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Political Theatre in Public Spaces: Manifesting Identity in Venice, Italy

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POLITICAL THEATRE IN PUBLIC SPACES: MANIFESTING IDENTITY IN VENICE, ITALY

by

IVEY R. TAPP

Under the Direction of Emanuela Guano

ABSTRACT

The combination of poorly managed mass tourism, rapidly increasing international migration, and a declining economy facilitated a permanent exodus of natives out of the Venetian lagoon. This thesis examines how the community activism group and social network Venessia.com attempts to reclaim a place-based and place-manifested Venetian identity (*venezianità*) through theatrical public protests. While members are sensitive to an ethic of intercultural awareness, the discourse accompanying their concerns reveals nostalgia for the power and grandeur of Venice's past that is threatened by a perceived invasion by suspicious outsiders. The theoretical framework I employ to illuminate Venessia.com's efforts includes the socio-cultural and economic implications of mass tourism, theory of space and place, and critiques of modernity and postmodernity.

INDEX WORDS: Tourism, Immigration, Modernity, Identity, Space and place, Citizen activism, Tradition, Chinese, Venice, Italy

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IVEY R. TAPP

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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2012

POLITICAL THEATRE IN PUBLIC SPACES: MANIFESTING IDENTITY IN VENICE, ITALY

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DEDICATION

A Venezia.

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To the members of Venessia.com. You opened your hearts, minds, and lives to me, and showed me how to *diventare veneziana*. For your hospitality, eloquence, and the many pizzas, coffees, and spritzes (the fuel of my research!), *grazie mille*.

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1 - Introduction

1.1 Setting the Scene: The Inauguration of Veniceland

Just before noon on a cloudy mid-November day, a blue, black and yellow *topa* (a flat-bottomed lagoon boat) makes its way down the Grand Canal in Venice, Italy. Normally blending into the steady water traffic of *tassi*, *gondole*, and *vaporetti*¹, today a local band, *La Ghenga Fuoriposto*, sports black sunglasses and Mickey Mouse ears while performing a satirical song about the increasingly dismal theme-park existence that plagues the historic lagoon city. The boat encroaches upon its final destination: the foot of the controversial Calatrava Bridge,² where *La Ghenga* reprises the song “Venezia 2020”³ (for lyrics, see Appendix A). As the bluesy tune livens the atmosphere, other boats arrive, and characters in vibrant, Disney-like costumes disembark and gather under a large blue and yellow banner brandishing the name “Veniceland”. A larger-than-life emcee brings a megaphone to his mouth. He welcomes visitors to this fantasy fun land, where all can rest and snack, and all sorts of accessories will be accessible at any price, in every corner of the park. In this unforgettable, dream-like atmosphere where “the real protagonist is you!” a young boy asks the charismatic blond woman dressed as Minnie Mouse, “Where is Veniceland?” and receives a hearty laugh in response. With all the pomp and ceremony surrounding this

¹ water taxis, gondolas, and water busses.

² Nicknamed the Calatrava Bridge for its architect, Santiago Calatrava, the *Ponte della Costituzione* (Bridge of the Constitution) might be perceived as the unofficial “entrance” to Venice, as it connects incomers from the bus traffic of the Piazzale Roma station to the thoroughfare that leads most directly down to the main tourist sites and heart of the city. The fourth and most recent bridge (2008) to cross the Grand Canal (all except the Rialto Bridge were built in the 20th century), the Calatrava is largely disliked for its sleek modern design and material, generally perceived as incongruous with the iconic Venetian Gothic architecture surrounding it, and slippery and awkwardly spaced steps. The greatest outrage for tax-paying citizens, however, was the exorbitant final cost of the production – well above and beyond its original €6.7 million.

³ The music video for this song, including footage from this particular performance, can be seen at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v= wbn1wG80Ik>.

theatrical event, it's hard to blame the boy—or any of the adults wondering the same thing, for that matter—for believing this “Veniceland” to be a true theme park, built for his pleasure and entertainment.⁴

This is the second grand *manifestazione*, or theatrical protest, of Venessia.com, following 2010's popular Funeral for Venice, which sardonically mourned the cultural death of Venice. The Inauguration of Veniceland in 2011 calls attention to the result of that death—the state of Venice as a theme park, a living museum, a backdrop for the dreams and adventures of tourists and financial pursuits of immigrants, while residents are condemned to either leave the city or remain on as *figuranti*—extras, characters, simply *figures* comprising the dreamlike experience for its transient visitors. Spectators are further informed that not only Murano glass is available, but ‘precious’ Chinese glass as well. After wishing visitors a fun stay in this park of dreams, he presents the key to the Mistress of Ceremonies, who taunts and teases as she takes her time cutting the tricolor ribbon. *Prosecco* bottles are popped and the effervescent white wine is served all around. Balloons are doled out to wide-eyed children or released into the air, smiles are captured on the faces of those who “take a shot” at being a Venetian in the life-size cardboard cut-out of a gondolier, and all are directed to the ticket counter, where a mouse-ear-clad worker hands out maps and brochures.

The Inauguration of Veniceland uses the premise of a theme park existence to call attention to the pressing issues that have led Venice to its current state: a combination of poorly managed mass tourism, rapidly increasing international migration, and a declining

⁴ For a thorough historic and logistic depiction of Disneyland in the US, see Stephen M. Fjellman's *Vinyl Leaves: Walt Disney World and America*.

economy, which have culminated in a permanent exodus of natives out of the Venetian lagoon. Based on ten months of fieldwork from August 2010 to May 2012, this thesis examines how the community activism group and social network Venessia.com attempts to reclaim a place-based and place-manifested Venetian identity (*venezianità*) through theatrical public protests. While members are sensitive to an ethic of intercultural awareness, the discourse accompanying their concerns reveals nostalgia for the power and grandeur of Venice's past that is threatened by a perceived invasion by suspicious outsiders. With the Inauguration of Veniceland, Venessia.com is channeling the heuristics of Disney characters, public figures, and caricatures of Venetian and tourist life to call attention to its very existence, thus intentionally making itself a simulacra of a simulacra. What do Venessia.com's methods and concomitant discourses reveal about how particular residents in Venice, Italy, cope with rapid economic and cultural change? Analyzed in a framework of Venice as a postmodern neo-colonized "tableau" (Boyer 1992), what is then implicated concerning perceptions and identities of selves and Others within these spaces?



Image 1.1 The Inauguration of Veniceland. Photo by author.

1.2 Background of Venessia.com

“Venessia.com” is a pluralistic, democratic, transversal and intergenerational civic movement. “Venessia.com” combines goliardic irony and civic activism to support the idea of Venice as a living city, for residential concerns and for socio-economic and administrative revival specific to the lagoon.

[<http://veniceland2010.wordpress.com/>]

Sometime in the year 2000, souvenir vendor Stefano Soffiato started a website as a hobby, candidly documenting details of the life and interactions he saw around his kiosk in Saint Mark’s Square. His aim was to use his interest in photography, videography, and web design in order to humorously cope with and jest at the antics and behaviors of tourists, immigrants, and Venetians (all the while hoping to shed Venetians in a positive light, presenting them as nice and cordial people, against their reputation as cold and rude to tourists). The website grew and attracted the attention of more and more citizens searching for a similar outlet to both praise and criticize their beloved hometown (and those in it), some of whom began meeting casually in 2003 in order to discuss city concerns. By 2007, the “Pro-Venice Website” expanded to include a ning.com social network, now with over 1,000 members enrolled. It was in this year the group began organizing and attending events around the city, which included anything from monthly social gatherings to municipal meetings to protests and demonstrations. Most members are in the 30-50 age range, and tend to come from or around Venice, although many also come from other parts of Italy and Europe, and even so far as North America, Japan, and Australia. Predominantly comprised of middle class individuals, many members work in the tourism industry directly as hoteliers or vendors; others work in sectors such as housing, marketing, or sales. In addition to the more explicitly public portion of

Venessia.com, it is also—and perhaps more importantly for some group members—a community group. In warmer months, members gather together for drinks and company at “*Spriss Time*” (a *spritz*, or in dialect, *spriss*, is an iconic regional cocktail made with sparkling wine, bitters, and seltzer water whose origins correspond with the Austrian regime in Venice, hence the more Germanic name).

Venessia.com describes their efforts as *goliardico*, harkening back to a group of students in Padova in the Middle Ages who would pull anti-religious pranks, and speaks to the tongue-in-cheek, irreverent, light-hearted nature of their activities—all with an underlying critique of the institutions and systems restricting their lives. Aligning with Michael Bakhtin’s (1941) notion of the *carnavalesque*—rambunctious burlesque performances that allow oppressed groups to express controversial views, and boundaries to be crossed—crude humor is used to appeal to a common humanity and provoke a sociopolitical discourse (Bakhtin 1941). Underlying Venessia.com’s pranks and protests is the motive of bringing attention to pressing issues, most particularly the continued loss of residential services and the loss of diversified economic activity in the lagoon.

Some of the more notable feats have included posting both the Calatrava Bridge and pictures of group members as “the last remaining Venetians” for sale on eBay, installing a well-known “resident tracker” in the window of a pharmacy in the heavily trafficked Campo San Bortolo near the Rialto Bridge, and dressing up as American Indians for *Carnevale* in February 2010 to invite the comparison of Venetian residents as Native Americans living on reservations. Incidentally ending up on the more nefarious end of their pranks was the laying-down of *linzuole*, or sheets, from St. Mark’s Plaza up to the Piazzale Roma bus station in an effort to bring attention to the illegal street selling of knock-off

designer purses and the like on the streets (in Italian, *calli*, or *calle* for the singular) of Venice by the *vu cumprà* (a transliteration of the words “*Vuoi comprare?*” or “Do you want to buy?” that the typically Senegalese merchants call to passersby [Davis and Marvin 2004:115]). Conducting business without permits, the *vu cumprà* tend to keep their goods easily mobile in anticipation of approaching police, either by carrying the items on their person or setting them down on a white sheet. The *linzuole* event provoked Migropolis (Scheppe 2010), a media-arts student study and critique of Venice, to dub them xenophobic neo-Fascists. For most all members, this libel was hurtful and harmful, and indicative of the extent to which their motives and missives were misunderstood. This has since served as a highly sensitive reference point for many members against which to defend their views on immigrants in the city, leading them to expound upon how and why these misnomers were based on shortsightedness and misinformation. Members such as Marco and Bart maintain that while race is implicated in this event from an outside perspective, the protest was against illegal practices hurting the city’s economy rather than any message against the presence of foreigners of any skin color in the city.

The Funeral of Venice of 2009 is rather well renowned, having received international media coverage and truly making a name for the group locally. In fact, group spokesperson Matteo Secchi pointed out that after the earthquake in Aquila (widely publicized not only for its devastating effects in the area near Rome, but also for Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi’s poor recourse in aid and reconstruction), the *Funerale* was the second most publicized international media event sourcing from Italy in 2009. Proceeding down the Grand Canal with a bright pink coffin and dramatic music, the group ended up at City Hall with bottles of *prosecco*, and circulating a petition entitled *Voglio Diventare*

Veneziano (I Want to Become Venetian). Although many younger residents in Venice, and even some group members, believe that the funeral sent too negative a message, the intention was to make a mockery of the city's "dying population" (having dropped in half since the 1960s, and projected to continue decreasing at a rate of 0.5% per year, according to Russo and Sans 2009) in order to spark a revival of citizen and government action.

Even in light of their scope of instigating political dialogue and change, Venessia.com ardently stands behind their assertion of being *apolitical*. By this, they mean that the group itself is not a political entity, and is not officially associated with a particular party. Members—even those of the *direttivo* (directive, the six main organizers and active agents)—run the gamut of the complex and wide-ranging Italian political spectrum. Although associated with right-wing parties, which I detail further in chapter four, *direttivo* members Matteo and Massimo clarify that this alignment is based on misguided negative media, such as the *linzuolata* event, or individuals members misusing the group as an avenue for their own rightist political motives without the full endorsement of Venessia.com behind them. While the (somewhat contentious) sibling group 40xVenezia (40 for Venice) outright trains and prepares members to enter into the political arena, Venessia.com focuses first on congregating citizens and constructing a sense of community, then on collectively bringing that strength to their Goliardic *manifestazioni* in order to provoke politicians and political change.

1.3 History of Tourism in Venice

More on Venice's history will be covered in a later chapter, yet initially a brief tour of its story with tourism will shed light on the significance of the practice for the city, and elucidate how and why tourism's mass modern incarnation presents such unique concerns. The Queen of the Adriatic has drawn visitors for centuries, with the first official tour guides appearing in 1204 (Quinn 2007:461). As a main stop on pilgrimage treks in the Middle Ages, Catholic relics were sold in Saint Mark's Square, and while the rest of Europe remained country backwaters, pilgrims marveled at the architectural, artistic, and cultural feats of the Republic (Davis and Marvin 2004:25-26). Dwindling in the mid-1500s due to a rise in Protestantism and conflicts with the Ottoman Empire, the pilgrim traffic allowed Venice to hone its service skills and infrastructure that would in turn make it ideally receptive to the elite male Grand Tourists that would infiltrate the city beginning in the 1600s (Davis and Marvin 2004:28, Lane 1974:432). During this time and on through the 1800s, Venetian opera, music, and drama climaxed; the city became known as the epicenter for escapist and deviant activities like gambling and prostitution; and the advent of package tours in the 1800s brought German, French, and British visitors in hoards (Davis and Marvin 2004, Lane 1974:431-434). While residents and visitors alike decry its modern day Disneyfication, Venice has in fact been considered Europe's theme park since the 1700s (Davis and Marvin 2004:16).

Tourist presence was not simply coincidental for the city. Rather, a highly reflexive consciousness of catering to tourist flows has been an integral part of its cultural and commercial development. Although it had previously held an autonomous military and maritime power since the 10th century, its reputation for the outlandish led to an explicit

performance of an expected identity by locals, allowing Davis and Marvin to call it “the first postmodern city, selling no product other than itself and its multiple images” (2004:16). The Venetian senate has been adapting their holidays and festivals to traveler demands since the 1400s. Tourism has not only long been an integral part of Venice’s history, representing and reinforcing its power and significance over the centuries, but it was also intentionally cultivated by the government at various points throughout history (Davis and Marvin 2004).

Adaptability of this sort has been praised as political and mercantile shrewdness on behalf of the Venetians, even while social science literature on other local groups’ accommodations to tourist demands touts them as ‘selling out’ for profit (Davis and Marvin 2004:23). For instance, following particularly devastating seasonal floods (*acque alte*) in the late 1960s that severely damaged the now world-protected architecture (which led to being protected under UNESCO as a World Heritage site, not to mention the leagues of organizations stationed around the world that exist solely to preserve its material culture) (Lane 1973:455, UNESCO 2010), local policy makers intentionally revived the then-dormant tradition of Carnevale soon thereafter in the 1970s. Falling in line with trends in 1970s Italy to revive traditional festivals, the mystery, performance, and lavishness of the festival was promoted as a means of increasing tourist flow to the city (Davis and Marvin 2004:247), this had also dovetailed a population decline in the 1960s, creating a hole that cultural expropriation and new depths of self-exploitation was desperate to fill (2004:238). (This, as I will later show, is also around the time when participants noted the biggest changes starting to occur in the city concerning economic and residential life.) Such efforts were financially successful and continued to expand in scope and in postmodern

'spectacular' grandeur in subsequent decades—including the introduction of a *madrina* (godmother) to Carnevale in the early 1990s, an Italian celebrity who would quite explicitly serve to draw media and tourist attention (precisely as Venessia.com did with their Mistress of Ceremonies, Venetian-born porn star Vittoria Risi).

