

**Alternating layers of ashes and limestone:
eroded, carved and scattered.**

Sulle orme del dinosauro

A mio nonno Enrico detto Rico,
che ha vissuto una lunga vita di 100 anni.

Francesca Lucchitta
Studio for Immediate Spaces
Sandberg Instituut
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

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On the dinosaur footsteps.

To my grandfather Enrico, called Ricco, who lived a long life of 100 years.

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Introduction

It's hard to find places already untouched by humans, but perhaps it is also relevant to retrace, update, and reimagine the ways we have measured and depicted certain landscapes over time.

The space analyzed and explored in this text is the mountain area (natural alpine area) in the Province of Pordenone, Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG) Region, north-east of Italy. It is an area close to my own town Pordenone, where I have been since I was young, first with my parents, than with friends.

∟ The first map represents the Italian peninsula and the FVG region coloured in grey; the second one shows the city of Pordenone (the black dot) and the territory of its Province in dark grey. This text is a collection of documents, newspaper articles, interviews, stories, and personal notes on various explorations and observations. In order to guide the reader through the different contents I used two different typefaces: a serif indicating the historical and documental texts, and a sans-serif for the more personal and experience based texts.

The *friulian* dialect is used throughout this text, specific words are utilized to name things, places and situations with the language spoken by the older people of the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region of Italy. Furthermore it is a dialect I used to interact and communicate with the older people from different villages within this mountainous area.

At first I felt the necessity to take distance; to detach, to find alternative visions, to live new experiences and to meet different people. While this was happening I went through a moment of recognition that the place I come from and grew up in, had a special attraction and affection on me. The farther I was from it, the more I wanted to feel closeness to it; but it was not possible. I asked to myself, could research and writing create a sense of proximity?

The research started with analyzing bonfire events (north-east of Italy, January 5th), traditional rituals that are centuries old and which celebrate seasonal cycles, life and death.



I was attracted to their simplicity and to the community organising these moments, but also to the question of what community could mean nowadays and how it could exist.

I reflected on the element of fire, by looking at the history of the fireplace and its role within the household. The fire was an element necessary to survive: to cook, to heat up and to produce. Therefore the fireplace was a space of aggregation, transmission of knowledge, tradition, histories and discussion; a symbol of community (family as the smallest idea of existing community) that nowadays it is an element less and less visible in architecture.

I felt the necessity to escape from the excess of dematerialisation and living with electronic devices, to experience again the unmediated corporeity of everyday events. To re-establish contact with the actual, the primal and the old. To seek the past and the archaic.

I decided to use the thesis as a possibility to interact with people, old men and women, to discover new stories, memories; to visit caves, ruins and shelters.

I wanted to get out and (metaphorically) dig: to investigate, to use the methods of archeology and anthropology, to understand and find connections. I carried out my research in two parallel ways: a theoretical research together with a more practical research.

I looked into documents, photographs and signs from the past. I took my own photos, collected my own material traces, had conversations, made drawings and wrote my own notes. Photography during the research and writing process was a starting point for possible explorations, used as a tool to document my adventures and to keep memory of them but also used as an instrument to tell a story. Documents became a poetic element enabling me to build a narration between fiction and reality.

I desired to tackle things with my own eyes, to capture the view with my own senses. I wanted to extract a part out of something or an anecdote out of someone and move it somewhere else; to create new stories or to expand the old ones. I needed to investigate a landscape but also to write my own. A landscape that is the result of collective action in history, time and space, a place born, an identity and a motherland.

From landscape to the inner landscape.

Writing became an impulse to notate a specific moment. I consider this thesis as part of my obsession for research and accumulation, as an ongoing process. Through this process, I introduce personal forms of knowing: personal memories, imagined spaces, feelings, notes and rituals. I faced many authors who deal with representation, memory, and the collection of material in relation to landscape; to look at which representational tools they use and how they deal with multiple points of view.

Alternating layers of ashes and limestone: eroded, carved and scattered is a combination of past and present documents, scientific knowledge with popular mythologies, landscape modified by weathering and by human kind. It is a geological, cultural and historical stratification and shows a parallel world suspended between experience, desire and imagination.

In an attempt to find the connection with a distant place, I used my time in The Netherlands to study and expand my knowledge of places I've visited in the mountain, to organise the explorations I would do next time I go back there. I understood that a landscape became stunning when I knew what I was looking at, when I experienced it with the fog, the wind or the rain which created a completely different atmosphere from the 'usual' sunny days. Living between two different countries allowed me to build a relation with the mountain environment and to appreciate it differently and more deeply once I was back. Even if only for temporary moments I immersed myself in the mountain landscape, I consider nature as a return to the fireplace, to the community; as a way to live and share experiences with others and as a possibility to build a common memory.

I would like to print this thesis as a book in multiple copies and to bring it to the mountain places, shelters, and caves that I have referred to during the narration.

“What a magnificent picture does nature spread before the eye, when the sun, gilding the tops of the Alps, scatters the sea of vapors which undulated below. Through the receding veil the theater of a whole world rises into view. Rocks, valleys, lakes, mountains and forest fill the immeasurable space, and are lost in the wide horizon. We take in a single glance the confines of diverse states, nations of various characters, languages and manners till the eyes, overcome by such extent of vision, drop their weary lids, and we ask of the enchanted fancy a continuance of the scene.”

Albrecht von Haller, Die Alpen (1732)

In the summer of 2018 I spent my holidays in Italy at my parent’s house in Pordenone, a city in the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region. At the end of Friday lunch we: me, my mother, my father and Mattia, stayed sitting around the table. I don’t know what we were talking about, but suddenly my father stood up and left us in the kitchen. After a few minutes he came back with a big book in his hands. It was around 30x50cm in size and 10cm thick. It was dark, old and looking precious. The hard cover was a green textile with a grey band covering the spine. In the middle of the cover, a bright yellow paper with a damaged hand written text.

My father reached out to put the book on the table in front of me and Mattia. I was surprised. After a few seconds of hesitation and suspense Mattia opened it. The first page was a green and yellow texture of a natural element, a microscope vision and detail of a piece of stone. No introduction.

