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(Re-)Staging Venice: William Dean Howells's Intermedial *Flânerie*

The article positions William Dean Howells's early travel sketches of Venice within the triad reading-traveling-writing, which comes to define the genre in the course of the nineteenth century. By means of an intermedial poetics the sketches express a basic paradox that characterizes travelogues and American literary realism: a desire for immediacy collides with an awareness of the inevitability of mediation. Staging himself as a *traveler-flâneur*, a position of distinction that finds its textual expression in a self-conscious intermedial *flânerie*, Howells tries to reconcile that paradox. The book itself becomes a medium of experience that dramatizes the processes of artistic refinement and cultural decipherment in terms of a practice of reading. While the early Howells thus emerges as an intercontinental writer interested in transatlantic artistic dialogue, his cultural politics remains nationalized since he constructs a narrative of genealogical replacement, where the U.S. takes the place of Venice as the leading economic trading power.

1 Introduction

There are certainly easier tasks than being a young American journalist in the nineteenth century who tries to describe a place like Venice, whose notorious 'over-signification' threatens to turn it into an empty signifier. In 1882, in his *Italian Hours*, Henry James sums up this dilemma as follows:

Venice has been painted and described many thousands of times, and of all the cities of the world is the easiest to visit without going there. Open the first book and you will find a rhapsody about it; step into the first picture dealer's and you will find three or four high-coloured 'views' of it. There is notoriously nothing more to be said on the subject. (James 1993: 287)

In a manner of ironic understatement, James separates the actual visit of a city and the existing catalogue of its representations. The representations seemingly replace the cultural practice of traveling. Since it has been extolled and overexposed in abundance, Venice has become a sign that circulates in the cultural imagination and in the artistic marketplace, from within which James carves out his own position as a writer. When he writes that there is "notoriously nothing more to be said" about this sign, the adverb declares even the gesture of representational exhaustion a convention. William Dean Howells, as will be seen, was equally aware of this dilemma. Between 1861 and 1864, when the Civil War in the U.S. took place – the period that presents a historical landmark in American development for a variety of reasons, among them the birth of literary realism – he lived in Venice as an American consul. Significantly, he was rewarded the position for a campaign biography he wrote on Abraham Lincoln. His collection of travel writings, entitled *Venetian Life*, first appeared in 1866, and was followed by another volume published two years later as *Italian Journeys*. Howells wrote most of the sketches during his four-year stay. It is important to note that, in contrast to the campaign text on Lincoln, the travel essays were by no means a contract work. In 1863, two years after Howells arrived in Venice and after several failed attempts to publish some of his sketches, the first piece was accepted by the *Boston Daily Advertiser*.¹

What makes *Venetian Life* (Howells 1866, Howells 2001) particularly interesting is its unstable status as a text. Howells continually rewrote and rearranged the sketches, a practice which was, of course, quite common among realist writers. Daniel Rubey suggests that this process of revision creates a textual apparatus that can best be designated as a series of interrelated texts, since it documents on an editorial level the representational difficulties Howells had to face in order to develop a supposedly new mode of mediation, which is based upon the visual regime and the notion of actual experience. (Rubey 1991)²

The scope of this essay is to contextualize, analyze and resituate Howells's first collection of travel writings in several directions.³ First, some general paradigms of traveling and travel writing as well as major conditions for the genre in the second half of the nineteenth century, encompassing the transition from romanticism to the realist literary movement, will be delineated. Thus a methodological framework is established that allows focusing on the intersections between travel, travelogue, and realist writing by investigating the interplay between prefigured perceptions, supposedly actual experience, and the general problem of representation and perception. The analytical parts of the present article characterize the travel *persona* in *Venetian Life* and the particular gaze Howells ascribes to this *persona*.

I argue that the sketches show a high degree of self-consciousness as to his observer-position, and that Howells's particular self-casting may be described, with reference to Walter Benjamin and others, as that of an intermedial *traveler-flâneur*. The travelogue's focus on the interposition of prior texts in the broader sense competes with the realist directive which demands the immediateness of experience. The staged 'spontaneous strolls' through the cities are accompanied by and contrasted with wanderings through those parts of literary history and the history of the arts concerned with the depiction of Venice. Furthermore, Howells's discussion of John Ruskin's art criticism will be of seminal interest because it elucidates not only the intermedial composition of these sketches but also unfolds a discourse on the book as a medium, or, more precisely, as a *medium of experience through the act of reading*. Finally, the article argues for a resituating of Howells, and thus of American literary realism in general: The intermedial negotiations create a transatlantic scope and thus defy regnant notions of American realism and naturalism as a predominantly secluded, intranational enterprise.⁴

2 Traveling, Reading, Writing: Immediacy versus Mediation

When discussing American travel writing on Europe in the latter half of the nineteenth century, i.e. the phase that marks the gradual shift from romanticist modes of representation to realist and naturalist approaches, we should discern several intertwined and often paradoxical linkages that may serve as methodological framework for this article.

Perhaps the most profound cluster of relations concerns the connection between reading, traveling and writing. In his comprehensive account, William W. Stowe (1994) emphasizes that these three cultural practices must be seen as "creative and interpretive acts" (13) and that, by extension, the cultural practice of travel is also "a literary activity" (13), at least for nineteenth-century Americans on their way to Europe. The impact of this perspective lies in a conception of foreign lands as a conglomeration of signs, as complex texts to be deciphered.

At the same time, the notion contains the traveler's imaginative qualities: The process of deciphering otherness enacts itself according to the preconceptions and fancies of the observer.⁵

The triangle reading-traveling-writing also marks the generic construction of travel writing as fundamentally intertextual and intermedial. Manfred Pfister drafts such a notion by differentiating a typology of intertextual travel writings. He reconstructs a development in the use of intertextual references. Well into the eighteenth century travel reports either tend to disguise their reliance on prior texts or honor their pretexts. In this last sense, quotations of and references to former depictions served as writing and editing practices, as strategically used elements that should ensure the validity and authenticity of one's own text. According to Pfister, from around 1800 onward a shift to a "dialogische Intertextualität" (Pfister 1993: 127: "dialogic intertextuality") can be observed. Pfister differentiates between what he calls "eine antagonistische oder polemische Variante" (127: "an antagonistic or polemic version") that aims at correcting, opposing, thereby finally replacing its intertexts and enacting a playful, plural dialogue of differences, ultimately culminating in a postmodern "'Meta-Reise'" (127: "'meta-journey'").⁶ Extending Pfister's notion of travel writing as a profoundly intertextual genre, I suggest for Howells text, and for the travelogues of American literary realism in general, a broader intermedial scope which allows for an analysis of problems of aesthetics, in the sense of perception, as expressed through shifting medial registers. I will, at times, apply intertextuality and intermediality interchangeably in this article, however, this synonymous use rests upon a general conception of 'text' that encompasses theater performances, art criticism, and literary works, all of which are linked to a particular mode of perception that emerges during the nineteenth century and that is epitomized in the figure of the *flâneur*. I will return to the theoretical implications of this impersonated aesthetic mode later on in my essay.

