NOWTILUS

Storie da una laguna urbana del 21esimo secolo

TRANSCRIPT

INDEX

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Episode 1

NARRATING VENICE

with writer Tiziano Scarpa

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TBA21—Academy Radio

Enrico Bettinello (EB): You are listening to "Nowtilus. Stories from an urban lagoon in the 21st century", a podcast by Ocean Space, Venice. Enrico Bettinello is here to welcome you aboard Nowtilus. Stories, thoughts, notes, and issues concerning the rethinking of Venice today. In this episode, opening the series, we will be discussing how to talk about Venice, how the Venetians talk about themselves, and we will be doing this with Tiziano Scarpa, writer, poet, playwright, but above all, Venetian. And so let's also welcome him aboard, welcome Tiziano Scarpa.

Tiziano Scarpa (TS): Thank you, I'm here.

EB: Here we are. Nowtilus gathers and explores a broad range of narratives, centred on Venice and the lagoon. For this reason we thought about beginning our series of episodes by asking a writer, and a writer actually from Venice, how to narrate Venice, its uniqueness and its overlap with the commonplace. And who better than a narrator to give us this insight? So let's turn the question over to Tiziano Scarpa: how do we narrate Venice? How did Tiziano Scarpa begin to talk about, if he can remember, his city?

TS: I actually started to write about it immediately, because since writing my first book, I've based my stories in Venice. My first book was "Occhi sulla graticola" ("Eyes on the grill"). There's a scene that left a lasting impression on those who've read it, because there's an incident involving an embarrassing 'intestinal' moment on a vaporetto, which makes the person suffering from the problem think it preferable to throw themself into the water than to endure such an embarrassing debacle ('laughing'). This situation provides a narrative opportunity: if this embarrassment

had taken place on a bus, or on another form of urban public transport in any other city, there couldn't have been such a striking image as in this particularly evocative scene, where someone, in order to save face, would throw themself into a body of water. In this particular case it was a young woman, too. So, let's say that in some cases it's true that the peculiarities of the city intervene in matters that elsewhere perhaps wouldn't have the same impact. But on the other hand, it's also worth noting that I had a very, very hard time fighting with Venice, I threw punches to try to blot it out, to not be overwhelmed by Venice, to avoid giving the impression that I was speaking exclusively about her, to succeed in telling my stores, despite being set in Venice.

EB: What kinds of difficulties, strategies and techniques did Tiziano Scarpa overcome in later years, in other important and justifiably celebrated works – "Stabat Mater" comes to mind - which are set in Venice. How did Tiziano Scarpa manage to fight one on one with this city?

TS: Yes, Venice truly is a sort of seventeenth-century matron. As soon as you say "Venice" the caricatures of Goldoni, Vivaldi, and above all Casanova immediately pop up. How do you usher the wide hips of this lady, who always wants to occupy the foreground, out of the scene? I learned something very useful, I have to tell you the truth, to be honest, and it pains me to say this because it was actually a foreigner, not a Venetian or even an Italian that taught me this... I owe a lot to the literary lesson of Ian McEwan, who in "The Comfort of Strangers" described the city without naming it. He managed to tell a story, a very murky one at that, because there's a certain fascination with an older couple preying upon younger people. Anyway, I won't tell you how it ends, but those who have read it will remember it very well. A grim story... Well, in this very, very contemporary story, absolutely twentieth-century - in that it was written in the second half of the twentieth century - Venice is there, you see it, but it's not the protagonist. It really is the backdrop. Why? Because Ian McEwan had the intelligence, the genius, to not name it and to leave the technical terminology that relates to Venice in the background. By calling it technical terminology, I used a rather grand term: simply the phraseology ('laughing')...

EB: Venetian words!

TS: Exactly, yes. I have to say that I've done it. I've done it. Earlier I was talking about the trio of caricatures that jump out: Vivaldi! The four seasons! Goldoni! Casanova! ('with emphasis') So, anyway, I wrote a book about Vivaldi, well actually, a book with Vivaldi in it...

EB: (Laughs) Of course...

TS: So, you know, I can't avoid it. How did I manage to assuage, to keep the little caricatures in check? By not mentioning Venetian terms. Therefore, I systematically told myself: not the Venetian "calle", never "calle", but street, alleyway. Never the Venetian "campo" or "campiello", but square or courtyard. Never gondola! NEVER, NEVER, NEVER, gondola! Boat! Except that Venetian boats as we know are of various shapes, purposes and nomenclatures... But let's just say, never the word "gondola," never! It's forbidden. Forbidden! By doing this I think I was able to focus on going in for a close-up of my characters. Do you know what the problem is? It's a paradoxical close-up, created by the background: a background on top of the background. Let's imagine a background that ('laughing') like a blob, swells up from behind and swallows itself, like an enormous inflatable backstage ('laughs')...

EB: An inflatable background that swallows everything! But how did you go about this? Did you do it when you were revising, editing, or did you force yourself from the beginning as a type of exercise?

TS: No, no, I didn't just force myself, it was necessary. I mean I fully embraced this exercise... Because my medium, language, is not merely ornamental, it's not tinsel, a layer of varnish that I apply later. Entering into this way of seeing, into this linguistic material, has given me above all the power to focus on characters and not leave me to absorb, to install aspects from this cumbersome, or inflatable as I said somewhat ironically, backdrop. And I must say that for me there was a sense of 'nemesis' in doing this...

EB: Oh really? Tell us about this nemesis.

TS: By nemesis I mean... a little toll that I paid. So, I have to tell you the truth. I was born in that place over there, l'Ospedale della Pietà. I was born in the place where orphan girls were abandoned at birth, or whose parents were poor, or for many other reasons. They learned to play music there, and in those places - not only at l'Ospedale della Pietà - they had exceptional music teachers! The venerated Vivaldi even taught and composed for them. So I felt OK, not greedy, not someone who exploits the city to write books and get published. I was born, I was given birth to, in that place, which was in fact the maternity ward of the civil hospital, and the story of those rooms, that building that brought me into this world fascinated me. Great. I feel innocent, pure of heart. I wrote a story that belongs to me...

EB: There's no malice.

TS: Right, and what do I see? I remove Venice, I don't name it, I don't name the streets. And what happens when the story gets translated abroad? On the book covers: Canaletto, Francesco Guardi, graphic designs of Ca' d'Oro. The Ca' d'Oro, my God, THE CA' D'ORO! I mean, the definition of lacework, of decorative marble, of white stone, of postcards! A little anecdote

for you. A brilliant, brilliant translator – I won't say in which language, because if I do they will know who I'm talking about, and that's not OK, because it would be very ungrateful of me – well a translator, who upon reading "Let's get in the boat," decided that in their language they would translate this as: "Let's get in the gondola."

EB: It's inescapable!

TS: They couldn't do it! It's like there's a compulsion to "re-venetianise" my book! They re-venetianised it!

EB: Can we say then, that Venice, and the act of writing about Venice, sometimes almost has a life of its own? It reclaims its territory involuntarily?

TS: Editors claim that in order to sell a book it's customary, if you want to be sure that it sells, that you have to put either the word "cat" or "Venice" on the cover. That way you'll be sure that someone will pick it up. Here we're talking about marketing, the encounter with the end user, the recipients. On a germinative level, this is where one needs to be careful. Not only to be, if I may say, in peace with one's own conscience, because who can claim to be inspired purely to do something just because they want fortune, success? Who, standing in front of the mirror, can say that? I don't know. But in fact for me it really is a problem, and I've only made peace with it in the last few years. I pretend that it's like any other city, even though I know that it's not. In the last three, four novels, I describe a contemporary Venice, and I have to pretend that it's really like that. But it is like that! The problem is if, for example, I describe a character who is feeling really worried because they have to go to the tax office, and so they run, take the vaporetto, get off the vaporetto, hurry across three bridges, then as they arrive, the office closes and so they will end up getting a fine, and... ('reaching a crescendo')! But you're always afraid that when someone reads something like that, they'll respond: "Ah, to take the vaporetto... Gustav von Aschenbach! Death in Venice! How beautiful! To run down the steps of the bridges, how "beauuutiful" ('with a dreamy and ironic tone')!" And then you say: really? I wrote this whole narrative paroxysm to create a scene that really hits you, and you, I don't know... It's like arriving somewhere all weary and dishevelled and someone, instead of asking what's happened to you, looks at you, mesmerised by the brand of your tie and says to you: "What a marvellous tie!" And you say to them: "Can't you see that I'm not feeling well, listen to me!"

Musical interlude: Christian Fennesz, "Laguna" (track from the album "Venice", 2004)

EB: So, Tiziano Scarpa, many writers, maybe too many, have grappled with writing about Venice. Which writers, in your opinion, have cultivated a way of writing about Venice that manages in some way to escape these conventions, conventions that we too try to escape but which sometimes catch up with us, almost like a sort of Hollywood film, seeming to jump out at us from around every corner to besiege us?

TS: I would say, without doubt, engineers and architects, you could say technical people. I'll start with a pure "technician", in inverted commas, Franco Mancuso. "Venezia è una città" ('Venice is a city') is a book that, for anyone interested in Venice, you really must read. It's a way of really entering into the city, from the way it was constructed, the way it was formed, to its urban rationale. And then there's an excellent writer-engineer who has told the city's story, who knew how to delve into both visionary and narrative inventiveness, intertwining this with knowledge of engineering and construction, the materials and techniques with which it was built. I'm talking about Paolo Barbaro. Paolo Barbaro, a writer who passed away a few years ago, not many years ago, but who left us with important books ranging from character and narrative, to novels and stories, to essays. In his essays, his deep-dives into Venice, but also through little glimpses when he describes the events that unfold around his characters, you get a sense of not only the visible layers of the city, but you also almost feel the mud below, into which the wooden piles were driven, the foundations. You feel that there's a rootedness in the writing, someone who knows about what the bricks are made of, the stones, the architraves, the things that are everywhere, above and below the characters. Paolo Barbaro, we really shouldn't forget about him. We must not forget Paolo Barbaro.

EB: They are undoubtedly authors of great value, but perhaps not among the most well-known around the world. So in the end what kind of image of Venice is created by books, the image that then circulates around?

TS: Many people write about Venice, but we Italians, sometimes when we talk about authors that write about Venice – recently Amitav Ghosh has written about Venice, for example – it's as if... the finale of "The Information" by Martin Amis springs to mind, where – well, I'll reveal it, if you haven't read it, it's a beautiful novel – where the protagonist discovers that his wife has been having an affair with his best friend for years. Martin Amis makes a brilliant comparison: "He felt like Tasman when he discovered Tasmania, without realising that just over there was Australia, enormous Australia!" We Italians, we Venetians, often talk about the literature relating to Venice, or even about Venice, while turning our backs on "Australia", by that I don't mean an Australian writer, but the huge narrative continent also known as Donna Leon.

EB: Donna Leon, of course!

TS: Donna Leon is the writer behind Commissario

Brunetti. When I go abroad, all around Europe, the second question that I'm asked... I mean, first they introduce themselves to me, they say: "Oh I've read your books!" if it's a bookshop owner, librarian, a professor that's introducing me, or the organiser of the event. The second question that they ask me is "You write books about Venice, like Donna Leon! Do you like Donna Leon?" And I'm shocked, because given that it's not my genre, I have this grave shortcoming of not having read any of her work. As we know, she doesn't like to have her work translated into Italian because the inquests of Commissario Brunetti often relate to local scandals, and sometimes characters from certain places are recognisable. But the amazing thing for me, for example, is like when we Italians go to Sicily, say to Val di Noto, Modica, Ragusa or elsewhere, we find plaques for tourists with photos of Commissario Montalbano, and a summary, a synopsis of a scene of a particular episode of Commissario Montalbano di Camilleri, in the version with Zingaretti, marking where various episodes were filmed for the TV series. Well, the Germans, who had a celebrated, famous and much-loved TV series about Commissario Brunetti in German, go to the terrace of Palazzo Barbarigo della Terrazza to take photos of the "Dachterasse" of Brunetti, "Brunetti's Dachterasse". The wonderful thing about this – and I implore you to do this, please do this! – search "Brunetti Venezia" on Google Maps, and right there on the map of Venice pops up the Dachterasse; it's the rooftop, not exactly a real terrace, where Brunetti lives in the German series, because it's a site that is photographed so often ('laughing')... They go to the palace on the Grand Canal, not to take photos of the facades, but to take photos next door of the Dachterasse, the rooftop terrace of Brunetti. So, what am I saying? That the image of Venice gets out of hand, perhaps as it should do too...

EB: So, Tiziano Scarpa, up to this point we have explored how to write and talk about Venice. But how do Venetians talk about it themselves? Because this is an interesting topic: the means, the words, the lexicon used by a community of people that live in a particular place, magical as it may be. Good, bad? What techniques do they use?

TS: I think they employ somewhat protectionist techniques, there's an esotericism and an "exotericism" in talking about Venice. Not when mediated through fiction, TV series, novels, but when speaking directly, I mean without the filters of fiction or characters, but when one says: "I think that, I find that, my life is like..." There's a sort of protectionism because people tend to complain a little, and I think they're right to do so because there are some real reasons to complain. The depopulation, the cost of living, the housing, the cost of rent, the inconvenience, the services, the emptying of the city, I won't keep going on... but the list of complaints, what can I say? It makes this whining plausible, but it functions as a kind of shell – not that these things aren't true – but it's a shell, it's there to defend the hermit crab, the snail that lives inside, they've been abandoned, but really they know that the quality of life here is very high. And so, maybe to put people off, maybe to protect themselves... The Venetians know very well that someone from Milan doesn't have access to such beautiful, marvellous little squares all over the place, where you can go for an aperitivo, for just a couple of euros might I add! Other Italian cities have nothing quite so marvellous, if not for their wonderful main squares, which are usually right in the centre, where it's very expensive, very cool, very glamorous, perhaps colonised by a certain type of people... This phenomena, I've not only seen it in the Venetians, to tell the truth, such a legitimate protectionism... I've done it too, a classic case... Almost every summer, a magazine or a newspaper reaches out to me, and they ask me for a colourful piece, something that they think might be rather helpful, and they ask me: "Listen Scarpa, would you be up for writing a piece about some of your favourite places, where the Venetians go, not the touristy places, where you guys go..." And I make my excuses: "Unfortunately, you know, this time of the year..." But do you really think that I'll tell YOU? Where we Venetians go? ('laughing') You think I'm stupid? For just a few euros for the article, I also have to contribute to the ruin of those few little spots that are still untainted?

EB: Our last hope...

TS: I've found people who understood me – actually, not just that, I'll tell you what they did – I've actually also found this to be the case with foreigners. I had the honour of meeting a dean, I think, because he has an executive role, working at a very senior level... Professor Rudolf Behrens, a great philosopher, a polyglot... I've never felt so abashed and embarrassed, at the time I had only written a couple of books, he had actually read the previous version of "Venezia è un pesce" ("Venice is a fish"), which was a children's edition called "In gita a Venezia con Tiziano Scarpa" ("A Trip to Venice with Tiziano Scarpa"), he'd even read that! He made a big show of it, we were in a sort of university canteen with other teachers, researchers from Bochum, and he said that he was very fond of the city, and that he went there on holiday every summer. I welcomed this, and then he said to me, "But you know where I go with my family?" in perfect Italian. "Tell me professor..." "I go to Pellestrina." "Ah how wonderful!" I say, "What a connoisseur, a man of good taste in travel!" We talk about Pellestrina 20 years ago, when it was more than just a little wild, and before it was well-known, it's full of people from Padova these days... And then he says to me, "You write about Venice." "Well yes, as you know Professor, I'm unworthy, but you've read my books..." "But you don't talk about Pellestrina..." And I feel almost guilty, when he then says, "Well yes, I have to admit, it's still something I haven't done either..." He moves closer to me from across the canteen table, he looks around

and sighs, firmly locking his eyes with mine, and says, "Never tell anyone about it." ('Slowly chanting the words in a menacing tone'.)

EB: ('Laughing') Well, I must say that's quite remarkable hearing such advice coming from someone like Professor Behrens, who experiences, who has experienced Venice in such an intense way.

TS: Rudolf Behrens has become my Super-ego for Pellestrina! Every time I've had the slightest urge to name Pellestrina in an article, in anything, I see Professor Behrens looking at me, saying, "Never tell anyone about it!" ('with emphasis') Except it's a bit of a lost cause now.

EB: Of course...

TS: Even if Pellestrina deserves to be recognised, it's an example of this sort of defensive reticence.

Musical interlude: Christian Fennesz, "Rivers of Sand" (track from the album "Venice", 2004)

EB: Tiziano Scarpa, we are slowly, but inevitably coming to the end of our chat, but I still have a couple of things that I would like to ask you. What are, in your opinion, having spoken about how the Venetians talk about themselves, what forms of narration are possible for a city reconsidering itself, in a sustainable way, taking into consideration natural issues, the relationship with the lagoon environment, the state of change that we are currently living through? I know that this is a difficult question, or maybe I should say an impossible one. But I'd like to ask you, if you're willing, to give us some idea, a basic vocabulary, for the changes that we are facing.

TS: I can tell you straight away that the answer lies to some extent in the question. I mean, the natural issues, they need to be kept them in mind, the lagoon environment, because as my friend Roberto Ferrucci has written, "Venice is the lagoon." But I would also say that Venice could be the Unesco worldwide capital of culture... Other aspects of the lexicon... It should be lived more than it is visited; it's always been evidence for a kind of utopia, that it's possible to live in a different way. It's also a reminder of things to forget about or to erase: the industry of foreigners. One hundred years ago, at the outbreak of the First World War when Venice realised that it lived off tourists, it understood that it was an industry of foreigners. That's what they called it, like a factory, that with the "clunk, clunk, clunk" of the machines on a conveyor belt, manufactured tourists. There you have it, we not only have to introduce new words, but scrutinise the old words too.

EB: Thank you so much. Just now when you told us about how newspapers sometimes ask you for recommendations about the special places that only the Venetians know about, following of course the suggestion of Professor Behrens, you try to get out of it and decline the invitation. But one of the things that we ask our guests here at Nowtilus is - very briefly and perhaps without revealing any big secrets - to share a place that's close to their heart with our listeners, a location, a Venetian situation that for Tiziano Scarpa, is close to his heart. What would you be willing to share with us?

TS: Without a doubt, the church of the Pietà, Santa Maria della Pietà. I know, it's not some little place, a hidden gem, an undiscovered corner, but in reality it is... San Marco is packed, the Riva degli Schiavoni, at least before the pandemic, was overflowing, but all you have to do is enter the church of Vivaldi - or rather the one that was next door to the church of Vivaldi, because in the middle of the 18th Century it was rebuilt, but anyway, the evidence that we have about that place, about the orphans growing up, being given a helping hand, and who learned to play music, to sing, in order to collect donations - well, the history of music changed in that place, and no one goes inside. And it's also evidence for the welfare of the 'Ancien Régime', to put it one way: how our ancestors resolved social problems. There's also a magnificent fresco by Giambattista Tiepolo, and frescoes are rather rare in Venice because they weren't often made here due to the humidity. Anyway to sum it up, it's a place that incredibly few people visit. So go, go! Because it really is from every perspective, musical, historical, political, artistic, a special place, and barely frequented, despite being a just few steps from San Marco.

EB: Well, thank you to Tiziano Scarpa and goodbye, we hope to see you again soon, perhaps even in the flesh! A warm farewell to Tiziano Scarpa.

TS: Thank you!

EB: Thank you to Christian Fennesz for the music from the album "Venice" that you heard fading in and out alongside our words throughout this programme. You've been listening to "Nowtilus. Stories from an urban lagoon in the 21st century". A podcast curated by Enrico Bettinello and Alice Ongaro Sartori, in collaboration with Graziano Meneghin for post-production. You can listen to this episode and future episodes of Nowtilus on ocean-archive.org or follow us on Soundcloud. A warm farewell from Enrico Bettinello, see you in the next episode.

NOWTILUS

Storie da una laguna urbana del 21esimo secolo

Episode 2

THE ARCHITECTURE OF "SUPERVENICE"

with Sara Marini

Available from 8th May 2020, 4pm
TBA21-Academy Radio on Ocean Archive, SoundCloud, Spotify, iTunes and Google Podcasts.

TBA21—Academy Radio

Enrico Bettinello (EB): You are listening to "Nowtilus. Stories from an urban lagoon in the 21st century", a podcast by Ocean Space, Venice. Enrico Bettinello is here to welcome you aboard the Nowtilus. Stories, thoughts, notes, and issues concerning the rethinking of Venice today. In our second episode we will explore some stories, some themes linked to the architecture of Venice, and we'll be doing this together with Sara Marini, architect and lecturer at the IUAV University of Venice. So let's welcome Sara Marini aboard.

Sara Marini (SM): Thank you, thanks Enrico.

EB: Sara Marini has dedicated many books and many editorial projects to the city of Venice, the most recent of which is "Vesper. Rivista di Architectura, Arti e Teoria" ("Vesper. Architecture, Arts and Theory Magazine") from the Department of Architectural Design at IUAV itself. Sara Marini is the director of this magazine, of "Vesper". The first edition came out in autumn of 2019 and has a title that immediately caught our attention, because it was entitled "Supervenice", and so I'd like to begin our chat by asking her to tell us about the rationale behind these two fascinating names, "Vesper" for the magazine, and "Supervenice" for this issue in particular.

SM: Well, "Vesper" is a half-yearly magazine, in two languages, the texts are in Italian and in English, and its aim is to deal with the different cultures of architectural design, seeking to renew the nexus between theory and practice, between text and object, an indelible nexus in the context of Venice. The name refers to the fact that our eyes are drawn to the dusk: when light and dark mix, and the source of light is no longer visible. "Vesper" attempts to read

the design process by following and highlighting the momentum of transformation. Pythagoras identified Venus as both the morning and the evening stars, the same celestial body in two different places. The word "vesper" evokes Venus, and in turn Venice, which like Venus, rises from the water. "Vesper" doesn't attempt to promise completely new horizons, "a brighter tomorrow," but seeks to catch a glimpse - in the light of twilight - of the possibilities that are hidden within what already exists. It should be pointed out that "Vesper" is 'paper architecture', that is to say it strives to be like a small building in miniature with every edition: with multiple layers that welcome different narratives, reclaiming and renewing the tradition of Italian paper magazines, welcoming varied forms of writing and different styles. The magazine is thought of, through the succession or themed editions, as a discourse on contemporaneity. Within the space of each edition, a collection of headings shed different lights on the theme. Headings such as the archive, travel, story, design obviously, essays... In essence, the objective is to provide tools and materials from the city's long shadow. The first edition of the magazine, which was edited in 2019, is dedicated to "Supervenice".

EB: Well, let's talk a little about this word "super" which evokes both superheroes, and contexts a little closer to the latin root of the word.

SM: Of course. Again, sort of like "Vesper", there are multiple meanings. We tried to create a multifaceted term that could clearly evoke the city, which is the focus of this account. We couldn't launch the magazine without talking about Venice, which is a great palimpsest of design, culture, which continually renews the trajectory of architecture. "Supervenice" because in Venice both gold and mud merge together and give form to a multifaceted document. Clearly Venice is a difficult document, in the sense that it's extremely well-known, its identity is almost taken for granted, so taken for granted as to be synthesised and even replicated in other contexts around the world. However, in Venice in particular, the minute and the immeasurable meet, the powerful and the fragile share the stage. Essentially, it's imperative to know Venice from within, but to write about it you have to place yourself outside, to place yourself above this context, to rise above it, because otherwise it's impossible to see the contradictions that the city hides from such a close proximity.

EB: Sorry if I'm interrupting you, but we were also talking about this in the last episode of Nowtilus, with Tiziano Scarpa, precisely about this narrative difficulty, almost a difficulty in its very being, in understanding this object that can actually get quite out of control. Don't you think?

SM: Of course. In order to write about Venice and to talk about Venice, two dramatic and antithetical movements are required: that is to immerse oneself in it and to distance oneself from it with the same intensity, otherwise there's a risk of being trapped, crushed inside the city's image. The contradictions that it hides, even this difficulty with perspective that you often experience when looking at Venice, are echoed in the image that we chose for the cover of "Supervenice". In this case it's a photo by Armin Linke - each edition of the magazine will feature photos taken by noted photographers on the cover - which is in itself almost an essay of its own, it reiterates what the theme is yet simultaneously engages with the theme of the magazine.

EB: Let's describe it for those who can't see it, for our listeners, but of course we hope that you will see it. This is a very beautiful image, taken by Armin Linke. If you don't know the setting - and I don't even think many Venetians would know the setting where this photo was taken - you can see the head of a gentleman, a workman, inside a control room, which could be on a ship, or could instead be... what is it?

SM: It's the portrait of a technician inside a control room, and inside this room he's taking virtual measurements of the tides and of the super-dam currently under construction, obviously we're talking about the MOSE project, and these simulations are projected onto a gigantic screen, so once again, there are lots of superlatives involved ('laughing'). And then, again sticking with the point about the name, the title that we gave this first edition, we wanted to reiterate that Venice is a "super-designed" city; by that I mean its appearance always seems to remain the the same, its form, its ostensibly continually repeated composition, in order to be so well-preserved, so repeated, so persistent throughout the years, in reality it requires a huge number of projects, a huge amount of design culture, a huge number of technical inventions. So this is a city that's full of design, and which continually looks to design for new ideas.

EB: And this is something that people often don't realise, right? It appears a bit like an object frozen in time, partly because of its historical characteristics, but also because there's often this idea that it's a kind of motionless entity. However, this continual process of redesigning to remain the same, but also to change, what does this look like?

SM: Well, for example, this edition contains an essay about the restoration of Palazzo Grimani, a restoration that took 25 years. It also contains the plans of the designer, Mario Piana, who oversaw this restoration, and from the plans it's clear just how many technical innovations were required to get the palace into the state that we can see it in today, after many years of being abandoned, slipping into a very bad condition. It has to be said that Venice is not just a large sandbox for design, it's not always read positively in this "Supervenice" edition, in fact in Nicola Emeri's

essay, he talks about when Benjamin visited the city as a young man, and he found it to be completely unbearable, he really didn't like it. So we're talking about a range of perspectives that relate to the same subject, but don't always agree, that don't all point in the same direction, but that all seek to explore the most hidden aspects of the city, that go beyond the most obvious assumptions.

EB: This relationship between the image of a Venice that is continually replicated, continually duplicated and reproduced time and time again, and the Venice that its inhabitants experience, the city and the lagoon, seems to be sort of dualistic, almost antithetical. But do these souls actually live side by side, and if so, how? Are there other ways of imagining this too? For example, another work comes to mind, another book that you wrote together with Alberto Bertagna, called "Venice. 2nd Document", which is a lovely little book on this subject, because it's concise and manageable. In the essays, in the very concept of this work, other paths are identified for navigating these two polarities of the concept of Venice.

SM: In this little book we deal with a kind of middleground, an "inbetween", a "being between", what lies between Venezia and Venice, that is to say between the reality and the logo, between the city and its brand. Obviously in between these two realities that share the same name, though here distinguished by two different languages – different ways of seeing the same space often correspond to different languages – we try to find some sort of conflict, and above all the things that belong to the realm of the imagination: in other words, where the two cities meet, where they're confused, but also where they manage to meaningfully overlap. I would also stress what "Venice. 2nd Document" represents from the point of view of it being an object itself, because as with "Vesper", we aimed to design an object that can actually be held in the hands of the people who read it. This little volume acts as a sort of souvenir, so certain aspects are designed to appeal directly to a specific audience or specific readers in particular, and it comes packaged in a transparent sleeve. Through this sleeve it's possible to read the various titles of the chapters which are embossed on the cover, where you can see words relating to Venice like: Novissime, Serenissima, Libertà, Fondaci, Spessori, Nostalghia, Scirocco. These terms immediately provoke quite specific associations, so the viewer might be able to imagine what the book contains. In reality these words are all references to design projects, rather than recent locations in which recent transformations of the city have taken place, or titles of films... Well the book actually contains a series of critical essays on the theory of architecture. But the fact that the object presents itself as a typical souvenir, appealing to average tourists, means that people have actually bought it, maybe in some bookshop here in Venice, and upon returning home have finally opened the book, only to write to us complaining about the surprise they had when they discovered its contents. This is just an example of some of the ways we can work with Venice, with its dynamics, and also with book culture, which has very deep roots in this city.

Musical interlude – Teho Teardo, "Sea Change" (sound installation, 2017)

EB: In the final pages of "Venice. 2nd Document" there are some beautiful photos of the church of San Lorenzo, which is the home of Ocean Space. They're really fascinating photos, taken by Sissi Cesira Roselli, and which were taken before the start of its restoration, so you can see the floor still in its pre-restored state. Looking at them makes me think of the theme of revitalisation, of the recycling of the city's spaces, a theme to which Sara Marini has dedicated particular attention in the book "Architettura parassita. Strategie di riciclaggio della città" ("Parasite architecture. Recycling strategies of the city"), which came out a few years ago, not quite as recent as the magazine and the book that we've talked about, but I would say it's still very current as a reading of some Venetian experiences, starting here with the church of San Lorenzo. So I'd like to ask you, Sara Marini, in your opinion, what are some interesting examples of this parasite concept, in this sense of renewing and recycling.

SM: Well, Venice is clearly a capital city for reused spaces, a bit like all our old historical centres. But Venice is an even more extreme example, because in having a limited footprint, the city is forced to be reborn continually within itself. For example, we can talk about the obvious case of the Fenice, which was redesigned in the nineties by Aldo Rossi. There are a huge number of examples, I'd like to mention some that I experienced daily until only a few years ago, like the premises of the IUAV University in Venice: one of these buildings, which we use for the Architecture degree programme, is an old cotton mill, and was reconceptualised as a university premises by a designer and teacher at the school. All of our schools were either noble palaces, or old warehouses, or parts of very extensive religious buildings, so the theme of reuse is the norm in this city. From this point of view for example, over the last few years I've dealt with the reuse of closed churches in Venice, which is perhaps a more specific case, less well-known and maybe also less obvious, again we're back to talking about things that are hidden and things that are evident...

