

SUMMER SCHOOL 2019  
Istituto Svizzero di Roma

## BECOMING A RIVER: LIQUID DISASTERS AND SPECULATIVE STORIES DAY TO DAY PLAN

A collaboration between  
EDHEA – Ecole de design et haute école d'art du Valais  
The Faculty for Italian Culture and Society, University of St Gallen  
Accademia di Belle Arti, L'Aquila

In 1962, J. G. Ballard imagined a “drowned world” as a result of global warming. The temperature in the Equator is 180°C, the ice caps have collapsed and Europe is breaking into an archipelago of lagoons. A group of scientists is trying to map the surviving nature in a submerged London city. Artificial lakes, multiple waterfalls and liquid platforms occupy the urban space following the failures of "synchronization" between the rhythm of industrial modernity and that of imperfect nature.

In the era of climate emergencies, the violence of exceptional floods and inundations, the disruption of dams and the creation of artificial lakes punctuate current events and raise the need to revisit and anticipate scenarios of past and future water overflows through aesthetic and scientific investigation. Looking at environmental history, natural sciences, Italian Studies and contemporary artistic practices, the Summer School *Becoming a river: liquid disasters and speculative narratives* aims at questioning the memory and present tense of water-related disasters in order to develop future scenarios. Our discussions and common activities will be fed by an initial study day, walks, an ongoing video screening program, shared readings and group discussions/work.

1. METHOD: HOW TO PREPARE
2. DAY TO DAY PROGRAM
3. PARTICIPANTS' BIOGRAPHIES
4. PRELIMINARY BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. METHOD: HOW TO PREPARE

**What to bring for the week:** We will walk, following water signs and underground waters, in particular on day 2, but also during the week. Think of bringing comfortable walking shoes, sunglasses and a hat. During the week we will also discuss about a possible publication – consider bringing recording devices that may be relevant for keeping traces of the process.

**Day 1 – Building a common Library of References:** we would like every participant to bring a tool (an object, a text, a reference, a work) that is representative of their interest in the Becoming a River summer school – in terms of research question, subjective experience, connection to one's own practice. These tools will be shared on the first day of the Summer School in August and will be temporary there and available for consultation for the whole week. Every participant will introduce their tool on the first day with a 5-10 min. presentation.

**Reading aloud:** do not hesitate to bring with you texts that fit in the Summer School themes and that may be shared during group discussions.

## 2. DAY TO DAY PROGRAM

### DAY 0 – SUNDAY AUGUST 25, 2019

Arrival of the participants at the Istituto Svizzero di Roma

5.30 pm – Quick introduction to the program

Optional – 8 pm Common Dinner at Pizzeria San Marco

### DAY 1 – MONDAY AUGUST 26, 2019 OPENING DAY

9am Breakfast

9.45am-10am Introduction and Opening remarks

Cecilia Canziani, Federico Luisetti, Federica Martini

10am – 11am Dayron Carrillo Morell « Reclaiming the Lake: on the Aesthetics of Water Recycling in Modern Mexico City», PhD Candidate at the Department of Literature, University of Zurich

Video screening: Uriel Orlow, «The Mussel Perspective» (2014), video, 16mm on DVD, 12'

11am – 11.15am Coffee break

11.15 am – 12.15am Marie Velardi «Terre-mer», artist, EDHEA Valais

Video screening: Marie Velardi, Rhino Ariefiansyah, «Aléa» (2014) video, 12'

13.15am – 2.40am Common lunch break

2.45am-3.45am Video screening

Deborah Ligorio, «The Submerged Town» (2008), video, 16mm on DVD, 5'

Ursula Biemann, «Subatlantic» (2015), video, 11'

3.45am – 4.45am Wilko Graf von Hardenberg «Understanding the Anthropocene: The Level of the Sea», Senior Researcher, Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin

Video screening: Maya Schweizer «L'Etoile de Mer» (2018), video, 12'

4.45 pm – 7 pm

FINAL DISCUSSION AND CLOSING

BUILDING OF A COMMON LIBRARY

Common dinner at the Istituto (timing to be confirmed)