For now, it is important to note that interactions and concurrences with prior texts helped nineteenth-century American travelers to position themselves according to their authorial, social, cultural, and national identities. Consequently, these textual dialogues enabled American writers to contour their status as authors and intellectuals, as did travel in general.⁷ James Buzard convincingly captures these emancipatory tendencies that worked both against European culture and American mainstream tourism:

Travel's educative, acculturating function took on a newly competitive aspect, as travelers sought to distinguish themselves from the 'mere tourists' they saw or imagined around them. Correspondingly, the authentic 'culture' of *places* – the *genius loci* – was represented as lurking in secret precincts 'off the beaten track', where it could be discovered only by the sensitive 'traveler', not the vulgar tourist. This development, it seems to me, helped to establish a view of acculturation as a double and potentially self-contradictory process, requiring gestures of both self-distinction (to separate oneself from the crowd) and solidarity (to appeal to an imagined small group of independent spirits). (Buzard 1993a: 6)

The search for secret places in a city like Venice, which are coded as authentic, and the strategy of self-distinction is matched by the attempt to correct earlier depictions, to present a different version, one that is closer to 'reality,' to literary realists' obsession: 'actual experience.'⁸ Keeping this chain of cultural practices, reading-traveling-writing, in mind, I would like to convey that the rhetorical strategy of William Dean Howells's text involves the critical self-positioning in contrast to prior accounts and a self-conscious attitude towards its own enterprise of representing experience, an attitude that is expressed through a negotiation of several medial registers.

Another set of factors relevant for the context of this article broadens the particular relationship between literary realism and the genre of travel writing. From the viewpoint of both literary history and literary sociology, travelogues with their open and experimental yet equally conventionalized and established form provided an ideal framework for the enactment of one's literary ambitions and for gaining professional acknowledgment and respect, not the least in a financially lucrative sense (see e.g. [Stowe \(1994\)](#)). Analyzing the functional history of the American novel and focusing on the potential of American literature as testing ground for facets of cultural perception and notions of value, Winfried Fluck argues that travel literature, understood in terms of a pre-stadium for the novel, can be read as protocol of the process of cultural self-definition. Within this realm, traveling to Europe and writing about it was organized around a well-known conglomerate of constructed juxtapositions that include, among others, American virtue versus European decadence, a generational and genealogical imagery (youth versus age and the trope of Europe as 'motherland' to which Americans now returned), and, most prominent not only for the purpose of this article, the opposition between American experience and European art ([Fluck 1992](#)).⁹

The most intimate point of intersection between realist and travel writing may be seen in the negotiation of different modes of perception with the visual register occupying a privileged position. In a now classical essay on the realist literary movement, George J. Becker already claimed: "[The realist writer] keeps asking himself: Is this the way I see things, or the way I think I should see them, or the way other people expect me to see them?" ([Becker 1963](#): 28) The knowledge system of realist fiction – recording observable facts, mimetically transferring them, letting them speak-for-themselves – collides with the tension between the necessary subjectivity of any (visual) experience and its reliability, or rather, the reliability of its representation. Travel writing expresses, more or less consciously, "the *interplay* between observer and observed, between a traveler's own philosophical biases and preconceptions and the tests those ideas and prejudices endure as a result of the journey," as Casey Blanton ([Blanton 1997](#): 5) notes. The genre's inner conflict, to put it slightly different, revolves around the inevitability of a personal scope and the ideal of distanced observation.

In a splendid paper, focusing on travel writings in the second half of the nineteenth century and radicalizing the basic premises delineated above, Eric Savoy suggests "that the characteristic tendency of travel writing is the *dislocation* of physical 'actuality,' its deferral, displacement, or *mediation* through received textual lenses and conventional – even stereotypical – habits of visual engagement" (Savoy 1990: 291). Savoy draws on the field of *Visual Studies*, namely on Norman Bryson's notion of "the 'screen of signs,' which constitutes represented visuality," in order to develop an understanding of travel writing according to its constructed "mediating filters." In particular, he mentions two such structuring filters. The first one points to a degree of self-reflexivity that relates to the discovery of second-order observation; it emerges due to the transference of the observing gaze from the object of observation to the process of observation itself. A second lens derives from what Savoy calls "the self-exhaustion of the genre," i.e. the intertextual paradigm that landscapes and cities are read through prior descriptions of them. Thus Savoy maintains the impossibility of perception "in the epistemology of American travel." Within such a framework, "travel writing might be defined as a self-conscious examination of the impulses to interrogate and interpret the unreadable 'text' of the other, and the defensive, pseudo-interpretive articulations constructed against the unreadable" (294).

What Savoy calls "the subverted gaze" (291) confirms the reciprocal triad traveling-reading-writing: Immediate experience (and its one-to-one transcription) may be the aim of travel writing (as well as realism) but, at least in the second half of the nineteenth century, this ideal is contrasted by an increasing awareness about the trickery of observation itself as well as by an intense negotiation of preceding textual descriptions. Nevertheless, as James Buzard (1993b) emphasizes, the basic *movens* of travel seems to remain the desire for experiencing "*alterity* as such" (30).

3 The Intermedial Traveler-*Flâneur*

The conflict between desired immediacy and inevitable mediation points to a prominent nineteenth-century figure that exemplifies a particular mode of perception. It may be said that the *flâneur*, poeticized by Charles Baudelaire, and later conceptually taken up by Walter Benjamin in terms of a reconciliatory epitome for the tensions of industrialized modernity, discovers alterations and deviances within a familiar environment. Although this is, at first glance, a contradiction to the traveler who moves in an unfamiliar surrounding, a scope that focuses on intermediality allows for an adjustment of the concept. Like the *flâneur*, the distinguished traveler's agenda is the detection of otherness within an area that is familiar to him through prior depictions and descriptions.

