

Max Rynnänen

LEARNING FROM VENICE

What a unique city can teach about the aesthetic

Department of Aesthetics
University of Helsinki , Finland

M a x R y y n ä n e n

Learning from Venice
What a Unique City Can Teach about the Aesthetic

Academic dissertation to be publicly discussed,
by due permission of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Helsinki
in auditorium XII, on the 5th of October, 2009 at 12 o'clock.

For Helsinki

Max Rynnänen

LEARNING FROM VENICE

What a unique city can teach about the aesthetic

© Max Ryynänen

ISBN 978-952-10-5741-0

Ulvilan Painotuote Oy 2009

Foreword	1
Introduction	9
1. An Aesthetic History	33
2. The Arrival and the Welcoming Façade	55
3. Surface and Depth	71
4. Walking	94
5. Water and Traffic	117
6. Museum, and Theme Park	145
7. Worlds of Art	159
8. Venice as Kitsch	179
9. Traffic, Mobility, Aura	206
10. Oscillations	224
Bibliography	234

Foreword

“I left my heart in San Francisco. Will I ever get it back again?” Gunnar Olsson begins an article on “Places of Desire.”¹

I left mine in Venice.

Venezia, Venedig, Venise – I entered her hot, stinking, humid, and commercially corrupted and sinking ruin on a sweaty afternoon in August of 2000, when the swollen tourist masses pushed their way through her medieval alleys. As in romantic tales of decadence, I was weak, having been released from Bologna City Hospital the very same morning, and I felt a negative loss of clear subject boundaries – becoming one with the American, German and Japanese hordes heading for San Marco.²

Life was a waste – the world leaking in. At the very least, I counted on being seduced. But as I walked down the stairs of *Santa Lucia*,³ and gazed at the emerald green waters where a trash boat slowly made its way to the *Canal Grande*,⁴ the most trafficked sink in the world, I knew it was love at first sight.

My love (and hate) story with Italian culture dates back to the winter 1998-1999 when I studied at the University of Pisa. Though I roamed happily in museums and

¹ In von Bonsdorff and Karjalainen 1997.

² St. Mark’s, which for centuries used to be the center of administration and city life, is now a constant tourist spectacle, and has little other function in the city. The name *San Marco* refers to St. Mark’s basilica, but refers as well to a whole *sestiere* (township) in the southern part of Venice – though often the name is used to pinpoint the touristified area around St. Mark’s chapel, the square outside of it (*Piazza di San Marco*), and its cafes – not to forget the bell tower, *Campanile di San Marco*, facing the Doge’s palace.

³ Santa Lucia is the railway station of Venice, named after Lucia, the patron saint of the blind – which is quite a contradiction in the “city of the eye” (Brodsky). According to local beliefs her relics rest in the church of Santa Lucia, close to the railway station.

⁴ *Canal Grande*, the Grand Canal, is the “main street” of Venice, a broad canal piercing her in a serpent-like fashion. It is one of only 3 canals called *canale* in Venice (the others are the *Canale della Giudecca*, facing the *Canal Grande* at St. Mark’s, and the *Canale di Cannaregio*, connecting the Grand Canal at the other end). Small canals which criss-cross the city are called *rive* (*riva* in singular).

churches, and though I enjoyed soccer and cuisine, I grew tired of living in a tourist attraction – so that I never even thought of visiting Venice or Rome. (Florence was too close, however, to be ignored.)

As the winter passed, the loudly conducted commerce in cups, t-shirts, and plates featuring pictures of the leaning tower printed on them, drove me to spend my free time rather in Lucca, a beautiful neighboring city of the same size, with virtually no tourist culture.

I thought Venice would be even more touristified than Pisa and Florence.

She was. But I could never have even begun to imagine the amount of kitsch and touristification she hosted. I had no idea that urban beauty could be exploited to such an extent. And nowhere else had I experienced such erosion of a city.

Venice is the Las Vegas of cultural history, where tourists dominate the use and atmosphere of the city to a greater extent than do its own inhabitants. Like many historical cities it is partly just a historical façade hiding modern interiors, where even whole modern building complexes can be found a few inches within such “shells”. And it is a city where gondoliers perform their anachronistic role in true, theme-park fashion.

Venice, which was once a medieval metropolis with 250,000 inhabitants, now serves as home for a mere 60,000 – with an exceptionally high average age of over 50. At its late summer peak, the number of tourists visiting Venice during one day far exceeds 100,000, and its gates have to be closed to prevent the fragile infrastructure from suffering overload.

Explorative trips followed. I fell in love with Muranese glass.⁵ I spent periods in Mestre, the coastal counterpart of Venice, a “real” city with close to 200,000 inhabitants, administratively a part of Venice, from where masses of workers daily board a train to the “old city” in the sea.

Publications, first on the Biennales of Art and Architecture, came along – and already in these early, less academic analyses on the city and its cultural life, the idea of Venice as a philosophical maze arose.⁶ A rare opportunity appeared in 2002 which was to change my relationship to the city. I was invited to apply for project funding in the field of environmental aesthetics, with the title *Change, Mobility, and Environment* – led by Ossi Naukkarinen at the University of Art and Design Helsinki (TAIK).

I had just arrived from Temple University in Philadelphia, where I spent Spring term 2002 digging myself into pragmatist philosophy with the support of a grant provided by the Academy of Finland (made possible by a kind letter from Richard Shusterman).

In writing my research plan, I realized that I could easily connect to urban studies from the knowledge I had acquired in writing my MA, an inquiry in the philosophy of popular culture (1999),⁷ and my then work-in-progress on the Licentiate degree⁸ concerning Shusterman’s Deweyan aesthetics of popular culture (2003). When the funding was awarded and the project was launched, my mind fixed on Las Vegas, partly

⁵ See chapter 7, “Worlds of Art”. See as well Rynänen 2004. I am thankful to Suomen Taideyhdistys for supporting my trip to both Venice and Murano in the fall of 2003 by awarding me the Edvard Richter travel grant for visual art critics.

⁶ Between 2003 to 2005 I published, e.g., a critique on Venice as a visual city, a critique on its architectural Biennale, and other textual comments where I tried to come to terms with the city. For more academic sketches for this dissertation, see Rynänen 2003, 2005 and 2006.

⁷ In my MA thesis I studied philosophical theories on mass culture with a focus on the 1990s wave (Vattimo, Carroll, Shusterman, etc.), and the way these pioneers discussed classics in mass culture (Adorno, Ortega, etc.).

⁸ The Finnish Licentiate degree is attained by completing the coursework required for a doctorate and then writing a dissertation which requires at least double the work of an MA but still less than a PhD.

following Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour's *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972), a book which illuminatingly concentrates on discussing what there is to learn from a peculiar city. I was enthusiastic about the manner in which it was not based upon ideals of city building any more than overtly critical stances against trash – though I was, myself, less into morphological work. But, I had never visited Las Vegas, I did not possess enough knowledge on her, and following the changing political climate in the US and its foreign policy, I did not feel tempted to go back – not even as a tourist.

First I did not even think about Venice as a possible object of research, but following the way in which thoughts on the city appeared repeatedly in abstracts, Ossi encouraged me to concentrate on what seemed to be productive. I soon realized, however, that nearly everything I cared about in practically oriented aesthetics, from tourism and popular culture to art and classical high culture, crossed paths in Venice. As Guido Valeri points out in his *Guida sentimentale di Venezia*, the city is one of “grandeur and decadence,” as well as “Dichtung und Wahrheit, Spleen et Idéal, verse and prose, story and legend.”⁹

Since even some philosophers I cared about (e.g., Benjamin, Heidegger) found a home in my interpretation of the city, I began to turn my wheels *only* for Venice. After my discovery and subsequent focus on the city, I enjoyed the benefits of funding from the Academy of Finland from May 2003 to January 2006.

I want to thank Ossi Naukkarinen, the head of my research group, and, more importantly, my advisor, for a sharp, critical, and sincere commentary on my writing. I have learned a lot from him. This applies to the whole research group: Pentti Määttänen,

⁹ Valeri 1955, 41. My translation.

Laura Uimonen, Tapio Heikkilä, Taneli Eskola, and Pasi Kolhonen have shared illuminating moments with me.

My main gratitude goes, still, to my alma mater, University of Helsinki, its Institute for Art Research, and its chair of aesthetics, Arto Haapala, who has, through my BA, MA, and Licentiate studies, and then through the progress of writing this PhD, encouraged me to go on with the path wherever it might lead me. Besides Ossi, Arto has been my tutor in writing – and an important jogging partner for years.

Countless other scholars, colleagues, friends, and students have left a mark on *Learning from Venice*.

In the Pori School of Art and Media at the University of Art and Design Helsinki, where I have worked as a Lecturer and the Head of the MA program for Visual Culture since February and March 2006, respectively, I am thankful to my colleagues Marjo Mäenpää, Harri Laakso, Minna Heikinaho, Janne Seppänen, Nina Sjölund, Mari Rimmistö, Jari Haapaniemi, Jukka Juhala, Satu Järvenpää, Laura Lilja, Anne Koskinen, Eeva Pilke, Kati Pelkonen, Taina Rajanti, Tarja Toikka, Reijo Kupiainen, Annu Wilenius, and Juha Kronqvist. I am also obliged to the following people who have, on courses, at seminars, through projects, visits, and friendship, shared their thoughts at UC Pori or in some external collaboration projects: Anni Venäläinen, Päivi Lahdelma, Hilda Kozari, Riina Liukkonen, Azar Saiyar, Joonas Kiviharju, Ange Taggart, Keri Knowles, Mireia Saladrigues, Hannu Marttila, Jaakko Suominen, Outi Tuomi-Nikula, Kimmo Ahonen, Peeter Torop, Kari Kallioniemi, Riikka Kiljunen, Sampo Laaksonen, Mirja Kortesharju, Jouko Kortesharju, Jani Leinonen, Hanna Sorsa, Topi Kauppinen, Minna L. Henriksson, Jussi Lehtisalo, Sezgin Boynik, Anssi Riihiaho, Kati Heljakka, Laura Selin,

Mirja Ramstedt-Salonen, Simo Saarikoski, Jussi Matilainen, Anna-Kaisa Rastenberger, Annamari Vänskä, Sami Santanen, Teemu Mäki, Maunu Häyrynen, Kari Yliannala, Tiina Ikala, Pilvi Porkola, Malla Silde, Ugo Volli, Martina Corgnati, Annamari Ahonen, Oula Salokannel Konsta Huusko, Sami Louekari, Jaana Kuusinen, Marika Leinonen, Jarkko Hienonen, Harri Peltoniemi, Rami Nummi, Esko Nummelin, Maija Mäki, The UC Pori Peda Group, and the librarians of the University of Turku.

At the Helsinki offices of the University of Art and Design Helsinki, where I worked from 2003 to 2006, I benefited as well from discussions, support, and cooperation from Karolina Kiil, Markku Hakuri, Outi Turpeinen, Mika Karhu, Juha Varto, Sari Elfving, Teija Löytönen, Inka Finell, Börje Helenius, and Irkka Tervomaa.

People associated with the department of aesthetics or the Institute of Art Research and the department of philosophy at the University of Helsinki who deserve a thank you include Tiina Erkkilä, Kirsti Nymark, Ilona Reiners, Altti Kuusamo, Martta Heikkilä, Janne Vanhanen, Kalle Puolakka, Hans Maes, Oiva Kuisma, Mia Kunnaskari, Pauline von Bonsdorff, Emily Brady, Miika Luoto, Sanna Mattila, Karoliina Ylihonko, Niko Pyrhönen, Pialivia Hekanaho, Arno von Pfaler, Tom Sjöberg, Ville Aalto, Anna Poranen, Pauli Kola, Vesa Korkkula, Rosa Rönkkö, and Mira Munteanu.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Eero Tarasti for his long-term support. Tarja Knuutila, Juha Torvinen, Harri Veivo, and especially Susanna Välimäki are, in one way or another, members of my clan, people with whom I consider to have shared margins, and with whom I have discussed theoretical issues – and from whom I have learned a lot.

Scholars at other universities who have, in one way or another shed light on the path include Kari Kallioniemi, Kimi Kärki, Hannu Salmi, Simo Säätelä, Göran Sörbom, Richard Shusterman, Dean Graham, Peter Fettner, Karol Polcyn, Laura Odom, Susanne Jansson, Joseph Margolis, Stefan Snaevarr, Seppo Knuutila, and Lars-Olof Åhlberg.

Joseph Kupfer, Yrjö Sepänmaa, Thierry de Duve, and Staffan Bengtsson have commented on earlier versions of chapters of the text – and by doing so helped to make them better.

As I have been active in the art world during this work, I want to express my gratitude to ROR, i.e. Revolutions on Request (Jiri Geller, Panu Puolakka, Karoliina Taipale, Klaus Nyqvist) – not to forget Sari Hiltunen, Eva Neklyeva, Ilse Rossander and Mikael Vallgren from the ranks of ROR ry. Having a gallery at Vaasankatu Kallio was a learning experience.

Marita Muukkonen has been an illuminating colleague (and friend). Khaled Ramadan, Panu Heikkilä, Hanna Haaslahti, Johanna Hammarberg, Rose Fenton (F.I.T.), Gundega Laivina (Homo Alibi), Primoz Jesenko (Exodos), Kristine Soncika, Laura Stašāne (Exodos), Penny Francis, Raimund Hoghe, Rok Vevar, and the participants of the series of workshops on theatre criticism I tutored for Festivals in Transition (Riga, Ljubljana), have shared thoughts and projects from panel discussions to festivals, critique and film manuscripts. And during these years I was lucky to have positive collaboration with Sari Tervaniemi, *Taide* (Arja Elovirta), Mustekala (especially Irmeli Hautamäki), and Kulttuurivihkot (especially Johan Alén, Elias Krohn, and Aleksu Ahtola).

A humble thank you goes also to Kyoko Tokumaru, Nancy Aneno, Heli Wen, Selja Ahava, and especially Stella Parland – without forgetting my tutors in eastern philosophy, Taavi Kassila, Carola Haaparinne, and NATHA.

Kerttu Aitola, Boris Legault, Jani Sund, Mika Turkia, Jenny Poutanen, Minna Suutari, Jarkko Pyysiäinen, Juuso Lehtonen, Minna Lehtonen, Monica Parland, Titti Miettinen, Küllike Saks, Yris Ersoy, Diego Ardoino, Monica, Rino, Sandro, da Elisa, and fratelli Tosi have all affected the work in one way or another.

Additionally, I made two visits (2005, 2007) to Venice with my dear parents, which were to produce major changes in the work. Thank you for your endless support.

Though this work should be dedicated to Essi, the literary character of the text seeks out another solution – which I hope she can digest. She is anyway the Queen of my Heart – not Venice.

Pori Town Hall, November 21, 2008

INTRODUCTION

“The only place on Earth that I love”

Friedrich Nietzsche¹⁰

If a culturally minded book on Venice does not begin with an appraisal of her beauty or an expression of love for her, a section on her appeal will appear sooner or later. It is as if it would be compulsory to appraise her looks.

This follows the extraordinary sensual quality of the city – streets of water reflecting her delicate palaces. But in fact, for centuries, Venice has been increasingly dominated by romantic, artistic, and tourist appropriation – over that of everyday use. The historical war machine and the old commercial center of the Adriatic is today approached through a matrix of expectations with roots in modern art, spectacle, and mass culture.

The change is not only merely a product of interpretation. An illuminating difference is found in comparing visits to both Paris and Venice. Though it would be possible to enjoy Paris selectively as an aesthete’s daydream, tourists seek out its everyday life. They shop, they visit bars and cafes, and they walk the streets – inhaling

¹⁰ Cited and accompanied with pictures – the subject of the quote is of course Venice – in David Karrell Frell and Donald L. Bates’ *Nietzsche: The Problem of Autumn*, a web feature of *The Good European*. [Http://www.press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/452786.html](http://www.press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/452786.html) (accessed March 28, 2009).

the Parisian lifestyle. Visitors of Venice also emphasize that they catch a glimpse of real life too – for example laundry hanging outside of a window.¹¹

The destiny of Venice is quite the opposite to that of Las Vegas. The latter was purpose built to serve as an entertainment venue, but year after year it has grown to be a city for living as well. In Venice, even since 1951, the population has dwindled to one third – making her a city of only 68,000 inhabitants.¹²

Besides architectural beauty and artistic resources, the aesthetic appreciation of Venice has been supported by her aquatic nature. Water has made her extraordinary. It has given her clear boundaries. There are no suburbs framing the old city. Where classical architecture ends, the lagoon starts. And following the sensitive building methods which have had to be applied to construct her in water, it has been hard to conduct major changes in the map. As the compound of small islands, low waters, and natural canals, which had served as the basis for building, were occupied, she just had to be considered ready. So, Venice has been finished for centuries.

By the time modern technology was able to give her a helping hand, museum thinking had already paralyzed town planning.¹³ It is not an exaggeration to say that Dante and Tiepolo would still find their way around the city. With the lagoon as her frame, and without visible modernization or disturbing eclecticism,¹⁴ the city also supports a sense of harmony and experience of wholeness.

¹¹ Already in chapter 3 we learn that we should not rely on laundry.

¹² See Antonio Paolo Russo's text "Venice: Coping with Culture Vultures," in the Unesco Courier 1999: 8, http://www.unesco.org/courier/1999_08/uk/dossier/txt35.htm (accessed March 28, 2009).

¹³ See especially chapters 3 and 6 for more on this issue.

¹⁴ By "disturbing eclecticism" I refer to experiences of disturbance caused by overly eclectic building – for the common visitor. Though architects might be sharp to detect (and sometimes even detest) eclectic mixes of medieval, renaissance, and gothic architecture, the average tourist reacts mostly to the issue of old enough vs. modern building.

From an aesthetic point of view, writing on Venice mainly follows two ideological paths. The first is a sentimental one, flirting with singing Gondoliers and sunsets at San Marco. The second conveys the city as a cluster of art and architecture, cultural heritage facing a violent, commercial, mass-touristified intrusion.

Tourism, though, is no news for the city, where mass travel to the Holy Land was organized already in the fifteenth century.¹⁵ In Venice herself mass tourism has been a commonplace far more than a hundred years.¹⁶ The city is an intense network of shops, restaurants, cafeterias, and overcrowded transportation systems – as any theme park is – but constructed upon profound history, and not just in the sense that contemporary life has been given birth inside an architectonically original shell, but in the way which hosts a long, distinguished tourist tradition, which has deep effects on its culture, *Lebenswelt*, and atmosphere.

No cultural formation can be an intruder after centuries of existence – and over a century of unchallenged domination. At the same time as tourism arrived to Venice, the modern lifestyle remarked upon by Baudelaire (and later also by Benjamin) invaded the streets of Paris. Could we consider modern life as an intruder?

Though tourism is always, to some extent, considered to be an intrusion, in addition to inward migration, in a city where its effects are as historical and massive as they are in Venice, one cannot criticize the phenomena by seeing it as a cultural outsider. Though individual visitors would be different from day to day, the dynamics of the phenomenon remain quite the same. And if it cannot be seen as quintessential by locals, it should be seen this way at least by scholars. The tourists of Venice are even of another

¹⁵ Urry 2002, 4.

¹⁶ See Pemble 1995, from page 1 onwards.

breed than tourists in most other cities. As the city is a museum, no one comes for parties. In Venice it is striking how very educated and culturally oriented its visitors are, whereas differing elitist points of view criticize them unfairly as merely beach tourists.

It is important to acknowledge that the artistic object *Venice* became favored quite in parallel with the evolution of modern tourism. The tourists of Venice are friends of art, and modern art with its attitudes and ways of seeing evolved between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries.¹⁷ As the system of art was created, Western art turned its vision toward the past, making old objects meaningful or not meaningful for art. Through a set of partly arbitrary choices, cave paintings were soon hailed as one beginning of Western art while popular pictures from the earlier centuries were not. Tourism and art, two seemingly different ways of appreciation have an intertwined history, although the idea of the cultural history of tourism and its effects is fairly recent.¹⁸

The anxiety raised by tourism is still not only due to arrogance on the part of the true Venetians. There are huge problems created by visitors, as Venice has a small population and a huge following. The economy of the city thrives on the income made through tourism. But when the overload hits Venice during the peak of the tourist season, everyone is alerted. Together with the tens of thousands of workers who commute there every day, the 100,000 tourists or more – estimates vary – paralyze her narrow streets, and shake her fragile base – an effect increased by the motor boat and luxury ferry traffic, which creates both noise and too many waves that lap unceasingly at her foundations. Even tourists who spend just one day in Venice can be shocked about her state, worrying about her future.

¹⁷ See Kristeller 1992.

¹⁸ Many books mix tourist and art attitudes flexibly. See, e.g., Bagnasco 1999. Zorzi 1983 tells the story of objects which have been stolen or otherwise exported from the city after it was found artistically attracting.

According to varying estimates, if moving away from Venice continues at its current level, the city is actually becoming a ghost town. Of course this is a theoretical threat. “Rich Americans buy vacation apartments in the city,” as the locals say, and there must be a limit on losing old families. Of course the city which is eroding in such a fashion will not be the same, if new inhabitants come and make it their own. The reasons for outward migration are simple. Tourist hoards have invaded the city, like Huns and Goths once invaded the mainland, forcing the original Veneto residents to move out into the Lagoon and to give birth to Venice. As Venice is less and less a city for inhabitants, it is hard to find the infrastructure for everyday *life*, and at the same time the situation gets tougher economically for the ordinary citizen: everything costs more, from food to apartments, and many modern needs are challenges in a city bewildered by water. Most people working in the tourist venues of Venice come every day with the train from the mainland, where a normal worker can more easily afford a decent living.

Venice here is, and has been, pioneering the destiny of old townships, as can be understood by reading Aylin Orbaşlı’s *Tourists in Historic Towns: Urban Conservation and Heritage Management* (2000), which underlines how many already traditional Venetian problems of touristification and the death of city life are becoming common elsewhere as well.

The difference Venice makes in this respect is remarkable. When other cities are “old,” “charming,” and “historical” through one or two of their historical townships, and when there is always normal city life going on around the old parts, if not mixed into them, Venice stands out as having no mixed areas; where old and new, the historical and the living, would meet. It is a pure historical whole, with no loose margins.

When Venice is discussed, it has become customary to tell tales of normal city life, memories of the everyday seen by visitors who have had an opportunity to stay in the city for a longer period, or who have been guided there by a local friend. A lecturer visiting *Ca Foscari* (The University of Venice) told me he had seen children playing soccer in a courtyard, and an architect told me he had been taken through the city by a local family through small routes hidden from the main streets. The latter one kept repeating: “there is life there too, really.”

Already the late 1990s witnessed the commonplace talk about “Veniceland,” but this discourse – favoured by scholars, artists and intellectuals – seldom found permanency in print.

In recent years we have witnessed a change. Even during the process of writing this inquiry Venice has become a more diverse topic of discussion – including critical views on its theme-park nature. Already in 2004 a book on the touristification of Venice was published by Robert C. Davis and Garry R. Marvin. *Venice: The Tourist Maze* is a work on the problems the city is facing, while losing its life as a city on behalf of its theme park use. Recent editions of Lonely Planet state that Venetians are “[u]sed to the incredible, indigestible accumulation of natural and constructed beauty that surrounds them, and seemingly indifferent to the slow decay of that same beauty.”¹⁹ And, actually, most tourist guides give advice on where to find the less touristified quarters for accommodation – and they do not forget to recommend the low seasons.

This turn was anticipated in a visually shocking way in 1999 when the magazine *Colors*, run by Oliviero Toscani, payed a “tribute” to Venice, focusing on anti-glamor photos of pollution and ruthless commercialisation, and focusing on freak statistics from

¹⁹ *Lonely Planet Venice* 2006, 5.

the number of doves fed, the kitsch produced in the third world that is sold in the city, to the amount of money one has to pay to step into a gondola or shoot a wedding photo at the waterfront.²⁰ The same critical stance found its way as well into detective stories and journalism on the city.²¹

As one has witnessed the extreme beauty of Venice, and its huge cultural resources, it is thus not hard to understand that it has been viewed even by critical intellectuals as being romantic and extremely beautiful, a source of sensual pleasure, a work of art, a compound of cultural history, and a perfect site to wander around and take a glass of *spumante*²² on a sunny *calle*.²³ But how on earth did it take so long to get rid of the obligatory nature of these selective perspectives, and could it be so hard to find the city in a more holistic manner?

Fans, Fanatics, and Conservatives

Venice is one of the rare cities to have a fan following. This is a feature that it shares with London, New York and Paris – which are viewed as real cities with real city life. As fans of the aforementioned cities, fans of *La Serenissima*, “the most serene of all cities” (as it was called during the days of its victorious autonomy), do not, aesthetically speaking, differ essentially from fans of Toscanini – or followers of Madonna for that matter. Writing on Venice means to step into a territory where “fans rule.”

²⁰ See *Colors* 1999.

²¹ See, e.g., Dibdin 1994, and Leon 2002 & 2007.

²² Typical sparkling wine of the area.

²³ A street not facing a waterfront.

In the average mass culture, from soccer to rock music, fans manifest their idolatry openly, even performatively through putting up posters on the wall, wearing T-shirts, and talking affectionately about their object of idolatry. It is no wonder that most analyses on fandom are anchored to mass culture, as it provides easy, visible coordinates for approach.

The fan makes a choice of following, for example, Madonna, and through this act he/she creates difference in the maelstrom of consumption.²⁴ The word “fan” was first used of baseball enthusiasts in nineteenth century America, and since then, this word, which originally relates to the Latin *fanum*, temple, and can be linked to the modern concepts of fancy and fanaticism, has mainly been used in relation to mass culture. The reason why objects considered to be high culture have remained outside of most uses of this concept is that our conception of high culture to date has repeated modernity’s ideals for the appreciation of art, a contemplative, analytic reception – however banal the consumption of high culture objects might be from time to time.

Wagnerians and Francophiles are classical cases of high culture fandom – always ready to defend their chosen object of devotion. And Venice *is* a city which has the power of casting its spell on people. Not just people hungry for cultural status or deprived of taste, but even cynical thinkers fall prey to her when facing her beauty.²⁵

Pier Paolo Pasolini remarks, while commenting on the beauty of Bologna, that Venice is the most beautiful city in Italy²⁶ – though by all standards of his work, he should have criticized its touristified nature. Bologna is a site of the everyday, if not *the* old city in Italy to see, if you appreciate beautiful historical cityscapes which are not

²⁴ See Lawrence Grossberg’s already classical ideas on fans, Grossberg 1992. See as well Maffesoli 1993.

²⁵ On the popularization of “good taste,” see Collins 2002.

²⁶ Pasolini 1995, 108. Original text published 1969 in *Tempo*.

touristified. For a thinker who was constantly attacking everything capitalistic and homogenized due to the effects of TV and national(ist) language literature to the formal education system,²⁷ making a statement like this is significant.

Guy Debord, from whom we could have anticipated as a straightforward critic toward the “permanent spectacle, nightmarish museification, cynical tourism and decadent, extensive commercialization of Venice” – to quote Philippe Sollers’ Debordian pastiche – was actually committed to the city.²⁸ He did not just organize meetings of the *L’Internationale situationniste* in Venice. Debord favored it in his free time as well, which cannot be explained just by recalling the situationist contempt for Haussmanian, open, vision centered, spectacularizing cityscapes.²⁹ If anywhere, Venice was already at situationists times a city totally commercialized through touristified use and tutoring of vision.³⁰

A lot could be said about the ignorance of the thinkers of our era, who have discussed topics related to Venice, but not touched upon the real hot spots. Umberto Eco wrote ironically about the fake nature of Disneyland, its absurd feeling of surface, and lack of history and originality,³¹ but never took on the challenge of Venice – or any other touristified Italian medieval maze – to convey how much the same fake historical venues built for entertainment compared to how touristically maintained real historical cities can feel, producing analogous experiences of surface, imitation, and unrealness.³²

²⁷ More on these tendencies in Pasolini’s work, see Ryyänen 2006b.

²⁸ Sollers 2004: 179-187. My (and Essi Lindberg’s) translation.

²⁹ Venice has, by the way, only one Haussmanized street, at Cannaregio, changing name quarter after quarter, connecting Rialto to the Railway station. Even this street, or chain of streets, would be quite serpentine in a normal city, where bridges cut off its straight nature many times.

³⁰ See also chapter 4 on Ralph Rumney’s project for *L’Internationale situationniste* on doing a “psychogeographical” research on Venice.

³¹ See Eco 1986.

³² More on this in e.g. chapters 3 and 6.

Less scholarly authors have of course been even less critical of Venice. From journalist reports to articles in fashion magazines and reviews, Venice has been portrayed like a candied Alpine castle on water, and sentimental authors, Hemingway in the forefront, not to mention romantic movie makers, have reinforced the sentimental, kitschy aura of the city.

No wonder that Sollers, in his *Dictionnaire amoureux de Venice* (2004), a poetic encyclopedia on the intellectual and artistic history of Venice, wants to make sure that his readers will not think he “loves” Venice in any clichéd sense of the term.³³

It is not easy to rise above the swamp of classicism, romanticism, and modernism – a mixed, complex, profound, and affective matrix, which supports daydreaming and aesthete attitudes, and which is deeply anchored in Western metaphysics. Ways of thinking, interpreting, and experiencing are as habitual as other habits in life which we consider to be of the everyday sort.

Reducing Venice from “disturbances” to static, silent beauty could be a rewarding strategy to engage with the city, to find foci and perspectives, to deepen and develop aesthetic experience through self-conscious strategic choices, but the practices we here meet are aesthete by nature. They restrict perception and understanding, and narrow it ideologically, making the city less than it is.

Philosophies, Venices, and Mobile Aesthetics

My aim is to provide a philosophical road map for questioning, discussing, renewing, and revamping our relation to Venice – and through this I want to help us rethink our relation

³³ Sollers 2005, 37.

to classical cities in general. I am intent on rediscovering Venice holistically, and I want to inquire what she has to give to urban aesthetics and philosophy, when taken seriously as a whole, and following her own clues, not just common interests and perspectives in urban studies and environmental aesthetics.

In Italo Calvino's *Le città invisibili* (1972)³⁴ a rather fictive Marco Polo tells stories to the Great Khan about the cities, or towns that he has seen on his voyages. The only city of his memories which is not mentioned, Venice, is after all reflected in all the others. Contrary to this, I here want to discuss Venice, and through that touch upon urban aesthetics in general, to develop a concrete, productive example for theory. To do this I have not taken into consideration people living in the city, though their role in the city is sometimes mentioned. Aesthetics of everyday life has shared features everywhere, but in Venice I think it would need too much work and good networks, which I lack to get into her diverse modes. And we are here talking about a work of art – something people seek out to gaze upon, something we engage with aesthetics on our minds. Visitors have the key role in making the city what it globally is – a “masterwork,” a cluster of cultural historical fetishes, and a set of beautiful sceneries.

I have developed three principal dogmas as a basic framework. First, I describe the city via perspectives and details which I feel to have heuristic potential for urban aesthetic thinking. As examples, peculiar constructions cannot exemplify the common city structures, but they can illuminate marginal rhizomes running through the wide variety of built environments we face during our lifetime. Here I am indebted to a tradition of philosophizing on cities, including eccentric thinkers like Simmel and especially Benjamin – but I also “follow” paths broken by contemporaries, like Arnold

³⁴ In English, *Invisible Cities*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974.

Berleant, in whose work aesthetically sensitive descriptions of the environment are worked out to provide material for aesthetic analysis (descriptive aesthetics).³⁵

I myself have spent a considerable amount of time “studying” Venice, for example by using its public transportation system in all possible ways before writing about it, and I have tried to familiarize myself with the many ways of appropriating classical cities which, beforehand, felt foreign. Through this work themes have risen naturally, that is, without me having to push them through with any premeditated violence. Second, after encountering these theoretical “punctums” of the city, I have analyzed them, tried to understand Venice as whole through them, to develop them as “themes” which I have worked to meet cities and their aesthetics in general. Third, I deal with some major names in twentieth-century philosophy, and their views on art, cities, and culture. The dogmatic approach is established here to bring them in slowly, so that the beginning of the inquiry could be read by non-philosophers, and so that the themes raised could be discussed in other scholarly territories as well. Venice here challenges philosophical systems and ideas cultivated by thinkers as diverse as John Dewey, Martin Heidegger, Walter Benjamin, Arthur C. Danto, and Gianni Vattimo – though none of these philosophers will be made the object of the study itself.

When the city itself is discussed, there is a wide range of illuminating, heuristic, or just otherwise rewarding perspectives to choose from – and this is not just a banality which could be said about every city. Venice offers its visitors an outstanding compilation of architecture, inspiringly maze-like city planning – or the lack of it, as some of us would put it – distinguished museums representing a broad variety of human accomplishments from naval history to painting, and the unique sensation of water it is

³⁵ See Berleant 1992, 25-39. See also Berleant 1991, 1997 and 2002.

famous for, not to mention its unforgettable urban landscapes, which have more or less become paradigmatic for Western romantic sceneries – “romantic” here pointing more to the culture of love³⁶ than to the artistic era of the nineteenth century.

Following this overwhelmingly broad variety of cultural history, its production for tourists, and its resources offered through museums and other venues, visitors can deal with the city through a wider range of touristic approaches than with most other cities. The “readings” and textures encountered here are constructed in different ways and for different socio-economical levels of accommodation, townships and cultural practices chosen for leisure, and routes used or found to move around and see, hear, inhale the city. The Venice of an art tourist, in any case, may not be even remotely similar to the Venice of someone spending there a honeymoon, and the same applies to wine tourists, or those who come to Venice just because they happened to like a copy of it – which they may have seen in Las Vegas, Rimini, Brussels, or Shenzhen.³⁷

Most visitors naturally do not restrict themselves to just one approach in dealing with Venice, as dealing with any other historical city, can, and sometimes even should be varied, if one wants to understand the whole, or even just take advantage of his/her trip. This applies to seasons and times of the day as well. On a sunny afternoon in August, in the midst of a hectic kitsch market, while doves are fed and photos taken, it may come as no surprise that the basilica of St. Mark’s does not appeal as much as it would, if it would be encountered on a silent morning in February. So, if one is on the hunt for contemplating masterpieces of architecture, one might want to return early in the morning, if not during the most silent periods of winter. Of course, it could end up being

³⁶ Here Venice shares a central role with Paris as the Western capital of sentimental love and a romantic atmosphere.

³⁷ *Colors* 1999.

completely different: a traveler reaching St. Mark's could, in the end, feel more seduced (and even rewarded) by the colorful kitsch versions of it, which are sold just outside the basilica – the sirens on the way to the real destination.

Lodged concretely between ways of approaching the city, its changing seasons and times of the day, the relevant art historical “resources” which the visitor has at his/her disposal while confronting the cultural heritage in question, one's aesthetic attitude, and the interpretational strategies chosen, there is something we tend to forget: traffic and other means of movement play a key role in how we perceive cities. The heights at which we see buildings, the speed used, the vehicles and modes of public transportation chosen for moving around, and our directions and ways of arrival, are significant factors in the aesthetics of a city. For example traffic routes and readymade walks found in tourist guides, are not separable from what the city is.

These mobilities, changes, and oscillations are part of the foundation of what it is to experience Venice – or any other classical tourist city. And experience is central for this inquiry. There is no exact frame for experience given, though. I will rely ad hoc on differing ways of thinking, from *Erlebnis* to “an experience” (Dewey), from *Ereignis* (Heidegger) to broader, or more analytic ways of discussing the processes binding the subject aesthetically with the world. Important for this work will not be theories of experience, but rather the way in which experiential processes gain and are affected by urban mobility, change, and particular Venetian features of city building and architecture on water.

In our era, mobility dominates cities more than ever. Mobile structures have become a commonplace in metropolises. They make cities lighter – ready to change fast

when a festival needs it.³⁸ Stages, removable huts, and extra bridges are used as urban events are organized, and they have become a commonplace in Venice too. In 1989 Pink Floyd played outside of San Marco on a floating stage. Every year extra wooden constructions are brought out on the *fondamente* to make possible the spectacular end for the Venice marathon – running through the otherwise bridge- and stair-filled *Riva degli Schiavoni* to the *Riva sette martiri* in Castello. People move around with laptops and mobile phones. Transport and traveling increases year after year.³⁹

Public transportation has a peculiar history in Venice. At its best, the city fed 10,000 gondoliers. Venice has been reachable by train for 160 years, and there is over a century of history focused on water buses. Venetians developed their public traffic hand in hand with their aspiration to become a more tourist and pedestrian friendly city – building better walkways. The way traffic has affected the city is illuminating to think about, when one remembers that Venice as a city has not changed significantly for centuries, which makes it easy to discuss the difference traffic has made. And as the traffic of the city differs from all others – the only existing public transportation system lies in water – we might hope to see traffic in a new way through an analysis of it.

Though tsunamis and fears raised by debates on green house effects have made us aware of dangers lurking in the sea, water is still central for many urban utopias. Cities reach for the sea, from old harbor areas used for new building (Copenhagen) to architectural construction plans giving overloaded coasts a helping hand from the sea.

Nowhere but in Venice, however, can one experience a city where water traffic is an indispensable part of life – not just a thrill on the way to the Statue of Liberty (New

³⁸ See Altarelli 2006 for a broader analysis on the issue.

³⁹ See Naukkarinen 2005 for an introduction to the theme – from an aesthetic point of view.

York) or Djurgården park (Stockholm), or a way of connecting a divided city (Istanbul) – and nowhere else are the houses so directly linked to the water, straight from the backdoor. In Venice the architectural maze is accompanied by a water maze – a blue riddle in the middle of the houses on the map.

Urban site-specificity – and City Specific Philosophy

In contemporary art we are accustomed to talking about site-specificity. With this we refer to creating art for distinctive spaces, using the environment as a resource or partner in dialogue with the work of art. The way works of art non-intentionally have site-specific extensions, mostly relating to their context of origin, has been less discussed.

American, car-oriented hard-rock music is contextually well situated when played through loud stereos in big cars – especially in cities built with a monumental structure. Listening to Ted Nugent in a car while driving an American highway, for example, supports its raunchy, hard, and culturally American nature in some sense.

In a parallel fashion, a distinguished historical city may likewise frame works of art connected to it in a meaningful way. In fact, we are not that used to thinking about cities in this sense, but we do take for granted the fact that context centered thinking is motivated in the discussion of artistic movements, for example. With the keyword “surrealism” we connect Dali’s eccentric painting virtuosity to Breton’s straightforward textualism, though it could be as motivated to link the sometimes formally closer Gaudi to Dali – via Barcelona. Besides eras (renaissance), schools (of painting, for example), and, most absurdly, national histories of art, or a single city – just think about Paris and

its non-French art history – can form the relevant frame for a whole world of art. Venice is *the* context of Vivaldi, Tintoretto, and Palladio. As nations and national cultures serve as the underlying basis for today’s discussions on cultural identity, one should not forget that, historically speaking, many old cities were actually politically independent city-states. Venice was once, too.

Some cities – here Venice shares essential features with Paris and Berlin – also have distinctive atmospheres which make differing phenomena seem to be meaningful. In Paris it somehow seems more appropriate to be a bit melancholic, and, in Berlin, big chaotic riots simply look better within its broad mathematically constructed streets.

Here, through the analysis of Jeff Koons’s work (chapter 7) we get a glimpse of what this local artistic meaning-creating context can be at its peak – resulting in an ontological difference challenging Danto’s notions of the status of works of art.

One city-specific book on urban studies, mentioned earlier and not only reflected in the title of the present inquiry, but which has had a remarkable impact on my writing, is of course Robert Venturi’s, Denise Scott Brown’s, and Steven Izenour’s *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972). It teaches us how illuminating it is to concentrate on one city – without forgetting that the city in question is not an ordinary one. Though the book, a real classic, is quite morphological, and so does not exemplify the actual possibilities of how to express the aesthetics of peculiar cities, it has a role as a pioneering work. It has already been stated here that Las Vegas bears resemblance to Venice. One of these ways, and one issue already discussed here, is that Las Vegas, like Venice, has become a model for a certain type of building. Cities with canals bring to mind Venice – and the world is full of entertainment venues echoing the neon lights of Vegas.

Venice has been the muse, not to mention the object of study of a variety of authors, ranging from philosophically sensitive novelists like Maupassant and Brodsky, to scholarly essayists – Valeri, Scarpa, and Stella in the forefront. Actually, not many cities have literature focusing just on themselves. But when they do, the books in question are nowadays a whole new, and very enjoyable, genre. Following the fact that travel books have become less important, as traveling itself has become a commonplace, when books on singular cities are published they nowadays less often present the city in any practical way (if we are not talking strictly about tourist guides), but to enrich and deepen experience and understanding of the cities in question.

When we talk about Venice, such books provide a wide range of peculiarly Venetian issues, ranging from late Renaissance painting and Byzantine building to the beach life of Lido in the 1920s, which are woven together to help the reader come to terms with the city holistically and in depth, in order to get the most of the city. Reading these books, I have long wondered why scholarly books are seldom written in this fashion. To academize this tradition is one of the sub-motivations for my work. Models for this include Diego Valeri's sentimental guide to the city, *Guida sentimentale di Venezia* (1955), Tiziano Scarpa's Venice is a Fish, *Venezia è un pesce* (2000), which discusses the city through a variety of themes including the senses, and Guido Fuga's and Lele Vianello's *Corto sconto. Itinerari fantastici e nascosti di Corto Maltese a Venezia* (1997) guides us in to the city through Hugo Pratt's comic life in Venice with the help of his comic figure Corto Maltese. Additionally, two northern books, where the history, beauty, and art of Venice are mixed in an art historically sensitive, poetical manner, to a holistic set of descriptions; indeed, there are not many cities which could produce books

as delicate as J. G. Links' illuminating essay *Venice for Pleasure* (2001) and Ebbe Sadolin's *Vandring i Venedig* (1956) where poetical illuminations meet beautifully penciled sketches of the city.⁴⁰

The scholarly background of the study does not owe much to “environmental aesthetics” or “cross-scientific” “urban studies,” which from my point of view have provided interesting thoughts and stimulating methodological considerations – but which just have not managed to revamp the great tradition of urban philosophy (Benjamin, Simmel) “my way,” The footprints left by the essayistic wit of Yrjö Sepänmaa and Arnold Berleant's sensually aware holism are still evidence throughout the work,⁴¹ and writing this book owes its institutional support to their pioneering work in the field. A couple of times I refer to authors of this tradition, but mainly this is a book written on Venice from a standpoint deeply anchored in European (mostly Italian and German) and American cultural philosophy and aesthetics – without forgetting my passion for Venice. Love makes the world go round.

Chapter by Chapter

The main themes running through the work have been introduced. In this section, the abstracts for all ten chapters are presented.

Chapter 1, “An Aesthetic History,” provides a historical overview of the city – with an emphasis on aesthetic ways of seeing and appreciating it, from early administrative descriptions to romantic decadence, modern art admiration, and tourist culture. The overview

⁴⁰ For a good, holistic, and sensually stimulating work, see also Romanelli 1997.