Even if the desire to see the content was really strong, I still remember how slow and delicate we were interacting with this artifact. Mattia turned the textured paper page and we saw a really thin white paper with yellowed edges and folded corners; he turned also this semi-transparent page and a black and white photo of a landscape appeared. Nature: a hill with straight high mountains behind it; the homogeneous fields in the foreground were sometimes interrupted by trees. The mountain in the background was black, full of nature and in the shadow. At the bottom of the page a typed caption with some information: *Andreis – I prati della ‘Crivola’* (The Crivola’s fields).¹

1 *Alpi* is a film about a landscape that is only visible through various elements and situations that represent it. The result of a long process (seven years) of research on contemporary perception, it juxtaposes places and situations across many different countries all crossed by a mountain chain. The narration moves from laboratories, to factories, to ski resorts; it jumps from one place to another without specifying its location. The filming avoids the panoramic movement typical in landscape films and uses only fixed points of view. The claustrophobic way in which details, actions and the spaces are shown don't allow the viewer to get distracted.

Even if nothing is explained it is possible to see how the landscape is designed and represented. The absence of narration voice creates the space to reflect on how we use and perceive the landscape.

Armin Linke shows the Alps as a location where it is possible to observe and study the complexity of social, economic, and political relationships. I found it fascinating that even if I felt a repulsion for the artificiality presented, the film made me feel completely mesmerized by the fast and never stopping succession of frames.

Alpi. (2011). [film] Directed by A. Linke. Germany.

Fields? Were there fields? What about the forest, the trees, the pines?

We went through the next pages. The translucent layer of the thin paper covered the portrayed landscape, the inside of the houses, the tradition, the hard work, the fireplace as a meeting point, the family reunions.

Black and white images of different sizes occupied the space of the pages in a composition of two or three. On some pages the photos detached from the paper, floating through the album.

The collection seemed composed of photographs taken by different people, yet unknown people. There was no author, no names of those who explored these remote mountain areas. The only information given were the names of the villages, valleys, cracks, peaks, rivers and some details about what had taken place in the images.

Who took those photographs and why? Were they memories of adventures? Were they special places meant to be shown to someone? Were they simple moments of life meant to be remembered?

Valcellina is an alpine valley of Friuli Venezia Giulia in the province of Pordenone, crossed by the Cellina torrent from which it takes its name. Before the 20th Century the only connection between the plains of Pordenone and the mountain (Valcellina) was the path of Sant'Antonio. The trail started in Maniagolibero and reached the village of Andreis through the Croce fork between Mount Fara and Mount Jouf.

The construction of the first Cellina hydroelectric plant made it possible to build the first road link between Valcellina and the plain. The road opened in November 1906 by the engineer Aristide Zenari.

My grandparents Enrico Branzanti and Vittoria Borsatti (parents of my mother), in the first half of the 20th century were living in Claut, one of the villages of the Valcellina. Vittoria was born in Claut 1919 and lived there most of her life. Enrico was born in Mantova in 1918; I don't know when or how he arrived in that isolated valley. Last summer my cousin Isa gave me some images of the historical bus company, *Corriere Giordani*, of which my grandfather worked for. Every day he drove a bus from the mountain to the plain and back; driving on the same *old road* everyday, over and over again.

In 1992 the road was closed. It was replaced by a new infrastructure consisting of three modern galleries that crossed the mountains, allowing for a shorter and more direct way to reach the valley.

Since the road closed (the *old road*) the area became part of the Natural Reserve of Cellina Gorge, a protected area within the Friulian Dolomites Natural Park. The Cellina gorge is a canyon formed by steep rocks that plunge vertically into the crystal clear water creek. The flora and the fauna of the landscape gained protection of the reserve due to the significant incision that the Cellina stream carved in the limestone.

My father also worked in Valcellina. He doesn't work there anymore but he knows the area very well. As an architect for mountain environment intervention, he would walk there with geologist and botanist; where together they would try to understand the landscape and how best to intervene in it. They learned how it was formed and shaped, who lived there

and how to preserve it. Through this work they created a dialogue between different disciplines that relate to the landscape in their specific way. He is not a person to tell stories, but during our meals together I tried to extract from him anecdotes about the mountain before, during and after the period he had worked there. Once, while we were talking about the Cellina gorge, he started to tell me about a large stone that fell onto the *old road* of Valcellina.

Broken, crumbled rocks fall into iron nets; sometimes.²

2 I let the findings and stories I discovered surprise me and take me somewhere, as Robert Smithson tells in his text *The Crystal Land*: “*The first time I saw Don Judd’s ‘pink-plexiglas box,’ it suggested a giant crystal from another planet. After talking to Judd, I found out we had a mutual interest in geology and mineralogy, so we decided to go rock hunting in New Jersey. Out of this excursion came reflections, reconstituted as follows [...].*”

Smithson, R. (n.d.). *The Crystal Land*. [online] Robert Smithson. Available at: <https://www.robertsmithson.com/essays/crystal.htm> [Accessed 11 Nov. 2018].

The giant occupied more than half the width of the street. It had fallen and stood there, close to the mountainside with some of its fragments around. The point from which it detached was not visible as the photograph ended just a little bit above the end of the rock. It was possible to distinguish its dark grey external side (the one exposed to the weather), from the bright grey and a little bit yellowed inside.³

3 The image supplemented the article:

Filippin, F. (2019). *Valcellina, il masso gigante sarà “rimosso” col tritolo Barcis, oggi il via alle operazioni di brillamento per liberare la vecchia strada Frantumazione e bonifica, affidate all’impresa Moretto, articolate in tre fasi. Messaggero Veneto*. [online] Available at: <https://messengeroveneto.gelocal.it/udine/cronaca/2014/09/26/news/valcellina-il-masso-gigante-sara-rimosso-col-tritolo-barcis-oggi-il-via-alle-operazioni-di-brillamento-per-liberare-la-vecchia-strada-frantumazione-e-bonifica-affidate-all-impresa-moretto-articolate-in-tre-fasi-1.10006169> [Accessed 18 Sep. 2018].

