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The news items in the right column were taken from “The New York Times”.

Cover by Sebastiano Buonamico

The pictures. On the front cover: Edo and Angelo, Giovenzana (Italy), November 1994. On the back cover: an abandoned car in an underpass of Milan’s central station. Someone has written on the window: “If I catch you sleeping in here I’ll beat the crap out of you”.

This issue was edited by Johanna Bishop, Lella Fusi, Erica Golo, Bea Mahieu, Bruno Manelli, Marina Massenz, Giorgio Morale, Massimo Parizzi.

“Here-notes from the present” is written so that it can be read “as a novel”: from the beginning to the

end in sequence. This is **an invitation and an exhortation** to the reader: many diary pages make little sense if not read immediately after the previous ones and before those that follow.

This review exists through the voices it gives expression to, in their variety. All contributions are welcome. Please write to **Here-notes from the present, via Bastia 11, 20139 Milano, Italy, phone-fax 0039-02-57406574, email: massimoparizzi@alice.it.**

People help one another, in this world. In Cuba, in China, in Lampedusa, in Gaza... It's comforting. It prevents despair. More than that: it allows hope. More than that: it allows determination. Actually, it demands determination. Without the passage to hope and the determination to translate hope into reality, comfort, even if we continue to call it that, is something else. It's a pretence, a falling short. "Human fellowship" is also twofold. It is "what it is", and it's an aim to be pursued. There's wisdom in this duality. Without the first, the human fellowship in which we live, the second, which we aspire to, would be merely a comforting thought, lacking hope. Without the second to think, speak, write and act towards, the first—our present reality—would only make us despair. The fact that we help one another, in this world, proves that the second human fellowship is present in the first. A "there" that is already here. A future already present. Not something to be invented, imagined, planned. Something to be grasped: it is within reach. It "only" needs, as Lidia Campagnano writes in these pages, to be translated into political action.

Diary: May to December 2008

Here

notes from the present

Gaza, May 11

Heba

It is exam period in Gaza for schools, colleges, and universities. Being a student myself helped me feel

the suffering of students first-hand. I have exams in a week and I do not know how to study with the return of long electricity cuts, and this time it is everywhere. I can't go to my parents' or friends' houses. All our gas lamps are off because natural gas has not been allowed into Gaza in two weeks and even candles are rare. My father went to different shops till he found some yesterday. "Candles seem to be unimportant or unprofitable to be smuggled through tunnels," he said. Students like me are wondering how to reach schools and colleges for exams with very limited transportation movement. Those cars that actually move on the streets are working on cooking oil! Yes, you did not misread, and not only cooking oil, but fried cooking oil, which is said to be carcinogenic and harmful to the environment. The stench in the streets is intolerable. [...]

Hangzhou, China, May 12

Hao Wu

The tremor hit this afternoon at 2:30 pm. The floor began to undulate under my feet. Then people started to yell—"It's an earthquake!" Few ran. We were working on the 24th floor of an office tower. Perhaps others were as scared as I was, but there was no time to get down to the ground floor anyway. Despite my nausea from the unsteady floor, I also had the vague confidence that if the first shock did not take down the building, the aftershocks would not kill us either. It was half an hour later when I really got scared shitless—the news arrived that Chengdu, my hometown, was very close to the epicenter. My parents are in Hong Kong but I still had many relatives and friends there. Calls would not go through. Few updates on the Internet about

A powerful earthquake struck Western China, toppling thousands of homes, factories and offices, trapping students in schools, and killing tens of thousands of people.

the damage. For a while, there was only my imagination concocting the worst possible scenario. Alas, who the f*** cares about office politics, stock options, career plans, Olympic torch, the controversies surrounding the Torch Relay, Chinese politics, ethnic tensions in China, or the incomprehensibility of blatant patriotism when all one could think of is safety, the bare minimum of safety, for one's loved ones? Finally relatives messaged back that they were safe. Throughout the rest of the day, friends and colleagues messaged and inquired about my family, from Beijing, Shanghai and as far as the US. Everyone in the office was greatly saddened by the rising death toll. The government is organizing disaster relief. Soldiers and armed police, the proud tools of the proletarian dictatorship, are moving in to help. The news reports were genuine. People's concern and willingness to help were genuine. Perhaps we should have mild aftershocks everyday to remind us that everything else is kinda stupid, compared to our own vulnerability and the well-being of our loved ones faced with this vulnerability.

From “The genista”

by Giacomo Leopardi

Of noble soul is he
Who doth our common fate
With dauntless aspect dare
Confront, and who with utterance full and free,

Here

notes from the present

That all the truth shall state,
The ill confesses given to us in share,
And our low, frail estate;
Who bold and strong and brave
His suffering bears, nor by his brother's hate
And wrath—an ill more grave
Than any—doth enlarge
His own misfortunes, in that he doth blame
His fellows for his woes, but lays the charge
On the true culprit, whom we mother name
Of men by birth, stepmother in good will.
Her he calls enemy; and knowing well
Society allied
Against assaults from her, and up in arms,
He deems his fellows tied
In one confederacy against all harms,
And lovingly enfolds
Them in his arms, and holds
A strong and ready hand to them; no less
He in the shifting chance and change and stress
Of the common war expects...

In *The Poems ("canti") of Leopardi*, trans. J.M. Morrison, BiblioBazaar, Charleston, SC, 2008, pp. 133-134.

Luchi, China. Hao Lin had already lied to his wife about his destination, hopped a plane to Chengdu, borrowed a bike and pedaled through the countryside in shorts and leather loafers by the time he reached this ravaged farming village. A psychologist, Mr. Hao had come to offer free counseling to earthquake survivors. He had company. A busload of volunteers in matching red hats was bumping along the village's rutted dirt road. Employees from a private company in

The New York Times,
May 20

Chengdu were cleaning up a town around the bend. Other volunteers from around China had already delivered food, water and sympathy. "I haven't done this before," said Mr. Hao, 36, as he straddled his mountain bike. "Ordinary people now understand how to take action on their own."

From the moment the earthquake struck, the Chinese government dispatched soldiers, police officers and rescue workers in the type of mass mobilization expected of the ruling Communist Party. But an unexpected mobilization, prompted partly by unusually vigorous and dramatic coverage of the disaster in the state-run news media, has come from outside official channels. Thousands of Chinese have streamed into the quake region or donated record sums of money in a striking and unscripted public response.

In Chengdu, relief volunteers have formed a command structure called the NGO Relief Action Group to coordinate 30 organizations. They have collected donations of instant noodles, biscuits, rice, medicine, clothes and bedding. "We realized that this is such an unprecedented crisis that we must join together to make some substantial contribution," said Xing Mo, 39, a veteran organizer of nongovernmental organizations and president of the Yunnan Institute of Development, a school that trains volunteers.

For many Chinese, the public reaction is simply a natural outpouring of grief and a desire to help. "People are touched by the scenes of children and also the value of life. We grew up in a society where people tend to believe that Chinese lives are of less value than foreign lives" said Alan Qiu, 41, an investor in Shanghai.

"I think a man matures by doing something else," he said. "Not only by not stealing, not killing, and so forth, by being a good citizen. . . I think one matures by doing something else, by taking on new, different duties. That's what we all feel, I think, the absence of other duties, other tasks to carry out. . . Tasks that would satisfy our conscience, in a new sense." (Elio Vittorini, *Conversations in Sicily*, trans. Alane Salierno Mason, New Directions, New York, 2000, p. 26)

Blood drives, cake sales, charity fund-raisers and art auctions have already been held. Other people have dropped everything and raced to the scene. Forty members of a private car club in Chengdu, Sichuan's provincial capital, made multiple trips transporting more than 100 injured people out of the devastated city of Shifang. Others have filled their cars or sport utility vehicles with supplies and driven hundreds of miles to Sichuan's mountains. Public interest is being driven by images and stories of heartbreak in the Chinese media that once would have been banned. State television has replayed film of herculean efforts to save trapped people, while newspapers have also been allowed to describe the horrors and graphic details of the devastation.

Here in the remote village of Luchi, the local glass factory is a shattered husk while clusters of brick farmhouses are leveled. For Liu Lie, 67, a rice farmer, the situation is dire. He is sleeping with seven family members under a plastic tarp. Every wall of his home has been destroyed. But at the edge of his tarp, Mr. Liu pointed to stacks of bottled water, boxes of snacks and food and two bags of rice—donations from volunteers who came here.

Hangzhou, China. Officer Jiang Xiaojuan, 29, the mother of a 6-month-old boy, responded to the call of duty and the instincts of motherhood when the magnitude-7.9 quake struck on May 12. "I am breast-feeding, so I can feed babies. I didn't think of it much," she said. "It is a mother's reaction and a basic duty as a police officer to help."

From **CNN International**,
May 22

The death toll in the earthquake jumped Thursday to more than 51,000, and more than 29,000 are

missing, according to government figures. Thousands of children have been orphaned; many others have mothers who simply can't feed them. At one point, Jiang was feeding nine babies. "Some of the moms were injured; their fathers were dead... five of them were orphans. They've gone away to an orphanage now," she said. She still feeds two babies, including Zhao Lyuyang, son of a woman who survived the quake but whose breast milk stopped flowing because of the traumatic conditions.

Deception

by Marco Saya

Here

notes from the present

It's strange to realize you are alive
you wonder why you are here with all the others (who are they?)
Perhaps it's the work of a deceitful, fugacious God
(captive in a watery body)
Even time, neuronic clown,
is the vision of a rotten fruit,
which splatters and converts to the humus of new soil...

Beijing, May 26

Hao Wu

On Sunday I went to visit a filmmaker friend whom I hadn't seen since my long leave of absence in 2006. Unsurprisingly he dropped many curious

questions about my absence. Our conversation then stayed on politics. I mentioned the recent sentences of several dissidents, including Hu Jia. He said, “Don’t you think Hu Jia is a little too much? I watched his documentary online [*Prisoners in Freedom City*, <https://twitter.com/freehujia>; with Chinese and English subtitles]. He was... often inviting trouble upon himself.” I asked if he meant Hu Jia had acted headstrong in front of those who had followed him. He nodded yes. “There were good things that had happened to this country and under this government. It’s not right for him to ignore the positives and only lash out at the negatives.”