### DAY 2 – TUESDAY AUGUST 27, 2019

MORNING - WALK

Following hydrometers and underground waters in Rome – proposed by Marie Velardi

EVENING – SCREENINGS AT THE ISR

4pm -7pm Video screenings, curated by Cecilia Canziani and Federica Martini

### DAY 3 – WEDNESDAY AUGUST 28, 2019

MORNING + EARLY AFTERNOON:

OPTION 1) Group Work

OPTION 2) Water Landscapes, a proposal by Sergio Sarra

Common lunch at the Istituto

AFTERNOON: 4pm – 7pm Talk/discussion with Aria Spinelli (Rome, Radical Intentions)

### DAY 4 THURSDAY AUGUST 29, 2019

MORNING + AFTERNOON: Stalker – walk/visit to the Ex-Snia Lake

### DAY 5 FRIDAY AUGUST 30, 2019

MORNING: Mabe Bethonico's «Letter from Minas Gerais» (2019) and Group Work

Common dinner at the Istituto (timing to be confirmed)

AFTERNOON: 4pm – 7pm Talk/discussion with Dario Gentili & Elettra Stimilli (Rome, Università La Sapienza)

Common dinner at the Istituto (timing to be confirmed)

### DAY 6 SATURDAY AUGUST 31, 2019

MORNING+AFTERNOON (OPTIONAL)

Visit to the exhibitions “Empire” - Elisabetta Benassi & Maria Lai – “Prendere il sole per la mano”.

### DAY 7 SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 1, 2019

MORNING: Departure of the participants from the Istituto Svizzero di Roma

## 3. TEAM & PARTICIPANTS' BIOGRAPHIES

### Team

Cecilia Canziani, Professor at the Accademia di Belle Arti, curator and art historian, L'Aquila  
Federico Luisetti, Associate Professor, Faculty for Italian Culture and Society, philosopher,  
University of St Gallen

Federica Martini, Full Professor HES and dean of visual arts, curator and contemporary art  
historian, EDHEA Valais School of Art

Aurélië Strumans, Assistant MAPS - Arts in Public Spheres, EDHEA Valais School of Art

Marie Velardi, Associate Professor, artist and researcher, EDHEA Valais School of Art

### With the collaboration of

Ghalas Charara, Maëlle Cornut, Patricia Comby, EDHEA Valais School of Art

**Mabe Bethonico** (1966), born and raised in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, is an artist researcher with a MA and PhD in Fine Arts from the Royal College of Art, London (2000). Since 2016, she's a regular contributor to the MAPS Program at EDHEA. Her artistic practice involves long-term research projects resulting in visual and sound pieces, installations, lectures, publications and websites, using documentary sources and field recordings. Since 2003, her work has been exhibited extensively, e.g. in 2012 at Centro Cultural São Paulo, in collaboration with Anselm Jappe, in La Revanche de L'Archive Photographique, Centre de Photographie, Geneva, 2010; Trienal Poli/Gráfica de San Juan, Puerto Rico 2009; the 28<sup>a</sup> Biennial of São Paulo - Em Vivo Contato, 2008; Encuentro Internacional de Medellin, Práticas Artísticas Contemporâneas, Museo de Antioquia, 2007; the 27<sup>a</sup> Biennial of São Paulo - Como Viver Junto, 2006; Subversiones Diarias - MALBA, Buenos Aires; Panorama da Arte Brasileira, MAM Museum of Modern Art, Sao Paolo, and the Art Museum of Pampulha, 2005; Telling Histories, Kunstverein Muenchen, Munich, 2003. Her work is regularly reviewed in the Latin American and international art press. She is Professor in Fine Arts at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, lectures and gives workshops worldwide. In 2013 she develops a project at the Museum of Ethnography of Geneva with support from CNPq - the National Research Council of Brazil.