October 2018. The majority of the mountains in the FVG region are formed from limestone. The idea was to spend some days in my region to document different phenomena related to limestone; phenomena such as landslides, cave formations and gorges.

Limestone is a sedimentary rock which is often composed of the skeletal fragments of marine organisms such as coral, foraminifera and molluscs. About 10% of sedimentary rocks are limestone. The solubility of this rock in water and weak acid solutions lead to karst landscapes, in which water erodes the limestone over thousands to millions of years.

In the spring of 2013 a 300 sqm piece of rock detached from the mountain wall and fell onto the *old road* n.251. Only one year later, in the spring of 2014, started the intervention to brake the giant into small pieces in order to remove it from the street. The entire area was closed for public access during that period due to its hydrogeological instability.

“*Even if the boulder is removed, it is still possible to understand what happened.*”⁴—Told me an alpine guide of the Friulian Dolomites Natural Park during a phone call I did in order to ask for some information.⁵

4 A conversation with Giuseppe Giordani. 9 October. (2018) [Phonecast].

5 Günter Vogt in his book *Landscape as a Cabinet of Curiosities* reflect on the way we relate to the landscape and how, when we consume it as an image, we have a superficial perception of it. “*These images have already been consumed through tourism advertising and they are always idealized pictures of the landscape. This ideal image than becomes part of the tourist’ expectations so that they can only enjoy the view if it presents them with this picture. An ideal landscape is created that practically only works when the sun is shining—like today—and people almost believe they can ask for their money back if the weather is not good.*”

For Volg is really important to acquire knowledge before going into a place in order to be able to understand what he will look at when he will be there. “*Landscape become really spectacular when you know what you are looking at*”. He is interested in placing himself directly in relationship with landscape, to expose himself physically to it—and not just to sit on a terrace and enjoy the view.

As Francesco Careri theorized in his book *Walkscapes. Camminare come pratica estetica*, walking can become part of a practice and—although it does not constitute a physical construction of a space—implies a transformation of a place and its meanings. The mere physical presence of humans in an unmapped space, as well as the variations of perceptions they register while crossing it, already constitute forms of transformation of the landscape that—without leaving tangible signs—culturally modify the meaning of space and therefore the space itself.

Careri, F. (2006). *Walkscapes. Camminare come pratica estetica*. Translated by Fassino, G. Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore.

In the early morning of October 20th 2018, my father and I left Pordenone towards the mountain. On the street, out of the second tunnel we entered in a indefinite extension of fog. *“Encountering the fog out of the tunnel is always a good sign, it means that the day will be sunny.”* – my father said to me. It was possible to see only a few meters in front of the car. All around us an immersive white blurry space. Everything had a layer of opacity in front of it, and seemed to be in a suspended time and space, disoriented, with no reference. Everything looked the same. Trees, mountains and elements of the landscape were coming out of nowhere. As we moved forward things started to appear in sight. It was like in photographic albums, were you flip the thin paper pages to unveil the images behind them.

The section of the street I wanted to see was just above the Cellina gorge. It was accessible only by a gated road in Molassa locality. The road is usually open only during the summer but it had been closed a lot due to landslides. At 9am in front of the Ponte Antoi Tavern, we met Giuseppe Giordani, the alpine guide of the Friulian Dolomites Natural Park. From there he brought us to the spot where it was necessary to wear a helmet.

We entered onto the old street and closed the fence behind us. We made our way along a narrow street between two mountains as the fog slowly disappeared it left a scene of the mountains illuminated by a delicate sun. The old street followed the curve of the mountainside with layers upon layers of rock. Morning silence and a shy sound of the flow of the river. Just below us the Cellina gorge, a deep narrow irregular corridor dug into the rock. The strength of the Cellina creek had slowly modify the riverbed in the rock, it had dug, leveled and smoothed the mountainsides and had broken and displaced pieces of stones.

Further along the street, to the left, a large curved crack appeared to us and around twelve meters above us there was a large hole in the mountain wall. The cracks and small stones, still on the street, were arriving until the side of the river where the

asphalt dragged down to the slope with some pieces of rock. Even if the block of stone wasn't there, by looking at the mountain where it detached from and thinking about the image of it, it was possible to understand the dimension of the giant. I wondered about the sound of the detachment and the consequent fall. It must have been such a strong noise vibrating all around. Afterwards, silence, as if nothing happened, and a boulder on the asphalt.

On the damaged surface of the street, a few meters before the crack, five black plastic boxes with stones on the top: cassa 1, cassa 2, cassa 3, cassa 4, cassa 5 (box 1, box 2, box 3, box 4, box 5). Meters and meters of cylinder rock extract from the mountain wall where the rock fell. Numbered rock core samples laying down. Removed pieces.

I wondered where the fragments were moved to, what they had become.

EB Son tre giorni che no vedo Vittoria. Dove sela?
SF Zio, l'è morta.
EB Perchè no me lo gavè dito. Varda cos che i me ga fat.

(EB: Since three days I'm not seeing Vittoria. Where is she? – SF: She passed-away. – EB: Why didn't you tell me anything? Look what they did to me.)⁶

6 Pordenone, Sept 21st, 2018, Morning conversation between my grandfather Enrico Branzanti and my cousin Sandra Fornezzo. Extract from: A conversation with Teresa Branzanti. 21 September. (2018) [Phonecast].

Enrico Branzanti lived in Pordenone in the same apartment that he moved into with his family when they left the village of Claut (in Valcellina) in 1968. It was located on the first floor of a four floor condominium close to the city centre. On the other half of the floor lived Sandra Fornezzo, a cousin who sometimes took care of him. After my grandmother died in 2004 there was a woman who lived with him, helping him to clean, shop and cook. As he got older he started to exchange people for other

people, to confuse the past with the present or the day with the night. During some nights he would talk alone or wake up, get dressed and walk with his wood stick to the entrance of his home to go out.

Memories came back. Maybe in the middle of the night, while he was sleeping they came back. I didn't know if he was still remembering all those details and stories or if small fragments of moments were sometimes just appearing in his mind. I was living in another country and talking with him once every two or three months when I was going back to Pordenone. When I wasn't there my mother was telling me about what he was doing and saying. When I was there we were not interacting a lot. He slowly started to lose his hearing and consequently to talk less and less. We were understanding each other through a glance. His needs were the basic ones: sleeping, eating, needing help to stand up or go to the toilet. Just by a small movement of his arm, his leg, his eyes I could perceive his desire.

