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# *If Venice Dies*

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## CHAPTER VII

### *How Much Is Venice Worth?*

What would Venice's market value be if it were put up for sale? Although one can hardly imagine a more grotesque or idiotic question, this has become a topical subject in Italy, and not just in the case of Venice. Thanks to a legislative decree passed by the government in 2010, a provision on so-called "federal property" signed into law by then Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and Roberto Calderoli, who served as minister responsible for legislative reforms—and was supported by Italy's other "founding fathers" like Giulio Tremonti, Umberto Bossi, Roberto Maroni, Renato Brunetta, and Raffaele Fitto—the *Official Gazette of the Italian Republic* and the Agenzia del Demanio (Italian Public Property Agency) have shamelessly begun to publish lists of public heritage sites alongside their respective price tags. Seventy-five properties in the Venice municipality alone were included, among them:

La Certosa Island	€ 28,854,000
Batteria Daniele Manin	3,885,276
Morosini Fort on the Lido	1,936,340
Caserma di cavalleria	1,719,864
State Archives, Campo San Bartolomeo	1,198,702
Fabbricato urbano, Santa Croce	900,000
former Casa del Fascio	461,740

One can hardly read the 536 pages constituting this list without losing one's mind (a second list, published on May 13, 2011 ran to 720 pages). We are now thus able to know that the Monte Cristallo in Cortina d'Ampezzo is worth 1,474,262.92 euros, but not a cent more; or that the Nicolò Machiavelli high school in Lucca is worth 1,417,702 euros; or that the headquarters of the *Genio Civile* or civilian engineers in Naples is valued at 14,978,541 euros; and so on and so forth. Thanks to the Calderoli Act, public heritage sites that once belonged to all Italians are now the exclusive property of individual city governments, thereby literally stealing them from everyone else. In the words of historian and journalist Ernesto Galli della Loggia, we have therefore become "Italians without an Italy" in complete violation of the Constitution. A recent case in point was the attempt to sell Venice's Poveglia Island in the Lagoon between Venice and the Lido, which was eventually thwarted despite a 513,000-euro offer made by a private entrepreneur that sparked an effort to raise funds to ensure it would be kept open to the public.

One might well argue that the ridiculous sums we've seen so far are nothing but rough estimates arbitrarily set in order to calculate an inventory value and thus enable the transfer of public assets held by the state to individual city governments. Yet this isn't the case: indeed, once the transfer of ownership has taken place, the majority of these assets and heritage sites become instantly available for sale to private interests and investors. In fact, the Calderoli Act also allows for city governments to literally give these properties away to privately-held real estate funds; furthermore, city authorities are being encouraged in every possible way to sell off their patrimony, to the point that another law requires them to furnish a yearly report on their "real estate disposals" alongside their

budgets. Thus, Paolo Maddalena, Judge Emeritus of the Italian Supreme Court, was quite right when he wrote,

the minds of our elected representatives have been clouded by theories that prize the value of money, and the counting of that money, while remaining indifferent to the fate of individual citizens, civic institutions or our country as a whole ... These legislative measures are exceptionally worrisome, and they run counter to the laws and spirit of our Constitution, in fact breaching nine articles in a single stroke.

This minutious calculation of value has turned Italy into a gigantic real estate supermarket, where anyone who can afford it can turn up with a shopping cart and pick out buildings or landscapes they like and just snap them up. We simply cannot shrug off such cultural regression unfolding before our very eyes, especially when it bears our institutions' seal of approval. The fact that the Ministry of Economy and Finance and the Italian Public Property Agency are literally putting a price tag on every mountain, school, or barracks is neither innocent nor harmless, since these bodies have been constitutionally charged with protecting public property. Yet the very agencies that should be safeguarding it have actually been contributing to the process of dismantling the state—which has been going on for two decades now—betraying it with impunity, transforming themselves from the custodians of public assets into the standard-bearers of private interests. It may well be that Monte Cristallo and La Certosa island are never sold, but this will probably have more to do with their being too expensive and the fact that they aren't a great source of revenue rather

than because they belong to all Italian citizens; nevertheless, the mere act of attaching a price tag to them, and cheerfully spreading the news through a website, has broken down the barrier between the state's inalienable right to own these properties (an essential attribute of popular sovereignty) and salable commodities, thus trampling on the Constitution, the public interest, and the country's history.