EB: How many closed churches are there in Venice, roughly?

SM: We've counted thirty, but we use the term "closed" in inverted commas, meaning that "the doors are mostly closed," so it's not necessarily a permanent state, but for the most part these sites are inaccessible. Obviously the theme of reusing

ecclesiastic heritage is something that is relevant to the whole of Europe, the whole ancient continent to a greater or lesser degree. In Venice the theme becomes relevant because it's a city that is traversed by millions of tourists, but also by its residents, yet it might not be possible to determine the state of a particular building. It's not an obvious state, very simply put, you can walk past an old building, see that it's doors are closed, but you can't imagine what's going on inside. A few years ago, in my design courses, I worked with my students on the possible reutilisation of some of these churches, the churches of Sant'Anna, San Lorenzo, and Santa Maria del Pianto in particular. The choice of these churches was dictated simply by whether the organisations responsible for the properties were willing to open their doors.

EB: Because the churches belong to different owners, right?

SM: Exactly, there are various owners, often the owners of these churches don't correspond with the people who manage the property, so it can be a very complicated landscape.

EB: Among other things, you refer to three churches that are located in three different areas, Sant'Anna is in Castello towards the end of Via Garibaldi, the church of San Lorenzo almost at the heart of the city, the closest to San Marco, and Santa Maria del Pianto is a church that is let's say somewhat hidden behind Fondamenta Nuove, and maybe people don't even realise that it exists... So they're located in very different places within the city's scenery.

SM: Yes, and that gives weight to the fact that this phenomenon doesn't concern just one specific area, but is in fact spread throughout the city. I have to say that of the three, the visit to San Lorenzo left a particularly strong impression on the students, precisely because the visits took place just before the restoration work within the church began, and so there were these two chasms in the floor, left behind by a series of archaeological excavations that were interrupted during the eighties, so this allowed the students to see what was hidden beneath the floor of a Venetian building. Furthermore, there was often water clearly visible in these pits. The church also allowed us to revisit an old design from the nineteen eighties: a temporary project by Renzo Piano, the so-called Ark, which had been conceived and designed for the performance of the musical opera "Prometeo. Tragedia dell'ascolto" ("Prometheus. The tragedy of hearing") by Luigi Nono. This was a particularly interesting case of architecture temporarily inhabiting the emptiness of the church, giving a space to the performance of a multidirectional musical opera, "like the sound that echoes within Venice," obviously now I'm quoting the words of Luigi Nono... Moreover, it was something of a collective effort - Renzo Piano responsible for the architecture, Luigi Nono the musical opera...

EB: I remember, Cacciari, Vedova, right?

SM: Exactly, an authorial hypertext, in which the contributions of each individual artist were nonetheless very evident, all brought together in a space that was temporarily hosted within the church.

Musical interlude - Teho Teardo, "Sea Change" (2017)

EB: Sara Marini, Le Corbusier defined Venice as "a city of the future." Do you agree with this definition?

SM: Yes absolutely, though I would say the future is now. By that I mean Venice is definitely a paradigm for contemporaneity and for the direction that the future seems to be going in. We are in the presence of a city that is completely pedestrianised, dependent in a very direct sense, without any ambiguity, on its own environment, which at times weighs it down; it's a strongly international place, but in other ways it's still just a village. Social life here is very intense, but if needed, it's possible to escape to the lagoon. Again, the architectural value of public space and the private space of the home is very clear, by that I mean they condition people's lives in an obvious way, while in other places it's easy to pretend that the differences are negligible.

EB: With that in mind, in your opinion, how can we consider or reconsider Venice as a living city, bearing in mind the very interesting ideas about architecture, but also design in general, that you have shared with us so far in this episode?

SM: From a design perspective I think that, very simply put, we must continue to reutilise Venice. It is already happening through work on an urban scale, and with projects concerning smaller spaces, the significant work being done at the Arsenale for the Biennale comes to mind for example. I also think that this culture of temporary architecture should be continually renewed, it has always highlighted the city's architectural history, both within its buildings, as we saw with Renzo Piano's Ark, and in the use of its waters; this is a city in which a temporary bridge is constructed every year, built and dismantled just as rapidly, but which changes the way we interact with the city itself. Another area of interest is definitely the lagoon, the lungs of the city, something that has always been a subject of much discussion. We could always do more for this area of concern, perhaps by creating interdisciplinary working groups with different skill sets, which would be able to better navigate this difficult territory, a territory that relates to the future and the destiny of the city. Aside from the spaces, from the territories, there are also the people. As for the people, I think it's ever more important to listen to a question that over the years, ever since I've lived in this city - for more than twenty years - I've always heard being asked. There are people who visit this city who would like to stay here, to live and work here.

It's a question which needs to be answered clearly, and answered from both a housing perspective, which is obviously fundamental, but also from a jobs perspective. Clearly new workers continue to be born, new forms of work can be created, new ways of collaborating, renewing ancient knowledge: but to do this, you need space.

EB: Given the events of recent weeks and months, let's just say that this will be a particularly interesting moment, a moment for reconsidering the possibility of accommodating new opportunities, given that the monoculture of tourism, which has been the symbol of daily and economic life in the city in recent years, will most likely be drastically different for some time, and so there's an opportunity to reconsider our city through this lens.

Musical interlude – Teho Teardo, "Sea Change" (2017)

EB: We are approaching the end of this episode, of our chat, but before we say our goodbyes, we always ask our guests on Nowtilus to tell us about a place, a moment, a Venetian situation that's close to their heart, to share this with our listeners. What place or situation is close to your heart, Sara Marini?

SM: I'd like to talk about a place first, then a situation. For the place, it's definitely Palazzo Grimani, because it was an empty palace, which doesn't house any collection in particular, and it's sort of hidden within the city because of its rather sober exterior, which contrasts sharply with what it contains within, the rooms, adorned with artificial landscapes, decorations that instantly transport you somewhere else, taking you on a journey without even moving an inch, which actually brings us back to the theme of this conversation and what's going on at the moment... As for the situation, it's a situation that is often mentioned by people who have perhaps had to leave Venice, who have maybe lived in Venice for some time, but who still feel the nostalgia for this city quite acutely. And it's walking at night, alone, though its streets. The texture of the shadows, of the darkness, which, far from being dangerous, actually wraps itself around you and protects you on these brief journeys through the Venetian nights, accompanied by the sound of your own footsteps: these sounds that bounce around within Venice's architecture in a completely unrepeatable way.

EB: Well, for now we'll say thank you to Sara Marini, we wish her farewell, and thank her for joining us aboard Nowtilus and for having shared these thoughts and stories with such clarity and generosity. Thank you Sara Marini.

SM: Thank you.

EB: And thank you to Teho Teardo, whose sound installation "Sea Change", extracts of which you have been listening to throughout the episode, was made in 2017 for Palazzo Grassi – Punta della Dogana, when it was hosting the great exhibition by Damien Hirst. This sound installation, Sea Change by the musician Teho Teardo, was created with a series of recordings made using microphones submerged in the Venetian Lagoon. Thanks to all of you for listening to TBA21 – Academy Radio from Ocean Space, Venice, for the second episode of "Nowtilus. Stories from an urban lagoon in the 21st century", a podcast curated by Enrico Bettinello and Alice Ongaro Sartori, in collaboration with Graziano Meneghin for post-production. You can listen to this episode and future episodes of Nowtilus on ocean-archive.org or follow us on Soundcloud. Until the next time aboard Nowtilus, a warm farewell from Enrico Bettinello.

NOWTILUS

Storie da una laguna urbana del 21esimo secolo

Episode 3

SOUNDS AND SIGHTS

with Nicola Di Croce and Mariateresa Sartori

Available from 22nd May 2020, 4pm
TBA21-Academy Radio on Ocean Archive, SoundCloud, Spotify, iTunes and Google Podcasts.

TBA21—Academy Radio

Enrico Bettinello (EB): You are listening to "Nowtilus. Stories from an urban lagoon in the 21st century", a podcast by Ocean Space, Venice. Enrico Bettinello is here to welcome you aboard Nowtilus, stories, thoughts, notes, and issues concerning the rethinking of Venice today. In our third episode we'll be exploring the role of sounds and sights in the dynamics of the city. We'll be doing this by exploring the artistic endeavours of two guests who have dedicated a series of interesting works to hearing and sight. We're talking about Nicola Di Croce, who is now joining us aboard and who we will soon say hello to, and Mariateresa Sartori, who will meet in the second part of this episode. So for now, welcome Nicola Di Croce, welcome aboard.

Nicola Di Croce (NDC): Hello everyone.

EB: Born in Basilicata, but Venetian by choice. How long have you been Venetian by choice?

NDC: Ah, for more than seven years now.

EB: For more than seven years! An architect, musician and sound artist, Nicola Di Croce has always been interested in linking artistic perspectives with academic research, the sound environment and urban planning. One of his recent works - I believe from 2019, correct me if I'm wrong - was published in a book titled "Suoni a margine" ("Sounds in the margins"), published by Meltemi, and which explores these connections between the sound environment and urban issues. And it's with this wonderful book that I'd like to begin, what were the guidelines of your investigation and why did you look specifically at sound as a tool?

NDC: The book stems from the PhD programme in territorial planning that I did in Venice, but it also opens up to my artistic practice; what I managed to develop was a way of linking the planning of the territory, so the rules that govern both the city and a much wider area, with analyses referring to hearing, research tools that aren't often encountered in the academic field, and that in some ways also provide a series of data and references that can be reused in an artistic context, in sound production, in performance production, in installations and so forth.

EB: So, we've also talked about this with some of our guests in previous episodes of Nowtilus, the notion that we live in a society that is spoilt with images, images above all of Venice, and these images duplicate themselves, splitting into many different versions that sometimes superimpose themselves upon and almost saturate the impression we have of this city. For you, why is it important to listen to the city, and to use its sound as a sense and as a tool?

NDC: Hearing is definitely undervalued both as a tool and as a sense. We are all aware of the possibilities that hearing offers us, but we often take it for granted in our daily lives. The title of the book "Suoni a margine" ("Sounds in the margins") places emphasis on the fact that sound, and consequently hearing, are often at the margins of our perception and of the culture in which we are immersed, yet simultaneously sound and hearing give us the opportunity to think, to refocus, on issues that are often in the background. I'm referring to issues like cultural transformation, the disappearance of local identity, the way the city is changing, the passage between events and themes that follow the transformations of the city and the wider area.

EB: Now we're curious about the way your work is presented day to day, because your analysis is really very interesting, and I'd like to understand how your research and artistic practise work in your everyday life.

NDC: It's a very layered kind of work that follows a series of various methods of research and expression. Listening, long before actually recording, is definitely the first step towards dealing with the questions that seem interesting and that generate curiosity and interest. I'll give you a specific example, to bring this to life. A few years ago I was in Palermo for an artistic residency and I had been invited to develop a work, a project dedicated to the city. At that time I was particularly interested in how Palermo's historical markets could be seen as particularly symbolic of this idea that we have in the Mediterranean: the songs, the sounds, these shopkeepers, these merchants that almost scream, crying out to promote their goods in a particularly fascinating way... And I asked myself how this way of doing things, this very powerful cultural trait, how it spreads through the various markets. From an analysis of the markets in the historical centre, I realised that in some places the cries and songs of the merchants were still very much alive, very much present, yet in others they were disappearing. So what can we link this to, what causes could have contributed to this gradual disappearance? Of course bearing the evolution of the city in mind, the fact that a city is obviously alive at every step along the way, some areas become less frequented, or are frequented at different times of the day. Think about tourism for example, how tourism changes and transforms the city and how the traders themselves have to adapt, adjust to these transformations. With this in mind, I realised that in some very touristy areas for example, this practice was disappearing faster than in other more residential areas.

Musical interlude - Nicola Di Croce, "Inner Tales" (2014)

EB: Talking about Palermo's markets, it feels like a natural progression given that our programme is about Venice, to reflect for a moment on the Rialto market in Venice, a market that perhaps doesn't have that same kind of characteristic sound, or at least it doesn't anymore, that loud, mediterranean quality, but it's somewhere that has definitely been at the centre of a profound transformation in recent years. It's something that not only the people who work there are worrying about, in fact the whole city is concerned, because you can see this historical market slowly disappearing, or at least changing. Have you studied it from an acoustic perspective - I imagine that you experience the Rialto market more as an average resident than as a researcher - but do you have any thoughts on this if you have indeed studied the Rialto market in Venice from the point of view of its acoustic landscape?

NDC: I'm definitely a regular visitor at the market. I also love its architecture, the loggias that somehow manage to contain the buzz, that fundamental character of markets and commercial spaces, the liveliest places in any city. Rialto market is obviously less noisy, less boisterous than the markets of Palermo, but it nonetheless displays some interesting characteristics that I've noticed while doing my shopping. One such feature is obviously the use of local dialects, the use of the voice that is obviously like a symbol for "Venetian-ness" itself. At the same time we are presented with a quieter market, one that offers the space for other cultures to emerge too. For example, there are people of other ethnicities who have set up businesses in the streets, and who give, who gift, a new tone, a different and certainly richer tone to the market, which makes it more complicated and more interesting for even a passing listener.

EB: Sticking with the theme of the sounds of Venice, and its acoustic characteristics, during the lockdown that we have been living through in recent weeks, the isolation, the city has been so incredibly silent, not just at night

as the Venetians will no doubt be familiar with, but also during the day, it's been a unique moment from a hearing perspective. How have you experienced these recent weeks? Have you done any research, have you made any recordings of the sounds in our city?

NDC: Yes, the last few weeks have been really interesting in many ways. From the point of view of a resident in this city, I have found a new appreciation for the rediscovered calmness that, with so many tourists, had all but disappeared here. At the same time however, I realised that this silence went beyond my expectations, and in some ways became almost overwhelming at times, especially because it allowed other aspects, to which we normally pay less attention, to emerge. I'm talking about very simple things, like how the church bell towers seemed to ring out so aggressively and impetuously, just because there were no other features around to contrast them with. More generally speaking, I found living through this time to be very interesting, because at the same time I've been working on some research into the relationship between the acoustic atmosphere and commerce. While considering this theme, relating to Venice and its historical centre too, I decided to make some recordings on the journey from my house towards a busy square close to where I live, Campo Santa Margherita. I retraced the route at various times of the day, and especially during different phases of the lockdown that we have experienced, which obviously entailed different types of restrictions on our freedom of movement and the types of shops that could be open. On this walk I found myself in situations that were at first very quiet and very interesting because they were devoid of features utilising the space, so it was very desolate, but also very striking from a perceptual point of view. As the shops slowly began to reopen, I realised that the background buzz of commercial activity provided a quotidian quality that Venice slowly regained, for sure.

EB: So, if you were to quickly tell us which sounds have characterised Venice in recent weeks, in your opinion, what would they be?

NDC: It's difficult to say. I think it's more a question of subtraction, the noises that we didn't expect, like I was saying about the sounds of the intensive activity in the city's spaces, of the masses of people that we were used to, or that we were often used to avoiding, perhaps in contrast with the more intimate sounds that we experience when we escape into an alleyway to avoid a crowd, places that not everyone is familiar with and where we feel safe.

EB: Soon we must say goodbye, but before that, we always ask our guests on Nowtilus to tell us about a place or a situation in Venice that is close to their hearts, to share this with our listeners. So I now ask you, which place or situation is close to your heart, Nicola Di Croce?

NDC: The sound of footsteps in the alleyways and in the quietest areas is definitely uniquely characteristic of this place, but if I have to be more specific, what really interest me are the sounds made in some very specific places, places in which I notice that the motion of the foot making contact with the pavement produces a very particular sound: a reverberation, but more than just a reverberation, it's really a specific frequency, a...

EB: A kind of music, a note...

NDC: A note, a resonance that echoes in a specific moment and that's identifiable with that exact place. The thing that's interesting is that there are many of these acoustic locations within the geography of Venice, and I like to pass through them frequently, and who knows, one day maybe I'll record them, do something with them...

EB: Well, if you do end up doing that, let us know because it seems like a really interesting idea. So, we thank Nicola Di Croce, and we wish him farewell. By the way, we are listening to some of his music in this episode, fading in and out every now and again. It's music composed with recordings made right here in Venice, as is often the case in many of our episodes of Nowtilus. So, Nicola Di Croce, thanks for spending some time with us, and see you soon.

NDC: Thanks to you.

Musical interlude – Nicola Di Croce, "Inner Tales" (2014)

EB: So we've said goodbye to Nicola Di Croce, and now we get to welcome Mariateresa Sartori aboard Nowtilus, a Venetian artist whose research involves the empirical scientific method, behavioural dynamics, music and sound in relation to language. All very interesting topics and partly linked to what we were talking about with Nicola Di Croce. So now let's welcome Mariateresa Sartori.

Mariateresa Sartori (MTS): Hello everyone, thanks for inviting me.

EB: Thank you for accepting our invitation aboard Nowtilus. Mariateresa Sartori, of all your many artistic projects, I'd like to begin our conversation by asking you to tell us about the ones that are directly linked to the physical and social dynamics involved in moving around the city of Venice. And so I'd like to begin with one of your projects that isn't exactly recent given that it dates from 2006, but that in my opinion gives us a very good impression of the kind of artistic approach that you employ in observing this city. The work is entitled "Tutte le pause del mondo" ("All the pauses of the world") and I'd like to ask you to tell us about it.

MTS: "All the pauses of the world" is a fairly old

work, but in some ways it talks about Venice too, and I'll briefly try to explain why. The work is based around pauses in spontaneous conversations between people. Thanks to Venice being an international city, I was able to find pairs of people speaking different languages who, thanks to a strategy that I came up with, spoke completely spontaneously, having to find an agreement on certain topics. I wasn't actually that interested in what they were saying, but rather the pauses within these conversations were what interested me. So I gathered footage of this... It's interesting because there's actually a branch of linguistics known as pausology, the pauses between questions and answers in cultures and languages around the world actually vary greatly, as in the time, the lengths of the pauses, and so misunderstandings can even result from this, it's a very rich area of study... So I filmed lots of footage of these people talking to one another in their mother tongues, and then I spent a lot of time editing this footage. These people, I didn't actually know some of these people. Since there's a faculty of eastern and western foreign languages in Venice, many of these people worked at the university or were university professors, who I was meeting for the first time. We met, I filmed the video footage, and I worked for a long time in the editing chair, studying the pauses for very slight movements of the eyebrows, a glance upwards as thoughts ran through the mind. And so in some ways it became very intimate – I don't know what other word I could use for my interaction with these people – and I began to form a bond with them, an almost affectionate bond. When did I discover this? When I met them again... And this is where Venice comes back into play, Venice is international but it's also very small, you bump into people in the street, something that just doesn't happen in a great international metropolis. So when I happened to meet these people in the street, I went right up to them, with great enthusiasm and affection, and in response there was actually this coldness compared to my approach, because these people had only ever seen me once in their lives, and they hardly recognised me. So my relationship with them... The interesting thing that I reflected on and experienced, is that relationships don't require an exchange in order to grow, they can be completely unambiguous, and don't even require great admiration or devotion. I don't know, think about the idolisation of footballers for example, or actors, singers, and so on. It doesn't even require this devotional approach, a close observation of an image suffices, in this case a moving image, and therefore a familiarity, but it's absolutely unambiguous. This leads to the creation of a bond, a bond that has no need for anything in return. This led me to discover Venice. Venice being international allowed me to see these people – two Germans, two Arabs, two French people, Chinese, Japanese, and so on – but then also to meet them in the street.

EB: Actually what you were talking about is something that really does happen sometimes. You were talking about famous footballers, but we can also think about famous presenters, famous actors, those times when maybe you feel an emotion for the loss of a celebrated TV personality, for example there's always a grandmother who says: "They really felt like a member of the family," because they actually do seem to be part of the family ('laughing'), because they become part of our lives. And so the people that you meet around Venice too, the faces that we become accustomed to, kind of become a part of our family. So, among the other works that you have dedicated to this city – well rather than dedicated, works that you have developed based on observations of this city – there are some that describe the trajectories, later we'll try to better understand why I use the word "trajectory," but to me it feels like a word that offers different ways of interpreting the work you have done, the trajectories of the people and their movements within the city and on public transport. On your website you can see the results and a little excerpt of two works in particular, and it would be great if you could tell us a little about these works, especially "Tutti quelli che vanno" ('All people going') and another that has a similar title.

MTS: The word "trajectories" is the right choice. "All people going" is a series that came about a few years ago, thanks to the incredible material from the "Fisica della Città" (Physics of the City) group, from the University of Bologna; theoretical physicists, mathematicians, and so on, above all Burno Giorgini, to whom I will be forever grateful, who gave me access some video footage shot from high above Venice during carnival over the course of four years. By high above I mean from the Palazzo Ducale, the Campanile, the Basilica di San Marco and so on. They needed material filmed in this, the quintessential pedestrianised city in order to analyse and then later deduce formulae that could make predictions. In the end this is what I did: I loaded brief clips of these videos onto a computer, so imagine people seen from above during the Sunday of carnival, the particularly busy times, very brief little clips of just two to three minutes. I applied a transparent piece of plastic over the computer monitor, and with a pen I traced the route – indeed the trajectory – of every single person within this timeframe. In the end, after removing the transparent sheet, I had this kind of network showing everything that happened within that spacetime. In fact, this was then of interest to the scientists, because they were effectively talking about an image of spacetime. The thing that came out of this, and this is another thing that always interests me, was the discovery of behavioural dynamics through a very empirical process. In this instance it related to Piazza San Marco, and two broad social categories can be fairly clearly distinguished, people who live in Venice, namely the Venetians, or at least the people who work here, and the tourists. So, the lines that were more or less straight, that cut across Piazza San Marco in two diagonals, were made by Venetians or people who

work in Venice. On the other hand, all the beautiful wiggly trajectories and zig-zags that made beautiful curves and doubled-back on themselves were clearly the tourists and the people who were there for the carnival. This is something that I've continued over the years, and which continues to excite me.

EB: It's a kind of infographic of our movements from a certain point of view.

Musical Interlude - Nicola Di Croce, "Inner Tales" (2014)

EB: So, another work that concerns these tourists, after they've created their beautiful curves, relates to where they go to board the vaporetto... What can you tell us about this?

MTS: Yes, this other work is a video piece called "Quelli che vanno quelli che restano" ("Those who go those who stay behind"). In this instance, I squeezed on board a crowded water bus during the busiest time of the year, in July and August. I chose a place on the boat that gave me the best view of the people boarding the boat from the pontoon, or the people who didn't manage to get on because the gate was closed by the deckhand. It's important to note that these people couldn't see that I was filming, so it was actually a sort of candid camera, I had it rested on my shoulder.

EB: What did you use to film? A video camera or a phone?

MTS: A video camera, but it was resting on my shoulder, I did lots of tests, because at first I managed to capture quite a lot of shots of the sky or of people's feet ('laughing'), because I wasn't looking through the viewfinder... but by the end I more or less got the hang of it. In this way humanity is observed as a species, moving like a herd. The people who board the boat are the ones that manage to get on, the ones that stay behind though, and this is particularly interesting to me, have this look on their faces - only the tourists though, who find themselves in an unfamiliar situation, very different from their normal environment and habits, or at least the non-Venetians, the non-aquatic people - and at the moment when the deckhand closes the gate, the look on the faces of these people is a look of dismay towards the horizon, a look that seems to say: "What happens now?"

EB: A look of disorientation.

MTS: Yes, disorientation, but with a bit of despair inside too. The interesting thing, something I often think about, is that an average tourist who misses a bus in Florence, that's to say a more normal mode of transport, would never demonstrate this kind of expression. It's effectively a result of being in such an unusual city, the dynamics that seem so extravagant and peculiar to the people who don't live here, and this is reflected in that look on their faces. The look that the Venetians give is completely different at that moment when the deckhand closes the gate.

EB: Because they know ('laughing') that another boat is coming along, maybe the tourists think they've missed their last chance ('laughs')... So, we are approaching the end of our chat, before we say goodbye, we always ask our guests on Nowtilus to tell us about a place, a moment, a situation that we might say is close to their heart, and to share this with our listeners. So I'll ask you too, which place is close to your heart, Mariateresa Sartori?

MTS: I'd like to talk about the Venice Lido, where I was born. My heart is definitely more there than in any other place in the world. Something just came to mind. Recently I had an experience, both enjoyable and unsettling at the same time. When I was on my bike, heading to Murazzi, which is a part of the Lido protected by these rocks and breakwaters, to protect it from storm surges...

EB: An area that faces the sea, just to explain for the people who don't know it.

MTS: Right, it's important to mention actually, because I feel much more connected to the sea than to the lagoon. On my bike, looking at the breakwaters, I felt like I was one of these breakwaters too ('laughs')... It was very strange, not a feeling of "being like" or "looking like"... I actually was this breakwater. So then I thought: what actually is a breakwater? In this case it's a long concrete structure that extends out into the sea, so a part of the land that extends outwards. And so I suppose it's a nice thing to feel anchored, but inclined towards the sea. It was a very nice sensation. I think I felt this sensation, this emotion, because of the incredibly deep bond I have with these places.

EB: Well, could it also be something to do with, maybe unconsciously, a kind of protection, given that these breakwaters, "dighe" as we Venetians call them - I think the technical term is "frangiflutti" (breakwater) or something like that - were obviously built to protect the beaches and the coastline from the force of the sea. So maybe, and this is a question for you, could it not also be a sense of protection for the things that you care about?

MTS: I don't know, no, the feeling is one of actually being this thing made of concrete, something solid, that begins on the land but has this momentum towards the sea and towards the horizon.

EB: Great, well a big thank you to Mariateresa Sartori for joining us aboard Nowtilus, and we wish her farewell. Thank you Mariateresa Sartori.

MTS: Thank you, thank you and goodbye.

NOWTILUS

Storie da una laguna urbana del 21esimo secolo

Episode 4

MACRO-TIDES AND MICRO-PLASTICS

with Luigi Cavaleri (CNR-ISMAR) and Fabiana Corami (CNR-ISP)

Available from 3rd June 2020, 4pm
TBA21-Academy Radio on Ocean Archive, SoundCloud, Spotify, iTunes and Google Podcasts.

TBA21—Academy Radio

Enrico Bettinello (EB): You are listening to "Nowtilus. Stories from an urban lagoon in the 21st century", a podcast by Ocean Space, Venice. Enrico Bettinello is here to welcome you - or welcome you back if you've listened to our previous episodes - aboard Nowtilus, stories, thoughts, notes, and issues concerning the rethinking of Venice today. In our fourth episode we will immerse ourselves, almost physically, in our lagoon, tackling some themes that are at the centre of the debate around the health of the lagoon ecosystem, themes such as the tides or the presence of microplastics in the water. And we will be doing this along with Luigi Cavaleri, oceanographer at ISMAR-CNR, who we are about to welcome aboard, and in the second part of the episode, Fabiana Corami, researcher at the Institute of Polar Sciences at CNR and at the Department of Environmental, Information and Statistical Sciences at the University of Ca' Foscari, Venice. We will welcome Fabiana Corami later on, but for now we'll say welcome to Luigi Cavaleri. Luigi Cavaleri, welcome.

Luigi Cavaleri (LC): Hello Enrico, it's a pleasure to be here.

EB: How are you? Everything well?

LC: All well, thank you. The lagoon is also doing pretty well.

EB: Oh, good, that's reassuring! So, introducing you properly would take quite some time, time that we don't have unfortunately, because your long time spent at ISMAR, both as an oceanographer and also as the director of ISMAR-CNR, really does represent a glowing career that does the organisation

a great honour. Was I correct to introduce you as an oceanographer at ISMAR-CNR, or do I need to add anything?

LC: Oceanographer is absolutely fine, I think that covers ninety percent of my responsibilities.

EB: Though you're an oceanographer who obviously works on the Venetian Lagoon, which is of course not an ocean, but is nonetheless a very interesting environment. And I would like to begin our conversation by asking you to tell us about what kind of environment the Venetian Lagoon really is, just very briefly, and how the tides interact with this environment.

LC: Of course. As an oceanographer I have to tell you straight away that I chose not to work on the lagoon at first, but instead I focused mostly on the seas in order to give me a more general perspective. However, I'm Venetian, so I know the lagoon very well. The lagoon should perhaps be seen from an evolutionary point of view. We like to think about it as we see it today, but we could say that the lagoon is merely something of a geological transient. There are a number of rivers that empty into the sea, these being the Piave, the Sile, the Brenta, and they create coastal bars which then occlude certain parts of the coastline, and in doing so they also create a lagoon that fills up with water over the course of many years. The current Venetian Lagoon is around 5000 years old. Others previously existed within it, there's a sort of natural evolution and the Venetians realised this, so they deviated the course of the rivers to empty outside the lagoon, in order to prevent it from filling up. Obviously it's essential for a lagoon to be in contact with the sea, otherwise it would just turn into a big pond. In fact the tides, which are also one of the big problems for Venice, are essential for oxygenating the water, for recirculating it. So we have something of a love-hate relationship with the sea, it gives us life, but with all its statistical variability, it also frequently leads to problems. However from a biological health perspective, the lagoon isn't doing too badly. You mentioned microplastics, and they are certainly present in the lagoon, but they're present everywhere around the world...

EB: We'll be talking about microplastics in the second part of the programme with Fabiana Corami; I imagine they're present all around the world...