I sometimes wished to sit with him at the kitchen table and listen to his voice telling me about his story, his adventures, the war⁷. It never became a real moment. He was old, in 2018 he turned 100 years and after that moment, every day he was smaller, thin and tired.

7 During the Second World War he was part of the Italian army and he went on expeditions to Russia and other countries in western Europe.

Less and less.
Time transforms.

The difficulty of not being *there* when a daily change happened means that it could become a shock (a sudden upsetting or surprising event or experience)⁸ once I go back after a longer period of time.

8 shock. (n.d.). In: Cambridge Dictionary. [online] Available at: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/shock> [Accessed 23 Feb. 2019].

During the 50's in the Alpine area of the Friuli Venezia Giulia and Veneto

Region landscape in particular, a lot of valleys started to change and to become water basins.

There are over 600 artificial lakes that were created to store water for multiple purposes: drinking, industrial, irrigation, hydroelectric power production, regulation of the fluvial flows and integration of the natural flow rates during periods of water scarcity.

A retaining dam is a barrier made in a valley, in the section of a watercourse in order to create artificial lakes. In many cases the basins became an eviction system for the people living there.

Marco Paolini in the theatre monologue *Il Racconto del Vajont or Vajont 9 Ottobre 1963–Orazione civile* (The Vajont Tale or Vajont October 9th, 1963–Civil Speech)⁹ described the environmental, cultural and social change of the Vajont valley before, during and after the construction of the highest European dam at that time. Even if this engineering opera was considered a symbol of evolution, progress and talent, it introduced an irreversible changing mechanism in the simple, traditional life of the people living in those mountains. The infrastructure bringing modernity and investment for the future, suddenly transformed into a tragedy, cancelling places, memories and destinies.

9 Paolini's work is based on Tina Merlin's essay *Sulla pelle viva* (On the alive skin) published in 1983. In the book Merlin retraced the events that led to the Vajont disaster that caused the death of 2000 people. The shame of not knowing, the shame of forgetting and the consequent desire of letting people know, moved Paolini toward the construction of *Il Racconto del Vajont* (The Vajont Tale) narration. The work was first brought to friend's houses, then to squares, to cultural clubs, to schools, to social centers, to factories, to radio, sometimes to theaters. On October 9th, 1997, on the thirty-fourth anniversary of the disaster, it was broadcast on television; for the occasion a theater was set up near the dam of the disaster, precisely on the slope filled by the landslide, once a seat of the basin.

Vajont 9 ottobre '63. (1999). [film] Directed by M. Paolini. Torino: Einaudi.
Paolini, M. and Vacca, G. (1997). *Il Racconto del Vajont*. 1st ed. Milano: Garzanti.

The first time I saw part of the theatre monologue I was young and I couldn't understand the scale of the event. Only a few years ago, after I moved back to my own town after studying abroad for my bachelor, I saw again the VHS. Paolini's voice didn't leave me detach from the television for the entire duration

of the narration. Three hours of details, intense rhythm and emotions. Even if there were no images, the body movement of the author, his face expression and his voice were a powerful means of transmission in a memory. Images were not needed, the voice was enough to make the audience reflect on a catastrophe that marks an instantaneous and irreversible alteration in the landscape. The identity of a place, normally subjected to gradual transformations, in this case, was brutally wiped out, making room for a new, irrational and chaotic urban plan.

“I am convinced that the future is lost somewhere in the dumps of the non-historical past; it is in yesterday’s newspapers, in the jejeune advertisements of science-fiction movies, in the false mirror of our rejected dream. Time transforms metaphors into things, it piles them in cold storage rooms or places them in the celestial playing fields of our suburbs. I had wandered in an imaginary world which not even I could clearly imagine. That zero panorama seemed to contain ruins in reverse, that is – all the new construction that would eventually be built.”

Robert Smithson, *The Monuments of Passaic*, 1967

“Expropriations.

Some houses were flooded and emptied; others were standing there waiting for the water; others located along the perimeter of the new ring road of the lake were destroyed immediately.

Saw the woods, destroy the houses.

[...] The water covered slowly the abandoned stone houses. People took away the salvageable: objects, shingles, wood. When they couldn’t walk anymore, they went boating.”¹⁰

10 Personal transcription and translation of extract from: *Vajont 9 ottobre '63*. (1999). [film] Directed by M. Paolini. Torino: Einaudi.

The stone walls of the houses emerged from the lake. I could see the windows and the hole that once was the entrance.

Only the water entered there.

Stones displaced from the mountains around, from the landslides, from the caves.

Stones put one on top of one another to form straight walls,

to form safe spaces to live in.

Sun dries. The water is less and less.

During the summer the houses resurface in the middle of the lake. Just like an island, they created a village surrounded by water. I wanted to go there, to see what was left. I tried. I failed. There was no connection.

I took a photograph of the scene. I took the distance from that place.

I will remember this for a long time. I hope I will remember it.

How does it look during the autumn and the winter when the rain can fill the whole capacity of this artificial basin? Do the houses disappear? Will they come back next summer?

I researched, I collected, I wrote and I documented. Cling.

Will all this get a meaning? Why am I archiving objects, thoughts and memories if I don’t know I will remember? And what if I will remember but I will not be able to communicate?

Things will just stand still or in my mind.

Breeze. When the wind has been so *idle* to move mountain.

[...] And then it goes.

What does makes it go?

How many are 260 millions of sqm of rocks?

It started up there, 600 meters on the ridge of the mountain; where there were houses, farms, hills, woods and a ponds. [...]

A whole forest slides downwards.

The whole mountain together with the forest ran.

The Mount Tòc after the landslide will be 150 meters higher than where it moved from.

What about the water?

*Where we are, there was water.
Where is the water that was here?
The water splashed upwards; it made a 250 meters wave.
The next day was a livid dawn.
What is a livid dawn? It's white, black and brown.
It means that the people have no words to say what they have seen.*¹¹

11 Personal transcription and translation of extracts from: *Vajont 9 ottobre '63*. (1999). [film] Directed by M. Paolini. Torino: Einaudi.