**Cecilia Canziani** is an art historian and curator. She holds a PhD in Art History, University of Naples Federico II; MA in Curating, Goldsmiths, University of London; and Laurea in Lettere (summa cum

laude), Università degli Studi di Roma La Sapienza, Italy. From 2014-2015, she was a research fellow at the Henry Moore Institute in Leeds, England for artists, academics and curators working on historic and contemporary sculpture. She has been Academic Advisor of AUR's MA in Arts Management and a member of its adjunct faculty in art history since 2015. She is also a professor at the Accademia di Belle Arti in L'Aquila, Italy. Previously, she was the program director in curating studies at IED (Institute of European Design) Rome and previously taught at the Università degli Studi di Roma La Sapienza, at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Palermo and lectured in several international institutions, among others at the National Museum of Cairo and the Center for Restoration in Tirana, Albania. From 2009-2016 she was the founding co-director of Nomas Foundation in Rome. The center (its name means 'nomad' in Latin) features research and production of contemporary art and has an internationally renowned program of exhibits, lectures and residencies. As an independent curator she collaborated with, among others, The National Gallery of Art in Rome, Museo Marino Marini, Florence; MACRO contemporary art museum, Rome; Praxes Center for Contemporary Art, Berlin; galleria P420, Bologna, Italy; and Spazio A, Pistoia, Italy and contributed to several art magazines and newspapers. She is the co-founder of Les Cerises (2016), a publishing project of children books commissioned to artists and designers.

**Dayron Carrillo Morell** is a graduate of Art History at the University of Havana and Art History and Hispanic Studies at the University of Zurich. He has published essays on visual culture and literature among them: "La Habana en obbara-meyi: La imagen de una ciudad en la post-apertura religiosa" in LA Magazine, Bulletin de la Société Suisse des Americanistes and "La autorreflexión en el Soneto I y el Salmo XVIII de Quevedo" in heterodoxies and peripheries: Hispanic poetry in Lower Baroque versants.

**Dario Gentili** holds an Honorary Fellowship in Moral Philosophy at the Department of Philosophy, University of Roma Tre, and is research fellow at the Sum (Italian Institute of Human Sciences). Main publications include: *Topografie politiche. Spazio urbano, cittadinanza, confini in Walter Benjamin e Jacques Derrida* (Political Topographies. Urban Space, Citizenship, Borders in Walter Benjamin and Jacques Derrida), Quodlibet, Macerata 2009; *Italian Theory. Dall'operaismo alla biopolitica* (Italian Theory. From Operaism to Biopolitics), Il Mulino, Bologna 2012.

**Wilko Graf von Hardenberg** is senior research scholar at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin where he coordinates the research cluster "Art of Judgement" and works on a history of the concept of mean sea level. Trained as a political historian and a geographer in Turin and Cambridge his researches have been mainly aimed at disentangling different aspects of 20th century environmental history. Prior to moving to Berlin he worked at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the Rachel Carson Center and the Deutsches Museum in Munich, the University of Trento, and the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa.

**Federico Luisetti** is an Italian philosopher, he is Associate Professor of Italian Culture and Society at the University of St. Gallen. From 2005 to 2017 he taught Italian Studies at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill where he has been the chair of the Department of Romance Studies from 2014 to 2017. He is the author of books and essays on philosophy, literature, visual studies, the Avant-gardes, and political thought. He has also worked on decolonial thought and anthropology. Publications include: *The Anomie of the Earth: Philosophy, Politics, and Autonomy in Europe and the Americas*, Federico Luisetti, John Pickles, Wilson Kaiser, editors, Duke University Press, 2015; *Una vita. Pensiero selvaggio e filosofia dell'intensità*, Mimesis, 2011; *A Century of Futurism: 1909–2009*, Federico Luisetti and Luca Somigli, eds., "Annali d'Italianistica," 27, 2009; *Estetica dell'immanenza. Saggi sulle parole, le immagini e le macchine*, Aracne, 2008 ; *Dopo il museo*, Federico Luisetti and Giorgio Maragliano, eds., Trauben, 2006; *Plus Ultra. Enciclopedismo barocco e modernità*, Trauben, 2001 ; *Museo*, Federico Luisetti and Giorgio Maragliano, eds., a special issue of "Rivista di Estetica," ns 16, 1/2001. In Italian