LC: Yes, but they're everywhere. There's even someone working with us at the institute who is studying them. The other thing that might interest you, regarding microplastics, are the residues in the seabed, from fishing nets and other things, and someone here at the institute is studying this to find out how to recover and remove them from the seabed.

EB: That's definitely very interesting. So, you were talking about the replenishment of the water. How long does it take, more or less, for the sea to recirculate the water in a lagoon like Venice?

LC: Ah, I'll have to respond like a politician: "It depends." It depends which part of the lagoon we're talking about. For example when there's a spring tide, during a full or a new moon, as much water enters the lagoon as there is in the lagoon to begin with: the volume of the lagoon doubles. But this doesn't mean that there's a 50% recirculation, because the water that enters the lagoon pushes the existing water out of the way, and 90% ends up heading back out to sea. It's estimated that the average recirculation with every tide cycle is around 5%, and the recirculation time varies depending on the location within the lagoon. If you were to throw a piece of wood into the basin of San Marco, within two tide cycles that wood would end up out at sea. If you were to throw that wood into the lagoon from Burano, you would need 30, 40 tide cycles, because it's much further away.

EB: There really is quite a tangible difference between the different parts of this lagoon. We were talking about tides that enter and tides that leave, and obviously the phenomenon of the "acqua alta" (high tide) is currently at the centre of debate for residents. On the 12th November last year the city was hit particularly hard by a momentous "acqua alta", and the debate began around various issues, about safeguarding and what that will look like in the future, and how to deal with these increasingly frequent phenomena. Can you explain in simple terms what happens in these instances of "acqua alta" and what particular conditions caused what happened last November when that terrible event occurred?

LC: Certainly. First of all, there are normal tides, the tides governed by the moon and the sun. In fact in the northern part of the Adriatic we have the highest tides in the whole of the Mediterranean. When there's a full moon or a new moon there's a rise of about one metre. We have to bear in mind that Venice has sunk down over the years - and we'll talk about this later - and we are relatively close to the water. So all it takes is a small rise in water levels and some parts of the city are flooded. Then there's the meteorological component, simply due to the Sirocco wind; the Adriatic is practically a basin, more or less rectangular in shape, and Venice is at the top of this rectangular basin, so when the wind blows from the south towards the north, it pushes the water towards the upper part of the basin; this is what we technically call a "storm surge". What happens or what doesn't happen next depends on good or bad luck. For example on the 29th October a year and a half ago, we were very lucky, because there was a very high meteorological tide, but it happened during a low astronomical tide, so the sum of the two was tolerable, one metre fifty. On the other hand, on the 12th November last year, the tide, the storm I should say, wasn't itself particularly strong,

but three different things happened. The first happened during this meteorological peak, which coincided with the astronomical peak, so the two factors were added together. Then there had also been a low pressure system over the Mediterranean for two or three weeks, so the Mediterranean, which connects with the Atlantic, had risen by thirty centimetres, so the water was already thirty centimetres higher than usual. Moreover there was a phenomenon, really a one-off, this very low pressure system, like a small hurricane that came up from the Gargano in Puglia and came up along the entire peninsula, passing close to Venice – it practically passed over Pellestrina – right at the crucial moment; this is what blew all the water up from the lower part of the lagoon around Chioggia towards Venice, and it caused the water to rise – and the shopkeepers of Venice know about this all too well – almost half a metre in just an hour. Incidentally, this accumulation of water at San Marco, and the subsequent deficit on the other side of the city at Fondamente Nove, this is the reason behind the difference between the two sides of the city, the south and north of Venice, the reason behind those full-on rivers, like in Via Garibaldi or in the canals, flowing at two metres per second. The 12th November really was a combination of particularly unfortunate events.

EB: So we can say that it was caused by truly exceptional events. But lots of people have also asked themselves how much human activity, the dredging of larger canals, the petroli canal, which obviously isn't actually that recent, but maybe the work being done for the mobile dam system is a more recent example, how much of a role these projects have played recently in the increasing frequency of the "acqua alta". Is this actually the case? Do we really have such a decisive role in all of this, or can we also outline the historical cycles of high tides, that in unfortunate circumstances, like those that you have described very clearly in the case of the 12th November, would always lead to events like these?

LC: Firstly, there are no indications that there are any shorter or longer term cycles, that's just a statistical fact. The events that you define as exceptional, precisely because the word derives from the latin "exceptiones", means that they must happen once in a while, so there's little we can do. As for the impact of human activity... I would be cautious about that. There aren't any indications that human activity has changed the frequency of the "acqua alta". There has never been much difference between the measurements of the tide at sea and in the lagoon. Perhaps the petroli canal could have accelerated the ingress of the water to some degree, but more than anything, if it caused any damage it was to the flow of currents within the lagoon itself, obviously. More than anything the increase in frequency of "acqua alta" is due to two contingent factors. Firstly the fact that Venice sinking. The city has sunk not only because of the draining of water that took place after the end of the two world wars – due to which we lost about fifteen centimetres – but there's the whole of the Val Padana area, and Venice in particular, which sinks by a millimetre and a half per year due to subsidence, due to the compaction of sediments upon which the Val Padana lies. And then secondly, there's the rising sea level. The sea has been rising by a millimetre and a half per year for a long time. Now with climate change and the accelerated melting of glaciers, it's currently rising by three and a half millimetres per year, which may not seem like much, but over one hundred years, that's 35 centimeters. The problem is that this is predicted to accelerate, and so by the end of the century the sea level will be 60 centimetres higher than it is now. With Venice sinking by another 13 centimetres, that would mean San Marco would be pretty much under water by the end of the century. This is the problem. The higher number of "acqua alta" events is simply due to the fact that we are getting lower, the water is getting higher, and so what used to be an increase that wouldn't have flooded San Marco, now unfortunately does flood it. There's nothing special going on: it's simply climate change. I wouldn't want to blame climate change for everything, but it's undeniable that the seas are rising faster and faster. The further down we go, the more often we'll get wet.

EB: So, given that you have studied these matters, in the past have there been "acqua alta" events of a similar scale to what we see today? Events that we no longer remember, because maybe they happened centuries ago?

LC: Look, let's go back to the 19th century. The measurements of the tides in Venice began in 1871, right after a big "acqua alta" in 1867, a few months after Venice was unified with the rest of Italy. The famous Podestà Bembo was probably in charge at the time, a name that we see on many inscriptions marking the "Rio Terà" (filled-in canals) around Venice, and he decided to take the bull by the horns and begin measuring. But there are paintings that clearly depict the "acqua alta" in 1850, in 1825, there are also other episodes dating from the 17th century; and let's not forget 1106 when it's said that the water came up to the windows of houses. What caused it that time is still something that's up for debate, some people don't discount it entirely. I personally believe it was a seaquake.

EB: Well, if it really was on that scale ('laughing'), it really must have been a peculiar event...

LC: The windows in 1106 would correspond with coming up to the first floor today.

EB: Cavaleri, our chat has been really enjoyable, but unfortunately we are approaching its end. Luigi Cavaleri, how many generations of Venetians are in your family?

LC: One side of my family has been Venetian for many generations, how many exactly, I don't know.

EB: So we can define you as a true Venetian, and now it's time for the question that we always ask our guests. Which place or situation is close to your heart, Luigi Cavaleri?

LC: Well, I've thought about this... There are two places that I would recommend you visit in Venice, places that aren't visited very often. Let's start with the smaller of the two: San Nicolò dei Mendicoli, an almost unknown church close to the basins, behind the sea port; but it's a jewel for me, because it's said that it was founded in the 8th century, not the 18th century! Later it was destroyed, then rebuilt in the 13th century. It's a little jewel, no one ever goes there and for me it's one of the most beautiful places in Venice. It's one of those beautiful corners of Venice. Incidentally it's on the island of San Nicolò, and that's why it's called Nicolò di Mendicoli, the "mendicoli" meaning mendicant, obviously because they were poor, and "nicolotti" was actually the term used to describe people from that area, who in fact spoke a unique dialect, distinct from Venetian. It's something that surprises people today, but let's not forget that in my youth, it was still possible to distinguish which part of Venice someone came from by how they spoke.

EB: Ah! And the second place that's close to your heart?

LC: The church of San Sebastiano.

EB: Which isn't far from there.

LC: No, it's close. It's one of the examples that I recommend people to visit in order to appreciate the work of a real master. Normally we are accustomed to going to museums and saying: "ah yes, how beautiful." So in short, what is it? Well, the brothers of San Sebastiano didn't have the money to pay a painter, so they held a contest for a young painter, unknown and still a novice, to see who could paint the whole church with frescoes. They didn't end up painting frescoes everywhere, only for the sacristy. If you go into the sacristy you will see eight, ten, twelve paintings by as many different painters. If someone goes inside, looks around and says "that one there!" there's no doubt about it. They've had the fortune of encountering Paolo Caliari, more famously known as Veronese: it's another world, another type of work, another thing altogether. It really is one of the most beautiful examples of what a talented person's work looks like compared to the average "handyman."

EB: Thank you, thank you so much to Luigi Cavaleri, to whom who we now must say goodbye, and who we thank for joining us today, and in just a few moments we will have Fabiana Corami aboard Nowtilus, but for now thank you to Luigi Cavaleri, have a good day.

LC: Thank you and goodbye, it has been a pleasure.

EB: Thank you, it was a pleasure for us too.

Musical interlude - Enrico Coniglio, "Teredo Navalis" (2020)

EB: We've said goodbye to Luigi Cavaleri and now we welcome Fabiana Corami aboard Nowtilus, researcher at the Institute of Polar Sciences CRN-ISP, focusing for many years now, for more than twenty years, on environmental chemistry and other issues linked to the environment, particularly - and this is one of the reasons why we invited her aboard Nowtilus - microplastics, a problem that is obviously very important and multidisciplinary, that also involves social and economic fields, when we take into account the impact that plastic has on the economy for all of us. So let's welcome Fabiana Corami: welcome!

Fabiana Corami (FC): Hello, and thanks for inviting me.

EB: Thank you for joining us aboard, I'll ask you straight away, seeing as we're talking about microplastics, can you tell us what exactly microplastics are? Based on the name we can take a guess, but what is the difference between microplastics and plastics, and how does the presence of microplastics in the environment have a different impact compared to the pieces of plastic that we can perhaps see more easily?

FC: Straight away I'll focus on the last part of your question, namely the pieces of plastic that we find in the environment and what exactly microplastics are. First of all, we have to use the term "microplastics" because there are many kinds of plastic, and often we don't consider certain types of materials that we see around us as plastics, such as textiles or vehicle tyres, but these are a source of plastic too. So when we talk about microplastics, we're talking about something extremely small, and when I say extremely small, I always give an example. Let's take a ruler, one that shows millimetres; we can see the markings for millimetres between the centimetre markings with the naked eye, this means that if we find ourselves in front of a fragment of something of that size, we could see it with the naked eye. So, to paraphrase a writer that's very dear to me, in fact very dear to many people, "what is essential is invisible to the eye," well, microplastics are also invisible to the eye, because they are so small that they can be fifty to one hundred times smaller than those markings that we see on the ruler. And so that means they're invisible to the naked eye. We therefore need to use a microscope or an instrument that contains a microscope in order to see fragments of that size. So it's clear that there's a whole world beyond what we're able to see. Consequently when we evaluate the impact of plastics nowadays, we tend to judge things based on what we can see, because it's clear that the large islands of plastic that

can be found in the oceans have a big visual impact, and therefore represent a problem that we absolutely have to resolve. But we also have to remember that there's also another problem on a microscopic scale that surrounds us, it's in our soil, in our air, it's in our lagoon here in Venice, and its impact can be felt in many ways, and there are many possible sources too. Because we're looking at something that isn't just found in the environment, but is also present within the organisms that we humans then eat. There's subsequently an impact on the whole environment, including mankind, and so there's also an impact on human health.

EB: Obviously in the last few weeks of lockdown, one of the questions that every Venetian has heard being asked more frequently, above all by people who aren't in the city, and a question that I'll now ask you, is the famous: "But is it true that the canals are cleaner now?" Leaving aside the urban legends of dolphins and crocodiles in the canals ('laughing') and who knows what else, clearly this was news that has been picked up by various newspapers, but also in the context of what you have been telling us about, this idea is even more interesting, so I'll turn the question over to you: "Is it true that because of the lockdown the canals are cleaner now?"

FC: Well, this is a question that we have asked ourselves, both me and my closest colleague, Dr. Beatrice Rosso at the Ca' Foscari University, who studies microplastics with me, we started this together. As soon as the lockdown began, being forced to stay at home, we also asked ourselves this question. In reality, rather than the canals being cleaner, they've become more transparent. This is because the sediments of the lagoon were given a moment of respite as soon as the traffic of speedboats and little motorboats in the canals stopped, just as the wheeled traffic on the roads reduced, so did the traffic on the water, and so there was this moment of calm. This downtime meant that the sediments in the lagoon weren't churned up, so the canals definitely became more transparent, and this allowed us to see the presence of fish, which we couldn't previously see due to the murkiness of the water, and this definitely gave us the impression that the water was cleaner, less polluted, but I always say that pollution is something invisible to the eye, something that was shown to be true in recent events, like what happened with the fire in Marghera last Friday. There was an enormous plume of black smoke that accumulated between Marghera and Mestre, and immediately we asked ourselves: "There was this black cloud... what could be in that?"

EB: Right, what could that contain?

FC: What it might contain is something that's being studied by both l'Arpav, through its surveys, and by researcher colleagues. And in my opinion it's important to understand what exactly happened, because the impact will not be felt immediately, but could be felt in the long term. As is often the case in the Venetian Lagoon, and when we talk about pollution in general, there are some impacts that are felt immediately which cause an acute problem, but at the same time there are problems that continue over time, becoming chronic. It's clear that our studies and research into environmental chemicals are aimed at understanding these phenomena, namely the persistence of pollutants in the environment, and this is also one of the problems linked to the presence of microplastics.

EB: Earlier you made reference to something that now we're intrigued by. According to your studies, what are the principal sources of microplastics in our lagoon and, seeing as you have been analysing this for some time, can you tell us something about the state of health – leaving aside the incident in recent days, because it was obviously a very dramatic event, the effects of which we hope will be more contained, but that still needs to be evaluated... However, in terms of microplastics, what is the current state of health of our lagoon?

FC: Well, whatever way you look at it, the current state of the lagoon is a work in progress, because it's early days for the studies, in the sense that our understanding is continually evolving. We are definitely building a good foundation for solid understanding, and therefore for solid measurements too. Because the fundamental thing when conducting research is having data that is really solid, or as we say, robust. The sources are very varied.

EB: Can you give us an example from our daily lives?

FC: Actually together with Dr. Rosso, I approached this problem initially by looking into what comes out of the waste water from washing machines, because we discovered – because you never stop learning – that microplastics can be produced by synthetic textiles. And so the waste water from washing machines, or even from hand washing, can contribute to the presence of microplastics in the environment. Why is this? Because the microplastics, as I was saying earlier, are so small that even though waste water can later be treated in a purification system, in some cases they manage to pass through the filters of the purification process, and we therefore find them in the environment. They become an environmental problem the moment they get into the environment, because as soon as the microplastics, these tiny fragments, end up in the environment, they are passed around as food by microorganisms, and therefore consumed by things like oysters, mussels and clams. And this becomes a problem. Furthermore we find plastic in other uses closer to home: think about the disposable face masks that we're all using at the moment, or the gloves that we have to use: these are also a source of plastic.

EB: And you see many of these strewn about the place...

FC: Exactly. And also the tarpaulins used in agriculture to cover the soil, they're a source of plastic too. The run-off from the soil then carries the particles of microplastics into the lagoon, so as you can see the sources are very diverse.

EB: In your opinion, are there behaviours, even simple ones, which we could all try to adopt on a daily basis that could have a consistent impact in addressing the problem of microplastics?

FC: I'm convinced that every one of us can contribute in some small way, without having to demonize plastic, because plastic does still have important applications and is therefore very useful. Nevertheless, returning to a previous point for example, right now we are obliged to wear face masks and gloves, which are a source of plastic, but as we were saying, the correct way of disposing of these items is fundamental. Just as fundamental as the reduction of single-use plastics for example. I'll give you a classic example: when I get a coffee from a vending machine it comes in a plastic cup. In many other countries, not just in Europe but also in the US for example, in many situations it's possible to avoid using a disposable cup, because you can use your own cup and wash it later. So these are just small changes. And as for the synthetic textiles that I use? Well there are little precautions that can be taken when washing them, high temperatures, or strong detergents can lead to the creation of more fibres, because it's actually the abrasion of the materials that creates these particles.

EB: Those are some interesting precautions that give us an example of how we can help to minimise this microplastic phenomenon little by little. We're coming towards the end of our conversation, which has been very interesting and we could go on for much longer, but time is unfortunately running out. Before we say our goodbyes though, we ask our guests on Nowtilus to tell us about a place or a situation that's close to their heart, to share this with our listeners. From your accent it appears that you're not originally from Venice, but I imagine you've been Venetian for a number of years, and so will certainly have a place or situation that's close to your heart.

FC: I'm an adopted Venetian.

EB: Acquired ('laughing').

FC: Exactly. I did my degree thesis right here in Venice, studying the Venetian Lagoon, and the place that's close to my heart is actually a crossing from the Lido to Sacca Sessola, on one morning at around dawn, on a foggy day in a little boat. And I remember that in addition to hearing the fog horns, seeing shapes appear through the mist, I also caught a glimpse of some skyline every now and again when the fog cleared for a moment, and my first thought was: "Some day, I will come back to this city and I want to live here." And then I did, being able to come back, to work and to continue to carry out my research into the environment. So, yes, let's say that Venice immediately manages to find its way into your heart in strange ways.

EB: ('Laughing') And you're a woman of your word, because you promised yourself something, and you kept that promise. Thank you so much, we thank Fabiana Corami for having joined us aboard Nowtilus. Thank you and goodbye.

FC: Thank you, goodbye.

EB: We'd like to thank Luigi Cavaleri once again for being with us in the first part of the episode. Special thanks also to Enrico Coniglio, who is a musician, a Venetian too, whose music you have been listening to during this episode in the form of some excerpts from an album that will be released in the next few days, titled "Teredo Navalis", which is the name of a small type of worm, or parasite, that burrows into wood, in particular the wood of the "bricole" (wooden piles) and other wooden structures of the lagoon. Thanks of course to all of you for listening to the fourth episode of Nowtilus, and for having listened to TBA21-Academy Radio from Ocean Space, Venice. This was "Nowtilus. Stories from an urban lagoon in the 21st century", a podcast curated by Enrico Bettinello and Alice Ongaro Sartori, in collaboration with Graziano Meneghin for post-production. You can listen to this episode, and both previous and future episodes of Nowtilus on ocean-archive.org or follow us on Soundcloud. A warm farewell from Enrico Bettinello.

NOWTILUS

Storie da una laguna urbana del 21esimo secolo

Episode 5

BOOKS ON THE WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES

with Sabina Rizzardi (Libreria Marco Polo) and Shaul Bassi (Ca' Foscari University)

Available from 19th June 2020, 4pm
TBA21-Academy Radio on Ocean Archive, SoundCloud, Spotify, iTunes and Google Podcasts.

TBA21—Academy Radio

Enrico Bettinello (EB): You are listening to "Nowtilus. Stories from an urban lagoon in the 21st century", a podcast by Ocean Space, Venice. Enrico Bettinello is here to welcome you, or welcome you back aboard Nowtilus, stories, thoughts, notes, and issues concerning the rethinking of Venice today. In our 5th episode of Nowtilus we'll be talking about books and bookshops, and human environmental science, how Venice has always been a breeding ground for interesting ideas and cultural exchange, especially in the spheres of sustainability, books and literature, varied themes that we will be exploring in this episode. And we'll be doing this together with Sabina Rizzardi, who is one of the owners of Libreria Marco Polo bookshop, and who we are about to welcome aboard, and later, in the second part of the episode, we'll be talking to Shaul Bassi, a lecturer at Ca' Foscari University in Venice. For now though, let's not keep her waiting, let's say hello to Sabina Rizzardi, welcome!

Sabina Rizzardi (SR): Thank you for taking me for a ride, Nowtilus.

EB: I hope that the journey with us aboard Nowtilus will take you through some enjoyable places and sensations. The Libreria Marco Polo bookshop, which I mentioned when we were introducing you, is a place that many Venetians, perhaps almost all Venetians, know well, though maybe it's not as familiar to people who aren't from Venice, so let's talk a little bit about it. It's a place that in recent years has cemented itself not just as a virtuous example of how to open and run a bookshop today, at a time when bookshops and the whole publishing industry are facing difficult challenges – it's often said that opening a bookshop isn't a simple matter – but it's also an example of how a bookshop can become a cultural point of reference for a city. And so now I'll ask you, Sabina Rizzardi, how did the Libreria Marco Polo come about, and what are the ingredients for this winning recipe?

SR: Well, the Libreria Marco Polo, in its current form, started in 2015, in September 2015, when three of its partners came together, those partners being Claudio Moretti, Flavio Biz, and me, Sabina Rizzardi. Currently there are actually two Libreria Marco Polo bookshops: one in Campo Santa Margherita and another on the Giudecca island. As for the ingredients for the recipe... The most important ingredient, maybe it will come as no surprise, is definitely Venice. Venice as a place, as a context, in it's quality of life and relationships, these are truly unique characteristics of this city, and I think I can safely say, it's different from any other. Another very important ingredient is the fact that we have always tried to reach out to the people that we like to call "the various inhabitants of Venice," the people who have chosen to live here their whole lives, the people who live here for a few years, like students and professionals, and also the people who decide to live here for a couple of days, that is to say travellers. The bond with Venice is absolutely undeniable, I think of the unity involved in the "No Grandi Navi" (No Big Ships) movement, but also among the other various collaborations that are formed in the city. Just think about the collaborative efforts involving the theatre of Palazzo Grassi, at the universities, for example the "Incroci di Civiltà" (Crossroads of Civilisations) festival at Ca' Foscari University...

EB: Which we will also be talking about in the second part of the episode...

SR: Right, exactly, so I often think about that, and all the other meetings and exchanges, both formal and informal, that have found their place in the bookshop, and that have defined our journey so far. So we definitely have an openness and willingness to listen in terms of shaping our evolution with respect to the city that embraces us and that gives us this opportunity to run our bookshops. Another ingredient that is very important, not only for the bookshop, but to some extent for all businesses in Venice and in other cities, is rent, and therefore landlords. The founder of the McNally Jackson bookshops in New York just recently said that it isn't the multinationals or catastrophic events that put bookshops in danger, but rather stratospheric rental payments. And I can safely say that this really is the case. We feel very lucky to have encountered, twice now, landlords who have decided to make their spaces available to us and to the bookshops, instead of to perhaps a souvenir shop or a bar, of which there are many in the city, and for what we consider a very affordable rent no less. Another ingredient is definitely the choice of books that we have inside.

EB: I was just about to ask you, what kinds of guidelines do you base your choice of books, publishers, and authors around in a bookshop like Libreria Marco Polo?

SR: Well, I'll begin by saying that in the shop there's a choice of fiction, non-fiction and illustration for adults and children, from small to medium-sized publishing houses, known as independent publishing houses, with whom we share a similar worldview. As people and as book dealers, the books we choose, and the messages that these books convey to the people who decide to come through the door, are very important to us. A section that has been very close to our hearts in recent years is our selection of feminist books, of which we have a wide variety, and around which we also set up a festival. And, I have to say as a final ingredient...

EB: Now this cake has a lot of ingredients ('laughing'), so you need a lot to make a good cake, it seems?

SR: Exactly ('laughs'). So last but not least, is us, the bookshop owners. We're all very different people, but it appears that we're a good mix and we're willing to have discussions. So there you have it, I'd say that's the recipe.

EB: Perfect, I hope our listeners have made a note of it, if they want to open a bookshop, those are the ingredients. So, we were talking about the selection of books that you have in the shop. The bookshop is called "Marco Polo," a name that we immediately associate with Venice and with travel. So why this name?

SR: We chose this name for the bookshop because it carries with it the name of the first Libreria Marco Polo, which was opened many years ago in the area around Teatro Malibran, right where Marco Polo's house is said to be located. Today the Libreria Marco Polo is no longer a travel bookshop, but we decided to bring the name with us, and let's say that books have become our preferred form of travel.

EB: And do you sell books by Marco Polo? Is Marco Polo a popular author nowadays?

SR: ('Laughs') Well, I'd say... Marco Polo, you know... Well actually I'll tell you about something really great. We sell and often recommend a beautiful and engaging book about Marco Polo, called "Marco Polo" by Sklovskij. Sklovskij is a Russian author of the early 20th century who decided to write, or rewrite, a version of "Il Milione" (known in English as "The Travels of Marco Polo") by Marco Polo, making it more engaging and understandable to modern audiences, and so it's a title that we really recommend, and we really recommend you all read it too.

EB: And so now we suggest that our listeners take a pen and paper to make notes of some recommendations because I get the impression that we'll be getting a few more, and I'll certainly be asking for some. This first one was "Marco Polo" by Sklovskij, published by Quodlibet. We have talked about travel, and the travels of a Venetian, but as for Venice itself, and bearing in mind the themes of our programme, those being Venice, the sea, and sustainability, if you were to suggest a book on Venice what would it be? For starters do you have books on Venice?

SR: Within the bookshops we have a selection of books on Venice that share characteristics we like, we prefer books that try to read the city to some extent. If you like I can quickly name two or three...

EB: There you go, that's what I wanted to ask you. If you were to suggest one, or even two or three books on Venice - maybe focussing on one afterwards so that you can explain it in a bit more detail - which would you choose?

SR: I absolutely cannot neglect the timeless "Venezia è un pesce" ("Venice is a fish") by Tiziano Scarpa, published by Feltrinelli; I was happy to see that Tiziano Scarpa was a guest on one of your previous episodes of Nowtilus, and I'll pick up on his discussion, when he said that the best books about Venice are the ones by technical writers. I'm very much in agreement with Tiziano Scarpa on the subject of seeing and observing the city, and of it being a vision for a city of the future. On that point I can't not mention "Venezia è una città: come è stata costruita e come vive" ("Venice is a city: how it was built and how it lives") by Franco Mancuso, published by Corte del Fontego, a Venetian publisher, which has never been surpassed in its architectural and urbanistic analysis of the city. I'd also like to suggest a book for children, in which Venice is the main character, called "Un sogno a Venezia" ("A Dream in Venice") by Štěpán Zavřel, published by Bohem Press. "Un sogno a Venezia" is a classic that has endured the test of time, and every time it brings a smile to the faces of its readers both young and old; it's an illustrated book. So what's "Un sogno a Venezia" about? A child wakes up and finds Venice has been flooded by water. The thing that I like about this book is that it has a message for us, the idea that Venice needs to be taken constant care of.

EB: Which is also the message that we try to communicate through our episodes. Any other recommendations?

SR: Right, another suggestion that I should give you is another book by a technical writer, which only recently came out, the title of the book is "Venezia Secolo Ventuno" ("Venice Century Twentyone"). It was written by Sergio Pascolo and it was released by Anteferma Edizioni. I'm happy to to tell you that "Venezia Secolo Ventuno" is a book that was completely "made in Venice." Originally conceived at the IUAV University, it was published in Venice and was even printed in Venice by Grafiche Veneziane. I really liked it because it presents Venice for what it is, at least in my opinion, and that is a very modern city. It's a city that is already prepared for the future, eco-socially prepared, it's a city that's inspiring other metropolises around the world which are investing money and time into changing and becoming a city with a high quality of life like that of Venice. Another important notion is the emphasis placed on Venice as a city of water, we can't forget that, as it's the most important and obvious characteristic of this city, because it not only dictates all of its qualities and merits, but also the list of all the risks that a city of water is constantly subjected to. If you like I can read a passage from the book to give you an idea of what it's like.

EB: With pleasure.

SR: "If we look at the situation from the right perspective, clearing the mental fog induced by the disastrous current conditions, we recognise that Venice is right in the middle of Europe, it's a world heritage site, it's a part of the world in not just an institutional sense, it's a unique jewel in the history of urban spaces. The lagoon and its territory are a natural and scenic wonder situated between the Mediterranean Sea and the Dolomites; it's a port city on the Adriatic at the western end of the Silk Road, it's a metropolitan city of 260 thousand inhabitants, capital of a region of eminent productivity and manufacturing, the city itself a centre of artisan traditions, a hotbed for art of global significance, a city of theatre, of cinema, a great university city." And here is the fateful question: "But how is it possible that a city like this is in a state of crisis, suffocated by tourists, polluted, flooded, suffering from depopulation, dying? How is it possible that we accept this and that we stand by and cynically watch this happening, or even plan for this eventuality?" There you have it, you get an idea of what it's about more or less...

EB: Well, it's something we understand all too well, because during these events we're trying to deal in various ways with some of these issues, issues that are coming at us from every direction, some of these same themes and problems that you read aloud to us - well done, by the way - from Sergio Pascolo's book. So, you were also saying something about the relationship with the sea, and the relationship with the sea and our

oceans is another one of main themes that we turn our attention to on Nowtilus, and also through the activities of Ocean Space. Seeing as you're continuing to intrigue us with these suggestions, at this point I'd like to ask you if, among the books that you sell and recommend, there are any that deal with the sea and the oceans that you might want to tell us about?