⁴¹ For works in this field, see, e.g., Haapala & Naukkarinen 2006, Naukkarinen & Immonen 1995, and Haapala 1998. See also Sepänmaa 1986, 1994 and 1995.

is loose and associative – far from hardcore history writing. I will discuss some of the early fame of Venice, and the way she has begun to function as a model, an idea of a certain type of cityscapes (with canals and/or waterfronts), or as a horizon for interpreting them. This chapter introduces artistic ideologies and aesthetic attitudes which have had an ongoing affair with the city – or are at stake in its current use. For a reader with no knowledge of Venice, this part of the inquiry offers a basic introduction to what the city is, both historically and practically.

Chapter 2, “The Arrival and the Welcoming Façade,” is an inquiry on the gradual change of the façade of Venice. People used to approach the city from the sea, but in the late nineteenth century the land bridge brought the railway, and started to import tourists to the “back side” of the city, where no façade had been built during the magnificent years of her international reign. Venice “lost” the ducal row of buildings on the *Riva degli Schiavoni* facing Lido. The new, less monumental buildings on the other side of the canal (seen from the steps of the railway station), are not consciously seen as a façade, though they in a way function as one. The old way of arriving into Venice, though, becomes a part of our experience as soon as we learn of it. How important is the arrival view for the experience of the city? How have architectural façades and directions of approaching Venice changed experiencing it – and how have they changed other cities, like New York City which lost its Statue of Liberty in the wake of its dull airport rides. To what extent do we build this experience consciously, that is by rethinking the city’s nature by finding out after the fact its “real” main façade?

Chapter 3, “Surface and Depth,” is a study concerning what a town aesthetically is on the surface, and how this experience develops through exploring the city. “Surfaces” include

main monuments, places which are hard to avoid, main streets, and sites which are a must to see. Nowadays visitors aspire as well have some contact with the locals and to tune into the everyday life of the city they visit – a virtually impossible challenge when in Venice.

Historical knowledge deepens experience – one reason for the use of tourist guides, which help us to come to terms with what we actually gaze at when we are in a new city. How do surface and depth interact, and how do we pursue them in Venice – and other cities?

Chapter 4, “Walking,” looks at perambulation as an urban phenomenon – through analyzing Venice as a “walking city,” Nowhere is it as easy and as important to walk as in Venice, since there is no other ground traffic available, public water transport does not always lend a helping hand. What kind of aesthetic experience is walking, actually, and especially urban walking – most importantly walking in Venice? How has the city adapted itself to the growing numbers of tourists walking there, and what kind of effects do readymade routes (tourist maps, public transportation routes) have on the city? Two ways of walking, especially suitable for Venice are named, “kitschy” and “philosophical” walking. Moreover, these heuristic perspectives on walking are analyzed to create differences concerning the possible uses of walking in cities.

Chapter 5, “Water and Mobility,” is an inquiry into the nature of water traffic – accentuated on Venetian *vaporettos* (water buses), gondolas, and *traghetto*s (small rowing boats taking passengers cheaply and fast over the Grande Canal in places where the bridges are far away). Why do we enjoy them so much, and the way we do – romantically? Water traffic is partly the reason why Venice has kept its charm. It is always slow, and as a result, makes an aesthetic difference. In slow speed you see the details of buildings better, and you actually “use” the old city more in accordance with the speed its builders where themselves

more accustomed to. By contrast, many old cities are now filled with fast cars. In Venice, it should be remembered, there is no underground which would allow the traveler to pop up on a street a great distance from where one stood only a few moments before. Nothing like this lessens the holistic nature of the Venetian cityscape. The difference in traffic in this city of water wakes people up, stimulating thoughts on traffic and also produces a special kind of city experience. Heights of surpassing architecture from the water level are different from the same cityscape in cars, and the tactile feeling of being on the water differs from using ground transport. What kind of city does the water transportation systems show us of Venice? These readymade ways of seeing the city create readymade experiential maps of it.

Chapter 6, “City, Museum, and Theme Park,” deals with Venice as a “museum” and a “theme park,” the practical structures in the city producing these interpretations, and the experiences gained from them – oscillating between real city, museum, and theme park. What do we benefit and what do we lose when a city becomes a theme park and a museum? How could we work out the most productive relation to this?

Chapter 7, “Worlds of Art,” discusses the strong, partly independent artistic realm of Venice. Jeff Koons’s *Made in Heaven* glass artworks are used as an example of works which have a differing position and identity in Venice (and in glass art, where Venice is a central historical site) than in other parts of the world. Here the difference is accentuated between contemporary art and the Murano island cluster, where Pino Signoretto manufactured Koons’s work in the beginning of the 1990s. We learn that works of art can have two distinctive authors and positions – even two differing ontological positions, in two different “cultural worlds,” of which one is geographical and the other a more globally affective circle of art.

Chapter 8, “Venice as Kitsch,” deals with the way in which Venice often feels kitschy. Many people claim this, but due to our often unconscious attitude towards kitsch, people explain this by saying that Venice is *original* – like this would change anything. Here we discuss how kitschiness is something which nowadays is defined by the way of “femininity,” particular colors (gold, pink), and materials (porcelain, glitter) – not simply as a case of unoriginality, a certain “fakeness” or “pseudo-artistic” nature. Kitsch here is differentiated from its more historical meaning of merely a case of “low” culture (until the 1960s) or pseudo art (still dominant in the 1980s). Indeed, the tourist industry can make even old, original buildings with no gold, pink, or cuteness easily feel like kitsch. More importantly, it is the changes in our “taste” for kitsch (and use of the concept) which have made Venice kitschier than it used to be. The analysis is inaugurated with an analysis on what kitsch actually means and how it functions today as a sensibility. Jeff Koons’s work, again, as an American “kitsch artist” with Venetian connections, helps us, through providing works of art with illuminating material and colourist extensions. Then we broaden the problematic to cities – without forgetting the relationship between the original city and its kitsch miniatures sold on her streets.

Chapter 9, “Traffic, Mobility, Aura,” deals with Walter Benjamin’s concept of the aura. I will go to the beginning of Benjamin’s meditations upon the theme, where he discusses far away mountains and natural phenomena as auratic objects – and I will continue discussing these environmental points in Venice. Does water make the streets of Venice more auratic than streets in other cities, as the other side is impossible to reach without a boat? More broadly: how has traffic changed the auras of historical cities? Venice became more

easily approached when the railway came. Reproductions and their role in eroding the aura of (the first encounters with) Venice is not forgotten.

The last chapter, “Oscillations (10),” is an attempt to bind together the theme of oscillations inherent in the previous chapters – ranging from experiences of change in approach, interpretation, aesthetic attitude, speed, and traffic vehicle. Practical examples are discussed together with notions on how our aesthetic experience is on the move constantly, and how it flourishes on many planes at the same time. We live in a constantly oscillating experience – marking a difference to the clearly structured and focused experience we so often encounter as being described in philosophical aesthetics. The chapter ends with a Vattimoan analysis of deep structures of Being, which are bound to Venice and our ways of coping with it. The Heideggerian *Ereignis*, the way in which Venice has existed as a unique place with a “historical people” and how it has gradually become something else are brought to light. This chapter works as well as a recollection on what we learned, chapter by chapter, theme by theme. The farewells are said, and the city is left in peace.

Chapter 1

AN AESTHETIC HISTORY⁴²

“Lorenzo: How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon the bank.”

The Merchant of Venice (V, i)

Shakespeare dwelled upon the waterfronts of Venice – *only* in his imagination.⁴³ But he chose no stranger to host the intrigues of *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*.

Elizabethan Venice was a literary commonplace. It represented a “model of republican government,” an “alternative to monarchy,” a “center of international trade and commerce, which made possible the flowering of Italian Renaissance painting, architecture, and culture.” It was also a decadent city of courtesans and charlatans – though, as Maurice Hunt (quoted above) points out, Shakespeare used Venice to convey intercultural plots.⁴⁴

As one of the impact cities of European civilization, Venice needed no introduction. It was a New York, Paris, or London of the Medieval and Renaissance Western world. Following its unusual architectural nature, it also certainly had, early on, become a horizon for thinking when water the in urban environment was discussed. Though not many had visited the city, its reputation was widespread.

⁴² As I do not have any scholarly comments to make about the actual history of Venice I here mostly recall bits of her history which seem to be accepted and adopted by all history books. For a history of Venice, see, e.g., Zorzi 2001 or Norwich 1982.

⁴³ He is no exception among historical authors on distant cities. Before modernity and realism, authors were not necessarily expected to know intimately the places they wrote about. One must also remember that traveling was not a commonplace and modern reproduction devices had not yet made us globally conscious.

⁴⁴ See Hunt 2003.

“Venice” of sixteenth-century northern Europe must have constituted a mental phenomenon founded upon a convergence of reputation, literary description, and graphic representation – as Venice today, for you, my reader, constitutes besides your own tourist experience a convergence of new and old media representations and descriptions of the city.

Already in Shakespeare’s time there must have prevailed some mental conception of Venice which arose to mind when someone mentioned the city – probably a dizzy vision of beautiful architecture with canals in the middle, though some of its most original landscapes (St. Mark’s square, etc.) might have, quite early, become well known in considerable detail. These stereotypical landscapes became known through stories and art. For many, they might have been ideal; but for all, Venetian landscapes soon became something that fulfilled the expectations of people arriving to the city.

Calles, streets not facing a canal which are important for Venetian city life, as any streets are, have not made it to this “canon.” They are too much like streets in Florence or some other historical Italian city – if there is no visible symbol, like St. Mark’s lion, or a well known *campanile*, in the picture connecting these city landscapes to Venice. Mainly the Venice of our representation and images means silent canals, gondolas outside of *Riva degli Schiavoni*, or the sight of Palladio’s *Redentore* church from a passing boat.

There exists a paradigm for how Venice “should look,” and there exists a paradigm for how it looks. Still, even the connoisseurs of the city know that to help someone understand Venice, they have to show the sides of it which make it distinctive from others, as for example Florence – or Amsterdam, respectively.

The city provides a variety of clichéd sets of well-known landscapes, which visitors seek out and experience. These are analogous to classics in art: like a “friend of art” searches for Giorgione’s *Tempesta* at the Accademia Museum, glancing only superficially at other paintings along the way, which could actually be even more rewarding; a tourist does not necessarily use the time to enjoy the hilarious *Ponte dei pugni*,⁴⁵ as he/she is too occupied in the search for the Bridge of Sighs – which is of course neat, but not necessarily the most beautiful or interesting bridge in the city, where there are hundreds of them.⁴⁶

The interaction of medieval, renaissance, and baroque architecture with water is a Venetian paradigm. Actually, for many it is the same wherever they go in the city. Only Venice at its most stereotypical matters.

Constituting the main interpretational horizon for waterly cities, Venice is only marginally challenged by Flemish windmills (less urban) and Oriental architectural joints (more of the gardening type and “too different” architectonically). Little Venices (Hamburg, California, etc.) echo her name. And no urban waterfront is built without thinking about her – at least a bit. The interpretation history of the city is rich, and it has deep historical roots, but its effects are not restricted to the city itself. Both its nature and the stories, common reproductions of it, and products associated with it (miniature gondolas, glass bowls, etc.) have their role in building an image and associational cluster point around it.

⁴⁵ On the *Ponte dei pugni*, see more in chapter 4 on walking. Venice has several “bridges of fists.”

⁴⁶ Still, of course, *Ponte dei Sospiri* is a “classic,” not just in Venice, but among the world of bridges – by being the one which sentenced prisoners had to walk through to their cells, seeing through its windows for the last time Venice and the sea.

Venetian city life itself is a layer of aesthetic traditions, like the carnival, an old (1162, 1268),⁴⁷ once already dead – Mussolini’s 1930s put an end to it – cultural tradition which has been recreated (1979) by the tourist industry with no interest in religion or a carnevalizing society, just echoing the empty surface of something which was once significant, not just a simple joy and spectacle. It is these types of complex phenomena which are at stake everywhere in a city as rich with cultural history and its use as Venice, and it is hard to say where a tradition ends and tourist culture begins.⁴⁸

I shall begin my survey with discussing the Birth of Venice – followed by an analysis of her early days of international reception: The Idea of Venice. This will be continued with a history From Marketplace to Ruin, and a comment on her ‘migrations’. From Huns to Tourists deals with tourism culture, and the manner in which it became dominant in the city. Traffic and the State of Life discloses some of the background on the role of traffic in the city, thus paving the way for chapter 2, “The Arrival and the Welcoming Façade.”

Birth

Cities seldom have clear births. Venice has such a birth – at least a story of one. Though the history of a somewhat organized community dates back to antique fishermen setting up dwelling on the lagoon islands, a city was built following the need to flee large, historical migrations. While this is a fairly rational explanation for the creation of Venice,

⁴⁷ The festivities took place as early as 1162, but the masks were introduced as a part of it only later 1268.

⁴⁸ In the long run, the carnival will of course become “authentic” again. If a tradition has been broken during an extra religious era or political situation centuries ago, we do not necessarily consider the return of that tradition as a fake after another century or two have passed.

the city itself is such an absurd project of architecture, that Diego Valeri is not far from the truth when he says that the builders needed a large doze of insanity.⁴⁹ John Julius Norwich says in his *A History of Venice*, that “[t]he traveller approaching Venice [...] is struck, more forcibly every time, not just by the improbability but by the sheer foolhardiness of their [the Venetians’] enterprise”⁵⁰.

From tourist guides to history books and literary love letters to Venice, we hear the same story: during the Great Migration Goths, Huns, and Lombard hordes looted and burned their ways southwards towards Rome. People from the Veneto area fled to the lagoon islands outside of today’s Mestre. Horace Brown is convinced that we can talk about the birth of Venice already in its pre-migration state,⁵¹ although it is clear that the word city should be reserved for later times; but Blake Erlich, in a contribution for the *New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, sees the pre-migration inhabitation of the lagoon only as a loose collection of individual fishermen and salt workers.⁵²

For some topics, it might be important to know when a city has declared itself a city, or when a cornerstone of an important building has been put up. But from an aesthetic point of view, what is distinctively Venetian, that is, houses and their engagement with water, has already probably been around at a very early stage of urbanization. Of course when the city has grown, much that actually makes it a city starts to affect its experience. One would need quantity in building to have city atmosphere. This applies to city life as well.

⁴⁹ Valeri 1955, 7.

⁵⁰ Norwich 1982, 3.

⁵¹ Brown 1907, 1-2.

⁵² Erlich 1982.

The mythical year for founding the city is A.D. 421, manifested in its early administration. This founding year, however, probably does not yet mark the birth of something we would in ordinary experience relate to a city – at least nowadays. The economic and political identity of Venice was of an even earlier period. Though the Doge, the singularly Venetian form of a Duke, is found reigning the city from the 840's onwards, Venice as a city manifested its existence on local coins already during the fifth century. In 466 the 12 islands which form her heart had formed a federation, each island governed by its own tribune. The Roman impact in the area decreased and the first Doge was elected. In the late seventh century the city had taken a significant step towards constituting an integrated whole, as Brown puts it.⁵³

When the building of the city began, there were over one hundred small islands in the area which we now know as Venice. It was of course mostly the islands which were put to use as a foundation for building – which is often forgotten, since the fact that the city partly stands on pinewood piles which have been driven deep into the solid clay in the bottom of the swampy lagoon makes a more poetical story.

Knowledge about Venice's fragile footing makes some of our aesthetic conceptions of the city's architecture and beauty more decadence-oriented than they should, as in some areas, like Dorsoduro, she actually stands on steady ground – so high in fact that the water does not form a threat to the houses.⁵⁴

This old Venice was first of all an important site of merchant activity, but also a war machine, which defended its inhabitants, ruled big parts of the Mediterranean sea, for

⁵³ Brown 1907, 19-20.

⁵⁴ Of course we are nowadays afraid of global catastrophes created by water – following the discussions on green house effects and the melting of the ice in the North and the South Pole we meet within the media – but these issues touch not just upon Venice, but upon all coastal cities, actually the whole world. They are not peculiarly Venetian problems.

example Istria, Dalmatia and Puglia, not to mention far-away areas, like Cyprus, and for a short time, Constantinople. It gave birth to many important personalities in history, for example Marco Polo (who was connected as well to the Venetian ruled Pula situated today in Slovenia). His Venice was still a city of warships (Polo even spent years imprisoned by the Genoans after a bataille on sea – and that’s when he according to the legend “wrote” his memoirs) and the famous political system, ruled by the Doge with the council of ten, which saw its end as late as when the city was won by the French in 1797 and Napoleon paraded through Canal Grande. Through centuries the city was conceived as a miracle, but it was not a site for aesthetic appreciation only. It was successful as a marketplace, and as a base for military activity. It had grown, and it had gained an important role on the European and Mediterranean map – and lost it, through the French, then Austrian occupation. At its cultural peak it was a center where artists came, but its aesthetic destiny is more anchored to its silent years and then to its decay as a city – though the great work of great artists had to be done to make her more attractive.

The Idea of Venice

Horatio Brown begins his canonical, 1907 *Studies in the History of Venice*, published in 1907, by quoting Cassiodorus (A.D. 523), the secretary of Theodoric the Great, king of the East Goths who ruled Veneto in the beginning of the sixth century. According to Brown, Cassiodorus wrote “to the Venetians of the Lagoons as to a people who has already achieved a certain amount of unity and self-government.” He goes on to saying that “[w]e gather the impression of a community simple, industrious, republican, and

already have we found depicted an *identifiable* Venice, “houses rising on the shoals, saved from destruction in the ever-shifting waters by the frail palisade of wattled osier.”⁵⁵

It is obvious what Brown here refers to as the “identifiable” Venice. He stresses its original building methods and engagement with water. No signs testify that the city described would actually be Venice, and there are no signs whatsoever of any urban seaside city with extensions in water. The context makes the identification clear. Even if it would not, Venice is what comes to our mind when we hear about the interaction of a city and the sea, to the extent that Amsterdam, an urban classic itself, has sometimes been marketed with the help of its affinity with Venice – for example as the city of canals with “real life,” as one advertisement put it a couple of years ago. In the marketing of Venice, the mentioning of any other city would be pointless.

One reason for this is, of course, the historical significance of Venice as a centre for culture, commerce, and political power – but even from an aesthetic point of view, the city stands one step beyond than other cities on water (e.g. Amsterdam, Brugge, Treviso). In Venice one just cannot escape water. Houses are built in it – on a foundation installed on the bottom of the lagoon. Everything in Venice is somehow connected to the sea, from food (*di mare*) to water buses. Only when there is something formally closer to Amsterdam – say, house boats and decadence, do areas like Camden in London get associated with the latter city.

Venice as a horizon for understanding waterly cities becomes less central, of course, when we move to parts of the world less dominated by Western culture. Soohow Gardens, Matsumoto Castle, Kinkaku-ji-Kyoto, and Zhouzhuang are architectural

⁵⁵ Brown 1907, 1-2. Emphasis added.

formations distinguished by their use of water – and portrayed in many architecture atlases, but identified with their respective building traditions to such an extent that there is no risk of overlapping horizons. The same applies, for example, to the “Venice of the East” – Bazra (Iraq).

Still, Western viewers somehow find a connection to Venice when watching pictures on these sites and cities. And looking at contemporary Chinese and Japanese culture, it seems that the success story of Venice is just growing. Tokyo Disneyland has a little Venice, and the city is frequently visited in the Japanese comics, manga / anime – see, for example, *Porco Rosso*. China has built numerous mini-Venices, both for living and theme park use.⁵⁶

Besides cities and neighborhoods which have gained their name following their resemblance to Venice, say California’s or Hamburg’s Little Venices, and similar towns with water involved, either built by Venetians (Pula), or just so close that one knows they are imitations (Livorno). A paradoxical example is Treviso, which is now seen to resemble Venice, but from which some of the original builders of Venice actually came; all watery cityscapes have at least some connection to it on the maps of perception, interpretation, and experience.

Venice guides us in building and town planning as a model, but also in interpretation and experience. When a new estate is built onto an extension of Copenhagen harbor, “Venice” is involved – as self-evidently as putting up house boats in a city center anchors a site to Amsterdam. In urban-water building, Venice is what Chicago and New York are for cities with skyscrapers. Though Frankfurt has indeed

⁵⁶ See Emmanuelle Eyles’s visually powerful article on Chinese cities which are copies of Western ones (*Marie France*, June, 2006). The article presents, e.g., cheap copies of both Venice and Paris.

made it to our idea of high towered cities from a European point of view, and in the far east, Singapore and China's urban giants on the front, is changing our conceptions of what a high building is, the Chrysler and Empire State buildings are root resources in this respect. The neon lights of Las Vegas have extended their power to entertainment venues around the world – both in exterior and interior design. These are all architecturally a priori.

These cultural resources are gained not just by firsthand experience, but by studying, reading about them, and foremost by seeing representations of them. Here we find the quantitative base for the idea of Venice. We talk a lot about the visual culture of our times as one where our sense of non-pictorial reality is affected by pictures, and where visuals are everything, but already when Lord Byron arrived to Venice, he said he knew it by heart through the pictures he had already seen⁵⁷.

Besides the idea of Venice which is easily understood by anyone who possesses enough encyclopedic knowledge of Western culture, there is a lot of pictorial material which is understandable only when initiated to the city – as mentioned earlier. The *forcola* of the Gondola, that is the carved metal piece in the back of the boat, or a terracotta piece decorating a Venetian door with a lion at some *calle* (a street without water), mark the city. In some cases dry landscapes are shown to be Venetian by showing someone in a carnival mask.

The *fondamente* (in singular *fondamenta*), streets at the waterfront in Venetian dialect, and *rive* (in singular *riva*), small canals, views from bridges down to the canals, boats floating by with famous churches like the Redentore in the background – all these

⁵⁷ Pemble 1995, 9.

have a major role in creating the texture of the touristified Venice, gazed upon from the perspective of mass consumption.

Venice is particularly visual, a city of the eye. It differs from other visually extra-pleasing cities through its relation to water, which affects the olfactory sense, and the bodily sense when one sits in a boat on the water, or sometimes when one just inhales it.

All cities actually associated with Venice share only this quality. This is different from most metaphorical connections made regarding cities. Riga is called the Paris of the Baltic Sea, but this is not a visual metaphor, but rather one which deals with its atmosphere. As Paris, Riga is a city with a certain lively and chic atmosphere (though less sentimental), but again Camden Town in London is associated with Amsterdam following its (drug culture, but more importantly) its canals and house boats. Cities with water form their own strong paradigm, which is divided into two model cities, Amsterdam and Venice, the latter one being the more dominant.

From Marketplace to Ruin

Venice during the Renaissance was a flourishing city of commerce, which thereafter became more important as a cultural center, owing here very much to the development of the Italian Renaissance. This change, as Venice became a target destination for making a career in the arts and culture, marked the beginning of a new identity which became dominant for its later lives as a romantic ideal, a treasury of art, and an object of tourism. Like Paris at the beginning of the twentieth century and New York in the post-war era, Renaissance Venice became a center, where remarkable steps in artistic development

were made, where people came to make a career and to work and gain an education in the arts. As a result, much that we find there is created by people who have come from other cities (similar to what we find in Paris and New York).

Before her decay, Venice was one of the main sites of the Grand Tours of young northern European noblemen, who fulfilled their classical education through studying the real things, after having gazed upon reproductions and read descriptions on the “Great Tradition” of art. Venice was a city with architecture constructed by big names.

Venice was also considered to be one of the main sites for libertine (philosophically orientated, at the time emancipatory) sexuality (Casanova), not forgetting its role as one of the most known brothel cities of Europe, which added to her later symbolic role as a city of love and romance.

The city still thrives on the interpretations of the Victorian period, when the honeymoon tradition chose Venice as one of its main interests. Of course Venice is romantic even by its nature. It has beautiful buildings, and water which mirrors the moon in the evening. Even more, of course, it is one of the most loaded sites for a romantic atmosphere. One does not easily start flirting, for example, in Auschwitz. Paris, Venice, and some other cities which are classically related to romantic culture, not to mention the way in which romantic human interaction forms a more integral part of southern European culture and behavior, allows us do these things more easily.

When modern life started to develop at a faster and rougher pace, challenging traditional ways of life, Venice started to decline as a city. It surrendered itself to occupying French troops in 1797. At this time it was already a marginal player in European politics and cultural life. This development only increased when the newly

formed Italian national state took over in 1865. Between these years she was a famous “haunted ruin” – admired by romantic poets, Lord Byron in the forefront, who visited the city 1816-1820. Byron actually wanted to be buried on Lido, which at that time was so silent (no beach life), that he might have thought it would fit this purpose as an uncanny island with a foggy view offered to beautiful Venice proper – quite a silent center as well in those times.

Goethe, at the end of the eighteenth century, on his Italian travels, could still then exclaim that it was nice to arrive to *lively* Venice.⁵⁸ It was soon after this time that she started to change. She stayed as she was and the world’s central cities developed following modern expectations and technological advancements, which were hard to implement in a city as fragile and aquatic as Venice.

The period of silence gradually came to an end in the middle of the nineteenth century, when the railroad was built (see next chapter), and soon Venice entered a new phase, one dominated by tourists. This meant an increase in the number of visitors, which were to feed discussions on building better streets for pedestrians, and developing public transportation.⁵⁹

In the end of the century Venice was already one of the number one travel destinations – a fact which boosted economic growth. She started to gain a role as a historical city with pre-modern charm. And her charms were commercialized. As cities became increasingly technological, the romance of being in an antiquarian one soon became a thrill.

⁵⁸ Davis & Marvin 2004, 92.

⁵⁹ On building the railroad and the reactions it stimulated, see Davis & Marvin 2004, 138.

In a late phase of this development, we find the Venice of Thomas Mann, in *Der Tod in Venedig*, where the decadent, aesthete city is paving the way for tourist industries. In the beginning of the twentieth century, there was suddenly no longer a sinking ruin suitable only for decadent admiration in the moonlight, but a city, which was filled with new life; tourism.

The description of nature in travel books changed during the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries from natural scientific descriptions to a more aesthetic admiration of, for example, waterfalls.⁶⁰ Though Venice, because of its art resources, had already been gazed upon more than (at the time) lesser valued natural landscapes, it too began to be appreciated and gazed upon increasingly for aesthetic reasons as well. The democratization of taste affected its public. It was not just a city from which a cultivated person could learn a lot, but a city which could offer something to everyone.

Becoming a city popular among tourists saved Venice. It did not necessarily fit modern lifestyle, but offered a needed aesthetic difference – and it was, though of oriental nature, not situated anywhere too far or in vastly different cultural margins, so that Westerners could visit with ease. She became a “hit” city. John Pemble writes that “Jules and Edmond de Concourt found it remarkable that Rousseau had spent more than a year in Venice in the 1740s and remained insensitive to its enchantment. In spite of his penchant for description, he had not seen the exquisite city that they and their contemporaries saw. They deduced therefore that the modern age had in some way clarified human vision.”⁶¹

⁶⁰ Löfgren 1999, e.g. 16-17, and 28.

⁶¹ Pemble 1995, 1.

All these changes in the use of Venice can easily be monitored as the city itself, is, as already stated, quite the same architectonically as it always has been. Its changing nature owes more to its changed use.

From Huns to Tourists

Venice was built for escaping the great migrations, but it has suffered so much following our culture of mobility, with tourism on the front, that a migration *from* Venice has become her new destiny. The city is now dominated by people who spend only a couple of days there.

In her new prime, no longer a site of commerce, nor as a center of cultural production, but a site of leisure and entertainment, Venice is now one of the most costly cities of southern Europe, and absolutely the one most invaded by tourism.

The modes of pictorial representation and its distribution favored by tourists, have become one central tenet affecting the way in which the city is seen, challenging Guardi and Canaletto. The arrival of tourism has also made the city develop a cluster of safety nets. The culture of traveling, when we do not speak about adventurers – of whom a greater part is only performing adventuring, taking no actual risks – is based upon safety and control. Menus are created for safe dining, the visual dominance of VISA and American Express signs, and other symbols, tell us that we are taken care of by reliable professionals, and that we are among other middle- or upper-class people, in an area where aggressive cultural differences are not the norm. Together with reliable exchange

value, cards, and travel insurances, hotels are built to look the same, helping us to navigate.

Cities have mythical brands too. Myths are partly based upon facts, though mostly old ones – as myths do not follow facts as fast as stats. New York City, for example, is for many still the pre-Giulianian, dirty Manhattan of Martin Scorsese’s *Taxi Driver* (1978); and Copenhagen is the open, liberal, and relaxed city which ‘tolerates Christiania’ (soon in memoriam).

In Venice this psychological horizon consists for example of romantic expectations, and though it is less celebrated than in its neighboring areas, the cuisine (we are after all in Italy). Like in all Italian tourist cities, extrovert tourists who think of themselves as being “too passionate” for their home countries (sigh), act out their “Italian soul” – which is a cliché, and actually, when true, connects to the more extrovert, less ratio-centered culture of southern Italy, of which Venice is not a part.

As tourism dictates the city’s atmosphere, the imaginary, mythical Venice with both spectacular commerce (singing gondoliers), and its clients saying that they feel at home in this “passionate” and “relaxed”⁶² country. A lot has been saved, following this – of course – including the gondola, but a lot has also been lost too, for a variety of reasons including heavy-handed marketing and an overly entertainment-centered use.

Venice has lost for example its old “real city” auditive landscape, and another, silent one – for tourism. The *O sole mio* sung by a gondolier is a historical echo with quite a banal effect for critical visitors.

⁶² “Relaxed” is another term which those who have lived in Italy seldom want to connect with it, as the everyday social life is filled with social “games” and territory fights.

Though auditive landscapes are important for experience and they might raise associations, they do not provide enough recognizable elements to become recognizable urban landscapes on their own. Hearing the bells of the *campanili* ring might feel Venetian for me, but the same noise can be found in all Mediterranean cities. What about the olfactory sense? Though Brodsky says that Venice is a city of the eye (I will return to this), he *begins* his book (1992) by describing the smell of sea weed. In winter one feels the scent of roasted maroons, but this belongs to the all Italian cities. Water is still the main olfactory distinction-maker in Venice. Besides hearing it and feeling it in the air as humidity, it is everywhere as a smell.

Most recognizable are of course the visual landscapes, to which these other senses connect, helping the more holistic experience to evolve. Sepänmaa says that the more a landscape is being gazed upon and discussed about, the more it is a landscape.⁶³ This is one of the remarkable changes Venice has passed through in the era of modernization. As it has become a city consumed, not lived, it has become one gazed upon. So too have many of its landscapes gained a life of their own. They are sought after when one arrives to the city, and they are recognizable – “oh, this is the place from that postcard.” Landscapes are enjoyed and partly controlled by the hungry masses, but they are also created by the tourist industry. Since the advent of modern tourism there has been kitsch for sale, contributing to the history of the aesthetics of Venice through imitations of central buildings and monuments.

Already Georg Simmel said at the turn of the century that Venice is just a façade. He reflected on it ironically, and saw its life as anachronistic, as a kind of a performance, not real. According to Simmel art expresses the possibilities of life, but at the Grande Canal

⁶³ Sepänmaa 2000, 16.

one just knows that this at least is what life is not. People look like actors – an experience which people have increasingly been expressing during the twentieth century in the footsteps of Simmel. He goes on by even saying that the city's reputation as a city of adventure tells it all: we are not in need of a homeland, just an adventure.⁶⁴ One of these adventures, practically speaking is traffic – to which many who have visited Venice in high season can stand as witnesses.

Traffic and State of Life

Urban beauty is never enough for tourism, and even if there would be a lot of culture to see, swimming resorts – Lido was the hotbed of 1920s beach culture – and plenty of good accommodations, one needs public transport. Tourism soon dictated that Venice must be easy to use. It all started by connecting Venice to the mainland.

Building the railroad was an important act. Rome and Florence, two other cities which, like Venice, once had an important role in the classical Grand Tours of northern European noblemen, had the advantage in relation to Venice when modern tourist culture started to evolve during the nineteenth century – at least partly because Venice was so hard to reach. One had to go there by water, until the railroad connection to the nearby Vicenza was established in 1846 to the Austrian-ruled city. As the railway in 1857 was extended in Milan in 1857 in order for tourists to come all the way from this modern metropolis directly without having to change trains to get to Venice, people could more easily visit Venice not just from northern Italy, but from Germany, France and England as well. “In the early 1800s Venice had been generally regarded as an odd and rather

⁶⁴ Simmel 1907.

depressing wreck which could qualify as beautiful only when seen at a distance or by moonlight,” as Pemble puts it. Already by the 1870s, however, the tourist masses of Venice had become a cliché in the travel literature. And in 1881 Henry James saw tour guides “lead[ing] their helpless captives through churches and galleries in dense, irresponsible groups.”⁶⁵

The city reacted to its new life, and reinforced possibilities for walking – so that tourists could enjoy her more easily.⁶⁶ As horse carriages could not reach Venice, development was focused on supporting pedestrian life. This way Venice became an early, ideologically pedestrian friendly city. New bridges were built, and people stormed in, resulting today in widely differing estimates, starting from 12 and ranging to tens of millions per year.

Claims that the city is being destroyed by tourism became one typical elitist way of discussing Venice, even among “normal” tourists. So, already quite early the “original Venice” became something that was missed, something longed for.⁶⁷

As a visually exhausting city, Venice is well suited to the demands of photography and film. In the early nineteenth century, Turner had still painted uncanny landscapes in Venice, but depicting her was more and more an act of nostalgia along such lines. The whole city was considered unreal. The twentieth century brought to the city film-makers, with their retinues of actors in make-up and costume. In 1922 the Italian writer Ugo Ojetti watched the shooting of *I Due Foscarini*, one of the first of countless

⁶⁵ See Pemble 1995, 15, and the pages that follow for a discussion on this change.

⁶⁶ Pemble 1995, 2.

⁶⁷ See Pemble 1995. Pemble presents broadly discussions on the restoration of Venice. An English language classic in this sense if of course Ruskin 2003.

films to use Venice as a location, and claimed to lose his “sense of reality” just by being in the city.⁶⁸

One of the strongholds of pre-modern cultural elitism had now been put finally to rest. This is beautifully shown in Mann’s *Der Tod in Venedig*, as well as in its filmatization by Lucchino Visconti (1971), where commercial exploiters are taking over the city, which still inhabits a decadent atmosphere.

The contemporary state of Venice, its way of constituting a mix of an object of cultural travel, a theme park, and the remains of a real city, is something which, when stated, often raises eyebrows. Though all the facts would be brought out, someone always lifts his/her hand and says, “But Venice *is* a real city!”⁶⁹ The critic in question always has some first-hand experience on locals in Venice. At what stage is Venice not anymore actually a city at all? If only 500 people would permanently inhabit it, and the others would, like now, be tourists, scholars, artists, and American millionaires coming to Venice every year for two weeks of holiday, why would we think about it as a city?

At least we are already talking about a very peculiar type of urban life, close to downtown Las Vegas. Only the long, lively history of Venice makes some of us want to claim that it is a city, repeating this to its bitter end.

What is so wrong about not being a city, and why does it raise emotions? And the point is: Venice is many things, without contradiction.

Gian Antonio Stella has talked about the change from the *La Serenissima* (the most serene of cities, a nickname of Venice when it was independent) to the *La Serenissima Trinità* (the most serene trinity) – here pointing to the companies Benetton,

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Fainstein and Gladstone 1999, 31 point out that the tourist Venice *is* the real Venice. They also ask, ironically, why should Venice be enchanting anymore?

Del Vecchio, and Marzotto, operating in the area.⁷⁰ The most important thing in Venice is still tourism – as Stella also notes throughout his essay on the city. *La Touristissima?* The most touristified of all cities?

Venice has gone through a lot of change, and all its historical eras have left a trace on its architecture, culture, and on the ways it is being sold. Some of the traces are clearly visible, like the changes made century after century to the area surrounding St. Mark's – some of the latest and most beautiful concerning the nineteenth century cafes built by the Austrians.

At the same time, restoration thinking has saved Venice from manifold phenomena which violently dominate contemporary life. She hides her McDonald's well, for instance, but she is not that much dominated, after all, by advertisement in the manner that other cities are.⁷¹ Indeed, one must remember that Venice is a maze, and street advertising is easier in Haussmanized cityscapes making wide gazes possible.

Learning from History

In this chapter we gained an understanding of historical eras, and how they have changed both the aesthetic use, interpretation, and actual aesthetic nature of Venice. She was prominent, she died out, and she found a new life – the last one dominated by aesthetic use. We gained reminders of phenomena directing the use of urban classics from advertisement (or the lack of it) to preservation. And through a historical overview we can see how our aesthetic lives are distinctive in history, and how much change can be

⁷⁰ Stella 1996, 73.

⁷¹ By taking a look at Pasi Kolhonen's visual and textual research work on how cities would look without advertising, one can easily get the point. See Kolhonen 2005.

involved in the life of one city. We learned a lot about Venice as well, which we will need to know in order to come to grips with the following chapters, which deal more in detail with her aesthetics. Knowing a city and its history in depth is important for understanding its aesthetics, since so many urban places echo not just traditions of city use in general, but geographical histories as well.

Chapter 2

THE ARRIVAL AND THE WELCOMING FAÇADE

When Thomas Mann arrived in Venice in 1911, and settled at the *Hotel Des Bains* at Lido, which is now famous for its film festival, and worked on his *Der Tod in Venedig* (1912), the railway had already reinforced its role as *the* way into arrive to the city. Historical ways of reaching her had, though, not yet, been forgotten.

From *Des Bains* one can see only the Adriatic Sea, but the western bank of Lido, which hosts the vaporetto stops connecting the island to Venice proper, faces the historical façade of Venice, San Marco and the Riva degli Schiavoni. It might be there where Mann, waiting for a connection, nurtured the idea of letting the protagonist of his story appraise its beauty.

In the now classical novella an elderly writer, Gustav von Aschenbach, arrives in Venice, after having visited the German speaking tourist resorts of the Adriatic coast. He chooses to travel to Venice on a small tourist boat. Was it already then a nostalgic route?

Thus it was that he saw it once more, the most astonishing of all landing-places, that dazzling composition of fantastic architecture which the Republic presented to the admiring gaze of approaching seafarers: the unburdened splendour of the Ducal Palace, the Bridge of Sighs, the lion and the saint on their two columns at the water's edge, the magnificently projecting side wing of the fabulous basilica, the vista beyond it of the gate tower and the Giant's Clock; and as he contemplated it all he reflected that to arrive in Venice by land, at

the station, was like entering a palace by a back door: that only as he was now doing, only by ship, over the high sea, should one come to this most extraordinary of cities.⁷²

Visconti's film, which is based on Mann's story, begins not earlier than with this moment of arrival. Shortly after we have been introduced to the small ship sailing the foggy sea, we find our protagonist (Dirk Bogarde) reading a book on deck. Then we see the glorious façade of Venice, which used to be seen by visitors approaching this "city of wonder" – before the drastic change in the city's façade followed the building of the railway.

Though building more bridges in the inner city and motorizing boats has had far more dominating effects on the everyday life of Venice, the change of perspective of arrival must have changed drastically the experience of the city for visitors. Rome and Florence, two other cities which had, like Venice, an important role to play in the classical Grand Tours of northern European noblemen, had gained an advantage in relation to Venice during the early days of modern tourism, as they were easy to reach. To Venice one had to go by water.

The railroad connection via the *Ponte della libertà*, the new land bridge which ended the city's nature as an artificial island, to nearby Vicenza was established in 1846. Then in 1857 when the railway was extended to Milan, tourists were able to travel all the way from this modern metropolis to Venice without having to change trains. It paved the way for people not just from northern Italy, but from Germany, France, and England as well, to travel to Venice with ease.

⁷² Quote: Mann 1998, 213. J. G. Links says in his *Venice for Pleasure* that "[i]t has often been said that the only proper way of arriving in Venice is by the sea, that is to say through the northernmost of the two openings in the eggshell to Venice's east, and so along the Riva degli Schiavoni [...]. 2001, 17. On the way tourists are surprised of the way water is an essential part of the city, see also Davis & Marvin 2004, 133.

Nowadays most people arrive in Venice by way of the approximately 3600 meter long land bridge to the railway station, if they don't happen to drive or take a taxi to the city quite along the same route, from the airport to *Piazzale Roma*, the only car park in Venice (built 1932). Also in that case they will end up close to *Santa Lucia*., the railway station, in the same end of the city. Even if water taxis coming from Marco Polo airport do take distinctive routes, they would need to be requested to make a small roundtrip before they would be able to present the view appraised by von Aschenbach.

The approach to the city that Mann idealizes actually features the slow speed approach, an important companion when one wants to enjoy sceneries – and the speed which was envisioned when Venice was built. She is no Las Vegas, which needs to be introduced to fast drivers where billboard advertisements loom large on the sides of the highways. She can be drifted to. And in the train, the once hard-to-pass lagoon with its uncanny sights, houses near the mainland, which are halfway built into the sea, and the small islands featuring inspiring ruins, is now overcome in just a couple of minutes in a static, high speed (in reference to historical arrivals), where only faraway landscapes make sense to the eye. All nearby details lose form, giving the impression of mere movement – an experience appraised by the futurists, who in their hatred of kitschy worship of cultural history (and the intentionally slow pace of Venice) were hungry to tear apart the city already in their 1912 *Contro Venezia passatista*, a flyer, which they threw down from the clock tower of San Marco.⁷³

Contemporary arrivals to Venice are anticipated by a sea panorama from a dirty train window. We leave Mestre railway station with the train and head for Venice among a crowd full of aesthetic anticipation (and locals going to work), and we soon enter a

⁷³ See, e.g., Pemble 1995, 159.

landscape of demarcation: small islands, “houses rising on the shoals,”⁷⁴ water taking over functions of land. Then the historical silhouette of Venice rises from the Horizon.

The magic vanishes at the end of the rail line, however. The inner yard and interior of *Santa Lucia* is that of an ordinary railway station. The actual moment of stepping down from the train is quite profane.

The new façade? Besides the water in the canal, the first thing one sees from the stairs of the station is a small eighteenth century neoclassicist church with a high cupola, *San Simeone Piccolo*, situated on *Fondamenta San Piccolo*, the opposite waterfront. It has now, arbitrarily, become one of the landmarks of Venice, and the “edge” of the “façade” offered to tourists – challenging in importance its artistically superior neighbor, the Church of *Santa Maria di Nazareth*, situated on the other side of the Scalzi bridge.

If the visitor does not stay at Cannaregio, but does the common one-day trip favored by relatively many travelers because of the extraordinary high prices of the city, s/he takes a walk, which begins from a bridge close to the railway, which is well remembered by most visitors, but likewise never recalled by its name, *Ponte dei Scalzi*. Then there are two routes to choose from. The other is the only Haussmanian route the city has to offer, the series of broad streets through Cannaregio to Rialto. The other is the labyrinth through *San Polo*.

Whatever route one chooses, one has to walk through the whole city before getting to San Marco. There is of course another way to get there, the water bus, for example number 1 straight from the railway station, but neither in this case can one reach *San Marco* from the direction Mann appraises. Mann’s and von Aschenbach’s fantastic

⁷⁴ Quote from Cassiodorus (A.D. 523). In Brown 1907, 1-2.

scenery is seen only if one takes a *vaporetto* from the city proper out to some of its islands, for example Lido, and then turns back.

This is particularly meaningful if we remember that Venice has changed less than any other old European center of culture and commerce – considering architecture and town planning. It is traffic alone which has here changed the aesthetic nature of the city.

