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Watermarked: 'Venice really lives up to its postcard beauty'

NICOLAS WHYBROW

Cities, like our bodies, like language, are destruction under construction
[...] a landscape of rubble piled on rubble which compels us to go out and
look for the last remaining things.

Valeria Luiselli, Papeles Falsos/Sidewalks

[[figure1 *Lavori in Corso*, Fondamenta delle Zattere, Venice, 2009. Photo by N. Whybrow]] NB. position alongside epigraph

When the historic centre of Venice finally sank completely from view during the acqua alta -- the high waters -- in November 2017, not long before the fifty-seventh International Art Biennale was due to wind up, some people had a hunch it was an artist's stunt that was supposed to be an ironic comment on the way this long-running event's time was finally up -- the Biennale's last gasp. A popular target of these wild speculations was the British artist Alex Hartley, largely on account of the fact that he had had a whole island towed by tug-boat along the south west coast of England during the course of the summer of the 2012 Cultural Olympiad in a performance entitled Nowhereisland.

Soon after the city's disappearance, a batch of Venice postcards was discovered floating in the lagoon somewhere in the region of the Biennale's former Giardini site in the Eastern Castello district of the city. The person who encountered them was initially intrigued by the minor detail that they all appeared to have a tiny hole punched in them and were joined together by a red thread, which gave them the bizarre appearance of having somehow clubbed together in a strength-in-numbers rescue tactic to save their collective souls. More importantly to the individual concerned, an art historian and curator who had been given special dispensation to scour the area for retrievable relics of the

former Biennale archive, it suggested that they may have been part of some form of exhibition or installation, and so he carefully fished them out.

As he did so, he realised that the reverse sides all contained dense hand-written texts -- commencing with an address on the first postcard to a cryptic 'N' - - which, owing to their waterlogged condition, were on the verge of becoming illegible. Unsure as to whether or not he had succeeded in retrieving the complete set, since there appeared to be no signature on the final postcard, the art historian/curator proceeded regardless to remove the red thread in order to allow each one to dry out properly in isolation, taking great care to ensure he maintained the sequence implied by their stringing together. When he eventually got round to deciphering and transcribing the texts -- which, as a form of private joke to himself, he gradually began to assume had in any case been intended for him since his name began with 'N', too -- he realised they represented a critical response to an installation entitled Venezia, Venezia by the Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar. As it happened, he had personally witnessed this artwork at the Arsenale galleries during the 2013 Biennale and, as he realised now, it could be said to have strangely foreshadowed the recent event of the city's complete immersion in the waters of the lagoon. As such he took his find to represent a form of 'last post' for the city and its Biennale – an epitaph or even lament – and felt it was important to present both the postcards and the corresponding text to a wider audience. Recalling that he had acquired the detailed catalogue accompanying Jaar's installation back in 2013, he was resolved to provide a scholarly annotation and submit the whole portfolio to a highly regarded international journal.

[[figure2 Venezia, Venezia installation detail by Alfredo Jaar, Venice Biennale 2013. Photo by N. Whybrow]]

[[figure3 Venezia, Venezia installation detail by Alfredo Jaar, Venice Biennale 2013. Photo by N. Whybrow]]

NB. Sixteen distressed/bloated Venice postcards in outside page column throughout. Text in continuous inside page column throughout. Plus notes in page margin as per journal convention.

LAST POST

Dear N,

I must tell you about Alfredo Jaar's installation for the Chilean Pavilion at Venice's International Art Biennale, which I've just been to see. The viewer is confronted initially by a large-scale black and white photograph hung from the ceiling. Just returned from eight years of exile in South America, the Argentine-born Italian artist Luciano Fontana is seen picking his way gingerly through the post-World War 2 rubble of his studio building in Milan (in 1946). He has reached a gap in what appears to be an interior load-bearing wall, formerly perhaps a doorway, and, seeking to steady himself with both hands either side of this threshold, he momentarily contemplates the next wobbly step on the unstable, ruinous terrain that lies before him. It's effectively an image of 'Italia, anno zero' and it's worth remembering, for Italy the end of the war marked the end of fascist rule in the country, in contrast to the majority of Europe, which had instead been on the receiving end so to speak.[{note}]1 But if it is anno zero, then that implies the hope of a new beginning amidst the traumatic aftermath and, while the slashed canvases for which Fontana was subsequently to become renowned suggest gaping wounds and the impossibility of painting after the war, at the same time they offer an opening: both a symbolic release of built-up pressure and a new aesthetic option for painting.[{note}]2