SR: Great, well let's move from Venice, the city of water, to a body of water that's a little bit bigger, the seas and the oceans. And incidentally, it's a great choice of book for Nowtilus, given that it's title is "Il libro del mare" ("The book of the sea", titled "Shark Drunk" in English). "Shark Drunk" is written by a Norwegian journalist and writer called Morten A. Strøksnes, edited and published by Iperborea, a publishing house that deals with Northern European literature. So, what's "Shark Drunk" about? The Norwegian, Strøksnes, and his artist friend called Hugo – it's a true story – immerse us into this kaleidoscopic, entertaining account, with lots of twists and turns, of a natural and cultural story set at sea. It's a travel book that begins with a phone call – I'll read you the first page of the book – and what do this pair, Morten and Hugo, want to do? For some time they've had this ambition that they set into motion with a careful plan, and that ambition is to go and catch a Greenland shark. Now, in my head I had an idea of what this creature might be like, but reading the book I discovered that the Greenland shark is one of the biggest and most dangerous animals in the world. The pair think about going in a canoe, just to give you an idea of the tone of this journey. I'll leave it to you to discover whether our two heroes managed to catch the Greenland shark. As I said, I'll read you the opening if you like.

EB: Yes, yes, read us the beginning! We would sit here and listen to you for hours and hours, but unfortunately time flies and we are approaching the end of the first part, but now at this stage we have to find out more about this Greenland shark.

SR: "It took three and a half billion years from the moment the first primitive life forms appeared in the sea to when I got that phone call from Hugo, a Saturday night in late July, while I was at a lively dinner in the centre of Oslo. "Have you seen the forecast for next week?" is all he asked me. For some time we had been waiting for just the right weather conditions, not sunshine or heat, and not even the absence of rain, what we needed was as little wind as possible on that stretch of sea between Bodo and Lofoten. As soon as I heard Hugo's voice, a man who hates using the phone, and calls only to deliver important messages, I understood that the forecast was finally just right. "I'll buy the ticket tomorrow, I'll land in Bodo on Monday afternoon," I told him. "Good, see you." Click." There you go.

EB: And with this "click" we'll have to leave our listeners hanging and curious to find out more about "Shark Drunk". As I was saying, we could happily listen to you for much longer, but unfortunately we now have to say farewell. But we can't let you go without asking you the ritual question of Nowtilus, that we always ask our guests, we ask them about the place or the Venetian situation that holds a special place in their hearts. Sabina Rizzardi, you're not originally from Venice, but how long have you been living here, if you don't mind me asking?

SR: For a good twenty five years now.

EB: So by now you're effectively a Venetian. So, very quickly, what is the place that's close to your heart, Sabina Rizzardi?

SR: I can say with certainty that the place that's closest to my heart is the Fondamenta delle Zattere. Why? Because it's a place where you can see the horizon, I like to go there with my dog, to go there and read. I like to say that the sun is always shining at the Zattere, and it's always springtime, and actually it's always nice to go for a walk there regardless of the season. As I say, I go there all the time, almost every day if the weather allows it, and I also invite you to go for a stroll there too.

EB: Sabina Rizzardi, from Libreria Marco Polo, thank you for joining us, you've been very kind and very generous with your recommendations. Thank you so much, and see you soon!

SR: Thank you!

Musical interlude – Giovanni Dinello, "Venezia Piange" ("Venice Cries") (2015)

EB: So we've said goodbye to Sabina Rizzardi and now we'll be welcoming Shaul Bassi aboard Nowtilus, someone who plays many roles in the field of Venetian culture, not only in an academic context, but in Venetian culture in general, and who we'll say welcome to now. A lecturer in English literature and co-founder of the "Incroci di Civiltà" (Crossroads of Civilisations) Festival, president of Beit Venezia – Casa della Cultura Ebraica (House of Jewish Culture) and director of the International Center for the Humanities and Social Change at Ca' Foscari, and in recent years someone who has been very active in the areas of sustainability and the relationship between literature, society and the environment, in other words the themes that we here at Nowtilus are particularly interested in. Welcome Shaul Bassi!

Shaul Bassi (SB): Hello everyone and thanks for having me.

EB: Thank you for coming. We just listed a lot of activities. Let's try to talk a little about something that came about from these activities, and then I'll let

you explain... I don't know, where shall we begin? Perhaps "Incroci di Civiltà", something that was also mentioned by our guest in the first part of the episode, Sabina Rizzardi, who talked about "Incroci" as one of the moments of collaboration between the various groups and organisations in the city. How many years has "Incroci" been going for now, and what sort of relationships and reflections have come about as a result of this original festival?

SB: Well, "Incroci di Civiltà" started in 2008, so this year would have been the thirteenth edition, we've called it "twelve and a half" just because it's been an unusual year, and I'm pleased to hear that Sabina Rizzardi talked about it, because since the very beginning a relationship with bookshops has been one of the recurring and qualifying reasons behind this literary festival that came about almost by chance. Many authors, many writers from the landscape of international literature have flowed through Ca' Foscari for many years, but Venice had always lacked a true literary festival. In previous years there had been the wonderful experience of "Fondamenta" by Daniele Del Giudice, which was a broader cultural festival, but something that specifically celebrated literature, and literature as a meeting of civilisations, was still missing. Incidentally, If I may share an overlooked anecdote, the name "Incroci di Civiltà" is actually taken from a slip of the tongue by Gianfranco Bettin... a revelation that I now share with Nowtilus! ('laughing')

EB: What a scoop! It makes us very happy when we get the scoop on something!

SB: You'll remember that those years were dominated by the rhetoric of the "Clash of Civilisations" from an infamous book by Samuel Huntingdon, which especially after 9/11 claimed that civilisations weren't talking to one another, that they were destined to collide. Since Venice, and Ca' Foscari in particular, are testimony to the contrary, the idea to call it "Crossroads of Civilisations" came to mind. We went on to propose a collaboration between Ca' Foscari and the Venice Municipality, and talking with the then-councillor Luana Zanella, to whom we owe a great deal, and with Gianfranco Bettin, it was literally a slip of the tongue in which Gianfranco Bettin said: "Yes, then there's this idea of Crossroads of Civilisations..." And I said, "You know what? It's supposed to be 'encounters' ("incontri"), but 'crossroads' ("incroci") is much more effective." So the short version is that this meeting gave us "Crossroads of Civilisations", as a spin-off of an academic conference in 2008, and in 2009 it became its own thing and converged with many local organisations, not just the Municipality. And I must say that after all this time, it's really moving to see how the writers love Venice and Venetian readers, and how the readers respond with such enthusiasm to these writers, both famous and not-so-famous, who come from all over the world.

EB: So, of all the famous and not-so-famous writers that have come and gone, and crossed paths right here in Venice, one of them, more so than any other, has written about and reflected on climate change and migration, mixing in Venice too, someone who has been here among us for a long time, and that's the Indian writer Amitav Ghosh. Would you mind telling us a little about the relationship between Ghosh and Venice, and what has come of this experience?

SB: The story of Amitav Ghosh is emblematic, because in recent times - he was on the jury for the Film Festival on the Lido in 2000 I believe - he came through Venice three times, and these three occasions were important milestones for our thoughts and ideas. In 2014 he attended "Incroci di Civiltà", when he was taking part in a residency in which he had been invited to talk a little about the Ghetto, the importance of the Venetian Ghetto as a location in the city, which has become a metaphor all around the world. He returned in 2017 for the inauguration of our Center for the Humanities and Social Change, for a conference which was very important for us, in which he explored the relationship between literature and climate change. And he came back again last year to present his novel "L'isola dei fucili" ("Gun Island"), in which he brings together the Ghetto, which is one of the Venetian places that the book is set within, the extraordinary theme of the environmental crisis, how it affects a city like Venice, and how environmental matters are inextricably linked to issues around migration. Because Amitav Ghosh discovered during his time in Venice that the largest community of migrants that live and work in Venice are of Bangladeshi origin, who happen to speak the same language as he does, Bengalese, as he is from Calcutta. He discovered that many of these people had to escape from a country, Bangladesh, which is more and more frequently subjected to flooding, only to arrive in a city that now accommodates them, but where flooding is always an impending threat, albeit on a smaller scale, at least for now. And so this extraordinary book, which we absolutely recommend, really is sort of the sum of everything that literature can do, namely helping us to understand climate change, not just as abstract atmospheric conditions, but through its repercussions in everyday life, while also writing about Venice in a very original way, on a global level.

EB: In another book that probably links back to the conference you were talking about before, Ghosh reflects on the fact that the thinking around climate change was for a long time, and still is, mostly absent in novels and the work of writers. What do you think about this assessment, and do you agree with Ghosh's view in identifying this big gap, which he defines as "The great blindness," this lack, this idea of neglecting something even though it's such a big issue that is affecting all of our lives?

SB: I definitely agree with his assessment, especially

with the part that represents something of a provocation. As a great novelist, he says that the history of the novel is the great history of humanity recounting its own subjectivity, of its own individual life, but paradoxically it's also a genre that's incapable of relating the extent of climate change which humanity itself has provoked over the last two centuries, really ushering in the era known by scientists and scholars as the Anthropocene. And yet it's also true that – and Ghosh himself demonstrated this with "Gun Island" – that we require literature for an emotional and cognitive point of view, allowing us to get closer to the facts, not just as scientific data, which of course is fundamental, but in order to understand them in a human context. Ghosh himself recognises that certain apocalyptic genres of science fiction have dealt with these phenomena, but he also says that these phenomena occur on timescales of millions of years, and so, I don't know, maybe an epic is more suited to tell their story. They're full of improbable events, and so this novel too is full of improbable things, while serious novels, the ones that we love to read, are novels that concentrate on more realistic and probable things, so it's a work in progress. What is certain, however – and this is the point of his analysis that we fully embrace, and it's no coincidence that we have built a master's degree around this – is that the world of humanistic culture absolutely must confront and deal with this issue, not like any other issues, but as the big question that affects all the others, and so there's this passage from "The Great Blindness" in which he imagines that in twenty years scholars and humanists of the future will say: "twenty, thirty years ago, why wasn't absolutely everyone concerned about this?" And so our response was to welcome and listen to Ghosh, and to create the first Italian degree in Environmental Humanities here at Ca' Foscari.

EB: This degree, Environmental Humanities, which just recently started and which as you will no doubt explain is known as "Scienze Umane e Ambientali" in Italian, is a degree that really explores the role that the humanities are called upon to carry out in the global challenge facing the environment, and in the creation of a ecological awareness. Can you tell us a little more about this course? How is it structured, who is it aimed towards? We're very intrigued...

SB: Well, the Environmental Humanities is an interdisciplinary field, which indeed brings together many different disciplines. It's existed for some time in English-speaking countries, in Northern European countries, in Germany, as a recognised area of study. In Italy there had been a few experiments, and we decided to repeat the pioneering effort that my colleagues in environmental sciences undertook thirty years ago, creating the first Italian degree in Environmental Sciences, and to repeat this at Ca' Foscari by creating the first master's degree in Environmental Humanities. This means that it's a second level degree, aimed at students who have degrees in a broad range of subjects, so we aim it towards graduates in history, literature, languages, but also in biology, economics, it's a big, big challenge. It's all in English, and this was also a deliberate choice, to make it an international degree, so as to not only potentially create a community of students from all over the world, but also to help Italian students to be more prepared for working within these areas in a European and global job market. In essence the degree is about placing the environment at the centre of thinking and studying it from not only a scientific point of view, but also an economic and legal point of view, and above all from a humanistic point of view. Ultimately this means that our students will find themselves studying – and I think this is quite rare, perhaps more unique than rare – chemistry and biology alongside literature and philosophy, or as an example of one the specific courses, Buddhism and a Methodological Introduction to the Environmental Humanities. This obviously requires a great effort from everyone; our biology course definitely doesn't assume that the students have already done three years of biology, or that vice versa they have already done three years of Hegel and Plato, and so it will very much be an interdisciplinary experiment, but also a necessary effort, because one of the big problems felt by Ghosh is that the segmented attitude towards environmental issues is one of the reasons that it doesn't succeed in changing our imagination. So, if I were to summarise the idea behind our efforts, it's that we want to change people's imagination, to contribute to changing the perception of the relationship between human beings and the environment, and to act upon this in order enact real change, because if things don't change in the next ten years, Venice will sink, and the world in general will become inhospitable.

EB: So, what type of figure or figures, I imagine there are many, do you hope that the course will help to shape? Maybe one student isn't very good at biology, so they'll suffer a little on that front ('laughing'), but maybe they're stronger in other things or vice versa, in the end what sort of opportunities will they come out with?

SB: This is a crucial question. The first answer that I feel compelled to respond with is that if the university only promised existing professional opportunities, it would be lying and be failing in its role, in the sense that the university can't just represent a snapshot of the job market, or merely chase it, it must also anticipate it. When the university has attempted to follow the job market in the past, the job market has simply moved more quickly. So on the one hand we maintain that today there are already professional figures, like environmental educators, cultural mediators or environmental consultants, who aren't yet registered as such in Istat statistics, but who are figures that are increasingly in demand. Recently the Ministry of Scientific Research and Education highlighted the importance of environmental education

as something that will be fundamental in the future for all levels in schools. Cultural institutions, public institutions, NGOs will all increasingly need people who know about the environment, who have a solid scientific foundation, who really understand rising sea levels, CO2 emissions, global warming, but who also know how to translate this scientific data into cultural practices. And so in Museums, organisations that offer education both formally and informally, we believe that those who have so-called "green jobs," a term that I don't really like because as an anglicist I don't like to use English at random, but anyway, I think that it's really important that science and art... And it's not by chance that we're talking here in a space provided by Ocean Space, which is a shining example of this interdisciplinary attitude and approach. By that I mean Ocean Space, which our degree will begin to have a fruitful collaboration with, is a place in which science, art and culture meet, which incidentally are three of the aspects for which Venice is internationally recognised. I'd like to add a joke if I may, one of the reasons why I don't like that people only talk about "green jobs" or the "green economy" when they talk about the environment, is that Ocean Space helps remind us that the majority of nature is blue, not green; so even within the humanities people talk more and more about the "Blue Humanities," so for us too this aquatic and marine angle will be very, very important.

EB: And will the fact that this master's degree programme is based in Venice mean that its participants will examine and utilise Venice as a living laboratory for what they study?

SB: Absolutely, we think that Venice is the ideal place to host this degree in Environmental Humanities, because it's both a place where, alas, climate change, rising sea levels are really recorded and experienced on a daily basis, and it's also a place that has a long tradition of creative reinterpretation between human beings and the environment. Venice wasn't created all at once with the waving of a magician's wand, as a famous romantic poet once said, but it was born through a gradual technological process and a balanced relationship between human communities and the environment, something that in the last century has been put under quite some strain... Venice is a crossroads of civilisations, Venice is also the place in which our students will have tens of potential institutions where they could do internships, where they could practice, one of which being Ocean Space.

EB: So, Venice is also the city where you were born and where you live, so you will definitely have somewhere close to your heart here, and as a ritual we ask our guests to tell us about these places, so now I turn the question over to you for the last part of our chat. Which place in Venice is close to your heart, Shaul Bassi?

SB: The place that's closest to my heart is, going back to Amitav Ghosh's novel, is the Venetian Ghetto, because it's a place that is linked to my family's history, my own personal history, my memories as an individual and as part of a community. But it's also a place that holds great importance for me, because it's somewhere that's still inhabited by Venetians, a place that shows that it is open to the world, thanks to the museums and institutions that open their doors to people from all around the world, yet it's still a place that's truly lived in by residents and by children playing outside. And it's also a place that has become a global metaphor. Alas many people only identify the word and the metaphor of the "ghetto" as a place of segregation, but over the centuries it was also a place where many ideas were born, despite the restrictions and limitations, ideas that then went on to spread around the world. I love it precisely because it's somewhere that carries memories of pain, of segregation, but also of community and creativity, which is also precisely what Venice can offer today in facing the challenges brought about by climate change.

EB: And so thank you to Shaul Bassi for joining us today, we wish him good luck with the Environmental Humanities course that's now underway, and thanks for being with us today.

SB: Thank you!

EB: And thanks again to Sabina Rizzardi who we spoke to in the first part of this episode, and thanks also to Giovanni Dinello whose music you have been listening to in the form of some excerpts from "Venezia piange", a piece made with underwater soundscapes and a string ensemble. As always thanks to all of you for listening to TBA21- Academy Radio from Ocean Space, Venice, the fifth episode of "Nowtilus. Stories from an urban lagoon in the 21st century", a podcast curated by Enrico Bettinello and Alice Ongaro Sartori, in collaboration with Graziano Meneghin for post-production. You can listen to this episode, and both previous and future episodes of Nowtilus on ocean-archive.org or follow us on Soundcloud. A warm farewell to all of you from Enrico Bettinello.

NOWTILUS

Storie da una laguna urbana del 21esimo secolo

Episode 6

CULTIVATE THE CITY

with Michele Savorgnano (Fattoria Urbana Diffusa) and Lorenzo Basadonna Scarpa (Ortofoto)

Available from July 3rd 2020, 4pm
TBA21-Academy Radio on Ocean Archive, SoundCloud, Spotify, iTunes and Google Podcasts.

TBA21—Academy Radio

Enrico Bettinello (EB): You are listening to "Nowtilus. Stories from an urban lagoon in the 21st century", a podcast by Ocean Space, Venice. Enrico Bettinello is here to welcome you, or welcome you back, aboard Nowtilus, stories, thoughts, notes, and issues concerning the rethinking of Venice today. In our 6th episode of Nowtilus we'll be talking about urban green spaces, trees, vegetable gardens, plants, and spaces and ideas relating to the theme of cultivating the city. We'll be doing this together with Michele Savorgnano, who for years has been working with permaculture and social agriculture, and whom we are about to welcome aboard, and in the second part of the episode, we'll be talking to Lorenzo Basadonna Scarpa, a photographer and part of the Ortofoto project, which he'll be telling us about later. As I said, we'll be taking one step at a time, and first of all, with great pleasure, we'll say welcome to Michele Savorgnano, welcome!

Michele Savorgnano (MS): Thank you!

EB: So, Michele Savorgnano, I obviously introduced you as someone who deals with social permaculture; in reality your work is wide-reaching and very interesting, and perhaps you'll be telling us a little more about it. You're a citizen who - and I'll leave the burden of recounting your biography to you - a number years ago, decided to leave your stable full-time job in order to deal with green spaces in the city, social agriculture and permaculture. Michele Savorgnano, let's start by clarifying the terminology for our listeners, what is permaculture?

MS: Ah, permaculture... Lots of people think that permaculture is a type of organic farming. In reality, it's

much broader than that; it's a system for design based on natural elements, a kind of comprehensive design, so the design of systems that take inspiration from the natural world and natural systems, that can then be applied to green spaces, and even social systems. But always using natural systems as the starting point.

EB: What led you to start thinking about green spaces, in Venice in particular?

MS: For me it was out of necessity, I see it as a necessity. Because Venice is ostensibly a place without greenery, it's a city that we could consider almost oriental, in which the greenery is hidden, it's a greenery behind walls - what is known as "hortus conclusus" - and so it's a greenery that remains unseen. It wasn't designed with public green spaces in mind, except in rare cases during the 19th century, but greenery is coveted. People who lack their own green spaces don't see them, and are forced to go and find them. And in my case, along with some other people I came up with the idea of a collective vegetable garden, a social vegetable garden, and together we began looking for land, eventually finding some, and we started on our adventure in urban farming. Our experience began around fifteen years ago, originally called "Spazi Verdi" (Green Spaces), but it no longer exists, it has evolved over time, but it was one of the first examples of urban collective vegetable gardens in Italy.

EB: So, normally we associate the idea of a vegetable garden, especially vegetable gardens that are in some way subsidised or supported by the public, with older people, with pensioners. Why do you think there's this association?

MS: Ah well... This association exists because a vegetable garden is considered as something "extra". What do most people do? They live and work, and then in free time they tend to their gardens, so it's considered as ancillary to their daily lives. On the other hand, there are many examples around the world of urban gardens that have been cultivated by families, by communities, for centuries. But beyond the vegetable gardens, it's a way of being involved in public green spaces, and therefore our own land, and a way of cultivating and allowing our cities to live.

EB: How many years have you been working with urban greenery in Venice for, exactly?

MS: For at least fifteen years.

EB: In these fifteen years, or in more recent years, compared to when you started, how do you think the green urban environment has evolved in our city? Do you think there's more awareness? Has the work that you started received any feedback? If so, who has it come from? In short, how have green spaces evolved in Venice in recent years?

MS: There have been some other projects similar to ours, for example, schools have shown some interest, and so through our experiences, various school vegetable gardens have sprung up, starting right from kindergarten, all the way up to a university garden on Via Torino in Mestre. However, there still hasn't been any real planning or a real rethinking of the potential of green spaces in the city. Public greenery is categorized as whatever gets used by people, used for going for a walk, there are private green spaces, but there's no interaction between them and citizens, and therefore no possibility for citizens to cultivate, to plan, to redesign, to live green, to feel like an active part of this green citizenship.

EB: In recent years, what kinds of spaces have you managed to identify as public greenery? Because maybe an average resident wouldn't think about them, couldn't imagine them, or wouldn't even look at them, but are there places around the city that could easily be converted and identified as new public green spaces?

MS: Well, a couple of years ago, I was asked to participate in a project with WPI, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, which is an American university in Massachusetts, I coordinated a working group of around ten students, and we mapped all the green areas of the city. We classified all the types of greenery: private green space, public green space, municipal heritage, utilised or less-utilised, in good condition or in bad condition. And this survey - which incidentally is also available online, accessible as one of our sub-projects on our website, www.fud.email - takes the form of an interactive map, and we discovered that there are some great opportunities. There are many abandoned or unused spaces, enormous ones too, like the former Italgas premises near Piazzale Roma, and many spaces especially on the Giudecca, where I live. The Giudecca could be thought of as the green island, there are incredible spaces like the former Giardino Eden, which became Hundertwasser, and which is closed to the public. It's more than a hectare of land, closed and boarded up, and it's not even possible to see a space like that.

EB: So are they predominantly private spaces, or are they public spaces too, spaces that the public could make available to people if they were interested?

MS: The public could very easily make them available, it's just a question of good will, and the appetite from the municipal and state authorities. One example, again on the Giudecca, is be the former prison, which also has at least another hectare of land bordering the Hundertwasser villa, Villa Herion, on the Giudecca, which is owned by the municipality and has been closed for years now, and a whole series of small, medium and large spaces, but as I was saying, there just isn't the appetite for this sort of thing.

Musical interlude - Riccardo Sellan, "Écouter le monde" (2017)

EB: So, Savorgnano, the the Venetian environment is very unique, speaking from a natural and climatic point of view. In your many years of experience, which crops and plants are best suited, let's say, to Venice, which can be cultivated successfully, and which on the other hand don't fare so well in the lagoon environment?

MS: Well, if we understand Venice as the Venetian Lagoon, the islands of Venice, it's a very difficult landscape, as we have seen especially in the last two years with the deadly flooding that has taken place. I, for example, cultivate some vegetable gardens on the Giudecca and I also help some older people to cultivate these gardens, and I do so by implementing a unique system, let's say a synergetic system, in which the plants are mixed together and help each other. This year I realized that my neighbours' gardens, which are cultivated in the "classic" way, removing as many weeds as possible, keeping only the plants that they're interested in, well, the land is completely white with salt, which rises to the surface. On the other hand, in my gardens, where the plants have autonomously extracted the salt through their roots and it has been brought to the surface, you can see that the leaves are white with salt, but the soil is also reacting to a very unique, very extreme stress. The plants that survive are the ones that have a high resistance to salinity, so all the halophilic plants, or halophytes as they're called, so they're resistant to saltiness, and the plants that we cultivate in our gardens are all similar, cabbages and cauliflowers - so the brassica family - and other plants like potatoes. At the beginning of the 19th century, the potato was a plant that was already well-known after arriving from America, but it wasn't used all that much; the Austrians experimented with the potato right on the Giudecca in Campo Marte, and this was where the first experiments with potatoes took place in Italy.

EB: Ah! A truly pioneering moment in farming! What about flowers and other plants?

MS: So, flowers and plants... You need to be very careful, because growing plants in the city means that you'll be tending a garden surrounded by palaces. So even if you have a south-facing garden, it's often as though it were north-facing. You either have the shade from these palaces, or the wind that blows between them, which cools down the soil. Or on the other hand there are many people who grow plants on their roof terraces, and it's hard to do so up on those terraces. I'm conducting a study, I'm trying out various plants, to avoid using the typical ones that you often see around Venice, like pittosporum, oleander, plants that are somewhat "undervalued", that everyone has in their gardens and we can do some interesting experiments with this. In 16th-century Venice there were more than 500 botanical gardens. Every spice merchant, every doctor, every pharmacist, had their own little botanical garden - Venice was of course the crossroads of all kinds of goods, even plant seeds too, and so it was a paradise for plants. The last botanical garden closed almost a century ago, and there's no trace of any sort of experimentation with plants.

EB: That's very interesting, thank you. In the last episode of Nowtilus, we were talking with Shaul Bassi, professor Bassi, and he told us about this project, this new master's degree course at Ca' Foscari University, in Environmental Humanities. Looking through the project, we noticed that you're also involved. Could you tell us about your involvement with the project at Ca' Foscari?

MS: I got involved because permaculture is fundamentally experiential. What do I mean by that? The theory is not detached from the practice, there's always practice. Everything has to be proven empirically. Often at universities, especially in Italy, everything is based on theory and the practice comes later once you've finished university, and students find themselves unprepared. In our case, it's a question of creating a sort of center, we don't know whether it would be a single place or multiple experimental places spread around the city, dealing with cultivation, not in the broad sense, in taking care of places, caring for the soil, planting flowers and other plants, and so on, but rather to care for a place means above all letting it care for itself, giving students an opportunity to create. For example, courses for children or working on designing places that are suited to cultural and artistic activities, playing with nature and allowing nature to become ever more prevalent in our lives.

EB: So do you think that a greater awareness within our city, and a greater enthusiasm for this opportunity to cultivate the city, can help the city to have greater autonomy? By that I don't mean complete self-sufficiency in food production, but an awareness of our own resources, a renewed relationship with nature and our own environment?

MS: Look, during the time of the Serenissima, there were registers that are now held in the State Archive, which anyone can go and look at, and from those registers the Venetians understood exactly what came in and went out of the city every day, what was cultivated and in what quantities, and therefore they precisely understood the yearly, and even daily, demand for their population. We, on the other hand, have our lagoon - and this is also within our mapping - a whole series of fields, and by cultivation I mean both land and water, more than 90 percent of our urban space is water. With this space we have the opportunity to cultivate many things, and above all plan and design and think for example, really starting with the weaker links in the chain. Starting to grow, for example, for school cafeterias, for the hospitals, for the people who need healthy food with low associated

food miles. Doing this would create lots of jobs, because it's not just a question of farming, but also of distribution, transformation, it would create what is now known as "circular economy" or "blue economy", and so things could change. Starting with the primary industry, we could find a way to change our economy.

EB: Thanks so much for these suggestions, they're really illuminating. We are, however, unfortunately approaching the end of our conversation. But before we say goodbye, as we do with all of our guests on Nowtilus, I'll ask you which place in Venice is closest to your heart, Michele Savorgnano?

MS: Well, the place that's close to my heart is somewhere that's very important to me, since it's my home: it's my front door and the windows of my house. I recently moved to the Giudecca, to Campo San Cosmo, and right in front, just a few meters from my house, there was a particularly colourful scene, because we're all familiar with the habit of some dog-owners, leaving these lovely multi-colored plastic bags all over the place to brighten up our walks. In seeing this disaster – in permaculture we say that everything starts at your front door – I started to create a little flowerbed. I even applied to the municipality's "adopt a flowerbed" scheme more than a year ago – I still haven't received a response, I'm talking to you, Mr. Mayor and the administrators at the Environment Office – and so I started to put my mark on the place, I sowed some seeds, just some little seeds. And so a flowerbed was born. My neighbors had already started to tend to this "campo" (field, but also used as the word for a piazza in Venice), and it's one of the few true "campos" as it actually has some grass. Two weeks ago, together with all the children in the "campo" we tilled another flowerbed, and our "campo" is blooming even more. I've noticed that in a short amount of time, when you start to take care of a place, people start to respect it, and even the harshest of passersby thank you, because you've made somewhere more beautiful, they smile, it brings them happiness, it's amazing.

EB: It brings a smile to our faces too and we're happy that you were able to join us as a guest on Nowtilus. Thank you to Michele Savorgnano and good luck with your hard work in cultivating the city, it's something that we really need. Thank you Michele Savorgnano!

MS: Thank you.

Musical interlude – Riccardo Sellan, "Écouter le monde" (2017)

EB: We've said goodbye to Michele Savorgnano, and now we'll be welcoming Lorenzo Basadonna Scarpa aboard Nowtilus, photographer and part of the "Ortofoto" project, which was exhibited at the a.topos gallery in Venice, a small but very interesting gallery in the Arsenale area. This project was exhibited until the middle of June to make up for time lost during the lockdown, as it was originally planned for the months when it was impossible to visit. So welcome Lorenzo Basadonna Scarpa!

Lorenzo Basadonna Scarpa (LBS): Thank you, good morning to everyone.

EB: Good morning to you too. "Ortofoto", this project with a composite name, what's it about and how did it start?

LBS: "Ortofoto" is a project that started in summer 2019, beginning with an idea that I had together with the Maps on the Luum collective, made up of Giovanni dal Sasso and Lucrezia Lamera, an idea to document and take a census of the trees in the public green spaces of Venice, starting with the historical centre. It's a project composed of two parts, one part concerning pure photography documentation of the trees, and another part that's more topographic, which Giovanni and Lucrezia have curated, to create a sort of index and survey of all the places that have been documented in the project.

EB: So, let's talk about trees and green spaces, which is the main focus of our episode. If I've understood correctly, we're talking about individual trees, or trees that form pinewoods or areas, like those at the Giardini or on the island of Sant'Elena, which are richer with visible trees when compared to the rest of the city.