**Federica Martini**, PhD, is a contemporary art historian and curator. Since 2018 she is Professor and Dean of Visual Arts at the EDHEA – Valais School of Arts. Previously, she was Head of the MAPS Master of Arts in Public Spheres at the EDHEA, and a member of the curatorial departments of the Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art, Musée Jenisch Vevey and Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts/Lausanne. In 2015-16 she was a research fellow at the Istituto Svizzero di Roma. Together with Patrick de Rham and Elise Lammer she initiated the Museum of Post-Digital Cultures (2012). In 2012, with Julie Harboe she started the editorial series *SARN Minutes*, focusing on art-based research. Publications include: *Blackout Magazine (No. 0 Art labour and No. 1 Olivetti poesia concreta, 2017)*; *My PhD is my art practice. Notes on the Art PhD in Switzerland (2017, with P. Gisler)*; *Vedi alla voce: traversare (2016, Traces)*; *Publishing Artistic Research (SARN, with B. Drabble, 2014)*; *Open Source Artistic Research (SARN, with B. Drabble, 2014)*; *Tourists Like Us: Critical Tourism and Contemporary Art (with V. Mickelkevicius, 2013)*; *Pavilions/Art in Architecture (with R. Ireland, 2013)*; *Just Another Exhibition: Stories and Politics of Biennials (with V. Martini, 2011)*.

Through research-driven approaches **Radical Intention** expands the horizon of possibilities for collective experiences/actions focusing on the affinity between the social-political and artistic practice. Collaborative research, activism, alternative education, gatherings and the politics of hospitality play a continuing and vital role within the methodology and concepts of the group. Maria Pecchioli and Aria Spinell started Radical Intention in order to investigate new forms of interaction and exchange in the context of visual arts. They aimed at breaking the boundaries between public and private domain by trying to activate experiential and self-reflexive moments of sharing. Through simply practicing convivial debates, they created intense moments of knowledge exchange around the practice of art. The groups' identity has been defined by their interest and methodologies, used and furthered in each project by creating temporary situations of evolution and discovery. Up until today, they have developed collaborations and produced projects with the intention to experiment and investigate new territories and places in their specificity, detaching themselves from a unique space of agency. Recently, with newly joined member Valerio Del Baglivo, the group has shifted its interest more specifically towards group working and collaborative practices.

**Sergio Sarra** was born in Pescara (I) in 1961. He graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Bologna at the Concetto Pozzati school of "Painting" (1987).

### **Stalker**

Stalker is a collective of architects and researchers connected to the Roma Tre University who came together in the mid-1990s. In 2002, Stalker founded the research network Osservatorio Nomade (ON), which consists of architects, artists, activists and researchers working experimentally and engaging in actions to create self-organised spaces and situations.

Stalker have developed a specific methodology of urban research, using participative tools to construct a 'collective imaginary' for a place. In particular they have developed the method of collective walking to 'actuate territories', which for them is a process of bringing space into being. Stalker carry out their walks in the 'indeterminate' or void spaces of the city, which have long been disregarded or considered a problem in traditional architectural practice. Referring to their walking practice as 'transurbance', the group views it as a collective mode of expression and a tool for mapping the city and its transformations, of gathering stories, evoking memories and experiences, and immersing themselves with others in a place. They use this knowledge and experience to address urban planning and territorial issues, focusing especially on the interstices of the contemporary city-region. Starting with the edges of the Tiber river on the outskirts of Rome, Stalker have since used this method in many other cities including Milan, Paris, Berlin and Turin.

**Elettra Stimilli** teaches Theoretical Philosophy at the Università La Sapienza di Roma and is Editor-in-Chief of the series “Filosofia e Politica”, published by Quodlibet (Macerata). She is the author of numerous essays that focus on the relationship between politics and religion, with particular attention to contemporary thought. Among her publications are *Debito e colpa* (2015) and the only existing monograph on Jacob Taubes: *Jacob Taubes. Sovranità e tempo messianico* (2004). She also translated into Italian and edited many works of this author, in particular *Jacob Taubes, Der Preis des Messianismus: Briefe von Jacob Taubes an Gershom Scholem und andere Materialien* (2006). Her new book *The Debt of the Living. Ascesis and Capitalism* (2017) has just been published by SUNY Press.