I was taken aback by his confident commentary. I had known him before only as a quiet filmmaker who had graduated from the Beijing Film Academy and opened a film equipment resale-rental business with several friends to support his filmmaking dreams. We had rarely spoken other than discussing technical details of filmmaking before. “So you think it’s all right to send him to jail even if he said something incorrect?” I protested out of reflex. “He will come out of prison faring much better than before,” he said. “What do you mean?” “Surely he will get a visa and financial support to go to America and stay there for the rest of his life. How much better could it get?”

His confident reduction of human motives to such vulgar calculations sent chills to my body. How could he, an out-of-the-mainstream filmmaker with the obligatory long hair and pensive smile, be brainwashed to such an extent? What’s the hope for China if even the bohemians consent to silencing the dissidents?

I remember a writing seminar I had been to two

A Chinese pro-democracy activist, Hu Jia was jailed by a Beijing court for three and a half years for “inciting to subvert state power” through a series of articles about freedom and for his constant dialogue with foreign journalists.

months ago. Two well-known Chinese writers were asked if their writing had any political intonation. Both answered no. Both said that they only cared about art, not politics. I could understand them, my filmmaker friend, and my own silent self. There is an invisible gag in the air. It's better to get used to its prevailing nonexistence.

There was a lull in our conversation. My lips felt dry. I said you sounded very interested in political matters. He said of course, my partners and I have probably been "noted" by Big Brother as well. He described a meeting with some kind old comrades at a certain authoritative bureau; the comrades did not exactly forbid them from making independent films, but warned them against making political ones. "Of course we won't touch politics," he said. "We just want to make films." Yeah yeah yeah, repetitive artsy "Chinese" films about AIDS, or poverty, or migrants, or urban alienation that aim for some big award at some Western film festival.

Then he asked for my opinion on a film he wants to make. He said he was really troubled by the polarized reporting and emotions on the Tibet issue and the Olympic torch relay, before the earthquake took over the headlines. He said he had been a loyal reader of CNN and other Western online media before. Like some of his friends, he didn't believe the Chinese official media and thus often looked to the West for "truth." The CNN incident told him that the Western media were equally unreliable. "Now my friends and I don't know who to trust anymore," he exclaimed quietly.

He wanted to make a film about a Chinese guy confused by the issues of Tibet, of protests over Tibet, of Westerners advocating Tibet's independence despite having never set foot in Tibet and know-

CNN's Jack Cafferty commented on April 9: "I think they [Chinese people] are basically the same bunch of goons and thugs they've been for the last fifty years".

ing little of the real-life complexities there, of his Han friends clueless about why some Tibetans hate them so much. “You know how extreme people could get on these issues?” he looked ahead in the air. “Friends would argue so violently over dinner tables that even long-time friendships would be difficult to maintain. Some love the West and would argue for the West despite everything. Others would take to arms to revenge the humiliation over the torch relay. You know the government had to police the university campuses to prevent agitated students from teaming up to smash the Carrefours [a French international hypermarket chain] and the KFCs [Kentucky Fried Chicken, an American chain of fast food restaurants]? You don’t believe me? People are ready for violence, and extremism. Society is getting increasingly unsettled. Something is ready to explode. I wouldn’t be shocked to find Al-Qaeda-like Chinese suicide bombers in the next few years.”

So he would like my more Westernized opinion on what kind of portrayal of this Chinese guy’s confusion would be receptive to an Western audience. The film would be banned in China for sure. But the Western audience... He would like to describe the Chinese and Tibetan issues as he understood them, and he would like to... bridge the massive misunderstanding between China and the West. He expressed his ideas slowly but clearly.

I was even more shocked than before—for a non-political filmmaker, how could he consider such a topic innocuously non-political? I said you are crazy to be even thinking about embarking on this. The West... at least the Western media, likely have little room for your confusions and your efforts to sort them out. They have their minds set already.

The only way I could see your film finding an audience, I suggested, is to focus on the main character's confusion.

"That's easy," he said, "I'm still confused as hell." Then he added, "but don't they, the West, understand the severity of the problem? China is rising, and agitated, and ready to explode on being slighted. I'm not kidding. I talk to my friends, my relatives, and kids still in school that I don't know well. Some of them could seriously go out and hack foreigners in the heat of the moment. The government is having a difficult job holding this huge pool of discordant population together. God knows when... That's what I want to make—a film about the making of a Chinese suicide bomber attacking foreigners."

"You are crazy!" I took my turn to exclaim. "You will be arrested by the police the day the film becomes public. Better to show the main character getting addicted to a computer game about suicide bombers in the end." He liked my idea. We sipped our tea and shifted the conversation to more pleasant topics: the Korean Pentecostal missionaries are converting Beijingers in house churches like wild fire; his business is going very well; people need religion; people need a reason to believe in something... We parted promising to get together for dinner and drinks in the near future. And I left feeling optimistic again about everything.

Karkur, Israel, May 28

Liza Rosenberg

Four years ago today, everything changed. The Little One pushed his way into the world, hijacking

our lives and our hearts. I spent a good part of those first few weeks crying, usually when I set eyes upon the little guy, but often while watching random television commercials as well. Officially, I chalk it up to the hormones that were raging around my body, but there's also a big part of me that believes I just couldn't get over our great fortune, that we'd finally, finally managed to have a child.

I was almost at a loss, really. After nine years of trying, failing, trying again, suffering, agonizing, here we were. One epidural, four units of blood and four units of plasma later (because god forbid I should have an easy, uneventful birth with no nearly fatal surprises), the race was suddenly over. And it was strange. Strange that everything we'd been through was now behind us, that we were no longer struggling to achieve what so many others around us had achieved with relative ease. Strange that the battle that had been with us constantly, the struggle that had been the very center of our lives, was now a moot issue. I can't even begin to describe how that felt, to realize that we no longer had to deal with this all-consuming saga that seemingly affected every aspect of our lives, every decision we had to make. Every. Single. One.

Not only had we finally succeeded, but with the Little One, we hit the jackpot, far surpassing our wildest dreams. We have a warm, intelligent, charming little boy with a marvelous (bordering on devilish at times) sense of humor, a twinkle in his eye, and a smile that makes his whole face light up. And, while there are certainly times when we'd be happy to auction him off to the highest bidder (or perhaps pay someone to take him), we are very

May 18, Johannesburg. Violence against immigrants—from Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and elsewhere—spread across one neighborhood after another, and the mayhem left at least 12 people dead. This latest outbreak of xenophobia began a week ago in the historic township of Alexandra and has since spread to other areas in and around Johannesburg.

"I don't doubt for a moment that you are good, hard-working people who have done what you did to help your families. Unfortunately for you, you committed a violation of federal law." Mark W. Bennett, a U.S. federal judge, to illegal immigrants sentenced to prison terms in Iowa. (The New York Times, May 24, "Quotation of the Day")

much aware of how truly blessed we are to have this beautiful little boy in our lives, especially today, on his fourth birthday.

We will be celebrating his birthday in pre-school on Friday. His teacher said she will make the cake and that we should bring fruit.

Havana, May 31

Yoani Sánchez

5.00 pm. At the entrance to the *Café Cantante* of the *Teatro Nacional*. I am not particularly interested in the programme, but I am accompanying a friend who is mad about dancing.

5.27 pm. The doorman asks us which institution we belong to: all the tables for Cubans have been reserved for a group of distinguished accountants. I explain that we are “independent”, and instead of getting angry he bursts into loud laughter. He lets us in.

6.10 pm. North American videos are projected on a screen, while the bar serves beer, rum and drinks, paid for in convertible pesos. My friend and I start feeling besieged by a few young men in tight clothes who are dancing wantonly. On hearing us speaking “Cuban” they are surprised and leave.

7.00 pm. Recorded music. It looks as if the band does not want to play or that some of the musicians have not arrived. The young men next to us approach three Spanish women who seem to find them interesting. The men are all wearing something white, which is striking under the disco lights.

7.40 pm. No one has approached our table anymore, which is unusual in the case of two women alone in a club. It seems as if nationality is decisive in advances.

8.20 pm. There is nothing here of the environment where I live: young men winking at women twice as old as them, glitter and branded clothes everywhere and a lot of bustle around every foreigner coming in, remind me of the imperatives of austerity, ideological resolution and discipline existing there.

8.40 pm. It is almost closing time and I realize that when I cross the street and find myself in front of the high ministries that abound in this area, I will not be able to get rid of the idea that I live in two parallel worlds, in two separate dimensions emphatically opposed to each other [...]

Gurgaon, India. When the scorch of summer hit this north Indian boomtown, and the municipal water supply worked only a few hours each day, inside a high-rise tower called Hamilton Court, Jaya Chand could turn on her kitchen tap around the clock, and water would gush out.

The New York Times,
June 9

Hamilton Court is just one of the exclusive gated communities that have blossomed across India in recent years. These enclaves allow their residents to buy their way out of the hardships that afflict vast multitudes in this country, giving them Western amenities along with Indian indulgences: an army of maids and chauffeurs live in a vast shantytown across the street.

“Things have gotten better for the lucky class,” Mrs. Chand, 36, said, as she fixed lunch in full view of Chakkarpur, the shantytown where one of her two maids, Shefali Das, lives. “Otherwise, it is still a fight.” When the power goes out, the lights of Hamilton Court bathe Chakkarpur in a

dusky glow. Under the open sky, across the street from the tower, Mrs. Das's sons take cold bucket baths each day.

Mrs. Das has worked in other people's homes since she was 7. She cannot read. "If they are educated," she said of her boys, "at least they can do something when they grow up." Next door to Mrs. Das's brick-and-tin room, a 2-year-old lay on a cot outside, flies dancing on his face. His mother, Sunita, 18, said the child had not been immunized because she had no idea where to take him, and no public health workers had come, as they are supposed to. The baby is weak, Sunita reckoned, because she cannot produce breast milk. During repeated visits in recent months, a government-financed childhood nutrition center was closed. The nearest government hospital was empty.

Inside the gates of Hamilton Court, the Chands have everything they might need: the coveted Sri Ram School, a private health clinic and clubhouse next door, security guards to keep out unwanted strangers and well-groomed lawns and paths.

"Women and children are not encouraged to go outside," said Madan Mohan Bhalla, president of the Hamilton Court Resident Welfare Association.

"If they want to have a walk, they can walk inside. It's a different world outside the gate."

The school recently hosted a classical music concert. The business school guru C.K. Prahalad gave a lecture the following week. Mr. Chand called Hamilton Court a community of "like-minded people." Some 600 domestic staff members work inside its gates, an average of 2.26 per apartment. The building employs its own plumbers and electricians. At any one time, 22 security guards and 32 surveillance cameras are at work.