Furthermore, the supposedly distant observer position of the *flâneur*, including the ability to control individual perception, matches the intertextual scene-shifting and the self-conscious mediation displayed by Howells's text. The threat strolling spectator and traveler have to deal with, however, is the absorption by the scenery itself and the accompanying loss of control and distance. Benjamin's *flâneur*, moving through the crowd, has to avoid direct involvement with the overwhelming amount of stimuli modern cities reveal. His mode of perception may perhaps best be described as filtered scanning that focuses on *Erlebnis* instead of *Erfahrung*¹⁰; the traveler's, on the other hand, is guided from the beginning. Armed with books, pictures, and paintings, and a set of stereotypes about the foreign place, as well as scanning other travelogues, he compares these figurations to his own experiences.

Due to its openness and incoherencies Benjamin's concept has inspired a wide range of studies. Within the focus of travel as both socio-cultural practice and hermeneutic endeavor the early review-article "The Return of the *Flâneur*" represents a particularly suitable point of reference and supports the assumptions stated above.¹¹ Benjamin starts his review of Franz Hessel's *Spazieren in Berlin* with the following remark:

If we were to divide all the existing descriptions of cities into two groups according to the birthplace of the authors, we could certainly find that those written by the natives of the cities concerned are greatly in the minority. The superficial pretext – the exotic and the picturesque – appeals only to the outsider. To depict a city as a native would call for other, deeper motives – the motives of the person who journeys into the past, rather than to foreign parts. The account of a city given by someone who will always have something in common with memoirs. (Benjamin 1999a: 262)

While an inhabitant would narrate his city by experiencing its and his own past, the traveler, practicing intermediality so-to-speak, relies on previous accounts and depictions which are informed by certain conventions of representation (in this case, the exotic and picturesque). In the course of his review, Benjamin describes the 'native's' mode of perception as "an echo of the stories of the city ... an epic book through and through, a process of memorizing while strolling around" (262). For the local *flâneur*, the cursory movement is linked to a narration rooted in his personal past, and thus gains its structure. The city, for him, functions as a space of memories. In the next paragraph, Benjamin specifies the counter-image of the cultural outsider:

And isn't the city too full of temples, enclosed squares, and national shrines to be able to enter undivided into the dreams of the passer-by, along with every paving stone, every shop sign, every flight of steps, and every gateway? The great reminiscences, the historical *frissons* – these are all so much junk to the *flâneur*, who is happy to leave them to the tourist [...] Landscape – this is what the city becomes for the *flâneur*. Or, more precisely, the city splits into two dialectical poles. It becomes a landscape that opens up to him and a parlor that encloses him. (Benjamin 1999a: 263)

It becomes evident that Benjamin contrasts the *flâneur* with the sightseer who believes to decipher the foreign city by visiting its most famous spots. The strolling spectator avoids the established survey and aims at discovering the unfamiliar within the known. For him, the city oscillates between an open landscape that has to be made accessible anew in the practice of strolling and the act of writing and a Salon, a closed, stylized, and thus aesthetically pre-structured area. This passage indicates the dialectics more explicitly: while the *flâneur* is able to open his perceptive channels in order to detect something distinct – he is, after all, a figure of socio-cultural distinction –, he nevertheless faces the danger of being entrapped by prior aesthetic modes.

Within such a perspective the figure of the *flâneur* matches with the distinguished attitude of the traveler who aims at dissociation from the tourist. The gaze of the traveler is guided by previous texts, and thus I suggest the working concept of the *traveler-flâneur* who attempts to navigate his poetic way intermedially through a vast amount of previous depictions. This literary *persona* unites the desire for an uncontaminated scanning perception, as indicated by Benjamin's notion of *Erlebnis*, with the textually, medially, and visually already pre-filtered mode of approaching the foreign-as-familiar, as circumscribed by Savoy's "subversive gaze." In other words, such a double-focus encompasses an epistemological conflict between a desire for immediacy and the recognition of inevitable mediation. In addition, it thus may offer a reconciliatory solution that consists of *a scanning stroll through the crowd of prior mediations* that are used as perceptive organizing frames for the foreign experience and as foil with and against which one's own text is modeled. Finally, this strategy must be seen as a paradoxical movement since the *traveler-flâneur* otherwise seeks to avoid engagement with the cultural Other by utilizing former representations for his purposes and, simultaneously, maintains and stages the desire for immediate experience in order to achieve a different representation. The figure of the *intermedial traveler-flâneur* thus may be said to embody the basic tensions within the relationship between travel writing and American literary realism.¹²

4 Staging "Venice" and the Anxiety of Visual Experience

To be sure, in the early 1860s Howells was not a realist writer in the strict sense of the word. He was, in fact, not even a known writer at all, and the realist movement had not yet had its profound impact on American literature. However, Howells already had quite concrete notions about the way his own poetics should be organized. Two letters he wrote during his stay in Venice exemplify his aspirations as well as the difficulties he sees connected with his yet-to-come literary enterprise. On 19, December 1861, twelve days after his arrival in Venice, he wrote to his sister Anne:

[Venice] is more like a dream than a reality, and you wonder that it does not dissolve away before your eyes. Ah! Annie – Venice is everything that the poets and the painters have told us; but they have not always put the ruin and the melancholy desolation in their pictures, and yet this strikes me more even than the transcendent beauty. Everywhere decay, rust, rot, damp, dirt. (Howells 1979: 101)

This early letter confirms a central problem for Howells, as well as literary realism and travel writing in general: The individual access to the object of observation is charged with a set of prior depictions. Venice, in this sense, is not a real object but an imaginative, blurry area of projection that cannot be seen due to its over-signification. Apparently, for Howells at this particular time, the image of a Venice in decay and shambles is a relatively neglected one – although he uses the writings of Byron and Ruskin, that both clearly favor such representations, as intertexts.

Little more than two years later, in a letter to Edmund C. Stedman, dated February, 1 1864, Howells already operates with some of the key terms that will resurface in his later theoretical writings.