The view offered from the railway station definitely works in a way *as* a façade, the first sight, but does this mean that it would function as an opening for a dialogue with the city? There is a classification of façades, which follows more rigidly the intentions of the builders, which we recognize, and note. I believe that in subjective experience the view offered from the railway station works in a façade-like fashion, but it seems plausible that no one would take it to be an intentional façade of the city, though the architect of *Santa Lucia* might have spent much effort in planning the view given from the station.

In fact, we do not relate to it actively, as we would relate to a façade we know is built to be one. This difference is not quintessential for a city like Venice, which is impressive all over, but in some cities the changes modern traffic has brought to the façade can be felt more clearly.

In Venice one's first glimpse of it is dramatic – in any case. There is no gradually subsiding forest or suburbia on the way to the city, and for a new visitor (even for old ones) it is a shock to see streets of water. In fact, the sight of water in the streets might be the most meaningful “façade” – experientially. Experiencing the city starts very clearly, like turning the first page of a book, by learning something new on how cities can be built, and this encounter is very sensual.

Aspects of Urban Arrival

Especially when we talk about capitals, arrivals from the airport have a role in forming the first encounter of a whole country. In an attempt to discuss the image of Finland Jörn Donner and Martti Häikiö pointed out in 1990 that as most people arrive to the country by air, the single most significant factor in developing their view of the country is to develop its main airport.⁷⁵

When one starts to think about it, seldom do we remember a lot about the way from the airport – nor consider it to tell us something significant about the country we come to. We are better in interpretation than Donner and Häikiö thought.

Of course arrivals have still changed a lot, and sometimes significantly. Modern bridges, motorways and harbors turn us on/off, seduce us, illuminate features in urbanity, and present cities in new ways. Foreign tourists no longer arrive in New York by boat – welcomed by the Statue of Liberty (still a popular scene in romantic, historical movies), but by plane, to its backyard (often New Jersey). European travelers used to see the Manhattan skyline and the Statue of Liberty hailing them when they arrived to The New Continent, and the change of that welcoming façade must have had effects on the way the city is experienced. For example, New York City's Penn Station is, for those who arrive by train from the New Jersey direction, still quite an experience in its pompous style. The view of New York it offers from its main entrance is not fancy, but one which a tourist also associates with the *real* New York. It is an arrival through a backdoor nearly as much as *Santa Lucia* is, but it authenticizes the experience of New York.

⁷⁵ Donner & Häikiö 1990, 14.

Here we find Venice different. Less for the everyday, there is no Venetian lifestyle experience in the same sense that there is something of that type in New York or Paris – though some tourists work hard to find a café where they think they are the only tourists of the day.

Modern bridges, motorways and harbors, routes to the airport, underground stations and shuttle buses which take us from airports, railway stations, and the highways and suburbia on the way to the city center, are all different beginnings for the dialogue of the visitor and the city. Sometimes a bus stop is the beginning of the dialogue for a whole area, and underground stations work as windows to the whole city – something which as a form of surface structure, is discussed more in the next chapter. But how much and in what way do they frame our encounter with the city? To what extent do arrivals dominate the aesthetics of cities, if we recall how we really build experiences?

In some cities one recalls only the airport. Take for example Paris. I cannot remember anything of the dull train ride to the city from the airport, but I remember well the enigmatic architecture of *Charles de Gaulle*. It might have overshadowed the ride, but in many cases, here as well, there is nothing to overshadow. Roads and rails to the airport are filled with dull suburbs and sceneries. Berlin *Tegel* is an airport I love architectonically, and I even enjoy the bus ride to the center from it, but this has not left any remarkable traces on my memory.

Traveling to Stockholm by ferry is an experience loaded with the natural beauty of the archipelago. At least the end of the trip is also very slow, as the ferry has to pass narrow channels between islands. Living in Stockholm is, though, no archipelago experience at all. The archipelago outside of the city is a known fact, but it does not form

an actual part of its everyday experience, or one could say that when a normal Stockholm resident is in the archipelago s/he has become a tourist in his/her own city.

One who comes by air via Arlanda airport to Stockholm is in the same situation as anyone landing in Oslo, Copenhagen, or Warsaw. The airport is dull, and the way to the site which is the object of the visit, leaves no remarkable traces.

Again, Venice makes an interesting difference. Arriving by air one lands in the lagoon, on an island, and the scenery is distinctive already before landing. One sees the lagoon with its islands well before, if the weather is favorable, and no one overshadows the view. Mostly the bus ride from the airport to Mestre, if one chooses this way of arriving (changing to the train at Mestre railway station or in some cases continuing all the way to Venice car park *Piazzale Roma*), is like it would be everywhere, except that one has arrived on an island, which is loosely connected to the continent. In the end, whether one crosses the lagoon with the train or bus (or taxi) over the *Ponte della libertà*, one sees again the structure one knows to exist, the bridge infrastructure connecting the land parts of the area. In taking the water bus from the airport one is once again on a miraculous trip. These are specialties which people remember, and which even tourist guides, otherwise not that active in explaining how it is to arrive in cities, start here and emphasize it as one of the first highlights of a Venice experience.

Some cities have kept their old façades though traffic has changed. But seldom do they have a façade as clear as Venice has. It follows from the fact that the city is surrounded by water, and that the façade for visitors has been easy to build into one direction. There are many kinds of classics in this sense. I have never visited Las Vegas, but even I know that there is a classical way to arrive and then there are “others.” The

famous way to arrive in Las Vegas means to drive through the desert, and see how the city rises up from the middle of nothing, suddenly, the road becoming the famous Las Vegas Strip, the first neon advertisements welcoming you. Even Hunter S. Thompson, who missed most of his physical trips because of his gonzo journalist drug use (and its poetic descriptions), was keen to explain how Las Vegas popped up out of the desert.⁷⁶

Though we sometimes know how to make it to the city the classical way, in most cases we feel free to build the arrival and its experience on our own. Cities are not novels, where you have to start from chapter one. Turning to the dull arrivals, this can even be something of an unpleasant issue. Some cities do not provide pleasant arrivals. The way from the port or the airport can be an anticlimax. Cities with unaesthetic arrivals, which contrast the appeal of the cities in question include Rome or Milan by air, or St. Petersburg and New York by train (this is not to say that some of these arrivals would not be hot). Bologna airport and its surroundings are quite enchanting, resonating well with the enormous charm of the city. Poznan train station suits the city as well, resonating with its dry, historical charm. Some arrivals are dull, but the city is seductive – I cannot recall a single city where the arrival would be a climax, but the city in question not.

Developing Experiences

Working on the experience of the city often starts long before the actual journey. In this way representation culture can make us even tired of a place we have not yet really seen.

Our control and cultivation of experience often begins actively as well even before arrival. We read tourist guides. We check out webpages – and often not just the

⁷⁶ Thompson 1980, 561.

ones made by the tourist council. We read about hotels, and we might even read a novel about the city or watch films connected to it. But still we wait for the real thing, and we get ready experientially, especially when we are on a short tourist trip. Often we enjoy, start to be really curious, and gaze hungrily at the environment, only when we know that we are in the right place, which often means when we have reached the old township or the center of the city we have traveled to. Here Venice is different, because it is a spectacular experience as a whole, only old, though a product of different periods.

John Urry describes neatly the experience of being a stranger in an environment used for leisure, even if his ideas can also be used to convey the experience of someone just taking the first walk in a strange city while on a work trip, or even the first days when living in a new city. Talking about “breaking with established routines and practices of everyday life and allowing one’s senses to engage with a set of stimuli that contrast with the everyday and the mundane” Urry is wise to suggest, that it is experientially quite demanding to come to terms with a new city or whatever aesthetic whole (this applies of course also to art), and one just cannot engage with the environment in the described way all the time.⁷⁷ After visiting Paris or Rome we are exhausted – with good reason – just by inhaling what the city has to offer. Actually Urry’s concept of the tourist gaze is perhaps too much connected to the eye when one thinks about the aesthetics of enjoying multisensory environments. It has something to learn from a classic of aesthetics, Jerome Stolnitz “aesthetic attitude,” which, as it points more to an attitude, does not lose all the other senses. Stolnitz’s concept points to an active construction of aesthetic experience, and one could say the tourist attitude could definitely be a concept worth thinking about,

⁷⁷ Urry 2002, 2.

as it does not cut off senses other than vision, and as it also points towards interpretation.⁷⁸

Often the right aesthetic tourist attitude is taken when the visitor arrives in the right neighborhood, i.e. the one with old architecture or the one with the famous buildings. And this attitude is important for the experience. Another issue worth discussing, though, is the fact that the attitude might be changed to gain a reward in another way when traveling to different areas of the city. Taking a walk from the ostentious center areas of Paris to Les Marais already seduces one architecturally to change one's stance, but in some cases one has to work to get into the new atmosphere and interpretation.

In Venice the different areas of the city do have differing atmospheres about them. But if the visitor is new, the sensation of water in the cityscape will distort him/her from taking advantage of these differences – and, anyway, these changes are not fundamental, like leaving Brixton for the central areas of London would be. Only major differences are felt, like being in the inner city and its narrow canal maze, or standing on the *fondamente* (outer waterfronts facing the sea). St. Mark's area is of course the most touristified, and this might feel more important – whether positively or negatively – the way tourists have more or less invaded the city.

The outer islands of Venice are in fact felt more significantly as making a difference. The difference is reinforced by the boat ride. Taking a day trip to Murano, Burano, or Lido feels significant though the whole city is in water. But actually, a typical

⁷⁸ See Stolnitz 1989, who names on page 336 tourism, too, by saying that “the tourist on his holiday glances at the trees on the hills or the ocean.” Though Stolnitz discusses mostly art attitudes, he can definitely not be overlooked here.

reaction when coming to these island clusters is realizing that the same kind of strange city building paradigm with water continues in the outskirts of the lagoon.

Important to notice is the action of opening ourselves for really experiencing something as tourists or admirers of art and architecture. It is the kind of choice which we cannot repeat too often. The experience of many typical tourist cities resembles the experience of visiting art museums. Even if cities are enjoyed more holistically than museums, where singular works of art call out for individual attention, and the building's architecture, though often made to manifest power (Louvre), or to fit our taste and high cultured values, are made to support the works of art, we actively take the role of experiencing in the same way. We open ourselves for stimulation and influence. We let ourselves be seduced, challenged, and removed from our static everyday mode to the flow of an experience. Of course there are sites which appeal so powerfully, that they wake us up, seduce us to take up this attitude, even against our will – and Venice definitely is full of them, being one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Still, even Venice is digested actively, and often that starts well in advance at home through representations and texts.

Museums, as well, feature noteworthy architectural “welcoming ceremonies.” For example the witty Pei glass pyramid at the Louvre or the slightly megalomaniac stairs at the Philadelphia Museum of Art which mark the beginning of an elevated experience. But in fact many museums are still, for one reason or another, kept visually quite neutral both from the outside as well as from the inside – perhaps to leave room for the works of art to flourish? And even if the building is visually stimulating, like New York's Guggenheim Museum or the Pompidou Center in Paris, one saves communicative energy to meet the

works of art inside the building. It is not strange that tactility has become more and more important in museum building, phenomenologized space where mobility and touch are stimulated, as the buildings are not wanted to dominate the works of art displayed for attention.

The question of arrival could be taken to be analogous to beginnings in other aesthetic territories, that is how we begin our encounters in a new love affair, how we start reading a book or how the author of the book can use the beginning of the book to seduce us to continue reading (or to make us adapt a certain way of reading). Also traffic and routes to the city can be constructed to whet the appetite of the visitors, or to help them orientate in the city – which is often forgotten or maybe just considered to be of minor importance by cities flourishing with the help of tourism.⁷⁹

Some “texts” are more closed than others, and do entail only one possible beginning: for example books cannot be read from a new direction, if not new interpretations are counted in metaphorically – or if we are not talking about the extreme avant-garde. Cities can be interpreted in new ways, as some particularly “open” artworks, like Karlheinz Stockhausen’s *Klavierstück XI*, parts of which can be played in whatever order, hypertexts, or just many buildings and other architectural complexes with many entrances do. For example St. Petersburg is a city which does not give us just one better or right way to approach it, but a variety of typical ways to arrive – including train, boat, and air.

We can also prepare ourselves in different ways to travel to a city – and we can even prepare ourselves too much. It might be important to have a realistic picture about what to expect. It might not be wise to expect too much from cities like Buffalo, Kassel,

⁷⁹ More on routes in chapters 4 and 5.

or Lahti – if one is passionate about urban aesthetics. In any case, cities can also be approached in various ways geographically, through new ways of using traffic, and by entering them at different times of the year or in the daytime/night. They might also change architectonically and through new town planning. The case of Venice is illuminating regarding the question of how traffic changes the aesthetic nature of a city when the city is quite the same as before the invention of modern traffic vehicles. Most cities have been rebuilt in many ways, and the effects upon them made by modernization are more dependent on the evolution of the cityscape as a whole.

Preparing for the experience and deepening it through new arrivals

Preparations are one important part of coming to a city. Reproductions can be watched, enjoyed, and interpreted. Maps may be seen, and stories may be read. Then there is experiential preparation. One cleans the home so that after the exhausting trip when one comes back everything would be in order, so one could just sit down in the armchair and enjoy being back. But one also cleans the mind and spirit, gets ready for something new, and pushes aside everyday attitudes, bringing in openness, and energy reserves for the new. This is actually also where the tourist gaze starts and gains its experiential base, sometimes a really profound one, making possible even personality development during dramatically affective trips. The tourist experience begins at home. Though it is not based upon an aesthetic dialogue with an object, it anticipates it, and is an active process. This still happens mostly through visual culture and visualizing thinking, and other senses, like olfactory, follow only from the actual contact.

This does not change significantly when one goes to the same place again, if the place just offers a lot to experience. It is only that experience changes. Every new visit adds something to our conception, interpretation, and (lived) experience of a city, more than reading a book, or visiting an art museum ever could, as the latter ones are not rich enough in possibilities. In cities there is always something new to explore, and they always show some new faces of their own. This applies naturally not just to arrivals. Cities are seen from different angles – and cities change, as we already discussed, for example, by adding new bridges and gateways.

Changes in a city or new ways of approaching it, though, do not totally change our relation to it. For my own part, I inaugurated my love and hate relationship with Venice by arriving first to its railway station, but during one later trip and after reading Mann's work, I once, after enjoying a beautiful day at Lido, took the boat back to Venice proper, and got the point of von Aschenbach's thoughts quoted earlier in this text, and through that experience my idea of approaching, entering Venice, and thinking about its façade, changed not just intellectually, but in lived experience. But the new perspective did not destroy the old one. Now two ways of arrival oscillate in my experience of Venice, as do also the art historical Venice I seek and the way it is "served" for tourists. And this, without forgetting my lived experience and the experiences of Venice, which have been made a part of my *Lebenswelt* through literature and arts. Here literature challenged my original arrival, and I got the point – coincidentally. Now even reading Mann's novella has changed.

Being many, an array of concrete possibilities, and intermingling these with pre-conceptions, cultural history, and other contextualizing forces, as well as representations,

and ways of framing produced by the tourist industries and ways of interpreting art history; this is what cities offer.

The Outcome of the Discourse on Arrivals

Façades change – and this is something we should understand, not just through noticing how new façades are built to replace the old, but through an understanding of the effects traffic has on the city. Real façades still have another kind of effect than the ones which have just been reinvented following other changes. We have also learned that gateways to cities are not necessarily of importance – if they are not distinctive, or extremely beautiful. It is important that we gain knowledge of differing modes of arrival, and know the original one, when it has been built to please our eye – if we really want to enrich our experience of a city. We are anyway good readers of city arrivals, and do not easily get distracted by unintentional structures. We know when to open up our eyes – something which is very important for learning about the depths of the city, which together with surface analysis forms the core of the next chapter.

Chapter 3

SURFACE AND DEPTH

At a summer school on urban nature which was organized by the International Institute for Applied Aesthetics at Lahti in summer 2006, biologist Susanna Lehvävirta revealed in a keynote, that whatever type of forest is in question, its typical features are dominant only after entering approximately 50 meters into it.

Cities do not follow any natural pattern. Our experience of them follows a similar one, though. At its margins Les Marais still feels like whatever part of Paris, as do New York's Chinatown and Tallinn's Vanalinn. But deep in the hearts of these urban classics we feel absorbed by them.

A complete experience of renaissance and medieval architecture needs a complete scenario – which we get most purely in Venice. Geographical size and stylistic unity give depth to the holistic experience of the urban environment. A singular old building in the middle of a modern office area can be a thrill – and so, an experiential peak on its own – but, as a fitting part of a whole it can produce a deeper experience. This deep experience, however banal the metaphor “deep” may sound, is a less structured additional gain, which connects closely to our feeling of belonging to this world. We feel at home in “our hood” – as so many Afro-American hip hop pieces recall, though the urban territories in question are actually ghettos. Though Kafka is history, we still feel alienated in enormous bureaucratic mazes. We like historical buildings and cityscapes. And we feel more

anchored to renaissance Venice than to a margin of four houses left in an otherwise modernized part of Milan.

The epistemological nature of enjoying historical cityscapes builds upon magnitude. When we sit at a terrace café outside of a renaissance palace, we need to know that behind the corner we are met not by a new bank building, but by more enchanting renaissance architecture – if we want to feel a deeper connection to it. Of course sometimes an interior, yard, or a small park may actually have an extraordinary effect in this respect, but those are peculiar instances of powerful atmospheres which some sites are able to stimulate.

In the preceding paragraphs, we have discussed one form of depth firmly anchored to interpretation and being. The metaphor of depth, together with its opposite, surface, will here still be seen in various other ways as well.

One of them is the everyday. Though the everyday might be as dull as it is at home, seeing it is an essential part of tourist trips. Through seeing and experiencing the everyday we feel that we understand the city better. And when the everyday gets hard to find – tourists work harder to find it. In Venice, where “real life” is hidden – and diminishing – some visitors work hard to find clothes hanging on ropes outside of a window in some narrow street.

Robert C. Davis and Garry R. Marvin (2004) tell us an amusing story about an American scholar who took a sabbatical leave and spent a year in Venice with his family. Though they found a place to stay in one of the least touristified areas of Venice, they

were often photographed while hanging out their laundry. They were photographed as authentic Venetians to the extent that they grew really tired of it.⁸⁰

The background for this is the way laundry in many areas of southern Europe has been hung outside the window already for centuries – mostly in poor neighborhoods – and the way this became a common theme in northern European picturesque painting, or, frankly speaking, kitsch.

As fewer and fewer people really live in Venice, someone might soon start putting out laundry just to attract tourists. This might be the destiny of touristified cities, not just the fact that the built environment is increasingly developed with the tourist culture in mind, but that real life begins to be more simulated than real. Visitors want to see evidence that they are in a real historical city. And they want to know that they are in a living city as well – which makes the border between cultural tourism and historical cities quite a challenging issue in the future, as the real life of historical cities is slowly driven down everywhere.

The real everyday in Venice is, of course, more interesting than the everyday of Uppsala, Lancaster, or Joensuu. It is not what one comes for, because it is partly hidden and partly really under threat, to the extent that the locals can even feel hostile towards tourists, but it stimulates interest, for sure – and I find it plausible that people will soon want to sell more real life experiences to tourists, for example, through taking them into be part of “real” Venetian families for a while.

Surface and depth, as themes, unlock other horizons as well, from sites to see vs. the less known city, routes and traffic vs. places which are not on any route, and tourism as a special form of surface culture which sometimes helps us to get deeper faster.

⁸⁰ See Davis & Marvin 2004, 97.

In *Entering Old Cityscapes* I will bring forth the experiential value of historical cityscapes, and how their rewarding experience thrives on knowledge of the real nature of the area. The experience also becomes deeper when the historical cityscape is well framed, big in geographical size, and not too eclectic. Questions on arrival are also discussed again to a small extent along with nighttime as a differentiating interface.⁸¹ We might have to learn the city more than once by heart, as its looks and atmospheres might change through different times of the day or seasons of the year. In the section *Everyday*, the role of everyday life, its way of giving depth to city experience – sometimes for real, sometimes only in an imaginary sense is discussed. *The Paradox of Tourism* deals with the way tourism, like trivial literature, is a culture based upon formulas, which are quite the same everywhere. At the same time, it makes it easier for us as tourists to come to terms with new locations, and sometimes it even helps us to acquire a deeper understanding more quickly. *Streets, Marketplaces, and Monuments*, finally, deals with places, streets, and buildings and their role as places that are a “must” to see, surface shared by everyone.

Entering Old Cityscapes

We enter old townships with an aesthetic attitude – and we are rewarded not just on our travels but on our walks to historical parts of our own cities as well. The bigger the cityscapes in question are, the more intensive the experiences are when we reach their

⁸¹ Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour, 1977, 79, point out that “Las Vegas is better known for its night light than its daylight.” Italian tourist beaches are known for their sunny summer. But cultural centers like Venice are photographed mostly in winter morning light. It makes the colors of the houses seem more clear and strong.

hearts. Often the historical cityscape is of course, in itself, thought to be the heart of the city – both providing it historical depth, and by offering the city aesthetically an elevated, intensifying atmosphere.

When a whole city is old it contributes to the depth of the historical experience as a whole. It applies to central areas in Florence, Bologna, Paris, Copenhagen, St. Petersburg (though it is younger, it has remained structurally the same), and Rome. Of course it has to do with the way architecture has been built to meet the old, as façades have been preserved well or new buildings hidden between the old, so as not to disturb the urban landscapes. But in many cases there is a noticeable difference. One can really feel that entering 50 meters into an old cityscape makes the feeling profound. One enters a special atmosphere, and the less touristified the better.

Digging oneself into the Roman maze or getting stuck in the labyrinths of a younger, but well-preserved Hansa cityscape (Tallinn, Riga) is significant partly following the size of these areas. In this respect, Venice is exceptional. As other cities offer historical areas where the old takes over, in Venice the whole city is the “old part,” and there are virtually no areas which would be mixed in this sense. It is just the administrative area of Venice that gets a modern counterpart in Mestre, but no one actually experiences these two historical cities of Venice and Mestre to be the same.

What is actually at stake aesthetically when a city is historical? An important factor making old cityscapes aesthetic in the aesthete fashion, is their meaningless nature. I am not pointing to worthlessness, but to a lack of meaning resulting from the politics of the era when the historical city was built. Trafalgar Square and the Louvre are imperialist monuments – which are adored alike by culturally minded pacifists and democrats around

the world. If they would be built now to reinforce our belief in the ethical worth of the Iraqi war or for hailing French African politics, urban scholars would detest them. Beauty is simply more abundant as there are no challenging meanings or power relations to note.

Everything old enough gets an aura of untroubled beauty. Working-class cities from Manchester to Liverpool are sold to tourists side by side with the elite architecture of the world. It is all the same – form and material, beautiful architecture, where old meanings are just shadows giving depth to the experience.

The old seems to remain beyond the grasp of good and evil. In Umberto Eco's "La struttura del cattivo gusto" we encounter neo-classicist statues at Cimitero Monumentale in Milano, which, as Eco points out, are more pleasant if we believe they are from the neo-classicist period, and not constructed by rich and wealthy families during the fascist period,⁸² which here, in the leftist circles of 1964 Milan, must have struck them at the time as negative history at too close a proximity for comfort. Once in Tartu I thought I was looking at classical neo-classicism, until I heard that the buildings had been ordered by Stalin. Their aesthetic worth sank.

In Hamburg's, Tallinn's, Stockholm's old cities we open our eyes for the real thing when we enter the old areas. Touristic experience is let loose. When there are old walls surrounding the cityscape (or water, surrounding the whole of Venice), this change is even faster. Walled cities do not require a "50 meter range." In Venice, surrounding waters, and architectonically unchallenged historicity sucks us into its historical atmosphere.

Most important to note, visitors do not necessarily see a big difference in visiting a township built in medieval or one built in renaissance times. The atmosphere of the old,

⁸² Eco 1997, 65.

pre-modern, is the success of these cityscapes. Often there exists an eclectic surface of the township when one arrives in it. For example, at the gates of Vanalinn (Tallinn) one does not yet feel absorbed by it, at least when arriving through the main tourist routes among tourists. As long as one can see other parts of the city too easily, or when one is at an open place in-between, and “even worse,” surrounded by overly eager tourists, it does not yet feel like being inside, absorbed by the special atmosphere.

In most cities this in-between experience is gained through a gradual change while walking or, for example, taking a tram to the old town. In Venice the difference to normal cities with old cityscapes invites us to understand this. The change is sharp, though not fast, when one arrives by train from Mestre or with a water bus from Marco Polo airport.– and after this, finding the city, lying in water, without any overshadowing new parts facing the old, is sole historical terrain which supports the building of a historical experience.

One arrives suddenly, not gradually to the city, without suburbia or eclectic twilight zones – and one is immediately absorbed in its antiquarian atmosphere, one of the strongest of all Western classical cityscapes and cities. At the same time, going over water gives one time to prepare for the experience, and as a whole new city emerges this experience is unique. Water reinforces her solitude.

One interesting effect is that when one has become acquainted with an old city, like Venice, by heart, or at least one has made good acquaintance with near surroundings, the city might still feel like a new one when night falls. This is not only due to the fact that different people are out during the nighttime, or that different venues are open. It is especially that many old mazes are not completely covered with lights. Lighting is used

delicately, and this brings out different forms at night than during the daytime. In Venice, even in crowded quarters close to Rialto one can get lost, even though one would know the way during the daytime. This experience is an anachronism. We recognize it from Edgar Allan Poe's short story *Man of the Crowd*, where the protagonist walks the crowded, half-dark streets, losing his sense of time, and blurring his subjective identity.

Everyday

Old cityscapes make us feel less a part of the everyday – though these areas sometimes are everyday venues for people living there. This is one reason why we favor them in tourism. Many classical areas change. Over time, they are increasingly becoming territories of spectacle and tourism, and their economical worth raises the cost of both housing and living, making the everyday harder to maintain for normal people. It seems that in historical cityscapes, Venice in the forefront, only rich people seem to survive – among the tourists. And so they buy vacation apartments, which are soon the only housing besides hotel living. Trastevere in Rome and Gamla Stan in Stockholm are changing in different ways or have already changed. Trastevere was an old slum, which became popular as a chic place to live – and Gamla Stan, the old part of Stockholm, has for a long time already been a place where no ordinary people can afford to live.

In Venice many apartments are owned by rich foreigners who come to the city for only two weeks of the year. Is this the future of all historical townships and historical cities, where not just prices are going up, but where it is hard to create a functioning

infrastructure for contemporary life? Is tourism together with high-class vacationing their destiny?

Where the everyday has died, a part of the depth gained by travelers in the city is lost, and this is now a crisis which Venice faces. We hear talk about its everyday, and everyone who has been there for a longer period wants to tell a story about it, how he or she saw everyday life in the midst of it all. This is a quest for depth, rarely gained anymore, as life has passed away from the city. The search for the real might even become irrelevant, as simulation, touristification, and commercial anachronisms rule.

In this case, Venice is not given a helping hand by surrounding neighborhoods. Though the area of the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia is kitschy, and feels a bit desolated, it lies close to the center. The Liberty Bell area does not feel at all dead in any particularly experiential sense. Areas can gain a sense of reality and liveliness from their surroundings. If the Liberty Bell site would be moved to a forest in Maine, it would feel as culturally dead as a tourist destination as such.

At the same time one should not forget that it is this pleasant, not too intensive everyday atmosphere, that we enjoy during walks.⁸³ The everyday is an atmosphere which we enjoy visiting, one thing to collect from different places, and a trendy topic of discussion in today's "cultures-meet-cultures" discourse.

The Paradox of Tourism

We need surface structures partly because we need safety. That is why many people go to McDonald's when they are culturally lost in a foreign city. Visiting a McDonald's is like

⁸³ More on this in chapter 4 on "Walking."

spending time at an airport – culturally it is simultaneously a form of Americanization and being in a non place. There are no significant differences between McDonald's restaurants, as there are no meaningful changes from hotel to hotel, or from airport to airport. There are also tourist restaurants, and there are main streets, shop windows targeting tourists – a whole matrix of surface that one has to step beyond, if one wants a deeper touch to the local culture and other cultural realms.

There are also sites which function as the face of a city (we are again not far from the themes discussed in chapter 2 on arrivals), like the area of the Eiffel Tower in Paris or the Colosseum of Rome, which can, as in these examples, have a profound historical nature, which can even contribute to experience, but which is still safe.

Tourism is a way to make surfaces broader, and profundity faster to reach. My favorite detective story on Venice is the Aurelio Zen mystery *Dead Lagoon* (1994) – a beautiful, laconic, and painful book on how things can go when people try to keep up with traditions in an extremely touristified city. Tourism stealthily approaches the very core of the everyday.

Many detective stories on Venice have become success stories. In Donna Leon's bestseller detective stories, the narrative always follows the same rule. Policeman Guido Brunetti, who is not originally Venetian, but who has strong networks in the city through his wife's family, faces a crime and starts to root around in local networks of finances, local politics, and family relations, which are all highly respectable on the surface, but are in the course of the story revealed to be polished façades which hide dirty intrigues and painful secrets. Collecting information from one source leads the protagonist to see through the façade of another, and the constant reformation of questions and hypotheses

helps him to form a deeper picture of the case, which is required so that he could solve the mystery at the end of the book. Following the formula of detective stories, the plot is easily comprehensible and the language used to convey it is far from challenging – without even offering a possibility for any deeper linguistic resonance, high-brow or boundary-breaking aesthetic experience, or challenges of interpretation in any artistic sense.

As “readers” of Venice, or any other city we visit, most of us are more like readers of Guido Brunetti than the man himself. We don’t interfere, nor do we often even have the knowledge and contacts needed to interfere with the real city, and in most cases when people take vacations they are not even interested in being challenged. This does not differ very much from going to movies or reading books. We need safe experiences when we have our bad days or when we take our children or narrow-minded friends to an artistic venue. We as individuals need art which does not challenge us, at least sometimes, however avant-garde we would consider ourselves to be.

This manner of dealing with culture has mostly been associated with mass culture – which is none the less a bit of a black-and-white description of the situation, as most classical concerts and experiences of literature are pleasant leisure activities in the way that Adorno has indicated in his writings on the culture industry.⁸⁴

In parallel fashion to most detective books, most tourism is mass culture in the sense that is criticized by elitists, as articulated in the mass culture debate, as early as the first quarter of the twentieth century. Still we also need the initial surface whatever we do, and tourism culture makes cities more easily approachable for us – just as Mozart is a good first step into classical music. In the same way, tourism gives us easier readings of

⁸⁴ See note 86.

cities – though even mainstream consumers might sometimes grow tired of the current Reader’s Digest type of approaches which are sold to us.

The mass-culture debate hinges upon the masses and modern popular culture, which suddenly became visible on the streets of developing, modern urban centers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The rise of the women’s movement, democratization, the rise of modern popular culture opposed to self-made folk culture – as well as the rise of mass-produced, mass-consumed, and mass-distributed culture, and the way high culture and high art suddenly had to meet popular culture in a democratic manner – form the core of this debate.⁸⁵ Some mass-culture theorists were preoccupied with how high-culture traditions could survive, some were more clearly prejudiced or just overtly critical about new media and the culture of the masses, which they often overinterpreted in an artistic way. The debates were active until the 1950s and even early 1960s.

Some of the features that were attacked and attributed to mass culture in this debate have been, and still are, a part of it (though one need not take them negatively).⁸⁶ There is an endless amount of culture which follows simple formulas, which does not give us an experience of profundity, or which lacks a need for active interpretation – and tourism definitely suits these attributes. Sometimes tourist environments are “plain vanilla” mass culture, as is the case at beach resorts, where everything is even built to exemplify entertainment and tourism, from ice cream statues to pastel colored, fake art-deco houses. These beach resorts are like Las Vegas, built fast and cheap, and with only leisure inscribed in their symbolical communication.

⁸⁵ See, e.g., Lunn 1990 on the history of the debate.

⁸⁶ See Gans 1974, Shusterman 1992, and Eco 1997 for analyses of these debates from (especially in the case of the two last books) an aesthetic point of view.

A common conception is that the mass-culture debate was mostly about criticizing mass mediated popular culture, but as already pointed out, cultural critics associated with the debate were not always horrified by the masses' own culture, but who were critical about their intrusion into fine arts, which from the beginning of their establishment had been appropriated, conserved and dominated exclusively by a narrow elite consisting of mostly central and southern European upper-class men. The aforementioned position can be found, for example, in José Ortega y Gasset's *La rebellion de las masas* (1929), where Ortega y Gasset, who was occupied with the destiny of the "great tradition of art" in the hands of the masses, writes about the way uncultured tourists came on a mass scale into churches without any dignity or respect, and without possessing the legitimate knowledge of architecture needed to take part in its appreciation, thereby not even getting a correct idea of what they saw – disturbing "connoisseurs."⁸⁷ One of the main phenomena Theodor Adorno attacked in his critiques of the culture industry was the way in which modern art and its conditions for flourishing were threatened by a pressure to mix non-compromising artistry with mass culture logics, to make the former understandable for a broader audience (the democratization of taste), if not even "easier to consume."⁸⁸

Sometimes, though, tourist culture is taken to new areas, to cities and cultural environments with virtually no history of tourism. This can feel like an attack with regard to the sites in question. Still, nearly everywhere that cities offer a lot to see, or where they seduce us with their sights, tourism has already acquired a long history.

⁸⁷ Ortega y Gasset 1929, 95.

⁸⁸ See Adorno 1991 and 1984 on this theme. See also Adorno 2006, the chapter on culture industry.

The main sites and buildings which are a must to see or experience acquire an extra architectural layer on them. Houses are given neon lights – if the city’s regulations allow this. Many historical cities, however, are nowadays rather strict about saving at least historical “façades.”⁸⁹ Kitsch salesmen appear on the streets outside of important buildings or at central sites, distributing stereotypical images and corrupted miniature copies of original monuments. In St. Petersburg one faces an endless number of traditional wooden dolls – which hide smaller ones inside of them. In Tallinn one meets people dressed in medieval costumes – all throughout the long summer. They even sell “medieval” food. In Venice the carnival – a tradition which was reinvented for tourists in 1973 – is seen, among other traditions, in the loads of cheap plastic copy objects for sale. Kitschy paintings are sold on every *campo*.⁹⁰ Acoustically kitsch sellers dominate Venice more than other cities because there is virtually no traffic noise in any ordinary sense, so all these features somehow draw our attention to them.

When a city does not offer these tourist conventions, it receives a flood of complaints from visitors – though some people, on the margins of tourism, are always looking for a non-stereotypical tourist experience. One should neither forget that hodgepodge is nice, and we usually enjoy it – even we elitists, though we seem to think that there is a boundary that defines how much one can sell kitsch, and how loudly, without disturbing the possibility of enjoying art.

In some Nordic cities one knows when one is at a touristified site when one sees reindeer skins being sold – although reindeers might live 500 miles up north. But in all

⁸⁹ Houses and constructions often hide modern interiors.

⁹⁰ I am thankful to Taneli Eskola for noting a strange feature in Venice: in this city, kitschy drawings and sketches sold on the streets are usually a bit better than in most other cities. Where this comes from remains a mystery.

cities with something to see, tourism becomes not just a way of seeing, but something visible as well.

Indeed, a tourist can spend the entire trip in this sphere of ready-made visiting. Many people would criticize this, but it is a form of leisure, where one need not think too much, and where one knows what to expect. There really are days and moments when even elitists prefer not to be challenged. To my understanding we do not necessarily need this kind of tourism, but we need leisure which is non-challenging, and tourism simply offers us one, already traditional, main genre of it. Some of us just lay down on the sofa, some of us read a detective story, some of us want to talk in a park, and some of us go to see a Disney film – but we all need it in some form.

Here avant-garde ideologies have failed to understand human life, or put another way: ideas of everyday revolutions have required too much from people, a misunderstanding arising from poor self-knowledge: everyone has his/her conservative or passive sides.

For some visitors, the surface provided by neatly produced tourist culture is enough. Some of us even prefer sitting in the hotel room watching TV and using the room service – to get a hamburger. Not many of us are this “radical,” but quite many of us do not want to meet challenges through traveling. We might want to read challenging books or to watch movies which make us think differently. But it is up to us when and in what ways we might open the gates for radical, unsafe, and challenging cultural encounters. And in every territory of culture where we feel fragile, some elitists will think that we are just lazy or that we have poor taste, though they themselves do as we do in some other field.

Looking for a deeper level in a new city includes the search for restaurants which are not too touristified, and going to cafes where there are only locals – but in many touristified areas, like Venice, even these can be fakes. Locals often know exactly what they are selling and how to do it. They see tourists coming all day, who wish they were the only ones, and so the local owners reinforce this exclusive feeling.

This is how middlebrow venues work, actually – in the arts. They sell the public the feeling of having visited an art venue, or they try to give the public a feeling that they have seen really challenging art, though it would be pretty kitschy.⁹¹ Many works of art suit both real artistic interpretation and appropriation challenges and lazy consumption habits. In music, Mozart is one of those artists which can be approached easily – and so it is not a coincidence that his music is so visible in chocolate advertisements, for example. Adorno is here right in saying that works, through being easy to consume, invite consumer culture to use them – a critical point in his theory of the culture industry.⁹² It is not because these works would be worse, nor is it because the advertisers would destroy the works. For example Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* and Monet's paintings are just more accessible than Schoenberg and Mitoraj.

Some cities are more accessible than others, as well – though here there are no elitists telling us that we should favor Stockholm over Milan just because, in Stockholm, its surface with a helpful web of signs usually leads one where one wants to go, whether one may want a good cup of coffee or to take part in an evening event (and here Milan is

⁹¹ On middlebrow, see, e.g., Eco 1997 and Gans 1974.

⁹² Adorno bases his analysis of culture upon his Hegelian-Marxian analysis of society. Following this middlebrow cultural consumption is seen to be analogous to the powers working to keep the society from entering a crisis – though it would need one, from a Marxist (Frankfurtian) point of view. In Hegelian terms this means that according to Adorno, Western societies are in a state of negative dialectics, where no synthesis seems to be able to develop. This is due to the culture industry which among other things entertains the crowd and produces subjects hungry for consumption. For more on this, see Adorno 2006.

so introverted). Some cities just do not open themselves up for visitors, but rather one has to have good guide to study them, or one just has to use a lot of time to get in on the inside track.

In the same way that some cities have *only* surface. We are quickly up to speed on where we want to be in Viareggio at the Riviera, but then there is not much more to it – and we are quick in a less pleasant way on our way to the heart of Lahti, which is less pleasing aesthetically. Kassel and Örebro are like tin cans of ready-made food, which are fast to eat, but they do not really give us the thrill of digging us into their world.

Florence, Venice, New York, and Paris are easy to approach, but they easily reward increasing amounts of attention as well. A more complex city to approach is Warsaw, where one has to get beyond the central sites to find most of the beauty which a tourist would admire, or Philadelphia, which is just an ordinary American city if one happens not to find ones way to old city, for instance.

Surface is everywhere, it is just that, from time to time, we have to or we want to surpass it – that is, if we do not just suddenly find ourselves being underneath it, as sometimes happens in a city to which we have moved. In these times of mobility, it is also important to say that living in two cities makes both often feel like surface – which is something academics should think about, as they build their life on taking care of a job situated on some small university campus hours away.

Moving to a new city anyway means weeks of surface – with no real access to the depths one would rather reach. It does not feel like home. And at the same time, tourism here is not of any help, as one does not seek to understand its monuments as fast as possible, but rather to create a microcosm around oneself.

I recall having problems explaining to people that I had moved to Pisa in 1998, because I spent only three months there and moved away in the end, which makes it sound more like a tourist or short-term study visit. Building infrastructure is different. However short the visit would become, one might as well still experientially start to anchor oneself deeper to a place when one believes that one is going to stay. Lack of tourist attitude makes the experience and interpretations of a city different. In my case, the three months in Pisa were filled with searching for functional infrastructure and creating it through bureaucracy and building everyday resources from hobbies to friendships that I thought were going to be permanent. Shorter visits do not include so much interest to change, and to learn from the new cultural situation where one finds oneself. Though there is a lot of recreational power to be had from such short trips, moving somewhere else easily gives a heavier cultural shock, as one tries to make one's everyday a new one. Being in Philadelphia for three months in 2002 was different for me, as I knew I was leaving, but I happened to absorb much of the infrastructure that I needed, which quickly transformed my stay into an experience of actually living somewhere – which cannot be said of some other longer stays. A big difference is involved if one has another home somewhere else. Moreover, the everyday does not come automatically, but by actively starting to live it somewhere. One even gazes at the everyday differently. Having a carousel outside of one's home is weird, but it can be nice if it is situated outside of one's hotel.

Tourism is constituted by a web of cultural industries,⁹³ which saves us from falling into real city problems and the infrastructure of the everyday. This is what we

⁹³ For the wide range of meanings given nowadays for “culture industry” or “cultural industry,” see Loisa 2003.

often pay extra for. It is not just about a feeling of safeness, but it is also a digested interface to the local life, culture, and environment. Through this web we still have energy for even challenging art, though we might have just arrived to a new place. I recall a friend who moved to Rome and said after a couple of months that he still had not visited the Vatican. I did it during the first one-day trip to the city, but the logic is so different when one moves somewhere for life.

Besides being an attitude, tourism makes cities more readable. Tourist versions of old historical cities are like detective stories in the world of literature. “The paradox of junk fiction,” as Noël Carroll has termed the process we deliberately enter when reading junk fiction, is that we know the outcome, and feel at home in the familiar surroundings in building the narrative – while enjoying it.⁹⁴ Tourism and the reading of junk fiction are parallel activities, though when one is a tourist in a city one can always choose the hard way, leave the surface, and dive into the depths.

Donna Leon’s books are actually detective versions of tourist guides. Leon presents Venice all the time, its customs, places, traffic, and social life, and tries to reveal a degree of depth of the city to people who do not have it. The reader dives with her, but for anyone already long interested in and knowledgeable about Italian culture or a more profound knowledge of the city, it feels like endless, tiresome tutoring. For many these books, like tourist guides, reinforce stereotypes, though they might show to people that

⁹⁴ Carroll 2001, 335-347. Actually, Eco points out the same thing in his early “Le strutture narrative in Fleming” (1965, republished in Eco 2001, 145-184). He says some elitist readers have enjoyed Fleming’s style of writing, which is, after all, not that bad, but all and all the reading public makes the book what it is. But of course readers also enjoy the way the plot is construed, with minor surprises. In this way reading trash or kitsch novels is, according to Eco, as a process analogous to watching a basketball match where the Harlem Globetrotters meets a local team in a show match. The result is obvious (Harlem Globe Trotters win), but the way it happens is enough to reward the attention of the audience.

there is much more to Venice than what the tourist culture shows. Still, Leon analyzes how the culture of tourism is changing Venice, or how it affects everything there.

We have here touched upon the theme of surface and depth through the way tourism lies upon the real city. After these culture industrial effects and interpretational themes, cities themselves seem to invite us to see them as surfaces, which have a great deal of depth lying beneath them.

Streets, Marketplaces, and Monuments

Every city has a surface which is seen by most, if not all of its visitors. Even if a traveler or one visiting the city for a longer period, would not deliberately go to the city's well-known façade, s/he would anyway know it.

