

NOSTRA BERLUSCONI AND YOURS: ITALY AFTER THE DELUGE

As I sit here in my hotel room in Southern Sicily, just outside the ancient Greek city of Akragras, now called Agrigento, where I had thought I would find the last of the raw edge of the country, instead what is most propulsive is the canned rhythm of the pool disco as the bathers obey the microphoned young woman who dictates the dance moves to Pink's commanding everyone to "Get the Party Started." Here, at the tail end of the post-Berlusconi maxi-commodification following the Italian "Economic Miracle" of earlier decades, Adorno's dictum about the Culture Industry is being slavishly illustrated: Everyone *must* be happy, if not they are for the concentration camp, or simply made to feel totally left behind. In Naples and throughout Southern Italy, the fascist functionalist architecture, especially in the Post Office Buildings, is everywhere still apparent and its lasting mark is the loudspeaker attached to the upper quadrille of the buildings. In Agrigento, everyone has a car except for the very poor who are discretely hidden. (The only place I saw Old Sicily, the toothless peasants astride donkeys carrying thatched wood, was in a series of photographs curated by a local professor in the Archeological Museum.) In this commodified place where the subsumption is not yet total, it is still possible to be impressed by the short distance between the fascist loudspeaker with its former insistence on blind obedience to Il Duce and the post-modern microphone and rhythm box with its insistence on blind obedience to the market.

The instrument for drilling home this obedience is, as always in Italian society, the family. The family, once spoken to through the church, is now addressed through the television. Berlusconi himself is the ultimate family man, preaching loyalty to one's friends and kin as the dominant, if not the only, value (and of course validating some of those other, more sinister, "families" in Italian society). Meanwhile the society itself becomes, at least in the South, more insular. Southern Sicily, the closest point in Europe to Africa, has almost no Africans. And this non-presence has nothing to do with preference. A scant four hours away by boat on the island of Lampedusa, once famous as the site of the film and novel *The Leopard* which detailed the passing away of the feudal order in Sicily, that order is very much alive and well, not the Holy Roman Empire, but Fortress Europa instantiated by the Italian Coast Guard patrolling the shores of the old kingdom, preventing Africans fleeing poverty from landing. While I was there, the bodies of 14 drowned Africans were found near the island (Chancellor).

Just as in the Arizona desert, these “coyotes” who take the Africans are now frequently setting them adrift in the ocean as patrol boats approach, recalling the bloodiest moments of the slavedriver’s treatment of their cargo in the Middle Passage. What was “The Southern Question,” that is, what to do about the underdeveloped peasantry in the south of Italy, is now a globalized Southern Question; the burning question of what is to be Europe’s relationship to Africa.

A question of course that will never cross the lips, except in the form of how to keep people out, of those enthralled with the market only. What has happened in Italy in the wake of Berlusconi is relevant to the rest of Western Europe where at the moment there is a huge drive to up the level of commodification, judged to be nowhere near saturation level, with the requisite doses of privatization, attacks on unions, and closing off of public spaces, all of which currently goes by the name “Sarkozy.” The idea being that this Thatcherizing of France will then spread quickly to the rest of Northern and Western Europe, Belgium, Holland, Scandinavia. This fall, as the French struggle over whether to accept Sarkozy’s “reforms,” it is crucial to see what the path of “reform” has wrought in Italy and also to see how difficult it is to get off that path once one has started down it. This article will first describe the change wrought by Berlusconi, a change now continued and intensified in the Anglo world by his business partner Murdoch and in no way isolated to Italy. Then it will describe three zones of the country: the globalized space of Venice; Italy’s accommodation with an international work force and its center of immaterial labor in Milan and Turin; and the intractable South of Naples, Calabria and Sicily. Beneath these geographical spaces swirl more ancient and timeless metaphysical spaces: Berlusconi’s Symbolic uniting of the family and the market; the depleted space of the traditional left Imaginary which is even now giving way to a new space that seems to be perennially in the process of being born; and below that The Real which asserts itself in all its wonder in the ever resisting and collective impulse of a people and a land, particularly in the South, which has endured centuries of hardship but still retains its collective impulse.