It may be that becoming acquainted with or rather *seeing* other arts than poetry – arts essentially *objective*, like sculpture, painting, and architecture – I have come to dislike personality and consciousness, and to hate work in which I find present anything of the author besides his genius. I don't know absolutely that this result indicates mental improvement; I only say that I have changed. The charm is broken that the subjective German poetry and its kindred English and American schools once had for me. [...] I believe now that a purer ideal exists in the objective. (Howells 1979: 176-78; emphases mine)

In these self-conscious statements Howells announces his break with romantic poetry and transcendentalist writing, although, of course, heavily relying upon the notion of genius that had, needless to say, widespread currency during the Romantic period. Moreover, he speculates about a different poetics inspired by and based on perceptions of visual, figurative, 'objective' arts. As early as 1864 Howells seems to have quite a distinct notion of what and how he wants to write. The supposed equation of visual perception and 'objective' representation, which develops into a complex dynamics between seeing and knowing, will constitute the realist movement throughout the following decades. Nevertheless, the problem indicated by Henry James, as quoted in my introductory remarks, remains: How to describe a city that is covered by a set of outworn metaphors ranging from glamour, pomp and decadence to carnival, erotic lust and capital of art?¹³ The contemporary critics of Howells's travelogue, at least, were very favorable in this respect.¹⁴

In order to delineate the specificity of Howells's approach, a closer look at the very beginning of the first sketch may be revealing:

One night at the little theatre in Padua, the ticket-seller gave us the stage-box [...], and so we saw the play and the by-play. The prompter from our point of observation, bore a chief part in the drama (as indeed the prompter always does in Italian theatre), and the scene-shifters appeared as prominent characters [...]. It has sometimes seemed to me that fortune had given me a stage-box at another and grander spectacle, and I had been suffered to see this VENICE, which is to other cities like the pleasant improbability of the theater to everyday, common-place life, to much the same effect as that melodrama in Padua.¹⁵ (Howells 1866: 1-2)

This prologue displays a complex negotiation of various degrees of artistic mediation and individual perception. First of all, Howells starts his description of Venice by situating himself in a theatre in Padua, thereby enhancing the distance to his actual object of observation, Venice. A couple of paragraphs down, he refocuses this distanced perspective back on Venice. Even more decisive is the strategic use of the theater metaphor which serves several functions at once and which, in all its complexity, defines the frame of perspective. On the one hand, Howells places himself above his object of observation in the stage-box, thus indicating his sovereign position as an American spectator, and already recalling a classical *topos* as well as a narrative strategy characteristic of travel writing. Simultaneously, and combined with the bracketed commentary on Italian theater, he enacts himself as a culturally refined *persona*.

Furthermore, his position enables him to take a look behind the scenes, to see the actual play performed on the stage and the by-play, as he describes it. Read together with the sketch-title "Venice in Venice," this verifies Howells's literary ambition: He implicitly claims to detect the unreliability of existing medial representations of Venice and, at the same time, wants to depict another Venice, one that differs from older accounts. Thus the initial setting in Padua implies an ironic critique of former depictions that failed to represent Venice according to what Howells perceives as reality. Venice has become a theatrical play, a continually displaced mediation that threatens to block any access to the commonplace.¹⁶

Howells stages Venice by ironically re-staging its different framings (even turning the observed melodrama on the Padua-stage into a playful comedy), and thus posits himself as *traveler-flâneur*, as distant, culturally refined observer of this continually displaced and reframed spectacle. He deems himself capable of de-masking existing representations as inconvenient when it comes to capturing what Venice actually is.

In the course of the introductory sketch, Howells distances himself from several canonical representations and representational techniques. He explicitly formulates his program:

So, if the reader care to follow me to my stage-box, I think he will hardly see the curtain rise upon just the Venice of his dreams, – the Venice of Byron, of Rogers, and Cooper; or upon the Venice of his prejudices, – the merciless Venice of Darù, and of the historians who follow him. But, as I said, I still hope that he will be pleased with the Venice he sees¹⁷; and – to take leave of our theatrical metaphor – I promise to fatigue him with no affairs of my own, except as allusion to them may go to illustrate Life in Venice; and positively he shall suffer no annoyance from the fleas and bugs which, in Latin countries, so often get from travellers' beds into their books. (Howells 1866: 3)

In a clever rhetorical move Howells invites the reader to share his position, i.e. that of an experienced observer and insider, shattering prevalent notions about Venice. The promised benefit for the reader encompasses the maintenance of the fascination for Venice as an object of imagination. At the same time, he promises an objective authenticity of the description by reducing personal comments to the minimum necessary for representing 'Life' – the capital 'L' further emphasizing the project of mediating actual experience. The title of his collection already indicates this project and encompasses the tension between immediacy and mediation, between the concept of actual life and a series of sketched still lives or literary illustrations. At the same time, in a humoristic remark, Howells makes clear that the depiction of everyday-Venice will not include guidebook information.

A conflict arises out of the discrepancy between the distant observer-position that de-masks prior representations in order to formulate a new agenda and the fact that this agenda, based upon the premises of truthful, actual, real-life portraiture, requires an active involvement with the object of study.

The second sketch, "Arrival and First Days in Venice," expresses this conflict from the very beginning: "I think it does not matter just when I first came to Venice. Yesterday and to-day are the same here." (Howells 1866: 19) The supposed timelessness of the city threatens to overwhelm the precise anchorage and circumstances of the personal journey. Howells moves on, describing his arrival, the transfer to his hotel, and the guidance by "a beggar in picturesque and desultory costume" (19) which sets off a series of reflecting remarks on stereotypical anxieties about being robbed or even murdered. Actually, Howells makes this clear, the beggar only wanted a little financial aid. Leaving him "empty-handed," he finds himself entrapped by "the wonder of the city." (20) Thus only by subsuming the beggar and the city under romanticist notions of picturesque and wonder, Howells manages to reconcile the foreign impressions that impose "every surface-sense." (20) What follows is a gondola-trip, staged as a failed rite of passage, shaking the foundations of confidence:

I could see by that uncertain glimmer how fair was all, but not how sad and old; and so, unhaunted by any pang for the decay that afterwards saddened me amid the forlorn beauty of Venice, I glided on. I have no doubt it was a proper time to think all the fantastic things in the world, and I thought them; but they passed vaguely through my mind, without at all interrupting the sensations of sight and sound. Indeed, the past and present mixed, there, and the moral and material were blent in the sentiment of utter novelty and surprise. The quick boat slid through old troubles of mine [...] Dark, funeral barges like my own had flitted by [...] One could not resist a vague feeling of anxiety, in these strait and solitary passages, which was part of the strange enjoyment of the time, and which was referable to the novelty, the hush, the darkness, and the piratical appearance and unaccountable pauses of the gondoliers [...] To move on was relief; to pause was regret for past transgressions mingled with good resolutions for the future [...] (Howells 1866: 21-23)

The psychological dramatization of the scene and its partly gothic imagery – recalling depictions by Byron and others – are significant. A conventionalized literary motif, the ride in the gondola becomes a journey into the unconscious. Imagination is stirred but the inner fantasies are faint. The connotations of the subject cannot compare to the overwhelming visual and aural stimuli. Here Venice marks an intersection between history and contemporary life. The boat-trip on the dense network of canals becomes a journey into one's own past. Signs of individual mortality create anxiety, and the gondoliers appear as mythological ferrymen, even pirates, robbing the traveler of his soul and body.