Prefaced by this historical framework of an uncertain, traumatised post-war European future, Jaar's installation goes on to present an exact model replica (1:60 scale) of the Venice Biennale's Giardini complex, that lush garden-scape of

signature national pavilions laid out neatly like a posh diplomatic neighbourhood of foreign embassies in a formation that exudes twentieth-century global power relations and tensions. Jaar studied architecture and this is very much an architect's maquette, but of course it *postdates* by many decades the actual coming-into-being of the Giardini pavilion complex, so it kind of suggests 'architecture in reverse': the ghostly epitaph to a form of rupture.^{[note]3} You could say the same of Fontana's post-war studio.

So, with the name of the country represented clearly emblazoned on each pavilion's facade there is, for example, a choreography of early-century European colonialist might as evoked by the British and French pavilions sitting at the apex of the rising, one-point perspective avenue of trees that initially greets the visitor to the gardens.^{[note]4} The German pavilion is up there too, forming a kind of Gorgon's head with the other two, but its presence is inflected more precisely by its fascist past. The pavilion was re-inaugurated in 1938 (in a new design by Ernst Haiger) with Hitler himself present and it reflected in its monumental neo-classical form the master-plan developed by the Führer and his 'personal architect' Albert Speer for a new post-war capital city for the thousand-year Reich named 'Germania'.^{[note]5} Then there is the US pavilion occupying the very centre of the grounds as if to exemplify the emergence of a new centrifugal/petal global force in the mid to latter part of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first -- America's time, if you like -- that simultaneously exerts power and attracts dependency.^{[note]6}

Meanwhile, the residue of Cold War era Eastern European national boundaries is epitomised by the continued existence of a 'Czechoslovakian' pavilion -- as if the velvet revolution had never happened. In fact, the Slovak artist Roman Ondák made a piece for this pavilion in 2009 entitled Loop, which seemed in part to be addressing this anachronism. As you wandered into the pavilion through the wide-open entrance at one end, it was as if the gardens had simply continued inside: a path led through tall plants and foliage and, before you knew it, you were out the other side again. A critical comment, as some believed, on this most prestigious of international art events as both an ingrown and overgrown

phenomenon, which -- like Venice itself -- just keeps hanging on in there, irrespective of how things have moved on in the wider world.

The critique may be justified from the point of view of the innovative curation of contemporary art, but if there's one thing that can be said about the continuing presence of the Biennale it is that it has a very acute sense of its own market value on the global stage, which includes its central importance in sustaining the industry that, for the time being, keeps the whole city afloat: tourism. As such, it is indeed sensitive and implicitly responsive to geopolitical events and shifts in its organisation as commercial event. The decision in 1995 to scatter the Biennale's parameters beyond its traditional sites in the Giardini and Arsenale shipyards to all manner of locations in the city could be said to have been driven primarily by a canny financial sense that capitalised economically on demands made by smaller nations also to have their art represented.^[note]⁷ What this reveals, as Luigi Fassi points out, is the degree to which the implicit choreography of a 'now completely globalised Biennale' is indicative of persistent geopolitical hierarchies and power structures (Fassi 2013: 42). Micro-nations, supposedly admitted magnanimously into the international art world fold since 1995, are effectively exploited for profit (via the exorbitant rents they are required to pay), but continue to have their visibility marginalised by being banished to the peripheries. Meanwhile, the old, horse-flogging Euro-American centre, with its twenty-eight immovable pavilions 'renders the structure of the Giardini even more isolated -- no longer an elite aristocratic club as it was in the heyday of colonial Europe, but rather a defensive fortress of supremacies and privileges' (42).^[note]⁸ As Jaar himself observes: 'for an African artist visiting the Giardini, for example, the total absence of a single pavilion dedicated to any African country communicates clearly what the so-called Western world thinks of Africa or African culture: it does not exist' (Jaar 2013).

