Feeling the changing climate

An affective approach to the strategic communication of floods in a tourist city

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Abstract:

Previous research has studied the strategic communication of climate change as a rational and purposeful means of communicating about climate change in accordance with political, corporate or scientific interests. These studies often consider emotions either as the psychological effects of planned communication, or as pre-existing attachments that influence an individual's understanding of the issue. Accordingly, strategic communication of climate change is designed either to elicit a certain emotional response from selected publics, or to find the right communicative formula to overcome people's psycho-emotional barriers.

This thesis introduces a different view of emotions as affect in strategic communication research, and proposes that collectively shared feelings can also be mobilized by strategic communication to influence how climate change is understood and addressed. To this end, the thesis examines the strategic communication of floods in the tourist city of Venice. Through atmospheric ethnography and narrative analysis, it shows how the strategic communication of the local municipality and a group of local scientists influences the constitution of climate change in the city by either preserving or resisting the existence of three affective atmospheres and the collective ways of feeling floods within them. Thus, strategic communication is shown to preserve or resist the existence of those affective atmospheres where floods are felt as wonderful and authentic Venetian experiences, as exceptional events resisted by technology, and as dangerous phenomena, in this way contributing to the constitution of climate change as a non-existent, solved, and unavoidable problem, respectively.

The findings of this thesis demonstrate strategic communication as a cultural practice that participates in the creation of public culture, and in the discussion of public issues such as climate change. Furthermore, the findings extend studies of climate denial and delay by suggesting that these phenomena depend not only on the purposeful forms of communication of an abstract and influential group of politicians and corporations, but especially on how well strategic communication mobilises collective emotional orientations towards the tangible manifestations of climate change around us. Consequently, resisting attempts to deny or delay climate action in climate-vulnerable urban destinations requires a broader and more overt effort to change the collective modes of feeling the changing climate in these places.

Key words: strategic communication, climate change communication, affect, urban atmospheres, tourism city, floods

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Acknowledgments

To Paulien and Emiel,
and to the Venice you will feel.

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Extended abstract

Climate change is as much a communicative problem as it is an ecological one. As a communicative problem, its understanding and responses depend on the ways its meanings are collectively felt, made, and negotiated.

Previous research has studied the strategic communication of climate change as a rational and purposeful means of communicating about climate change in accordance with political, corporate, or scientific interests, as a persuasive tool to convey the preferred meaning of climate change. In doing so, these studies tend to view emotions either as the psychological effects of planned communication – things that can potentially be stirred up according to the communicator's liking and ability – or pre-existing psychological attachments that influence an individual's understanding of the issue. However, an over-focus on strategies and their emotional influences and effects does not give us an adequate insight into why so little seems to be happening so slowly in terms of climate action. In fact, according to this focus, the continued delay in climate action is simply the result of either the intentions of an abstract and influential group of politicians and corporations, or an inability of research to find the right communicative formula to overcome people's psycho-emotional barriers. While both of these issues are undeniable, climate inaction cannot be explained away by focusing on communication strategies alone, for the simple reason that strategies never exist in a vacuum, and instead work in tandem with the work of society at large. Consequently, it is necessary to examine the wider cultural influence of strategic communication, how it permeates the intimacy of our emotional lives, and how we all participate in making it work at the level of everyday practice.

In this thesis, I approach the strategic communication of climate change as an affective practice that contributes to the creation and maintenance of collective ways of feeling a changing climate. The main argument of this thesis is that collective feelings play a central role in the way climate change is communicatively constituted. Yet, how strategic communication mobilises these collective feelings as part of the process of constituting climate change, based on political and corporate interests, has been surprisingly under-researched. To illustrate this, I employ the concept of affect, which allows for an understanding of emotions as both personally and culturally bounded (Ahmed 2004a; 2004b). Through an affective understanding of communication (Ashcraft 2021), the effectiveness of strategic communication depends less on purposeful communication than on how well this communication supports collective emotional orientations towards the tangible manifestations of climate change around us.

To this end, the thesis considers the strategic communication of floods, as signs of climate change, in the context of the tourist city of Venice. An atmospheric ethnography was conducted, wherein a series of qualitative, in-depth, and mobile interviews, a document study, and participant observation allowed me to capture different communicative practices in relation to floods and explore how these relate to culturally infused ways of feeling a flooded Venice. These practices belonged to both strategic and non-strategic actors: the local municipality and local marine scientists were considered to belong to the strategic realm, given the power and responsibility they hold in how floods are understood and approached in Venice, while other actors in the city, such as tourists and local workers in the tourism sector, were considered to exist outside the strategic realm. To grasp how affect – that is to say, collective ways of feeling floods – participated in the constitution of climate change in this climate-vulnerable urban setting, the empirical materials were analysed using a narrative approach (Boje et al. 2015; Czarniawska 2004; Breger 2017).

The narrative analysis suggested that the constitution of climate change in Venice is influenced by the negotiation of shared feelings of floods through practices of

atmospheric emergence. This means that the constitution of climate change in Venice can be shown to be related to the negotiation of collective ways of feeling floods in relation to three coexisting affective atmospheres of the city: *Wonderful Venice*, *Safe Venice*, and *Doomed Venice*. Strategic communication was found to influence the constitution of climate change through the way it either preserves or resists the existence of these three affective atmospheres, and the collective modes of feeling floods within them. Thus, Venice Municipality's strategic communication is shown to preserve the existence of Wonderful Venice and Safe Venice as places where floods are felt as wonderful and authentic Venetian experiences, and exceptional events resisted by technology, respectively. In this way, climate change itself is felt either as a non-existent problem for the city, or as a problem that has already been solved. Conversely, the strategic communication of floods by local marine scientists is shown to preserve the existence of Doomed Venice as a place where floods are felt as dangerous and unpredictable phenomena, thus contributing to the affective constitution of climate change as an unavoidable problem for the city and its inhabitants.

The findings of this thesis have implications for several current debates in both strategic communication and climate change communication literatures. In terms of its contribution to strategic communication, the affective approach of this thesis demonstrates the importance of a cultural understanding of such a practice. Specifically, an affective approach implies, firstly, expanding analyses of which emotions are triggered by strategic communication to examine how shared feelings are mobilised through such communication. Secondly, an affective approach implies approaching the notion of communication not as a purely conscious act of creating and negotiating meaning, but as a constitutive transmission of affect. In this new understanding, communication includes those practices in which meanings are created and negotiated at the often-unconscious affective level of everyday practice. Thirdly, and finally, an affective approach calls for modesty in strategic communication research in terms of rethinking the role of the 'strategic' in the communicative constitution of organisational realities. Indeed, such an approach sees strategic communication as inevitably

intertwined with non-strategic forms of communication, and refocuses the field away from narrow analyses of organisational existence towards analyses of the strategic maintenance of affective atmospheres as emergent forms of organising. In terms of its contribution to climate change communication research, the affective approach of this thesis expands on studies of climate denial and delay by showing how these phenomena depend not only on strategic communication per se, but perhaps more importantly on how strategic communication enables the existence of habitual and collectively shared ways of feeling the tangible manifestations of climate change around us. Consequently, resisting attempts to deny or delay climate action in climate-vulnerable urban destinations requires a broader and more overt effort to change the collective modes of feeling the changing climate in these places.

If institutions do words not to do things, then we have work to do,
which often means work to do on these words –
work to do with these words.

Sara Ahmed
How not to do things with words (2016: 3)

Part I
Climate change as a communicative problem

Chapter 1.
Introduction

In *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, the Indian writer Amitav Ghosh (2016) argues that climate change is more than an environmental crisis, as it is also a crisis of imagination. He notes how the modern novel, with its emphasis on the regularity and predictability of everyday life, has relegated climate change to the realm of the exceptional and the 'out of the ordinary', in this way resulting in a lack of adequate cultural representations of the scale and urgency of such crisis. Ghosh thus calls for a different approach to storytelling – one that makes climate change more thinkable, and into a common, evolving, and active protagonist in our everyday lives. Ghosh also notes that the modern tendency to transform the Earth's natural elements into temperate and orderly ones has not only infiltrated literature but caused much of modern urban planning to turn a blind eye to the risks of unpredictable natural behaviour. As a result, many of today's urban areas – from Mumbai to Rotterdam, Venice to New Orleans, and Jakarta to Miami – are located in places that are geologically unstable with regard to the current era of anthropogenic climate change. In other words, having lost a certain awe of and respect for nature, the modern mindset has both greatly influenced how climate change now appears in our cultural imagination, and perpetuated the development of cities that are now slowly but steadily being reclaimed by the watery world.

It can thus be argued that the way we communicate about nature today does not allow us to properly attune to how climate change manifests in our immediate urban environments. Research has shown that communicating about natural changes as brutal and sporadic events can make people less inclined to recognise

the changing climate's far more recurrent and tacit manifestations around us (Adams 2022). The communication of these manifestations – which increasingly take the form of frequent and intense flooding, heat waves, droughts, and wildfires – has been shown to be closely linked to our cultural narratives about the places in which they occur, our common tendency to see such places as peacefully relating to a natural environment made the tranquil backdrop to our daily lives (Norgaard 2018). As an example, it has been shown that the Municipality of Miami has struggled to communicate the threat of sea-level rise to residents, who have a tendency to minimise the significance of flooding as a psychological defence mechanism (Treuer 2018). However, research has also suggested that the struggle to communicate about sea-level rise may be due to people's tendency to continue with the usual rituality of everyday American life in such a place (Donald 2022). Thus, how climate change is communicated in Miami is certainly influenced by residents' psychological tendency to avoid stress and discomfort but can also be said to be linked to a pervasive cultural narrative that promotes Miami as an enduring and infrangible cultural symbol of American splendour and success. Cultural narratives have been found to influence our cultural imagination of places, to have a concrete influence on how people feel in those places and how they feel regarding the manifestations of climate change there (Norgaard 2011; 2018). What we can learn from climate-vulnerable urban centres like Miami, then, is that climate change is not only an environmental problem but – perhaps especially – a communicative one, one that is intimately linked to different ways of narrating, and feeling, its tangible manifestations in the urban environment.

Economic and political interests can strongly influence how climate change is felt and communicated in climate-vulnerable cities. Tourism interests, for example, can strategically make climate change impacts feel like less serious problems than they actually are, with the result that immediate solutions are postponed or ignored in order to maintain urban life as usual for as long as possible (Potter 2020). The ocean-view boulevard of Miami City, the sandy beaches of the Maldives, or Venice as 'the city on water' are still sold today by property

developers and the tourism industry as alluring and glamorous destinations, even though studies predict that these areas will most likely be underwater by the end of this century if no action is taken (Molinaroli et al. 2019). However, how people in tourist cities feel about a changing climate cannot depend solely on tourism communication strategies, for the simple reason that communication strategies never really exist in a vacuum, and instead work in tandem with the work of society at large (Hallahan et al. 2007). The case of climate-vulnerable tourist destinations highlights then how climate change is a contested issue at the intersection of strategic communication, our shared ways of feeling about these destinations and the changes that are happening in them. Consequently, strategic communication scholars who are interested in how corporate or political interests influence how climate change is communicated by public and private institutions in tourist cities may also need to examine the cultural influence of this kind of communication, in terms of how it permeates the intimacy of people's emotional lives at the level of everyday urban practice. A cultural understanding of strategic communication would support an exploration of the ways in which strategic communication efforts in tourist cities operate beyond marketing strategies and corporate 'best practices', as it would require to reflect also on the collective modes of feeling mobilised by these types of communication.

To explore the cultural side of strategic communication, in this thesis I make use of the concept of affect, which allows me to understand emotions as both personally and culturally bounded (Massumi 2002; Ahmed 2004a; 2004b; Clough 2007; Gregg & Seigworth 2010). I utilise an affective approach to the study of the strategic communication of climate change in order to circumvent certain limitations identified in previous research, particularly in relation to an understanding of communication and emotions as separate from culture. The following section outlines these limitations and presents the foundation that paved the way for the affective approach here proposed.

Limitations of extant research

In this section, I briefly present some of the important limitations that I claim exist in both fields of strategic communication and climate change communication, and discuss these in relation to the study of the strategic communication of climate change in tourist cities.

The lack of attention to climate change in strategic communication

The field of strategic communication encompasses various research strands focused on the analysis of communication within and outside organisations. These include organisational communication, business communication, public relations, marketing communication, political communication, and corporate communication (Hallahan et al., 2007; Zerfass et al. 2018; Falkheimer & Heide 2022, 2023). The modern discipline of strategic communication has, since its inception in the early 2000s, pointed to the need to understand strategic communication in relation to its societal context, as an actor in society. In a seminal article, Hallahan et al. (2007) write that "[s]trategic communication also includes examining how an organization presents itself in society as a social actor in the creation of public culture and in the discussion of public issues" (28). This definition recognises that strategic communication is not just about the objectives of an organisational entity, nor the individual strategic communication efforts of that entity; rather, the relation between these objectives and the broader socio-cultural realm must also be considered.

However, today studies in the field more often than not focus either on how organisations present themselves to their publics, or on internal organisational dynamics (Falkheimer & Heide 2022; 2023). In this regard, strategic communication is thought to be pivotal for the sustainment of organisational entities. Yet, because of this epistemological tendency, the ways in which strategic communication co-participates in the creation of public culture and the discussion of public issues is frequently greatly overlooked (Frandsen & Johansen

2022). In other words, the field is currently tilted towards its corporate and business communication roots, and only rarely considers social or cultural analyses in its theory and practice. As a result, when research considers climate change, it seldom does so while taking into consideration the cultural role of strategic communication, focusing instead on organisational concepts such as strategic corporate social responsibility communication (Kim & Lee 2018) or strategic sustainability communication (Weder 2023). Due to their inherently corporate or political nature, these concepts tend to relegate climate change to narrow organisational domains, causing it to be an issue that is studied using an organisational focus, and for mere organisational purposes. Yet, this very narrow organisational focus is problematic when considering broad societal issues such as climate change. Indeed, what these issues mean in society requires a broader attention than one that is limited, or only relevant, to organisational entities, as their communication has cultural and social implications that exist beyond the entities themselves.

An instrumental understanding of climate change communication

Analyses of the issue of climate change communication have also been carried out by the homonymous field of climate change communication research (Agin & Karlsson 2021; Canon et al. 2022). This field has its roots in environmental communication, and addresses an increasingly wide range of topics using theories and methods from across the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities (Comfort & Park 2018). Among the epistemological focuses, studies have investigated how climate change is communicated by organisational actors such as the oil industry and political parties (Ballantyne 2016). The field is currently one of the most proliferous sources of knowledge on greenwashing and other unethical forms of communication by corporations and governments to deny climate change or delay climate action (Ihlen & Nitz 2008; Ihlen 2009; Schlichting 2013; Schäfer & Schlichting 2014). Yet, also in this field, such communications are seldom explored in terms of their social and cultural role, as the focus is generally on analysis of the framing and rhetorical techniques adopted

by organisational actors, leaving aside socio-cultural understandings (Cox 2010a; Ballantyne 2016; Carvalho et al. 2017; Kumpu 2022). As Cox (2010a) recognised early on, climate change communication research

> has focused on the discursive representations, framing, and perceptions of climate change itself and its seriousness, rather than the relationships among specific communicative efforts (e.g., framing) and their strategic or consequential potential within the economic, political, and ideological systems (123).

It can thus be argued that also in climate change communication research how organisations communicate about climate change is researched mainly in a representational fashion, where communication is thought of as strategically 'representing' the issue of climate change in relation to corporate or political purposes (Agin & Karlsson 2021). This greatly overlooks how these organisations' communication co-participates in the communicative creation of climate change as a political and cultural issue (Ballantyne 2016; Carvalho et al. 2017). Consequently, here the continued delay in climate action is simply conceptualized as the result of either the intentions of an abstract and influential group of politicians and corporations, or as an inability of research to find the right communicative formula to overcome people's psycho-emotional barriers.

Thus, on the one hand, strategic communication research has almost entirely overlooked the issue of climate change, preferring to consider it to be merely an organisational concern. On the other hand, climate change communication research has approached strategic communication in instrumental terms, as a rational and purposeful means of communicating in relation to organisational interests, and as a persuasive tool for delivering the preferred meaning of climate change. As such, both fields are unable to provide an apt epistemological basis for investigating the cultural side of strategic communication in the setting of climate-vulnerable urban destinations. In these urban settings, where it is particularly clear that organisational interests merge with collective feelings regarding these places, studying the role of strategic communication in the

making of climate change should consider also the public side of this communication, thus its relation to the wider cultural realm of the city in question.

The missing link between communication and emotions

Specifically, I claim that the greatest shortcoming of the fields of strategic communication and climate change communication is how they understand the relation between communication and emotions. In strategic communication literature, emotions are understood in specifically psychological terms, as things that can be both intentionally elicited in people and quantitatively measured in order to circumvent possible barriers to the effectiveness of strategic communication initiatives (Jin et al. 2017; Ćosić et al. 2018; Goldberg & Gustafson 2023). Similarly, climate change communication research has tended to consider climate change messages as mere vessels for sparking emotional responses in order to purposefully shift people's beliefs and perceptions of climate change (Nabi 2003; Nabi et al. 2018; Nabi & Myrick 2019; Bilandzic et al. 2020; Wong-parodi & Feygina 2020; DiRusso & Myrick 2021). In both fields, therefore, communication is often conflated with the communicative interactions that occur between people, wherein emotions (when they are taken into account) are considered to be mere effects of or interferences between linguistic processes. As I will argue in more detail below, this understanding of emotions as the effects of communication does not take into account the fact that emotions are not only felt individually, but are collectively shared and culturally bounded (Ahmed 2004a; 2004b). Accordingly, communication cannot only be said to only evoke emotions, as it can also be thought about in terms of the existence of collective feelings.

To be sure, the field of climate change communication has also proposed a focus on emotions in a more cultural and collective sense, for example when emotions are referred to via the concept of place attachment, which describes the emotional attachment people feel to their town, city, or nation (Lorenzoni et al. 2007;

Scannell & Gifford 2010; Cantrill 2016; Altinay 2017; Kongsager & Baron 2024). However, also here, the understanding of emotional attachment to place is mainly approached in a psychological sense: as a persistent, stable, and secure tendency of people to relate to a place based on a psychological need for belonging and identity. Consequently, these studies tend to assume that climate change communication simply needs to anticipate the existence of such emotional attachments in order to promote the right framing of the issue. Once again, then, what remains underexplored is how climate change is influenced not only by specific feelings about one's place, but by the myriad ways in which these feelings are themselves influenced by broader socio-cultural dynamics. As Juhlin (2024) rightly observes:

> We can feel attached to a place to which we do not belong, such as in immigrants' aspirations for a better life on the other side of the border. We can feel attached to a place that is harmful, such as when the home becomes a means of suppression to which we nevertheless cling. And we can feel attachment to a place that is no longer there, such as in the longing for the clear boundaries of a shrinking nation state. (109)

In a more nuanced way, then, emotional attachment can be understood not as people's emotional connection to specific places, but as a fluctuating relationship between people and places (Ahmed 2004a; 2004c; 2010). This circulatory and affective understanding of place attachment is also able to explain how tourists' feelings about famous destinations influence what climate change becomes in those places – how it is felt. Thus, an understanding of emotions as either simply the psychological effects of communication or as mere psychological attachments to places does not help us to explore how climate change communication relates to the existence of collective feelings towards places and their natural environments. This is on the basis that collective feelings cannot really be triggered and continuously controlled by any single form of communication. I will return to these issues in more detail in the next chapter, which presents the literature review.

A new research focus

Until now I have briefly discussed the ontological and epistemological limitations of both strategic communication and climate change communication in relation to the study of climate change in tourist cities, particularly their assumptions about emotions as individually bounded psychological traits. Building on such a problematisation, in this thesis I bring the fields of strategic communication and climate change communication into conversation and focus on what I call *the strategic communication of climate change*. This research focus involves analysing climate change communication in relation to organisational contexts such as corporations, governments, municipalities, trade associations, political parties, NGOs and alike. This research focus is not concerned only with how organisations communicate about climate change in relation to their political or corporate agendas, but with how the ways in which these organisations' communication about the impacts of climate change relates to both their interests and the wider socio-cultural sphere. In other words, the strategic communication of climate change examines how climate change is communicatively constructed by starting from an understanding of strategic communication as a cultural practice. As a cultural practice, strategic communication is here studied not only via planned communication campaigns about climate change and circumscribed communicative situations between specific organisations and their selected publics, but at the intersection of organisations and multiple heterogeneous publics, in relation to larger communicative processes regarding the tangible manifestations of climate change around us. Indeed, it is through these communicative processes that I claim it is possible to study how climate change is created and negotiated at the level of shared feelings.

Various forms of communication, then – both strategic and non-strategic (Christensen & Christensen 2022; Winkler & Schoeneborn 2022) – are assumed to participate in the communicative creation of climate change, primarily through the way in which they allow people to feel a changing climate. Feelings are conceived of here as both inherent to the individual and (more importantly, I argue) as affect – dependent on how communication can cause people in

particular times and places to be emotionally aligned with one another (Ahmed 2004c, Ashcraft 2021). In the context of climate change communication research, Lockwood (2016) suggests that different forms of climate change communication can be thought of as "collected in an archive of green feelings" (742) – that is, effective not only at the personal, individual level, but at the collective, affective level. Starting from his own tears over a graph of transgressed planetary boundaries, Lockwood asserts that "being able to cry and write about those tears is part of the process of reparative exposure to the crisis" (Ibid.). Indeed, emotional responses to climate change communication can be seen as having not only individual but collective potential to facilitate different affective orientations. Building on Lockwood, in this thesis I therefore understand climate change as an affective issue that is negotiated in and through the transmission of affect, and that requires new, collective ways of attuning to the inevitable changes ahead. In the following section, I elaborate on the proposed affective approach to the strategic communication of climate change.

An affective approach to the strategic communication of climate change

An affective approach to the strategic communication of climate change provides a cultural understanding of strategic communication and can therefore help to overcome some of the limitations of previous research outlined above. At the most basic level, this is because affective thinking distinguishes between emotion and affect (McCormack 2008; Thrift 2008; Anderson 2009; Wetherell 2012). On the one hand, the term 'emotion' is used to refer to personal responses and socially bounded expressions of subjects' inner states (when one feels sad or happy, for example). 'Affect', on the other hand, is used to refer to socially shared and collectively felt forces, fields of intensity that precede and are shared in and among bodies in places. In this sense, affect can refer, for example, to the sense of anxiety that pervades an exam or a court room, or to the sense of awe that is

commonly experienced in the face of the immensity of natural landscapes or proximity to untamed animals. These feelings are surely felt personally, but their experience is never entirely one's own, nor entirely 'just cultural', but both at once – emanating from the situated and culturally infused arrangements of bodies, times, and places. Hate, love, hope, fear, awe, and desire, then, are not only emotions that are singularly felt by individuals, but circulate as affect, and contribute to the maintenance of larger socio-cultural collectives (Ahmed 2004a; 2004b; 2004c).

Crucially, emotions are here understood as both culturally dependent on *and* generative of the culture on which they depend (Ahmed 2004; 2004b). This aspect is important in differentiating between theories of affect and theories of the sociology of emotions (Hochschild 2012). In fact, from a sociological perspective, culture pre-exists and determines the expression and mobilisation of emotions, which then presupposes the existence of emotional orders or profiles. In affect thinking, however, emotional orders or profiles are not thought of as culturally fixed, insofar as cultures themselves are seen as contingent and constantly produced through the ways in which affect travels and circulates. Emotions, as affects, are therefore culturally recognisable, but not culturally specific, in that they are the drives that create cultures in the first place. This understanding of emotions can also be applied to the concept of place attachment, as briefly introduced above and developed more fully in the next chapter. Emotional attachments to places are certainly culturally identifiable and shared, but it can be argued that this is the case because of the ways in which they are continually constituted and maintained as such through the transmission of affect.

Against this heuristic distinction between affect and emotion, an affective approach promotes an understanding of communication as the constitutive transmission of affect – as a practice in which affect is transmitted at the level of the collective constitution of meaning (Ahmed 2004a; 2004b; Stewart 2007; Ashcraft & Kuhn 2017; Ashcraft 2021). "Affect", writes Stewart (2007) "works not through 'meanings' per se, but rather in the way that they pick up density

and texture as they move through bodies […] of all kinds" (3). Communication and emotion, in affect thinking, do not exist as two separate entities, one influenced by the other, but simultaneously in the way meanings are made and circulated between people and places. Indeed, we might then say that communication, as the fundamental practice of creating understanding between people, not only creates meanings, but specifically creates 'affective meanings' – ones that signify through the ways in which they enable certain shared feelings to be transmitted and perpetuated.

Accordingly, through an affective lens, what climate change is in climate-vulnerable tourist cities intimately relates to the ways collective feelings are allowed to travel and be sustained in and through communication. More precisely, what climate change is in these urban destinations is intimately linked to the communicative creation and sustainment of the 'affective atmospheres' of these places. Indeed, the cultural narratives of cities, and how they exist in our collective imagination, can be said to find their expressions in situated atmospheres, as diffuse ways of feeling places that are at once dependent on and performative of these narratives (Anderson 2009; 2014; Stewart 2011; Böhme 2014, 2017; Sumartojo & Pink 2019; Bille & Simonsen 2021). In other words, affective atmospheres are the collective modes of feeling places that result from the practices carried out in them, just as people live in and visit them in accordance with their relevance in our cultural narratives and collective imaginaries. Consider the vibrant atmosphere of a street festival (Edensor 2012; Michels & Steyaert 2017; De Molli et al. 2020), the fervent atmosphere of a football stadium (Edensor 2015), or the convivial atmosphere of a tourist resort (Rokka et al. 2023; Steadman & Coffin 2024). These atmospheres are not simply the result of our cultural narratives, nor simply of the strategic communication of events by organisers or tourism managers; rather, their vibrancy, fervour, and conviviality emerge precisely from the coexistence of such narratives and strategic efforts, along with the practices of those who wander through them.

As a result, an affective approach to the strategic communication of climate change sees it as a cultural practice, the role of which in the constitution of climate

change relates specifically to how strategic communication intersects with larger communicative processes of affective transmission – with the habitual, unreflective, and unpurposive ways in which people feel in accordance with the affective atmospheres of places. In other words, the affective approach taken in this thesis does not assume that the creation of climate change depends on the effectiveness of strategic communication in eliciting pre-determined emotions. Rather, it suggests that the role of strategic communication is more likely to lie in its ability to mobilise those affects that sustain the existence of affective atmospheres within which climate change is felt and understood. Affective thinking is therefore useful in this thesis in that it allows me to examine *how* strategic communication might achieve such mobilisation, and how climate change can be said to be affectively created therein. The next section presents the research objectives and questions that guided the development of this thesis.

Aim and research questions

The aim of this thesis is to examine the role of affect (i.e. collective feelings) in the communication of climate change in a tourist city. Specifically, it focuses on how strategic communication in the tourist destination of Venice influences the city's affective atmospheres to shape public understanding of the flooding phenomena that occur there. By operationalising an affective approach, the thesis contributes with a much-needed cultural perspective on both strategic communication and climate change communication, inviting both fields to adopt a cultural understanding of emotions.

To achieve this aim, I trace the way climate change feels in the city of Venice through an exploration of communicative practices relating to floods. These practices are understood to belong to both the strategic realm of the local municipality and local marine scientists, and to the non-strategic realm of everyday touristic life.

The thesis thus poses three main research questions:

1. *How are atmospheres around floods created in everyday touristic practices in Venice through the transmission of affect?*
2. *How does the strategic communication of floods mobilise shared feelings in atmospheres?*
3. *What are the implications of the affective negotiation of floods for the broader issue of climate change in Venice?*

To answer these research questions, I examine the processes through which climate change is communicatively constituted in the setting of Venice. In particular, this study focuses on how climate change unfolds in and through collective feelings of floods in such a climate-vulnerable urban place. In this regard, the existence of different affective atmospheres of the city is captured by investigating everyday touristic practices relating to floods in order to answer the first research question, which explores the collective and habitual ways in which tourists and local workers in the tourism sector (i.e. concierges, gondoliers and restaurateurs) talk about and act around floods. Investigating the strategic communication of floods to answer the second research question allows me to capture how Venice Municipality and a group of local marine scientists seek to influence these affective atmospheres. Paying attention to the ways in which shared feelings of floods are negotiated through the third research question allows me to explore the implications of such affective negotiation for the issue of climate change in this city. These analytical steps are explained in more detail in the section of the methodological chapter that discusses the process of analysis.

Overview of the thesis

This thesis consists of three parts. After this introduction, Part I continues with Chapter 2, which presents previous studies on the strategic communication of climate change in the established research fields of strategic communication and climate change communication research. This literature review highlights the limited understanding of the relationship between communication and emotions

in both fields and provides a basis for the discussion of the theoretical contribution of the thesis, which is presented in the following chapter. Chapter 3, in fact, presents the theoretical framework of the thesis and thus the conceptual foundations on which the main argument is built. In particular, this chapter addresses the proposed affective approach to the strategic communication of climate change by delineating its inherent attributes of constitution, materiality, and affectivity, as well as discussing places as affective atmospheres. Chapter 4 concludes Part I of the thesis, and presents the methodological and ethical considerations. Specifically, it situates the epistemological work within an atmospheric ethnography, and employs a narrative approach to explore the constitution of climate change through the analysis of different communicative practices relating to floods.

Part II is composed of three analytical chapters. The first, Chapter 5, analyses the strategic communication of floods by Venice Municipality. In line with the theoretical and methodological approaches of this thesis, it shows how the communicative constitution of climate change implies the mobilisation of feelings of wonder, which are crucial for the maintenance of the affective atmosphere of Venice as a wonderful tourist destination where climate change supposedly does not exist. Chapter 6 continues the analysis of the strategic communication of Venice Municipality, showing how it can be said to mobilise the feelings of safety necessary to maintain a safe atmosphere of the city as a place where climate change feels like a problem that has already been technologically solved. Chapter 7 examines how the strategic communication of floods by a group of local marine scientists challenges the affective atmospheres discussed in the previous two chapters, in that they mobilise the transmission of feelings of doom in order to construct Venice as a doomed place where climate change feels like an unavoidable problem.

Part III consists of two concluding chapters, Chapters 8 and 9; these discuss the main findings of the empirical analysis, provide a detailed presentation of the theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions of this thesis, highlight

the critical potential of affect for climate action, and offer suggestions for further research.

Chapter 2.

Problematising the relation between communication and emotions

This chapter problematises two views of emotions – as psychological effects, and as attachments – that are present in both strategic communication and climate change communication research. These understandings of emotion, I show, are inherently linked to the understanding of communication as either a linear or dialogical practice that is prevalent in both fields. It is in problematising this relationship between communication and emotion that this thesis proposes a new research focus: the strategic communication of climate change. The chapter proceeds as follows: after briefly introducing the fields of strategic communication and climate change communication, I trace within them two normative understandings of communication, and corresponding understandings of emotion. After presenting each understanding, I provide a problematisation of these relationships and, at the end of the chapter, an overall summary of the problematisation. This provides a basis for the discussion of the theoretical and methodological approaches of this dissertation, which are presented in the following chapters.

Introducing two overlapping research fields

In this section, I firstly outline how strategic communication and climate change communication research have respectively approached the issue of climate change. These two brief general introductions allow me to then elaborate on some

of the limitations identified in their conceptualisation of the relationship between communication and emotion.

Strategic communication

Strategic communication is today a holistic field of study that encompasses various disciplines that are focused on the analysis of communication between organisations and their publics, including public relations, organisational communication, and marketing communication (Falkheimer & Heide 2018, 2022). This broad research agenda implies that there is little agreement on what counts as strategic communication and what does not (Nothhaft et al. 2018). To some, this points to the need to identify a specific research object, as well as a specific research perspective, for the field (Zerfass et al. 2018). Others, however, are inclined to keep the heterogeneity in place, and "to accept […] the different contradictory positions within the field and live with the tensions instead of trying to resolve them" (Falkheimer & Heide 2023: 5).

Outside of these differences, scholars of strategic communication can be said to agree on the fact that what characterises strategic communication research is attention being paid to the 'strategic' aspect of communication (Dulek & Campbell 2015). In strategic communication research, then, strategy is a core concept, although the meaning of the word has shifted with the development of the field itself. In their seminal piece, Hallahan et al. (2007) propose that strategic communication be defined as "the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfill its mission" (3), thus conflating strategic communication and purposeful communication on the part of an organisation towards its publics. However, more recent definitions have circumvented some of the perceived shortcomings of this conflation: for Zerfass et al. (2018), the purposeful use of communication by an organisation to convey certain information or values is not the same as the strategic use of communication. Instead, the authors propose a focus on the temporal precariousness of organisations, which strategic communication can help to resolve: "Our suggestion […] is to consider an issue

as strategic when it becomes *substantial* or *significant* for an organization's or other entity's development, growth, identity, or survival" (493, original emphases). As such, what differentiates strategic communication from purposeful communication is a certain character of "complexity and uncertainty" (Ibid.) for the organisational entity that is potentially resolved through strategic communication.

Although, as Frandsen and Johansen (2017) argue, strategy within strategic communication can be seen "as a multidimensional concept that offers many alternative understandings, including a postmodernist or critical approach" (2252), the field currently rarely explores how strategic communication supports the sustainment of organisational missions and existence in collaboration with broader socio-cultural dynamics, as a postmodern and critical approach would generally require (Frandsen & Johansen 2022). 'Strategic' is therefore most often conflated with the deliberate, organisational use of 'communication', while the wider, unintended consequences of such communication beyond organisational settings and for society at large remaining underexplored. Thus, although strategic communication was from its inception intended to focus on how an organisation can be said to function as a social actor in order to further its mission (Hallahan et al. 2007), a socio-cultural understanding of strategic communication as such is largely absent from the field today. Indeed, the field generally adopts one of two approaches to communication; the first of these is an instrumental approach, wherein communication is a linear transmission of information from an organisation to its public (Botan 1997) – one which 'passes through' society without being much influenced by it. The second is a dialogical approach to communication, in which society mainly functions as a contextual playground for the communicators' will to reach some kind of understanding about an organisational issue (Falkheimer & Heide, 2018; Kent 2022). In both cases, strategic communication is relegated to the realm of rational language use between organisational actors, where societal issues and cultural values figure mainly as external interferences to rational, communicative processes. As a result, it is often assumed that there is some kind of comprehensible communication

model that organisations can use to communicate correctly in the specificity of each socio-cultural context, as if strategic communication could ever exist as distinct from society and culture.

One consequence of this tendency towards an epistemological focus on organisations and their sustainment is that strategic communication is rarely studied in relation to complex societal and cultural issues, such as climate change. Indeed, the field generally approaches climate change only through organisational concepts, such as strategic sustainability communication (Weder 2023) or strategic corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication (Kim & Lee 2018), and the ways in which these are achieved *by* and *for* defined organisational entities. However, as is briefly argued in the introduction to this thesis, strategic communication research cannot relegate climate change solely to organisational missions and interests, for the simple but straightforward reason that these latter only exist in relation to broader societal and cultural understandings of climate change. I will return to this point in more detail in the following sections.

Climate change communication

The field of climate change communication emerged from that of environmental communication when the latter shifted its focus from risk-related studies to analysis of environmental messages in advertising in the 1990s (Cox 2010b). The first article on climate change was published in 1996, and publications on climate change have become more frequent since then, peaking in the late 2010s (Comfort & Park 2018). Contributions have come from a wide range of research fields and disciplinary traditions, including media and communication, human geography, urban studies, political science, the natural sciences, psychology, and economics (Moser 2010a; 2010b; Nerlich et al. 2010; Agin & Karlsson 2021). Arguably, then, most of the literature on climate change has been published in the last 15 years, with *Environmental Communication* being the leading journal in the field of climate change communication, followed by the *Journal of Global*

Environmental Change, *Public Understanding of Science*, and *Science Communication* (Comfort & Park 2018). The wide range of findings and perspectives on climate change communication from different disciplinary traditions makes it difficult to analyse the field (Agin & Karlsson 2021; Canon et al. 2022), but recent literature reviews almost unanimously point to the fact that at present the field is predominantly populated by content analysis of media material, with print news-media content preferred over television or online social-media content, giving the field a very discursive and representational character (Agin & Karlsson 2021; Canon et al. 2022; Comfort & Park 2018; Schäfer & Schlichting 2014).

Few studies in the field of climate change communication research have investigated how climate change is communicated by organisational actors such as governments and corporations (Ballantyne 2016). This, Agin and Karlsson (2021) argue, "is very problematic because these particular groups are the primary drivers of global change in mitigation strategies and adaptation policies" (443). When the climate change communication of these organizational actors is studied, this is primarily in terms of framing and rhetorical analyses of climate denial and climate scepticism (Ihlen & Nitz 2008; Ihlen 2009; Schlichting 2013). As a result, such studies tend to focus mainly on the intentional use of communication by specific organisational actors or entities, leaving underexplored the fact that climate change communication also emerges from and contributes to the formation of collectively shared understandings and values about climate change in society at large (Cox 2010a; Ballantyne 2016; Carvalho et al. 2017). In other words, although relevant, content analyses of this kind limit the study of climate change communication to the intentional and instrumental use of language that is intended to achieve a predetermined set of organisational goals, leaving underexplored the unplanned and recursive effects of this practice in society. Therefore, instead of considering climate change communication as an intentional and a-cultural practice that communicates about climate change from an organisation to its public, there is a need for an analytical shift, as suggested by Carvalho et al. (2017), involving "looking at communication as a

constitutive practice rather than as a matter of transmission of messages" (124). Climate change communication research has therefore recently called for more attention to be paid to the inherently political and cultural weight of such a practice, especially when it is carried out by organisational actors responding to corporate or political interests.

I now move on to explore how each field has adopted normative understandings of communication where it is either approached as a linear or a dialogical practice, and their respective understandings of emotions as either psychological effects or psychological attachments. The limitations of these understandings are discussed at the end of each section.

A linear view of communication and emotions as psychological effects

A linear understanding of communication defines it as the transmission of information from a sender to a receiver through a medium, in specific social circumstances, in order to produce some sort of outcome. This understanding follows static models of communication, wherein the point of communication analysis is to identify who says what to whom, through what medium, under what circumstances, for what purpose, and with what effects (Lasswell 1948; Shannon & Weaver 1949; Braddock 1958). These models were the first attempts to describe and formalise communication in relatively simple terms, with an emphasis on clarity and efficiency of transmission. As a result, in these models communication is a linear and interactive means by which one person influences another through informative messages, as part of a one-way process that is more or less efficiently controlled by the sender. These early models of communication are based on a rhetorical tradition that emphasises the deliberate use of language, structure, and reason (Heath et al., 2018). Their effectiveness is assumed to depend on the careful selection of publics, the flawless execution of the communication, and the careful evaluation of the communication's impact.

This very mechanical and functionalist understanding of communication was also the first and most basic understanding of strategic communication. In fact, the earliest understanding of strategic communication considers planned communication, framed messages, and effective campaigns that are designed to achieve various organisational goals (Botan 1997). As Botan (Ibid.) argues, "[a]lthough models vary, strategic communication […] almost invariably uses research to identify a problem or issue, relevant publics, and measurable goals and objectives" (188). Here, organisational units such as corporations and political institutions decide how to allocate their resources, design effective messages, anticipate the barriers these messages might face, and diagnose any problems that may have occurred.