“We can’t rely on the police,” Mr. Bhalla said. “We have to save ourselves.” Once, Mr. Bhalla recalled proudly, a servant caught spitting on the lawn was beaten up by the building staff. Recently, Mr. Bhalla’s association cut a path from the main gate to the private club next door, so residents no longer have to share the public sidewalk with servants and the occasional cow.

From “Choruses from The Rock”

by T.S. Eliot

Here

notes from the present

When the Stranger says: “What is the meaning of this city?
Do you huddle close together because you love each other?”
What will you answer? “We all dwell together
To make money from each other?” or “This is a community”?
And the Stranger will depart and return to the desert.
O my soul, be prepared for the coming of the Stranger,
Be prepared for him who knows how to ask questions.

in *Complete Poems and Plays, 1909-1950*, Harcourt, Brace, New York, 1952, p. 103

Milan, Italy, June 4

Attilio Mangano

Two small episodes. 1. Fifty students from the “Berchet” Secondary School in Milan made a proposal, and obtained permission, to go and collect rubbish in Naples. Just a symbolic gesture? When interviewed, one of the protagonists remembered

*Hundreds of tons of
backlogged trash had*

the flooding of Florence in 1966, when his uncle left as a volunteer; that flooding was evoked in the movie *La meglio gioventù* as having marked the dawning of the 1968 generation. 2. In a school - I cannot remember the name - the whole teaching staff appealed to public institutions since some young Romany students had been threatened three times outside school by some disturbing characters.

Some days ago, sociologist Giuseppe De Rita suggested we should encourage all initiatives which promote integration and start from scratch to create new connections.

“We should give maximum encouragement to all initiatives which promote integration. I understand this is no easy task, but we should start again to form associations, trade unions, political parties and parish groups, i.e. all those activities that can re-create positive identity.” All evils are born from a slow, but inexorable, process: “A few at a time, all the places and situations which enabled people to do things with others have collapsed. Therefore, Italians have started to live no longer together, but one next to the other; we should watch out, as the second condition is worse than the first. So much so as to have become the disease of our country”. Here is what De Rita calls it: “It is a widespread incapacity to get in touch with those around us, and above all with those regarded as being different from us or strangers”. And it is our responsibility too, that is the responsibility of those who produce culture, convey information and create opinions. “We have carried to extremes all that led to freedom... from our home, our country, and our roots. We have ended up living in a society which

been piling up on the streets of Naples since collection came to a near halt in December 2007. Collectors had stopped picking up garbage because there was no more room for the trash at dumps.

exalts individualism and has broken away from its old sense of belonging, but is not capable of creating a new one.”

Gaza, June 9

Heba

[...] I was walking in Gaza market and I just spotted a coffee place. I went in and found this beautiful café where you can sit and have a big cup of cappuccino listening to soft music. I just got a novel that I am reading out of my bag and sat there for half an hour and cleared my head.

I looked at people walking along the street through the big glass window. I was fascinated by the way they rush to do something, keeping themselves busy. They may stop for a minute; greet an acquaintance in the street, and immediately start discussing the news about Hamas and Fateh meeting and negotiating at last.

I could almost hear them say the one and only sentence often used to close a conversation “*Allah yefrejha*—May God help us out”. They end the meeting with a good-hearted smile and just disappear; each into his/her small individual world!

Havana, June 10

Yoani Sánchez

I think I am amongst the few Cubans—aged less than forty—who read the national press every day. [...] What I enjoy doing is discovering the increased prominence of this or that other politician, which news items come to the fore and which ones are forgotten and, above all, the reiterated

omissions which are so blatantly obvious in our newspapers.

For example, what did not escape my notice is the way in which they keep claiming that economic hardship and difficulties in services are the result of social indiscipline and vandalism. To start with, such an allegation relieves the country's highest powers and overriding economic and political model of all responsibilities. If we have problems—they explain to us—the reason is that we have not managed to implement such a policy, not that this very policy is not applicable in the present context.

Therefore, the police have launched into a hunt for “rebels” and vandals, and one of these hunts is aimed at *buzos*, those who scavenge in search of raw materials, food and various objects. Without them collecting plastic bottles, cardboard boxes and metal waste, these recyclable materials would be lost: a waste that does not befit our sparse resources. Those hands plunging into stinking bins do, in an independent way, what institutions, from the height of their centralism, do not manage to organize.

However, according to the new campaign, *buzos* convey a bad picture of the city (“they contribute to dirtying the city streets and avenues”). They can be immortalized by a tourist's camera and disprove the imaginary thesis that “nobody scavenges in Cuba”. Their very existence speaks of social rejects, deprivation, illegal immigrants who prefer “scavenging in the big city to working in the fields for a symbolic salary”. Here's how the newspaper “Granma” describes the punishment awaiting “illegal collectors of solid waste”, and the threat

hanging over the heads of those belonging to the double category of *buzo* and “illegal immigrant” of being expelled from the capital city:

“Fines, convocations before the local community of residents, and sentences to correctional work with no internment, are among the measures taken in the Cuban capital city against 355 people who used to collect solid waste illegally.

The National Press Agency reports that those citizens had made a lifestyle of scavenging food, bottles, plastic, metal and other items on dumps, in waste bins or along the streets for profit-making or selling, without considering the risk of carrying epidemics or being the source of crime and illegal actions, as established by the Criminal Code.

One of the reasons for the proliferation of the so-called *buzos*—who, generally speaking, contribute to dirtying the city streets and avenues—is the inefficiency of the companies in charge of recycling raw materials and of the hundreds of organizations in charge of their delivery to the State.

That is why the capital city Management, through the Integrated Supervisory Control Commissions—which also include representatives of Public Health, Social Prevention and Assistance, Municipality Services, Police, Work and Social Security, and the Legal System—has increased prevention and actions of repression against such individuals.

Of the 355 citizens transferred to a Provincial Classification Centre, 290 were fined, 20 summoned before the local communities of residents, 45 sent back to their respective provinces of origin because they lived in the capital city illegally, 11 persistent offenders were sent to correctional work with no internment, while other 59 over-persistent offenders underwent criminal court cases.

Guillermo Pérez Barroso, an executive of the Town Council of the City of Havana, has highlighted that the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution, together with the rest of the community, support the battle against different kinds of social indiscipline”.

Rome, June 11

Lidia Campagnano

Why a blog, a friend of mine asked me by e-mail, in other words, privately? Almost as if to say, what’s wrong with you? You’ve always written for the public (I’m a journalist), you’ve spoken in public (I’ve done a lot of political work), and what are you doing now? Are you going back?

Maybe. I am aware of our times, if I may say so, though this does not seem to be the only reason. Actually, it seems to me that writing and voices that “speak” together sensibly about real, personal lives and things of the world, in search of connections between them, hardly survive in public nowadays. Where have public spaces gone which made this possible? And in particular, where are the political spaces to do this? It does happen sometimes among women. But that’s not enough.

In blogs... there is everything, of course, including the purest form of narcissism and bits of bad talk. But there is also a great desire to be able to express and imagine ourselves, men and women, together in the world. There is the blog of a speech therapist who is capable of telling us about her job as it is, day-by-day, offering an idea of herself, her patients and the social mechanisms that link her to them; at the moment this seems to me as being

a lever that can lift the World. It combines Poetry, Commitment, Humour and Clarity... This fascistic country is full of people like her. I want to look for them, speak to them, listen to them, learn from them... And I want to be among them anyway.

A blog can be such a field of discovery. For me, no longer a young girl, it works as a renovation exercise (I think we have all the time we need, and even more, for exercises, given election results). And so, let us stop repeating, like depressed angry people, how ghastly this country is and how wonderful our ideas were. What is ghastly may have perpetually been conjured up and thus enhanced, while what is beautiful may have been hidden and played down and humiliated, sometimes even by those who came forth as standard-bearers of the Great Transformation. But from where will even those standard-bearers of the least ambitious renovation start again if not from themselves, from their own way of thinking, speaking about and doing things?

From style.

From a certain kind of humility too, I feel like saying, as well as from other similar feelings: curiosity, a capacity for gratitude, adherence to real lives and imagination... [...]

A general election was held in Italy on 13 and 14 April 2008. Silvio Berlusconi's center-right coalition won a convincing majority in both houses of Parliament.

Rome, June 13

Lidia Campagnano

The whole Left seems to be discussing the election results and what is to be done. Fine. But I don't even know how to enter into this discussion. And the newspaper reports are so difficult to read, or of marginal importance. Why?

I listen, or read here and there, and I miss having someone capable of giving me data and news arranged into meaningful pictures of that part of society they mix with and must know. And there ought to be enough of these people so as to recreate the whole map of Italy within Europe and within the world. Then I miss the narrators, men and women, capable of reassembling the puzzle of recent stories rooted in a territory, so cleverly as to put me back into History, with my own present and the present of millions of other people. In short, after space, time. [...]

A whole chorus of voices and knowledge is missing. Without it, no offence intended, any opinion maker or leader is just plain hot air. Am I creating a staff organization chart? Selection criteria for cadres? The foundations of a party? Ravings in the void. Sure, I'd have a few pieces of advice for the people responsible. Does anybody really believe that a Left could ever live without getting down to work on its cultural framework? And without establishing places for research and schooling involving millions of people?

Raving drains me emotionally. So now I'll tell you a story. A big tree in front of a main door, in a town. On the tree, a blackbird has been performing for half an hour its exquisite, liquid, gratuitous song, avant-garde music, with seemingly deliberate pauses. And it looks us in the eyes when it's not swelling its neck to sing. It looks into the eyes of a truly ancient man, a Bangladesh shopkeeper, a young boy wearing a baseball cap, and into my own.

We smile at each other, as if we were at a concert. We feel fine where we are.

I don't know what this has to do with the previous reasoning. But it does.

A priceless joke from my sister. "Well, someone from the Left voted Right. The nervous ones."

I listened to Beethoven's Symphony no. 4. I felt the urge to write, but I was afraid I'd write "nervously" like yesterday. That is, badly. When it comes to politics, nothing is more stupid than being nervous.