The only solution to escape anxiety would be the recreation of the distant observer position. Ease can only be achieved by moving on, by simply scanning the surroundings without affecting them or being affected by them. The scene displays several mediated images, some of them reminiscent of common motives connected with the city, others springing from imagination. Accordingly, "the anxiety of visual experience" that Eric Savoy detects in the subverted gaze, concerns both the stimuli of the city and the fancied mental images the traveler is confronted with in the foreign area.¹⁸

Two paragraphs down Howells *persona* is stabilized again and expresses his familiarity with and expertise of the object. He claims to have "felt curiously at home in Venice from the first," (Howells 1866: 24) and to have gained quick access to the language. Language acquisition and the curiously homely feeling serve Howells to transform his *persona* into a "citizen of that Venice from which I shall never be exiled." (24) The glorifying tone of this passage not only conflicts with the biographical data¹⁹, but also marks the extreme opposite to the melancholic darkness dramatized in the failed rite of passage above. The urgency to establish a linkage with the foreign city, to even incorporate the terrain, is subverted in the next textual move. Recalling his first strolls through the city, Howells designates "a peculiar charm which knowledge of locality has since taken away." (24)

The anxiety of the foreign meets the vision of citizenship and local knowledge that, in turn, sheds the traveler away from actual experience. The paradoxical dilemma of the realist traveler couldn't be better expressed: First, the other is known only by mediations, its 'nature' is not graspable and, therefore, the other creates anxiety (even by forcing the traveler to deal with his own preconceptions). Second, the contrastive reclamation of membership among the 'natives' founded in the comparatively long duration of the stay creates the illusion of access. The insider-knowledge, however, would produce even more mediations and disclose the observer from a supposedly unmediated perception, from the actual, commonplace experience whose immediate representation marks the aesthetic ideal of the realist movement.

5 Intermedial *Flânerie*, Art Criticism, and Economic Heritage

Howells was aware it might be necessary for him that he ceases "to be merely a spectator of this idleness" (Howells 1866: 29) and literally leaves his stage-box in order to develop another mode of literary expression. In his search for actual experience he chooses to collect impressions, 'off the beaten track,' to use James Buzard's phrase. In the sketch "A Daybreak Ramble," Howells stages himself as a *traveler-flâneur* conquering the terrain early in the morning. The strategy is to avoid contact with other foreigners and thus escape contamination with pre-figured views and automatic routes. On the other hand, Howells accentuates that the process of transcription takes its time. One should not, as "scribbling people" (130) tend to do, write down the impressions immediately after a stroll. On the contrary, a truthful description, he maintains, can only be achieved by a controlled, thoughtful writing in retrospect. Of course, Howells once more implicitly criticizes former accounts and claims his position to be superior because of his long stay that allowed him to detect the hidden sides of Venice. Yet a central paradox becomes no less obvious: the notion of a distinctive mode of expression that should produce immediacy is coupled with the process of distancing oneself from immediate impressions. It is precisely through mediation and reflection that actuality and immediacy in representation are to be achieved.

Throughout the sketch Howells emphasizes that he "walked freely back and forth" (133) in the city. He suggests that the alternative way of moving in the streets and re-charting the city requires not only some degree of cursoriness but also a wave-like wandering that may create an individual map by repeating certain movements and by revisiting reevaluating preliminary points of interest. The specific mode of unguided strolling provides the only possibility of temporary escape from the pressures of structured sightseeing. Finally, the aim is to become oneself a part of the 'authentic/native' scenery.

I walked there freely, for though there were already many gondoliers at the *traghetto*²⁰, not one took me for a foreigner or offered me a boat. At that hour, I was in myself so improbable, that if they saw me at all, I must have appeared to them as a dream. My sense of security was sweet, but it was false, for, on going into the church of St. Mark, the keener eye of the sacristan detected me. (Howells 1866: 133)

What Howells stages in this passage is the tension between the *flâneur* who blends with his surroundings and the final impossibility of this phantasmagoria. The gondoliers, who at his arrival automatically recognized him as a foreigner, now, supposedly, show no reaction at all. Accentuating his distraction at the early stroll, Howells casts himself as a ghost-like apparition. In this case, however, the dissolution of bodily materiality presents no danger but allows a feeling of safety, which yet proves to be illusory. Anything but coincidentally, Howells self-ironically depicts himself as being rediscovered in front of a major Venetian sightseeing spot, thus also suggesting the impossibility of escaping from the tourist position.

The *flânerie*, enacted within the interplay of desire for immediacy and of inevitably filtered perception, reaches one of its peaks in a sketch headed "Churches and Pictures." In this piece Howells engages with John Ruskin's aesthetic criteria for the judgment of art and architecture, as developed in *Modern Painters* and *The Stones of Venice*. Daniel Rubey has demonstrated that in the course of the continual editing process no other sketch of the collection has undergone more alterations. Therefore, "Churches and Pictures" qualifies, on a general level, as paradigmatic text for several reasons. It not only mirrors American literary realism's practices of textual revisions, but also articulates the basic *topos* of the conflict between 'American experience' and 'European high culture.' Additionally, it allows a full grasp on travel and travel writing as intertextual and intermedial practices, circulating around the immediacy-mediation tension by combining the problem of perception with the reliance on former depictions.

Although John Ruskin's influential art criticism cannot be sufficiently covered within the scope of this article, some aspects that were obviously relevant for Howells may be briefly outlined. From a historical point of view, one major achievement of Ruskin's art criticism was its focus on the observer. In the first volume of his seminal study *Modern Painters*, he argued that basically any spectator is able to discern good art and bad art. He further maintains that the greatest art emerges by representing "any natural object faithfully" (Ruskin 1963: 22). For Ruskin the retrieval of the truth-content in an artwork would depend on "physical perception and abstract intellect wholly independent of our moral nature," (Ruskin 1963: 25). And he also emphasizes that perceptive ability is guided by the moral standards of the observer. If these foci on the recipient's position, his actual physical and mental *aisthesis*, and especially his moral affinities, may explain the impact of Ruskin's work on Howells's, other aspects clearly have contrastive effects.