Entitled Venezia, Venezia, Jaar's resin model of the Giardini invokes a similar sense of a relentless replaying of the status quo. As you climb the set of steps to reach it, there is no initial indication of any Biennale complex, only the deceptive calm of a large square pool of still, murky-green Venetian canal water. As you

dwell expectantly by its side you can catch a glimpse of your own reflected image, whose effect is ambivalent: at once positioning you actively within the work and implicitly chiding you for your introspective narcissism. Finally your mystified waiting is rewarded when a clunking mechanism, reminiscent of playful nineteenth-century amusement park automata, can be heard kicking into gear and the scaled-down Biennale gardens slowly emerge from the depths, an ash grey island of exactly-replicated pavilions. Eventually reaching a still point, the model remains for approximately thirty seconds, water dripping furiously from its plethora of broccoli-like trees, before gradually receding again, a 'lost Atlantis' that leaves behind but a few air bubbles floating on the surface, evoking, as Ranci re suggests 'a Biennale sunk beneath the waters of a city that is itself always under threat from the sea' (2013: 85). At this point you either stay for an encore of this endlessly-replayed, lo-and-behold kinetic curiosity or proceed down the steps on the other side of the square pool and move on. The installation as a whole is effectively arranged so as to replicate, in abstract, the form of a typical Venetian arched bridge -- an apocalyptic bridge of last sighs, you might say.{{note}}9

Some have seen in the elevation of the island a miraculous form of Lazarus-like resurrection or cleansing, but the immediate dramaturgy couldn't be clearer really: this is a Fall, and, theatrical illusion or no, it is not so much the waters rising here, as they do periodically in the lagoon, but the island being subject to sinking as the work of civilisation. So, these are 'drowned gardens', which, under the long shadow cast by Fontana's studio rubble, have the effect of 'doubling the trope of the ruin' (Kapur 2013: 63).{{note}}10 As Jaar himself states: 'The pavilions and their archaic rigidity dissolving into the flowing depths of water reflect the manner in which [they] have lost their meaning in the fluidity of today's world of culture' (Jaar 2013). On the other hand the initial, invariable rise towards the brow of the bridge's arch can also be said to be ambivalent in its effect on the pedestrian, producing, like the post-war image of Fontana, a combined sense of profound uncertainty about that which lies ahead and of expectation and possibility. Thus, Jaar continues: 'A utopia is created the very instant the Giardini

vanish, for the space of the pool becomes a historical opportunity for rebirth. [...] Drowning the Giardini abolishes the authority of an old-fashioned global hierarchy in the hope that a redeemed Biennale may emerge from the abyss' (ibid.)

Moreover, as I've intimated all along, if Venezia, Venezia represents a critical confrontation of the Biennale as highly-influential, long-standing global art-world event (founded in 1895), it is at the same time a comment on the city of Venice as a whole: the Giardini site -- not in actuality an island in itself, of course, as the maquette would have it -- as Venetian synecdoche. And it is also, therefore, and in a far grander sense, an engagement in turn with the notion of a declining western civilisation and the last gasp of a colonial and post-colonial Western power complex. What's interesting about the Giardini in this regard -- paradoxical, in fact -- is that the site has always preserved an aloofness from the rest of the city: a kind of 'otherness' that is very much 'not Venice'.^[note]¹¹ So, again, the island analogy is ambiguous: on the one hand it stands for a separatist Biennale that occupies a privileged art world 'high ground';^[note]¹² on the other it chimes very much with the image of the city in toto as atrophying ruin. What this proposes, in short, is that, separation or no, the fate of the Biennale symbolically encapsulates the fate of Venice -- and, by extension, western civilisation -- and it is the complex interaction of art, tourism and water that provides the conceptual link to an understanding of this state of affairs.

In his Venice essay Watermark, the Nobel Literature Prize winning author Joseph Brodsky declares the city as a whole to be a work of art that is 'the greatest masterpiece of our species' (1992: 116). For him the picturesque nature of its art and architecture guaranteed a benign, becalming and uplifting public environment for visitors and citizens alike, an argument whose potency might implicitly be encapsulated by the city's centuries-old mythical name of La Serenissima (the most serene republic). Brodsky also developed a spatio-temporal theory about the city which boils down to the formula 'Water equals time and provides beauty with its double' (134). In other words, Venetian water reflects the picturesque quality of the city's facades, thus the ebb and flow of

water-as-time captures and records the aesthetic beauty of Venetian space. For many a tourist such a universalising, romantic view of Venice's visual presence provides the stimulus to visit the city and have the perceived spectacle confirmed for oneself.