Yet the habit of putting a dollar sign on everything doesn't stop there. In a news story first broken by the *Financial Times* in 2014, which was then reported by all Italian dailies, Italy's auditor general, the Corte dei Conti, threatened to sue the credit rating agency Standard & Poor's over its decision to downgrade Italy's credit rating without taking its historical and cultural treasures into account.

*Corriere della Sera* wrote on February 5, 2014: "How much are the *Divine Comedy*, *La Dolce Vita* or Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel worth in relation to the public budget? What sort of role should Italy's immense historic, artistic and literary heritage, which was accumulated over the course of millennia, play in determining the country's wealth? According to the auditor general, it should heavily influence a country's credit rating."

Such was the argumentation behind the plan to sue S&P for 234 billion euros. Is this a fair estimate of the country's culture and total market value? Does it really account for every inch of the country's landscapes, every cathedral, every word of the Italian language, every panorama seen from the Alps, every painting displayed in the Uffizi Gallery, every stanza put to paper by Ariosto, every Antonioni film? Does this sum also include the value of every Italian citizen?

Analyzing every aspect of that bizarre news story—the denials, counter-denials, pundits' comments and the oblivion to which it was all rapidly consigned—hardly matters

here: what is truly important is that this kind of cost-accounting was actually taken seriously. In an interview given to *La Repubblica*, the economist Paolo Leon was very adamant on the subject: “Figuring out how much the Colosseum is worth is quite easy, it’s already been done, but quantifying the value of Dante Alighieri is far more difficult,” given that “credit scoring agencies are only interested in the market value of an asset’s usability.” Citing the well-preserved Renaissance walls of Ferrara, he furnishes us with an example:

We’ve worked out how much space those walls take up, thus restricting the available amount of space the city has to expand: the missed opportunities in real estate speculation, if index-linked through the centuries, together with the intrinsic beauty of Ferrara’s walls, can give us an approximate idea of what they are worth, as well as allow us to better understand their importance and how best to preserve them.

Given that this was printed in one of Italy’s leading newspapers, let’s look at this argument from a literal point of view: one could deduce from it that whether a public asset should be protected depends on the market value of the land where it is situated, which doesn’t take into account the value of the buildings constructed on top of it, or their “intrinsic beauty.” Of course, nothing of the sort ever crossed the minds of Italy’s legislators when the Constituent Assembly discussed and finally approved Article 9 of the Constitution: “The Republic promotes the development of culture and scientific and technical research. It safeguards the natural landscape and the historical and artistic heritage of the nation.”



But apparently the walls of Ferrara (as well as those of Lucca, or the piazzas of Turin, Florence, and Palermo) have been “restricting the available amount of space the city has to expand.” In other words, the most natural use of land is real estate speculation, which could turn a profit today or tomorrow, whereas the existence of buildings that were constructed yesterday but are still valuable doesn’t actually matter, since they end up “restricting the available amount of space” and therefore limiting income (but what if that part of town was valuable precisely because it is in the vicinity of those walls?). Consequently, in the case of Venice, one must work out the value of St. Mark’s Basilica by calculating the amount of space it takes up, which could otherwise be used to build a skyscraper. Or if the Colosseum in Rome were worth only what the land would be valued at if a high-rise were built in its place. Or if the archaeological site at Pompeii would be only as valuable as land on which it stands, so that Mafia kingpins and their construction companies could get rid of all those archeological ruins and build slums upon slums in their place. This, then, is what Venice is worth: the labyrinth of islands on which it is built is only as valuable as the land would be, were it made available to real estate speculators. Can anyone work out exactly how much this would be? It’s certainly possible, and since we’re all so obsessed with putting a price tag on everything, it’s quite likely that someone, somewhere has already figured it out. Such is our inability to understand that there are some things money can’t—or shouldn’t—buy, because they are quite simply priceless. And that cities aren’t just the physical sum of walls, houses, and churches, but that there are invisible cities which can’t exist without those very walls, houses, and churches. In Venice’s case, also bridges and canals.