The English critic aligns his assertion that any observer is capable of judging art by its aesthetic value with the notion of training in aesthetic experience. Based on the statement that the human eye constantly beholds, Ruskin criticizes the illusion that seeing a thing before one's eye automatically implies the gaining of knowledge about it. Seeing, in other words, has to be learned. Ruskin embeds this thought in a theory of perception. He conveys that "objects pass perpetually before the eyes without conveying any impression to the brain at all; and so pass actually *unseen*, not merely unnoticed, but in the full clear sense of the word unseen ..." (Ruskin 1963: 22/23) Inherent in this pre-modernist perspective is the contention of a continuous stimuli-input that does not leave its traces in a trained human mind since this mind is able to select and organize the important impulses. It is precisely this concept of perception that motivates the engagement of Howells's *traveler-flâneur* with and his gradual deviation from Ruskin, which is traceable in the editing process of *Venetian Life*.

Howells's course of re-vision, which mirrors at once the editorial process, the gradual refinement of his aesthetic judgment and the development of his own representational mode, can be traced most clearly in the following passages that set up a critical dialogue with Ruskin's notions:

The writer, whom we must accept, after all, as the greatest critic of art [meaning John Ruskin], seeks to direct each one's attention to what is actually his natural, unsophisticated feeling for the beautiful, and to teach him to judge art by it [...] In spite of all this, however, Ruskin is the best master you can have in your study of the Venetian painters [...] Without any master, I think, Venetian painters may be studied and understood, up to a certain point, by one who lives in the *atmosphere* of their art in Venice [...] [Any] stated dimensions fail to convey ideas of size, adjectives are not adequate to the ideas of movement, and the names of colours, however artfully and vividly introduced and repeated, cannot tell the reader of a painter's colouring [...] It results from all this that I must believe books on art to have their small use only in the *presence* of the works they criticize. (Howells 1866: 146-148; emphases mine)

In these excerpts Howells already doubts Ruskin's criteria for the judgment of art. The alterations in the 1885-version significantly enhance the dissociation by means of a changed vocabulary. "Master," a term that may also be read as evoking the Romantic notion of the all-controlling creative genius, is replaced with the more informal "Guide" (1885: 112). Ruskin subsequently does not appear as "greatest critic of art" but as "best guide" (1885: 112) and is thus functionally reduced to a mere guideline, ironically resembling the prominent guidebooks. Furthermore, and this is Daniel Rubey's observation, the later editions contain a gradual omission of footnotes, which may be read as a continual dismissal of Ruskin for a point of reference.

Yet even in the early 1866-version Howells's persistent focus on actual observation is striking. For one, he thus gladly adapts Ruskin's emphasis on the spectator and immediate visual experience. For another, however, he has considerable doubts concerning the written mediation of this aesthetic experience. Language, as he puts it, is insufficient to mediate what is seen and perceived. Therefore, art books are only useful to the observer if he is standing in front of the work that is depicted; they cannot replace, or even convey, aesthetic experience. Thus what these passages unfold is a discourse on the functionality of art books, and finally, I contend, on the book as a medium of experience. If seeing and, consequently, art criticism can be learned and have to be trained, as Ruskin asserts, then, Howells seems to argue, aesthetic concepts and any documented judgment are inadequate. Art must be seen. Howells situates this practical aesthetics in the immediacy of the moment; the book fails as sufficient mediator. Yet what the act of reading offers is a cultural practice of testing and training one's observation.

This may be read as another common theme in American realist travel writing, namely the avoidance of an engagement with art.²¹ However, as I would like to maintain, Howells's text rather interrogates a certain notion of art criticism that, despite its seemingly democratic observer-focus, ignores the individuality of perceptive frames, as well as the temporal and local restrictions of aesthetic judgment. What remains, then, are the indeterminacies as well as the insecurities that these passages and their revisions display.

A fractional solution to this problem discloses itself in the essay "Commerce," in which Howells sketches a brief history of the rise and fall of Venice as the major trading metropole. Significantly, he added this essay not until the second edition of 1867. In this context, it is expedient to recall the following statement of John Rosenberg in his classical study on John Ruskin, claiming that the latter's "interpretation of Venetian history rests on two assumptions: the art of a nation is an accurate index of its moral temper, and this temper, more than anything else, determines its fate" (Rosenberg 1963: 87). Thus Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice* (Ruskin 2003) begins with a genealogy of three kingdoms: Tyre, Venice, and England. While the first is only present in memory, the second still exists but is in shambles. England is presented as legitimate heir to Venice which, Ruskin argues, "is still left for our beholding in the final period of her decline: a ghost upon the sands of the sea" (Stones 1960: 13). In fact, the book conceptualizes Venice as admonishing example for the transience of a trading power, a memorial for England.

Accordingly, Howells's sketch on the economic history of Venice ends by reflecting upon reasons for its fall. He refers to a multiplication of trading powers due to the effects of imperialism and industrialization, e.g. he mentions the production-distribution of "industrial arts" (1885: 188) among several nations, one of them England. And he refers to the Portuguese colonial empire in terms of market extensions. The important move, however, occurs when he constructs a genealogy between Italy and America, following the contemporary state of knowledge about the discovery of America:

It remained for Christopher Columbus, born of the Genovese nation which had hated the Venetians so long and so bitterly, to make the discovery of America, and thus give the death-blow to the supremacy of Venice [...] and at the time Columbus was on his way to America, half Europe, united in the League of Cambray, was attempting to crush the Republic of Venice. The whole world was now changed. Commerce sought new channels; fortune smiled on other nations. How Venice dragged onward from the end of her commercial greatness, and tottered with a delusive splendor to her political death, is surely one of the saddest of stories, if not the sternest of lessons. (1885: 189)

As Ruskin before him, Howells, with the last sentence, depicts the transience of Venice as warning example. Prior to that he juxtaposes the genealogical link between Italy and America, i.e. the succession as an economic power legitimated by a deliberate Columbian transfer qua heredity, with a simultaneous forceful, and thus illegitimate, European alliance against Venice. Notably, this genealogical chain reaches back to the supposedly first travel text written on North America. Again, Howells defines his position by recalling a pretext, thus placing himself as rightful heir of Columbus – now, in turn, re-conquering Europe/Italy. The reversal of the American discovery-myth together with the oppositional construction additionally serves to rewrite, remediate and replace Ruskin's narration. It thus allows Howells to stage himself as the legitimate biographer of the city.²² Thus the function of this belatedly inserted essay may be found in its reconciliation of the representational crisis by establishing, on the basis of capitalism, a genealogical tie to its object of observation.