After a month in London, without seeing the imperial (though also partly postmodernistically distinguished) fronts facing the Thames, the visitor would know that s/he would not actually have had a "proper" London experience. Places like Trafalgar Square in London, or the Eiffel Tower in Paris, are central for experiencing these cities, and through seeing these places one knows that s/he knows the city in question – though spending time on these places do not take one at all closer to the everyday lives of these cities. They are what a visitor should see. What the city is for everyone, and what it is known for – which applies also for instance to the melancholic atmosphere of winter in Paris or the rush hours of New York City. One does not prioritize a surface in this sense, or choose it – it is objective. There may of course be sub-surfaces for cultural margins, but these are a different case. In London's Camden Town and Brixton function as

surfaces for people associated with rock and Rastafarian culture. In Berlin, Turkish Kreuzberg is on the list of all culturally virile and adventurous visitors – not forgetting that for many Turks it *is* Berlin. In a sense, metropolitan areas are of course often clusters of cities, which should not even be thought of as being on a par with that of the same whole.

A surface may consist of central plazas and monuments. In Berlin one cannot evade the presence of the symbol of the cold war divide, the Brandenburger Tor – if not in any other way, it is featured on countless posters and all guides. But a surface may also consist of streets. A visitor in Copenhagen walks along the Strøget – without doubt. In St. Petersburg one cannot evade Nevsky Prospekt. And who would have visited Paris without seeing the Avenue de Champs-Élysées?

Centers are surfaces, where it is likely that a visitor would spend some time. A tourist has to have something special in mind if s/he chooses to go to Copenhagen's Christiania (in memoriam) or London's "black" Brixton, even if these parts of their respective cities are also more on the surface than many other, more boring ones, following their extraordinary nature. Outside of the Brixton underground station one can see northern European rastafarians standing and gazing at one of the most well-known centers for West-Indian culture in Europe.

A good way to come to grips with the city's surface is to take a bus tour, though some areas can never be seen this way. In Hamburg the bus cannot tour through the narrow Reeberbahn, and in Venice this kind of tour is impossible to organize without leaving out either land or water.

Even for ambitious visitors these rides are helpful, as they give a good overall picture of the city, and through this make the visitor more conscious about what to look for and how to find it. Good surface use of a city provides information on the depths it can offer, and tourism, when well working, can really help people to dig deeper, though in many cases, especially when historical cityscapes are at stake, studying art history can be more rewarding as a background. Sub-culture tourist rides are one possibility to do this in your own respective territory of interest. In New York, at least a few years ago one could see Brooklyn in a bus guided by Grandmaster Flash.

The surfaces of Venice from St. Mark's square to the whole Riva degli Schiavoni with its classical hotels are myriad. The whole maze is a surface in this city – and in any case many tourists could claim that taking a gondola is that too. In a city where there is so much tourism, some tourist features of the city are already so much more on the surface than others, that the difference is felt. And nowadays people give us hints on where to see really freakish tourist culture. We might soon be able to enter at least marginally an era of meta-tourism.

In architecture, depth on an experiential basis is also a matter of materials, at the same time as it is gained through knowledge. We gain a feeling of depth when we know that we visit a real historical city – but having wood or stone somewhere gives us much more a down to earth feeling, a feeling of profundity as compared to what is achieved in most cases with concrete and glass. This epistemological foundation for feeling historical depth is, of course, a product of the modern eye with focus on art and the aesthetic in cities. How it evolved seems not yet to have become of interest to scholars, but at least one form of mobility has remained together with the Gondolas (in other cities the horse

wagon rides) as *the* way of experiencing Venice. In Venice one can, besides using water traffic, enjoy the city just by walking – which is anyway the most popular and rewarding way tourists want to engage with cities. The right way to move around makes for the right depth in many cases.

Learning from Surface, Learning from Depth – and their Interaction

We have inquired into the way in which the size of a historical cityscape affects its experience – without forgetting that we need to know that it is real, to really get absorbed by its atmosphere. The way old architecture “suffers” from a loss of meaning seems here to give space to its aesthetic function. At the same time, tourism becomes a surface for many visitors, who actually anyway search for the everyday of the city they visit, or try to get deeper into its cultural resources – a challenge in most cases, and partly an impossibility in Venice following its barely existing everyday. The way that tourism makes deeper levels of the city easier to approach was conveyed – at the same time as tourism itself was seen to be dangerous for the flourishing of real life in cities. Our aesthetic attitudes in entering old cityscapes were explored, at least to an initial extent. And through discussing the history of the mass-culture debate, signifiers of “real life” (laundry), and the way cities hide their normal life within the eggshells of classical palaces, working for better façades for the travelers, we were able to penetrate more deeply into the maze that Venice actually is. Moreover, the theme of next chapter, walking, will enhance the depth we have already achieved.

Chapter 4

WALKING

“Rumney has disappeared, and his father has yet to start looking for him. Thus it is that the Venetian jungle has shown itself to be stronger, closing over a young man, full of life and promise, who is now lost to us, a mere memory among so many others.”

Guy Debord, 1957⁹⁵

Ralph Rumney, British member of the Situationists International, promised to produce a “psycho-geographic map of Venice” for the first issue of the journal *Internationale situationniste* in 1957. Rumney wanted to “de-spectacularize” Venice by exploring unknown routes in the city. As he failed to deliver his contribution in time, Guy Debord launched the (quoted) attack on him, accompanied with mug-shots of the artist.⁹⁶

For the situationists, this was just one bizarre incident among many. The major role they attained as *the* post-avant-garde group of the 1950s and 1960s gives a piquant side-taste to the story, but even more is it Venice and its now huge tourist culture which has reinforced the productive semiosis of the quote. One can just imagine Rumney working on a less spectacularized Venice at the same time as the city was becoming more spectacularized than he or his “comrades” could ever have imagined – the first urban center where the tourist spectacle and self-simulation conquered real life.

⁹⁵ Quoted in Ford 2002.

⁹⁶ Rumney, who was associated with various thinkers from Bataille to Guattari, was linked to Venice later even more – in depth – as he married Peggy Guggenheim’s daughter Pegeen. Rumney was also expelled from the Situationists International (SI) after his “failure.” See Sadler 1998, 79 for a picture of Rumney’s “map”.

In an age of visual spectatorship, finding fresh readings, perspectives, even just not yet commercialized ways of appropriating cities has become a commonplace among critical consumers. Getting lost in a “jungle”, though, can never become over-produced. Nearly all tourist guides on Venice tell us that we should try getting lost in her medieval maze. But getting lost is never done just like that. Such an experience craves for a real feeling of not knowing where you are. Such an experience has to happen by accident.

Seldom do we find cities which are so easy to get lost in as Venice, though. If you spend time there walking you usually find yourself lost at least once. Getting lost can be enjoyable – when you are on vacation, and when you are surrounded by beautiful architecture. But who would want to get lost in an industrial area or among any of the sky scrapers of world business? New cities don not offer easy possibilities for getting lost. If one gets lost in a new cityscape, the reason is that all the houses look the same, not that the city would be a maze.

Breaking up the medieval maze by opening them up and creating wide boulevards and main streets, a clarifying vision in cities,⁹⁷ might have been a needed change as the world turned to modernity, a period of mankind, when speed, vision, and easy mobility, all gained importance. And making straight, wide Haussmanian streets from the historical labyrinths must have felt like an increase in urban diversity at first. Now we appreciate the way cities like Venice help us to get lost – when we walk. When getting lost is enjoyable, it seems that we are always talking about walking.

In this chapter, getting lost though is but one subtext for philosophizing on walking, which is discussed via four subsections in the pages that follow.

⁹⁷ Jay 1993, writes in length about this from a visual point of view, connecting theories of vision to practical issues.

In the section Walking, Dwelling, Socializing, and Moderate Pleasure walking itself – with a focus on urban walking – is discussed as an aesthetic practice. How does it differ from jogging? What kind of experience do we seek from walks – and especially urban ones? Venice is a Walking City – because You Cannot Walk on Her Main Streets after this basic introduction deals with the peculiarities of walking in Venice. Pedestrians are always outside of transportation routes which are reserved for water traffic. And the city has been modernized from the late nineteenth century onwards for easy walking – to serve tourists. The particularly aquatic nature of walking in Venice is explored – from the way water accompanies pedestrians by being inhaled and by being seen all the time, to the way the 400 bridges of the city are one key component in experiencing it. Kitschy Walking is an inquiry into the connection between kitsch and walking, starting from the critique the futurists posed regarding tourists in Venice in 1912 – the flyer *Contro Venezia passatista*. The futurists hit one of the city’s already then dominant ways of appropriation, daydreaming and nostalgic walking. This type of walking is typical for tourism – and more broadly petty bourgeois culture. Cute houses and romantic landscapes reward it well – a reason for the success of Venice in sentimental traveling. Artistry and Thinking in Urban Walking is an attempt to discuss walking as a way of comprehending the world aesthetically and philosophically. Through this last sketch we conclude and step into a boat (Chapter Five, Water and Traffic).

Walking, Dwelling, Socializing, and Moderate Pleasure

In the *Human Habitat* Pauline von Bonsdorff seems to claim that walking supports dwelling in the environment – more than jogging does⁹⁸ (von Bonsdorff 1998, 32).

Though a whole culture of meditative and spiritually oriented running has developed hand in hand with new forms of somatic tripping and holistic self-care,⁹⁹ the runner stays less engaged with the built environment than the walker – though the former might have a more concrete, sensual contact with ground and air.

Taking a walk is *the* way to see, feel, sense, and gaze at the environment, and it is *the* way to connect with it. Only when buildings and their proportions are massive enough can running serve as a competitive way to connect with them. The size of wide beaches typical for the Italian Riviera – framed by colossal art-deco hotels – or Brooklyn Bridge on a windy day are sites where joggers might at times get more anchored to the built environment than walkers, but these places belong to the margins of urban life.

Walking does not take you as “high”¹⁰⁰ as jogging does, and it leaves time and space for cultivating experience. It does not turn off the senses. It reinforces a moderate movement reflection of ideas, following the natural rhythm of walking. It is a moderate pleasure, as well, one of the most traditional ways of accomplishing a feeling of harmony, belonging somewhere, and forgetting troubling issues. Walking, whether in a silent forest, in a sleepy Mediterranean village, or just anywhere where we feel at home, rewarded by beauty, or existentially supported for a reason or another (down to earth building, good “vibes”), is pleasant in a loose, not too intensive or dramatic way. It is not

⁹⁸ von Bonsdorff, 1998, 32.

⁹⁹ This has resulted in numerous works on the philosophical depths of these forms of bodily life. See e.g. Shusterman 1992 & 1997, and Kupfer 1983, 2003. Numerous jogging magazines, like *Runner's World*, give support for running oriented to “inner growth,” often with a very holistic touch.

¹⁰⁰ The aspiration to get “high,” most visibly through experiencing contemporary popular culture, is taken up as a theme in Perniola 2004, 14.

one of those cultural practices which we use to intensify experience. Walking does not draw attention to itself, and it is not a tool for aiming to transcend boundaries.

If not the most academic or intellectualist forms of contemporary art are in focus, the arts reward intensified attention with intensified experience.¹⁰¹ Even when not, like, say at an exhibition of abstract, intellectualist works of art, art makes a difference to the moderate not-that-focused attitude of which life mostly consists. In art, we work out experiences differently.

When we walk and interact with the environment, our aesthetic mode of being is close to that of eating and hearing background music at the same time, or to gazing fragmentarily and sporadically at magazines in an airplane. As we walk, our bodies live, react, and respond to the environment, but our somatic system is not overloaded. Walking is something you enjoy, moderately – and here the body enjoys the same kind of resting movement as in silent, gentle love-making, or a Sunday afternoon swim. Walking can even be seen as a way of letting things happen as they do, a gentle yielding, a practice of *Gelassenheit* in everyday life – to apply Heideggerian terms. In his *Discourse on Thinking* (1957) Heidegger rediscovers an old German term, *Gelassenheit*, and philosophizes it to be a key for his late philosophy of life, an invitation to a “releasement towards things.”¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ See Shusterman 2001, on “art as dramatization”. With “academic and intellectualistic forms of contemporary art” I want to remind the reader about the way for example the presence of actors is diminished or the experiential function of the work of art often minimized in experimental art.

¹⁰² Heidegger 1957, 54.

Walking in nature, for example in the mountains, is not coincidentally something Heidegger describes in his late work.¹⁰³ From Socrates to Goethe we find people walking themselves to the depths of life and metaphysics.

Whether we talk about moderate everyday walking, or the philosophical depths that walking can support, these celebrated sides of it do not rule out challenges, or even avant-gardes of walking. Artists have famously explored limits, through walking as well, by choosing distinctive routes, making them too long, reflecting on them through their work, and marking their paths as if they would be writing manifestos.¹⁰⁴

In his *Walkscapes: Walking as an aesthetic practice* (2002) Francesco Careri does not, though the name of his book would indicate it, discuss walking as an aesthetic practice in any overall sense, but portrays walking events in the history of modern art, most notably avant-gardist ones, including Dadaist interventions with respect to Paris in the 1920s. These “(e)xcursions to the *banal places*”¹⁰⁵ are interesting in the frame of modern art, but only loosely connect to the culture of walking.

Contrary to modern art, walking, at core, is about resting the mind, and not feeling too challenged or threatened. It is like a breakfast, a hug, or airplane travel – more rewarding when practiced in good company or in fruitful solitude, in relative silence, amidst beauty, and by not being overly bombarded with sense stimulation or risky encounters. It is rest, though in mobility, in most cases when one is out and about just for the enjoyment of it.

¹⁰³ See “The Thinker as Poet,” in Heidegger 1971.

¹⁰⁴ The most famous walker in art is of course Richard Long, who pioneered the creating of art by walking in landscapes already in the 1960s, forming the basis for a whole tradition.

¹⁰⁵ According to Careri the first of these walks was organized on the 14th of April 1921. Careri 2002, 68-69 also says that this was the most important dadaist city intervention.

Of course, we take challenges in everyday walking as well, but with a moderate touch, to add variation to our life. As Naukkarinen (1998) points out we sometimes choose our routes in the city just for the sake of difference.

Breaking routines by walking through areas which are unpleasant, or searching for a feeling of risk or decadence are also a part of walking in cities. In many countries middle-class people enjoy drinking beer in “shady” neighborhoods. A jogger enjoys running through an aesthetically violent industrial area. Real life is not about values or architectural ideologies but about change and diversity, a holistic enjoyment of cultural diversity.

Venice is here different from other cities. As a city it is quite the same in all of its districts. Of course there are differences, but any normal city overshadows Venice in this sense. There is no distinctive “old township,” business district, or any other functional, differing area which would mark a big difference from the whole. Its characteristics – history, tourism, water, and beauty – are all around.

Cars cannot disturb walking in Venice. It is rather disrupted and made “challenging” by bridges with stairs and narrow porticos filled with people. The silence is at its best far away from the main tourist routes – and of course away from the canals, where boats make noise.

Diego Valeri writes in *Guida sentimentale di Venezia* (1955) about “the other Venice: the internal, the city of *calli*,¹⁰⁶ *campi*,¹⁰⁷ *rii*,¹⁰⁸, and remote *rive*,¹⁰⁹ which form

¹⁰⁶ *Calle* = street which is not at water. In the plural *calli*.

¹⁰⁷ *Campo* = square. In the plural *campi*. The name *piazza* is reserved only for San Marco.

¹⁰⁸ *Rio* = small canal. In the plural *rii*. *Canal* is reserved for the three main canals of the city.

¹⁰⁹ *Riva* = when a *fondamenta* (walking bank) is at broad water (*bacino di San Marco*), it can be called *riva*.

the grand corpse of the city.”¹¹⁰ This Venice poses a difference to the outer waterfronts and the main ways where noisy tourists rule.

That Venice is not a normal “real city,” does not pose problems for the theme of urban walking, and it would not, though the whole city would be just filled with tourism. In Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk and Jeff Speck’s *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream* (2000) we find research on Disney World,

where a disproportionately large number of suburbanites choose to spend their holidays. Why do so many people go there – for the rides? According to one Disney architect, the average visitor spends only 3 percent of his time on rides or at shows. The remaining time is spent enjoying the precise commodity that people so sorely lack in their suburban hometowns: pleasant, pedestrian-friendly, public space and the sociability it engenders.¹¹¹

Here, in a book written against the phenomenon of sprawl and its devastating traffic culture, we find a theme park fulfilling needs which we associate with cities. Public space is an important factor in creating the basis for enjoyable urban walks, not the fact that people live real lives.¹¹²

One sensual pleasure which Venice also shares with theme parks is that there are no cars. This might make it, together with other entertainment venues, a better-built entertainment for socializing than many normal cities. The streets are either water or too narrow for any vehicles, without forgetting that the city is filled with porticos and bridges with a lot of stairs, which make pedestrians the only ones able to get around on all

¹¹⁰ Valeri 1955, 99.

¹¹¹ Duany & Plater-Zyberk & Speck 2000, 63.

¹¹² Also Berleant 1992, 43 seems to describe Disney World as having the right proportions for dwelling.

Venetian ground. Traffic noise is low and when you hear it, it comes from a “charming boat” – which we react to differently than to cars. From time to time nature dominates the scene, not that much the green – there is naturally a very limited space for parks in the city – but a stinking canal or the open sea, the sense of nearby water. For a Sunday walk any city would like to have a piece of Venice.

Following the fact that there are still enough locals around, and that Italians prefer traveling inside their own country, the city still provides an opportunity for a *giro* or a *passaggiata* – an evening walk traditionally performed by Italians, a nearly anachronistic, and for outsiders, rather strange scene. These walks are not fast, and they are socializing. You talk to people, you do window shopping (and shop windows are more art in Italy than in other countries), and maybe buy something to eat out on the street.

Is this why Italian cities are so beautiful? Not following the walk, but following the way everyone, including high ranking decision makers, city planners, and architects do it – and the way ordinary people really use the cities they live in for dwelling. In countries where people responsible for building and planning drive cars and never take a walk, or where both urban planners and the people living in cities spend their time mostly in restricted territories like home, the gym, or bars, changing locations with the help of modern transportation, it becomes natural to think about the cityscape more as an area you have to cross on your way somewhere else, or just a cluster of spots to visit – rather than as a shared space for cultivating everyday aesthetics. Even suburban areas are in some sense socially livable in most southern European countries.

In Venice the biggest paradox in this respect is that its role as an outstanding walking city – which is something nearly every European city can be said to be from an

American point of view – owes to the fact that its most famous streets are waterways. There was a time in history when there were not as many bridges in the city as there are nowadays, and you had to own a Gondola or to use other boats to get around. Georg Simmel said, in his essay about Venice already that there were too many bridges. The magic is gone. Being too many, he thought, they no longer connected anything, but had become just a part of the cityscape, structures with no intensifying, experiential potential.

But bridges made the city what it is now, the queen of walking cities – and tourism would never have invaded Venice as effectively as it did had the city not been made more approachable for the pedestrian. Both too many bridges and their touristic use for “pleasure,” of course, destroys their possibility to “gather,” to be a constitutive part of a cultural world, in a Heideggerian sense.¹¹³ Here the cultural world is of course dying in other ways too. The bridges built in Venice constitute nothing for any historical people, if their role in supporting the life of universal tourism is not counted in.

Venice is a Walking City – Because You Cannot Walk on Her Main Streets

“Venice is the best city in the world to roam in,” as Ebbe Sadolin, a Danish essayist and visual artist, begins his *Vandringer i Venedig* (1956), a charming work of travel literature and witty portrayal of urban details – illustrated by the author himself. Sadolin is delighted by the fact that every single corner of Venice can be reached by foot – a thrill in a city bewildered by water and known for it, and a fact which confronts a common misunderstanding regarding its nature. “And so you roam,” he describes, “good to acknowledge, along traffic routes which have been designed mainly for pedestrians, and

¹¹³ See Heidegger 1971, 150, on bridges as “gathering” elements.

where vehicle traffic never disturbs you with its dangers or noise.”¹¹⁴ Many cities are now developing their pedestrian (and bicycle) culture, but this has been the case in Venice from the advent of its life as a tourist city.

Modernizations of metropolises have provided the pedestrian with more open space in opposition to the traditional medieval mazes, and the pedestrian has benefited from this. The charms of cities like Venice must here have gathered power already in the early days of this change of traffic when the innovation of automobiles began to invade the more open space provided by urban modernization.

In Venice pedestrians have the streets just for themselves. The medieval maze has only in some distinctive streets on Cannareggio lost out to these modernizing tendencies. Biking is not possible in Venice because of the endless numbers of stairs at the bridges and inside the arcades, and though one could carry the bike on the stairs, there would not be enough space to bike. Pedestrians have to stop walking constantly to give space to others.

In other historical cityscapes which were built during pre-industrial periods, and where pedestrians might have even had a dominating role in the public outdoor space, they anyway had to share their passages with horses and wagons. The history of Venice as a pedestrian-friendly city goes far beyond any conscious, or ideological work to support walking.

Venice differs from the *centri storici* of Rome, Stockholm’s *Gamla Stan*, and the Old Town of Riga, because the narrow space left for walking does not in many cases in fact follow from the lack of actual space, but ground. It is water which inhabits major parts of the environment. When the space is restricted, the pedestrian does not face walls,

¹¹⁴ Sadolin 1956, 1.

but rather an open space upon water. The same water mirrors houses, makes the air humid, and gives a feeling of depth to places where you cannot walk. Though you cannot see the bottom of the canal, the deep space of it invades our senses through our knowledge of it.

It would be too much to say that in ordinary cities you are afraid of traffic – but the lack of dangerous encounters on the streets definitely affect walking in Venice. Other fears rise from the central role canals have in the city. It is hard to say what an inhabitant thinks and experiences, but a visitor is afraid of falling into the canal – though during the last two centuries bridge railings have been introduced for better safety – and this feeling gets stronger the colder the water is. As the humid air affects painfully anyone who is not careful enough to cover the throat well in January, one feels a fearful resonance with the cold water when walking over it on a bridge. The effect of not having to share space with motor vehicles feels both relaxing and liberating – though one has to keep an eye on the water. An added bonus is that there is not much criminality in Venice.

Lack of active fear is important for aesthetic experience. It is difficult to enjoy beauty or to support the inner evolution of an aesthetic experience if one is under threat. This basis for experience might even be biological. When one is performing sexual intercourse, one does not feel the aching back. When one feels under threat, one focuses on it. Any threat too close to us blocks our ability to experience. For example, while Americans were only horrified by the terror attacks of September 11th, there were people from elsewhere around the world, who did experience parts of the attack and its effect as visually stimulating, even enjoyable – though most of them backed off ethically, when

they realized that their sense of the aesthetic was leading the experience too much, overshadowing the ethical.¹¹⁵

For example, it is hard to enjoy beautiful houses and murals in slums – when you have to keep an eye on the passers by. Leaving a ghetto¹¹⁶ starts the active reflection and building of an experience of the beautiful things seen along the way.

The history of Venice is not a beautiful and alluring place, but a sack of dark stories as well. In literature it is often portrayed as a maze of evil and corruption.¹¹⁷ Nowadays its wars, prisons, and prisoners – the most famous of them being Giacomo Casanova – and the reminders of war machines long past (the Arsenale) are more often seen as piquant reminders of a real and sometimes unsavory history.

Architectural details which stimulate us are more meaningful, and Venice has plenty of them, being in this way, as well, pedestrian friendly. On the *Ponte dei pugni* you suddenly feel carvings of footprints under your feet. *Ponte dei pugni* means Bridge of fists, and in these footprints you were supposed to put your feet before starting a duel. This is not the only place where you suddenly wake up following a stimulating detail – felt somatically. In normal cities you walk and streets are quite the same, but Venice keeps you from falling asleep by offering you narrow *sottoportici*¹¹⁸ – porches which pass between houses – some of them closed only on one side, the other side being breathtakingly beautiful and which open out to the *rio*, sudden dead ends, and imaginative bridges. Nowhere else is walking such an adventure. And here Venice provides a place for “urban hiking” better than perhaps any other city.

¹¹⁵ More on this, Rynänen 2002.

¹¹⁶ An interesting reminder here is that Venice has the world’s first ghetto, where Jews were closed between two iron bridges 1512.

¹¹⁷ See e.g. Dibdin 1994 and Leon 2002, 2007.

¹¹⁸ In the singular *sottoportico* / *sottoportego*.

You walk endlessly without the disturbance of cars, and as a pedestrian you are faced all the time with small problems and stimulating places where you have to climb a bit or go into a narrow tunnel. Venice as a cityscape thus feels organic. It changes from one quarter to the next, and house by house. None of the *sestieri* differ that much from each other as wholes, but streets and houses are unique – as in all other cityscapes that are old enough, ones that are made totally by hand, and built in different eras, planned ad hoc and so on.

In a sensually overtly stimulating city, walking extends the treat, as it allows for the enjoyment of moderate movement, enough time to wonder about things to see, smell, and hear, and a way of interacting sensually with stone, bridges, shop windows, and other people (clothes, perfumes).

Most importantly Venice delivers silent knowledge on the nature of urban walking, as the lack of traffic becomes so dominant that you start to think about it. Even people who usually don not think about urbanity in any reflective sense wake up to a critical stance towards contemporary city life and its traffic. Venice here illuminates our desires with respect to cities, our enjoyment of urbanity without violent traffic. It is a living laboratory for analyzing what has been lost with the development of the modern world, and what kind of possibilities cities could provide for the pedestrian.

Tourists were the first ones to really bring this forth. It is no coincidence that the two modern iron bridges, which ended *Rialto*'s centuries-long role as the only bridge over the Grand Canal, were built in 1854, eight years after the railway connection was established. Tourists needed an easier city to walk in. The vaporetto water bus system

was established in 1881 to ease the pressure which the tourist masses put the city under. They brought some noise, but they made the city more functional.

The tourist hoards had already by the 1870s become a “cliché in travel literature,” as John Pemble puts it,¹¹⁹ and nowadays they roam in huge masses.

People in other urban centers saw life getting more hectic, fast, and technological. Venice kept its silent nature partly because introducing a modern lifestyle to the city was so difficult with respect to its peculiar infrastructure, but also because it found a central role in modern leisure culture.

One can, in this light, imagine the silence that dominated the city before the advent of its new life as a tourist resort – and funnily in that time there were fewer possibilities to wander around without a ride. And the city grew increasingly more silent and museum-like the more the world outside of it kept developing towards its modern ideals.

From the days of Mann’s Venice to ours, the biggest differences lie actually in the way life outside of Venice has changed – which changes the interpretation and experience of Venice.

If one looks for a slow rhythm, and urban culture without heavy traffic, there are only small towns with really narrow streets which give you an alternative to Venice. Sadolin might have acknowledged it, but historically it is quite clear that all other cities could have been even better for walking than Venice before modern traffic, as you in Venice, in the end, always needed a boat. Funnily, where you’d need it, you cannot borrow one or rent one – in Venice everything is very restricted, and actually you are taken care of by professionals in every sense.

¹¹⁹ Pemble 1995, 15.

Venetians put up signs for you so that you'd find your way through the maze, they drive boats, they help you through their work in the tourist industry to find the culture you are after in the city, and they produce the whole infrastructure from food to beverages for you. Printed guides include walking maps. Even walks are more managed and pre-produced in Venice than anywhere else.

The city has also become more interesting than it used to be, when we think about town planning. Water is like glass in contemporary architecture. If glass is used to create space, and it is thought of as increasing light (and mirroring it), water is nowadays seen to be convenient when cities and townships build routes for walking.

And as we know, many cities have built or are planning to build more on their waterfronts. Walking is brought together with water, more and more, and so the idea of Venice is still spreading. Beautiful, socially activating areas have been restored and rebuilt in the canal districts of Manchester and on the seaside of Copenhagen, where people are expected to walk and cycle. In such areas, one need not fight the growing pace of life and the centrality of speed in transport.

According to Walter Benjamin, Parisian flaneurs used to walk turtles on the street at the time when the speed of city life and transport was increasing – at a point in history when the slow ferries that used to take people over the Seine had been superseded by the bridges.¹²⁰ In Venice this was never the case. Water and narrow walking spaces have taken and still take care of resistance. Turtles may, though, come with the rising tides and green house effects, however much we would want the paradise of Venice to survive for us.

¹²⁰ Benjamin 1999, 193.

Kitschy Walking

Though Careri claims that the futurists did not produce city interventions,¹²¹ they did, and their intervention in the tourist crowd in Venice, in the summer of 1912, touches upon the subject of leisure walking.

Tommaso Marinetti, accompanied by followers, climbed up to the newly rebuilt bell tower of San Marco (the old one had collapsed a year before) and spread the flyer *Contro Venezia passatista*, an attack against the lazy bourgeois, kitschy way of enjoying classical beauty. It was of course an attack on a broader set of bourgeois values as well – so really not differing in nature from other acts of the historical avant-garde. The aggressive, technologically utopian futurists stated that Venice was a historical relic used for regressive daydreaming. The flyer was thrown on the visitors returning from Lido to their hotels on a sunny afternoon.¹²²

Enjoying neat, picturesque, or even kitschy urban environments is one typical feature of tourist culture, though it is also an important part of our culture(s) of Sunday walks (and the like). Seaside cities and cityscapes are popular places for walking. And the slow, enjoyable walk, where one gazes at beautiful houses and land or cityscapes, is a bourgeois tradition.

The futurists favored speed, something they portrayed in their art. They painted moving vehicles, runners, and views from bus windows. Kitschy walking¹²³ was for them just a side object in their attack on Venice, the waterly streets of which they wanted to fill with concrete.

¹²¹ Careri 2002, 72.

¹²² Pemble 1995, 159.

¹²³ The concept “kitschy walking” is my own.

At that time, tourism had arrived in the mass-culture debates. Discussions on the nature of the taste of the masses had started to grow. Already in the late eighteenth century there had been discussion on trivial literature,¹²⁴ but just 12 years after the futurists' flyer on Venice, José Ortega y Gasset criticized uneducated tourists who came to churches without any understanding of what they were seeing,¹²⁵ and in 1939 Clement Greenberg wrote about fake handicraft items sold to visitors in touristic cultural centers in his "Avant-garde and Kitsch." In the mass-culture debate, the main point was often to criticize the way the masses entered the holy shrines of high culture, but here the futurists went a step further, by actually attacking the moderate leisure life where the admirors of the past served a major role, without taking a look at their position in the cultural hierarchy. This makes the attack an original one in Western art and aesthetics.

Kitschy walking – which I myself find enjoyable – is a tradition of sentimental admiration of the environment, the way neat surroundings are used for slow, beauty-oriented gazing. It is a way of walking which does not have working-class roots, but owes more to the old high-society traditions of living life as it were an eternal Sunday afternoon.

It is a way of nicely relating to the environment, and to enjoy it in a neat manner, to safely, half-passively, search for the cute and beautiful sites, landscapes, picturesque settings, and the uncanny or the cutely ornamental in cities.

People everywhere seek to walk close to candied houses – and not too close to challenging scenes. Cities like Manchester and Berlin can seduce us by being nostalgic, and they can reward admirers of modern architectural beauty, but still, they do not seduce

¹²⁴ See Woodmansee 1994, chapters on on literature.

¹²⁵ Ortega y Gasset 1993.

us that much into walking around slowly and enjoy cityscapes in a sentimental way. These cities have too much of a rough edge to them, where Berlin even has streets that are too wide. Only at their margins, where the bourgeois has constructed its cute villas, can one really go for the kitschy way of enjoying the environment. Kitschy walking needs nice, moderate, pleasant-to-watch environments, history and a bit of silence – something that small Austrian towns like Freistadt have. One has to be able to keep up with a sentimental attitude, one where aesthetics is neater and more unchallenging than it is everydayish or challenging in any overt manner. Copenhagen, parts of Paris, and Venice at the top of romantic urban daydreaming suit this way of walking. Imperial Rome is far too big for it, and its small antique streets are too degenerated in their atmosphere. Milan is too modern. Venice is not as kitschy in the modern sense of the word as the luxuriously, leisurly flower and decoration resort of Monaco, nor is it that of the aesthetic sense of Alpine landscapes that one finds in 1000-piece puzzles. Pink palaces, picturesque waterfronts, and the way luxury shops play visually together with cute canals and beautiful small houses make her still a treat which rewards kitsch walking. It is just that under the surface it is superbly highbrow and it has amazing cultural resources. Kitschy walking in Venice can, when preferred, easily become an elitist analysis of the city, or a profound cultural trip.

Like all classical touristscapes, the kitschiness of walking in Venice is reinforced by the walking tours that tourist guides offer us. On these walking tours we find the most spectacular, the easy to like, and the historically pleasing or stimulating settings all neatly presented.

The metropolis of Benjamin was a resource of shocks, a stage and form of modern urbanity which Venice never entered. As art grew more to shock its audience together with mass culture and modern city life, Venice and its classical admiration of old art and architecture, kept itself tidy and silent. The shock effects from pushy masses of people to hectic traffic have become a norm nearly everywhere else. Venice is the perfect antidote for the rush hours of London.

Artistry and Thinking in Urban Walking

Photographs can be thought of as visual thinking, and this is the way many photographers nowadays conceive them. The same can be said of abstract painting, and many other art forms which have chosen intellectual routes and made a dramatic difference to handicrafts and entertainment.

Could we discuss walking as philosophizing, or as an artistic practice? If one talks about thinking as problematizing, taking a challenge, or making a difference, I would indeed say so.

Walking has great potentials for auto-communication. This Lotmanian concept points to any way of doing something which enables one to communicate with oneself. For example, in the classical Lotmanian example, when one prays, one communicates with oneself. One reflects on your own matters, have a moment of self-communication.¹²⁶ In walking, this self-reflective process takes up more levels, starting from movement,

¹²⁶ Yuri Lotman presents some basic thoughts on auto-communication and its role in semiotics in Lotman 1989.

somatic reflection, and it includes the possibility to have a dialogue with the environment.

At its best, walking is often aimless as well. Careri talks about *andare a zozzo*, which means “to waste time wandering aimlessly.”¹²⁷ This, if anything, is an important way of walking, as one processes thoughts and emotions through it. Even jogging can easily turn to competing with oneself, but walking, especially with friends can not be considered in such category.

It is not only that walking is a good thing to do while one is thinking, but that through doing it one can think – for example about cities. Walking is about choices on where to walk, it is about engaging with an environment – and the amount of self-consciousness and reflection on how this can be done can be accumulated.

And cities can offer us a mirror for thinking about ourselves. Venice can show us what we are historically. Walking through her *campi* and *calli* can form a way of communicating with cultural history. So this constitutes the silence and architectural taste from which our background as Westerners emerges? Choosing routes, watching people and buildings, and also of course thinking about materials underneath, while walking, can work as a basis for a whole, holistic way of thinking, which produces no outcome, other than the intellectual experience of framing the cityscape in new ways, to reflect upon oneself through new shop windows, and street routes.

In the end walking itself is a way of thinking even about the body. Through visual, auditive, and somatic stimulation the body gets fed, and can be engaged in a learning process of all the different ways in which one is related to the world with and through somatic consciousness. We learn with our bodies about heights, materials used in

¹²⁷ Careri 2002, 185.

building (sensing) – water, when it faces us from all possible angles, surprising us with the power of its aesthetics, its therapeutic feel, and sensual glamor. Conscious work through walking is a study of the city, body, and in cities like Venice, cultural history. At the same time the slow, rhythmical pace of walking gives the body a feeling which naturally supports wandering in one’s mind as well. When we walk in cities which are culturally rich, we stimulate more our inner mobilities. There are an endless number of inner levels, where a beautiful, multi-sensory, safe, historical and, in all other ways as well, stimulating city with its endless numbers of layers can form a key for a greater self-understanding.¹²⁸

Learning from Walking

In this chapter we learned about the pleasant experience of getting lost and where it functions well (in old cityscapes). One cannot choose to get lost, and one cannot turn off the body – these are an integral part of city experiences. At the same time, urban spaces are important social environments, but we might not need a city for a pleasant “urban walk” at all – as we can perform it under theme park conditions as well.

Besides getting lost, tourist books recommend getting out of touristified quarters. This strain of development leads, in the end, to the total touristification of Venice – the final victory of the society of the spectacle. Walking is here the only way to do it in Venice, as water buses provide the basis for what tourists see as the city.

¹²⁸ Sadly, streets have been less interesting for scholars than roads. For illuminating articles on the latter theme, see Lehari 2005 and Sepänmaa 2005.

The moderate experience of walking was contrasted to jogging and experiences typical for art. Walking is a very, very moderate “art.” The philosophical sides of it were taken up as well – pointing to walking as one possible tool for engaging in thinking and reflection. And through Marinetti’s example of a critique on the lazy bourgeois, we discovered kitschy walking – not forgetting that we do not have to see it in a negative light. Kitsch here does not point to fakes and cheap thrills, but to sentimentality, and enjoyment of the neat and safe visual pleasures some cityscapes provide us with in an analogous manner to that of romantic novels.

Venice actually supports a variety of ways of walking, which is not that usual – just think how few opportunities industrial areas or theme parks offer: in Venice there is high culture, entertainment, beauty, somatic stimulations (stairs, bridges), and material seductiveness (the role of water in the city). The way walking is used to create differences in our use of a city is an issue as well, together with the way Venice here seems to make a difference with respect to other cities, as it is quite the same in all of its parts. Nevertheless, the whole city, quite the same everywhere, actually shares the same endless variety of organic, ad hoc architectural solutions. In this maze it is enjoyable and partly even challenging to walk. As the scale of the city is relatively small, a visitor can comprehend it in just a couple of days.

And the typical end for a walk in Venice is not to step up into a car – but to step down into a boat, which takes us to our next chapter, “Water and Traffic.”

Chapter 5

WATER AND TRAFFIC

He saw the plaque marking the home of Lord Byron, a man who, like the young Brunetti, had once swum in these waters. No more.

Donna Leon, *Through a Glass, Darkly*¹²⁹

Venetian waters are no longer seductive for swimming. This is not only due to common knowledge about their polluted state. Trash in water is disturbing – more so than on the ground. Seeing trash on the grass or smelling oil on concrete does not affect us as much as seeing empty cans floating or the rainbow colors of gasoline glint off the surface in water. It is disgusting to see natural waters raped. Together with wood, water as an urban element anchors us to nature.

In such a manner, Venice has for me served as one of the most effective consciousness-raising experiences when it comes to pollution. Still, contrary to the myth, the smell of Venetian waters is no news. A sanitary side-effect dates back to pre-modern times, and nowadays its sanitary system is more modern than most visitors believe.¹³⁰

Swimming is just a daydream in Venice. But one gives it a thought on a hot day, when the idea of diving into the green fills us with pleasure – and one finds inspiring the fact that the architectural structures of Venice lead deep into the lagoon. Imaginary, underwater landscapes are a part of Venetian architectural legacy, and the interpretation

¹²⁹ Leon 2007, 334.

¹³⁰ See Davis & Marvin 2004, 181-182.

history of the city.¹³¹ And, after the cluster of environmental threats which have been posed up on us, rising water levels on the coasts, we might already imagine how Venice looks when the sea has taken over, and how she will be filmed by a future Cousteau.

However pleasant the touch of water feels on our bodies, swimming has never been a major form of movement in any city. The aquatic nature of Venice has, though, stimulated the development of other forms of mobility. Based upon this, and the way the city has remained quite on its own culturally speaking, out in the lagoon, a whole culture has evolved. The peculiarities of water traffic have a significant role in making a stay in Venice different from stays in other cities.

Georg Simmel said, that there is no city other than Venice, where the rhythm of life would be so steady. No carts or other moving vehicles steal attention, and the gondolas (still a part of normal transport culture when Simmel visited the city) have quite the same speed and rhythm as the walkers have. According to Simmel, it is this which makes Venice dream-like.¹³²

Water is a sensual element, a possibility for mobility, and the reason for the humid air of the city – and not just a special treat for Sunday picnics. As Diego Valeri notes, already Cassiodorus made a remark about the boats moored outside of every house, “like domestic animals”¹³³ – and this has not changed. One still sees backdoors of ordinary citizens opening straight on to the canals, so that they are able to step into the boat without touching ground.

¹³¹ Discussed by e.g. Brodsky and various poets, the underwater parts of Venice have been made a shared, poetical, cultural resource.

¹³² Still referring to Simmel’s holistic essay on the city.

¹³³ Valeri 1955, 9.

And a lot of the architecture in Venice looks heavenly following its engagement with water. The *Redentore* of Palladio seems to overcome matter when one sees it together with its mirror image at St. Mark's basin on a calm, clear morning. Without water *Il Redentore* would just be one beautiful and harmonic work of Palladio.

In *Water, Traffic, and the Urban Maze* I will discuss the slow speed of Venetian water traffic, its meditative nature, and some romantic aspects of it. Other noted issues include the way traveling in water affects us aesthetically and even existentially – without forgetting the unique nature of the Venetian water traffic system in general. *Traghettos*, *vaporettos*, and *gondolas* are only Venetian by nature.¹³⁴ In *Some Peculiarities of Venetian Waters* I will make more historical remarks about the development of the culture of water in Venice – and its effects. The interaction of architecture and water gains attention as well, and I hope there will again be something to learn from Venice, which can then provide more understanding of water and urbanity in general.

Water, Traffic, and the Urban Maze

“The boat’s slow progress through the night was like a passage of a coherent thought through the subconscious,” Brodsky recalls a silent winter night, the romance of traveling through the dark, historical scenery – in a water bus.¹³⁵ He accentuates the contrast between the bright, clear contoured interior of the boat, and the foggy urban maze

¹³⁴ The gondola is well known to everybody, and the word *vaporetto*, meaning water bus – there are different lines connecting the city (including its outer islands) – has become common knowledge for tourists, but the *traghetto* is less known. It is a small boat, which a rower takes over the Grand Canal, in places where one is not close to a bridge, and it is used a lot by locals.

¹³⁵ Brodsky 1992, 12.

surrounding it. Water somehow stimulates poetic thinking. Meditation and creative thinking seem to find natural metaphors in sailing and floating.

Though the noise made by the vaporetto can actually be infernal, Brodsky's experience is known to all visitors who have sat in one of them late at night. The smaller the boat is, the more we feel to be engaged with our aquatic surrounding. In the beginning vaporettos were thought to destroy the magic of the city,¹³⁶ which is quite understandable if one thinks how silent she must have been when boats were rowed.

Both Arnold Berleant and Joseph Kupfer write at length about paddling, and the direct manner in which it engages with nature.¹³⁷ Though one would feel the road when one drives cars, for example when one comes from gravel to concrete, feeling water in boats is just different. One constantly feels the way the boat glides on water, one feels waves, and one can hear water, a feature, which together with seeing and feeling, adds to the overall experience of being in interaction with it.

Venetians know this, and some of them say that if one cannot afford a gondola, one should at least test how the water feels in a traghetto, a connection boat rowed over the Grand Canal for a small fee (50 cents currently). One stands in a traghetto, which makes it adventurous for tourists. Though one would otherwise be accustomed to boats and their feel, the strangeness of having buildings around you creates a peculiar, urban, and aesthetic effect – increased by their extraordinary beauty.

Strangely the theme of water creating humidity – an important part of the experience of sitting in a boat – does not arise as a theme in Shusterman's somaesthetics

¹³⁶ Pemble 1995, 144-145.