**Aurélie Strumans**, artist and assistant UAS at EDHEA. Lives and works in Zurich.

In 2018 Aurélie Strumans obtains a MA in Fine Arts at the Zurich University of the Arts. Further to her collaboration with the EDHEA Research department, she serves as teaching assistant in the Master Arts in Public Spheres and is part of the video production unit. Exploitation of earth, technological infiltration of all areas of life, exchange, information and infrastructure take place in Aurélie Strumans’s work, embedded in the specific interests of power structures. Notions of scale and territory to the human understanding of a glossy augmented reality. The Swiss – Belgian artist concentrates her practice on digital media installations, performances and texts. She brings together contemporary questions on the triangulation, territory - human - technology, with a poetical approach. Aurélie Strumans recently showed her work at the Institute of Contemporary Arts of Singapore, Zoological Museum of Zurich, Corner College in Zurich, Locallnt in Biel, Raum\*Station in Zurich, Swiss National Park in Zernezz, Galerie 3000 in Bern.

**Marie Velardi** is an artist whose work takes multiple forms – installations, videos, drawings, texts, printed images and sound – in which there is always a common element: the link to time, and in particular to the future. Her primary aim is to construct a memory of the future – a long-term perspective – which she understands as of equal importance to a memory of the past. Her work has been exhibited in Switzerland, France, Germany, Belgium, Italy, USA, UK, India and Thailand. In 2014-2015, she was one of three artists to represent Switzerland at the Kochi-Muziris Biennial of India. Her work has won many awards.

Since 2017 she has been a teacher on the Bachelor’s program at the EDHEA - Valais School of Arts. Website: <http://marie.velardi.ch>

#### 4. SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Roni Horn, "Still Water (The River Thames, for Example)", *Shark*, No. 4, Summer 2002.

Bright volumes of vapour through

Lothbury glide,

Bution of

By chemicals

By original usage, a river is

flowing water in a channel with

defined banks (ultimately from

Latin ripa, "bank").

Character

Climatic shifts are known to be

capable of effecting fill or

clearance of channels and valleys;

They can also change the channel

Habit.

Communi-

Concept of

Contami-

Cockoo-echoing, bell-swarmed, lark-charmed, rook-racked, river-rounded.

Density at 25 degrees C in g/ml

0.99707 1.10451 –

Density, degree C

Depth, and

Down to a sunless sea.

Drainage area/extent (000 sq km)10

**Ursula Biemann, "Metachemistry and Other Planetary Perspectives". In *Art in the Anthropocene, Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies*, sous la direction de Heather Davis et Etienne Turpin, Open Humanities Press, 2015**

"Fieldwork is central to this ontological orientation because it locates the research within time, space, and the obstinacies of physical existence. Fieldwork takes place in a series of present moments. There is something absurd in trying to locate and define the qualities of a particular place based on flowing water; one can only hope to get an approximate test result, and the researcher and artist both know that even when the results are returned from the lab, the water will have already changed. However, the classical scientific method is still the most attentive form of observation we have, the most focused advertence one can grant any object under investigation. As a gesture of earnest civil concern for water quality, there is certainly some merit in this acute, focused attention. For me, the purpose of measuring and obtaining quantifiable water data was less about determining the variable degree of water pollution than it was about the care brought to learning about it. (...)

Before it was tamed by engineers, the Nile was more generous and democratic: with every high flood, it evenly spread its fertilizing mud over the entire valley. After hydraulic structures were introduced, chemical fertilizers began to be used and market dynamics were established through the political mechanisms of agricultural subsidies. The seasonal occurrence thus became a matter of the social sphere. It is in pivotal sites like these where geophysical and social processes most dramatically intertwine.