Beethoven's symphony no. 4 is part of the musical world of my origins. My father wrapped my childhood in classical music and classical music only. Now I think it was hard, for him, to be more paternal than that. He wasn't able to be a true patriarch—protective, imposing, limiting—but what better could he possibly have done, wrapping me in classical music (and in figurative arts up to Picasso), than to introduce me into the widest and least parental genealogy possible? Obviously, he did not want me to be a product of himself, of grandparents and ancestors, nor did he know how best to introduce me into society: so he must have decided he could entrust me to wider rivers.

Rivers of sounds and images, which have left their mark on my relation with the history of mankind, politics and love. A current where I still find it hard to separate one water from another. It's always been like that. This is why I've never got ahead in my career.

Every time I listen to a piece again, even a piece I know so well, I feel like I'm about to uncover a secret. Sounds flow, and they even do so in layers, on superimposed levels, on to the end. Silence follows and the secret still remains, but I have "had" a piece, or a prop for my self. Thinking only comes afterwards, not during. Eventually, I expect some

blocked fountain within me to become unblocked and its flow to spring to life again. I believe this. It's really a primitive belief.

I confess that my attitude towards the political relations between people, and towards the speeches and actions that may ensue, is not so different. I want to make discoveries, to share out and shed light on a universal, contagious and extremely vital human substance. I firmly expect politics to bring basic needs into contact with a fully-developed sentimental and rational world.

Politics should be an art.

My first political action was a campaign against world famine. But I've always thought that freedom from need ("rights" is what they call them) must be accompanied by access to the more refined levels of culture. In my opinion, no one can make better use of it than a hungry man who's definitely sure of being fed. [...]

Beijing, June 15

Hao Wu

For days, residents chatted excitedly among themselves in the apartment complex where I'm staying, while cops watched wearily from their patrol cars just outside the gate. The compound is perhaps the most expensive in the neighborhood, beautifully landscaped with lush plants and flowers and with a tiny muddy river running through it. The agitation came from the river.

The government wants to clean up the river and turn the banks into public recreation areas with boat docks and bike tracks. Not a bad idea, considering how polluted the river is right now. But the residents are angry—as property owners, they

had not been consulted before being told that walls would be built along the banks and their apartment compound's land would shrink. "That would decrease the value of our property!" one resident seethed. The owners' association organized late-night planning meetings and public rallies. Huge banners unfurled from the top of the tallest building proclaiming the residents' "strongest resistance."

On Saturday afternoon during a rally a resident was arrested after an altercation with a plain-clothes cop. More confrontation. Riot police were called in. The intersection was jammed. A resident said that he had taken photos of the plain-clothes cop and he would post it on the Internet. Another chimed in, "This is our property, they can't do whatever they want here; doesn't the government want a harmonious society; we are all for harmony here!" (A beer-bellied cop chuckled awkwardly nearby.)

A day later, I came down out of the building and saw two cops helplessly surrounded by angry residents again. Many were yelling "get off our property," "you don't have any right to be here." Even a kid learned fast—"Get out, cop!" he screamed at the top of his voice. It's exciting that one finally hears some angry voices up close. Only confrontation begets negotiation which begets some semblance of true harmony. Let one hundred voices bloom.

Rome, June 16

Lidia Campagnano

Went swimming in the pool, today, with a friend.
The sky, moving with clouds of different colours

overlapping, brought back to us all the skies lodged in our memory. We talked of important things and enjoyed every single moment. Two swallows were amusing themselves, flying low over us, their throats sparkling for a few seconds, hardly the time to notice them.

That's all, I mean, that's how thoughts arise sometimes. From nothing, it seems. Or from a sort of spontaneous vitality.

With my friend I often talk of freedom, so that this poor, mistreated word regains its importance and beauty: it becomes incarnate. Freedom which doesn't spread, touch or free all men and women has such little staying power, fades so easily, bumps up against every obstacle it meets, which a poor understanding of things, of ourselves, of others has prevented us from seeing. It really must be nourished, through the knowledge of reality, through passionate experience, cultivating fruitful relationships. You must love other people's lives as you love your own, because the threads of your own personal fabric of life are interwoven here and there with those of other people's fabrics. If this interweaving becomes an awareness, it turns into your way of being. You must care about other people's blooming to make your own freedom grow strong. And nothing in my whole political experience will take away from me the joy of seeing people of all ages and from all places and social conditions grow and blossom. So much so that, in my mind, the very idea of politics has become associated with this task of freeing and nurturing other people's lives along with my own. The contrasting pair of Egoism/Altruism doesn't really render the idea, in fact, it is misleading.

Today, the so many steps that two women like us

have made in this direction have turned us into two foreigners in the political debate. And yet we are excellent translators, there is no political choice we haven't translated—for ourselves in the first place—into this language, slaloming between the slogans, all of them, including the feminist ones (The Personal is Political! Just saying it is not the same thing). But of course when we read, for instance, that the European Council of Ministers for Employment and Social Affairs “recommends” a working week of 60-65 hours for those member states lacking the relevant regulation, what comes to our minds is a series of life stories in which there will be no real space for freedom, no opportunity for autonomous cultural development, no energy to spend on making relationships more civil, including love relationships. [...]

Long Friendship

by Jaime Gil de Biedma

Here

notes from the present

The days go slowly by
and many times we've been alone.
But then there are happy moments
when one gives oneself to friendship.

Look:

we exist.

A destiny skillfully guides
the hours, and company flows.

Nights were arriving. For the love of them
we set fire to words,
the words we then leave behind
in order to go higher:
we begin to be comrades
who understand
above voice or sign.

Now, yes. Gentle words
can rise up
—those that don't say things now—
floating lightly in the air;
because we're brambled
in the world, tangled
in piled-up history,
and this is the complete company we've formed
leafy with presences.
Behind each one
keeps vigil over house, field and the distance.

But hush up.
I want to tell you something.
I simply want to tell you that we're all united.
At times, in speaking, someone may forget
his arm on mine,
and even though I've been silent I give thanks
because there's peace in bodies and in us.
I want to tell you how we brought
our lives here in order to tell of them.
For a long time, the lot of us
have spoken on the corner, for so many months!
And we know ourselves well and, in our memory,
joy is equal to sadness.
For us sadness is tender.

Aye, these times! Now all's understood.

Rome, June 17

Lidia Campagnano

The history we are living? Those dead bodies photographed in the waters of the Mediterranean, just off our coasts, with their poor clothes on. Dead because they are forbidden to board an ordinary ship, an ordinary plane. Immigrants have to be “chosen” by a boss, a man or a woman, otherwise they cannot buy travel tickets and cross a frontier in search of a job, life, or simply salvation. Freedom, when it was redefined and rewritten, in Europe, on the threshold of modern age, was “freedom to come and go.”

As usual, a memory springs to mind. My father again, crossing the Italian-Swiss border on his skis. Switzerland would sometimes close the frontier and return the fugitives to the Nazi-Fascists.

In order to interpret a historical phase we resort to memory, albeit warily. And memory, whether unexplored or even deleted memory, brings fear. It may happen again. As long as it doesn't happen to me. As long as it happens to others. Less worthy people, so to say. Or needier, poorer. And also “a bit strange.” However, it may happen again because nothing in this world or among the stars assures that the social condition or the peaceful situation, on this side of the Mediterranean, in Europe, will remain as it is for ever. This is a common mental heritage, but one which is left without a shape, deprived of words, of meaning. So it doesn't generate thoughts, projects and political choices capable of saving those people.

This morning I walked the streets around my last workplace again. As a matter of fact, I used to have a workplace and streets to get there and cafés to have coffee in and newsstands to buy newspapers

June 18. European Union lawmakers voted to allow undocumented migrants to be held in detention centers for up to 18 months and banned from European Union territory for five years.

from and a book shop for my midday break and a beautiful square to cross and all the changing images of that wonderful part of my city, depending on the time of day and the season. As a matter of fact, I also used to have work hours.

Duties and pleasures, freedom and necessity.

My life—its meaning as well as the identity it has stratified in me—is mostly made up of the many maps of where my jobs were located as the years went by. Not only workplace maps, of course: there have been various houses and so many different paths. But now I can see how crucial to my imagination, to my sense of freedom, and to the aesthetics of my life each trip back and forth to my workplaces has been, the variety and depth of the feelings I poured into those streets, those squares, those trains, trams and buses.

If I wanted to turn my identity as a citizen into a story, I'd probably tell of all those places where my invisible footprints mixed with those—either contemporary or from the past—of millions of other people “going to work.” And I'd like this story.

But I've never risked my life crossing a sea or the Alps, no police have ever looked for me. This must be the reason why a dream I had many years ago and have never forgotten is of central importance: in this dream I arrive, alone, at night, at the doors of a Middle-Eastern city at war, knowing that this is where the adventure of life starts for me. And my identity hasn't trained me for that life: I have to learn to live all over again.

Kyiv, June 19

Veronica Khokhlova

Yet another Kyiv cab driver story.

A hideous old Zhiguli car. A very skinny, musta-

chioed, greasy-haired middle-aged driver, with the suntan of someone who spends long hours working in the garden. The odor of sweat permeates the car, even though all four windows are rolled down. We talk about the weather. He speaks Ukrainian—a villager’s Ukrainian, very distant from the literary language, just as beautiful, and impossible to imitate, unless you’ve been exposed to it since childhood.

After a few near-accidents caused by people who don’t know how to drive, we begin talking about the general mess that’s now a norm in Kyiv. The driver says things were great in Soviet times: from the 1970s to the 1990s, there was order and life was easy. I diplomatically respond that although I tend not to have any illusions about the Soviet period, I do agree with him 100 percent on certain points.

One or two intersections later, we somehow start talking international politics. “Ukraine needs to join NATO as soon as possible, or else Russia will swallow us,” the driver says. I find this switch quite hilarious, but tell him we still shouldn’t rely on others too much, citing Sarajevo and Srebrenica as examples. [...]

Rome, June 20

Lidia Campagnano

Do parents exist who do not hand down a sense of time—past time—to their children? Since this would make a great difference. And I really begin to feel such a difference. A warning bell rang in my ears when a number of Left-wing leaders started to repeat that we had to “get out of the twentieth century”.

My first reaction was to think that theirs was a delusion of omnipotence, that they thought they could re-invent themselves on command, in other words that they were not children of History. My second reaction was to think that it was a show of cold thinking, of thought separated from self-consciousness; therefore sterile thought. My third reaction was to think that it was fourth or fifth hand thought and that they had not been thinking for themselves. Ever since they were told that “great narrations were over”, their shame for having believed them has rendered their thoughts vitreous and their sense of time lifeless.