Is it really possible, wise, or commendable to pile the Colosseum, Tintoretto, *La Dolce Vita*, Machiavelli, Bernini, and *La Traviata* into the same shopping cart? We have the right to ask those who dwell on discussing how much they are worth for explanations. For a start, the Sistine Chapel is out: if anything, it will be chiefly useful in working out the Vatican's creditworthiness. But to return to Italy, how much is Caravaggio worth (and I don't mean just one of his paintings)? How exactly does one put a price tag on Dante or Petrarch? And what about the Roman Empire—how does one estimate its value? Not to mention the other fruits of Italian creativity, from sonnets to pianos, and from lyric opera to the papacy (should one include the Mafia too?). Or Galileo, Volta, and Marconi? What is “the market value of an asset's usability” when it comes to *The Aeneid* or *The Decameron*? We've trained ourselves far too well to monetize everything by repeating that boring mantra of “oil reserves,” demoting our cultural heritage to that of a reservoir which we empty in order to cash in, leaving nothing behind for future generations. Yet our cultural heritage has nothing to do with oil; it's the very air that we breathe, the blood that flows through our veins, the flesh of which our bodies are made of. Article 9 of the Constitution explicitly refers to safeguarding “the artistic heritage of the Nation”—in other words the repository of individual histories and memories—for the benefit of its citizens. One cannot put a price on that, and the 234 billion euros demanded from S&P wouldn't cover a single tercet of Dante's poetry (or Homer's, or Shakespeare's), or a single one of Rossini's notes, or a single one of Raphael's brushstrokes. Simply because the real value of one of Dante's tercets lies not only in its relationship to the other sections of the *Divine Comedy*, but is also to be found in its ties to the very history of Florence, Italy, and Europe—

right up to the present day. Any price a speculative market would set on this intricate fabric of artistic and social relationships would be nothing short of an obscene lie.

We should counter the approximations of self-styled appraisers with the seriously pondered reflections of others on the true value of cultural heritage. One need only cross the Alps and head into France. A report entitled *The Economy of the Immaterial: The Growth of Tomorrow*, which was drawn up by Maurice Lévy and Jean-Pierre Jouyet, reflects on immaterial values (meaning priceless ones) as the basis of all future growth. It begins: “We possess a single, inexhaustible source of wealth that can fuel future development and prosperity: the talents and passions of men and women.” Talent and passion triggered and nurtured by our cultural memory. The report was commissioned by the French Ministry of the Economy in 2006 under the presidency of Jacques Chirac and concluded that immaterial values are “concealing a huge potential for growth, which can stimulate the French economy by generating hundreds of thousands of jobs, while simultaneously preserving others that would otherwise be put at risk.”

No Italian Minister of the Economy—nor for that matter, any Minister of Cultural Heritage—has ever employed words like these; in fact, no high-ranking government official of any kind in Italy has ever tried to even meekly defend the true immaterial value of our cultural heritage.

Venice is priceless: the invisible city has seeped into every stone of its paths and bridges, and every drop of water in its canals, forming a dense network of connections, a powerful web of facts and actions, memories and words, beauty and history. Yet Venice is now threatened by what John Maynard Keynes once termed the “parody of an accountant’s nightmare,” in other words the abject, prejudiced view that

everything should have a price tag, or better yet, that money is the only thing that matters:

Instead of using their vastly increased material and technical resources to build a wonder city, the men of the nineteenth century built slums; and they thought it right and advisable to build slums because slums, on the test of private enterprise, "paid," whereas the wonder city would, they thought, have been an act of foolish extravagance, which would, in the imbecile idiom of the financial fashion, have "mortgaged the future"—though how the construction to-day of great and glorious works can impoverish the future, no man can see until his mind is beset by false analogies from an irrelevant accountancy. Even to-day I spend my time—half vainly, but also, I must admit, half successfully—in trying to persuade my countrymen that the nation as a whole will assuredly be richer if unemployed men and machines are used to build much needed houses than if they are supported in idleness. For the minds of this generation are still so beclouded by bogus calculations that they distrust conclusions which should be obvious, out of a reliance on a system of financial accounting which casts doubt on whether such an operation will "pay." We have to remain poor because it does not "pay" to be rich. We have to live in hovels, not because we cannot build palaces but because we cannot "afford" them.

The same rule of self-destructive financial calculation governs every walk of life. We destroy the beauty of the countryside because the unappropriated splendors of nature have no economic value. We are capable of shutting off the sun and the stars because they do not pay a dividend.

What if the wonder city envisioned by Keynes already existed? What if its name was Venice? Or what if Venice could become such a city?