LBS: The criteria we selected included solitary trees or individual rows that can be found in the "campos", along the canalside promenades or in the alleyways of the city. We excluded the parks or the public green spaces that are generally recognised in the city, precisely because we wanted to place a particular focus on these aspects of greenery, these trees that grow between of paving slabs, in the middle of the stone of the city, like elements of nature that manage to grow and live in a context that is ostensibly completely in contrast with their existence.

EB: Well, in reality the perception that people have of Venice, which is actually a city that's rich with gardens – we were even talking about this with our previous guest – gardens that are perhaps closed to the public, unseen by the people who pass by, there's the impression that there aren't many trees around. But on the contrary, how many have you managed to survey or identify in your project?

LBS: In the last stage of documentation that we conducted, which includes only the historical city and for the moment doesn't include the Giudecca or the other islands, we've counted more than 250, many more than we expected. The geoportal of the Venice Municipality was extremely useful in creating our census, as every plant-related feature is recorded in the land register with extreme precision. We expected

far fewer, but thanks to this tool we really found a lot of trees that offer a bit of shelter to tourists and residents in the city alike. We're very lucky that a tool like this exists. At the beginning we tried to use the satellite images from Google Maps, but it was impossible to distinguish between private courtyards and public spaces. Using this other tool instead, we could be really certain that what we were documenting was public property.

EB: So, the trees that are present in private properties, gardens, are excluded from this, right?

LBS: Yes, that's right, just public spaces.

EB: So what criteria did you employ when you went on to photograph these trees?

LBS: We tried to create as objective a view as possible of the trees. We chose a medium that perhaps wouldn't immediately be considered as the most suitable for photographs of vegetation, because we used black and white photography, in a medium format, reflective, which required staying in place we were documenting for at least an hour, tree by tree. We didn't set out to exclude the presence of people or those who were making use of the trees, and so there are people in some photos and none in others, because no one happened to be passing by at that moment, and so from that perspective we didn't try to limit ourselves.

EB: Why did you choose black and white, a style that people might think would be unsuitable for reproducing the "greenness" of the tree, which is a characteristic that, if I'm not mistaken, you'll be telling us about, it's an element of color that's utilized in the survey.

LBS: Yes, you're right, we reserved the black and white only for the photographic documentation, above all we chose it for contrast, making it a bit easier for the structure of the tree and the foliage to stand out separately from the background of the city, because by using specific color filters it's possible to make the green or the brown of the trunk really stand out. Precisely because the photographic documentation is monochromatic, we chose to use color in the photographic survey. On this large map, which measures 100 by 70 centimeters, acrylic green in particular was used to signify the places that are currently being shown and that have been documented.

EB: You mentioned before that the type of photographic technique that you implemented required, and continues to require, quite some time for exposure and framing, it's a rather long time to spend in the places where these trees are located. During the time you spent around these trees, did you end up learning any additional history, any stories linked to individual trees?

LBS: Yes, we definitely realised, even though this project has been going for less than a year, that the things we have documented are already changing. One such instance that comes to mind, for example, is the large tree that was located near the passenger terminal at San Basilio, a really big mulberry tree, more than 15 meters tall, which offered shade to both the passengers on the boats arriving in Venice, and of course to the workers at the port. This tree, shortly after we documented it, only about a week later, was cut down to make space for the new bridge that links the terminal to the Fondamenta delle Zattere towards San Basilio. That was one of the first losses we witnessed.

EB: Did you know that the tree was going to be cut down, or was it pure chance.

LBS: We saw that there was some work underway on the bridge because of some structural problems, but we would never have imagined that they would touch such a large and important tree.

Musical interlude: Riccardo Sellan, "Écouter le monde" (2017)

EB: I realise you're not a botanist, but I imagine that in becoming more and more familiar with these trees, you've learned to recognise and classify them. Without venturing into scientific detail, what types of trees have you encountered most frequently in the city?

LBS: Among the most common species, we've seen a large number of poplars, sycamores, and a species that's quite unique, hackberry trees, which are often found on the mainland.

EB: The hackberry. And did you see these trees at different times of the year? With more leaves, with fewer leaves, bare or in bloom, or did you choose to take photographs of all of them during the same stage of flowering or leaf development?

LBS: The first part of our documentation took place in the summer, because we were preparing an exhibition which would have been hosted at Palazzo Mora, an "Insiders" show curated by Emma Soletti, and so for the moment we only have the documentation from the summer, when the trees were very leafy and had thick canopies. However we also intend to do a winter stage, to go and recapture just the structures of the branches and the trunks that also hold some real significance, for both aesthetic and documentary purposes.

EB: Of the trees that you have surveyed, have you photographed them all, or is this still a work in progress?

LBS: It's still a work in progress. We're still missing many, because there are so many subjects, it takes

a lot of time to go and take photographs of them. Up to now we have exhibited only around ten of the 125 or so photographs that we've taken during the first edition. Our idea is that this is a continually developing project. First of all, we would like to finish covering the historical city, and then maybe open up to the Giudecca and then the other islands.

EB: Did you also have an opportunity to meet people who live in the areas where these trees are located, and did they in any way tell you, or could you infer from them, any particular relationships with the trees? What's the relationship like between these trees and the people? Who benefits from these trees? Who rests beneath them? Do children play around them? Can you also tell us a little about the human aspects linked to these trees?

LBS: Clearly like in many areas of Venice, the kind of people that benefit from the trees depends on the flow of the city's tourism in those areas. In areas that are less frequented by mass tourism, like Castello, near the Giardini or the Arsenale for example, or certain areas in Cannaregio, towards Sant'Alvise, the trees and the greenery are still enjoyed by the resident population. To give you an example, one of my favourite tres, the large hackberry which is right in Campo delle Gorne is a focal point for all the houses that look onto the square, the people, both young and old, go there to read a book, to get some fresh air during the summer, sitting on the benches that have been made beneath the tree.

EB: Campo delle Gorne – for those who might not be very familiar with some areas of Venice – is a fascinating square, directly next to, in fact facing onto a small canal that encircles the walls of the Arsenale of Venice, so it's also very close to the gallery where you held the exhibition. It's something of a "kilometer zero" tree... Is there an interesting story behind this tree?

LBS: Yes, it was the tree that started the project. The story is a bit sad, like the one before. The residents built some small benches, little areas to better make the most of the shade produced by the tree, but when we went to document it, a work site for fiber optic internet had enclosed the tree, and when it was eventually taken away, all the wooden structures had been removed, leading to the loss of something that allowed the residents to enjoy it.

EB: Come on, hopefully the stories about these trees aren't all sad, hopefully the residents, given their strong and personal relationship with nature and the place where they live, maybe they'll slowly start to rebuild their benches and tables around the tree. So, how will this project evolve, what ideas do you have for developing the project?

LBS: We have ideas about making it even more precise from a topographical perspective, adding details to the maps created by Giovanni e Lucrezia for every photo. We're working on and starting to get underway with the documentation for an expanded second edition. For the moment we've only set out the scope of the exhibition, but were open to anything that might come about as a result of this project.

EB: Well, thank you for everything so far. The project is really interesting, and we hope to see it soon in another exhibition, and to continue to watch how it develops. As always, we ask our guests on Nowtilus to tell us about a place in Venice that's close to their hearts, it could be a moment, or a situation too, and to share this with our listeners. So I'll ask you too, which place is closest to your heart?

LBS: Well, we've already talked about it, it's the tree in Campo delle Gorne.

EB: We talked about it even without knowing that it would come up as your favourite place! Why is it so close to your heart?

LBS: It gives me a very unique sense of peace.

EB: Thank you! Well, good luck with the "Ortofoto" project, and thank you to Lorenzo Basadonna Scarpa for having joined us aboard Nowtilus.

LBS: Thank you too.

EB: Once again we'd like to thank Michele Savorgnano, who was with us in the first part of the episode, and thanks to the musician Riccardo Sellan, whose music you've been listening to throughout the episode in the form of some excerpts from a soundscape composed in 2017 for the "Ecouter le monde" project by Radio France Internationale. As always, thanks to all of you for listening to TBA21-Academy Radio from Ocean Space, Venice for the sixth episode of "Nowtilus. Stories from an urban lagoon in the 21st century", a podcast curated by Enrico Bettinello and Alice Ongaro Sartori, in collaboration with Graziano Meneghin for post-production. You can listen to this episode, and both previous and future episodes of Nowtilus on ocean-archive.org or follow us on Soundcloud. A warm farewell from Enrico Bettinello.

NOWTILUS

Storie da una laguna urbana del 21esimo secolo

Episode 7

THE EVOLUTION OF FISHING IN THE LAGOON

with Luigi Divari and Matteo Stocco (Metagoon)

Available from July 17th 2020, 4pm
TBA21-Academy Radio on Ocean Archive, SoundCloud, Spotify, iTunes and Google Podcasts.

TBA21—Academy Radio

Enrico Bettinello (EB): You are listening to "Nowtilus. Stories from an urban lagoon in the 21st century", a podcast by Ocean Space, Venice. Enrico Bettinello is here to welcome you, or perhaps welcome you back, aboard Nowtilus, stories, thoughts, notes, and issues concerning the rethinking of Venice today. In our 7th episode of Nowtilus we'll be talking about fishing in the lagoon, how it has changed, how the relationship between the city and the lagoon is changing in recent decades, and what the people who are in close contact with the lagoon, who work with it every day, think about it. In this episode, we'll be doing this in the company of Luigi Divari, who for many years has been involved in fishing and the lagoon, has written wonderful books, has painted beautiful watercolors, and whom we are about to welcome aboard, and later, in the second part of the episode, we'll be joined by documentary filmmaker Matteo Stocco, who will be telling us about a very original project called "Metagoon". But for now, let's say welcome to Luigi DIvari: welcome!

Luigi Divari (LD): Hello, thank you.

EB: In my brief introduction I was saying that you are involved in fishing and the lagoon, and that you're a writer of books about fishing traditions and navigation, and that you paint beautiful watercolors.

Unfortunately, we're limited to sound, so we can't see them, but I hope that our listeners will try to see them for themselves...

LD: At the exhibition at Candiani, for the watercolors.

EB: There's an exhibition at the Centro Candiani that people can visit...

LD: Where people will be able to visit, maybe...

EB: Yes, of course, they will be able to visit, we're always optimists! In the last few weeks the museums and exhibitions have been reopening, so let's hope that people will be able to see these watercolors of fish and traditional boats again soon. Luigi Divari, how did your fascination with fishing come about?

LD: It came about because destiny led to me being born in Castello, and not in San Polo or near the Frari church. If I had been born in San Polo, perhaps none of this would have happened. But being born in Castello in the late-forties, from a young age I always had the chance to see fishing boats, which came and went along the many canals of East Castello, of San Pietro di Castello and the canals around there. They were mostly boats from Chioggia, with the odd boat from San Pietro in Volta too, which all came to fish in Venice and then stayed in the area, sometimes for weeks at a time. And so ever since I was a child, I passed the time by watching these strange characters, these fishermen and their boats.

EB: Why do you say they were strange? What was strange about them?

LD: Ah, well it was strange that even from a distance you could tell that they weren't Venetians. They dressed differently, spoke differently. They went around wearing clogs or boots or were even barefoot in the summer. And they were full of character. And so I was particularly interested in their lives.

EB: Did you ever speak to these fishermen? Did you ever chat with them?

LD: I made friends with the boys, because in those days they used to bring their sons aboard too, when they reached 12 or 13, sometimes even at 11. As soon as they finished elementary school, many ended up on the boats with their fathers.

EB: To help out?

LD: To help, yes, but it was real work! Like in the countryside or in the mountains, the children really worked. And so I was very jealous of them, because I had to go to school in the morning, and they went fishing instead, and I considered them to be very lucky.

EB: Who taught you to fish? Was it them?

LD: All Venetian children have some experience with fishing, as children we used to go along the canals or on the Riva dei Sette Martiri with our rods to fish for "palanelli", for gobies, and then when we slowly perfected the technique, we began to go out on boats. It was a long process, a long fishing resume, but learning to fish takes years, in fact I'd say that it's impossible to learn everything. I'm over seventy years old now, but even nowadays I learn new things.

EB: How did the fisherman fish in those days, and how did they think differently compared to nowadays? I imagine the techniques were different back then...

LD: In the fifties they were still fishing as people did in the 19th century. The only difference was that by then many of the boats were motorized, mostly after the war, and so everything was simpler because they had eliminated the hard work associated with using oars and sails, with a motor everything was very easy. Then nylon came in as a replacement, and that was another even bigger step. But the fishing systems and the nets were more or less the same as they had been in the previous century.

EB: So, despite your jealousy of the fishermen's children's lives, at first you didn't work on the sea, did you? Can you tell us about this?

LD: Obviously one passion leads to another. So having to continue to go to school, because it was important to go to school back then, I went to middle school and then I said to myself: what do I need to do in order to breathe the sea air? I'll go to the Nautical School. And so, being only a few hundred meters from my house by the way, I went to the Nautical School. But it wasn't what I expected, I didn't get much experience, because I realised immediately that it was already too late for me to be a true sailor, because I would have liked to sail on brigantines, on schooners, but instead I only had the chance to work on tankers, and that just wasn't the same thing. And so after a few years I started looking for a job on the land.

EB: But then, at a certain point...

LD: On the land, with the advantage of working from Monday to Friday, on Saturdays and Sundays I could indulge all my passions: sailing, nautical things, fishing, all that kind of stuff.

EB: So listen, while you were telling us about fishing in the 1950s, you said that it was technically closer to fishing in the 19th century, but what happened after? When did the acceleration of changes in general fishing techniques and lagoon fishing take place?

LD: Well, in the fifties, actually I'd say in the sixties, there was a boom in fishing. There had been many people who had been poor fishermen, who suddenly got rich, it was the only time in human history that

fishermen became rich. Between the sixties and seventies, when they had the opportunity to strengthen the efforts of fishing enormously, with trawlers, with stronger nets than were really necessary, which ten years or so later went on to completely empty the Adriatic Sea of many species, almost irreversibly. Now there's nothing left, and now fishing is an industry that's dying out, if nothing changes it will stop entirely, because it's becoming very difficult.

EB: Let's try to explain what has changed for our listeners. You said that there were species that have been wiped out, I imagine that there are now species that on the other hand...

LD: Well, for a start, beginning on a smaller scale, the lagoon has changed enormously. Let's not forget that between the sixties and the seventies there was a lot of industrial pollution present in the lagoon, and the effects of this we still probably feel today. Despite these pollutants, also made up of micropollutants, the water is beautifully clear, the lagoon looks perfect, but the amounts of chrome, tin, mercury and dioxin that are present have effects on the long term, and some organisms disappear or have difficulty in reproducing, and so the fish that feed on these things have difficulty growing. So the environment has changed greatly, and so has the sea.

EB: Can you give us the names of some fish that used to be caught regularly because they were previously present in large numbers, but that today are no longer around, and vice versa?

LD: The classic fish of the lagoon, the eel, used to be caught by the ton, but today if you were to catch one it would be worthy of an article in the newspapers: "Someone caught an eel!" Flounders, of which there used to be millions in the lagoon, are still present, but catching them is a rare and exceptional event. The "gò" (goby), is a fish that used to be found in unlimited quantities, and it used to live in the canals too, but now in order to collect a kilogram of them you would need to go on a scientific expedition to find them, and above all they don't get as big as they used to, it seems to be the effect of some sort of dwarfism.

EB: They don't grow to the sizes they used to because they're caught earlier, or because they just don't grow?

LD: No, nobody fishes for them, there's no longer any sort of professional fishing of the "gò". While back then there used to be whole families on San Pietro in Volta, Pellestrina and Chioggia that lived off fishing "gò" exclusively, year-round. Now nobody fishes for them, but very few are now left, and they only grow to half the size that they used to.

EB: That's really interesting. And on the other hand, what do you find today that wasn't around before?

LD: Something that we didn't have previously is an immeasurable quantity of sea bream compared to before. It used to be that catching five or six was a photo-worthy catch. Now people catch thirty, forty, fifty of them, a kilogram each, seven hundred grams, you wouldn't even see those sizes in your dreams back then. We also have new species, there's the bluefish, it's a beautiful fish and it's pretty good to eat too, but there was a time when it wasn't caught, yet today it's quite common. We also have a very recent arrival, the blue crab.

EB: The blue crab? And where does this blue crab come from?

LD: The blue crab is an American crab, it's beautiful, and above all it's one of the few invasive species that's actually very good. Because usually the species that come from abroad are all of poor quality, but the blue crab is actually very good to eat.

EB: Has it adapted well, or is it like the shrimp from Louisiana that eat everything?

LD: No, it's adapting very well, it's now very common in the Po river delta, in the bay of Goro it's thriving, but year after year it's becoming ever more common in the lagoon, and it's actually very big, it's not just some little crab.

EB: So it could become the new "granseola" (spider crab) of the 21st century?

LD: Yes, it has some good qualities. In America it's a very important commercial product in Washington state, and they make "mołeche" (soft-shelled crab) with the blue crab in America. And just last year they found blue crab at Rialto.

EB: Wonderful! But let's talk about Rialto, thanks for moving our conversation in the direction of the fish market there. We spoke about the Rialto fish market and how it's changing in a previous episode. From your observations and research, can you tell us a little about how the fish market has changed in the last century?

LD: Like all markets, Rialto is based on the number of shoppers. Because if you were to build a big market and there weren't any shoppers, the market would have to become smaller. Rialto is a market that no longer has many shoppers because Venice has become a village with very few locals, who don't eat much fish, and so the market has shrunk down to what you see today.

EB: Sorry, but in terms of fish consumption for example, could you give our listeners a number, some sort of detail to help them understand?

LD: Right now I don't know how many kilograms per capita are consumed in Italy.

EB: No, of course, but just to give us an idea of the proportion.

LD: I have the data, which is fairly easy to access, on the quantities of certain common fish species that were commercialized in the early 20th century. There's a document from 1905 in which there's a whole investigation into all the fish species that were present in the Rialto market, and there are astonishing numbers associated with the tons of "mołeche", tons of sardines, tons of "gò", of sea snails, of mullet. 650 tons of mullet for example.

EB: The stuff of dreams today...

LD: I don't think they aren't even eaten in most of Italy. Maybe that's where the myth that the Venetians always eat fish came from, because today people who come to Venice always want to eat fish. In reality, beyond selling tons of fish every day at Rialto, they used to sell tons of every other type of food, because Venice used to have 160 thousand working mouths to feed, and they ate more than the tourists eat today. These days a tourist is satisfied by a couple of little sandwiches, but that wasn't always the case.

EB: So, of the fish that we see in the market today, what percentage is locally sourced or imported?

LD: Well, fish currently make some long migratory journeys. So, the fish in the northern Adriatic end up in Switzerland, in Milan, in the five-star restaurants of northern Italy, and here in Venice we get shrimp from Argentina, monkfish from Scotland, John Dory from England, scallops from Brest, spider crab from Spain, and so on. Basically, if it wasn't for planes and trucks, nothing would ever get to the market here. Apart from clams, sardines, "gradusoi", and a few other species.

EB: And a few calamari that come from Caorle every now and again.

LD: Much of the calamari come from South America.

EB: Oh dear... Well, we're approaching the end of our chat, even if I would happily continue chatting with you for hours on end, because you are truly an encyclopedia of information and stories. But I can't say goodbye to you before asking you, a true Venetian as you are, which part of our city or our lagoon is closest to your heart.

LD: Ah, well Venice as a whole is close to my heart, because I consider myself truly lucky to have been born here. If I'd been born in Abbiategrasso it would have been a completely different life...

EB: ('Laughing') Let's hope that no one is listening in Abbiategrasso!

LD: I've never actually been there, but that's what I think ('laughing')... However, my connection to the sea air, to the water with that marine air, means that often in the winter, especially when there are storm surges, I like to go for a walk up to the lighthouse and the breakwater at San Niccolò, because it's like being at sea, right on the water, because the breakwater extends right out into the Adriatic, it's an ideal place.

EB: Thank you Luigi Divari, we'll say goodbye, thanks for joining us.

LD: Thanks to you too.

EB: And good luck with the reopening of the exhibition at Centro Candiani, where your watercolours can be seen!

LD: Thank you, goodbye!

EB: Goodbye!

Musical interlude - Nicola Privato, "EdiTidE" (2020)

EB: And now we've said goodbye to Luigi Divari, we're going to welcome Matteo Stocco aboard Nowtilus. Matteo Stocco is a documentary filmmaker and the creator of a very interesting project, which he'll be telling us about now, called "Metagoon". Matteo Stocco, welcome!

Matteo Stocco (MS): Thank you Enrico, hello. So, "Metagoon" is a project that stems from an experience that I had years ago with Bevilacqua La Masa, I had the chance to take part in a residency there, and so I decided to investigate themes relating to the Venetian Lagoon, an environment that is very close to me, but aspects of which I had never had a chance to study and explore. So what happened next? I began to explore a broad network of contacts, people who I might want to interview, and from there, step by step, I prepared and filmed a series of interviews with people who were directly linked to the lagoon, such as fishermen, scientists, and university researchers.

EB: I see. Would you mind telling us what "Metagoon" means? I imagine it's a composite word, but where did it come from?

MS: Yes, I realise that it's a name that doesn't immediately evoke anything in our language, Italian, it could be that I'm shooting myself in the foot to some extent, but it seeks to make a statement about communication, in the sense that this project, from my point of view, obviously has to resonate with the local population, and then widen the scope beyond the Italian language, but in reality it stems from English. The name is divided in two halves: "Meta" and "goon", taken from the English words "lagoon" and "meta", because my intention was to talk about an environment, let's call it an environment, that's ephemeral, because the lagoon as we see it today

exists due to the efforts that people went to in order to maintain it in the past. As many people will know, in the past the Republic of the Serenissima managed to deviate the course of rivers thanks to great engineers – perhaps they weren't called engineers at the time, but experts in hydraulic engineering...

EB: Yes, we talked about this in previous episodes. I didn't want to interrupt you, but our listeners are already somewhat familiar with this aspect of our lagoon's history. But maybe, beyond the name, they're curious about what sort of criteria you use, or have used, in tackling this project – can you tell us if it's a work in progress? What were the criteria that you implemented when conducting your interviews?

MS: Thanks for asking me that, because it's a project that is based almost entirely on the content of the interviews, and the interviews were conceived as mirror images, so to speak. By that I mean that we have the point of view, the testimony of a scientist and their research on the lagoon, but on the other hand we also have the non-scientific, but completely experiential evidence of a fisherman, or the helmsman of ship, or a birdwatcher. So there are different perspectives of the same space, sometimes at complete opposite ends of the spectrum, but with some points where they overlap. So you see that even the experience of an old fisherman offers us information that then gets used and studied by the scientists.

EB: And so, returning to the word "meta" that we left hanging for a moment, what does it mean?

MS: Thanks for bringing us back to that. The "meta" refers to a desire to go beyond the space of the lagoon as we see it or perceive it, and so the project, because it is a project more than just a documentary, is about communication, to convey the idea of a lagoon beyond what we experience and beyond the everyday impressions that a person might settle upon.

EB: So listen, we're intrigued by the content of these interviews, these perspectives on the lagoon. Can we listen to one perhaps? Would you play one for us, an excerpt, obviously. How long are the individual interviews normally?

MS: It depends, they vary quite a lot. Sometimes they last just three minutes, sometimes they reach ten minutes in length. We try to keep them within a standard range though.

EB: And given that our time is particularly limited, what could we listen to?

MS: From my selection of interviews, I would suggest ('laughs') my conversation with Dario Smania, who is an external collaborator in the Lasa research group, the Environmental Systems Analysis Laboratory at the Industrial Engineering Department of the University of Padova.

EB: Well let's listen to this excerpt.

Excerpt from "Metagoon", Interview with Dario Smania
Dario Smania: ('Sounds of waves and a motorboat in the background') "For example, if all the sandbanks were to disappear, what would be left? A great gulf filled with barracudas thanks to climate change? Now of course I'm deliberately exaggerating to make a point... But in fifty years it could well be that there are barracudas out here at sea, they do come from the Red Sea after all. There are quite exotic species of birds, fish, and vegetation that live on the sandbanks. There are also plants there that are completely foreign to this environment. Everything is in a constant state of change, and the kind of evolution that we can expect here means that in a few decades the sandbanks will certainly disappear, and this will become a lake. If it turns into a lake we could find opportunities by offering kite-surfing, doing a lot of water sports, but we will lose the typical characteristics that keep us in touch with our traditions, not just for nostalgia, but because it gives us some support from the point of view of the people who live here. Otherwise Burano will become a Disneyland for tourists, and the fishermen will start selling french fries and hamburgers, as we can already see starting to happen... At that point it becomes a race for real estate developers, because only the richest would be able to afford a even small apartment here, and at that point the people who do the most humble jobs would be forced to move to the mainland, as is already regularly the case nowadays. The young people leave, and the island's population decreases, the quality of the services tends to decrease, the cinema has gone, the population has gone from five thousand to less than three thousand, and the people in the most precarious situations have to move away. You lose the community of fishermen here, and if you lose the fishermen, of which there are already very few, you lose control of the territory. Control of the territory is an advantage for those who want to exploit it, to take advantage of it, and make profit in the short term, as a poor quality, touristy sideshow... If tourism is based on, and manages to enhance, the typical aspects of this place, perhaps instead we will be able to mediate between the various needs of the people, and make a slightly more balanced contribution to the lagoon's development..."

EB: Well, that was a really interesting clip, because this Dario Smania has a lot to say. What sort of lagoon and what kinds of changes does an interview like this one with Smania reveal, and what other observations have you made from other interviews, perhaps with other fishermen or people that work in the lagoon? Are the attitudes similar? Is their attention drawn to the same sorts of themes?

MS: So, I must say that I didn't often encounter any

one specific type of awareness or theme, I'm very aware that such a broad, but simultaneously very sensitive, perspective is difficult to find in the people who live in the lagoon every day, not to take anything away from the fishermen, but sometimes you do need an external point of view to better understand the environment in which you operate. In my experience in recent years, I have found that there is something of a trend among institutions such as the Universities of Padua or Venice to approach the lagoon environment with safeguarding projects. For example, I interviewed Dario in 2016, and at the time he was working on a project to safeguard the salt marshes. The project was called "Life Vimine", which can be explored online at their website lifevimine.eu, but what I can tell you now is that the way they worked with the participation of the fishermen is very interesting. Like many industries that affect the lagoon environment, fishing is currently in a state of crisis...

EB: Sorry if I interrupt you there, but in the first part of the episode with Luigi Divari, he was actually talking to us about the way that fishing has transformed and how this is now pushing this industry towards a moment of serious crisis. Can you tell us how people are dealing with this problem, what has come out through your project and the interviews that you have conducted?

MS: Well, from the interviews that I've done and the projects I'm involved in through my studio Kinonauts, together with Matteo Primiterra, so I'll use the plural, we often find ourselves involved in documenting scientific projects in which fishing is fundamental. Imagine I'm a biologist researching a specific species in the lagoon, it's impossible, for financial reasons too, for me to be in the lagoon every day, observing certain animal behaviours for example. So, what do I do? I take advantage of the work done by fishermen, so that their daily observation of the lagoon can reveal a source of data for my research. So what happens? Sometimes scientists appoint the fishermen to help them in their research, paying them to do so of course, and so it's like there's a parallel activity for the fishermen, it's like having a kind of sensor out in the lagoon, if you'll allow me that metaphor, that observes, collects data, and reports this data back to the scientists every day. In Dario and Vimine's case specifically, the fishermen were introduced as labor and assistance in order to be able to understand how to contain and protect the sandbars as much as possible by using barriers.

EB: Are there other examples of possible opportunities to convert the jobs of these fishermen in this very synergetic and interesting manner, with science?

MS: I should start by clarifying something in order to explain this sort of collaboration a little better. These kinds of projects are all financed by European funds, so they're projects that are only of value as one-offs. The intention that underlies the people who initiate these activities, like Dario, and I'll tell you about another example shortly, is to reconsider the political world as well. Then of course there's always the hope that there will be interest from the political counterparts too, a new perspective that can open up new opportunities. Does that make sense?

EB: Of course, you're explaining it very well! So let's talk about "Metagoon", what is the mission behind this project and how will it develop in the coming months?

MS: "Metagoon" is quite alternative as a documentary project, so to speak. We've already been fairly active in producing interactive online documentaries for a few years now. For example, the film "Board of Canada" developed various projects in this manner, just to mention one of the major producers. And in fact, "Metagoon" is designed to be an online interactive documentary project, where all of these interviews will be linked together in a dynamic interface, through which people will be able to connect the various pieces together themselves. It's a kind of DIY editing that's quite ahead of its time, and doesn't require much effort. Right now, thanks to Ocean Space and We Are Here Venice too, David Hrankovic's studio and Laguna B have managed to get us some help putting together all the material and making the web interface ready, if all goes well, for September. The launch of the platform should take place by September or October, in the next few days we're deciding on the final deadline.

EB: Let's cross our fingers! How many years have you been working on this project for?

MS: The project started five years ago, in 2015, and I'm still going with some interviews that I'll be conducting in the coming days.

EB: And in all these years of working on "Metagoon", what have you learned?

MS: Well, I've learned that I still won't have fully understood the lagoon for many years to come, because the interviews that I'm conducting reveal that that there's it's incredibly complex, and within this complexity there's also a beauty that can be appreciated just by simply looking around, as a sailor might do arriving in the lagoon on a boat, or as people might do on the bus as it travels along the coast of Pellestrina. But at the same time, this beauty can be appreciated by learning to listen to people who have experienced it all their lives.