With the infrastructural intervention of the Aswan High Dam in the watercourse, the ecology of the Nile inevitably changed. The fish that migrated from Ethiopia through the Mediterranean to the Atlantic and back were interrupted by this monumental architecture. It is important to remember, however, that the hydraulic regime of the Nile was already altered a century before by the construction of a series of barrages designed to raise the water line on the upstream side in order to feed irrigation canals without the use of pumping, but they had unintended consequences. The barrages reduced the velocity of flow, which diminished the supply of oxygen. This process facilitated the anaerobic decay of organic pollutants, infecting pools and, eventually, the land through the millions of irrigation canals. The result was an insurgency of tiny pollutants that reconfigured Egypt on a molecular level. While environmental engineers had a tremendous impact on the hydraulics of the Nile by regulating its velocity, gauge, and seasonal flows, the variations of water quality—based on its salinity, acidity, oxygen content, mineral composition, nutrient systems, organic pollutants, suspended particles, and silt—largely escaped human control. Although the hydraulic regime of the Nile was deliberately changed, the biological and chemical composition of the water was inadvertently though equally affected.

These water transformations in Egypt allow for the detection of emergent forces as various combinations of natural, technological, and social processes alter realities. Such modified water chemistry transforms soil quality, interferes with land management, drives urbanization processes, and disrupts food supply chains, infiltrating the human sphere through multiple venues and illicit channels. These components do not line up as a simple causal chain of reactions, as they constantly shift and create strange feedback loops—nor are they solely the result of specific economic policies. Each element interacts to create hybrid ecologies in which global organizations, desert developers, and tiny pollutants all forcefully affect the water and topography of Egypt.”

**Marco Balzano, *Resto qui*, Torino: Einaudi, 2018.**  
(see English Version below)

Le parole che mi tornano piú spesso in mente me le ha dette una mattina di primavera, di ritorno da una passeggiata. L’acqua improvvisamente si era abbassata e per qualche ora sono riemerse le vecchie mura, i prati coperti di erba e sabbia. Erich mi ha preso per mano e portato alla finestra.

– Oggi mi sembra che da nessuna parte ci sia piú acqua. Vedo ancora il paese, la fontana con le mucche in coda per dissetarsi, le distese d’orzo, i campi di grano con Florian, Ludwig e gli altri che li falciavano.

Me le ha dette con una voce ingenua, quelle parole, e per un momento mi è sembrato ancora lo stesso di quando lo spiavo da dietro lo stipite a casa di Pa’ e aveva i capelli biondi che gli finivano dispettosamente sugli occhi.

Dopo che è morto gli ho sfilato dalla giacca il quaderno che mi aveva mostrato quella notte. Da quando non avevamo piú il comodino delle calze se lo portava sempre appresso. Ci ho trovato dei nuovi disegni. Una bambina che va sull’altalena, una che gli dorme in braccio, una che pedala sulla bicicletta coi capelli al vento. A volte dubito che questa bambina sia tu, mi dico che è la figlia di Michael, che ogni tanto Erich aveva voglia di vedere e di portarsi a passeggiare. Gli piaceva sentirsi chiamare nonno e andarsene con lei a tirare sassi nell’acqua. Non so se quando era con lei pensava a te visto che ormai, come diceva lui, ti pensava senza pensarti.

Oltre a questo quaderno, un mazzetto di fotografie e una vecchia scatola di fiammiferi, non ho piú niente di lui. Non ho nemmeno piú quel cappello con la visiera piegata all’insú che da giovane si metteva sempre. I suoi vestiti li ho lasciati a un camioncino che passa ogni tanto a ritirare abiti e scarpe da mandare ai poveri dall’altra parte del mondo. Forse l’unico modo di continuare a vivere è farsi altro, non rassegnarsi a stare fermi. Certi giorni me ne pento, ma è tutta la vita che



mi succede così. D'improvviso devo disfarmi delle cose. Bruciarle, strapparle, allontanarle da me. Credo sia la mia strada per non impazzire.

