality of the canal's surface, the stretch all the way to the gondola beneath the bridge in the background is suggestive of "the

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Figure 5 Emmanuel Lansyer, *Venise, mur de couvent et vieilles maisons en briques au bord d'un canal, aux environs de l'église San Sebastian*. 1892. Oil on canvas, 46 × 38 cm. Musée Lansyer, Loches. © Ville de Loches – François Lauginie

scalar fluidity and ineluctable materiality of water" (Winkiel 2019, 9). Akin to each aforementioned painting, this scene encapsulates both sensory immediacy and interpretive vectors extending towards an array of aquatic environments, all on the basis of the channelled liquid's palpable qualities.

In conclusion, I wish to point up the value of hydro-peripatetics as a practice of attending to conditions in physical and representational environments that can inform the protection and restoration of water-related ecosystems, in accordance with UN Sustainable Development Goal 6.6. By engaging with the fluidity inherent in *venezianità* through the likes of a brackish smell or a touch of wetness from

a pedestrian's down-to-earth perspective, as above, it is possible to develop a keener understanding of what is at stake when conceptualising the most effective way of going about conserving Venice in one form or another. In "The MOSE Machine", the ethnologist Rita Vianello reckons that

> today the importance of a new, 'soft', approach to [...] conservation works is evident. But [...] engineers and technicians have presented themselves as the bearers of a rigid technocentric environmental vision which neglects local knowledge. (2021, 112)

How great is the potential for non-technocentric decision-making based on stories and proxy ecological data encapsulated in paintings of the hydropolis, whether by visitors like Lansyer and Pasini, or born-and-bred individuals such as Ciardi and Favretto? To all intents and purposes, broader familiarity with the lagoonscape's "intensity of place" (Kelly 2019, 388) promises to yield more rounded ways of conceiving futures to the satisfaction of a plethora of stakeholders.

In working primarily from nineteenth-century visual culture to imagine smell/sound/taste/touch, I have sought to expand the horizons of art history through the Environmental Humanities, especially their 'blue' inflection, as well as suggesting an approach to questions of conservation, which tend to lack perspectives from the arts. Given the architectural and ecological alterations around the time of the four paintings in question, there is hardly anything new about strategising the lagoonscape for human ends, however much of a quantum leap might appear to be encapsulated by MOSE. Instead of continuing such efforts to keep the historic centre dry, at the cost of the health of the majority of the wetland, it would be beneficial to progress towards scenarios in which the more-than-human is given its due, as much as the aspects of human culture that attract international prestige. After all, the treasured adornments of St Mark's Basilica will continue to be regularly flooded regardless of the massive investment in tidal barriers, only raised when water is forecast to reach more than half a metre above the crypt lying at 65 cm. A sensorially inclined engagement with the hydropolis's more secluded corners from a pedestrian perspective could help with comprehending a greater range of elements when it comes to determining courses of action that will serve the common good in the long term. The cultural heritage expressed in paintings such as those by Ciardi, Favretto, Lansyer, and Pasini can be an important stepping-stone in this process, especially in terms of recognising continuities and disjunctures in hyperlocal values over 150 years.

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On Ice: Life and Lunch at Mercato di Rialto

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Abstract Visitors consume Venice's Mercato di Rialto most often with their eyes. Venetians, in contrast, consume it with their mouths. During the week they voice their orders gently, but on Saturday mornings shopping lists become full-volume announcements that compete against the market noise. By analysing the history and role of the Pescheria at Rialto Market and its culinary and cultural representations, this article considers the entanglement between seafood and people, ice and freshness, life and lunch.

Keywords Seafood. Multispecies. Foodways. Culinary knowledge. Markets. Venice.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Portrait of a Market. – 3 A Market and its Fish. – 4 Smells Fishy. – 5 The Early Bird Gets the Fish. – 6 Conclusion: Life and Lunch.

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1 Introduction

The wind keeps wrinkling the sign's readability. Bold capital letters dominate a white background that sways and then stands still to announce: "VENEZIA È VIVA". These signs decorated Venice's Mercato di Rialto on March 25, 2021: the city's 1600th birthday **[figs 1-2]**.[1] Stories about Rialto Market – just like the ones about Venice – routinely feature words like 'dying' or 'sinking'. But on this day, Rialto dressed up in red and pink balloons to declare that Venice is alive.

Unlike visitors, who usually experience Mercato di Rialto with their eyes, as well as their cameras, Venetians experience the market with their mouths. From Tuesday to Friday their mouths gently voice their orders, but come Saturday morning their shopping lists are loud announcements that are in competition with the market's other sounds – hungry seagulls, the spinning wheels of shopping trolleys, and seafood slapping against paper and sliding into plastic bags as fishmongers pack orders. This article considers the entanglement between seafood and people, ice and freshness, and life and lunch at Mercato di Rialto. It analyses culinary and cultural representations of the market and weaves this together with accounts of personal experiences. Drawing from Food Studies and Environmental Humanities scholarship, this article is an example of what I call the 'culinary Environmental Humanities'. It asks: how does shopping at Rialto help Venetians and visitors alike feel connected to the lagoon? And to the foods they eat? I spent one year shopping at the market, which informs my methodology: a 'frontstage' approach. But it took me a while to find a cooking rhythm in Venice; for weeks I ate sandy shellfish because I was not used to seafood that remembers the sea. Nonetheless, I kept going back in hopes of eating my way to a closer understanding of Venice and its foodscapes.

My approach also highlights Venice and its lagoon as a liminal space. Right on the edge of the Grand Canal, Rialto Market, I argue, is one as well. It blurs neat distinctions between land and water. Stalls rely on forms of water to keep their bounty fresh: the ice that props up shellfish and the water buckets that prevent freshly trimmed artichokes from browning. The fish and fruit that become food arrive by boat. Both in the past and the present, Rialto depends on its proximity to the water. In a city where swimming is often a crime, I relied on rowing – *voga alla veneta* – to experience a view from the water, instead of the water. A *batela*, just like its fancier sibling the gondola, is a way to "see what the water sees" (Brodsky 2013, 126). *Voga* is an example of "going back to water" and in a city where mo-

1 There is no historical evidence for the foundation date of Venice (Cavallo, Vallerani, Visentin 2021, 4).

Figure 1 Signs at Mercato di Rialto announce that the city of Venice is alive. Photo by the Author

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Figure 2 Signs at Rialto Pescheria narrate Venice's foundation myth and celebrate the city's 1600th birthday. Photo by the Author

tor boats dominate rowing has become "a form of civic resistance" (Cavallo, Vallerani, Visentin 2021, 12). During my second lesson I graduated from the canals to the lagoon, which was when I realised just how shallow the water is. Another lesson reminded me of interconnections – the subject of this article. The gentlest of wakes can throw your oar off course. But even on land, the tide keeps Venice on its toes, always informing the city of its presence. It especially keeps Rialto on its toes – the area is often one of the first to flood. Living in Venice means always thinking about the lagoon, its rhythms and moods, and its aches.

Federica Cavallo, Francesco Vallerani, and Francesco Visentin point out in their aptly titled article "Heart of Wetness", that Venice "is among one of the most studied urban and environmental systems in the world" (2021, 2). But because this environment is also personal, weaving itself through individual, family, and community memories, its meanings are multiple. They, therefore, argue: "we need to comprehend not only politics and grand narratives but also personal memories, reflections, local traditions and vernacular practices" (2). I do not speak the same language as Rialto. My weekly Italian classes, similar to my rowing lessons, have prepared me to keep my balance but I am not yet able to confidently steer. My orders come out as fragments. Being a native English speaker fluent in German and rusty in French, languages that sometimes mask my accent in Italian, has contributed to my market interactions, of the vernacular practices that inform how I experience and, thus, know, Rialto, and the market that this article serves forth.

Rosa Maria Rossomando Lo Torto believes it is possible to get to know Venice and its history through food and especially through food that is fish. This is what I attempt here. "[I]nevitable in a city built on water", she writes that "an old saying of the local fishermen was 'dove ghe xe l'acqua ghe xe anca pesse' (where there's water there's fish)" (2020, 22). The article begins with the history of Mercato di Rialto and then zooms in on its seafood section, navigating the smell of shellfish, the appetite of seagulls, and the sight of hand-written signs that inform – as well as confuse – shoppers about the biological and geographical origins of their lunch or dinner. It concludes by considering what Kelly Donati calls 'multispecies gastronomy' and the connection between life and lunch.

2 Portrait of a Market

Writer Tiziano Scarpa begins his cultural guide to Venice by repeating the book's title. "Venice is a fish", he writes. "Just look at it on a map" (2008, 1). Joseph Brodsky describes its shape with a more obvious appetite: "On the map this city looks like two grilled fish sharing a plate, or perhaps like two nearly overlapping lobster claws" (2013, 45). If Venice is a fish, then its Pescheria (fish market) is located in its stomach, or perhaps its liver.

Rialto signifies multiple things. A market, bridge, and city district all share this name, which emerged from *Rivo Alto*, meaning high bank. The island of Rialto is also Venice's legendary birth place (Calabi 2021, 31). Since the ninth century, it has hosted a fish market, but it was not always the only one in town. What is now a handsome park tucked behind Piazza San Marco – Giardinetti Reali – was once the Republic's granary and, before that, a market peddling fish (Agostini, Zorzi 2004, 14). However, in the sixteenth century Venice reformed its mercantile system and designated Rialto and Saint Mark's, located on opposite sides of the Grand Canal, with separate functions. Donatella Calabi, an architectural historian, has chronicled these reforms in detail. Between 1537 and 1578 Venice issued provisions to clear out Saint Mark's Square "in an effort to push the uses incompatible with the prestige of the surroundings of Palazzo Ducale back into the market at San Giacomo" (Calabi 2004, 27-8). The magistracies wished for Saint Mark's to be *spedita e libera* of the mess and noise of market activities. But it was only in the late sixteenth century when the two squares were redesigned that Rialto became the commercial core and Saint Mark's the government centre.

In addition to these reforms, Rialto's Pescheria also moved. City planners selected a "separate" and "suitable" location (Calabi 2004, 122). Adjacent to the Fruttaria e Erbaria (fruit and vegetable markets), the Pescheria "was transformed into a more 'decorous' space to serve as a landing place for the nobility in 1459" (131). It was moved further away to neighbour the Beccheria (meat market) in an effort "to avoid an unpleasant stench in the heart of the island" (58). Rialto as a site for selling fish may be over a thousand-years old, but its neo-Gothic Pescheria was built only in 1907 by Cesare Laurenti and Domenico Rupolo. Column capitals both support and decorate the building, showing off carvings of fish and sea monsters, clam shells and crustaceans. Tucked into the staircase that leads to the top floor are two iron gates. The larger of the two bears the inscription *Piscis primum a capite foetet* (fish begins to stink from the head). From Tuesday to Saturday fishmongers set up their stalls as early as 6:30 am on the ground floor's loggia.

The Venetian Republic divided the selling of fish into three categories: *pescatori* (fishers); *compravendi* (wholesale fish merchants); and *pescivendoli* (fishmongers). The *pescatori* delivered their catch to

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Rialto, where the government inspected the quality and set the maximum price (*calmiere*) and duties to pay (Spector 2020, 124-5). *Compravendi* were authorised to sell at Rialto and Saint Mark's, whereas *pescivendoli* could also sell elsewhere in the city. But no matter the location, vendors could only sell fish outside in the open, a practice that continues today.

In 1173 Venice introduced an edict outlining the minimum length of fish that could be sold, an example of an early environmental policy aimed at preserving fish stocks. Plaques across the city remember this history. At Rialto's Pescheria there is one. Another hangs in Campo Santa Margherita and another in Castello on Fondamente della Tana. These are historic examples of seafood size rulers – a method that is still in use today (see Koldewey, Atkinson, Debney 2009, 76). The one at Campo Santa Margherita lists that a mussel must be at least three centimetres and an oyster five. The fish that must be at minimum seven centimetres are the red and grey mullet, sardine, and anchovy. A whole shoal of fish must be at least 12 (sea bass, gilthead, dentix, umbrine, white sea bream, grey mullet, thick-lipped grey mullet, golden grey mullet, flathead mullet, leaping mullet, brill, hake, sole, flounder, and turbot) and eel at least 25 (Scarpa 2008, 65-6).

Considered the Wall Street or World Bank of its time, Rialto was, according to Calabi, at the centre of a "world economy" (Orazi 2020). Yet today, she describes the area as neglected and at risk of becoming "a large, bad quality supermarket" (2021, 34). Its decline reflects depopulation, which is pronounced in a city that has made tourism its main trade. It also reflects structural changes in food distribution and consumption. Rialto is now in competition with supermarkets that offer longer opening hours and a larger range of products and prices. Although supermarkets ease the convenience of grocery shopping, they also further the distance between those producing food and those consuming it. Nonetheless, convenience matters. Rialto Market is open five days a week, only in the morning. Although the fruit and vegetable stalls stay open until around 1 pm, many fishmongers begin shutting down around noon. Addressing Italy at large, anthropologist Rachel E. Black attributes the drop in business at open-air markets to their limited opening hours (2012, 71). I got around this challenge with the help of my office fridge. Conveniently halfway between my apartment and office, I would drop by Rialto on my way to work. After storing my catch in the communal kitchen fridge, I would write a note to remind myself to pick up the "SARDINES!" or "FISH!" at the end of the day. I did not want to risk another colleague encountering the smell of forgotten fish.

Luigi Divari is an artist who documents the lagoon's fish and boats. "Like all markets", he explains, "Rialto is based on the number of shoppers" (Ocean Space 2020, 39). A shrinking city means a shrinking market. Although beyond this article's scope, Divari also calls the

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idea that Venetians always eat fish a myth. The market once sold large quantities of many other foods in order to feed the city's 160,000 inhabitants (today this number is around 50,000) (Ocean Space 2020, 39). Additionally, who eats what has changed over time. For example, in the eighteenth-century, fish was a rare site on the tables of the noble and rich, but a staple in other homes (Da Mosto 2007, 146).

Rialto's Pescheria might be a tourist attraction, but tourists do not buy fish. As "Venice natives vanish", the *Wall Street Journal* describes the fishmongers as "at risk at disappearing" (Legorano 2018). It quotes Andrea Vio, who as of 2018 had worked as a fishmonger for 43 years (although the same year *La Stampa* wrote 50). Vio sees Rialto's future as a synonym for Venice's: "The market's struggle is a sign of Venice's fight to survive as a normal city", he states (Legorano 2018). In the 1980s he sold up to forty small crates of sardines per day and now sells five. The price of the stalls has also decreased. In 2008 Marco Bergamasco was offered € 80,000 for his stall and in 2018 was trying to sell it for € 12,000 (Zambenedetti 2018). This change has been quick. In Lidia D. Sciama's ethnography of Burano, first published in 2003, she writes that a Rialto stall is very desirable: "Licenses are not easy to obtain, and, in some instances, they have been kept in the same family for generations" (2006, 113). In 2008 there were 18 stalls, but now there are less than half, plus some for sale. Vio, one of the four last big traders, wonders if tourists will continue to frequent the Pescheria without the fish and the people selling it (Zambenedetti 2018). As fishmonger Dario Naccari details, around eighty per cent of people who stop at his stall are tourists who take photos (Legorano 2018).

Because of these challenges, reports about Rialto often proclaim that the market is dying – a narrative Venice's 1600th birthday signs countered. In response, there is a citizen-led association to save Rialto, and Calabi serves as its head. Progetto Rialto aims to highlight the market's history in an effort to re-energise the area. It proposes to transform the Pescheria's top floor into a centre that hosts events, workshops, and courses (Rosenberg 2020).[2] It spans nearly 1,000 square metres, but has been empty for around a decade, with the exception of pigeon guano (Calabi 2021, 34). Although it is not in use, the city, which owns it, has designated it as a museum in the town plan. Progetto Rialto's goal of revitalisation spills far beyond the market.

> Enhancing the area's excellence could be a way for the future city to exist and maintain it beauty, and indeed to make it to the ob-

2 Another example is the #PescheriaRialto initiative on 3 and 4 August 2018. Also aimed at revitalising Rialto, it encouraged residents to buy fish from the market.

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> ject of specialist training and the transmission of knowledge; ultimately attracting new citizens. (Calabi 2021, 35)

Progetto Rialto's mission reflects Black's suggestion that "the best way to see markets is as integral, living heritage sites" (2012, 180). In her ethnography of Porta Palazzo in Turin, Black describes the *Oxford Dictionary* definition of a market as having three components: "the physical place organized around the activity of exchange, the gathering of people for the activity of buying and selling, and the abstract economic concept of exchange" (2012, 4). In addition to their commercial and culinary functions, she further underlines the social aspect of markets. Because of their sociability, she compares them to parks and plazas. In fact, the economics of markets are not reason enough for them to operate because, as she explains, "markets are among the least efficient methods of food distribution" (2012, 4). Rather it is their social lives and functions that keep them alive.

Men dominate the Pescheria, but there is a woman who works at a storefront that is often the last to close. With a Venetian colleague, I asked her how fish culture in Venice has changed. A cigarette dangled from her hand as she answered (while she stood in front of a sign forbidding smoking) that people want to buy seafood that has already been cleaned and is ready to throw into a pot. There is consumer demand for fillets instead of whole fish, for deboned and skinless chicken breasts instead of chickens with hearts and livers and the odd feather still hanging on.[3] Customers, she states, only want to buy *schie* (miniature prawns) that have been cleaned. In addition to limited opening hours, it all comes back to labour and time. However, she is confident Rialto will not close. Venetians do not go to the supermarket, she explained. They want to buy fish and meat from the market. If you close the market, then Venetians cannot eat.