A linear understanding of communication is used in the majority of climate change communication analyses. As Ballantyne (2016) writes, "articles tend to emphasize the sender as the active part, conceptualizing communication as a secluded process of simply conveying a message to an audience" (336). This way of understanding communication is particularly visible in early climate change communication initiatives, where there was a belief that consensus on climate change would be achieved simply by throwing more and more scientific facts and information at a selected public, with tangible consequences for public understanding of the issue:

> In the beginning, the communication about climate change was mostly centred around scientific findings: e.g. IPCC reports and specialized conferences or policy meetings […] information mostly presented by scientists and policymakers *for* scientists and policymakers, rendering it hard for the general public to understand and comprehend. (Agin & Karlsson 2021: 431, original emphasis).

In the 1960s, which were the early years of climate change communication initiatives, communication was seen as a means of promoting the acceptance of scientific and technological advances, in the hope that these would lead to a greater harmony between scientific knowledge and the actions of key societal actors. However, at the end of the twentieth century, with the actual signing and

ratification of the international treaty known as the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, which made more publics familiar with the issue of climate change, people started to demand more clarity in order to improve their understanding of the climate issue. Simultaneously, publics also started to demand more transparency and climate commitment from both companies and public institutions (Epstein & Buhovac 2014; Genç 2017). Thus, at the end of the twentieth century, the debate on climate change became more complex and public, moving "beyond just the most basic impacts on physical and ecological systems" (Moser 2010a: 32). In those years, studies showed that a sense of unease arose within the lobbies of the major fossil-fuel corporations, who began to purposefully amplify doubts about climate change and use them to divert attention away from warnings to take action against this global crisis (McCrigh & Dunlap 2001; 2003; Bodansky 2001).

Research shows that in the twentieth century the fossil-fuel industry did not explicitly oppose climate science, but did fund scientists to carry out scientific research that would maintain the companies' business plans (Levy & Egan, 2003; Jacques, Dunlap & Freeman 2008). Therefore, contrary to the idea that the fossil-fuel industry was 'anti-science', these companies continued to base their arguments on science, but were strategic about which parts of it they used and highlighted. Thus, the oil corporations were shown to adopt the same communicative strategies as scientists and public institutions in terms of how they communicated about climate change through scientific communication. Furthermore, in the same years, the giant oil corporations started to fund legitimate-seeming global climate coalitions, environmental councils, research groups, and climate conferences around the world in order to strategically communicate on the issue (Livesey 2002a; 2002b; Levy 2005; Greenberg, Knight & Westersund 2011). What were they actually saying about climate change? As I will show below, a vast array of academic research has aimed to answer this question, and to unmask these communicative strategies and explore how they allowed these actors to continue their corporate and political operations in the

face of mounting evidence and widespread scientific consensus on the seriousness of the climate issue.

According to climate change communication analyses, oil companies and similar organisations use language to influence the ways in which climate change is understood through the careful selection of frames, metaphors, images, slogans, and stories (Ihlen & Nitz 2008; Ihlen 2009; Schlichting 2013; Schäfer & and Schlichting 2014). Framing analyses specifically are the preferred types of analysis in this regard (Badullovich et al. 2020; Agin & Karlssson 2021). Here, framing theory is used to explain how the presentation of a message influences people on psychological and cognitive levels (Scheufele & Iyengar 2014). In the twentieth century, oil corporations were increasingly inclined to use framing techniques to communicate with their publics about the issue of climate change in order to influence how this crisis was understood and approach (Lakoff 2010). In their literature reviews on strategic framings, Schlichting (2013) and Schäfer and Schlichting (2014) show that, until the mid-1990s, the climate debate was dominated by what the authors call the 'scientific uncertainty frame'. According to this frame, organisations emphasised the need to reach scientific consensus before taking any substantial decision regarding the issue of climate change. However, two other frames later emerged in the public discourse: the 'economic development' frame, and the 'industrial leadership' frame. The former was used mainly by oil companies to frame climate change as a problem that will have important economic consequences for society, and the latter was used by these corporations to present themselves as the only group capable of developing solutions that would help to avoid such catastrophic consequences, while at the same time calling for further investment in oil extraction and refining to support the technological advances needed to tackle climate change. According to Schlichting (2013), through the leadership frame, oil corporations often presented voluntary action, rather than mandatory regulation, as the most powerful means of preventing climate change, shifting responsibility from themselves to consumers and other stakeholders (see also VanDyke & Tedesco 2016). Similarly, Jaworska (2018) uses rhetorical analysis to examine how lexical-

grammatical choices (i.e. the choice of nouns, verbs, and adjectives) in the oil industry's CSR reports between 2000 and 2013 revealed its positionality on the issue. The study shows that, by using verbs such as "combat" and "tackle" in their strategic communication, oil companies caused climate policies to be "predominantly formulated as future goals", with the responsibility for implementation falling to "other stakeholders" (207). In this way, the oil industry aimed to prevent radical change and ensure that their operations continued "to a large extent, with business as usual" (208).

Governmental actors have also been found to strategically frame climate change in order to advance their agendas. Romsdahl et al. (2017) analysed newspaper articles in the British press over a ten-year period, between 2004 and 2014, and found evidence that an economic frame was used in political discourse on climate change in the UK. In particular, the authors found that, in the context of the 2008 economic recession, the UK government began "a steady shift away from addressing climate change through the sustainability discourse and move[d] back into the problem-solving discourse, with its focus on industrialism and economic growth" (530). What these types of framing and textual analyses reveal is that early climate change communication initiatives sought to frame climate change as a non-existent problem that was not yet scientifically proven, while from the 2000s to the present, climate change has mainly been framed as a problem that can be solved through hard forms of technological intervention and modernisation.

Emotional effects

Strategic communication literature has long recognised the need to consider emotions in both research and practice. Here, emotions are most often conceptualised based on understanding borrowed from the cognitive and behavioural sciences, as unique events that occur as a result of specific cognitive mechanisms, where each emotion has its own specific brain circuitry (Brundin & Liu 2015). The expression of each emotion has its own specific response, manifested in facial expressions, voice inflection, and body movements (Gross &

Feldman Barrett 2011). These theories on emotional effects have found relevance in strategic communication research, particularly in measuring the emotional effects of advertising (Byunghwa et al. 2013), corporate social advocacy (CSA) (Liu & Wang 2024), and political communication (Schemer 2014) on selected audiences.

Similarly, climate change communication scholars have long argued that emotions play a pivotal role in understanding climate change (Moser & Dilling 2004; Moser 2010b; Roeser 2012). In this field, analyses focus mainly on the emotional effects that these communications aim to achieve, and understanding these effects is crucial to designing successful communication campaigns and initiatives. As Ballantyne (2016) writes: "The 'how to' approach […] often results in a normative focus, where the goal of overcoming communication barriers becomes the guiding star" (335). Thus, climate change communication analyses tend to consider emotions to be the effects of planned communication initiatives – things that can be measured quantitatively, in order to find the best communication strategy. Just as for strategic communication, most of these studies draw on psychological and behavioural theories in order to understand the role of emotions in people's perceptions of climate change, and the public's sense of action on the issue (Kumpu 2022).

In this regard, studies show that, in making people aware of the existence of climate change, fear has a promising effect, inasmuch as it is an emotion that breaks through people's psychological indifference and numbness (Nabi 2003; Nabi & Myrick 2019; DiRusso & Myrick 2021). As Moser (2010b) argues, these studies assume that "[i]f global warming is made scarier, it might become more salient" (69). Wong-Parodi and Feygina (2020) explore whether different climate stories can elicit negative emotions, and the impact that these emotions have on the level of attention on and engagement with the issue of climate change. They found that "experiencing negative emotion in response to learning about climate impacts consistently drove concern about and engagement with the issue" (581). Studies like these have also inspired the broader social realm: for example, the slogan "the most terrifying film you will ever see" was used to promote Al Gore's

2006 documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*, or a 2006 cover of *Time* magazine, which showed a polar bear on melting ice, featured the headline "Global Warming: Be Worried, Be VERY Worried". More recent examples include Wallace-Wells's book *The Uninhabitable Earth* and Greta Thunberg's invitation to "think as if your house were on fire".

However, studies have also shown that appeals to fear rarely generate a constructive and sustained climate engagement, and can even lead to negative emotional states, such as anger (O'Neill & Nicholson-Cole 2009). As Moser (2010b) argues, there is a broad scientific consensus that "using positive motivations and forms of communication may prove more successful in engaging social actors" (71–2). Positive emotions such as hope have been found to be effective in promoting behavioural changes towards sustainability practices (Myers et al. 2012; Nabi et al., 2018; Nabi & Myrick 2019). 'Hope appeals' can take different forms and use different communication tools, such as images or stories; in general, they work towards the emergence of a shared vision and emphasise positive effects, thereby "[i]ncreasing the sense of personal vulnerability, responsibility, and empowerment" (Moser 2010b: 74) by giving people a sense that there is something that they can do. As such, in the early 2000s climate messages intended to spark fear and alarmism so as to shake public consciousness and prompt people to act; more recently, however, messages have been adapted so as to spark not just fear, but hope regarding the possibility of solving the climate issue. These messages usually refer to the need to and possibility of creating a brighter future, especially for the generations to come (Moser 2016). This shift away from fear has also brought about a change in the terminology used regarding the phenomenon of climate change. The initial messages on the climate often referred to 'global warming', but this was perceived as too frightening and alarming (Boykoff, 2011; Whitmarsh 2008). As a result, other terms, such as 'climate change', have been used due to their less figurative power. However, such change has been criticised for creating ambiguity and distance, and thus weakening the understanding of an ecological catastrophe that is caused by human practices (Moser 2010b; 2016).

As Bilandzic et al. (2017; 2020) highlights, though, decades of climate change communication research have been inconclusive, and findings about the 'right' ways to elicit the 'right' emotional responses are still largely inconsistent and contradictory. This is because emotions can be both powerful motivators and de-motivators for climate action, and the same types of climate change communication initiatives have been found to elicit different emotional responses in different publics (Moser 2016). For example, in their analysis of how companies use social media to communicate about the dangers of plastic pollution in a changing climate, DiRusso and Myrick (2021) show that fear appeals sparked both anger and hope, and, surprisingly, that anger led to more persuasive outcomes than hope and fear: "The more anger participants reported, the higher their levels of social media intentions, political participation intentions, and plastic pollution attitudes" (1055). As De Meyer et al. (2021) note, these results are in line with the revival of fear appeals in media and popular culture of the present, where "climate change is primarily communicated about in the media through doom and disaster narratives" (2), as an existential threat to society and the natural world alike. This idea is so strong that, by 2020, words such as 'crisis', 'emergency', and 'breakdown' were widely used to describe climate change by large sections of the public (Dillon & Craig 2023).

Limitations of a linear view of communication

There are problems with the linear view of communication and its underlying understanding of emotions, as employed in both strategic communication research and climate change communication research. A linear understanding of communication tends to focus exclusively on the sender side of communication, while the receiver side is seen as passive in the processes of creating and negotiating meaning. Adopting such an understanding leads to seeing climate change as already having a specific meaning, which can be packaged and delivered by an active sender to a passive receiver. Here, climate change is understood not as a phenomenon constituted in and through communication, but as a fixed, pre-existing phenomenon, the meaning of which can be communicated differently

depending on the intentions of particular organisational actors. As Ballantyne (2016) rightly puts it, the majority of climate change communication studies overlook the fact that "climate change is not only a physical phenomenon [to be communicated about], but also an ideological, cultural and symbolic issue that takes on different meanings dependent on different people and places" (338). In a linear understanding of climate change communication, there is no emphasis on the creation and negotiation of meaning; there is only a preferred way of communicating about climate change. Framing and rhetorical analyses completely overlook the complex web of negotiation and contestation around the issue of climate change because they do not take into account the recipient of the communication. For example, Jaworska's (2018) rhetorical analysis does an excellent job of showing how climate change is represented through strategic choices of grammar and lexicon, but does not explore how these choices contribute to the maintenance of cultural ideas about climate change in the context in which the oil companies operate. These analyses consider climate change communication to be an unlocated practice, stripped of its socio-cultural understandings (Ballantyne 2016; Carvalho et al. 2017). Understanding climate change in this way fails to take into account the fact that the meaning of climate change depends on how its particular manifestations are narrated, not only in relation to an organisation's intentional communication but on a broader, socio-cultural level.

At the same time, research that relies on a linear perspective on communication often considers emotions to be mere innate psychological effects, a-cultural traits with effects that can be carefully and quantitatively measured in order to design more effective climate messages. Consequently, analyses of this kind assume that climate (dis)engagement is merely the result of (un)successful communication strategies to circumvent the psycho-emotional biases of a public, and that communication can be adapted to elicit the desired emotional responses. This understanding of emotion, I argue, is problematic in that it does not take into account the existence of collective feelings and their relation to shared cultural narratives. Indeed, the existence of collective feelings implies that emotions

cannot be understood only as traits that belong to individuals, and that they are also shared between people. Consequently, while it is certainly necessary to take psycho-emotional barriers into account, communication scholars ought not only to consider which emotions are evoked in pre-selected publics, but how these emotions are maintained and shared on a broader socio-cultural level. Communication is the means by which emotions are elicited, but also shared and sustained over time.

In the next section, I present an alternative understanding of communication and discuss the limited understanding of emotions present in the fields of strategic communication and climate change communication research.

A dialogical view of communication and emotions as psychological attachments

While traditional conceptualisations of communication, which see it as the linear transmission of information, remain popular in strategic communication research, the field has evolved to encompass more diverse perspectives, methods, and goals (Heath 2023). This is largely due to the adoption of a constitutive, rather than instrumental, understanding of communication (Craig 1999). According to a constitutive understanding, communication is "not only something we do, it is something we recurrently talk about in ways that are practically entwined with our doing of it" (Ibid.: 149). In other words, communication constitutes the very things it seeks to communicate about. The constitutive role of communication is thus used in strategic communication research to examine the sustainment of organisational entities. As Falkheimer and Heide (2018) write, "communication is perceived as the very means that creates and provides the conditions for an organization's existence" (72). Here, communication is more than a means, because it is a force that plays a fundamental role in the human need to understand and be understood. This understanding of communication requires more than the linear and instrumental

approaches presented above. The linear understanding of communication as a mere instrument and transmission tool is considered to be inadequate for explaining the complex nature of strategic communication. Strategic communication scholars consider the linear approach to communication to be too sender-oriented, arguing that it underestimates or ignores the important role of the receiver in the process of constituting organisational reality (Falkheimer & Heide 2014; 2018). Instead, strategic communication is not just a linear flow of information, but a process of co-constituting that information, which is central to the existence and maintenance of organisational entities.

As a result, a constitutive understanding of communication means that strategic communication can no longer be approached only as planned communication, and that the field must adopt a dialogical approach that pays attention to notions of cooperation and interaction in the creation and negotiation of meaning. As Falkheimer and Heide (2023) write, "[c]ommon goals for organizations' communication include the production of understanding, durable relations, and a common identity" (88). In other words, efforts to communicate strategically inevitably involve not only the pre-selection of possible challenges, but the emergent difficulties of interpretation, trial, testing, and retesting, processes of consensus and dissent. Thus, today strategic communication research, in addition to informing and gathering information in order to better communicate with strategic publics, needs to build a relationship with its publics that is based on mutual dialogue and understanding, which are crucial for the maintenance of organisations. Popular concepts in the related field of organisational communication, such as dialogue (Grunig 2001) and sense-making (Weick 2001), are incorporated.

This has led to a recognition of the need to avoid the top-down paradigm, wherein only managers and internal organisational actors are in control of the strategic communication steering wheel, as there is a need to acknowledge the interconnectedness of and interdependence between internal and external instances of strategic communication (Falkheimer et al. 2017; Heide & Simonsson 2018). An organisation's communication activities are best viewed

from an integrative perspective. As Falkheimer and Heide (2023) write: "'internal' communication does not stay in the organization but also reaches out to other stakeholders, and 'external' communication (e.g. marketing communication and advertising) also reaches employees and has a potential impact on them" (96). Inevitably, this means acknowledging that strategic communication is more messy and less definable than initially thought, and that the success or relevance of strategic communication inevitably implies dependency between senders and receivers.

In climate change communication research, understanding communication as a dialogical endeavour entails recognising that the meaning of climate change is not simply communicated and directly understood by a given public, but constituted in and through the very communications that aim to communicate it in specific contexts (Nerlich 2010; Nerlich et al. 2010). Adopting a more dialogical understanding of communication has therefore meant considering a more nuanced role for climate change communication than simply delivering a message about climate change to a predetermined audience. With a revised understanding, what climate change means is dependent on the negotiation of meanings in specific contexts that are central to the preferred understanding of climate change. The focus here is less on the outcome than on the factors that determine that outcome, and these factors require an examination of the characteristics of the cultural context as it manifests itself in interactions. Whereas in a linear understanding of communication the purpose of climate change communication is, as is discussed above, to create successful communication in order to achieve predetermined effects, successful communication here means achieving consensus by screening the cultural context in order to better predict how meanings of climate change will be negotiated within it. In other words, understanding the socio-cultural context is useful not only for designing the perfect climate change communication campaign, but for understanding how the success of a campaign is linked to recipients' understanding of it. For example, Adams (2022) shows that when farmers in West Texas, USA, were approached with messages that promoted locally focused frames with a focus on weather

changes, rather than climate change, they were more likely to recognise the importance of climate action and social participation. In other words, for these farmers, 'weather' changes were easier to discuss and think about than 'climate' changes. Adams concludes by suggesting that successful communication with these rural communities might avoid the term 'climate' altogether. The next section introduces an understanding of emotions as psychological attachments.

Emotions as psychological attachments

In strategic communication research, a dialogical understanding of communication means considering that emotions are not only potentially triggered by strategic communication but are factors that disrupt or influence the dialogical process of creating and negotiating meaning (Jin et al. 2017; Ćosić et al. 2018; Goldberg & Gustafsson 2023). For example, Ćosić et al. (2018) propose Emotionally Based Strategic Communication (EBSC) as a communication strategy that aims to contribute to the de-radicalisation of certain social groups through "semantically and emotionally appropriate multimedia messages toward targeted groups, as a kind of strategic communications based on positive psychology" (197). Here, emotions are common human traits that can be evoked through the will and ability of a communicator, in order to shape perceptions and attitudes. The idea is therefore to de-radicalise the target social group by providing positive (i.e. hopeful) rather than negative (i.e. hateful) emotional messages, and to allow these positive emotions to mature by increasing the frequency, resonance, and durability of the messages. Yet, and importantly, group-specific communication and the development of personalised algorithms and intelligence measures to discover the keywords, phrases, or online behavioural patterns of a target group are also highly recommended (see also Holtzhausen, 2016; Wiesenberg, Zerfass & Moreno, 2017). This attention points at the need to also take the specific cultural context into account as potential factor in the success of these communication initiatives. Studies on affective polarisation, i.e. the emotional orientation of individuals or groups towards people who share their political or ideological views and away from those

who do not, especially in media channels, support also this type of epistemological measurement of emotional orientations, and often involve searching for emotional expressions in word clusters and word maps (Zoizner et al. 2021; Skytte 2021) as collective emotional orientations that belong to certain social groups.

In climate change communication research, a dialogical understanding of communication has led to attempts to understand how different meanings of climate change are negotiated by specific selected publics according to their situated cultural positionings and emotional orientations. Here, the concept of place attachment, which is defined as "the bonding that occurs between individuals and their meaningful environments" (Scannell & Gifford 2010: 1), has gained prominence. Indeed, studies that have utilised the concept have explored the role of emotional attachment to specific places, and the importance of it in relation to designing communication initiatives. In this regard, it has been shown that engaging people in the issue of climate change can be difficult, because many people view it as abstract, distant, and impersonal (Leiserowitz 2006; Lorenzoni et al. 2007). Given these challenges, some scholars suggest that long-term climate communication is often less effective than messages about how climate change is harming people here and now (Van der Linden 2017), on the basis that personally relevant stories have been found to increase emotional engagement by reducing psychological distance (Gustafson et al., 2020). For example, in their study of 'locality framing', Degeling and Koolen (2022) tested the impact of local frames on attitudes towards climate change mitigation behaviour among selected residents of a coastal town in the Netherlands. They found that residents were more likely to recognise the importance of climate action when they were shown the direct consequences of rising sea levels for their specific town, rather than for random places on Earth. This local perspective makes climate change more psychologically accessible, thus promoting emotional and cognitive engagement with the issue. Such studies are important because they show that understanding of climate change inevitably depends on how its manifestations are communicated and understood in specific socio-cultural

settings. People's emotional attachments to places are measured not against a vague and abstract phenomenon, but against the tangible manifestations of climate change in particular environments and for those who live in and care for them (Kongsager & Baron 2024).

However, research on the effects of place framing is inconclusive: while some studies show that local frames have a more positive effect than global frames (Scannell & Gifford, 2010; Wiest et al., 2015), others conclude that the effect may be the opposite (Schoenefeld & McCauley, 2016; Altinay 2017). For example, Altinay (2017) found that the use of local frames in videos paradoxically made viewers aware of their lack of self-efficacy, and thus dissuaded them from becoming more involved in the climate issue: "[p]erhaps", writes Altinay (2017), "disengagement from climate change with local framing was strengthened by the message's visual nature, which may have amplified feelings of helplessness" (302). This type of study suggests that emotions are both triggered by communication, and closely linked to people's emotional orientations to the places where they live or have lived. As a result, climate change communication must not only find a better way of framing climate change but ensure that it takes into account how these frames are understood by people in particular places, and how emotions affect their understanding. In other words, climate change communication is here understood in a more dialogical sense, insofar as these studies are more inclined to understand how communication is interpreted by a chosen public. Emotional responses are not dependent on climate change communication alone, but on the connection of publics to their local environments, which communication must take into account.

Limitations of a dialogical view of communication

There are problems with a dialogical view of communication, and the underlying understanding of emotions in both strategic communication research and climate change communication research. While an understanding of communication as a dialogical practice of meaning-making and negotiation allows us to move

beyond the study of the emotional effects of communication in order to pay more attention to the cultural and emotional factors that influence the success of specific communication initiatives, this understanding of emotion is still largely conceptualised through a psychological lens, as something akin to an individual attitude that leads to action. As Carvalho et al. (2017) write, the effects of climate change communication are most often considered "from the perspective of (social) psychology focusing on individual engagement as the driver of societal change" (124; see also Kumpu 2022). By viewing emotions as attachments that influence processes of meaning-making and negotiation, and consequently assuming that emotions and culture are inevitably intertwined, these studies of emotional attachment arguably neglect broader socio-cultural and political dimensions, and thus present a rather static view of human-environment relations (as argued by e.g. Devine-Wright, 2009; 2020; Devine-Wright & Quinn 2020). In other words, critical studies of place attachment have criticised the tendency to overlook the socio-cultural and political embeddedness of emotional attachments to places, and to see such attachments as purely internal or as mental processes that drive people to a place because of psychological needs for belonging or identity. As a result, emotional attachments are theorised as being predictable and stable, as psychological preferences or attitudes. Conceptually, this is problematic because attachments seem to emanate only from the human body and towards the external environment. This leads to a situation where, as Hennion (2017) puts it, "on one side there are objects and their properties, on the other, subjects and their preferences" (17). Empirically, this notion of emotional attachments to places is problematic because it does not take into account the tensions that create and are created by these attachments (Juhlin 2024).

This is consistent with the methodological approaches used in these studies of place attachment in climate change communication, where they investigate the link between communication and place attachment using either quantitative analyses of numerical data, or qualitative techniques meant to capture people's personal, emotional attachments to places. As a result, although emotions are here

not seen as direct effects of communication, they are still approached as barriers that can be overcome by asking people the correct questions and showing them the right images. In other words, such analyses tend to assume that the perceived importance of climate change depends only on successful communication strategies to circumvent cultural-emotional biases, which are themselves understood as stable and persistent. Consequently, a supposedly more accurate understanding of climate change can potentially be attributed to certain cultures (and not to others), to certain places (and not to others).

However, emotional attachments are neither universal psychological traits nor stably tied to specific places, peoples, and cultures, and are better understood as contingent, unstable processes through which cultures themselves are constituted and sustained (Ahmed 2004a; 2004c). In result, emotions cannot be studied simply by asking people how they feel about a place, or by measuring these responses quantitatively, since they also always operate at the unconscious and habitual level of everyday cultural meanings and collective experience. As Juhlin (2024) writes, "attachments hold us in complicated dependencies" (120). Emotions are not tied to recognisable signifiers and expressions (emotion-related words, phrases, idioms), but move more subtly in and through cultural practices in contexts. In this thesis, therefore, the notion of 'feeling' a changing climate refers to a situated phenomenon that emerges from particular agglomerations of places, peoples, and emotions, as suggested earlier by the introduction of the concept of affective atmospheres. This is developed further in the next section.

Summary of the limitations of previous research

In this chapter, I have shown that the fields of strategic communication and climate change communication share similar limitations in terms of how they explore the ways in which organisational actors, such as governments or corporations, communicate about climate change. While strategic communication relegates the study of climate change to strictly organisational

issues, making it merely a corporate or governmental concern (Kim & Lee 2018; Weder 2023), climate change communication examines the communication of organisational actors as a kind of purposeful communicative act aimed at influencing the public through ethical misconduct (Ihlen & Nitz 2008; Ihlen 2009; Schlichting 2013; Schäfer & Schlichting 2014). In both cases, I argued, climate change communication by organisational actors is understood either in an instrumental way, as a linear transmission of information about climate change, or in a dialogical way, as a dialogue to reach a certain understanding about the issue. In both cases, then, it is assumed that organisations communicate about climate change in order to maintain their own organisational identity or business plans either by communicating their preferred meaning of climate change or by adapting such a meaning to selected audiences. While these analyses are extremely important for exposing cases of greenwashing and other unethical communication that support phenomena such as climate denial and delay, they fall short of providing a more nuanced understanding of the role of organisational climate change communication in the culturally contested nature of climate change. Indeed, they fail to account for the ways in which organisational actors' climate change communication is always embedded in, and actively participates in, the cultural meanings of climate change at a broader, socio-cultural level (Ballantyne 2016; Carvalho et al. 2017).

In order to explore this cultural side of organisations' climate change communication, in this thesis I bring the fields of strategic communication and climate change communication into conversation and explore a research focus that I call 'the strategic communication of climate change'. The strategic communication of climate change is a research focus that lies at the intersection of strategic communication and climate change communication, and involves analyses of climate change communication in organisational settings such as corporations, municipalities, trade associations, political parties, and NGOs. By bringing these two fields of research into conversation, this thesis contributes to both at the same time. It contributes to the field of strategic communication by paying attention to its cultural side, that is, the role it plays in the communicative

constitution of broad societal issues such as climate change. It contributes to the field of climate change communication with a better understanding of the receiver side of organisations' climate change communication, responding to past and present calls for such an epistemological positioning discussed in the previous section. In what follows, I present the proposed research focus in more detail, paying particular attention to how it can enhance our understanding of the relationship between communication and emotions.

The strategic communication of climate change

This thesis understands strategic communication as an inherently cultural practice. As a result, the analysis of the strategic communication of climate change includes not only the ways in which it sustains organisational purposes and missions, but also how it does so by sustaining collective modes of feeling a changing climate around us. More specifically, in the context of this thesis, the strategic communication of floods is understood as a cultural practice that mobilises collective feelings in order to shape public understanding of the changing climate in the setting of Venice.

Analyses of the strategic communication of climate change cannot be based solely on a linear or dialogical understanding of communication, as both understandings tend to see communication as a rational, possibly a-cultural endeavour. As a result, emotions themselves are seen either as effects of communication, or emotional attachments that strategic communication simply needs to avoid and work around by creating the best communicative strategy. This is particularly problematic in relation to the strategic communication of climate change in well-known urban destinations such as Venice, where it is crucial to consider emotions from both a psychological and cultural perspective. From a cultural perspective, emotions are not just psychological predispositions or attachments to one's own place or culture; rather, they are linked to broader cultural narratives that influence how people feel about places they have never seen or visited. Collective feelings about places around the world, popularised by

our cultural narratives, simultaneously belong to everyone and to no one, as they are created by the ways we perpetuate them on a collective level.

I argue that studies of the strategic communication of climate change can provide a broader and more complex picture of how strategic communication influences collective feelings starting from an understanding of these feelings as fluid, dynamic, contingent, and emergent. Exploring the full analytical potential of this cultural practice means moving beyond linear cause-and-effect studies of communication, as well as beyond studies that focus on narrow, two-way communicative processes, and into the realm of situated, lived, and contested everyday practices that are inevitably embedded in socio-cultural, economic, and political systems. As Cox (2010a) argues, "the *strategic* […] requires 'a place to stand', that is, a relationship or access to a relevant site within a system of power" (130, original emphasis). Understood in this way, the strategic communication of climate change involves dialogue and mutual understanding not only between people, but between a more complex set of actors who interact and participate as part of the collective communicative making of climate change. The next chapter introduces the affective approach utilised, which is intended to offer such an understanding of the strategic communication of climate change.

Chapter 3.

Outlining an affective approach to the strategic communication of climate change

In the problematisation presented in the previous chapter, I pointed out the inadequacy of both linear and dialogical understandings of communication for analysing the strategic communication of climate change in a tourist city. Both of these understandings lead to the assumption that emotions are merely individually bounded psychological traits, and this alone cannot explain the intertwining of strategic communication with collective feelings towards well-known urban destinations. Based on this argument, this chapter argues for an affective approach to the strategic communication of climate change. Through such an approach, we can gain a better understanding of the cultural influences of such a practice in climate-vulnerable urban destinations. To that end, I here introduce three interrelated views on communication – as constitutive (Craig 1999), material (Ashcraft et al. 2009), and affective (Ashcraft 2020, 2021) – and explain how the strategic communication of climate change is influenced by the utilisation of each of them. Specifically, viewing communication as constitutive means that the strategic communication of climate change is viewed both as an intentional act of communicating about climate change, and as an emergent, collective, and less intentional act of creating what climate change means. The material view of communication understands the strategic communication of climate change to be a situated process of negotiation of meaning, wherein meaning is an inherently material-semiotic construct. According to an affective

view of communication, instead, the strategic communication of climate change is a situated process of negotiating meaning, wherein meaning is also inherently affective. Step by step throughout this chapter, communication becomes less about rational usage and more about collective transmission, a shared movement in a broader cultural environment. In order to respond to the spatial specificity of the research case – the strategic communication of climate change in the tourist city of Venice – the three views of communication are coupled with a view of cities as affective atmospheres, that is, places encapsulated by particular collective affectivities (Andersson 2009; Böhme 1997, 2013, 2014, 2017; Stewart 2011; Bille & Simonsen 2021). In this way, the theoretical framework facilitates the study of how strategic communication influences the existence of collective feelings in Venice, and the implications of this for the issue of climate change.

The strategic communication of climate change as constitutive affective transmission

In this thesis, an affective approach to the strategic communication of climate change sees communication as constitutive affective transmission. To explain what this means and how it is relevant to the aim of this thesis, in this section I present three interrelated views of communication that are utilised in my affective approach. By 'interrelated', I mean that these assumptions build on one another, rather than being mutually exclusive (see Fig. 3.1). Thus, in order to understand strategic communication as constitutive affective transmission, communication must be seen as simultaneously constitutive, material, and affective.
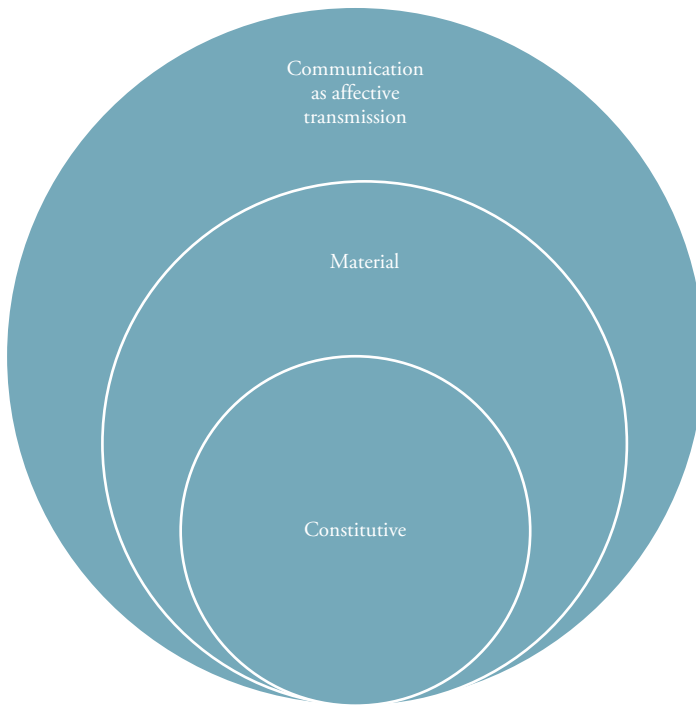
Figure 3.1 Communication as affective transmission

A constitutive view of communication

The first view of communication that underpins my affective approach to the strategic communication of climate change sees it as a constitutive practice. A constitutive view of communication sees communication not only as a way of intentionally expressing meanings, but as a way of less intentionally participating in the cultural creation of these meanings through their expression (Craig 1999). According to such an approach, communication is understood to be a means by which speech and actions produce reality by co-creating meanings, doing things, and making changes in the world, rather than merely representing pre-existing states of affairs. As Ashcraft et al. (2009) write: "Communication acts on the world; it is a social practice alive with potential. Not 'mere' talk or transmission, it (re)produces and alters current realities" (5). From a constitutive perspective,

the way in which 'things' are talked about fundamentally influences how those 'things' are understood in society at large. Consequently, a constitutive perspective does not assume the existence of communication on the one hand and 'things' on the other, as two separate entities; instead, it sees them as intrinsically related. In particular, it does not see 'things' as existing outside the realm of signification, that is, outside the communicative practices of making and negotiating meaning that are necessary for people to understand what those 'things' are and how they work (Searle 1995). Certainly, 'things' exist independently of communication, in that a flower exists independently of how people refer to it. But it does not exist *as a flower* outside the realm of language and meaning.

The same can be said of climate change: while it certainly exists as an agglomerate of ecological and environmental facts, it does not exist *as climate change* outside the realm of signification. A constitutive view of communication is therefore primarily important, for the purposes of this thesis, in that it allows for an exploration of the constitution of climate change in and through communicative practices. While a linear understanding of communication makes a clear distinction between what counts as communication and what counts as practice (i.e. communication is about the verbal instances that represent practical doings), a constitutive view of communication sees communication and practices in a kind of "temporal simultaneity" (Schoeneborn et al. 2020: 18). In this way, communication and practices are caught up in a continuous flow in which it becomes impossible, even pointless, to try to recognise when practices stop, and communication begins.

Strategising communication

The constitutive view of communication used in this thesis rejects the assumption that strategic communication simply aims to talk about pre-existing phenomena like climate change, and instead asserts that climate change is constituted in and through the performance of collective ways of talking about and moving around floods in the city of Venice. From a constitutive perspective, the strategic

communication of climate change is not only about how climate change is communicated by powerful organisational actors, but about the ways in which strategic communicative practices contribute to the creation of cultural meanings of climate change. In this regard, the concept of strateg*ising* communication (Gulbrandsen & Just 2016; 2022) is useful. This concept draws our attention both to the fact that strategy is a communicative process that is always in the moment of being done, as well as to the fact that this doing does not belong to any actor in particular but is shared among a vast array of more-than-human actors. These actors include documents, banners, and posters, for example, which "communicate the strategy and participate in the process of strategy-making in and through communication" (Gulbrandsen & Just 2022: 103). Accordingly, strategising communication is always undertaken in relation to the material world; if strategising happens in and through communication, then the investigation of these communication processes needs to include not only the communication of human actors, but of the materialities and practices that contribute to the emergence of strategy (see also Vásquez et al. 2018). In this sense, strategic communicative practices are perceived as "flows of shared decision-making by both humans and nonhumans" (Gulbrandsen & Just 2016: 225).

According to Winkler and Schoeneborn (2022), an understanding of strategic communication as strategi*sing* "presents the greatest challenge to an established understanding of strategic communication as purposeful goal attainment of an organization as given entity" (124). Indeed, an understanding of strategic communication as a process of strategi*sing* troubles the normative understanding of it as a purposeful communicative act of an organisation, implying seeing it as "an ongoing process that develops as it occurs and cannot be predicted" as part of "a continuous, reflective learning loop" (van Ruler 2018: 371) of constitution. This process of constructing and negotiating meaning is not necessarily a two-way process, but "omnidirectional diachronic, with an emphasis on the external and internal arenas of continuous meaning presentations, negotiations, and constructions" (Ibid.: 367). Understood in this way, strategic communication is

a communicative practice that does not necessarily require only a specific initial intention, as it can be assumed to have neither a clear beginning nor a clear end.

Consequently, the communicative constitution of climate change is conceptualised as a broader cultural process that transcends the pre-defined realms of organisational strategies and their publics. Strategic communication itself is seen as a mere participant in this collective process of constitution, which involves multiple heterogeneous actors, both humans and non-humans, inside and outside the realm of the organisation. This means that strategic communication cannot be understood in isolation from its entanglement with non-strategic forms of communication (Christensen & Christensen 2022; Winkler & Schoeneborn 2022). In the words of Winkler and Schoeneborn (2022), the constitutive understanding of strategic communication

> requires broadening the analytic perspective on mundane, mostly ambiguous, everyday communicative practices, various internal and external actors, and tools-in-use in order to understand the complex logics that ultimately define what counts as strategic communication in an organizational setting. (124)

What is considered to be strategic communication is therefore a situated process that includes both planned communication events and a wider range of other communicative practices, both strategic and non-strategic. Winkler and Schoeneborn (2022) refer to these as "emergent instances" of strategic communication, which are "unintended, hence non-purposive communication" (124). Thus, for communication to be considered strategic, there does not always need to be a planned and measured intention behind it. Of course, this does not mean that strategic communication cannot be intentional, planned, and measured. What it does mean is that strategic communication can be understood in relation to broader communicative processes in which a wide range of intended but also unintended, informal, and everyday communicative practices participate in the creation of our social collectives. Thus, a constitutive understanding of strategic communication sees it not only as a singular act of communication by powerful actors, but as a communicative practice that never really succeeds nor

fails, but that influences the creation of meaning at a broader socio-cultural level. It sees it, one might say, as a cultural practice.

A constitutive view of the strategic communication of climate change considers the meaning of climate change to emerge from the interplay of purposeful communication and the habitual, un-reflective, non-contemplative, situated, collective, and unpurposive communicative practices on autopilot. A constitutive view of strategic communication makes it possible to show how the meaning of climate change is always in the process of being constructed in and through communicative practices, some of which are intentional, others less so. Consequently, the communicative constitution of climate change is a collective process, in that climate change is constituted by a set of practices that may be strategic in their intentions but not in their consequences. As such, analyses of strategic communication can see communicative practices as both intentionally designed and inevitably more complex in their effects. Indeed, as Christensen and Christensen (2022) argue, "there is, of course, more to strategic communication than what the sender intends. One thing is the overall purpose of such communication; another is what the communication actually achieves" (33). A constitutive approach bypasses any search for traceability, and is more concerned with what strategic communication does independently of any given actor. This does not mean that climate change cannot be intentionally communicated by a particular actor or group of actors. What it does mean is that, while there may be a strategic intention to communicate about climate change, what it becomes is never a direct result of such an intention, but a processual accomplishment, the result of a processual concatenation of multiple communicative practices over time that aim to achieve this, between practices that came before and will come after (Lê 2013; Sison 2013; Porter et al. 2018). For example, in her analysis of the 'Earth Hour' campaign, Sison (2013) shows that this strategic communication was simultaneously planned and evaded a strong degree of control by the organisers, as the meaning of such an event was actually created by the participants themselves. As Sison writes:

> From a strategic public relations planning perspective, Earth Hour is a classic global event with a clear brand, a symbolic visual, excellent applications of new and traditional media, and a global celebrity. The question is whether the use of these tried and tested public relations techniques enhances or hinders the true cause underlying Earth Hour and climate change. (2013: 236)

Although Earth Hour may have been designed to deliver a clear story about climate change, what that story ultimately became was the result of a constant process of co-creation between the event organisers, social-media technologies, and the wider global community. All the strategic communication professionals could do was "enhance or hinder" (236) the strategic significance of such an event. The strategic communication of climate change can also be explored beyond planned communication and in the realm of the non-strategic, in terms of how it can be used to influence the public regarding and constitute climate change among multiple heterogeneous actors.