### **DEADWOOD**

Berlusconi is generally thought to have contributed to a more lawless state, one in which nothing impedes commerce in general and in particular the continual expansion of his own media empire. (Not so different from that brilliant television description of the contemporary socio-economic formation metaphorically situated in a mythical old west of saloon, or casino,

capitalism where the whore house manager and chief entrepreneur Al Swearingen appoints himself to preside over a meeting to determine town officers “on account of I have the bribe sheet”—*Deadwood*, 2004) One of the defining moments in Berlusconi’s first term of office was in 1994 when as he was presiding over a UN commission on “criminality,” charges were brought against him for bribing a member of the finance police on taxes (Ginsborg, 2005, 70). Again, what has been well detailed is his using his own two terms in office to impede or halt investigations into his own corrupt dealings, and the level of audacity with which, as in the Bush Administration, the corruption was not only carried out but done with a wink toward the Italian public, embracing the idea that to cheat the government is not to cheat. In the case of the finance police, the defense did not consist in claiming the bribery did not occur but only that Berlusconi could not have known about it, a defense in Italy wryly described in the best Ken Lay fashion as “ignorance as a result of magnitude” (Ibid, 76). The public then was never really asked to believe that the same Berlusconi who (like the Charles Loughton publisher in *The Big Clock*—and like Murdoch today—orders a janitor fired who left a light on in the fourth floor of his media skyscraper) was involved in contesting the price of teleprompters for his television channels, personally oversaw the buying of a house for the brother of ex-Socialist premiere Bettino Craxi (his Tony Blair) and oversaw the design and execution of a full page ad in *USA Today* was conveniently absent from considerations involving his own taxes. Rather, in Adorno’s phrase, non-public opinion (2005), the level of cultural communication below what is expressed in public opinion polls, is supposed to understand these actions as standard business practice.

But, as Paul Ginsborg in his excellent book on the ex-premiere explains, to focus on the corruption is to ignore the substantial political and economic project that goes by the name Berlusconi, a project which has largely succeeded. Berlusconi took the Italian economic miracle of the 60s and “completed” it. Or rather, he stood as the primary signifier of the transformation from an industrial, product-based economy, centering around the automobile, to a service based, communication economy centering around a conception of television that seamlessly blended the functions of entertaining, informing and selling to the point where they came to be seen as the same, or as all part of a continuum defined within the medium as “fun,” or, closer to home, on Murdoch’s Fox Network as “sassy.”

In Italy this involved two major changes to the communications laws in the decades of the 1980s and 90s, changes which in effect overturned the pub-

lic control of the airwaves and privatized them. The first was a challenge to a law which forbid any but public channels from broadcasting nationally. Berlusconi's channels simply ignored the law when, in 1984, an Italian court pulled them off the air for a day as a response to the violation, causing millions to miss episodes of *The Smurfs*, *Dallas* and *Dynasty*. Berlusconi successfully defended the long cherished citizen's "freedom to use the automatic controls (liberta di telecomando)," (Ginsborg, 2005, 38) the long suppressed fifth of Roosevelt's four freedoms. Berlusconi also challenged the law that forbade live broadcasting on any but a government channel and thus like Murdoch's Fox News began his own form of highly politicized infotainment. Among his televisual "innovations" was a return, as in the early days of television, to variety show hosts hawking wares mid show. (The salient image of Berlusconi TV is the graying patriarch "entertainer" cavorting with barely dressed females called galines, or chickens, a dumbing down which Fellini foresaw and criticized in one of his most interesting later films *Ginger and Fred*—1986.) Another "innovation," one that would put an end to any speculation that this programming was about anything but selling, was taking full advantage of the custom of deliberately raising the volume on advertising during children's programs. Once in public office, Berlusconi then melded his conception of television, which also included a huge presence for sports with Murdoch's when he granted Murdoch's Sky Broadcasting access to the Italian market, adding to the Italian televisual palette Hollywood movies, Murdoch's own brand of political discussion, and worldwide sports. As in the US, this onslaught caused public television stations themselves to move their formats closer to the "fun mix" of bubble headed variety shows and US sitcom reruns. The quintessential critique of what this format has done to the populace, where by the late 1980s watching television had become "the cultural activity of the Italian family" with 86.3% and the majority of the poor watching everyday (Ibid. 50), was lodged by the writer Albert Moravia who told of a little girl running up to him the day after he was interviewed on the air and proclaiming, "How happy I am to make your acquaintance. Who are you?" "...She loved me," he recounted, "but she had no idea who I was (Ibid. 51.)."