All of this is to say that the Rialto Market is a thermometer for several things: the size of the local population; how many chefs and home cooks do or do not source from the market; the intersection between human appetites, the lagoon and other bodies of water; and the health of seafood stocks. I argue that Mercato di Rialto measures the health of the city – tracking its pulse – but also the health of the lagoon and even the world.

3 This connects to scholarship that shows how contemporary cookbooks and supermarket displays have turned animals into meat. See, for instance, Syse, Bjørkdahl 2021.

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3 A Market and its Fish

Although farming fish is an ancient practice, contemporary aquaculture has disconnected it from the boundaries of seasons, biology, and geography. Fish stalls at markets and freezer aisles at grocery stores map the waters of the world. The Rialto Pescheria is no exception. It carries salmon from Norway raised on a diet of anchovies from Peru, calamari from Chile, mullet from France, tuna from the Seychelles, and so on (Berardi 2020). One morning when I was placing my order my eyes drifted down to the fishmonger's apron. Thick, waterproof, and navy blue, white letters and a flag crossed its chest: "Seafood from Norway". An apron from the same country from which the stall's scampi, salmon, and cod had travelled.

So how Venetian is Rialto Market? The question may appear simple, but the market's entangled geography makes it difficult to establish clear borders. Where does Rialto begin and end? Does it begin in Istanbul, formerly an essential stop in the spice trade, or Bangladesh, from which some market vendors come? Does Rialto Market begin in the lagoon, once the source of much of its seafood? Or in the Norwegian waters that supply its scampi? Black outlines that "[m]arkets, and in turn cities, put themselves on the map through their connections outside their limits" (Black 2012, 30). This is especially true of Venice, which has long defined itself as a crossroads, as where East meets West.

At many markets, fruits and vegetables do not arrive directly from farms. Instead, wholesale distribution centres connect produce, from Italy and elsewhere, to markets and shops. This reflects developments in technology and transportation, both of which have transformed culinary relationships to fish. For example, despite being landlocked, Milan now has the best provisioned fish marked in Italy (Perasecoli 2014, 212). Similarly, seafood does not usually travel directly to the market; it detours to a *mercato ittico*, a wholesale marketplace. In Venice there is one on the island of Tronchetto, next to a car park and the cruise ship terminal. Chioggia, too, has a *mercato ittico*. Seafood arrives from the lagoon but also from faraway oceans and seas and lakes. It arrives by boat but also by truck and plane. From the wholesale market, seafood then travels by boat to Rialto. As Divari states:

> So, the fish in the northern Adriatic end up in Switzerland, in Milan, in the five-star restaurants of northern Italy, and here in Venice we get shrimp from Argentina, monkfish from Scotland, John Dory from England, scallops from Brest, spider crab from Spain, and so on. Basically, if it wasn't for planes and trucks, nothing would ever get to the market here. (Ocean Space 2020, 40)

Gone are the days when fish arrived by water alone. Global trade routes – refrigerated ones – keep Rialto Market running.

Fishing has changed in the lagoon, and it has changed the lagoon. Human appetites are a major contributor to climate change (see Reay 2019). Focusing on Venice, the anthropologist Rita Vianello explains that:

> While the fishers of the Lagoon do not associate the rising sea and lagoon water temperatures with the increased intensity of *acqua alta* events, they do see warming as a primary cause of the changing habits of fish and their reproductive cycles, the presence of new species […] and the disappearance or decrease of native ones. (2021, 104)

Like eel, once a popular catch, other fish have become less common, such as goby. Some have become more common, like sea bream, and some are completely new, like blue crab.

In the cookbook that chronicles Venice's most famous restaurant, Harry's Bar, Arrigo Cipriani shares his memories of how plenty fish once were in the lagoon. In the late 1940s, he recounts that a Harry's Bar regular would drink an Americano and then ask the restaurant to boil a pot of water. While the water came to a boil, he motored his boat in front of Harry's Bar in Saint Mark's Basin, trailed a silver spinner, and then returned with a couple of sea bass. Although Cipriani's tale memorialises the golden days before the water was polluted and the fish were still native, he ends by assuring readers that Venice still has wonderful fish, even though some of it comes from elsewhere. "Almost all the fish and shellfish we get at the market is still alive", he boasts (2000, 159).

In modern industrial diets seafood is one of the few wild foods – which is to say a food that has been hunted or caught as opposed to farmed or raised – that many people eat.[4] Or it has been until recently. Scale distinguishes early models from globalised and industrialised aquaculture. Industrial practices use artificial lighting to control the seasonal growth cycles of fish, manipulating when a fish thinks it is day versus night. Similar to challenging and conquering seasonal boundaries, globalized seafood also collapses spatial ones. Historically, a fish was consumed immediately or preserved, aided by the likes of drying or smoking, pickling, salting or canning. Now, the industry employs flash-freezing, stretching the lifespan of a fish that is considered fresh.

Flesh alone, however, does not reveal geographical origins. Shoppers must instead rely on labels. And trust these labels. One study,

4 I also address these ideas in Gora, forthcoming.

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however, found that thirty percent of labels misidentify fish – examples of fish fraud and even "fish laundering" (Barendse et al. 2019, 198-9). Beyond misleading consumers, seafood fraud is of concern for matters like species conservation, environmental impact, and the health of humans, sea creatures, and bodies of water. Labels reframe flesh, which means consumers need what I call fish or seafood fluency to navigate grocery store aisles and market stalls. This is just as true at Rialto's Pescheria as it is in a big-box store. One common recommendation to counter fraud is to buy whole fish as opposed to fillets, which are easier to identify. But even a whole fish needs a label to know from which waters it comes.

So how does one choose what seafood to buy? Culinary knowledge, food knowledge, food literacy, and kitchen literacy are all terms related to the question of how one knows food (Goodman, DuPuis 2002). Jessica Kwik, a public health professional, defines traditional food knowledge as "the cumulative teachings and experience gained from the process of sharing foodways from generation to generation" (2008, 62). She sees the concept as supporting "the continuity of cultural heritage", as well as providing a counterpoint to the de-skilling of grocery store consumers (63). Food literacy, on the other hand, concerns consuming food. As its name implies, it suggests being able to read one's options and make responsible decisions about what to eat. Addressing the emergence of the term, Helen Vidgen, a scholar of nutrition, writes that it "is an attempt to encapsulate the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed for everyday eating" (2016, 2). Although it grew out of health literacy, Vidgen explains that the term has taken on new meanings related to "environmental sustainability, informed consumerism, active citizenship and food security" (2). It advocates eating practices that are ethical as well as healthy. Similarly, Ann Vileisis writes about "kitchen literary", which is synonymous with cookery with a conscious and kitchen know-how (2008, 3). This returns to de-skilling. The less agrarian and more industrialised a society becomes, the thinking goes, the less its citizens know about their food. I know fish by eating fish, which means that I am better at naming the fish I eat than the ones I do not.

4 Smells Fishy

Beyond their lists of ingredient, instructions, and illustrations, cookbooks are also maps. They connect plants and animals and chart the lands and waters of the cuisines they represent. English language cookery books about Venice are, unsurprisingly, rich in fish. The lagoon's waters are present throughout their pages and the geography of some titles, such as Nino Zoccali's *Venetian Republic: Recipes from the Veneto, Adriatic Croatia and the Greek Islands*, published in

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Australia no less, travel far beyond the lagoon. Zoccali considers Rialto "one of the world's best retail food markets" (2019, 19). However, Lo Torto points out that it is up for debate just how fresh Rialto's fish is. Distinguishing Venetian cuisine from Chioggian, she writes:

> In Venice, one eats fish caught elsewhere whereas – and it is no small distinction – in Chioggia one eats fish caught locally. And this is fish that has all the forty virtues that popular tradition declares a fish possesses, a virtue it loses at the rate of one per hour. (2020, 12)

Nonetheless, Venice is a city of fish.

In 2012 restaurateur Russell Norman published *Polpo: A Venetian Cookbook (of Sorts)*, chronicling the London restaurant he opened in 2009. "It is possible to spend a whole morning wandering from stall to stall marvelling at the vast array at the Rialto fish market", he writes, "You know with absolute certainty that these beasts were swimming just a few hours earlier" (103). However, another cookbook disagrees. Chronicling Osteria alle Testiere, *Venice, Food and Wine* includes the section "Choosing Fresh Seafood". "Unfortunately, not all of the fish one finds at the fish market is actually that fresh", it reveals (Chojnacka 2010, 16). It then provides three pointers for determining freshness: "*tatto*, *olfatto*, *vista*, touch, scent, vision" (16). Smell plays an important role in judging if food is good or bad, if fish is fresh or old. For fish, one should rely on "*Olfatto*/scent" and ask: does it smell bad? "It should smell fresh, salty, of the sea", the restaurant points out, "[a]ny bad or suspicious odor is cause for alarm" (16). Regarding molluscs one should ask if they are still alive. "If they are, then they are fresh; if they are dead, then you are taking your chances" (16). Crustaceans also call on the nose.

> Any hint of bleach odor is a sure-fire sign that the creature is at least three days old, and that decomposition has begun – that odor is a natural by-product of the breakdown process. (17)

Judging the freshness of seafood is a multisensory affair that requires culinary knowledge.

Cookbook author Skye McAlpine, who grew up in Venice, also confesses that she was apprehensive about cooking fish although she loved eating it. She was "tentative about what to buy, uncertain about its freshness, oddly squeamish about the handling of it" (2018, 203). But then she discovered:

> [a] fish that is fresh looks fresh. Its eyes are bright and sparkly, not cloudy; its body is firm; its scales are wet and glossy, not dry; its gills are red. It smells salty and briny like the seaside and not, as you might perhaps expect, 'fishy'. (2013)

Similarly, Francesco Da Mosto recognises that for the inexperienced buying fish can be “daunting”. To counter this, he recommends buying directly from the fishermen who return in the morning. He, too, relies on smell: “saltwater fish should have a hint of seaweed in their smell and freshwater fish should recall the smell of river reeds” (2007, 147).

Ice also helps to ensure freshness. It encourages an ingredient to last longer. Raw seafood, especially oysters, are often served ‘on ice’. Ice slows down time and ‘on ice’ means to stall or to delay. To preserve something for later. At the Pescheria, ice helps to delay any ‘fishy’ smells. Jan Morris describes the Rialto fish market as “a glorious wet, colourful, high-smelling concourse of the sea” (1998, 199). Brodsky remembers the first night he arrived in a city; it was December, late and windy. His nostrils delivered him a “feeling of utter happiness”, which, for him, is a synonym for “the smell of freezing seaweed” (*vodorosli* in Russian) (2013, 5). He recognises this is peculiar and that others likely prefer the smell of tangerines. He continues:

> A smell is, after all, a violation of oxygen balance, an invasion into it of other elements – methane? carbon? sulphur? nitrogen? Depending on that invasion’s intensity, you get a scent, a smell, a stench. (7)

Another way to describe the smell of the Pescheria is *freschin*. The Venetian chef Marco Bravetti taught me this term, describing it as “the smell you can feel at Rialto at the end of the day”. This is a more polite way to say the stench, or perhaps what some might even consider a scent. Bravetti’s description frames smell as something you feel.

In her discussion of tourist imaginations, Italian Studies scholar Stephanie Malia Hom addresses guidebooks, writing they “have long influenced the behaviour of tourists by directing them where to go and telling them what to see” (2015, 14). They reinforce stereotypes, including culinary ones, and often tell tourists where or what to eat. Or which foods to photograph. The popular travel guide *Lonely Planet* describes the Pescheria as “pungent”. “To see it at its best”, it recommends arriving “in the morning along with the trolley-pushing shoppers and you’ll be rewarded with pyramids of colourful seasonal produce”. It is telling that it addresses “seeing” the market rather than, perhaps, experiencing or smelling it, or even shopping there. Oddly, it ends with: “If you’re in the market for picnic provisions, vendors may offer you samples”. Instead of supporting vendors by purchasing from them, it recommends aiming for free bites. Another travel guide, *Afar*, also emphasises the market’s visuals: “Seek it out in the early morning”, it advises, “when it provides an authentic local experience (and awesome social-media ops), with fishmongers hawking their fresh seafood catches”. At Rialto tourists do not only photograph fish and flora. They also photograph birds with voracious appetites.

Figure 3 A seagull feasts on fish in front of Rialto Pescheria. Photo by the Author

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Figure 4 2 € worth of shrimp and 2 € worth of green onions. Photo by the Author

5 The Early Bird Gets the Fish

When I visited Rialto with a colleague and her dog, while she bought scampi for *spaghetti alla busara* he stole a *canocia* (mantis shrimp), proudly licking his lips as we tried to prevent him from snatching another. Fish attracts other animals, from cats and dogs to rats and mice. But, above all, fish attracts birds. The English expression claims that the early bird gets the worm, but at Rialto it gets the fish. The late bird does too. Pigeons casually loiter between stalls. Seagulls, in contrast, are less casual in announcing that they, too, are interested in the seafood on offer. Morris even claims that most people "remember Venice as a city of birds" (1998, 59). Beyond the seagulls foraging at Rialto and the pigeons that once carpeted Saint Mark's Square, she explains that birds are entangled with Venice's legends and art. Morris includes "the big white seagulls of the lagoon" in her inventory, writing that they

> are often driven into the city canals by bad weather, and are even to be seen, humiliatingly plucked, hung up for sale in the Rialto market – excellent boiled, I am told, but only in the winter season. (59)

I have yet to see seagulls on offer as food, but I have seen plenty of live seagulls on the hunt for food **[fig. 3]**.

Markets classify animals and plants as food – classifications that change across time and place. Simply presenting something for sale at the market asserts that it is food. Labels provide more details – that is if one is able to read them. I have cooked fish and shellfish I know by name, but also ones I did not. Some days I would purchase something on a whim, trying to pronounce a new-to-me name, or simply pointing and saying *questo*, only to then look up what I bought and what to do with it. I collected receipts, made notes, and took photos in an effort to connect my grocery shopping to the bigger picture of foodways in Venice, the lagoon, and the world.

One day, fuelled by a craving for shrimp and grits, I paid 2 € for a handful of shrimp and then the same amount for a fat bunch of green onions **[fig. 4]**. This left me thinking about price, value, and plant and animal life. Another day I paid 1 € for ten sardines that I roasted with harissa, pine nuts, and *coriandolo*. And one morning, a fishmonger simply gave me a handful of sardines for free when I asked for the price. The small amount I requested – which I ate with pasta, yellow raisins, fennel, and parsley – was not worth my small change. I did, however, pay higher prices for scampi, all of which I learned was Norwegian. I roasted it with medicinal amounts of garlic and blushing radicchio. I boiled it and dunked it in saffron mayonnaise. I ate it raw with pistachios, orange, mint, and olive oil. The scampi felt connect-

ed to Venice, to the lagoon, and yet, unlike the sardines – *sarde nostrane* – never wore a sign classifying them as 'ours' **[fig. 5]**.

Labels at the fish market range from minimal black marker announcements on white card paper to form-like templates with boxes to tick, the likes of: *decong.*; *fresco*; *acqua dolce*; *pescato* and *allevato*. Some signs are simply recycled labels and stickers that recall long shipping journeys. Although the Pescheria peddles fish from all over the world, shopping there creates a sense of connection to the Venetian lagoon that is similar to what Black writes about farmers' markets: "[f]ood sold in the *mercato dei contadini* is instilled with value that has to do with place, local knowledge, and social relations" (2012, 145). Because of this she argues: "[l]ocal food is produced at the market itself, rather than just in the field on the farm" (148). Local food is both a cultural construction as well as "something one can certify and put a label on" (150). Although *nostrano* is not a legal term, it is the term with which market vendors and fishmongers claim produce, as well as fish, as local, as Venetian, as Italian, as 'ours'. Black also unpacks the function of this pronoun, writing:

> the farmer is possessive of the produce and proud of what he or she is selling. There is a nationalistic connotation in the term *nostrano*: anything grown in Italy must be better than produce grown elsewhere. (151)

She defines a market as "a series of intimate daily interactions between humans and built spaces that facilitate social relations" (171). But what about the plants and animals? The fish and shellfish?

6 Conclusion: Life and Lunch

Eating is messy. It is extractive and exploitative but it can also enact ethics of care, policies of conservation, and efforts to restore and eat with environments instead of just eating them all up. As literary scholar Jes Battis asks: "[d]oes food have rights? Would that matter?" He continues:

> Thinking about the ways in which we coexist with food might galvanize us to treat non-human life in more ethical ways. […] Respecting things that don't think – at least not in the ways that we think – can only lead to a more expansive definition of the human. (2020, 326)

Pursuing similar ideas, geographer Kelly Donati uses Donna Haraway's work as her

Figure 5 Signs claim sardines as 'ours', meaning 'local'. Photo by the Author

> springboard in calling for a multispecies gastronomy that considers not only how humans might eat better, but how we might eat better with non-human others. (2014, 128)

Here, non-humans others is expansive and recognises all the forms of living things that make up the food chain, from fungi to insects and from microorganisms to animals.

