

Charlotte Ladevèze. *Fluvio-Graphy. From Source to Delta: Giving Voice to Rivers – remodelling their future*

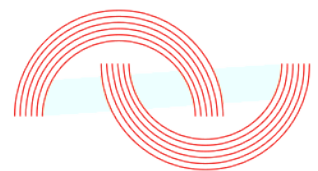
Project presentation | Postdoctoral research, Fritz Thyssen Stiftung | Franco-Italian comparative literature (20th–21st centuries)

6:00 PM, Tuesday, January 13, 2025, Sala del Caminetto, Centro Tedesco di Studi Veneziani, Venice

This presentation reports on a year of postdoctoral research conducted in Venice, funded by the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung, devoted to exploring the relationships between hydraulic infrastructures, transformations of river landscapes, and literary representations over the past century. Within the framework of the habilitation project *Fluvio-Graphy*, the talk examines how rivers become spaces of tension between institutional narratives and local voices, and how contemporary cultural forms reflect, reproduce, or more often contest these power dynamics. Against the massive, industrial control of waterways in the 20th century, a prolific body of literature celebrates the flowing, unpredictable, binding, and living character of water, whose currents are mirrored in the voices and imaginations it inspires.

To illustrate the tension between technical control and literary imagination, the presentation is structured around three emblematic hydraulic infrastructures in northeastern Italy: the Po Delta with its historical water mills, the Alpine dams of Trentino-Alto Adige, and the MOSE system in Venice. The methodological framework is geopoetic and comparative, combining field observation, textual analysis, and attention to the symbolic and affective dimensions of river landscapes.

The Po Delta and its historical water mills first exemplify a long-standing cohabitation between human societies and river flows, where knowledge of currents, sediments, and seasonal cycles enabled adaptive and sustainable uses of the river, celebrated in literature. This millennial coexistence continues to resonate in contemporary discourse and is invoked in response to modern flooding events, such as those in Emilia-Romagna. By contrast, Alpine hydroelectric dams represent a radical rupture in scale and



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regulation, where technical mastery of water flows and industrial development reshaped landscapes and imaginaries. The Vajont disaster particularly highlights the asymmetry between institutional discourses and local experiences, giving rise to cultural productions of memory often mobilized to contest new hydraulic projects. Finally, the MOSE system in Venice exemplifies modern, integrated governance of lagoon flows, preserving water circulation while protecting the city from flooding. Yet it inspires literary dystopias and raises questions about the hierarchy of heritage preservation and the sustainability of engineered solutions.

The presentation concludes with an overview of the current habilitation plan, showing how these case studies inform a broader reflection on rivers as spaces of conflict, memory, and potential future reconfigurations.