A harsher, more realistic view would suggest that Venice is in fact in grave trouble. It has been struggling for some time now to control the decline of its historic infrastructure, as the rising tides of water (literally) and tourists (figuratively) threaten to make the city disappear altogether. The commercial excess of tourism implicitly exacerbates the practical ecological problem of regular flooding, and thereby the material erosion of the built environment, caused not least by the regular arrival and departure of disproportionately oversized cruise ships. So, the very sights that might be said to constitute the singular appeal of the city are under attack by virtue of being subject to such a compulsive and indiscriminate 'industry of gawping', suggesting that the long-running 'immersive show' that is Venice contains the seeds of its own destruction, a combined overkill of 'climate and capitalism'. Art world island that it may be a major event such as the International Art Biennale is deeply implicated in this scenario inasmuch as it contributes directly, and for substantial periods of time, to the influx of visitors into Venice. Thus, it continues to promote itself as a landmark global event in order to enhance the image of the city as a desirable destination, thereby indefinitely perpetuating not only its own existence by association but also the commercially profitable yet clearly attritional tourist industry in general. This witnesses a form of unconscious complicity between city and tourist: effectively a co-produced fetishisation of Venice's 'sustainable demise'.

Arguably, then, Venice is a city on the verge of ruin or, for those who care to take a closer look, already in ruins as we speak. As Hanru states: 'Its historical and imaginative beauty and grace, along with its mystery and theatricality, poetically shared by people from all around the world, are now hijacked by materialistic and profit-oriented consumptions of that "beauty", by the spectacle, an image of life in agony' (Hanru 2013: 51). But states of ruination are always

ambivalent. Suspended as they are between pasts and futures, they potentially acquire a dynamic which marks a point of transition or departure -- a leaving behind and a leaving for -- that is marked by loss -- a form of entropy -- and uncertainty about what the future will hold, but also by desire and opportunity: the promise of a destination.^[note]¹³ As Hanru concludes: 'Indeed, the real meaning of beauty is in ruination...' (51).

Venezia, Venezia. If Brodsky proposes an untainted, idealised doubling of the city's unique beauty in the clear reflections that appear in the water surrounding its built environment, Jaar's form of doubling draws sobering attention instead, first, to the self-absorbed and ultimately myopic reflection of the narcissistic twenty-first-century viewer -- made possible, ironically, by the murky water's opacity and 'incapable of seeing any beauty but its own' (Valdés 2013: 102) -- and, second, to a transparent and melancholic premonition of the mythical city's eventual 'undoing'. Thus, where Brodsky was able to project the beauty of the city -- its life-enriching vitality -- on to a neat and eternal temporal rhythm of ebb and flow, Jaar points to the inevitable decay that will follow from such an indefinite and relentless reiteration -- a flow that turns into flooding. High waters or high tide urgently signals 'high time', in fact, and the Biennale's very premise of a large-scale showcasing of the 'here and now' of international art every two years into eternity in itself points to a perception of time that belongs to another era. As Ramírez observes, these days 'by accessing the Internet, every computer user in the planet has immediate access to new art produced around the globe on a daily basis' (2013: 82). In other words, art is happening everywhere all the time now.

But if we're talking doubling, there's a further one that Jaar enacts in his installation inasmuch as its title and, indeed, the repetition of its mechanical operation effectively echo not only themselves -- suggesting a kind of self-reflexive meta-theatre -- but also one of the artworks of the 2009 Biennale, Aleksandra Mir's VENEZIA, whose subtitle is (all places contain all others). Trading, like Jaar, on a form of performed fictionality the piece presented one hundred different 'Venice postcards' -- each one printed up 10,000 times,

amounting to a million in total. Emblazoned on all the postcards is the sign 'Venezia', often inflected by the green/white/red national colours, or some equivalent symbol, of 'Italia'. The images turned out, though, not to be of Venice at all but of other 'watery places', sometimes even composites of several 'watery places' in quite distinct countries.^[note]¹⁴ Not only was it suggested that Venice 'contains all other places' but that all other places contained 'Venezia', too. The postcards were dispensed for free -- from tightly-packed blocks on palettes or typical postcard racks -- in the expectation that Biennale visitors would pick them up and post them -- a special mailbox was provided at the Giardini -- with the act of sending out a million postcards into the global-postal ether, from a 'watery place' to 'a million other places', arguably replicating the ice melting, evaporating, cloud-gathering, rain-falling, seeping-into-the-earth climatic cycle of H₂O. The doubling of Mir's artwork is not merely in the name, then, but also in the use of Venetian water as trope and, more importantly here, on the engagement with place as a form of both fictional unsiting -- the 'unreality' of Mir's postcards is echoed in the theatre of the drowned Giardini maquette -- and an unsiting of certain fictions: Mir's displaced myth of 'Venezia' is echoed in Jaar's critique of the Biennale's myth, which, as Martini and Martini explain, challenges 'the morphological inability of the Giardini to adapt to a transnational vision of art' and results in 'an attempt to "deactivate and discontinue" the linkage between the international art fair and national representation' (2013: 26--7). So, like the city, the organisational premise of the Biennale is trapped in a damaging time warp and, in Valdés neat summary: 'A fascinating illusionistic device is used to show the illusionism of an order that continues to believe in its own existence, when in fact it went under long ago and is now a ghost of itself' (2013: 96).