In 1825 the French lawyer and politician, Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, published *Physiologie du Goût*, which begins with: "Dis-moi ce que tu manges, je te dirai ce que tu es" (1970, 13). The sociologist Priscilla Ferguson writes that the obvious comparison to this aphorism "is the well-known German adage 'Mann ist, was er ißt', which Americans personalize as 'You are what you eat'" (2004, 31). Its notoriety demonstrates how strongly entangled food and being are. Donati adds multispecies gastronomy to this equation. Expanding upon Brillat-Savarin's aphorism, she writes:

> We too are food, or as Haraway puts it, 'everyone is on the menu'. Yet, this lack of generosity in giving our bodies back to the living earth and our unwillingness to feed the soil which has fed us position humanity outside of the food chain. (2014, 131)

Donati names soil; water is another example. Multispecies gastronomy disregards the boundaries that separate humans from other animals, the boundaries between food and feed.

Rialto, depending on the season, takes turns boasting tiny artichokes or heavy pumpkins. An edible calendar. But despite its seasonal plenty, the market's fish section is its main draw. Brodsky writes that it is clear that, whether swimming or caught, Venice is a city of fish: "And seen by a fish […] man would appear a monster indeed; not an octopus, perhaps, but surely a quadropus. […] Small wonder, then, that sharks are after us so much" (2013, 84). A multispecies approach to markets recognises that lunch is always about life.[5] It is about ethics and the interactions between human appetites and the worlds around them. In addition to acting as a thermometer that charts the health of Venice's population, its lagoon, and the many water-based animals that call other waterways home, Rialto provides a viewpoint from which to consider the entanglement between life and lunch. Between appetites and environments.

5 If lunch is about life then it is also about death. As Iovino points out: "[a] recurrent trope among artists and writers long before Thomas Mann, death in Venice is much more than a fictional theme" (2016, 48).

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Resisting the Tourist Gaze. Art Activism Against Cruise Ship Extractivism in the Venice Lagoon

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Abstract The essay situates Venice's struggles against the cruise ship industry within a larger framework of resistance against planetary extractive capitalism, emphasising the role of local art-activist initiatives in denouncing the social and the ecological degradation caused by the cruise ship presence in Venice. In the first part, the concept of extractive tourism is introduced and analysed in relation to the case of Venice and the cruise companies' economic model. The operations and infrastructure of cruise tourism produce extractive relations that entangle and exploit tourists, local communities and the natural environment. The Author examines how mass tourism has aggravated the environmental and social issues of the city of Venice and its lagoon. In the second part, the essay presents a number of artistic projects, specifically by visual artists Eleonora Sovrani, Gli Impresari, Banksy, and Elena Mazzi. These artworks can help us visualise the failures of the current urban development model of the tourist economy, while also exposing the nefarious effects of extractive capitalism on the well-being of the lagoon ecosystem and the human and non-human subjects cohabiting in it.

Keywords Venice. Extractive tourism. Cruise ships. Art-activism. Banksy. Elena Mazzi. Eleonora Sovrani. Gli Impresari. Contemporary art. Environmental justice. Capitalocene.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Cruise Ship Extractivism. – 3 Art Activism Against the Extractive Gaze.

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1 Introduction

At the time of writing, the socio-environmental activist groups fighting against the presence of cruise ships in the Venetian lagoon have just won an important battle. After decades of struggles and mobilisation, the Italian government has now officially banned cruise ships from entering the Giudecca canal, de facto halting, at least temporarily, the cruise industry's operations in the old city (Giuffrida 2021). This decision follows a year of forced cruise absence caused by the pandemic and a drastic reduction of tourist presences in the city (-72% in 2020).[1] During the first phases of the pandemic, the city and the Veneto regional governments have unconditionally supported the Venetian tourist and cruise economies[2] and have actively worked towards the reopening of the city for 'business as usual', purposely missing the chance of re-imagining a future for Venice that does not depend on managing massive flows of tourists. The first cruise ship of 2021 was met by national and international outcry and a large protest was organised by the Comitato Grandi Navi – the main anti-cruise ship activist network – in early June,[3] while UNESCO threatened to strip the city of its 'World Heritage in Danger' status.[4] The Italian government acted soon after. With the legislative decree Urgent Measures for the Protection of Waterways of Cultural Interest and for the Safeguarding of Venice as Well as for the Preservation of Jobs approved on July 13th, 2021 (Consiglio dei Ministri 2021), the Italian government recognised *some* of the waterways of Venice as "national monuments", and as such deemed worthy of being protected and preserved (Consiglio dei Ministri 2021, 7). In the same decree, the Italian government agreed to compensate the cruise ship companies through a series of economic relief initiatives, a strategy discussed also by other national governments, but eventually not implemented, for instance, by the United States (Levin 2020; Moskowitz 2020; Yeginsu, Chokshi 2021).

The *Urgent measures* decree is not a definitive solution for the progressive ecological degradation of the lagoon ecosystem: it does not terminate the problematic relationship between Venice and the *grandi navi* and it does not offer any form of alleviation for the socio-ecological problems caused by overtourism. Proposed long-term so-

The Author wants to thank the artists mentioned in the essay for agreeing to meet and be interviewed, and for providing images of their work.

1 https://www.regione.veneto.it/article-detail?articleId=11045375.

2 https://bit.ly/3GHAYhP; https://bit.ly/3GLuKhc.

3 https://bit.ly/3GGlRoX.

4 https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/venice-avoids-in-danger-unesco-designation-1234599834/.

lutions involve rerouting cruise ships to the Malamocco-Marghera channel, which, in change, may significantly impact the lagoon ecosystem in other ways, altering its morphodynamics and provoking the release of sedimented chemical contaminants from the petrochemical complex of Porto Marghera (Parnell et al. 2016, 911; Teatini et al. 2017, 5643); or expanding existing cruise terminals outside the lagoon such as the ones in Trieste and Ravenna.

The harmful environmental impact caused by the cruise industry has been documented extensively both on a global level[5] as well as in the Venice lagoon (Avena 2010; Camarsa 2003; González 2018; Tattara 2013), with significant effects spanning from threats to local biodiversity (Hall, James, Wilson 2010; OSPAR Commission 2008), contribution to general air pollution,[6] water contamination levels,[7] and structural damage to the built environment (Parnell et al. 2016). On top of the environmental damage, cruise ship operations provoke a series of 'side effects' that substantially re-shape the socio-economic structure of port cities by establishing relationships of labour and economic dependency, and by exacerbating pre-existing phenomena of gentrification, displacement, and social precarity. The emergence of tourism as an economic monoculture translates as an unsustainable increase of the cost of living for the resident population and, as the tourist economy quickly fagocitates the urban spaces for tourist consumption, the local community experiences an overall impoverishment of its quality of life. For Venice, the transformation provoked by these phenomena has been referred to as *disneyfication* (Gorrini, Bertini 2018, 361; Hannigan 1998; Rosin, Gombault 2021, 77; Settis 2016), *museification*,[8] and *gentritouristification* (Cristiano, Gonella 2020, 7).

In this essay, inspired by environmental justice scholarship on extractivism and overtourism,[9] I intend to situate Venice's struggles against the cruise ship industry within a larger framework of resist-

5 Farreny et al. 2011; Higgins-Desbiolles 2020; Hill 2015; Jennings, Ulrik 2016; Vidal 2016.

6 Caric, Klobucar, Tambuk 2016; Celic, Valcic, Bistrović 2014; Eckhardt et al. 2013; Howitt et al. 2010; Maragkogianni, Papaefthimiou 2015; Murena et al. 2018; Oceana 2004; Simonsen, Gössling, Walnum 2019.

7 Jones 2007; Perić, Komadina, Račić 2016; Perić, Mihanović, Račić 2019; Ytreberg et al. 2020.

8 For Salerno, the museum city can be identified as "the commodity-city exploited by the tourism industry as the theme-park city. The inhabitants progressively represent, like in a theater, the simulacrum of their lost urban life for the enjoyment and fruition of tourists" (Salerno 2018, 489). In this context, Venice is subjected to a mutation which turns it into a *tableau-vivant*, a mise-en-scene targeted for touristic consumption, until eventually the museum city absorbs completely the living city (Salerno 2018).

9 Barca 2020; Gago, Mezzadra 2017; Mezzadra, Neilson 2021; Salerno 2018; 2020; Svampa 2019.

ance against planetary extractive capitalism. I do so by bringing into the light local art-activist initiatives that denounce both the social and the ecological dimensions of the degradation caused by the cruise ship presence in Venice. I believe that the work of the artists included in this essay – Eleonora Sovrani, Gli Impresari, and Elena Mazzi – can help us understand the failures of the current urban development model of the tourist economy, while also exposing the nefarious effects of extractive capitalism on the well-being of the lagoon ecosystem and the human and non-human subjects cohabiting in it.

2 Cruise Ship Extractivism

Understanding the conflicts caused by the cruise ship presence in Venice, and the involvement of local, regional, and national political bodies, requires disentangling the way extractive economies, local ecosystems, and communities are interconnected. Recently, Giacomo-Maria Salerno has proposed an interpretative lens for the processes of touristification based on extractivism and neo-extractivism scholarship (Salerno 2018; 2020) as a way to understand tourism capitalism through the critical tradition of colonial and resource exploitation. Extractive tourism stimulates different interconnected processes: the creation of relations of dependence that favour the emergence of economic monocultures, where the intensive exploitation of a resource tends to destroy itself – the so-called *voracity effect* (Strulik 2012; Tornell, Lane 1999); an impoverishing form of developmentalism in which infrastructure and jobs are produced but wealth is not redistributed, but rather centralised in the hands of few; social disaggregation phenomena that lead to a passive society striving for wealth accumulation produced mostly by rent and passive income; and finally a tendency for non-democratic decision making, authoritarian political discourses, and the emergence of oligarchic forms of power (Salerno 2018, 498). In this sense, the intensification of mass tourism has configured Venice as a site of extraction, not of raw materials or carbon fossils, but of its cityhood, natural environment, and social vitality.

As pointed out by Salerno, because of its history, Venice is subjected to a specific form of urban extractivism, one that manifests as a progressive erosion of the commons through processes of displacement and dispossession that run parallel to the environmental degradation of the lagoon. In a historically formed city such as Venice, the creation of the commons is not an ongoing process, but rather the product of a long sedimentation (Salerno 2018). As in the case with the resource and the fossil extraction industries, what we face here is a form of economic organisation and mode of appropriation and accumulation developed in accordance with external market forc-

es (exports, neo-colonial extraction, international tourist markets) (Svampa 2019). This, according to Salerno, produces a progressive "erosion of the common dimension" on top of which said economy is based upon (Salerno 2018, 498), through a process of "spatially orchestrated dispossession, aimed at dismantling autonomous, collectively produced and managed forms of commonwealth and value regimes" (Sevilla-Buitrago 2015, 5 in Salerno 2018, 498). Because of the extractive nature of urban tourism, the goal of a touristic city is

> evidently profit maximisation for some. Thus profit-seeking also represents the driver of urban transformations to receive tourists and this does not automatically imply well-being for all. (Cristiano, Gonella 2020, 9)

In Maristella Svampa's formulation of neo-extractivism,[10] a concept "developed in Latin America to make sense of the developments and the reach of extractive capitalism in the 21st century", and an analytical category with "descriptive and explanatory power, as well as a denunciatory aspect and strong mobilizing power" (Svampa 2019, 5), this stage of capitalism is seen as a way of

> appropriating nature and a development model based on the over exploitation of natural goods, largely non-renewable, characterised by its large scale and its orientation towards export, as well as by the vertiginous expansion of the borders of exploitation to new territories, which were previously considered unproductive or not valued by capital. (7)

This becomes particularly evident in the case of Venice, where the logic of the tourist monoculture requires an ever-expansive movement and a constant appropriation and repurposing of the spaces left intact, or even abandoned, by the previous economic forces. Consider for a moment the cases of the Certosa island, Alberoni beach, and the *ex-gasometri* area in Castello, where spaces of common usage and abandoned industrial infrastructure are being sold to international groups and may be turned soon into exclusionary spaces such as high-end restaurants, luxury resorts, and private yacht clubs:[11] a striking example of what Svampa sees as a "recolonization of nature and of dispossession, visible in the process of land grabbing", and of what Salerno aptly defines as "internal colonialism". In the recent past, this pro-

10 Svampa and others individuate the current phase of extractivism as an evolution of previous regimes of colonial capture.

11 https://altreconomia.it/dallisola-di-certosa-alloasi-degli-alberoni-che-cosa-succede-ai-beni-pubblici-di-venezia/.

cess has interested Sacca Sessola, an artificial island created in 1870 using the waste material produced by the port construction works in Santa Marta. Today the island is owned by Marriott International, which has also decided to erase the memory of the island's origins by renaming it Isola delle Rose.[12] Not unexpectedly, these processes are met with social conflict and are countered by a growing number of socio-environmental activist collectives and initiatives that make use of established tactics of political mobilisation and citizen participation, and new, creative, site-specific modes of resistance to the deterioration of the lagoon environment and the impoverishment of the urban experience (Vianello 2016). Like other communities currently fighting against extractive injustice worldwide, Venetian activists also demand "other ways of building society and inhabiting the world" (Svampa 2019, 4) while dismantling the narratives spread by the government and economic stakeholders according to whom the cruise industry's presence in the city is financially beneficial for all. Comparably to what is happening in other geographies, Venice is the host of numerous artistic projects that address and negotiate environmental conflict in ways alternative to planetary neoliberal eco-governmentality, "formulating a lucid analysis of ecological destruction and proposing egalitarian structures of living" (Demos 2016, 10).

In the last ten years, along with the birth of the Comitato No Grandi Navi in 2012, a myriad of activist groups, collectives, and individual artists have produced socially and environmentally engaged artistic events and citizen participation initiatives. The Venetians' opposition to the cruise industry has become an exemplary campaign of socio-environmental activism. It has disseminated information about the nefarious impact of mass tourism on the city and its ecosystem, while piercing the bubble designed to maintain the leisurely allure of cruise tourism and uncovering its green washing efforts. The No Grandi Navi protests show a high degree of performativity and include tactics such as staging blockades of the cruise ships in the Giudecca canal, experiments in citizen participation and horizontal democracy,[13] raise-funding events, and direct communication with the cruise industry workers.[14] In the recent protest organised on June 5th 2021, for example, the first post-COVID cruise ship was intercepted by a swarm of *barcattivisti* who on board of *barchini* (the small boats typically used in the lagoon) surrounded the ship, urging the tourists on the deck to face the social unrest caused by this form of tourism. The hundreds of protesters – a mix of families, senior cit-

12 https://www.jwvenice.com/it/isola/.

13 http://www.nograndinavi.it/ecco-i-risultati-del-referendum-autogestito/.

14 An updated list of the initiatives can be found on the website of the Comitato: http://www.nograndinavi.it/.

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izens, locals, and international residents – that had gathered on the Fondamenta delle Zattere were yelling anti-cruise slogans, lighting flares, and holding banners. At the June protest, the *barchini* flotilla was in turn disturbed by the appearance of two boats purportedly operated by cruise ship terminal workers holding large "Welcome Back" banners oriented towards the tourists. This interaction was not an isolated episode as the port workers also hung similar banners around the San Basilio area and posters throughout the city.[15] The port workers' provocation and counter protests show how the public spaces of Venice have become a contested space where the tourists' attention is sought by both the socio-environmental activists and the cruise companies.[16] This conflict is common within extractive economies, since

> capitalist modernity has naturalized class and other inequalities as necessary evils that allow for the supposedly greater common good of economic growth, it has tied working class survival to the infinite expansion of the forces of production. (Barca 2020, 43)

The aesthetics and the politics of the swarm mobilised against the megafauna of the Capitalocene, the 'extractive monsters' roaming the oceans or drilling the permafrost around the world, have been observed in other instances of resistance against the extractive operations of capital, for example in Latin America (Dietz 2019; Urkidi, Walter 2011)[17] and during the 2015 Seattle protests against Shell where

> kayaktivists hoped to block the Polar Pioneer drilling rig temporary stationed in Seattle, preventing it from leaving port, or at least to delay its departure, and create a media firestorm to help shift public opinion against extreme forms of petro-capitalist extraction. (Demos 2019, 39-40)

It is important to note that all these activist practices, including the No Grandi Navi struggle, do not limit themselves to simply halt or slow the socio-ecological devastation, instead they formulate horizontal and "counter-hegemonic visions of modernity" (Barca 2020, 1). In particular, the No Grandi Navi movement and the artistic activism associated with it

15 The port workers' posters urged the national government to resume cruise ship operations as soon as possible.

16 For an exhaustive critical study of the spatial politics of Venice see Araya López 2021.

17 The definition of cruise ships as megafauna of the Capitalocene was suggested by Serenella Iovino during a personal conversation.