For all one’s own self-consciousness is worth (so in need of a look from others—that is, may others be as kind as to tell you *your* story), I would say that the inheritance I received consists of that very sense of time that has passed and which, because of this, is still present with its peculiar quality of passing. I can feel this especially in my houses—so far I have moved into twelve different ones. I know someone else (and in particular some other woman) has lived there before me, and I can feel it and play with my imagination. Do I have a good relationship with ghosts? Maybe.

What I am thinking of is a walk in the countryside in the hills of Oltrepo Pavese, where there is an abandoned village and vegetation has won back its rights. However, behind a ruined wall, one can easily perceive the square outline of a kitchen garden. A woman, who knows when, worked there to grow carrots, onions and salad. Surely, she planted some flowers, too. Vegetables to sell? For cooking? Life was so hard. My ghosts do not speak through words, but I can decipher messages in their traces. That unknown woman has something to do with

me becoming what I am now with my Feminism. She has as much to do with me as my mother, I would say.

My mother added her most personal message: try to be independent in life, work and make a living. Do not shut yourself in at home. This, to my ears, sounds like: do things for me too, carry on my story and *do justice to it*. Sort out what I left unfinished or even in a mess. Which meant commanding me a future, or to be precise, a better future. It is up to us to understand what this means, at the cost of quarrelling with messages from ghosts, or saying no, however flinging ourselves into the future with our own interpretation. Yet, we are not alone ever...

But do parents exist who do not hand down all this? Or who hand down an unbridgeable time-gap, a void of history or even stories? Out of fear, perhaps. Because *old times* seem to be speaking of hardships and fighting for life. As if today people wanted to force their children *not to fight*?

Moscow, June 20

Veronica Khokhlova

At the playground, I talk with a young Russian woman whose son is Marta's age. We discuss our kids' eating and sleeping habits, and then I mention Turkey, and she says she kind of hated it there—because of the way Turks treat Russians, and because of poverty. But poverty there is so different from our poverty, I tell her: it's a drunken kind of poverty here, while there... But she interrupts me, somewhat angrily: "Yes, and over there it's a hungry kind of poverty."

Antalya, Turkey. One of the most enduring changes in the lives of Russians in recent years has occurred not in Russia itself, but in places like this coastal region of Turkey, where an influx of Russian tourists has given rise to a mini-industry catering to their needs.

The New York Times,
June 15

There is perhaps no better symbol of the growth in Russian tourism than the very resort where Yelena Kasyanova, 51, a health-care aide from the Kaluga region, 125 miles southwest of Moscow, was staying, the Kremlin Palace Hotel, which has more than 800 rooms and whose buildings are replicas of major sights at the Kremlin complex.

The Russians are coming from all over. "It is now so easy—buy a package tour for \$800, and here we are, in paradise," said Ms. Kasyanova. "For us, it's like a fairy tale to be here," said Lilia Valeyeva, 46, a clerk from Chelyabinsk in the Ural Mountains.

"Through all this travel, we are seeing a change in mentality at home," the writer and commentator Viktor Yerofeyev said. "People are now seeking pleasure, whether it is in the night clubs of Moscow or in restaurants. Travel is a continuation of that pleasure. Just to have pleasant lives, not to suffer, to feel positive. Their life compass changes, from 'I don't care about anything' to 'I would like to have a better life.'"

Milan, Italy, June 24

Giorgio Morale

"Tickets, please!"

A squad of ticket inspectors and police with truncheons and pistols board the trolleybus. Doors and windows are blocked.

Anyone without a ticket meets a further request:
“Documents”.

A few foreigners don’t have their documents and are made to get out and board a bus waiting in the square, with iron grilles on the windows.

“The party’s over” one passenger says, “Italy’s no longer a wonderland”.

“It’s the right thing to do” says a woman, “otherwise they try and escape... This way it’s certain they’ll get to their destination”.

Some people on the pavement applaud. (*Milan, near Piazzale Lodi*)

At the bar. From my table in the corner I watch a scene played out. Duplicated in the mirror wall behind the counter—the one framed by multicoloured liquor bottles. A foreigner approaches the barman and sets off a chain reaction in two couples at the counter. The two customers closest to the foreigner turn their backs on him, the one on the left stretching out his arm on the counter, the one on the right taking a step back, ensuring there’s no space for the new arrival to place his order. (*Milan, Corso di Porta Ticinese*)

“Certainly nothing is commoner nowadays than to see people working from morn till night and then proceeding to fritter away at card-tables, in cafés and in small-talk what time is left for living. Nevertheless there still exist towns and countries where people have now and then an inkling of something different. In general it doesn’t change their lives. Still, they have had an intimation, and that’s so much to the good.” (Albert Camus, *The plague*, trans. Stuart Gilbert, Vintage, New York, 1991, p. 4)

Rome, June 30

Lidia Campagnano

I have erased the word “identity” from my own vocabulary ever since the time when the whole Left-wing lent a hand in the dissolution of Yugoslavia. It was then (during the nineties) that I started feeling extraneous and began suspecting that the new, or alternative, Left was over. And so my exaggerated demands emerged. I now have to review them: a demand to be a “woman politician” [an expression which does not exist in Italian], care-

fully avoiding the metaphorical elimination of someone with the excuse of a “political battle”. I’d rather clear out. And yet, I am not Gandhian. A demand to infuse the attributes of both female and male politicians with extraordinary doses of self-consciousness. A demand to create political entities founded on civil relationships—splendidly civil ones: almost a future dream of love—between men and women. A demand for this relationship to pass through and recount Capitalism once again, and therefore involve its alternative too. A demand for Politics to learn its skills from Music, Painting, Sculpture and Poetry (well, you should read *Parallels and Paradoxes*, by Barenboim and Said). A demand for political passion to be rooted in the extremely refined art of passing the baton (Derrida) and in an acute perception of Time and History, both economic and social (Marx), as well as the history of human feelings (Freud, Zambrano). Finally (though I have not finished), a demand for all these wonders to be within everybody’s reach, but especially within the reach of the socially-unprivileged. A demand for all these wonders to be *Equality*. [...]

The military trainers who came to Guantánamo Bay in December 2002 based an entire interrogation class on a chart showing the effects of “coercive management techniques” for possible use on prisoners, including “sleep deprivation,” “prolonged constraint,” and “exposure.” What the trainers did not say, and may not have known, was that their chart had been copied verbatim from a 1957 Air Force study of Chinese Communist techniques used during the Korean War to obtain confessions from American prisoners. (The New York Times, July 2)

Mass

by César Vallejo

Here

notes from the present

At the end of the battle,
and the combatant dead, a man came toward him

and said: “Don’t die; I love you so much!”
But the corpse, alas! kept on dying.

Two approached him and repeated:
“Don’t leave us! Be brave! Return to life!”
But the corpse, alas! kept on dying.

Twenty, a hundred, a thousand, five hundred thousand, came up to him,
crying out, “So *much* love and no power against death!”
But the corpse, alas! kept on dying.

Millions of persons surrounded him,
with a common plea: “Do not leave us, brother!”
But the corpse, alas! kept on dying.

Then, all the inhabitants of the earth
surrounded him; the corpse looked at them sadly, moved;
he sat up slowly,
embraced the first man; started to walk...

From *Spain, Take this Cup from Me*, trans. C. Eshleman, Grove Press, New York, 1974.

Karkur, Israel, July 14

Liza Rosenberg

Oh dear, the twins were at it again. Those bratty, preteen girls (potentially the most dangerous and merciless of all living creatures, of course), standing less than fifty feet away, whispering to their bratty little friends, simultaneously casting furtive glances in my direction, smiling, laughing, and continuing to whisper.

This little activity had been going on sporadically over the years, and I’d begun to wonder if they’d finally outgrown such childish behavior. Clearly, they hadn’t. “What are they laughing at,” I mused.

What could there possibly be wrong with me in such an outstanding way as to provide fodder for preteen gossip for such a long time? I was curious, but more than anything, I was annoyed. Stupid little children playing games, I know, but still. The rudeness, the arrogance they displayed infuriated me far more than not knowing what it was that they were saying.

Call me pathetic, but I wanted revenge. I wanted to embarrass them. I wanted to humiliate them. I wanted them to know who they were dealing with, and I wanted them to regret tangling with me in the first place. [...]

Gaza, August 3

Heba

It is strange, I must admit, that life has got back to normality after the factional problems that took place in the last ten days. It seems that if we have a cease-fire agreement, we turn on each other immediately. Factions must have their hands busy but not with people's priorities and needs apparently!

The Gaza siege is no longer a siege. It has turned into a de facto condition, with de adaptation of people and the deaf ears of the international community. What really pisses me off is that people allow themselves to be caught in the middle between the Fateh government's and Hamas government's never-ending struggle. And isn't it ironic that we have two governments and limited services offered to people?

The factional tension has for the first time caused interference by Gaza's government in the work

July 21. Radovan Karadžić, one of the world's most wanted war criminals for his part in the massacre of nearly 8,000 Muslim men and boys in Srebrenica in 1995, was arrested in a raid in Serbia that ended a 13-year hunt.

of non-governmental organizations, which might discourage several donors from continuing supporting these NGOs, which might give a little generous push to the unemployment rate in the Gaza Strip.

Life carries on as usual and I like it when I meet women and they start telling me how they watch the “Noor Series” (a Turkish soap opera called *Gumus* that is so popular in the Arab world) with their husbands and live in this fancy of fashion, love, and life luxuries. “It is a surrogate reality,” a woman says shyly, “it is one hour of problem sedation, after which we immediately go to sleep and do not have to think about our bleak condition till the next morning”!

Durham, North Carolina, August 3

Laila El-Haddad

I’m going to settle this once and for all people. *No!* I did not name my daughter Noor after the now insanely popular Turkish soap opera, whose male star (Turkish model Kivanc Tatlitu) has managed to secure a loyal (some would say obsessive) following of several million Arabs and is making women swoon from Gaza to Riyadh (my mother confirmed this when she said she called her friend around Maghrib time in Gaza City to chat and she quipped “I can’t talk now—I’m watching Noor. Aren’t you? Every TV set in Gaza is turned to it!”). In fact, I’d like to think *they* were inspired to name the show and the character Noor after my own little ray of light... except that the show originally aired in Turkey three years ago (where, incidentally, it was a flop). I guess when you are living

in Gaza these days, escapism isn't such a bad thing (though I wish the masses were half as enthusiastic about... I dunno, any number of things that pop to mind). [...]