## CHAPTER XI

### *The Truth of the Simulacrum*

Simulation is the keyword that runs throughout this extraordinary cultural transformation. It includes several levels of virtual reality and various methods of reproducing monuments or historic cities: you can replicate Venice “in the flesh” inside a Las Vegas casino or a neighborhood in Istanbul, but you can also situate it inside a virtual city which anyone can explore via their avatars from the solitude of their own home.

We cannot reduce this shift to an ephemeral fashion trend, or consider it a tribute to our dominant technologies and market mechanisms. Another factor is at least as important: the need to explore notions of diversity, which has been prompted by the global widening of our horizons. As University of California at Berkeley architectural professor Nezar AlSayyad argued, the need to “find authenticity and truth in times and places away from his/her own everyday life” has been answered in part by mass tourism, whose unexpected metamorphosis conferred the obsolete practices developed during the era of the Grand Tour to countless multitudes of *petits touristes*. That slow kind of traveling, once the exclusive preserve of learned elites—and which was thus inspired and nurtured by a great deal of reading, or accompanying tutors and guides and the production of countless diaries and watercolors—has been shattered by the impalpable rhythm of mass

tourism. Nevertheless, the direct experience of urban space, accommodation, and ways of living that are not one's own, has remained an essential component of travel, even though the current practice of hit-and-run visits often elicits meager results (75 percent of those who visit Venice stay there only for a day). Souvenir snapshots—where quantity trumps quality—are a testament to the tourists' ritualistic presence, and not their cultural curiosity. Photographs do not preserve a memory; instead they have replaced our remembrance and our ability to see.

The fake Venices of Las Vegas, Dubai, and Chongqing are even more paltry responses to that need for diversity and otherness, which can find a second-rate outlet in both forged and virtual realities. Yet the pervasive manner in which virtual reality has gained the upper hand and blurred the line between the fake and the authentic while simultaneously subverting its terms amounts to this: virtual reality can be better than normal reality not only because it is more immediately accessible, but because it elicits more standardized (and therefore more marketable) emotions. Instead of introducing something real, virtual reality can simply take its place; physical reproductions found in theme parks—or pseudo-historical neighborhoods, those open-air museums that re-create a fake German or Norwegian village using authentic building materials—can do this in an even greater capacity.

In his *Repairing the American Metropolis: Common Place Revisited*, urban planning and architecture professor Douglas Kelbaugh quotes a college graduate just back from her first trip to Europe:

I didn't like Europe as much as I liked Disney World. At Disney World all the countries are

much closer together, and they show you just the best of each country. Europe is boring. People talk strange languages and things are dirty. Sometimes you don't see anything interesting in Europe for days, but at Disney World something different happens all the time and people are happy. It's much more fun. It's well designed.

It's hard to believe that someone actually mouthed such embarrassing words, but the logic they employ is certainly authentic: what is different is boring, and what is identical (to ourselves) is reassuring, and thus it makes us happy. It would be useless to laugh this off, since the Disneyfication of our cities proceeds unabated day by day, and with it the tacit stripping of their variety, diversity, and identity, a process whereby history is reduced to a mere brand. Even in Venice. In fact, especially in Venice. According to several observers—and I'm going to quote only from an article called "The Ugly Side of Venice," which appeared on the Gourmantic website—the real Venice is becoming less welcoming than its knockoffs:

Ugly monstrosities in the form of massive advertisements covered the iconic buildings ... *Ponte dei Sospiri* was barely visible, dwarfed by fake skies and make belief [sic] clouds. Further along, Piazza San Marco was under the effects of *Acqua Alta*. But this inconvenient yet natural phenomenon paled in comparison to the giant Trussardi advertisement towering above the square ... Granted, many of Venice's buildings are in a state of disrepair and require sizable funding for restoration. But hiding the beauty



of the city with ugliness should come with a travel warning. Don't come here ... *La Serenissima* is no longer serene. The city itself is no longer a pleasure to be in ... I didn't raise an eyebrow at the multilingual signs on rubbish bins forbidding tourists from littering, loitering, eating and drinking in Piazza San Marco.