> have acted as a catalyst for the convergence of different actors and mobilization efforts and as a focal point to address broader issues related to Venice decline as a 'lived city'. (Vianello 2016, 184)

The artists involved in this project have understood that cruise workers and tourists are also objects of the extractive violence of cruise ship capitalism, and as such they need to be included in the imagining of possible alternative futures. It is understandable, in this sense, that the cruise-terminal workers 'welcomed' the return of the cruise giants: the COVID crisis had stopped all cruise operations for more than a year, during which the workers of the terminal and their families suffered the threat of economic loss on top of the health-related anxieties of the pandemic. But, at the same time, the pandemic revealed the extreme precarity of cruise-related jobs:

> beyond the mainstream narrative of the creation of jobs, advocated by governments and unions, often in spite of the actual working conditions data, the professed benefits to the local economy often conflict with the well-being of local dwellers, the built environment, and the surrounding natural environment. [...] As an economic monoculture, a touristified destination is very vulnerable to external events. The narrative of job creation is extremely precarious, as is the touristic destination itself. (Cristiano, Gonella 2020, 2)

According to Marco Armiero, the Titanic is a fitting metaphor of the Anthropocene because it conflates technological hubris, class inequality, and apocalyptic narratives (Armiero 2015). Cruise ships, on the other hand, can be seen as metaphors of extractive capitalism. They function as extractive devices that operate simultaneously on different scales, inside and outside of the physical space of the ship, putting local communities, tourists, and workers in conflict against each other, and deeply transforming the environment and the political and economic landscape around them. As a "highly rationalized form of mass consumption" (Miles 2019, 523), the object of extraction of cruise ships is simultaneously the ecosystem in which they operate and the flows of tourists they host onboard. Seen inwards, the physical dimension of a cruise ship becomes a space for the maximisation of profit through processes of value extraction where tourists on board become "captive consumers" (Weaver 2005, 168). Outside of the ship, a larger project of infrastructure expansion and commodification of tourist destinations progressively transforms those cities into dominions of the tourist economy, a status from which it becomes increasingly difficult to escape. On the other hand, to exist and function, cruise companies must rely on a vast infrastructure of ports, harbours, and industrial production that is often built by national governments under the premise of job creation or reallocation of industrial spaces.

Part of cruise tourism's profitable model lies on the designed narrative that cruise consumers are "leading the good life", where the ship becomes a space for meaning making and belonging (Miles 2019, 525). To maintain this narrative, and to keep cruise tourists from being exposed to the negative effects of this form of tourism, cruise companies hide the environmental and social impact of their operations as much as possible. Most cruise companies publish a yearly sustainability report, with statistics and goals for a 'sustainable' way of doing cruise tourism. In these reports, they list the environment-friendly activities they promote onboard**,** such as waste recycling, water conservation, energy saving and so on. For instance, in its most recent sustainability report, Costa, one of the major vectors operating in Venice, emphasises its efforts in promoting sustainable and inclusive models of tourism (Costa 2019). Costa, similarly to other companies, has declared to comply with the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. In the report, Costa stresses its participation in climate action initiatives, and it pledges to a 40% emission cut by 2020 and to adopt responsible consumption and production guidelines and to lower food waste (Costa 2019, 16-17). Climate change action and sustainable development goals are used by cruise lines both as a marketing tool, and as a form of obfuscation of the persistent ecological damage they cause on the local ecosystems where they operate. The *Costa Academy* formation programme includes for sales departments a training in how to "intercept the value attributed by guests and potential consumers to social and environmental issues" for commercial purposes and to "spread awareness about Costa's efforts" (57).

Cruise consumers are actively shielded from directly facing the socio-environmental damage of the cruise ship industry and even the health hazards to which they expose themselves, because cruises are "temporary floating utopias" and

> spaces devoid of social context beyond that defined by the ability to consume: a space that firmly establishes the principle that human activity or endeavour must always be defined through a specific image of the economic. (Miles 2019, 525)

In the Capitalocene, cruise ships become prospecting machines that project an extractive gaze outward while manufacturing an endless series of moments of consumption on board. The images of Venice taken from the deck of the cruise ship construct an experience of the city and the lagoon that can be infinitely reproduced for temporary tourist consumption, cruise after cruise after cruise. The production of these images is not a disembodied process, as it becomes possible through processes of gentrification, contamination, labour precarity, displacement, and loss of biodiversity disseminated in time and

space. In this sense, the extractive dynamic at play in Venice is not as visible and self-evident as the operations of the so-called "planetary mine" (Arboleda 2020) and it requires a creative effort from the local community to visualise such processes for the rest of the world to see. Venice as a site of extraction makes visible the extent and the pervasiveness of the extractive operations worldwide, even when they take place far away from minerary mega-projects and petro-chemical plants.[18] Cruise ship capitalism's adoption of the neoliberal eco-management practices (carbon offsets, sustainability goals, etc.) as marketing tools reveals the ineffectiveness of said practices in protecting local communities and ecosystems from irreversible damage, while allowing cruise ships not only to exist and expand, but also to market themselves as 'green' as long as they operate within the parameters set by intergovernmental organisations.

3 Art Activism Against the Extractive Gaze

A few months before the breakout of the COVID-19 pandemic, journalist Alessandro Calvi boarded a cruise ship in Venice for a tour of the Eastern Mediterranean Sea to write a short piece about the experience. As a Venetian, boarding a cruise ship from the Tronchetto terminal and moving slowly through the city "on the monster's back" had a different significance. Calvi wanted to "invert the perspective and to see what it feels like" to experience Venice that way (Calvi 2019):

> On the bridge everyone takes pictures, […] they wave goodbye to a city that does not wave back. […] Venice seems nothing more than an embellishment that is partially non-essential.

For Calvi, it is not Venice what he sees from up there, but rather something "too small to be true, a children's toy".

> But Venice from the back of the monster is not a spectacle, it's simply not Venice. […] It cannot be really Venice, this thing that is being forced to spread apart, crushed by the manifestation of a willpower that has nothing of the scale of humans.

The megalophobic dread caused by the sheer scale difference between the cruise ship and Venice can fully manifest only when the visual arrogance of the cruise ship is experienced first-hand, when all the possible significance of Venice and its lagoon is reduced to a

18 In the case of Venice, the Porto Marghera petro-chemical complex is just a few kilometers away.

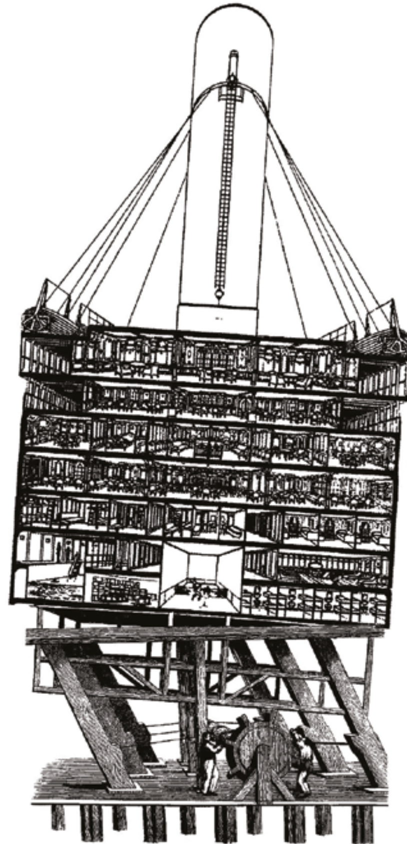

Figure 1 Gli Impresari, *La Grande Macchina*. 2014. Print. Venice, S.a.L.E Docks. Courtesy of the artist

brief, meaningless, touristified encounter. The spectacle of Venice reduced to a scale model, "difficult to tell apart from the Venices that were created in the United States" to quote Gianni Berengo Gardin (Berengo Gardin in Calvi 2019) is the form of "visual bullying" that thousands of cruise consumers participate in every year. In Gli Impresari's *La Grande Macchina* **[fig. 1]**, the cruise ship becomes a theatrical machine: a scenic device, operated by two labourers. In Gli Impresari's vision, the cruise ship is not a vehicle. Its section reveals living quarters and working spaces. In this enclosed and isolated bubble, value is produced by bare existence and capture. A visual refer-

ence to the sections of the ships used in colonial and the Atlantic slave trade, *La Grande Macchina* allegorically places the cruise ship within a spectacle of theatrical nature, a contraption that is both a gaze-projecting machine and the stage of a farce or an opera. *La Grande Macchina* was produced in a limited number of prints that were sold in a fund-raiser for the legal expenses of the Comitato Grandi Navi and, as other artworks considered in this essay, it was part of the 2014 *You Are Not Welcome* exhibition hosted in the S.a.L.E. Docks occupied art space. In their multidisciplinary artistic practice, *Gli Impresari*[19] focus on the relationship between modernity and visual culture. Quoting their artistic statement, their collective practice consists mainly of sculptures and installations – often activated by performances – inspired by a complex and varied imaginary, ranging from the marvellous effects obtained through theatrical machines, to the mediatic power of the first cinematic projections. The inevitable link between the political and economic system and the representation modes within society becomes the object and subject matter of a new aesthetic production; through a dialogue with the past, they attempt to foster a reflection on the concept of technique and spectacularization within contemporary society. In *La Grande Macchina*, the collective reflects on the two simultaneous visual domains of the cruise ship: the contained reality of the cruise ship experience, and the orchestrated projected gaze on the lagoon and the city.

In 2019, global street artist Banksy proposed his own take on the optics of cruise ships in Venice. During the first week of the 58th Biennale of Art, Banksy set up a small stand, like the many stalls selling watercolor paintings of Venice in Riva degli Schiavoni, not far from some of the most visited landmarks of Venice. **[fig. 2]**[20]

Banksy's performance titled *Venice in Oil* forced the tourists visiting the city to encounter the monstrous cruise ships in a different way. In Banksy's stand, views of the city inspired by Canaletto's paintings are invaded by a giant ship, but unlike Gli Impresari's vision where the taxonomic section of the ship reveals the inner workings of the spectacle, here the cruise ship is diffracted and scattered, violently occupying the city, disclosing an implicit multiplicity of horizontally dispersed observers. In these anthropocenic versions of Canaletto, the body of Venice is crossed and hidden by the inhuman scale of the cruise ship. The paintings force an interaction with the tourists, some of whom may have come to Venice to board a cruise ship,

19 Gli Impresari is a collective based in Venice and is composed by Edoardo Aruta, Marco Di Giuseppe, Rosario Sorbello.

20 https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/cronaca/2019/05/23/banksy-espone-a-venezia-contro-le-grandi-navi-cacciato-dai-vigili-_30a61a55-2b9a-4ee8-9766-3d81cba70659.html.

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Figure 2 Banksy, *Venice in Oil*. 2019. Performance. Venice, Riva degli Schiavoni. Source: https://streetartnews.net/2019/05/banksys-street-stall-in-venice.html

reversing their experience of viewing the city from the deck of the ship. Banksy's *Venice in Oil* and Gli Impresari's *La Grande Macchina* point towards the same tension between two fundamentally different modes of visually experiencing the city and, possibly, the planetary environment. These modes of visuality roughly adhere to the two ways of representing a city as models of Leibniz's distinction between scenography and iconography, as notably pointed out by Jonathan Crary in his seminal essay *Techniques of the Observer*. Crary displays two distinct ways of representing Venice: Jacopo de Barbari's 1500s vertical, aerial view of Venice, a pre-Copernican, synoptic, and totalising apprehension of the city as a unified entity;[21] and the mid-18th century views by Canaletto, which disclose a field occupied by a monadic observer within a city knowable only as the accumulation of multiple and diverse points of view (Crary 1990, 52). A third, oblique view is finally introduced by the cruise ship. The exclusionary gaze of the cruise ship strips Venice of its cityhood and reconfigures it simultaneously as a theme-park and as an extractive field, "nothing more than an embellishment that is partially non-essential" as Calvi puts it (Calvi 2019). From the deck, the cruise ship's prospecting gaze extracts economic value from the sedimented bodies composing Venice

21 For artist and theorist Hito Steyerl we live in an age of "growing importance of aerial views: overviews, google maps, satellite views. We are growing accustomed to what was once called the God's eye view" (Steyerl 2011).

and its lagoon – the "super-organism made of other organisms, their lives porously connected with its life" (Iovino 2016, 67) – and its fixed accumulated capital over centuries (Salerno 2018).

An alternative visual interaction between the city and the cruise tourists is also at the centre of Eleonora Sovrani's work. Sovrani is a multidisciplinary artist who uses video, détournement of advertising material, and public poster campaigns as forms of art activism aimed at debunking the cruise industry's marketing narratives and green washing efforts. For her graduation project, Sovrani embarked on a cruise ship as staff to document the cruise ship experience from within the "belly of the monster". Her 2012 video *Loveboat*, was produced using authentic video footage recorded during her time working on the cruise ship, mixed in with bits from the homonymous 1970s show, advertising material, stock photos and pieces of the orientation and safety videos presented to the consumers on the ship.[22] In the artists' words:

> During a cruise voyage most of the events onboard and onshore are organised with the main aim to produce self-referential pictures; landing places become a sort of extension of the cruise ship, and they lose their own quality of place. The result is a kind of 'voyage to nowhere', based on repetition, placeless and timeless perception.

The sense of a deterritorialised experience of consumption is also a result of the fact that cruise vacations have been increasingly marketed as travel destinations by themselves, in a process that has been defined as *destinization*. In *Loveboat*, the cruise ship is shown as a giant experimental laboratory of neural capitalism, where tourists are encouraged to barely exist in an eternal cycle of leisure activities and mindless consumption. A Verhoeven-esque dystopian feel is produced by the contrast between the glitchy texture of Sovrani's video and by the oppressing droning soundscape alternated with soothing advertising messages: "This is what your dream will look like. No matter who you are, you will be far from boundaries and far from land".

As part of Sovrani's work with *We Are Here Venice*,[23] one the most active and recognised advocacy groups fighting for Venice's future led by environmental scientist Jane Da Mosto, the artist designed a series of posters with the intention of breaking the bubble that surrounds cruise tourists. The posters confront the tourists with a reality that has been actively hidden from them. Spread around the city, they include information about the impacts of mass tourism on

22 https://vimeo.com/58413615.

23 https://www.weareherevenice.org/about/.

Figure 3 Eleonora Sovrani, posters for *We Are Here Venice*. 2019-20. Venice, different locations. Courtesy of the artist

the environment, public health, and social life of Venice. For a second poster campaign, Sovrani decided to reproduce images of the endangered vegetal species inhabiting the salt marshes (the *barene*) of the lagoon such as the Zostera Marina, Salicornia, Spartina, Limonium and Salsola Soda. These plants have defined the lagoonscape of Venice for centuries and may soon disappear if decisive actions are not taken to protect the ecosystem of the lagoon. The artist in this case wanted to make the tourists aware of their temporary habitation within a unique amphibian ecosystem where humans and vegetal and other non-human forms of life have coexisted for centuries. For Sovrani, having the tourists perceive the damage they participate in, and the many forms of life affected by their actions is a valuable effort to hinder the cruise industry's green-washing capabilities at their root **[fig. 3]**.

An even more direct form of artistic intervention and direct communication with the tourists was staged by Sovrani in her most recent performance action that took place at the Marco Polo airport in 2019. On that occasion, the artist produced and distributed fake advertising material to the tourists traveling to Venice to board a cruise at the Tronchetto terminal. The flyers portrayed a stock photo of a couple in Venice and mimicked genuine cruise company advertisements:

> "GET READY FOR YOUR VENICE ADVENTURE(R)!
>
> Feel what is like to breathe* in one of the most polluted cities in the world, as you walk on shore, or while you relax on the pool deck of your favourite cruise ship.
>
> *Respirator masks are highly recommended!
>
> AIR ON CRUISE SHIPS CAN BE WORSE THAN IN SOME OF THE MOST POLLUTED CITIES OF THE WORLD".

In this case, Sovrani intercepted tourists before they had even entered the environmental bubble of the ship, allowing for a possible circulation of this material on board. Sovrani's direct approach achieved a level of engagement that other forms of activist art in Venice cannot attain easily. Her performative and informational art interacts directly with the subjects of extractive tourism: no longer seen as mere demographics, or flows and numbers to be managed, nor treated as passive cargo of the extractive operations of mass tourism, the tourist becomes an active participant in Sovrani's art. The exchange between Sovrani and the tourist can spark curiosity, awareness and even opposition towards the hidden costs of the cruise economy.

The role of technology is an important aspect of the 2014 video project *Lacuna: Land of Hidden Spaces* by multimedia artist Elena Mazzi. According to the artist, the project intended to investigate

Figure 4 Elena Mazzi, *Lacuna*. 2014. Video. Courtesy of the Artist

the possibility of responding to the increase of environmental issues affecting Venice. Through the application of an interdisciplinary methodology, the artwork explores technological innovation and its implications. Considering local context in conjunction with new environmental goals is beneficial in redefining their broader effectiveness and functionality. The video combines and intertwines the different 'actors' of the project: a prototype of a solar wall made with mirrors (a reference to Archimedes' inventions), the ancient tradition of engraved glass in Murano, and the fragile environment of the Lagoon, now in peril [fig. 4].

In her practice, Mazzi is interested in analysing through an anthropological lens the relationship between human communities, the

Figure 5 Linear Mirror. Excerpt from *Lacuna*

environment they inhabit, and the mutations provoked by external economic forces. For instance, in her 2021 project *Silver Rights*, Mazzi's focuses on the bond between indigenous communities in Argentina and the land (*mapu*),

> a bond eroded and denied by colonising forces that have mutated over the centuries to gradually establish themselves in recent decades through neo-extractivist practices; a settlement process resulting from the convergence of investment policies and commercial agreements between South American governments and foreign multinationals, including the Italian Benetton.[24]

The three parts of the video *Lacuna: Land of Hidden Spaces* tell us a story where the reflective surface of mirrors is used to convey resistance, materiality, energy production and fragility. In the first frames of the video, a cruise ship is navigating the Giudecca canal and is greeted by three mirrors. Mazzi is referencing the trope of Archimedes' burning mirrors used during the siege of Syracuse (212 BC), according to which the Sicilian mathematician destroyed the besieging Roman fleet using mirrors to amplify and weaponise sun rays. The mirrors of *Lacuna* (a wordplay that simultaneously refers to the *lagoon* and an empty space) are held in opposition to the cruise ship

24 https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/402385/elena-mazzisilver-rights/

presence in the lagoon like the banners and the flares used during the anti-ships protests. The mirrors defend Venice from the cruise ships by reflecting back their extractive gaze and by symbolically shooting sun rays against their dark, vampiric presence over the lagoon. But mirrors, as glass, are also part of the pre-industrial economy of Venice. For this project, Mazzi collaborated with a solar energy company that built Linear Mirror, a prototype of a solar thermal device composed of several mirrors that direct sun rays in order to produce emission-free heating **[fig. 5]**.