6 Conclusion

The article discussed some aspects central to the poetics of *Venetian Life*, Howells's first published book. Narrative strategies were elucidated as being intermedial in the sense that allusions to and corrections of prior representations are combined with a specific mode of perception and thus constitute a *flânerie* through former depictions of the city. The basic tension of the text evolves between Howells's already visible realist paradox of the desire for an immediate representation and the recognition of a necessarily mediated experience. I further argued that Howells's text is highly self-conscious when it comes to this conflict, staging from the very beginning the mediality of Venice. While the contradiction between the strive for immediacy and the inevitability of a filtered perception at some times causes instable counter-moves within the text, reconciliatory tendencies are, of course, equally discernible. These textual incoherencies are, finally, calmed by economical and political strategies, which nevertheless depend on founding (inter-) texts.

Howells's *Venetian Life*, his first published collection of travel sketches and essays, heavily relies upon intermedial strategies insofar as allusions to and corrections of prior representations are integrated into a specific mode of perception. By means of an intermedial *flânerie* Howells browses and strolls through a catalogue of depictions and positions himself as a distinguished *traveler-flâneur*. This mode of perception, negotiated both on the level of textuality and in the creation of a persona, is meant to reconcile a central paradox of American literary realism: the desire for the expression of immediate experience and the recognition that any experience is always already mediated.

Secondly, as already indicated in the introduction, the inevitable intertextuality of travel writing challenges the notion of a secluded development of the American realist movement, which often serves as implicit premise of academic works. In his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to American Literary Realism and Naturalism* Donald Pizer assesses this argumentation:

Once Howells's early realist travelogue are understood as a system of intermedial references this invites a reconsideration of some major tenets of scholarship on American literary realism. It challenges arguments by critics such as David E. Shi who maintains that it was not until the 1890s that American realist literature complicates the relationship between visual perception and the construction of truth/knowledge (Shi 1995). From the very beginning, Howell's text self-consciously negotiates the problem of representation itself and thereby dramatizes a reflection upon the book as a medium of experience. The various staged and deferred attempts of deciphering the arts and the cultural other sketch out the contours of a theory of culture as a practice of reading.

The intermedial design of travel writing also complicates the notion of a secluded development of the American realist movement, which continues to figure as an implicit premise of many studies. In his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to American Literary Realism and Naturalism* Donald Pizer assess this line of argumentation:

In short, it is now generally held that American realism and naturalism are not similar to European varieties, but that the differences between them should lead [...] to studies that will exploit an understanding of these differences in order to help us interpret American literary phenomena designated by the terms. (Pizer 1995: 5)

Howells's sketches partly contest such claims of exceptionalism. Their ironic intermedial poetics construct the notion of a transatlantic dialogue on the representation of culture and the arts. The genre of transatlantic travel writing, whose negotiation of the triad reading-traveling-writing became its defining feature during the course of the nineteenth century, allows for resituating Howells beyond the paradigms of Midwestern and/or national literature.²³ When it comes to the literary representation of the discourse on the arts by means of an intermedial poetics, the early Howells is no less international than Henry James. Yet the intercontinental literary flair strikingly contrasts with Howells's construction of a genealogical replacement of Italy with the U.S. under the regime of economic trade. This qualification adds all the more reason to analytically separate the intertwined realms of a transnational dialogue on aesthetic critique and a nationalized competitive struggle for political and economic hegemony.

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Notes

¹ For biographical background see (Goodman 2005) and (Dawson 2005).

² For the purposes of this article, two editions provide the basis of analysis: The first edition of 1866 and another one from 1885, a time at which Howells already had become a landmark figure in American realism. Despite Daniel Rubey's observation that the sketches have been changed significantly in the various editions, it will become clear in this essay that, at least in the selected passages of the two versions discussed, the alterations prove to be remarkably slight (Rubey 1991). However, two notable exceptions must be mentioned and will be analyzed: The significantly revised Ruskin-sketch "Churches and Pictures," and the essay on "Commerce," which Howells added in the second edition that appeared in 1867.

³ In general, Howells's early Italian writings, among them the two travel books as well as several essays on Italian theater and fiction, tend to be neglected by research. This blind spot has serious consequences on the positioning and understanding not only of Howells but also of American literary realism. Oloy W. Fryckstedt (1958) still has to be credited with providing a seminal study on Howells's early writings that takes into account his Italian travelogues. In his study Fryckstedt regards *Venetian Life* as an "aesthetic approach." (57) He discerns the picturesque as the "key-word in this context," and misses the social agenda he discovers as the chief characteristic in Howells's later writings. Fryckstedt circumscribes Howells's writing technique as "predominantly impressionistic" and accuses him of avoiding to "penetrate beneath the surface," (58) by aestheticizing the poor. Nevertheless, Fryckstedt, and Woodress before him, highlight the importance of these early writings for Howells's later work as well as the crucial role Italy generally plays in his work (Woodress 1982). As dubious as Fryckstedt's judgments on Howells's Venetian aesthetics appear to us today, his emphasis on Italy as a topic/scenery and on the influence of the travelogues for the later works needs to be acknowledged, especially since today's criticism on Howells and American realism could profit from such a reconsideration. Finally, Daniel Rubey's article on editing practices and inter-textual relations to John Ruskin marks an isolated attempt that takes into consideration the complexities of the sketch-collection (Rubey 1991).

⁴ This notion can be found, implicitly or explicitly, in such important works as Alan Trachtenberg's *The Incorporation of America* (1982), the collection *American Realism: New Essays* (1982) edited Eric J. Sundquist, or Amy Kaplan's *The Social Construction of American Realism* (1988).

⁵ For a profound analysis of the psychological implications of travel, albeit from a European perspective, see Dennis Porter's seminal study *Haunted Journeys: Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing* (Porter 1991).

⁶ The translations are mine.

⁷ William W. Stowe (1994) argues: "Travel, reading, and writing were among the most favored activities of a growing class of privileged, influential Americans in the nineteenth century. They exploited all of the features of their favorite pastimes to claim social and professional positions for themselves, to gratify their desires for pleasure and especially for prestige, and to justify their privileges by demonstrating their superior taste and sensitivity." (15)

⁸ In his influential study *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (1976), Dean MacCannell combines sociology and semiotics to describe the tourist's endeavor as continuous "quest for authenticity" (14). According to MacCannell, the need to signify and mark tourist sites not only blocks any 'authentic' experience because it is already mediated but also creates, more fundamentally, an "interchangeability of the signifier and the signified [...] The Referent of a sign [being] another sign." (MacCannell 1989:118)

⁹ Jeffrey Alan Mellen provides a brief, useful overview on such oppositions (Mellen 1999). On the reclaiming of American experience as a productive and creative force see e.g. the classical essays by Daniel J. Boorstin (Boorstin 1960).