Expanding the constitutive view with materiality

The constitutive view of communication presented above allows me to understand that the role of strategic communication in the constitution of climate change is inevitably linked to the role of non-strategic communication. The strategic communication of floods in Venice is therefore, in this thesis, seen as intertwined with non-strategic communication practices. Hence, 'climate change' is what these strategic and non-strategic practices create. On a theoretical level, however, this constitutive assumption of communication implies that strategic and non-strategic communicative practices, even though they relate to objects and technologies, primarily involve rational forms of communication. The constitution of climate change is therefore seen here as the result of people's communicative practices relating to climate change, and the meanings that are created and propagated through these practices. Accordingly, communicative practices exist on a different ontological level from the actual, material effects of climate change to which these practices refer. As such, a constitutive theory of communication is not fully able to account for the ways in which the strategic

communication of climate change is intimately connected to the material effects of climate change in an urban place. In other words, to say that climate change is produced in and through communicative practices does not account for the ways in which these practices are themselves influenced by material, concrete, sensory encounters with floods in urban environments. To address this theoretical nuance, I introduce below the second view of communication that informs my affective approach: a material view.

A material view of communication

The second view of communication that underpins my affective approach to the strategic communication of climate change is that of communication as a material practice (Cooren 2000; Taylor & Van Every, 2000; Ashcraft et al. 2009; Cooren 2010; 2015; 2018; 2020; Cooren et al. 2011; 2012). This second view of communication can be read as a way of conceptually complexifying my understanding of the strategic communication of climate change, taking its conceptualisation a step further from its rational and intentional human use. A material view of communication embraces the constitutive potential of communication, but shares it, so to speak, with material elements that are thought to participate in this constitutive work. As such, a material view of communication moves away from the idea that communication is exclusively a humanistic practice that involves only the sayings and doings of human beings, in order to develop a sensitivity to the presence of other elements involved in communicative practices.

This sensitivity can take different forms, however, depending on one's view of what communication is. The simplest understanding of a material view involves paying attention to how human communication creates realities due to the presence of material elements. Similarly to Gulbrandsen and Just (2016; 2022), Bencherki et al. (2019), in exploring the communicative constitution of organisational authority, show how an office counter contributes to the allocation and distribution of authority during a dispute in a public office. In a reception

room, a counter can both prevent movement from one side of the room to the other and provide a surface between two parties that facilitates expression and coordination. The authors note that organisational authority is not a property of certain individuals over others, and is instead created in conversation, through the interplay of human communication and the presence of more-than-human actors, such as the counter, in the interaction. Similarly, the human body, with its gestures and emotional expressions, has been theorised as another type of materiality that is involved in processes of communicative constitution. Interactionist studies have long examined how processes of meaning negotiation involve the use of the body and the valorisation of spatial surroundings (Heath et al. 2010), with more recent contributions investigating, for example, how touch functions in social interaction (Cekaite & Mondada 2020). Rather than seeing communicative constitution as merely linguistic, then, studies such as these show that communication is more than just words spoken by humans or the enactment of human practices, as it also involves multiple heterogeneous spatial and bodily elements that co-participate in this process of constitution.

Applied to the communicative constitution of climate change, this material view of communication allows me to understand that the ways in which floods are communicated are always influenced by the specific material setting in which such communication takes place (i.e. Venice), and the materiality of floods themselves. However, such a 'simple' material view does not account for the fact that there is an influence that is material, even if it is not always immanent (Bencherki 2016). In other words, this perspective does not account for the fact that the influence of materiality exists even when materialities are not being physically encountered. This influence is actually repeated through communication, at the level of meaning.

The materiality of meaning

Normative phenomenological theories view the human body as a pre-existing semiotic realm, and bodily experience as meaningful only in retrospect. However, this binary understanding has been challenged by the concept of embodiment

(Merleau-Ponty 1962; Shilling 1997), which sees the body as the source of not only an experience that is then rationalised by the mind, but of knowledge and agency. The body feels, not simply because the mind recognises and rationalises a raw, brute experience, but because in that experience there is already the entanglement of body and mind, because the experience is already culturally embedded. The experience of sensory perception (e.g. feeling cold) is both individually felt and collectively shared, in the sense that there has to be an already semiotised material encounter for the meaning of cold to occur in the first place. Thus, there must be a collective idea of what coldness means in order for those who are to feel it to express it. Similarly, Paolucci (2010) argues that when you taste a wine and describe it as 'full-bodied', what you are actually understanding is not a fixed, pre-existing property of such a wine, understood in a raw bodily encounter with it, but an already-semiotised materiality of the wine as 'full-bodied' that is given by the social collective. In other words, there is no wine that tastes 'full-bodied', and there is no possibility of a pre-semiotic bodily contact with it, insofar as it is the encounter between the materiality of your tongue and the materiality of the wine that constitutes the taste that you recognise as 'full-bodied'. As a result, sensory experiences and meanings cannot be seen as de facto belonging to human subjects, since subjects never really 'own' their bodily experiences and the meanings that they create to describe these experiences. Instead, both sensory experience and meaning are the repetition of what has already been felt and said by our social collective. This does not mean, of course, that you do not really taste the wine, or that you do not consciously understand what the wine tastes like. What it does mean is that every subject "does not speak and is not spoken but is always constitutively held in an enunciative conjunction from which its own possibility of speaking depends" (Paolucci 2010: 483). A sensation and a proposition are 'borrowed', they are experienced and said because they were felt and said before the act of experiencing and enunciating them. In other words, because an encounter between matter has already been semiotised, it has already been given a meaning. As a result, meaning does not belong to human communication alone, nor to materiality per se, but is materialised in the relationship between two materialities (in this case, the human tongue and wine)

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and the broader interpretive context. As Kuhn et al. (2017) argue: "Instead of treating meaning as a purely social construction or possession of encultured human actors, relational ontologies treat meaning as a particular kind of matter located within practice" (37). Communication becomes the mechanism by which meanings are constituted through material-semiotic practices.

In the context of this thesis, a material view of communication allows me to consider the communicative constitution of climate change as the result of the relationship between human bodies and the materiality of floods in the urban setting of Venice, in terms of the particular ways in which the two encounter each other. This encounter is both physical (i.e. when people physically encounter a flooded Venice) and on the level of meaning, in terms of how a flooded Venice always implies a preferred way of encountering it nested in the broader socio-cultural realm. A material understanding of communication therefore grounds the exploration of the cultural role of strategic communication in the setting of Venice, by paying attention to how climate change is produced through both language and shared cultural ways of encountering floods. In other words, a material view on the strategic communication of climate change makes it possible to highlight how strategic communication in Venice works primarily because it reiterates common ways of encountering and addressing floods. These ways of encountering floods in turn support common ways of understanding them. The influence of strategic communication, then, is both in reproducing the cultural meanings of floods and the culturally inflected ways of encountering these natural phenomena. As such, the strategic communication of climate change can also be examined in terms of how it prevents, hinders, or facilitates a particular way of materially dealing with floods.

Expanding the material view with affect

Although a material view of communication helps to see communicative practices reproducing not only cultural meanings but cultural modes of encountering floods, it overlooks how the materiality of meaning implies not only sensory experiences (such as touch, smell, taste, and sight) but emotional experiences such

as feelings of happiness, sadness, excitement, or danger. As Beyes and Holt (2020) note, by considering constitutive processes only in relation to perceived sensory experiences, material views of communication "tend to suppress the influence of emotions and affects, as well as risking indifference to imaginative power, to gaps and pauses, and to the ghostly presences of absent but felt forces" (14). In other words, a material view of communication tends not to fully account for the affective capacities that escape the realm of signification, but which can nonetheless be experienced and are thus central to processes of communicative constitution. For this reason, the next section complements the material view of communication with an affective one. An affective view of communication helps to focus our attention on how communication is sometimes even "too quick for the actual perceiving" (Manning 2013: 167), insofar as it paradoxically operates "non-representationally, even when working through language" (Ashcraft 2021: 575). I will elaborate on this below.

An affective view of communication

In order to introduce an affective view of communication, I start by presenting how affect theory conceptualises meaning.

The affectivity of meaning

According to Ahmed (2004a), emotions and language are generally considered to be separate entities, with emotions thought to be intrinsic to the body and triggered by language, the effect of rhetorical and semiotic manoeuvres. However, "[s]uch a view," she argues, "constructs emotion as a possession, at the same time that it presumes that emotions are a lower form of speech" (194). To deal with this, Ahmed proposes thinking of emotions not as separate from linguistic signs, but as existing in the way signs become signified – or, as she puts it, "in the determination of the relation between signs" (194). For Ahmed (2004a; 2004b) semiotic signs are 'sticky', they already carry an affective charge that is then re-proposed through signification. Meaning is thus saturated with affect, and the negotiation of meaning involves the iteration of the sedimented ways in which

signs make us feel. In a beautiful passage, Riley (2005) reflects on the pain that certain words can inflict:

> Verbal attacks, in the moment they happen, resemble stoning. Then isn't it too labored to ask how they do damage: isn't the answer plain, that they hurt just as stones hurt? At the instant of their impact, so they do. Yet the peculiarity of violent words, as distinct from lumps of rock, is their power to resonate within their target for decades after the occasion on which they were weapons. (10)

In discussing the enduring and persistence of pain in relation to verbal attacks, Riley notes that not only do emotions come as the *effects* of words, but that the two often coexist for some time after their verbal expression – that the meaning of words can remain painful "for decades". This passage suggests that emotions belong neither to particular bodies nor to particular signs, but to what Ahmed (2004a: 45; 2004b) calls "the historicity of signification" – the repetition of an attachment, an adherence of affect to meaning, a stickiness that occurs between bodies and signs. "[I]t is the failure of emotions to be located in a body, object, or figures that allows emotions to (re)produce or generate the effects that they do" (Ahmed 2004b: 124). In this way, emotions such as disgust, love, hate, or happiness do not belong only to human subjects, but to the ways they circulate in and through meanings. Accordingly, to call something disgusting is not to make that something disgusting out of nothing, but to transfer a pre-existing feeling of disgust to that sign, which then 'sticks' as a disgusting sign. Similarly, to feel happy about something does not necessarily mean that one's happiness is merely a personal expression, nor that certain signs are intrinsically sources of happiness. It means, for Ahmed (2010), that happiness is more of "a happening […] a promise that directs us toward certain objects, which then […] accumulate positive affective value as they are passed around" (29; see also Ahmed 2004c). Happiness thus results from the investment of such an affect in another sign, which can then potentially be redirected elsewhere – "to what is close by, smiling for instance, at a person who passes you by" (Ahmed 2010: 33). Emotions, then, are not just about bodily responses, are not just expressions of emotional states;

they are habitual and less conscious orientations, "an effect of the repetition of some actions rather than others" (Ahmed 2004a: 196). If a sign is the attribution of a meaning to an object, and if that sign is then used in a certain way, over and over again, then that use *becomes* its intrinsic use. "Felt associations come to stick as they are passed around, accruing resonance, force, and new associates" writes Ashcraft (2021: 587). In this sense, then, stickiness is "as an effect of the histories of contact between bodies, objects and signs […] [that depend] on histories of contact that have already impressed upon the surface of the object" (Ahmed 2004a: 90).

Paying attention to affective meanings, or the affectivity of signs, helps to account for the ways in which power operates outside the institutionalised contexts usually associated with politics, and within the more mundane, but no less important, levels of everyday practice. "Injustice", Ahmed (2004a) argues, "may work precisely through sustaining particular kinds of affective relations to social norms through what we do with our bodies" (196). In affect theory, presumed social issues such as gender, patriarchy, racism, and capitalism are seen not only as pre-existing the social constructions of subjects, but as continuously arising out of the material encounters between bodies in space (Stewart 2007; 2011). These "micro-moments" of affective contact between bodies "may only last a few seconds, yet they make a key difference in the constitution of the events that bring forth social collectives" (Brummans & Vézy 2022: 265). Gender in affect thinking, for example, is not a property of individuals who express it through behaviours and preferences; instead, it occurs when bodies meet: "'Woman' then becomes a 'compulsive smile' that appears on someone's face to minimise a sexist comment they have just received" (Ashcraft 2021: 574). Similarly, capitalism becomes "a compulsive glance at the smartphone" (578), and racism "the chronic sweat that besets him at a police car's siren" (578). Rather than describing gender, capitalism, and racism as merely the results of social constructions, affect thinking points to the irrational, material, and sensory aspects that construct individuals and social structures as such.

Communication as constitutive affective transmission

By placing feelings outside the sphere of the exclusively personal and at the centre of cultural and power processes relating to the constitution of meaning, affect theory calls communication theory to greater modesty in the constitution of reality (Ashcraft 2021). Indeed, affect is both embraced by communication and constantly escaping its grip:

> It is the force of moving and being moved, as when we recognize feeling touched, shaken, or otherwise altered by something that happens. Yet we cannot quite explain, and the intensity slips away as we try. In such moments, feeling is more powerful than saying, and attempts at representation can dull it (Ibid.: 573).

Affect flows through bodies and objects, while language is used to translate affective encounters, even though they cannot be explained wholly rationally. Because "[a]ffect resists symbolic capture yet is profoundly communicable" (Ibid.: 575), an affective reading of communication is less concerned with how meaning is created on the level of cultural practices and more with what makes these practices work in the ways that they do. According to Ashcraft and Kuhn (2017), an affective analysis of communication "becomes less about tracing back meaning construction and more about following what meanings do, where they go, and which differences they produce" (182). In other words, the attention of communication analyses inspired by the encounter with affect theory is redirected "from the construction of meaning to its movement or circulation – how signification travels like other matter and become felt, inhabited, and impactful in the lived world" (Ibid.). Consider, for example, an airline pilot. What we mean by 'a pilot' is inextricably bound up with particular bodies (mainly male bodies) and objects (e.g. a uniform), and with culturally shared feelings of safety invested in those bodies and objects, making the male body in uniform a source of security, responsibility, success, and power (cf. Ashcraft 2020). Thus, when analysing the communicative constitution of 'a pilot', one must not only consider how communication supports specific meanings of such a word, but how these meanings allow for the reiteration of shared feelings.

In the context of this thesis, an affective view of communication helps to complexify my understanding of the cultural role of the strategic communication of climate change in the tourist setting of Venice. Whereas a materialist view helps me to look at how the strategic communication of floods promotes cultural meanings and ways of encountering floods (i.e. cultural practices around floods), an affective reading considers that what strategic communication also promotes is a cultural way of emotionally feeling floods. Thus, the cultural role of strategic communication is seen here as making floods feel in accordance with cultural ways of feeling the urban place itself. In other words, an affective approach to the strategic communication of climate change makes it possible to highlight how strategic communication works, primarily because it mobilises preferred ways of feeling floods that already exist in the socio-cultural realm of the city. By 'mobilising', I mean that strategic communication influences how affect gets 'stuck' (Ahmed 2004a; 2004b) on floods – how it adheres to material objects through the ways in which it makes them signify. Consequently, the strategic communication of floods is here analysed in order to understand how it influences collective feelings of floods, the affectivity of floods. As Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos (2016) argues: "although an affect is excessive, acentral and posthuman, it is regularly manipulated or at least smoothed in an institutionalised direction" (158). Therefore, understanding strategic communication, as the constitutive transmission of affect helps when examining how such practices mobilise culturally shared ways of feeling floods according to strategic interests and agendas, and how all of this participates in the affective constitution of climate change. Table 3.1 summarises these three views of communication that inform the affective approach to the strategic communication of climate change.

Table 3.1. The three views of communication that are part of the affective approach, where in the strategic communication of climate change is simultaneously constitutive, material, and affective.

	Constitutive	Material	Affective
View of communication	A practice of creating and negotiating meaning between people.	A practice of creating and negotiating meaning between people and other materialities.	A practice of creating and negotiating meaning between people, other materialities, and affective forces.
Relation between communication and human experience	Communicative practices express stable and pre-existing sensory and emotional experiences.	Communicative practices (re)create sensory and emotional experiences.	Communicative practices (re)create sensory, emotional, and affective experiences.
Strategic communication of climate change	The interplay between strategic and non-strategic communicative practices of meaning negotiation. Climate change depends on how people share meanings of floods.	The interplay between strategic and non-strategic communicative practices of negotiating both meanings and sensory modes of experiencing. Climate change depends on shared modes of encountering floods.	The interplay between strategic and non-strategic communicative practices of negotiating meanings and sensory and affective modes of experiencing. Climate change depends on shared modes of feeling floods.

As Table 3.1 shows, considering the strategic communication of climate change to be constitutive affective transmission means, first and foremost, considering it to be a communicative practice that is always undertaken in relation to non-strategic instances of communication in the process of constituting climate change. This constitutive process is communicative in that it involves the creation and negotiation of shared cultural meanings. It is material in that it involves the creation and negotiation of both cultural meanings and shared sensory experiences. It is affective in that it involves the simultaneous negotiation of cultural meanings, shared sensory experiences, and shared affective sensations. Seen from an affective approach, strategic communication influences the process of constituting climate change by mobilising both sensory and affective experiences of floods in the urban setting of Venice. I use 'influences' rather than 'creates' because the communicative constitution of climate change does not depend upon strategic communication alone, insofar as it is an affective, collective, and thus non-strategic process. In order to account for the non-strategic side of the process of constituting climate change, the next section

introduces the final theoretical concept of my affective approach: cities as affective atmospheres. Figure 3.2 presents this addition to the theoretical framework.
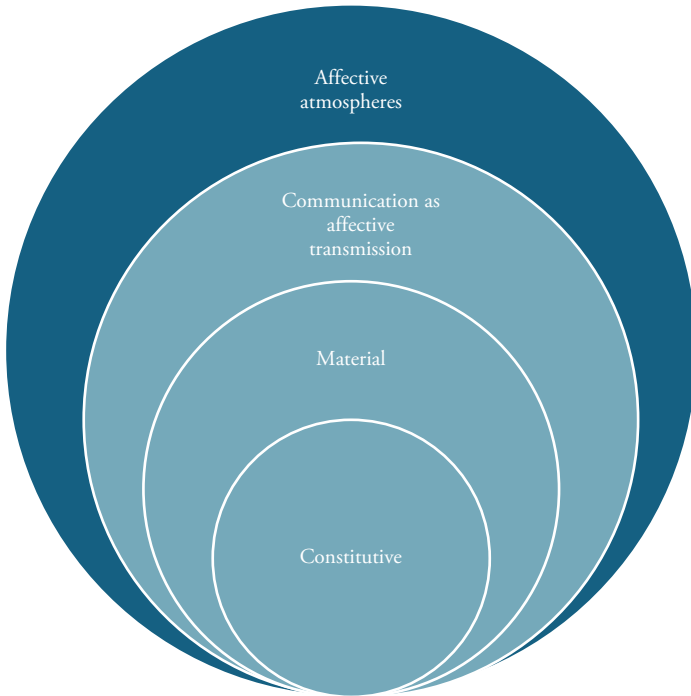
Figure 3.2. My affective approach to the strategic communication of climate change, with three interrelated views of communication (light blue) and cities (dark blue).

Cities as affective atmospheres

An affective approach to the strategic communication of climate change in the tourist setting of Venice would be incomplete without consideration of cities as affective atmospheres. Indeed, as operationalised so far in this thesis, the theoretical approach allows me to examine how strategic communication influences public understanding of floods by mobilising collective ways of feeling and encountering them. However, it is not able to account for how such affective

mobilisation relates to the collectively shared feelings that already exist about a flooded Venice. In other words, it is not able to account for the fact that strategic influence always relates to the influence of the broader-socio cultural realm of the city in question. Therefore, a view of cities as affective atmospheres considers strategic communication to exists always within affective atmospheres.

Affective atmospheres

Böhme (1993; 2013) is often credited with being the first theorist to conceptualise atmospheres outside of the physical and meteorological realm, and to promote a spatial and aesthetic interpretation of these phenomena. Inspired by aesthetic arts such as music, theatre, and other artistic performances, the German phenomenologist noted that it is common to speak of an atmosphere as something that is both consciously produced on stage through the arrangement of elements such as lights and sounds, and felt in a largely unconscious manner by the audience. The creation of the right atmosphere is fundamental to the correct delivery of a performance on stage, and must be camouflaged from the audience. However, in his research on urban atmospheres – that is, atmospheres in the urban environment – Böhme (2014) found that people not only experienced and reiterated planned atmospheres, but co-produced them in novel and arbitrary ways. "The atmosphere of a city is precisely the way life goes on within it" (Ibid.: 48), he argues. Accordingly, for Böhme, the concept of atmosphere encompasses the intertwinement of both subjective and objective aspects of affective transmission: "we experience [atmospheres] [...] as something quasi-objective, the existence of which we can also communicate with others. Yet they cannot be defined independently from the persons emotionally affected by them" (43). In other words, affective atmospheres are felt both personally and collectively; they are out there, but they are nothing without a subject to feel them. Think of the ephemeral yet tangible feeling of being in an oppressive, boring, or cheerful environment, without being able to pinpoint exactly what or who triggered such a feeling, nor when. It is precisely this somewhat fuzzy sense of how a spatial situation feels that I term here an atmosphere. McCormack

(2018) calls it "a condition in which bodies are enveloped" (21), while Jørgensen and Beyes (2023) refer to atmospheres as "spatialized forms of collective affectivity" (4). Affective atmospheres are never exclusively personal experiences, nor objective things that are 'out there', planned so as to be felt by a particular audience; rather, they are always located between personal experiences and the places where they emerge. The existence of affective atmospheres depends on the ways in which practices support the transmission of shared feelings (Anderson 2009). Affective atmospheres thus simultaneously determine how people feel, and exist only because of the ways in which those feelings are sustained in and through affective practices (Bille & Simonsen 2021).

In their analysis of the convivial atmosphere of a tourist resort, Rokka et al. (2023) examine how an atmosphere is dynamically created through the bodily encounters of visitors and service workers with the materiality of the resort – encounters that sometimes diverge from how management attempt to stage them. Tourist destinations such as Venice, then, can be understood to be affective atmospheres that emerge from both the strategic interests of the tourism industry, and the practices and experiences of those wandering through them. As Stewart (2011) writes, an atmosphere "is not an effect of other forces but a lived affect […] It is being in tune without getting involved. A light contact zone that rests on a thin layer of shared public experience" (52). Consequently, to understand urban places as affective atmospheres is to understand them not as having an *a-priori* affective predisposition, nor as being imbued with such an affective character *a posteriori*, but as continually achieving such a character through the interplay of strategic and non-strategic practices, and the specific spatial arrangements that constrain or enable them.

The historical, cultural, and political aspects of affective atmospheres

Atmospheres do not emerge only at the intersection between strategic intentions and non-strategic practices and experiences, as they are always historically and culturally bounded. As Bille et al. (2015) write:

> Atmospheres do not merely exist as simultaneity of human beings and material culture, but also as a temporal dimension: atmospheres change. Atmospheres are susceptible to how the material environment changes, to changing human values and cultural premises (34).

Atmospheres emerge out of a certain cultural historicity. In other words, atmospheres are not only staged and experienced; they determine the repetition of their own staging and experience. They depend on the repetitiveness and habituality that make people perform them during everyday practices. Atmospheres potentially reflect both strategic intentions and non-strategic socio-cultural collective ideas of what they ought to feel like.

Pink et al. (2015) set out to understand what constitutes the atmosphere of a home. They found that the habitual morning practices of getting up, brushing one's teeth, getting dressed, leaving the room to make coffee for someone, turning on the radio, and waking up children in the next room constitute the atmosphere of 'home' through the multisensory experiences felt during the performance of these practices. This atmosphere is not something that can be seen as pre-existing the practices that actually generate it, as belonging to the specific configuration of elements in people's houses or to the intentions of those who live in it. Rather, as Pink et al. (2015) write, "the atmosphere of home [...] is rather re-made each day as part of the ongoing shifting environment of home, in ways that usually sufficiently resemble how it has 'felt' on other mornings for it to be recognizable" (356). In other words, a house becomes a home through the enactment of specific practices in accordance with how the atmosphere of the home was perceived in the past. Similarly, in his analyses of the atmospheres of an event (2012) and a football stadium (2015), Edensor shows how such atmospheres are not necessarily strategically orchestrated by architects or event organisers, but co-produced by visitors through "the mingling of affect, emotion, sensation, and social interaction" (2012: 1111). Thus, atmospheres emerge from the situated configurations of bodies and things that occur during people's sensory and affective experiences of places, and themselves in accordance with pre-existing notions regarding how those places are supposed to feel. In this regard, the

emergence of an atmosphere of a house, an event, a football stadium, or a tourist resort does not depend entirely on the strategic intentions of its organisers, nor entirely on the practices of its users, but on the ways in which both conform to historical and culturally sedimented ideas of what houses, events, football stadiums, and tourist resorts feel like according to shared socio-cultural understandings.

The emergence of an atmosphere therefore depends on the arrangement and the staging of the various elements (i.e. discursive, sensory, material, affective) that make bodies attune to the pre-existing cultural and institutionalised ways in which the elements have previously been staged and arranged. In this respect, the concept of affective atmospheres is in this thesis intrinsically linked to that of cultural narratives. These can be conceptualised as both shared stories or sets of beliefs that reflect the values, history, and identity of a particular group or society, and as the ongoing collective creation of these ever-evolving values, histories, and identities. In the first sense, cultural narratives shape how people understand themselves, their place in the world, and their relationships with others. In the second sense, cultural narratives are created by the ways in which people understand themselves, their place in the world, and their relationships with others. Like affective atmospheres, then, shared cultural narratives are both the drivers of practices, and the effects of those practices. However, affective atmospheres can be thought of as the situated and emergent expressions of cultural narratives. In other words, cultural narratives influence how affective atmospheres feel, but cannot be conflated with affective atmospheres themselves.

Atmospheres can take on lives of their own, and foster the affective practices and encounters necessary for their continuation while simultaneously resisting others (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2016). An important feature of atmospheres is that they simultaneously constrain and regulate the practices that take place within them, in an attempt to stay put. As Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos (2016) argues: "the greatest coup of an atmosphere is that it generates the very affects that desire its continuation" (151). In this sense, then, atmospheres can be influenced by strategic intents insofar as such influence can be shown to entail

the mobilisation of affective transmission between bodies and places. In this way, Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos (2016) continues, "an atmosphere is successfully engineered when it manages to rupture the affective continuum with the outside, while at the same time reproducing it inside and presenting it as the only atmosphere possible" (158). In other words, an atmosphere perpetuates once it manages to reproduce the normalised way in which affect flows in and through bodies, without bodies being aware of this affective flow.

In contrast to the descriptive focus of phenomenological accounts of atmospheres, critical analyses of atmospheres focus on their production, repetition, and contestation (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2016; Sumartojo & Pink 2019; Marsh & Śliwa 2021). In other words, the study of atmospheres is not only about describing the material configurations, practices, and experiences that produce them, but – more importantly – about what they make possible. Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos (2016) suggests focusing one's critical attention on the moments when atmospheres can be shown to break or rupture, to become other: "people get bored, things break, the weather changes, technology lets us down, governments fall, accidents happen, and disasters hit" (162). In these moments when atmospheres change and are disturbed, it is possible to highlight how power operates atmospherically. The next chapter will show how I operationalise the affective approach in the context of Venice.

Chapter 4.
Methodology

This chapter presents the methodological implications of the affective approach outlined in the previous chapter. Using this approach, the constitution of climate change can be studied at the intersection of the affective atmospheres and strategic ways of influencing such atmospheres through the mobilisation of affect. This chapter presents a methodology that can be used to investigate what such mobilisation might actually entail. It does so in five sections: the first section presents the research strategy underlying the methodology, namely a qualitative methodological strategy based on a relational ontology. The second section presents the research context, while the third section presents atmospheric ethnography as the research design chosen for capturing communicative practices relating to floods in Venice. By 'communicative practices', I mean the seemingly coherent sets of sayings and doings that relate to floods in the city of Venice, the habitual ways of talking about floods and the ordinary ways of acting around them. By exploring these communicative practices, I am interested in understanding how strategic communication influences the existence of collective modes of feeling in a flooded Venice, through which climate change is affectively constituted in this particular urban setting. The third section also presents the selection of research sites, and the techniques used to collect the empirical material. The fourth section explains the analytical method used to analyse such material, namely narrative analysis. The fifth and final section concludes the chapter by discussing the ethical considerations of this methodology.

A relational ontological perspective

In this thesis I adopt a relational ontology (Barad 2007). According to a relational ontological positioning, the methodological focus is not only on producing a representation of an object of study, but on participating in the creation of this object. A relational ontology therefore emphasises the impossibility of separating epistemological practice from the ontology of the object of inquiry (i.e. they are onto-epistemological endeavours; Barad 2007). These kinds of investigation can be said to be ontologically generative: they are seen as creating reality rather than merely representing it, and require the researcher to be accountable for these creations (Haraway 1991; 1997; 2016; Mol 2002; Schneider 2002). In this thesis I am interested in capturing how strategic communication influences collective ways of feeling, and this has meant that I have to understand feelings not as belonging to individual people, but as being actually shared and collectively felt. They are shared and collective in the sense that they are themselves driven by the coexisting affective atmospheres of the place. This is to say that when I was in Venice I was not just researching people's emotions towards floods there, as if these emotions existed before I looked for them, but co-creating and sharing these feelings through my methodological efforts, with my own body among the bodies of others, in the specificity of the places I was in. This meant that in my research I had to be able to study feelings not as things that could be grasped from singular individual expressions of emotions, but in their collective, embodied, and situated production – a production that I helped to create as it unfolded. For this reason, the chosen method of data collection was atmospheric ethnography (Sumartojo & Pink 2019), while the chosen method of analysis is a narrative approach (Czarniawska 2004; Boje et al. 2015; Breger 2017). In the following section, I present the research context chosen for my methodological investigation.

Research context: Venice as a climate-vulnerable tourist city

The research site chosen for this thesis was the Italian city of Venice. Although it can certainly be considered to be a city, Venice is more accurately an agglomeration of residential areas scattered across islands and the mainland located on the north-eastern part of the Italian coast. Venice was chosen as the research site for this thesis for two main reasons. The first reason, perhaps unsurprisingly, is that Venice is one of the world's most famous tourist destinations, an icon of popular culture, and a place of strong economic and political interest (Van der Borg 2017; Bertocchi & Visentin 2019; Amore et al. 2020). The choice of such a famous urban area was motivated by the assumption that tourism interests and Venice's cultural relevance strongly influence how floods are communicated and felt in the city. The second reason is that Venice is a climate-vulnerable tourist destination, as the periodic flooding of Venice, usually referred to as *acqua alta* and considered to be an inescapable part of urban life, has significantly increased in the second half of the twentieth century due to climate change (Cavaleri et al. 2020; Umgiesser 2020; Lionello et al. 2021; Faranda et al. 2023). In recent years, the fate of Venice has come under intense global scrutiny, with widespread interest in the city's future fuelling public discourse, and the national and international media speculating regarding its ability to stay afloat and habitable in the crucial years ahead (*The Guardian*, 10 Dec. 2019).

The city's problems with overtourism and its vulnerability to exponential sea-level rise cannot be separated as phenomena (Baldacci et al. 2022); one problem feeds the other in intricate and complex ways. This is evident in the existence of the *acqua alta* phenomenon, which began to recur due to the relentless pumping of groundwater to both cool industrial plants in Marghera in the 1940s, and to allow for the expansion of the tourism industry in the 1960s (Gambolati & Teatini, 2014; Zonta et al. 2018). A succession of local administrations, determined to maintain Venice as a modern tourist destination, has in recent

years slowly but inexorably eroded the social fabric of the city, where overcrowding, high housing costs, and loss of quality of life and cultural heritage are driving residents away, to the extent that the population today is a third of what it was in the early 1960s (Bertocchi & Visentin 2019). Similarly, over the past eight years local authorities have significantly reduced funding for climate-awareness initiatives, environmental education, and climate change research. In 2015, the Lagoon and Territory Observatory, an important municipal service that had been collecting scientific and environmental data on the Venice Lagoon for ten years, was closed, and a series of seminars and educational activities that were intended to inform the public about the lagoon environment and climate change in Venice were discontinued. Within the Venetian administration, the office in charge of climate and air quality was abolished in August 2022, and a new one was created only in February of the following year. This new office currently only has one employee, who is responsible for assessing the environmental and climate risks that Venetians will face in the future and developing recommendations based on this (Santana 2023).

The global cultural and emotional appeal of the city, on the one hand, and the tangible risk posed by climate change, on the other, make Venice an appropriate research site for this study, as it is a place where the constitution of climate change inevitably depends on how floods are felt and made to feel. Because of the paradoxes inherent in the way Venice's morphological and socio-economic natures coexist, Venice can be seen as a privileged observatory for how climate change affects coastal cities worldwide, and ones with high cultural and economic capital in particular. As Baldacci et al. (2022) write, "Venice and the Anthropocene are not an unlikely pairing, but a useful and (painfully) necessary one" (9).

As I will explain in more detail in the following pages, in this research setting I paid particular attention to how strategic and non-strategic communicative practices around floods give rise to different coexisting affective atmospheres of the city.

Atmospheric ethnography

In this thesis, I investigate the role of affect in the communication of climate change in the context of Venice. Specifically, I examine how strategic communication influences the existence of affective atmospheres around floods in the city, through which collective modes of feeling a changing climate are thought to depend. In line with the theoretical framework, strategic communication is assumed to influence affective atmospheres at the level of communicative practices around floods. Communicative practices are here understood to be culturally bounded collective sets of sayings and doings, through which socio-cultural realities are created (Schatzki 2002). Consequently, strategic communication is here assumed to influence Venice's atmospheres at the level of collective sets of doings and sayings in relation to floods in Venice. The main unit of analysis of this thesis is therefore communicative practices around floods. I use atmospheric ethnography to capture these communicative practices.

Atmospheric ethnography is a development of the sensory ethnographic approaches proposed by Pink (2009; 2015). Both sensory ethnography and atmospheric ethnography take as their starting points the multi-sensoriality of knowing in research practice. That is, they are situated research methods that pay particular attention to what and how bodies feel in particular places characterised by particular material arrangements. As Pink (2015) argues:

> human beings are continuously and actively involved in the processes through which not only culture, but rather the total environments in which they live are constituted, experienced, and change continually over time. (32)

In this sense, atmospheric ethnography departs from an understanding of ethnography as the re-production of knowledge through writing (Clifford & Marcus 1986) and sees ethnographic knowledge as being produced in recognition of the importance of the acting and sensing body in human experience. In atmospheric ethnography, affective atmospheres are thought to emerge from the

entanglements of human and more-than-human elements in particular times and places. Yet, because affective atmospheres are *situated* more-than-human performances, an atmospheric ethnography also differs from ethnographic accounts of the senses developed by sociologists and anthropologists (Howes & Classes 2013). Whereas an ethnography of the senses examines established, culturally specific sensory categories and meanings (as when anthropologists acknowledge how sensory experience is culturally influenced), thus treating the sensing body as pre-existing in its cultural expressions, an atmospheric ethnography understands sensory categories and meanings in terms of a model of culture as constantly produced and thus contingent (Ingold 2004; Kohn 2013). In other words, by paying attention to actually lived and contingent sensory and affective experience, atmospheric ethnography does not take into account different cultural categorisations of experience, and instead examines how these are produced and negotiated in their entanglement with the research environment. In this respect, sensory ethnographers do not see the senses as expressions of culture; rather, because they work as 'emplaced sensory apprentices', to borrow a recent formulation from Cavey (2021), they gain knowledge by seeing sensory and affective elements as themselves inevitably emergent from the very practices that cause us to feel them.

Atmospheric ethnography is an appropriate methodology for considering the role of affect in the communication of climate change in Venice. This is because its privileged focus on the sensory and affective elements of urban practice facilitates an analytical exploration of what collective feelings of floods in Venice's affective atmospheres make possible, and thus the implications for the issue of climate change. Investigating the existence of affective atmospheres in the city of Venice means, first and foremost, accounting for communicative practices around floods. This allows collective ways of feeling floods to be captured, insofar as affect is performed in practice and disclosed in atmospheres (Bille & Simonsen 2021).

Capturing communicative practices around floods

Through an atmospheric ethnography, I first captured the communicative practices around floods, starting by paying attention to how floods are habitually encountered and talked about by tourism actors in the city. Specifically, then, I explored Venice's affective atmospheres in relation to the realm of everyday tourist life, where life is thought to showcase its ordinary rhythm. Within this everyday tourist realm, I identified spatial and temporal arrangements of humans and more than humans where communicative practices around floods could be captured (see 'Selection of research sites and research participants in Venice' below). Here, I paid particular attention to how tourist actors in the city, such as concierges, restaurateurs, gondoliers, and tourists, communicate regarding and respond to floods in habitual and spontaneous ways – that is, in ways which are less tied to any particular power to maintain the city as a tourist destination. I approached the communicative practices of these actors as non-strategic communicative practices, and distinguished between strategic and non-strategic communicative practices in relation to the research participants of this ethnographic study. Although a clear-cut distinction is ontologically impossible to make when using a constitutive understanding of strategic communication, which sees such phenomena as ongoing and emergent (Gulbrandsen & Just 2016, 2022; Christensen & Christensen 2022; Winkler & Schoeneborn 2022), it is nevertheless useful for analytical and explanatory purposes. In this study, therefore, I traced the existence of affective atmospheres starting from non-strategic communicative practices around flooding. With regard to the strategic realm, I focused in particular on the communicative practices of politicians and communicators who work for the Venice Municipality, as well as those of local marine scientists in the city. I chose Venice Municipality and local scientists as strategic actors because of the power and responsibility they have regarding how floods, and consequently climate change, are communicated and addressed there.

Affective atmospheres are thought to emerge from the ways in which affect is transmitted during everyday communicative practices. By 'emerge', I mean that communicative practices are thought to depend on affective atmospheres, and at

the same time create them through the transmission of affect (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2016; Bille & Simonsen 2021). The recursive ways of talking and moving around floods led me to question the existence of the specific affective atmospheres in the city that seemed to prompt this repetitiveness. In simple terms, this means that certain patterns in the way non-strategic actors talked about and/or moved around floods was thought to depend on the existence of affective atmospheres that made those actors talk and/or move in that way. Although affective atmospheres are often captured by asking people how they feel about the place they are in, my main goal was not to understand how specific actors felt about floods, but to understand the existence of collective ways of feeling floods through the ways in which the actors spontaneously, habitually, and unreflectively talked and/or acted around them. I will return to this point shortly, in the section on the analytical approach.