Now tourists truly outnumber native Venetians on any given day (60,000 and growing versus 55,000 and shrinking), and the Carnevale season itself consistently packs Venetian and surrounding accommodations to maximum capacity. Resulting from this expansion pulling in more *foresti* (foreigner, referring to anyone not originally from Venice—including other Italians), smaller-scale festivals geared towards locals emerged in the 1980s. To this day, the *Svolo della Pantegana* (Flight of the Sewer Rat, an exaggeration of mythic proportions Venice's unofficial mascot) takes place a week before Carnevale officially begins. Dubbed the "Carnevale for the Real Venetians", the event is inaugurated with the lowering of a mammoth-sized papier-mâché rat to the water, where he is accompanied by boats of families and organizations in themed costumes rowing down the Grand Canal. On the *fondamenti*, or banks, music plays and traditional Venetian snacks and wine are served. With such a history, one can easily understand how Venessia.com hopes that their own carnivalesque endeavors resonate with their compatriots.

Venice's Infrastructure

One of the most distinct aspects of Venice is its lack of cars. On its streets one must disband reliance on modern transportation and rely solely on foot power. From avoiding the cacophony of horse hooves and carriage wheels in the days of the Grand Tour, to retreating from the speed, pollution, and noise of modern automobiles, such an

infrastructure has produced a cityscape where, according to Davis and Marvin, “the modern rules of urban space appear to have been suspended” (2004:94). This anti-mechanic, suspended environment emboldens pedestrians to explore spaces that would be otherwise notably off-limits to them. As Davis and Marvin state, “public and private, interior and exterior, all seem somehow more similar when cars are removed from the equation” (2004:94-95), and truly contribute to a sense of safety and peace in the city—one of the most frequently mentioned benefits of living in Venice according to many of my participants. Davis and Marvin (2004:95) term this car-free fluidity a “democratization of space” where one can “literally be on equal footing with the locals.” This lack of “automobilization” is crucial in differentiating Venice from other world cities, where the car “reconfigures urban life, involving...distinct ways of dwelling, traveling and socializing in, and through, and automobilized space” (Sheller and Urry 2000:738). Where cars may be seen in urban environments as impositions upon citizenship, compromising a sense of locality and citizenship that is solidified within public spaces (Sheller and Urry 2000:741), the lack thereof in Venice facilitates the confrontation of individuals in public spaces.

Use of the waterways and knowledge of the winding maze-like streets, or *calle*, do indeed allow for a level of spatial segregation. Yet boats are open, unlike cars, and slower moving, allowing for communication from boat to gondola to street, and the labyrinthine pathways are technically open to whoever may dare to follow where they may lead. Even the historical use of architecture in Venice allowed for an intermingling of classes as business transactions, family meals, and room and board for domestic servants were all encompassed under one roof. Lane asserts as well that “the homes of the rich and poor were never segregated in Venice as they are in modern cities” (1973:11) like with slums

and gated communities, which serve to perpetuate and exacerbate social and racial segregation and stereotyping to an exponential degree (Lanari 2010). Rich and poor, instead, lived “cheek by jowl” (Lane 1973:11). Social intermingling still occurs the most in the *campo*, or plaza, found at the center of each neighborhood. The *campi* are the public spaces in which community is created, enacted, and continually reinforced, and to this day is frequently a dominant reference point for a Venetian’s sense of identity and belonging. The kinds of interactions which occur in the *campi* may be reflected in other cities of a similar structure, yet within my interviews, the specific *placeness* of Venice and the unique kind of sociality inherent to it is often repeated.

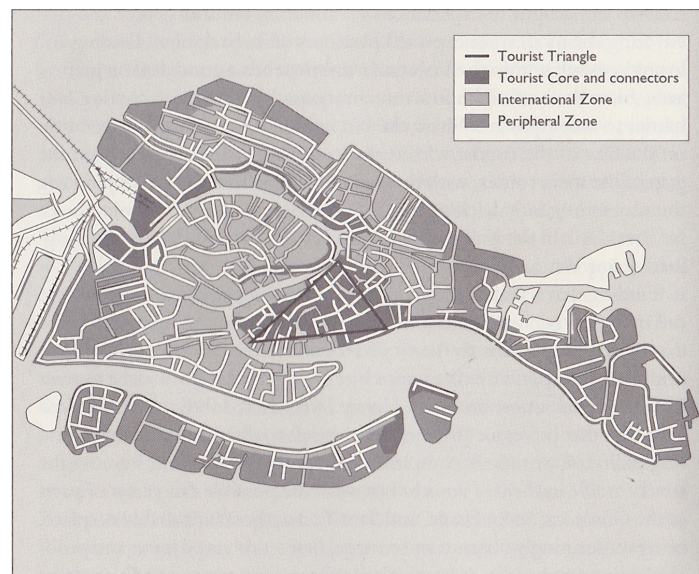


Image 1.2 – The Social Zones of Venice. Davis and Marvin 2004.

Davis and Marvin (2004:97-104) outline the social zones of Venice, devised by Isabella Scaramuzzi, vice-director of *Consorzio per lo Sviluppo Economico e Sociale della Provincia di Venezia* (COSES, Consortium for the Economic and Social Development of the Province of Venice). These include the Tourist Core, the International Zone, and the

Peripheral Zone. The Tourist Core is roughly organized around a triangle demarcated by three mainstays of Venetian art and architecture: the Piazza San Marco, the Rialto Bridge, and the Accademia Gallery and Bridge. Within this area and its connectors, any semblance of a domestic business has been bought out in recent years by high-end retailers, souvenir shops, and overpriced restaurants. All businesses explicitly cater to tourists, and are more and more frequently owned and operated by non-Venetians. The next zone is home to significant cultural and tourist sites, yet also caters to domestic life through its businesses and services, and is dubbed the International Zone as semi-permanent non-Venetians populate the area as students and second-home owners. Finally, the literal and figurative Peripheral Zone hangs on the edges of Venice proper, as well as Lido (not pictured), the second largest island in the archipelago. This houses the majority of the dwindling population of natives is geographically and ideologically marginalized, as a discourse of an aging, dying, lower class of individuals who were either too stubborn or too incapable of finding work elsewhere (Davis and Marvin 2004:98-102).

1.4 Methodology

Methods for this study included participant observation (both in person and online), interviews, and text and image analysis. Participant observation entailed organizational meetings, protests, political events, and a variety of social gatherings both related to these events, as well as those simply for the sake of sociality. These all took place during my yearlong stay in Venice on an academic exchange from August 2010 to May 2011 with the *Università Ca' Foscari Venezia*. After making initial contact through the social network in September, I attended organizational meetings for the November Veniceland event, which

proved to be more crucial for integrating myself into the group rather than explicit data collection, as I had initially expected. Following these meetings, a portion of the group would gather at a café in Piazza San Marco for a *spritz*, where they would return the curiosity the strange young *americana* was taking in them. During this time, I was able to gather invaluable information while also building personal connections with group members, which would carry on beyond the confines of my research. Interviews—nearly twenty in total—were both formally scheduled and semi-structured, including collecting abbreviated life histories, as well as informal and unstructured interviews that would occur during the social events or other happenstance encounters around Venice. With that said, it should be duly noted that the overall scope of Venessia.com should not be seen as representing the voice of all Venetians as a monolithic group, any more than any one voice within the group should serve to stand for the beliefs and opinions of every member.

Ethnography is always a form of interpretation, and has even been debated as a form of fiction, as it passes through the lens and biases of the ethnographer who observes, interprets, and constructs a new depiction of the words and activities absorbed in fieldwork (Rodman 2003). Regardless of any attempts at objectivity, my work will always be presented through the filter of my own lens, one of a liberal middle class white female, hailing from a conservative and predominantly Protestant suburban town in the Southern United States. Implicitly, this colors the way in which I initially understood and now depict the information in this thesis. Explicitly, this factored into the ways in which the participants of this research perceived, understood, and reacted to me. Members frequently compared and contrasted their views and statements to examples and trends in the United States. Additionally, as middle-aged men outnumbered other demographics in this group,

in a highly gender-traditional community, conversations were always peppered with references to my age and gender, whether flirtatiously, protectively, or otherwise. Notwithstanding this unavoidable slant, my goal on these pages is to represent and honor the voices and experiences of those who were benevolent enough to open their minds, hearts, and lives to me during the course of my stay.

Online Participation

Venessia.com is both a civic activist group and an online social network. These aspects are highly intertwined, however, with the social network serving as a means to organize members for meetings, protests, and other events, but also as an extension of the group where debates, discussions, and details of daily life may be shared, and where a sense of group cohesion is constructed (Beaulieu 2005, Diani 2000, Forte 2005, Etzioni 1997). While this particular paper does not delve into the importance of the Internet for this group and their local and international audience, it was nonetheless the central means of connecting with Venessia.com and its members.

As such, my involvement in the group had both an in-person and an online component, both of which fed into, instructed, and informed the other. The social network provided me with an opportunity to engage the community multi-dimensionally, connecting conversations in discussion boards with those face-to-face; prolonging discussions of topics and events through posting pictures, videos, and articles; instigating contact with individuals that may not have occurred otherwise. The online component provided me with a vast wealth of information on the group, the things they stand for, and who they are as individuals (at least their online selves), but also provided me with ways to

gain entry into the community and build relationships along the way. I enrolled in Venessia.com's online social network in late September 2010, posting a brief introduction paragraph (visible to all members) depicting who I was and my role in the city as a student, curious about Venetian life. This information was posted for all Venessia.com members to see, and led to my first contact and subsequent interview.

I also employed photography and video as a means of recording my own observations, allowing myself the opportunity to return viscerally to certain moments when writing through visual and audio recall. Taking these pictures and videos and subsequently posting them on websites like Facebook, and on the Venessia.com message boards, allowed me a further way to integrate myself into the group, establish my role as one that could be of benefit to them, and expanded my participant base. In posting pictures online, group members with whom I am already "friends" will "tag" other friends of theirs in the pictures, which links that person's profile page to the picture in question. Out of this, discussions arose, and even simply out of curiosity, other members of the group would then request my "friendship," thus forging yet another connection. This gave me an element of legitimacy and transparency, and also allowed me to integrate with group members on a more personal level. For instance, when posting about developments with my family and even the untimely death of my grandfather while I was abroad, Venessia.com members were the first and most salient group of people to respond with kind comments and support.

1.5 Mass Tourism, Neo-Colonialism, and Space and Place

The tourist has no memory of last year's play and actors, he does not come to see the new work of a director, of a playwright, or of a designer. He comes to see a *spectacle*, which will neither provoke nor disturb, whose worth cannot be questioned. He does not come with the theatrical curiosity of the native theatergoer but with the desire for amusement, and he comes as to an amusement park, for the thrill first of experiencing, and next, and perhaps more important, of being able to relate *having experienced* that particular thrill deprived to the stay-at-homes. He wants to brag of having seen star X or star Y.

The tourist goes to the theatre as much as I went in London, to see the Crown Jewels. No adult Londoner would go to see the Crown Jewels, and no adult New Yorker went to see *Mamma Mia!* for to do so would have been culturally repugnant, branding him as a tourist or dufus.

New York, with the rise in real estate prices and the disappearance of manufacture, business, and, thus, of the middle class, has become New York Land. [Mamet 2011:14-15.]

As playwright David Mamet describes for New York City, it is not Venice alone that finds itself reduced to an amusement park, throngs of people seizing upon its streets. Venice and New York, each epicenters of culture and history in their respective countries, also share similarities in their estuary geographies and flight of island residents to more affordable peripheral areas (Eichenbaum 2011). Yet from tourists' conspicuous collection of experiences to the economic transitions that stymie residential lifeways, cities throughout the world are experiencing parallel effects of the same global patterns. Each location carries with it its own specific history and complex combination of intersecting factors that reveal the need for each case to be examined within its own context. In the following pages, I aim to contextualize these themes in cross-cultural comparisons of other cities dealing with the effects of mass tourism and its concomitant elements, anthropological theory on modernity and cosmopolitanism, and finally political history in Italy and Venice itself.

The Implications of Mass Tourism

Tourism is the world's largest industry, a major force in transforming local and global culture, linking regional development worldwide, and accelerating transnationalism, international migration, and diaspora (Swain 1997:163). While it is frequently touted as a means of development for a locale (Ernoul 2009:232, Mason and Cheyne 2000:408), research shows that in both developing rural environments as well as in developed urban centers, it rarely brings about the expected regenerative and constructive effects. With a notable few exceptions⁵, tourism—most notably mass tourism—instead tends to increase the cost of living for locals, perpetuates and accentuates pre-existing inequalities, and displaces local residents (Dogan 1989, Gossling 2002, Gullette 1997, Wilson 2008). Mass tourism has contributed to a decline in local traditions, materialism, and environmental welfare, and to an increase in crime rates, social conflicts, crowding, and dependency on industrial countries, all the while favoring neoliberal capitalist consumption over the wellbeing of local residents. All of this results in producing or exacerbating a power imbalance and dependency that resembles or continues colonialist and imperialist relationships, thus acting as a form of post- or neo-colonialism (Dogan 1989:218, Crick 1989:335, Dicks 2003, Wilson 2008, Joseph and Kavoori 2001).

John Urry (2002:5) points out that the forty-five most highly developed countries in the world account for three-fourths of international tourism departures, which by and large include Europeans, North Americans, Australasians and the Japanese, who are generally traveling to less developed nations. Bella Dicks (2003) specifies that this means

⁵ Models of successfully incorporating citizen participation into tourism can be found in Costa Rica (Martin 2004), rural Brazil (Bartholo 2008), and within Europe, Dublin and Ireland (Mason and Cheyne 1998).

most tourists are “getting away” from affluent, consumerist, technologized, centralized and regulated societies, which offers a feasible explanation for why there is such a “need” for Venice to remain a pre-modern romantic escape (for residents and visitors alike, Venice stands to counteract the ills of modern society with its pre-modern pace and structure (Davis and Marvin 2004)). As of 2007, Italy ranked fifth among the top five most popular tourist destinations in the world, along with France, Spain, the United States, and China with 37 million visitors, over 20 million of whom likely passed through Venice (Berger 2008:327).