EB: Right, we're approaching the end of the episode, but we never forget to ask our guests about something a little more personal: the place that's closest to their heart in Venice or in the lagoon. For you, as someone who has travelled around the lagoon and the city in order to record all these interviews and to film your

documentaries, is there somewhere in Venice that's really close to your heart?

MS: I really appreciate you asking me that question, but I have to be completely honest, it's a difficult one to answer.

EB: Throw something out there, from the heart.

MS: A place that comes to mind is somewhere that I've yet to explore, but when I look at it I'm filled with a real desire to explore, and that's the octagon at Alberoni.

EB: Ah, the octagon at Alberoni! Let's explain for the people who aren't from Venice and who might not be familiar with the lagoon, it's a sort of fortified islet that's currently abandoned, and only accessible by boat. So you've passed close by the island, have you ever stepped foot on it?

MS: Exactly, during my time exploring the lagoon, I've set myself the goal of exploring many of the abandoned islands, like San Secondo, which is the island that you can see when you arrive in Venice by train, on the left side of the Ponte della Libertà there's this abandoned island, and I've been there too. My next target is the octagon at Alberoni. Every time that I pass it, I come up with a great film in my head ('laughs'), so to speak, trying to imagine what might be inside.

EB: I know it well and I know what you mean! Thank you to Matteo Stocco for joining us aboard Nowtilus, and good luck with the "Metagoon" project!

MS: Thank you, fingers crossed! Goodbye.

EB: Thanks again to Luigi Divari who was with us in the first part of the episode, and thanks to Nicola Privato, whose music, from an very interesting project called EdiTidE, has been present throughout the episode. As always, thanks to all of you for listening to TBA21- Academy Radio from Ocean Space, Venice for the seventh episode of "Nowtilus. Stories from an urban lagoon in the 21st century", a podcast curated by Enrico Bettinello and Alice Ongaro Sartori, in collaboration with Graziano Meneghin for post-production. You can listen to this episode, and both previous and future episodes of Nowtilus on ocean-archive.org or follow us on Soundcloud. A warm farewell to all of you from Enrico Bettinello, and see you soon.

NOWTILUS

Storie da una laguna urbana del 21esimo secolo

Episode 8

MURANO AND GLASS, BETWEEN HISTORY AND INNOVATION

with Alice de Santillana (Autonoma) and Marcantonio Brandolini D'Adda (LagunaB)

Available from July 31st 2020, 4pm
TBA21-Academy Radio on Ocean Archive, SoundCloud, Spotify, iTunes and Google Podcasts.

TBA21—Academy Radio

Enrico Bettinello (EB): You are listening to Nowtilus. Stories from an urban lagoon in the 21st century, a podcast by Ocean Space, Venice. Enrico Bettinello is here to welcome you, or perhaps welcome you back, aboard Nowtilus: stories, thoughts, notes, and issues concerning the rethinking of Venice today. In the eighth episode of Nowtilus we'll be talking about glass, one of the techniques, art forms and manufacturing activities linked most closely with Venice and its history, as I'm sure you're aware. We'll be doing this together with Alice De Santillana, artist, designer and co-founder of Autonoma, a project that she will be telling us about shortly, and then in the second part of our episode, together with Marcantonio Brandolini D'Adda who will talk to us about the LagunaB project. In the meantime, let's welcome Alice De Santillana aboard: welcome!

Alice De Santillana (ADS): Thank you Enrico, hello.

EB: Welcome aboard Nowtilus. So let's talk to you about glass, you're an artist, a young designer, who

- and maybe you would like to tell us about this - has a very deep and important relationship with the world of glass, it's in your blood. Would you mind telling us more about this?

ADS: Of course! So, I represent the fourth generation of a family of glassmakers, I'm the great-granddaughter of Paolo Venini, who arrived in Venice at the beginning of 1920 and discovered Murano, he fell in love with Murano, and so decided to move to Venice. Together with Napoleone Martinuzzi and Vittorio Zecchin, he founded Venini in 1925. After that, Paolo Venini, with a real entrepreneurial spirit, decided to open his furnace to the world and allowed research, experimentation, and glass itself to be taken to another level beyond what was known up to that point. Above all, he opened his doors to a lot of international artists and designers and ran a fabulous company for forty years, right up until his death. Then my grandfather Ludovico De Santillana, who was an architect, took over and married my grandmother Anna Venini. Ludovico, who was in charge of Venini for more than twenty years, also continued this sort of openness towards the world, and managed to export Murano glass in a completely new way, in an international way. Venini hasn't been in our family since 1986, so my father, my aunt and my grandfather opened a new company together, called Eos, with which they tried to continue the philosophy of Venini. After my grandfather passed away, my aunt Laura De Santillana and my father Alessandro continued as independent artists, going their separate ways, remaining faithful to the family aesthetic, but following two completely different paths. My aunt focused more on simple shapes, working more with color and color combinations, a sort of Rothko of the glass world, and my father, especially in the last years of his career, concentrated on using a kind of mirror technique, mirroring, gilding, which are very traditional Venetian techniques, linked to gilders, which started being used around 1300. Both have managed to continue this experimentation and take glass in a completely new direction. I actually come from a background in high fashion, I worked for Valentino for some time and I was completely amazed by the poetry of the workmanship, of what you can achieve with hours of patience, working with very fragile and extremely ephemeral materials, which are somehow actually quite similar to what I later found in working with glass. I've been hanging out in the world of glass for three years now, and I'm slowly continuing to learn everything I can myself.

EB: I was just about to ask you, what sort of similarities there are? Fragility strikes me as a very interesting concept for those who "handle" both high fashion and, of course, glass. How much of your family history did you rediscover through your experience in the world of high fashion, and how much did you then bring back with you in your most recent experiences relating to glass, through this idea of working with such delicate materials?

ADS: Well, firstly, I came across many similarities between high fashion workshops and Murano furnaces. We always start with a team discussion. Both in fashion and in glass, the people who put things together, and the people who create are never just an individual person, but are the result of a combination of ingredients. The big difference between glass and fashion is that fashion timescales are much longer and slower. while glass has the beauty of being able to transform itself into a three-dimensional object very quickly, so you have an immediate result. I'm convinced that we have to be completely attentive to everything around us, to have therefore an awareness of and a respect for objects, things and people, that's why I like the idea of working with materials that are extremely fragile, but that can be - if treated well - also extremely long-lasting. Obviously there are some characteristics that are similar. Fabrics are the result of layering, stratifications, as is often the case with glassmaking too, there are transparencies and variations in texture which can be achieved, so even on a tactile level, when you touch them, both clothes and glass, very different sensations can be obtained.

Musical interlude - Christian Fennesz, "Rivers of Sand" (track from the album "Venice", 2004)

EB: So, I wanted to ask you something: How do you think the legacy of Paolo Venini continues? It's very interesting how you, as a young person who has had a significant and international experience, has ended up on Murano with the legacy of Paolo Venini, and above all with a job that is not just a role in a team, as you told us with great clarity, but which is also linked to an artistic vision, so how do you find it today?

ADS: Let's say that an aesthetic linked to Venini still echoes around Murano. However, Venini has remained an extremely important brand, recognized internationally. So I believe that everyone has grasped what needed to be grasped. I certainly believe that one of the most interesting characteristics of Venini, in my opinion, has to be the colors, and here are still some combinations of colors and techniques that were developed by Venini that have remained, and have become, characteristics of Murano more broadly. I think everyone has obtained something very personal.

EB: And for you, given that you mention the personal, which technique or techniques do you like the most, or have you identified with most in recent years?

ADS: Well, let's say that I definitely have a passion for lines and everything to do with using "canne" (rods of glass), "reticelli" (mesh-like patterns), "fenici" (festoon-like wavy patterns), and "fili buttati" (thin strands of glass). However, I stick to a maximum of three colors, which is something that is always very important to me. In my small sculptures I've tried to experiment with various traditional techniques, sometimes considered a little old-fashioned, trying

to give them a slightly innovative spin, stopping the process halfway, or employing techniques typically used for other shapes of glass, in order to momentarily distance the object from what you are used to seeing, while maintaining a kind of poetic identity perhaps linked more closely to glass itself than eighteenth-century Venice.

EB: Very interesting. So, while I was introducing you, I mentioned the "Autonomous" project, so it seems like the right time to ask you to tell us a little about this project, which is obviously closely related to what we are talking about.

ADS: So, I returned to Venice three years ago, and three years ago I met Marcantonio. We said to each other, both being in a similar situation, we said: we want to do something with glass, so what can we do? Do we want to open the doors of Murano to the world for a moment? He has his own company, LagunaB and through my family's contacts, which are spread between Italy and the United States, my aunt put Marcantonio in touch with the school in Pilchuck, with Tina Aufiero who was the director of Pilchuck, and Marcantonio ended up going to Pilchuck to take a summer course, and while he was there he was able to experience the liveliness of the American glass world. Pilchuck is a huge center for experimentation and research, where artists from all over the world meet every summer, and it enjoys a liveliness that there wasn't much of in Murano anymore. So we thought about creating an ad hoc program in Murano in collaboration with Pilchuck, and this program started three years ago. We have created various programs, and every year there's a new program dedicated to a different problem. So far we have hosted fifteen artists who have come from fifteen different countries. We sent some Murano glass masters to Pilchuck, who really had their eyes opened, and who rediscovered a love and passion for their work, which at times can become almost automatic. It ended up being an experiment that has actually been a great success, and it's really nice to see how the people of Murano are gradually opening up and showing a desire to share and learn. It's a program that is constantly evolving. This year we started a program for high school children, so we involved two American high schools, Yaya, which is based in New Orleans, and Hilltop in Tacoma, in collaboration with the Abate Zanetti school in Murano. Obviously, due to Covid, we had to reinvent it as a digital program this year, but next summer American school children will be here to attend a workshop. The following year, in 2022, all the children from both Murano and the American schools will meet in Pilchuck to share an experience together, and we would like to be able to help today's young artists as much as possible in giving them the inspiration to continue to work in the glass world, and to feel supported, giving them a way to gain some visibility within a context like Venice, which is super prestigious and very important. So yes, we definitely won't stop here...

EB: Thank you so much. But before saying goodbye and passing the baton over to Marcantonio Brandolini D'Adda, who will be our guest in the second part of this episode, I have a question that we ask all our guests on Nowtilus, and that we now also ask you with great pleasure: could you tell us where in Venice is closest to your heart, Alice De Santillana?

ADS: My favorite place is definitely the lagoon and the Punta della Salute. I grew up in Dorsoduro and I have seen the city change very rapidly over the years, especially in that area. Now there is nothing left, except the houses of the few people who live there. The thing I love most about Venice is that it is a city that at a certain time of day, and in certain periods of the year, becomes completely yours again. I feel like I'm the owner of my city. This is something that is fundamental for me, beyond beauty, the pleasure of being close to the sea which for me is also fundamental. However, feeling connected to, and not aggressively swallowed up by a city, feeling that connection, but also being able to disconnect when I feel like it, a bit like the tide, is very important to me, and allows me to meditate, to listen. Time in Venice is drawn out in an almost ancient way, and that is very much in harmony with my personality...

EB: Thank you Alice de Santillana, thank you for joining us today, and good luck with all your projects.

ADS: Thank you!

Musical interlude - Christian Fennesz, "The Point of it All" (track from the album "Venice", 2004)

EB: Now it's time to welcome Marcantonio Brandolini D'Adda aboard Nowtilus, who, as was mentioned in the first part of this episode, plays a leading role in the LagunaB project. Welcome Marcantonio!

Marcantonio Brandolini D'Adda (MBDA): Thank you Enrico!

EB: Thank you, and welcome aboard! Thanks for joining us. As we were saying, Alice already talked a little about it, but now we'd like to hear directly from you how your passion for glass came about, and what exactly is LagunaB?

MBDA: If I'm completely honest, my passion didn't start with glass. Glass is something that I found its way into my hands, because LagunaB is a company that my mother founded in 1994 and I experienced the world of glass through her when I was a child, and I didn't always exactly love it. I didn't love it because the relationship I had with Murano, when I visited the island, was difficult. Murano is an island that can give a lot, but at the same time it can intimidate people, often young people and children. It's a pretty difficult working environment, so I wasn't all that inspired by glass, and then, and I often tell people this because

it's a something that makes me laugh, I almost couldn't stand it, I used to break it, which was a source of great anxiety for my mother...

EB: (Laughs) What did you break it with?

MBDA: I broke it with my ball, with my video game controller, I broke it with all sorts of things. But again, glass still found its way into my hands, yet my passion extends beyond glass itself.

EB: So can you tell us, now that it's in your hands, how after this initial lack of love you came to understand the true essence of Murano glass, and how the LagunaB project evolved?

MBDA: Let's say that together with my two partners, we took over the company in 2016. We wanted to take a broader path than the one my mother had undertaken, also because surrounding yourself with a strong and effective team leads you to think more broadly. And in this case, to think beyond the product. We are young people after all.

EB: What's the average age?

MBDA: Around thirty. Well, we were young when we started...

EB: (Laughing) You still are!

MBDA: We decided to follow a path in which the value of the product is not conferred by aesthetics, by beauty, by the nostalgic beauty that is often associated with Murano glass, but rather the value we want to associate with our product is the value of delivering positive benefits for future generations.

EB: Sorry to interrupt, because we talked about this before with Alice. There have been some great examples such as that of Venini, which is a wonderful example in this context, with a history of excellence in the relationship between glass makers and artists. And in fact Alice brought back the idea of taking this combination to a higher level, as she herself is testament to. Can I ask you, without going into too much detail from a historical point of view, your opinion on what went wrong in this relationship, in this marriage between art and the great glassmaking tradition on Murano, which has not always been able to realize its full potential?

MBDA: There are answers that Murano's history can offer, but this history doesn't begin just a hundred years ago, but rather hundreds of years ago. Murano was born as an industrial district, necessary at the time for Venice and for its trade. Obviously, along the way, in the last hundred years there have been numerous inventions and various changes to the economy, and this in turn has led to globalization, it has caused production to shift to areas where it is more convenient. The first transition was moving from industrial to artisanal production, as I see it, which was a huge transition, because there has been a great loss of work in the process. Just as a little footnote, they also made syringes on Murano for example, and by that I mean they really made everything. When the production moved away, the island had to rethink everything. And there was Venini, the world of design, the world of craftsmanship, art, and so on. This world ended here twenty or thirty years ago now, because there's no longer any company with true management or real vision. So now it's really important that Murano changes its approach to the world of glass, in the sense that it is no longer a place linked exclusively to traditions and to history, but it has the potential to be a place of research and innovation that can then be applied more broadly to the glass industry as a whole.

EB: So, we often talk about the colors of Murano, and how color has changed from a chemical and material perspective. It is unlikely that the colors utilized by the great masters a few decades ago are still being used today. Would you mind telling our listeners about this transition and what caused it?

MBDA: There are also various answers here. If we wanted to really go into depth on this, we could be here for five hours. But the short version is that over the last hundred years, if not more, Murano glass has been characterized by the color of the glass, this is also linked to the practicality of production. Nowadays, we've realized that most of the components that make up glass are harmful, both for the ecosystem and for humans.

EB: Can you give an example?

MBDA: Cadmium, or for making white, arsenic, we could also talk about uranium for making yellow...

EB: Dangerous substances.

MBDA: Dangerous substances that, in our opinion at LagunaB, should no longer exist. By this I mean that although Murano was so brilliant in the past, and that part of its history needs to be remembered, nonetheless we need to push ahead, not trying to relive the past, fighting against the emotion of craftsmanship, industry and aesthetics. The aesthetics have to evolve, because today we still have this mentality of "Ah, che beo!" (Ah, how beautiful!). But no, it should be that it's beautiful because the way it was made is beautiful, it's beautiful for the benefits it brings, that's what's really beautiful.

Musical interlude - Christian Fennesz, "Laguna" (track from the album "Venice", 2004)

EB: Well, seeing that you're talking to us very frankly about Murano, but also with a deep love and understanding which almost physically comes out

through your story, in your opinion how has the island itself transformed, even just from an urban point of view? It is an island which is often spoken about as a place that is full of abandoned and unused spaces, obviously there are many furnaces that are no longer operational, which could be converted and reused. What sort of impression does Murano give in the eyes of a young person like yourself, and what kind of potential could it have from this perspective?

MBDA: There is real potential for Venice as a city. Murano is more closed than Venice, and this is a problem that affects our entire district. What I believe, and what we believe, is that foreign countries and the world as a whole should participate in the redevelopment and creation of a new identity for Venice. So these empty spaces that we have should serve as places of research, offices for large global companies, bringing jobs along with them. So I would go from door to door of the top ten companies in the world and I would say: Guys, there are buildings upon buildings here, the quality of life isn't so bad either, on the contrary ('laughs')…

EB: Here on Nowtilus we often talk about how the quality of life is one of the principal characteristics of the whole city.

MBDA: So it would be a case of incentivizing these spaces and the owners of these spaces to sell them to, or to hand over management to organizations that can bring jobs, innovation, and a new identity to Venice.

EB: In your opinion, who needs to make the first move? The companies or the government?

MBDA: The government is a lost cause, so it is useless to even try to talk to them. I am of the opinion that we need to make do even without institutions. I am lucky enough to be able to say that, not all of us are able to get by without these institutions, and yet I think that both companies and every Venetian must abandon the idea that the state works, because the state just doesn't work.

EB: Well, you are always very clear and very straight with your opinions. I'm very interested in what you said when you hinted at internationality and this international vision that the island of Murano could embrace for glass production in Venice. Earlier we talked about Pilchuck. In your opinion, given that you have an international vision, are there other glass centers around the world that we can look to? Clearly there are some well-known and highly developed examples, which are also avant-garde from many points of view. But are there any experiences that you suggest looking towards, in light of this reimagination of Murano as a place of research, which you have rightly emphasized as one of the key points of innovation? So can you give our listeners an international example, even just briefly?

MBDA: You mentioned Pilchuck, which is a great example of how glass can create a community, and how it can create art. From a research perspective, Koenig, which is the most important glass industry in the world, has introduced marketable innovations in the industrial sector, and is a firm foothold for the glass community, because it has a very active foundation that finances projects linked to the artisanal glassmaking. It's a large corporation, so it has its own way of doing things, but in our opinion it's an important example for research. Of course there are probably many others…

EB: I can imagine, but unfortunately we can't talk about all of them. So, returning to LagunaB, I know that you also started research into life-cycle assessment with the University of Padua last year. Do mind telling us about that briefly, because we are approaching the end of our chat.

MBDA: Sure. In a nutshell, life-cycle assessment aims to analyze the environmental impact of a certain industry. We decided to do this voluntarily, to go in depth with our impact, to look at not only the impact of the office or the production itself, but also to look into the impact of bringing in mineral products from all over the world. So transport, how things arrive, by truck, by ship, how it arrives on Murano, how much gas we use in production.

EB: How much traffic are we talking about? I'm not going to ask for the specific data, but how much material, raw material, arrives on Murano annually or monthly, I don't know…

MBDA: Very, very, very little in comparison with the mainland. But one thing that's really interesting is the impact of our glass, which is of course our main product, and which has an impact of releasing one and a half kilograms of CO_2, also accounting for all the semi-processed materials that used, turbine machines, and so on… So it was an interesting study, which over the next few years we will balance out through our offsetting project…

EB: Listen, I'm sorry to say, because this chat is really interesting, we're approaching the end of our episode. But as with all our guests aboard Nowtilus, I'll ask you this question too: where in Venice is closest to your heart?

MBDA: My favorite places in Venice are the lagoon inlets. Because they give me a feeling of freedom that is often lacking in Venice, because it is a small city after all. I always leave a part of my heart behind at those inlets…

EB: You go there by boat obviously.

MBDA: Yes, always.

EB: What kind of boat do you have? If you don't mind me asking...

MBDA: I use the work boats...

EB: And so every now and then you use them for some escapades around the lagoon inlets! Thanks again to Marcantonio Brandolini D'Adda for joining us aboard Nowtilus and good luck to LagunaB!

MBDA: Thank you Enrico.

EB: And thanks to Marcantonio Brandolini D'Adda for joining us aboard Nowtilus, thanks again to Alice De Santillana for being with us in the first part, and thanks to Christian Fennesz whose music you will have heard both in our classic intro theme and throughout the episode in the form of some excerpts from the beautiful album, "Venice", an album from a few years ago, dedicated to the city of Venice. Of course, thanks to all of you for listening to TBA21 — Academy Radio from Ocean Space, Venice, for the eighth episode of "Nowtilus. Stories from an urban lagoon in the 21st century", a podcast curated by Enrico Bettinello and Alice Ongaro Sartori, in collaboration with Graziano Meneghin for post-production. You can listen to all the episodes of Nowtilus on ocean-archive.org or follow us on Soundcloud. A warm farewell to all of you from Enrico Bettinello.

NOWTILUS

Storie da una laguna urbana del 21esimo secolo

Episode 9

SLOW NAVIGATION, GONDOLAS, SAILS, OARS, AND NEW CHALLENGES

with Elena Tramontin and Silvio Testa

Available from July 29th 2020, 4pm
TBA21-Academy Radio on Ocean Archive, SoundCloud, Spotify, iTunes and Google Podcasts.

TBA21—Academy Radio

Intro Music - Enrico Coniglio, "Saltland" (2020)

Enrico Bettinello (EB): It's Enrico Betinello here, welcoming you aboard Nowtilus, stories, thoughts, notes, and issues concerning the rethinking of Venice today. In our ninth episode, we're talking about boats, lagoon watercraft, and we'll be doing this together with Elena Tramontin, who along with her sister Elisabetta, manages a historic family "squero", or boatyard, and later with Silvio Testa, who was a journalist for the "Gazzettino" for many years, and who has always been an authority on the practices of rowing and sailing in the Upper Adriatic. In the meantime, however, let's welcome Elena Tramontin, welcome Elena!

Elena Tramontin (ET): Thank you, welcome.

EB: Thanks! Elena said welcome to us because we are actually recording this episode from inside this magical

space, the Tramontin "squero". For those who don't know, perhaps we should explain what a "squero" is?

ET: A "squero" is a typical Venetian shipyard, which typically has a clay dock that descends directly into the water. And then there's a covered part, which is called the "tesa", with an exterior built entirely from wood and is somewhat reminiscent of a house in the mountains, and which is where the gondolas and all the smaller, typical Venetian boats are built.

EB: So aside from the gondola, which of course everyone is familiar with, what kinds of boats are built here?

ET: Ah, "sanpierote", "tope", "scioponi", "mascarete", "sandoli", might all be built here ...

EB: Right, these are all names that will be familiar to Venetians, but people who aren't from Venice might not know them, these are all names of various boats used for both work and leisure, of various shapes and sizes, names that represent a great variety of boats. Elena, as we said while introducing you, you manage this squero together with your sister Elisabetta. How long have you been running it?

ET: We have been managing it since November 2018, after our father passed away we decided to continue the tradition, obviously aware of our limits, there were certain things that we didn't know how to do, but the desire to carry on such an important tradition, not only for us but for the city itself, is our motivation to move forward.

EB: So how long has the "squero" been in the family?

ET: Our great-great-grandfather Domenico founded this "squero" on February 2, 1884.

EB: 1884, let's do some calculations ...

ET: This year it'll be 136 years, next year it will be 137.

EB: The "squero" will have been in the Tramontin family for 137 years.

ET: Yes, this is where the family works, right here.

EB: When you started running the "squero", you weren't particularly experienced in this business. But what did you do when you were children, did you come here, did you help out?

ET: This place is like home for us. We have always spent time here, the family has always talked about both our grandfather's and our father's profession, so let's say we know the theoretical side. Unfortunately, we aren't as familiar with the practical part, we were doing something completely different before. When it was time to decide what to do, we took this challenge into our own hands, and so for two years now we have mostly dedicated ourselves to the maintenance and painting of gondolas and other small boats. The construction side of the business is on standby for now.

EB: It's on stand-by because obviously it requires skills, time and materials...

ET: It requires a lot of experience and requires a good eye, "ocio" as they say in Venice, and it takes many years to learn. So we're taking it slow, no need to hurry, we'll get there in the end.

EB: So let's try to describe what your typical day is like inside the "squero", and what the division of labor is like in particular.

ET: Well, we get here in the morning, we decide what work needs to be done, and then when the work is finished we rest. We share the work: my sister dedicates herself to more of the practical stuff, the real work, and I help her, because she is better than me with her hands, she is much more artistic. On the other hand, I deal with more of the public relations side. Our father had been giving tours for twenty years, so we continue to do this too. We share the workload and we complement one another.

EB: So what do these tours consist of? Are they tours for tourists, for travelers, for Venetians?

ET: They're tours for anyone, even for Venetians themselves.

EB: Do Venetians come to visit?

ET: Yes, yes, they do. Then we also run an educational project for children together with the schools. During the visit, all the stages of gondola construction are explained, we tell the story of our family, and we always try to adapt our visits to the people we are in front of. We really want to offer an experience, immerse people in a somewhat unknown world, and so we try to involve people as much as possible.

EB: How do people usually react? What kind of feedback do you get?

ET: When they come inside the "tesa" they are speechless, they're amazed by what's inside here, by the atmosphere that you feel here, the smell, and the way we try to tell the story is very engaging and really appreciated. For us this place is normal because we grew up here, but when I see the amazement on people's faces, I feel very proud to be the daughter of Roberto, the granddaughter of Nedis.

EB: ... To carry on this lineage. But how was the decision initially received, the decision to carry on the family tradition?

ET: I think it may have been a bit of a surprise, and I have to say that we didn't find that anyone was particularly against it, but nor particularly for it either. We went ahead on our own path, obviously we had people who supported us, because it's difficult to do on your own, but I am of the opinion that words are empty, facts count more.

Musical interlude - Mauro Sambo, "From Giudecca to Campana Island" (2020)

EB: That's certainly an interesting point. Another interesting point, which you mentioned earlier, concerns the timescales involved in the job. Even in our previous episodes of Nowtilus, our guests have told us about these multiple possible Venices, these different versions of Venice that exist, and the unique sense of time that is special to this city. How long does it take to build a gondola on average? How many gondolas could be built at full capacity - I know you don't build any for now - but at full capacity, how many could a "squero" like yours build in a year?

ET: Our dad built one, at most two a year. They're built during the winter because later, during the "high season" as they say, there's the whole painting and the maintenance phase of the gondolas, so basically one or two a year. Today, on the other hand, even though we don't build gondolas, there's nonetheless a certain slowness involved even in the painting of a gondola, there are times when you have to wait, for the paint to dry, for a little resin to dry... So it's very calm, you can organize your work without any real rush, calmly, and that's where patience is essential.

EB: Is it a kind of slowness that you can also take into the other activities in your life? Does it in any way inspire a different type of attitude towards your daily life, or does it clash with the fast pace of our modern society?

ET: I personally made "con calma" (calmly) my philosophy: rushing never leads to anything good, calmness is the right counselor, you need to ponder, understand, to avoid being hasty in making decisions or doing something rash. So yes, Venice is slow, and I would never live anywhere other than Venice.

EB: On that note I really wanted to ask, what version of Venice have you seen in recent years, from the perspective of a tradition like yours, an ancient tradition that you are strongly linked to not just in an emotional sense, but also because the gondola is an almost iconic element of Venice... Often in this podcast we have talked about how some symbols of Venice lend themselves to multiple interpretations, because they are often appropriated, sometimes trivialized. Just saying the word "gondola" conjures up a range of ideas, from that of a souvenir to the images from an old film, and yet behind all this there is a very slow process, a love for materials and attention. How do you see the evolution of this occupation in today's Venice?

ET: I see that there are many people with a lot of passion for this kind of profession, and a lot of passion for preserving what Venice truly is. Because there's no way Venice can go forward without thinking back where it came from. So tradition and craftsmanship are very important, and I see a lot of participation, especially from my generation, younger people want to rediscover this stuff too, they want to get closer to this world, and I hope that this passion turns into something concrete, because it's really important. We always try to be available to anyone who needs or wants our help. We're lucky to work here and to have this place that is completely one of a kind, and we want to share this fortune with people who have real desire and passion. Collaborating with as many people as possible is very important to me.

EB: What do your friends say about your business? Do they come visit you? Do they go out on boats, do they row, do they Venetian row, or do they have those fiberglass boats with powerful engines?

ET: No, I must say that there has been a real resurgence. There are people who love to buy neglected little "topetta" boats, fix them up and then go out in them. I see this a lot and I'm very happy about it, because seeing Venice from the water, living it on the water is a completely different world, even just seeing Venice from a rowboat with only the sound of water and nothing else around you is something that... the people who don't get excited by that must have a heart of stone!

EB: ('Laughs') Then, among other things, you were telling us earlier about how one of the typical characteristics of the "squero" is this coexistence with the water, which goes up and down like a shoreline, in a certain sense. The subtitle of our podcast is "stories from an urban lagoon", and what better way to encapsulate that concept than a "squero" that is naturally and regularly invaded by the water of the lagoon, only to withdraw again, it's a halfway point, a kind of amphibious environment.

ET: Exactly, in fact we always wait for the high tide to haul and launch the gondolas so that we can use as little effort as possible, since we still use the old-style rollers...

EB: So you like high tide unlike the rest of the city...

ET: Within reason yes, we like it!

EB: Did you suffer any damage during the "acqua alta" flooding?

ET: Some, yes, we decided to fix things little by little, "con calma"...

EB: Let's talk some more about Venice. You are very young, so you represent a new and vital force for this city. Beyond your business, what kind of perception of Venice do you have, or how do you perceive it now after these strange last few months that have made everyone reflect on the nature of our cities, on slowness, and on the potential of Venice to be a sort of city for the future?