Comparing Venice to Disneyland has now become commonplace; without citing too many examples, simply two will suffice. In 1981, the Italian journal *Urbanistica* published an article which argued, among other things, that "the transformation of Venice into Disneyland could very well signal the transition to a more creative and cheerful way of life." The author in question was a professor of urban planning, had edited *Urbanistica* for seven years, and was subsequently a member of Italy's Higher Council for Cultural Heritage and Landscape. The second example is culled from an advertisement posted on the Internet in February 2014:

Veniceland, the Disneyland of the Lagoon, is coming to Italy. On the island of Sacca San Biagio, the roller-coaster giant Zamperla will build a theme park dedicated to the history and culture of the city, in order to remind visitors of a time when Venice was an international economic powerhouse.

The island this article refers to is situated in the Giudecca Canal, only a step away from the Venice we know and love: yet if one wishes to speak about *La Serenissima's* history, the city itself isn't enough any more. Instead, one needs a Venice

equipped with “educational areas set aside for schools, huge touch-screen displays, performances developed in partnership with the city authorities, a specific area dedicated to the splendid carnival, roller coasters, slides and a large Ferris wheel.”

Reproductions of various natural landscapes (the *barene*, or salt marshes) and historical reenactments (the Battle of Lepanto) have been planned, all of which has been granted the seal of approval by the University of Venice, whose rector “offered his university’s expertise to the company so that the protection of the city’s historical and environmental treasures would be guaranteed. Nobody would think of calling such a place a Luna Park.”

Thus, *The Guardian* newspaper was certainly correct when it published a provocative piece in June 2006 entitled “Send for Disney to Save Venice,” which argued that if Venice’s future lies in cheap, mass-market tourism, then it might as well be entrusted to the Disney Corporation, who would run it better than the city authorities.

No one is safe from such a radical drift. In Pompeii, city authorities are planning a Pompeii Experimental Park, a sort of facsimile of the actual archaeological site, which one can only presume is now deemed too boring. Yet there’s nothing new about this idea: back in April 2007, then Minister of Culture Walter Veltroni launched the idea of a Jurassic Pompeii, “made up of gadgets, CDs, recreational areas and virtual games, and created to salvage the deteriorating site of Pompeii, which belongs to our archaeological heritage.” All of this would be accomplished in a hurry, of course: according to the minister, it would take only “three years and a special law.” Not to mention what Gianni Alemanno cooked up in 2008 when he was mayor of the Italian capital in order to “save Rome from a decline in tourist numbers,” namely: “the Disneyland

of ancient Rome, featuring virtual reconstructions that will allow visitors to watch shows at the Colosseum, chariot races at the Circus Maximus, explore the catacombs, or take a dip in the Baths of Caracalla.”

Even in their most depraved form—for instance, Venice-land—these new coinages and cultural initiatives are seen by some as a democratization of culture, and anyone who dares question them is deemed elitist. Historian Howard Kaminsky has written that in a mass society our attempts to analyze history have fundamentally changed:

In resonance with the post-national and post-political mentalities of a mass society, its function is not to impose a new, authoritative story but rather to stock the scholarly section of what can be imagined as a Universal Historical Museum, corresponding to the needs of our time much as do supermarkets, shopping malls, the Internet, multichannel television, and the various post-modern deconstructions of traditional modernity ... Disney World [is] ... both epitome and major mover of this postmodern drive to reduce our culture from a meaningfully structured system to a decontextualized wilderness of repackaged symbolic forms in no particular order, all to be consumed indiscriminately as commodities ... [This] is obviously in line with this *Zeitgeist*, which is a point against it only if one thinks ignoring the *Zeitgeist* will make it go away.

From this perspective, according to the neoliberal mind-set now glorified as our zeitgeist, consenting to the com-

modification of the entire planet and wandering around the cultural artifacts of our past with a shopping cart and credit card are facets of a categorical modernity deemed as inexorable as the passage of time.