¹³⁷ Berleant 1992, 29-34. Kupfer 2003, 84.

as one issue which brings together environmental and bodily aesthetics¹³⁸ in Venice and urban areas alike. Breathing close to water, though a real pest when it is winter and the humid air hits one's lungs, make you feel the surrounding water close to oneself. One should not forget that drinking water is sometimes quite an aesthetic experience as well, as one can feel the water going down into the body, relieving thirst.

In a boat one can also feel the slow, sometimes playful, but always active movements of the canals themselves. In Venice, as Valeri points out, streets are mobile, not just making mobility possible.¹³⁹ Close to the poetic feelings gained by being in a boat we might find mystical experience. This can happen just by gazing at boats. If one has ever spent a night in one of the hotels in the *palazzi* facing the Grand Canal, one cannot forget the glow of the water buses passing by, their distant humming, and their windows of light in the middle of the monumental darkness. Slowly drifting boats in the night have something melancholic, poetical, and sensually, even erotically appealing about them.

No wonder that the representative of Charles VIII, Filippo di Commines, thought the Grand Canal was the most beautiful street on earth.¹⁴⁰ It is not just about buildings, and not even water; rather it is the whole way of living, and traffic, which makes it extraordinary. This is true in our era as much as it was in history, as the visitor enjoys everything he/she sees in the canals – from ambulance to funeral boats. And through her

¹³⁸ For Shusterman's somaesthetics, see e.g. Shusterman 2000, chapters 7 and 8. Experiencing breathing, as a part of bodily aesthetics is discussed on pages 139 and 167.

¹³⁹ Valeri 1955, 8.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 85.

uncanny, meditative nature, Venice, as a historical city on water, has found a natural role as a topos for esoteric comics (Corto Maltese) and dream-like Japanese anime¹⁴¹.

Water traffic helps us to get away from the everyday. Sitting in the water bus is just so different from the ordinary. Besides the fact that tourist culture rules, and that the city as a city is dying, this is one of the effects which adds to its dream-like, leisurely nature.

In most cases traffic is not considered to be that romantic, nor do we find it relaxing or inspiring. Whether we talk about an everyday fight to get in or out of a crowded bus in Brixton or an endless wait for a train in Vejby (or any other dead spot in the Danish countryside), traffic is usually far from an aesthetically admired cultural phenomenon in itself. It is a way of getting somewhere, though there exists a tradition of romantic attitudes towards (old) trains and driving, even with some existential extensions.¹⁴²

As a tourist one might enjoy a “cool” ride through Manhattan in the underground or a smooth flight overseas, but in the former case one considers himself/herself a visitor in a form of everyday life, and in the latter we are talking about longer traveling, not everyday traffic.

When traffic outside of water gains an aura of romance or when it is loaded with aesthetic expectations and rewards, we are in most cases talking about anachronisms, slow, silent, cherished historical means of transport like steam engines or horse wagons,

¹⁴¹ See for example the animation *Porco Rosso* (Hayo Miyazaki, Studio Ghibli, 1992), where a mix of Venice and Japanese fantasy aesthetics work as one of the main scenarios for adventure. The Corto Maltese albums which are situated in Venice are *Favola di Venezia*, and *L'angelo della finestra oriente*. See Pratt 2000 and 1971. See also Fuga & Vianello 1997. Hugo Pratt, the author of Corto Maltese, has Venetian roots and he started his career in a traditional comic studio in the city. Nowadays none of this kind of creative businesses could anymore afford the city.

¹⁴² Below more on e.g. Jack Kerouac. Trains are romantic in Italy, actually, as they are slower, and they work more as pleasant, public spaces than in most countries.

and most preferably in an area where it is expected that tourists need a ride. At its peak, this happens where architectural history dominates the scenery, as is the case with the horse carts of Manhattan, Borgå, or Vienna.

This is traffic for traffic's sake. One enjoys slow rhythm. One appreciates the design of historical traffic vehicles. And one interprets through them, like through old houses, how life was once lived. Nostalgia, even covering periods when we were not alive (but which we have seen through countless visual and audiovisual representations) dominates these experiences. We also think about historical traffic vehicles as the symbol for a life which used to be less stressful – though one can doubt if it really was less stressful then, since people have seemed to feel that life has become too fast and hectic in all times, as can be seen for example in Benjamin's thoughts on the shocking and fragmenting nature of everyday life of the 1930s. It is our experience that needs time to adjust to development, and through all eras we struggle to digest and keep stable our experience in changing times. The older, slower, and less fragmented pattern of life follows us always in our experience, as an interpretative horizon, through the changes, always a step behind our present situation, still helping us to make it meaningful.

In just this sense, slow traffic is thus a treat for tourists. At many tourist resorts one can rent a small cycle "car," or boats cycled or rowed, which are ideal for leisurely enjoying nature and its landscapes. In Venice the water traffic is so regulated, that one could not even think about rowing a boat – if one is not a local. The whole territory of water is heavily safeguarded.

And water traffic, even in its modern form, seems to be the most romantic and aesthetically laden form of everyday we can achieve – if a funicular rail in the Alps could

not be included, but in such a case one cannot talk about traffic on the same scale. The waters of Venice face real rush hours. Unique in Venice, water traffic is romantic, but at the same time really everyday, and it is a mobile part of the historical cityscape partly being as historical as its architectural surroundings.

Indeed, water traffic is just a marginal phenomenon in other seaside cities and townscapes dominated by water. Taking a ferry to Djurgården Stockholm or to the Statue of Liberty outside of New York City is not essential for city life, though these experiences might be well remember by the visitor.

And nearly nowhere is there so much beauty and history to see from the windows of everyday traffic vehicles, and actually nowhere is the rhythm and speed so low and steady that one can actually take everything in. Besides Victorian culture, which inaugurated the northern European tradition of traveling to Venice for one's honeymoon, Venice has the slow "romantic" gondolas to thank, for its role as a honeymoon classic.

The routes of traffic in the city have their own roles. Vaporetto line number 1 is a touristified one, taking the tourists through the main street of Venice, the Grand Canal, where the grandest of palaces are located. This route even costs more (6 euros) than other water bus routes (3 euros). Locals try to avoid it¹⁴³ – though all traffic in Venice, especially during high seasons, is touristified when contrasted to any other city.

Locals never take a gondola. In Robert C. David and Gary R. Marvin's *Venice the Tourist Maze: A Cultural Critique of the World's Most Touristed City* (2004) we find a story about an American visitor who took his local friend for a ride. The friend happened to find himself under his family's window, so he shouted to his mother, who looked out

¹⁴³ This is even portrayed in novels. See e.g. Dibdin 1994 and Leon's Brunetti series.

asking “what on earth are you doing in one of those things.”¹⁴⁴ This is not hard to understand. The gondoliers dress anachronistically, approaching a real theme park atmosphere, and as one ride costs from 80 to 150 euros, why would anyone living a real life in the city use a gondola?¹⁴⁵

Besides being a maze of water intertwined with a maze of stone, the city, also in traffic, is two cities also in this respect: there is a city for tourists with its own set of transportation systems, and there is another one for the real inhabitants (who actually pay less for the water busses as well).

One pleasure in Venice is just taking a normal vaporetto through smaller canals, the dockside areas, or some nearby islands like Giudecca or Murano. My own favorite is 41, as it drives through narrow canals in Cannaregio, and then takes its passengers around the city’s western part, through Giudecca to, of all ends, San Marco.

All the water bus routes are rewarding from an aesthetic point of view. The city is filled with beauty, sights, and astonishing architecture. Slow panoramas of visually attractive and culturally rich sceneries follow each other. People know this already when they arrive. It is not just the gondola, favored by American and Japanese tourists, but the whole water traffic system which is something many visitors wait for when they arrive. We often come to the city of gondolas, vaporettos, and traghetto with an aesthetic attitude towards traffic, something we might await from the ferry connecting Istanbul, the

¹⁴⁴ Davis & Marvin 2004, 159.

¹⁴⁵ In his work for the Biennale of Venice in 2003, Fred Wilson recollected images of colored people in Venice in early modern times. Of course colored people have been everywhere in Europe, and they were even a trend at some periods in court life, but strangely no one had thought about their role, for example, as wine pourers in Carpaccio paintings or as boatmen in old pictures. These “gondoliers” have not been auto-imitated in the fashion of the others. Presenting history is always selective, though one can say that a change might be coming soon to Venice, as already now many new local entrepreneurs seem to be from countries which have many fans of the city, such as Japan, China, and the USA. In a natural way, the city is becoming multi-cultured once again, in a more democratic way than before, and not just by way of the arriving tourists.

slow romantic trains of the Italian countryside or, for example, the funicular rails at Naples, Trento, and Mount Koli.

This is reinforced by the city, which has not given up its historical traditions. Usually only traditions in art or food are allowed to live, but Venice is an open museum also in terms of traffic – due to its special preservation of the gondolas and traghetti. Tram museums and historical steam engines in water and on the railroad are forms of leisure culture in other cities, but in Venice the traditions live – some touristified (the gondola), some practical (the traghetti), however, equally possible to access during the entire day by anyone willing to pay for them. Gondoliers sing anachronistically, and they dress historically. Formally, history lives on in them, though it would all be a performance.

Old traffic is preserved and water traffic overall has to be slower than traffic on land, but traffic elsewhere keeps on rising in speed. This increasingly differentiates Venice from other cities. And Venetians just cannot let motorboats run through its aquatic alleys at high speed due to the fragile nature of its building. The world is shocked year after year following the introduction of new forms of traffic and transport. Speed grows in importance, but so does comfort as well of course, both the comfort of traveling offered by the transportation systems, and the experiential comfort of the passengers. The first trains, which shocked the perception and challenged the passengers' ability to make sense of landscapes, are nothing compared to the trains of our era. Cars, airplanes – all forms of traffic, except for traveling in water, have become fast, and speed, together with traffic has become more a commonplace than ever.

Following this, Venice has safeguarded its inhabitants' from some existential challenges human experience has had to go through in cities modernized the normal way. Her historical nature just gets reinforced decade after decade, at the same time as its hard-to-modernize and hard-to-change infrastructure forces inhabitants to move away. Their needs are modernized faster than the city can accommodate them. For visitors, being in Venice is aesthetically relaxing – like watching old, slow movies can be.

Tourism cannot but win, however, which is reinforced by the fact that water traffic is a joyful thrill for us who do not live on an island or in any other area where traveling on water would be a commonplace. We enjoy it.

From Walter Benjamin's texts to our time we find thinkers analyzing the fragmenting, stressful effects of modern life, from being forced to sit too close to other people in fast-moving public transport vehicles to the effects that constant mobility and fragmenting lifestyles have on us.¹⁴⁶

To some extent this process of the development and technologization of human civilization affected existentially oriented philosophies in taking a stance towards discussing them in the 1930s, providing both apocalyptic visions and technocratic daydreaming. Existentially oriented philosophies discussed authenticity, cultural roots (vs. being too mobile), and also discussed the conditions of life in a modern, technological world.¹⁴⁷

At the same time, these tendencies found shared melting points. Following the way cars became a commonplace, long car rides became the mythical way of crossing the

¹⁴⁶ Benjamin discusses this way of pushing people too close to one other, from an experiential point of view, in Benjamin 1939. In our times it is usual as well to advise new inhabitants in metropolises not to watch strangers in the eyes – a skill needed in metropolitan life.

¹⁴⁷ See, here, e.g., the work of Heidegger or Ortega y Gasset.

USA, something which was poetically cultivated in Jack Kerouac's classical *On the Road* (1957), a book about both traveling for travel's sake and about mobile identity,¹⁴⁸ spiced up with Western interpretations of oriental philosophy. Regarding plane travel the same existential discourse found a more romantic and more traditionally poetic literary form in Antoine St. Expery's books on flying.

Water traffic has remained connected to thinking, meditating, and sensing – more than any other form of traffic has done. This is partly due to water, which moves. We hardly sense the tracks under our hyper-technological trains anymore, and cars get smoother every year without forgetting how convenient flying is nowadays. It is water, though, which makes it impossible for us not to feel itself – if we are not talking about very large cruisers, where one has no connection to water other than seeing it from a high deck. Here Venice, and its boat rides, both modern and those that imitate history, continue rewarding us existentially and sensually, giving us historical experience as a living tradition as well. Water, as an element, is somehow therapeutic, and the slow-motion traffic in it makes us feel less stressed.

The tourist culture fits perfectly to water traffic. As already stated, in the everyday one wants to make it fast to the desired destination, but a visitor enjoys slower, and if possible, somatically smoother rides. If one can take a tram in a city one is visiting, one often does not prefer a bus, and in many cities tourist guides advice us to take a certain tram.¹⁴⁹ Old trains can sometimes compete with trams in this sense, and we never know

¹⁴⁸ There are of course other books on this topic as well, not to mention films, but Kerouac's novel remains the key to the whole tradition of on-the-road narratives.

¹⁴⁹ See Naukkarinen 2003 on this and many other features of traveling with a tram, and on the effects of trams in urban space.

how the slow and majestic Zeppelin's would have affected traveling if they would have developed into a quintessential traffic medium.

It is not just the way we engage with water in small boats. There are other connections with the environment as well which is strengthened in boats rather than in cars – which relates it more to walking (see chapter 4). There are always open windows, or doors, and one can stand outside as well, feeling the breeze. At a slow speed one sees the details of old houses. And, actually, one moves approximately at the speed which was customary when pre-modern houses were built.

As the Venetian historian Alvare Zorzi points out, the resonance of the right speed and environment can be rewarding, but it often needs to be worked out in a legitimate manner by the visitor himself/herself. In his *La repubblica del leone. Storia di Venezia* (2001) he discusses the topic in a broader context. If we do not walk – and even this is not always easy in contemporary cities (at least in the USA) – most cities are nowadays seen at high speed, from a car or a bus for instance (if not an underground train which delivers its riders to various points around the city in a seemingly instantaneous manner), but Venice, following its naval nature, is seen from boats – and the speed of a boat is nearly always slow,¹⁵⁰ Zorzi points out, and goes on to discuss the road from Paris proper to Versailles, and the way it was built to be a pleasant visual experience for Louis XIV. The same trip is now traversed at a speed too fast to realize its initial appeal. When one travels from Paris to Versailles the road is made to please the traveler at the speed of a horse wagon.

In some cases, though naturally not in all, the wrong correlation of speed and building ideology have fatal effects. Think about traveling in a horse wagon on a

¹⁵⁰ Zorzi 2001, 11.

highway with huge advertisements at the side of the road meant to attract fast-driving car users – as can happen in poor eastern European countries like Romania, where the old countryside meets the new highway culture in a rough manner.

Though a part of this comes from the tradition of honeymoons and historically the way Venice was known as a center of courtesans and libertines, low speed makes for romance as well – and not just in the symbolically overloaded and for critical consumers banal gondolas. In *The Soul of Sex: Cultivating Life as an Act of Love*, Thomas Moore quotes art historian Bruce Radde’s description of the Connecticut’s famous art-deco highway, Merrit Parkway. According to Radde one cannot see the beautiful details of the bridges and the road if one drives faster than was the norm when the highway was built in the 1930s, that is to say approximately 30-50 miles per hour. The road is serpentine in form and really fits into the landscape it pierces through.¹⁵¹

Noise is a big issue. Silence is romantic, but in a moving vehicle it does not always add to romance. The noise of the engines used in boats is different from most cars. It sounds more organic, and of course it sounds different at the sea as well. The rhythm of a boat engine can be heard better than the rhythm of the much faster humming of cars. Only really big, old American cars can give the same feeling, though with much more rumbling – and these cars are nowadays felt to be somehow romantic as well due to their historical nature. In any case, boats reward meditative attention more than cars. While writing this chapter I happened to call my mother, who had a day off. She told me that she was sipping coffee in a café at the seaside: “I am watching ships and boats go by. It is relaxing.”

¹⁵¹ Moore’s discourse on this refers to Radde’s 1996 *The Merrit Parkway*. New Haven: Yale University Press. See Moore 1998 chapter 12.

Getting back to Brodsky's poetic description of traveling in a vaporetto at night, he is traveling through a sleeping museum. When Venice goes to sleep one can really see that she is a museum. During the hectic daytime, at least during the high seasons, she is more like a theme park. But when the tourists leave...

Here water traffic works during the daytime as an important factor in making the theme park a functioning whole, and during the nighttime the boats show how silent the surrounding city is, being huge robot-like museum guards between the houses.

Nighttimes are of course commonly more laden with ideas of profoundness and deep thoughts than daytime, and as water is an element supporting poetic thinking and reflection, Venice is a city where many poetic thoughts arrive after the sunset.¹⁵²

The flow of water, its feel, acoustic nature, and way of moving in rivers and waterfalls, has made it one central metaphor in perennial philosophy – from Japanese “eastern thinking” (both scripts and gardens) to German idealist springs and their later echoes (Hölderlin, Heidegger).

“Whenever in doubt, turn off your mind, relax, float downstream”, Timothy Leary recommends his readers in *The Psychedelic Experience*.¹⁵³ You float in water, you move around, but there is something actively “passive” about this – something which connects to the Taoist ideas of yielding as a life principle or just otherwise to so deep resources, not just due to the intellectual reason that water has depth which one cannot see, but also because one somehow reacts both mentally and physically to water in a way which supports this type of experience and thought. In the small, silent, often sleepy waters of

¹⁵² It is no coincidence that Mikko Mannberg has in his licentiate work, 1999, discussed the “poetics of Venice” from the point of view of an architect.

¹⁵³ Leary 1964, 11.

inner city Venice – which can lie dozens of corners away from the open sea (still only a lagoon) – we are easily seduced to stop moving, becoming one with the standing water.

Huge amounts of water make us feel small. Wolfgang Welsch (2003) has described his own experience of facing the Pacific Ocean and how this experience formed a “threat” to his Cartesian subject structure in the article *Reflecting the Pacific* (2003). Of course already in Kant’s famous passage on the sublime, water, in the form of a dreary wave, is meditated upon, safely, from the shore, creating this peculiar aesthetic.¹⁵⁴

Yrjö Sepänmaa says in his introductory text for a book on the aesthetics of water, that when he once crossed the Atlantic Ocean with a ship he understood how strange it is to see only water for such a long time. Sepänmaa talks as well about silence,¹⁵⁵ though the silence of the open Atlantic is different from the cozy canals of inner Venice. Sepänmaa’s comment reminds us also about the fact that we experience water mostly in some interaction with land, and when we lack this coordinate, it feels strange. One peculiarity of Venetian waters is the way water constantly stands in relation to the ground even more than elsewhere. Streets, waterfronts, and churches acquire a reflecting, liquid boundary in the green canal, showing by contrast how solid and stable they are.

Some Peculiarities of Venetian Waters

In Venice, light and mirror images have a special role in seeing and experiencing the city. Light and architecture meet beautifully in and through water, which reflects the city

¹⁵⁴ See Korsmeyer 1998, 264-273.

¹⁵⁵ Heikkilä-Palo & Sepänmaa 2002, 9.

sometimes very clearly, and creates, this way, an illusion of extra space – if not an idea of another city in the depths.

And reflections of light move – through the movements of water – sometimes in a cozy way, sometimes relentlessly, oscillating on walls and bridges. In the evening, water no longer produces mirror images at all, and neither is light reflected on architecture, but in the water one can see the moon and the electric lights of the city: the lagoon no longer mirrors the cityscape, it just picks up some of its brightest parts.

And where is it possible to see underwater architecture, except for Venice? Light pierces the dark green water in the canals, during the sunny peak of the afternoon, and we can see glimpses of underwater landscapes – which now slowly engulf those buildings still holding out above water. This is the case more during the winter, even if the water would be as dense and polluted as during the summer. When there is a flood, one can see stairs descending into the water – and sadly many buildings have started being partly under water all year long. An actual flood, *aqua alta*, is where water breaks the boundary between the sea and the Piazza San Marco, thereby blurring the boundaries of the whole city, creating a spectacular, though apocalyptic waterscape, where the peculiar life of Venice is vividly reminded of its own fragility.¹⁵⁶

Pierre Leprohon states that Venice is a “city where the power of nature is felt only through its most insubstantial elements, sky and water. The earth beneath it is hardly visible to the eye.”¹⁵⁷ For my part, I would say that water is more substantial in Venice than anywhere else, as it carries us, floats all around us, letting us know of its existence through sight and sound, and because the humid air makes itself heard in our bodies

¹⁵⁶ See Obici 1967 for shocking pictures of the dangerous flood of 1966.

¹⁵⁷ Leprohon 1973, 3.

especially in winter: nowhere can one escape water, and so the air is also and more substantial than elsewhere. Even when we go to sleep we feel the waves, after long days of commuting in the water-transport system.

Water somehow dominates where ever we have it in our environment. Where there is a lake, where there is a canal, and where there is a river, it becomes the sensual focus of life. And we sense it where it is around, in a way that we do not sense ground, snow (which is of course one form of water, but sensually very different, like ice), or any other material. Water 10 meters from our place of dining is with us all the time, on the skin, in the breath, as an acoustic background.

We find Leprohon continuing on the elements, “Water and stone, the eternal and the ephemeral, the immutable and the mobile.”¹⁵⁸ So true. Though the basis for building in the city is fragile, and we know that parts of the city are sinking, and constantly under the threat of being immersed in the sea; being close to water, ground shows its immutability in Venice. It has a feeling of permanence as well.

The canals themselves are as old as the building structures – though the water keeps changing in them. There are nearly 200 canals in Venice, covering a length of nearly 30 miles. They are continuously used by all kinds of boats from water buses to trash boats, ambulance boats and police boats, as well as private ones. Many times I have heard a visitor tell about a water ambulance or police boat they saw in Venice. Even in the Biennale of 2005 I recall that after seeing a lot of dull career art picked up by career curators, we took a break with my father, and suddenly a trash boat floated through the area, collecting trash boxes with its robot hand. The sheer originality of the enterprise

¹⁵⁸ Leprohon 1973, 23.

struck us, and it seemed to be so much more interesting than most career oriented art around.

Seeing a funeral boat leave, or sometimes seeing workers on a boat painting a wall, has its effects. Even in movies on Venice these peculiar boats create atmosphere. It is not just the gondola which is used. For example Nicolas Roeg's *Don't Look Now* (1973), a thriller with Donald Sutherland, uses a funeral boat to provoke uncanny feelings. It is just more jolting to see a funeral boat than a funeral car, as it is different, and one can stand on it, looking sad, while it is moving.

In the basins on the outer edges of the city one can sometimes see huge cruise ships passing by. Their effect there is somewhat different from what it is in other harbors and waterfronts at the sea, where they are seen as just bringing in visitors and looking glamorous. In the environs of Venice, however, they are dangerous, as they make the water rise, and because they create big waves when they move. They even create a lot of noise which disturbs the local inhabitants.¹⁵⁹

Broader canals are a thrill in any case, because the city consists mostly of small ones. There are only three canals with the name *canale*, the *Canale della Giudecca*, which separates the seven *sestieri* from the island of Giudecca, and the *Canale di San Marco*, opening towards Lido, which connects to the former canals with *Canal Grande*. Together with the sea areas between central Venice and its remote satellite parts (the Cemetery Island of San Michele, Murano, Burano, Lido, Torcello) they create a feeling of the sea in the lagoon city.

The gondola was the main public transportation vehicle resembling the horse-drawn vehicles of other Western cities until the early twentieth century. But in 1881 a

¹⁵⁹ Davis & Marvin 2004, 202-207.

French company started to carry people from site to site with steam powered water buses. The cost of traveling in these mass transportation vehicles became, naturally, significantly cheaper than in the gondolas.

After the building of the two strategically well-planned iron bridges over the Grand Canal (1854), the gondoliers' duty became even less important. The whole main city (separate islands not included) was more accessible by foot than ever before, already at the time the vaporettos arrived on the scene. For centuries the Grand Canal, the main water way, had hosted only one bridge – the *Rialto*, of which the new Byzantine version (c. 1590) was preceded by wooden ones.

The number of gondolas declined from the late nineteenth century number of approximately 10,000 to the contemporary 400.¹⁶⁰ The gondolas, though, had a new destiny in store for them. They had long been a symbol of the city. Now, together with the development of tourism, they became a tourist attraction in their own right. As a form of historical auto-imitation, their use has become dominantly touristified.

Auto-imitation is not just a feature to be found in Venice, but typical for historical cities, which thrive on tourism. In Montmartre, Paris painters still sell impressionist pictures to art-hungry tourists, painting them on the streets with berets on their head, and a bottle of wine on the ground close to the canvas. For an analogy in traffic we can recall Vienna and New York, where horse wagons can be rented for nostalgic city rides.

A strange difference – and here we once again find Venice simultaneously both a theme park and an original city – is that the gondolas of Venice are somehow felt by many to be real traffic. Indeed, they are less “just for tourists” as the aforementioned carts are. This might be due to their being in water, which is a less familiar element for

¹⁶⁰ For the change and its effects see e.g. Pemble 1995, 47, and Erlich 1982.

transport for most people. The original and peculiar nature of Venice, the fact that there is no other city to compare to when we view it, might affect this acceptance of a totally historical vehicle being used today. There is something else to it as well. Gondola culture has never ceased to exist. Horse carriages died in many cities following the advent of car culture. But the use of the gondolas has not been historically interrupted.

Gondolas are also quintessential for Venice as a city – safeguarded cultural treasures, symbols of a whole culture and its glorious history, antiquarian counterparts for what London’s double-decker might become in the future, though much more original. Of course their continuous existence is partly due to a conscious aspiration to preserve classical Venetian culture, and in this way their role has been commercial and museum-like for centuries.

For the majority of wealthy visitors with no critical interest in culture it is a must to take a trip in a “romantic” gondola. For a critical art tourist it can even become a problem to sit down in these boats, as their historical nature is closer to that of a cheap performance. In the gondola the rower, as well as the singer (extra charge), who from time to time accompanies the former, are dressed in role uniforms, which are far-removed from even local taste and conventions. The singing of banal classics – “O sole mio” – generates cynical responses. Even as romantic culture, the gondola is stereotypical and far from rewarding – if one is not for the easy stereotypes. The gondola is *the* kitschy water traffic vehicle.

In the discussion on kitsch the performance of folk tradition was an issue discussed already in Clement Greenberg’s classic “Avant-Garde and Kitsch”, which was written in 1939. Greenberg talked mostly about handicraft – and its “annoying”

production in different forms is an even older phenomenon. And we find that Goethe was already intrigued by the huge numbers of fake antiques which are sold to him on his late 18th-century *Italianische Reise*. Goethe owned a miniature gondola, which he received from his father, and which he had in mind, when he left for his trip to Italy. In this way the unique water traffic of Venice was one of the first symbols used in the early production of tourist kitsch.¹⁶¹ Nowadays the miniature gondolas and other kitsch objects sold in Venice are made for example in Taiwan.¹⁶²

Still, I have found no indication that there would have ever existed discussion on performative, or live tourist kitsch, of which the gondola ride itself is an example par excellence. It might be that the tradition became completely touristified after the wars. Anyway, it is mostly objects we see as kitsch, not performances/events, and this might be the reason why miniatures sold to tourists have been a part of aesthetic debates, but not the Hawaiian dances which are performed for tourists, shamanist Lapp performances, nor the way the gondolas are used in Venice (keeping them in museums would make another case). These forms of culture definitely fit in with many of the qualities attributed to kitsch. They are imitations of the “real thing” (here authentic folk culture). They are stereotypical versions of what the non-expert audience hopes to experience from the other culture. They are sentimental in nature, and always “easy to consume,” that is safe from cultural clashes or painful challenges.

And because object kitsch has, following its role as a challenger of (modernist) art, been an issue in aesthetics, the connection between imitations of folk art/miniatures

¹⁶¹ See Goethe 1976, 87 on his thoughts regarding his fathers miniature gondola.

¹⁶² See, e.g., Davis & Marvin 2004, 172..

of architectural treasures and different types of cultural performances provided for tourists has not been discussed so much.

Gondolas are so expensive that most tourists do not even consider taking one. Still 400 of them makes for quite a circus. Though many authors on the city talk about gondolas together with other forms of tourist culture as in intruder in the city, the connection between water traffic, raw capitalism, and tourist culture has deep historical roots. This can be read already in Mann's short story *Der Tod in Venedig* (1912). When von Aschenbach, the protagonist of the novella, arrives in Venice he is taken to Lido by a gondolier, who at the end of the trip is found to be working without a license. The pseudo-gondolier escapes the scene and the locals, who were already then insolent towards foreign tourists – as is the case in most small cities which are overly crowded with them – arrive just in time to ask the old man for the tip he was saved from paying to his fake rower.¹⁶³ Soon before this embarrassing situation the counterfeit gondolier and his prey had met a joyful company playing music for tourists on the sea, and von Aschenbach had felt obliged to make a small donation.

The same unscrupulous way of making money from visitors is still alive in the city, which seems to have a schizophrenic relation to people. There are locals. And there are tourists.

After the era of decadence, as not just modern tourism, but also the modern lifestyle with its needs was brought to Venice, symbols like the gondola provided help for those who opposed themselves to technical development, and who in that way wanted to preserve historical Venice. To my knowledge this was never done with horse wagons in respectively important cultural cities on the mainland. The gondola was an aesthetically

¹⁶³ Mann 1954, 24.

pleasing symbol and one central, peculiar feature in the atmosphere of the city, and vaporettos, electric lights, and other signs of modern life were often criticized on aesthetic grounds.¹⁶⁴ Critics of development wanted to save Venice's "original" spirit, "original" here referring to silence, boats without engines, and moderate city lights – in other words, town planning and culture from the pre-technological era.

City nostalgia is one of the main aesthetic attitudes toward historical cities and townships, one which lasts long after the object (era) of nostalgia is gone. The periods of nostalgia depend on the history of the city. Paris is not looking at its transgressive 1960s nor its classist eighteenth century. It is haunted by its great nineteenth- and early twentieth-century role as a center for European culture, and Venice in its turn is stuck in its romantic role – since its pre-romantic pioneering role in international commerce and naval warfare are not pursued for.

At the time that Venice became fixed in its nostalgic role, it was reflected in Mann's novels,¹⁶⁵ and of course the rage of the futurists, described in chapter 4, was one outcome of this. There must have been a perceivably decadent atmosphere dominating the city which was explicitly less and less in control of the cultured upper class. Year by year it was increasingly taken over by the middle-class (later also working-class) tourism. In all historical townships nowadays we have certain types of constraints on how to preserve architecture and classical city planning. These restrictions have to do with advertising, lighting and for example everyday issues like where restaurants can put their tables and chairs outside of their interiors. Usually this is anyway a problem just in a part

¹⁶⁴ See e.g. Pemble 1995, 144-146.

¹⁶⁵ As a child Luchino Visconti who directed the film version of Mann's *Death in Venice*, 1971, visited Venice with his family. In a book on his movies, edited by Alessandro Bencivenni (1995), he says that he recognized the atmosphere Mann wrote about. Partly because he felt Mann's description of the decay of the city to have been correct, he wanted to direct the movie. See Bencivenni 1995, 77-85.

of the city, in a historical townscape; but in Venice, as pointed out many times already, we have a whole city conserved like a museum.¹⁶⁶

Venice just turns us on, in a way no other city could do – seducing us to admire its beauty, sheer fantasy of building in water, and the way the city is at the same time a theme park, and this experience is of course in itself inaugurated with traffic. We fly, take trains, and drive to Venice.

John Urry says about “getting away,” that when we travel to distant places, “we look at the environment with interest and intensity.”¹⁶⁷ But this happens actually already in the traffic vehicles we use. For many of us the enjoyment begins in the airplane, if not in the taxi taking us to the airport, and this should be kept in mind when we remember how nice it was taking trams, buses, and boats in our travel destination. When the attitude is right, the positive tourist experience can begin at home. I recall taking a tram in my home city with a Canadian friend. Gazing at it through the tram window with him, talking about it, made me aware of new details, and to enjoy it more than I had done in years.

Water wakes us up even more, though. Brodsky says that a traveler in water is always a bit more alert than one who travels on land.¹⁶⁸ One could rightly ask if this, in Brodsky’s case, might have something to do with his lack of exposure to traveling in water. Someone from the Venetian islands could be more on his/her toes when traveling in a car – and even some tourists could be, if they do not enjoy high speed in small

¹⁶⁶ Only administratively the city includes the mainland Mestre, which is actually the city’s resource, from which many workers come to the shops and cafeterias of Venice. In natural language there is no idea to follow this administrative move. Mestre is far away in the mainland, and inhabits a totally different tradition with its architecture, industry, and atmosphere, without water.

¹⁶⁷ Urry 2002, 1.

¹⁶⁸ Brodsky 1992, 14-15.

claustrophobic vehicles. Brodsky's experience of being alert in a Vaporetto is still typical for tourists in Venice.

At the same time this way of being activated in Venice is somewhat similar to being in amusement parks, where one lines up in the same way to get into the machines, as one in Venice lines up for the vaporettos. This applies especially to the high seasons in Venice, where one is sometimes only among tourists, waiting for a boat, in the midst of flashing cameras. One waits for the boat with a group of people, which seems, talking about most of the passengers, to be just visiting the city, not belonging to its inhabitants, gazing around in a way typical for tourists. This can be seen in their gestures and in their way of looking at everything intensively and curiously. Photos are taken, foreign languages spoken, and maps rustle. This atmosphere of tourism, the tourist event, is reinforced by relaxed clothing, typical for tourism, from Bermuda shorts to other more conventional pieces of clothing which signify summer and spare time.

Someone might try to pay his/her trip with foreign currency. Then the vaporetto comes. It hits the dock and the passengers rush in to the water bus, which is often already filled with tourists. There reigns an atmosphere of anticipation of the beautiful and / or important sights, a tension which can be felt in the boat. In such a manner the vaporetto is not that much less touristical in its atmosphere than the gondola.

Venice seduces the gaze. Inhabitants may feel tired of the endless slow speed of the city's transportation system, and they may get tired of slow tourists, but for many visitors slowness is valuable, seducing them into coming back. Slowness can even be said

to be luxury.¹⁶⁹ In a world, where everything is in control in the highly developed countries of the West, the way *aqua alta* takes over the city, provides adventure as well. One can see that people take pleasure from having to put on rubber boots, and walk in water. As one of the peculiarities of Venice, it adds to the overall experience.

Learning from Water, Learning from Traffic

We learned a lot about urban waters. They bring sensuality to the experiencing of cities. It is not just the way they can be felt, seen, and heard, but also the way urban transport systems situated within them have to be slow, a feature which enhances the visitors' possibility to really see the cityscapes. The rhythm and pace of traveling in water is a luxury in today's stressed, overtly fast-paced culture. It supports romance and poetical experience, both in the boat, and on the waterfront while watching one.

The slow speed resonates well with old buildings, built for slower use. The speed used today to get around Venice is still quite the same as it was centuries ago, something one cannot say about ground traffic in Florence for instance, which has now exceeded the speed of Renaissance times.

Water, by its very nature, contrasts as well through its own soft liquidness the hardness, permanence, and stability of other materials in the city. It reflects her city through mirror images, and redirects sun rays onto old walls. Venice has been forced to create a unique conception of infrastructure, which has led to a unique culture of both building and transporting people in Venice – without forgetting how some old instances

¹⁶⁹ Here I am grateful to Karoliina Ylihanko and Sanna Mattila for their kind invitation to contribute a lecture in their series of talks on luxury. During the preparation of my own lecture I started to see extensions in the concept that I was not conscious of before.

of this tradition have later been so codified, that they feel museumized (traghetto), or sentimentally, nostalgically kitschy – as the gondoliers in their high-priced boats sing their anachronistic songs. From these thoughts concerning the museum and theme park sides of the city it is natural to move on, to focus on how we could or should think about a city turning into a beautiful museum and a thrilling theme park, thereby losing its cityness.

Chapter 6

MUSEUM AND THEME PARK

It is a theme park, but it's a real and a profoundly magical one, the ultimate one.

Robert Elms, *The Guardian* June 18, 2005¹⁷⁰

The paradox for many is that Venice is a real historical city but it feels like a theme park. Its layer of visible everyday life is thin, and it offers a lot of tourist services, for a huge number of tourists.

As much as a theme park, in any case Venice is also a museum – and this is something it nowadays shares with virtually all historical cities. Often these modes overlap. But in many areas, times of the year and day, it is either the theme park or the museum which dominates our experience of the city – and sometimes, still, the everyday.

In Donna Leon's *Through a Glass, Darkly* (2007) we find a discussion on Muranese glass items. Vianello, a colleague of the protagonist, detective Brunetti, sighs, "like we had toreadors here," commenting on the absurd themes of the glass items sold to tourists, ranging from Spanish cultural heritage to Disney imitations. He continues talking critically about the fact that "local" crafts are increasingly being manufactured and then imported from third-world countries like China.¹⁷¹ Brunetti, who knows that Vianello has relatives in Murano, where real Venetian glass is produced, asks him: "And your relatives?" Vianello states bitterly: "Either they'll learn how to do something else, or

¹⁷⁰ Guardian Saturday June 18 2005.

<http://travel.guardian.co.uk/activities/family/story/0,7447,1508912,00.html> (accessed March 28, 2009).

¹⁷¹ For facts on this see, e.g., *Colors* 1999.

everyone will end up [...] dressing in seventeenth-century costumes and walking around, speaking Veneziano, to amuse the tourists.”¹⁷²

There is not always a big difference in the way the city functions as a theme park, museum, or a site of the everyday. But one difference maker is the crowd. When there are over 100,000 tourists around during the high tide of the tourist season, no place feels like a museum anymore – and the everyday gets overshadowed, even more so as the inhabitants of Venice themselves form a community of less than 70,000. In winter, though, when one sees how small the local community actually is, and one does not have the entertainment industry around oneself, the museum-side of the city is very much accentuated.

This inquiry has already earlier concentrated on the unreal nature of Venice as a city. Here peculiarities of this phenomenon are analyzed in a more focused manner.

In *Masses, Elite Tourists, and Inhabitants* I will analyze different layers of taste and knowledge and how the city following these horizons is used, I will talk about the death of the city, and some of its touristic interpretations (here partly relating to the chapter *Surface and Depth*. The role of the development of a tourist culture for the ordinary man is discussed and contextualized in a broader manner in discussing the democratization of culture.

In *Theme Park and Museum as Frames and Horizons for Experience* I will recollect some phenomena which support the theme park atmosphere in the city. Oscillations between these accents of Venice are discussed. I will also discuss the interpretation history of Venice and its effects.

¹⁷² Leon 2007, 27.

The section Seasons takes up changes in the city, and their effects – here stressing theme park and museum atmospheres. Wintertime Venice is quite a museum. The cold season's silence and feeling of being in history is particularly effective on the islands of Venice, though one must remember that it is during this season when everyday life is most visible as well.

In the last part, Rethinking Theme Park, Museum, and the Real City I will discuss how museums and theme parks actually change in our times. Museums activate people, and theme parks touch upon cultural history more than ever. As metaphors these concepts have to be thought of in a critical manner.

Real life is reconsidered here too. People easily say that Venice is not Venice as its inhabitants change, but actually, how can we await a conservative state from a city – and is there not easily a danger here that we are actually just hostile to migration in a way not that easy to differentiate from normal racism?

Masses, Elite Tourists, and Inhabitants

As already suggested in chapter 3, Surface and Depth, what we now consider to have been the mass-culture debate was focused on the fact that the masses, understood here as the people who were not cultured enough to meet the expectations of the world of high art and culture, were strolling toward the safeguarded realm of culture with a big C.

City life was the womb of the masses. In Baudelaire's poems on Paris, quoted philosophically by Benjamin, we find the crowd as a shock effect on the street. From the way the people bumped against each other in the rush along their way, people suddenly

had to sit too close to each other in public transportation, whereby the masses suddenly became a ruling force of history.¹⁷³

We find this ordinary man of the crowd entertaining himself in towns, theatres, and parks in Josè Ortega y Gasset's 1929 *La rebellion de las masas*, where the author sees the masses threatening to destroy high culture, as dilettants who suddenly felt that they had the right to walk in to classics of architecture, and who, following the process of democratizing culture, had to be accepted there.¹⁷⁴

Folk art died as the professionals of urban centers set out to entertain the people, a development which became even more serious through the development of the mass media. Variety shows, popular theatre, music performances, and street jugglers created the early images of this new tenet, which was then reproduced in our minds by early impressionists in a variety of ways.

Cabaret, Dance halls in England, and Tivoli, together with new, urban common nightlife were just the beginning of a process which was to become even more central. Newspapers developed, trivial literature gained more and more readers, the radio saw its birth in the beginning of the twentieth century together with film, and with the advent of TV, tourism, as well, was no longer a luxury for the high class, but a commonplace for all classes.

Through this development, the ordinary man could also become a part of the traveling culture, which used to be reserved only for the rich. Now the middle class wanted, among many other sites, to see the places which were so popular among

¹⁷³ On this, in many ways, see Benjamin 1999 (162 onwards). Of course, the masses were the dynamo of progress already in the first Marxist writings ever produced, though they found an aesthetically interesting role not earlier than in Benjamin's writings.

¹⁷⁴ See Ortega y Gasset 1993, 11-12.

historical travelers, though, of course, they enjoyed them differently. Then came the other classes as well, and modern tourism invaded historical cities.

In many old cities where tourists roam, the original culture has been ripped off its traditional economy and the new economy is built upon the exchange created by visitors. The masses of local people on the streets, which were the first symbol of the modern era of the masses, have in Venice lost to the far larger masses of visitors.

To those places where tourists like to come and where they are provided with a safe and well organized safety net of tourist culture (safe versions of food, entertainment, cafes where the waiters speak English, and so on.). Where this matrix dominates, we easily experience the theme-park effect, wherever we are.

Montmartre of Paris is a slimy self-imitation of impressionist times, every summer the old city of Tallinn is a medieval mass performance, and the center of Rome, at its worst, is like a beach (it is just that the visitors dress up). Real life is overshadowed by tourism, and not just masses of people, but rather through the overwhelming self-presentation of urban history (postcards, painters, etc.) and other sales (t-shirts, flags, etc.).

The most paradoxical creature in this context is the critical tourist. The Byrons and Brownings of our era arrive in Venice quickly diving into her cultural resources with the help of the tourist industry (guides, maps), but they react to the same system of mass travel and its results critically, even arrogantly – and they often do not want to admit that they need it themselves.

It is not just once that I have overheard that Venice is not rewarding to visit, because it is too touristified – a comment by semi-professional backpackers and people

who travel a lot with the goal of seeking out “real” experiences, and in places which the tourist industry would not have touched yet. They are the “pioneers” destroying new areas, pushing, respectively, the adventurous tourists of the future to even more fragile and original areas. Of course new cities wake up, and do not destroy old buildings, as they see a possibility to earn tourist money with them. This dual process both saves and destroys.¹⁷⁵

Touristified cityscapes are filled with kitsch which is produced in the third world. And one might even get food which just looks local. When most tourists do not have the time and the cultural resources needed¹⁷⁶ to access local culture, it does not matter what one sells to them. In restaurants close to important monuments the food quality often becomes worse in Italy. The leaning tower of Pisa is a good example of this. Pisa does not attract a lot of tourists otherwise, so the area around the tower is like any beach society of the Riviera. Food and culture becomes more local and along with better flavor the further one walks away from this architectural failure.