While the “neo-colonizers” are almost exclusively members of post-industrial, post-Fordist capitalist world powers, and the “neo-colonized” are those who live in rural regions of developing nations, tourism as neo-colonialism and its concomitant impacts take place elsewhere. For instance, amidst tourism-induced residential and housing crises in Prague, over-commercialization and touristification in Prague have displaced local residents and contributed to a growing monocultural tourist economy that erodes traditional economic activity, just as in Venice (Morpeth and Cooper 1998).

Colonizing Venice

Studies of tourism in Venice, according to Davis and Marvin, have mainly situated Venice within a British narrative of the Grand Tour of the 1600-1800s, and as a part of its own cultural history (at times French and German as well). In so doing, such studies elide La Serenissima’s rich and far-reaching social and economic history, and instead emphasize “the story of how a cosmopolitan consciousness developed among the ruling elites of these rising states, one that paralleled and abetted the rise of Western European expansion and

colonialism during the early modern era” (2004:11). Given this precedent, as well as largely British efforts in preserving Venice as a romantic pre-modern escape (Davis and Marvin 2004:199, 206), the idea of mass tourism in Venice as a form of neo-colonialism that parallels a First-Third World power hierarchy and dependency becomes quite feasible. Edward Said (1994), in fact, specifies Venice (along with Ireland) when discussing peripheral, borderland, Orientalized, and “desirable but subordinate” places within Europe that larger colonial powers, namely Britain and France, have more locally colonized (1994:61), suspending it between the familiar and the exotic (Davis and Marvin 2004:13). Given that tourism was built out of the nineteenth century colonial powers’ discovery of the appeal of ‘pre-modern’, traditional cultures, and has since provided a powerful economic incentive to keep them looking that way (Dicks 767-73), one might also say that Venice is colonized by the tourist gaze, having been Orientalized, exoticized, eroticized, and romanticized as a static “anti-modern fantasy land” (Davis and Marvin 2004:33); the “perfect place” for “fantasy and forgetting,” to “get away from it all” amidst its “gently crumbling grandeur, where marble palaces slump drunkenly against each other” (Trend 2008).

As an entitlement to travel is an aspect of cosmopolitan identity (Gossling 2002:552), and the inundation of images and myths of Venice contribute to tourists feeling a sense of entitlement to the city, this begs the question of to whom Venice belongs. According to the 1972 Convention Concerning the Protections of World Natural and Cultural Heritage, as Venice is a World Heritage Site, it has universal value, and thus is the patrimony of the world rather than Venetians alone (Drost 1996, Davis and Marvin 2004). National Italian laws and subsidies are necessary to preserve Venice’s sinking

infrastructure, confirming Rome's consideration of Venice as part of Italy's national heritage (Lane 1973:457). As I will later describe, while Venetian residents may also recognize the city's worldwide importance, a rhetoric of autonomy and independence remains in the lagoon, thus creating a tension between locals trying to salvage their way of life against a perceived infiltration of greedy and entitled outsiders. These shifts are mainly exercised in the *calli* (streets) and *campi* (plazas) of Venice's public arena. By making a name for themselves through theatrical protests and international media presence, Venessia.com is attempting to reclaim ownership of this space—not only for those born here, but also for those willing to invest in *living* here, and not simply in passing through or financially supporting heritage preservation efforts.

Theorizing Power, Locality, and Space and Place

The tourist's destination is the archetype for what Marc Augé (1995) calls “non-places.” Non-places are real, physical locations lacking a history and devoid of any social connection or community. Individuals may be policed, or there may be particular prescribed codes of behavior, yet with a lack of personal history comes a lack of individuality (1995). In short, the lack of time and knowledge is not enough for a tourist to experience a destination as a place, grounded in history and rich in context, even while the location itself may be steeped in history. Tourists, despite educating themselves through guidebooks or journey narratives, cannot experience a culture by simply stopping through to see scenery, buildings, and historic spots. Instead, the overwhelming differences and intricacies around them result in disconnect and disorientation – it is simply impossible to experience and see it all.

Understanding this reclamation of public space with more subtlety includes abandoning the traditional thought of a tourist location as inhabited by dichotomous “hosts” and “guests” (Dicks 2003, Gibson 2010:523, Quinn 2007:471). To further problematize the linear neo-colonialist power dynamics and host/guest binary, many theorists employ Michel Foucault’s definition of power as relational, productive, exercised (rather than embodied), and operating on all levels—even micro levels—of society (Foucault 1995), pointing out the variety of ways that locals resist subjugation and marginalization, constantly renegotiating their rights, interests, and identities (Cheong and Miller 2000:373, Kahn 2000), knowing that power is not owned by particular groups but is omnipresent, multi-directional, and productive, and can be manifested in subtle, unexpected ways (Cheong and Miller 2000:386).

It is important to note that while the general rule of community involvement is a common theme, this simultaneously means that the most effective solutions for a particular locale will be situationally specific. As a framework for this, Bartholo (2003:58) cites Hassan Zaoual’s concept of *situated development*, where social developments continually adapt to specific locations with a focus on individual citizens engaging as active agents in the development process (2008:106). This is necessary because of the integral relationship that location has with identity. For an individual, a place can be the root of a sense of belonging, being, and ontological orientation, incorporating and symbolizing the spectrum of one’s values, beliefs, experiences, and knowledge (2008:105).

Many anthropologists point out that as a discipline, we have historically taken places for granted as passive settings for events to occur (Rodman 2003, Gupta and

Ferguson 1992, Appadurai 1988). However, in a time of nation-states, where nationality, ethnicity, and culture frequently become conflated as synonyms, yet where these seemingly geographically bounded and homogenous identities are increasingly more "translocal" (Appadurai 1996, Gupta and Ferguson 1992), it is important to remember that national identity is a recent—and contested—phenomenon. This notion is particularly relevant in Italy, a very young country explicitly in terms of unified nation-states, yet with a complex history and a dynamic and changing presence of international visitors and migrants. These factors point to the importance of interrogating our naturalized conceptions of geographic boundaries, space, and place in order to account for the plurality of experience and meaning therein. It is thus relevant to point to Margaret C. Rodman's argument of *multivocality* as crucial to understanding place, remembering to never homogenize and generalize the perspectives of the individuals within any particular group (2003).

Rodman also maintains cultural geography's perspective that "places produce meaning and that meaning can be grounded in place," (Rodman 2003:207). Anthropologists must recognize places as actively socially constructed and contested (2003:212, 216), she urges, and bring a critical eye to ethnographic writing itself, a power-laden form of narrative that runs the risk of downplaying inhabitants' lived experience in a place, constructing and representing it instead as simply "an ethnographic site." As a place itself is a narrative, however, borne of the discourse of its inhabitants (Berdoulay 1989:135), the anthropologist's lived experience in the place, then, is not to be discounted. After all, she is not a sterile, objective observer, but rather becomes a part of the landscape, a part of the life and community in which she is situated, contributing to its definition and understanding.

Humans must not only be understood in a historical context, but in a geographical one as well (Soja 1989:11). As Soja reasserts, “The critical hermeneutic is still enveloped in a temporal master-narrative, in a historical but not yet comparably geographical imagination.” While written in 1989, perception of space widely remains as “fixed, dead, undialectical,” with time as its counterpart embodying “richness, life, dialectic” (1989:11). Thus, while Venice is but one example of global trends, attention must be turned to its unique *placeness*, in this *particular* point in time.

Defining the Stage: Spaces, Zones, and Tableaux

As Time Edensor (2001) discusses tourism as taking place on various “stages” (2001:63), M. Christine Boyer (1992) discusses tourist spaces in terms of “tableaux”, or “scenographic arrangements of city views and simulated landscapes of consumption [that] have been presented to fascinated audiences” (Boyer 1992:184). While it differs from actual Disney theme parks, which were created with the explicit purpose of promoting consumption (Boyer 1992:200, Fjellman 1992:59), its structure and history have allowed for a prototypical environment in which to play out postmodern flows and practices. These spaces of spectacle (where images and representations replace and degrade genuine social interactions, Debord 1994), of images and conspicuous displays that were produced through the accumulation of capital (Boyer 1992:195), also function to regulate tourist’s gaze and desires; reference, recreate, and preserve aspects of the past; and a clichéd recycling of codes, symbols, and behaviors of the past (Boyer 1992:186,188). Boyer states that this latter aspect is the most significant, as “codes contain a schema or program that generates a narrative pattern, a kind of memory device that draws associations and establishes relations between images and places, resemblances and meaning” (1992:188).

As mass international tourism is a part of modern capitalist, consumerist life (Urry 1994:233-4), and is integrally tied to ideologies of cosmopolitanism (Gossling 2002:552), an exploration of these phenomena is in order. Symbol and aesthetics become marketable items in late-modern economies, necessitating symbolic associations and clear cultural identities in order to become visitable commodities. These associations become geographically tied, thus providing an incentive for individuals to visit particular places, yet

also results in 'urban entrepreneurialism', where local governments pit their place-identities against each other in competition for the tourist 'dollar' (Dicks 523-29, 538-46). Jean Baudrillard's (1983) canonical concept of *simulacra* implies a society grounded on images of images, a "hyperreality" that blurs the lines between true and false, where copies of originals are considered more real than the originals themselves, disconnected from original context and meaning. His example of Disneyland existing so as to conceal the fact that the "real" America is actually the simulation is exactly what Venessia.com's "The Inauguration of Veniceland" is trying to express, in a highly reflexive, highly 'high-modern' way (Baudrillard's 1983). Venessia.com's actions reflect those also seen in a pilgrimage town in Pushkar, India, which Joseph and Kavoori (2001) entitle "mediated resistance" in order to effect change (2001:1004). From requesting that tourists remove their shoes and refrain from public affection at religious sites to month-long fasts in protest of illegal fishing in a holy lake, these forms of resistance allow residents to mobilize the signs, symbol, and images that are significant to their identities in order to engage in a critical dialogue of blame, misuse, and change with tourists and politicians, while avoiding direct and heated confrontations (2001). Additionally, Cristina Moretti (2008) points out how theatricality in public space—in her case, a theatrical tour guide in Milan, Italy—can allow for an exchange of ideas and experiences across social, economic, and cultural boundaries; serve as a powerful forum for utopian dreams and ideals to be asserted and practiced and struggles revealed; and provoke audiences to some end, whether that be creative inspiration, or debate and deliberation (2008:34-36).

Considering Venessia.com's methods and discourses within this framework, in the following chapters I will elucidate the interconnectivity among space, place, and identity in

Venice. With this understanding, I will then depict experiences of change and loss in the lagoon as narrated by Venessia.com members. I will then turn the focus to their comments and representations of a common scapegoat for these issues, Chinese immigrant groups. While a postmodern “media blip” version of these grievances might perpetuate perceptions of Venessia.com and its members as a xenophobic institution, by examining their statements in detail I instead contribute a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the suspicions, fears, and critiques Venessia.com members harbor as they feel their way of life will vanish within their lifetime.

CHAPTER 2: MAPPING VENICE

2.1 Placing History in Venice

Space is important in constructing a particular kind of identity, what Venetians refer to as *venezianità* “Venetianness”, or the quality of being Venetian. The most appropriate point of departure for understanding modern *venezianità* in relation to this space (and subsequently in understanding why an infiltration of outside groups so deeply threatens this way of being) is with a basic understanding of Venice’s origins. While the lagoon was inhabited during Roman times, the progenitors of modern Venice were groups of noble

refugees fleeing the northeastern Italian mainland as Lombards were encroaching upon their territory in 568 A.D. (Lane 1973:4). Even in its origins, or perhaps most especially so, the land itself proved instrumental in forming and facilitating distinctive political, commercial, and cultural aspects that set *La Serenissima*⁶ apart from other medieval polities, eventually becoming a strong and powerful city state (Lane 1973:2).

The head of this state was the *doge*, an elected leader who would serve for an indefinite amount of time, deemed best suited to fairly and accurately represent the will of a free and independent people. Ironically, these independent minds were skeptical of individual power, thus leading them to stake more faith and legitimacy in communities and councils (Lane 1973:87, 95, 100-1).⁷ While the aristocracy has since been abandoned, the independent minds and propensity toward committees sustains in modern Venice.

This structure is frequently idealized by modern Venetians as exemplifying the greatness of Venice's past. There wasn't equality, per se, but there was nobility in knowing and accepting one's station, serving one's polity, and performing one's civil duty in whichever capacity that might be manifested. As an autonomous city-state, Venice was noted for being a tolerant home to a variety of ethnic groups. Non-Venetian groups, however, had to retain their economic and residential practices to prescribed areas in the city, which still retain their names today: Germans were bound to the Campo dei Tedeschi, Albanians to the Calle degli Albanesi, and most notoriously, Jews initially to the island of

⁶ Meaning "the most serene," this was Venice's name during its reign as a maritime republic, and continues as its nickname to this day.

⁷ This stands in great contrast to the widespread critique and distrust of the modern Italian state, where politicians are seen as prodigal, inefficient, and insensitive to public needs (Ginsborg 2003).

Giudecca, and subsequently to the first-ever Ghetto⁸ in the *sestiere* (one of six neighborhoods in Venice) (Molmenti 1906:62, 195).

The Venetian state was subsequently weakened by Napoleon Bonaparte's and the Austrian Empire's occupations at the turn of the 19th Century (Lane 1973:436, Haddock 2000:11-12). Notwithstanding a Venetian revolution from 1848-49 (Ginsborg 1979), these occupations were met by a local lack of military power and stagnation in political strength (Lane 1973:400-402), changing the face of Venice physically, politically, and culturally. Despite this weakness, the Veneto was the last and most reluctant region to take part in the *Risorgimento* or Italian unification in 1861—something many in the region would later view as a mistake and a manipulation on Rome's part (Ginsborg 2003:175-6). Rather than a common sense of nationhood, it was collectivity against a common enemy—Austria—that was the catalyst for the Veneto's ceding to the unification. Early Fascists even felt the *Risorgimento* was never fully solidified, using this argument as fodder for their movement to revive a sense of unification among Italian speakers under one common flag (Haddock 2000:43).

While the Fascist movement in the early 1900s had as its goal to construct a unified, homogenized, and ideal Italian citizenship (quite coercively at times (Sluga 2000)), its use of theatricality in the public arena was notable, and not to be overlooked given Venessia.com's focus on this tactic. Under the Fascist regime, parades and festivals were employed as means of minimizing the individual and maximizing the collective (Maier 2006), and of constructing a particular social memory through nostalgic celebration and

⁸ The origins of the term “ghetto” are frequently attributed to the Venetian word *gheto* or *ghet* (slag), so named for the foundry in the area (Molmenti 1906:195).

revival of the past (Lasansky 1999). Even Venice's iconic Biennale festival, which continues successfully today, was wielded by the Fascist government in the 1930s to reflect a distinctive impression of Italian identity that fell in line with Fascist ideals (Stone 1999). Thus, while not aiming to equate the simple use of theatricality with Fascist ideology, as such a parallel would prove to be entirely incongruent, it is still relevant to at least note the context with which these tactics may be locally perceived, and even the visceral reactions that may be associated with them given their history within the country.