¹⁰ In his 1940-essay "On some Motifs in Baudelaire," Benjamin draws this distinction between these two versions of experience in relation to the shock: "The greater the shock factor in particular impressions, the more vigilant consciousness has to be in screening stimuli; the more efficiently it does so, the less do these impressions enter long experience [Erfahrung] and the more they correspond to the concept of isolated experience [Erlebnis]. Perhaps the special achievement of shock defense is the way it assigns an incident a precise point in time in consciousness, at the cost of the integrity of the incident's contents. This would be a peak achievement of the intellect; it would turn the incident into an isolated experience." (Benjamin 2006b: 319) The passage implies the notion that perception can be controlled. The shocking stimuli may be blocked by consciousness, and thus prevented from reaching the inner life of a person, his or her thoughts, memories, dreams.

¹¹ Choosing this brief review article, I am, of course neglecting the classical points of reference for any discussion of Benjamin's flâneur-concept. While his later remarks in "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century," (Benjamin 1999b) "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," (Benjamin 2006a) and "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" (Benjamin 2006b) strongly situate the flâneur-figure within large cities, namely Paris and London, thereby focusing on topics ranging from consumer society to the observation techniques of a detective, the early review of a book by Franz Hessel stresses themes like experience and memory (which are, of course also present in the other essays) without embedding them in the context of consumerism or metropolitan perceptive overflow.

¹²With regard to realist fiction, John Rignall stresses the strolling spectator's mediatory position and deems him paradigmatic for realist fiction (Rignall 1989; Rignall 1992). He argues that "the figure of the disengaged onlooker has been a common accomplice in the realist's project of representing the world. In one respect he constitutes [...] a reflexive element in a mimetic composition, pointing up the privileged role ascribed to seeing in the practice of literary realism." (Rignall 1992: 2) Dana Brand, who delineates the profound impact the flâneur had on the supposedly anti-urban American culture even prior to Civil War, maintains that Americans "were fascinated by the cosmopolitan mode of being exemplified by the flâneur. The flâneur may have had a particular suitability to American culture. To many Americans, he may have presented an aspiration, a desire for the subjective benefits of the metropolitan civilization that [...] was even more consonant with the avowed ideals of America's capitalist, democratic, bourgeois-dominated society that it was consonant with the values of the older European societies." (Brand 1991: 9)

¹³ For detailed descriptions of Venice and its various sets of representation (see [Ross 1994](#) and [Corbineau-Hoffmann 1993](#)).

¹⁴ Writer and critic James Russell Lowell in 1866 highlights Howells's "conscious security of matured style." ([Lowell 1962](#): 3) He praises the accurateness of the city-portrayal and admires "the charm of tone and the minute fidelity to nature [as well as the] refined humor, and an airy elegance"(4). Henry James, reviewing *Italian Journeys* two years later, regards as chief quality that Howells "is simply an observer" ([James 1962](#): 5), writing "[i]n the simplest manner possible, and without declamation or rhetoric or affectation of any kind, but with an exquisite alternation of natural pathos and humor" (6). James's enthusiasm culminates in a comparison: "Mr. Howells is, in short, a descriptive writer in sense and with a perfection that, in our view, can be claimed for no American writer except Hawthorne." (7)

¹⁵ The alterations in later editions are minor. In 1885, a point when Howells's career was about to reach its peak, "point of observation" is replaced by "point of view." This is the only notable change.

¹⁶ Angelika Corbineau-Hoffmann, who traces the genealogy of Venetian representations, maintains that, from the nineteenth century on, Venice is reduced to mere scenery. The notion of Venice as ruin that connotes some glorious past replaces the living, actual city. According to Corbineau-Hoffmann, Venice thereby releases (poetic) imagination and serves as background for individual memories. The dramatization of Venice as a stage is thus already a representational convention at Howells's time. However, the remarkable feature of the text is its self-conscious, even self-reflexive, intertextual treatment of this tradition. ([Corbineau-Hoffmann 1993](#): 139)

¹⁷ At this point, in the 1885 edition, another half-sentence is added which reads "and will think with me that the place loses little in the illusion removed." (1885:3)

¹⁸ James Buzard elucidates the specific role of Italy as the Other of the European continent: "Britons and Americans agreed that Italy possessed the greatest concentration of the valuably different in Europe, the greatest density of Europeanness, as long as that nation seemed exempt from modernity, untouched by industry, nationalism, political democracy, and secularism. For British and American visitors, the southward crossing of the Alps figured as an entrance into the inner sanctum of European otherness. But the general framework of the gaze made virtually every place 'on the Continent' or 'in Europe' describable in terms of its opposition to the modern and familiar." ([Buzard \(1993b\)](#): 32) Michael L. Ross affirms the chief importance Italy both as travel destination and as literary topos had and still has: "For writers of the two past centuries, Italy has [...] opened [...] an avenue of personal freedom that transcends, while it includes, artistic license [...] For foreign refugees from Puritanism, Italy has stood as a kind of delectable anti-home: the paradise of the pliable upper lip, of the bashed frolic of consciousness. To the Romantics and their successors, the country has come as a blessed 'relax' after the damnable 'brace' of the northern homeland." ([Ross 1994](#): 4)

¹⁹ Among others, Fryckstedt comments on Howells's initial difficulties in learning the foreign language, and thus in becoming acquainted and familiar with Venice and its inhabitants. ([Fryckstedt \(1958\)](#))

²⁰ In the 1885 edition, the Italian word is replaced by the English one, "station." (1885: 101)

²¹ For this general argument see e.g. (Fluck 1992: 114-147)

²² In this context, the notion of travel as imperial conquest delineated by ethnography and anthropology gains chief importance. For detailed explanations on this topic and the complexities arising see the contributions in Clifford and Marcus (Clifford 1986).

²³ Such a view is reflected, among others, by Ronald M. Grosh in a two-part article series: "Early American Literary Realism I: The National Scene" (Grosh 1988: 132-144) "Early American Literary Realism II: The Midwestern Matrix" (Grosh 1989: 122-130).