In office, Berlusconi then applied the variety show format to government with himself as the genial patriarchal emcee. The 42.3% of housewives who watched more than three hours of television per day and voted for Berlusconi in 1994, as opposed to working women who tended to vote against him (Ibid. 98), along with the rest of the country was then fed a watered down version of the state. Fifty of his Forza Italia party legislators, the name derived from Berlusconi's championship Milanese soccer team

signifying nothing but “winning,” were not politicians but senior members of his company, in the legislature not to represent their electoral constituency but to effectively execute orders from their boss (Ibid. 68). What Berlusconi has done is to commodify the state. He had previously bought a chain of supermarkets to attempt a vertical integration of product and product sales on television and his movement into the state can be seen as adding another level to that integration, so the state too becomes a vehicle for promoting this selling. “Individuals are their own best guides for what is good for them (Ibid. 111),” is Berlusconi’s often stated cloak for what has instead constituted a consistent attack and ruthless commodification of these same individuals while at the same time attempting to strip away all possibilities of a collective response to this attack. The ethos has continued despite the recent ascension of a weak left-center coalition. This summer the two biggest stories were the failure to sell off the state owned Air Italia and the degree of anger of Italians over the cost of government. Italy’s is the most expensive parliament in Europe in terms of salary but this “anger” must also be read post-Berlusconi as petite bourgeois outrage at democracy interfering with the market.

The media magnate whose goal is to commodify the public sphere is not unique to Italy. One of the other most ominous events of the summer was Murdoch’s buying of *The Wall Street Journal*, with his blatantly stated intention of changing not just *The Journal’s* but the Western Media’s reporting of business news. Roger Ailes, the ex-Reaganite who ran Fox News, in announcing the launching of Murdoch’s Fox Business News which eventually *The Journal* will feed, declared that, unlike its rival CNBC, the Fox channel was not interested in reporting anti-business news, meaning that labor, corruption, and investigation of business ethics are all off the agenda. Business news is thus reduced to ruthless aggrandizement of the market. News has finally and fully become advertising.

This progressive marketizing and attack on the public sphere (New York’s multibillion dollar media magnate Bloomberg with exhaustive ties to New York real estate and finance capital got elected mayor on a claim that because he had so much money he couldn’t be bought) is in effect a sign of desperation. With Western commodities, and especially American ones, locked out of the Middle East post-Iraq, with Latin America because of its past experience questioning and increasingly rejecting the tenets of neoliberalism, with China defining itself as a “robust” competitor to the West intent both on dominating Asia and on pursuing African resources and the African market by identifying itself as a fellow former Third World country,

and with the credit squeeze in the US brought on by the housing crisis, the market for Western goods is shrinking. The answer is to increase the level of penetration of capital in the already developed countries. (Why shouldn't the Dutch countryside now defined by its environmentally conscious solar windmills and still bearing some resemblance to the 17<sup>th</sup> century landscapes of Rembrandt and Vermeer instead be filled with advertising?). Conversely, a defeat in France will have serious repercussions in terms of capital's consistent need to rid itself of its surplus commodities and finance. Thus, the frantic quality of Sarkozy's attack, the desperate need for the Berlusconiization of France and Western Europe.

### **DISTURBING THE SERENITY OF LA SERENISSIMA**

It's not called the Serene City for nothing. Venice has long been separate from the rest of Italy, its beautiful palazzos in their gingerbread wonderland on the Grand Canal, effacing both the labor in the earlier form of primitive accumulation from Arab and African lands (the city celebrates its founding moment as the theft from Alexandria of the relics of St. Mark), and later, concealing the labor from the mainland as is the case of Ca' Rezzonico, a palazzo bought by a Genovese banking family in the 17<sup>th</sup> century which then sealed its ascension into the upper levels of Italian society and crowned this effacement by having a family member appointed pope. Thus their money, it would seem, came from God.

In the midst of this splendor is the grandest of world art exhibitions, the Venice Biennale, with its two main events, the national permanent pavilions in the Giardini, the stately, pun intended, Italian garden, and the curated exhibition at the Arsenale, once the center of Venetian naval power, now a rusted shell of its former self, which nevertheless in its decay is often the site of global art that in its own patchwork brilliance continues to make mainstream US still post-expressionist high modernism seem ever more antiquated.