Beijing, August 8

Hao Wu

My parents arrived yesterday for the games. As soon as she put down her luggage, my mother started dusting, cleaning, laundering and having my dad hang a string in the kitchen to line dry the laundry. And she complained about her knee, about my niece being too loud, and about me not making enough money. The same old mother, despite my many tête-à-têtes regarding the importance of leaving time for exercise, recreation and peace of mind, especially at her age. It's a bit of a relief to step out and go about my usual work.

Taking a cab about town, I saw cops everywhere, tourists having replaced the residents everywhere, and all the unfinished construction sites prettied up everywhere. Seven years in the making and it's happening in less than 24 hours? It felt surreal. For beneath all the heavy makeup, Beijing still looks the same—the haze hanging over the city (“Let’s see how the government can manufacture a clear day tomorrow for the opening,” chuckled the taxi driver), the strong desire to put on a face-enhancing extravaganza at all costs (a friend said it felt like the family is receiving important guests and all the poor relatives have to go into hiding, just like in the old days), and the visiting foreign reporters fishing for the same old China stories (“can we interview you to understand more about the underground church?” asked a foreign reporter).

I dragged my parents out for a walk after dinner, much to my mother's displeasure (she still has tons of cleaning to do, even though our *ayi* (maid) just came for his weekly cleaning today). I took them to The Place Mall which is rumored to have the second largest LCD screen in the world. The huge screen was filled with Coca-Cola logos due to an event there sponsored by the company. I kept on describing how wonderful the images on that screen were in other non-Olympic days. I wanted to impress my mother, tacky tourist trap or not, to get her mind off cleaning. She had not wanted to come in the first place. I had pleaded with her. It's probably the last and only Olympics she would experience in person. I want her to be happy, however briefly, even though she appears bent on denying that to herself.

So I'm praying for a safe and good Olympics, for my mother and other Chinese who are like my mother. Just to be able to have fun for a brief period of time. It might be a silly party and people have all the reasons to scorn at this show-and-dance on top of the environmental and human rights problems. But I've learned (or forced) to be more patient, for Beijing has changed faster, much faster, than my mother. And for my mother, I hope she can enjoy the silly party, even just a little bit.

Mr. Song Wei and Ms. Sun Ruonan live along Beijing's central axis in neighborhoods that have been gutted to make the city look clean and orderly for the Olympics. A veil of green plastic netting now covers Ms. Sun's restaurant. Mr. Song's house was surrounded by a 10-foot-tall brick wall. "We all support the Olympics," said Mr. Song. "But why are you building a wall around us?"

The New York Times,
July 29

A mysterious notice appeared beside the shops on July 17, typed on white paper and signed by no one. It read, "In keeping with the government's request to rectify the Olympic environment, a wall will need to be built around No. 93 South Tianqiao Road." The next morning, several bricklayers showed up with a police escort. Now a wall conceals a little cove of entrepreneurship where several migrant families sell socks, book bags, pants, noodles and shish kebabs cooked in a spicy soup. The wall did not go up easily. After a brief shoving match, a little demonstration unfolded. Mr. Song hung three Chinese flags from the trunks of trees—and three white flags emblazoned with the 2008 Olympic logo. A migrant worker climbed a ladder and stuck up a poster that said, "Need Human Rights!" To scare away the officials, Mr. Song brought out a large poster with a famous photograph of Mao sitting in a wicker chair. "He thought Mao might be able to do something for us," joked Ms. Zhao, the neighbor.

Durham, North Carolina, August 23

Laila El-Haddad

Many of you have by now likely heard of the Free Gaza movement, whose two boats full of 46 civilian activists (including my uncle, a UK-based engineer) from 14 countries are attempting to break the siege on Gaza by sailing to its shores from Cyprus. Among the passengers are Jeff Halper, founder of Israel Committee Against House Demolition, an 81-year-old Catholic nun, the sister-in-law of Mideast envoy and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, and an 84-year-old Holocaust survivor.

August 8. Russia conducted airstrikes on Georgian targets, escalating the conflict in a separatist area of Georgia South Ossetia.

They are meant to arrive today, and everyone is waiting anxiously to see whether they will make it or not. Their journey has been fraught with technical difficulties, rough sea conditions, and electronic piracy-scrambled radio signals and jammed phones. But despite it all, it appears they are making it into the Gaza harbor! According to Jeff Halper, who is one of those on board the SS *Free Gaza*, they are nine nautical miles from the Gaza Port. The SS *Liberty* is still 25 miles out. [...]

August 15. Fernando Lugo, "the bishop of the poor," as he is known here, was sworn as president of Paraguay, promising to give land to the landless and to end entrenched corruption after six decades of one-party rule.

Meanwhile, in Gaza, tens of thousands of Palestinians are waiting on shore to celebrate the much anticipated and daring arrival. My mother and Aunt were on board Palestinian vessels on the Gaza side that went out to greet the international vessels; apparently they had to turn back to the Gaza shore after hearing Israeli naval warning shots. I have been unable to make contact with them since this morning, but we all anxiously to hear if this attempt to break the siege will succeed. [...]

Update: The boats both arrived safely earlier today! My parents called to update me earlier today. My mom said she greeted the activists with *labaneh* sandwiches, cucumbers, and warm mint tea, which they much appreciated. My father accidentally fell into the harbor after trying to prevent my mother from doing the same aboard a life raft! [...]

Durham, North Carolina, August 26

Laila El-Haddad

After a long and hard trip to Gaza, international activists who sailed there from Cyprus plan to return, taking with them a few stranded Palestinian

Fulbright scholars. In Gaza, they delivered hearing aids to a charity—Atfaluna Society for Deaf Children (one which I absolutely love for their handicrafts, made by deaf men and women, which you can purchase online: <http://www.atfaluna.net/>). But before doing so, they accompanied Palestinian fishermen yesterday morning to help them break the maritime siege on their fishing boats.

The Oslo Accords were supposed to “grant them” (a natural right, but they decided it should be bestowed nonetheless) the right to fish twenty nautical miles out to sea. In reality, this has translated to no more than twelve in the best of times, four at the height of the second Intifada based on my interviewees with fishermen; and six in the past few years. [...]

The hope was that accompanied by international activists and a swarm of media alongside them, the Israeli naval boats would lay off; and despite circling them from afar with their enormous guns pointing towards them, they did.

My father accompanied one of the fishing vessels to aid in translation and protection. Initially, the fisherman were afraid to leave for fear of being shot at by the Israelis, as they frequently are. Slowly, they decided to attempt to surpass the nautical mile limit imposed on them by the Israelis. And they did.

The fishermen told him it was their most successful catch in four years!

“The Prophet Muhammad said: ‘Help your brother, whether he is an oppressor or he is oppressed.’ The Prophet was asked: ‘It is right to help him if he is oppressed, but how should we help him if he is an oppressor?’ He replied: ‘By preventing him from oppressing others.’” (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, 3, Hadith 624).

Rome, September 1

Lidia Campagnano

[...] I’m thinking of male and female students who are good at doing research, professors who bring

them on. Mothers and fathers who still dedicate themselves to making their children's growth meaningful, from the very first day. Or the medical and paramedical staff I met at the Maggiore hospital in Bologna. Skilful, caring, respectful. Even if a job well done is no longer requested or seen. I go and search for these people, even in the blogosphere. And I do find some. I look at them, listen to them, read what they have to say to find out what helps them resist. I want to be able to tell a little more and a little better about them, since writing is my specialty.

Yes, I know, it's almost a conditioned reflex: I'd like to have the opportunity to bring out these people's qualities, establish a connection between them and the two sources of "breathing" I always refer to, international relations and primary relations, especially between men and women. In short, anthropology and Great Politics. What I dream of is a huge cultural campaign to preserve and renovate the horizon outlined by these two sources. The possibility of it. In a sense, everyone's right to see it, to know it. [...]

Havana, September 3

Yoani Sánchez

A series of images of the havoc caused by Hurricane Gustav in the western part of the country appear on the screen. Dark faces in front of flimsy houses which couldn't stand up to gusts of more than 124 mph. [...] Civil society in Cuba cannot launch, of its own accord, a campaign for collecting aid. It would be illegal, without going through official channels, to make an appeal inviting peo-

"What on earth prompted you to take a hand in this? I don't know. My code of morals, perhaps. Your code of morals? What code? Comprehension." (Albert Camus, *The plague*, trans. Stuart Gilbert, Vintage, New York, 1991, p. 130)

ple to send clothes, medicines and food to the affected areas. Our condition of civic minority has got to the point that we cannot unite spontaneously to help our neighbours, even when there's a disaster. [...] On Sunday I'm going to Pinar del Río to take my help directly to the victims. I'm going to meet members of the civil society to exchange views on the possible ways of providing assistance.

Havana, September 8

Yoani Sánchez

On Sunday, when I returned from the Pinar del Río province, Havana was already in hurricane alarm status. Rarely has it given me so much pleasure to see the elevated bridges of Calle 100 and Boyeros as after seeing the series of buildings destroyed in the west. In the area between Los Palacios and San Diego, where the winds had reached speeds of more than 124 mph, on both sides of the road you could see the vegetation dry, bent in the direction of the stronger gusts, and hundreds of houses with their roofs blown off, or completely in ruins. The hurricane even destroyed the noxious *marabu* weed, which had formerly resisted all the much-advertised plans to extirpate it.

People whose houses had been blown down and whose childhood photos were under water were mourning their fate. A bicycle taxi driver sent his daughters to stay with an aunt because he couldn't pay the 9.70 pesos charged for each sheet of asbestos distributed to the victims. The future was already looking black, but now it's taken on a worse shade of ochre, spreading desolation and uncertainty.

September 7. Hurricane Ike barreled west across the already beleaguered islands of the Caribbean.

Crops destroyed, which no insurance company will cover. Electrical household appliances purchased on the informal market which cannot even be declared lost because for the State they've never existed. The citizen's vulnerability, when faced with these meteorological events, is disconcerting. One hammer costs practically a month's salary, and planks and nails are a luxury only few can afford. When hurricanes hit there's only one thing to do: get out and leave your more bulky belongings to the mercy of the winds.