Central to capturing the presence of affective atmospheres was my own bodily and situated experience in the field. Indeed, an inescapable part of atmospheric ethnography is the recognition and valorisation of the researcher's own sensory and affective accounts during ethnographic practice (Sumartojo & Pink 2019). As Sumartojo and Pink (2019) write, researching atmospheres means "researching something that we are in the flow of, rather than something that we are researching from the outside, or that it would even be possible to step out of and observe" (36). As such, atmospheric ethnography "always involves an autoethnographic engagement with our own experience" (38). In general, an autoethnographic engagement is an account of the researcher's lived experience (Denzin 2014). In atmospheric ethnography specifically, engagement involves both "attend[ing] to our own experiences of atmosphere while also seeking to comprehend how these feel to others" (Sumartojo & Pink 2019: 89). In other words, attending to my own experiences and practices in the field can be read as both an autoethnographic account, and an account of someone else's socially shared and potential experience of the field. In relation to the relational ontological position of this thesis (Barad 2007; Haraway 1991, 1997, 2016), researching atmospheres is inherently an onto-epistemological process, in the

sense that the researcher always participates in the production of atmospheres while researching them. Indeed, as Sumartojo and Pink (2019) argue, "[a]tmospheres cannot *make* people feel particular things, precisely because it is the way that people feel about things that make atmospheres perceptible" (5, original emphasis). This does not mean that atmospheric research is not objective, but that any research on atmospheres provides a situated and partially objective account of the research phenomenon (Haraway 1997). The phenomenon does not pre-exist the research, as a unit that can be observed from different angles, but is ontologically multiple and emerges in different instances through the enactment of social practices (Matte & Bencherki 2018; Mol 2002). Thus, despite accusations of a narcissistic tone (Atkinson 2015), auto-ethnographic accounts of lived sensory and affective experiences and practices are valuable material, and in this thesis were useful in order for me to examine the (sometimes unexpected) sensations and interpretations of floods and of the city around me.

The following three sections deal with the selection of the research sites and participants, the methods of collection, and the analysis of the empirical material.

Selection of research sites and research participants

According to Pink (2015) and Sumartojo and Pink (2019), conducting sensory and atmospheric ethnography does not require any particular preparation, as the sensory and affective qualities of a research context emerge through the actual encounter with the people and material environment in which one participates. Nevertheless, the atmospheric researcher must be able to account for multi-sensory and affective elements by remaining open to the different ways of knowing and exploring these elements when they are encountered, which usually takes place unexpectedly. In the context of this thesis, therefore, I chose a number of research sites in advance – ones where I felt it would be easier to answer my tentative research questions. This meant deciding on times and places where I could relatively naturally capture the co-existence of the city's atmospheres, in terms of the ways people usually talk about and move around floods. Although I

preferred to stay in the areas around Piazza San Marco, where the effects of floods are more visible and clearly experienced than other parts of the city, I moved around in order to "hang out in places that do not immediately seem central to the research question" (Driessen & Jansen 2013: 259; see also Marcus 1995). In terms of time, the obvious decision was to visit the city during 'the flood season', which is usually the winter months. I thus spent three consecutive weeks in Venice in November 2021. I am aware that this short period of time could mean that I am not able to provide a valuable, in-depth, and detailed description of the field. However, Pink and Morgan (2013) argue that long-term fieldwork "is often not viable in contemporary contexts" (3), especially when a researcher's presence is not always appropriate or practical, as well as because of time constraints. In the case of my ethnographic practice, one of the main factors that limited my ability to stay in Venice for an extended period of time was the COVID-19 pandemic, which at that time was disrupting travel and access to places. It is important to stress, however, that a shorter, in-situ study cannot be seen as a shortcut to producing accurate and diverse types of knowledge about the field. In fact, the three weeks spent in Venice were complemented by an ongoing study about the relationship between Venice and its lagoon, the historical development of the built environment, and the technologies and techniques that the city has adopted to cope with the presence of floods throughout its history. This ongoing study meant that, while I was actually in Venice, I was able to understand how the practices I was capturing related to the specificity of the field at hand. In total, therefore, the timeframe for the collection of empirical material spanned February 2021 to July 2022.

Online interviews with strategic actors and document retrieval were conducted throughout the duration of the study. While in Venice, I carried out both participant observation and a series of interviews with actors who belonged to both the strategic realm, and the non-strategic realm of everyday tourist life. In the strategic realm, I conducted observations and interviews with local politicians and professional communicators working for Venice Municipality, as well as local marine scientists. In the realm of everyday tourist life, I interviewed tourism

actors such as hotel concierges, local restaurateurs, and gondoliers, as well as tourists themselves. The following sections discuss the collection methods used in this research project in more detail.

Collection of empirical materials

In order to capture communicative practices around floods, the study used a combination of qualitative methods: document study, semi-structured and walking interviews, and participant observation. These are presented in the sections that follow.

Document study

The process of atmospheric ethnography began in February 2021, with the remote collection of a wide range of ethnohistorical documents and secondary sources on the historical development of the Venetian built environment and its relationship with the Venetian lagoon. These sources allowed me to better understand the emergence and causes of flooding phenomena in the area, the ways in which the city has referred to them over time, and the technological practices the city has adopted to resist them. When I was in Venice, I also collected documents found in old bookshops and in the libraries of the scientific centres I visited, scientific and political pamphlets about the tides that were due to reach the city in the coming days, and a number of other official brochures produced by Venice Municipality. All of these documents were important sources for capturing normal ways of talking about and encountering floods in Venice. However, it was only in the summer of 2022 that I identified one of the most important materials of the study: six videos that had just become available on the official tourism page of the Municipality's website, in which the Municipality explicitly presents the phenomenon of flooding to tourists (VeneziaUnica 2022). This planned promotional campaign allowed me to understand how the Municipality strategically communicates about floods to tourists, as well as about the practices tourists are encouraged to perform in a

flooded Venice. Table 4.1 summarises the documents collected from February 2021 to July 2022.

Table 4.1. Documents collected from February 2021 to July 2022.

DOCUMENTS RETRIEVED	
1	Promotional materials from the official webpage for Venice tourism, to communicate about floods to tourists: one promotional campaign, comprising six online videos (Venezia Unica 2022).
2	Official scientific communication about floods: scientific reports, pamphlets and brochures published by the Municipality's Tidal Forecasting Centre (CPSM)
3	Information from the Modello Sperimentale Elettromeccanico (MOSE) system's official website.
4	Archival materials about floods: old photographs, tidal reports, and historical accounts of the exceptional flooding in 1966.

The next section presents the research method of semi-structured and walking interviews.

Semi-structured and walking interviews

During the process of conducting the atmospheric ethnography, I used in-depth interviews (Gubrium & Holstein 2001) to investigate the communicative practices of strategic and non-strategic actors that relate to floods. The fact that I grew up in the area near to the Venetian lagoon made it easier for me to get in touch with people who live and work there and who, through their networks, were able to introduce me directly to my interviewees. I reflected on the possibility of meeting interviewees through this snowball form of sampling, which has clear limitations, including the potential for bias (as participants tend to refer the researcher to people who are similar to themselves) and limited control over the sampling process (Seale & Filmer 1998). However, as Alvesson and Kärreman (2007) argue, the technique allows the researcher to easily find people to talk to in a short period of time, which was important given the few weeks I had available in the city. It also allowed me to pay close attention to the local and unspoken rules of this community. During my attempts to grasp the strategic communication of floods, I was introduced to a local politician from one of the opposition parties within the city council, who then gave me further suggestions regarding who to interview within the management group itself.

Because of this, I conducted two two-hour semi-structured interviews who, at the time of writing, were responsible for promotion of the territory and its heritage, and environment protection, respectively. During these interviews I asked about the ways in which the municipality tackles the issue of flooding. I also conducted two ninety-minute semi-structured interviews, one in person and one via Zoom, with three communication professionals from the Municipality's communication department. In order to expand into the scientific sphere, I then contacted two marine scientists from the Municipality's Tidal Forecasting Centre (CPSM), and asked them about the impact of floods on Venice and the measures that have been taken over time and more recently, in these times of climate change. These interviews with local marine scientists were important for me to identify possibly contrasts between the cultural meanings of floods promoted by scientists and political members of Venice Municipality. The scientists referred me to other local scientists who are part of the National Research Council (CNR) in Venice, as well as to tourist actors in the area, such as concierges and restaurateurs. I asked the latter how they deal with the long-term presence of floods in their professional lives, and how they adapt to the exponential increase in their occurrence. The interviews with tourism actors allowed me to investigate the relation between the strategic political and scientific spheres on the one hand, and the non-strategic everyday touristic sphere on the other. By the end of the fieldwork, I had conducted a total of 11 semi-structured interviews of at least 30 minutes each, either in Venice or online.

Although the majority of the interviews were conducted under the normal circumstances of an interview setting, usually involving face-to-face interaction, one interview took the form of a walking interview; this lasted approximately two hours, and was conducted with a retired marine scientist and local resident.[1] In a walking interview, the researcher typically accompanies the participant on foot around a given location while conducting the interview (Yi'En 2014; Kinney 2017). As such, walking interviews are more than just a way of listening to and

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1. None of the other interviewees agreed to participate in walking interviews due to lack of time.

interpreting other people's experiences, as they are about the deep entanglement of communication, embodiment, and space (Pullen 2023). I was interested in capturing not only how the scientist talked about floods but how his way of talking to me implied particular sensory and affective expressions in our encounter with the phenomenon itself on that cloudy November day, and felt that a walking interview would provide me with this. During the walking interview, I paid attention to how the scientist talked about floods while moving around the flooded city. It was important for me to able to capture the co-presence of words and actions embedded in communicative practices in a way that the sterile setting of classical interviews normally does not fully allow. Through our synchronised movements around the city, our conversation turned out to be more of a "lesson in co-sensing" (Fiore 2021: 93) than a means of exchanging information, as this interview taught me to appreciate a particular way of paying attention to details in the city that I would otherwise have easily overlooked. For example, the interview drew my attention to specific fragments of space, such as near-invisible corroded bricks, which were signs of the presence of floods over the centuries, and taught me how the urban space always feels different to different bodies, depending on their degree of entanglement with the material, non-human side of the city. Practically speaking, taking these entanglements into account during the walking interview meant that my interviewee had to hold the voice recorder close to him in order to record what he was saying, while at the same time allowing me to take pictures of the things he was pointing at or jot down descriptions of interview settings, bodily gestures, sensory events, and nonhuman interventions that complemented and shaped our conversation. In the end, after we had gone our separate ways, I recalled the most salient parts of the interview and how I had felt with the help of the voice recorder. Table 4.2 summarises the interviews I conducted.

Table 4.2. Interviews conducted either online or in person.

INTERVIEWS				
	Who	Where	When	How long
1	One group interview with two professional communicators from the Tourism Department of Venice Municipality	Zoom	Nov. 2021	1 hour
2	Ex-professional communicator for the Tourism Department of Venice Municipality	In-person	Nov. 2021	1.5 hours
3	Politician 1, Tutta la Città Insieme ('the whole city together') party	Zoom and in-person	May 2021 and Nov. 2021	About 4 hours
4	Politician 2, Member of the City Council. Responsibilities: Urban Planning and the Environment	In-person	Nov. 2021	40 min
5	Politician 3, Member of the City Council. Responsibilities: Heritage and Territorial Promotion	In-person	Nov. 2021	1 hour
6	Retired architect and resident of the historical centre of Venice	Zoom and in-person	June 2021 and Nov. 2021	About 3 hours
7	Marine Scientist 1, from Venice Municipality's Tidal Forecasting Centre (CPSM), (retired and living in the historical city centre)	Zoom and in-person (walking interview)	June 2021 and Nov. 2021	About 4 hours
8	Marine Scientist 2, Venice Municipality's Tidal Forecasting Centre (CPSM)	In-person	Nov. 2021	1 hour
9	Marine Scientist 3, National Research Council of Italy in Venice	In-person	Nov. 2021	55 min
10	Marine Scientist 4, National Research Council of Italy in Venice	Zoom	Feb. 2022	40 min
11	Concierge, Hotel Londra Palace, historical city centre of Venice	In-person	Nov. 2021	30 min

The next section presents the participant observations I carried out while in Venice in November 2021.

Participant observations

Given the centrality of the sensory and affective dimensions to this research endeavour, the most important aspect of the ethnographic study was investigating how floods are bodily encountered in the city. Because I was interested in capturing affect, I needed to focus especially on the communicative practices performed within the flooded city itself. Observing the ways in which people moved around and referred to floods did not allow me to directly grasp

collective ways of feeling floods, but did facilitate an understanding of the existence of the affective atmospheres of the city, and consequent theorising regarding the existence of collective ways of feeling floods in accordance with this atmosphere.

With regard to atmospheric ethnography, participation observation is more than observing practices which unfold from a distance and, at times, interacting with research participants; rather, it involves a holistic process of learning through multisensorial and emplaced participation (Sumartojo & Pink 2019). Participatory practices can therefore take many forms: drinking, eating, and other activities with people (Fiore 2021), simply walking and listening to the sounds and rhythms of a research field (Nash 2018), becoming attuned to others' sensory and affective experiences through your own senses (Calvey 2021). When I was in Venice, I found myself chatting spontaneously to waiters during their smoking breaks, and sitting with tourists enjoying a cup of espresso with water reaching up to our ankles. In these informal settings, it was of pivotal importance to develop what Driessen and Jansen (2013) call "the hard work of making small talk" (249). A basic social skill in everyday life, small talk is characterised by relatively spontaneous verbal occurrences with people. Because of its unpredictable and unstructured nature, making small talk escapes the dominant rhetoric of control, planning, and structuring that is intrinsic to much social research today. As such, it provides "a necessary lubricant not only between the researcher and research participants but also in facilitating access to a wider network" (250), thus facilitating access to information that is difficult to obtain otherwise. It was often the case during my fieldwork that the most salient information – the ordinary ways of talking about and encountering floods – came from these less hierarchical and structured interactions, where my interlocutors were free to talk about floods or move spontaneously around them, exploring where water went and where it made us go, what it made us do, and how it made us feel. During the participant observations it was especially important to observe whether people's practices, and my own, acquired a regularity or pattern, a

collectiveness and routine. Capturing these practices allowed me to capture the existence of affective atmospheres in the city.

To document my practices within the environment, I used a small GoPro camera, which allowed me to take photographs and record videos during my walks. Photography allows the researcher to reveal the details of the urban space, as well as to record the moments that interrupt and punctuate the rhythm of a particular place (Nash 2018). Photographs of seemingly insignificant objects in the field can be important means to reveal how one's own self – with its sensitivities, situatedness, and predispositions – was intimately tied to the details captured by the camera. A flock of birds flying low or a diaper floating in the canal were not only strange elements for me to encounter, but surprising signs of an approaching storm or evidence of the vital role of the tide in cleansing Venice of waste. Videos served as substitutes for note-taking during my walks, allowing me to record, especially at night, what it meant to experience a flood, how water dictated my paths, my movements, and my linguistic expressions. Pink et al. (2015) write that "[i]f we are in our environments, and […] atmosphere is experienced from the inside, video recordings are likewise made in environments, not of them" (354–355). By incorporating the oscillations and rhythms of the walking body, with all its accelerations, moments of arrest, sudden changes of direction, and accidental bumps into other people or things, along with the sounds of rubber boots on flooded ground, the GoPro camera videos are emplaced traces of my passage through Venice that allowed me, upon re-watching them, to examine the atmospheric dimensions of the place I was in. Table 4.3 summarises the participant observations conducted in Venice in November 2021.

Table 4.3. Participant observations performed in Venice in November 2021.

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATIONS			
	Name	Documentations	Duration/units
1	On the Way Home	Audio recordings of flooded urban soundscapes	26 minutes
2	Small Talk	Audio recordings of arbitrary or spontaneous conversations with tourists, residents, and tourist actors (restaurateurs, gondoliers, hotel concierges)	2 hours and 42 minutes
3	Reflections	Personal recollections of sensations and thoughts	33 minutes
4	Wandering	Go-Pro videos of wandering through flooded Venice	3 hours and 17 minutes
5	Photos	Photographs	441
6	Sketches	Jottings and fieldnotes	14

In the following section I present how the empirical materials were analysed.

Narrative analysis

The situatedness of one's sensory research apparatus inherently prevents homologising of the ways it is made sense of by individual researchers. Pink (2015) argues that "[i]t would be impossible to provide an answer to the question of 'how to' carry out a sensory ethnography analysis. And really no 'standard procedure' does and can exist" (142). Nevertheless, any analytical work should start with the sensory and affective elements, and should aim to acknowledge the relation between these elements and the production of knowledge. Thus, the analysis of empirical materials collected using an atmospheric ethnography does not merely aim to describe how people and the researcher felt and what they did, but must consider how what was felt and done contributed to the making of shared feelings towards the phenomena being studied. Accordingly, in the context of this thesis, I was not necessarily interested in habitual ways of talking and moving around floods in themselves, but in how those habitual practices could be said to be the drivers of the existence of shared modes of feeling floods within different affective atmospheres of the city. Affective atmospheres were

considered to be what prompted people to feel, talk, and move around floods in the ways that they did. It was these affective atmospheres, and the shared feelings of floods that they implied, that I regarded were influenced by strategic communication in the process of constituting climate change.

The analytical endeavour began when I started sorting the materials in order to detect patterns and idiosyncrasies in the communicative practices I had captured.

Sorting and identifying patterns in the communicative practices of floods

In line with the overall abductive reasoning of this study – a "process of continual re-shaping that involves ways of relating forms of ethnographic learning and knowing and theoretical ideas" (Pink 2015: 143) – I approached the analysis not just as something that happens after all the material has been collected, but as something that was very much happening simultaneously with my experience of the field. Being a native Italian speaker and having spent most of my life in the Venetian lagoon provided obvious advantages in this regard, including giving me the ability to easily and directly grasp the recurrent emergence of patterns as I examined and tentatively organised the materials at the end of each field day. I began organising the materials into separate digital folders when I was in Venice, and attempted to provide initial explanations for the communicative practices I was capturing through my methodology. The most rigorous qualitative analysis, however, took place in a more methodical way after I had returned to Sweden, at which time I transcribed the interviews into English and more closely examined all of the collected materials. Initially, I relied on a coding software, which allowed me to bring all of the materials that I had scattered across different documents and folders into the same digital space. For example, I categorised the empirical materials in terms of the actors involved (i.e., strategic and non-strategic actors), the setting where these were collected (i.e., Piazza San Marco, Rialto), and the sensory and affective sensations that those practices implied for me and for my research participants (e.g. excitement, pleasure, fear). However, as I felt a

growing need for more freedom and creativity in handling the materials, I also used a more traditional hand-coding method, using different colours and pencils to highlight key passages in the transcripts, grouping printed photographs together, and creating an event timeline of everything I'd brought home.

In this moment of post-collection, the analysis was not isolated from the experience of the field, inasmuch as the multisensoriality of the materials reminded me constantly of how it felt to be there, and how floods seemed to have been felt by others. Pink (2015) states that

> this process of re-visiting the research encounter through prompting the memory and imagination in such a way provides […] a corporeal route to the sensorial and emotional affects of that research encounter, which themselves are ways of ethnographic knowing. (146)

This was the case when, while transcribing the interviews, I remembered what happened during those conversations, and especially upon looking at and watching the GoPro photos and videos that I took during my walks in the city, as well as listening to the personal notes I recorded in the field. "[I]t is not only visual images that might be memorable or evocative of the multisensoriality of a research encounter and of the researcher's emplacement" writes Pink (2015); "audio recorded materials and audio memories can create strong connections to the research encounter" (147). Recalling my sensory and affective experiences when I encountered the flooding waters of the lagoon was complemented by a search for clues about the experiences of my research participants.

But how do you identify affect (i.e. the collectivity of feeling), as something that ontologically transcends identification, something that "flies under the radar of conscious capture" (Ashcraft 2021: 576), insofar as it is what moves bodies without their full awareness? As Stewart (2011) observes, affect is "not the kind of analytic object that can be laid out on a single, static plane of analysis"; rather, it is "a problem or question emergent in disparate scenes and incommensurate forms and registers; a tangle of potential connections" (3–4). In other words, affect is not observable in itself, nor is it merely captured in the verbal expression

of an emotional state, when one shares her/his feeling happy or sad, for example. Instead, affect is possible to grasp through the ways in which it makes people move or talk in similar ways about the same things, or direct their attention towards the same things in a sort of "collective contamination" (Knudsen & Stage 2015: 9; see also Gherardi 2019). In the case of this thesis, this meant that, as I sorted the empirical material and looked for answers to my research questions, I tried to identify similarities and differences in how people moved around floods and how, in the transcribed interviews and small-talk interactions, there were similar ways of talking about floods. As Hutta (2015) suggests, in fact, speech can be viewed as "expressing something affective despite of [sic] itself, as it were" (297). To this I added consideration of how I moved and talked about floods, as well as how I felt during flooding events. Having recognised patterns in movement and verbal expressions, I looked for analytical ways of accounting for these instances of collective feelings and movements.

Identifying shared feeling of floods in practice

Having identified patterns and regular occurrences in the way floods were talked about and encountered, I used narrative analysis to analyse these patterns and occurrences.

Although narrative analysis is often used within a structuralist and hermeneutic approach which aims to grasp narrative meanings of textual accounts, in this thesis I did not use narrative analysis to understand the inherent meaning of texts, nor to understand people's personal experiences of floods. Instead, I used it to make sense of the communicative practices I collected. In this sense, narrative analysis is a suitable way of identifying how meaning is produced in practice (Czarniawska 2004). As Czarniawska argues, a narrative is a way of 'emplotting' actions and events into a coherent story in order to convey meaning. Accordingly, a plot is

the passage from one equilibrium into another. An 'ideal' narrative begins with a stable situation, which is disturbed by some power or force. There results a state of disequilibrium; by the action of a force directed in the opposite direction, the equilibrium is re-established; the second equilibrium is similar to the first, but the two are never identical. (Ibid.: 19)

Thus, a narrative is not a linear chronological development, but a sequence of contrasting events held together by a logical connection. Narratives are texts, actions, practices, and events that are emplotted and made into a coherent story so to create a particular meaning. Emplotment is a way of understanding how meaning is generated through a plot that is made by the researcher, and not thought to reside inherently in any textual or spoken account. I have therefore adopted narrative analysis as 'a way of knowing', rather than a way of representing meaning. Czarniawska (Ibid.) argues that "events acquire a meaning by the application of *abduction* (a guess, a tentative plot), which introduces a hypothetical connection" (9, original emphasis). A story, in particular, may be seen as the reconstruction of a causal account of events, settings, actions, characters, tensions, and resolutions (Riessman 2005). Meaning is not thought of as already existing; it is created in the ways in which events are related into a structure – a story – that produces it.

In this thesis, I used narrative analysis to first and foremost capture shared feelings of floods. This was necessary in order to understand the role of affect in the communication of climate change, and especially how strategic communication mobilises affect to influence the affective atmospheres of the city and public understanding of flooding phenomena there. Identifying shared feelings of floods involved deploying narrative analysis as a way of identifying narrative settings, characters, and actions, starting from the communicative practices around floods I had collected. I created these narrative settings and characters by analysing snippets of interviews, conversations, field notes, observations, and visual materials, as elements within a "narrative in the making" (Czarniawska 2004: 64). However, because of the need to capture affect, rather than meaning itself,

regarding the shared feelings of floods, I had to pay particular attention to sensory and affective experiences.

Hyden (2013) argues that narrative analysis often fails to consider storytelling as an embodied practice, and observes how "all the 'heated' bodily engagement in storytelling is lost and turned into a 'cool' cognitive process (or in some cases a disembodied, discursive 'cool' process)" (127). According to Hyden, there are two different ways of bringing the body back into narrative analysis: in the simplest sense, the body is the body that is present during storytelling, and thus an element that influences how stories are told (the gesticulating hands, the angles of the mouth and eyebrows, the pitch of the voice). In a more nuanced sense, however, and more in line with the way I understand narratives in this thesis, the body can also be considered in narrative analysis in the way it is embedded in the story itself. In other words, it can be understood in the way that stories are based on shared bodily experiences, in that in order to understand a story one can be able to refer to a similar experience (Hyden 2013). In both ways, narratives are thought of as inseparable from embodiment, and on that basis are therefore inseparable from affect (Breger 2017). Breger notes that narratives are a preferred analytical tool for capturing affect, and argues that "affect facilitates a non-linear concept of narrative worldmaking" (229). By this she means that affect allows us to think of narratives as "multidimensional, 'multivectoral' assemblages" (231, emphases omitted), compounds of different elements as diverse as bodily practices and experiences, objects, ideas, words, animals, buildings, water, etc. It is by looking at the agglomeration of different elements and identifying how affect is holding them together that narrative analysis helps.

Capturing shared feelings of floods through narrative settings and characters

In the following two sub-sections, I discuss the ways in which I consider affective atmospheres to be narrative settings, and floods to be narrative characters, in the story of climate change in Venice.

Affective atmospheres as narrative settings

In this thesis, affective atmospheres are analysed as narrative settings – agglomerations of human and more-than-human elements held together by the transmission of affect. The first analytical step involved looking at how communicative practices around floods could be thought of as instances of affective transmission, i.e. as practices moved by and sharing affect among bodies and places, moments in which the bonding of certain particular affects to the materiality of floods and the city involved the creation of affective atmospheres. In line with the theoretical approach, floods are here thought as objects to which affect is attached, through communication as movement.

Central to this were my own feelings and practices around flooding. Indeed, capturing affective atmospheres meant combining how floods in Venice made me feel and move with how I observed other people moving and talking about them. Thus, by comparing the repetitive ways in which actors talked and moved around floods with the feelings that the same practices evoked in me, I was able to question the existence of affective atmospheres of the city as the forces that made us feel and move in seemingly synchronised ways in relation to floods. Unlike how emotions are only grasped by asking people how they feel in particular situations, here I traced the existence of collective emotional states by observing the communicative practices around floods. Therefore, looking at these practices as instances of affective transmission allowed me to both capture collective ways of feeling Venice (affective atmospheres) and, consequently, infer the existence of collective ways of feeling floods. As the analytical chapters will shortly show, it is because tourists had similar ways of moving around Venice, reiterating a series of practices that made them 'feel' like tourists in Venice, that floods were seemingly approached in accordance with these feelings.

Having identified the affective atmospheres that encapsulated the practices and feelings of floods, I moved on to investigate how strategic communication mobilised such collective ways of feeling. The analysis was intended to provide

an understanding of how floods figured as narrative characters invested with particular affective charges, as I will show below.

Floods as narrative characters

Because I wanted to focus specifically on how the strategic communication of floods by both Venice Municipality and local marine scientists influenced the existence of affective atmospheres, narrative analysis allowed me to consider strategic communication as one element in the story of climate change in Venice. As such, strategic communication was assumed to convey particular feelings to floods through the ways in which floods figured in it as narrative characters.

When analysing a character, attention is paid to typical modes of action, i.e. typical plots (Gabriel 2000). Epic, comic, tragic, and romantic plots are not understood here as universal structures that underpin stories, as a-priori encapsulating certain pre-existing affective meanings of floods that result from the ways floods are talked about. Rather, they were used as useful analytical tools for examining how floods were invested with different emotional auras in different strategic communication events through the actions connected to those characters. As the analysis will shortly argue, it is through what I recognise to be a romantic story about an idyllic relation between water and land that strategic communication made floods seem to be harmless phenomena in the city. Capturing strategic ways of 'making floods feel', then, meant interrogating the relationship between strategic communication and non-strategic ways of feeling floods previously identified through atmospheres as narrative settings. The assumption was that the strategic communication of floods existed 'within' specific affective atmospheres, which determined how floods were strategically 'made to feel like'. In the example above, feeling floods as harmless was thought to depend less on the purposes of strategic communication, and more on the fact that strategic communication operates 'within' the atmosphere of Venice, as a safe and wonderful tourist destination.

Capturing climate change through narrative tensions and resolutions

The second analytical step involved identifying how contrasts and similarities between different modes of feeling floods opened up, constituted, and implied different modes of feeling climate change in Venice. Thus, the narrative approach was important not only for identifying affect towards floods, but for understanding the role of affect in the process of constituting climate change. To this end, I found useful the concept of the 'antenarrative': a mode of narration used by organisational actors when forming their preferred narrative accounts (Vaara & Tienari 2011; Boje et al. 2015; 2022; Vaara et al. 2016). This concept allowed me to identify not only typical plots and characters, but inconsistencies in the ways in which floods acquired collective feeling through less planned forms of organisational storytelling, such as those communicated during interviews with local politicians or local marine scientists. Czarniawska (2004) argues that "the power of the story does not depend on its connection to the world outside the story but in its openness for negotiating meaning" (9). This means that a story acquires value not because what it represents is true or false, but because it allows for multiple, contrasting interpretations of the same phenomenon. In the case of this thesis, narrative analysis allowed me to identify narrative twists and conflicts, how they implied a negotiation of collective feelings of floods, and how these negotiations had implications for how climate change is felt in Venice.

During the second analytical step, I thus re-analysed the strategic communication of floods as instances of the strategic communication of climate change. While the lens of strategic communication was initially useful for capturing shared feelings of floods, a second analytical focus was how strategic communication was used to share feelings of climate change. Following narrative deconstruction as a critical narrative approach (Boje 1995; Martin 1990), I thus investigated what was missing from the strategic narratives about floods, and paid attention to how they simultaneously had implications for the feeling of climate change in Venice. In other words, I looked at how climate change was constructed by the ways in which narrative tensions were resolved by either enhancing or hindering collective modes of feelings in Venice in the age of climate change.

Emplotting the story of climate change in Venice

As the analytical work took on a coherent and cohesive form, I was constantly looking for the best ways to present how the various narratives around floods came together to tell a story of climate change in Venice. In this thesis, the task was to present my analysis of the communicative practices around floods, and how these practices fit into the process of affectively constituting climate change in the city, as clearly and transparently as possible. As such, I chose to present three stories of climate change in three different analytical chapters. These chapters can be read as three forms of emplotting the stories of climate change in Venice – that is, three structures I have created that help the reader to make sense of the process of the constitution of climate change.

In making sense of narrative events, settings, characters, tensions, and resolutions, I have juxtaposed them in order to fit them into a seemingly coherent story. Thus, each analytical chapter begins by presenting the reader with one of three affective atmospheres, which function as narrative settings, and the communicative practices around floods that were found to produce them. The affective atmosphere is where the story of climate change is played out. Presenting these atmospheres at the beginning of each chapter is, in effect, a way of signalling the non-strategic side of the process of constituting climate change, before delving into the strategic side in the following two sections. In order to provide a credible and trustworthy account of my qualitative study (Rennstram & Wästerfors 2018), I provide excerpts from my ethnographic observations, field notes, voice recordings, interviews, and small-talk interactions in the city, in order to show the experience and creation of these affective atmospheres. I also use vignettes as a way of illustrating and recreating the atmospheres of the field for the reader (Langley & Abdallah 2011). With these, I emphasise my sensory and affective experiences, in order to evoke something that might be familiar to the reader even if they have never been to Venice. I also try, whenever possible, to include a photograph or video still (i.e. a screenshot of a video) alongside each written excerpt.

The second part of each chapter is designed to show how shared modes of feeling floods were mobilised by the strategic communication of either Venice Municipality or local marine scientists. This involves presenting the strategic communication of floods by politicians, communicators, or local marine scientists, and showing how, by reading this communication as a narrative within the main story of climate change, similar collective ways of feeling and encountering floods to those presented in the first part of the chapter can be discerned. In presenting the strategic communication of floods, I have relied on what Emerson et al. (2011) call 'excerpt-commentary units' – excerpts from the empirical material, coupled with a commentary in which the analytical point is presented, supported by theory and the unit itself. The last part of each chapter shows how shared feelings of floods are strategically juxtaposed by either members of Venice Municipality, or local marine scientists. In these parts I show how different ways of feeling climate change emerge at the intersection of the strategic communication of floods and the affective atmospheres of the city. In this way, I explore the different ways in which strategic communication has been found to influence the existence of the affective atmospheres that constitute climate change according to political and scientific interests. The next section presents some of the ethical considerations related to the research journey.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations and guidelines play an important role in the quality and conduct of research, and how research findings can be used in a responsible way to develop our society (Swedish Research Council 2017). In the process of writing this thesis, I paid particular attention to three aspects of research ethics: privacy, transparency, and secure data storage.

Protecting the privacy of my research participants was one of the central concerns throughout the fieldwork and data-analysis processes. In accordance with the current ethical standards for research at Lund University, I took a number of

measures to ensure the integrity of my work and protect the identity of my research participants. Firstly, I prepared an informed consent form – in English and Italian – that all research participants signed. This gave me permission to include quotes, photographs, and video stills from walks and conversations in my thesis and other related academic publications. All of the fieldwork material included in this dissertation was then completely anonymised. This meant removing all references to my interviewees' persons in a way that would make them identifiable. In addition, the research participants are never visible in the visual material collected during my fieldwork. In both observation photography and the walking interview, participants' faces were not captured by the camera lens.

Attending to transparency in ethnographic data collection meant that I informed all of my interviewees about the purpose of my research before starting the interview. This is natural in pre-determined interview settings. However, it was not always possible during participant observation, especially during small talk, as I approached my interviewees relatively spontaneously, and our conversations were shorter than traditional interviews. Driessen and Jansen (2013) write that

> to ask such people, with whom one has fleeting conversations in the street, on the bus or in the market, to sign informed consent forms would be absurd. To comply with the ethical principle of informed consent, it is usually sufficient to mention that one is there to write a book, and to allow the other to ask for more information if they wish. (259)

During the sensory ethnography in Venice, where I mostly walked with my GoPro camera on my chest and/or my microphone in my hand, I made sure to keep this methodological apparatus visible whenever I started a conversation with someone. Most of the time, they would ask me questions about these tools, and I would explain the purpose and goals of my research. No sensitive personal information was collected during either these small-talk conversations or the in-depth interviews.

Managing the large amounts of data involved in a research project is challenging. To keep track of the data, I systematically labelled, stored, and password-protected data files in a secure web folder hosted on the Lund University cloud. I uploaded all photos and videos to this folder, as well as interview transcripts; to this I added the date and details of the interview, the interview context, and the pseudonyms used for the participants. I did not upload recordings of the interviews, as such files cannot be anonymised. Upon completion of my PhD, the research materials will be stored on the Lund University database system for 10 years, as recommended in the data-management plan.

Beyond these ethical considerations, a more intimate reflection on this research journey can also be advanced. The proximity of the research site to my personal life brought with it a high degree of intimacy with the field. Alvesson (2009) writes that this "can be as much a resource as a liability" (156). In the context of this thesis, I fully embraced this intimacy, and treated it as a resource. My closeness to Venice, its people, and its creatures allowed me to quickly grasp what was going on in the specificity of the place I was in, and proved fruitful for my understanding of the different ways in which floods could be felt by different actors in the city. Over the course of the five years of this research process, I was simultaneously an academic researcher, a tourist, and a local – three positionalities that, as will be shown in the following analytical chapters, allowed me to capture the inherently affective ways in which climate change is felt.

Part II
Stories of climate change

Chapter 5.

Climate change as a non-existent problem

This chapter examines how Venice Municipality's strategic communication of floods aims to constitute climate change as a non-existent problem for the city. In order to do so, the chapter is divided into three parts: the first part introduces the affective atmosphere of Wonderful Venice, and shows how a shared way of feeling floods can be grasped, starting with the everyday touristic practices through which feelings of wonder are perpetuated. The second part presents how such feelings of floods can be traced in Venice Municipality's strategic communication. The third part explores how feelings of wonder are negotiated in the sustainment of the affective atmosphere of Wonderful Venice as a place where climate change supposedly does not exist.

The atmosphere of Wonderful Venice

I want to start this chapter with a recollection of one of my first days in the city of Venice during my research project, which introduces the practice I call 'photographing wonderful places'.

Photographing wonderful places

From my very first steps, it seemed as if everything, from the historic buildings to the crowded terraces and shops, from the green waters of the canals to the

façades of the buildings, deserved to be remembered, frozen in time through the lens of the camera, to be looked at again later. Noticing anew the beauty of the landscape which had been the background of many of my childhood memories, I found myself admiring the shimmering waters of the lagoon at sunset, and I took a picture:

Figure 5.1. Photographing wonderful places – a sunset in Venice.
Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021.

When I took this photo, I did not want to document a specific object, but rather capture the stereotypical beauty of Venice, composed of the relationship between various objects in front of me. These included church spires breaking up the linearity of the skyline, people sitting by the water, silently admiring the sunset. Taking this picture was a way for me to express how I was feeling, a kind of enchantment with the city. Jesurum (2023) suggests that

> imagining Venice […] means imagining a state, a different and exotic existence, constantly dominated by landscape emotion. Water, ancient palaces, bridges, no cars, no trams, no mopeds: another dimension, a kind of eternal watching a sunset (27).

The city felt quiet without the buzzing noise of cars, which was replaced by the sound of water gently lapping at the city's banks. The fresh November air carried the strong smell of the lagoon.

The presence of water all around the city is what gives much of this 'exotic existence' to Venice. The sight, the smell, and the sound of water attracted me, and drew me to take another photograph, as if photography, rather than words, would allow me to best represent Venice's dreamlike atmosphere.

Figure 5.2. Photographing wonderful places – a hidden spot in Venice.
Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021.

When I found this place, hidden among the narrow streets of the city centre, I felt that it was representative of Venice's beauty: the old walls, their reflection in the emerald waters, the typical Venetian windows, arched in the centre and symmetrically flanked by two shorter sidelights, water creeping lightly over the steps, the quiet sound of water and the smell of damp bricks.

Many tourists come to Venice because it is built on water, and are sometimes surprised by how much water they actually see. From the initial arrival in the city, the tourist experience is typically filled with water: tourists first pass over the lagoon, along the Bridge of Liberty, and then board the *vaporetto* of line 1 along the Grand Canal, all the way to Piazza San Marco. Here, as Davis (2022) writes, "they marvel, as all visitors have for centuries, at how the city's buildings go 'straight down into the water', and they point their phones and cameras at anything that is on the water" (34). As I observed the city, I quickly realised that I was not alone in my quest to capture its peculiarity: around me was a sea of cameras and smartphones, trying to immortalise every detail of the city – its buildings, its canals – and to document their own presence among these.

Figure 5.3. Photographing wonderful places – tourists at the Bridge of Sighs.
Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021.

In Venice, photography seems to be a normalised practice, an ordinary practice in harmony with the place itself. After a few hours in the city, I had completely internalised this behaviour and was able to camouflage my photographic equipment among the crowds of other cameras and smartphones. I said into my voice recorder:

> I don't feel guilty taking photographs […] I try not to photograph people, but I don't feel guilty taking photographs […] I don't feel out of place photographing terraces and restaurants because here in Venice it seems like you can photograph anything and appear completely normal.

Personal Reflection 3
Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021

In line with what Urry (1991) and Urry and Larsen (2011) refer to as 'the tourist gaze', which relates to the ways tourists 'perform' the places around them as tourist destinations by taking photographs, I interpret the practice of photographing Venice as an ordinary practice through which tourists, and myself, affirm the city as a wonderful tourist destination. Practices are here understood to be communicative practices of transmission of affect (Ahmed 2004a; 2004b; Ashcraft 2021), practices that allow for the transmission of a shared sense of wonder. Charles Dickens (1844) once wrote, Venice is "the wonder of the world […] such a splendid dream to me, that I can never speak of it, from sheer inability to describe its effect upon my mind" (59). Similarly, I felt, and everybody else seemed to feel, a sense of wonder while walking around the city in those days, all rhythmically aligned with one another. I therefore adopted a touristic gaze as I walked through Venice, my practices aligned with the practices of others – practices that are themselves driven by the pre-existing and culturally shared narrative that depicts Venice as a wonderful place to visit.