Highlighted in Image 2.1, the mainland portion of the Venetian municipality, Mestre, has roughly 200,000 residents, and thus has a larger portion of the constituency. Ever since Mussolini married the two together in 1926 (Morris 1992), the two lands of vastly different topographical, logistical, even cultural identities have been politically viewed and treated as one. Just south of Mestre is industrial port of Marghera. While plants in Marghera produced tens of thousands of jobs for the region, the chemicals, petroleum, and plastics processed there contributed to a putrid pollution of the lagoon (Lane 1977, Davis and Marvin 2004).



Image 2.1 – Map of Venice and Mestre. Courtesy maps.google.com.

2.2 Staging Postmodern Venice

Venice has long been perceived and experienced as a stage for performances, its *calli* and more purely “Venetian” neighborhoods the behind-the-scenes area to the grand stage of the tourist (Davis and Marvin 2004, Berendt 2004). Boyer points to Umberto Eco’s interpretation of postmodernism as repetitive, serial, and passive (contrasting modernity’s valorization of the new and innovative) (Eco 1985 in Boyer 1992:188). As Giddens (1990) states, reflexivity is an indicative quality of modernity as well. Venessia.com is a prime example of a highly modern consciousness, using the tools of modernity to shock passive, complacent, receiving consumers of space, place, and identity into an aware and informed action. With their brash performances, Venessia.com obstructs and upsets this passivity. Within what have become passive spaces, these manifestazioni are attempts to reclaim—to reclaim the public space in Venice, to reclaim the narrative of those spaces, and to reclaim

modernity (or even pre-modernity) itself. Other theorists have described modernity as a displacing, disorienting, and estranging influx of advertising and media inundated with over-sensationalized images, obsessive commodification, and a means of production that is frequently out of balance with its possibility for use (Marcuse 1964, Simmel 1908). Tim Oakes (2005) in fact distinguishes postmodernity as a subset of 'modernity proper'. Modernity proper is typified by such terms and concepts as rational, progressive, pursuit, forward-thinking, while postmodernity embodies a critique of all that modernity stands for, including historicism and quixotic ideals for the future. Ultimately, postmodernity is itself thoroughly modern (Oakes 2005:39).

Viewing Venice as a stage, I reference again the social zones therein as a means of contextualizing the performance of Veniceland, yet with some qualifications. While this tidy explanation of the social zones of Venice are quite accurate and prove very useful in understanding the city's space, place, and identity performances within, two important qualifications should be remembered. First, as would be the case with any heuristic technique, the zones are simplified representations of the lived reality in those spaces. To say that the Tourist Core has become a theme park space full of faceless individuals clamoring to either sell or buy a piece, a taste, or an experience of a culture and history that is not their own is a statement that one could confidently assert after spending significant time there—and surely, many do. Yet as the previously cited theorists pointed out concerning the plurality of experiences that construct and define spaces, even the most seemingly empty and inauthentic non-places are in fact richly meaningful places for those who inhabit them. This is true even for more newly created spaces, such as airports and actual theme parks, as employees and even frequent patrons develop histories, stories, and connections therein, thus forming inter-subjective identities relative to that space and the other individuals within.

Second, although descriptions of Venice as a theme park from centuries ago resonate still today, the particularities of how and where these are manifested are constantly shifting and flowing, relative to the point in history. They have changed since the publishing of *Venice: The Tourist Maze* in 2005, and will continue to do so. Figure 2.2 shows a Google Map that I created with my estimates of how these zones have expanded and

contracted in the five years since, which gives further insight into the continued course of change in coming years. Additionally, regardless of their size, my own experience living in Venice revealed that these zones are by no means rigid; “real Venetians” live in all parts of the city, and not all are like those described by Davis and Marvin. Perhaps as a general rule this holds true, particularly concerning trends in businesses and services and main tourist nodes. Yet the Università Ca Foscari’s centralized presence in Dorsoduro only came about in recent years, changing the cultural landscape of the city (Russo and Sans 2009).

Mapping out the route for the Veniceland protest provides a clear visual for the significance of the route taken down the Grand Canal as a portion of the *manifestazione*, and for the location of the protest itself. The journey initiates at the *erbaria* (herbary), the pulsing economic, touristic, and social heart of the city. By morning, this space houses the produce portion of the famous Rialto fish market, an exceedingly historic and important economic activity for tourists and locals alike. By evening, it houses one of the liveliest bar scenes in the city, and hosts many concerts, festivals, and charity events. The *erbaria* is also a short walk from Ca’ Farsetti, a municipal building where the mayor’s office is located. The

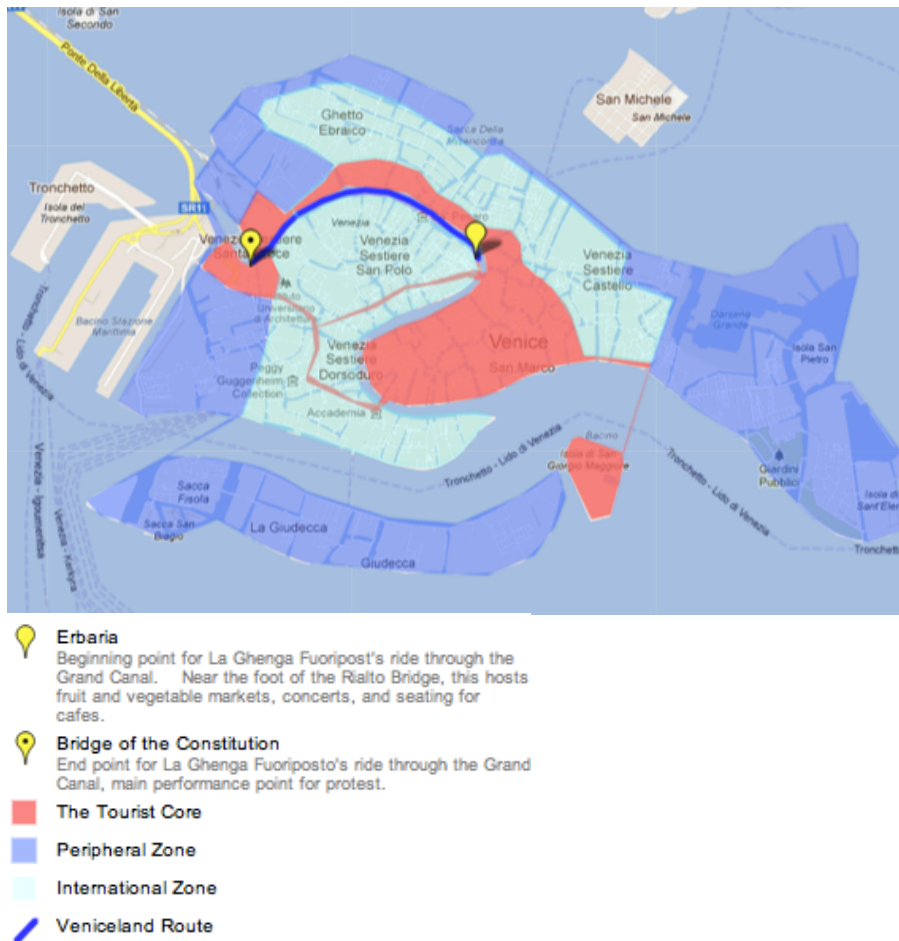


Image 2.2: The Social Zones of Venice, expanded. Based on Davis and Marvin's 2004 map, with Venessia.com's 2010 Veniceland route. Map by author using Google Maps.

performance propels westward through the Grand Canal, attracting attention from boat passengers on this aquatic thoroughfare, and paralleling a distinctive Tourist Core artery. The trip ends at the mouth of the fish (Scarpa 2008), so to speak, where the remainder of the *manifestazione* takes place. As the main receiving point for incoming traffic from the mainland, this is the point at which modernity shifts to pre-modernity. Standing in one direction, the view is of cars, buses, and boxy modern buildings. These are the symbols, sights, and smells of a disillusioning modernity and the ugly, polluting, and isolating sides of “progress,” that also allow for the ease with which the throngs of tourists and mainland

commuters can invade the island. Turning around, before you lies the first of many breathtaking views comprised of the iconic Venetian Gothic architecture, aqua blue canal waters, and brilliant pastel sunsets.

Included in the “entrance packet” to Veniceland was a map of the “park”, shown in Image 2.3. This satirical interpretation serves as a cognitive map of sorts, reflecting the ways in which Venessia.com members perceive the spaces of the city as being misused. It touches on nearly every issue of concern to residents. The Calatrava Bridge (2), tower of Saint Mark’s Plaza (7), and Giudecca Canal (11) become rides: respectively, the Brucomela (the Caterpillar), the Main Tower Ride, and Splash Ship Voyage (referencing the cruise ships which come too far into the lagoon, towering over Venetian buildings, causing physical destruction and pollution, and dropping off thousands of day-trippers at a time). The Margarita Night Walk (5) instructs visitors to be extremely loud at all hours of the night, as the student population is notorious for doing in Campo Santa Margherita, while Ca’ Farsetti (6) is depicted as a clown circus, and the island cemetery of San Michele (13) claims to be the location of the “Last Real Venetians”, as the yellow arrow sign states in Italian. Just north of San Michele in Little Shanghai (12) takes the place of the famous glass-blowing island of Murano, where families have passed down the craft through hundreds of years of generations—instead, knock-off Chinese glass is offered. Finally, the Fugitive Promenade (9) (“Hosted by Tax Free”, the subtitle states) occurs every 30 minutes, where tourists can shop for knock-off designer handbags from the *vu cumprà* with the thrill of potentially being caught by Venetian police.

This over-the-top comical depiction is, for many, not far from the truth of how they see the spaces of the city being used day to day. Notwithstanding, as I have shown, that place is multivocal, and every individual constructs a subjective experience and conception of placeness relative to their own experiences and social networks therein, the Veniceland event expresses that how tourists, immigrants, and politicians perceive of, use, and manage this space has exceeded the limits of what is respectful of the history and tradition embedded in this space.

2.3 A Tale of Three Zones: Creating a “Spatial Narrative” in Venice

The day of the Veniceland event, I arrived at the foot of the Calatrava Bridge around 10:30 a.m. in order to help with setting up. Serving for a while as an *annodatrice*, I frantically helped tie knots (*nodi*) on balloons until there was nothing for me to do but stand by and wait for the festivities to officially begin. I donned my own Minnie Mouse ears, took my own picture in the “Venetian for a Day” gondolier cutout, and made idle conversation with group members, one of which began with a gentleman saying, “Aren’t

you the girl who doesn't know what to do with herself?" (*Non sei tu quella ragazza che non sa come comportarsi?*) I could only chuckle—my behavior, as I feared, did indeed belie my intimidation and awkwardness from being in the field, even amongst such welcoming and friendly people as these. At this point in time, I had only interacted with these individuals online and at Veniceland planning meetings, where, doe-eyed and nervous, I already stood out as an obvious outsider, aside from being mistaken as northern Italian at first glance based on my pale white skin and dark eyes and hair. Sitting at the corner of the long, stately wooden table in a meeting room at the Hotel Bauer, a stone's throw from Piazza San Marco, phrases in Italian and Venetian dialect sped around my head like a swarm of bees.

My awkwardness stemmed from being a foreigner from one of the main "tourist-sending" countries, and a temporary student, which meant I was doubly implicated with two groups who collectively contribute to the Venetian exodus. While no members ever treated me with anything other than respect, excitement, and appreciation at my interest and involvement, this mal-adroit of my own greatly contributed to the way in which I interacted with and came to understand the space and place of Venice in unique ways. My position to see the city simultaneously as a sort of tourist/traveler (more so during my initial weeks of awe and exploration), student, and even potential future citizen (as friends and participants insisted throughout my time there, I would become so much a part of the lagoon that I would someday *have* to return permanently) allowed me to see the city from multiple perspectives. At this intersection of tourist, temporary resident, and timid researcher, I experienced a uniquely rich mode of understanding and engaging in Venice.

Fittingly, Swain (1997) proposes that the “anthro-angst” against tourism research over the past few decades has been due to how closely the role of ‘the anthropologist is to that of ‘the tourist,’ “as travelers, collectors/extractors, and tellers of tales” (1997:162). Seta Low (2003) states that both are grappling, if each in divergent ways, for semblances of authenticity and place, generating their own kinds of translocality along the way (2003:29). Crick (1989) has encouraged anthropologists to confront and work with that anxiety, as Edward Bruner did by working as both an ethnographer and a tour guide in Bali (Swain 1997:162). What follows are vignettes into the process by which I mediated my



Image 2.3 – Map of Veniceland

own “anthro-tourist-angst” throughout my time in Venice, creating as I went along a “spatial narrative” (Guano 2003:359).

Surfing the Tourist Core

Finding my own way to engage this angst was, for me, an awkward process. Having long considered myself the “anti-tourist tourist,” differentiating myself from the mass crowd as those of a cosmopolitan ideology are known to do (Edensor 2001), I even found myself despising Venice upon first visiting in 2007, as I felt the mass swarm of tourists compromised the city’s “authenticity.” True to form, my main interaction with the city at this time was located in the Tourist Core, which lived up to its “theme park” reputation in my eyes. I was disillusioned by the caravans of *gondole* proceeded down canals, tourists waving and gawking at each other from gondola to *vaporetto* to bridge and back, with accordion-accompanied singers belting Neapolitan, Spanish, or Frank Sinatra songs—but never Venetian. I scoffed at hearing English more than I heard Italian, at roses being thrust in my face by unwarranted vendors, and advertisements covering the monumental buildings in Piazza San Marco. I lamented having to park on the mainland (having arrived in an RV at the time) and take an expensive waterbus in to this expensive city with what seemed like no comfortable and affordable place to rest, in addition to having to walk over endless awkward bridges. Returning for an entire year not too long afterward may seem counterintuitive, then, yet I was determined to see, understand, and if at all possible, come to love what I could of the Venetian lifestyle.

To begin, rather than rejecting the Tourist Core, I embraced it, and began created a sense of place for myself within this non-place. Initially this happened through acting as a

host and guide to temporary travelers at points during my stay through Couch Surfing (CS), an online social network that connects travelers with hosts. Through CS hosting, I was not only able to orient myself to the city by guiding guests through it, but was also able to connect with many transient “anti-tourists” (Edensor 2001)⁹, and to meet other hosts through monthly CS outings who remained friends and research participants even after I ceased hosting. Entering into this role helped me appease my awkward “angst” by putting me in a position of power over place, and providing me with an efficient way to learn the topography and history of the town. This then allowed me to gain power through knowledge, which in turn formed and informed the experience of my guests’ experience of this space, yet also allowed me to feel a sense of belonging to the terrain. Curing me of my need for a map, this thereby visibly and mentally absolved me of my ignorant tourist status.