To return to the theme of pre- and post-saturated economies, one had only to compare the adjacent French and British national pavilions at the Giardini. Sophie Calle's "Prenez soin de vous (Take care of yourself)" takes a very private moment, the artist's receiving a Dear John letter which ends with the facile exhibit title, and turns it into a public (and collective) reflection as various women in French society explain how they dealt with the same type of letter. The reactions, in the best Simone de Beauvoir/Shulamith Firestone tradition, illustrate the uneven nature of

male/female personal relationships under capitalism, as the women are left reacting to the social validation of the male inability to achieve intimacy, while also celebrating the myriad of occupations (judge, chemist, performance artist) that women occupy by having them reply in their professional capacity, the chemist writes her response as a prescription. If the French pavilion is a questioning of the none too solid bonds that melt into air in the relationship market, the Brit Saatchi Superstar Tracey Emin's "Borrowed Light," which won a prize for best exhibit, a series of etchings flaunting battered and exposed women, represents a true post-Thatcherite feminism. Don't Mourn, Sell, it urges. Emin takes the traditional violence the Empire inflicts on its working class, refines it to focus on the abuse of women and then "exposes" that brutality in a way that wants only to profit from it. Her pussy etchings such as "Preying For A Penis" suggest neither longing nor pain, nor female control of the sexual process. Instead, they suggest the whole operation can be dispensed with rather quickly so we can all get back to work.

At the Arsenale, this year magnificently curated by the American critic Robert Storr, the theme that overwhelmingly emerged was artist's dealing in a variety of modes and moods with the destruction of global war. "Why war?" was the question obliquely asked by Hirharu Mori as she posed in khaki's next to her question mark balloons. Elsewhere, this destruction could be read very specifically as pre and post-9/11 imperial destruction rather than simply liberal anti-war angst. The most striking moment was the video of a boy in Belgrade kicking what at first looked to be a soccer ball but on closer examination turned out to be a skull, reminding us of the needless destruction of that city by NATO. This carnage is echoed in the present by the Scandinavian exhibit of Abdel Abidin creating a mythical travel agency for tours of the hottest new haute bourgeois vacation spot, Iraq. Footage of the real-life destruction, footage struck from US television, runs over the perky announcer detailing the joys of a Muslim Club Med getaway. Another striking sound/image discordance was images of the present quietism in Chile in the economic devastation of Pinochet's Milton Friedman inspired Chicago School Shock Capitalism with people passively going about the business of having their lifestyle lowered over an audio of the film *The Battle of Chile*. Thus, the singular military destruction as recounted in the film is repeated endlessly in the long-term economic upheaval of the opening of Chile to the rapaciousness of international capital.

Two striking moments of de-territorialization, of what Mike Davis terms, the "Barbarian Hordes" fighting back, were a wonderful *bande desinee*, a

comic book by Cameroonian born Eyoum Ngangue about the fitful starts and stops of an African in Tunisia trying to cross over into Europe, making his journey the equivalent of any other superhero's, and, second and best of all, a scale model of a Brazilian favela, complete with soccer field and concert stage, in the midst of the national pavilions in the Giardini, pointing to the international challenge to the state that this vibrant urban culture continues to pose. Finally, back at the Arsenale, Dimitry Gutov and David Riff, part of a Marxist Collective from Moscow, pointed to the sterility of New York Art School Conceptualism by returning politics to the usually vacuous "concepts" that movement espoused. Their boldly stenciled statements proclaim "Consciousness Is Something The World Has To Acquire Even If It Does Not Want To" and "In Our Days Everything Is Pregnant With Its Contrary."

Thus the first challenge to Berlusconiization is posed in Venice by the global art community. In the midst of the splendor of that city the Biennale organized and manifested impulses which often in Italy are seen by the Western media as only erupting in the frequent anti-war mass demonstrations in the streets, but which in the Biennale were linked to a larger and international anti-war, anti-capitalist community challenging not only commodified statehood but also the image of art as simply another part of a portfolio for hedge fund investors seeking to diversify, the dominant use of art in the global capitals of London and New York.