The tourists who cannot “read” Tintoretto and Carpaccio in the legitimate manner are now absolutely dominant among the visitors in Venice too. They only enjoy beauty in a reduced form, with little or no depth in the traditions of art and cultural heritage. In a way they resemble the popular audience which enjoys Hitchcock films. Most viewers see *Rear Window* (1954) only as an entertaining piece of film, and it is just a small minority that interprets it in complex ways.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ This cultural economy is thoroughly analyzed by Orbaşlı 2000. Rosato 2003, who analyses Venice’s architectural plans, is also very worried about the city.

¹⁷⁶ These cultural resources can include, for example, the ability to speak the local language (makes access easier to its cultural resources), art historical knowledge, etc.

¹⁷⁷ See Cohen 1993.

Already in the 1930s Gramsci wrote about the fact that Dostoyevski's literature became a big hit in Italy – following the manner in which uncultured people interpreted his works in unorthodox ways, rewarding their own needs.

Of course many of us play roles in different audiences, changing from one to another, or even simultaneously – consciously or not. We like to enjoy a bit of surface, and tourist culture; but on the other hand, at some point during our voyage we insist on going deeper.

Important to notice, most novels on Venice – Brodsky here is a strange romanticist exception – already note early on its not just uncanny, but its unreal nature. For example in Patricia Highsmith's classic *Tom Ripley* (1955) the city is portrayed as alienated as the main character of the book himself – without forgetting how touristified Mann's Venice was. In contemporary books from detective stories (Dibdin, Leon) to poetic romances,¹⁷⁸ the tourist nature of the city is being portrayed as something close to freakish. The dominant apocalyptic feeling in these books is that Venice has become a theme park, and its end as a city is near. Ready-made, over-produced, often even presented via foreign, non-expert matrixes (tourist offices, traveling companies), the theme park grows over the local peculiarities and the entrepreneurs who have contact and access to them.

The museum is an issue that is good to discuss in combination with the theme park. Venice is old, and at its peak of historical atmosphere, on winter mornings, it feels like a museum – not a living one, as Rome does, though, as its everyday is felt to be fleeing. The city might even seem too silent to be real, and if one is around doing

¹⁷⁸ See, e.g., Scarpa 2003.

research one easily meets other people doing the same, resulting in a strange experience of working in a sinking archive, in the middle of a huge tourist market.

Theme Park and Museum as Frames and Horizons of Experience

Though the city of Venice itself sometimes produces stimuli for thinking about itself as a theme park or a museum, this stimuli is itself often gained following the expectations of the visitors. Although one would not be on a hunt for a museum or theme park experience, the city invites to do this constantly.

Many people with whom I have discussed Venice, seem to want that the city should continue to be “a city,” which is strange, in the sense that its cityness is so weak. One wonders whether or not they have noticed that Venice is in crisis. Brodsky says in his *Watermark* that Venice should not be turned into a museum.¹⁷⁹ What does Brodsky mean by this? Practically speaking he might be referring to plans to develop the city to be not just a site for the traditional, local inhabitation. Venice acquires new inhabitants as well, though many of them stay there only a part of the year, for example during the three weeks of their holidays. At the same time, during the winter period, during the time of the year when Brodsky used to stay there, Venice feels like a museum, since even the local inhabitants seem to be absent to the extent one would not expect of a city of the geographical size of Venice. Did Brodsky think this is the way cities should be in Italy – silent, slightly touristified, and with a catastrophic infrastructure for everyday?

In this case, there is a misunderstanding at work here – at least partly. There is no need to find one identity for a city, and we cannot force any city to have just one – not

¹⁷⁹ Brodsky 1992, 98.

even in our own experience. It is normal for cultural products and cities to be multi-faceted.

People talk a lot about the silent, museum-like atmosphere of Venice in winter. It is even sought after, in her margins, to reinforce melancholic experience. Islands like Murano and Burano are excellent places to stay, if one wants to experience Venetian life without too much visible tourism. In Murano one finds the “real life,” the “laundry,” dogs barking in the morning, and fishermen leaving for the sea. Funnily, during high seasons, the day starts without tourists, and from approximately 10 AM to 6 PM this cluster of islands is an active part of the theme park, changing back to its own silent life. This might change, though, as the hotel industry is starting to find its way out from the totally filled central areas of Venice to the islands.¹⁸⁰

Nighttime makes the city more a museum as well. It is old, it is not lively, and it is not overloaded with lights and tourists, since it is no Ibiza, but rather a site for cultural travel. Though other old cities can be silent, such as Lucca or Ravenna are; the feeling in Venice is different, however. One can just feel the lack of real everyday life, and this experience is original.

Many visitors come to search for the theme park, and just as many also come in search of the museum. Oscillations are a norm in tourist experiences, as they are in art. People tell us that the beach area they visited was naturally very beautiful, but overtly commercialized and exploited, and their experience balanced between these two aspects of pleasure and criticism. At one and the same time, St. Petersburg is both beautiful and

¹⁸⁰ In an article on the touristification of Venice (*Marie France*, December, 2004, 161-171), Martine Azoulai is right in saying, that actually the islands are the next ones to go – as the tourist culture hectically seeks out new venues it could take its tourists to, since the space in Venice proper is being overtly used.

frightening. For Europeans, visiting the USA is a strange experience, where a feeling of being in a TV program becomes blurred with the fact that “this is real.”¹⁸¹

We live in quite a flexible aesthetic reality, where we swing from listening to hard rock to gazing at paintings, or walking around enjoying a cityscape. We switch TV channels and we have a couple of books open close to our bed while listening to Mozart. And as even this would not be enough for a difference in relation to earlier modern times, we have large numbers of works of art which hold positions in many spheres of culture simultaneously.

Our needs for classification and definition are insatiable, though most people would like to think about themselves as not being the ones classifying and compartmentalizing phenomena. But not even the flexible nature of our aesthetic life in this area has been able to break through the boundaries of language which do not reward cultural philosophy.

Here Venice, together with other historical touristified cities, stands in the same position as Andy Warhol’s works of art. That is, the work of art is many things for many people, and rewards many ways of looking at it, but people nevertheless seek to define such things as being just one thing (“art” / “museum” / “theme park” / “everyday”). Cities are aesthetic object clusters producing a variety of stimuli and substance for experience, varied by changes in the texture, but also seen, interpreted, and experienced in a varying manner by the mobile and actively interpreting subjects visiting them.

¹⁸¹ Books reflecting on this experience and its oscillations have a tradition of their own. See, e.g., Tocqueville’s early 19th century book *Democracy in America* (1998) on experiencing America at the time preceding modern media, and Baudrillard’s *America* (1998), where the latter has increased the strangeness of the visit.

The affective interpretation history of Venice bears within itself all the different interpretations which have ruled over history (see chapter 1). It is a romantic ruin – and a honeymoon site – and it is a renaissance architectural shrine as well as a center of art.

The tourist industry then, on location, helps people find what they want, the way they want to find it – and people interpret and experience, changing focus and nuances, sometimes oscillating between two poles, minute after minute, second after second. Posters, guides, audio materials, signs, and books on the city point in different directions, helping visitors to dive faster into the culture. One moment we interpret San Marco formally, as an art historical object – but then the focus shifts to its glitter, together with seeing the crowd getting inspired by it.

Rethinking Museum, Theme Park, and Real City

The metaphors of museum and theme park are a bit old fashioned. In this way they resemble art as metaphor. When we say that soccer is an art, we do not mean that players would provide us with enigmatic challenges, like artists do in contemporary art, but that there is beauty in soccer, and the kinds of skillful artistry which can be enjoyed aesthetically. Museums are not what they used to be, either. They no longer merely collect items, which they present in a hierarchical order. Museums want to activate people, and they produce happenings, virtual sightseeings, all kinds of ways in which to help people grasp their exhibitions experientially.¹⁸² “Theme park” in its turn, is a concept often used negatively – though we all sometimes enjoy visiting one, and though

¹⁸² See e.g. Corsane 2005. In philosophy the change in museum culture has not always been noticed. See Grabes 2002 on Dewey’s museum critique and its later interpretations.

the parks themselves answer many of our needs, from providing enjoyable leisurely public space to entertaining environments.

In such a manner a historical city turned into a theme park and museum are very much the same thing. As more and more people arrive in the huge tourist masses of today, more and more elitist tourists follow suit as well. There are also tourist guides for all kinds of people nowadays – gay guides, sex guides, art guides, and guides for everyone who want a touch of everything.

Talking about the way the everyday changes in this process, why would it not be okay that Venice would be inhabited by people interested in Venice as a work of art, with visitors doing the same? Why would an inhabitant with a family history in the city be so much better? Are the people traditionally living in the city actually used as entertainment, and is this the reason elitist tourists want to save real life in historical cities?

It is hard to understand the purist thoughts which elitist scholars and tourists have about the city. London of today is international, why could Venice not be? Why would a city be authentic by having its old inhabitants, and how can people during times of migration and discussions on racism even talk in this way about Venice?

In the end, theme parks also change. In England there exists a Charles Dickens theme park, and many theme parks thrive more and more on local history, as is the case with the Dracula theme park of Transylvania.

And many tourists need at least a semi-theme park for their vacation. An economically successful tourist resort must have the universally familiar infrastructure, the matrix of sales, information, and pre-packaged experiences, which mainstream tourists seek, in order to make it. And it is an experience we should not dismiss if we

want to understand our era. Where the tourist matrix is found, and where it dominates, we know that we are in safe hands. Tourism, museums, theme parks, and mainstream culture are all ways to keep safe, which should not only be criticized. Though Venice is not a city especially for children, its theme-park nature, spiced up with a lot of high-class cultural visitors, and without the usual sex markets and the like, which tourist resorts often have, it feels like a safe place to come to.

Learning from the Museum and the Theme Park

In this chapter “critical tourists” were found to be the people invading new realms to as the pioneers of tomorrow’s tourist traps, and so their ethical stance remains problematic. Reality and performance of reality were discussed as well, and the way the oscillation of these is a typical experience in Venice, resembling the one many Europeans experience in the US. The safety of the tourist matrix was found to be a positive potential in the overtly touristic use of the city.

It does not have to be a paradox that a city sometimes feels like a theme park, sometimes like a museum, and sometimes as a site of the everyday. These are aspects, which can live side by side – and in many cases featuring historical cities which provide an interesting location for tourism. Discussing this easily takes us to understanding how aesthetics all in all works like this. In theory we like to say that we experience a work of art in a certain manner. But in most cases, during interpretation and experience, we oscillate between seeing it, e.g., as art or as popular culture (Tarantino).¹⁸³ A part of the

¹⁸³ Art and popular culture do not here refer to actual classifications, but to the variety of sensibilities and interpretation strategies associated with these horizons.

aesthetic dynamics of cities like Venice lies in these differences. My reason for loving Venice is that she provides it all. She has art, kitsch, tourism, mass culture, and a variety of layers from cultural history to sensual pleasure, and their resonance and multi-level effects in actual experience is titillating.

Experience is constantly changing, and we oscillate between the works of art and everyday pleasures by surfing along different models of interpretation and absorption of what we perceive. Differences can be deeper, yet, however, as can be seen in the next chapter on Worlds of Art, where an ontological divide marks the life of two works of art produced in Venice, but signed by Jeff Koons in the world of contemporary art.

Chapter 7

WORLDS OF ART

David Carrier recalls that seeing “Carpaccios, Tintoretos, and Titians in Venice, the city where these artists worked,” made a difference.¹⁸⁴ For me especially Tintoretto does it. This sixteenth-century Kant of painting scarcely ever traveled – from Venice. Knowing this reinforces my feeling for sound resonance between his use of colors and the Adriatic seawater, famous for its green color.

After contemplating on the dance of water in the *rive* outside of *Ospedale della pietà*, the orphanage where Antonio Vivaldi worked, I cannot but help hearing his *Four Seasons* echo the Venetian waters.¹⁸⁵

Tintoretto’s use of green feels like a legitimate key to some aspects of his work. The case of Vivaldi definitely affects listening to his music, though it feels less compulsory to see Venice for understanding *The Four Seasons*. Carpaccio’s paintings of the festivities at St. Mark’s are just content which we understand better when we have visited the city.

Different works of art and events of cultural history often begin supporting each other when we study a cultural whole where they in some way belong, and this could quite naturally be the case, especially in cities which have a distinctive cultural history. We are here, through Venice, talking about a center for arts and the aesthetic, where

¹⁸⁴ Carrier 2004, 62.

¹⁸⁵ Maybe this as well explains why Brodsky sees Venice as an orchestra? Brodsky 1992, 97.

artistic and aesthetic traditions have flourished in interaction for centuries, and in some periods even quite a closed reality.¹⁸⁶

In books on the nature of the city, works of art produced in different ages by different masters are “analyzed” in relation to the texture of the city, to present analogies. Water is of course an element, which in Venice binds so much together.¹⁸⁷

Venice, as any peculiar, strong cultural center, has its own laws of culture. Like Russian classics of literature jump out at us behind every corner on a walk in St. Petersburg, in Venice local resources of art and culture flood, forcing us, the more we know about them, to count on the city’s cultural history – from Hemingway’s bar to the echoes of Casanova’s gondola.

Though a whole movement of site-specific art has emerged on the scene lately, there is still not much discussion on the fact that in some cases locality forms the identity of other types of art as well.

This is especially strange in aesthetics, as Arthur C. Danto, introduced us in 1964 to the concept “artworld”, has in fact based his classical text on the subject, *The Artworld* (2005) on very local notions. Though what is happening in New York’s contemporary art circles is definitely always an international issue as well, not only because of the way the city mixes people with different backgrounds, but also because of the nature of the city (which always has a significant impact); indeed, Danto’s own theory, where he uses concepts like “art historical knowledge” and even more importantly “atmosphere,” definitely points to a small community.

¹⁸⁶ As regarding all classical cities with enough history, Venice has had its periods of isolation, but actually the way the city lies in the sea has always made it a bit more isolated than the others. The effect of this has partly been reinforced by the city’s own politics, for example by closing all the glass makers into Murano in the 13th century (due to the risk of fires).

¹⁸⁷ See especially Valeri 1955 for this type of essayistic work.

In a famous passage, the young Danto recalls how Robert Rauschenberg's work, where a stuffed goat had been pulled inside a tire, just felt like the right thing to do at the point of presenting the work in New York. Following Danto's text, aestheticians have mostly felt that here we had an example of how the artworld keeps on developing, though the actual point was made about Manhattan. How would Rauschenberg, as a local artist, have made it in Tokyo or Moscow, or even culturally a bit closer, London, with his work? Most of Danto's commentators have been American, so they perhaps have not even realized the locality of the issue, because in English-language culture New York is something undebatably universal.

In addition, discussion concerning the artworld has over-emphasized the idea there is only one, quite monolithic reality of art, which would globally connect different centers of art – without even mentioning the fact that discussions on the artworld in aesthetics have been bound to discussing high art, museum art, and art of intellectual circles.

But as anyone connected to the arts knows, there are reasons why certain avantgardistic movements, like, say, constructivism and futurism, were born in early twentieth-century Russia and, Italy, respectively.¹⁸⁸ Indeed it is a well-understood fact that old, local traditions of handicraft can affect even quite abstract contemporary artists. Social structures, deep historical ties to local culture, and local institutional structures create huge differences between the artworlds of different cities like (Danto's) New York, or (Adorno's) Vienna – reflected in Adorno's *viennoise*, though also universally modernist analyses of jazz which he made without any expert knowledge on the music –

¹⁸⁸ Constructivism and futurism were both intimately connected to the political crises of their respective home countries.

and, of course, Venice. These differences provide not just differing frames, horizons of interpretations, and atmospheres which affect experience, but totally diverse ontologies as well – though the last ones are less usual in art.

A piece with a strongly dominating bass and drum works, straight and heavy rock music sounds more to the point in a big car on a broad street under the evening skyline of a big American city built on a huge scale and filled with gigantic cars, than it does in a small wooden boat on a silent canal in Venice. And in the end there are even deeper ties, which even decide for us, through cultural territorialization, as to what works are seen as art, and in what way.

I will here present some elements of Danto's thinking together with aspects of George Dickie's institutional theory of art, though not in a very orthodox manner, but rather to provide a path for thinking about Venetian culture, and to show how peculiar cultural spheres can be strong in singular cities. The first section Danto, Dickie, and the Geoesthetic Fallacy helps us to come to grips with the localist touch which is quintessential for Danto's thinking. We will then encounter Jeff Koons, in Koons, Signoretto, and Murano, and through some of his works – which are anchored to Venice through the glass artist Pino Signoretto – we will attempt to find an understanding of local ontologies of art, since it is Signoretto who is actually the author of Koons's works of art in Venice, following the logic of the glass artworld. The third part, Koons, Signoretto, and Murano, is an analysis of the strong force field of Venetian culture.

Danto, Dickie, and the Geoesthetic Fallacy

Danto was the first to show that art, at least when we discuss some current trends in contemporary art, is dependent on our more or less philosophical interpretations of them.

Danto does not himself push his theory too far, by claiming for example that art would only be the intellectual, ready-made oriented games played in East Coast American art in the 1960s and 1970s. In any case when Danto's thinking and the concept of the artworld are mentioned, this is the type of thinking that lies in the background.

The point is that the effects of Dantoan atmosphere of theory and art historical consciousness are, still, decisive for a limited scope of contemporary art. Danto's interest in the philosophical side of contemporary art makes his philosophy of art exclusive in relation to art which is less philosophically appealing than the ready-made tradition, to the extent that Danto did not, for a long time, even try to incorporate problems of beauty, aesthetic experience, and formal qualities, into his theory of the artworld.

The main point in Danto's theory is that the world of art, that is the (post)modern realm of museum, critics, and artists (not to mention elite audiences) is quite philosophical nowadays, and it develops in a quite theoretical manner. Deeds done in the world of art are followed by other deeds, which often comment upon the former ones – like cutting ties (including Nam June Paik's) has followed Nam June Paik's original act of cutting John Cage's tie.¹⁸⁹

Besides this art historically and theoretically motivated force which takes art onward in its philosophical explorations, there is an atmosphere in the art world regarding what is good and what is interesting. This is why most works of art could not have been done and presented successfully in other periods. Here Danto discusses time as a factor, but not place.

¹⁸⁹ The tie example is my own.

As long as we are discussing the artistic games played by Marcel Duchamp or Andy Warhol, Danto's theory does not pose any problems. The more universal the art, and the more connected it is to the international realm of art, the more it fits Danto's theory.

But the field of contemporary art consists of a broad variety of practices, of a whole family of game-like territories of art, embodying a multiplicity of aesthetic interests, ideologies, and narratives of art history, as well as differing practical conventions, such as the uses of popular or local imagery, artistic techniques, and, if audiences are discussed, countless ways of making intertextual connections, ways of framing, and interpreting objects.

Anish Kapoor's somatically appealing colorist sculptures, the provocative manga glass fibre statues of Takashi Murakami – which require as much understanding of contemporary popular culture as of the artworld – and the irritating, disgusting performances and videos of Paul McCarthy, all recall how philosophers may just want to see art as a philosophical enterprise, without taking into account the variety of ways contemporary art flourishes, without even mentioning broader, more democratic fields of art, including the popular and folk arts. Competence in understanding some contemporary art, like the philosophical game made famous by Duchamp and Warhol (or the intellectualistic interpretation of it), does not automatically lead to a competence required by another, say, even a New Yorker like Jean-Michel Basquiat.

The games Duchamp and Warhol played with the ontology of art, and which Danto portrayed in his writings, were important in the international field of high and modern art. And many of the works of art we consider to be important have at least some

connection to the ready-made tradition, whether roughly philosophically, as in Duchamp's case, or, appealing also to popular consumers, as Warhol's pictures often did, and still do. Philosophers of art have not, however, given enough attention even to later moves connected to the Duchampian tradition.

One contemporary artist, Jeff Koons, claimed already in the beginning of the 1990s, that he, as an artist, had made the next big move in the ready-made game.¹⁹⁰ I am not aware if Koons referred to a singular exhibition, series of works, or, just one piece, but, I doubt that most of his works, like his ready-made drycleaners or kitsch statues, would make a difference in this respect. The 1991 series *Made in Heaven* is more interesting philosophically. For this series Koons produced a group of artworks, which are, whether intentionally or not, fully, and without any contradiction, members of two different artistic realms with two authors, two artists who made them. The series was made in Murano, the cluster of islands belonging to Venice, which is famous for its long history glass and glass art, and the other artist, who is more of an author in Murano, is the famous glass designer Pino Signoretto. Here we find a local artistic force field with enough strength of its own to make a difference in the international, contemporary art scene.

How this is possible needs an introduction. Before going into the delicate example case, it may be good to get a theoretical grip on the problem by turning again to Danto's, and also to George Dickie's theory of art.¹⁹¹

Danto gave us the "artworld," a concept, which has become a part not just of the world of aesthetics, but also of art talk in general, and even the vocabulary used in

¹⁹⁰ Koons said this in an interview published in a 1990 edition of *Vogue*. The interview is republished in Muthesius 1994, 153.

¹⁹¹ For Dickie's thinking, see, e.g., Dickie 1974 and 1989.

cultural bureaucracy. In his theory Danto described the peculiar logic, sensibility, which makes it possible, in the artworld, that any object may become presented and interpreted as art in a meaningful way.

Dickie's institutional theory was an attempt to explain how the realm of art functions from a sociological point of view. Dickie seduced philosophers of art to understand how the abductions of everyday objects into the artworld take place with the help of museums, critics, and other gatekeepers, and also how the name of the artist, when it becomes well known, works like a brand, a meaningful factor in producing meaning when presenting radical objects as art.

Dickie does not, like Danto, discuss only the New York artworld, neither does Dickie discuss exclusively conceptual, nor intellectualistic art. Still his theory is so narrowly sociological, that, as a model, many philosophers feel that it is a dead end for a project of defining art, where theory, even if at first heuristic, ceased to be productive and informative. What is presented in the *Centre Pompidou*, the Guggenheim's, or in central international exhibitions (Kassel Documenta, Venice Biennale), and what the critics of the main newspapers and art magazines write about, has to be art with the capital A at least in some respect. But this does not really satisfy the interest most of us have in art. We enjoy sculptures which lie outside of this institutional cage, we love art made with an anti-art attitude, and we enjoy movies which we appreciate in an art manner though they would otherwise be classified as entertainment.

Danto's and Dickie's models could be used as models for thinking about art. To take one example, visual artist Steve Harvey created, to make a living, a package to be mass produced by the Brillo Company. Harvey's background in abstract expressionism

did not turn the Brillo Box into an interesting object, but, as we know, Andy Warhol took the Brillo Box to the East 74th Street “Stable Gallery.” The self-conscious customers at the gallery connected Warhol’s work to an art historical context, and Danto himself helped with this connecting process through his numerous writings about the Brillo Box. We will never know if Warhol meant his early works to be just jokes, critiques of the world of art, or as new moves in a more or less Duchampian game. Perhaps Warhol was made to be a contemporary artist by an enthusiastic public, and he decided to accept the “invitation.” This would not, of course, change the ontological status of his works, as works of art.

Chronologically Danto’s theory, the Artworld, always comes one step ahead of Dickie’s institutional theory of art, in the process of theorizing the fact that something is becoming high art. The Dantoan atmosphere of theory and art historical consciousness gave the public, which attended Warhol’s 1964 show at the Stable Gallery, the ability to enjoy a radical work, which was not yet institutionalized, and, by accepting Warhol’s work as art, they, as powerful gatekeepers, helped to institutionalize it. In this process they exercised power following their role in one of the global art centers, New York. A great audience in a small town in Mongolia would not have made it following power relations, and colonialism, maybe even of the right economy and communications. Western centers of art publish costly, flashy journals, and distribute them to the world.

The *Brillo Box* brought analytic philosophy of art from the world of objects and their intrinsic qualities to the realm of non-objective factors. This move stressed the fact that our interpretations of art are an important factor in the process where some works acquire the status of being works of art with a capital A. At the same time, it made

analytic aesthetics stick to the works of contemporary art which could be called explicitly philosophical (or possible to be interpreted that way), made the analytic philosophers see the realm of contemporary art from a very narrow viewpoint, forgetting not just other spheres of contemporary art, but also broader uses of the concept of art.¹⁹² And strangely, Danto could not really free himself from object-centered thinking, that is, traditional ways of seeing objects bearers of just one singular, exclusive identity. In a way, Danto did not work out his theory to its logical end, even if he started to take analytic aesthetics away from focusing just on objects and their qualities (or the lack of importance of their qualities).¹⁹³

Warhol's *Brillo Box* became a special case in the class of mass-produced Brillo packages, but Danto did not take into consideration that the ontological status of an object of art might, following the possibility to abduct nearly everything into the realm of contemporary art, sometimes be divided between two different realms of art. Harvey's authorship of the Brillo Box may not be a topic worthy of discussion, but Danto could have concentrated even more on his local artworld, as Jeff Koons worked with Dantoan themes in the 1990s, producing objects, which may have led Danto to continue on his radical path.

Koons, Signoretto, and Murano

¹⁹² Shusterman says that Danto should have continued after finding Warhol's Brillo Box by taking philosophy into popular culture. See Shusterman 2002, 175-190.

¹⁹³ Actually analytic aestheticians never thought of anything other than "high art" in their texts, but the "artworld" closed the set of objects for good – after this concept arrived, it was used exclusively to convey the legitimate sphere of the discussion.

The history of the arts show us that at least some types of works of art may have been divided between two different tokens, and this already before the era of modernism. In his book, *Highbrow / Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (1988) Lawrence Levine shows that Shakespeare's plays were performed and appreciated in the nineteenth-century USA as entertaining popular culture, and, for a while, simultaneously, as high-art theater.

According to Levine the two different Shakespeare audiences fought violently over the right interpretation of Shakespeare's plays in the so-called Astor Place Riot, where dozens of theater fanatics, belonging to the entertainment wing, were killed, and hundreds of friends of theater were wounded. The entertainment wing lost, with its non-dogmatic version of Shakespeare. Shows subsequently filled with jokes about political issues, and the whole entertaining event resembled more a variety act than an event we connect to appreciating an autonomous play in high culture. The art version of Shakespeare was legitimated as the only right way to enjoy Shakespeare, for a long time, with devastating results concerning the multiplicity of ways in which a good Shakespeare play can serve us, and, as Levine hints, entertainment Shakespeare was born again only when film came to satisfy our needs of entertainment in the twentieth century.¹⁹⁴ Anyway, the violent case reminds us about the fact that we often want our dearest objects of appreciation to have the status of belonging just to our specific ways of using them.

My own proposition for a new Fountain or Brillo Box consists of the creation of unique physical objects, not types for different incarnations of the work, like playwriting might be for performance instances of theater, but two differing works of art in one

¹⁹⁴ See Levine 1988, the essay on Shakespeare.

object, with differing ontological statuses, two authors, and, paradoxically without any contradiction.

Koons's *Made in Heaven* exhibition consisted of photos, and glass and marble statues portraying Koons himself with his wife, Cicciolina, better known as a porn star, in sexual acts.¹⁹⁵ Koons was already known as a ready-made artist who had presented mass produced basketballs and dry cleaners in his shows, ready-mades in the traditional meaning of the work. He had also worked with ready-made themes by, for example, copying pictures from kitschy postcards to his own porcelain works, and by using famous brands in his artworks.

The glass and marble works of the *Made in Heaven* exhibition were ordered from skilled Italian artisans, which are, at least in some language games, called artists, and who are appreciated in their local artistic realm in a manner which resembles the high appreciation we give to modern or contemporary artists as authors.¹⁹⁶

How can a work ordered from another artist be a ready-made? In a way it cannot, and maybe we should be talking about a special case in the class of ready-mades, or a clever comment on the ready-made tradition.

A legitimate, canonized, and, for art dealers, safe contemporary artist like Jeff Koons may just bring any object into the artworld. The history of art is, in its turn, full of example cases, where we find works from less valued art forms and artists rising in the cultural hierarchy, or entering the artworld in different ways. One of these historical examples could be the poster art of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, which belongs to all contemporary versions of our canons of art. In this case works of art outside the

¹⁹⁵ As Thierry de Duve mentioned, when I presented this chapter as a paper in Sønderborg Denmark in 2002, we might also want to see Cicciolina as one possible author of the *Made in Heaven* artworks.

¹⁹⁶ See Dorigato 1986 for the history of Venetian glass.

institution of art are being interpreted in fresh ways, and become part of a new artistic context. In the Toulouse-Lautrec example we still have only one author, which is not the case with the *Made in Heaven* artworks, as we shall see.

It may be useful to briefly include some other paradigmatic cases before going into the main problem. One of them could be exemplified with the help of my personal memory, concerning the relationship between a skillful artisan and a contemporary artist. The father of one of my best friends, a carpenter, used to execute the artworks of a famous contemporary artist. The fact does not shock anyone who is educated in contemporary art, but it was an illuminating experience to spend time in his studio, to see the instructions written down on paper, and, future works of art, simple, geometrically shaped, huge pieces of wood, lying on the floor. Once there was a problem with the instructions, that is the order, and the carpenter called the artist, who advised him to solve the problem on his own.

Philosophically the case is not that interesting, nor problematic, and it is more than a half century later than the *Fountain* made by Duchamp. From the viewpoint of authorship it is even less problematic than the masterpieces signed by early modern masters, who, as we know, were often partly executed, maybe even created by their students. This was the way artists were educated in early modern times, but, in the end, the maestro was responsible for the work produced. The artisan in our contemporary story produced physical objects which would not have had any meaning outside the realm of contemporary art, as they were formally dull, not very beautiful, useless pieces of wood, and even quite easy to execute. In fact the contemporary artist would probably not have needed the help of the carpenter, as the execution of the work was not very

complicated. We would have an analogous case, from the ready-made point of view, if our exemplary artist would have thrown a piece of wood in the river to rot, as he seemed not to care very much about the final form of the work when the carpenter called him and asked for advice with the instructions. The carpenter could be said to be the author of the works only in a very banal, non-artistic meaning of the word. The pieces became interesting when they were presented as art in an exhibition of the famous artist, in the artworld.

In the other, aforementioned historical example – let us talk about the school of Raphael – the early modern artist used his students' skills to produce paintings in his own style. He was responsible for the planning of the work, as well as all formal decisions, and, in the end, of all details, as he had the authority to accept or not to accept the work of his students. The students had differing roles in the execution, but none of them had an independent role as the author of the work.

There is still one paradigmatic example which could be recalled to make the own case more clear. It is the already classical, delicious (and delirious) example of the Willem de Kooning painting which Robert Rauschenberg wiped away. The destroying of the de Kooning painting took place, as we know, peacefully. Rauschenberg asked de Kooning for permission to erase the colours of one of his paintings. Philosophically the story is quite simple. A contemporary artist, a giant in our contemporary artworld, proposes to another, already a canonized artist, that he would like to deconstruct one of his works of art. An institutionally secure work of art becomes another, one nearly as institutionally secure. We are here talking about games played by two Midas-like characters in contemporary art.

In his series *Made in Heaven* Jeff Koons presented glass and marble works, and photos, portraying himself and his wife Cicciolina in a variety of more or less pornographic acts. The *Made in Heaven* works have then been presented on many occasions, and they have already become canonized in the art history of the 1990s. In the execution of his work Koons used virtuoso artisans, who continue to cultivate old, highly valued local traditions. The busts, made of marble, were produced in Tuscany, in the inspiring marble area extending from Carrara to Camaione. More importantly, for us, the glass statues were made in Venice, more accurately in Murano. Once the tradition of glass making on this island touched upon everything. Even Jesus on the cross can be made of glass in a Muranese church. Now the contemporary art attitude has invaded some margins of Muranese glass making, but even more, Muranese glass masters – who fight the cheaper third-world glass which is brought to Venice following globalization – do a lot of kitsch and design.

In Murano, while living at Lido di Jesolo, Koons and Cicciolina set out to model for Signoretto, who is not just a local but is also an internationally famous glass artist. Their works can be found in the backrooms of high-class glass shops in Murano.

So, Koons hired a world famous Venetian glass artist to do his works of art. Those who know Signoretto's work know that it is high class, and Signoretto has a really big name, so that his work is always appreciated as glass art in the world of glass – a world where the technical ability of the artist is still important, together with formal expression, and where being a big name gives more weight to your works.

Signoretto's work is here, so to speak, in the employ of an another artist, Koons. Differing from the classical example of Rauschenberg and de Kooning, Signoretto is no

player in the world of contemporary art – and we should also remember that Koons is no glass artist. If Rauschenberg would have asked de Kooning to paint a painting for him, we would know all about it. That Signoretto has been ignored as the the other artist here is only due to his hierarchically lower position as an artist in the realm of contemporary art – though, most people in the world of glass art would view Signoretto as the author of these works.

There has not been a lot of discussion on the autonomy of glass art, and it has not been cultivated aggressively against other forms of art, that is “kitsch,” “popular art” and so on, as has been done with modern art and its followers (for instance postmodern art¹⁹⁷), but still, the world of glass art, and here especially a realm with deep and peculiar traditions like Murano, has its own inherent logic, and its own criteria for who is an author as well.

Autonomy is not underlined by the authors of Murano glass, but do they feel less threatened by other forms of culture as do contemporary artists, who have to make the difference in everything they do? Murano glass is safely in its own haven, protected by local thought and experience, and loaded with over a millennium-long tradition which gives it weight.

If someone hires a glass artist to do something, whatever this could be from a glass made Benetton sign to the headquarters of the company or just a small ash tray on the table, in glass art, and in everyday life, we consider this object to be the work of the

¹⁹⁷ Though many postmodernists claim that anything can be said to be art, there are of course ethical constraints to it – at least when the communities keeping up with the use of the concept of art are discussed. For example Karlheinz Stockhausen made a wrong move by calling the September 11th 2001 terror attack in Manhattan something analogous to a work of art. He was excluded quite efficiently from the artworld for a while. Aesthetic constraints seem to be strong, too – see for example Nerdrum 2001 on cases where paintings have been too sentimental to be accepted as art.

glass artist, and not the person who hired him/her to do it. Though Koons can be the author of these works inside the realm of contemporary art, why would there be a distinction in this regard, when we talk about Koons's work and the artisans' life in the world of glass art?

Indeed, I suggest that we have to accept the fact that the *Made in Heaven* artworks have two authors, and through this, and their life in two realms, they have two ontological statuses in two different realms of art.

Normal ready-mades are removed out from the everyday, and they do not represent any special value as art in the realms in which they are used, but even this is not enough. Koons could use Signoretto's work because it was a tradition inside of Western culture, because the art world has been especially blind to other Western traditions of art. Moreover, using oriental or African traditions would have made people angry because democratically, we tend to think that they have "their" forms of art. Political correctness has awakened us to "Others," but only if they do not come too close. Inside Western culture there is still not much respect in this sense. The same happens in some ways in philosophy as well: African and oriental philosophies are mentioned in analytic encyclopedias and handbooks, but the close, really "dangerous" continental ones are not mentioned.

Glass art is a world unto itself with its own artistic and cultural values, logics, and sensibilities, which have not traditionally been interesting for philosophical aesthetics. We can easily understand that it has also been the other way around. An old glass maker has perhaps seen the *Made in Heaven* works (in a magazine) and thought, "oh these are the hot works made by Pino." As a curiosity one should know that in Muranese glass

shops where I have visited, these works have in fact not at all been discussed as Koons's works, but only as Signoretto's. Even Cicciolina is more interesting as a person for these local people than Koons.

If the works would physically be made by Koons, they would in fact not be interesting at all in any realm of art, especially not in the realm of glass art, which has high craft standards.¹⁹⁸ Koons is not a name in the realm of glass, and even less in Muranese glass. Though he would be good enough technically, it would take time to establish a name – as it does in contemporary art – where Koons, like in our example, is now using his long-acquired name to do philosophically interesting works of art.

All this does not have to be viewed as a challenge for the status of the works in contemporary art. *Made in Heaven* cannot be but Koons's work as contemporary art, and it is a good series, which even plays around intelligently with Duchampian and (philosophically speaking) Dantoan themes. In fact we have a problem only if we feel that works of art should have only one ontological, artistic status, and a position only in one world of art as art. In light of all the facts reviewed here, this position would be hard to defend.

Two different realms attribute the work to two different persons. One is positioned as an author in a geographically and formally distinctive tradition of a form of art which is not very central to the global, dominant concept of art but is still very appreciated. The other is one of the most important provocateurs of contemporary art. If we here, when the works of art find themselves anchored in two strong cultural realms, try to say that this difference is a question of interpretation only, we put ourselves in an

¹⁹⁸ Of course, in contemporary art it would be interesting if Koons suddenly started doing his work again with his own hands, but this is another story.

even more challenging position: we are in fact saying that the difference of the works of these two artists is only a question of interpretation.

I do not know if the *Made in Heaven* glass art works are ontologically unique, but I doubt it. I just happened to find the case by concentrating on Venice, and spending a lot of time in the glass boutiques of Murano – not to mention their backrooms, where the hardcore sales are done, and where some of the best works seem to be sold. I cannot tell if we have followed Koons's thoughts the way he would have wanted us to do, but we have to give him credit in the Duchampian game philosophers have been so interested in for decades.

Learning from Koons, Murano, and Signoretto

We understood how differently works of art can be anchored to a city. The case of Tintoretto's green seemed to be not only productive for interpretation, like Vivaldi's. One ought to see Venetian waters to get a certain essence of the work of this painter who never left Venice.

Geography seemed to be, in many ways, an underestimated theme in aesthetics. In this chapter the question of the role of a geographically distinctive cultural sphere was taken to meet ontology. I claimed that two works of art had a different ontological position in Venice that they had in the global art world. They had a different author. The same objects have had different ontological positions in the universal realm of contemporary art, and (especially Muranese) glass art.

We can thank the world of modern and contemporary art for making us conscious of art and its concept, institution, and high logic, but the world of art is far more multifaceted, multilayered, and multi-identical, than philosophers would so far have liked to admit.

Local realms of art with a deep cultural history and a strong logic of its own are ontologically potential. As it is not only a question of interpretation, for example in the Koons-Signoretto case, seeing the works both as Muranese glass art and contemporary art strikes us with a deep oscillation, of something being two profoundly different things at the same time, made by two authors – and attributed to them for different reasons.

As we shall see, it is no coincidence that Koons chose Venice and Murano as the place where he wanted to make his glass artworks. And while Signoretto's work looks like glass art, under Koons's influence the works have a touch of kitsch to them – since Koons has commented a lot on kitsch and since glass is more associated with kitsch than art. In the next chapter we will be guided by Koons to understand kitsch better, and then, through this heightened understanding, to understand in what way Venice, as a city, is kitschy and hands over the kitsch.

Chapter 8

VENICE AS KITSCH

“All that glisters is not gold”

The Merchant of Venice (II, vii)

In Shakespeare’s times Venice was truly a city of commerce, but now its treasures are artistic and historical – resources which are harder to distinguish from forgeries than gold ever was, and which belong to a world of art and culture, where strange alchemies rule, making the most banal everyday objects highly regarded works of art, and sometimes the object is praiseworthy merely due to its age.¹⁹⁹

Though our travels to see art would not be fuelled by status anxiety, and though we would be highly distinguished connoisseurs of a variety of art forms, there are always traditions, conventions, technical finesses, hidden codes and inversions, which make it hard for us to understand what we are encountering. In the beginning of a relationship with a form of art, we all fall for the easy, and often we go for the “glitter.” Sometimes the glitter is just glitter, like in the case of Richard Clyderman’s piano music. It glisters, and definitely it is not gold. A different case is found in some of the most simple musical passages of Mozart – or Vivaldi – which are approachable and enjoyable by anyone, but which provide deeper challenges for those who have been initiated into classical music.

It is no wonder that a Bolognese colleague of mine corrected me when I talked about the kitschy nature of Venice by saying that she is not kitsch. “She is original.” He

¹⁹⁹ Even lousy paintings from the sixteenth century make it into “high” museums.

thought that I came from the outside of the(ir) system and needed help to find my way into understanding the city. I was not insulted, but thought about it. Actually it is not just that Venice feels kitschy from time to time. It is this feature which makes her also easy to approach for people who are not that much into architectural history and artistic treasures. One has to be really interested in architecture to be able to appreciate a street in Berlin, but nearly whatever street in Venice touches upon the sense of beauty people share everywhere.

And Venice really is a city full of attributes we often associate with kitsch. It is not just the tourist industry which makes it all kitschy, it is that the city is a perfect object for kitschy appreciation. Her architecture has a lot of pink and gold color. Many aquatic sceneries of Venice are so stereotypically romantic, that we have a hard time enjoying the scenery if we are not good at tolerating sentimental nuances in art and experience. The same applies to sunsets at San Marco, views of passing gondolas in the dark, or the decorated façades of the palaces along the Grand Canal. Like a “too beautiful” Norwegian mountain landscape which brings to mind the kitschy nature postcards, and Disney’s nature films, Venice sometimes overlaps with the way it (and some other historical cities) is sold cheaply.

Knowledge is an important factor here. If we would know that a van Meegeren²⁰⁰ of architecture would have built Venice to resemble a more original one, Venice would affect us heavily in a kitschy manner. It would be the kitschiest city on earth. But we know Venice is original. This knowledge used to safeguard it well against kitschy feelings, but both the way it is sold and touristified, and the way our use of the concept of

²⁰⁰ Han van Meegeren is perhaps the world’s most famous forger, who created paintings which were sold as real Vermeers during the Second World War.

kitsch has changed in recent decades, has made the situation different. Many people talk about the kitschy nature of the city. Not just heretical scholars. This is due to the new use of the word, the way it is associated with certain colors, for example.

Kitsch has been a side theme throughout this inquiry, as when water traffic (the gondola) has been discussed, when theme park associations have been analyzed, and in a various small notions.

Besides Venice, we are here discussing contemporary art, and one of its pioneers of the 1990s, Jeff Koons – who already, as an old friend of Venice, gave us a helping hand in chapter Seven. He has shown through his work something important about the nature of kitsch, and that is that kitsch is more and more, besides lately being rated as a feminine branch of mass culture, bound to certain colors and materials – at the very same time as the pseudo-art meaning of the word is dying out.

A lot has been said about kitsch, but the discussion on its multifaceted nature and our need for it has hardly begun. Though the concept is used to refer to a variety of phenomena from pseudo art, pretentious art and luxurious interior design to plain knick-knacks (mass-produced tourist objects, feminine everyday luxury, etc.), and though some objects (as I will point out below) are called kitsch or kitschy following the material and color which they possess (pink, porcelain), philosophical debates on kitsch mostly present the issue as being polarized between art and wannabe art, or just view it through one basic perspective (sentimentality, commercialism, etc.), which is then presented as *the* perspective on kitsch. There is as well too little discussion on the difference between bad taste and kitsch. The concepts are very different, though connected: There is a norm

for bad taste (a pink suit), which can be used as a means to create an elitist, witty aesthetic move, that is, in being used by a transvestite.

Originality and copy/imitation is one polarization, which is typically discussed in texts on kitsch.²⁰¹ There is something kitschy about copies which we know from Las Vegas, Disneylands, and other theme parks, but it is good to remember that in most cases there is a conscious copying going on, not an attempt to present the copy as anything else than a playful imitation. The role of copying and how we experience it as well has changed, as we are less obsessed by originals than we were in earlier decades.