In the morning of October the 10th, 1963, the army with cars and helicopters arrived to Longarone, Erto and Casso. *“The street wasn't there anymore. It was 6 in the morning and I was walking alone. After a while I met some journalists from Il Giorno; between them there was a weird but friendly person, Guido Nozzoli. He saw me: a young man who he didn't know and he asked me who I was and how old I was. At that time I was 28 years old. He reflected silently for a couple of seconds and then he said to me “So you didn't see the war. Walk forward and you will find it.”*¹²

12 10th October 1963. Conversation between Gianpaolo Pansa and Guido Nozzoli, journalists of La Stampa, Torino and Il Giorno on the street from Belluno to Longarone. Personal transcription and translation from :èStoria (2013). *Gorizia, 26 maggio 2013. èStoria, 1963, la tragedia del Vajont. 50 years after the tragedy.* [video] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6UtJKJ-Wwg&t=1352s> [Accessed 9 Feb. 2019].

When the rescues arrived in the Piave valley (on the other side of the dam, where there was Longarone) there was nothing to do, to say: the day before there were five villages and thousands of people, the day after only gravel.

The small stones, shrubs and soil were under our feet.
We walked on the landslide, on the soil that once was up there,
on the Mount Tòc (*tòc*, piece; *pa-tòc*, rotten).

How is it possible to consider this space that once was the lake?
Did it become the mountain or did it become something different?
And if it became something different, what do we name it?

We (with my brother Gabriele) followed the CAI¹³ path number 905.
A long climb in the shadow of a beeches forest.

The more we walked without stopping the more we could feel our breath change. Even if sometimes I wanted to stop, he wanted to stop, we would look at each other and keep walking. *An alpine climb has the power to bring out the best in your partner and yourself.*¹⁴ After a few hours of walking, *Rifugio Casera Ditta* appeared in the middle of a meadow, illuminated by the sun. While we walked to reach the outside tables, a gruff man stopped us and asked us to help him bring some bags up there.

In the early 2000s Adriano Roncali chose to go live in the mountains and to manage the *Rifugio Casera Ditta*. This decision led him to a *“profound awareness of simple things”*. He decided to change his life by cultivating *“things of the past, more real and more sincere”*¹⁵. Even if at first approach he seemed rude and upset, we discovered that it was his way to fight back and send away undesirable guests. Roncali became a simple man who didn't sugarcoat anything; his life was built around fatigue, smiles, enthusiasm, hangovers and long winters.

13 CAI, Club Alpino Italiano (Italian Alpine Club) established on October 23, 1863 in Turin as a free national association which *“has for purpose alpinism in all its manifestation, the knowledge and the study of the mountains, especially the Italian ones, and the defense of their natural environment”*.

The association provided for the diffusion of mountain attendance, the organization and management of training courses, the tracing, realization and maintenance of paths, the construction and management of alpine refuges and high-altitude bivouacs (749 structures).

Club Alpino Italiano. Statuto. (2010). [pdf] Club Alpino Italiano. Available at: https://www.cai.it/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Statuto_CAI_.pdf [Accessed 22 Feb. 2019]

14 Transcription of a Renan Ozturk sentence from: *The North Face* (2017). *Life Coach*. [video] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yqum9FhyGkQ> [Accessed 9 Jan. 2019].

15 Notes from a conversation with Annalisa and Stefano, Adriano's friends.

In the 19th and 20th Century Val Mesath was an important area for the coal production and *Rifugio Casera Ditta* was one of the places where the *cjarvònars* (professional woodsman who knew how to produce coal from the wood) stayed during the end of the summer. This shelter was located close to a creek; it was really important to be near a watercourse in order

to put out a possible fire. People came from far away, even from other neighbouring countries to work on the charcoal.

In waning moon the woodsman cut *cjarpins* and *faiârs* (hornbeams and beeches) and left the pieces to age for three weeks.

After this period they cut the wood in 1 meter pieces and they positioned them vertically around the chimney of the *poât* (charcoal knil). They created a truncated cone stack of 3 meters in diameter; that they after covered with dried leaf and moist soil to obstruct the air passage and allow a slow charring.

The *carbonaia* is a slow carbonization process that lasts around fifteen days. The change in the colour of the smoke from white to light blue symbolizes the end of the charring process. The weight of the wood transformed into coal decreased of the 30/40% and allowed an easier transportation.

Every year at the end of the summer Adriano with a group of friends organizes the *carbonaia*.

What does it mean to preserve and pass on this tradition?
Is it about sharing time and an experience with other people?

Can I be able to do that? Can I trust others to do something and give them my time?

I sometimes think about that experience, of how simple it was and how the excitement of it has remained in my memory.

I would like to be up there more often, with those people and their ambitions. I desire to fill my body with fatigue after days of hiking, climbing, running, wood cutting and cooking for guests; where the mind is satisfied with the unique adventure shared with others.

When would it be possible to go back there?

The mountain landscape and its weather created a difficult reality that forced the inhabitants to emigrate or to seasonal travel; to go *fora pal mont* (out, in the world). They often left their villages to sell the products of a very simple craftsmanship; it was the only way to integrate the little derived from the work in the fields and in the huts.¹⁶

16 *Una vita altrove* (A life elsewhere) is a documentary film that came out from the encounter between Alberto Cima (the author) and old immigrants. The main character Lorenzo is a woodsman that spent all of his life abroad, first in France and after in Switzerland.

The slow narration offers the audience a different perspective and a possibility of *life elsewhere* but also of a *different way of living*. The absence of musical commentary or narrative voice gives space to the images, the noises of the work and the voices of the woodsmen.

Lorenzo lightly brought his seventy-three years on the top of forty meter firs. His work in the endless expanse of beeches and firs of the Risoux appears scientific and passionate. In the forest Lorenzo and his friends sets up the charcoal to transform the beech branches into coal through the ancient ritual performed through the days and nights. The whole rhythm of the film is really slow, every action takes its time and gives the space to reflect on how we live in our time.