The greatest difficulty, for those of us who want to help, is the lack of a civil route to ensure the victims receive the donations we are sending. State distribution systems are not able to shake off the indolence and poor organization that characterise all the other economic activities. Many people choose to send donations through churches, but these lack the necessary infrastructure and personnel to reach all areas of the country.

Yesterday evening, with the members of the *Convivencia* [Coexistence] team and other members of the developing civil society of Pinar del Río, I discussed how to send clothes, food and medicines to those who have lost everything. Unfortunately, all the avenues have been closed over the years as Cuban citizens have lost their autonomy at the hands of an overprotective and authoritarian State. Even if a group of people could collect aid, the problem would then be how to transport it to the disaster areas and distribute it without being reported to the authorities and eventually arrested.

Thus, the most viable option is for family members abroad to send cash to their relatives in Cuba. For those of us who live here and want to help, the only

possibility is to personally go and deliver our donations to the devastated areas. “Anything helps,” a sobbing gentleman told me, showing me his house, already a hovel before the hurricane and now razed to the ground.

Durham, North Carolina, September 10

Laila El-Haddad

I recently completed updating the most recent edition of the Beit Sahour-based Alternative Tourism Group’s *Palestine and the Palestinians* travel guide (www.atg-sverige.se/atgswe/guidebok.shtml). My job was to work on the Gaza section, since a lot has happened over the past two years. I tried to include as many juicy tidbits as possible to really give an insider’s view of Gaza as well as suggestions on favorite local spots and so on. Part of the idea is to challenge the media perception of the city. The book is sold in Europe, USA and Canada.

ATG also has an annual olive-picking campaign in late October, as well as a bed-and-breakfast program where visitors are housed with local Palestinians in Bethlehem. The group is a Palestinian NGO that specializes in Fair Trade and “justice tourism”, focusing in tours and pilgrimages that include critical examinations of the history, culture, and politics of the Holy Land.

In so doing, they try to support the local community through the creation of economic opportunities and positive cultural exchange between guest and host, the protection of the environment, and political/historical education. ATG works to encourage all tourism operators to abandon exploitative mass tourism and to adopt practices that positively affect the host population. [...]

It's Saturday evening and I keep yawning in front of a boring thriller with cops and criminals. The phone rings: it's Adolfo, who's been behind bars ever since an outburst of power sentenced him during the Black Spring in 2003. He sounds strung up. A few, almost illiterate, guards have prevented him from receiving the books and magazines his wife took him during her last visit. The list of the "dangerous" confiscated texts includes the Catholic publications "Palabra Nueva", "Espacio Laical" and a few spiritual reflections by Saint Augustine. His companions in this cause, Pedro Argüelles Morán and Antonio Ramón Díaz Sánchez, have joined him in order to exert pressure in the only way they can: by refusing the meagre food they find in their plates. Unless the food of literature is not let through, they will avoid the tasteless meals that keep them alive.

The suspicion that books generate among the guards at "Canaleta" prison reminds me of the Colombian Jorge Zalamea and his fictionalized poem *El Gran Burundún Burundá ha muerto*. A dictator who fears articulated language condemns his subjects to a world without communication or literature. In order for his silence order to be enforced, he recruits all those who feel offended by speech. In order to form his army of censors, he summons "those who are incapable of fervour, who lack imagination, who have never spoken to themselves [...], who beat animals and children when they don't understand their glances..."

These myrmidons withholding Adolfo's books today are part of those same hordes of illiterate controllers. As prison warders of expression, they

sense, exactly as the Gran Burundún did, that the human condition and “the urge to rebel that entails from it, finds its foundations in articulated speech”. They suspect that when Adolfo, Pedro and Antonio are immersed in an essay or a novel, prison bars disappear, jail disappears and they manage to shake off their exaggerated sentences. “Instructions” received by Cuban prison guards are sufficient to indicate that a book is something extremely dangerous.

Milan, Italy, September 26

Sebastiano Buonamico

I don't remember noticing anything different or unusual, coming home Sunday night [September 14] from Paola's. I must have drunk a glass of wine; I washed the dishes, maybe, and went to bed early. It was the morning news on Radio Popolare that told me what had happened: clubbed to death, near the station, a stolen package of cookies, the alleged murderers arrested, Abba, a young black man, his family originally from Burkina Faso. Near the station means everything and nothing. At the café the regulars in front of their usual coffee can talk of nothing else, and so I find out that “near the station” means my street; what's more, the scene of the killing is fifty yards from my house, the corner I usually turn at on my way to work; the corner where flowers, notes, and teddy bears have started to pile up in the secular altar that follows every crime story. I find out that the murderers are the people who run the place just down the street, a father and son as congenial as dog shit, with their squalid bar, always half-empty, a calendar of Mussolini hanging in the back. This detail is what

Abba was the nickname of Abdul William Guibre, 19, who was born in Burkina Faso, and raised in Italy.

automatically triggers the thought “well, who else would it be”, my lack of amazement about the identity of the two killers. “I never really liked them,” says the Dutch gentleman who’s a regular there, and winks; me either, I think, and then say. I head off for work. The exact spot where Abba fell is a bump of asphalt melted by the summer heat, I almost graze it with my bike but don’t ride over it. Someone has left a circle of white chalk around that bump. I write to Paola about what happened and she replies: how can these things happen, how can you club somebody to death over a package of cookies. They happen, they happened, I say.

Two vigils are planned for Monday evening. I go home and wait. From the end of the street you can hear shouts demanding justice, the sound of shutters being hastily pulled down, they’re almost here, the tobacconist brays as he throws me out of the shop and runs to lock up. Abba’s friends and family are at the center of a rapidly advancing procession that reaches the unguarded shutter of the murderers’ bar, pummelling it with kicks and thrown bottles. When they get to the crime scene, they write things on the walls, leave flowers, make impromptu statements, and many of them cry; the young women in particular are grief-stricken, and in the absence of cameras their palpable despair seems terribly real. No mainstream media are there, no police, it doesn’t seem to be an organized event and no one makes prepackaged pronouncements. It’s just them, and that’s enough.

Later on, the second demonstration is made up of the kind of people who jump at any occasion, Rifondazione Comunista, the social collectives, and the usual mavericks who never miss an event like

this; with their micro-bourgeois comments and ridiculous plans for revenge; the generator powering a small sound system from which Daniele Farina from the Leoncavallo center tells us that no, they didn't know Abba, but the underlying message is, how could they let an opportunity this good escape? The second demonstration is sleazy, pe-riod, but unlike the first, it is full of TV cameras; TV cameras that will return many times in the days that follow to chart the growth of the heap of flowers on the sidewalk and interview residents who are already fed up with the graffiti that have covered the wall behind it; my trusty bartender churns out coffee for the activists and the cops who have thronged there in riot gear to guard the charged vacuum that hovers over the bystanders.

The next evening, at dinnertime, someone rings my bell. Police. I look through the peephole, it's true. There are two plainclothes cops holding up their badges in front of the door. Only one of them talks, identifying himself as Inspector A. from the homicide squad. Their attention immediately focuses on the photos hanging on the walls of my living room. Yes, I'm a photographer, but I wasn't home on Sunday morning. They take notes, they're looking for someone who witnessed the beating. I can't help them, I repeat, and they take their leave, telling me I may be called in for further questioning, which is exactly what happens the next evening. I'm summoned to come down to the central police station on Monday at 2 pm.

I walk through courtyards and corridors and my thoughts drift to the Pinelli affair [an Italian anarchist who died in police custody in 1969], asking myself—as I have been for some time—what it really is they still want from me. Inspector A. tells

me someone confided in him that they saw people filming the beating from the third or fourth floor of my building. You live on the third floor, you're a photographer. I repeat that I wasn't home on Sunday morning, and must unwillingly get Paola mixed up in things to back up my "alibi". I sign a statement that will go into the file for the examining magistrate. The whole office is talking about the Abba case; sticking out from the papers on the desk is a DVD of what the cameras at the corner bank managed to capture. I say goodbye to the inspector and head back to work.

I write to Paola about my meeting with the cop. Days later I talk to her about it over dinner: "Who on earth would film a beating without first trying to intervene?" "Let's say that when they heard the shouts of Abba and his killers, at 7 am on this dead quiet street, four or five people looked out their windows; I think that on seeing a white guy clubbing a black man, three of them probably thought he had to have some good reason for it, one grabbed a cell phone or digital camera or video camera to film the scene, and the last did nothing at all." "But who would say they saw someone filming the scene or taking photos?" "Anyone, if they were questioned, better yet in front of a camera, or in the kind of bar-room chat where you might tell whoppers just for the hell of it."

I wasn't home that morning, I repeat. Unfortunately, or fortunately?

Milan, Italy, October 2

Massimo Parizzi

In the morning: translating. In the afternoon: editing of a translation for the magazine. A text by

Maria Ofelia [“My yesterdays”, in “Here - notes from the present”, 20, pp. 71-74] which says “nothing” apart from describing the beauty of friendship, the emotion of memories, the fullness of life. That is, the most important things. Creating a magazine that deals with these things is right. But does the magazine make it clear? Does it make it clear this is what it’s all about?

London, October 4

Tiziana Zaino

The best way I can think of to describe how I feel is a quotation from my beloved Eliot: “At the still point of the turning world.” I’ve been in London for two months now but it feels like at least two years, I work in a bookshop and I’ve just been offered the chance to teach Italian: I feel like I’ve lived much more in these two months than I ever lived in the previous 24 years in Italy. As if London’s crisp and lively air has swept away the dust which covered so many aspects—intellectual, psychological, personal, sentimental—of my life and personality, restoring them to their natural freshness. It may sound exaggerated, but I feel I am a totally different person from the one who, on July 15, took a plane towards a completely unknown future. The best thing is that now the most pressing problems—a house, work—have been solved, I’m starting to carve out a niche for reflection about myself and the future, and little by little I’m beginning to see more clearly. One of the most rewarding aspects is that at last, after such a long time, I feel intellectually stimulated, curious, eager to exchange opinions, to make new acquaintances, to find a new motivation. My job at the bookshop offers me the opportunity to exchange views with

some very interesting and intelligent people among my colleagues, and I often find myself talking with them about the most varied subjects—from Bergman and Lars von Trier to Joyce's *Ulysses* to *A Brief History of Time* to the notion of post-modernism. I've rarely felt so motivated and encouraged to think and use my analytical and critical abilities... So, even if it's a hard, difficult and often frustrating job, even if my new life is not entirely perfect, sometimes to my surprise I am struck by a rewarding feeling of happiness.