The lack of originality is just *one* way today that can give us a feeling of kitsch, but not necessarily a lot more important than, for example, plain style, color, or material used. Kitsch is a cluster of overlapping different uses of the word – like art is. One way to use the word “art” is to discuss landscape paintings created for the needs of interior design – and they can be discussed as kitsch as well. And if my intuition is right – this is something we will see during this chapter – it turns out that original architecture even in classical cities such as Venice present us with kitsch. To get there we have to go through some discussion on kitsch, and I have chosen a guide for us, who can show us the way through his artistic research. It is no coincidence that Koons made some of his most radical moves in the art scene while working in Venice in the beginning of the 1990s, as I think the city invites us to think about issues like this.

First I will give a survey on the history of kitsch and the evolution of the concept, through introducing Koons’s work, his way of using the tradition and force field of kitsch in his work, in Koons, Kitsch and Ready-Made. Then I will discuss Venice as kitsch – including its colourful palaces in gold, and other features which fit our conception of

²⁰¹ See, e.g., Eco 1997 and Calinescu 1986.

kitschiness and an object of kitsch use – in Venice is Kitsch. In the end I will take Theodor Adorno's and Clement Greenberg's thinking into account and by forcing them through a short journey To San Marco. Learning from (the mistakes of) Adorno and Greenberg. I will show how their thinking upon mass culture and kitsch is at least partly based upon a lack of cultural literacy, something in which consumers have grown substantially in our era. The last part also gives hints as to how to think about kitschy environments, strategies and skills for their interpretation and experience.

Koons, Kitsch and Ready-Made

Jeff Koons is one of the most canonized artists of our time. Simultaneously his work is claimed as being kitsch. Some people who connect the word kitsch to Koons's work do think that it is pseudo-art, that it fails to address our conception of what contemporary art is or should be, and that in the end, even if it is witty in some sense, it is rewarding only on the surface and quite empty in terms of content. Simultaneously, also some of Koons's admirers see his work as kitsch, and quite clearly this is not a sign of criticism or negativity towards it. We encounter here two differing ways of addressing the word kitsch. Our judgment, "this is just kitsch," in an exhibition, in front of a work which we think fails to address the whole field of art with a capital A, is not necessarily that much connected to the word kitsch that we use, when we take a look at a pink plastic decoration or souvenir porcelain, as the latter objects do not necessary form a threat or a contradiction to our conception of (contemporary/high) art.

“Kitsch,” referring to pseudo-art, and “kitsch,” covering the realm of trashy glitter, folksy knick-knacks, and objects painted in pink and gold color, or made of porcelain, can still totally not be separated, neither historically, nor in contemporary culture.

It is illuminating to take a look at how the concept has changed during the 150 years of its existence, and to see how our own ways of using the word have emerged quite recently.

Matei Calinescu has conveyed extensively the early history of the concept in his *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, and Postmodernism* (1987), even if neither he nor anyone else seems to have provided us with a profound history of how the extension of the concept has really developed.

According to a frequently cited story, the word came into existence following a misunderstanding between painters at an 1860s marketplace in Munich and English tourists buying their work. The English word “sketch,” used by the buyers, might have been heard as “kitsch” in the ears of the commercial painters. This fresh German concept might have defeated a couple of words in other languages to become the internationally successful concept it now is – Calinescu mentions for example the Spanish “*cursi*,” the French “*camelot*” (which stands for cheap and bad quality), and the Yiddish “*schlock*” (which stands for bad quality) and “*schmaltz*” (which stands for sentimental and exaggerating) as competitors of “kitsch” in its early years. And it is interesting that the German word “*Verkitchen*” meant to make something cheaper, “*Kitschen*” to collect trash from the street or in Southern Germany to make new furniture of old ones.²⁰²

²⁰² See Calinescu 1987, chapter “Kitsch and Modernity” (pp. 225-262), for an overview of this.

Most importantly for the issue raised in this paper, the birth of the concept – we know what kind of paintings are sold for tourists – stressed both the pseudo-art and the knick-knacks, pretentious, interior design nature of the objects. Here we might have one historical reason for the fact that there is no real debate on the differing uses of the word kitsch, but it does not explain as a whole. Even before the concept was born, cheap imitations, fakes and forgeries sold to tourists had been around for decades, and they seem to have been gazed at differently from straight miniatures and knick-knacks sold for tourists. Goethe was tired of the fake antiques sold to him during his late eighteenth century *Italianische Reise*, as I have already pointed out, but we will once more go into this story. One of the highlights of his trip, though he became tired of kitsch, was his initial arrival to Venice, because he had had the opportunity to play with a miniature gondola his father had bought on his own Italian trip. Goethe got tired of pseudo-art, but not of kitschy, non-pretentious and entertaining cheap luxury objects sold for tourists.²⁰³

So we should perhaps not take for granted that the use of the word kitsch has ever totally blurred these two dimensions, and that there was a need to distinguish fake / pseudo / and pretentious art from glitter, nice miniatures and knick-knacks even before the advent of the term itself. The discussion of the concept in aesthetics has mainly been dominated by modernist discourse, the self reflection of modernism, and that might have resulted in forgetting how different the uses or needs of this word have been. From what we know by listening to philosophers of art, kitsch is a competitor of art, not the satisfactory cheap glamor in everyday life that the word mainly indicates for the average consumer.

²⁰³ Goethe 1976, 87.

It is of course important to remember that the decade when the word kitsch was coined was maybe the most central in the rise of modernism in modern elitist visual culture, inaugurating an era of aggressive, moralistic and simplifying manifestos against the competitors of high art in many forms. The birth of the concept, or the fact that it continued its existence as an evaluative one, is anchored to the broader socio-economical situation in the middle of the nineteenth century. After centuries of patrons, the bourgeois society “offended” the artists by forcing them to earn their living with the help of the same field of commerce in which professional entertainers and designers had already found a home for their work after the decline of folk art and folk culture – which kitsch, or mass culture (which stood mostly for the same thing in many twentieth-century cultural debates), was often accused of being in charge. As these factors would not have been enough, artists started to come from lower socio-economical levels of the society and needed an income more than ever to make a living; moreover, visual culture went through a stage of technological development, which included for example the fact that “photorealistic” ways of depicting reality by painting became less rewarding after the advent of photography.

The birth of modern art, which narrowed aesthetically the space legitimate art had in the society, meant a crisis also for art’s gaze at its own borders. We should, of course, thinking once again about the marketplace in Munich, not forget the fact that also tourist culture with its increasingly mass-produced imitations of original works of art and architecture, developed rapidly in the mid-nineteenth century, together with the development of traffic, most notably the train, which made possible the movement of huge masses of people enjoying their leisure in other cities, foreign museums, and

marketplaces. Modernist art turned itself against capitalism and the bourgeois society. What could kitsch have become, whether as pseudo-art or as glitter and cheap luxury, other than an enemy?

So, the concept began its life as a defensive one, a guardian of high culture. As Calinescu points out, written, more or less theoretical use of the concept is still not found earlier than during the first decades of the twentieth century, in modernist art discourse.

Funnily, as the concept is claimed to have gained its birth in connection with visual culture, it also soon became a commonplace to judge pretentious literature, music, and other forms of art, which in the end was considered to be low, to be kitsch – until the late 1960s, when it seems again to have become just visual culture, well before the writing of Kulka's and Calinescu's famous essays on the subject. Greenberg's classical modernist manifesto "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" includes even culture not usually seen as knocking on the doors of art, as for example journalism, to be its object of attack, in the rage against kitsch. Literature, painting, all culture found between modernism and "authentic" folk art, is here portrayed being kitsch. The concept in use in Greenberg's text conveys quite the same field as "mass culture" and "popular culture" in most twentieth-century cultural debates, but it is even broader, as also Ilya Repin's painting's, among other objects mainly considered belong to high culture, are seen as being kitsch by Greenberg, who's ideals for art were found in abstract expressionism. In this way his concept of kitsch is related to Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's 1939-1944 "culture industry" (in the essay *Kulturindustrie*, in Adorno & Horkheimer 1988), which is also a very broad term, touching all fields of culture from advertising to Jean Sibelius's music, and which gives more of a helping hand in understanding modernism than mass

culture and kitsch. In Umberto Eco's 1964 "La struttura del cattivo gusto" (in Eco 1997) kitsch is discussed via examples of literature, music, even clothes, but still, as in Greenberg's article, mostly via the visual arts.

During the 1960s, or soon after it – it is difficult to say exactly as the 1970s seems to have been a passive decade for kitsch debates – but at least clearly in the 1980s, kitsch had again lost its non-visual nature, and became restricted to the confines of a concept applied only to visual culture – painting, sculpture, and increasingly to interior design. Already in the 1960s the concept had also been strangely anchored to feminine consumerism. Trash, junk, and mass culture from science fiction and erotica to all other kinds of cheap entertainment were still negative concepts but more reserved for culture associated with males and concepts like mass culture (a concept reserved more for male than female culture). And in the 1960s, for example in the articles by Eco, neither detective stories nor James Bond novels were kitsch,²⁰⁴ however romantic novels were considered to be. As we know, this has later become the destiny of porcelain, postcards, all pink and gold colored objects, as well as nearly all visual culture with a sentimental or emotionally nostalgic tone, cute objects, and often objects seen to be of a feminine nature – without forgetting the concrete list of themes and motives of kitsch-painting found in Tomas Kulka's 1989 article "Kitsch," featuring for example deer flocks in an open space in the forest and cute furry cats. Picturesque landscapes, a classic way of portraying Venice, are a typical example mentioned in critical articles on kitsch.

If kitsch once was a formally, materially and, when thinking about colors, a very open concept, which was an ideologically constructed negation of modernism and/or "authentic" folk art, now it seems that there is an abundance of material and color

²⁰⁴ See Eco 2001.

ingredients which can help an object to become kitsch – and without any suggestion that the object in question would be pseudo-art, as one can see not just in the judgments of Koons’s fans, but also by making a Google search with the word kitsch: many interior design stores proudly sell their products as kitsch, and as I have been giving courses and presentations on the subject in universities, art schools, and museums, quite many people, in fact, say that they like, or even love kitsch. In the former use of the word this would have been impossible, as it used to indicate that something was cheesy, low, and not worthy of attention.

This inaugurates a new stage in the history of the concept. Firstly, the array of objects which “kitsch” points to became narrower. This happened, as I already said, sometimes between the 1960s and the 1980s. Then in the wake of this shift the concept gained some positive value, but not before the late 1990s.

I am here not interested in trying to make a new definition of kitsch, but to raise some thoughts on what the ingredients for kitsch really are, and I think Koons’s work might be helpful in working this out. I am now deliberately forgetting the pseudo-art meaning of the concept, which I think does not help us to understand what kitsch is on the basis of color and material, and which as I have already pointed out, is not always necessarily connected with it. Though the historical connection between these two can be seen in many ways in the following, it is not decisive in any way for our understanding of what kitsch is in color and material – since even people who are not into high art can easily recognize that a pink porcelain statue is kitsch.

The fact that Koons's work *is* kitsch, as well as art, automatically returns us to the pseudo-art question. Koons's own motivation of why he uses so much porcelain in his work is illuminating:

In the porcelain pieces I wanted to be able to show the sexuality of the material. Porcelain is a material which was created in the service of the monarch and made in the King's oven. Of course, over the centuries it has become totally democratized but still the material always wants to return to the service of the monarch. There is this uplifting quality about it, this feeling of one's social standing being increased just by being around the material.²⁰⁵

This "uplifting quality" is of course seen by many to be a pretentious aspect in commodities, everyday objects made to be enjoyed. If the underground spirited lowbrow artist Charles Krafft or the Nordic manga sculptor Kim Simonsson²⁰⁶ are not counted in, porcelain and ceramics almost never used in contemporary art without a strong commitment to commentary on kitsch – and even when these aforementioned artists are named, it is often stressed just because of the material they use that their work is far from kitschy – so Koons seems to be right in his intuition. It has an elevating effect in conservative bourgeois high culture, but throughout the era of mass production this elevating effect has, firstly, ceased and, secondly, it has become a thrill mostly restricted to just middle- and working-class women, while at the same time, also in all of its post-forms, modernism has detested it.

When Koons's work is said not to be art at all, the comment is, not surprisingly, often directed upon his porcelain work, for example his statue of Michael Jackson and his

²⁰⁵ Koons 1992, 100.

²⁰⁶ See, e.g., McGee, M. and Reid, L., 2002, on Krafft's work. See also www.kimsimonsson.com.

monkey Bubbles. So porcelain seems to be a very effective material in this sense, and painfully anchored to the history of ways of manifesting social differences, and high art's hidden psychopathology concerning materials, without forgetting that Jackson, of course, if anyone, stands for entertainment and popular culture, which reinforces this connection. Traditional pop artists would have painted Jackson, or reproduced his image in some way which would have been comprehensible for quite many modernists as well, but creating his statue in porcelain was a witty deed, which has made *Michael Jackson and Bubbles* both kitsch and art at the very same time.

It is a problem for many that Koons does not keep enough distance to kitsch. In a broader context, this is, as at least philosophers of art should know, a part of a never-ending quarrel between pop art and modernism, or nowadays pop art and postmodernism: even if the latter's proponents are keen to say that the dichotomy of high and low has lost its power, they celebrate all attempts to mix them, so that it must still be very clear that there is a difference between what is high and what is low. And it seems that art should still always keep some kind of a distance to the low it is commenting on, as can be seen by taking a look at the critique which so many contemporary popish radicalists, for example the overtly nostalgic Odd Nerdrum and the Tokyo Pop guru Takashi Murakami, have encountered – attacks mostly based upon critical views of consumerism.²⁰⁷ The same judgment was already made of the works Andy Warhol presented as art in the early 1960s in New York – when the now legendary *Brillo Box* was exhibited, and Arthur C. Danto was convinced that art has become philosophy.

²⁰⁷ At Galerie Emmanuele Perrotin Paris I recall in fall 2000 to have seen an attack even painted on the gallery window where Murakami, at the time still quite fresh in the international artworld, exhibited. The attack stated quite clearly that he was creating only entertainment. Nerdrum has written about his hard times as a “kitsch painter” in Nerdrum 2001.

In fact, thanks to pop, if we are to believe Danto, art is now broadly seen to be philosophy, but the art world, at least in Europe, is still anything but ready to grant pop the same philosophical rights as it has given to performance, environmental art, community art, and other types of movements which aspire to break out from the white cube and its discourse. It is just pop which should continue in the original spirit of modern, nineteenth-century art and the modernist movements of the twentieth century, to keep up with the distance separating art from the rest of life – in the case of pop the most crucial distance concerns the world of commercial culture – at the same time as social, environmental, and political artists are celebrated pioneers in art's engagement with life.

Indeed, many people see the statue of *Michael Jackson & Bubbles* as kitsch, without any hesitation, and many art critics do not even see any difference between it and the kitsch sold outside the museums. How is this possible? The difference does not lie just in the price. The statue is definitely not of the type of kitsch sold in either marketplaces or in fake antique shops. If it parallels the kitsch sold out there, it does it in a special way. This move is so well done that consumers, and unfortunately also many art critics, cannot see any difference between this extraordinary kitsch and mainstream kitsch.

Koons's kitsch statues are still in a way "too perfect" for classification as ordinary kitsch, at the same time as they are recognizable as kitsch. As the dishes made by gourmet chefs, which are often representations of the recipes which ordinary people use for cooking, but which as gourmet versions are simultaneously at the same time more challenging, and a bit too sophisticated in relation to the original dishes they stem from – at least for the average consumer's taste – Koons's kitsch is too big in size, and definitely

too witty to suite the everyday commercial markets. In a way the artist has here produced “better,” or “nastier” kitsch objects than the kitsch industry, and the viewer definitely can fall for them in the same fashion as for ordinary kitsch, and instantly, by getting an experience of beauty and glamour without hard conscious interpretational work (which contemporary art often desires), which, I think, Koons’s work rewards as well, if one has acquired a taste for neo-pop and a good knowledge of pop’s post-Warholian history.

Nobody has really written about the fact that Koons seems to hit a painful problem in contemporary art. His work is helpful for our understanding of what kitsch really is, by showing that certain materials and colors can turn anything into kitsch. So he has managed to bring real kitsch into art.

To now continue with other examples, think about a typical work of Alexander Calder, a contemporary, abstract work of art, a mobile. Think about how it would change, if it would be made of porcelain and painted in pink. No color or material can raise the object to the status of art – if not bronze or some other classical material would not have a bit of an elevating power – but to make kitsch is easy in this sense. Any work of art would be counted as kitsch as well, if it would be made of porcelain and painted in pink or maybe even a gold color. This material and color scheme can be applied to almost any work of art and the result is always the same: it either becomes kitsch, in addition to its status as art, or it just sheds its art status and becomes kitsch.

Philosophers, who have shown in a variety of ways, from Morris Weitz to Arthur C. Danto and George Dickie, how art cannot be defined on any formal grounds, cannot agree on what they too easily consider to be just a negation of art, that is to say kitsch, partly because they have been wrong in assuming that kitsch is just a competitor of art,

and that the word refers only to pretentious, pseudo-artistic work. This is easily seen in *Michael Jackson and Bubbles*, as the work is without doubt contemporary art, as canonized as a work of contemporary art can be, but at the same time stands as a firm example of kitsch.

From here we might continue along the path Tomas Kulka opened in his article “Kitsch” (1988). The final years of the 1980s seem to have been very illuminating in relation to kitsch. Calinescu’s article originally came out in 1986.²⁰⁸ Eco’s classic article came out in English in 1989, the same year Kulka’s text was published, that is, just a year after Koons’s most kitschy work in the series *Banalities* (1988), of which the statue of Michael Jackson is also a part, together with cute pigs, angels, and teddy bears made of porcelain.

Kulka gave a list of motives and themes for painting, which are hard to work out without falling for creating kitsch. This list included, in addition to the ones mentioned earlier, sunsets, sad clowns, crying children, and faithful dogs.

Looking at Koons’s work we found porcelain to be a nearly impossible material to employ if one does not want to do kitsch, but the same applies in many cases also to glass and gypsum, though not that well, and sometimes even for plastic, though plastic is a material with no elevation in interior design: it is plain trash, even if it is more kitschy than, for example, wood which is considered to be an authentic material for sculpture. The use of glass is seen to be a bit kitschy in Koons’s 1991 *Made in Heaven* glass artworks. But as with gypsum, when we encounter classicist statues in a cemetery, the problem is here that the works *are* realistic. Abstract works of glass art are mostly not kitsch to anybody – if they are not done in pink. Realism would *not*, anyway, destroy *any*

²⁰⁸ A sketch for it had, though, been published already in 1976.

porcelain statue, nor could abstract expression save it. Porcelain is nearly always kitsch, at least a bit, whether it is simultaneously art or not.

In terms of colors, those which make any object they are painted with kitschy, is short. It is pink, gold, and maybe sometimes even silver, if not some caramel nuances as well, all used by Koons, and most actively in his show *Banalilty*.²⁰⁹ None of the other colors can compete with pink in this sense. We can imagine how, for example, Kazimir Malevich's pink square on pink square might have looked, and how it would have provoked the modernist audience – without even thinking about a pink porcelain square on a pink porcelain square – and it suffices just to imagine a bit how, for example, Giacometti's statues would look if they would have been painted in gold, or, once again, if they would be made of porcelain, to see how kitsch, as a color and material phenomenon, is linked to certain materials and colors, and how these can be used just in an ironical or provocative way inside the realm of art. All classical examples used in aesthetics show the way to the same conclusion. A *Guernica* painted in pink would be kitschy, and the same applies for all attempts to create a porcelain version of it, but one in pink color, made in porcelain, would without doubt be kitsch – even if it could be taken to be art as well. The same applies to Duchamp's urinal, which manages to retain some modesty in white, but would appear to be much kitschier if it would have been painted in pink, and so on.

Much has already been said, but many features said to belong to kitsch from stereotypical ways of expression which leave no room for interpretation to aspirations for climbing the social ladder shared by kitsch consumers have yet to be discussed. They would not, to my understanding, change what I have here said about kitsch and its color

²⁰⁹ Muthesius 1994 shows a good retrospective of the first decades of Koons's work.

and material nature. But they remind us about the fact that the discussion on kitsch is just in its beginning phase, and we should be on our way to analyze the broad array of the uses of the word – which also change from country to country.

Koons does not think about his works as ironical, and the same applies for many Russian virtuoso-like, though, for us western Europeans, very sentimentalist painters. Their problems on the Western art scene are still more of an interest for cultural geography or ethnology, and the issue would anyway take us far beyond the scope of this paper, which rests on the Western sensibility of art. Though, it seems enough clear that we have to be on our toes, as even the Western sensibility of kitsch seems to be changing.

One mirror for reflection here is of course Koons's work which simultaneously takes further the boundaries of what kitsch can be (nasty, rich in ideas, intellectual commentary). Not surprisingly, I think, Koons arrived in Venice at the turn of the 1990s together with his wife, the porn star Cicciolina. He commissioned glass art works with himself and his wife, portraying them in sexual acts. Here the locally profoundly experienced mastery of glass was imported to the global scene, where glass, often, was classified more on the order of knickknacks or design. In the same way, someone who is not from Venice can fairly easily associate a lot of the city's original architectural work with kitsch.

Venice is Kitsch

La Gioconda, or *Mona Lisa* as it is also called, has become “a hit” not just through late literary success stories (*The Da Vinci Code*). It has been that so long that already

Duchamp had to comment on the painting by adding a moustache to a reproduction of it. Antonio Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* has gained a role as one of the main lobby and elevator music pieces. But following a false idea that works of art could have a home in only one sphere of culture, the variety of uses of Vivaldi and the like have not been discussed. So we have lobby music (Vivaldi) which, as an object, is plainly art – in aesthetics.

There are works (and I think Adorno was hitting on this in his writings on critical art) which are hard to consume and hard to find any use for in popular culture, like Schönberg's music, or the late nihilistic film *Salò* (1975) by Pier Paolo Pasolini. At the same time there are works of popular culture and kitsch which cannot but be enjoyed in narrow spheres of consumption and mainstream popular culture, or if we would find a way of appreciating them in high culture or art with a capital A, that would have to be based upon irony, a camp attitude, or a very intellectualistic interpretation. For example, it is hard to even imagine any other use for Bruce Willis movies or Mariah Carey's music than entertainment. But, many works are able to support both kinds of experiences. Warhol and Vivaldi are excellent examples of works of art which support well-fragmented gazing/listening, but as well concentrated intellectually agile perception and interpretation conscious of tradition – and so on. Objects can have permanently shared roles in both fields of entertainment and art.

From this point of view, it is suddenly possible to understand why Venice gives us kitsch. Buildings of Burano look like candies, and all over Venice (and its islands) we find pink houses and romantically decorated, even cheesy bridges and houses. Besides this, in a context where there are many people using culture in a kitschy manner, the

objects render themselves more kitschy than in another context. And we have to remember that even a sunset may sometimes look kitschy, if it fulfils to a great extent the standard that determines how sunset postcards should look.

At the same time, the city's kitschy feeling has gained much weight through the development mentioned in the beginning of this chapter. As kitsch has more and more become something restricted to colors and materials associated with "femininity," Venice soon developed into something even more kitschy than it was in the 1970s. Pink is a frequently used color in its architecture. Even some other central classical buildings are partly pink, and as the color brings them closer to the knot of sensitivities, which are at stake in our faculty of kitsch, they feed the kitschy atmosphere.

Many people consume the city as a place for a honeymoon, a big classical shopping mall for luxury products, and kitsch sellers together with bad tourist food increase the city's feeling of kitsch. This is the same thing which happens when one walks into the room where the *Mona Lisa* is kept in the Louvre. After halls filled with beautiful Lucchese painting and early renaissance masterworks, where an atmosphere of dignity dominates together with the public's genuine interest for the art of our forefathers, one suddenly finds himself/herself in a room where photo flashes dominate, where people talk, and idolatry has broken out in a way which is distinctive from all other rooms. In this room it is hard to maintain a focused art attitude. In the same way that the cupola of San Marco, the horses on its roof, and its bell tower are far from being the same when seen in summer, in the middle of the kitschy tourist chaos, or on an early morning in winter, if not a cloudy night of autumn. Atmospheres surrounding works of art have an impact on our relation to them.

Originality is still an idea that many modern-minded people keep up with while thinking about kitsch. There typically exists an intentional fallacy in relation to kitsch, in the claims made that Venice was not built to be a fake, but that it was original, and that this originality has affected other cities and ways of building. But the problem of originality is no longer the core concept of kitsch. In any case, Venice as something “original,” is a product of modern art interpretation.

We also do not really have a possibility to reduce the responses that the old works have acquired with their target audience during the centuries of their existence. A Sibelius thoroughly “read” into a national scheme of emotions, ideals, and identity questions makes it problematic to draw further interpretational rewards in Finland. Some of the worst Picasso or Dali works walk around with an aura of high achievement, because they have been produced by a “master.” Venice has a huge interpretation and experience history as art, mass culture, and kitsch – a reason why we feel romance in the air just by arriving to her first water streets from the railway station. Even the history of kitschy attitudes lies deep in the atmosphere of the city.

But that which has once entered into the realm of high culture, museum art, or any other sphere put on a pedestal, is somehow no longer discussed from a “lower” point of view. As if it suddenly would no longer have any kind of history in the lower spheres it actually has, or as if it would no longer be possible to use or interpret it from a popular point of view.

As noted, Ted Cohen points out that a film by Hitchcock can be viewed both as entertainment and with a search for more artistic rewards. But when someone becomes a Godard or Bergman, suddenly there is no longer room for eating popcorn and just

enjoying the film. Absurdly, even more entertaining mainstream films of their era, like *Alphaville*, seems to be watched nowadays only through a filter constituted by the artistic genius of Godard.

The same laws of high culture can be found everywhere. Sibelius wrote popular music, but musicologists prefer to keep him on the art side of music – forgetting his other side. One can always raise the status of an object. But it is hard to take anything down from this pedestal, or even talk about its actual “low” use after it has been canonized.

High or low, kitschy Venice is pink, filled with details painted with gold color, sentimental sunrises where the red sun shines between old picturesque houses in the water, where a gondola slowly winds its way through a tiny canal, a harmonica playing somewhere on a waterfront filled with postcard and soccer t-shirt commerce.

As the focus has been brought again on changes and oscillating differences which occur, though the object (here the surrounding city) remains the same (of course, in this book, change has been covered in many concrete physical ways as well), it is now time to move on to an important point concerning kitsch, and another theme which has occurred on occasion in this inquiry, mass culture. We will take a walk through Venice and think about our increased ability to shift ways of interpreting, experiencing, and handling sensibilities. We can talk about a form of cultural literacy which we need today in Venice, and this literacy is an important part of enjoying environmental aesthetics in most historical cities.

To San Marco. Learning from (the mistakes of) Adorno and Greenberg

We are so good at aesthetic multitasking, that our modern predecessors would never have been able to comprehend it. One might begin the morning by quickly perusing the newspapers, continuing by reading Joyce's *Ulyssus*, while simultaneously listening to John Zorn's fragmented and dissonant modern music. We have become more flexible when it comes to culture, and when we read old cultural theory we should remember that critics often had a lot of experience only of high culture or museum culture when they criticized the low. This is where we find people like Adorno and Greenberg over-criticizing culture. Imagine arriving at the *Santa Lucia* railway station with them.

Already the main route from the railway station to St. Mark's includes sites which easily bring to mind studio settings. A visitor may reach a small bridge, in late autumn, for some minutes totally alone, in silence, which is not typical for urban environments. The water is still, unnaturally green. Trash moves slowly on the water's surface, as in a swimming pool – indeed, the movements of the sea are not always evident in the inner city canals. Here we would feel that it is a bit kitschy, but as modernists, and children of a certain era, Adorno and Greenberg would probably think about its original nature.

If, some minutes later, we would run into some hectic, noisy commercial areas, we could easily walk by, but Adorno and Greenberg would not handle it so well. Reading old cultural critics, what is striking is the way in which they truly care for culture, and their pain when they feel it is being destroyed. We can take differences like this rather easily, but some decades ago cultural theorists could not.

The courtmen and women of Baldassare Castiglione's *Il Corteggiano*, the classical renaissance work which served the basis for the concept "gentleman,"²¹⁰ did not even take into account any arts of the lower parts of the society – which is no wonder: we

²¹⁰ See Castiglione 1981.

might know more about the cultures of distant countries nowadays more than the renaissance nobility knew of the poor people in their midst. And from this period of European culture we have come a long way until now, the 1960s being the most important period of change.

This is of course what was understood through Hegel, Marx and Adorno as giving the lower parts of the society knowledge of the society as whole (that is, through work for the upper classes, where upper-class values and discourse became well known). This process Marx thought would result in revolution (synthesis through antithesis) and which Adorno and Horkheimer in their more pessimistic stance saw as being destroyed by the culture industry, which entered even the development of subjectivity, thus making it just one phase of production of a society without hope of human development and freedom.

As the accelerating pace of the twentieth-century speed came into traffic, the montage broke traditional ideas of time and narrative and also made films a part of the growing wave of speed in culture with their rapid changes of time and place, whereby new medias emerged virtually every decade but were not discarded as the new forms emerged (radio, tv, newspapers, internet – we have them all simultaneously, and not just the newest developments). In this development the narrow part of the society which had been concerned with aesthetic discourse met the others in these medias.

As Gianni Vattimo puts it in his *The Transparent Society*, Kant's ideas of community as a basis for aesthetic experience is now challenged by the fact that we bump against a *sensus communis* of a group of skinheads listening to Wagner and other groups with their own tastes and ways of using culture.²¹¹

²¹¹ Vattimo 2000, 94.

It is during this process of development where one-eyed attempts to judge artistic and aesthetic phenomena outside of the narrow realm of high culture, avant-garde, and intellectual culture emerged in the hands of Theodor Adorno and Clement Greenberg.

As Robert Solomon puts it, Western thinkers and artists have been strangely afraid of sentimentality.²¹² But we are now so much more literate, able to change rapidly from the profound to the surface, from a classical work of art to a fragmented piece of modern music or a chocolate advertisement. We can multitask better than ever.

Critical theorists of the high modernist period would not have been able to enjoy Venice in the way we do, because they were not fast enough to change sensibilities. Thinking about Adorno, his problems with mass culture often seems not really to be mass culture as it would appear if it would have been consumed as intensively and artistically as high art should be. One cannot listen to a *schlager* like one would be listening to Schoenberg. For someone like Adorno, walking through Venice proper from *Santa Lucia* to San Marco would have been painful, because he would have concentrated too much on the trash he saw along the way, while we, as contemporary, flexible and more relativist people, would have lowered our level of intensity in our interpretation and artistic enjoyment rapidly when seeing the trash for example, that is when we were passing *Fondaco dei Turchi* or any other extraordinary palace – if we were not in a camp mood, which is of course also one possibility today. The traditional mass-culture debate is much about people's fears of new culture and sensibilities, and their clumsiness in moving around in a multifaceted and multileveled culture.

One can self-consciously find different interpretations of the same movie enjoyable. I have, for example, had a good time with some Hitchcock movies as

²¹² Solomon 2004, e.g. 3-4.

entertainment, but sometimes I have engaged with them in a way which is closer to the sensibility of modern art. In experience we, who have zipped through TV channels from the time when we could barely read, are quick in adapting ourselves to fast changing programs. We do just fine in a fast rhythm where one has to adapt to the new at a pace which was inconceivable for earlier generations. With aesthetic multitasking I mean that we often enjoy two or even more aesthetic features at the same time. We read a book and listen to music. Adorno was against this, and of course this way of enjoying culture is not the one to be used for Schoenberg or Beckett, but we are also more clever and skillful in using it than Adorno and the people of his time. We live in a time of oscillations, fast-changing sensibilities, and well-prepared consumers, who are literate and willing to read culture in many ways, sometimes even at the same time. This has made our life easy in relation to art and kitsch – for example, when we walk in historical cities, invaded by kitsch and kitschiness.

Learning from Kitsch

Art can be kitsch and the other way around – these do not necessarily exclude each other. Kitsch has invaded art through the work of Jeff Koons, for instance, but the concept has become more specific, and less anchored than ever to what we praise or do not praise as art. Materials (porcelain) and colors (pink, gold) affect what we see as kitsch – and so do glitter, scenes associated with romantic culture, and other phenomena, which are often found in Venice, a city where there is a lot of pink, gold, and sceneries which, though real, feel like living postcards.

In Venice this experience is often reinforced by the cheap ways of selling the city to tourists, but it is also that the city gets kitschier every year – as is the case as well with old landscape painting: only knowing that some sentimental waterfalls are really painted, with high artistic ambitions in the eighteenth century, lessens the kitschy taste of experiencing them, still not purifying them totally. Kitsch as a concept has developed²¹³ to suit them – and Venice – well.

We also discussed how artistic literacy has evolved, and how this can be seen to be one problem in the way modern cultural critics like Adorno and Greenberg worked. They would actually not have survived our days of cultural fragmentation, multitasking, and enjoying different things simultaneously. Oscillating between different poles of culture and their rewards, we note how distances between sensibilities get smaller and smaller, and how the changes challenging our systems of interpretation and experience occur ever faster. In this way, the world is in many ways still taking steps towards the ideas Walter Benjamin presented on the future in his writings in the 1930s. In chapter 9, *Traffic, Mobility, and Aura*, his thoughts are employed to meet with the peculiarity of Venice.

²¹³ For a more profound discourse on the state of kitsch today, see Ryyänen 2008.

Chapter 9

TRAFFIC, MOBILITY, AND AURA

Though Walter Benjamin's essay "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit," which was written in 1936, has for decades rewarded film and media theoretical readings, it supports inquiries of a broader nature – including environmental aesthetics and urban research.

Presenting an analysis on the analogies between Benjamin's and Martin Heidegger's aesthetics, namely, the concepts of *Shock* (Benjamin) and *Stoss* (Heidegger), in his *La società trasparente*, Gianni Vattimo concludes that Benjamin's work is Heideggerianly speaking of an inquiry on art's *Wesen*, its only true and possible way of existing in its own era.²¹⁴

What was fresh at the time of publishing the essay on reproduction, that is, the constructive inclusion of new media and mass culture into a holistic theory of culture, has later overtly guided readings of Benjamin's philosophy of art. Its aesthetically holistic nature has not gained the attention it rewards.

In the reproduction essay and in the three years later written *Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire* Benjamin analyses of (aesthetic) experience in a variety of ways. He traces a process of development of aesthetic experience starting from the days of Baudelaire, when lyrical poetry was beginning to be overshadowed by a new, more profane, fragmented, and shock-oriented form of experience. Baudelaire wrote in a profane language, and targeted readers who had already lost their touch with slower,

²¹⁴ See Vattimo 2000, 63-83.

deeper, more focused, and lyrical experience, which served the slower, less shock- and experiential impact-oriented pre- and early modern readers. According to Benjamin, this new sensibility, which of course developed hand in hand with the everyday of modern industrial society, its rhythm and culture, and which created a need for new forms of art, started to disconnect us from traditional art, which he claimed had inherited an aura from earlier, religious practices of mankind, still echoing in the negative theology of art.

The development of modern reproduction devices and culture can be said to be the primus motor in this process. Still, Benjamin focuses a lot on discussing and, what is more, hinting at what the destiny of traditional art is. In this estimation, the destiny of traditional art is to fade away experientially. The dogmatic, black-and-white art-or-not attitude which dominated in art was to die out through this change of human experience, Benjamin concluded.²¹⁵

The environment, physical distance, and (modern) city culture are topics and themes which Benjamin analyses as well. For example, the theme of physical distance seems to be even more crucial for thinking about “aura,” than the reproduction devices which have been so broadly discussed and, as I will show, by thinking about Benjamin’s way of introducing the whole concept of aura, we enter environmental aesthetics. As distance is so central for aura, it thereby aids us in a new way of understanding the watery nature of Venice, where everything is harder to reach due to water.

Benjamin weaves a picture of urban life and its shocking effect on our experience. He discusses the way modern city life situates people shockingly close to each other in trams. He talks about the way masses rule the streets, and the way workers are forced into mechanical, repetitive, and rhythmically shocking jobs in factories. Even the Tivoli

²¹⁵ Benjamin 1999, 235.

seems, together with the avant-garde, to be both mirroring the aforementioned tendencies and pressing forth a change – without forgetting the most seriously taken of all of Benjamin’s topics, film.

Montage and its shock effect produced a lot of serious analysis later on. In all these we find forces driving down traditional experience. Benjamin thought that the devices and culture of reproduction would, both by taking traditional, singular and original artworks closer to the people by mass producing and distributing them, and by stimulating new forms of artistic work and experience, ruin the dignifying, monumental physical situatedness which traditional artworks possessed. Art’s “negative theology,” through the Here-and-Now nature of its objects (Benjamin is here talking mostly about visual culture), did not just echo a long history of religious use of artistic objects from fetishes to relics and churches, but continued through the system of modern art to create the same kind of auratic presence.

Benjamin still did not discuss the corruption of aura enough through an analysis of the change of mobility and its effects on the Here-and-Now of artworks. This is a clear error in his thinking on aura, and it is here that we need to go deeper into the origins of the concept (referred to already above).

Benjamin says that traditional works of art achieved an aura from the fact that they were both original, singular objects, and that they could be seen only in one place, which one had to travel to. This was the state of pre- or early modern experience: besides being less fragmented, disrupted and more lyrical than its modern counterpart, the experience of art was affected by a need to travel, if not to a faraway fresco of Giotto, then at least to the nearby museum or concert hall.

One often encounters critique of the idea of aura based upon the fact that later media culture came up with its own auras. For example, the stardom of Marilyn Monroe is often taken up as an example of this.²¹⁶ Though it is easy to understand what one can mean by saying that reproductions of these stars inhabit a kind of aura, these latter phenomena do not help us to build a critique of the discourse on aura which Benjamin produced – because Benjamin’s thinking was rigidly based upon the Here-and-Now nature of works of art.

There is no longer the same need to travel to works of art as there used to be. We make trips to the Louvre, and we go to see Paris, but a measurable decrease in the importance of this has affected art.

It is important, in this regard, to notice the kind of role traffic has to play in this process. Modern traffic and transportation is, decade after decade, decreasing the dramatic effect of traveling to places, and traveling itself.

Benjamin is not only talking about “place”, but about how to get there as well. Following this, experiencing traditional works of art has changed, and we have all reasons to believe that encountering the real Mona Lisa or arriving at the Vatican today do not make us kneel in quite the same way as they used to do in the beginning of the twentieth century.

We travel more, and it is easier all the time. It seems that only flying has become again a bit harder following the 11th of September 2001. Together with possible restrictions on traveling, which may hit us in later phases of our environmental crisis, will faraway objects of art increase their aura, once again?

²¹⁶ See, e.g., Shusterman 2002, 186.

Immanuel Kant, for example, never even visited the Sistine Chapel, though he wrote about it – something one just could not do today. In fact, after seeing hundreds of reproductions of the Mona Lisa, the easy traveling to Paris, and then seeing the small original painting, viewed in a pushy crowd in a museum not designed to enhance experience, is an anti-climax for most of us. In many cases, I believe that we aesthetically prefer a poster of it on the kitchen wall, which can be gazed at in peace, and which is not disturbed by camera flashes – though we think it is a must to see the real work as well, if we are really interested in it.

I have felt, that it is even enigmatic that traffic does not enter into Benjaminian meditations more clearly, because a hint of its role is found in *Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire*. In this text on art, urbanity and experience, Benjamin discusses among other issues the challenges with which fast traffic, including its network of communication devices (traffic lights and traffic signs) confronts our perceptual habits – not to mention our everyday experience. We sit in crowded buses, forced to be close to people unknown to us, and we defend ourselves by reading newspapers, so that our eyes would not have to meet those of our fellow passengers. We drive faster. We have to be quicker to read traffic lights and signs. Traffic is an endless challenge, a loud chaos, without forgetting the way in which Edgar Allan Poe's "the man of the crowd" already managed to get both concretely and existentially lost in the maelstrom of pushy, stressed people entering the heart of a metropolis in the evening.

Benjamin's idea of *Shock* and the way it is connected to experience is loosely based upon Freudian, Bergsonian, and Proustian literary notions of memory. According to Benjamin our life and, respectively, our experience in modernity's rapid and

dominantly reproductive realm is under constant attack. We experience *Shock* everywhere, and this shock we reflect in the arts, though we also gain shocks through its new modes. Society, technology, and culture develop hand in hand.

Film montage was one of Benjamin's favorite examples. Its early effect can be hard to understand for the reader of today. To understand it we have to think about developments that took place with early MTV in the late 1980s, or think about the accelerating pace of some forms of popular music (techno, speed metal), to even get a glimpse of the shocking effect a sudden change of sceneries through cutting the film had on people. What a revolution it must have been to be able to put different things together with montage, to be able to make a detail bigger, or slow down the speed of a film, and concentrate on a still picture. This made the new media culture of film more central for Benjamin's theory than the more shock-oriented artistic groups of avant-garde (dada, surrealism) of which he was also fond.

In everyday life the shock is still more threatening. According to Benjamin, our life consists of endless defenses against shocks, that from time to time, still break through our barriers, and hurt our system; so remaining beyond our ability to digest the experience. It is in these moments of unsafe processing, when we are not in control of the experience, that shocks, which break down our defenses, change our way of experiencing. When not defended, when something comes in unexpectedly, it changes our relation to the phenomena, or takes us to uncontrolled experience, unconscious change. Transcending structures, it reforms the base. It is on these unconsciously effective short trips, fueled by shocks, wherein experience itself undergoes change.

In this cultural situation, traditional experience of art becomes impossible, or at least anachronistic. There is no time required, seriousness, possibility for concentration. This was (according to Benjamin) anticipated by Charles Baudelaire, who wrote his poetical protagonists to be pushed around by masses both emotionally (*À une passante*, where the protagonist sees a woman who disappears as fast as she was encountered, again in the mass of people²¹⁷) and physically, and who wrote it in a manner which made poetry take a leap from the safe haven of lyrical poetry to more profane wastelands connected to modern everyday metropolitan experience.

Mobility allures as well, as we see, in Baudelaire's poetry. And with the emergence of the train, later cars and airplanes, the masses changed location easier than before. If Benjamin thought they were hungry to get close to original artworks by enjoying representations of them, they could now also reach the real ones relatively easily. At the same time, actually, tourist culture developed to lessen the shocks of getting to faraway places.

Here three new paths are taken from the departure point of Benjamin's discourse on aura, which I want to discuss.

First, the way faster and easier traffic and public transportation became a commonplace must have had an impact on the aura of traditional, permanently situated works of art (and beautiful cities). This must also be the destiny of historical cities – Venice in the fore of these.

Secondly, the whole idea of eliciting an auratic effect from something admired but hard to reach deserves attention, and one might ask why all phenomena which are hard to reach, even if they would be physically quite close, would not create an auratic

²¹⁷ See Baudelaire 1964, 114, and Benjamin's discourse on it, Benjamin 1999, 164-165.

tension. Benjamin's own examples at the beginning of his meditations on aura (a branch of a tree, faraway mountains) seem to point to this. If we see any point in Benjamin's ideas, why not discuss, for example, houses hard to reach, or streets (of water) hard to cross?