Qui dietro, sopra il paese vecchio, c'è la sua tomba. È in un piccolo cimitero che affaccia sul lago artificiale. Pochi giorni prima di mettere il tritolo alle case un capomastro della Montecatini è andato da padre Alfred a dirgli che avrebbero ricoperto il camposanto con una colata di bitume. Allora padre Alfred lo ha preso per il collo, l'ha fatto inginocchiare sotto l'altare e l'ha obbligato a ripetere quello che aveva detto davanti al crocifisso. spintoni fuori dalla chiesa ed è corso a chiamare Erich. Per l'ultima volta Erich ha fatto il giro di tutti i masi. Per l'ultima volta la gente, anche quella che gli aveva sempre sbattuto la porta in faccia e sbuffato addosso, si è radunata davanti alla chiesa a gridare che i nostri morti non potevano venire sommersi prima sotto il cemento e poi sott'acqua. (...)

D'estate scendo a fare due passi e costeggio il lago artificiale. La diga produce pochissima energia. Costa molto meno comprarla dalle centrali nucleari francesi. Nel giro di pochi anni il campanile che svetta sull'acqua morta è diventato un'attrazione turistica. I villeggianti ci passano all'inizio stupiti e dopo poco distratti. Si scattano le foto con il campanile della chiesa alle spalle e fanno tutti lo stesso sorriso deficiente. Come se sotto l'acqua non ci fossero le radici dei vecchi larici, le fondamenta delle nostre case, la piazza dove ci radunavamo. Come se la storia non fosse esistita.

Ogni cosa ha ripreso una strana apparenza di normalità. Sui davanzali e sui balconi sono tornati i gerani, alle finestre abbiamo appeso tendine di cotone. Le case che oggi abitiamo somigliano a quelle di qualsiasi altro borgo alpino. Per le strade, quando finiscono le vacanze, si sente un silenzio impalpabile, che forse non nasconde più niente. Anche le ferite che non guariscono prima o poi smettono di sanguinare. La rabbia, persino quella della violenza inflitta, è destinata come tutto a slentarsi, ad arrendersi a qualcosa di più grande di cui non conosco il nome. Bisognerebbe saper interrogare le montagne per sapere quello che è stato.

La vicenda della distruzione del paese è riassunta sotto una pensilina di legno, nel parcheggio degli autobus delle agenzie viaggi. Ci sono le fotografie della vecchia Curon, dei masi, dei contadini con le bestie, di padre Alfred che guida l'ultima processione. In una si vede anche Erich con i compagni del co mitato. Sono vecchie foto in bianco e nero infilate sotto il vetro di una bacheca, con qualche didascalia in tedesco tradotta in un italiano approssimativo. C'è anche un piccolo museo che apre di tanto in tanto per i pochi turisti curiosi. Di quello che eravamo non rimane altro.

Guardo le canoe che fendono l'acqua, le barche che sfiorano il campanile, i bagnanti che si stendono a prendere il sole. Li osservo e mi sforzo di comprendere. Nessuno può capire cosa c'è sotto le cose. Non c'è tempo per fermarsi a dolersi di quello che è stato quando non c'eravamo. Andare avanti, come diceva Ma', è l'unica direzione concessa. Altrimenti Dio ci avrebbe messo gli occhi di lato. Come i pesci.

*The words that come to mind most often came to mind on a spring morning, on my way back from a walk. The water had suddenly lowered and for a few hours the old walls reemerged, the meadows covered with grass and sand. Erich took me by the hand and took me to the window. - Today it seems to me that nowhere is there more water. I still see the village, the fountain with the cows queuing up to quench their thirst, the barley fields, the wheat fields with Florian, Ludwig and the others who mowed them.*

*He said them to me with a naive voice, those words, and for a moment it seemed to me still the same as when I was spying on him from behind the doorframe at Pa's house and he had blond hair that ended up mischievously on his eyes.*

*After he died, I took from his jacket the notebook he had shown me that night. Since we no longer had the bedside table of the socks, he always wore it with him. I found new designs there. A little girl who goes on the swing, one who sleeps in his arms, one who rides on the bicycle with her hair in the wind. Sometimes I doubt that this girl is you, I tell myself that she is Michael's daughter, that every now and then Erich wanted to see and take a walk. He liked to*

hear himself call his grandfather and go with her to throw stones into the water. I don't know if when he was with her he was thinking about you since now, as he said, he was thinking about you without thinking about you.