Meanwhile, Mir's use of postcards draws attention to another emblematic anachronism of the city, posing one of the enduring conundrums of Venice's modern-day tourist culture: what accounts for the postcard's continuing presence and popularity in an age when every single visitor arrives carrying the means to photograph the city and, indeed, instantly post or relay those images around the world in an instant (with messages attached) via various networking and

communications media? The answer doubtless lies partly with that mythical sense of the city's historical quaintness, the sentiments of romance and nostalgia it provokes and which attract tourists to it in the first place. To the visitor the 'ancient ritual' of sending postcards somehow seems appropriate in a place that so powerfully evokes a former age. But it is also the role the postcard plays in disseminating an image of the city both in anticipation of an actual encounter with it and, subsequently, as an affirmation of sights seen -- of conquest. As Scheppe et al explain:

The worldwide proliferation of a codified iconic catalogue dictating the pre-established perception of Venice -- with such propensities going back well into the nineteenth century -- has made touristic contact with the city a determinate and subordinated function of a pictorial programme. [...] Venice is a shadow that casts another shadow. Yet this shadow then falls back on Venice: the encounter with the physical urban territory becomes the enactment of characteristic rites of passage in which pictorial prejudices precede and determine the first-hand inspection. [...] With reality transpiring here as a comparison to prior-held notions, the consumption of place is transformed into an utterly idealistic practice. The site of its staging is recognisable as a city mutated into a universal machine désirante.

Herein Venice is revealed to be a close tautological chamber of mirrors, a city that confronts itself only in effigy. Each photographic print offers a satisfaction in the accord between the a priori and its own realisation, whether by the author of the snapshot or of the portrayed subject against the background of the iconic inventory. [...] The snapshot must prove the success of the journey while simultaneously affirming the advertisement of the tourist industry. [...] Made possible through the intentional disregard of all unexpected characteristics of the destination, this contradiction is

formulated in the typical avowal: “Venice really lives up to its postcard beauty”.

(Scheppe et al 2009: 1264--5).

Not unlike Brodsky’s vision of aesthetic beauty as reflected in the waters of the city, the myth of Venice’s eternal picturesqueness is thereby maintained. Mir by contrast lets the image of her postcards produce puzzlement in the viewer’s mind, partly because one does not as a rule recognise where the place depicted actually is, just that it is evidently ‘not Venezia’ despite claiming to be. It is the ‘wrong place’, but, as that, as a disjunctive space, it has the effect of drawing attention to the instability or ‘wrongness’ of the place that we take to be Venice.

And so, dear N, I write these kitsch Venice postcards to you mindful on the one hand of Valeria Luiselli, who in her Papeles Falsos -- her ‘false papers’ (translated into English as *Sidewalks*) -- swore, after a frustrated attempt to ‘locate’ Joseph Brodsky in the city,^[note]¹⁵ ‘never to write anything about Venice, simply because there is nothing more vulgar and futile than encouraging the production of even one more page about the city, the most frequently cited place in the world of books. Writing about Venice is like emptying a glass of water into the sea’ (2013: 102-3). On the other hand, fascinated by the notion of the postcard both as ‘ruinous artefact’, as emblematic precisely of this city’s perpetuated decadence, and as a ‘false’, pre-mediated testament of Venice’s beauty -- which makes it a pre-card really, rather than a postcard -- I take leaves out of Jaar’s and Mir’s respective books and use the form to enact a commentary from within: a light-hearted, clichéd postcard image with the surprise of, I hope, a sincere missive on its reverse side. The question of whether or not the postcard is positioned ‘pre’ or ‘post’ in time neatly captures its ambivalent, ruinous state of being in between the ebb and flow of disappearing pasts and uncertain futures. What’s also uncertain is whether you’ll ever receive these thoughts of mine. As John Cage once said, ‘we should stop assuming just because we mailed something it will get where we sent it’ (1969: 150).

NOTES

1 Roberto Rossellini's film Germania, anno zero (1948), set in Berlin after the end of World War 2, is one of the neo-realist classics of post-war Italian cinema.