With credit due as well to my roommates who had lived in Venice for five or more years, and other Italian and Venetian friends I met through them, I was able to show my guests a more unique and intimate experience in Venice, frequently understood by them to be more authentic than visiting otherwise. Nighttime food and music festivals by the Rialto Bridge would go entirely unnoticed by day-trippers who catch a 5:00 or 6:00 pm train back to the mainland, yet my guests and I would mingle and dance with locals and other international travelers with fried calamari, polenta, and regional white wine. When many visitors marvel at the architecture and grandeur of Piazza San Marco, I was able to repeat to my guests the histories I had learned of the meaning therein, such as a carving that commemorates a housewife who accidentally saved Venice from attack, pillars that serve

⁹ Couch Surfing tends to draw in individuals seeking a more “authentic” experience in a location, yet who actually tend to know little to nothing about their destination, relying upon the host’s guidance and recommendations to help them bypass the effort as well as the “mass tourist” stigma.

as trophies of Venice outsmarting and thus defeating the larger Genovese fleet at Accra, and the faded red columns—only two amongst the many white—from which the *doge* would announce the fate of prisoners. Quickly my understanding of and experience of Venice as a non-place faded away, as learning and reiterating such history and stories added depth and width to my conception of the space.

Losing My Place in the International Zone

This newfound connection to Venice did not prevent me from frequently losing myself in its complex maze of intricate streets, essentially developed as back alleys to the main thoroughfares of canals (Davis and Marvin 2004). Coming to understand the layout of the city in more detail was a simultaneously entertaining and trying experience. Together with the uphill battle of language acquisition, this would render me feeling childish and incompetent at times, taking the proverbial wind out of my sails following the empowerment over place experienced through Couch Surfing hosting. My comprehension of the *campi* and *calli* which, for the most part, I was eventually able to power through with little to no attention paid to signs or landmarks, developed in segments. In my mind, the sensation was akin to the development of the lagoon islands themselves, disparate whole pieces of swampy land that were slowly built up, paved, and connected until they comprised a larger integral whole.

While this childlike sense contributed to my awkward anthro-angst, it in fact gave me fresh eyes with which to see and understand this new world around me. Anthropology icon Bronislaw Malinowski in fact encouraged a return to innocence, noting the importance of cherishing novel experiences throughout intensive fieldwork (Grimshaw 2001:52). During

this time, an anthropologist comes to incorporate an *experiential* rather than factual knowledge of a place and its inhabitants, and does not only observe, but also learns anew how to *see* (Grimshaw 2001:52).

Losing oneself is unavoidable in Venice, perplexing the most geographically and directionally gifted of us all. Yet the more time I spent there, developing relationships along the way, I conceded my sometimes indignantly independent nature, embraced the child within, and soon began to experience the extent to which the infrastructure in Venice facilitated a familial sense of community and belonging. New friends and neighbors imparted their aid and knowledge upon me as I blundered my way through the city at times. I will share an excerpt from my field notes from September 2010 which captures this experience:

Whether out for drinks or grabbing a coffee, or passing through going to and from the library, *Campo* is essentially the heart of student life in Venice. One of the things I love most about living here is the sociality of daily life--being such a small city with no cars and a waterbus system that doesn't actually get you anywhere faster than walking means that nearly every time you're *in giro* (out and about), you see someone you know. It's a wonderfully gratifying way to weave a sense of community, belonging, and being into a place, and something that I hold especially dear coming from a heavily car-dependent city like Atlanta.

This small-town social feel is also a very practical thing when you return home to realize that you left your keys inside, all of your roommates are out of town or at work, and on top of it all your phone is dead. In such an instance, you can pop over to *Campo* and happen upon two friends chatting over coffee, who make a round of calls to locate a roommate of yours, and spend time hanging out with you until the roommate in question is able to return home and save you from your blunder.

Life in Venice, for better or worse, brings to the fore the impact of architecture and terrain on daily life, personal experience, social cohesion, individual identity. Having Atlanta as such a stark contrast to compare it to might make the differences more

apparent, but the impacts seem to be felt by everyone who spends time here. Being surrounded by the still lagoon water daily has a very calming and stabilizing effect on people (perhaps a bit counteracted when *acqua alta* hits and you're forced to walk on temporary elevated platforms, or to avoid certain areas altogether. Although I fortunately haven't had to deal with that much at all yet, as my neighborhood doesn't generally flood, and it usually only lasts for a few hours from what I hear). Even if the water does have its pollution issues from factories in the mainland city of Marghera, huge cruise ships that release impacted muck from the depths of the lagoon, waste from homes and hotels, and so on and so forth (all to say that it's not water that you'd want to go swimming in, much as it entices me to do so), it's still lovely to be around.

To this day, however, time roaming the streets, simply getting lost—literally and figuratively—amidst the still waters and exquisite architecture remain some of my fondest and centering memories in Venice. After the tourist rush would empty the city like a school of fish swarming towards the trains and buses, at times, all that would remain would be the moon, the fog, the sound of my footsteps echoing off the deteriorating but dignified buildings, and the reflections of light flickering on the still waters. It was in these moments, nothing in my mind but the admiration of what was around me, that I most associate with a sense of connection to Venice. And incidentally, it was recounting such moments to native Venetians that they reiterated to me that I had come to understand and embody *venezianità*.

Finding Venezianità in the Peripheral Zone

Carnevale allows Venice to transition from the quiet, frigid, and empty off-season winter months to the warmer, more densely populated spring months. As previously mentioned, before the streets are swarming with a mass influx of costume-clad visitors, Venetians have taken to celebrating the “Carnevale for the Real Venetians”, colloquially referred to as the *Pantegana*, previous to the official festival. The Pantegana of 2011 was

my opportunity to reconnect with Venessia.com members after time spent away for the holidays and cooped up studying for finals. Having been away from Venice for nearly a month and spending more time with other Anglophone friends than I had been used to the previous semester, I was nervous to return to the group, feeling somewhat guilty for having spent so much time away that my linguistic skills began to suffer.

Held in the ‘peripheral’ northern *sestiere* of Cannaregio, I arrived around noon, as some decorated boats were still filtering through the canals, an Indian-sounding style of music was blasting through the speakers, and the remaining crowds, many dressed in costumes from flowers and princesses to medieval noblemen (even the dogs!), clustering around tables that were serving wine and local S-shaped cookies called *bussolà buranelli*, a flavor and texture somewhat akin to (yet denser than) shortbread which originated on the quaint and brightly painted fisherman island of Burano. Matteo, Venessia.com’s spokesman, immediately approached me in his quintessential black leather pants and tight-fitting screen print T-shirt (peeking out underneath a coat, of course), and welcomed me back into the fold with cheek kisses and greetings of the recently passed New Year. He invited me to join the crowd of nearly twenty for lunch following the festivities, asking in his usual way that doesn’t quite leave room for a refusal, “Why on earth *wouldn’t* you come to eat with us?”

We walked along in the brisk, damp air, winding our ways through the streets, testing my knowledge of the nooks and crannies of Venice, catching up with friends from the group along the way. Restaurant after restaurant was full to the brim, ultimately bringing us to the far reaches of the neighborhood to an eatery I doubt I would be able to

find today. As we stood in a circle outside, waiting for our tables to be set, Matteo's father took an interest in seeing a new-to-him face, and abruptly asked me, "*Sei italiana?*" ("Are you Italian?") I smiled and shook my head and he quickly followed up with, "*Ma sei veneziana?*" ("But you're Venetian?"), to which I again answered, "No." But before I could fully utter the word, all of my worries of having pulled to far away from Venice and Venessia.com to be considered a part of the group washed away, as Matteo, Enrico, Luana and others emphatically interjected, "What? Of course you're Venetian! Come on, you're one of us!"

As we were seated and continued conversations about Venice's history and Italian and American cultural differences over lunch, I let the meaning of that precious moment sink in. Reflecting that level of acceptance as more than a friend, as a Venetian myself, was deeply meaningful to me, and reaffirmed my own sense of having begun the process of "becoming Venetian". Yet what that acquisition reveals about *venezianità* is enlightening as well. My Venessia.com friends were implying that my newfound identity was based on particular practices, attitudes, and approaches to the terrain and inhabitants of Venice: taking a vested interest in the histories, traditions, and behaviors of Venetians while sharing my particular perspective as a young, white, American middle class female pursuing higher education. Delineating these factors is by no means meant to undermine or devalue the accolade of identifying as Venetian, yet serves to reveal how I myself began to subjectively experience and embody this ontological understanding. In the next chapter, through their critiques of current practices and patterns in the city, Venessia.com members reveal further insight into the meaning and importance of respecting the space and place of *venezianità*.

CHAPTER 3: NARRATIVES OF CHANGE AND LOSS IN THE LAGOON

3.1 Sociality and Nostalgia in Lieux de Mémoires

Pierre Nora describes *lieux de mémoires*, or sites of memory, as any culturally

significant entity (material or non) which has “become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community” (Nora 1996: XVII). They allow individuals to add meaning to a location through its history and the cultural memory. Sourced in a reiteration or reenactment of the past, sites of memory may incorporate contemporary elements, but are predicated upon a narrative of nostalgia and a collective consensus on that history. For tourists and immigrants the city may be understood as a theme park non-place solely for entertainment or work, yet the residents and members of Venessia.com reflect an experience of Venice that weaves aspects of the city’s history with that of their families’ and their own personal histories, thus experiencing Venice as a *lieu de mémoire*.

James, an American-turn-Venetian, having lived in Italy for 20 years and in Venice for 10, is just one among many to relay how running errands includes carving out extra time for the inevitable conversations he will have with friends he casually encounters on the street, or chatting with the store clerks that have become mainstays in his daily life. Some still report that this is what makes Venice *Venice*. Those stating this, whether Italian or not, have either moved to the city in recent years and found this level of sociability to be more acutely felt here than other cities they have lived in, or have simply grown up in the current climate and thus have no other point of reference. Native-born Venetians over the age of at least 30, however, recognize that this element still persists, yet speak about it with much more urgency, as they have seen drastic shifts in public sociality in recent decades. As Matteo elaborates:

Twenty years ago there were 20,000 more people than now. There was a sense of home. If you went out—I couldn’t even walk because I’d find friends everywhere. There was a sense of community. Venice is structured like a huge village since we don’t have cars, so relationships here are a bit different. Here, you don’t need cell

phones—you go in the street—like, you live here and you know that it’s a bit different. Here we have face. So the difference now, everyone’s left. All my friends live outside of Venice, I don’t know anyone anymore. We are few, we are lost. Venice has become enormous because we Venetians have become so few.

Pietro speaks similarly. Now in his mid-forties, when he was a teenager, he knew at specific times throughout the day exactly where he could find his friends: at 2:00, they would be grabbing coffee at this particular cafe; at 5:30, it’s spritz hour at a particular bar; at 7:30 they would be returning home for dinner with their family, and so on and so forth. Now, though interactions do indeed happen, they happen more randomly and fluidly, or individuals employ technology in order to encounter each other rather than relying on a set schedule. Additionally, while many participants could count twenty to thirty friends and peers in their youth, they can now name only five or six who remain in the island city, as tourists, immigrants, and transient students now fill those spaces.

The lack of youth, specifically, becomes a poignant reminder of the declining population for many residents. “There are no more children playing in the streets,” rues Giuseppe. “When I was young there were so many of them, like swallows. Today, the only sound you hear on the street is the rumbling of tourists’ suitcases.” For the youth who are still raised there, the *campi* and *calli* take the place of playgrounds and soccer fields. Twenty-six year-old Erik recalls growing up in Venice as idyllic for this reason, as “for children, the city is a kind of playground. Every corner is a hiding place, they can play soccer in the *campi*, living a very peaceful life. Everyone knows each other.” Raising children in Venice means never having to worry about the danger of cars, and the comfort in knowing that neighbors always have a watchful eye over young ones scampering around.

This integrated space of Venice allows for a level of inter-generational interaction,

and for class interaction as well. Many, including Beatrice, regarded this as leading to a more democratic lifestyle afforded by the unique infrastructure and topography of Venice. “People on the mainland, they look at the kind of car you drive, and they judge you as being a part of a certain social class. And that would never happen here. And intellectuals, you'd never spot them by the way they are dressed.” Enrico followed this comment with a nostalgic point about Venice's past: “Venice was particular, too, in the way people occupied the houses. In the lower floors, you would find more working class people, and in the upper floors, the upper class. But there were no separation of the classes by neighborhood or anything.” Beatrice's family history reflects the continuation of this democratic space:

Even from a cultural perspective: Peggy Guggenheim's grandchildren used to take their gondolas to play with my aunts and uncles and mother. They were from completely different social classes, of course, but that distinction somehow didn't matter very much. And because there are few fields and playgrounds, the children of rich, poor, and middle class people would all play together. It's still that way, with the few native children who remain. But on the mainland, it's all much more segregated by class. And we call the mainland "terra ferma" because it's almost as though nothing beyond the bridge has anything to do with us. Venice has always had exactly what it needed. If you speak with very elderly Venetians, they can recall a time when, if you were from the Giudecca, you stayed there, maybe you'd never even go to Piazza San Marco; you had everything you needed where you were

Class intermingling of this sort still carries on today. However, it seems to be waning, an element of a purely Venetian lifestyle that the “low quality” tourism, tourists, and immigrant populations and practices are compromising, embodied by the transition of the *gondole* as canal chariots for the lagoon elite to purely postmodern rides that herd tourists (as no Venetians will ride them, save the gondoliers themselves) on prescribed routes, given shallow bullet-point histories of the city (Davis and Marvin 2004).

Different individuals reveal varying ideas of the culpable parties in leading to Venice's current state, from the tourists and their treatment of the city to the infiltration of international migrant workers to Venetian residents themselves. Yet there is a general consensus that the Venetian government should be held the most accountable, is in the best position for implementing change, and has made the most explicit decisions in policy change and city management that have resulted in the constellation of issues contributing to the depopulation. This underlies Venessia.com's position of asserting an apolitical stance, in that they do not want to support any particular politician or train any member for public office. Rather, they want to provoke and hold accountable whichever politician currently holds office.

One of the areas most directly affecting residents, and most directly associated with an institutional misuse of power, is housing. Both the municipality and the Catholic Church own a large amount of housing in the city, as residents of the central Roman neighborhood Monti experienced in the process of its own gentrification process (Herzfeld 2009). In Venice, much of these city and Church-run homes are in such a state of disrepair that they must remain closed. According to Marco,

The problem is that the Church is no longer accustomed to having a positive rapport, an active role with inhabitants. Furthermore, the Church is also the largest property owner in town, possessing not only churches but houses as well. They shouldn't exploit their own properties for tourism. One example is the exploitation of Saint Mark's Basilica, for the exclusive use of visitors who hardly respect the sacredness of the place and damage the historical and cultural value.

Much of what is in acceptable living conditions is rented out to tourists and students at exorbitant prices, making it nearly impossible for a young couple even with steady jobs that pay decent salaries to purchase a home. By and large, only those who inherit a home on the island are able to maintain life there, as is the case with Pietro Bortoluzzi, a school teacher

and local politician known to the group as “Il Prof” (teach). Pietro is able to maintain his attic apartment overlooking the Accademia Bridge arching over the Grand Canal, adorned with red velvet-clad furniture, historic documents of Venice’s history, and a painting of a *doge* ancestor of his, thanks to his family. As Gioia reasserts, for university students in the city, the high rents drive them to either partake in black market renting, or to live in more affordable housing on the mainland and commute in each day—unless, of course, their family has the financial resources to be able to afford the pricey places.