Following a seventeenth-century Murano tradition, the mirrors of Linear Mirror have been engraved by an artisan with drawings depicting plants from the local salt marshes. The engravings include autochthonous vegetal species of the lagoon that may disappear if pollution in the lagoon worsened further. The current high contamination levels in the water are caused mainly by the toxicity produced by the petro-chemical complex of Porto Marghera, which is responsible for the "presence of over seven and a half million cubic meters of toxic and poisonous sludge" (Iovino 2016, 59). Mazzi contraposes the vital energy, represented here by solar power, to the lagoon's loss of biodiversity but, instead of celebrating solar power technology or energy transition as ways out of environmental disaster, she chooses to bring into the light an artisanal, pre-industrial, pre-extractive form of production that has almost gone extinct. In *Lacuna*, Mazzi combines the life-enabling properties of the salt marshes and their ecological functions of water filtration and photosynthesis, with a conceptualisation of solar energy that is horizontally defined and distributed. "The peculiar technique of engraving on mirrors, a typical local craft tradition that is rapidly being replaced by badly blown glass items, easy to sell to tourists" is another casualty of the advancement of extractive tourism. Mazzi concludes the video with images of the *barene* and the unique forms of vegetal life living on them. *Lacuna* was exhibited together with the Linear Mirror prototype, a critical herbarium, a comic strip and a recycled-glass sculpture. Mazzi's interest for the artesanal modes of production, of which Linear Mirror embodies its contemporary form, and for the vital functions of the *barene* re-centres the efforts of opposing the cruise industry towards a co-emergence of lagoon agencies. This continuous exchange, which is put in danger by the presence of the cruise ships and by mass tourism, involves both human and non-human subjects, entangled in the life and the labours of the lagoon. "How can we burn down the ships besieging the lagoon if the artisans do not produce the mirrors anymore?" the artist may ask. The process of disneyfication of Venice has also repurposed the mirror making artisans into manufacturers of touristic goods.

The practitioners mentioned in this essay are operating within activist-led artistic initiatives and in spaces alternative to the mainstream contemporary art industry. Their work has been exhibited in

the S.a.L.E. docks autonomous art space,[25] which, since its inception in 2007, has become an important venue for promoting activist and socially engaged art projects in the Venice lagoon. Thanks to the political decision of S.a.L.E Docks – and of Marco Baravalle, its prominent theorist and curator –[26] to establish a space of artistic conflict against the neoliberal art markets, the art-activists of Venice have contributed to sustain a decade of protests against the socio-ecological exploitation of the lagoon operated by the cruise industry and supported by the city and regional governments. As of now, the protests and the activist practices of the Comitato No Grandi Navi and many other organisations have resulted in a fundamental (temporary?) victory, demonstrating a way to success for socio-environmental activism worldwide. Besides the tourist industry, the activist art in Venice has contrasted and resisted what Clorinda Peters has defined as "the aggressive atomization" of neoliberalism in contemporary art: a process that represses the production of a social and political subject as an agented part of a collective (Peters 2015, 150). Instead, the actions of these artists, together with several others, emerge as an art assemblage comprised of

> living subjects, physical space, material infrastructure, technological devices, cultural forms, and organization practices that simultaneously stage dissent against the status quo while prefiguring 'alternative worlds', (McKee 2017, 101)

and that has harnessed "a utopian discourse that stems from the engagement and the stimulation of the social imagination" (Peters 2015, 154).

25 Located in the Magazzini del Sale, S.a.L.E. Docks is an activist-managed, independent, contemporary art space: "an open laboratory of radical imagination, cultural production and research in arts and politics" (`http://www.saledocks.org/about/`).

26 See Baravalle 2021a and 2021b.

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The Role of Performance in Environmental Humanities: The Case of Joan Jonas's *Moving Off the Land II*

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Abstract This article explores the role of performance in Environmental Humanities by discussing Joan Jonas's staging of *Moving Off The Land II* at Ocean Space in Venice as a case study. More specifically, the article shows that *Moving Off The Land II* and Ocean Space have created a space in which to practice environmental art illustrating how co-habiting ecosystems that we regularly fail to acknowledge should form part of how we construct our own presence.

Keywords Joan Jonas. Performance. Environment. Ecology. Nature. Presence. Ocean Space. Venice.

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In 2019 one of the best-known contemporary artists, the performer Joan Jonas (b. New York, 1936), returned to Venice to install her piece *Moving Off the Land II* at Ocean Space. The event was held to mark the inauguration of Ocean Space, a collaborative platform located in the Church of San Lorenzo, fostering interdisciplinary research and co-creation, which, in the words of Markus Reymann, cofounder and director of TBA21-Academy, aims to "imagine a radically different future for the Earth and our oceans" ("Ocean Space" 2019). Ocean Space builds on the work of the TBA21-Academy, which has, since its foundation in 2011, engaged artists, scientists, technologists and policy makers in residencies, expeditions, and research worldwide. Ocean Space, which is run by the Academy, has already produced several memorable events including, in recent times, *Oceans in Transformation: Territorial Agency* (2021), a work curated by Daniela Zyman, which intended to raise awareness of the consequences of overfishing, deep-sea mining, and oil exploration on our oceans. It is not a coincidence that Ocean Space was opened in Venice, a city that has always been ahead of others in living by, sometimes in, and always through the sea. It is in this context, in which art and interdisciplinary research are brought together to make a public statement about local and global challenges caused by climate change, that Jonas's staging of *Moving Off the Land II* in Venice at Ocean Space must be read. What the work shows is the remarkable role played by performance within an environmental and ecological context, not only in raising awareness about climate change or environmental matters, but also in helping audiences to understand *how* they can perceive the world in a different, more inclusive way **[fig. 1]**.

Moving Off the Land II, which was first staged under the titles *Ocean Sketches and Notes* and *Moving Off the Land* in 2016, was exhibited in 2016 for the Kochi – Muziris Biennale in India, in 2018 for the Tate, in 2019 at Fort Mason Center for Arts and Culture, San Francisco, and in 2019 at Ocean Space in Venice. The result of three years of research by Jonas into the spiritual and cultural role played by the ocean, *Moving Off the Land II* includes performance, sculpture, drawings, sound and video, combing elements from previous artworks with poems by Emily Dickinson, Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851), Rachel Carlson's *The Edge of the Sea* (1955) and Sy Montgomery's *The Soul of an Octopus* (2015) with footage from aquaria filmed around the world, as well films shot in Jamaica where the boom of algae and overfishing have been causing a direct threat to the environment. A complex, summative and powerful work, *Moving Off the Land II* was curated by Stefanie Hessler, commissioned by the TBA21-Academy and coproduced with the Luma Foundation. The work was installed across 500 square meters of the desecrated church of San Lorenzo, which, dating back to the 9th century, was originally part of a Benedictine monastery and, possibly, according to local mythol-

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ogy, the burial place of Marco Polo. The work had a soundtrack by Ikue Mori, played by musicians María Huld Markan Sigfusdottir and Ánde Somby and the performer Francesco Migliaccio. The opening programme also included a conversation between Jonas and Dr Sylvia Earle, a marine biologist and National Geographic Explorer-in-Residence, moderated by Hessler **[fig. 2]**.

At the heart of *Moving Off the Land II* was the ocean and the creatures that live in it. For Jonas the ocean is the origin of everything. Thus, she states: "The mind evolved in the sea. Water made it possible. All the early stages took place in the water" (2020b). So, this is a work about both past and new origins, in which audiences are given strategies through which to experience and define life in the ocean. For this, Jonas used a wide range of visual and performative practices stemming from her own past work so that her audiences could experience the ocean from the point of view of the animals who live in it. Visually, hung high up in the naves, were Jonas's drawings, made on paper and sailcloth reproduced as inkjet prints, showing fishes and other sea animals, including a huge whale. Performatively, the work comprised five videos, each located in a wooden structure or 'theatre' based on her previous work *My New Theater* (1997-). The theatres were meant to "portray a sense of live performance to audiences, even when [Jonas] wasn't present" ("Five Things To Know"), showing footage of other performances, and featuring Jonas playing a mermaid dressed in nets and shells making her way down to the sea, or, wearing a white outfit, drawing an octopus onto it, literally showing herself in the act of becoming an animal. Each video 'theatre' had its own sound and showed images of sea creatures projected onto several children (the future) dressed in white who stood in front of the screens in an intermediary position, to suggest that they could still effect change in the world. Sat in front of the theatres (or theatres within the theatre), audiences became spectators for others to look at, a reminder that they were all *inside* the work **[fig. 3]**.

A sense of immersion was created by the overall sound installation placed in the front room that had been created by Jonas in collaboration with marine biologist David Gruber and that broadcast the sounds of a sperm whale throughout the environment. Mirrors made in Murano reflected the audience and brought it into the work, so that people would realise, in Jonas's words, that "the piece is about us, also" (2020a). Here, by using the term 'also' Jonas implied that the protagonists of the piece are the various sea creatures that feature in it and the children who represent the future. The mirror, a recurrent feature in her work, added an element of discomfort. For Jonas, the mirror was in fact meant to have "a visual impact, altering space by fracturing it and changing the audience's perception of that space" (Jonas 2018). In the performance, Jonas therefore acted as a mediator, bringing the fragmented world of the image into the performance

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Figures 1-3 Joan Jonas, *Moving Off the Land II*, at Ocean Space, Chiesa di San Lorenzo, 2019. *Moving Off the Land II* is commissioned by TBA21-Academy and co-produced with Luma Foundation. © Enrico Fiorese

space, for example by gently touching the projections of the underwater animals from the acquaria (Fabijanska 2019). A believer that fish "think and feel" (2020b), Jonas shows through this piece that to save our oceans, as well as ourselves, we must leave the land, enter the world of water, both physically and metaphorically.

I mentioned that Jonas used a series of key performative strategies, including drawing, mirrors, video, children, animals, performance, myth, masks, time and presence. To understand the specific roles of these strategies it is important to understand that Jonas's works have grown organically over the years. By using the term 'organically', I suggest that practices and strategies adopted in her work evolved over time, so that to understand the performance vocabulary of *Moving Off the Land II* we need to trace its points of origin in previous works. However, before I start with my analysis of Jonas's wider opus, I must devote a few words to this term, 'nature', and explain why it matters so much in the context of Jonas's work. We know that nature must be interpreted within the parameters of culture and that nature forms part of culture (Featherstone, Burrows 1995, 3). We also know that nature is an "independent domain of intrinsic value, truth or authenticity" (Robertson et al. 1996, 22) and that we should look at nature as process, leading to "co-produced nature-cultures" (Szerzynski, Waterton, Heim 2003, 4). Elsewhere, dancer and choreographer Nigel Stewart and I have been claiming that nature is "appropriated by means of performance" (2005, 20) and encounters with nature need to be looked at in terms of performativity. This suggests that nature can imply a "materiality" (i.e. "rock, ocean, biota, atmosphere"), a "process" ("causality, evolution or 'life itself'"), signification (e.g. "Eden") (Szerzynski, Waterton, Heim 2003, 2), as well as a performative experience. Anthropologist Tim Ingold captures nature's paradoxical position in a diagram published in his seminal text *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, showing nature twice, as part of culture (what he calls "culturally perceived" nature) and as part of nature (what he calls "really natural" nature), visualising that culture and nature "presuppose each other" (2000, 41). Jonas's work makes visible this dual presence of 'nature' in nature and in culture, and challenges canonical ways of interpreting the former through the latter. Thus, in her work, nature is often present as a materiality or object; as a process, usually captured through video documentation; as signification, rendered through narrative, including myth; and as embodied performance, by which I mean not only Jonas's own performance but also that of the audience that often finds itself, unwittingly, reflected, usually by mirrors, to occupy various positions within the work. Thus, a number of active elements in *Moving Off the Land II*, including mirrors, video, drawing, performance, myth, masks, animals, time and presence, continuously re-orient the work's audiences, herewith rewriting their experience not only of but also, literally, off the land.

To fully understand the origin of these active elements, I need to retrace the history of some of Jonas's key works. Trained as a sculptor in the 1960s, Jonas studied with the choreographer Trisha Brown and, influenced by the work of John Cage and Claes Oldenburg, started, after the 1970s, to use video, personal objects and images in her work, turning also to fairy tales, sculpture, dance, and performance to develop highly personal complex visual landscapes, scattered with objects, often out of size, and her own drawings, to create environments combining physical and subliminal elements. For her, video, which she called a "layering device", was an inspiration "to perform for the camera, working with masks, costumes and objects so as to create alternative personas" and "to transmit a live video image – a close-up of objects, a figure, performed actions – to a monitor or a projection" in that "the audience simultaneously saw the live action with a close-up or a detail of the poetic narrative" (Jonas 2018).

Describing her own presence as that of another material, "or an object that moved very stiffly, like a puppet or a figure in a medieval painting", Jonas claimed: "I gave up making sculpture and I walked into the space" (in Rush 1999, 42). This action of 'walking in' is as an act of self-representation (an act of presence) *and* a conscious positioning of her work as environmental and ecological.

In *Archaeologies of Presence* (2012) I made a distinction between the two terms 'environment' and 'ecology' in relation to presence by suggesting that, while the term 'environment' indicates the surroundings or conditions in which a person, animal, or plant lives or operates, the term 'ecology' indicates a branch of biology that is concerned with the relations of organisms to each other and to their surroundings. This distinction made it possible for me to claim that an environmental interpretation of presence foregrounds the set of circumstances that surround the occurrence of presence, while an ecological reading of presence foregrounds how presence may operate as a relational tool between organisms (Giannachi in Giannachi, Kaye, Shanks 2012, 50). Whereas presence is about the continuous unfolding of the subject into what is other to it (presence, etymologically, is what is *prae esse*, before being), the term 'environment' defines its surroundings, that is, what remains other to being, to the subject, which is, however, necessary for presence to occur (51). Jonas, who uses layering to bring together the various meanings of the term 'nature', constructs her presence environmentally, by constantly drawing attention to what is other to her, and ecologically, by re-performing this presence, constructed environmentally, so as to include other ecosystems and the nonhuman beings that define them as key presences in her work.

Jonas has often made clear how her work is concerned with her life and the re-presentation or even re-cycling of environments that have been familiar to her audiences within the work. Thus, the use

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of the mirror stems from early works such as *Mirror Piece I and II* (1969-70), where Jonas explored gaze, reflection and representation by using mirrors to bring, in her own words, "the audience into the picture" (Jonas 2020a), flattening the physical environment into the world of the image (arguably, turning nature into culture). In the original staging of *Mirror Piece I* at New York University's Loeb Student Center, the piece was interpreted by a group of mostly women performers who moved in "slow choreographed patterns while holding oblong mirrors in front of their bodies" that reflected the audience as well as the environment in which they were sat. Two men periodically lifted and carried the women horizontally, by feet and neck, towards different places (Mount Holyoke College Art Museum 2019).[1] In the original staging of *Mirror Piece II* at New York's Emanuel-El YMHA the performers carried heavier mirrors and glass that slowed "the pace of their movements", thus "creating a sense of risk and vulnerability to their bodies". While in *Mirror Piece I and II* the mirror integrated the audience into the work, though always partially and only sporadically, in *Mirror Check* (1970) the performer, Jonas, was seen inspecting her own naked body with a hand mirror. Here the spectator became a voyeur since only the performer could see what was in the mirror. In both cases, the mirror, like the video, operated as a medium for self-reflection (self-portraiture even) that, however, only returned a partial and ephemeral fragment of the subject and the environment it reflected, drawing attention to the limitations of technology and so also of culture in capturing what we commonly call 'nature'.

Jonas subsequently used both mirrors and videos to bring the audience into the work (Jonas 2000). Thus, she claims:

> video is a device extending the boundaries of my interior dialogue to include the audience. The perception is of a double reality: me as an image and me as a performer. (in Martin 2006, 62)

This doubling of reality makes it possible for Jonas to be both an image *and* the performer, located both within *and* outside of the parameters of the representation, in both nature and culture. Jonas's subsequent piece *Volcano Saga* (1985-89), originally performed live by Jonas, and then developed, in 1994, into an installation with the same title, was based on a 13th Century Icelandic poem in which a woman marries four times. The protagonist, Gudrun, interpreted by Tilda Swinton, tells the seer, Gest, interpreted by Ron Vawter, about four dreams which Gest thinks are about each of Gudrun's husbands and

1 https://artmuseum.mtholyoke.edu/event/mirror-piece-i-ii-reconfigured-19692018-2019-joan-jonas-58.

her lives with them. The performers looked like "paper dolls pasted on the scenery – similar to what Jonas achieved with a projection backdrop in the original performances" (MoMA).[2] The video backdrop showed a river flowing through a black volcanic landscape intercut with images of mountains, plains and desert-like landscapes, sheep, seals and other animals, accompanied by a soundtrack by the US composer Alvin Lucier. Juxtaposed against the video projection was a desk, and on top of that was a map of Iceland. While most of the work consisted in the narration of the saga itself, Jonas can be seen at the beginning of the video, wearing a raincoat and measuring the backdrop created by the video projection in relation to the map, comparing scale and distance, while she narrates how in researching the work she went on a drive near a glacier, lost control of the car and was left hanging upside down. The images were intercut with the hands of a woman seen wringing a cloth in a bowl and scenes of the dialogue between Gudrun and Gest. In recalling the accident in the performance, Jonas noted: "the wind whistled and blew. Everything was moving" (Jonas in Kaye 1996, 95). This image conveyed the shifting territory and subsequent displacement (from dream to reality to image to map to performance to myth) that characterises this work. Here the foundations of knowledge, our own presence, become, like rivers, fluid, and in perpetual motion. Setting the parameters for *Moving Off the Land II*, Jonas exposes the fragility of an epistemology that is bound to fail as it is entirely grounded in human perception.

