Title: Venezia 2024-Stories from the Archipelago

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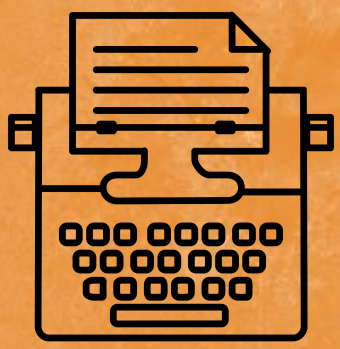

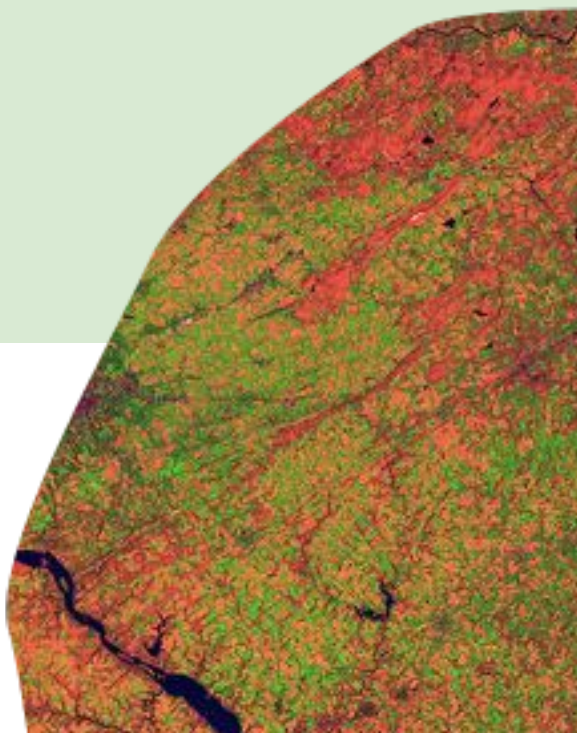

Venezia 2224 – Stories from the Archipelago

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Introduction

The year is 2224, the anniversary of the one hundred years of the collapse of the Nation-State and the 200 years that marked the beginning of the most disastrous climate cataclysms on Earth. Almost no sapiens life in the global north is left to celebrate, widely erased by the nuclear fallout of the past wars.

Somewhere in the Adriatic Sea, near the once-known city of Venezia – now submerged beneath the waves – a new league has come to life, beginning to inhabit the lagoon. They came together under the name of APAZ (Archipelago of Permanent Autonomous Zones), a collectivist league of all the con-spirators gathered around the materiality of their shared breath.

Since the bombings, radiation has spread widely through aquatic and sub-aquatic ecosystems, triggering a wave of rapid evolution resulting in extreme evolutionary adaptations. Strange and vibrant new life forms emerged under erratic survival pressures. A new kind of symbiosis spread and developed between radiation-resistant organisms, algae, and fungi, forming dazzling bioluminescent breathing assemblages. These symbiotic communities - all together with stray creatures - began to inhabit the small, emerged islands of the lagoon, each becoming a self-sufficient community linked through the perpetuation of kinship ties.

It soon became clear that in APAZ, the only possibility of life was defined by a shared teleology, rooted in the kinship between all breathing organisms.

Erasmo

The islet had high, rocky shores. On its summit, a thick, low scrub of vegetation flourished, resilient to the brackish proximity of the lagoon. Above, seagulls wheeled in the sky alongside seafroms – an emergent species born from the radiated mutations of the bombings. Erasmo was a small island, until before the climate acceleration the landmasses occupied ten times the space now left. In the archipelago, each island operated as an autonomous zone, self-sufficient yet interwoven with the others. Conspirators born on one island were encouraged to migrate to another, forming bonds across the archipelago, and they returned to their natal island only to give life to the newborns. Parenting, much like education and other social responsibilities, was a collective endeavor, shared among all species in a commitment to nurture the first, most essential kin ties.

Fig. 1. View from the isle of Saint Erasmo. Photo taken by the author.

The island of Erasmo, historically known as the "garden of Venice," had retained its legacy as a site of cultivation. Subsistence farming remained the main activity, as it had been in the past. Despite centuries of upheaval, the agroforestry landscape persisted. Trees like tamarisk, juniper, sea blackthorn, and poplar stood in association with horticultural crops planted by the farming collectives of mainly permacultorist sapiens. The soil, rich with humus, yielded harvests that frequently exceeded the needs of Erasmo's inhabitants. Surpluses were shared freely with the rest of APAZ, reinforcing bonds between the islands.