A collective sense of wonder, then, is not merely an emotional expression felt by those who are in Venice, an affective state determined by the fact of being in the city. Rather, it is the primary force that keeps everyone re-practicing and re-imagining what ought to be wonderful for yet another time. This shared sense of

wonder is not only felt personally but it is felt personally because it exists as an affective collective force that drives the emergence of Venice's renowned tourist atmosphere. This atmosphere emerges through the repetition of ordinary tourist practices such as photography. Photography entails the transmission, the 'stickiness' (Ahmed 2004a), of wonder onto the materiality of the city itself, in this way allowing for the feeling of Venice as a wonderful place to exist in the first place. Similarly to how Rokka et al. (2023) describe the emergence of an atmosphere of conviviality in a tourist resort, in Venice feelings of wonder facilitate the emergence of an affective atmosphere I call 'Wonderful Venice' through the way they travel through our bodies. Wonderful Venice is not a brand that is found in tourist brochures and promotional material, nor does it belong to Venice itself as a cultural symbol; rather, it is created through the practice of photographing 'wonderful places'. Wonderful Venice, in other words, is made and remade through every click of the camera, and the feelings that stimulated these. By directing people towards shared affective experiences, this wonderful atmosphere resembles what Stewart (2011) calls a common affective "experience of being 'in the mainstream'" (51).

Staying with this idea of Wonderful Venice, which emerges from the practice of photographing wonderful places, I would now like to consider another practice that I argue participates in making a shared sense of wonder flow and perpetuate among people. Accounting for such an affective transmission is pivotal for a later discussion of how strategic communication mobilises it in accordance with its communication of floods: the practice of immortalising floods.

Immortalising floods

On many of my walks around the city, the pavements were covered with large puddles of water from recent floods. It was not uncommon to have to watch out for them as I walked around the city, hopping here and there to avoid getting my shoes wet. During these walks, I noticed that many tourists, like me, carefully tried to avoid stepping in the puddles, instead observing them from a distance or

using the planks provided by the Municipality to cross them. During floods, the Municipality places wooden planks side by side on metal stands to form paths about two metres long, one metre wide, and half a metre high. People walk along these planks to cross the water, then descend to dry ground on the other side. Usually, you see people moving in two directions, passing each other on the right, sometimes making eye contact and clumsily crossing at junctions. It is not unusual to see tourists stopping on these planks to photograph the water below them or their acquaintances in such a peculiar setting – a practice that often inspires others, including me, to do the same.

Figure 5.4. Immortalising floods – tourists on walkways in Piazza San Marco.
Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021.

Figure 5.4 shows tourists on a wooden plank in Piazza San Marco, with a person photographing a group of others walking on it. I am also photographing them standing on the same plank, right behind the woman in the bottom-left corner.

In the background of the photo are puddles of water in Piazza San Marco from the previous flood. When I took this photo, I assumed that what moved this woman to stop and take a photograph was her feeling that such a particular phenomenon and experience ought to be documented. Figure 5.5 shows this interest in floodwater even more clearly, with two people in Piazza San Marco photographing it close up, their bodies bent over to be closer to the water, their camera lenses almost touching it.

Figure 5.5. Immortalising floods – tourists in Piazza San Marco.
Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021.

I see these two photographs as representing the practice of immortalising floods. Similar to how I approached the practice of photographing Venice as a 'wonderful place', I wanted to understand this practice of immortalising floods as one that involves the affective transmission of feelings of wonder – an affect that comes from a pre-existing atmosphere of Wonderful Venice, and that imbues

what is in it with the same affective charge. This is the power of atmospheres (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2016). Accordingly, I read here the practice of immortalising floods as reproducing the touristic atmosphere of Wonderful Venice through the affective transmission of a shared sense of wonder between bodies and places. Understood in this way, immortalising floods is a practice that works through the ways in which affect is made to 'stick' to floods and make them meaningful. Whereas the practice of photographing Venice as a 'wonderful place' implied the stickiness of wonder with regard to unspecified objects such as buildings, busy terraces, and skylines, here the practice of immortalising floods implies the stickiness of wonder to puddles of water left by floods, scattered throughout the city. I claim that this stickiness of wonder to the puddles of water occurs mostly unconsciously, on the part of tourists, and is a response to a collective, shared feeling of being in a wonderful place, which consequently turns floods into yet another wonderful sign of Venice's uniqueness. I suggest that Wonderful Venice moves tourists to engage in the practice of immortalising floods, and that, through this practice, floods become yet another sign of Venice's splendour, a wonderful Venetian experience.

Given the aim of this thesis is to explore the role of affect in the communication of climate change, it is not especially relevant to investigate whether tourists actually feel and think about floods in such a way. What I am interested in showing is how this way of feeling floods, as a wonderful Venetian experience, can be said to exist alongside a culturally shared feeling of Venice as a wonderful place to visit, a cultural symbol in our collective imaginary. What I am claiming, then, is that floods are a wonderful Venetian experience precisely because of this shared cultural imaginary of Venice, and not because of tourists' inner feelings. Individual ways of feeling Venice, and floods within it, are but a consequence of a collectivity that I have tried to capture. Showing this collectivity is important in order for me to explore the strategic communication of Venice Municipality in the next section.

This ordinary practice of immortalising floods, then, is important both because it sustains Wonderful Venice by allowing wonder to be passed on, and because

through this transmission a shared way of feeling floods as a wonderful Venetian experience is created. With the next practice, I want to show how the creation of a shared sense of wonder regarding floods relates to a practice that I term 'visiting *acqua alta*'. This is another ordinary tourist practice, in which tourists not only recognise the presence of floods, but actively seek them out as authentic Venetian experiences.

Visiting *acqua alta*

When talking to people who work in the tourism sector in the city, such as gondoliers, restaurateurs, and concierges, it was not unusual to hear them refer to floods as a positive experience for tourists, as things that made Venice attractive during the cold winter months. This aspect was highlighted in an interview I conducted with a concierge in one of the most luxurious hotels near Piazza San Marco:

> Water for the guests is an attraction […] it's just a matter of transmitting a positive message, after all. […] The city has cohabited with *acqua alta* for centuries; when one arrives in Venice, it is part of the experience […] and therefore they take the rubber boots and they go for a walk in Piazza San Marco at high tide, it seems banal to say it but it's like this […] what's a discomfort for us [locals, but] for the guest […] it's still something pleasurable. […] Sometimes they even eat in restaurants which are flooded!
>
> **Interview with Concierge 1**
> Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021

According to this concierge, the fact that Venice has lived with floods – or *acqua alta* (literally, 'high water'), which is the local term for floods in the city – for a long time means that tourists in Venice understand floods to be "part of the experience" of Venice, as "an attraction". For the local population and the businesses in the area, however, floods can cause discomfort; they invade spaces and alter private and business practices. However, "for the guest […] it is still

something pleasant". Interestingly, the concierge hinted at a relationship between the phenomenon he called *acqua alta* and the interpretation of floods as a positive experience for tourists. Whereas floods have been thus far discussed in this chapter as a wonderful Venetian experience, in relation to the concept of Wonderful Venice, this excerpt shows that floods can also be felt to be wonderful experiences in connection to the term *acqua alta*. By referring to the floods as *acqua alta*, the concierge seemed to feel positively not only about floods, but about Venice itself. When the concierge said "it's just a matter of transmitting a positive message, after all", this can be interpreted as meaning that his role in making tourists feel like they are having a great time while in Venice is related to the conceptualising of floods as *acqua alta*. This relates to the stickiness of positive affects onto the term itself, as well as the performance of particular practices connected to it. The concierge described providing tourists with rubber boots so that they are able to experience floods as locals do, sometimes "even eat[ing] in restaurants which are flooded". Consequently, this extract shows a collective sense of wonder regarding floods that depends on the performance of ordinary practices, in accordance with the concept of Wonderful Venice, and the naming of floods as *acqua alta* within that.

This practice of visiting *acqua alta* is part of the realm of everyday tourist life in Venice; in the next section, however, I want to show that naming floods *acqua alta* and prompting tourists to approach them as locals do is part of a strategic endeavour to preserve the shared feeling of floods as wonderful and authentic Venetian experiences. In other words, feeling floods as *acqua alta* is an affect that is both collectively shared in the everyday tourist realm of the city, and strategically mobilised to maintain the city as a tourist destination.

Mobilising affect through a story of Venice

The previous section discussed the atmosphere of Wonderful Venice, wherein floods are a wonderful and authentic Venetian experience called *acqua alta*. In

this section, I show how Venice Municipality's strategic communication of floods can be seen to promote this shared feeling of floods as *acqua alta*, by telling the story of Venice as a place that is in harmony with nature.

I start by presenting an analysis of a promotional campaign that Venice Municipality undertook to explain floods in Venice to tourists. This campaign was in part a response to the 2019 flood, and the resulting international attention. On November 12, 2019, the second-highest flood ever recorded in the Venetian lagoon saw 187 centimetres of muddy water crash violently into private and public spaces, submerging almost all walkable ground, leaving thousands of residents without homes, and damaging the various works of art scattered throughout the archipelago. Two deaths were reported as a result of the flooding. That night was just the beginning of a week in which tidal levels reached 150-year highs (Cavaleri et al. 2020). The 2019 event was covered extensively in the media, with alarmist headlines on the front pages of the national and international media describing Venice as a 'sinking city'. The media discourse was so great that, in the aftermath of the event, the tourism sector suffered cancellations equivalent to 40% of its capacity (*La Nuova Venezia*, 1 January 2020). This situation continued for months and left Venice, as a city whose main source of income is tourism, reeling. Both the Municipality and the Venetian Hoteliers Association (AVA) appeared frequently in all of the major newspapers in an attempt to restore normality and present the flooding as a serious, albeit exceptional, event (*La Repubblica*, 30 December 2019). In the months that followed, Venice Municipality launched an official communication campaign to promote floods to tourists and respond to the idea that they are a direct result of climate change. This campaign was completed in the summer of 2022.

The making of acqua alta

As part of the campaign, the municipality produced six promotional videos. In the first of these to be released, the narrator says:

Welcome to Venice! For a few days a year here, often in autumn and winter, you might find yourself walking through the *calli* [alleys] and *campielli* [squares] in the *acqua alta*. This particular phenomenon has occurred in the city since its foundation, and the first evidence of it dates back to the sixth century AD. Venetians have always lived with it – there are those who hate it, and those who love it, but everyone has learnt to recognise it by now.

Excerpt from '*Acqua alta* – The High Water Phenomenon'
Promotional campaign by Venice Municipality, June 2022

The promotional video produced by Venice Municipality begins by welcoming tourists to the city of Venice, and referring to the possible presence of flooding water as *acqua alta*. From the first very line, *acqua alta* is introduced as a recognisable and well-known characteristic of the city, a phenomenon that is said to have been an intrinsic part of Venetian life "since its foundation", one that "Venetians have always lived with". The video even provides "evidence", in the form of a collage of black-and-white images that represent glimpses of daily life in Venice in the past (Fig. 5.6).

Figure 5.6. Video still from '*Acqua alta* – The High Water Phenomenon'
Promotional campaign by Venice Municipality, June 2022.

These images show people walking through water is shown, depicting phenomena that have either been integrated smoothly into everyday urban life

(e.g., people still buying groceries in the street), or altered in ironic ways (e.g., people drinking their expressos on boats rather than at cafes). These images are shown in order to present 'correct' ways of encountering floods: as unimpactful backdrops to people's daily activities, and as minor inconveniences that, for just a "few days a year" mean that one "might" need to adjust, for example by walking on planks and finding alternative means of moving through the city. The explicit reference to the local name for the floods, *acqua alta*, suggests an intrinsic familiarity, and it is this familiarity – the fact that the floods have a name through which they are collectively recognised – that is emphasised. This can be explained by what Ahmed (2004a) terms the 'history of affective sedimentation', which is the way in which an affect is repeatedly stuck to a sign (the name *acqua alta* in this case) and transmitted with that sign in the making of the meaning of the sign itself.

As the video proceeds, the incorporation of *acqua alta* into the social life of the city is explained as the result of Venice's unavoidable interdependence between water and land:

> Venice is a city built on water, which allows its citizens and visitors to live in symbiosis with the natural flow of the tide. The cyclical movement of the water surface can cause some of the roads to flood, resulting in the famous high water [*acqua alta*].

> **Excerpt from '*Acqua alta* – What is High Water?'**
> Promotional campaign by Venice Municipality, June 2022

At this point, it becomes clearer why floods are occurring: because of "the natural flow of the tide", which sometimes causes floods that result in the phenomenon of *acqua alta*. Here, then, *acqua alta* is clearly a flood due to tidal movements. This is presented as a positive experience for the local population, since it allows them to "live in symbiosis with" nature. Floods in the city are here conceived of as intrinsic to the existence of Venice: no Venice, no *acqua alta*. This character of *acqua alta* as a "famous" and authentic phenomenon is also supported by the choice of visuals – snapshots of contemporary flooding episodes are shown as

being integrated into everyday life in the city, seemingly without disruption (Fig. 5.7):
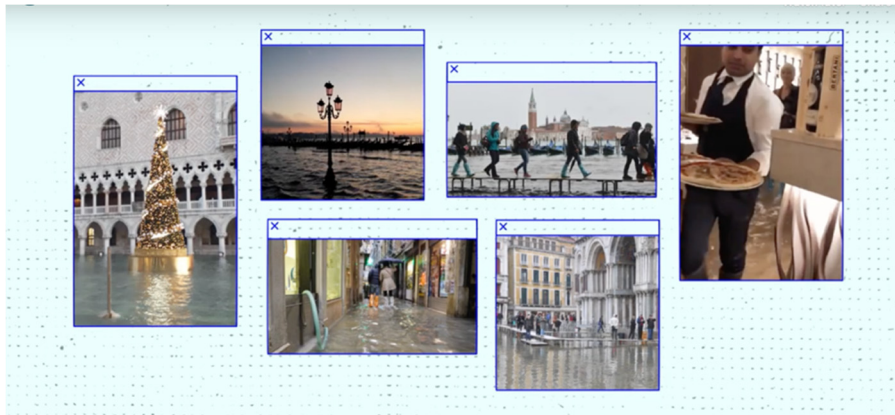
Figure 5.7. Video still from '*Acqua alta* – What is High Water?'
Promotional campaign by Venice Municipality, June 2022.

Figure 5.7 shows how the campaign represents the ways in which urban life is affected by floods: people are still able to walk around, eat pizzas in restaurants, and celebrate Christmas in a flooded square. Like the images in the first video, Venetians today deal with *acqua alta* just as they always have. Floods are here presented as a curious and intriguing element in an otherwise ordinary urban experience – a nice addition to it. Venice Municipality, therefore, presents floods as the authentic phenomenon of *acqua alta* by emphasising the cyclical and recursive movement of the tide, weaving a narrative of Venice as having a primordial and harmonious relationship with the watery world.

This way of communicating about Venice and its watery surroundings resembles what Boje et al. (2015) call the narrative of 'the collective life and the idyllic'. Here, organisations tend to "connect [themselves] to concrete notions of space, human nature and life, which become shared, interactive experiences that flow from nature" (8). By stressing the connection between Venice and the natural rhythms of its watery surroundings, Venice Municipality portrays the city as standing both outside of time and in an ancient, nostalgic past, where land and

nature, to quote Boje et al., "relate in a unified place in the world" (Ibid.). In this wonderful world, floods are not harmful phenomena, but natural parts of the city.

Feeling *acqua alta*

The second video from the promotional campaign makes explicit reference to how tourists should feel about the presence of *acqua alta* in the city, i.e. not

> too alarmed, because even when it's very intense, this event isn't violent, and doesn't expose people to any particular risks. The water in Venice only invades particular areas of the city's land *slowly*, starting with the lowest point […] Once the tide has reached its highest level, it almost always, within two or three hours, goes down and returns to the lagoon, leaving the streets empty again.
>
> **Excerpt from '*Acqua alta* – What is High Water?'** (original emphasis).
> Promotional campaign by Venice Municipality, June 2022.

In this excerpt, the story of Venice, as a place that is in harmony with water, and the creation of the character of *acqua alta* are contraposed with an alternative, alarming way of feeling about the phenomenon. Through words such as "only" and "certain", and the emphasis on "*slowly*", floods are depicted as harmless events – fleeting, ephemeral things that never really last too long because they are inherently related to the tide, and "always" disappear within hours. With the phrase "also when it's very intense", the campaign explicitly contrasts the idea of floods as things that can erupt violently in the city, as happened in 2019, and stresses that the flooding of the city premises, even if it sometimes presents in intense ways, is a calm, slow, and momentary process of submersion due to the presence of the tide. Thus, floods in Venice should not be understood as intense phenomena that spark alarm, but as constructed, recursive, and ordinary events: *acqua alta*, which sparks positive feelings of reassurance and safety. *Acqua alta*, in other words, is harmless and should be felt as such.

Continuing with the story of Venice as a city in harmony with nature, the next excerpt shows how the Municipality promotes a feeling of floods as *acqua alta*, and thus harmless, wonderful, and authentic Venetian experiences, and does so by promoting the performance of ordinary practices of encountering such a phenomenon.

> How do you get around in Venice during *acqua alta*? Inflatable boats, canoes, flippers or life jackets? None of these options will be necessary. As a rule, you simply need to wear a pair of knee- high rubber boots. The *vaporettos* continue their service, changing their routes, but still providing access to almost the entire city. Meanwhile the walkways allow you to access the main attractions on your own two feet, staying dry. We've seen all sorts of things in recent years, so it's important to know what's forbidden. Would you like to walk barefoot in the water? Better not! It's forbidden, and there may be dangerous objects that could injure you. A quick dip and a swim in your swimming things? This is strictly forbidden! And you could receive a fine as high as the water you dive into. A romantic picnic on the walkways? Well, sorry, but the walkways are there for everyone to use, and need to remain free pf obstacles.

Excerpt from 'How do you get around in Venice during High Water?'
Promotional campaign by Venice Municipality, June 2022

Figure 5.8. Video still from 'How do you get around in Venice during High Water?'
Promotional campaign by Venice Municipality, June 2022.

With a joyful tone, the narrator of the film lists a series of practices that people might consider adopting when they encounter floodwaters: using inflatable boats, flamingos, swim rings, and canoes, for example. Such practices are mentioned ironically, to counter the idea that when a flood reaches the city, Venice is submerged in water and so aquatic means of transportation and protection are required. These are things that "won't be necessary", the narrator explains, as flooding simply means that the tide has come visit; thus, "as a rule", you simply need to wear a pair of rubber boots and walk on planks specifically provided by the municipality to access all of the main attractions while remaining dry. "We've seen all sorts of things in recent years," the narrator continues; by 'we', she means the city and its inhabitants, those who behave according to the rules. These rules, through this 'we', are positioned as ordinary rules, the rules of the place. The narrator then, in a patronising and legalising tone, lists what "is forbidden", and talks about "dangerous" objects that may "injure" tourists. What was never dangerous becomes so, and thus is possibly unsafe. In an attempt to regulate tourists' practices to a list of appropriate ones in the presence of *acqua alta*, the narrator explicitly bans a series of practices that relate to contact with the phenomenon: walking barefoot in the water, or dipping or diving into it.

Thus, according to the campaign produced by Venice Municipality, the authentic Venetian phenomenon of *acqua alta* requires specific practices when encountering it. These are the practices carried out by the locals themselves, the authentic and ordinary practices of the place in relation to the phenomenon. The wrongdoing of tourists is here presented using irony, a kind of mockery of those who might be tempted to think of not embracing the ordinary local practices when encountering floods.

The same point was made during an interview with one of the professional communicators in charge of the campaign at the communication office of Venice Municipality.

Professional Communicator 2: [W]hen the tourist comes here and sees Piazza San Marco and *acqua alta* […] it's a spectacle, after all […] it's the citizen who obviously has more problems, but it's also true that the tourist must be a bit more educated from the point of view of how to move around the city when it is high water because often we see tourists who may be walking barefoot, and this is very dangerous. So, we would like to raise awareness among tourists to adopt behaviours that do not put them in danger.

Monica: Certainly.

Professional communicator 2: So, you have to walk on the walkways, you have to use boots if necessary, and obviously not walk barefoot. These are the behaviours that we would like to promote to ensure safe access to Venice.

Interview with Professional Communicator 2
Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021

According to the communicator, even though it is understandable that tourists would be amused to seeing Piazza San Marco covered by *acqua alta* – "it is a spectacle, after all", she says – they need to "be educated" on "how to move around the city when it is high water". Thus, visitors need to be educated in how to practically approach such a phenomenon. This means "to walk on the walkways", "to use boots if necessary, and obviously not walk barefoot". Walking barefoot is regarded as especially "dangerous" for tourists, as they could slip or their bare feet might come into contact with a sharp object. These recommendations, according to the communicator, are in place in order to "raise awareness among tourists to adopt behaviours that do not put them in danger", and to "ensure safe access to Venice".

However, I would like to suggest that the safety of tourists is not the only objective that the strategic communication of floods seeks to achieve. What the strategic communication of floods is also trying to achieve is to ensure that the correct way of feeling floods as *acqua alta* takes place. Would floods be

encountered differently than from the usual practices performed in the city, tourists won't only hurt themselves, but they would also be drawn to feel for floods feelings they ought not supposed to feel: feelings of fear, for example, or intense feelings of joy and euphoria. According to the campaign, *acqua alta* cannot cause fear or too much excitement; it is simply an inherent part of Venice's ordinary atmosphere. The promotion of ordinary practices, therefore, is intended not only to make tourists move correctly around Venice, but to make tourists feel the correct way about floods themselves, to see them as harmless and authentic Venetian experience of *acqua alta*.

This section has thus far discussed a romanticised story of Venice as a city where water and land coexist naturally and harmoniously, and floods are authentic Venetian phenomena*, acqua alta*. As the main character in this story, *acqua alta* is invested with positive feelings of safety, awe, and wonder thanks to the emphasis placed on the actions tourists should perform when encountering it. In other words, the strategic communication of floods, read in the form of a narrative, aims to 'stick' (Ahmed 2004a; 2004b) positive feelings of safety, awe, and wonder onto the phenomenon of *acqua alta* by ensuring the performance of the ordinary practices of encountering such a phenomenon. It is the performance of these practices that facilitates the perpetuation of the collective way of feeling *acqua alta*.

Importantly, strategic communication here ensures the performance of the same practices which were discussed in relation to the affective atmosphere of Wonderful Venice, where floods are felt as *acqua alta* when tourists wear rubber boots, as locals do. As a result, following Bille and Simonsen's (2021) understanding of atmospheric practices, these excerpts of the strategic communication of floods by Venice Municipality can be said to show the idea that, by ensuring that people move around and feel floods in the 'correct' way, strategic communication aims to mobilise a shared sense of wonder. This is pivotal not only to the mobilisation of this 'correct' way of feeling floods, but to the sustainment of Wonderful Venice. In other words, through the character of *acqua alta* and the promotion of specific ways of approaching it while in Venice,

these excerpts can be said to support a correct way of feeling not only floods but Venice and its 'ordinary affects' (Stewart 2007), presented as natural and inherently embedded in the social and material fabric of the city. The next section discusses the implications of this for the constitution of climate change in Venice.

Constituting climate change

In this section I explore how a shared sense of wonder regarding *acqua alta* is negotiated in order to constitute climate change as a non-existent problem for the city of Venice. I begin this section with my interview with the professional communicator, briefly discussed above.

> **Professional Communicator 2**: So, after the *acqua alta* in November 2019 […] there was a distortion in the communication of the phenomenon. It was thought that Venice was submerged in water for a long time because when the predicted flood is 120, 110 cm, people think that this means that the water will reach their waist. And so, from this point, the European project [which funds the campaign] was initiated, and we produced these short films.
>
> **Interview with Professional Communicator 2**
> Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021

In this excerpt, the professional communicator argues that the promotional campaign was intended to change the understanding of floods, which had been wrongly communicated since the *acqua alta* of 2019. This implies that there was another way in which floods were communicated and understood before, and that this had been lost. Accordingly, the communicator seems to imply that it was necessary for Venice Municipality to stress the way of understanding floods that existed before 2019. The problem with floods would seem to be that they are thought to be as intense as those of 2019, when "it was thought that Venice was submerged in water for a long time". They describe a problem of "distortion", and argue that this is due to the fact that the numbers used to communicate the

forecasting measures do not correspond to the amount of flooding, in terms of the height reached above the city floor.[2] As a result, the communicator argues that, following the event in 2019, when people were told about the tidal predictions, the difficulty of communicating flood measurements confuses tourists, who often think that a flood is higher than it is – "that the water reaches their waist". An incorrect interpretation of the tidal prediction is here regarded as the main cause of floods being understood as intense phenomena, as in 2019, rather than as *acqua alta*. As the conversation continued, I asked the communicator to explain what motivated the municipality to produce the campaign:

> **Monica:** Did you feel that there was a need for this awareness and communication campaign because you noticed a change, perhaps in terms of bookings?
>
> **Professional Communicator 2**: Yes, we noticed at the media level that there were… there were agencies, especially foreign ones, communicating that Venice was inaccessible… and so…
>
> **Monica:** And so, you had to respond a bit…
>
> **Professional Communicator 2:** Yes, and also in general, there is, there is growing awareness that the city of Venice needs to start talking more about itself and not let others talk about it because, until now, Venice has been communicated by others. Now the city wants to take on the responsibility of communicating itself to the outside world.

> **Interview with Professional Communicator 2**
> Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021

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2 Tidal values in Venice are calculated using a measurement system established in the nineteenth century called the *medio mare* ('mid-sea'). At that time, the sea level in Venice was on average 30 cm lower than it is now. This means that the predicted height of flooding in centimetres does not correspond to the height in centimetres of flooding above the city floor, as the value depends on the altitude above sea level of a particular area of the city, from which roughly 30 cm generally needs to be subtracted. For example, a tide prediction of 100 cm in a lower part of the city that is at 80 cm above sea level experiences an actual submersion of 10–20 cm.

In the interview, I asked if a change in bookings prompted the Municipality to produce the campaign; the communicator replied by relating the decrease in bookings to tourist "agencies, especially foreign ones" communicating to tourists that "Venice was inaccessible". The problem, therefore, of the distorted narrative of floods existing in the broader cultural realm is not directly linked to the local difficulty of communicating tidal predictions, but to incorrect communication of these predictions by foreign agencies. In response to these external, distorted narratives of floods as intense phenomena, and thus of Venice as submerged in water, the communicator argues that Venice Municipality took control and decided "to take on the responsibility of communicating itself to the outside world". The campaign, therefore, can be understood as a consequence of this decision.

According to the communicator, then, whether floods are felt as harmless *acqua-alta* events or dangerous climate change events depends on whether tourists believe a foreign, external, and allegedly less well-informed story about floods, or a local, experienced, and accurate story about them. This 'accurate story' is what the promotional campaign is intended to communicate to the public. In line with this, I suggest that it is useful to read these excerpts from interviews with professional communicators as part of the strategic narrative of floods communicated by Venice Municipality. I read them as what Boje et al. (2015) term the story of the 'romance adventure'. Through such a narrative style, organisations can depict themselves as fighting external forces by uncovering their own intrinsic, original traits and developing their core inner strengths. According to Gabriel (2000), the basic plot of a romance is a hero or heroine's quest for a lost sacred object, such as treasure, love, or happiness. In order to obtain the desired object, they must go through a series of trials and overcome evil. In the case of this excerpt, the romantic adventure is a story of Venice fighting against the external threat of foreign audiences and emphasising its inner core – the preferred story of its watery environment, the cyclical and harmonious relationship between water and land that is said to have characterised Venice since its foundation. In this story, Venice has a responsibility to talk about itself, to

constitute itself in the way that it feels is necessary, to take up a quest of writing its own story. This story implies that the interpretation of floods as *acqua alta* is correct, and that the floods are not due to climate change.

This point was also made during an interview with a local politician:

> **Politician 2**: So, the concept is this, and it's a significant concept in my opinion, especially in terms of communication: everyone talks about Venice, but *nobody* knows Venice… You know that there are people who come because of *acqua alta*? […] then if *acqua alta* is broadcast and conveyed by newspapers and foreigners as a flood, we are wrong here. […] it is the result of incorrect communication, that is, we don't… it's not a flood, that is, it's not a flood… okay? Eh, because the Arno [Italian river] takes everything away. […] Eh, *acqua alta* rises and then lowers, that is… it's different from a river that overflows, right? I mean… and… maybe you go to the museum, you don't move.

> **Interview with Local Politician 2**
> Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021

According to this local politician, the problem for Venice Municipality is that "everybody talks about Venice, but *nobody* knows Venice". Thus, although Venice is known worldwide as a powerful cultural symbol and tourist destination, the city has not yet talked about itself as it should have. For this politician, then, Venice needs to speak for itself and correctly describe what floods are: *acqua alta*, something that "rises and lowers". This is different from a flood, which is something that "takes everything away", which "overflows", like a river.

In this interview excerpt, then, the 'correct' story of *acqua alta* is contrasted with an external foreign story of floods that are intense phenomena that occur due to climate change. In this foreign story, floods are dangerous, harmful phenomena. In order to ensure that the 'correct' story of floods is told, and to reinstate the 'correct' feeling of floods as harmless, wonderful, and authentic Venetian experiences, the politician, like the communicator discussed above, presents floods as *acqua alta*. Here, floods are not felt as harmful; they simply require one

to wait in a museum until the water recedes. This is in contrast to intense phenomena, which require one to find refuge, to run away in fear.

Gabriel (2000) argues that a romance can turn into a tragedy when it is used as a means of expressing or dealing with fear, anxiety, or anger. I suggest that, through the presentation of floods as *acqua alta*, the politician's communication resists a collective way of feeling floods as dangerous and causing fear, as these feelings mean that people are scared in a place where flooding is, instead, absolutely normal. The preservation of a shared sense of floods as *acqua alta* is here performed as an ordinary practice of atmospheric emergence, and as resistance to alternative modes of feelings that would shatter that atmosphere. By emphasising floods as *acqua alta* and the practices that relate to encountering such phenomena, this strategic communication implicitly resists the transmission of negative feelings, and their 'sticking' (Ahmed 2004a; 2004b) upon floods. More clearly than in the previous section, then, the strategic communication of floods is here shown to be necessary not only to promote the correct feeling of floods as *acqua alta* in Wonderful Venice, but to promote the existence of Wonderful Venice as a place where climate change does not exist.

Summary of the chapter

At the beginning of this chapter, the field notes and observations I presented, which were collected while in Venice, traced the existence of an affective atmosphere that I called 'Wonderful Venice'. The many photographic practices undertaken by tourists who visit Venice were argued to derive from, and at the same time sustain, a collective sense of Venice as a wonderful tourist destination that astonishes and visitors and captures their attention. This is nothing new, as many – from Charles Dickens to Guy de Maupassant, Italo Calvino, and contemporary Venetian writers – have written about Venice as the most romantic city in the world, a city that seems almost unreal. In Venice, I too felt a sense of wonder and awe as I walked through its narrow streets and gazed at its buildings, rising straight from the water. The tourist atmosphere of Venice is not, however, objectively wonderful, nor is it deliberately made so by strategic communication

and promotion of the place as a tourist destination. Rather, it emerges from visitors behaving in the city as if it were wonderful, in accordance with the promotional campaigns and brochures, giving Venice a cultural relevance in our collective imagination. In this wonderful affective atmosphere, floods feel special. The first part of this chapter showed that the habitual and shared sense of wonder can be said to cause people to move around floods as if they are yet another sign of Venice's wonder. Immortalising floods by photographing them from up close, or using them as the perfect background for a selfie, can therefore be seen as both dependent on and conducive to shared feelings of floods as wonderful and authentic Venetian experiences. The conversation with the concierge highlighted how the practices of tourists around floods support the feeling of floods as *acqua alta*. Thus, at the end of the first section, the sense of Venice as a wonderful tourist destination was shown to enable the emergence of shared feelings of floods as *acqua alta*, a wonderful and authentic experience in Wonderful Venice.

In the second section of the chapter, the analysis of various excerpts of the strategic communication of floods by Venice Municipality showed how this communication can be read as telling a romantic story about a harmonious relationship between Venice and the watery world around it. It was shown that the Municipality's communication followed a romantic mode of narrating Venice, as a place that is in harmony with its natural environment – where nature and culture coexist peacefully, floods are just tides, rhythmic and recognisable movements inherent to the city and part of an authentic Venetian experience. In such a narrative, floods are narrative characters invested with an inherent sense of appreciation, safety, awe, and wonder: *acqua alta*. This investing of shared positive feelings is also undertaken narratively through the ways in which floods are approached through local practices of protection. By explicitly promoting certain practices and forbidding others that are considered to be unusual and dangerous, the strategic communication of Venice Municipality, I argue, aims to not just protect tourists from harm, but ensure a collective sense of wonder regarding floods that is inherent in the affective atmosphere of Wonderful Venice.

Having shown how the strategic communication of floods can be said to preserve collective ways of feeling floods as *acqua alta*, the final section of this chapter moved on to the core of my analytical proposition, wherein I examined the implications of these modes of feeling floods for the broader issue of climate change in Venice. In this third section, I showed that strategic communication not only preserves shared modes of feeling floods as *acqua alta*, in line with the tourist atmosphere of Wonderful Venice, but resists the idea of collective feelings of floods as dangerous phenomena caused by climate change, which is supposedly promoted by the international media and foreign tourist agencies. I therefore propose that the way in which the Municipality communicates about floods as *acqua alta* promotes a shared sense of wonder regarding a flooded Venice, but also and at the same time the preservation of a place where climate change supposedly does not exist.

Chapter 6.

Climate change as a problem that has already been solved

This chapter examines how Venice Municipality's strategic communication of floods aims to constitute climate change as a problem that has already been solved in the city. In order to do this, the chapter is divided into three parts: the first part introduces the affective atmosphere of Safe Venice, and shows how a shared way of feeling floods can be captured, starting from everyday touristic practices that perpetuate a sense of safety. The second part presents how feelings of safety regarding floods can be traced in the strategic communication of Venice Municipality, while the third part shows how such feelings are negotiated in the sustainment of the affective atmosphere of Safe Venice as a place where climate change is a problem that has already been solved by technology.

The atmosphere of Safe Venice

As in the previous chapter, I would like to begin with some extracts from my ethnographic observations made in the city of Venice. These extracts allow me to show how a series of practices transmit a sense of safety, through which I suggest that an atmosphere I call 'Safe Venice' emerges.

Before introducing the first practice, I need to explain the MOSE system. MOSE is an acronym that stands for 'Modello Sperimentale Elettromeccanico' ('experimental electromechanical module'), and refers to a system of 78 mobile gates that are positioned at the three inlets of the lagoon (Lido, Malamocco, and

Chioggia). The function of these gates is to isolate the lagoon from the sea during exceptionally high tides (Vianello 2021).

The MOSE system had the highest budget ever allocated by the Italian state to a single engineering project (almost 6 billion Euro; Benzoni & Scaglione 2020) and was not completed for more than 50 years following its approval, during which time one of the most recent corruptions scandals in the history of the Italian republic took place (Amadori et al. 2014). The MOSE system was tested for the first time on October 3, 2020, and many of its functions still need further improvement (D'Alpaos 2019; Madricardo et al. 2019). During my fieldwork on the island, in November 2021, MOSE was still in its testing phase, and was activated in response to tidal predictions of higher than 130 cm.

I wish now to introduce the first practice which is spurred by and sustain the circulation of a shared sense of safety in relation to the technology of the MOSE system, and the consequent emergence of an affective atmosphere of Safe Venice: the practice of adjusting one's outfit based on flood predictions.

Adjusting one's outfit

One day, during my fieldwork in Venice, the Hi!Tide Venice app, which allows users to monitor the current flooding by providing forecasts for the next three days, announced a code red.
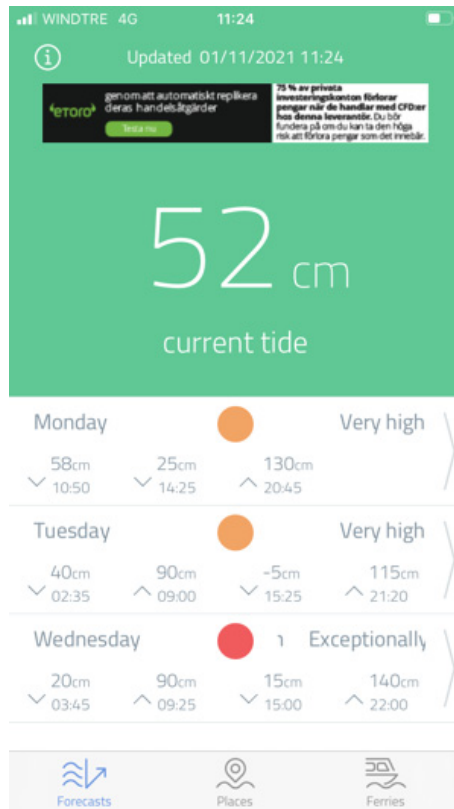
Figure 6.1. Screenshot of the Hi!Tide app.
Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021.

On Wednesday night there was to be an exceptionally high flooding event, of 140 cm, at 22.00. However, because this exceeded the minimum requirement for the activation of the MOSE system, Venice would not be flooded, since the MOSE was going to be activated. Hence, on Wednesday night, even though the highest floods of the season were about to happen, when preparing to go out I decided not to wear my rubber boots, and trusted that the MOSE system would be activated. While taking my first steps out of my apartment, I spoke into my recorder:

I just went out… the water is calm… low… I wonder what time it is, I mean, how many centimetres there are now… it's around 7 o'clock, and I didn't put on boots, I'm in sneakers… in fact, like everyone else… I would have looked ridiculous.

Personal Reflection 4
Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021

The city that I found in front of me when I left my apartment seemed to be the same that I would have found on any ordinary evening in Venice, with people continuing with their usual business while the water remained, calmly, within the the canals. When looking at the canals, I noticed that the water seemed particularly low, a sign of the fact that the MOSE system had already been activated, turning the lagoon momentarily into a shallow lake. When I then looked at other people's shoes, I rejoiced that I was appropriately dressed, without my rubber boots up to my knee. "I would have looked ridiculous", I said.

I would like to focus on this expression for a moment, as it tells us something about the relationship that I am suggesting exists between the feeling of safety connected to MOSE and its protecting of the city, the outfit I chose, and my understanding of the place I found when I opened the door. I argue that my feeling safe made me feel the city in front of me as ordinary, normal: I looked at the water and saw that it was low, I looked at other people's outfits and thought that they are appropriate. In affect theory (Ahmed 2004a; 2004b), this can be read as a moment in which I was affectively 'sticking' a sense of safety to objects around me, and it was the transfer of that safety that made me feel that the city I was in was an ordinary place. In such an ordinary place, I created a group of people who supposedly also knew that MOSE was protecting us from an extreme flood that night. This creation of an ordinary atmosphere, one that one might normally encounter when heading out for the evening, occurred through the way in which feelings of safety made me read people's clothing as a sign of normality. This is similar to what Ahmed (2004c) calls the emergence of 'feelings in common'. In this case, it is not that there was an actual group of people in front

of me wearing the 'right' outfit based on flood predictions, but that I mentally formed such a group by feeling appropriately dressed in relation to it. In other words, the group of people, and Venice in front of me, does not exist in itself; rather, it emerges from my own feeling of being in tune with it, thanks to the transmission of safety, the way this feeling sticks to objects in place of my experience of the place itself. Analysing this excerpt in this way underlines the notion that the practices performed in relation to the MOSE system, like the simple one of dressing to go out and trusting that the system will function, reproduce an ordinary safe atmosphere of place, creating a feeling of safety in everyday encounters. The atmosphere that I call 'Safe Venice' thus emerges through affective transmission of a feeling of safety, through this embodied and collective affective transmission between bodies and places.

Having suggested that Safe Venice emerges from practices of transmission of a feeling of safety, I now propose to look at another practice, which I call 'appointing a saviour'. This is a practice that involves explicitly naming MOSE as a saviour against floods, which allows the feeling of floods as *acqua alta* to be created. As such, this practice shows the interconnection between the atmosphere of Safe Venice and the shared feeling of floods as *acqua alta*.