Others like Luana and Sabina pay sky-high rents (€600-700, or \$780-\$914 USD) for cramped apartments, nearly double of what they would pay on the mainland; families like Matteo, his wife Beata, and their young daughter sacrifice the amount of space that would be more accommodating to a family in order to hold on to their ties to the lagoon. Bart informs me that a steep escalation in housing costs occurred about twenty years ago, as large hotel groups transformed homes into hotels and bed and breakfasts, along with “foreign investors,” as he termed them—wealthy French, German, British, American, or even Milanese families—following a trend of purchasing second homes in Venice (which they frequently let out to students and tourists when not in Venice), causing surrounding homes to increase in rent. He followed this by saying that the municipality should have taken the funds available to them to restore inhabitable houses and sell them at affordable prices for residents. But the municipality failed to do so, and instead funneled the funds back to the *terra ferma*. “This is how Venice can be abandoned to tourism, and how it will soon become one huge hotel. From Piazzale Roma to San Marco, just one huge hotel. That’s what they want Venice to become. It’ll be just a tourist city, and nothing more.”

Even if funds are used on the island itself, dissent still arises over how this is done. Recalling the controversial Calatrava Bridge, the site of the Veniceland protest, many residents expressed discontent with the use of funds to build the structure instead of investing the money otherwise. Luana points out that the bridge does indeed add a crucial crossing point over the Grand Canal, the previous option being one very small and cramped iron bridge that became extremely clogged with foot traffic, as it took the brunt of the influx of daily visitors into the city. But with the nearly 12 million euro ticket price (~\$15.8 million USD)—twice its intended cost—Stefano and Giuseppe question why these funds couldn't be used for more pressing residential concerns. Seventy-two houses could have been constructed with this money, says Stefano, allowing more families to remain in Venice. The bridge's construction took place under the leadership of former leftist mayor Massimo Cacciari, who stood in contentious opposition against Venessia.com's efforts. Known to speak lowly of Venetian residents, referring to them as complainers and whiners, he felt Venessia.com embodied this mentality—full of laments and complaints, holding on to a stagnant tradition, lacking in understanding of the demands placed on the mayor of such a city as Venice.

3.2 Low Quality Mass Tourism

While tourism itself is not the issue, tourism on a mass scale and of a low quality is. This low quality refers to the economics and demographics of modern mass tourism, as well as the services and products available in the city. After years studying and working in the hospitality industry in Venice, Sabina summarizes:

What's being offered is low quality, so those who come in will be of low quality.

There's poor planning and poor quality offers. The result is, on one side, that tourists don't return because they're being taken advantage of, and on the other, corruption, like bribes for hotel permits. The hordes of tourists lead to a low-level monoculture.

As she reveals, these factors are all highly interconnected. Sabina's train of thought reveals an assumption that the origin of this issue lies in what is being offered, thus implicitly blaming the local government and population, yet realistically, pinpointing a single culprit is a nearly impossible and futile task. Given Venice's history of mindfully responding to and exploiting tourism market trends (Stocker 2007, Bunten 2008, Price 1989), it is more likely that the low quality offerings blossomed in response to market demand—itsself a complex, pluralistic force. Sabina continues,

Tourism itself shouldn't be limited, and it's great that it's here. The problem is when this source of richness becomes exploited at the expense of everything else. The tourist is then ever more ignorant and approaches the city without informing himself on it.

This “everything else” primarily refers to a defunct housing market; the loss of domestic, residential, and social services to the mainland; and the advent of a “tourism monoculture,” whereby the previously diversified economy gave way to mass tourism of *bassa qualità*, or “low quality.” Massimo and Davide, members of the *dirrettivo* who both work in tourism (Massimo owns an artisanal mask shop near San Marco, and David worked in a souvenir kiosk near the Rialto bridge at the time of my research), talk about how Americans used to come to Venice for a significant amount of time—a week or more—investing in high-quality artisanal products and staying in Venice's Grand Hotels. Stefano elaborates:

Tourism has transformed over the years. In the 50s, the tourists were principally rich Americans and Venetians were happy to welcome them. Today the Americans have become poor, and of consequence are less present. Previously in Venice, it was

only the rich who came – the tourist was welcome because he had money to spend. Today, instead, one can visit Venice even on a small budget. It's mass tourism, accessible to everyone, the so-called *mordi e fuggi*¹⁰, day-trippers.

And the city, he concludes, is utterly invaded by them. Marco Vidal, a very active and rather young member, estimates that these *mordi e fuggi* tourists comprise 80% of the 25 million—and growing—tourists per year that enter the city. Frequently toting sack lunches, which, in addition to further pulling away business from local restaurants, also lead to polluting the streets, clogging bridges and tight pathways as groups sit and eat, thus blocking the flow of foot traffic for residents who need to get to school and work, and run errands. Beatrice, another younger member of the group who works in arts management, points out how this feeds into the physical degradation of the city as well. At the time of our interview in April, Beatrice had just witnessed what was to her a horrid sight: tourists using a recently restored well as a combination picnic table and stretching center (see Figure 2.1). She and her boyfriend Enrico were outraged by the occurrence, that these historic wells, the focal point of *campo* activity, should be respected as monuments rather than degraded by such banal use. They recounted the moment to me with large, incredulous eyes as they passed me more *antipasti* in their sleek red-and-black adorned apartment near Campo San Stefano. The picture clearly shows that no other seating options are available, leaving tourists with very few options if they want to take a break from the extensive walking and bridge-hiking site-seeing in Venice requires. Add to that a *coperto* (cover charge) for seated service in restaurants, at times increasing ticket prices by a number of euros, it is no wonder that price-conscious tourists opt for the more affordable take-away option.

¹⁰ Literally “bite and run”, or more colloquially in English, eat and run.

As Marco eloquently states, the *mordi e fuggi* thus “not only consume but usurp the historic patrimony of the city.” Each day, thousands of these tourists arrive via cruise ships, which tower over the four to five story buildings, pollute the air and water, and dredge up deep-rooted waste from the lagoon bed, assaulting the environmental integrity of the lagoon. More than simply not leaving enough money, members lament that these short,



Image 3.1 - Picnic on a well. “Years of restoration, and now...Stretching or a picnic? Da Nico Gelateria on the Zattere, comfortably seated in the open air with a sandwich and a Coca-Cola costing € 6,50.” Photo courtesy Beatrice Susa.

superficial trips do not allow the time and depth for visitors to absorb and understand what Venice is and has to offer—compounded by the frequency of visitors who come to the city based solely on vague and romantic conceptions, with not even a basic knowledge of the local history or culture.

Unfailingly, members pair their critiques of tourists—no matter their origin—with counterexamples of their own travels, unearthing that the heart of the issue is not merely a

financial bottom line. On a more nuanced level, their criticisms have to do with rhetoric of ethical travel that respects the environment and culture of the receiving location. Marco dovetailed his previous comment by saying, “I prefer to travel a little less throughout the year, and to take all the time necessary to see everything there is to see when I select a destination.” Giuseppe confirms as well that for him, “touristy locations don’t interest me. For example, when I travel in Greece, I want to socialize with the Greeks. I don’t want to find myself in a touristy hotel just to speak with an Italian.” Likewise, Beatrice and Enrico recently went on a cruise to the Caribbean, pointing out that they are by no means against cruises per se. Rather, they used their trip as a benchmark for how cruises in Venice should respect the environment more: ships should be docked at a reasonable distance from cities, and more time should be spent visiting.

The physical space of the city is surely conducive to particular actions and practices, but does not mandate them. As James mentioned, “it’s not the buildings, but how people use them.” Furthermore, the residential decline in recent decades and shifts in who has primarily inhabited these spaces has impacted how Venetians act and perform publically, as Quinn (2007) has pointed out. A common perception is that Venetians are cold and closed off, angry and antagonistic towards tourists, if not entirely ambivalent and disinterested, leading even born-and-bred Venetians—such as a friend of mine, Gloria—to make such statements as “Venice would be wonderful if it weren’t for Venetians.” Recalling that a factor of the nascent Venessia.com website was to counteract the stereotype of Venetians as curmudgeons, founder Stefano acknowledges the responsive, reactive element of this oft-cited behavior:

I say it all the time - if a tourist comes with a smile, we Venetians also welcome them

in the same way. Often, instead, the tourist comes with the pretense of being served and revered like he owned the place. In fact, he's a guest, and must have patience. As such, he loses sympathy. It's common to say that all Venetians are crabby. When there are so many people around, you become disagreeable.

3.3 Fast-Capitalism: Consolidation of the Local Economy and Technological Advances

On a brisk and sunny day, Marco and I sat at Caffè Rosso, a central café and bar in the infamous Campo Santa Margherita in the Dorsoduro neighborhood. Donning a tweed driver's hat over his red hair, a long army green wool coat, and impeccably tailored khaki pants, at only thirty years old he epitomized the image of many well-heeled Venetian men. He had grown up very close to our meeting point, and recounts to me how the campo had considerably transformed over the years:

Up to twenty years ago the city was completely different. The law on the liberalization of commercial licenses hadn't yet gone into effect – the permit to open a store – and all commercial activity was subject to the regulation of the municipality, who decided how many shops of a certain type could open. Consequently, there were many more businesses reserved for citizens, a large and lively interchange among residents. In this *campo* there were many more stores than there are now – five butchers, greengrocers, fishmongers, a toy store. It was lively, there weren't all these bars. For example, the shop right behind us here sold only eggs. With the liberalization of the licenses, all these activities for residents have turned into souvenir shops – much less costly and demanding from the perspective of management. This has distorted the social dynamics of the city.

Those who have lived in the city have seen many transitions of this kind. Marco continues:

We're trying to save Venice, its traditions. We're aiming to oppose the closing of small shops in favor of huge international chains. An example is the historic Tarantola bookstore in Campo San Luca, which was forced to close and cede its activity to Chinese merchants who vend low-quality products at low prices, a product that unfortunately works.

Offices, banks, insurance companies, industry, and a thriving maritime economy have most all given way to bars, gift shops, hotels, and bed and breakfasts, and small, independent

family-owned stores have given way to national and international chains. For instance, the emergence of European and Italian grocery store chains, respectively, *Billa* and *Coop*, makes business difficult for small market and specialty shop owners to compete with their lower prices and larger selection. International food chains such as Burger King, McDonalds, and Hard Rock Cafe unsurprisingly usurp business from other locally owned options, and even national chains such as Italian fast food restaurant *Brek* and gelato shops *Grom* and *Venchi* threaten the stability of their independent counterparts. Even groups with strong ties to Venice and its greater Veneto region still contribute to the chain trend: Italian department store *Coin* is headquartered in Mestre and occupies a prime three-story location near the Rialto Bridge, and the notorious Benetton family, originally from the nearby town of Treviso, owns far more than their clothing store United Colors of Benetton, and continues to expand. For instance, the family also owns hotels in the city, and their purchase of and plans to restore and develop the *Fondaco dei Tedeschi* building near the Grand Canal into a shopping center have created much controversy, as the transformation is believed to degrade the integrity of the building's history while further contributing to local Venetian economic decline (Kington 2012).

For Giuseppe, the gravity of these changes are on par with the physical and environmental degradation of the city—but sting more deeply as the increase in bed and breakfasts are the result of an “inconsiderate authorization” by the mayor. Even local news headquarters and hospitals have already moved, or are in threat of moving, to the mainland. In the case of hospitals, the obstacles this presents for island residents could prove fatal, and as Enrico points out, would mean that there would be no more births in Venice proper. James experiences the declining healthcare availability quite acutely, as he

cares for his ailing and aging mother-in-law. While one hospital remains on the island (for now), the services she requires can only be found on the mainland. As island residents without a car, the trek from home to hospital is a long and trying one. They first either take a *vaporetto* or walk to the bus station at Piazzale Roma, from where they wait for the appropriate bus to take them to the mainland. From here they must transfer buses, then once that bus takes them as close to the healthcare facilities as possible, they must walk another twenty minutes from this point. The high costs of water and land taxis prevent them from being viable options, except in cases of extreme emergency. Even then, the time and distance to help and care, and lack thereof close to their home in Venice proper, may result in a matter of life and death.

In addition to the loss of a diversified, artisanal economy, many members also perceive technological advances as threats to residentiality. Proposed projects like an underwater subway connecting to the mainland and a panoramic Ferris wheel would only exacerbate issues of over-crowding and Disneyfying the city. Even the adjustable dam project, MOSE, the purpose of which is to mediate the ever-increasing *acqua alta* (seasonal flooding) divided the city, as many felt the funds were too exorbitant—just as with the Calatrava Bridge. These changes cause such an upset and overhaul of residential life in the lagoon, that it leads the descendants of innovators of the past to express mantras similar to Stefano's: "We Venetians are against innovations, against modernity. We just want to safeguard the soul of the city." Matteo echoes:

Venice is becoming modern. I don't like it. In big cities, you know, there are so many people...if there's a dead man on the street, you pass by, and leave him there. Here in Venice, years ago we still had community. If you needed something, we helped you. Now instead it's becoming more like larger cities, and I regret that very much. Years ago if you needed something, a Venetian would have helped you right away. That still

happens now, but only a little. Because the city lacks 20,000 inhabitants. Mathematics. These laments voice a critique of fast-capitalism (Holmes 2000), whereby the rapid pace of technological advances and global economic flows erode the ethical, moral, and social fabric of a community (2000:9-10). Simultaneously, their reactions show reflexivity and a heightened awareness of their impact on the globe environmentally and culturally, which in turn influences the way that they themselves travel. Whether this is fully enacted or is rather a narrative told to vindicate their complaints, the awareness is present. Paul Ginsborg (2003) delineates two types of middle classes in Italy, together comprising two-thirds of the total population – one that is more modernized, Americanized, hedonistic, and defends the status quo, and one that is “reflexive.” This reflexive middle class is mainly characterized by being more critical of modernity, the effects of globalization, and the interconnectivity of private lives and public actions (2003:43). Aligning Venessia.com with this reflexive middle class, and in light of Anthony Giddens’ concept of “reflexive modernity” (1990), they are not only looking internally at the problems they encounter in Venice, but extend this outward.

Within Italy as a whole, and not only in Venice, these middle classes are disappearing. The lack of available jobs in the country, coinciding with the increase in stable immigrant communities and businesses (discussed in more detail in the following chapter) led to a “Brain Drain”, as educated and trained Italians follow a trend of seeking employment elsewhere in Europe or beyond, depriving the country of (native) human capital (The Economist 2011, Becker et al 2003). This emigration quadrupled during the 1990s and has only continued to increase since (Becker et al 2003), while the remaining middle class in the 2000s experienced a still-augmenting “household impoverishment”

(Massari et al 2008:1), losing purchasing power and increasing in vulnerability, frequently unable to make ends meet throughout the month (Massari et al 2008).