ET: I think and I hope that there is more awareness around what Venice really is. Because everything that Venice represents is important: it is not just tourism, it is not just tradition, it's something that has to grow and live together in mutual respect. So I think Venice has a bright future, it can also be a place of exchange, as it was in the past, a starting and meeting point, a cultural nerve center. It's a treasure chest, if you manage to adapt to it, it can be really lovely, especially for people who decide, like me and my sister, to live here in Venice; it's a challenge, but you miss Venice after a while, you miss the brine, you can't stay away… I have faith in the future.

EB: And from a professional point of view, how do you see collaborating in the future?

ET: I am of the opinion that collaboration is important, because everyone can contribute in their own ways, they can offer their points of view, their knowledge, and together you can always create something new or improve something that already exists. In my opinion, collaboration is essential, not just in shipbuilding, but in every aspect of life.

EB: Is this something you are working on?

ET: At the moment everything has stopped to a certain extent, this COVID problem has kind of stopped everything, but we are always available and willing to collaborate and learn everything we can.

EB: We are coming towards the end of our chat, and there's a question we always ask our guests on Nowtilus, and that is: Which place or Venetian situation is closest to your heart, Elena Tramontin? Not including this place, which I imagine would be your first answer, we can clearly see that from what you have said so far.

ET: A place in Venice that I really love is Torcello and its surrounding sandbanks. When I'm there I really feel good, I feel really peaceful.

EB: What does such an ancient place and such a peculiar environment like that of Torcello and its sandbanks offer to a young person like yourself?

ET: Well, it reminds me a little of the origins of this place. Torcello was the first settlement and has a very important role in the history of Venice, and the sandbanks around it, there's this fragility that always amazes you. At any time of day, in any season, go to the sandbanks and you'll see something you've never seen before… Amongst the sandbanks, you feel good, there's peace and quiet, even though there are lots of "tavanelle" there in the summer.

EB: ('Laughs') Let's explain what "tavanelle" are to our non-Venetian listeners!

ET: They're horseflies, and they are awful!

EB: Because they really sting!

ET: But when those purple flowers that cover the sandbanks are in bloom, it really is a magical place…

EB: Thank you to Elena Tramontin, good luck to Elena and also to Elisabetta Tramontin for the future in this wonderful tradition, but now we must say goodbye. Thanks again for being with us!

ET: Thank you!

Musical interlude - Mauro Sambo, "From Giudecca to Campana Island" (2020)

EB: Welcome back to the second part of this episode of Nowtilus. As we said earlier, in this second part, we'll be in the company of Silvio Testa, who for many years was a journalist for the Gazzettino and has always been not only an enthusiast, but also an authoritative voice for both rowing and sailing practices of the Upper Adriatic and the Venetian Lagoon in particular. Welcome to Silvio Testa!

Silvio Testa (ST): Thanks for the invitation!

EB: With Silvio Testa we'll be talking about and considering traditional watercraft in the lagoon, boats, "vela al terzo", all these themes, which - correct me if I'm wrong - have almost become icons of this area. When one thinks of Venice, one thinks immediately of the gondola… As Venetians perhaps, as we saw in the first part of the episode, we understand just how much effort goes into building a gondola, the level of craftsmanship, what a gondola really represents, but maybe for the rest of the world it's little more than a plastic souvenir. What do you think?

ST: Undoubtedly, rowing and the practice of "vela al terzo" could be considered two symbols of resilience. The attempt by a minority within the city to maintain practices linked to tradition, and above all something that's compatible with the city and the lagoon. Places in which, unfortunately, diametrically opposite phenomena are also manifesting themselves, making the practice of the most noble of activities somewhat problematic.

EB: Let's explain for our listeners, because perhaps people who aren't from Venice don't fully understand,

maybe they think that we all go to work on rowing boats, or that maybe gondolas run through every canal. Let's estimate a proportion, without giving precise numbers, which of course would be difficult to ascertain, what percentage of people practice is rowing or sailing, "vela al terzo" - which perhaps you will delve into in more detail later - and on the other hand, what percentage use motor boats?

ST: I can't give you an exact number. The total number of members of the rowing clubs throughout Venice, also taking the lagoon area into account, will be around three or four thousand people I guess. And there are currently about 120 to 130 boat owners registered for "vela al terzo". What does this tell us? It means that both practices are essentially recreational activities. It is a form of exercise, just as on the land going to the gym or jogging or cycling are forms of exercise. Perhaps there is a difference between "vela al terzo" and rowing, at least in my experience. I get the impression that among the people who practice "vela al terzo" - soon I'll explain exactly what this is - there is maybe a little more awareness of why the activity is practiced, there is this idea of sustainability that is less widespread with rowing.

EB: It's less widespread and yet not too many years ago, let's say about fifty years ago, it was actually a driving force of sustainable initiatives, right?

ST: Yes, if you are referring to the "Vogalonga" in particular, that theme is important. So just as a little side note: the "Vogalonga" was started when the "Front for the Defense of Venice" ended, which perhaps some of the older generation will remember. It was a form of proto-environmentalism that developed in Venice after the "Acqua Granda" floods of 1966, and which took a stand against the excavation and opening of the "canale dei petroli". So we're talking about the end of the sixties, the seventies. A proto-environmentalist movement that resulted in an apparent victory, with the first special law 173 in 1971, which then remained largely unimplemented, but it was essentially the first national, and perhaps international, recognition of the so-called "Venice problem". The leaders of the "Front for the defense of Venice", in particular the first Rosa Salva, who was essentially the soul of the movement, asked themselves how it was possible that out in the lagoon, just one and a half kilometers away from the Zattere and Giudecca, the environmental fabric was essentially being destroyed without anyone noticing or without even the slightest concern. So Pino attempted to find a way to bring the Venetians back to the lagoon, to ensure that the lagoon was not seen as separate from the city, but was fully part of it. The idea came to Pino's son, Paolo Rosa Salva, at the same time as another thought also occurred to the editor of the Venice Gazzettino at the time, Delfo Utimpergher. The idea was to organize a rowing event, a marathon, like the "Marcialonga", like the "Vasaloppet", which would bring the Venetians to the lagoon. This opens up another interesting discourse, how did an event born of these notable environmentalistic qualities then over time become such a touristy event? Let's say that nowadays the event is somewhat neglected by the Venetians, and is instead filled with tourists in rowing boats that basically come from all over the world.

EB: Sorry to interrupt you, this is a phenomenon that over the course of our episodes of Nowtilus we have become rather familiar with, this continuous confusion, this continuous mirroring of the real image of Venice, the image that is sold, perceived, described. The tale of Venice and the identity of Venice continue to swap places in such rapid succession that sometimes it's hard to tell which is which. It's sort of like in quantum physics, when particles move so fast that their position can't be determined...

ST: Yes, yes, it really is a perverse mechanism, because in reality Venice is contorting itself, essentially for profit, into the kitsch image of itself that exists throughout the world: the romantic sunset, the moon, the gondola. The gondola really is the clearest emblem of this mechanism. If you think of its black, refined, elegant image and then compare it with the gondolas that now move around the canals, which are a sort of Baroque pomp of patterns and gold and so on, and which resemble a Sicilian cart, you understand the kind of regression that the city is experiencing. Sometimes I have this paradoxical thought, I think of how much effort was required to build this city over the centuries, that is, how much sorrow, how much pain, how many wars, how many deaths, how many sacrifices, and so on. And I always wonder, if those people knew what had happened to the city, would they ever have done all that hard work?

EB: That really is a paradoxical question, but it certainly makes you think... We have mentioned "vela al terzo" a few times now, would you mind very briefly telling us what it is?

ST: Yes, so basically it's a traditional kind of sailing, which came about in the Upper Adriatic between the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, when flat-bottomed lagoon boats were adapted for deep sea fishing, a phenomenon particularly linked to Chioggia, where this type of activity would continue to develop due to economic factors that would take too long to explain. The "vela al terzo" is a type of gaff sail, by that I mean a quadrangular sail, which is the kind of sail that is best suited to balancing boats with a flat bottom in sailing.

EB: Why is it called "al terzo" (the third)?

ST: It's not really clear. In the past it was called "trabacolo". A "trabacolo" is a boat used for transporting wood and stone, which used this type of sail and was common from the Adriatic all the way

to Greece. Then at a certain point, this new definition took hold, which is perhaps linked to two things: one is the fact that the "brezza", by that I mean the way in which the sail is hoisted, is at one third of the length of the upper part of the sail. The second is because the "calcese" mast - that is, the mast that fits into the bottom of the boat - is one third from the stern of the boat.

EB: So this "terzo", this 'third', turns up in some places...

Musical interlude - Mauro Sambo, "From Giudecca to Campana Island" (2020)

EB: Earlier you said that there are about 100 or 150 people who own this kind of boat. We were talking about the gondola before, famous for its simplicity, these boats on the other hand are all different colors...

ST: Yes, this is part of the tradition. I was saying that this type of sail was essentially invented in Chioggia. It was traditional for the Chioggiotti people to color the sails, for two pretty practical reasons: one is that the colored sail kept better over time, and two because it was recognizable from a distance. Consider that the fishing companies could stay out for even months at a time, just try to imagine the suffering and concern of the families who were back on land, so being able to immediately see your loved one coming back in by recognizing the sail was a moment of great relief. Furthermore, the organization of fishing was such that the companies of "bragozzi", typical fishing boats, remained at sea but the fish, seeing as there was no way to preserve them, were brought ashore every day by smaller boats, and the people that manned these boats had to be able to find their own fishing company. According to the wind conditions and so forth, they knew where they would be, more or less, but then it was a question of recognizing them...

EB: So it was like a coat of arms that could be recognized. Incidentally, recently there was an artistic project involving these colored sails, let's talk about that very briefly, because we are coming towards the last part of our chat.

ST: Of course, the Red Regatta project by the American artist Melissa McGill, who conceived of this performance involving the "vela al terzo" association, taking place over the course of four events in which about sixty "vela al terzo" boats took part. The unique thing about the performance was that all the boats had red sails, but not exactly the same red for all sixty, each sail was a particular shade of red. For Melissa, and for the partners who joined the project, the idea of red was intended to represent passion, risk, danger...

EB: And it's a very iconic colour here too.

ST: It is also the color of anger, the anger at seeing how the city is bowing down to the kitsch image we were talking about at the beginning of our conversation.

EB: So, how do you see the future of traditional watercraft in the lagoon? Who could be entrusted with the task of raising awareness in the use of traditional boats and methods? Among other things - and this is also a theme that has frequently emerged in our episodes of Nowtilus - these practices convey a sense of slowness, sustainability, and of tranquility in life, something that we have unfortunately experienced perhaps unwittingly during the lockdown, and which have also reconnected us with a slower pace of life to some degree.

ST: Today I think these admirable practices are at risk, and are perhaps in some way already compromised, there is already a sense of falling out of love with them. Going out to the lagoon with all the traffic that we see today, instead of being a moment of peace and relaxation, becomes a source of anger and nervousness. Let's say that informed local administrations should be tackling this issue. How? By making Venice a normal city; it's clear that on the mainland there are incompatibilities between cars, buses, trucks, motorcycles and the bicycle, but they all coexist because there is a set of rules that are enforced, perhaps even dedicated routes, and there is widespread awareness. Violations of the rules of the road are rare. Here, the opposite happens, and suppression is difficult when everyone is stealing. It is no longer a problem that concerns the police or sanctions for bad behaviour...

EB: Let's quickly elaborate on that for our listeners, who is stealing? Because let's face it, you alluded to theft, but in reality what you're talking about are infringements of the water traffic rules required for coexistence.

ST: The rules designed to protect traditional watercraft here in Venice are totally unknown. If you go out into the lagoon it's like the Wild West, there are 14-year-olds with real weapons in their hands, by that I mean modified forty-horsepower engines that are actually seventy-horsepower, taxis, motorboats, even the recreational traffic... there's no awareness of the risks, so much so that there are often deaths out in this placid lagoon, nor any awareness of the environmental damage that is inflicted upon this important habitat. Earlier you were speaking of slowness, slowness unfortunately presupposes the education required to grasp the beauty of the things you see when traveling peacefully through an environment that is utterly unique. Racing at seventy kilometers per hour to get to Chioggia in a quarter of an hour, and then getting there and doing something without having enjoyed the journey at all... that's just silly.

EB: Can the schools do anything about all of this?

ST: Of course, schools and the administration together, because in my opinion the two things must go hand in hand, they could have a big effect, as long as there is a shared long-term project that can last. It can't be a one-off project. Some organizations in Venice have tried to step up given the lack of attention on the part of the administrations, for example the Giudecca Rowing Club, which for twenty years, except for the last two due to some issues, has carried out a project called "Row a School". Every year they introduced 350 to 400 elementary and middle school kids to rowing, and to whom we first gave lectures in class explaining what the lagoon is, the fragility of the lagoon, and the relationship it has with a certain type of boat, our boats, which are flat-bottomed, in other words why these boats are used here and nowhere else. And then they were taught to row. It was a real effort, but it has produced some results even if they weren't the results we hoped for. Of these 350 or 400 children who took up the oars, I believe that in the end you can count how many have stayed on and continued to take part in the practice on the fingers of one hand.

EB: But we will have to keep pushing. Before you were talking about the city's reaction to the "Acqua Granda" floods in 1966. We have recently experienced another "Acqua Granda", and with COVID too, maybe a new awareness could be reborn. I also believe that aspects of traditional watercraft could be very important from an identity point of view. We could continue to chat for a long time, but we are approaching the end of the episode. However, we can't say goodbye to you without asking the usual question, that is, which place is closest to your Venetian heart, Silvio Testa?

ST: Eh, good question ...

EB: We ask everyone, so it's your turn too ...

ST: Let's say that my favorite place is the lagoon, the southern lagoon more so than the northern lagoon, although that is actually the more compromised part, because in reality it has larger spaces and as a result it has become a sort of arm of the sea, due to the erosion triggered by the deepening of the "canale dei petroli". However, this also allows for easier navigation. It's a bit of a paradox in that this sort of damage has in fact become the thing that draws people to the area.

EB: This is how lagoons work, whether modified by man or nature, change is always inevitable. I thank Silvio Testa very much for being with us in this episode. Thanks to Mauro Sambo, whose music we have been listening to in the form of an excerpt from a very recent piece that was created exclusively for Nowtilus. It was made using the recordings from a long journey rowing from Giudecca to the island of Campana, an island of the southern lagoon, just to reconnect with what Silvio Testa was talking about, and was later reprocessed. So thank you to Mauro Sambo for this beautiful audio contribution. A big thank you to all of you for listening to TBA21 — Academy Radio from Ocean Space, Venice, for the ninth episode of "Nowtilus. Stories from an urban lagoon in the 21st century", a podcast edited by Enrico Bettinello and Alice Ongaro Sartori, in collaboration with Graziano Meneghin for post-production. You can listen to all episodes of Nowtilus on ocean-archive.org, or follow us on Soundcloud, Spotify or iTunes. A warm farewell to all of you from me, Enrico Bettinello.

Musical interlude - Enrico Coniglio, "Saltland" (2020)

NOWTILUS

Storie da una laguna urbana del 21esimo secolo

Episode 10

REINHABITING THE WATER AND THE LAND

with Giancarlo Ghigi and Laura Mascino

Available from October 19th 2020, 4pm
TBA21-Academy Radio on Ocean Archive, SoundCloud, Spotify, iTunes and Google Podcasts.

TBA21—Academy Radio

Intro Music - Enrico Coniglio, "Saltland" (2020)

Enrico Bettinello (EB): You're listening to "Nowtilus. Stories from an urban lagoon in the 21st century", a podcast by Ocean Space, Venice. It's Enrico Betinello here, welcoming you aboard "Nowtilus", stories, thoughts, notes, and issues concerning the rethinking of Venice today. In our tenth episode, we're talking about urban regeneration, about residence and tourism, and about the dynamic between spaces and the communities that pass through them. This is a hot topic in Venice, and we'll be discussing it together with Giancarlo Ghigi, who has been dealing with these issues and projects concerning urban regeneration for many years, and then in the second part of our episode we will be talking to Laura Mascino, an architect who has also dealt with social housing for a long time, and who works professionally on issues relating to regeneration. But for now, let's welcome Giancarlo Ghigi, welcome!

Giancarlo Ghigi (GG): Thank you.

EB: So Giancarlo, we could discuss many issues with you, but first of all I would like to ask you to tell us about one of the projects concerning our city that has gained a lot of public interest in recent years, the "Poveglia per tutti" ("Poveglia for all") project, a project

focussed on the island of Poveglia, which, for listeners who might not know Venice, is a beautiful island in the southern lagoon that has been uninhabited for many years and, as Giancarlo Ghigi will perhaps tell us now, is completely abandoned, and a place that really should be reconsidered. How did this project come about and what exactly is it? And what was Poveglia, what could it be in the future?

GG: First of all, hello to everyone listening. The "Poveglia per tutti" project started one day by chance at a bar, when we opened a newspaper and discovered that the island of Poveglia was going up for sale. So, rather casually, together with the owner of the bar and about twenty other people we decided to dedicate an evening of conversation to this opportunity.

EB: Why was it up for sale, who did it belong to? Who does it belong to?

GG: The island of Poveglia belongs to the state and was put up for sale - well, we understood it as being up for sale, but it was actually a ninety-nine-year lease - in 2014 following an attempt by the state to transfer the property to the Municipality of Venice, which didn't work out, so they decided to put it on the market. We saw this news and, outraged by the fact that all the islands of the southern lagoon had already become hotels, we decided that a popular takeover could be a solution. Since there was no starting price, this led us to say, "well, let's all try to participate, each putting in a little money". This was an unexpected success in the lagoon, and in a short time we managed to gather thousands of people together, with seven points around the city issuing membership cards. In fact, we owe a lot to the urban and commercial operations of the city which acted as a catalyst for registrations, and in a short time we reached almost 5,000 members, something that has been regarded as the most powerful example of social crowdfunding in Italy, at least in terms of the amount of money raised.

EB: How much did you manage to raise?

GG: We raised 478,000 Euros, which is a pretty nice figure.

EB: And yet it didn't help with acquiring the island?

GG: The idea of winning at auction never even crossed our minds, because we know that unfortunately the kind of capital involved in the construction of a large hotel is in a different league. But the notion of challenging these giants with a slingshot was what inspired us, we said: "let's aim for a symbolic figure". Then in reality, during the first phase of the auction we managed to place a bid of 160,000, which made the large international groups give up, and the only group that remained was the Umana group, which had invested 513,000 euros. Let's say that when the state opened the envelopes, they realized that these figures were much lower than expected, and so they put Poveglia on pause and declared the call for bids null and void. We saw this as a first success, because in the last six years the island has remained accessible thanks to this kind of mobilization, but it has also been something of a failure, because we haven't been able to find a way to convince the state to go down a different route. We wanted and still want to create an example of how Poveglia could potentially contribute to the city, we consider it an integral part of the urban fabric of the city.

EB: Right, so let's explain for the people who might not be so familiar with this island - which you can even see from the Lido, it's quite close to Malamocco, which is a small town on the Lido - what is Poveglia, and what can Poveglia represent in an urban lagoon, a concept that will now be familiar to our listeners, or in this continuous dialogue between the water and the stone of our city? What does Poveglia represent, what is it, how long has it been abandoned? Can you briefly explain to help the people listening understand what a wonderful place we are talking about?

GG: Well actually I often find myself trying to define it. Poveglia is truly a part of the urban fabric, if we think about its history it used to have 800 inhabitants, so it was a place that can be compared to one of the smaller inhabited islands today, such as Murano or Burano. In fact, over the centuries its function has changed from being a multipurpose place, to serving just a single one, and the last real purpose of Poveglia was that of a geriatric hospital. This greatly weakened its ability to adapt to small changes in this type of community space, and in fact this caused it to fall back on its historical function.

EB: It seems to me that it is a sort of common thread that connects all the islands of Venice, a kind of monoculture, even from a visual perspective. When you think of Murano, you think about glass, when you think of Burano, you think of course about lace, and when older people think of the other smaller islands, which have now been transformed into hotels or other destinations in the southern lagoon, they were in fact previously home to hospital facilities of various kinds for long-term patients, or in the case of San Servolo for the mentally disabled. It's something of a common trait...

GG: Maybe it stems from the lazarets, by that I mean from the idea that these islands were perfect for serving single purposes, or were necessarily suited to a specific function. In reality this is a weakness. "Poveglia per tutti" hasn't wasted the last six years in vain waiting for the state to give an answer. We have analyzed this fragility and we have tried to initiate a process of repurposing and regeneration that goes in the opposite direction, towards multifunctionality.

EB: What can be done on this island?

GG: The first thing we would like to do is turn a large part of the island into an urban park, which can rebuild that relationship between the water and the land that has often been neglected even by the local administration. For example, it would allow the children of the historic center of Venice to see how agriculture works within the city, or it could accommodate a small weekly market for zero-kilometer produce, there are many ideas based around Poveglia. There are nine universities that have declared their willingness to build a participatory and active relationship with the "Poveglia per tutti" project.

Musical interlude - Giulio Aldinucci, "Autofocus" (2011)

EB: So, one of the projects you have been working on in recent years, and of which you are a co-founder, is a project that - and as you were saying just now, you haven't stood still, and we can see that, so it seems to me that analysis is one of your strong points - it's another project that involves observation and analysis, called "OCIO", a word that perhaps even people who aren't from Venice will recognise as meaning not only "eye", but also "be careful!", a typical Venetian expression, and this is the name of the watchdog on housing and residency. What does this watchdog do, and what have you learned about housing and residency, which incidentally are not only very hot topics, but also extremely current from a regeneration perspective.

GG: As an association that is part of the Venetian civic fabric, we realized that the data on the situation relating to housing in Venice was actually rather scattered, there was no collection point, and some cases were effectively rejected by the administration. We found out that the public watchdogs on housing had all been dissolved, the last one was the Municipality of Venice watchdog in 2012, and the penultimate one was COSES in 2008, so in fact we had no way of keeping an eye on the housing situation in Venice. We felt that the best thing to do was not to ask the institutions, because they are severely lacking in national funding for housing plans, but instead to try to manage it ourselves, while maintaining a very high research profile, so that the data was incontrovertible and wasn't mixed up with opinions. In order to do this, we initially did three days of self-training to understand which areas to investigate - many people got involved with these activities - and in the end we decided that we had to confront three sectors that were particularly relevant to public and private policies on housing: the first is residential housing, which in Venice covers 11% of the market; the second is tourist rentals, which has multiplied in the city in recent years; and the third sector is social housing or housing projects. These are the three sectors that we covered, and in the near future we will also tackle student rentals and student houses.

EB: What kind of picture emerges from the data you have collected and analyzed over the years? What is the current situation? There's a lot of talk - it is obviously a theme that is also often covered in the international press - not only about the depopulation of Venice, which has lost a very high number of residents, but also the idea of «over tourism», which has currently been frozen by this situation with the pandemic, however, certainly the idea that most of the city's houses have been converted into tourist rentals is a topic that is debated by many people, because it's a topic that affects many people, but also because it's also something that's happening to other tourist destinations around the world. So what sort of picture emerges from your analysis?

GG: First of all, there are about 36,000 apartments in the city. Between 6 and 9 thousand of these are rented out to tourists. Trying to reconstruct the data based on the plausible assumption that the proportion of Venetians that own their homes is comparable to the rest of Italy, this means that over the period in which these tourist leases have emerged, the residential leases have significantly decreased, or that the two have been somehow cannibalized. This hypothesis is also confirmed by the most recent data available from the tourist rental portals, which now turns out to be one of the main problems of finding a house in the city. It is no coincidence that during the COVID crisis, numerous tourist apartments have been freed up, and are now becoming available for residential leases, which up until a year ago had been in decline or had completely disappeared. The other sector is the public offering, and this too absolutely must be analyzed.

EB: We always talk about Venetian houses and pass through the squares and streets and see all these beautiful places with all their window shutters closed. According to your analysis, how many publicly owned homes are currently unused?

GG: Reconstructing this data is really difficult, because the listings aren't transparent. Let's say that a public figure was provided by INSULA in 2017, which states that more than 1000 public apartments owned by the municipality are empty. Perhaps some of these are being restructured, but in fact the public offering has contracted considerably due to the absence of strategic national resources for the "housing" sector.

EB: So this is not just a Venetian problem?

GG: Unfortunately it is a problem faced by all historical centers in Italy. Italy invests one fortieth of France and one seventy-second of England for the housing sector.

EB: Given that we are now in this situation with very little international mobility due to the pandemic, and the difficulties that are facing many tourist cities and all the businesses that are based around the movement of people, could this situation, in your

opinion, constitute a basis for change? Do you see any signs that might allow us to start rethinking this issue? And I'd also like to ask what your position is, what are the best practices or ideas that you think might be worthy of consideration in this area?

GG: So this represents the next chapter, which would be difficult to summarize in just a few minutes, but it has to be done: the chapter of possible scenarios. I basically see two options, to put it very simply. A scenario in which public policies restart a housing market that is significantly less "doped" than the current one, less drugged-up by the tourist offering; and a scenario in which the relegation of the "do-it-yourself" tourist rental sector leaves spaces open for international apartment hoarders, who differentiate their portfolios by buying up pieces of the territory and transforming them into luxury hotels.

EB: Is this a real danger? Are there already signs that this might happen, or is this type of threat not yet looming over Venice?

GG: The watchdog has already found some cases that we have documented on the OCIO sites - you can find the sites by googling "Ocio Venezia" - we have documented examples of multinationals that differentiate their portfolios by buying up apartments in Venice, considering it something of a safe haven, with respect to market movements. The best practices in this situation are not particularly simple without public action. Of the attempts at social or subsidized housing from the nineties up to 2010, we have found that in 98% of cases they were unsuccessful. Because it was essentially an attempt at creative finance and either it didn't live up to the public offer that was promised, or it was reabsorbed by market mechanisms. I believe that by analyzing the holes in the plans that have been made in the past, for social housing and subsidized housing, and by trying to understand which practices among these have been successful, a solution can be found for the middle class. But a strategic solution for the city needs to be found above all for the lower middle classes, because the right distribution of income can strengthen the fabric of the city. Having only a few social classes living in the city weakens it.

EB: Well, I'd like to say thank you very much because you have been very precise and clear, and you've painted a picture that - and I'll repeat this, if you google "Ocio Venezia" - our listeners can see for themselves, because all the data you have collected is of course available to everyone. But time is running out and unfortunately we'll soon have to say goodbye, but before we do that, I'd like to ask you which place is closest to your heart in the city of Venice?

GG: Well, the answer is quite simple for me, but maybe it will seem a little too subjective ...

EB: Ah, but it is, it's a question that by definition requires a subjective answer!

GG: Venice is made up of all these little patches of land and its hundred-or-so surrounding islands, and one of my own micro islands is a space between the public and the private that is near my house on Giudecca, where friends can meet up, where we can share the kinds of moments of sociality that really justify doing this type of research, it's an area on Giudecca that I won't share with you, so the location can't be revealed...

EB: We won't reveal it, because otherwise it would be under siege immediately! A big thank you to Giancarlo Ghigi, thanks for joining us aboard Nowtilus!

GG: Thank you too.

Musical interlude - Giulio Aldinucci, "Autofocus" (2011)

EB: And now in the second part of this episode of Nowtilus, we welcome Laura Mascino, an architect who deals with social housing, and who has been working on regeneration issues for a long time. Welcome Laura!

Laura Mascino (LM): Thank you and hello.

EB: Laura has been dealing with these themes for some time and in fact, beyond just thinking about these issues, in recent years Laura's work has also materialized in the form of a cultural project, which was later followed by the publisher Donzelli, which resulted in the publishing of two books. One is called "Riabitare l'Italia" (Reinhabiting Italy), and the other slightly smaller one is called "Manifesto per riabitare l'Italia" (Manifesto for reinhabiting Italy), books in which there are various contributions towards this theme. Laura Mascino is one of the people who contributed to these books, and in the manifesto in particular, she is also the author of the entry on "regeneration", because the manifesto - and maybe shortly you will tell us about this - is almost a sort of manual, a vocabulary to understand the key words on these issues. And so now I'm compelled to ask you, what are the key and pivotal points of this "Reinhabiting Italy" project?

LM: "Riabitare l'Italia" was started in 2017 when we felt the need to bring together a group of people including researchers, professors, and scholars who had all worked on projects and studies relating to regeneration in very varied fields, to put them all together and reconstruct a study that represented several different points of view. Because when we talk about regeneration, it's not that we are talking about redevelopment or architectural regeneration, we are talking about a process that involves scholars who might be anthropologists, sociologists, economists,

urban planners, historians, but also people who work in forestry or with the environment. So we deal with a whole range of disciplines, which perhaps within the book don't completely reinhabit Italy, but they still find their own voice nonetheless. This brilliant group was created, and it has given life to this first book, "Riabitare l'Italia", where we basically talk about the regeneration, the revival of places, especially places that have been abandoned. We started with inland areas, even if our thoughts actually characterize the whole country, however we started from these internal areas as places of experimentation and of regeneration that have the most value; the inland areas become places of experimentation, and in this first text we all worked together. This cultural project then carried on, and we have now become a group, which among other things has also become a "Riabitare l'Italia" association.

EB: On a national scale?

LM: Yes, a brand new cultural association. And the second book arose from the need to build a common vocabulary relating to the theme of "reinhabiting Italy". Words that therefore carve out their definition not only as an explanation of a term, but also through their possibility of becoming an element of design, almost a tool. So it's a vocabulary that's also a bit of a toolbox, which can be used for people approaching these issues. There are two pieces in the "Manifesto" written by me and Antonio De Rossi: one is "heritage", and the other is "regeneration". "Regeneration" is one of those words that, like "sustainability", has now almost lost its meaning because of the way it gets used, but I think it's a very important word, despite it having been a bit diluted, and a word that we come across in all sorts of speeches...