Una Vita Altrove. (2019). [film] Directed by A. Cima. Centro Studi Valle Imagna.

The *portatrici* (bearer) were woman bringing artifacts, hay or coal from the mountain villages down to the valley. They used mostly the *gerla*, a wooden, wicker or viburnum basket intertwined in the shape of an inverted truncated cone, open at the top and equipped with two straps to be carried on the shoulders. They walked for tens and hundreds of kilometers to reach other villages and markets, with their bartering products. The artifacts were mostly made out of wood: kitchen tools, games or small objects. Women learned the activity from their mothers and passed it on to the next female generation.

During the First World War all the men were at the front in the hostile environment of the Alps; every day they needed ammunition and food stored in the valleys. The *portatrici* played a fundamental role during such a difficult period, walking every day in the mountain paths until the peaks, to bring the soldiers the required equipment.

November 1st, 2018. Rifugio Casera Ditta. *This is the first report of the damage. We have been isolated. Of course we had heavy troubles with running water. Three days of wind and rain. The worst was in the valley. On Wednesday we managed to get out and what we found is indescribable: sections of the path are unrecognizable and almost impassable. The photos didn't communicate how the real situation was. Even the mountains above the shelter changed.*¹⁷

17 Personal translation from: Rifugio Casera Ditta. (2018) *Rifugio Casera Ditta*. 1 November. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/rifugiocaseraditta/posts/2282878988390203> [Accessed 1 Nov. 2018.]

To wheeze. Verb To make a high, rough noise while breathing because of some breathing difficulty.¹⁸

18 wheeze. (n.d.). In: Cambridge Dictionary. [online] Available at: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/wheeze> [Accessed 23 Feb. 2019].

On November 1st my parents together with my aunts brought my grandfather Enrico to the hospital because he was not breathing well.

*“Villages and roads have been cut off by landslides as storms across Italy. Trees were torn down across a swathe of northern Italy.”*¹⁹

19 BBC. (2018). *Italy storms: Five dead as northern villages are cut off.* [video] Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46069769> [Accessed 2 Nov. 2018].

November 3rd, 2018. Rifugio Casera Ditta. *News from Mesath valley. This time good news. We can talk to the outside and we are fine with water and electricity. So much work, but at least we can still get in and out. We are still reachable, certainly with some annoyance; the new path is not yet perfect but you can walk without having to climb on the boulders. The bridge, even if damaged, is still there.*²⁰

20 Personal translation from: Rifugio Casera Ditta. (2018) *Rifugio Casera Ditta*. 3 November. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/rifugiocaseraditta/posts/2285599711451464> [Accessed 3 Nov. 2018.]

Could a phone call make me understand my grandfathers health situation?

Could 42 seconds of video²¹ be enough to understand the environmental damage caused by the storms and landslides?

21 BBC. (2018). *Italy storms: Five dead as northern villages are cut off.* [video] Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46069769> [Accessed 2 Nov. 2018].

Trees: uprooted, broken and smashed.
The ghosts of the forest that was no longer there.

The storm thrown trees on the ground, on the streets, on the houses and in the torrents.

There were more on the ground than standing, and many others, shaken, tilted and unsteady would be cut down.

There was no light, no telephone, no internet, in some places no drinking water.

The streets were damaged and occupied by mud, trees or gravel. No connections.

For days the people there knew almost nothing about the world outside of their walls, nor even of the neighboring villages. Unattainable.

Enrico seated in the hospital bed tried to catch some flies in front of him. There were no flies, probably he had an hallucination or a vision of a memory.

He repeated ‘ignorant’ to all the nurses that entered the room to take care of him.

There was always someone seated in the chair next to the bed, ready to intervene in case he wanted to stand up. He would continuously ask for his suitcase. He sometimes would put his legs out of the bed because he wanted to go home. When he saw my father (who would usually drive him around) he asked for his clothes and his hat, the one he was always wearing. He probably felt good and ready to go home, or he felt bad and he didn’t want to leave us from that stranger bed.

He was still breathing with difficulty and some days he was out of his head with his eyes wide open, screaming throughout the day and not sleeping.²²

22 A conversation with Teresa Branzanti. 6 November. (2018) [Phonecast].

The health information always came at the end of the phone calls, as it wasn’t necessary to say, the important thing was to transmit his behaviour because it spoke about him and kept him in good memory.

So idle to move roots, to decide fate.

What did it mean to think about a place before being there physically? How many descriptions and images lived in my consciousness? Which ones ruled? How did I imagine being there?

These trees, this amazing heritage I used to consider eternal, I suddenly discovered that it was not.

The forest became sparse, exploded, like a bomb.

How beautiful and tidy was this relaxing nature?

I understood it well after the storm, seeing it sprawled.

What did it mean to go back home where I couldn't see a person I expected to see?

What did it mean to not see this person anymore?

I needed to walk, to struggle, to see with my own eyes the change, to digest.

We all came back home at the end of December, me, my brother and Mattia and one day together we drove to the mountain.

It was a cold and humid morning, a humidity that allowed the cold to enter throughout the body.

Walking helped to warm up our legs, our feet, our arms and our busts. The path was narrow and in places it crumbled from under our feet. The rocks slid down until they found something to stop them.

I saw the broken trees with their roots out from the soil, roots that seemed to scream. We climbed the logs of the trees that fell on the path. The higher we went, the more we could see all of the overturned trees in the mountains around us.

After a couple of hours we were up there, on the peak, under the winter sun. I looked around and it was possible to see all the layers of rock that formed the mountains. We continued the walk, descending down, once we reached the valley and the stream Susaibes we encountered an abrupt variation in the landscape. The natural friction activity between the rocks gave the territory a lunar appearance. No animals, no vegetation, no human signs, only layers on top of layers of rocks; and a stream, invisible from some points of view.

The *Barcis-Staro Selo line* is a periadrial fault extended from Valcellina to

Slovenia. The fault was born from the thrust of the African plate against Europe and caused every year a shift of a few millimeters, determining the overlap of the ridge of the Fara-Jouf with Mount Ràut. This tectonic line merges the mountain together: for this reason the Pre-Alps are at medium-high seismic risk. This fault was responsible for the earthquake of 1976 in Friuli Venezia Giulia, one of the worst earthquakes that ever hit Italy.