In an interview with Stefanie Hessler, the curator of *Moving Off the Land II*, Jonas recounts how she grew up spending a lot of time "in nature", both in the woods and at the beach, so that, over time, nature became part of her life and of her "imagery" (Jonas 2020a). In fact, Jonas had been using environmental images in her work since the 1960s, including in *Mirror Piece I and II* and in *Volcano Saga*. Even her first public performance *Oad Lau* (1968), whose title refers to the name of a village in Marocco and translates as "watering-place" (Jonas in Rush 1999, 43), embraced wind and water as elements of the work. Inspired by Halldór Laxness's *Under the Glacier* (1968), which tells the story of a man sent to investigate paranormal activity around a glacier, her more recent work *Reanimation* (2012) first shown in Kassel at dOCUMENTA 13, then, the same year, in New York at the Performa Biennial, is an immersive installation with footage shot on Norway's Lofoten Islands, comprising four videos showing glaciers, roads and dark tunnels. Projected on four shoji screens, the images evoke the aesthetic of traditional Japanese dwellings, while the music by Jason Moran was not only an accompaniment but formed part of, in Jonas's words, "my body and my space" (in Marranca 2019). In-

2 https://www.moma.org/collection/works/118324.

cluding also both live and recorded performance by Jonas, the piece saw her drawing live against a video backdrop, with which she occasionally appears to merge, as if she was following the characters in the piece (Marranca 2019). Here, we see her become a fox, through a mask and a gesture, merging with the Icelandic landscape projected onto her body. For Performance Studies theorist Bonnie Marranca, Jonas in this work literally "draws her way into the world" in so far as

> *Reanimation* is not a performance *about* a particular subject, but rather one that demonstrates its *process* of being made through various technologies of performance. (2019; original emphases)

Thus, Jonas's performance unfolded by the act of drawing, within which the audience witnessed an environment being created, with Jonas "both narrating and embodying the narrative". Additionally, for Marranca the piece entailed a complex engagement with time, including "cosmic time, performance time, and documentary time". These intertwine in the work, creating a multifaceted layering that variously evokes the 'nature' of time, questioning what we commonly call 'present' or 'now'. Thus, Jonas concludes the piece by saying:

> Time is the one thing we can all agree to call supernatural. It is at least neither energy nor matter; not dimension either; let alone function: and yet it is the beginning and the end of the world.

Interestingly, *Reanimation* had at its centre a metal cube structure from which crystals were hung that reflected the light from the video projections and so also multiplied the space of the performance within the set time of the work. Hence, *Reanimation* was about process, reflection, and spatio-temporal expansion to consider what falls outside of canonic definitions of human nature. Here, the present is extended and expanded, reaching into the past and towards the future. Interestingly, it was while working for *Reanimation* that Jonas started filming in aquaria in Norway and it was this work, alongside Laxness's text, which had a section on bees, that inspired Jonas's first work in Venice, setting the terrain for *Moving Off the Land II* in which the trope of the acquarius seems to merge with the space of the work itself.

In 2015 Jonas represented the United States at the 56th Venice Biennale with the exhibition *They Come To Us Without a Word*. The installation was commissioned by the MIT List Visual Arts Centre to portray natural environments and the animals inhabiting it – from bees to fish – as well as exhibiting the present danger caused by climate change and extinction. The work occupied all of the US pavilion's galleries and entailed video, drawings, sculptural and performative elements. The rooms that did not have animals were defined through objects (mirrors), forces (wind) or by place (the homeroom).

The rooms were linked to each other through a narrative about ghost stories sourced from the oral tradition of Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, where Jonas often resides. The piece was performed by a group of children aged 5-16 wearing white paper hats or papier-mâché masks, who could be seen in the video performing in front of video backdrops, often showing extracts from films from Jonas's past work as well as images from Nova Scotia and New York. The rooms also contained some of the objects that could be seen in the video, creating a link between the physical space and the space of the video projection. In the rotunda from which the other rooms could be accessed there was a big crystal-beaded chandelier as well as a number of rippled mirrors that had been handcrafted in Murano and that reflected images from both the installations and the passers-by. It is worth noting that the presence of animals, especially dogs, even her own dog, in Jonas's work is often seen as "symbolic of the animal helper common in ancient mythology and ritual" ("Five Things To Know"). For Jonas the presence of the animal is important for its ability to open the minds of humans to *their* world:

> The relationship between animals and humans is very mysterious, and I think it's very important, especially in this world right now, the planet we're living on.

The animal's appearance in her work is usually spontaneous, such as Moving in Place (Dog Dance) (2002-05), where her dog Zina ran onto the scene of her performance and began nudging her to play with her. Thus, she comments: "My dog is a character. She is a comedian and a natural performer. I never ask her; she just gravitates towards the action. It's very strange; she somehow knows what to do". Hence, the presence of the animal adds another layer to the work, that of non representability, of the 'real' or Ingold's "really natural" nature – through which audiences perceive an immediacy that would be otherwise absent from the work. In *Moving Off the Land II* it is the presence of the animal in culture that asks of audiences to re-presence themselves in the work. By re-presence, on this occasion, I mean that they abandon the logic of a 'narrow present' (the now) and instead embrace that of a 'long and wide present' including different moments in time (the past and the future) and different species. In this 'long and wide present' past languages created to capture the environment through drawings, mirrors, video, myth, masks, and the presence of the animal actively inform the present, the audience's presence, and their place within that. The long and wide present is what we need to focus on to understand the implications of climate change.

To further comprehend the relationship between nature in nature and culture in Jonas's work it is useful to look further into the presence of animals in her work, which tends to be mediated, either

though video or drawings. While the animal in the video is almost always the animal in its 'natural' state, even when in an aquarium, the animal in the drawings, however, is the stylised animal in culture. Just as the video and the mirror attempt to reflect or capture nature, the act of drawing intends to make way into the cultural dimension of the work. For the Art Historian Ann Reynolds, the act of drawing is therefore crucial in relation to what happens in the video. Thus, in Jonas's work we often see Jonas stand in front of a prerecorded video backdrop holding up a piece of white paper or cloth,

> sometimes shifting it from side to side, tipping it slightly left to right, then right to left, shaking it, or using it to track or momentarily frame the movements of something in the projection behind her. (2015, 21)

Sometimes we see Jonas drawing on the paper or holding it very close to her body, like a shield. For Reynolds

> The visual effects are subtle. Just a slight change in the distance or angle between the projector and the surface of the projection brings the portion of the video image Jonas is capturing a bit closer and isolates, frames, and magnifies it slightly, in or out of focus, transforming the rest of the projected image into background. If the paper she holds up is black, Jonas's gesture produces the opposite effect; it almost obliterates part of the projected image and substitutes a black void or a white-on-black drawing for this temporarily 'lost' portion. (21)

Just as in the early mirror pieces the reflective surface was used to illustrate the inability of the medium to reflect the totality of the environment in which Jonas performed, and so also its inability to document the audience's presence in the work, here the body is seen appearing and disappearing into the medium, swallowed up by its own cultural referents.

The reason I had to trace the history of Jonas's work so as to talk about *Moving Off the Land II* is because, as I have shown, Jonas's work evolves organically. What we see in *Moving Off the Land* II originated elsewhere. As curators Julienne Lorz and Andrea Lissoni suggest, it is important to note that Jonas's work "does not necessarily remain fixed in its first exhibited or staged iteration" but rather "it is open for further transformations and variations", concluding that the "apparent instability" of the work "is one of the great strengths of the artists' oeuvre" (2018, 10). I have shown that Jonas's work is formed by the intersection of the different media, video, painting, narration, drawing, music, performance, objects, and sound that form it. These, interlocked with each other, create strata that entail a palimpsestic

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depth, from which reworked remains from previous works created at different points in time and through different media emerge like archaeological artefacts at a dig. For Lorz and Lissoni, the layers that form Jonas's work are both on and off stage (23) and, in *Moving Off the Land II*, they specifically occur

> as depth of field (that is the movement towards the camera, or fading in and out), while in the installations, spatial transparency and shadow become layering aspects through the use of projections screens. (24)

Here, different strata formed by the wide range of media employed penetrate each other and ultimately, literally, form each other, both culturally and materially. The strata capture the passing of time, and our presence not so much in the now but again over time, in a "long and wide present". Ultimately Jonas's work, as Art Historian Douglas Crimp put it, exists in a state of "desynchronisation" (1999, 8). Her aesthetic is porous, fluid, changing constantly, like life itself. This is what the "long and wide present" asks of us, that we stop obsessing about the 'now', that we desynchronise from our perceived present, and refocus, restart, represence to include the future into the present. It is timely that Jonas's attention has once again be caught in *Moving Off the Land II* by the ocean itself, for, as Gender and Cultural Studies Scholar Astrida Neimanis suggests, thinking with and about water might help us to find a way to "imagine and cultivate a much-needed epistemology of unknowability" (2017, 58). *Moving Off the Land II* does just that, it moves us away from the ground we walk on every day, away from our cultural references and body of knowledge, away from our obsession with the now, to immerse us into a world that is at once ancient and always new to us, our past and hopefully our future, at once forgotten and unknown.

Ultimately, the experience of *Moving Off the Land II* in Ocean Space, an innovative cultural space in which culture is for once used to promote societal change, is in stark contrast to life in Venice, plagued by rising waters, 'over-tourism', Disneyfication. *Moving Off the Land II*, instead, and Ocean Space more broadly, constitute a step towards a turn marking the re-invention of Venice as an international environmental laboratory in which to create new cultural, socio-political and economic practices. These would escape the logic of capitalism and instead promote a new and much more complex cultural and economic eco-systems that would be fully aware of the fact that at the root of the terms economy and ecology is *oikos*, our house, our planet. Thinking of our presence over time, rather than purely in the now, and including in our presence our co-habitation with other species, would help us to inhabit the earth more consciously, aware of the need to create new equilibria and respect other ecosystems.

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Within this process, performance, as Jonas's work shows, is key for it makes it possible for us to experience and so also realise that a different world order is indeed not only possible but also at hand. In this context, looking after the ocean, its space, from Venice, a city built on the rising sea, must be our first priority.

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Bodily Transformations: Goethe and Mann in Venice

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Abstract Using material ecocriticism, this essay considers how Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* and Johann Wolfgang Goethe's *Italian Journey* portray the experience of Venice's watery boundaries as transformative of both one's sense of the body and of body itself. Mann obsessively presents bodies in *Death in Venice*, including the impact of cholera on the body of his protagonist, Aschenbach, and the idealised form of the Polish boy Tadzio; yet his text also eludes portraying Aschenbach's death in any graphic detail. In other words, bodies matter in *Death in Venice* but there appears to be an inappropriate and less bodily gradient for the impact of disease such that the bodies of the workers who succumbed to cholera are portrayed in horrific detail while Aschenbach just quietly falls asleep, transformed visibly only by cosmetics. Goethe, in turn, also embraces both a bodily focus in his Italian writings, and one that similarly looks away from gritty embodiment. His journal depicts more abstract and scientific details of non-human bodies that later shape his writings on botany, optics, and morphology. However, Goethe's text presents a proto-ecological sense of natural bodies immersed in an animated, lively, and disturbing world of water and life, one clearly inspired by his study of the ocean and lagoon in Venice.

Keywords Johann Wolfgang Goethe. Thomas Mann. Venice. Material ecocriticism. Death in Venice.

Summary 1 Introduction: Bodies and the Environment in Goethe's and Mann's Venice Texts. – 2 Mann's *Death in Venice*. – 3 Goethe's *Italian Journey*. – 4 Conclusion.

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1 Introduction: Bodies and the Environment in Goethe's and Mann's Venice Texts

While visiting Venice on the edge of the sea and within the lagoon, the German authors Johann Wolfgang Goethe, in his autobiographical 1816-17 *Italian Journey* describing his trip from 1786-1788, and Thomas Mann, in his fictional yet very personal 1912 *Death in Venice* written after his 1911 visit, document how experiencing the city's fluid boundaries can radically transform both one's sense of the body as well as the body itself. The Italian culture and the Adriatic Mediterranean's hotter climate in Venice connote for the Germans a stereotypically exotic and rather Orientalised otherness of the southern environment. In this essay I will analyse the environmental implications of Mann's and Goethe's various portrayals of transforming bodies, whether by climate, cosmetics, culture, or cholera. Specifically, I will use material ecocriticism's emphasis on the ecological enmeshments of bodies immersed in, and interfacing with, their physical environment in order to assess the bodies described by these authors during their stay in the lagoon city. Both men reveal uneasy responses to the power of their material surroundings in Venice, yet with very different ecological implications as we now understand them. Reconsidering these two older texts in terms of possible environmental relevance reveals significant insights but also deflections away from ecological bodies. Mann obsessively presents bodies in *Death in Venice* including the impact of cholera on the body of his protagonist, Aschenbach, and the youthful form of the young Polish body Tadzio, whose body is the object of desire; yet his text also ends with a kind of gradation of bodily connections to the physical world as if some people were more material and so must suffer more graphically than others. Goethe also embraces a bodily focus in his Italian writings, but one more abstract, scientific, and comprehensible only later in his writings on botany, optics, and morphology that present the full bodily immersion of natural bodies in an animate world while partially deflecting his discussion away from more uncomfortable aspects of human embodiment.

Death in Venice documents brutal bodily transformations through the story of Gustav Aschenbach's fatal vacation in Venice. The exotic setting and growing desire for the young Polish boy Tadzio produce a profound reorientation of his aesthetic and philosophical principles gradually resulting in physical changes when he uses cosmetics to attempt self-transformation. Cosmetics for men have been popularised by the recent US president famed for his bronzing makeup, copious hair spray, and other body-altering tactics, yet their role in *Death in Venice* is closely associated with a loss of boundaries or morals, revelry in Nietzschean and/or ancient Greek philosophies of love, disease, and eventual death. Revised philosophies and cosmetic enhancement

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are just the first steps of Aschenbach's path to full transformation which is ultimately brought about by cholera. He experiences the terrors of disease-induced bodily transformations even though the novella carefully avoids attributing to its protagonist the distasteful reality of cholera such as its typically extreme diarrhea and vomiting. Other victims are not so lucky, and there is a long paragraph in the form of report graphically describing the horrific course of the "plague" as it spreads across lands and killing 80% of those who are infected, leaving "emaciated, blackened corpses" in its wake (Mann 1963, 64). It is thus noteworthy that Aschenbach's demise occurs atypically for cholera: the great scholar just falls quietly into repose, avoiding all such bodily ugliness while staring off at the sea and his beloved Tadzio, for whom he has donned the cosmetics. While bodies transform in *Death in Venice*, Mann presents a scale of physicality that is rather problematic in ecological terms since it assumes that some bodies are, in more contemporary terms, more closely related to the raw physicality of ecological life than others.

For Goethe, in contrast, Venice's watery world causes minor unease and consternation regarding life on the lagoon, which is in constant motion, but does not bring bodily harm or a quest for body cosmetics; instead, it helps inspire his developing scientific vision of the entire natural world as fluidly active metamorphological processes. Indeed, Goethe's *Italian Journey* includes copious comments on the natural bodies he experiences including plants and his quest for the *Urpflanze*, rocks, sea creatures, and natural and artistic forms that inform his later well-known scientific texts on, for example, botany (*The Metamorphosis of Plants*, 1790), optics (*Theory of Color*, 1810), and his many morphological texts (he, in fact, coined the term "morphology"). His experience on the island of Lido with its crabs and limpets running in and out of the high and low tides produces a sense of instability and flux that results in the further development of his enthusiastic theory about nature's ongoing processes.[1] For Goethe, natural bodies are fully physical, although he presents human bodies primarily in a rather gentle relationship with their surroundings. Arthur Zajonc explains: "For Goethe, the world is no mere surface reality but a living cosmos that we can gradually learn to see if only we do not abandon a 'gentle empiricism'" (Zajonc 1998, 27). Goethe's inspirations about nature's flux and ongoing transformations through the watery encounters detailed in his *Italian Journey* express this gentle empiricism and not surprisingly avoid the graphic horrors of Mann's text. On the one hand, I claim, Goethe provides much more ecologically relevant information in terms of contemporary scientific knowledge, but, on the other, he also tends to deflect our gaze away from

1 For new insights on snails as living figures in Goethe's work, see Nagel 2020.

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particularly gritty aspects of the human bodies' participation in these processes and towards the glorious vibrancy of nature.