Appointing a saviour

When I arrived at Piazza San Marco on the evening on which flooding had been predicted but not happened, the Basilica di San Marco and the surrounding *portici* ('colonnade') were silent and had a peculiar solemnity. There were people walking and taking photographs, dogs barking, a child chasing some pigeons, a pianist playing in one of the cafes in the square. Venice was beautiful that night, with the MOSE system actively protecting it from a potentially destabilising flood.

Figure 6.2. Piazza San Marco the night of an exceptionally high flood.
Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021.

Yet, like the passengers on the Titanic immediately before it was hit by an iceberg, the tourists were being tourists with an astonishing serenity. Curious as to whether they knew that, had the MOSE system not been activated, Piazza San Marco would certainly have been flooded, I approached some of them and asked them a few questions. The following is an excerpt from a conversation I had with a man visiting Venice from Australia, whom I asked whether he knew that *acqua alta* had been expected that night:

> **Tourist 1**: No… we don't get too much information about *acqua alta*, we just hope we are going to stay dry! [laughs]
> **Monica**: [laughs] You always hope!
> **Tourist 1:** [laughs] We don't like wet feet… there is enough water in the canals!
> **Monica**: Eh, you're really lucky because here it was supposed to be quite high.
> **Tourist 1**: Tonight?! Okay… so we just hurry up before the water…
> **Monica**: No, but tonight you're safe.
> **Tourist 1:** Oh, we are safe.
> **Monica**: Because the MOSE system is working.
> **Tourist 1**: Ohh.

Monica: And tomorrow morning it will be a little bit high again, but probably there will be water in the morning here.

Tourist 1: No… we know what *acqua alta* is, we've seen pictures and… but you're right, today it was supposed to be water, we are glad we've met you, and we got some more information… you see… [inaudible] in Normandy you better inform yourself, up there, and here you just get wet feet… it's not very high-risk.

Small Talk with Tourist 1
Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021

In this excerpt, although the tourist "does not get much information about *acqua alta*", he mentions that he knows about it as a phenomenon that can make you uncomfortable ("we don't like wet feet"). However, when asked whether he knows that in that very moment *acqua alta* is supposed to be "quite high", he reacts with surprise, and asks whether the place we were should be conceived of as a dangerous place ("tonight? Okay, so we just hurry up before the water…"). Interestingly, the adjective "high" contests the feeling of floods as simply uncomfortable events, as phenomena that wet people's feet. This word turns *acqua alta* into a potentially dangerous phenomenon, something to run away from, a stream of water that requires people to find refuge. This adjective, in other words, seems to unbalance the affective charge of the name *acqua alta* as an overall harmless phenomenon, and to drive the tourist to confirm his reading of the place he is in. In that feeling of uncertainty, in this micro-moment when affect is sparked in conversation (Brummans & Vézy 2022), Venice's atmosphere seems to morph from an ordinary safe place to a potentially uncanny one. In other words, in that instant of fear and uncertainty, *acqua alta* becomes a flood, an intense phenomenon – and with it, the place itself becomes eerie. As such, Venice in that moment is both potentially unsafe due to the possibility of a sudden flood, *and* safe as usual amid the usual *acqua-alta* event. When I say "but tonight you're safe […] the MOSE system is working", floods are felt again as the phenomenon of *acqua alta*, an overall safe phenomenon that is successfully mastered by the MOSE system. It is, in other words, my appointing of MOSE as a saviour that causes the feeling of fear and alarm to dissipate, and the

conversation able to progress; floods become unthreatening again, sources of possible discomfort and minimal inconvenience relating to getting wet feet while wandering through the city.

Similarly, in the following excerpt, taken from a conversation I had with a tourist from Germany a few minutes later, the appointing of MOSE as a saviour is shown to be related to a shift in the feelings of floods:

> **Monica**: Did you know that tonight it [*acqua alta*] was supposed to be very high, but now it's not because of MOSE, which is blocking…
> **Tourist 5**: No, I didn't know that, I didn't know that, I just read that the, MOSE, about the project, and the millions, and billions… and that it will work someday, but that it's now… I didn't know…
> **Monica**: Well, right now your feet are dry because of it.
> **Tourist 5**: Oh really?
> **Monica**: Yeah, yeah…they opened at six, because high tide was foreseen to be 140 cm, actually at ten tonight […].
> **Tourist 5**: Ah, so it can be, it can be very high at the moment
> **Monica:** Yes, exceptionally high.
> **Tourist 5**: Ah!
> **Monica**: At 22.00, so in one hour, it can be completely…
> **Tourist 5**: So, if MOSE doesn't work, it would come… there will be a flood, suddenly…
>
> **Small Talk with Tourist 5**
> Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021

Like the other tourist, my interlocutor here was not aware of the predicted flood, nor that the MOSE system was functioning as we were speaking. What she knew about MOSE came mainly from a patchwork of un-situated memories about the system, and information provided by media outlets ("I just read that the, MOSE, about the project, and the millions, and billions… and that it will work someday"). When I pointed out an actual, tangible effect of the activation of MOSE – her having dry instead of wet feet – she was surprised ("Oh really?"),

and as the conversation proceeded, *acqua alta* became a potentially dangerous phenomenon should MOSE somehow not keep working ("so if MOSE doesn't work, it would come... there will be a flood, suddenly..."). Here, the MOSE system has a two-fold influence on feelings of floods: it both protects Venice from *acqua alta* ("it's because of MOSE, which is blocking..."), and thus seems to make floods feel harmless, but it does not do so for long. The fact that the MOSE system is needed in the first place contrasts with a feeling of floods as *acqua alta*, insofar as it transforms *acqua alta* into a sudden and violent flood which, were the MOSE not a reality, would necessitate a prompt reaction on the tourist's part. Similar to the other excerpt, then, this excerpt shows how feelings of safety towards the MOSE system relate to a shared feeling of floods as *acqua alta*. However, more explicitly than in my conversation with the other tourist above, here the appointing of MOSE as a saviour does not present floods only as harmless *acqua alta*, as here, they are also potentially dangerous phenomena, due to the potential non-functioning of the system. Consequently, trust in the functionality of the MOSE system appears to be directly connected to what one thinks MOSE is offering protection from, to a level of risk implied in feeling floods as either harmless or harmful. This later point also emerges in relation to a third practice, which I call 'taking a risk'.

Taking a risk

As I left the main square and walked through the streets around it, I was struck by the presence of bulkheads in front of many of the shops I encountered.

Figures 6.3 and 6.4. Bulkheads on doors around Piazza San Marco at night before an exceptionally high flood.
Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021.

I was surprised to see them, because they contradicted my understanding that there would be no flooding that night because the MOSE system has been activated. They contrasted with the atmosphere of Safe Venice, which I had so far wrapped myself in. The city seemed to be communicating something else to me. I read the bulkheads as signs of caution on the part of local residents and shopkeepers regarding the activation of MOSE; they suggested that these residents preferred to carry out the usual practices of protection, including placing bulkheads on doorsteps. This was also reflected in the words of one local resident:

I hope that it [MOSE] continues to work as it's working now […] for the moment, it's defending us excellently, luckily… and so… we hope that this problem, this anguish [of floods] becomes part of the past, but… well… well… I will continue to put things up… you never know.

Small Talk with Local 2
Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021

Arriving in front of the Fenice Theatre, I decided to enter a restaurant that had no visible protection against the flooding and ask the owners if they knew that MOSE had been activated. As I entered, I noticed a few people dining by candlelight, being served by bow-tie-wearing waiters who elegantly moved amid the soft clinking of crystal wine glasses. I smiled at a young Chinese couple taking selfies and glanced at their newly purchased Gucci bags under their table. As I reached the end of the room, I noticed two men talking behind the counter. They were the owners. The following is an extract from a conversation with them:

> **Monica**: I would just like to know how you get information about the situation, whether the MOSE system is open or closed, if…
> **Restaurant Owner 1**: We receive messages… from the…
> **Monica**: From the CPSM.
> **Restaurant Owner 1**: Yes.
> **Monica**: Okay, and… and then you decide whether to put up the barriers or not… you close? What do you do?
> **Restaurant Owner 1**: No, we don't close… because we don't have the barriers…
> **Restaurant Owner 2:** [ironically] No, because we trust the system [smiles].
> **Monica**: [smiles] So, you trust the… I noticed that even around here, there are shops that have put up barriers [smiles].
> **Restaurant Owner 1**: No, we don't have them, we don't have them because we have three thousand doors and… We don't have the barriers… so if the water comes, we wash it away and move on.
> **Monica:** Okay, I understand.
> **Restaurant Owner 2:** We absolutely trust the institutions…

Monica: Well, you see? And… because I see that there isn't much trust in the surroundings since the MOSE has been activated […]

Restaurant Owner 1: I received the message that MOSE is active…

Monica: Exactly, so you're safe tonight.

Restaurant Owner 1: So we're safe.

Monica: Okay.

Restaurant Owner 1: Unless a… cataclysm happens, and the barriers go down, but… let's hope not…

Restaurant Owner 2: By now, let's say we have a kind of … It has already happened three or four times, and the system has always held up… moreover, we are obligated to do it because, as he said, we have so many entrances so we need to have protection at each entrance, in the end…

Monica: It would be…

Restaurant Owner 2: Might as well wait and see if it comes… since we already have a good certainty that MOSE works… We take a risk, let's say, it's a calculated risk.

Small Talk with Restaurateurs
Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021

When I ask the restaurant owners how they obtain information about flooding predictions and the function of MOSE, one tells me that they usually receive an SMS from the official forecasting center (CPSM). When I ask whether they "close" the restaurant with bulkheads when a flood is predicted, one replies that they do not because they do not own any. At that point the other owner, ironically, says that they do not close the restaurant with bulkheads not because they do not have them, but because "they trust the system", meaning that they trust that the MOSE system will actually work. In response to this remark, the other interviewee says again that they do not put bulkheads at the doors because "we have three thousand doors", and so it would be impossible to put one on each door. Thus, one owner explains the lack of bulkheads at the restaurant's doors as a result of their trust that the MOSE system works, while the other, to counterbalance the joke, uses hyperbole to present the true reason for the lack of bulkheads: the floorplan of the restaurant. As the conversation progressed I tried

to give the second owner space to talk, as I felt that his feelings contrasted with what I had witnessed on my way to the restaurant a few minutes before, when I read the bulkheads placed at the doors of businesses as signs of mistrust in the functionality of the MOSE system.

Continuing the conversation, the first owner then says that they knew that the MOSE system had been activated and that, for that reason, they felt "safe" and "relaxed" – "unless", he adds, "a… cataclysm happens, and the [MOSE] barriers go down, but… let's hope not". In other words, the first owner expresses feeling safe and relaxed that evening because he trusts that the MOSE system will function, and admits that trust and feeling of safety. At the same time, he doubts them, because a "cataclysm" could have happened anyway. This scenario is, however, promptly dismissed by the second owner, who provides evidence of the fact that MOSE has functioned properly in the past, justifying their trust in MOSE. Put differently: their feeling of safety regarding the *current* situation is directly related to the fact that the system had worked *before*. The already-existing feeling of trust in the MOSE system, "a good certainty that MOSE works", as they put it, made them open the restaurant that night, even though a flood was predicted. Thus, due to their agreement, their feeling of safety was strengthened not only by the message from the CPSM, but by their previous experience of their trust having been well-placed in the past.

This first reading of this excerpt highlights how feeling safe is not felt solely personally, and instead can be shared by multiple people in close relation to the city they are in and their trust in something – in this case, the MOSE. If we analyse this passage based on affect thinking (Ahmed 2004a, 2004c), instead of reading these feelings of safety simply as expressions of the individual feelings of two restaurant owners, they can be read as affect. Here the feeling is collective, in that it relates to shared experience of these feelings in the past, in other situations where MOSE successfully functioned to protect the city from floods. Here, then, feelings of safety travel among us because the atmosphere of Safe Venice encapsulates us, as much as this atmosphere is sustained by our feelings, even as the highest flood of the year approaches from the open sea as we speak. Just as I

went out wearing sneakers, trusting that MOSE would hold back the flood, the restaurant owners trusted that MOSE would work, and so opened their restaurant.

Another aspect of feelings of safety was revealed in this conversation: the fact that these feelings relate to trust not only in the technology of the MOSE system and the local atmosphere of Safe Venice, but in what MOSE is intended to protect us from. This excerpt shows that the owners opened the restaurant that night not only because they trusted the MOSE system, but because it was "a calculated risk", as one of them says. A calculated risk is a risk taken after a preliminary assessment of the pros and cons of the situation in which one finds oneself. If the cons outweigh the pros, the risk is not worth taking. In this situation, the calculated risk was to open the restaurant anyway, because what would happen were the MOSE to not work was not a very high risk for the business. This is because the two owners thought that MOSE protects them from a "tide". Thus, insofar as MOSE is supposed to protect them from a tide or *acqua alta* – even a high one – the feeling of safety is associated with a different level of risk than if MOSE were intended to protect them from a flood. One says "[m]ight as well wait and see if it comes"; if it did, they would "wash it away and move on". The interview with these two local restaurant owners shows how feeling safe in Venice that night, and feeling floods as *acqua alta*, depended not only on Safe Venice and the trust in the functionality of MOSE, but above all on the fact that, even when *acqua alta* is exceptionally high, it is still an authentic and harmless phenomenon. In Safe Venice, floods are felt as safe not only when they are felt as *acqua alta*, but when they are felt as exceptional *acqua-alta* events that are resisted by the MOSE system.

Mobilising affect through a story of Venice

The previous section postulated the existence of an atmosphere I call 'Safe Venice'. In Safe Venice, floods feel like safe phenomena even during exceptional

acqua-alta events, insofar as the city is protected by the technology of the MOSE system. In this section, I want to show how Venice Municipality's strategic communication of floods can be said to preserve the feeling of floods as safe exceptional *acqua-alta* events resisted by the MOSE system by telling a story of Venice as a place where water is an unruly natural element.

I start with an excerpt from an interview with a local politician in charge of the city's planning and environment.

> **Politician 1**: From an environmental perspective, I must say that this is a city that has always, I must say, in 1600 years of history, had a culture of approaching the environment…
>
> **Monica**: Yes, in relation-
>
> **Politician 1**: No, it's not a matter of relation, it's a matter of survival! Eight rivers used to flow into the lagoon… since the 1400s, six rivers have flowed into it because two rivers were diverted to the open sea, no longer into the lagoon. The big problem with rivers is the transport of sediments… it means that… as the seabed level rises, land starts to appear. … This means that Venice would have been one with the mainland. Instead, the city's defensive system was to create, like a medieval castle, a moat with water… but six rivers still flow today…
>
> **Interview with Local Politician 1**
> Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021

At the beginning of the interview, the politician points out that Venice has a specific type of relationship with its environment: one that relates to survival. He refers to past interventions that were intended to divert the lagoon's main rivers out of the lagoon in order to prevent sedimentation, as evidence for his argument that Venice has always needed the lagoon to "defend" itself, "like a medieval castle". Thus, according to the politician, over the centuries Venice has protected itself from water using technological interventions that have allowed the lagoon, and therefore the city itself, to exist. This was repeated later in the same interview:

> **Politician 1**: I am of the opinion that this city can continue… to do what it has done for 1600 years.
> **Monica**: Live in harmony with nature.
> **Politician 1**: In harmony with nature… no! In contrast… look, Venice opposes nature… the history of Venice, perhaps we forget it today, has always opposed nature, because if Venice had let nature take its course, the lagoon would not exist!

> **Interview with Local Politician 1**
> Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021

In this excerpt, I propose again the idea of a harmonious relationship between Venice and the lagoon, whereas the local politician depicts nature (i.e. water) as an unruly element, stubbornly and persistently threatening Venice's survival. In Venice, according to the politician, harmony with nature is a constant endeavour of "opposing" it.

When I ask him about the MOSE system, the politician argues that

> MOSE saves Venice, and MOSE is one of those works that helps Venice to remain preserved, [but] I always say, be careful, the water issue cannot be addressed in a single way. Venice, everyone thinks about seawater, the MOSE is a barrier against the sea, it raises its hands in front of the sea, and I remind you that there are six rivers behind, that flow into the lagoon… we must not forget what the water carries. […] we must focus on science… research, and technology.

> **Interview with Local Politician 1**
> Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021

The politician argues that "MOSE saves Venice", but that this technology alone is not enough to solve what he calls "the water issue". He argues that, when thinking about Venice's environmental problems, "everybody thinks about seawater", but stresses the need to remember that "there are six rivers behind", which bring debris and can dry up the lagoon. As in the previous excerpt, then, water is an unruly element that stubbornly and persistently threatens Venice's

survival from the front (the sea) and back (the rivers). According to this politician, keeping Venice safe is an ongoing, constant battle that needs to be fought on multiple fronts through continuous investment in science and technology.

The Venetian lagoon, in fact, is anything but a pristine natural environment (D'Alpaos 2019), the result of centuries of human modification. In the 1930s, the eastern part of the lagoon marshlands were covered with 2000 hectares of sand – almost twice the size of the island of Venice itself – to create Italy's largest and most polluted industrial area, Porto Marghera. This became the site of power stations, petrochemical plants, and oil refineries, taking over nearly all of the salt marshes and irreversibly altering the fragile lagoon ecosystem (Ibid.). The construction of the major navigable canal, known as the Petroli Canal ('petroleum canal') in 1968 brought even more significant changes to the lagoon environment, comparable only to the construction of the MOSE system, which began in 2003. The canal required continuous dredging, causing relentless erosion of the seabed. In addition, industrial waste was disposed of in landfills in newly reclaimed areas throughout the twentieth century, contaminating water and soil, until the site was declared of national concern in 1998 (Longhin 2022). Today, a maze of tidal channels of different depths characterises this 550 km² area of shallow lagoon waters, fens, and salt marshes.

Against this backdrop, the excerpts from this interview with the local politician tell a story of Venice as continuously threatened by the unruly element of water and in need of technological intervention, allowing here for the creation of the character of the MOSE system as the saviour. As a savior, MOSE saves Venice from its long-standing enemy, water. By arguing for an overall and ongoing "water issue", rather than a contemporary environmental necessity due to climate change, the politician positions MOSE as the logical continuation of a series of technological interventions carried out over centuries to keep Venice afloat. In other words, the character of MOSE is not positioned here as an intervention against the current ecological challenges posed by climate change, but against Venice's eternal enemy: water.

Epic stories are those that inspire pride in the narrator and admiration in the listener (Gabriel 2000). These stories usually narrate achievements, contests, and trials, and almost always have a happy ending. In the interview with the local politician, an epic story of Venice's previous achievements against water can be discerned. This narrative invests the MOSE system with a pre-existing and justifiable feeling of trust – that it will, like all the technological interventions before it, be successful in protecting Venice from water. Contrasting with the story of Venice as a place that exists in harmony with water, as is explored in the previous chapter, in this story the relation between water and land is harmonious only when actually sustained through hard form of technological intervention. This resembles what Boje et al. (2015) term the story of the 'Everyday Adventure', wherein organisations emphasise both unseen threats and the repetitive nature and predictability of everyday organisational life. These unforseen events, Boje et al. (2015) argue, "transform managers and key individuals into heroes" (6) that fight against them.

Thus far, this section has shown that the strategic communication of floods by Venice Municipality can be said to preserve the 'stickiness' (Ahmed 2004a; 2004b) of feelings of safety to the MOSE system by telling an epic story of Venice's technological achievements against the unruly character of water. I would now like to analyse the promotional campaign published in 2022, to show how Venice Municipality sustains a shared way of feeling floods as exceptional *acqua-alta* events that are resisted by the technology of the MOSE system. Trust in MOSE, therefore, is shown to be pivotal for the sustainment of shared feelings of floods as *acqua alta*, even in the case of exceptional flooding events.

Feeling exceptional *acqua alta*

In order for the 2022 promotional campaign to communicate about the MOSE system, it needed to explain the reason for the existence of the system in the first place. The last video of the campaign presents this:

Flooding in the lower part of the city has become a recurrent phenomenon, especially in autumn and winter. Unfortunately, over the last 20 years, every two or three years, the high-water level has reached or exceeded 140 centimetres, thereby flooding at least 45% of the streets. The MOSE system is capable of blocking the temporary entry of sea water into the lagoon, consequently preventing *acqua alta* from occurring in the event of intense phenomena.

Excerpt from '*Acqua alta – MOSE, what is it?*'
Promotional campaign by Venice Municipality, June 2022

In the videos analysed in the previous chapter, floods in the city were named *acqua alta* in order to contrast external feelings of floods as intense phenomena due to climate change. In this video, however, there is an explicit mention of "flooding", which are not the result of "the natural flow of the tide" but have, instead, "unfortunately become a recurrent phenomenon". Whereas in the previous videos the recursive nature of the tide was a positive sign of Venice living "in symbiosis" with the watery world around it, in this video this is not the case, and the recursive character of the tide is understood as a chronic, unpleasant event for the city. "[O]ver the last 20 years", the narrator argues, *acqua alta* has grown, reaching higher-than-usual levels, becoming "an intense phenomenon" that requires the MOSE system to "prevent" it. The campaign stresses that higher-than-usual tides are nevertheless rare ("every 2 or 3 years"), exceptional events, during which MOSE only "temporarily" blocks the entrance of sea water to the lagoon in order to protect the city. Therefore, MOSE not only protects Venice from exceptional high tides but, in doing so quickly and temporarily, prevents damage to the lagoon ecosystem by not otherwise blocking the constant reflux with the sea. The name 'MOSE' thus seems somewhat appropriate; just as the biblical figure Moses parted the waters of the Red Sea with his hands just long enough for the Israelites to cross over, the MOSE system is activated only briefly, to hold back the flood, before modestly receding.

As the video progresses, the campaign presents how *acqua alta* is supposed to be felt:

MOSE […] is activated when forecasts are equal to or greater than 130 centimetres. […] this means that with predicted levels of between 100 and 105 centimetres the system cannot come into operation. At these levels, Piazza San Marco is covered by a layer of water approximately 20 centimetres high and a few other parts of the city are also beginning to flood. So don't worry! *Acqua alta* will not disappear completely from the city overnight and you will still have to deal with it. Indeed, the Municipality and its citizens won't stop taking all the necessary precautions to protect themselves from high water in the event that MOSE does not come into operation.

Excerpt from '*Acqua alta* – MOSE, what is it?'
Promotional campaign by Venice Municipality, June 2022

While in the previous chapter, *acqua alta* was a character that strategic communication used to invest all flooding phenomena with a wonderful emotional aura, in this excerpt the character of *acqua alta* changes, as the excerpt refers only to flooding of up to 130 cm. Above that height, the video explains, *acqua alta* is an intense phenomenon that necessitates intervention from the MOSE system. The majority of the time, therefore, the character of floods is peaceful and tranquil, i.e. it is *acqua alta*, and tourists can expect to experience a thin "layer of water" covering the city pavements. At this point, tourists are even given the instruction "don't worry!", on the basis that the MOSE system will not prevent *acqua alta* from happening entirely – the phenomenon "will not disappear completely from the city", which will "still have to deal with it". "Dealing with" here means that tourists still need to perform the practices discussed in the previous chapter when encountering *acqua alta* – walking on planks, wearing rubber boots – just as locals do. With the instruction "don't worry", floods, as *acqua alta*, are reassessed as positive experiences for tourists in Venice, and an authentic and harmless Venetian experience.

Comic stories, like epic stories, involve achievements, contests, and trials that eventually lead characters to transition to new and better identities (Gabriel 2000). However, comic stories also involve self-mocking humour, wherein characters adopt playful and ironic attitudes, preventing the comic story from

becoming a tragedy. The excerpt from the promotional campaign produced by Venice Municipality could be said to reveal a comic, satirical narrative that combines tragedy and romance, with the combination being made ridiculous through the use of humour and irony. As Sköldberg (1994) argues, "something that changes but does not change at the same time is typical of satirical narration" (228). By presenting the MOSE system as a saviour against the unruly element of water, against the sporadic misbehaviour of *acqua alta*, the campaign changes the original story of Venice as a place that exists in harmony with its natural surroundings, and suggests an unruly, dangerous side of *acqua alta*. Whereas *acqua alta* was previously made to seem a harmless phenomenon in the city, here it is presented as a danger that must be controlled by the MOSE system. In other words, in order to avoid the contradiction of having previously promoted a shared feeling of floods as harmless, Venice Municipality turns *acqua alta* into both a threat and an authentic Venetian phenomenon. This causes Venice to be a place that is in harmony with the water, and safe from its dangerous side. In the story of Venice as a place that needs protection from the dangerous side of *acqua alta*, MOSE is positioned as the unavoidable technological saviour. This character, invested with a feeling of trust, allows the floods to be felt as safe even in the case of extraordinary events, such as when *acqua alta* is exceptionally high.

Until now I have shown how the strategic communication of floods by Venice Municipality creates a shared sense of safety regarding floods, even when they are exceptionally high, through the way it mobilises a sense of safety in relation to the MOSE system. The next section explores the implications of this for the constitution of climate change in Venice.

Constituting climate change

In this section, I focus on how a shared sense of safety regarding floods, even in the case of exceptional events, is negotiated in order to constitute climate change as a problem that has already been solved in the city of Venice. I do this by

showing how the strategic communication of Venice Municipality resists alternative ways of feeling about floods in order to sustain the existence of Safe Venice, as a place where climate change is a problem that has already been solved through technology.

I will begin by analysing an extract from an interview with a local politician in charge of heritage and territorial promotion:

> **Politician 2**: The other day we had [...] the international press [...] they came and asked two questions: "so now the changes of the climate [...] [grumbling]
> **Monica**: And what did you say?
> **Politician 2:** I said "these apocalyptic changes that you are going to think about, can be thought of in 5000 years [...] and then, you worry about New York". I told her [...] that there is an ocean there that the wave arrives and [in dialect] there is no chance that you can [...] you worry about New York". I told her "we'll take care of Venice" [...] it's the ignorance towards the [...] So, since Venice makes the news [...] people say all sorts of things! They arrive here with preconceptions, prejudices that I would never think of having myself [...] towards others, never towards other countries, in fact I told her "Ma'am, worry about yourself [...] you go under water first", I said. [...] alarmism [...] works better than good news [...] So: 140 [...] was there *acqua alta*?
> **Monica:** No.
> **Politician 2**: Does MOSE work?
> **Monica**: Yes.
> **Politician 2:** So what [is the problem]?

> **Interview with Local Politician 2**
> Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021

During this interview, a local politician recalled a day when the international press came to Venice. A journalist asked the politician to talk about the "changes of the climate" in relation to Venice – a question that seems to have annoyed the politician, who, becoming defensive, gives temporal explanations in order to discredit the idea that climate change affects Venice (and argue that climate

change will not affect Venice for many years). The politician then explicitly told the journalist to focus her worries on where she came from, i.e. New York City – a place, according to the politician, that is inherently vulnerable to the unpredictability and ferocity of sea "waves". In line with the argument presented in Chapter 5 regarding the supposedly distorted reporting of the international media on flooding events, then, the politician claimed that feelings of fear and alarmism reflected an ignorance of how floods in Venice work, arguing that people like the journalist have "preconceptions" and choose to follow the logic of sensational journalism, wherein "alarmism […] works better than good news". As a way, then, to demonstrate the pointlessness of alarmism over climate change as a potential problem for the city of Venice, the politician stressed to me the good function and reliability of the MOSE system during the floods of the previous night.

As the politician recounts the episode, she seems to remember most clearly the concern and alarmism that presumably caused to the journalist to ask their questions, who (to the politician) wrongly assumed that climate change is an unavoidable problem for the city of Venice. In other words, the journalist's questions disturb the politician not so much because the journalist implied that climate change existed in Venice, or that Venice would succumb to rising sea levels, but because the journalist herself, through her feeling floods as dangerous, became the medium through which a collective sense of anxiety, fear, and alarmism about climate change was transmitted. The transmission of these affects depends not only on the communication of individual people, but on the shared feelings of doom about climate change that already exist and are transmitted in and through individual acts of communication. This is the cultural historicity of atmospheres (Bille et al. 2015). The existence of a culturally shared atmosphere of Venice as a sinking, fragile, doomed city in the age of climate change relates to the transmission of feelings of fear, anxiety, and hopelessness. These feelings, embodied by the journalist, pertain to an external, collective narrative of Venice as a sinking city. At the end of the excerpt, by stressing the proper function of MOSE to me, the politician can be said to reiterate MOSE as a saviour so to fight

against this shared feeling of doom and reinstate a feeling of safety regarding both floods and Venice. Indeed, trust in the MOSE system supports a way of feeling floods as harmless, even when they are exceptional events, insofar as they are resisted by a strong and reliable form of technological intervention. Yet, the politician's communication here does not use the MOSE system merely to promote floods as harmless and safe, but to promote the feeling of Safe Venice – a city where climate change, if it is a problem at all, is one that has already been solved.

Summary of the chapter

As in the previous chapter, this chapter began with an analysis of a series of ethnographic materials I had collected while in Venice: a personal reflection, two small-talk interactions with tourists, and an interview with two restaurateurs in the city on a night when exceptionally high floods were contrasted with the activation of the MOSE system. The narrative analysis of these materials showed that ordinary practices around flooding in the city, including my own, can be understood to be motivated by a shared sense of safety that emanates from the city itself, and is inherently linked to trust in technology. The feeling of trust that MOSE would work not only influenced my decision about which outfit to wear but led me to recreate an ordinarily safe atmosphere of Venice through my interpretation of the people and objects around me, which I call 'Safe Venice'. The analysis of extracts from my conversations with two tourists in Piazza San Marco then highlighted how the emergence of Safe Venice depends on the reiteration of ordinary feelings of safety through the practice of explicitly appointing the MOSE system as a saviour. By appointing MOSE as a saviour, floods are once again felt to be *acqua-alta* events. However, an interview with two local restaurant owners showed that feeling floods as *acqua alta* is dependent not only on trust in the proper function of MOSE, but on the fact that MOSE is trusted even before it successfully functions. A logic of successful technological interventions to keep Venice afloat is therefore crucial to ensuring both confidence in the MOSE system and the feeling of safety in relation to *acqua alta*

even during exceptionally high floods. Trust in the MOSE system thus allows floods to be felt not only as *acqua alta*, but as exceptional *acqua-alta* events that are resisted by technology.

The second part of the chapter examined the strategic communication of flooding by Venice Municipality. First, by analysing an interview with a local politician, which I read as an epic story, I showed how the MOSE system was positioned as a hero against Venice's chronic enemy of water. Thus, the harmonious relationship between water and land emphasised in the previous chapter was here narratively supported by the element of technology. In this way, the MOSE system was found to be imbued with an automatic sense of confidence through its ability to keep Venice safe from flooding, just as technology has kept Venice safe many times before. Then, through the analysis of a communication campaign, I showed how the Municipality can be said to create a shared sense of safety in relation to *acqua alta* through the narrative mode of comedy, by splitting the phenomenon into harmless and harmful parts. Only the harmful part, the campaign suggested, necessitates the use of the MOSE system, while the harmless side can remain as it is. In this way, feeling floods as *acqua alta* is strategically preserved, even in the case of exceptional phenomena. MOSE can also be trusted to protect Venice from this sporadic, unruly side of *acqua alta*.

Having shown how the strategic communication of floods can be said to promote a collective sense of floods as exceptional *acqua-alta* events by preserving a sense of safety in the city, in the final section of this chapter I looked at the implications of this for the issue of climate change in Venice. By analysing an excerpt from an interview with a local politician, I showed that strategic communication mobilises a collective way of feeling floods as exceptional *acqua-alta* events in order to resist a collective mode of feeling floods as dangerous phenomena that are caused by climate change, promoted by foreign news media. I therefore proposed that strategic communication, by investing trust in the character of MOSE, promotes both a shared sense of floods as harmless, and the feeling of Safe Venice as a city where climate change is already solved by technology.

Chapter 7.
Climate change as an unavoidable problem

This chapter examines how local scientists' strategic communication of floods aims to constitute climate change as an unavoidable problem for Venice. In order to do so, the chapter is divided into three parts: the first part introduces an affective atmosphere that I term Doomed Venice, and shows how a shared way of feeling floods can be captured by practices through which feelings of doom are transmitted and perpetuated. The second part presents how such feelings of doom regarding floods can be traced in the strategic communication of local scientists, while the third part shows how feelings of doom are negotiated in the sustainment of the affective atmosphere of Doomed Venice as a place where climate change is an unavoidable problem.

The atmosphere of Doomed Venice

As in the previous two chapters, I would like to begin with some extracts from my ethnographic observations made in the city of Venice. These extracts allow me to show how two practices can be read as communicative practices of transmission of feelings of doom. By feelings of doom, I mean fear, anxiety, and hopelessness. The excerpts document my experience of walking through Venice one night when it was unclear whether the MOSE system would be activated, and the subsequent impact this had on my feelings of floods and the city around me.

Feeling the uncanny

At around 20.30 I left my apartment in the northwest part of the island, just minutes before the tide was set to reach its peak. I headed straight to Piazza San Marco, where the flood was expected to be the most severe. I was prepared: I had my raincoat on, my phone and recorder in my waterproof pouch, the GoPro camera in my hand, knee-high green rubber boots on my feet. I was not the only one. As I began walking in the rain, I overheard a woman asking another woman walking in the opposite direction if she knew whether MOSE was going to be activated. The response was uncertain, and the first woman reacted with frustration.

...and she said in Italian: "Ossignore!"

Figure 7.1. Feeling the uncanny while walking in the rain (the English translation of 'Ossignore' is 'oh god'). Video still from atmospheric ethnography, November 2021.

Overhearing their conversation, I felt a sense of excitement for what was coming my way, and I said to the camera "it's going to be an interesting night" (*Wandering 5*, Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021).

What was interesting that night, for me, was documenting a direct experience of floods on my first day of ethnographic work in the city. Interest therefore translated into excitement when I heard that MOSE might not be activated. Following Ahmed's (2004a; 2004b) suggestion that affect makes us feel the signs around us in a particular way, from that moment on I felt that everything around me was indicating that the city was becoming more and more dangerous by the minute. Indeed, as I ventured onto Strada Nova – the bustling street leading to Rialto and, further ahead, Piazza San Marco – I observed tourists crowding in restaurants, busy waiters quickly closing the terraces of businesses, pedestrians in ponchos dragging suitcases over slippery bridges, and people scurrying away from the rain like gazelles fleeing a lion. It seemed to me that, to borrow Stewart's (2011) words, "[r]ight away everyone knew that something was happening, that we were *in* something" (447, original emphasis). In other words, it seemed to me as if the city in front of me was turning into an uncanny place because of the approaching floods. I read other peoples' practices as being in accordance with a potentially collective feeling of floods as dangerous – a feeling that was, for me, in that moment related to a feeling of excitement. This feeling of excitement related to my quest to document floods during my ethnographic practices, to a sense of thrill and luck at being able to glimpse the uncanny side of floods on my very first day.

Witnessing people's practices and feeling that these were signs of an approaching dangerous flood made me start to walk faster than before, my pace becoming irregular. While rushing towards nowhere in particular, I heard a person passing suddenly on my left, saying "*acqua alta* is an imminent reality" (*Wandering 5,* Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021).

(Acqua alta is an imminent reality) ... he just said

Figure 7.2. Feeling the uncanny while rushing in the rain.
Video still from atmospheric ethnography, November 2021.

The term *acqua alta*, uttered by this man, confirmed to me that the people around me were running away from floods and not from the rain – that *acqua alta* was showing its dangerous side at that moment.

After less than an hour of walking, I was thoroughly soaked. My boots, having been repeatedly submerged in puddles, contained water that sloshed between my heel and toe with each step. I stopped multiple times to observe the rising water levels in the city's basins and to photograph signs of the odd place I was in – one that was different from the tourist brochures and the personal memories of my youth. I found Piazza San Marco to be particularly eerie that night, with chairs usually carefully placed in the terraces of cafes, now being messily resting in the middle of the square, awaiting no one to be sited (Fig. 7.3).

Figure 7.3. Feeling the uncanny in Piazza San Marco: chairs being carried away by the wind during an exceptionally high flood.
Video still from atmospheric ethnography, November 2021.

I photographed the chairs shown in Figure 7.3, which are partially obscured by water on the camera lens, because for me in that moment they represented the signs of an affective atmosphere I call 'Doomed Venice'. Doomed Venice is an eerie place that is on the edge of collapse, a sinking city slowly being taken over by the relentless power of water. Although this wasn't my first experience of a flooded Venice, that night my encounter with water felt different, more visceral. This is because usually one retreats to drier ground in the face of such flooding, but in that moment I purposely put myself into contact with the element, moved by the quest to encounter it and understand how it felt. It was as if, because of these ethnographic practices which attuned me to the uncanny, I became one with the place as it became more and more unfamiliar to me, more daunting.

Doomed Venice, then, can be said to emerge from research practices that involve wanting to document floods as dangerous phenomena.

Wandering through Venice in the dark of night wearing rubber boots, intent on documenting the flood using my camera, my glasses fogging due to the contrast between warmth of the heavy rain and the cold November air, I found myself standing at the edge of a canal. In front of me was dark, black water. One more step, and I would have plunged into the restless black liquid getting stronger and stronger due to the wind blowing south. Even though I knew exactly where I was, the water above and below me triggered a sense of unfamiliarity with the place.

Figure 7.4. Feeling the uncanny at night during an exceptionally high flood.
Video still from atmospheric ethnography, November 2021.

Ordinary affects, writes Stewart (2011), "are not exactly 'personal', but they can certainly draw the subject into places he didn't exactly 'intend' to go" (40). The regularity of my walks in Venice, the ordinary atmosphere of the place as I had come to know it in more usual circumstances, had brought me to that place. And yet, there and then, excited and thrilled by the process of documenting a flood,

aware that the tide was peaking far out in the open sea, my "senses sharpen[ed] on the surfaces of things taking shape" (Stewart 2011: 448), and a cold shiver ran down my spine.

Beyes and Steyaert (2013) refer to the aesthetics of the uncanny as the "interconnection [that occurs] between affect and space" (1455). They argue that "[t]his bodily experience is predicated upon the everyday production of space and performed through walking, strolling, stopping, turning, waiting, watching, listening, sweating, having the shivers and so on" (Ibid.). Thus, an uncanny feeling of place relates to a feeling of unsafety, fear, and threat in an otherwise safe and recognisable environment. In that moment and place, where I found myself because of my usual route in Venice, it was if I the shiver woke me up from a dream, and I could feel Venice's ordinary atmosphere shattering in and through my body. At that moment, the doomed atmosphere I had seen in the chairs presented itself to me as reality, and this took me by surprise. With(in) it, the dark water in front of me felt like an unfamiliar, dangerous element, as I wanted it to be, but I was unprepared to encounter it in this way.

What I want to show with these excerpts from my ethnographic practice is that there is a connection between the performance of research practices and the feeling of the atmosphere of the city around me. The city felt like an uncanny place because it seemed like it was in peril and had been taken over by water, but most of all because of the way this resonated with the pre-existing cultural imaginary of Venice as a sinking city in the age of climate change. My ethnographic practices were intended to help me to grasp floods as climate change, and in that quest, or even *because* of that quest, my body was attuned to a city in peril – it encountered and reiterated it through the reading of everybody's else practices of running away from the dangerous phenomenon of *acqua alta*. What I am suggesting, in other words, is that the collective sense of doom over Venice, a city in peril due to climate change – the perfect city to document the inexorable force of water, submerging and washing over a place – created an atmosphere that I felt encapsulated in. My ethnographic practices, the aim of which was to attune me to a changing climate, were simultaneously the drivers

of and testament to the metamorphosis of *acqua alta* in these contemporary times. Through these practices, and the practices of others who quickly entered buildings to find refuge, a pre-existing sense of doom was stuck upon the city, turning it into a doomed place.