Faced with the abundance of Erasmo’s biodiversity, the conspirators proposed a project to establish a seed bank focused on the conservation of climate-resilient seeds. Creatures from across the island gathered in a circle to discuss and design the seed bank, a process marked by collective deliberation. The model of consensus and community participation – an expression of APAZ decision-making processes – made possible all the initiatives and projects decided throughout the archipelago. Choices were made not through majority rule but through consensus, honouring the voices of every single species and individual within the collective.

Conspirators from the southeastern sector of Erasmo proposed an ideal location for the seed bank. "After consultation with our trans-specific holobionts, we propose placing the seed bank in our sector," they offered. "The windy and cool climate of the horn would preserve the seeds best." Murmurs of agreement rippled through the gathered crowd. Amphibians shimmered in radiant approval, their bioluminescent backs glowing in soft pulses. Seagulls and seafroms glided through the air, adding their chirps and twitters to the shared consensus.

The seed bank's design was nicely blending with its environment. Drawing on principles of biophilic architecture, the structure would be crafted entirely from glass reclaimed from the drowned ruins of Venice and retrieved thanks to the efforts of the amphibious conspirators. For the exterior features, the community would use the moss and algae always covering the lagoon and flowering plants to support pollinators and regulate temperature. Even mid-born conspirators came to terms with a play space dedicated to them: to the living walls climbing vines would be added to make the most of the bank seeds in all its features. As for the seed bank’s interior sapiens would provide climate-controlled chambers and advanced AI and blockchain technology ensuring cataloging and tracking of the seeds.

The deliberation process was taking a long time but at least it was putting many conspirators in agreement. One of the many holobiont gathered in the assembly voiced a proposal: "We’ve heard that in the old human times, there were banks where people borrowed paper stories – books, they called them – and returned them after a time. What if… what if we try and do something similar here?"

The crowd hesitated briefly, puzzled. One voice finally broke the silence. "How exactly would this work?"

"The conspirators could borrow seeds, plant them, and return a portion of their harvest to replenish the bank," the holobiont explained. "This way, by sharing, we multiply rather than subtract."

The logic resonated with the gathered conspirators. Voices rose in growing agreement and enthusiasm swelled, with it came a torrent of ideas for further improvement. By the end of the meeting, Erasmo’s living community had not onlylaid the groundwork for the seed bank but, through their cooperation, had also reaffirmed the anchors of their shared teleology.

Pellestrina

Among the scattered islands of the Archipelago, news spread quickly: the conspirators of Erasmo had begun building a seed bank. Joy rippled through the lagoon. Every step forward was celebrated as a testament to cooperation and the collective drive to thrive. It was another milestone in APAZ path to mediate the metabolic fracture that brought the collapse of the ecosystems and the division between the living forms.

One of the most transformative milestones to date has been the creation of the bioelectric grid – a decentralized energy network powered by a living infrastructure of fungi, with their intricate mycelial networks, in concert with algae and plant roots, thriving together in their symbiotic forms. Feeding on sunlight, they cleansed the lagoon of pollutants while storing surplus energy deep beneath the waters. This energy, accessible to all, was no longer a commodity to hoard but a shared resource. The energy would move and travel freely across the island following the rhythm of the moon phases through the tides.

Fig.2 Abandoned fishing vessel,isle of Pallestrina. Photo taken by the author

The benefits of the grid were visible everywhere. Vertical gardens on each island flourished, sustained by the excess bioelectricity. Aquaponic systems reconnected land and sea, regenerating aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems alike. The conspirators celebrated these innovations as acts of repair, not only for the Earth but also for the relationships between its species.
Next to the bioelectric grid came the development of the bio-implants, a synthesis of sapiens science and innovation. These devices enabled interspecies communication, bridging linguistic divides, and fostering new ways of cooperation. Of course, this did not resolve the discrepancy in behavioral patterns among the species, which only prolonged coexistence and proximity over time could clarify. But for once holobionts understood that sapiens science could be intended as valuable knowledge to unite the organic forms and not only divide, as it had been for the most recent sapiens history.
"What do you think is next?" asked Karimè, lounging lazily on the shores of the *lido*[1], their amphibious limbs glinting faintly in the sunlight. Beside them, their friend lazily basked in the shallows, blinking slowly.