Besides this notebook, a bunch of pictures and an old matchbox, I don't have anything of him anymore. I don't even have that hat with the visor folded up anymore, which he always wore when he was young. I left his clothes to a truck that sometimes picks up clothes and shoes to send to the poor on the other side of the world. Maybe the only way to continue to live is to do something else, not to resign oneself to stand still. Some days I regret it, but that's what's happened to me all my life. Suddenly I have to get rid of things. Burn them, tear them apart, get them away from me. I think it's my way not to go crazy.

Behind here, above the old town, there's his tomb. It's in a small cemetery overlooking the artificial lake. A few days before putting the TNT in the houses a Montecatini foreman went to Father Alfred to tell him that they would cover the cemetery with a bitumen casting. Then Father Alfred took him by the neck, made him kneel under the altar and forced him to repeat what he had said in front of the crucifix. For the last time Erich went around all the farms. For the last time people, even those who had always slammed the door in his face and puffed on him, gathered in front of the church to shout that our dead could not be submerged first under the concrete and then under water. (...)

In summer I go down to take a walk and skirt the reservoir. The dam produces very little energy. It costs much less to buy it from French nuclear power plants. In just a few years, the bell tower that stands over the dead water has become a tourist attraction. At first, the holidaymakers were amazed and after a while distracted. They take pictures with the church tower behind them and they all make the same dumb smile. As if under the water there were not the roots of the old larches, the foundations of our houses, the square where we gathered. As if history had not existed.

Everything has regained a strange appearance of normality. On the windowsills and balconies geraniums have returned, the windows we hung cotton curtains. The houses we live in today resemble those of any other alpine village. On the streets, when the holidays are over, you feel an impalpable silence, which perhaps no longer hides anything. Even the wounds that don't heal sooner or later stop bleeding. The anger, even that of the violence inflicted, is destined, like everything else, to slip away, to surrender to something greater whose name I do not know. You would have to know how to question the mountains to know what it was.

The story of the destruction of the country is summarized under a wooden roof, in the bus park of the travel agencies. There are photographs of the old Curon, of the farms, of the peasants with the animals, of Father Alfred who leads the last procession. In one you can also see Erich with his companions of the *co mitato*. They are old black and white photos stuck under the glass of a notice board, with some captions in German translated into an approximate Italian. There is also a small museum that opens from time to time for the few curious tourists. There is nothing left of what we were.

I look at the canoes that slit the water, the boats that touch the bell tower, the bathers that lie down to sunbathe. I observe them and try to understand. No one can understand what's underneath. There's no time to stop and regret what happened when we weren't there. Moving forward, as Mother said, is the only direction allowed. Otherwise God would have put his eyes to the side. Like fish.

## **JG Ballard, *The Drowned World*, 1962.**

Here again the rise of global water levels would have been little more than a few feet, but the huge discharging channels carried with them billions of tons of top-soil. Massive deltas formed at their mouths, extending the continental coastlines and damming up the oceans. Their effective spread shrank from two-thirds of the world's area to only slightly more than half.

Driving the submerged silt before them, the new seas completely altered the shape and contours of the continents. The Mediterranean contracted into a system of inland lakes, the British « Isles was linked again with northern France. The Middle West of the United States, filled by the Mississippi as it drained the Rocky Mountains, became an enormous gulf opening into the Hudson Bay, while the Caribbean Sea was transformed into a desert of silt and salt flats. Europe became a system of giant lagoons, centred on the principal low-lying cities, inundated by the silt carried southwards by the expanding rivers.

« During the next thirty years the pole-ward migration of populations continued. A few fortified cities defied the rising waterlevels and the encroaching jungles, building elaborate sea-walls around their perimeters, but one by one these were breached. Only within the former Arctic and Antarctic Circles was life tolerable. The oblique incidence of the Sun's rays provided a shield against the more powerful radiation. Cities on higher ground in mountainous areas nearer the Equator had been abandoned despite their cooler temperatures because of the diminished atmospheric protection.