### **MILAN TURIN AND THE VENETO: MATERIALIZING IMMATERIAL LABOR**

The Northern industrial heartland of Milan, Turin and the industrial mainland surrounding Venice, the Veneto, always a study in contrasts, now constitutes one of the major global sites of the concentration of the two pronged attack that in *Empire* and *Multitude* Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri claim is in the process of destroying global capital from within; the immigrant remaking of corporate capital with its deterritorializing challenge to imperial sovereignty and what Marx described in *The Grundrisse* as the "General Intellect" at the center of the now dominant form of service and information oriented immaterial labor which supposedly will come to the fore with the "withering away" of the leadership of this new form of commercial organization (Vercellone).

Milan itself is the center of the region and of its contradictions. It is the city where both Berlusconi, as developer, and Mussolini, as a newspaperman,

started. Its petite bourgeois was and remains among the most reactionary in the world. This is the class that helped bring both men to power, but, equally, its working class has a history of being the most organized and volatile in Italy. Modern Italy begins in 1943 with anti-fascist strikes at the Resetti factory in Turin, which then spread to nine other factories in that city and then to Milan, with Milan, Turin and Genoa known as the resistance triangle (Ginsborg, 1990, 10). Finally it was in Milan that the bodies of Mussolini and his mistress were hung and allowed to rot.

It was this region that was the heart of the 60s "economic miracle," spear-headed by the automobile, particularly Fiat, in Turin, and fueled by the seemingly unlimited supply of cheap labor from the south. All that has changed; the brightest names of that period are now in decline. Olivetti is a holding company for Telecom Italia, Fiat is completing a long process of disinvestment from Turin, once employing 130,000, now fewer than 16,000 workers (Ibid. 2005, 21), and Parmalat has collapsed (Ibid. 134). Milan, long a world center of fashion, is now Italy's high tech center, particularly communications, while Turin, in a way more successful, but still reeking of some of the desperation of Michael Moore's Flint Michigan, has made itself over into a tourist center with the working class enclave of Lingotto, once the site of one of the largest factories in the world, now known mainly as a mall and automobile museum.

What is dynamic in the region is a sophisticated two-tiered economy with labor now split into Negri's two groups. There is a highly skilled artistic and technical community, media savvy and mainly traditional Italian; a still recognizable also largely Italian working class in what remains of the region's unionized industry; and a large scale immigrant community that is performing the basic service jobs while also, sometimes in second shifts in the major factories at much lower wages, producing the products hawked on Berlusconi's commercial wonderland and sold on the sly by immigrant street vendors.

Milan is being remade from below by these immigrants into a truly global city. On the way to dinner with an American friend, a restaurateur, an Italian woman who had just returned to Milan from San Francisco told us the best food was in a local pizzeria. Inside the pizzeria, indeed, there were huge tables filled with pizza and pitchers of beer, but being consumed and served by Chinese. In Venice, I was asking for directions back to my hotel and a Venetian told me to "turn left at the Chinese pizzeria." Milan also boasts large Latino, Malaysian and African populations and has become one

of the open centers in Europe where those fleeing the lowering of the global wage in their own countries establish their own communities and remake the old ones. So much so that, in this city at least, to be “Italian” now also includes being someone who counters the sweep of global corporations by taking advantage of their base in Fortress Europa.

Here the hope is that immigrants, already highly politicized because of the struggle in their own countries, because of their experience of “Shock Capitalism” (Klein) will join with a native working class that is one of Europe’s most radical. It was in Turin that Gramsci founded the Communist Party and outlined, with his concept of “hegemony,” the plan for its eventual post-World War II success. Continued success depends on extending moments like the one in 2002 where approximately 2.5 million workers gathered in Rome to protest the abolition of a statute which would allow employers to fire workers without just cause (Ginsborg, 2005, 169). As for immaterial labor, the service and communication workers, this socialism at the heart of corporate capital, in searching for signs of this more subtle evidence where these workers act on the fact that they, as my students say, “could do their work so much better without their boss,” perhaps there was a moment of their reclaiming their public space when in the entertainment industry, at the beginning of the summer, protestors caused the canceling of what was to be Barbara Streisand’s first concert in Italy. They objected to promoters selling tickets for \$200 to \$1200, calling the actions “absurd” especially because the stadium in Rome where she was to perform was “public property, and not (to) be used for immoral deals that are shameful to a civilized country” (New York Times, May 28, 2007). It’s a small moment but, as Gramsci noted, culture and the culture industry is more and more dominant in the information age. After all, the first post-modern eruption, France 1968, was triggered by Godard, Truffaut, and the student protestors’ refusal to accept the government’s firing of the Cinematheque’s Henri Langlois.