EB: A little overused, sometimes even out of place...

LM: Yes, but it carries with it a range of important meanings, not just the architectural ones. It connotes the idea of something that has changed its way of being, something that has been weakened, which needs to be restored, and that itself suggests the idea of a process rather than just a project that needs to be started.

EB: While you were telling us about these concepts very eloquently, I associated a couple of words with the situation facing this "urban lagoon", which is what we call Venice here on Nowtilus. One is certainly a word that's in the title: "Reinhabiting Venice", which is a city that has long needed to be reinhabited, given the continuous flow of people leaving Venice behind. The other thing relates to these fragile areas, because the subtitle of the book "Riabitare l'Italia" refers to inland areas, which might not be inland geographically, but which might be fragile areas within historical centers, with a different sort of history from that of a small village in the mountains. How do you think we can connect a city like Venice, which is certainly not an inland area, but which does contain many fragile areas within it, with this type of discourse?

LM: Within the "Manifesto" we underlined that when we talk about fragile areas, we are also talking about places inside the city, places that once had a very unified identity, a very unified structure, places that in recent decades have perhaps emptied and have been emptied of their original meaning, finding themselves becoming very fragile areas. In Venice these places exist not only in the historical center, but also in many places on the Venetian mainland, therefore in the entire metropolitan area, and there is a concentration of these places in the central areas, such as in Mestre, as well as in the historical center of Venice. Let's say that right now, with COVID, while everything is at a standstill and the huge economy linked to tourism has stopped, the real fragility of Venice has been revealed, and its impact is huge. The other day I was walking behind San Marco, the bars and restaurants weren't closed, but there were no residents around. So the monoculture of tourism has highlighted the fragility of this place, so we can absolutely speak of a fragile place especially when it comes to the most tourism-centric areas.

Musical interlude - Giulio Aldinucci, "Autofocus" (2011)

EB: Of the many activities that you have been and are still involved in, would you mind sharing some examples that might be interesting to help us understand the practices and dynamics that arise from within the community? Examples that, in your opinion, represent good practices that could also set an example, giving us an indication the potential of these areas, which as you said, extend to the wider lagoon and to the mainland, which actually have a much stronger relationship with the city of Venice and its lagoon than we are often led to believe.

LM: In recent years I have been dealing with the attempts or the desire to revitalize parts of the territory by various active citizenship groups, and I must say that the city as a whole is full of these sorts of attempts. So it appears there's great strength, great energy, and a great chance to work on this territory. I was lucky enough to follow some of them...

EB: Tell us about the luckiest, or the best example, in your opinion.

LM: The best are probably the ones I believe in the most. For example there are these groups of young farmers, based on both the mainland and in the lagoon, and I found the same people on the island of Sant'Erasmo. It's a large group called "Terraferma" which involves the large area near the Terraglio. Between them they have a very strong network. Agricultural production has seen the arrival of

these new figures, of these new farmers who live in these areas, who want to get this industry going again, who believe strongly in creating new types of economies and new ways of using the land, from zero-kilometer produce to organic farming, and so on. And "Terraferma" is one of these groups with whom we have developed a project, a "production park" for the Venetian agricultural territory, which seeks to create a brand, thereby building an economy and contributing to the recovery of the area, while also establishing a new kind of image. By that I mean a territory that isn't wasted, a territory that instead has both aesthetic and productive value, and a place where there are different kinds of values of life, where people might want to raise children. In addition to "Terraferma", another project that I have worked on is something that started just a year ago, close to Via Piave in the center of Mestre, where there is a building complex, indeed a whole block that's completely empty, it's known as "Crocevia Piave", close to the church. It was slowly abandoned, but it used to have a very bourgeois image at the beginning of the twentieth century, it used to house some very elegant shops, and families lived in these large apartments above, built specifically for the middle class. This class no longer exists, and that kind of trade no longer exists, and so this place has been abandoned, despite the will of the owners, and the will of the people who came to live there to reappropriate and reactivate the space. We found ourselves in this situation where the whole project had stopped in its tracks. But there was nonetheless the will and the strength to reopen these spaces, and I realized that in a very short time, with the people who took care of these spaces, this place had the ability to become a central location once again. It only took a few actions to make it a central location that is now starting to gain a new image, representing more of a cultural matrix. A third project that I followed is a part of the institution I work for. The great strength that institutions have in carrying out these projects can be an important factor, which in this case is the opening of a social garden, even if the term is perhaps illustrative of a wider issue, in the sense that the garden has become a meeting place for the elderly.

EB: What area is it in?

LM: It's in Dorsoduro, the project is called "DD-Social". The interesting thing is that these are all low-cost projects, by that I mean the processes began with the bare minimum required to bring that place back into use, so without any real infrastructure, but perhaps with the introduction of temporary elements, such as wooden platforms, or by reintroducing a water supply, reopening the shutters, so that it the space be used safely. So my role as an architect is to make it usable, and then slowly reactivate it with internal work that represents reinhabiting it in a broader sense.

EB: That's really interesting, and I get the sense that the approach you're adopting with all of these projects is not what would be considered a classic approach to redevelopment for redevelopment's sake, which is obviously one of the issues that is much debated, but it's a process that seems to focus more on people, rather than on stone and wood and local materials, right?

LM: You're absolutely right, and that really highlights the importance of the term regeneration, which contrasts with the projects of the nineties or the beginning of the 2000s, in which you could see the main work was being done on the redevelopment of heritage sites, only for something to move in to them, and we ended up with this monoculture of tourism everywhere. Everywhere, because our heritage sites have been redeveloped, but there have been no new ideas about what to do with them. We've arrived at this inverse type of process where the rehabilitation or regeneration process is started without knowing where it will end. The process is triggered without having control of it right through to the end, taking the variables into account and adapting to them from time to time. This also happens with spaces, I start with a space, but I don't exactly know what the evolution of space will look like. Even with "DD-Social" we started with the garden, but then it also became a sort of apartment for the elderly. Maybe now it will grow, without us knowing exactly what will happen in advance. But one thing has to be said: the architectural component becomes very important. Because with these regenerative processes, it's true that the process is important, but it's also important to identify the nature of certain spaces, spaces that have transformative qualities or the capacity for change.

EB: So, just to play devil's advocate, if we were to tell some Venetians about these things, they might perhaps answer by saying, "Yes, that's all well and good, but maybe you should have started with the Venetians when there were still some Venetians living here". The fact is that the critical mass of citizens has been considerably weakened, because the number of citizens has decreased, and this creates a bit of doubt around whether there is even a community capable of actively caring for this sort of stuff. Part of the population has a kind of double link to the tourist monoculture, in both good and bad ways, but people certainly often say, "Let's start with the citizens, when most of the citizens are now gone". In your opinion, where do we find the human resources for this kind of opportunity for regeneration?

LM: Your question just made me think about something that I hadn't really grasped before. Perhaps Venice has experienced a sort of abandonment like what we've seen in the inland areas, in that there are increasingly fewer residents due to a number of factors. When they rebuild in the inland areas, they don't tend to rebuild those communities with the people who lived there, or the few who still live there in mind. However, by creating situations and opportunities, people with

certain values, or who have certain personal projects, might be attracted to go and live in those places. Not only to go and live in those places, but to take care of them too. So through these experiments, Venice too needs to create a citizenship made up of citizens who want to live here, who have their own projects, who actually reside here, who aren't just tourists in this city, and who want to invest in this city.

EB: Thank you for painting us this picture, it has been really stimulating, and it would be interesting to explore some aspects even further, but unfortunately time's running out and we're approaching the end of this episode. But we can't leave without asking you the question we always ask our guests: which place in Venice is closest to your heart, Laura Mascino.

LM: There are many places that are close to my heart, this is a city in which it's really hard to choose one particular favorite place. But right now, maybe the place closest to my heart is Cannaregio, a place that I go to frequently and where I always feel good. Perhaps because it has these long canalsides, one after another, which are perfect for walking along.

EB: Thank you, now it's time to say goodbye to Laura Mascino, thank you for joining us, and thanks to all of you who have been listening. We'd like to thank Enrico Coniglio, who is the musician behind our theme song. The music that you listened to during the episode on the other hand, which as usual emerges from time to time in a rather ethereal way only to fade away once again, was by Giulio Aldinucci, taken from "Autofocus", whom we'd also like to thank. So thanks again to all of you for listening to TBA21 — Academy Radio from Ocean Space, Venice, for the tenth episode of "Nowtilus. Stories from an urban lagoon in the 21st century", a podcast edited by Enrico Bettinello and Alice Ongaro Sartori, in collaboration with Graziano Meneghin for post-production. You can listen to all episodes of Nowtilus on ocean-archive.org, or follow us on Soundcloud, Spotify or iTunes. A warm farewell to all of you from me, Enrico Bettinello.

Musical interlude - Enrico Coniglio, "Saltland" (2020)

NOWTILUS

Storie da una laguna urbana del 21esimo secolo

Episode 11

ALL THE VENICES IN THE WORLD. POSTCARDS, COMICS, GAMES AND CURIOSITIES FROM ALBERTO TOSO FEI'S COLLECTION

Available from December 17th 2020, 4pm
TBA21-Academy Radio on Ocean Archive, SoundCloud, Spotify, iTunes and Google Podcasts.

Enrico Bettinello (EB): You are listening to Nowtilus. Stories from an urban lagoon in the 21st century, a podcast by Ocean Space, Venice. This is Enrico Bettinello, here to welcome you aboard "Nowtilus", stories, thoughts, notes, and issues concerning the rethinking of Venice today. In the eleventh and final episode of 2020, we'll be talking about the image of Venice around the world through the lens of objects, postcards, toponyms, and we'll be doing this in the company of Alberto Toso Fei, someone who certainly needs no introduction. An expert in Venice's history, it's stories and mysteries, both familiar and unfamiliar. A writer and essayist whose works have been translated into several languages, and above all, a narrator of a multi-faceted Venice that can be observed from many different perspectives, something that we really like here at Nowtilus. The perspective we have chosen today passes through the lens of an incredible collection of objects that all relate to Venice in some way. This is something that many people might not be familiar with, but something my fellow Nowtilus producer Alice Ongaro Sartori and I are both aware of, and it seemed perfect to somehow bring things back around to some of the reflections we have covered in our podcast, which for several months now has been focussed on the contemporary image of Venice. In the many months that we have spent with you, not only on the podcast but also at Nowtilus Live! which we held at Ocean Space in the Church of San Lorenzo back in October, a thin but very clear thread emerged, which ties together all the stories and all our guests, who we continue to thank for sharing their time with us. This thread is the interesting dynamic between the narratives of Venice, between its identities, whether perceived, narrated, or real, a dynamic in which perspectives often exchange roles, and bring about new ways of rethinking the relationship between communities and what we have defined as the "urban lagoon". Today we continue this reflection in a lighthearted yet hopefully coherent way together with Alberto Toso Fei. Welcome, Alberto Toso Fei.

Alberto Toso Fei (ATF): Thanks Enrico, and hello to everyone listening.

EB: As we said in the introduction, you're a writer known and appreciated for your many stories, but not everyone knows that you are a compulsive collector of objects and various memorabilia relating to Venice. How did your passion for these objects come about? Obviously you are Venetian, and very much in love with your city, so we might make an educated guess, but tell us about how this started, and what was the first object that started your collection?

ATF: I don't really know if there was a first object, I have always loved going to flea markets, I have an unstable and uncontrolled compulsiveness for things that speak to me in some way. I am a story hunter, and sometimes even objects tell stories, they can carry meanings that can affect you in some way or another. Initially I started collecting things I liked, things that spoke to me, then it became unsustainable, both objectively and materially, and I "limited" myself to things relating to Venice alone. Wherever I go, if I come across a second-hand dealer, any small shop selling pseudo-antiques or just old stuff, I always go in and say the name of the city, and I ask, "What does this remind you of?". And they bring out what they have, open drawers, search shelves, take down books and objects, and sometimes you find some really lovely things. We're talking about all sorts of objects, from the simplest and most immediate, such as postcards, matchboxes, or vouchers. I really have everything, erinnofili, which are not traditional postage stamps, but instead stamps that were used to seal envelopes, the stickers that used to be found in boxes of chocolates, or any other objects that were intended for children. Venice, however, offers an image of itself that enters the imagination from a very young age.

EB: So, I ask you as a historian of Venice, when exactly did this image, this sort of promotion of the image of Venice come about? How did it develop? It must have been pretty remarkable marketing if images of Venice have ended up all over the world?

ATF: It began long, long ago, since at least the dawn of the printing press. Venice was of course once a world center for the publication of all kinds of books, so the city didn't hesitate in promoting its own myth. Already by the 1500s there were wonderful books that give accounts of Venice, written not only by Venetians, but also outsiders. And by the 1600s there were many travelers of other nationalities who were writing books about Venice, and this added fuel to the myth, a myth that was born ever further away. I've noted that even if you travel to the peaks of Tibet, or among the mangroves of Brazil, if someone comes across a coat of arms with the Winged Lion, they don't say, "Ah, Saint Mark the Evangelist" - to whom this symbol really belongs - but they say instead, "Ah, Venice !" Venice represents the first extraordinary example of stealing a logo design, not only taking possession of the body of the saint (if indeed there even is one, but that's another story), but also taking possession of his symbol, embodying it, and making it their own. Venice understood that the image and the positioning of oneself are perhaps more powerful than any reality.

EB: Even the name "Venice" hasn't been limited to our urban lagoon, and has actually traveled all over the world. How many Venices are there around the world, as far as you're aware?

ATF: It's very difficult to say, there are at least twenty of them in the United States alone, and at least twenty-three elsewhere, we are talking about "recently colonized" places, at least compared to the history of Western colonization, in Central and South America.

They are either names like "Venezia" or "Venetia". Venezuela got its name because the explorer Amerigo Vespucci saw that the territory's inhabitants lived in houses on stilts that reminded him of little Venices. The first name of Venezuela was "Veneziola" or "Venezuola". So there's even an entire country that takes its name from Venice. There are places called "Rialto" too, and this is only factoring in places have been named after Venice. We can also add to this list cities that have earned the nickname "The Venice of the North", from Amsterdam to Bamberg, Stockholm, Bruges, and St. Petersburg, and there are also cities in China that are called "The Venice of ..." in this case, "of the Far East". Furthermore, there are cities that have neighborhoods called "Venezia", such as Palato, Spalato, Bamberga, and Livorno. There are also a dozen "Bridges of Sighs" around the world.

EB: Are they simply named after the Bridge of Sighs, or do they also resemble it from a structural perspective?

ATF: They'd like to think they resemble it... It's fun to do a search on the internet by typing in, for example, "Bridge of Sighs in different languages" and all sorts of things crop up, it's wonderful. There's one in Cambridge, and obviously if Cambridge has one, Oxford has to have one too. There are some in Germany, there's one in Lima, Peru, a pedestrian bridge that passes over a freeway which they say is so romantic that it's called "El Puento de los Sospiros", naturally. Almost all of them are inspired by the Venetian one. As always, the Americans are the most philological, there used to be one, which no longer exists but can still be seen in old postcards of New York, which transferred prisoners from court to the prisons, which were called "The Tombs", and this was also called "The Bridge of Sighs". That was very historically accurate. There's another one today, a modern bridge, which spans two parts of a skyscraper which was built after 1902, based on the bell tower of San Marco. It belongs to the "Life Insurance" company, and it's a skyscraper that really does resemble the bell tower of San Marco, and it's connected to another building by this "Bridge of Sighs".

EB: In short, this really is a recurring image, as we have often pointed out in previous episodes of Nowtilus, an image that bounces around in a truly uncontrolled way, meaning that the image and identity of this city are constantly confused in something like an endless hall of mirrors. You mentioned the postcards from your collection, can you tell us about some gems from your collection? Just to say for those who are listening, who might now be worried because they won't be able to see the objects we'll be talking about, but don't worry, all the objects are going to be viewable on our social channels, both on Facebook and on Instagram. We'll be promptly putting up images of Alberto Toso Fei's curiosities, who we thank very much for helping us with this. So, these postcards then...

ATF: Venice is evocative though, isn't it? Earlier I mentioned matchboxes adorned with pictures, this one here that I'll give you to show off is a Japanese matchbox with this gondola in the middle of the skyscrapers, it's a wonderful thing. And similar to this kind of evocation, these postcards show places, circumstances or objects, in this case a gondola, something that has been reproduced in very disparate forms. Around the world several real gondolas can be found, which have been bought, imported, and made use of. In many places it's possible to find gondolas with pseudo-gondoliers, people who have learned to use a gondola, "gondola" is a Venetian name which is now found all over the world. All a boat needs, I don't know, is a certain shape at the bow, and that it's generally used to take people around for leisure, and that boat ends up being called a gondola. There's a kind of steamboat in Wales, there are - well, at least there used to be, because they feature in very old postcards, and we need to find out if they still actually exist - but there are some inside a cave in Mallorca, which are known as "las gondolas" of the cave of the "Drach", and there were fakes of these, which they used to make postcards in Manchester... Even in Star Wars, with all of it's many references, also makes use of a gondola, which is obviously an ultramodern interpretation of the gondola because we are talking about a dystopian future, but it is nonetheless called a gondola, and unequivocally resembles one. In this case too, if you just search the internet you will immediately find "The Star Wars Gondola".

Musical interlude - Molven, "Random Access" (2009).

EB: So, we often imagine postcards as illustrations that are just like photographs, but obviously there are also many postcards that are designed and manipulated. What kind of Venice emerges? A realistic Venice? Or is it one that overlaps with other elements of the imagination?

ATF: Generally speaking, people who seek to represent Venice through their creativity tend to include everything they would like to see. This will become relevant to the comics we talk about in a moment, in the sense that it's not even necessary to copy a real image, a photo, a postcard, you don't need to reproduce it faithfully in a drawing in order to convey the idea of Venice, because it's enough to include some houses on the water or whatever, something that you remember, something that floats, some sort of dome. I have sheet music in which Venice appears very similar to Constantinople, Istanbul, there are more minarets and domes than churches and palaces, but "Venice is so many things". After all, this really is the case, in some ways... In the sense that these references to the East are unequivocal. We who live here can perceive it, and the people who have never been here may feel this influence even stronger, which is more a feeling than something you can fully appreciate visually.

EB: Well, this really is interesting because they are projections of Venice, they are the projections of what people imagine, and this is something that we have come to understand throughout these episodes of "Nowtilus", because we live in what is kind of like a Rorschach city, in which everyone is asked "what do you see inside?" And there are some who see nostalgia, or some who see potential. Others instead recognize real aspects that aren't real, and vice versa. Perhaps within these imaginary elements, whose roles are interchangeable with reality, we might also find the key to rethinking our city. These postcards come from all over the world, so how far afield have you found traces of Venetian imagery and symbols on a postcard?

ATF: The farthest traces almost always come from the United States, where there's a great creative freedom. These are pre-internet postcards, and in most cases pre-television too, when there was no way to imprint such a faithful image on the retina. And so someone could just recall Venice... There's this French postcard that's fairly accurate in its wording, because it reads "a gondola in Italy", not even in Venice... This gondola could be on Lake Maggiore or Lake Como, I have no idea... Maybe even on Lake Bolsena but [in Venetian] it's definitely not in Venice! [laughs].

EB: On the other hand, before the internet or television there wasn't really a way to check or verify truthfulness, and so the imagination could run wild. Let's leave the postcards for a moment, and continue to rummage through your collection. Let's move on to three dimensions, the objects that you think are of particular interest and that represent this continuous exchange of the imagination, what can you tell us about?

ATF: Well, I have more reproductions of gondolas, from the Rialto bridge, which can be quite faithful as far as souvenirs go, for example. Among the old souvenirs that I collect, especially from the United States, there are many letter openers, envelope openers with a blade, and the handles feature the "ferro" of the gondola, the metal decoration at the bow, or even a whole gondola with a gondolier on it, very comfortable to hold as you can probably imagine... They are rather charming and decorative, and this is something that is also reflected in the everyday object. Some of the most peculiar things are games. One of the most curious that I've found is a French game, quite old - I think it's from between World War One and World War Two - which is called "La Colombe di Venise", or "the dove of Venice" in English. This is a closed box with a glass window, and the lid features a city that isn't Venice, a girl surrounded by these doves and wearing a costume, which in my opinion is more typical of Matera. The aim of the game, enclosed by this glass, is to make this metal bird go up a small glass ramp, making it jump until it reaches the top, which is a kind of cylinder. I'll give you an image of this to share with your listeners too. So this is "La Colombe de Venise", which really has nothing to do with Venice, other than the name printed on the box. But it nonetheless sticks in your imagination, I imagine generations of children who had their perception of Venice ruined by playing this game, which I must say is perhaps the most strikingly dystopian thing I have found in recent years.

Musical interlude - Molven, "Random Access" (2009).

EB: Alberto Toso Fei, earlier you mentioned that Venice has featured in comics, so let's now dive into the heart of popular culture, a medium that's found far and wide, whose images leave an impression on readers of all ages, almost subliminally. How many comics does Venice appear in? And in which comics? By that I mean the comics that aren't specifically dedicated to Venice...

ATF: I would say all of them! In the sense that, if we think of any so-called "VIP" or any character from history, even from recent history, no matter how famous they are, they all come to Venice sooner or later, they take their photos in Piazza San Marco with pigeons in their hands, or in a gondola, and so on... And just as flesh and blood personalities come to Venice, ever since comics have existed, so do comic book characters. Such an imaginative city can easily host any character that comes to mind. The only one I still have been unable to find in Venice, but it is only a matter of time, is Tex. I haven't lost hope... Besides, Buffalo Bill came here, so I don't see why Tex couldn't. From Topo Gigio to Huckleberry Hound, from Tiramolla (for the listeners of a certain age) to the Disney mice and ducks that often come and go, and who we should definitely take a look at because it's very funny to see what they get up to in Venice, to all the superheroes: from Wonderwoman to Batman, who also recently visited a version of Venice that looks a lot like Florence: he supposedly goes to Rialto but it honestly looks more like the Ponte Vecchio. Stuff that was drawn just a few years ago, very Gotham City-like Venice. But then again this city really lends itself to any type of sublimation and transformation. Spider-Man couldn't miss out either...

EB: He was recently in a film shot here in Venice...

ATF: Then there's Phantom, or "the Masked Man", so we're talking about the olden days too. So they've all been to Venice, and sometimes they live here too... even Yogi Bear! They work as gondoliers, or sometimes they just go on their gondola ride... Dylan Dog, Martin Mystère, just to give another couple of Italian examples. Sometimes they come to a Venice that seems to really exist, in the sense that we can get our bearings as we read, sometimes in the most well-known locations: from San Marco to Rialto. There's Japanese manga too... I'm going through it mentally... On the other hand, sometimes the city takes the form

of recognizable but somewhat hidden glimpses that are evidently copied from photographs. And in other instances, more often than not, it's a Venice that doesn't really exist, one that exists only in that specific comic book. There is a comic from the '60s called "Spionaggio a Venezia" (Espionage in Venice) – the name of the series is "Guerra di Spie" (Spy War) – there is a part in Venice in which a character arrives at Venice train station, gets into a car and says the classic phrase: "Follow that car!" which belongs to the person being followed, who is heading to a hotel.

EB: In Venice!

ATF: Yes, yes, like at Piazzale Roma, repeating what happened on the bridge there [laughter]... What a hilarious and ridiculous situation. [Reference to a news story from February 2011, when a group of young people illegally drove a car across the Calatrava pedestrian bridge, connecting Piazzale Roma with Santa Lucia railway station.]

EB: So, earlier you were talking about Disney characters, in both duck and mouse forms. Could the fact that Venice is present in so many Disney stories also be influenced by the fact that one of the great Italian Disney artists was Venetian?

ATF: Yes, more than one! There is Cavazzano, the master of masters, but there was also Gatto, there were others whose names I can't remember right now. There are at least four Venetians who worked as artists for Disney; this certainly influences their work, and theirs is a recognizable Venice, as you can probably imagine. The funny thing is that often real historical things have been included in Disney comics, such as "Theriaca", a miracle drug of antiquity, the Doge's ring, and consequently the Marriage of the Sea ceremony, these recurring elements that are entirely factual, they are part of the city's history. Or the problems the city has struggled with too, like the Acqua Alta in the '70s, which has always been a serious problem, and which was addressed by placing large inflatable mattresses beneath the monuments of the city. When the waters rose, something which comes in waves – when I was a child I was really struck by this mini "tsunami" that came and then went with the Acqua Alta – Scrooge McDuck was there to invent a system to lift the monuments up, and keep them dry. Naturally, Scrooge McDuck runs into some trouble with the Beagle Boys, who at a one point steal the Basilica of San Marco.

EB: No!

ATF: They tow it away, but in order to do so, they release all the other monuments, and they end up all around the lagoon, so we had to give up on the idea of saving monuments using this method...

EB: Well, it's a nice suggestion.

ATF: There's another good comic that deals instead with tourism, and consequently the overpopulation of tourists. I don't remember what year it came out, but it's from a few decades ago, and this speaks volumes about Mickey's foresight when compared to the local administrations over the last few decades. So what did they do? They made the tourists visit the city virtually. This would be particularly useful today, in an age defined by coronavirus and restricted movement. There were robots on caterpillar tracks that moved around the city and offering physical guided tours, with this technology these robots allowed people with VR headsets to experience the city in real-time, wherever the robot went. But then the Venetians realise that this technology means that they don't make any money – the tourists don't go to restaurants, they don't buy souvenirs, they don't consume anything – and so the experiment fails miserably.

EB: As a vision, that seems both very prophetic and very interesting. So, we are coming to the end of our chat, I'd happily stay here talking with you for hours and hours, because I imagine these are just a few examples that we could pluck out from your beautiful collection. In your opinion, what kind of idea of Venice emerges, or which Venices emerge? How do these different Venices recur, and how are Venetians themselves represented? Can you give us just an impression, I don't want to get too serious, because your stories have been very light and funny, but also extremely useful in my opinion, in terms of understanding this exchange of imagination.

ATF: Historically, we Venetians have in some way always created and nourished the myth of the city. But then on the other hand, we have also become the victims of it, so even very recently, we have become sort of like a postcard version of ourselves, by that I mean we try to offer up this ideal image of the city to the people who come to visit us, or to those who flatter us, to keep them happy somehow. This is a beautiful and noble thing, of feeding people what they want to eat, putting them to sleep where they want to sleep, however, we haven't taught them what we really are, or what good local food to eat, or that they shouldn't always go to fast food restaurants (not that I have anything against fast-food). I say this because when you go to a new or different place, it's nice to experience many aspects of the place, such as its culinary traditions for example, and so it's always something of a double-edged sword. We love to nurture the myth of Venice, sometimes inventing things ourselves too... I deal with history a lot, with legends, even legends that have been created in very modern times. Staying with the theme of the gondola, the "ferro" at the bow of the gondola has six "teeth", which supposedly represent the six sestieri, the city districts, but they probably only date from the '40s or '50s. This makes the legend no less true, however. I don't know how to explain. It's a recent invention, it's a little, modern legend that should be taken for what it

is, but it's also a sign of how this city is in continuous transformation, even in the contemporary era, and on the other hand how it's continuously searching to perpetuate its own myth. I'll give you one last example, if I may: the game "Mercante in Fiera" (the Merchant at the Fair) which involves playing cards that feature characters, places, animals, and a single city, which is Venice. Of all the cards of Mercante in Fiera, this game that used to be played at Christmas a long time ago, Venice is the only representation of a city that exists in this deck that contains dozens and dozens of images.

EB: Well, thank you so much for all these suggestions, which I think offer us not only a way to have some fun, but also help us to reflect and look at the city from lots of new angles. As we are moving towards the end of this episode, we can't help but ask you, as a Venetian who happens to be known by Venice, what is the place that's closest to your heart here in Venice?

ATF: Now I'll tell a lie, so everyone goes elsewhere...

EB: Don't think you're the first to mislead our listeners like that!

ATF: For me, a Venetian setting that I hold very close to heart because of both its extraordinary beauty and its "banality", in the sense that it's not exactly a central place, is Campo San Giovanni e Paolo. It's one of those places where I always feel good, where my eyes are engaged as much as my spirit, it has a lot of history and stories, you can sit and have a good coffee, which never hurts, and it's always full of children playing soccer, using the tombs of the Doges as goalposts. Something that could be seen as a bit blasphemous, but I'm sure that the Tiepolos (the Doges between the 13th and 14th centuries), a father and son, are very happy with this. The children have taken possession of these stones in a healthy way, and it's a place that I really like. I'll add another one. I'm from Murano, and as a boy we used to go to the Lazzareto Nuovo, Sant'Erasmo. A place that really connects with me, don't ask me why, is the abandoned island of San Giacomo in Paludo.

EB: You told me not to ask you why, and so we'll leave our listeners guessing about these places. Thanks very much to Alberto Toso Fei, thanks for joining us, and thanks to all of you for listening to us. We'd also like to thank Enrico Coniglio who is the musician behind our theme song, while the music you listened to throughout the episode is by Molven, and was taken from the "Random Access". Thank you for listening to TBA21-Academy Radio from Ocean Space, Venice, for what was the eleventh and last episode of "Nowtilus. Stories from an urban lagoon in the 21st century" in 2020, a podcast edited by Enrico Bettinello and Alice Ongaro Sartori, in collaboration with Graziano Meneghin for post-production. You can listen to all episodes of Nowtilus on ocean-archive.org, or follow us on Soundcloud, Spotify or iTunes. Today, more so than ever, have a look at our social networks, both Instagram and Facebook, to see images of the objects Alberto Toso Fei talked to us about. A warm farewell to all of you from me, Enrico Bettinello.

Musical interlude - Enrico Coniglio, "Saltland" (2020)

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