Third, mobility itself should as well have some effect on experience. Sitting in a moving "place," and seeing the world from it, is a common everyday experience and must affect the way we experience even static places. Even our perception of non-mobile spaces has gained new perspectives, beginning from the way they look at high speed, from a moving plane. Here Venice offers a slower version of sitting in a moving space, one historically more connected to old experience than in any other Western city. Mobility, though destabilizing in some sense, has as well, through becoming an everyday issue, and through becoming more comfortable, become more stable, and the moving places through this more like any other places, not just the medium for reaching them.

Through discussing these themes I hope we can illuminate something about both Venice and Benjamin's philosophy. The first two points are accentuated in Auratic Streets, and the third in Moving Planes, Everyday Mobility.

Auratic Streets

Should not the fact that someone can reach Venice easily from Munich just by jumping on a train and perhaps changing trains in Milan, have some effect on the Here-and-Now nature of the city and its cultural treasures?

Benjamin himself begins his reproduction essay by discussing the natural environment. He mentions faraway mountains as an example of what is at stake in aura. Benjamin writes:

If, while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eyes a mountain range on the horizon or a branch which casts its shadow over you, you experience the aura of those mountains, of that branch.²¹⁸

The branch gives something to think about: the aura does not necessarily grow out of being something very permanent or faraway, and it does not have to be very appreciated according to Benjamin. To be hard to reach or unreachable is enough to create at least some kind of aura.

The mountains provoke a contradiction when we think about it. When encountering the mountains in reality, we would no longer have a mountain range, no blue colors, no soft forms, but a new object, massively different in both size and amount of texture with rocks, sand, and trees. Here the branch is different. We would encounter what we see if we would approach it, if we do not use a microscope.

As we saw in chapter 2, “Entering Through the Back Door: The role of arrival and the welcoming façade,” the monumental, traditional artistic, and culturally stimulating cities have first of all gone through a profane turn already through the way they have been rebuilt to meet contemporary needs of traffic. At the same time, arriving in Venice must be very different now, when both the number of reproductions is much greater, but also through the way in which it is easier to reach.

²¹⁸ Benjamin 1999, 216.

This faraway hard-to-reach nature is probably what Benjamin mainly wants to accentuate when he talks about the here-and-now nature of traditional works of art, but still, as Benjamin talks also about smaller spatial divides, the aquatic nature of Venice provides something to think about when we are in Venice.

We do not have to concentrate on just reaching the whole city, as it is full of auratic divides. Many cities provide panoramic views from high towers or hills (Rome) or huge distances where we face urbanity as an endless landscape and where a new part of the city endlessly comes to the fore (Berlin). A visitor in Venice gains auratic tension in urban experience which technology has not been able to change – or which would not be allowed to change, even if a solution would be found, to restore the nature of the city. Water makes us see beautiful palaces like we would see a branch in the yard Benjamin talked about in the beginning of his discourse on the aura.

From the times when Venice was made famous by painters, that is, in the eighteenth century, where at the top of the list we find Antonio Canaletto and Francesco Guardi, and less known, but not that much less worthy of attention, we find Michele Marieschi and Bernardo Bellotto; moreover, the views offered have shared the same distinctive feature. The landscape only starts with water from the bottom, and what is viewed, often admired – Santa Maria delle Salute, the Doge's palace or a composition of peculiarly beautiful boats in exceptionally candied or warm light – is on the other side of the water. Often we even find a natural reproduction of the palace in the canal. Of course this just increases the magic by breaking it, if we try to approach it.

Water makes most buildings, on the other sides of canals, hard to reach. The process of developing a smoothly running water bus system and the building of bridges in

the late nineteenth century, have slowly expunged this auratic everyday factor. But it is still a part of experiencing Venice.

Walking in a city with concrete streets one cannot of course always easily go to the other side of the street due to the car traffic and, in all cities, there are places which are not easy to grasp, but nowhere as in Venice is the city dynamically filled with a feeling of being close to beauty, but even so, beauty that is out of reach. Cars and motorcycles disturb and frighten us in Florence, but the church on the other side of the street is, nonetheless reachable just by taking a few steps.

If this is an example of a very special type of auratic urban aesthetics, more dramatic, and easier to distinguish from the everyday stream of experience, it consists in the way reaching Venice has (more than in the case of other cities) lessened its auratic tension. The hard to reach nature of the city must have given it a unique auratic glow in historical times. Within the process that Benjamin describes, when the Here-and-Now nature of works of art were becoming weaker, Rome and Florence were at first very easily reachable, but Venice stayed out of reach, 2 miles offshore of the mainland. Of the Grand Tour cities, Venice was the last one which fought back the loss of aura brought by modern traffic.

The traditional, peculiarly Venetian auratic tension is what Mann's protagonist of *Der Tod in Venedig* tries to restore by taking a water ferry, not the train, to Venice. To approach a city by water is slow and creates around this city an aura of being hard to reach. Speed plays an important role here.

A whole city suddenly became reachable with the advent of modern traffic. At the same time, reproductive culture took it closer to the man on the street of northern Europe

at a very early stage. As already mentioned, Lord Byron claimed that he knew Venice too well already when arriving there, as he had seen so many reproductions of it, and when photography and film were invented they were, of course, soon brought to this city of the eye.

As works of art can be thought to have changed following the way media, mass culture, and all forms of everyday shocks have changed our way of experiencing, a change understandably has touched Venice through the way its touristic use, economy, ways of presenting it in representations, and the manner in which its growing nature to be a museum and not a city has evolved. How has tourist culture, which has become an inherent part of Venetian culture more than in most if any cities, changed the aura of the city? Indeed, it has made her easier to approach, by providing shortcuts to her treasures.

Knowledge of the city's façade nature has its impact as well. Many historical buildings in Venice as well as in many other cities, are façades hiding another house built inside the old one, with modern comforts – sometimes build practically a foot inside the old one, which in this way functions as a historical shell for something else. Knowing it does not degrade the house, but the feeling of it is different if one knows that one is watching only a historical façade. The façade is not a reproduction, but it is in actual fact not the real thing.

A voyage to Venice, in its turn, might as well lose auratic tension following the fact that one knows how many people have left the city, and by following an understanding of its theme-park nature, which becomes obvious already by reading travel guides.

Another point has to be made about time. As a pedestrian sees a woman passing by in Baudelaire's famous poem, and loses his object of desire in nearly the same moment as this appears, we see cities, and the objects of passion pass by rapidly – letting them go just as quickly. Von Aschenbach came to Venice not as easily as we now can take a flight tomorrow and take with us a small suitcase with underwear and a toothbrush. Traveling used to be rough. It used to take time. And when cities, especially cities hard to reach, were reached, one stayed for a longer period, and had to face city life on a more realistic scope.

In Baudelaire's *À une passante* in *Fleur du mal* (1857) the narrator “drank from her eye/ a living sky where hurricanes take seed, sweet fascination and fatal pleasure,” but had to lose her painfully in a “flash of lightning(…)” “Lovely fugitive, with eyes that suddenly resurrected me, will I not see you again...,” he says, in his fast-paced modern life of nineteenth-century Paris just in the beginning of its development, where increasing change, accelerating mobility and ephemerality started to teach us not to get anchored to the objects we meet along the way.

One who cannot forget Marilyn Monroe's subway breeze in Billy Wilder's *The Seven Year Itch* (1955) or a nameless dancer of a music video, is considered to suffer from a psychological disease, and will not survive in today's culture – like those who think too much about the violent news they see every day on television.

Both cities themselves and their managed presentation for the consumers have gone through a change which has resulted in the fact that there are suddenly fewer differences than ever. Sites are made more seductive, and spectacular, at the same time as the tourist culture functions as a shield blurring real differences. When no one has too

much time, we need to become adjusted – not just physically, but culturally as well – and then we have to get out as quickly, back to our hectic everyday lives.

In this process Venice has managed, following its highly original nature, to make a difference, at least as a site. As a city of water, unique in style and impossible to imitate, it succeeds in keeping up with its aura more than many other cities. Though its culture has suffered more than in any other city, its architecture and town planning are so unique, that as long as the city exists, it needs a special kind of infrastructure.

Increasingly, we also find in its aura its role as a future Atlantis, an anticipated, slow catastrophe, a growing sense of soon no longer being reachable, as the end lurks in the lagoon.

Baudrillard wrote in his 1983 *Les Stratégies Fatales* our way of seeing the cities together with their presupposed ends, that

New York is King Kong, or the blackout, or vertical bombardment: Towering Inferno. Los Angeles is the horizontal fault, California breaking off and sliding into the Pacific: Earthquake.²¹⁹

An auratic power now seals the grave of the Twin Towers,²²⁰ and a heavy aura now hovers over the building in photos. Venice has an aura of imminent death, which gives it still, in times of easy reachability where all cities are the same, a special glow. We are partly already in history, where whole quarters will go down. It is the aura of dying art, culture, and lifestyle, which we witness, giving us a special experience. History here – a

²¹⁹ Baudrillard 1990, 20-21.

²²⁰ More on this in Baudrillard 2002.

theme Benjamin loved – serves us in a strange way. An anticipated end makes a city, if not harder to reach, at least something to reach out for before it has encountered its end.

Moving Planes, Everyday Mobility

During this inquiry we have discussed both our own movement in urban landscapes and then in moving vehicles, but the spaces moving around, carrying us from place to place, are interesting from a Benjaminian standpoint.

When spaces we inhabit did not yet move as much as they do now (ships, cars, vans, trailers, planes, buses), and when we did not as much orient ourselves in a mobile fashion – we take buses to our work, run after work, and chase faraway sites for our leisure²²¹ – it must have been different to be in an immobile space.

We must experience permanent places differently, as such are now only one part of our life. I myself spend over seven hours in buses every week, and during the year I leave my hometown for a trip for one reason or another.

What we experience in a city like Venice is that the rhythm of life is slow and sleepy (though a bit of a theme park by nature), as already pointed out earlier. Even more, in moving spaces like gondolas, we remember something essential of the enjoyment of being on the move – in a moderate speed, which feels somehow natural for us.

In fact, I would suggest that there is a special auratic tension in slow traffic. Benjamin talks about aura mostly when he thinks about objects we want to reach, but slow traffic and ways of moving, which are more like rites than effective forms of

²²¹ On the growth of mobility, from an aesthetic point of view, see Naukkarinen 2005.

transportation, create a nostalgic experience, a trace of the old experience that Benjamin said we are losing.

Traffic has also become something very comfortable. If there is an auratic tension in works of art which are hard to reach, the comfortable nature of traffic nowadays must have its share in lessening it. It is not just that we travel faster and that we have many means to choose from.

How hard it must have been to come by train from Munich still in the 19th century. Now many contemporary places on the move are like old-time bourgeoisie spaces for leisure. One can enjoy wine and dining, the trains and planes are silent, and entertainment from TV panels to different possibilities of using computers (a dual mobility: internet and train) make our trips different from the past.

Benjamin's philosophy of the aura can be seen not just as a theory of art, but as a theory of the lessening importance of locality. But culture has gone even further in this sense, providing us with a feeling of feeling at places in motion, a new perverse form of locality (my car, my train). My bus is a place where I sit approximately on the same bench for 300 hours every year, reading a book – or writing one. It feels more like a home than most buildings I spend time in.

Speed, which probably worked in the beginning like the montage in film (think about the shocking views the futurists painted from bus windows), has become something we can calmly contemplate upon while sitting in a fast train.

Man in our times is even less in contact with any kind of place, and he/she can be on the move in many ways at the same time. This multiple oscillation of time and place (we talk to someone in Skype who is far away at the very same time we cross over the

border between France and Italy) which is once again a moment of change and mobility in our lives. Indeed, our working place becomes less of a physical place as we work more from home – or on the bench seat of a bus.

From this point of view, together with the way modern cities have decade after decade been renovated, it is understandable that Venice and other cities (though none of them is as peculiar as Venice in this sense) which do not change, and where there is a feeling of non mobility and inertia, gain more and more difference in relation to other cultural formations, centers, and environments. And as traffic and speed has become less shocking, since everything nowadays has a high pace and our ability to cope with speed has developed, Venice is nowadays strangely enough also a kind of a shocker when it comes to slowness. Slow boats make quite an impact when we have lived a life of speed. Experiencing this difference sometimes leaves permanent traces. One understands the nature of ones own hectic everyday lifestyle, and what it lacks. Venice can help people to wake up. If it hosts millions of tourists every year, we can also hope that this experience of how it could be to live in a city without cars, and without a hectic lifestyle, might have a healthy effect on culture overall. Not just theme parks can be cozy and offer nice sites for walking and leisurely activities. We remember that we can still build cities for these activities, and thereby decrease the shocks we are so often exposed to in today's media and working life.

Learning from Benjamin

We recalled how Benjamin's concept of aura is actually most dependent on place, and distance. So we learned that Venice might have broken its own aura as an artistic object and a beautiful city hard to reach in a very peculiar manner, as the railway in the middle of the nineteenth century connected the city to the mainland. At the same time we thought of the fact that, actually, many beautiful houses are not within reach of the pedestrian or one sitting in a boat, but nearly always behind a barrier of water. Some façades of palaces are never within reach. Gondoliers will not take tourists close to them.

Thoughts on vehicles as places were raised as well, as it is nowadays so easy to travel, all and all. Benjamin's thoughts on the shock nature of modern (and applied here to contemporary) culture found a polarization in Venice – which can be said to be shocking only metaphorically. It is always slow and it always has the same pace of life and traffic. Places of travel were noted, too, as they are more “places” than ever. We are constantly on the move. Even inside, we have always been oscillating between different strands of interpretation and experience, and nowadays, we are more consciously and actively multitaskers and multifaceted consumers, reflecting self-consciously on our roles and resources – one of the main themes of the next chapter on Oscillations, where the themes of this book are recalled together and partly through an analysis of mobility and change in interpretation and experience.

Chapter 10

OSCILLATIONS

In this last chapter we will gather together what we learned during the theoretical leaps we made on the way to Venice. As this is a holistic inquiry on one city and its heuristic potentials for thinking about cities and aesthetics in general, it suits well that this is done through a discourse of the way in which we make sense of larger wholes, and how experience, sometimes focused, sometimes sleepy, functions in the everyday.

Multitasking, changes and oscillations, and our more and more conscious play with many horizons (kitsch, art) simultaneously are illuminated through the example case of being in Venice. Knowledge and myth, fiction and fact, art, kitsch, tourism, everyday, and camp are strands in a sea of interpretation and experience, where we sail skillfully, and where we get more stimulated than ever by aesthetic encounters (the media on the forefront here).

At the same time hierarchies, polarities, and classifications are weakened, and our basis for being aesthetic subjects reveals itself to be floating on an abyss, where we ourselves have to choose all the time how to cope in different ways with different phenomena. In a place where all layers, modes, and forms of sensibilities and sensitivities meet, we might learn something.

This is the epilogue, and the place to stop rowing – and definitely the place to take a look upon the journey that we have made. I will recollect points made in chapters 1-9. I will discuss the oscillating, floating nature of aesthetic life – with the experience of

Venice as an example, the only part of this short chapter being an Overview of the Chapters, which ends with peaceful words, closing the discourse.

Overview of the Chapters

Differing historical periods have marked different uses of Venice – aesthetic interpretation and experience being no exception. From a city evolving from a loose foundation of islands and their villages of fishermen, following a need created by catastrophic migration, Venice has gone through eras accentuating commerce, warfare, decadence, and finally tourism – the last two serving more than the others the interests of aesthetics, the former for a handful of decadent poets, and the latter for the whole world. These periods have left their traces on today's Venice. It is not just that guides show us the house where Byron stayed, it is that what we await and experience follows the historical horizons hidden in the texture. Silent canals are still found in the midst of the tourist theme park, but the main point is that people seek them out, because this is one of the phenomena which have dominated the reading of the city for centuries. Some cityscapes of Venice have even been aesthetically codified, so becoming paradigmatic landscapes.

At the same time we learned how slowly, through plays, poems, and paintings, the city's image started to live its own life in Western civilization. Venice became, early on, *the city of water*, which Little Venices around the world echo today. La Serenissima pops

up in every city where something is built to engage with water. Venice is to waterly cities what Chicago and New York are for cities with skyscrapers.²²²

The historical layers of the city are imitated by contemporary Venice, through a museum attitude, which has reigned from early modern times when the city's unique nature was discovered to the hommages paid by the tourist industries (carnival). Its original building methods and weird infrastructure add to this profitable whole. Besides interesting history and beautiful sceneries, tourists can go to so see reconstructed festivities (which are, of course, a norm for tourist resorts today) together with unique forms of architecture (canals, waterly cityscapes), and mobility (in water – no cars in the city).

The arrival to the city has changed, bringing with itself new aesthetics. First of all the façade of the city changed. Though the new façade is not seen *as* one, it functions in a way as the new face of Venice, seen from the stairs of the railway station. Here Venice served us as an example, also bringing to mind other cases – which were different though, because of the changes other cities have gone through during their periods of modernization (of all big cultural centers only Venice seems to have stayed the same). New York, for example, has lost its fabulous Statue of Liberty as its first messenger for people arriving over the Atlantic, who, together with all the other passengers arriving there today come through a terminal at some of its nearby airports – but also the city has changed (where Venice has not).

²²² Though, in the future, Venice will still probably be *the* city of water, at the same time as a new generation of sites for high (and peculiarly contemporary) building in Dubai and the far east will make Chicago and New York more historical than ever. Dubai's watery buildings are of course a new issue as well, but then we are talking more about single houses, extending to underwater worlds – a trend in luxury building as well in other areas of the world.

We also discussed how arrivals to cities differ. To some cities we arrive through stimulating landscapes, to some others the whole way from the airport or railway station is just grey and dull.

Most importantly, we found out that in the end our interpretation is an important issue. We know what to look for as *the* façade of the city, and how – and experience is not just built following chronological events. We do not think we know a country from what we see on the way to the airport. We actively build our interpretation and experience when we are on the legitimate site, say, at San Marco, not at Marghera close to the airport of Marco Polo.

Tourists rushed in following the land bridge which made traveling to Venice easier, so changing not just the silent life of the city – making her vivid again – but changing the whole way the city was used, which has since become something anchored to art and entertainment. Tourism is entertainment, but it also helps us to become more readily acclimatized to the city, as everywhere where there is organized travel, and where people want to get the most out of cultural history and the arts around, tourism shares information on what to see and how, and helps people to overcome the worst cultural shock.

From surface to depth there are of course many other routes to take as well. Façades and arrivals are already one dimension of visiting a city, but other ones include main streets, central monuments, the “real” city with its everyday (which Venice lacks), and the deeper architectonic and artistic resources which one has to work oneself into.

The feeling of cultural history gains depth the less eclectic our city is and the larger it is in size. Here Venice easily defeats Florence, which becomes modern very

rapidly outside of the most central corners of the Medici's architectural reign, or Rome, where old meets new all the time. Water as its aesthetic heart, a boundary surrounding the city, and as an element which has, for as long as Venice has existed, made it harder to construct changes, Venice absorbs us easily to connect with historical atmospheres – here the absence of cars giving the last touch upon this dive into history.

Moving around in this pure, historical, holistic ground, tourist guides (both printed and living), create invisible thoroughfares – which in Venice more than anywhere else get help as well from signposts, which the city is full of. Walking, a major aesthetic practice itself, gains special features in Venice – from which we can learn about cities. Done at a slow speed, moderately, and engagingly, walking in Venice is especially advantageous because there are no cars disturbing the pedestrian, and the city also offers a more stimulating whole for walkers than do other cities. Water accompanies the pedestrian, and everyone else walks too – forcing the city not just to follow its Italian nature, but to follow its peculiar architectural nature, and of course its theme park nature too, a rewarding social space. One cannot walk on the main streets of Venice – and this gives a lot to those of us who enjoy walking. The city has consciously worked to develop this side of itself by building new bridges and developing its water traffic, to make itself easier to be approached.

Some peculiarities of walking in Venice were presented among these pages, from the *Ponte dei pugni* where one can feel the footsteps of duelers carved in stone to the way walking there was criticized as being kitschy in the 1912 Venice by futurists. Kitschy walking was discussed as well on its own, not that negatively, and so were some sides of philosophical, and artistic walking – which Venice rewards especially well, as it is a huge

resource of beauty, with somatically stimulating streets, and history. There one can really go on enjoying the environment in all possible ways aesthetically.

Some of these resources are of course at hand as well when one takes a water bus through the city, or uses a traghetto to get over the Grand Canal. Venice is the only city where water traffic is an essential part of city life. The feeling of water is a stimulating somatic factor, but so is the way the slow speed of water traffic meets the old buildings, which are so still when seen at quite the right speed – differing so much from other old cities, where cars and trams run through sceneries, not fitting the details and ways of building which have been at stake in old cities.

Stepping into a vaporetto easily brings to one's mind experiences from theme parks. Some weight was also given to traffic for traffic's sake, without forgetting an analysis of the auto-imitative nature of the gondola, a treat for tourists which the locals do not use. Here real history was seen as oscillating between tourist culture and auto-simulation. We discussed as well the slow speed, and the enjoyment it gives for the stressed people of today, who seek out a feeling of relaxation on their trips – and so can learn in Venice what it could mean to live in a city without car traffic and the stressed, everyday lifestyles of our era.

We did not forget to note how pleasing and interesting it is to see infrastructure boats in Venice from police boats to funeral boats, though, as interesting is how all these local peculiarities, which are needed to give the city some real life too, become a part of the tourist spectacle. As there is something distinctive to show, and everyone around is looking for aesthetic enjoyment, all resources are put to use.

The touristified side of Venice was emphasized in a new manner still through thoughts on the way in which Venice has actually become both a theme park and a museum – experiences one does not usually get even in historical cities. The Venice of early mornings and winter is a museum, and one experiences the difference by attending San Marco during the worst theme park period of August.

Though Brodsky was heard fighting against museumizing, Venice is already seen to be a museum – at least in winter, when the theme park partly sleeps. The way these sides of the city overlap, sometimes with the slowly dying everyday as well, should not be a problem, as different modes of aesthetic appreciation and ways of flourishing can really coincide.

One of the issues that seriously provokes elitists is of course kitsch, which dominates historical sites all over the world. In a way, we saw it commented upon through Jeff Koons's works of glass art, which were handmade by the Muranese glass artist Pino Signoretto. We learned that local realms of art can be so strong, that they can break apart our otherwise valid thoughts on the artworld. Then the kitschy side of Venice was analyzed as well, again with the help of Jeff Koons's work, and we learned how Venice can be seen as being kitschy while at the same time, it can be viewed as a work of art, original, and a real cultural and historical resource. This is due to the development of the concept of kitsch, as we saw. The way Venice as a local stronghold of culture has its own laws of culture is illuminated in two chapters to the extent, that we understand that being there makes the connoisseur oscillate more between the universal and the local than in many other places, at least when we talk about arts and culture.

Without a doubt we have learned at least that philosophizing about just one city can be fruitful for not just understanding the city in focus, but it can also teach us something about urban studies and aesthetics. Moreover, have we noticed, for example through the analysis of Jeff Koons's Murano-made works of art, that there is need for geographically situated aesthetics.

In the end, we returned to Venice together with some of Walter Benjamin's thoughts, just to learn that though a real marketplace of reproductions, the city as an environment provides more to think about via Benjamin's philosophy. The aura of the city diminished through the building of the railway, but definitely a kind of auratic tension keeps alive in the city, where most beauty is unreachable. We also discussed the way that sitting in moving spaces has become more and more a commonplace, together with comfort, which accompanies all our enterprises in the Western world today, from traveling to staying in a foreign city. Oscillating between two places, the traveler today is not just on his/her way somewhere, s/he is in a place, which feels meaningful, sometimes more meaningful or enjoyable than the destiny of the journey itself.

Oscillation, together with changes in focus and accent should, more often than not, be thought of as being a part of aesthetic pleasure. Like ethics sometimes rules more than aesthetics, and sometimes the other way around, surface and depth, classical art stances, and our everyday need to be entertained, work with countless other nuances in the ever-changing stream of aesthetic experience in our life. A city as rich as Venice can be thought of as helping us to get the most there is to get out of aesthetics, as it can provide such a variety of stimuli, knowledge, and artistic resources at the same time,

without forgetting that aesthetics completely thrives on everything which is fresh, and wherever people come from, Venice definitely strikes them as being different.

Practical oscillations, changes of accent in focus, and the simultaneous effect of different horizons, are a commonplace in all aesthetic experience. Of course aesthetics as a discipline has naturally sought out the universal, but still, more attention could have been given to the way shared horizons and ways of appreciating constantly change in ongoing experience. As Paul Virilio says, we are so much away from the moment we actually live (for example wandering in our thoughts), and this should not be ignored in cultural philosophy.²²³ Our life consists of being present, and being away, and the way the latter one affects our experience of reality, which we still work out as being a whole, is interesting.

In aesthetic experience as well, being away is typical. No one understands absolutely everything that has been said during a play, or has the ability to read the whole *Odysseus* of Joyce in a totally focused manner. Cities are even more active than works of art in the process of seducing us to change stance suddenly, following their living nature.

Cities are more mobile in what they are as objects of aesthetic appreciation than works of art. The reason is that they become renovated, they change during seasons and times of the day, whereby people living and visiting them change them, shopping windows change, and many other factors keep them constantly on the move.

Venice is the most intense melting pot of real, original cultural history (architecture, art, old cityscapes), the most exploited site of cultural tourism in the world, and at the same time one of the most beautiful cities on earth. Its local culture of building

²²³ Virilio 1991, see introductory sequence.

is so distinctive that together with the aforementioned, and so many other aspects, the city is illuminating for all cities, aesthetics, and urban studies alike.

We walk there in the midst of such a broad variety of stimuli, ways of appreciation and experiencing, and pre-packaged modes of city life, that themes of built cultural history, conservation, theme parks, entertainment, kitsch, and traveling float over each other, filling our heads with thoughts.

No wonder that the city continues to become increasingly important for travelers, who are always exhausted when returning home. Venice is the ultimate illumination on our position in the contemporary world, when cultural history, its use, and our hunger and relation to Western culture and its traditions are at stake.

Venice seduces us into seeing things differently and it rewards us well when we take on the challenge to understand and enjoy it. At the same time, we have learned how much we can learn about urban studies and aesthetics through the dogma of concentrating on something unique – something we should not forget while traveling around the world, engaging with new places.

Even dying cities, theme parks, and museumized spaces can form not just a mirror, but open up new theoretical connections if we are willing enough to dive into them with total commitment.

In closing this theme I find myself happy to say that neither Venice nor aesthetics nor urban studies are, for me, the same as they were when starting my theoretical love affair with the most serene of the cities, as this waterly maze was once called. And I will of course never totally shed myself of her enigmas.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adorno, Theodor W. & Max Horkheimer. *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2006.
- Adorno, Theodor. *Aesthetic Theory*. London: Routledge, 1984.
- . *The Culture Industry. Selected Essays on Mass Culture*. London: Routledge, 1991.
- Altarelli, Lucio. *Light City: La città in allestimento*. Rome: Meltemi, 2006.
- Bagnasco, Marco. *Venezia: Luoghi d'incanto*. Colognola al Colli: La libreria di Demetra, 1999.
- Baudelaire, Charles. *Les Fleurs du Mal et autres poèmes*. Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1964.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Fatal Strategies*. New York: Semiotext(e), 1990.
- . *America*. London: Verso, 1998.
- . *The Spirit of Terrorism: And Requiem for the Twin Towers*. London: Verso, 2002.
- Bencivenni, Alessandro. *Luchino Visconti*. Milano: Il Castoro, 1995.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. London: Pimlico, 1999.
- Berleant, Arnold. *Art and Engagement*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991.
- . *The Aesthetics of Environment*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992.
- . *Living in the Landscape*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997.
- . *Environment and the Arts. Perspectives on Environmental Aesthetics*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002.
- Bonsdorff von, Pauline. *The Human Habitat. Aesthetic and Axiological Perspectives*. Lahti: International Institute of Applied Aesthetics, 1998.
- Brodsky, Joseph. *Watermark*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992.
- Brown, Horatio. *Studies in the History of Venice*. Vol I. London: John Murray, 1907.
- Calinescu, Matei. *Five Faces of Modernity. Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1987.
- Calvino, Italo. *Le città invisibili*. Milano: Mondadori, 1972.
- Careri, Francesco. *Walkscapes. Walking as an Aesthetic Practice*. Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, 2002.
- Carrier, David. "Remembering the Past: Art Museums as Memory Theaters." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 61 (2004), no 1: pp. 61-65.
- Carroll, Noël. *A Philosophy of Mass Art*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.
- . *Beyond Aesthetics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Castiglione, Baldassare. *Il Cortegiano*. Milano: Garzanti, 1981.
- Cohen, Ted. "High and Low Thinking about High and Low Art:" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51 (1993), no. 2: pp. 151-156.
- Collins, Jim, Ed. *High-Pop. Making Culture into Popular Entertainment*. Malden: Blackwell, 2002.
- Colors*. August-September. 1999.
- Corsane, Gerard ed. *Heritage, Museums, and Galleries*. London: Routledge, 2005.

- Danto, Arthur C. "The Aesthetic Enfranchisement of Real Objects: The Artworld." In George Dickie, Richard Sclafani, and Ronald Roblin, eds., *Aesthetics. A Critical Anthology*. 2nd Edition, pp. 171-182. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989.
- . "The Last Work of Art: Artworks and Real Things," in George Dickie, Richard Sclafani, and Ronald Roblin, eds., *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology*, pp. 551-562. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977.
- David, Robert C. & Marvin, Gary R. *Venice, the Tourist Maze. A Cultural Critique of the World's Most Touristed City*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.
- Dewey, John. *Art as Experience*. New York: Perigree Books, 1980.
- Dibdin, Michael. *Dead Lagoon. Aurelio Zen Returns Home to Venice*. London: Faber & Faber, 1994.
- Dickie, George. *Art and the Aesthetic. An Institutional Analysis*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974.
- . "The New Institutional Theory of Art." In George Dickie, Richard Sclafani, and Ronald Roblin, eds., *Aesthetics. A Critical Anthology*. 2nd Edition, pp. 196-205. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989.
- Donner, Jörn & Häikiö, Martti. *Suomi-kuva vuonna nolla*. Porvoo: WSOY, 1990.
- Dorigato, Attilia. *Il Museo tetrario di Murano*. Milano: Electa, 1986.
- Duany, Andres, and Plater-Zyberk, Elizabeth, and Speck, Jeff. *Suburban Nation. The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream*. New York: North Point Press, 2000.
- Eco, Umberto. "Travels in Hyperreality." In *Travels in Hyperreality*, pp. 3-58. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986.
- . *Apocalittici e integrati: Comunicazioni di massa e teorie della cultura di massa*. Milano: Bompiani, 1997.
- . *Il superuomo di massa. Retorica e ideologia nel romanzo popolare*. Milano: Bompiani, 2001.
- Fainstein, Susan, and David Gladstone. "Evaluating Urban Tourism." In Dennis Judd and Susan Fainstein, eds., *The Tourist City*, pp. 21-34. London: Yale University Press, 1999.
- Fuga, Guido, and Vianello, Lele. *Corto sconto. Itinerari fantastici e nascosti di Corto Maltese a Venezia*. Rome: Lizard, 1997.
- Grabes, Herbert. "The Revival of Pragmatist Aesthetics." In Winfried Fluck, ed., *Pragmatism and Literary Studies. Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature*, pp. 137-149. Tübingen: Narr Verlag, 2002.
- Greenberg, Clement. "Avant-Garde and Kitsch." In John O'Brian, ed., *The Collected Essays and Criticism, 1939-1944*, pp. 5-22. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986.
- Ford, Simon. "A Love Story That Ended Badly (Three recent books on the Situationist International)". *Mute Magazine – Culture and Politics after the net*. 11 December 2002.
http://www.metamute.org/en/a_love_story_that_ended_badly_three_recent_books_on_the_situationist_international
- Gans, Herbert. *Popular Culture and High Culture. An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste*. New York: Basic Books, 1974.

- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang. *Italianische Reise*. Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1976.
- Grossberg, Lawrence. "Is there a fan in the house? The affective sensibility of fandom." In Lisa A. Lewis, ed., *The Adoring Audience. Fan Culture and Popular Media*, pp. 50-65. London & New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Haapala, Arto, ed., *The City as Cultural Metaphor: Studies in Urban Aesthetics*. Lahti: International Institute of Applied Aesthetics, 1998.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Discourse on Thinking*. New York: Harper & Row, 1966.
- . *Poetry, Language, Thought*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.
- Heikkilä-Palo, Liisa & Sepänmaa, Yrjö, eds., *Vesi vetää puoleensa*. Helsinki: Maahenki, 2002.
- Hunt, Maurice. "Shakespeare's Venetian paradigm: Stereotyping and sadism in The Merchant of Venice and Othello". *Papers on Language and Literature*, 2003 spring. Link: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3708/is_200304/ai_n9225201.
- Karjalainen, Pauli Tapani, and von Bonsdorff, Pauline, eds., *Place and Embodiment*. Saarijärvi: University of Helsinki & Lahti Research and Training Centre.
- Kolhonen, Pasi. Moving pictures. Advertising, Traffic and Cityscape. *Contemporary Aesthetics*. Aesthetics and Mobility: Special Volume 1, 3 (2005). Link: <http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=351>
- Korsmeyer, Carolyn, ed., *Aesthetics: The Big Questions*. London: Blackwell, 1998.
- Kristeller, Paul Oskar. "The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics I & II." In Peter Kivy, ed., *Essays on the History of Aesthetics*, 3-64. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1992.
- Kupfer, Joseph. *Experience as Art. Aesthetics in Everyday Life*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983.
- . "Engaging Nature Aesthetically." *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 37 (2003), no. 1: pp. 77-89.
- Leary, Timothy, and Metzner, Ralph. *The Psychedelic Experience. A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead*. London: Academy Publications, 1964.
- Lehari, Kaia. "Walker in a landscape." In Seppo Knuuttila, Erkki Sevänen and Risto Turunen, eds., *Aesthetic Culture*. Helsinki: Maahenki, 2005.
- Links, J. G. *Venice for Pleasure*. Seventh Revised Edition including Venice for Children's Pleasure & The Delights of the Brenta. London: Pallas Athene, 2001.
- Lotman, Yuri. "Kulttuurisemiotiikka ja tekstin käsite." In *Merkkien maailma*, pp. 149-156. Helsinki: SN-kirjat, 1989. Title in Russian: "Semiotika kul'tury i ponjatije teksta."
- Leon, Donna. *Willful Behavior*. London: Random House, 2002.
- . *Through a Glass, Darkly*. London: Random House, 2007.
- Leprohon, Pierre. *Venice*. Genève: Minerva, 1979.
- Levine, Lawrence. *Highbrow / Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural History in America*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1988.
- Loisa, Raija-Leena. *The Polysemous Contemporary Concept. The Rhetoric of the Cultural Industry*. Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä, 2003.

- Löfgren, Orvar. *On Holliday. A History of Vacationing*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1999.
- Muthesius, Angelica. *Jeff Koons*. Cologne: Taschen, 1994.
- Nerdrum, Odd (et. al.). *On Kitsch*. Oslo: Kagge, 2001.
- Lunn, Eugene. "The Frankfurt School in the Development of the Mass Culture Debate." In Ronald Roblin, ed., *The Aesthetics of the Critical Theorists. Studies on Benjamin, Adorno, Marcuse, and Habermas*, pp. 26-84. Lewinston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990.
- Maffesoli, Michel. *The Contemplation of the World*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Mann, Thomas. *Der Tod in Venedig*. Frankfurt am Main und Hamburg: Fischer, 1954. English translation: *Death in Venice and Other Stories*. London: Vintage, 1998.
- Mannberg, Mikko. *Kaupunkitilan runollisuudesta*. Licentiate thesis. Oulu: University of Oulu, 1999.
- Moore, Thomas. *The Soul of Sex – Cultivating Life as an Act of Love*. Sydney: HarperCollins, 1998.
- Naukkarinen, Ossi & Immonen, Olli, eds., *Art and Beyond – Finnish Approaches to Aesthetics*. Lahti: Institute of Applied Aesthetics, 1995.
- Naukkarinen, Ossi. "The City, Sin, and Enjoyment." In Arto Haapala, ed., *The City as Cultural Metaphor. Studies in Urban Aesthetics*, pp. 26-37. Lahti: International Institute of Applied Aesthetics, 1998.
- . "Mobile Cities: The Tram and the Uses of Urban Space." In Virve Sarapik & Kadri Tüür, eds., *Koht ja Paik / Place and Location. Studies in Environmental Aesthetics*, pp. 246-260. Tallinn: Proceedings of the Estonian Academy of Arts 14, 2003.
- . "Aesthetics and Mobility. A Short Introduction into a Moving Field." *Contemporary Aesthetics*. Special Volume 1: Aesthetics and Mobility, 3 (2005). Link: <http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=350>.
- Naukkarinen, Ossi, and Haapala, Arto, eds., *Mobiiliestetiikka – Kirjoituksia liikkeen ja liikkumisen kulttuurista*. Lahti: International Institute of Applied Aesthetics, 2006.
- Norwich, John Julius. *A History of Venice*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.
- Obici, Giulio. *Venezia fino a quando?* Venezia: Marsilio, 1967
- Orbaşlı, Aylin. *Tourists in Historic Towns: Urban Conservation and Heritage Management*. London: E & FN Spon, 2000.
- Ortega y Gasset, José. *The Revolt of the Masses*. New York: Norton, 1993.
- Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *Il Chaos. L' "orrendo universo" del consume e del potere*. Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1995.
- Pemble, John. *Venice Rediscovered*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.
- Perniola, Mario. *Contro la comunicazione*. Torino: Einaudi, 2004.
- Romanelli, Giandomenico. *Venice: Art and Architecture*. Cologne: Könemann, 1997.
- Rosato, Lucio. "On the Falsification of the Town. Venice and the '900 or the Denied Modifiability." In Jale Nejdert Erzen, ed., *International Yearbook of*

- Aesthetics*. International Association for Aesthetics: 2003. Link: http://www2.eur.nl/fw/hyper/IAA/Yearbook/iaa7/lucio_rosato.pdf
- Ruskin, John. *The Stones of Venice*. New York: Da Capo, 2003.
- Ryynänen, Max. "Terrorism and Aesthetic Experience (or take a cigar, Buddy!). In Marita Muukkonen, ed., *ArTErrorIsm*, as a flyer. Helsinki: NIFCA, 2002.
- . "Venetsialaisia eskatologioita". *Kulttuurintutkimus* 2003: 3: pp. 45-52.
- . "The Double Life of Jeff Koons's *Made in Heaven* Glass Artworks". *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics* 2004 (29-30): pp. 99-111.
- . "Learning from Venice". *Contemporary Aesthetics*. Aesthetics and Mobility: Special Volume 1, 3 (2005). Link: <http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=349>
- . "Liikkuminen ja liikenne Venetsian estetiikassa". In Arto Haapala & Ossi Naukkarinen, eds. *Mobiiliestetiikka. Kirjoituksia liikkeen ja liikkumisen kulttuurista*, pp. 157-174. Helsinki: International Institute of Applied Aesthetics, 2006.
- . "En kritik av homogeniseringen. Tankar om Pier Pasolinis verk." *Kontur* 2006(b): 5: p. 6.
- . "Pinkkiä posliinia. Kitschin nykyhetki – oppaana Jeff Koons." In Seppo Knuutila & Ulla Piela, eds., *Kansanestetiikka. Kalevalaseuran vuosikirja 87*, pp. 43-52. Helsinki: Kalevalaseura, 2008.
- Sadler, Simon. *The Situationist City*. London: The MIT Press, 1998.
- Sadolin, Ebbe. *Vandringer i Venedig*. København: Carit Andersens Forlag, 1956.
- Sansot, Pierre. *Poétique de la ville*. Paris: Editions Klincksieck, 1973.
- Scarpa, Tiziano. *Venezia è un pesce. Una guida*. Milano: Feltrinelli, 2000.
- Sepänmaa, Yrjö. *The Beauty of Environment. A general model for environmental aesthetics*. Helsinki: Suomalainen tiedeakatemia, 1986.
- . *Tuhatjärvinen. Esseitä ympäristökulttuurista*. Helsinki: SKS, 1994.
- . *Kuukävelyllä. Esseitä taiteen tulevaisuudesta*. Helsinki: SKS, 1995.
- . "Face to Face with the Landscape". In Kaia Lehari & Virve Sarapik, eds., *Koht ja Paik / Place and Location I. Proceedings of the Estonian Academy of Arts* 8, pp. 11-20. Tallinn: Estonian Academy of Arts, 2000.
- . "The Aesthetics of the Road, Road Art, and Road Traffic." *Contemporary Aesthetics*. Aesthetics and Mobility: Special Volume 1, 3 (2005). Link: <http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=348>
- Shusterman, Richard. *Pragmatist Aesthetics. Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.
- . "Art as Dramatization." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 59 (2001), no. 4: pp. 363-371.
- . *Surface and Depth. Dialectics of Criticism and Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002.
- Simmel, Georg. "Venedig." In *Sociology in Switzerland* (website). <http://socio.ch/sim/verschiedenes/1907/venedig.htm>. Original year of publication 1907
- Sollers, Philippe. *Dictionnaire amoureux de Venise*. Paris: Plon, 2005.

- Stella, Gian Antonio. "Venezia: luna park o "cervello" del Nordest".. In "Schei". *Dal boom alla rivolta: il mitico Nordest*, pp. 119-133. Milano: Baldini & Castoldi, 1996.
- Solomon, Robert. *In Defense of Sentimentality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Stolnitz, Jerome. "The Aesthetic Attitude." In George Dickie, Richard Sclafani and Ronald Roblin, eds., *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology*, pp. 334-341. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989.
- Thompson, Hunter S. *The Great Shark Hunt: Strange Tales from a Strange Time*. London: Picador, 1980.
- Tocqueville, Alexis de. *Democracy in America*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics of World Literature, 1998.
- Urry, John. *The Tourist Gaze*. Second Edition. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage, 2002.
- Vattimo, Gianni. *La società trasparente. Nuova edizione accresciuta*. Milano: Garzanti, 2000.
- . *The Transparent Society*. Cambridge: Polity, 1992.
- Valeri, Diego. *Guida sentimentale di Venezia*. Firenze-Antella: Passigli editori, 1955.
- Venice and the Veneto*. Eyewitness Travel Guide. London: Dorling Kindersley, 2001.
- Venturi, Robert, Scott Brown, Denise, and Izenour, Steven. *Learning from Las Vegas*. Revised Edition. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1977.
- Virilio, Paul. *Aesthetics of Disappearance*. New York: Semiotext(e), 1991.
- Welsch, Wolfgang. "Reflecting the Pacific." *Contemporary Aesthetics*. 1 (2003). Link: <http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=198>
- Woodmansee, Martha. *The Author, Art, and the Market: Rereading the History of Aesthetics*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
- Zorzi, Alvise. *Venezia Scomparsa*. Milano: Mondadori, 1983.
- . *La repubblica del leone. Storia di Venezia*. Milano: Bompiani, 2001.