### **NAPLES, CALABRIA, SICILY: COMMODIFYING THE INEFFABLE**

Naples, with its uncollected garbage, an industry tied to the indigenous organized crime families, the Camorra, its surrounding area of Campania with the highest incidences of cancer in Europe because of the unregulated dumping of industries whose ownership is dubious, its harbor and coastline leading South to Amalfi, perhaps the rawest and most beautiful coast in the world with settlements still seemingly hanging on for their survival to the mountain paths they are carved out of, and with the whole area still living

under the imminent threat of a re-eruption of Vesuvius, the volcano that buried Pompeii, is a city of savage beauty and a prototype for the drama of the South, which also includes Sicily, and the toe of the Italian boot, Calabria.

Naples consistently runs ahead of the national average of 9 percent unemployment with a perennial 20 percent, and with ages 15-24 averaging 58 percent (*Time Out Naples*, 33). The deep inequalities of the city are written more strongly than most into its class-based geography. The working class and immigrant population are left to fend for themselves living in squalor around the train station and the center city; the middle class having vacated the center city occupying the mall zone of Vomero that overlooks the city; and the global corporations and barbed wire encrusted US embassy luxuriating around the exquisitely developed bay.

Corruption is endemic to the region with Naples' once crusading Communist mayor, Antonio Bassolino, now having moved on but benefiting from land garnered in Campania during his term. The distinguishing feature of the region is not its form of government but its form of secret government. Sicily, in which over 80% of the store owners in the capital, Palermo, pay protection (*Rough Guide*, 458) is characterized by its mafia families which after the killings of federal judges in the 1990s now try to keep a lower, more legitimate, profile and which are rumored to be very excited about the money laundering prospect of the Berlusconi "dream" of a bridge at Messina to the mainland (Ibid. 457). Naples is the site of the Camorra which does not police street crime and thus mixes petty vandalism with more organized mob action. Finally, Calabria, ruled by the 'Ndrangheta, long known for the ruthlessness of its internecine warfare (a 2002 killing featured all female assassins including a 62 year old grandmother arrested hiding a 9mm automatic pistol in her bra-*Time Out Naples*, 27), this summer made a splash with an open battle in the streets of Dusseldorf as part of a gang war which emphasized once again that criminal capital is as global as any other capitalist enterprise.

Here the predominant message of Berlusconi's satellite dish culture is, take the new easier access to cheaper commodities and shut up. Yet this state of things is resisted, primarily in three ways. The first is that since the government is so bound up with organized crime, young idealists who would ordinarily be joining NGOs here become lawyers and cops. At Sorrento, near Amalfi, I met a young lawyer who was about to start a practice in Naples defending those apprehended for street crime on the assumption that many are just brought in on police sweeps rather than because they are guilty and

because it is his way of striking at the injustice of disorganized crime being cracked down on while the organized variety operates at will. Likewise, on the ferry to Sicily, I met another young female Carabinieri who was trained as a lawyer but instead became an organized crime investigator because she wanted to do something more practical. She grew up in Naples but was moved to Palermo where it was less likely she would be battling those she grew up with. Likewise, her ex-boyfriend from Sicily was moved to Calabria to contest the 'Ndrangheta. All three were influenced by Turco's film *Excellent Cadavers* (2007), about the efforts of the two judges, Falcone and Borsellino to put the mafia on trial in Sicily, eventually leading to both of their public executions. The film apparently functioned as a kind of *All The President's Men* for a generation that has not given up the attempt to at least separate the ordinary violence capital inflicts on its workers from the extraordinary violence inflicted by an utterly lawless and literal gangster capitalism. (Meanwhile, the Western media, instead of focusing on this crime empire, resuscitated by the US during and after WWII as detailed in Rosi's *Lucky Luciano* (1973), tars Putin's nationalist seizure of Russia's resources by characterizing that country as one of lawless gangsters with the psychopathic Russian mob killer being Hollywood's new villain de jour; see particularly Cronenberg's *Eastern Promises*—2007.)