Having suggested the existence of Doomed Venice as emerging from practices of transmission of a feeling of doom, I now propose to look at another practice, which I call 'imagining the unusual'.

Imagining the unusual

A few minutes after I had felt the fear described above, I crossed the bridge on my right. After walking a few steps towards the city banks, I noticed a group of gondolas moored with their *ferro* (the prow of each boat) facing the street, moving rhythmically with the movements of waves, up and down, hitting each other at times, and in that way producing the sound of scraping wood. These boats are usually elegant silhouettes calmly traversing the Venetian lagoon without ever, even lightly, coming into contact with one another, and so they now revealed to me a wild side I had never witnessed before, and I imagined them as animals:

...horses, black horses...
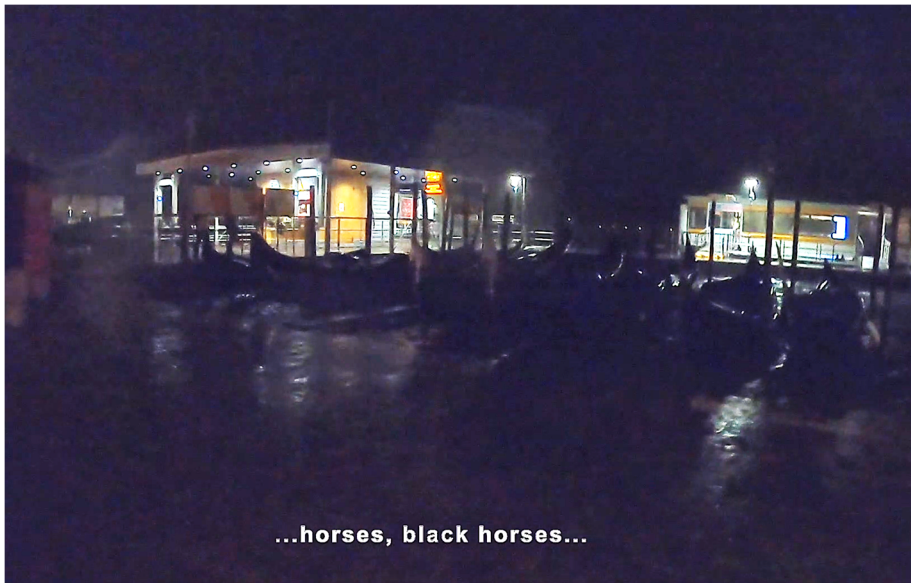
Figure 7.5. Imagining the unusual: gondolas in the dark of night during an exceptionally high flood.
Video still from atmospheric ethnography, November 2021

The agitated waters turned gondolas into wild animals that moved uncontrollably. They were like mad black horses charging towards me, and I once again felt in danger in an otherwise familiar environment; again, I shivered. In that shiver, Doomed Venice was felt again, contrasting with my usual feelings of amusement by and enchantment with the calm rhythm of water, and of gondolas in it.

Atmospheres do not exist prior to entanglements, yet they determine what can be communicated and experienced (Böhme 2017; Edensor 2012; 2015). In the case of my walk that night through a flooded Venice, an uncanny atmosphere of Venice did not emerge only because of the mixture of my imagination, memories, and feelings regarding the objects around me. This would have meant that I created Doomed Venice through my body, words, or interpretations. Instead, I propose reading my feeling of Doomed Venice as itself unavoidably dependent on a pre-existing, collective way of feeling Venice as a doomed place due to climate change. As such, it was this shared cultural feeling that made me feel

Doomed Venice in that moment and place, and that feeling made me re-create the atmosphere once again. The affective charge of such an atmosphere of vulnerability and peril, where water is surprisingly dangerous, made me see gondolas in a different way; it mixed up my imagination and feeling of the place I was in. Doomed Venice made me feel the place as on the edge of a flood, because in it water was an unpredictable and dangerous element – one that MOSE seemed to be allowing in from the open sea. In my uncertainty as to whether a flood was actually coming or the MOSE system had been activated, I felt a doomed atmosphere once again, and through this feeling I contributed to its creation. In this sudden shiver, I not only experienced Doomed Venice, but re-created a feeling of floods as dangerous and intense phenomena due to climate change.

Mobilising affect through a story of Venice

The previous section discussed an atmosphere I call 'Doomed Venice'. In Doomed Venice, floods feel like dangerous and intense phenomena due to climate change. In this section, I want to show how the strategic communication of local marine scientists regarding floods can be said to promote such a shared feeling of floods through a story of Venice as a sinking city.

I begin with some excerpts from a walking interview with a retired local marine scientist. The scientist explained to me that, before the advent of modern technology, Venetians observed the rhythms of the tides by observing the way the water, staying in the same place for several hours, left lines of algae on the white and smooth Istrian marble of the city's shores. All over the city, in calm water currents, Venetians would carve a 'C' in order to 'read' the lines left by the algae. This method is called *Comune Alta Marea* or, in dialect, *Comun* (Battistin & Canestrelli 2006).

Figure 7.6. The Comune Alta Marea method, where a partially submerged 'C' is carved in the marble wall.
Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021.

The scientist with whom I walked told me that less than a handful of the many 'C's carved into the walls are visible today, the rest having been submerged by the steady rise of the sea and the gradual sinking of the city's foundations into the muddy bottom of the lagoon.

Another sign of Venice's sinking is the many staircases that are used to enter gondolas and boats. The scientist told me that Venetian staircases are washed by the lagoon waves, and that the lower steps of most are now constantly underwater. He explained that their surfaces, which are covered with mussels and green algae, can be used to trace the changes that the city and its natural environment have undergone in recent times (Fig. 7.7).

Figure 7.7. The sinking city: a staircase.
Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021.

Proceeding with our walk around the city, we reached the calm, emerald-green waters of the Orseolo Basin, right behind the busy Piazza San Marco. At first glance I was struck by the beauty of the gondolas parked there, and by the number of tourists taking selfies nearby. It was only later that I realised what I was seeing. Unlike a typical hotel overlooking a calm body of water, the Hotel Cavalletto communicates something about the city's historic adaptation to rising sea levels, and chronic sinking into its own foundations.

Figure 7.8. The sinking city: the Hotel Cavalletto.
Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021.

It is no coincidence that the scientist took me to this place; he wanted me to see how the windows had been moved upwards to keep them out of reach of the rising water. Before this was done using blocks of marble, he told me, water used to come in, causing damage to the hotel lobby and inconveniencing staff.

Objects in places are meaningful because of how they make us feel (Ahmed 2004a; 2004b; Kuhn et al. 2017; Ashcraft & Kuhn 2017). In front of the hotel and those staircases, I understood what the scientist wanted me to understand, because I understood how he wanted me to feel what I was seeing. What I understood by looking at the windows, staircases, and carved 'C' – by paying attention to them – was not meaning, but meaning through sensation, a sense of doom that does not come merely from the words of a scientist nor from objects

themselves, but that seems to travel through those words and stick to those objects, making me feel the doomed atmosphere of the city. In my feeling for the city, what was once another picturesque side of Venice became a sign of Venice's doom.

As the conversation progressed, my interviewee suddenly stopped speaking as we were in front of a marble wall, as if he had not expected to see what he was seeing. "Here's another curiosity", he said, turning into the narrow street to our right "It is…"; he paused for a moment; "this is…"; he stopped talking again. "It's neglected…"; "there was also something here… it's all worn out… these are not… [tuts] you can't see anything anymore…" (*Walking Interview with Scientist 1*, Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021).

Figure 7.9. The sinking city: carved marble. The scientist indicates an incision made relative to the 1966 high tide.
Walking interview with Scientist 1, Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021.

The incisions in the marble showed the heights of the highest tides of the twentieth century, constituting a form of spatial memory of how the city has been affected by past exceptional *acqua-alta* phenomena. While standing in front of these incisions, the scientist said: "If I were the mayor or somebody, I would renew these marbles, I would put all the lines… clean up… look… I wanted to do it but they [the Municipality] told me no… I thought it would be something useful" (*Walking Interview with Scientist 1*, Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021).

My interviewee felt that it is important to preserve these tangible reminders of the at-times difficult relationship between water and land, and that the political realm has failed to recognise their importance. For the scientist, the neglect of the carvings – now dirty, broken, and forgotten – was indicative of a lack of recognition of the importance of Venice's relationship with the watery world around it, which the city's administration can, but does not, care about. "You see?", he said a few steps later, as we stop in front of the door of a storehouse, where the line of the 2019 high tide had been drawn by someone: "These are all private initiatives", he said, "but it would be good to have something… public, no? In the past, the Serenissima Republic took care of all these things… it's important!" (*Walking Interview with Scientist 1*, Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021).
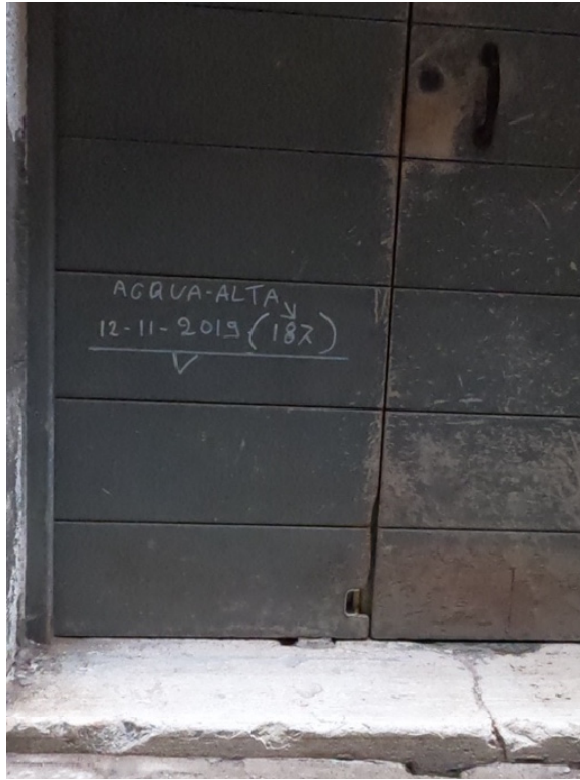
Figure 7.10. The sinking city: the door of a storehouse. A line showing the 2019 high tide on a door in the city.
Walking interview with Scientist 1. Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021.

By drawing my attention to these two objects, the scientist showed me not only how flooding phenomena are recorded in the city, but the refusal of the political realm to consider Venice's fragile relationship with its natural environment. In this interview, which I read as part of a narrative about a sinking Venice, the scientific realm is a kind of empathic and attentive protector of the city; the political realm, and the mayor in particular, are the antagonists ("If I were the mayor or somebody, I would renew these marbles", the scientist said). This story is a moral drama about what it means to be a scientist in a city that is sinking. By emphasising private initiatives, the story also creates a homogeneous local population that stands with scientists, against politicians. At the same time, this

story positioned me, the audience, as a witness to a moral tale of science versus politics. I want here to suggest that to read the strategic communication of local marine scientists in this way allows to capture how the shared feeling of doom over Venice, the cultural narrative of Venice as doomed due to climate change, and the feeling of floods as dangerous and unpredictable phenomena are preserved. By reading the ways in which the scientist helped me to pay attention as mobilisation of affect (Ahmed 2004a), it is possible to consider how feelings of doom were stuck, or adhered, onto signs as disparate as the city's shores and staircases, hotel windows and marble walls. As the following extracts will show, this story is useful not only for the feeling of Venice as a doomed city, but to make possible the existence within this doomed city of the dangerous character of *acqua alta*.

In the next section I analyse another event in the story of a sinking Venice, and focus on the character of *acqua alta*: an excerpt from another interview with the local marine scientist.

The creation of *acqua alta* as dangerous

In the following excerpt, the scientist explains me what *acqua alta* actually is:

> **Scientist 1**: *Acqua alta* is made up of two main components: the first is the so-called astronomical tide, which is derived from the movements of the Earth's surface, the water surface of the Earth, mainly due to the Moon, the Sun, and all the planets that are part of the solar system […] and the second component is the meteorological one. Depending on how this meteorological component pushes on the water, how it modifies, let's say, the water level, you have contributions either positive or subtractive. So, if there is… then you also have to consider the shape of the Adriatic…
>
> **Monica**: Okay.
>
> **Scientist 1**: It's like a channel, if the *scirocco* wind pushes in the southeast direction from the… from the open composition of Otranto…
>
> **Monica:** Yes.

Scientist 1: It accumulates in the upper Adriatic, accumulating a quantity of water that we see as the difference between the astronomical tide and this additional… this additional value is quantified by this red line.

Monica: I understand.

Scientist 1: That is the meteorological contribution. It can be negative! If there is a north wind, a *tramontana*… northwest wind.

Monica: That pushes from the other side.

Scientist 1: That pushes out, you can… then there's also the pressure… it's quite complicated… there are several phenomena…

This conversation makes clear that *acqua alta* is not one thing, but the sum of two components: an astronomical component, which is the tide derived from the movements of the Earth's water surfaces because of the Moon's gravity, and a meteorological component that "pushes" the water level. This meteorological component, the scientist argues, pushes from the south-east, partially due to the morphology of the Adriatic basin. When it does this, water accumulates in the north Adriatic and is then pushed into the Venetian lagoon, consequently flooding the city. There is also another element of pressure, the scientist adds, but mentions that "it is quite complicated" as "there are several phenomena" that compose the phenomenon of *acqua alta*.

Thus, *acqua alta* refers to a phenomenon that is created in the offices of scientists, that is not visible to the naked eye, as it has been understood in the previous chapters. Here it is not water that floods the city and leaves puddles as it retreats back to the sea, nor something to be resisted by the MOSE system; it is neither water, nor a tide, nor a flood, nor a mixture of components, but a phenomenon that is represented as a mixture of technologically mediated measurements of these components. More radically than in the previous chapters, then, the making of the character of floods here implies an actual, technological mediation. *Acqua alta*, in other words, is the result of the fact that technology has been able to

properly create and represent it, like the red line on the screen that my interviewee pointed to while talking to me.

The phenomenon is constructed by a complex set of instruments that feed data into predictive models. These statistical forecasting models refine their predictions by accumulating data from past events. In this way, the more tides that occur, the more expert the models become, and the more accurate the forecast. However, as the scientist explained:

> **Scientist 1**: Then there are much more advanced systems, 'expert' systems like the human mind. Meaning, they assess the current atmospheric pressure conditions…
> **Monica**: More parameters, I imagine.
> **Scientist 1**: Exactly, more parameters, but also intelligent ones, right? They have become smart models, in the sense that they observe that the pressure is decreasing, the wind is increasing… but in the Adriatic…
> **Monica**: Okay, they are more flexible.
> **Scientist 1**: So, they refine and become smart or complete models, specialised, because they become like a human being: experts. When one sees many cases of high water, it begins to understand and acquire the knowledge of how to handle them. …Some models manage to forecast 3–4 days in advance. […] but certain situations… slip past us.
> **Monica**: Like, I imagine, the one in 2019?
> **Scientist 1**: Exactly, that one really slipped past us precisely because it was an incredibly rare event; I mean, a small cyclone formation occurred in the Gulf of Venice, which is very rare… and models struggle to predict such things, especially if they have never occurred before in history…
>
> **Interview with Scientist 1.**
> Atmospheric ethnography, June 2021.

According to the scientist, there are also "more advanced" models, ones that become "experts" in combining different parameters to make their predictions more accurate. He explains that these models not only take a broader view on the movements of more components, but are able to interpret how the movement of

one element interacts with another. In this way, the scientist argues, these models are "smart", "intelligent," "like a human being", and interpret and learn from their experiences of "how to handle" cases as sequences of historically acquired knowledge, rather than separate events. While relatively archaic statistical models require active work on the part of humans in order to interpret data, these models can replace human interpretation and predict tidal levels. The phenomenon of *acqua alta*, therefore, is not merely created by an abstract and unrelatable technology, but by a smart, human-like technology – that of forecasting models. Similarly to how the technology of the MOSE system is invested with trust in the story presented in the previous chapter, forecasting models are here invested with a similar affective charge.

Yet, as the conversation progresses, the scientist notes that these models are not completely trustworthy, inasmuch as "certain situations [can] slip past us" by failing to predict a flood. This, the scientist explains, is especially the case for phenomena whose components behave in unpredictable ways, as happened in 2019. In these cases, it can be said that the models lack experience, and are therefore unable to predict and interpret the movements of the natural elements. As such, the scientist's communication initially portrays the social and technological work of humans as being up to the task of predicting and dealing with natural phenomena, but then suggests the possibility of these phenomena being able to 'win' against intricate human practices of prediction. As another scientist told me: "they are still mathematical methods […] the natural phenomenon has thousands of components, some of which are still unknown" (*Interview with Scientist 3*, Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021).

In this sense, then, *acqua alta* does not pre-exist technological construction, and technology alone does not create the phenomenon that is called '*acqua alta*'. As Ashcraft et al. (2009) argue with regard to the relationship between communication, technology, and reality, "[e]ach is already embedded in the other, and they develop—and so, can only be known—in relation, through their evolving interaction" (35). The communication of scientists creates *acqua alta*, which is stable just long enough to be recognised as such, but is also in constant

evolution. Thus, in order for the character of *acqua alta* to exist, this unfolding story depends on the ability of technology to 'identify' the phenomenon, and on the stability of natural elements themselves. If these elements change, and *acqua alta* changes with them, the models struggle to identify a phenomenon at all. What *acqua alta* means, then, depends as much on technological mediation as on the agency of natural elements.

Feeling *acqua alta* as climate change

With the next excerpt, I want to show how the unfolding story of Venice as a sinking city is able to invest the character of *acqua alta* with a shared feeling of doom. In order to achieve this, I use an excerpt from a conversation I had with another scientist in the city:

> **Scientist 3**: So, *acqua alta* has always been there, but now we see with climate change, *acqua alta* is, let's say, occurring over and over again. If you look at the figures, the frequency of *acqua alta* in recent years has grown exponentially, and this is precisely because the climate is changing, extreme events are changing, and sea level is also changing. All these things together, which are all climate change, have created a… a predisposition for more *acqua alta*. And we can expect this situation more and more. Just to tell you, we have, since 1870, we have had sea-level measurements, 150 years, and in total we have had eighteen exceptional tides, of more than 140 centimetres. In the last three years we have had S-E-V-E-N exceptional tides, that is, in three years, seven; in 150 years, 18. You understand that [chuckles] we have a problem.
>
> **Interview with Scientist 3.**
> Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021.

At the beginning of this excerpt, the scientist explains that, although *acqua alta* has always existed, its frequency has increased due to climate change. He argues that not only is *acqua alta* occurring more frequently, but that exceptional *acqua-alta* events (over 140 cm) are occurring more frequently. While the strategic

communication of Venice Municipality presented in the previous chapters refer to floods as *acqua alta* in order to make them feel like a harmless, authentic Venetian experience, even in the case of exceptional events, in this story *acqua alta* is a phenomenon that is becoming more dangerous due to climate change. Here, feeling floods as dangerous does not relate necessarily to the power they have to wash over everything and everyone. Rather, feeling them as dangerous is here connected to another sort of strength – the relentless, slow, and unavoidable power of water to advance and take over the city. This contrast with how *acqua alta* is ordinarily felt in the city is emphasised by the scientist's chuckle; with his voice, how he emphasises the events of recent years (in the excerpt he spells out the number for emphasis) and refers explicitly to it as 'a problem'. Thus, I propose that *acqua alta* is created through feelings of doom being 'stuck' (Ahmed 2004a; 2004b) to the character of *acqua alta*, in this way denying the ordinary affective charge of the phenomenon.

Investing *acqua alta* with feelings of doom also changes the character of MOSE, as the scientist discusses the repercussions of climate for the functionality of the system:

> **Scientist 3**: So, MOSE works for tides of up to 3 metres… so… a single event, MOSE can contain it. That's not the problem with the MOSE; the problem with the MOSE is if you have to close it too many times, it's the frequency of *acqua alta*, not just the one *acqua alta* that comes to you… having to close it every day, at least once, well, that, in the end… MOSE wasn't designed for this. MOSE was designed to protect against strong *acqua alta*, you see.
>
> **Interview with Scientist 3.**
> Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021.

The scientist tells me that the MOSE system is effective in dealing with exceptional *acqua-alta* events ("MOSE works for tides of up to 3 meters… so… a single event, MOSE can contain it"), but that "MOSE's problem" is its inability to deal with the increasing frequency of *acqua-alta* events. In other words, the problem with the MOSE system is not the height of *acqua alta*, but the frequency

of *acqua alta*. MOSE's problem, therefore, is related to the fact that climate change is making *acqua alta* more and more frequent, which means that it has to be activated repeatedly, "every day, at least once". MOSE "wasn't designed for this"; it was not originally conceived of to address the issue of more frequent *acqua-alta* events. Conceived in the aftermath of the 1966 exceptional high tide (thus more than 50 years ago), it was not built to deal with *acqua alta* as exacerbated by climate change, but to protect Venice from rare and exceptional events such as the ones in 1966 and 2019 (Benzoni & Scaglione 2020). Today, however, it is expected to provide protection against climate change, and this has clear consequences for the function and future of the city. In this story, it is not only the ordinary affects of *acqua alta* that are called into question, but the ordinary affects of the MOSE system, the sense of safety provided by and trust in the system, that are usually attached to it to position it as a saviour.

A tragedy focuses on the downfall or suffering of a protagonist; is often characterised by a series of events leading up to a catastrophe, emotional pain, and loss; and evokes feelings of pity, fear, and catharsis in the audience (Gabriel 2000). The story of Venice as a sinking city challenges the story told by Venice Municipality about water. This narrative of a sinking city, which emerges from the strategic communication of floods by local marine scientists, is similar to what Boje et al. (2015) term a "Rabelaisian purge narrative": one that offers a radical change in approach from previous institutional narratives, and that reframes old worldviews. In the story told by Venice Municipality, the character of Venice has a relationship with water that is either symbiotic, or trivial and based on a form of technological control over an unruly element. In contrast, in the story of Venice as a sinking city, the vulnerability of Venice stands out and the story of an eternal city collapses. In this anti-narrative, water is neither harmless nor unruly; it is the main character, agentic and powerful, a dominant force. Simultaneously, technology – both in the form of forecasting models and the MOSE system – is made to feel obsolete. The scientific narrative is a story about the power of water in the age of climate change, and the inability of humans to control it.

These excerpts from the strategic communication of floods by local marine scientists can be said to be show how, through the character of floods as *acqua alta* and the way it contraposes the character of technology, a shared sense of doom over floods is created. The mobilisation of this sense of doom through the creation of the character *of acqua alta* is pivotal to the sustainment of Doomed Venice in the age of climate change, as I will shortly show.

Constituting climate change

In this section, I discuss the implications of the mobilisation of a shared sense of doom for the constitution of climate change in Venice. I exemplify this with another conversation at Venice's forecasting centre, in which a scientist explained to me the possible solutions to the exponential rise in sea level due to climate change, and consequent increase in the frequency of flooding in the city:

> **Scientist 1**: The idea that we had here, engineers, Venetians… was that of managing the lagoon with pumps… I mean, closing the entire lagoon and managing it… with pumps and barriers so that… but… Venice is not something you can manage well because… you practically have to keep the level of the lagoon always lower than the sea…
> **Monica**: Yes, I see.
> **Scientist 1**: It's something… perhaps unthinkable now, we hope that with the technology in 30, 40 years we can do it, but it's not a 100% solution… and… and then we will think about it… or raise the subsurface with pumping… underground, water and sand pumping… to raise it a bit and recover those 20, 30 cm that can be recovered, I don't think you can recover more… so it means a horizon of another 20–30 years… then, however, another system must be found…
> **Monica**: What are they doing in other cities, in other countries?
> **Scientist 1**: Well, there's no city like this…
> **Monica**: No, really?
> **Scientist 1**: Because, like Venice, on the Po Valley with that little…

Monica: That's going down.

Scientist 1: It's going down… and… having an important port… usually, cities like that are abandoned… gradually abandoned… otherwise…

Monica: How sad…

Scientist 1: You build a great dam, long… the same problem with other lagoons…the problem is big, it's not a simple problem… in history, however, we see that there have been ice ages… that is… the sea level has changed by several metres… even civilisations went underwater.

Monica: Indeed.

Scientist 1: Well, then they were abandoned… they were abandoned and… of course, Venice, abandoning it… that is, they will put it under a glass dome…

Monica: [smiles softly]

Scientist 1: And they will manage it like, I don't know, a museum…

Interview with Scientist 1.
Atmospheric ethnography, November 2021.

In this long excerpt, the scientist tells me about possible solutions to sea-level rise for the city of Venice beyond the MOSE system, such as closing the lagoon off and managing its flux with pumps, or raising the city by pumping water and sand underneath it. Although these are "perhaps unthinkable now […] in 30 to 40 years", with the right technological advances, such solutions could become a reality. However, he adds that technology would never be a "100% solution", in that "there are no cities like it" – i.e. where the foundations of the city are the floor of a lagoon. "Usually, cities like that are abandoned", the scientist says. Feelings of sadness and hopelessness are expressed in relation to this narrative of a sinking Venice, for example in my explicit remark ("how sad") and my interviewee's doubting of the efficiency of solutions and admission that "I don't know" what the future will bring.

In this excerpt, climate change is once again presented as something greater than technology, stronger, a force that will eventually leave Venice with no alternative but to abandon it to its fate. Fate and climate change here connect to a certain natural logic that is intrinsic to the rhythm of the planet, the representation of a

recurring phenomenon from which humans cannot escape. Here, then, climate change does not mean the loss of Venice, but rather the loss of Venice's "soul". Under a glass dome, Venice could be preserved as a museum, a place emptied of the liveliness of everyday human and aquatic life. Interestingly, through this story of Venice as a sinking city, climate change is created as an unavoidable problem through the way in which feelings of doom – sadness and hopelessness – are mobilised specifically in order to resist alternative feelings – hope and safety – relating to the character of technology. A shared sense of doom regarding the sinking city allows technology to be seen as incapable of withstanding the force of climate change, insofar as climate change is not a sudden, dangerous wave of water but a slow and inescapable process of submersion. Climate change emerges from this story of Venice as a sinking city as an unavoidable problem through the way in which feelings of doom are resisted in relation to the future of the city on water and the inadequacy of technology in preventing this.

Summary of the chapter

As in the previous two chapters, this third and final analytical chapter began with an analysis of some ethnographic materials I had collected while in Venice – in this chapter, my walk through the city on a night when floods were supposed to occur. Using auto-ethnographic material, I showed how my sense of floods as dangerous phenomena was related to a feeling of being trapped in a doomed atmosphere, which I call 'Doomed Venice'. This doomed atmosphere is closely linked to feelings of doom, such as anxiety, sadness, fear, and hopelessness. These feelings, through the performance of ordinary ethnographic practices that were intended to account for a more intimate relationship with water, made me understand and interpret the signs around me as signs of a sinking city. This collective way of feeling Venice as a fragile, potentially sinking place has been especially prevalent since the 2019 *acqua alta* phenomenon. During my walk I was afraid of falling into the dark, rippling waters of the canal, and interpreted these feelings as not just mine, but part of a relation to the culturally shared sense

of floods, as dangerous signs of climate change. These passed through me during my encounter with a flooded city.

After discussing the emergence of Doomed Venice, I examined the strategic communication of floods by local marine scientists, and how this communication can be said to maintain a collective sense of floods as dangerous phenomena in Venice. I showed how the narrative setting of Doomed Venice was created by a tragic narrative of Venice as a sinking city. In this tragic narrative, the sense of doom is used to highlight the vulnerability of Venice, which is represented in signs as diverse as the city's embankments and staircases, hotel windows, and carvings in marble. In this sinking city, the scientific realm is juxtaposed with the political realm, and the local population is portrayed as a homogeneous group that is suffering due to the relentless power of water. In this narrative setting, *acqua alta* is a shifting character that is sometimes dangerous, and is linked to climate change. The creation of this character was shown to have an impact on the character of the MOSE system: whereas in the previous chapter it was argued that MOSE is central to maintaining a sense of safety, in this chapter it is presented as obsolete technology in the face of exponentially frequent floods due to climate change. In the strategic narratives of Venice Municipality, floods are successfully mastered by human technology and intelligence, but here the protagonist is water itself, its unruly nature and fluidity. Thus, in contrast to the way in which the shared sense of flooding was discussed in the previous chapters, here it can be said that the narrative of Venice as sinking proposes a counter-narrative – one that exposes holes and contradictions inherent in the strategic narrative. In this tragic story, Venice will soon succumb to the power of nature and its fate, and *acqua alta* is yet another sign of Venice's vulnerability.

The final part of the chapter showed how the strategic communication of floods by local marine scientists has implications for how climate change is felt in the city. Through the analysis of an excerpt from an interview with a local marine scientist, I show how the scientist's emphasis on the inability of technology to save Venice from becoming devoid of urban life mobilises feelings of doom. These are presented in order to resist a sense of hope that clings to the character

of technology; in this way, climate change is constituted not as a violent, sudden flow that can be resisted by high dams, but as a slow, almost imperceptible and inevitable process of submergence. Here, climate change is an unavoidable problem, a danger to not just Venice's squares, buildings, and *callis* (narrow streets), but to the everyday social life that takes place there. Table 7.1 summarises the key findings of the empirical chapters: the three stories of climate change.

Table 7.1. The three stories of climate change.

	Climate change as a non-existent problem	Climate change as a problem that has already been solved	Climate change as an unavoidable problem
Affective atmosphere (narrative setting)	Wonderful Venice	Safe Venice	Doomed Venice
Affective transmission (narrative actions)	Feelings of wonder	Feelings of safety	Feelings of doom (fear, anxiety, sadness, hopelessness)
Shared feelings of floods (narrative characters)	Authentic Venetian phenomena (acqua alta)	Exceptional acqua-alta events	Dangerous and intense phenomena
Affective negotiation (narrative tensions and resolutions)	Feeling wonder vs. feeling fear because of floods	Feeling safe vs. feeling fear because of floods	Feeling fear vs. feeling wonder and safety because of floods

Part III
Feeling the changing climate

Chapter 8.
Discussion

In this chapter I discuss the findings of this thesis by presenting the key themes that emerged throughout the analysis. These themes help me to explain the paradoxes and inconsistencies in the ways in which strategic communication was shown to influence the existence of affective atmospheres, and the consequent affective constitution of climate change within them. The themes relate to three types of practice in relation to floods: ordinary practices, preserving practices, and resisting practices. Through these practices, ordinary modes of feeling floods are reiterated, preserved, and used to resist contrasting affective experiences. These practices thus suggest how the influence of strategic communication can be traced at the level of collectively shared ways of feeling the changing climate in the tourist city of Venice.

The analysis dealt with the following research questions:

1. *How are atmospheres around floods created in everyday touristic practices in Venice through the transmission of affect?*
2. *How does the strategic communication of floods mobilise shared feelings in atmospheres?*
3. *What are the implications of the affective negotiation of floods for the broader issue of climate change in Venice?*

These three research questions aimed to unfold the communicative processes of constituting climate change, and to shed light on the role of affect in this constitution. In the following section, I explore the processes of constituting

climate change in more detail in relation to the three identified themes of ordinary, preserving and resisting practices.

Ordinary practices

Ordinary practices are the habitual ways in which tourists, workers in the tourism sector, and I encountered floods in Venice based on shared, collective sensations.

When I was in Venice, I observed that a feeling of wonder in such a famous tourist destination relates to the presence of the calm and shimmering waters of the lagoon around the city; this makes the place feel special, and gives it a dream-like quality. Venice achieves this atmosphere because water seems to be in perfect harmony with the land, acting as the perfect backdrop to the everyday experiences of the tourist (Davis 2022). In Venice, water is an element that remains calmly at the edge of the canals, or slowly and gently submerges premises. Venice is today one of the most famous touristic destinations in the world because it holds a symbolic place in our shared cultural imaginary. The city is known even to those who have never been there, and people associate it with a wide range of feelings – wonder, love, desire, and mystery (Lane 1991; Jerusum 2023). When visiting or imagining other famous places one tends to think about seeing something beautiful, but Venice instead means imagining a broader affective state, an experience constantly dominated by the emotion of the landscape, "a kind of ad libitum reproduction of the experience of the sublime" (Jerusum 2023: 27). In such a dreamy place, a sense of wonder attracts people to the city as well as drives the performance of tourists practices in such a place. In this thesis, I showed how feelings of wonder drive the performance of the usual tourist practice of photography, as if everything around needs to be remembered, immortalised by each click of the camera (Urry & Larsen 2011). Various technical devices, such as the planks provided by the Municipality and the rubber boots provided by hotel concierges, make it possible to carry out the everyday practices of tourists such as photographing, visiting, dining, even during and after floods, when

tourists can go about their business as usual, living quietly among the element of water and imitating the local customs of the place.

During my time in Venice, I also observed another common feeling in the city: a shared sense of safety. I linked this to the performance of ordinary practices through which trust in technology is continually, almost unconsciously, rebuilt. As industrialisation has progressed, technology has become an inseparable part of our daily lives, facilitating many of its aspects; however, it has also drastically changed the way we feel about the urban environment around us (Ratti & Claudel 2016). A modernist mindset has driven urban planning in the past, based on an idea of nature dominated by technology – a Western, masculine, and imperialist mindset in which nature is seen mainly in aesthetic and productive terms, as a serene backdrop to our urban lives (Ghosh 2016; Gies 2022, Heikkurinen et al. 2021). Feeling safe in Venice can thus be said to involve a collectively shared sense of being in a modern, Western city, where the unruly and dangerous side of water is kept at bay and in check by various forms of technological intervention (Pascolo 2020; Baldacci et al. 2022). These include the planks and rubber boots provided by the local municipality and hotel concierges, but also the bulkheads placed on the doors of restaurants and houses, and the complex network of weather-forecasting models and digital applications. Feeling safe in Venice is a common feeling, in the sense that visitors and locals tend to forget the technology that makes the city a safe place. The sophisticated array of technological apparatus that surrounds Venice, and constantly tracks the movements of water, is almost imperceptible to the layperson in everyday practice. As a result, the unruly side of water is silenced and ignored by technology, fostering an idea of water as tame and domesticated (Gies 2022), and allowing for the continuation of the usual practices of both tourist and locals.

Lastly, while in Venice I also traced the existence of a shared sense of fear in relation to water. In Venice, as in most urban centres, fear is not a common feeling (Bannister & Fyfe 2001). Fear is a destabilising feeling, one that makes people feel unstable, alarmed, and in danger. The particular aquatic environment of Venice and shared cultural narrative of the city have made it a place where one

is confronted with the finiteness of human nature, where water is attractive not necessarily due to its splendour, as in the case above, but because of its inherent destabilising feeling (Jerusum 2023). This feeling is combined with the fact that the city exists in our collective imagination as a symbolically vulnerable place that is succumbing to the threat of climate change (Baldacci et al. 2021). Scientists have been trying to create a sense of fear and anxiety regarding climate change for many years, and global media coverage of climate-related disasters feeds this sense of unease and uncertainty (Nabi 1999; 2003; DiRusso & Myrick 2021; Wong-Parodi & Feygina 2020). Yet, most people have never really experienced fear in relation to climate change, because the natural world around us is changing in almost imperceptible ways beyond its sporadic blasts and surges (Moser 2010a). A collective sense of fear and anxiety about climate change can therefore be said to hang over us in its potentiality (Stanley et al. 2021), making us question how long the places we live in, and visit will remain as safe as we think them to be. This affective orientation drives the performance of research and scientific practices that are intended to witness and adapt to such changes – practices that can be said to have become habitual ways of exploring vulnerable places such as Venice (Pascolo 2020). I myself was drawn to carry out my ethnographic work in Venice. When I was performing ethnography in the city, I found that fear attuned and sharpened my senses to my surroundings, forcing me to pay attention to details, to how people behaved and how I behaved. My ethnographic practice encouraged such attention, recording the movements of the water and feeling the city as if it were slowly but inexorably sinking beneath my feet.

The analysis thus showed that three common modes of feeling in Venice (wonderfully, safe, and scared or alert) are stimulated by the performance of ordinary practices around water, such as the practices of tourists, locals, and scientists. The presence of these common feelings is consistent with research on the emergence of affective atmospheres (Bohme 1993; 2014; 2017; Pink et al. 2015; Edensor 2012; 2015; Sumartojo & Pink 2019; Rokka 2023), according to which atmospheres determine how people feel, and simultaneously emerge in relation to these modes of feeling. Atmospheres continually emerge from the

interplay of practices of affective transmission in the specific spatial arrangements that constrain or enable them (Anderson 2009; Stewart 2007; 2011; Bille & Simonsen 2021). Thus, these three shared modes of feeling in Venice not only stimulate the performance of ordinary practices around water, such as photography, eating, and walking, but are modes that allow these feelings to persist and be transmitted in the first place. An affective approach allowed me to explore how cultural narratives of Venice – as a wonderful city on water; as a safe, modern, and technological tourist destination; and as a doomed, sinking city – find expression in situated affective atmospheres. These atmospheres not only influence the practices of people there, but are themselves intimately dependent on the performance of these practices. It is in these practices, where affect travels between bodies and places (Bille and Simonsen 2021), that floods are felt, rather than seen as dependent only on discursive, disembodied constructions such as cultural narratives.

Specifically, ordinary practices reveal that Venice can be understood as consisting of three coexisting affective atmospheres that emerge from and determine the affective practices of those who wander through it: Wonderful Venice, resulting from the transmission of a shared sense of wonder; Safe Venice, resulting from the transmission of a shared sense of safety; and Doomed Venice, resulting from the transmission of a shared sense of Venice's doom. Because atmospheres also have a certain cultural historicity (Bille et al. 2015), in the sense that they are susceptible to changes in human values and cultures, these atmospheres of Venice inevitably emerge from the ways in which ordinary practices conform to historically and culturally sedimented notions of how water and technology should feel in this fragile urban environment. Thus, the atmosphere of Wonderful Venice can be said to refer to a sense of wonder that emanates from the tranquil element of water, which ordinarily remains unthreatening and confined to its usual environment. The atmosphere of Safe Venice, where Venice is collectively perceived as a safe urban place to live, visit, and work, can be said to refer to a shared sense of trust in technological mastery of the unruly side of water. In the atmosphere of Doomed Venice, Venice feels like a doomed place in

the age of climate change, and this sense of doom is linked to a culturally shared sense of water as a brutal, untameable, and uncontrollable element even by technology.

Ordinary practices and the affective atmospheres they sustain are thus the first way in which climate change is constituted in the setting of Venice. As I argue in more detail below, it is only through the existence of affective atmospheres that the story of climate change can be told.

Preserving practices

Preserving practices, in this thesis, are those through which strategic communication influences how floods are felt in Venice. The term refers particularly to the stories and materials interventions in the urban place that Venice Municipality and local scientists can be said to use to preserve the performance of the ordinary practices described above, as well as their implicit ordinary modes of feeling and encountering floods.

The analysis presented in this thesis shows that, in a collectively shared atmosphere of wonder, the strategic communication of Venice Municipality mobilises a sense of wonder towards the tourists through a romantic mode of narrating the relationship between Venice and the watery world around it, as an effortless and harmonious coexistence. In this story, the character of floods as *acqua alta* is imbued with a sense of awe, making it an authentic, recurring Venetian experience, a harmless phenomenon that enters the city calmly and gently before quickly receding back into the lagoon. To feel floods as *acqua alta*, for tourists, therefore, is to not be frightened by the presence of water, to use the technological means at their disposal – such as the planks and rubber boots – and to adapt their practices by patiently waiting for the flood to pass, and simply carrying on as usual. The existence of these technologies in the urban space is therefore seen as not only a response to the practical need of both residents and tourists to carry out everyday practices as usual, but – I would argue, above all – as enabling the perpetual transmission of a shared sense of wonder among tourists

performing such practices. In other words, the municipality provides planks to allow tourists and residents to live in the city even during a flood, but also to maintain the flood as an exotic, authentic, and ordinary experience that tourists can encounter, in this way maintaining Venice a touristic destination.