The dolomite layers are verticalized, with evident fault mirrors. Due to the high degree of fragmentation of the rocks and the continuity of the processes, the slopes were devoid of vegetation.

It was such a dried, uninhabited and alien place to be.

The *Krivapeta* was a character of the Alpine mythology represented as a woman who lived isolated from people in caves, ravines or near the streams. They were described as green-haired women who dressed in white and had twisted feet. These different women were endowed with a great autonomy, a gift of foresight and culture; they were also aware of the virtues of herbs and the evolution of time. These legendary creatures in the world of fantasy and imagination enriched the fairy tales that grandparents told their grandchildren around the fireplace. Because they were always associated with caverns, precipices and streams, or places potentially risky they were used to ensure that children were kept away from dangerous places.

Alternative visions.

When I decided to follow my *idle* curiosity.

During the period I spent in Friuli Venezia Giulia between the end of December and the beginning of January, I researched a lot into the regionale caves cadaster and the geosite list (The *Barcis-Staro Selo line* is a geosite of the FVG region). I was attracted to natural architectures, places where it was possible to see geological phenomena.

The geosites represent the geodiversity of a territory, understood as a range of the geological, geomorphological, hydrological and pedological characteristics of an area which are crucial for the different species living in it.

The preservation of the geodiversity and the protection of the geological heritage contribute to the maintenance of the integrity of the ecosystems. These natural architectures, or singularities of the landscape, testify the processes that formed and shape our planet.

Cavità n. 235—Fontanon dal Toff.

“It is one of the largest springs that gushed from the dolomite, its water flowed out into spectacular waterfall leading into the Rio Valcalda. It is possible to enter the cave from which the waterfall originates.”²³

23 Cavità n. 235—Fontanon dal Toff. (n.d.). [pdf] Catasto Grotte. Regione Autonoma Friuli Venezia Giulia. Available at: <http://catastogrotte.fvg.it/pdf.php?doctype=cave-base&ID=235> [Accessed 22 Feb. 2019].

CAI n.829, we encountered the ruins of *Plan dal Maccan* and later the ones of the *Malandrai* houses. There were stone walls, opened up ceilings and entrances without doors. The moss covered everything, as to fossilize and stop the time.

When I observed these abandoned houses I found it hard to imagine that there was life there, that there were families with their animals living so isolated.

We continued on the path, climbing over boulders trying to stand on the sliding rocks. It was difficult to follow the signs of the trail, sometimes we lost them and we had to walk back until we saw one again, from which it was possible to re-start. We heard the waterfall sound and we finally saw this huge amount of water that continuously flowed over a rock face partially covered with plants. From some points of view it was possible to see the rainbow between the rocks and the water. There was a suspended atmosphere as something was going to happen.

In the Alpine mythology places like *Fontanon dal Toff* were inhabited by the *Agane*, young women, often really attractive and able to seduce men. These creatures protectors of the water lived near waterfalls and streams. They dressed in white and they always had a non-human traits: feet of chicken, duck or goat. Many stories (also common with the *Krivapete*) said that they taught traditional craft activities, such as wool spinning or cheese making

to humans. Sometimes (as well as the *Krivapete*) they terrorized night travelers or spread discord; if insulted, they are prone to revenge, bringing misfortune to life.

The waterfall hid a cavern from which the water flowed out.

To access the cave we climbed along a steep track and entered in it, exploiting the slippery outcropping. Once inside, it was possible to continue for a few meters between stalactites and rocky blades up to the bottom of the cave.

With torches we lit different corners of the space; it was possible to see something only when the light was directed toward a detail and all around it was remaining dark.²⁴ We were silent and quiet in a corner as if the space required that behaviour.

24 The movement of the light to see the details of the space reminded me at the Werner Herzog documentary *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*, where inside the french cave of Chauvet the author and his collaborator show to the public the impressive cave paintings. The paintings are in complete darkness, the light create the space, and therefore, the possibility to view them. Due to the rules of the almost inaccessible space (only specific people, in a precise period of time and with definite clothing can access the cave), the documentary becomes the only way to see this frozen flash moment in time, hidden in a mountain. Herzog's voice guides the audience through the story about what could have happened in that cave. The past is definitely lost, we will never reconstruct it, we can only create a representation of what exist today: the paintings are for the author images of long forgotten dreams. He asked himself and the audience if will we ever be able to understand the vision of the artist across such an abyss of time?—What could be our connection to them?

I thought about Herzog and what he might have felt while he was there only for a defined period of time and after a long preparation. This documentary helped me reflect on how many mediated experiences I live, and helped me to recognize that when I do something physically the memory of that moment remains stronger.

Cave of Forgotten Dreams. (2010). [film] Directed by W. Herzog. France, Canada, Germany, USA, UK: Creative Differences Productions.

Looking through the photographs I developed a few days after, I was surprised by the light. The rocks were different greys, and in the photo appeared with some green and light purple details.

I will always be attracted by the actual, the archaic, the remote.

“A Mountain on Fire.”²⁵

25 Messaggero Veneto (2019). *Montagna a fuoco tra Budoia e Piancavallo, Ipotesi scoppia di un petardo*. [online] Available at: <https://messaggeroveneto.gelocal.it/pordenone/cronaca/2019/01/01/news/montagna-a-fuoco-a-piancavallo-ipotesi-petardo-1.30011619>

The wind brought around the fire smell which arrived to us at the bottom of the last climb.

The burning smell was so strong as the fire was still alive charing more vegetation.

Just below us a black stain in the middle of the mountain side. A pine tree half with branches and half without. They probably fell or they just became ash moved by the wind somewhere else.

Every step on that fragile surface raised a cloud of smoke and a gust of ash scent.

Shrubs with black branches without leaves directed vertically to the sky. Here and there trails of smoke, embers of the fire fed by the wind.

The smoke became more and more present. From a small corner next to a bush it quickly spread, first close to the ground and after all around us.

The fire that the firemen tried to put out for days was still there, alive.