This brutal variety of presentism presumes that our era can, and should, be guided solely by a market mentality: and that the crowds which throng our shopping malls are the only possible expression of postmodernity and the apex of its rituals and values, the only measure by which one is allowed to shape both the present and future. Yet why do those who idolize the free market economy place all bets on a single zeitgeist that allows for no alternatives? Why must our mass culture obsess over the repetition of sameness and not further our knowledge of diversity and otherness? Whatever triggered the race to build theme parks and fake residential Venices replete with Rialto Bridges wasn't the democratization of culture, but rather the imposition of a standardized and sterilized version of our past and our diversity. This has nothing to do with the blissful coexistence of multitudes, but is actually the same old habit espoused by the privileged classes who wish to keep the pleasures of what is authentic all to themselves, while offering pale imitations to the masses, paternalistically camouflaging them as gifts. These practices reveal no interest in what is different except from the desire to absorb it, commercialize it, and finally neuter it so that it no longer represents an alternative to the dominant monoculture. *History sells* has been said over and over again, so long as it is attractively packaged of course. So long as it is literally *consumed*.

The very act of selecting a few iconic monuments in order to promote them as the authentic epitome of Venice (nevertheless built on a reduced scale and employing low-quality materials) lays bare the authoritarian mechanism that pre-

sides over these “democratic” practices. There are those who decide which objects are conventional and representational enough to summarize Venice—and then there are those who have to abide by those decisions, or better yet, those who are persuaded to pay for them. This arbitrary selectiveness toward the continuum of art and history has erected a powerful filter that eliminates any notion of complexity and distorts the whole. This filter refuses to recognize diversity, which is the yeast of history and our cultural memory, but instead forcibly annexes what is different to the monolith of the identical. It subordinates what is true to what is false, what is complex to what is simple, the eternal to the ephemeral. It puts on a show of cultural diversity driven by the single aim of a means of virtual simulation, to then sell it, adulterating it in the process. Yet the simulation and the simulacrum are only a step apart. As cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard wrote: “The simulacrum is never what hides the truth—it is truth that hides the fact that there is none. *The simulacrum is the only truth.*”

That such a mechanism of cultural manipulation came into play by cloning Venice from afar (in China and the United States) is now beyond question and will undoubtedly keep occurring. Yet what effects has this had on Venice itself? One would be forgiven for thinking that each new clone would enrich the glory of that city on the Lagoon and its amazing diversity, but this is not the case. The virus of the simulation has wormed its way into Venice and has ensnared it, just like a mirror that swallows up the face of whoever looks into it. Or better yet, like a burning glass that doesn't merely collect light and refract it, but instead concentrates its rays onto a small area to combust and destroy. While Venice's inhabitants continue to flee, thereby depleting the city's civic consciousness

and cultural memory, the Ugly Side of Venice is taking over and entrenching itself, allowing the unthinkable to happen: a fake Venice next to the real one, whereby the truth of the simulacrum shatters and engulfs the truth of history. The planned project of building a Veniceland right next to Giudecca is particularly heinous precisely because it suggests situating the copy right in front of the original; in fact, it actually suggests putting the two in direct competition with each other, thus decreasing the city's ability to tell its own story: by embodying it, and not just mimicking it, to tell a story that is made of stone, and not papier-mâché, that is expansive and not reductive, that is real, and not fictional. Veniceland and its siblings resemble shopping malls, yet this similarity implies that everything has a price, and that anything that can't be sold on the market has no value whatsoever. Indeed, it presupposes that a fake Venice can be more valuable than the real one specifically because it can be marketed and advertised. Yet this specific project is a telltale clue that Venice is losing its own identity, and is trying to find it elsewhere, at an exorbitant price. It's as if this city of such miraculous beauty were becoming invisible to the very people who live in it, or as though its identity were growing weaker with each passing day. Like an old man on his deathbed.

Venice multiplies itself and refracts, like light bounces off the shards of a mirror that has broken into a thousand pieces. Yet in this unprecedented scenario, the city runs the risk of losing its very soul and life force. Instead of validating its uniqueness and indivisibility, it risks slipping into a dizzying confusion of facsimiles. Instead of distilling its resources, ideas, and creativity into the fabric of city life, it risks losing itself in a delirium of imitations. Instead of strengthening its

inhabitants' civic awareness and cultural memory, it confuses elitism with history and popular culture with its own destruction. Yet neither democracy nor policy lies on the horizon, and without a population the city cannot be said to have any citizens. The only thing that will remain is a skeletal, monotonous zeitgeist, a kind of commodities exchange or souk where anything that isn't sold dissolves into nothingness. One can certainly replicate Venice, that's true; one can even pretend to do so in the name of diversity. Yet Venice enjoys an advantage over all its imitations and simulacra: it doesn't *pretend* to be diverse, it simply *is* diverse.