Despite the wealth of scholarly studies on Goethe's *Italian Journey* and especially on Mann's *Death and Venice*, there are still relatively few ecocritical analyses overall, much less studies considering how either text portrays the transformation of concrete bodies participating in the physical world. Yet the work done by Serenella Iovino in her essays on material ecocriticism and her 2016 book, *Ecocriticism and Italy: Ecology, Resistance, and Liberation*, is a noteworthy exception. She looks at both Goethe's text on Italy and Mann's Venice texts through the lens of material ecocriticism, highlighting the authors' bodily experiences in the lagoon city. Iovino reads *Death in Venice* specifically in terms of bodies, writing:

> The points that principally draw our attention, however, are two: first, the fact that Mann's novel is a story about bodies, whose macro-category is Venice's body itself as a hybrid and collective organism; second, the fact that *Death in Venice* is also the story of how discursive falsifications of Venice's bodily texts generate forms of cognitive injustice, culminating in death. (Iovino 2016, 64-5)

She elaborates on the bodily themes:

> Venice's body is indeed Aschenbach's body, an elegant but also aging, decaying, unquiet, embellished body – a dirty, sweating, sublimely dying artist's body. But Venice's body is also Tadzio's body, an ineffably beautiful young body in which, however, the germ of decay resides for the very fact that this is a living body, a biologically determined matter. (65)

Thus, Iovino brings our attention to the prominent themes of bodily existence in both texts and connects them to the political deceptions so frequent when addressing questions of power, wealth, and bodily health or death.[2] I build on her analysis here to consider how much of the focus on transforming bodies in Mann's and Goethe's Venice texts reflects a sense of ecological immersion and engagement, and in what forms.

2 See also Iovino's 2013 essay on Mediterranean Ecocriticism for additional comments on Mann in Venice.

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2 Mann's *Death in Venice*

Goethe, of course, famously collected large numbers of geological and botanical samples and theorised about the history of the Earth and of the metamorphosis of plants during his Italian travels. He was very attuned to bodies in Italy, human and otherwise. And he responds directly to the physicality of Venice, which is the frame for our discussion as a specific environment unto itself that impacts bodies even if he wavers on corporeal details. Mann is a different case. Indeed, debates rage whether one can read Mann's *Death in Venice* in terms of actual bodies or only metaphorical ones. While Mann's many tomes have inspired libraries full of discussions regarding their national, social, psychoanalytical, mythological, literary, and philosophical topics, or, with specific reference to his Venice novella, how it embodies Modernism, Decadence, pedophilic love, the life of artists, and the question of form (among other topics), one does not find many ecocritical analyses of *Death of Venice* other than Iovino's. Nevertheless, several essays that take on the discourse of disease in *Death in Venice* are helpful for our discussion. Let us consider two exemplary readings that represent the spectrum of those who pay more attention to the cholera theme directly. First is Thomas Rütten's 2009 essay on "Cholera in Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*", which presents the text not only as another example of Mann's well-documented cultural analysis of Nietzsche, Greek philosophy, or of the German bourgeoisie but also as a specific study of the 1911 outbreak of cholera in Venice that Mann himself witnessed. Rütten seems to think it is necessary to justify reading the text with any literal understanding, noting:

> It may come as a bit of a surprise that, in view of the abundance and general lucidity of the existing critical commentary on *Death in Venice*, very little, or, as in some cases, no attention whatsoever has been paid to a whole host of autobiographical and contemporary events that yet inform the novella in fundamental ways. (Rütten 2009, 258)

Furthermore, he notes that analyses of cholera tend to see it as a symbol, psychoanalytical motif, or mythological theme. Otherwise, he notes,

> cholera is referred to as a metaphor for the monstrous rebound effect of colonial ideology or as an intertextual reference to the lives and works of Platen and Flaubert, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, Tschaikovsky and Winckelmann, Turgenjew and Feuerbach. (258)

Coming to his own discussion and careful documentation of Mann's time in Venice during the 1911 outbreak of cholera, Rütten offers a

brief but historically documented description of the events in Venice relevant to the details of the novella. He notes:

> Only occasionally do we find a reference to cholera as a real and historically verifiable event that Thomas Mann himself witnessed, endured (at least retrospectively) and finally worked through intellectually. (258)

Less analysis than description that includes copies of the actual guest lists from Brioni Island where the Manns are named, original handwritten charts on the mortality rate of cholera in 1911 in Venice, and pages out of the sketchbook of the famous Dr. Koch who worked in Venice on hygiene issues and malaria, Rütten's article nevertheless sets up the debate of whether to read cholera in *Death in Venice* as, well, cholera, a force that brings involuntary bodily transformations.

Amrita Ghosh takes on and critiques Rütten's claims directly in her 2017 article, "The Horror of Contact: Understanding Cholera in Mann's *Death in Venice*", looking at how the novella uses the 1911 outbreak of cholera in Italy as a metaphor enabling colonial discourse reminding the reader of the danger of contact zones between cultures. Ghosh begins with Rütten's documentation:

> As Rütten explains, Mann and his wife, Katia, left for Venice on 7th May 1911; he then charts the textual chronology and compares to a more specific historical chronology that coincides with Mann and his wife's journey into Venice. Mann and his wife stayed at the island of Brioni on 9th May 1911, a place that also forms the transition island for the protagonist Gustav von Aschenbach before he arrives in Venice. The island of Brioni was supervised by Dr. Robert Koch, a famous pathogen expert, who was extensively known in the West and the East for his work on sanitization and contagious diseases. (Ghosh 2017, 2)

Ghosh agrees that the disease and historical context of the Manns' visit is relevant, yet then asks:

> Certainly, the historical verisimilitude is important for the medical history of transmission of cholera, and how Italy responded in order to control the disease, yet the larger question that is worthwhile to raise is – what is at stake in such a charting of the historical trajectory of the 1911 cholera outbreak through the *Death in Venice*? (3)

Ghosh reads cholera through a postcolonial lens, seeing Dr. Koch's problematic influence on the fear of the 'East' fuelled by the fact that the outbreak of cholera came from India. Indeed, Mann specifies in

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his novella that this is an eastern strain from India that infects Venice during Aschenbach's fateful visit.

Citing Susan Sontag's study on disease as a metaphor, Ghosh justifiably critiques Mann's descriptions and Orientalism associated with both India, the "unfit wasteland", as Aschenbach says, and the exotic, red-headed figure who inspires Aschenbach to head south at the very beginning of the novella while he is back in Munich.

This is the only time that the novella pronounces the Asiatic cholera germinating from India, the 'unfit wasteland' – 'a wilderness' that is to be avoided and a spectre that is waiting to take over Europe. The hostility of the tropical environment is evident here, and interestingly enough, a crouching tiger hiding in bamboo thickets is even mentioned, completing the orientalist vision marking the unstable, dangerous tropics (Ghosh 2017, 4).

Her argument about the hostility towards India and the tropics that carries over into Aschenbach's experience in Venice is compelling, and helps contextualise historically the similarly framed racist arguments surrounding COVID-19 and its 'Asian origins argued with fervour and associated with violence in the United States and elsewhere over the past year, 2020-21. Ghosh concludes that

> At best, Mann's text posits the age old imperial fear of colonized and colonizer coming in any contact, and at worst, the text presents a deep rooted anxiety of contamination – 'a horror of diversity' that Aschenbach first notes when talking about the imagined space of India and disease. (Ghosh 2017, 9)

She precisely documents prejudices held by European doctors regarding diseases and practices from the East and Africa with much relevance for Mann's portrayal of the path of cholera. Ghosh concludes, in reference to Rütten, that Mann can still be acknowledged as a "meticulous chronicler of facts" and that the novella has the cholera epidemic as a "historical backdrop of the text" (9). As Ghosh's essay demonstrates, Mann's careful presentation of Venice's 1911 outbreak is framed and skewed by his colonial perspective on the 'Asian' origins of the disease; such an insightful reading reveals Mann's troubling embrace of the ecological body as primarily a cultural or geographical entity.

And yet, Venice nevertheless functions as the site where bodies reassert themselves even if oddly in *Death in Venice*. Before his trip to Venice, Aschenbach was driven, contained, and disciplined. However, despite his life-long focus on form and writerly process, all it took to distract him was an encounter one day on his daily walk in Munich when he spotted a strange red-headed man and is overcome with wanderlust for exotic, tropical, sexualised scenery. It hits him in full vegetal glory:

> with such suddenness and passion as to resemble a seizure, almost a hallucination. Desire projected itself visually: his fancy, not quite lulled since morning, imaged the marvels and terrors of the manifold earth. He saw. He beheld a landscape, a tropical marshland, beneath a reeking sky, steaming, monstrous, rank – a kind of primeval wilderness-world of islands, morasses, and alluvial channels. Hairy palm-trunks rose near and far out of lush brakes of fern, out of bottoms of crass vegetation, fat, swollen, thick with incredible bloom. (Mann 1963, 5)

Note the strange vision of plants as sexualised, phallic bodies whose crassness is to be hairy and "fat, swollen, thick", filling morasses and alluvial channels. Vegetal bodies stand in for Aschenbach's mythologized, exotic, and Orientalist vision of travelling. Like the hairy palm trucks rising out of the ferns, the body rises in this opening scene of the novella.

Additionally, the relevance of the fourteen-year-old Polish boy Tadzio's youthful body for Aschenbach in *Death in Venice* has received much attention, particularly after the revelations in Mann's personal writings on his own pederastic feelings. Also frequently noted is that Mann's protagonist is physically and emotionally transformed due to his experiences in Venice where the supposedly formless sea radically alters his sense of bodily boundaries. The beach of Lido is a contact zone for him, one of desire, bodily reshaping, and bacterial penetration that finally lead to his dissolution and demise. The older German scholar is transformed bodily (with the magic of the hairdresser, cosmetics, and eventually cholera) and aesthetically (with his turn away from writing and towards languid mornings staring at bathing adolescents and then chasing Tadzio through the Venetian canals). Famously abandoning his pedantic and military diligence, Aschenbach opens his horizons to the beauty of Tadzio who stands before the endless seascape of the Adriatic Mediterranean. Tadzio is for Aschenbach the ultimate form – but bodily form, now: "his face recalled the noblest moment of Greek sculpture" (Mann 1963, 25); that is, he is an artistic object who stands framed against the infinite openness and chaos of the sea. Aschenbach also experiences his first beach view of Tadzio while contemplating the sea as a void, the "unorganized, the immeasurable, the eternal" (31), that is interrupted, "cut by a human form", who, when later emerging from the water, is a "living figure, virginally pure and austere, with dripping locks, beautiful as a tender young god, emerging from the depths of the sea and sky, outrunning the element", like the vision of "a primeval legend, handed down from the beginning of time, of the birth of form" (33). As a body, Tadzio fundamentally exists as an object of idealised desire, whereas Aschenbach returns – or is brought to – the harshness of embodiment by experiencing the world of Venice's marine environment and the delightful sight of Tadzio.

The end of the novella presents most clearly the paradoxical aspects of bodies in *Death and Venice* when the readers witness Aschenbach's infection with, and death from, cholera. Having become obsessed with Tadzio as the seeming embodiment of physical perfection, he spends his days gazing at the youth while on the beach, in the hotel restaurant, and then even in the streets of Venice as he secretly trails behind the family. On a particularly sweltering day during his pursuit, his hot desires and fast pace bring thirst, leading him to consume fresh, overripe strawberries that potentially are the source of his demise. Enraptured, he is overcome by heat:

> His head burned, his body was wet with clammy sweat, he was plagued by intolerable thirst. He looked about for refreshment, of whatever sort, and found a little fruit-shop where he bought some strawberries. They were overripe and soft; he ate them as he went. (71)

The bodily danger, of course, is not just deflecting his homoerotic desires for the boy, but rather the cholera sweeping through the city upon winds from the fantasised and colonially perceived "East".

> For the past several years Asiatic cholera had shown a strong tendency to spread. Its source was the hot, moist swamps of the delta of the Ganges, where it bred in the mephitic air of that primeval island-jungle. (3)

Here, as Aschenbach learns more from quiet conversations about the spread of disease, unspeakable death arrives in Italy via a long route from the East to the Mediterranean.

> But in May, the horrible vibrions were found on the same day in two bodies: the emaciated, blackened corpses of a bargee and a woman who kept a green-grocer's shop. Both cases were hushed up. (64)

Food is believed to be contaminated and the plague rages into Venice even as officials still deny its presence. Mann includes full details of the strains and the virility of their power:

> Yes, the disease seemed to flourish and wax strong, to redouble its generative powers. Recoveries were rare. Eight out of every hundred died, and horribly, for the onslaught was of the extremest violence, and not infrequently of the 'dry' type, the most malignant form of the contagion. In this form the victims' body loses power to expel the water secreted by the blood-vessels, it shrivels up, he passes with hoarse cries from convulsion to convulsion, his blood grows thick like pitch, and he suffocates in a few hours. (64)

The paragraph goes on to state that some, however, the fortunate ones, just have a slight malaise, fall into unconsciousness, and never wake up. This is the case for our aging non-hero, Aschenbach, in his passing at the end of the novella. His final philosophical ponderings come as he sits with his "rouged and flabby mouth", having an internal dialogue with Phaedrus, the beloved of Socrates (72). Mann then allows Aschenbach to fade away, with no convulsions or other actual cholera symptoms like vomiting and diarrhoea, mentioning only: "[h]e was not feeling well and had to struggle against spells of giddiness only half physical in their nature" (73). Thus, Aschenbach becomes ever more bodily present in the novella but never achieves the level of the gruesomely blackened corpses of others.

Indeed, he has a surprisingly peaceful death. On his final morning, Aschenbach walks to the beach, aware of his indisposition and the imminent departure of the Polish family, only to witness, to his dismay, the beautiful Tadzio be bullied. The last thing that he sees as he sits dying is Tadzio standing out on a sandbar in the sea, much as he was on the very first day. Mann's descriptions of Tadzio shows his stance on the sandbar as a contrast of perfect form juxtaposed with absolute formlessness: "[h]e paced there, divided by an expanse of water from the shore, […] a remote and isolated figure, with floating locks, out there in sea and wind, against the misty inane" (74). The juxtaposition of the young boy's body and the sea inspires Aschenbach to feel seen and even invited to join the boy, but this vision is actually his death. What we do not see directly, just hear about in the hushed report from the one honest official who warns Aschenbach to leave, is the reality of a cholera outbreak and the extended bodily suffering of an individual infection. Bodies in Mann's *Death in Venice* can be youthful and desirable, horrifically physical with graphic deaths, or old and cosmetically altered, yet the only choleric horrors we see directly are of unknown victims. Death and passion in full bodily experiences are present but primarily in dreams, reports, and internal dialogues. Mann presents yet skews the overtly bodily stories in his Venice novella. Ecologically speaking, *Death in Venice* offers strong historical context and a solid focus on bodies, yet it also shies away from embodiment just as it appears to document its greatest challenges.

3 Goethe's *Italian Journey*

In contrast to Mann, Goethe's proto-ecological views are fully immersive for bodies though his emphasis trends much more towards generalised 'nature'. His autobiographical writing on his first trip through Italy describes at great length and in lavish detail his surroundings, whether artworks, plays, people, the city layout, or the

plants, rocks, water, and animals. One could speak of all of these living and non-living things as traditional objects, passively viewed by an active subject, yet Goethe already was beginning to see the world around him in terms of interrelated active forces in flux that change with our perception. He sees Venice primarily as a disturbing yet art-rich swamp in his *Italian Journey*; that is, as a fluctuating zone of water and land shaped by tides, shifting grounds, and the built environment. Having fled Germany after the mine in Ilmenau, which he oversaw as a minister in Weimar, flooded yet again, he appears troubled by the water's endless acts (one can also view the final "putrid swamp" in Act V of *Faust* II as another example of his frequent references to water's troubling powers). Goethe's *Italian Journey* specifically describes how "ancient nature" and the human together have shaped Venice and how it is still a site of ongoing change:

> The lagoons are an effect of ancient nature. First low then high tide and earth work against each other, then the gradual sinking of the original waters were the cause for an impressive stretch of swamp emerging on the upper end of the Adriatic Ocean. This stretch is covered by the high tide and exposed in the low. Art [human artifice] had conquered the highest positions, and thus Venice exists surrounded by hundreds of islands grouped together and surrounded by hundreds of others. At the same time, they expended unbelievable efforts and costs in order to excavate deep channels in the swamp so that one can also have access to the main ports with warships even during low tide. (Goethe 1982, 91)[3]

Water, land, tides, and human labour interact in shaping and transforming this fluid area and city. The world in Goethe's description changes with the actions of both human and nonhuman agents. Venice is thus a geophysical set of processes that are quite literally shifting daily with the tides, and entering this realm brings transformation to the visitors. In Goethe's texts, the waves act on the sandbars and architectural features, as do the human residents who shape the buildings, islands, and sandbars for their own uses, and as do the crabs and limpets that so delight Goethe.