Feeling the impacts of global economic and technological flows and changes so acutely, this perspective shows how tourism encounters can lead to a higher consciousness of global interconnectivity and accountability, thus perpetuating an ethic of responsible, sustainable tourism (Chambers 2009, Gibson 2010, Jamal 2004). Yet as the following chapter will show, many have come to believe that the ethical, moral, and social fabric that is constructed and enacted in the *campi* and *calli* of Venice is being compromised by political mismanagement, mass tourism, and, as I will expand upon here, an infiltration of immigrants—most notably and permanently, Chinese immigrants.

CHAPTER 4: RESPECTING AND PROTECTING THE VENETIAN WAY OF BEING

4.1 Others in Venice

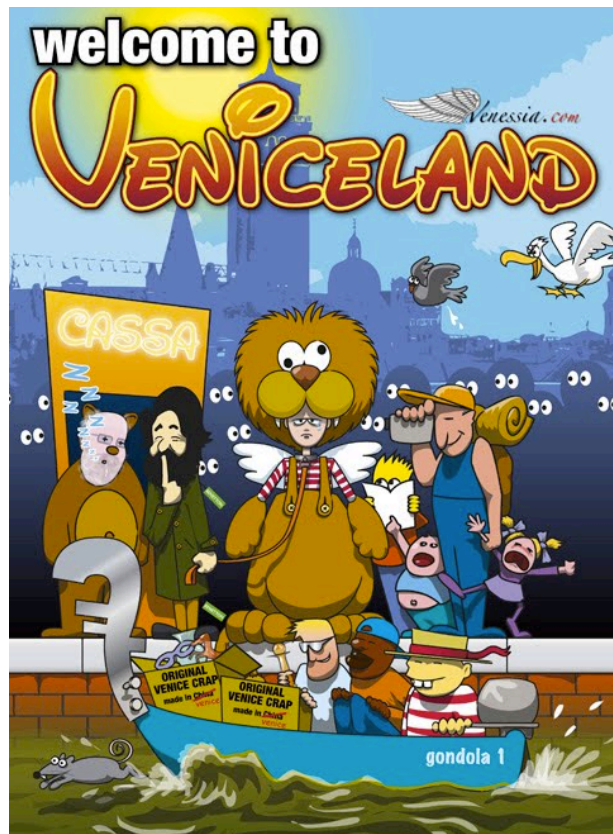


Image 4.1 - Welcome to Veniceland. Image courtesy www.venessia.com.

Ghost-like figures peer upon a ghastly scene: tourists and politicians crowd a *fondamenta* subjecting one of their own—a fellow Venetian—to a belittling role as an egregious cartoon character. On the now-motorized *gondola* in the polluted canal below, boxes of “Original Venice Crap” reveal their origin (“made in ~~China~~ Venice”). A Venetian himself picks through the goods, while a *vu cumprà* enjoys a free ride, all driven by a Chinese gondolier.

In a nutshell, this is how Gioia described to me the flier for Veniceland, at the second planning meeting I attended at the Hotel Bauer. All of the figures in the illustration present

a threat to the traditional Venetian way of life—including, as Gioia herself will attest—the Venetians themselves. Here, however, I will focus on what one character on the poster represents: the overtaking, even robbing, of Venetian culture by Chinese immigrants.

As evidenced by this chapter, my participants did indeed divulge rich and honest passages concerning their impressions of and feelings toward immigrant groups, yet this was only after careful probing on my part. Rarely was this information voluntarily offered, as the most important audience for most members is the local government and complacent Venetian population, who they hope to awaken and provoke to take action. However, this is not to say that a discussion of immigrant groups in this thesis is the result of manipulation, and was based upon careful consideration, and even hesitation, before realizing this was too relevant a topic to let pass. Like inspecting a painting of pointillism, one's understanding of an issue changes depending on the distance away from the work. When examining the collective whole of the documents, images, and texts associated with the Veniceland event; the comments from participants; related events such as a one-man play starring Cesare Colonnese (Veniceland's emcee) entitled *Ma Va' in Cina* (Get Back to China); and the very many explicit and implicit details that I absorbed throughout my ten months in Venice, it became impossible to ignore. In fact, the sheer fact that many members withheld opinions on *extracomunitari* until explicitly asked is in and of itself revealing, given that the Chinese and the *vu cumprà* were so symbolically present otherwise: eliding these groups in the discussions serves as its own form of discrimination, and much can be gleaned from what is *not* said (Low 2001).

Participants frequently asserted that foreigners and immigrants are gladly welcomed in Venice, but there should be a mutual exchange and a base of respect for pre-existing cultural traditions, instead of the brute over-taking and closed communities groups for which the Chinese are notorious (Ceccagno 2003). Notably, this aligns with the difference in Chinese immigration in Switzerland, a “new migration,” where immigrants come individually rather than in a group, for or with higher education and white collar jobs, thus differentiating themselves from the “chain migration” often seen in England, France, and Italy (Lieber 2010). Chinese immigrants in Switzerland also report being well-integrated into Swiss society culturally, as opposed to only being entrepreneurially integrated in Italy (Lieber 2010, Ceccagno 2003). This reveals that the crux of the matter is one of class and economic standing rather than race, explicitly, even while on a grand scale these issues are certainly correlated and conflated. Establishing themselves permanently in the country, the Chinese thus present a different, more permanent kind of threat that supposedly transient groups like the *vu cumprà* and tourists do not: the number of immigrants of Chinese origin has grown rapidly over the last 20 years, as has the number of businesses owned by the Chinese (Ceccagno 2003:207).

These fears are by no means novel. Suspicion of others is a part of human history, with a modern incarnation of the bourgeois form of racism that runs rampant today reaches back to medieval times, when the belief was that an inherent order of master and slave was inscribed in nature (Said 1994:18). Pietro Basso (2007) points out that within Italy during this time, fear of Arabs and Mongols was strong, as they posed a perceived threat to Christianity (Basso 2000:27). This very same concern shone through as an ultimate justification for being suspicious of certain groups. Not coincidentally, the

Northern African populations that comprise the *vu cumprà* are frequently (though not always) Muslim. Some say they disapprove of the way women are treated within that religious paradigm; others point to what they perceive as laziness and a lack of effort to live honestly and lawfully in Italy. Ultimately, it comes down to a matter of values. Those that resonate are acceptable; those that clash are not.¹¹ Arjun Appadurai (2006) remarks that along with the expanded flow of financial capital, and the spread of human rights rhetoric worldwide, ethnic and political violence has swelled alongside and within this intense globalization. He specifies that this creates a novel need for a level of certainty that one's cultural identity, social values, and group survival will not be compromised, and thus perpetuates a truly postmodern form of cultural fundamentalism (Appadurai 2006:7). Ethnic minorities within the nation-state come to represent "predatory identities" (2006:51) which contribute to an *anxiety of incompleteness* (2006:52) where dominant cultural groups perceive a serious threat to a cohesive and continuous national whole.

4.2 Tradition and Suspicion

Chinese immigrants seem to hit a deeper chord with Venetian residents, and not simply for their presence. A common myth is told about the Oriental man who arrives in Venice with a suitcase full of hundreds of thousands of euros, and buys a down-on-his-luck Venetian out of house and home. Instead of opening a Chinese restaurant in place of the typical Italian *trattoria*, he instead proceeds to run the business as usual, only selling sub-

¹¹ Similarly, by virtue of what Leiba Faier calls "resonant patriarchies" (2009:180), the cultivation of ideal Catholic Filipina femininity translates into being recognized as a highly lauded *ii oyomesan*, or ideal traditional Japanese wife, for Filipina immigrants in rural Japan—even if for themselves it means compartmentalizing and losing aspects of their identity (Faier 2009).

par versions of Italian specialties and “*spliss all’Apelol*” in lieu of a *spritz all’Aperol*¹². Residents in their twenties can relay stories their parents have told them, but Bart, in his early forties, has seen the transition firsthand:

The Chinese are buying half of Venice. Twenty years ago there was only one Chinese restaurant. Now you go into any Venetian restaurant—for instance, there was a Venetian family who used to make the best *tramezzini*¹³ in the city. A Chinese family comes in and buys the place up, and starts selling these things like they’re authentically Venetian, but at the core of it, it’s just not the same. It creates a contrast – you go in a Venetian *osteria*, see someone Chinese, it’s annoying. You’re losing a piece of tradition.

Enrico articulates how this trend goes beyond a mere annoyance, and hits a chord that is deeply embedded in his sense of identity as an Italian: “I love Chinese food. But it bothers me when a Chinese person takes over a traditional Venetian shop or restaurant, and doesn’t change a thing, but profits by selling Venetian tradition. Selling Venetian culture, when maybe he doesn’t even speak Italian himself.” More than irking Enrico and others for seeing their own traditions misrepresented, he also feels this is a disservice to tourists. To emphasize his point, he asked me, “You are from America, you’re visiting Italy, you want to eat Italian, I imagine. And coming here, seeing all these restaurants managed or owned by Chinese people. Is it all the same to you, or does it change something?” As MacCannell (1999) maintains, most tourists are—if ironically and fleetingly—searching for a sort of authenticity¹⁴. Even for the *mordi e fuggi* briefly touching down on Venice, the important point for them is that they visited *the* Venice—not its replica or representation. Yet while, as I have shown, local populations in tourist regions, and quite explicitly Venetians

¹² Aperol is the most common bitter used in the spritz cocktail.

¹³ A popular Venetian snack, white bread sandwiches filled with cured meats, salads, and/or vegetables.

¹⁴ John Urry, (1990) begs to differ with MacCannell, saying that tourists are aware of the lack of authenticity and in fact search for inauthentic experiences. Tim Edensor (2001) delineates varieties of tourists, however, with varying levels of intentions and awareness.

themselves throughout history, have burlesqued themselves for profit, when a foreign group manufactures this “staged authenticity” (MacCannell 1999) instead, control of the performance is ceded and identity runs the risk of being lost, the replica ultimately and officially replacing the original. Enrico continues:

Tradition has a lot of value in Italy. It's all we have, in a sense. We are nothing in terms of military prowess, we're no economic superpower. Tradition is our oil, so to speak. If we lose this, as a nation, we become poorer. This transformation of Venice into a Chinatown is sort of unique to Venice. If we continue in this manner, in 20 years, there won't be any more Italian restaurants left in Venice. I think it's a problem for the city.

Beatrice points out another concern of many: the opening of knock-off souvenir shops:

It's not just a problem of the Chinese buying shops here, but it's the kind of shops they open, too. Selling just purses, little masks, and Chinese glass. Things, made in China, that the Chinese and Japanese tourists buy and bring back to that part of the world. It's crazy. Absurd. But it's not really a question of racism, which is the first thing that one might think. To me it doesn't matter if they're Chinese, Mexican, Dutch, whatever. The point is, if I need something particular, chances are I won't be able to find it, because there aren't the right kind of stores. At one point, there were laws governing shops, so that a store that sold shoes, if it changed owners, would still have to sell the same product. If it was a bakery, it had to stay a bakery. This law worked beautifully. But eventually, it changed. And then everything became more homogenous, and stores useful to the natives of Venice disappeared. One can't exactly go back to the old laws, but one can create incentives for people to open stores more based on the needs of the citizens of Venice, stores filled with useful things.

Beatrice reflects what many participants affirmed—the government’s policies and city management have shifted to favor non-Venetian institutions, all for the sake of quick and easy tourist money. Antithetical to the traditional Venetian economy, this perpetuates the trend of compromising *venezianità* for the ultimate financial gain of Chinese immigrants rather than native residents. Emanuela Guano (2010) describes how suspicion of the state’s misuse of taxpayer money is tied to a weakened sense of national cohesion,

exacerbating a tendency to blame ethnic minorities that are now in competition for state services and benefits—and in the Venetian context, for space and economic dominance as well. With a paternalistic view of the state, this becomes interpreted as a family betrayal, as if an unwelcomed adopted child was given preference over the firstborn biological children (Guano 2010: 484-487).

Adding to the suspicion of the source of the funds to buy up lagoon property and sell mock Italian culture, the Chinese remain in unified, tight-knit groups that seem impenetrable—from the inside, or the outside. “The Chinese are particular because they remain amongst themselves, you don’t see them,” Bart continues. “They don’t rob your wallet, come home finding all of your things stolen—like people from Eastern Europe. The Chinese respect the laws. But they stay amongst themselves. There’s no “melting pot” with them.” At dinner in their home, Beatrice and Enrico fed off of each other’s comments on the matter:

ENRICO: They don't really live here, in the sense that you never see them outside of where they work. They're like ghosts. They don't participate in the lifestyle of Venice. You never see them at the movies, at the beach, eating out. They just work.

BEATRICE: Under the building where I work, there's a bar managed by a Chinese girl. Having gotten to know her some, I asked her what she does on her time off, and she said, because she works all the time, she just sleeps. These aren't criticisms in the sense that, they should feel compelled to go out and socialize, but in the end, they don't want to integrate themselves into the places where they live.

At this point, the suspicion turns into a matter of offense and disrespect, adding insult to injury. From Gioia’s perspective, though, there is something to admire in their unity:

The phenomenon we are seeing in Venice actually is happening all over Italy. Our country is a much sought-after destination of immigrants, thanks to its pivotal geographical position. In Mestre, there is a street, Via Piave, which now only has

Chinese-run shops, where they are creating a sense of community and unity that is absent among Italians.

We Italians have lost the sense of community, thus we struggle to understand these phenomena. Not having a policy of integration, these foreign communities have more difficulty in entering in, and their detachment is perceived by the Venetians as a threat.

Embedded in their critiques is a class and practice-based discussion of what is acceptable. Yet given the flows of colonialism and imbalanced geopolitical power around the world, these issues of class and comportment become conflated with matters of race, ethnicity, and nationality. Rather than a blatant racism, their critiques reflect a *racialized victimology*, a term coined by Douglas R. Holmes (2000:144). Whereas racism per se codifies groups into physiology-based hierarchies, justifying discrimination based on a perceived inferiority, racialized victimology is a more nuanced iteration whereby certain ethnic groups are believed to receive preferential treatment at the expense of, in this case, the native Venetians. Reified by Bart, "It's not the people we take issue with, it's the practices." Given Venessia.com's history with having been associated with being far right xenophobic neo-Fascists, sensitivity pervades among many members on the topic of being considered racist. Referring to such events as the misinterpretation of the *linzuolata* prank and right wing individuals' politicized use of the group as a platform, Bart retorts:

This is just the result of a series of mistakes. Because we are great lovers of Venice, of our traditions, this kind of confusion happens when someone who reads what we write things we're xenophobic or nationalistic, like someone who loves on the flag of San Marco and hates all the others. In fact it's not like this. To love one's own history, traditions, doesn't mean to hate others. I respect everyone. Whoever truly loves this city understands its traditions - foreigners, Americans, Germans, French. It's a condition that you can either have from birth or acquire through love. But as you can acquire it, you can also lose it. There are Venetians exploiting the city to make money, selling Chinese glass. He has lost *la venezianità*, he who doesn't respect the traditions doesn't have the right. He's lost *venezianità*, in my opinion. I know foreigners who are more Venetian than Venetians. So who would be bold

enough to call me xenophobic after this? Because you don't have to be born in Venice to be Venetian.