"I don't know… maybe fishing nets?" replied Patxi, shifting slightly. "The seabed is still full of them. We keep finding more every new moon."

Pellestrina had been the heart of the lagoon's fishing industry in the old times, before the climate acceleration. Massive canning factories had lined its shores, but even before the collapse, the industry had been in decline. When the activity no longer benefited human needs – due to declining fish populations and pollution – they abandoned their factories, large boats, and tools of destruction, bringing an end to an era of exploitation and mass killing of non-human life.

"Maybe we could recycle them…" Karimè mused, their bioluminescent back flickering in shades of contemplative yellow. "…we could make climbing nets bigger than the ones they will put on the seed bank wall. Imagine that!"

Their friend snorted, amused. "And where would we put them? The MOSE walls?" Karimè gave an exaggerated shudder, shaking their webbed limbs. "Urgh, those ugly, cranky yellow walls. I have never liked them." They paused, reconsidering. "But putting the nets there might be…great! Can you imagine? The *masanète*[2] will go wild with excitement!"

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[1] *Lido* = (from Italian) shore.

[2] *Masanète* = (from Venetian dialect*)* crabs.

The MOSE, a colossal engineering project meant to protect Venice from rising seas, was one of humanity's grand failures. Intended as a flood barrier, MOSE had been rendered obsolete when the rapid escalation of climate acceleration overwhelmed its capacity. During the period of climate acceleration, Venice was completely flooded, and the few remaining sapiens fled amidst the bombings, leaving their ruins behind – as they always seemed to do.

Karimè sighed, flicking a small wave of water toward Patxi. “Well, at least we’re putting those walls to better use now.”

The two little friends waded into the shallow waters of the lido, soaking in the sunlight, and basking in the quiet hum of life surrounding them.

“Alright,” Karimè said suddenly, their voice playful.

“At my count of three, the last one to reach the MoSE is a tone-deaf dolphin!”

“But—” Patxi began to protest, their voice slow as ever.

“One—two—three!” Karimè leaped forward without giving their friend a chance to react, diving into the waters with a splash.

The turtle let out an indignant huff before lumbering into motion, diving into the sea currents to chase after their amphibious friend. The race was on, laughter and ripples marking their joyful path toward the MoSE walls, which loomed in the distance like a relic of an almost forgotten past.

Lazzaro

In the quiet hours of the night, the animated waters of the lagoon glowed softly, illuminated by the gentle radiance of amphibious life glowing beneath the surface. Schools of sea basses silently darted through the reed beds, while small swarms of lepidoptera flitted among the salt marshes, the flickering of their wings blending with the sound of the waves.

The strong connection between species and habitat had given rise to a unique community of species that evolved exclusively in the Mediterranean wetlands. Animals and plants across the archipelago had adapted in remarkable ways, new symbiosis between organisms forged new patterns of interaction and made the habitation of the waters once hostile, now possible for life.

Fig. 3 View from lagoon salt-marsh, Venetian archipelago. Photo taken by the author

It was never a matter of one's efforts to sustain life but rather always a collective one. A while after the great collapse many organisms abandoned their solitary hibernation in the deep Mediterranean sea and gathered around Lazzaro — the first island where subsequently APAZ would born. Historically, Lazzaro had served as a sanctuary for those cast out by the sapiens society. First a leper colony, then a refuge for the sick and the poor, and later for displaced people forced to flee their homes. Now, the conspirators honored the indigenous tradition of hospitality in the same way, becoming the first foothold in the archipelago for outcasts seeking refuge. Here, home was defined not by possession or belonging to a land but by proximity and care. Those who had no home elsewhere would find neighbours among the other creatures living in the archipelago. Anyone could join APAZ, but the process of assimilation was deliberate and structured: resources were finite, and ensuring the balance between consumption and contribution was fundamental. To adhere to the metabolic collective flow was a necessity, not a choice therefore all the organisms were subject to the same principles of adaptation and cooperation. Strangers became kin through the ritual of breath and light, joining the symbiotic network that sustains life across the islands.

The quiet island of Lazzaro, once embodying sapiens' rejection of the "other", now stood as a living testament to the conspirators' ethos: life flourishes and thrives through connection and collaboration without the other, we do not survive.

And so APAZ became the moon that pulled the tide of life, striving to heal the metabolic fracture that for too long divided the species.

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Figures:

All images were shot by the author (Chiara Brusatin).