Ecosystems subject to fire show high resilience which allows the restoration of the reality present before the perturbation: each species responds differently in growth and reproduction during the period following the fire. Some plants (*pyrophytes*) have faster multiplication and reproduction rhythms in concomitance of fires; other species (*anthrophites*) colonize burned areas for their growth.

“Once necessary for survival, the fireplace is now, in the West, a nostalgic luxury, redundant but cherished – providing an extra boost of heart in the centrally-heated home, a ritual (laying the fire), and a sense of community. In the face of the edicts of sustainability to master and maximize the efficiency of our energy use—where every joule and every leakage must be accounted for and ideally compensated through a renewable source—the honest and visible entropy of a burning fireplace becomes more appealing. It’s just there,

*you can see what feeds it, you know it will die, and that’s fine.”*²⁶

26 *Fireplace*, from the series of 15 books accompanying the exhibition *Elements of Architecture at the 2014 Venice Architecture Biennale*, is a genealogy of the role of fire from the caveman to now. The book is designed and built on a constant intersection of photographs and drawings with text. These overlapping elements create a dialogue stimulating different relations between them. The text uses in the form of interviews, short blocks and in some parts only as caption. The narration is quite rich in detail, with different points of view and examples given, and provides an overview on the evolution and role of the fireplace. The design uses red as the main color, both in the texts and to highlight parts of the images with drawings and shapes. The ‘red’ shows visually how the fires presence over time became less and less (in the first pages it appear in almost every picture, in the last pages it is almost absent). I found that the balance between the written part and the iconographic creates a dialogue between the two, but also separates them by bringing focus to only the images or the text.

Marot, S., Koolhaas, R., AMO, Harvard Graduate School of Design and Boom, I. (2014). *Fireplace*. 1st ed. Marsilio.

The *fogolâr* (fireplace) was very symbolic in friulian dwellings and was always the most prominent space in friulian houses. It was not only the place where the food was prepared, but also where the community came together, and where all discussions took place. The fire was lit on a stone raised about sixty centimeters from the floor called *larin*: the sacred place of the *Lari*, the spirits of ancestors who hovered in the house, in the place where family reunites, lingering with the intention of protecting them. It was the place of exchange, transmission of knowledge, traditions and histories.

The image of fire reminds me to the meeting places within mountain summer camps, or the nights spent in shelter, were together with friends we would speak of our memories, our fears and our ambitions. It also made me think about the big room at my grandparents place, where the family would unite for shared meals, and where the fire was always burning, providing a background of all the conversations.

A ritual could exist for a period of time, but also passed on from one generation to the next. Every year at the epiphany in Friuli Venezia Giulia groups of people come together to build ‘sculptures’ made mostly of old vegetation. Community involvement is required in order to keep the tradition alive and to organize the feast every year.

The *panevin* happens on the 5th or 6th of January in the northeastern regions of Italy: Friuli Venezia Giulia and Veneto. It is a chronological ritual linked to vegetation and natural rhythms, practiced with spatial and temporal continuity. The event takes place in fields around cities and villages where there is a strong existing community taking care of it. All the people involved are volunteers, they “do for the community” and they think – “it’s a good feast, it makes us feel united”.

Since a few weeks before the event, the people involved collect the materials (the main ones are: old vegetation, hay, dry broth, corn canes, scrub, juniper evergreen and aromatic) and only a few days before they assemble them in the traditional shape. Each group uses specific construction techniques to raise the ‘sculpture’, that vary in relation to the area, and are passed on between generations.

The names of the bonfires differ depending on the territorial area in which it takes place and to the tradition linked with it. They may result from construction type, central pole presence, crown, shape, rhymes, feast and joy, materials and fire. In the evening of the feast it is possible to drink some *vin brulè* (mulled wine) or eat typical foods that vary from area to area (*polenta, frico*, sausage, pinza, pork, potatoes), prepared by the community with a primus stove built up in the field. Often around the fire people dance and sing the traditional rhymes.

“*Se il fum al va a soreli a mont,
cjape il sac e va pal mont.
Se il fum al va a soreli jevât,
cjape il sac e va al marcjât*”²⁷

27 If the smoke goes to the west, take the sack and go to the world. If the smoke goes to east, take the sack and go to the market.

The roots of the bonfire are in the Belano adoration, pagan god protector of the light. Beloved by Celts, Belano was known for their influence on sunlight and consequently on agriculture, seasonality, temperature and breeding; and every human activity of the protohistoric age.

The meaning of the Friulian fires are connected to the ancient propitiatory and purification rites. Where the ashes were scattered in the fields to push

away curses and ensure abundant crops. Fire, therefore, symbolized purification and regeneration. The fire lit at the base quickly rose in the dark and the wind that night mortgaged the future of the year. The direction of the smoke was an indication of a good or bad year.

Even if the meaning of these rituals have changed due to the societal evolution, I am intrigued by their ongoing existence. I find these rituals really distant from the digital, abstract and parallel reality faced by the contemporary society, but at the same time something in which a specific community recognized itself. The *panevin* defines a space where two typologies are acting figures: an active one that organizes and a passive one that becomes spectator. For the community it symbolizes a moment of togetherness, of shared roots and values related to the past. For both typologies of actors it is a moment of reunion with known and unknown people and an occasion to eat typical food.

Local roots have developed over centuries, millennia and have evolved to take care for human kind and the human life. The more we live in an excess of dematerialisation, the more we have a mediated experiences with less and less corporeity. Will the roots of the past disappear in the future or will they stay rooted in our lives? Could it be possible to live in ‘parallel’ with nature, more physical and more actual? Can we still exist as part of a group and have a common mythology and narrative representing us?

Everytime we go back to our place of birth we go to the mountain. It seems that it will always be there. Researching and studying these places helped me to see and understand how they have changed over the years and how they are still transformed by multiple factors: both natural and human.

On my flights back to Italy, I used to wait to pass over the Alps. The plane would offer a completely different point of view of a reality I had seen so closely. In the beginning it was spectacular, but after awhile I started to refuse this image; it showed this mountain range as beautiful and untouched, perfect even; slowly created an illusion.

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Thank you.