As the libel of the group as xenophobic sends most all members into a defensive exegesis of how and why they have been misunderstood and wrongly represented, it is relevant to mention a right-wing group, the *Lega Nord* (Northern League), and delineate what they stand for, thus illuminating how and why particular groups and individuals have drawn comparisons. The Lega Nord is a regionalist political and cultural movement that advocates for Padania, a group of northeastern Italian regions, to be considered as an independent state (for this reason, they may also be considered a nationalist movement). The basis for this movement stems from the belief of forming a unified ethnic and oppressed minority with historic rights to the land, likening themselves to other “minority nationalisms” such as the Quebecois, Scottish, Welsh, and Catalonians—even if the most unifying factor amongst them is primarily economic (Bull 2000:259-60).

To equate Venessia.com with the Lega Nord would be inaccurate and shortsighted, yet their relation is significant. Even if members of the group claim to be part of other political groups and no one that I encountered affirmed any kind of connection with the party—in fact, I only heard critiques and ridicule of them—there are indeed members of the social network and Venetian citizens with whom I spoke casually who align the perspectives and opinions asserted by Venessia.com as reminiscent of the Lega's ideologies pertaining to Venice's autonomy and their perceptions and treatment of *extracomunitari*¹⁵. More to the point, the themes that arise out of the two reflect phenomena seen within

¹⁵ The term *extracomunitari* denotes any non-European Union immigrants, and carries strong negative overtones of exclusion and invasion. While it technically refers to all non-Europeans, it is generally used when speaking of Asian, African, and Latin American immigrants (Ginsborg 2003:62-65, Angel-Ajani 2008:41).

economic globalization, which sees with it more regional autonomy and a decentralization of nation-states (Bull 2000:263), expressing general discontent of global movements and a reverence for preserving and maintaining cultural traditions.

Central to each movement, as well, are discourses of economics and class, of unification on these terms, a protection of economy- and class-based practices, and other pecuniary matters. Recalling Venessia.com's stance as an apolitical group, as Mete shows, being anti-political still has everything to do with politics. A political apathy still reflects a cognizant, conscious critique of the state. While the populist movements *Lega Nord* would be considered by Mete as a form of "internal anti-politics," Venessia.com's incarnation of anti-politicism would be best aligned with "active anti-politics," connoting that rather than passive, fatalistic resigning from political engagement, this stance of distaste and critique of politicians and the political system is honored and venerated, activism still a priority (Mete 2010:42).

Although understanding where the Lega comes from and the political instability and unrest in the northeast altogether aids in contextualizing the movement of Venessia.com, it should be stated that they should not be conflated together as one similar directive. While similarities exist, rather than labeling Venessia.com as blindly or silently part of these movements, it is more useful to consider them as yet another outcome of the same progeny of ideologies, political movements, and economic patterns that formed these movements as well.

4.3 The Value of *Venezianità*

This respect for others does not necessarily imply, however, that all others *do* what it takes to claim the title of Venetian. While members of the group hotly debate immigrant issues, and certainly do not comprise one monolithic voice on the matter, a particular interpretation of what it means to be Venetian circulates and binds the group. Contrasting disparate definitions of what it means to be Venetian that support a rhetoric of carrying on a generations-old lineage of Venetian patricianhood, or, as a gondolier once told me, that being Venetian meant to “take part in a superior race,” Venessia.com members interpret *venezianità* as a practice and moral disposition rather than a racial or genetic concern. “I actually don’t understand those who speak of the ‘real Venice’, which no longer exists,” says Sabina, referring to a group of American researchers whose genetic study of the origins of “purebred” Venetians coincided with 2009’s Funeral protest. “A Venetian friend of mine laughed and said, ‘The real Venetian has a Veronese grandmother, an Egyptian father, a Calabrese aunt, and so on, so what is the *true* Venetian?’ It’s an intersection of a bit of everything. This city was the first melting pot.” For many others, including Marco, *venezianità* primarily involves respect, understanding, and love above all else. In Erik’s words, “To be Venetian principally means to live the city, respecting it. To respect it means to also have an active rapport with the city itself, to know its traditions and to revive them.” Rather than *claiming* the heritage, the essence of being Venetian is taking part in it. Yet the way in which one might take part in this heritage must correspond to the values of respect and honor that native Venetian residents hold for their traditions, in order not to risk its permanent loss.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Space and identity are integrally tied, and in Venice, Italy, the public spaces of the *calli* and *campi* and the interactions therein are of utmost importance to how residents define and manifest Venetian identity, or *venezianità*. As mismanaged mass tourism and an ever-increasing immigrant population etches Venetians out of this space, the community activist group Venessia.com employs a time-honored locally-honed tradition of carnivalesque performances in their *manifestazioni*, which employ a highly reflexive postmodern consciousness in order to reclaim the space and reassert a Venetian presence in the city. Their critiques of the current state of lagoon life can be seen as symptoms of the underlying force of fast-capitalism and a too-accelerated, over-technologized advancing of modern life, which compromises the values and essence of the *venezianità* they hold so dear. One of the most salient and menacingly permanent threats to this lifestyle is the ever-expanding Chinese immigrant community, often blamed for stealing culture and identity by buying Venetians out of their space in order to profit financially from selling inauthentic, low quality representations of this culture.

Whether in a positive or negative light, these discourses place foreigners as “spectres of comparison” (Anderson 1998), whereby Venetian selves come to be understood, solidified, and vindicated when paraded against Others. Narrating alterity, according to MacCannell (1992:116) and Said (1994), is not purely a Western or imperialistic trait. It is a basic element of identity production that reinforces self-identity and group cohesion, even while perpetuating myths and stereotypes about the Others in question. If identity is dialogic (Bakhtin 1982), then the dialogue introduced by

Venessia.com's *manifestazioni* and the discussions surrounding them reconfirm, reaffirm, and remanifest the *venezianità* that they fear is at risk of being lost.

By looking more deeply into what is perceived to comprise identities in Venice, I have shown the importance of the physical space and embedded sense of place therein, understanding the *campi* and *calli* as embodying and contributing to a place-bound history, heritage, and tradition, the discussion and acknowledgement of which still contributes to a deeply meaningful sense of being and belonging for modern Venetian residents. Venessia.com members seek to reclaim this space, and thus an important element of their identities, through traditional Venetian tactics of *carnavalesque* performance, which ultimately reveal a highly postmodern consciousness and reflexivity concerning the issues they experience in the city. When this ontological purview is corroded, evidenced by rapid hyper-modern changes to the economic, social, and residential practices in the city, residents grapple to understand and interrupt the causes of these changes, many scapegoats become points of blame, from politicians to mass tourists to Venetian residents themselves—and quite frequently, to immigrant groups seeking financial opportunity in the lagoon. Forces external to Venessia.com have interpreted the actions, representations, and discourses that imply this blame as xenophobia and racism. Rather than entering into a debate concerning the validity of these claims, I have shown here the underlying fears and critiques that act as a *colpo al cuore*, or a blow to the heart, to the Venetian way of life.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Italian and Venetian Terms

Calle – (calli, pl.) Names of streets, specific to Venice.

Campo – (campi, pl.) A plaza or square in Venice, called so because of their historical use as gardens (camps). While now paved over, they carry on the name of their historical use.

D.O.C. - Acronym for *Denominazione di Origine Controllata* (Denomination of Controlled Origin), a state classification of wine verifying its regional origin in Italy. Used to describe native-born Venetians.

equivalente - equivalent. Used to refer to non-native Venetian residents.

Foresto - foreigner; refers to any non-Venetian, even other Italians.

Goliardico – dating back to 14th century Padovan scholars, denotes being outlandish, brash pranksters with an underlying cause or motive.

Manifestazioni – Italian for demonstration, procession, parade.

Rio terà – Venetian dialect for “interred river,” referring to a canal over which land has been built up to create a street.

Terra ferma – Italian for mainland.

Venezianità – the quality of being Venetian.

Appendix B – Veniceland Documents

- 1) Blog Entry/Press Release from <http://www.veniceland2010.com/>, accessed October 18, 2010.

The Inauguration of Veniceland 14/11/2010

October 14, 2010 by Venessia.com

November 14, 2010, at 12:00, at the foot of the Calatrava Bridge, “Venessia.com” launches “Veniceland.” An irreverent event to highlight a dramatic problem: the transformation of the city of Venice to a marvelous “theme park,” in which the antique palaces, artworks, plazas and streets constitute an open air museum, and the few remaining Venetians assume the role of theme park characters.

Twenty-five million tourists per year against 59,000 residents. The exodus from Venice ceaselessly continues: some 1,000 inhabitants left the city between 2008 and 2010; one resident per day leaves Venice for good. Entire areas of the city are nearly uninhabited, visited by tourists alone. The monoculture tourism economy is now the only source for job opportunities for young people, and the historic capital of the Veneto is losing its characteristic economic activity, crafts and services, and residents. Without alternative plans in place to stop such a hemorrhage, many institutions have become indifferent and complacent. Residential policy has in fact been absent for years, while citizen-directed services are being concentrated on the mainland. The historic city has become but a stunning display for the rest of the municipality. As if all of this was not enough, Venice is also surrounded by industrial dumping grounds and landfills.

Economic and residential policies and projects that guarantee a revival of the city of Venice are needed immediately. To this end we have drafted The Decalogue for Venice, an essential contribution and innovation that offers various insights and ideas for a new city government. Yet along with these proposals we also bring this event, serving as an alarm, a call, ironic and insouciant (as is our style), directed to those held responsible in the government, and to anyone who has a heart for the fate of Venice. “Venessia.com” thus launches “Veniceland,” a great theme park on the ruins of the City of the Doges that denies its citizens so that they would be admired by travelers from the world over.

2) Brief English version of The Decalogue, Venessia.com’s ten points of concern for the local Venetian government. From <http://www.venessia.com/decalogue.html>, last accessed November 11, 2011. Full Italian version may be seen at <http://www.venessia.com/DecalogoperVenezia2.pdf>, last accessed November 11, 2011.

THE DECALOGUE English version

1) SELF-GOVERNANCE OF VENICE. The future of Venice as a “living city” depends on the recognition of the lagoon of Venice as a municipality with separate administrative authority. This self-governed municipality will be combined with specified mainland districts to form the area of Greater Venice.

2) SPECIAL TAX STATUS. In recognition of the unique nature of the historic Venice area and the need to diversify its economic base, the new city of Venice will be delegated administrative authority to levy or assess local taxes and fees within its own territory. Such taxes will not be in conflict nor will they supersede taxes of other administrative regions to which Venice belongs.

3) RESIDENTIAL POLICY. Repopulation of the city will be accomplished through housing policies that provide incentives for the settlement of permanent “year round” residents. These incentives will aim to attract and retain current citizens of Venice, families, and former residents wishing to return to the city. In addition, given the residential improvements that are needed in several areas of Venice, the new municipality will establish residential improvement districts that will directly and indirectly affect the redevelopment of the area to include residential improvements as well as the enhancement of health and social services. The objective is to return to a more balanced city with the permanent residents increasing over time to 100,000 inhabitants.

4) REVITALIZATION AND DIVERSIFICATION OF THE ECONOMY. Through economic development, tax incentives, business incubators, and partnerships, the new municipality will revitalise and diversify the economy of Venice. This will include the encouragement of traditional activities in Venice, as well as new businesses that will serve the increasing residential population. This new economic development will be aimed to support the increased autonomy of the municipality, and it will be consistent with the historic and cultural values of Venice – the goals of which may at times be at odds with the objectives of some Italian and European Union regulations.

5) TRANSPORTATION. It is essential to provide quick, reliable, and convenient transportation throughout the city and to the mainland. Continued development of transportation options within the city must consider the delicate ecological and structural environment of the lagoon.

6) NEW TOURISM POLICY. Administrative oversight must be placed on real estate transactions to discourage speculative activity and encourage long-term permanent residents. Continued tourism is essential to the economic viability of the city, however, it must be done in balance with the objective of keeping Venice a “living city” that promotes its tradition and culture. The development of new tourist facilities should be strictly controlled, with an emphasis on standards for tourism quality, and efforts should be made to develop policies and regulations that balance the flow of tourists with the quality of life for the citizens of Venice. Taxation revenues should benefit from tourism for the city without adversely affecting the permanent residents.

7) DIRECT PARTICIPATION OF CITIZENS. A Municipal Assembly of Venetian Associations should be established, with powers of consultation and the charter to build partnerships between companies, community groups, and the municipal government.

8) DEFENCE OF THE ARTS, HISTORIC PRESERVATION AND CULTURAL TRADITIONS. The government and community organisations should work to protect the monuments and historic landmarks that represent the historic identity of Venice and its lagoon.

9) ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION OF THE LAGOON. The government, citizens, and businesses of Venice, along with its visitors, need to be partners in preservation of the uniqueness of the lagoon's marine environment by actively adhering to environmental protection regulations and by sponsoring conservation initiatives to maintain the health of the aquatic environment.

10) PUBLIC SAFETY AND VANDALISM. The government, civic organisations and the public at large need to work together to address the growing levels of vandalism and crime in the city. This serious situation requires strict laws, adequate enforcement, and appropriately severe penalties.

3) Lyrics to Venezia 2020, copyright La Ghenga Fuoriposto 2010. Translation by Joshua Gulotta.

Venice 1500: 200,000 inhabitants,
Venice 2010: 60,000 inhabitants (...scarce!)
Venice 2020: 300,000 inhabitants
All fake, all popping up!

Venice 2020
Everyone at work, pretending to be inhabitants
Venice 2020
We are the commuters of the amusement city.

Every morning on the train
We all sleep and feel no pain
Bleary eyed but dressing smart
In uniforms that break our hearts

My costume makes me dirty
Cause I get paid to party
But I won't gripe, I'm paid to act
Though I sure would like a long-term contract

Venice 2020
Everyone at work, pretending to be inhabitants
Venice 2020
We are the commuters of the amusement city.

My buddy Toni, he's all set

Paid retirement, making bets
With tourists playing dice and cards
Collecting cash in fancy bars

They fired my Aunt cause she was too fat
And looked to much like those American cats
The kids are told to play in plazas
Then they're shoed home to cheaper casas

They've got a project going on
To stop Venezia's denouement
They'll bring tourism to the town
And buy the rights to tear things down

And now they control all our rents
The prices are exorbitant
So we all left, yes, everyone
All schools and gardens on the run
The streets and squares and canal shores
Are rest stops for tourists galore
And walking down by Saint Marks Square
You'll only find large cruise ships there
Bank the barbarians on horseback
And in the meantime I'm outta here.