Regarding the *Italian Journey* and the many material things described there, scholars like Astrida Orle Tantillo, Achim Aurnhammer and Thomas O. Beebee read the autobiographical work as an exemplary text of Weimar classicism and the entrance into a new phase where Goethe shifts to a more 'objective tone'. Aurnhammer writes that

3 All translations of Goethe 1982 are by the Author.

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> Goethe de-subjectivises sentimental travel [accounts] in that he enriches it through the distancing elements of informational travel. […] In this way, he objectivises his poetic consecration and so creates for himself classicism. (Aurnhammer 2003, 83)

Beebee similarly argues that Goethe emphasises the "real as opposed to the fantastic" (2002, 337); and claims that "[d]espite its high degree of self-reflexivity, the *Italienische Reise* emphasizes exact observation rather than inspiration" (337). Indeed, the text is filled with detailed observations, though one might note that observation and inspiration are not necessarily disconnected, particularly for those who work on Goethe's science. One of Goethe's main considerations in most of his scientific and philosophical writings, I claim, is learning how to see, or how to observe without imposing yourself onto the observed and yet still perceiving the underlying patterns to which one must be open.[4] Perhaps we might call it 'inspired observation'. Goethe's *Theory of Colour* directly addresses, in fact, how there is an entire category of colours that occur due to the interaction of light with objects and our brain; he labels these "colours that belong to the eye" rather than the objects themselves. Goethe's vision of objects is thus not a supposedly objective gaze of a neutral scientist observer but rather a reciprocal sense of interactions. Bodies are co-constitutive and constantly undergoing transformations. Already in Goethe's *Italian Journey*, we can see such active morphological ideas as Tantillo's 2002 book, *The Will to Create: Goethe's Philosophy of Nature*, demonstrates. Tantillo describes how his time in Italy directly influences the development of such scientific concepts such as polarity and *Steigerung* describing how natural elements and bodies engage in shifting evolutions into new forms. Human perception plays a significant role in these engagements, but Goethe focuses more on seeing and creative alignment with nature than extreme bodily situations.

Nevertheless, the *Italian Journey* demonstrates that Goethe's experience of the sea places human bodies alongside natural forces as both seek to shape the watery city of Venice. For Goethe, the combination of the rich marine ecology and the complex cultural and artistic experiences that make up his version of Venice emerges in his writing as a threatening swamp created by diverse power struggles. The city is an embodiment of battles among human and non-human forces:

> This folk did not flee to these islands for pleasure; it was not random chance that drove them to unite themselves with the islands. It was necessity that drove them to seek security in the least favoura-

4 See my essays on his optics, Sullivan 2008 and 2009.

> ble circumstances that later became so advantageous for them and made them clever while the entire northern world remained in the dark […]. The buildings were crammed ever more closely together; sand and swamp were replaced by cliffs, and the houses sought the air, like trees. (Goethe 1982, 67)

The city grew out of the land like trees toward the sky, driven by need and struggles rather than artistic impulse. It is a battle zone of competition where houses expand like organic life striving upwards for air.

The water, on the other hand, flows day in and day out exposing one to the open view of the vast sea and the tiny scurrying creatures revealed at low tide. When Goethe rides out to Lido, the sandbar surrounded by lagoons, he hears the tides and sees the sea up close for the first time.

> I heard a stark noise; it was the ocean, and I soon saw it. It went high against the shore, and then it pulled back at midday, time of low tide. Thus I have also seen with my own eyes the ocean and I went onto the lovely threshing floor that it left behind, following the water. (89)

He is delighted with this sweeping view and enthusiastically describes his day on Lido, the very beach also experienced not coincidentally by Mann's Aschenbach. Goethe revels in the sea creatures he views, and especially in the business of selling sea snails. He writes over two pages about his experience with the lively bodies of crabs, limpets, and mussels.

His stay in Venice is brief, however. The direct experience of the sea fascinates him, but also, in certain regards, disturbs him profoundly. In Venice, Goethe declares, "[i]f only they kept their city cleaner!" (92). Still, he enjoys and clearly profits from visiting the many architectural delights, attending plays, and riding out to Lido to walk along the sea and the sandbanks. The one absolutely unique experience of Venice for him is, in fact, seeing the sea. His first view is from the tower of St. Mark's on 30 September 1786. He makes the climb twice: once at low and once at high tide.

> It looks strange to see all around the land appearing where earlier there was water. The islands are no longer islands, but only elevated and built on spots of a great gray-green marsh ridden through with nice canals. (92-3)

The sea inscribes itself on his consciousness as much as human craft has inscribed the shape of the canals, but Goethe is also unnerved by its flows and the griminess of the water-urban coalition.

Inspired and troubled by Venice, Goethe departs rather preemptively after only about three weeks. He expresses a joyful celebration of the return to solid ground exemplified for him by the exploration of minerals and mountains and the chance to add to his rock collection.

> This beautiful day I spent entirely under the open sky. I had hardly approached the mountains, and I was already drawn in again by the rocks. I seemed to myself like Anthaeus, who was continually strengthened anew, the more powerfully one brought him into contact with mother earth. (109-10)

Referring to Anthaeus, Goethe ascribes to himself the power derived from contact to "mother earth" or back among the solid rocks and in the mountains after the unsettling sands, sea, and agentic swamp. He notes a need to escape from the fluidity back to his solid "gardens and possessions", back to the clarity of the mountains, and back onto his road trip to Rome, which is, in his terms, the centre of the world. For ecocriticism, this discomfort provides an access point for viewing nature-culture as integrated yet strained boundaries. The sea reveals to Goethe a profound and yet uncomfortable sense of being part of the 'world' whose boundaries flow like tides. His observations of the city and its geographies reveal him primarily as a viewer instead of part of the forces acting on the city. It is important, however, to note that this perspective is not so much the 'objective', scientific subject who sees and describes the world as passive matter from a distance, but rather that Goethe draws in active earthly forces that continually shape the world and which he desires to grasp most precisely in relation to human creativity. In other words, he aligns the artist's creative projects with the physical manifestation of natural creations.

Though he is troubled by the watery city, he later declares that we only have an accurate concept of the world when seeing the ocean surrounding us from all sides. "If one hasn't seen oneself fully surrounded by the ocean, then one has no concept of the world and one's relationship to the world" (Goethe 1982, 230-1). The ocean gives him a profound sense of relationship to the rest of the world, yet swamps typically function in his literature as a sign of uncomfortable nature-culture always on the edge of becoming fully uncontained, a sign of combined ecological and anthropogenic impacts written as cultural development engaging with incessant floods, ever reemerging mud, and edible snails surrounded by incredible art and architecture. On the other hand, spending time in this space of shifting nature-culture forces and ongoing transformation inspires Goethe's scientific works. I suggest that his theories of metamorphosis and of nature as a realm in motion are influenced by the fluid and changing world he saw in his travels, especially in Venice, which also apparently influenced him to focus on delineating transformation as a capacity of

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the physical world. Human beings also transform through *Bildung* and through exposure to nature's forms, albeit less brutally than, say, in Mann's text.

4 Conclusion

This ecocritical reading of Mann and Goethe in Venice documents the German encounters with transformative experiences of human and non-human agencies (desire and cholera, artists, crabs, and limpets), and with absurdly Orientalist German fantasies of a Southern Other (while still in Europe) that they adore or flee. In these contrasts, a picture of Venice emerges that demonstrates it can be advantageous to step out of the familiar into an unfamiliar geography of practices in order to feel and see what is so often overlooked: that we are imbricated in a world of mattering whose stories interweave with ours in discursive and physical signs, bodies, and contact zones. Damaging that world or altering it alters us, too. A walk in the swamp at the beach can bring awareness of the hybrid and active exchanges between our own bodies and ecologies of all forms and scales. But it can also be profoundly disturbing, as Goethe and Mann demonstrate. Finally, in a manner similar to science fiction's 'cognitive estrangement' that transforms the mundane into a new strangeness, the German experience of Venice and the Mediterranean alters their self-identities and in, Goethe's words, their "relations to the world". Goethe sees these relations as being part of creative processes, though his *Italienische Reise* locates the bodily aspects primarily in the active, material environment. Mann similarly sees the relations to the world also in terms of the artistic endeavour yet his intellectual insights come, in contrast to Goethe, along with cosmetics and deadly bodily transformations. Venice, for Goethe and Mann, reveals the land, sea, and art to be active processes in a living world. Mann simultaneously takes the active, creative world into abstract philosophical discourse and also portrays the fully physical embrace of porous bodies, at least for some. In other words, Mann appears to have a rather non-ecological hierarchy of bodily existence whereas Goethe's scientific insights from Italy are intensely ecological if somewhat softened.

Thinking ecologically, I read both Goethe's and Mann's responses to Venice and their very different depictions of bodily transformations in terms of what I call a 'skewed reciprocity'. Reciprocity refers to the fact that all living bodies participate in reciprocal exchanges of energy, matter, and information when breathing, eating, excreting, and perceiving or interpreting their physical surroundings. Plants, for example, absorb carbon dioxide while releasing oxygen, while animals respire in the exact opposite chemical reaction, using oxygen and producing carbon dioxide; indeed, as we know from ecology, all

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living bodies are enmeshed in shared systems of exchanges. Furthermore, living things must perceive and respond to their surroundings whether growing towards light or seeking food. These interactions of living bodies can, however, be skewed by either physical changes or discursive and semiotic systems. The physical changes skewing ecological systems include a wide range of shifts such as movements of species, changes in populations, climate factors, geological disruptions, and disease, but also anthropogenic deforestation, pollution, development, and resource extraction. In fact, I would say that most industrial cultures exist in an ongoing state of deliberately skewed reciprocity such that the living world is treated as if it were merely a heap of resources perceived, rather magically, to be unlimited. Along with the harsh materiality of skewed reciprocity exist examples of perceived bodily differences by individuals or even entire communities, that is, we can speak also of ‘a sense of skewed reciprocity’, which can include a feeling of being disconnected, bodily alienated from the physical surroundings, or even a belief that human bodies and subjectivity are not a part of ecological reciprocity at all. Travel to new lands, as we see in Mann and Goethe, issues with bodily identity, and the view that humanity has successfully used technology (or religion) to escape from ‘natural’ systems, to mention a few examples, can all create a sense of skewed reciprocity, which in turn, can impact practices resulting in additional physical impacts. Indeed, discursive practices such as the denial of disease in Mann’s *Death in Venice* and in the contemporary case of COVID-19, exemplify the reality of how discourse can further harm bodies, lived and imagined. Mann and Goethe display various degrees of deflection and concurrence with ecological reciprocity but also very familiar aspects of how easily skewed ideas of human bodies come into play.

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If Venice Dies: A Reading from the Perspective of Environmental Humanities
Interview with Salvatore Settis

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Salvatore Settis is Professor Emeritus of the Scuola Normale Superiore of Pisa after having been a professor of history of art and archaeology. He directed the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles from 1994 to 1999 and the Normale from 1999 to 2010. He was president of the High Council of Cultural Heritage from 2007 to 2009 and since 2010 he has chaired the Scientific Council of the Louvre Museum in Paris.

He has written numerous essays including *Futuro del classico* (Einaudi, 2004), *Paesaggio Costituzione cemento. La battaglia per l'ambiente contro il degrado civile* (Einaudi, 2010), *Azione popolare. Cittadini per il bene comune* (Einaudi, 2012) and his latest volume *Incursioni. Arte contemporanea e tradizione* (Feltrinelli, 2020).

This interview starts from one of Salvatore Settis' best-known texts, *Se Venezia muore* (Einaudi, 2014),[1] taking one of the many possible angles of analysis offered by this book, that of Environmen-

1 *Se Venezia muore* has been translated in English, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese and Chinese. There are three editions in English: *If Venice Dies*. New York: New Vessel Press, 2016; Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2016; London: Pallas Athene, 2018.

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tal Humanities, understood as a precise multidisciplinary context of studies that has methodologically and theoretically been defining itself in recent years.[2]

The interview combines the content and topic of Settis' book, the stimuli that come from the public debate on Venice and its environment and the analysis perspectives coming from Environmental Humanities. It starts with a question on a theme tackled by literature, and by the arts in general, that is the death in/of Venice. *Death in Venice* by Thomas Mann (1912) and the Futurists' hope of Venice's death (1910) appeared when the city still expressed a living memory of its past but, reread today, they sound like sad omens. The second question starts out from one of the key concepts introduced by the ecological question in the critique of modernity, namely the concept of limit. The idea of the finiteness of the Earth and nature was introduced in 1972 with the publication of the report *The Limits to Growth*, commissioned by the Club of Rome and which became the basis of Donald Worster's latest book, one of the founders of environmental history, entitled *Shrinking the Earth: The Rise and Decline of American Abundance* (Oxford University Press, 2016). The third question reflects on one of the current cruxes of territorial development in recent years: Venice shares with other Italian and foreign cities – I am thinking of Florence and Istanbul – and with other rural areas – above all the Val di Susa – the great pressure with which infrastructure puts socially and ecologically fragile territories at risk. The fourth question is inspired by the text of Piero Bevilaqua *Venezia e le acque. Una metafora planetaria* (Donzelli, 1998) and considers Venice as a powerful metaphorical device and a model on which to measure urban phenomena. If the conversation begins with death, it ends more positively with a line about the future of Venice.

Roberta Biasillo Around the 1910s, the destroyed bell tower of San Marco was restored to where it was and how it was. In those years Venice was a model for the design of modern American cities. From the years of Fascism, however, Venice begins to die, that is, it begins to see its memory disavowed and starts to follow a modernisation far from its genetic heritage. What are the stages of the death of Venice in our age and why does death in Venice today capture a reality rather than recalling a literary quotation?
Salvatore Settis The agony that Venice lives can be seen not in literature but in the registry office. In the last fifty years the Lagoon

2 For a definition of Environmental Humanities and a methodological and theoretical introduction see Emmett, R.S.; Nye, D. (2017). *The Environmental Humanities. A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge (MA): MIT Press. A chapter is dedicated to Venice in Iovino, S. (2016). *Ecocriticism and Italy: Ecology, Resistance, and Liberation*. London: Bloomsbury.

city has lost two thirds of its population, and the few survivors (only 50,000 inhabitants) not only decrease with each passing day, but are often dedicated to activities in support of the devastating mass tourism which is one of the destructive forces of the historic city, of its transformation into a kind of sad Disneyland.

Roberta Biasillo In the case of Venice, the descending parable that you retrace occurs due to the cancellation, or the attempted cancellation, of two limits, the *forma urbis* on the one hand and the regulatory constraints on the other. Can you explain how the erosion of the *forma urbis* and of the landscape and environmental protection regulations has created a rift between the historic city and the contemporary city?
Salvatore Settis We should speak of 'limits' in Venice, above all, to make it clear that the city coexists with the Lagoon in a bio-ecosystem where nature and culture do not overlap, but are identified as one thanks to a centuries-old history. Only by forgetting this can we explain the foolish tendency to consider the Lagoon as a sort of useless appendage of the tourist city, and the plans to dig new canals to allow the passage of large ships to Marghera. A bad idea that has been touted as the awareness of a limit, and is instead its violation, dictated by ignorance or arrogance.

Roberta Biasillo The justifications given to projects of port and road development and of tide protection are always about breaking the isolation, of connecting Venice to who-knows-what novelty and of increasing circulation and profits. When and how has the role and perception of water changed in relation to the development of infrastructure in Venice?
Salvatore Settis I know too little about it, but I have the impression that it was a slow process, which began with the fall of the Serenissima. The ancient Republic had developed an extremely sophisticated culture of coexistence between urban structures and the Lagoon, between the Lagoon city and the mainland. Venice was then the centre of a small but very prosperous, cultured and civilised state. From one day to the next it became a periphery, first of the Hapsburg Empire, then of Italy. And the uniqueness of its problems, observed from Vienna or Rome, gradually began to blur. But it is certain that in recent decades this process, under the pressure of a plundering tourism, has exceeded (and by a lot) the alert level.

Roberta Biasillo Even *Se Venezia muore* starts from this assumption and transforms it into a method of writing and reading. Venice, the Lagoon city par excellence, was able to rise, for better or for worse, through the celebration of its uniqueness and through the reproducibility of some symbolic elements, a synthesis and antithesis of the

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idea of a city on a global level. Can you tell us what elements and considerations led you to this idea of Venice? Also, why is it, for you, a key to interpreting different places?
Salvatore Settis In Venice, the characteristics of the historic city stand out with exceptional intensity due to an absence, that of car traffic, to which cities around the world have been and are enslaved. Walls demolished, rings and motorway junctions that pass alongside or even over historic districts, and so on: all this has not (yet?) happened in Venice, and its forced pedestrianization is one of the reasons for its incomparable charm. Therefore Venice is particularly suited to represent the otherness of the historic city with respect to the most current model of urban development. It lends itself to a question we should ask ourselves: would we want it as it is, or with a subway dug under the Lagoon? (and I'm not joking – this proposal has been put forward repeatedly).

Roberta Biasillo There is an expression that struck me towards the end of your book in which you insist on the need to "think Venice" (p. 150). And also in the recent interview "L'arte è una macchina per pensare" given to Antonio Gnoli for *Robinson - la Repubblica* (1 April 2021), you reiterate the importance of thinking. What does it mean to "think Venice" and what is the task of those who observe and those who live in Venice to save Venice from death, and with Venice, the very idea of the city?
Salvatore Settis I use the word 'thinking' in the most literal sense. I am increasingly convinced that it is necessary to stop and reflect, to question ourselves on the customs we practice, the clichés we help to keep alive, the social hierarchies and the injustices that surround us, and which we no longer even notice. The symphony of human history is, after all, a continuous bass on which, from time to time, the voices and sounds of those who have 'thought' are grafted against the grain, and therefore have something to say (which does not mean they will necessarily win, however). To put it another way, 'thinking' is throwing a stone into the quagmire. Or in the Lagoon.

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