A second resistance is the age-old proclivity toward anarchy in the region as a response to governments that fail the people. The peasant knowledge of this failure is exhibited in a Calabrian proverb *chi arra diritto, muore disperato*, he who behaves honestly comes to a miserable end (Ginsborg, 1990, 34). This deeply felt, true anarchism, which exceeds the bounds of any scholastic, anarchist theory, was expressed to the painter Carlo Levi during his exile by the fascists to the village of Gagliano recounted in the book and Rosi film, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*: "There are hailstorms, landslides, droughts, malaria, and ...the State...(Ginsborg, 1990, 32) These are feelings that may now be endemic in the US as well after government negligence in both the fires of Southern California and Katrina. When these feelings pour out in the streets they become part of a third form of resistance, the intermittent forms of protest in the large public gatherings in Rome where in 2003 two to three million people from all corners of the country gathered to protest the Iraq war (Ibid. 2005, 170) and in the protests in early spring 2007, petitioning for the closing of US bases in the North, protests which exacerbated the split between a legitimate left and the business as usual neo-liberal left center coalition headed by Romano Prodi.<sup>1</sup> It is in the street that the proclivity toward anarchy joins the now international working class movements from the North and the idealism of

young artists and activists as evidenced at Venice, with the Iraq protest numbers comparable to the peak protest moment of the 1960s, the hot autumn of the worker/student struggle in 1969 (Ibid.).

### POSTSCRIPT: WELCOME TO THE HOTEL BONAVENTURE, EUROPEAN STYLE

Finally, I would like to contrast two spaces of a post and pre total commodification by way of warning and thwarting the Berlusconiization via Sarkozy of the remainder of Western Europe. Frederick Jameson's elegant walk through the post-modern space of Los Angeles' Hotel Bonaventure, a completely enclosed, subsumed, nether, almost cyber- space, has its commercial projection in London's Heathrow Airport. Here passengers waiting for flights, a captive audience really, will find clothing, jewelry and accessory boutiques, cafes, restaurants, mobile phone companies. Every conceivable form of shopping is catered to, but what you won't find is *seats*. Apparently sitting, other than in a restaurant, is seen as detracting from time that could better be spent shopping. There is absolutely no space outside the commodified space. The idea of the commons is entirely obliterated and all consciousness and object relations are the relation to the commodified object. The plan is to project Heathrow, after all, the symbol of the gateway to the "healthy" economy of the pound, onto Europe.

Outside this fabricated empire, but barely, is the Amalfi coast jewel of Sorrento, a town which the shopping classes use as its hermetically sealed refuge from which to explore the nearby, more rawer Naples. Sorrento has the most exquisitely drawn boutiques though with more character than the global Heathrow chains—one bookseller told me he had been collecting and selling American books and records for 30 years-but a town nonetheless whose center revolves around supplying the high end mass produced clothes and accessories used by its visitors to create their equally mass produced uniqueness. Yet dead center in the town, in an only slightly roped off area, is a huge hole that drops down thousands of feet and reveals a centuries old building below. It's the scar, the gaping wound, the desert of the real, which, in this savage land, keeps threatening to swallow the extraordinarily delusional order that surrounds it.

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<sup>1</sup> As a mark of the ineffectiveness of this coalition, one need only cite the *Financial Times* gloating headline, "Prodi hails Italian deal **raising** pension age to 61." July 21, p. 2.

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*Lucky Luciano*, d. Francesco Rosi, 1973.

In March, the acclaimed Italian novelist Francesca Melandri wrote a letter to fellow Europeans "from your future", describing experiences of lockdown. Now, as restrictions are eased, she has another message. I am writing to you from Italy, which means I am writing from the accelerated present of the pandemic. What started as a parallel dance among successive epidemics' charts has become a chaos of separate choreographies. Other articles where A Letter from Italy is discussed: Joseph Addison: Early life: 1718) and the poetic epistle A Letter from Italy (1704). From Italy Addison crossed into Switzerland, where, in Geneva, he learned in March 1702 of the death of William III and the consequent loss of power of his two chief patrons, Somers and Halifax. From Italy Addison crossed into Switzerland, where, in Geneva, he learned in March 1702 of the death of William III and the consequent loss of power of his two chief patrons, Somers and Halifax. A Letter From Italy. Rating: 3.1. Autoplay Next Video. Oh could the Muse my ravish'd breast inspire With warmth like yours, and raise an equal fire, Unnumber'd beauties in my verse should shine, And Virgil's Italy should yield to mine! See how the golden groves around me smile, That shun the coast of Britain's stormy isle, Or when transplanted and preserv'd with care, Curse the cold clime, and starve in northern air.