Similarly, in the culturally shared atmosphere of Safe Venice, strategic communication mobilises safety through a comic story of Venice wherein the city coexists harmoniously and naturally with its watery surroundings only as long as technology is available to tame the unruly element of water. It is a comic story in the sense that it can be said to contrast the romantic story of Venice as being in harmony with water, and playfully and ironically highlights the trials and tests that lead the character of *acqua alta* to transition to a new and better identity. The comic story preserves the ordinariness of Venice by normalising the phenomenon as natural and not destabilising the status quo, thanks to the technology of the MOSE system. This story preserves ordinary practices by imbuing *acqua alta* with a sense of safety through the way it is narratively constructed as an exceptional event – one that is rare and successfully kept at bay by the MOSE. To experience *acqua alta* as exceptional is therefore to trust human constant technological control over the lagoon's waters, and to continue visiting Venice as usual. Tourists are encouraged to visit the city even during the winter months, with the promise that they will experience the city they have dreamed of (and paid for), even if the floods are more frequent and more destabilising for the local population and the city as a whole. MOSE is here the ultimate saviour against both floods and time – the latter in the sense that the ongoing effects of climate change are negated, preserving Venice as it has been for millennia.

Finally, in the collectively shared sense of Doomed Venice, a tragic story of Venice as a sinking city is told – a city where the land will soon succumb to the water, which is increasingly unpredictable and unruly. Strategic communication here preserves a pre-existing ordinary sense of floods as being caused by climate change by investing the character of *acqua alta* with a sense of doom. Indeed, the character of *acqua alta* reappears in this fatalistic narrative, but is imbued with different feelings from those imbued by Venice Municipality in the previous

atmospheres. To feel floods as *acqua alta* in Doomed Venice, indeed, is to feel and reiterate a sense of fear and hopelessness – to acknowledge that the phenomenon is changing before our eyes, that the city is sinking beneath our feet (Umgiesser 2020). Being afraid of *acqua alta*, of what it is becoming, is linked to those practices that require us to pay attention to the city around us (Pascolo 2020). For scientists, this means trusting in their methods of reading the signs in the city more than how the city appears on their screens, directing their gazes and the gazes of others to what is usually unseen, uncared for, and forgotten. This point was raised in the walking interview with the scientist that I analysed in Chapter 7. In the scientist's story, *acqua alta* is frightening, in the sense that water always wins, no matter how high the dikes are, no matter how the city's embankments are built; the element does not play by rules in the age of climate change (Gies 2022). Here, technology is outdated in the face of this new, hybrid phenomenon, half known and half unknown; the water resists technology, which can no longer monitor and control it from afar. In the analysis, models are incapable of fully grasping the phenomenon, and *acqua alta* does not even exist in itself; rather, it is created in scientific laboratories in order to give floods a recognisable rhythm, an identity, in order to confront them (Umgiesser 2020). *Acqua alta* thus erodes trust in technology and the sense of safety provided by it; technology is always a little behind the natural elements, the movements of which it tries to predict.

Thus, the analysis shows that strategic communication mobilises affect through strategic modes of narration that are intended to sustain the performance of ordinary practices of affective transmission of feelings of wonder, safety, and doom. This is consistent with research on the ways in which the creation of meaning involves affective sedimentation – the 'stickiness' of felt associations that resonate and persist (Ahmed 2004a; 2004b; Ashcraft 2021). Indeed, emotions are not just a matter of bodily responses or outward expression of emotional states; they involve habitual and unconscious orientations that can be described as the effects of repeated actions (Ahmed 2004a). Reading strategic communication as a narrative within the story of climate change therefore shows

that such strategic practices not only evoke emotional responses, but participate in processes of affective sedimentation. In this thesis, the preservation of ordinary practices through the telling of strategic narratives facilitates the continued 'stickiness' of wonder, security, fear, and hopelessness to the phenomenon of *acqua alta* and the technological element of the MOSE system. This strategic mobilisation and affective sedimentation take place through narrative techniques, the explicit and implicit promotion of practices, and tangible interventions in the urban space that hinder or enhance the performance of such practices and 'stickiness' of affect to them.

Resisting practices

Resisting practices are those communicative practices through which strategic communication uses ordinary affects to explicitly or implicitly resist alternative ways of feeling floods in the age of climate change.

The analysis showed that the strategic communication of floods by Venice Municipality mobilises feelings of wonder and safety not only to preserve the feeling of floods as usual, wonderful, and safe, i.e. as *acqua alta*, but to simultaneously resist the attachment of fear to this phenomenon. These practices show how strategic communication preserves affective atmospheres while preventing alternative modes of feeling from arising within them. Indeed, if *acqua alta* is felt as frightening, climate change appears in these two narrative settings. By preserving the atmosphere of Wonderful Venice, however, floods feel like another wonderful sign of Venice's splendour, and climate change is a distant and harmless phenomenon – one that happens in other places and not in Venice. This was posited during the interview with the politician, who argued that in Venice there exists a symbiotic relationship between the natural environment and the social environment of the city. By preserving the existence of Safe Venice, floods are felt as sporadic phenomena even in the age of climate change, and at the same time climate change feel as a controlled, predictable, monitored, and managed problem, and a problem that affects other cities in the world that are more

exposed to rising sea levels, or less able to manage their relationship with water than Venice is. The preserving of Venice as a tourist destination in the age of climate change is therefore based on both the strategic preservation of wonder and safety, and on the strategic resistance of fear through the preservation of these feelings. Importantly, then, if tourists continue to feel a shared sense of wonder and safety in the face of flooding, there need be no adjustment in the way Venice is visited, lived in, and governed.

The analysis thus showed that the existence of affective atmospheres depends not only on the performance of ordinary practices, but (more importantly) on the ways in which strategic interests and agendas maintain such performances in order to resist disruption to affective atmospheres (Bille et al. 2015; Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2016; Sumartojo & Pink 2019). As Bille et al. (2015) write: "the purposeful staging, orchestration, or manipulation of atmosphere […] becomes a way of performing what the world both *is*, and *can be*" (Bille et al. 2015: 34, original emphases). Atmospheres, however, leak, crack, and in so doing expose the mechanisms of their maintenance (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2016). Wonderful Venice and Safe Venice 'crack' through the bulkheads placed on the doors of houses when MOSE is supposed to have been activated; it 'leaks' in the feelings of fear and anxiety that a flood is coming anyway, that *acqua alta* is mutating into something more dangerous than it has been in the past, in this way 'exposing' the reality of Venice. These feelings arrive in Venice through the ways in which journalists ask about the future of the city in the age of climate change (see Chapter 6), through the arrival of researchers like me who want to document and analyse such a change, and through the story told by scientists of Venice as a sinking city (see Chapter 7).

In this regard, the strategic communication of local scientists has been shown to mobilise feelings of doom and hopelessness so to make *acqua alta* feel scary, and climate change feel inevitable. The analysis showed that when *acqua alta* feels scary, it feels like climate change, like it is happening all around us, in the familiarity of our daily surroundings and to what we have come to recognise as our companions in life (Cf. Norgaard 2011; 2018). Unlike the political sphere,

which makes climate change seem distant and abstract, the scientific sphere points at how climate change is already present in everyday life in Venice. In particular, the analysis showed that the mobilisation of fear through the story of a sinking Venice is central to resisting the clinging of safety to the character of the technology of the MOSE system. Indeed, the sense of doom is central to the scientists' emphasis on the need to imagine alternative futures for the city to those proposed by the political realm, which argues for institutional care of the fragile relationship between water and land in Venice. Feeling *acqua alta* as doom-laden is an act of recognition of the inevitable decline of the city and its dystopian future, where the fragile balance between water and land is maintained by putting Venice under a glass dome, stripping it of any social and human soul, and reducing to a cultural fetish (Settis 2016). In this atmosphere of doom, where fear is central, technology is not a saviour, and it remains to be seen how and by whom Venice will be saved.

Multiple feelings of climate change

Taken together, the three practices discussed above show that the constitution of climate change in Venice is influenced by the habituality and preservation of, along with resistance to, shared ways of feeling floods through practices of atmospheric emergence. The analysis suggests that climate change in Venice is not a single and abstract phenomenon but many concrete phenomena at once, and that each depends on how floods are felt in and through the three affective atmospheres studied here. In these atmospheres, strategic communication can be understood to be an affective practice that either preserves or resists the spread of a shared sense of wonder, safety, or doom regarding floods. Strategic communication was found to participate in the affective constitution of climate change not only by strategically promoting specific feelings about floods, but in the way it simultaneously and inevitably promotes collective feelings towards Venice and its watery environment and future, and the technology with which it is intertwined.

Thus, rather than thinking about strategic communication as involving communicating specifically about floods, the analysis showed that it involves communicating about floods, Venice, and climate change all at the same time. Accordingly, how climate change is felt in Venice is the result of not only the strategic communication of floods and habitual ways of feeling them, but of the ways in which strategic communication enables the perpetuation of these habitual ways of feeling. The relevance of the strategic communication of climate change can therefore be said to depend less on whether it directly promotes, preserves, or resists specific ways of feeling floods, and more on how it causes Venice to be felt in the age of climate change. In affective terms, the way in which strategic communication preserves and resists practices that are central to the transmission of wonder, security, and fear, recreates the affective atmospheres in which climate change is felt. In this sense, strategic communication uses and reproduces existing collective ways of feeling floods by using and reproducing shared feelings about Venice.

The findings of this thesis can be then said to show that effective communication about climate change does not depend on finding the 'right' way of communicating in order to elicit the 'right' emotional responses in selected audiences, whether that be through advertising, marketing tricks, or narrative constructions. Instead, effective strategic communication exists at the intersection of the wider socio-cultural realm where shared cultural stories about places interplay with one another, and in relation to the situated and spatial circulation of feelings that these stories entail. As such, the strategic communication of climate change is less about finding the 'right' way to make people feel about it, and more about trying to preserve and resist those affects that already influence how people feel about the changing climate around them during everyday urban practice. I will return to this point in the concluding chapter.

These findings have implications for how climate change is affectively constituted beyond the specific setting of Venice. In this regard, the next chapter expands on

these findings, and presents the general contributions of an affective approach to the strategic communication of climate change.

Chapter 9.
Conclusion

At the beginning of this thesis, I argued that shared cultural ways of narrating nature have important implications for how we collectively feel about the tangible manifestations of climate change around us (see also Ghosh 2016; Norgaard 2011; 2018). I therefore suggested that exploring the broader interplay of strategic communication with cultural narratives, and the collective emotional attachments that these stories generate, could be fruitful for finding explanations as to why so little seems to be happening so slowly in terms of climate action. This epistemological focus allowed me to explore the role of strategic communication beyond the intentions of strategic actors, and to focus on the subtle, intimate ways in which this practice operates on the cultural level of shared emotional orientations. The aim of this thesis was to examine the role of affect (i.e. collective feelings) in the communication of climate change in a climate-vulnerable tourist city. In this setting, shared modes of feeling regarding the urban place, which I have proposed to understand as its affective atmospheres, were found to be influenced by strategic communication efforts that enable specific modes of feeling towards a changing climate.

Paying attention to atmospheres allows the epistemological gaze to be redirected to the collective, habitual practices undertaken in a changing climate, and the shared emotional orientations that these practices support. In so doing, this thesis has shown that affective atmospheres are central to the strategic communication of climate change. In contrast to studies that examine strategic efforts to influence how climate change is understood and addressed in climate-vulnerable cities by focusing on the individual emotional reception of planned communication

initiatives (e.g. Degeling & Koolen 2022), the findings of this thesis show that there is no straight line between strategic communication and the way people understand and act in relation to climate change in specific urban settings. This is because the strategic communication of climate change is not a practice that can be optimally tailored to the cultural specificities of a selected audience, because communicating about climate change involves responding to, mobilising, and reconstituting these cultural specificities. In connection to this, the strategic communication of climate change cannot be thought of as simply making people feel something, since feelings are simultaneously and inevitably always felt in response to culturally mediated emotional orientations (Ahmed 2004a; 2004b; 2004c), which can be strategically mobilised, sustained, and resisted. In other words, this thesis shows that there is no simple way of capturing homogeneous cultural and emotional states as external elements that influence how climate change is understood and addressed in cities. Conversely, the findings of this study suggest that climate change does not exist in itself as a stable signifier, but that it is a contradictory, slippery, affective construction due to the inherently contradictory and slippery ways in which its tangible manifestations are felt during the performance of ordinary urban practices. In other words, what climate change is in cities is intimately connected to the coexisting, contradictory, and ephemeral ways in which its daily manifestations are collectively felt based on the affective atmospheres of cities, and how strategic communication acts upon these atmospheres.

The figure below illustrates how climate change is affectively constituted, and the role of strategic communication in this constitution.
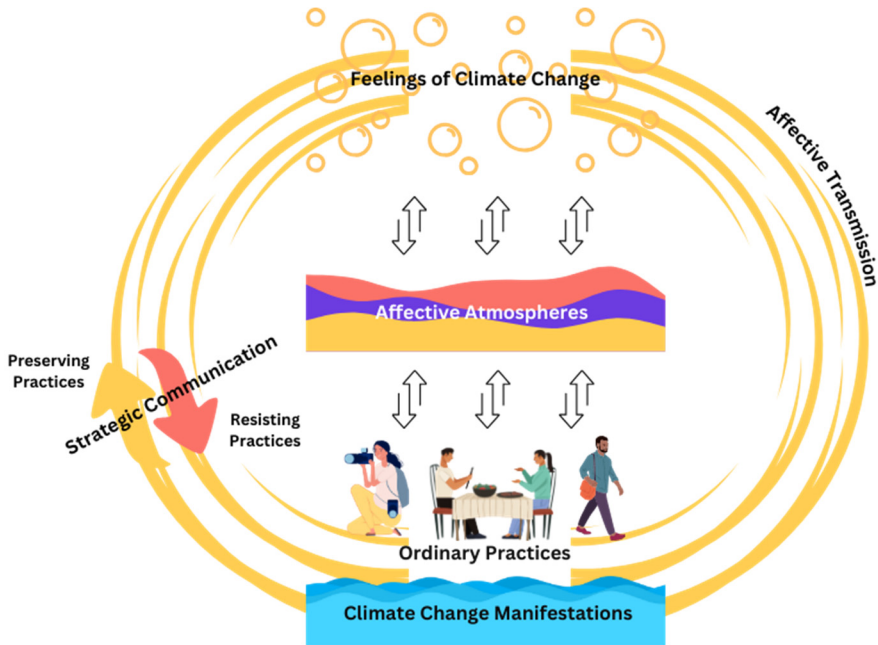
Figure 9.1. The role of affect in the communication of climate change

As Figure 9.1 shows, different ways of feeling climate change arise from the coexistence of different affective atmospheres in a city. These affective atmospheres themselves arise from and stimulate the performance of ordinary practices in relation to different manifestations of climate change (e.g. floods, heatwaves, storms). Affective atmospheres influence how such manifestations are felt, and are themselves influenced by shared modes of feeling. Ordinary practices in a changing climate thus allow for the transmission of affect according to the affective atmospheres of the place, and are central to how climate change is felt. Strategic communication mobilises affective transmission by preserving or resisting the mostly unconscious performance of ordinary practices. This is undertaken not only through strategic communication campaigns, but through how these campaigns support tangible material transformations of urban spaces. These material transformations influence the performance of ordinary practices and how affect circulates in a city, and are central to how climate change is felt

therein. How climate change is felt, in fact, depends less on individual strategies than on how well these strategies influence everyday practices and the affective transmissions that take place within the coexisting atmospheres of a place. In other words, climate change is created at the level of collective feelings, and this process of creation is influenced by the power and ability of strategic actors to maintain and resist how such feelings are habitually, ordinarily expressed in everyday urban practice.

The next section shows that, considering the role of strategic communication not only in the deliberate crafting of promotional campaigns, but in the way such campaigns influence the broader existence of affective atmospheres in the city, has implications for both the fields of strategic communication and climate change communication research. These implications, and thus the contributions of this thesis to both fields, are outlined below.

Contributions to strategic communication and climate change communication research

At the beginning of this thesis, I proposed bringing together the fields of strategic communication (Falkheimer & Heide 2018, 2023) and climate change communication (Agin & Karlsson 2021; Canon et al. 2022), and focusing on what I call 'the strategic communication of climate change'. Such a research focus in this thesis was not necessarily concerned with how organisations communicate about climate change in relation to their political or corporate agendas, nor the emotional effects that this strategic communication generates. Rather, it was concerned with how the ways in which an organisation communicates about specific manifestations of climate change align with both its interests, and the existence of shared emotional orientations among people. In proposing such an epistemological focus, and in responding to recent calls to explore how strategic communication participates in the creation of public culture and the discussion of public issues (Frandsen & Johansen 2022), the main contribution of this thesis

to strategic communication literature is to highlight the central role of this practice in the creation and negotiation of the issue of climate change. In particular, this study demonstrates the relevance of affect theory (Massumi 2002; Ahmed 2004a; 2004b; Clough 2007; Gregg & Seigworth 2010) to explorations of the cultural influence of strategic communication. Adopting an affective approach to strategic communication research means considering: emotions to be shared and collective felt forces, affect; communication to be a movement of affective transmission; and strategic communication to influence the existence of affective atmospheres as emergent forms of organising. I will elaborate on these three points below.

From emotions to affect

The affective approach begins with the assumption that emotions are felt not only individually but collectively, and that this collective aspect of emotions is important for strategic communication research and practice to consider. In particular, understanding emotions as affect requires a rethinking of the relationship between communication and emotions. An affective approach to strategic communication cannot rely on either a linear or a dialogical understanding of communication; both tend to see communication as a rational, possibly a-cultural, unemotional endeavour (Botan 1997; Heide et al. 2018). As a result, emotions themselves are seen as either effects of communication, or as attachments that strategic communication simply needs to avoid and work around by creating the best communicative strategy (Jin et al. 2017; Ćosić et al. 2018; Goldberg & Gustafson 2023; Liu & Wang 2024). However, from an affective perspective, emotions are not just psychological predispositions or attachments, but fluid, dynamic, contingent, and emergent orientations that influence how individuals feel (Ahmed 2004a; 2004b). Emotions are not just effects of communication, but inherent, unavoidable elements in all communicative processes, and constitute our shared social reality (Ashcraft 2021). Understood in this way, strategic communication involves not only the careful crafting of slogans and campaigns, and the achievement of dialogue and

mutual understanding between organisations and their publics, but larger communicative processes that take place at the intersection of organisations and multiple heterogeneous publics. An affective approach to strategic communication means moving from an understanding of the emotional effects of communication to the realm of situated, lived, and contested modes of feeling.

As such, an affective approach offers not only theoretical but methodological contributions to strategic communication research. Both linear and dialogical understandings of strategic communication treat the creation and negotiation of meaning as a human enterprise, as something that can be captured through interviews and questionnaires, and that depends on people's habits and psychological needs. In these epistemological efforts, emotions are seen as either direct effects of communication, or barriers that can be overcome by asking people the right questions and showing them the right images. However, an understanding of emotion as affect contrasts with an understanding of emotion as something that can be expressed verbally by a person, insofar as affect operates at the cultural level of shared emotional orientations. Consequently, verbal expressions of emotion are only one of the ways of capturing the complex relationship that exists between emotion and communication (Ashcraft 2021). The unexpressed, the ways in which affect is intrinsic and travels through the reiteration of shared cultural meanings, represents a very different way of seeing this relationship, and cannot be captured simply by asking people how they feel or tracking emotions through the use of words and other verbal expressions, as is done in affective polarisation analyses (Zoizner et al. 2021; Skytte 2021). Viewing emotions as things that can be detected in language or images assumes that there is a corresponding linguistic expression for each emotional state, and that emotional states can be studied and classified with cultural specificity. Conversely, studying affect requires observing patterns of movement and habitual bodily practices, alongside which strategic communication is assumed to operate. To study affect in strategic communication is to see strategic communication itself as a movement, as coexisting with and influencing processes of affective transmission.

Strategic communication as a movement of affective transmission

Through a less conscious, collective and culturally bounded understanding of the relationship between communication and emotion provided by affect thinking, strategic communication can be rethought from a purely rational practice of eliciting or measuring emotions to a cultural and therefore also less intentional practice of sustaining collectively shared feelings. Strategic communication mobilises these collective feelings by either maintaining or resisting the adherence, or 'stickiness', of affect (Ahmed 2004a; 2004b) during everyday practices.

Over the past decade, strategic communication has moved away from the simple analysis of promotional campaigns and towards the idea of strategic communication as being constitutive of organisations (Heide et al. 2018). From this perspective, strategic communication is not only a tool that organisations use to communicate with the wider public, but a set of practices that determine the identity, purpose, and mission of an organisation. This attention to communicative practices has led to a focus on how organisations engage in consensus-building activities, which are a fundamental aspect of how organisations are not only brought into existence, but sustained over time against external changes such as societal shifts or cultural developments (Falkheimer & Heide 2023). The problem with a dialogical understanding of strategic communication, however, is that it proposes a certain view of an organisation, as an entity that is separate from the doings of society at large (Winkler & Schoeneborn 2022; Christensen & Christensen 2022). The organisation, in this sense, is constituted in and through strategic communication practices, which are researched outside of the broader socio-cultural realm, something that can be easily recognised, controlled, and shaped in order to 'surf' the societal waves that influence rational endeavour. Such a constitutive view of strategic communication involves examining how meaning is created between two pre-defined and relatively controlled communicative sides that are engaged in understanding what things mean to the other side.

An affective approach builds instead on an understanding of strategic communication as a process of strategising (Gulbrandsen & Just 2016; 2022), a communicative practice that does not necessarily require a specific initial intention as it cannot be assumed to have a clear beginning nor end. As a result, strategic communication is seen as a participant in a collective, constitutive process involving multiple heterogeneous actors that are both human and non-human, and exist both inside and outside the organisation (Gulbrandsen & Just 2016; 2022; Christensen & Christensen 2022; Winkler & Schoeneborn 2022). An affective approach thus considers strategic communication to be a collective movement that extends into the social sphere, the potential of which lies primarily in how it allows feelings to be perpetuated and situations to be felt in a similar way between people and places. Through an affective lens on communication (Ashcraft 2021), strategic communication participates in this collective movement of affective transmission, allowing affect to adhere to signs in place in the creation of meaning. Strategic communication in this thesis was therefore studied not in the deliberate use of language to evoke emotional responses and promote strategic meanings, but in the ways in which shared emotions and meanings are also always and simultaneously made beyond language: through the repetition of movements, sensory and emotional experiences by altering the place around us. Strategic communication was therefore studied as capable of influencing the existence of the affective atmospheres of places.

From organisations to affective atmospheres as emergent forms of organising

Shifting attention away from organisational entities and towards atmospheres means considering how strategic communication achieves organisational sustainment through the ways in which it enables affect to flow between bodies and places in particular situations. Some scholars of strategic communication have recently highlighted the importance of places and the material networks they host (Cassinger & Thelander 2022). However, the idea that places are made of

co-existing affective atmospheres helps to circumvent the common tendency to think of places as stable material agglomerations that are statically inhabited by human bodies and/or produced by human practices, and facilitates an understanding of them as always multiple, constructed, and sustained at the level of contrasting and evolving feelings, bodily movements, and sensations (Edensor 2012; 2015; Gherardi 2019; Sumartojo & Pink 2019; Rokka 2023). An affective approach, as operationalised in this thesis, assumes that strategic communication inevitably exists within coexisting affective atmospheres, and thus that what strategic communication actually influences is more than the constitution of specific organisational entities and their spatiality. Indeed, with an affective approach, atmospheres themselves can be seen as emergent, ever-fleeting forms of organising, arising from the interplay between strategic communication, the materiality of organisational places, and ordinary ways of feeling in them (Beyes & Steyaert 2013; Beyes & Holt 2020).

Strategic communication cannot permanently create affective atmospheres through rational forms of communication, but it can nevertheless influence their sustainment through the way it acts in relation to a variety of other actors and the affective transmission that takes place between them (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2016). Consequently, paying attention to affective forces requires modesty in strategic communication research, and the rethinking of the role of the 'strategic' in the communicative constitution of organisational realities. Insofar as strategic communication is seen to operate also at the unconscious level of affective transmission between bodies and places, it becomes difficult – perhaps even pointless – to try to discern the intention behind the staging and maintenance of a particular affective atmosphere by an individual organisation. What is more useful is to understand how strategic communication moves within and among atmospheres – how it makes bodies relate to one another, and how the staging and maintenance of some atmospheres contrast those of others (Sumartojo & Pink 2019). Rethinking the strategic in strategic communication research therefore means considering that both strategic and non-strategic forms

of communication are always involved in the constitution of the multiple, momentary, and contrasting ways in which places are felt.

The assumption that strategic communication always implies its coexistence within and among affective atmospheres provides a broader epistemological focus – beyond what is merely said and done by strategic actors, and towards how what is strategically said and done enables the maintenance of shared modes of feeling between people in place. Although in this thesis I have been particularly concerned with the role of strategic communication in influencing affective atmospheres in the context of climate change, an affective approach to strategic communication can also be useful in investigating other cultural issues or global concerns, such as military conflicts and financial crises. Strategic communication by organisations in times of global crisis can be seen to have a broader social influence than the delivery of strategic messages, as it also contributes to a wider set of organisational structures (i.e. atmospheres), the socio-cultural realm, and people's ways of feeling.

Affectively constituting climate denial and delay

The findings of this thesis also contribute to existing debates in climate change communication literature on the communicative constitution of phenomena such as climate denial and delay. In particular, it shows that, contrary to studies that suggest that strategic attempts to deny climate change or delay climate action are based on the communicative elicitation of emotions (Nabi et al., 2018; Nabi & Myrick 2019; Bilandzic et al. 2020; Gustafson et al. 2020; Wong-Parodi & Feygina 2020; Duan & Bombara 2022), conscious emotional elicitation is not always necessary. Thus, rather than testing the best ways of eliciting fear (O'Neill & Nicholson-Cole, 2009) and guilt (Ferguson & Branscombe, 2009) or hope (Myers et al. 2012), and exploring the behavioural changes regarding climate change that these emotions can sustain, an affective approach shows how strategic communication can hinder or enhance the existence and sustainment of collectively shared feelings which are not always accounted for by individuals.

An affective approach differs from that taken in studies that focus on the influence of emotional attachment for climate action (Scannell & Gifford 2010; Altinay 2017; Kongsager & Baron 2024). Psychological views of emotional attachment generally assume that climate denial and delay depend only on successful communication strategies to circumvent cultural-emotional biases, and that these can be attributed to certain cultures (and not to others), to certain places (and not to others). With an affective approach, however, emotional attachments are understood not in a psychological sense (as enduring, stable, and secure), but in a relational sense (as fluid, situated, and emergent) – as things that fluctuate, and that exist through the relationships between people and places (Juhlin 2024). In this respect, emotional states such as eco-anxiety and the inaction that it tends to support (Stanley et al. 2021) are not necessarily the result of inefficient forms of communication (as in, for example, Wang et al. 2023) as they may relate to broader strategic attempts to mobilise the shared emotional states that precede the expression of these emotions. In this regard, Mouffe (2022), for example, has recently called for an understanding that the political question at stake in the current socio-political moment - characterised by wars and climate change - is a matter of affective (i.e. harnessing and controlling affects) rather than rational political calculus.

In line with this, an affective approach is useful for understanding how our social collectives exist, not necessarily because of the deliberate and explicit exercise of power by strategic actors, but because of the more subtle ways in which power operates at the more mundane, but no less important, level of everyday practice. Consequently, motivating people to act is not simply a matter of crafting the 'right' climate message, nor of explaining things or telling people not to be anxious and why this should be the case, but of working towards changing the conditions that make people feel anxious in the first place. In this lens, the fact that emotions such as climate anxiety are widespread among the youngest sections of the population is related not only to the inability of scientific and/or political communication to make such anxiety disappear, but to how such

strategic communication causes many of us adults to carry on with life as usual, our ordinary practices.

An affective approach to climate change communication research thus needs to build on discursive analyses of climate denial and delay (Hajer 1995; Carvalho 2007; Fleming 2014; Roper 2016; Lamb et al. 2020). Indeed, paying attention to affect can complement discourse analyses that examine broader collective structures of meaning and power negotiation (Wetherell 2013). In particular, an affective approach can help to establish that phenomena such as climate denial and delay depend not only on communication per se, but on how communication enables or resists the existence of collectively shared feelings. Accordingly, climate denial and delay are the result of ordinary ways of feeling about the places we live and visit, and of strategic attempts to mobilise these. The findings of this thesis suggest that climate denial and delay in Venice may result from the ways in which the Municipality preserves the ordinariness of urban life in order to conceptualise floods as ordinary, thus erasing the possibility that floods could in any way be related to climate change. Climate denial may thus be an (un)intended consequence of the strategic communication of floods, which ensures that life goes on as usual, tourists continue to be tourists, and locals continue to be locals. The same could be said of climate delay. The instances of strategic communication of floods analysed in this thesis can be understood to be instances of climate delay, insofar as they involved the promotion of technological solutions to inherently dangerous natural phenomena, e.g. 'taming' and controlling water.

In the next section I explore the practical implications of my findings for the practice of the strategic communication of climate change.

How to use affect in the strategic communication of climate change?

This thesis is of interest to strategic communication practitioners who need to communicate about the effects of climate change in climate-vulnerable areas, or who need to implement climate-adaptation and mitigation strategies in urban centres. The results of this study show that communicating about climate change in urban places means, first and foremost, influencing the affective atmospheres of the city. The presence of these atmospheres influences how changes in the natural environment are felt in terms of the practices of living and visiting a place. This means that the strategic communication of climate change needs to be less about making people feel something about climate change, and more about what people already feel and what those feelings cause them to do.

The first step for strategic communication practitioners is therefore to understand which affective atmospheres coexist in the city – that is, which collectively shared feelings about a place exist among its residents and visitors. In Venice, the affective atmospheres include a wonderful tourist destination, a safe urban place, and a dangerous sinking city. Within each of these atmospheres, climate change figures very differently. One way to account for these affective atmospheres is to learn about shared cultural imaginaries of the city; another is to observe the activities that different actors, including citizens and visitors, carry out in relation to these cultural imaginaries. By cultural imaginaries, I mean not only widespread cultural myths, but local and emerging stories about the city.

It is particularly important to account for stories about and to look at the practices that take place around the tangible manifestations of climate change in an urban place, and how these make people feel and behave. These observations can be combined with interviews, focus groups, and guided photo walks and workshops in order to understand how people talk about natural changes, and to come across the stories that emerge and the feelings that arise from these stories. Another method of capturing an affective atmosphere is to map how people communicate

about changes on social media. Capturing the affective atmospheres of cities, neighbourhoods, and even smaller and more clearly delineated urban areas allows us to see how climate change emerges relative to ways of feeling in these places.

The second step, then, is to communicate about necessary interventions in the urban environment in a way that makes them feel as natural as possible within the existing affective atmospheres, without downplaying the transformation that these interventions will entail. One practical way of doing this is to use storytelling techniques to create hopeful future imaginaries of kinship, the changing urban place, and those who live and travel there. Climate narratives are a useful tool for stimulating climate action because of the way they create shared feelings about places. Another practical approach is to conduct walking tours with selected groups of visitors or residents. On these tours, scientists and communicators alike could draw participants' attention to the often-invisible signs of climate change in the urban environment. The aim of this initiative would be to integrate climate change in the existing social fabric of the place, and to emphasise the importance of changing people's practices in line with these changes.

Strategic communication involves more than designing campaigns and testing their reception; it involves more than provoking emotions through campaigns. This can certainly be done but, where budgets allow, strategic campaigns can also be combined with dynamic initiatives, such as walking tours, in the urban place itself. Through these initiatives it is possible to not only evoke key emotional responses and attract people's attention, but sustain these emotions and attention over time by integrating them in people's everyday practices in the city. To ignite hope is to sustain hope by staging hopeful affective atmospheres. This means seeing hope not as a universal and abstract promise, but as a concrete and situated one. This in turn requires hope to flow into and through collective practices – to be contextualised in the specificities of urban settings, and to be nurtured and tended to by administrations that care for cities, their people, and their environments. Indeed, in communicating about climate change and about a general sense of hope for the future, we can fall into the trap of asking very

different people to feel equally hopeful about the future. In this scenario, climate change can be seen as an issue only for privileged people who have nothing else to worry about but the climate.

Instead, it is important to understand feelings as being collective, but to work on them locally rather than globally. Making people hopeful about climate change and getting them to act on it means encouraging people to build a more hopeful future for the specific place they inhabit. It means allowing feelings to arise, yes, but also to spread, to attach, to travel, to stay. It means facilitating practices so that these feelings continue, adapting the material space so that these feelings can remain and continue to be nurtured among people. In this thesis I have shown that telling certain stories about nature influences the maintenance of shared feelings towards natural environments. Promoting climate engagement and action in urban places is therefore about communicating what places can and should be like in these precarious times, working concretely to make people feel equally safe, and allowing emotions to infuse the places around them, so that climate change is addressed accordingly.

Affect's critical potential for climate action

Studies of climate change communication have predominantly focused on the strategic use of language to communicate about the contemporary climate crisis in order to perpetuate climate delay and climate denial. However, these analyses tend to take a simplistic view of strategic communication, seeing it as simply the intentional acts of strategic actors. Although much has been revealed about the greenwashing strategies of certain actors, and much is said every day about the threat of climate change, we still lack a nuanced idea of why so little happens so slowly across the political, cultural, and economic dimensions of life in response to such a crisis.

The findings of the thesis show that one reason for this apparent impasse is that the strategic communication of climate change is a more complex endeavour than

it first appears. Strategic communication works through the promotion of not only stories, meanings, and frames, but the collective feelings that are connected to them and the ordinary practices that these feelings support. This thesis has proposed a novel approach to unravelling some of the complex ways in which the strategic communication of climate change works affectively through language, yet also beyond its intentional and purposeful use. An affective approach to the strategic communication of climate change reveals it as a practice through which the meaning of climate change is constituted, negotiated, and contested at the often-unconscious level of affective everyday practice.

It has been argued that climate change needs to be brought into our everyday lives (Ghosh 2016), but this thesis shows that climate change is already there, in ordinary affects and what they make possible. It is this ordinariness that is preserved and used to resist alternative modes of encountering the natural environments around us and attuning to a changing climate. The effectiveness of the strategic communication of climate change infiltrates our practices every time we walk through the city without noticing that the climate is changing, every time we perpetuate the ordinary atmospheres of the places we live and visit, even as they inexorably and slowly change before our eyes. The constitution of climate change as a tangible, unavoidable, and inescapable problem to be tackled therefore requires more than the unmasking of the greenwashing practices of organisational actors; it also requires a shift in the collective practices we carry out in relation to the places we live and visit. The affective approach to the strategic communication of climate change proposed in this thesis sees climate change not as a single and abstract phenomenon, but as many things at once, even in the same place. Resisting climate delay and fighting climate denial therefore begin with resisting the ways in which organisations perpetuate our habitual ways of feeling.

This may mean calling for new words to be used at the institutional level. At the beginning of this thesis, I quoted Ahmed (2016), who wrote that "[i]f institutions do words not to do things, then we have work to do, which often means work to do on these words - work to do with these words" (3). Exposing climate denial

and climate delay means seeing words not only as strategic communicative phenomena, but as emotional ones too, and acknowledging the affects that move in and through them. Put differently, exposing and resisting the ways in which climate denial and climate delay are perpetuated means resisting the affective atmospheres and the implicated feelings which words are sustaining. As I have shown in this thesis, the communicative constitution of climate change as a non-existent problem (i.e. climate denial) is fostered in the way the term *acqua alta* is made to promote feelings of wonder regarding a natural environment that is rendered passive, static, harmless, and dormant. On the other hand, the communicative constitution of climate change as a problem that has already been solved (i.e. climate delay) is promoted by the way the term catalyses a sense of safety regarding a natural environment that has been manfully (the gender connotation here is not accidental) made docile, kept in check, neutered, and conquered once and for all by technoscientific arrogance. In both cases, strategic communication encourages practices wherein the natural environment is kept out of the picture, unmentioned, relegated to a mute background to our lives, or valued as a commodity to be used for our own pleasure.

Because what climate change means in different places depends on collective feelings about its manifestations, different actors have different roles to play in how these feelings take hold and are perpetuated. Resisting attempts to perpetuate climate denial and delay in urban settings through strategic communication involves resisting the transmission of affect inherent in our understanding of these places. In particular, it means rethinking the sense of wonder and safety that travels through these forms of communication, so as to mobilise them towards the creation of cities that are sensitive to the effects of climate change, rather than towards the maintenance of their stubborn ordinariness of urban life.

In conclusion, this thesis calls for a collectively different way of relating to the ordinary environments that surround us. It calls for, in the words of Ahmed (2016), "an invitation to inhabit something in a way that is better" (183). One way of attuning to the changing climate might be to find new, better words to

communicate these changes; another might be to withdraw from the ordinary atmospheres of our surroundings, to make those atmospheres leak, break, and rupture. To look and make others look, if possible, at the other sides of familiar objects, places, and events around us, to see what we have inadvertently overlooked or been caused to overlook. To turn the familiar into the unfamiliar, the usual into the uncanny, to make the climate crisis a new opportunity to question ourselves, our cities, and our practices. To allow a shared sense of hope to flow through these practices, and to demand that such a flow be institutionally protected.

Suggestions for further research

This study has highlighted the importance of considering how strategic communication operates in the lived realm of everyday urban life, within the affective atmospheres of a city. Further research could continue to explore the coexistence of affective atmospheres, in Venice or in any other climate-vulnerable setting, paying particular attention to the ways in which these atmospheres meet and collide, the challenges and opportunities they present for climate action, and the role of strategic communication in either hindering or preventing their resolution. This research focus could also be applied to other contemporary societal grand challenges - such as wars, migration crises and financial collapses - to show how societal responses to these global crises involve strategic efforts to both preserve and resist collective modes of feeling, such as fear, but also anger, hope, happiness, joy and wonder. In other words, how strategic actors be shown to mobilise shared emotional orientations in pursuit of their corporate or political agendas. A particularly interesting research approach might be to analyse how strategic communication through preserving and resisting practices is enacted in and through media and social media channels, highlighting the ways in which these technologies can be shown to operate affectively. In this case, particular attention could be paid to the advantages and disadvantages of artificial intelligence (AI).

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Feeling the changing climate

Previous research has studied the strategic communication of climate change as a rational and purposeful means of communicating about climate change in line with political, corporate or scientific interests. These studies often consider emotions either as psychological effects of planned communication or as pre-existing attachments that influence an individual's understanding of the issue. Accordingly, strategic communication of climate change is designed either to elicit a certain emotional response from selected publics or to overcome people's psycho-emotional barriers. This thesis introduces a different view of emotions as affect in strategic communication research, and proposes that collectively shared feelings can also be mobilised by strategic communication to influence how climate change is understood and addressed. To this end, the thesis examines the strategic communication of floods in the tourist city of Venice. Through atmospheric ethnography and narrative analysis, it shows how the strategic communication of the local municipality and a group of local scientists influences the constitution of climate change in the city by either preserving or resisting the existence of three affective atmospheres and the collective ways of feeling floods within them. The findings of this thesis demonstrate strategic communication as a cultural practice that participates in the creation of public culture and the discussion of public issues such as climate change. In particular, the findings extend studies of climate denial and delay by contributing a new way of understanding the influence of strategic communication in terms of how well it mobilises collective emotional orientations towards the tangible manifestations of climate change around us.

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