2 With old Europe on its knees and the new world of the Americas waiting in the wings, Kapur also sees in the ambivalence of this threshold image the heralding of a new global order based on a blurring of borders: 'Fontana's presence in this installation is emblematic: stretched between old and new worlds, he loosens the tensions of nationality' (Kapur 2013: 62).

3 Rupture is an interesting choice of word here corresponding to the German Riss which forms the stem for the architect's blueprint or Grundriss (ground sketch/imprint). So here it may be appropriate to talk of a ghostly Nachriss or post-sketch/imprint (in 3D) that emerges after the event. As Hou Hanru suggests: 'Probably, only the image of a ghost can "represent" nation-states, as a kind of post-apocalyptic ruin' (Hanru 2013: 50).

4 Significantly, as Adriana Valdés notes, the art historian Hans Belting draws a connection between the vanishing point perspective 'invented in Renaissance times, and flourish[ing] in Venice' (Valdés 2013: 100) and a colonialist outlook: 'there can be no doubt that perspective functioned as an instrument of colonialism. Europeans considered it the "natural way of seeing"' (Belting 2011: 45).

5 Hans Haacke's 1993 German pavilion commission saw fit to create a ruin within the building, prompting Hanru to ask: 'Is it only with the "suicide" of national representation that the word 'representation' starts making sense?' (Hanru 2013: 51).

6 Bearing out the point: with exhibition space in the Giardini at a premium in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, Israel caused some

consternation -- above all among certain South American countries -- when, as a new nation, it appeared to be allowed to jump the queue in the allocation of permits to construct a pavilion. It duly nestled itself, so to speak, on a prime site directly under the protective shadow of the US pavilion next door (Martini and Martini 2013: 21).

7 As Martini and Martini explain: 'Thus began the new system, now routine, of private owners, church authorities or the municipality renting out palazzi to countries' (Martini and Martini 2013: 22).

8 As Valdés puts it 'Not a lot of water has gone under the bridges of Venice, the spatial layout of the Giardini seems to say' (Valdés 2013: 95).

9 The Bridge of Sighs (Ponte dei Sospiri), built in 1600 to join the Doge's Palace to the New Prisons (Prigioni Nuove) next door, is one of the most sought-out tourist sites in Venice. Myth has it that condemned prisoners' sighs could be heard as they made their way to jail.

10 As Antonio Negri confirms: 'All the national pavilions of the Giardini complex [are] drowned here, then, re-emerging not to show signs of life but to remind us what drowned bodies look like' (Negri 2013: 74).

11 The gates of these one-time public gardens (inaugurated in 1797) remain locked and access denied outside of the period of the Biennale, supposedly leaving the Giardini to be 'inhabited only by cats' (Jacob 2013: 59). In fact, Steve McQueen's 2009 British entry, the film Giardini, focused on the 'post-party' life of the gardens out of season in which a fascinating natural wilderness reigns. Rather than cats, it is a pack of stray dogs that features, sniffing at piles of post-Biennale debris. As one commentator observes: 'At times they appear to have become rooted to the spot, so absorbed are they in the detail of their activity.'

Then, all of a sudden, a hind-leg raises itself and the dog sprays its mark of conquest before moving on. Like tourists taking their pictures' (Whybrow 2010).

12 For what it's worth, the Dutch architect Wouter Vanstiphout, who had collaborated on the British Pavilion for the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2014, was heard to quip at a conference themed Imagined Cities that the Giardini site was 'the only part of Venice never to flood' (Folkestone Triennial, UK, 12 October 2014).

13 Regarding Venezia, Venezia, Fassi states: 'This very ambivalence, the impossibility of telling whether Jaar's work relates to a future prediction or an image of the past, places the ghostly apparition of the Giardini at an indefinable temporal boundary' (2013: 42).

14 The web-link to view all one hundred of Mir's postcards is:

<http://www.aleksandramir.info/projects/venezia/venezia.html>

15 Brodsky spent eighteen consecutive winters sojourned in Venice between 1972 and 1989 (resulting in the eventual publication of Watermark in 1992). When he died in 1996, the poet was buried in the cemetery on the Venetian island of San Michele. Luiselli conducted research into what turned out to be 'an improbable future book on the periods Joseph Brodsky spent in Venice' in which she revisited locations frequented by the poet, interviewed a string of his passing acquaintances and sought out his grave (Luiselli 2013: 102).

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