Gaza, October 8

Heba

What is nice about the Eid is seeing the kids all around dressed up, buying toys, and feeling like a million bucks. My younger daughter Hala kept asking me the minute she woke up for about a week "is it the Eid yet?" When it is Eid Al-Fiter after Ramadan, we prepare a breakfast of *fseikh*, which is fish that's been kept in salt for a long time. We fry it and eat in the morning so our stomach will not hurt upon getting back to eating after fasting for a month. So the kids wake up, dress up, and get the *eidiyya*, which is some money from parents and relatives, often used to buy toys.

This year, we took our daughters to the zoo (it is sort of a small garden with some animals) and to a play zone.

Moscow, October 20

Veronica Khokhlova

A week or so ago, Marta and I were waiting for a trolleybus near the Universitet metro station. It

was raining, but Marta didn't care, and so we didn't join the small crowd taking shelter underneath the covered bus stop. A middle-aged woman with a disabled teenage girl leaning heavily on her tried to squeeze in and accidentally pushed another woman already standing there. They had a brief but rather nasty argument. The girl had cerebral palsy and wasn't capable of walking on her own; her mother had a heavy bag in her other hand. It hurt badly to hear that other woman bark at them. When the trolleybus finally arrived, the woman basically had to lift the girl to get her inside, and not a single person offered help. But they got to sit at least, even though the trolleybus was packed. Marta was offered a seat, too, across the aisle from the disabled girl and her mother, and I stood next to her like a wall, keeping other passengers from accidentally falling on her.

After a while I started chatting with a delicate-looking grandmother of a very sweet nine-year-old computer whiz kid sitting next to us. He was running late for his first advanced-level class at some computer school and was terribly nervous about it, so I tried to calm him down a bit, telling him that all he had to do was apologize and everyone would understand. That seemed to have cheered him up. He told me he used to be as fair-haired as Marta when he was her age, and then he shared some bizarre memories he thought he had from when he was three years old: sitting in some empty room, playing with some wires, thinking thoughts that were too complex for a little kid, but could have just as well been his—because he definitely seemed like an odd kid, in a totally lovely way.

October 28, Congo. As many as 250,000 people have been driven from their homes since August, with the collapse of a peace deal between the government and rebels under the command of Laurent Nkunda, a renegade general who says he is fighting to protect ethnic Tutsis.

October 29, Congo. Countless people of all kinds poured out of Goma, a strategic Congolese city on the border of Rwanda, fleeing the advancing rebel forces massing on the outskirts of town.

I was standing back-to-back with two guys in their mid-20s, and even though I could hear them talking, I wasn't paying any attention. Until I heard the mother of the disabled girl address them very loudly: "Please stop using that word!" They had been cursing, obviously. I still can't get over the exchange that followed. The guys—who looked very average, not starving, not super cool, most likely on their way home from some boring office where they probably worked as sysadmins or something, though actually I've no idea and don't really care—so yeah, the guys told the woman that it was none of her business what kind of language they used among themselves. She told them they were not at home, and that there were kids around. One of the guys then told her that right, they were not at home, but on a public trolleybus—and in public they were free to say whatever they felt like. And then he specified, in a very loud, theatrical way: "I can say *blyad, suka, nahui* all I want—and I don't give a shit about what you think." You know, Russian curses are way stronger than their English equivalents, so there's no use to translate what the guy said to the poor woman. But it was totally unacceptable, and shocking, and it seemed to have left everyone who heard it speechless, whereas the guys continued their interrupted conversation as if nothing had happened. They moved a few meters away when some space cleared as some passengers got off the trolleybus at the next stop, and that was it.

If Marta and that cute boy hadn't been there, I might have said something to the assholes. Or maybe not. Because it only seemed possible to respond in curses to them, and that would have made

"Once the social character of human beings has been disturbed and forced to throw itself into idiosyncrasies, it becomes so profoundly distorted that it depends its strength on this separation from others and proceeds to assert its isolation to the point of madness; for madness is simply the complete isolation of the individual from his kind." (G.W.F. Hegel, *Political Writings*, trans. H.B. Nisbet, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 101)

things worse, regardless of whether there were any kids around or not. So I just stood in silence for a minute or so, and so did everyone else around me, including the grandmother and her brilliant grandson, and then she and I resumed our own interrupted conversation. I continued with a story of my early childhood memory, of a 1976 or 1977 earthquake in Kyiv, which I somehow remember very vividly, even though I was either two or three years old then (our lamp was swinging like crazy that night, and even now, especially in Istanbul, I keep looking up at the ceiling to check for an earthquake). The woman told me that she loved Kyiv, had many friends there, but didn't feel too safe visiting them, because, you know, the situation in Ukraine is so crazy, so chaotic, etc.—all the basic stuff that I'm already used to hearing here. I told her not to worry—and not to believe everything that Russian TV was telling her. She smiled and gave me a knowing glance, I guess—which was nice. But I also find it wild that she could bring up the mess in Ukraine after the ugly conversation we had just overheard. Like it's paradise here, but utter hell over there. [...]

Durham, North Carolina, November 4

Laila El-Haddad

Every day I sit down in front of my laptop during that single hour of time that I own, but that somehow, seems to own me, after my children fall asleep (sometimes on the couch... but who's counting). I sit down and I say: ok, time to write. But it doesn't happen, and instead I begin to go off in tangents until I wonder how my precious hour passed. So

Barack Hussein Obama was elected as the 44th president of the United States.

today I decided to simply let my words spill out without worrying about excessive editing and beautification. Today my tangent was thinking about a time in my childhood when I actually had time to feel “bored”. I’ve also been distracted by other thoughts. Thoughts of homeland; of absence; of belonging; suspension of time and place and space.

And the elections of course, and all that jazz... Counting the visit to my brother’s this weekend, we’ve had five house visits from Obama campaigners, “change” buttons plastered to their vests, clipboards in hand. I applauded their efforts, but stopped them short to save them the trouble—we aren’t citizens, I told them, and I’m not sure how I got on their list (their answer: the lists don’t specify citizenship), though my sister-in-law did vote, proudly, for Obama. I also suggested they work on my blue-collar neighbors: with a house full of at least five undecided voters, they had their work cut out. You may have heard, North Carolina has been thrust into the limelight as a swing state all of a sudden.

And so on and so forth. As though it mattered, as though I belonged, somehow, to this season, to this cycle, to this time, to this place.

I keep up to date with all the Free Gaza news about the ships travelling to and from Cyprus and Gaza. And I think how lucky they are, to have the luxury of choosing to voluntarily sail to Gaza to prove a point. I think how in this day and age, in this time of ours, where borders and all they signify seem to dissolve, they have actually never mattered more; citizenship has never mattered more. The paradox of my existence.

My father provides daily updates on Skype: collection of the olives from his farm during the fall harvest; pressing them for oil today: they had a surplus. Persimmons are finally in season, but still expensive. They'll get cheaper though, he assures me, as though it will matter. As though I belong to that season; that cycle; that time; that place.

It's chilly outside. My fig tree stands upright and green, branching out near the rosemary and loquat, as though snubbing its nose at the weather. It is estranged, too. And who, in my lonely little garden, really belongs to this place or this season. Some thrive, and others make do with the reality before them: they predict a harsh winter this year. Conserve your energy, like the dormant mint, until the season passes.

Israel. For most Israelis, Jewish identity is central to the nation. But Israeli Arabs, including the most successfully integrated ones, say a new identity must be found for the country's long-term survival. "I am not a Jew," protested Eman Kassem-Sliman, an Arab radio journalist. "How can I belong to a Jewish state? If they define this as a Jewish state, they deny that I am here."

The New York Times,
May 7

Land is an especially sore point. Across Israel are the remains of dozens of Palestinian villages, scars on the landscape from the conflict that gave birth to the country in 1948. Yet some original inhabitants and their descendants, all Israeli Arab citizens, live in packed towns and villages, often next to the old villages, and are barred from resettling them.

One recent warm afternoon, Jamal Abdulhadi Mahameed drove past kibbutz fields of wheat and

watermelon, up a dirt road surrounded by pine trees and cactuses, and climbed the worn remains of a set of stairs, declaring: "This was my house. This is where I was born." He said what he most wanted now, at 69, was to leave the crowded town next door, come to this piece of uncultivated land with the pomegranate bushes planted by his father and work it. Yet, as an Arab, his quest for a return to his land challenges a longstanding Israeli policy. "We are prohibited from using our own land," he said, standing in the former village of Lajoun, now surrounded by the fields of Kibbutz Megiddo. "They want to keep it available for Jews. My daughter [a doctor] makes no distinction between Jewish and Arab patients. Why should the state treat me differently?"

"Land is presence," remarked Clinton Bailey, an Israeli scholar. "If you want to be present here, you have to have land. The country is not that big. What you cede to Arabs can no longer be used for Jews who may still want to come.

Karkur, Israel, November 7

Liza Rosenberg

[...] US elections. I didn't vote. I have the right to vote, but given that I chose to make my life here, outside of the US, I don't feel that it's my place to try to make an impact when I don't have to live with the consequences of that action. Of course, some of you may say that as an Israeli, that's not necessarily true, and that I should use my vote to help elect the more pro-Israel candidate, but I disagree. What is best for Israel may or may not be best for the US, not to mention the fact that your ideas about what is best for Israel may not gel with mine. [...] Had I voted, I would have

voted for Barack Obama, which I'm sure comes as no surprise to anyone. While I'm still not sure how he will be as president, I am impressed with his intelligence and his eloquence, and that he genuinely seems to give Americans hope in ways that I can't recall ever seeing before. I am excited by the outcome of this election, and I am moved by all that his win symbolizes. It excites me that Barack Obama has realized Martin Luther King's dream. It excites me to know that racists across the United States are most probably still apoplectic, and will be for at least the next four years. [...]

Rome, November 13

Lidia Campagnano

I've seen again the red roofs and the cypress-trees of the Arezzo lunatic asylum: now it houses the University where I was invited to lead a workshop on communication. I feel I should mention the names of my hostesses: Patrizia Gabrielli and Lucilla Gigli, professors, researchers and scholars. They have been entrusted with the historical documents—files, case histories written in fine handwriting, daguerreotypes—on the issue which, along with international conflicts, started the threads of my political passion weaving: destroying the lunatic asylum. Or maybe the issue of madness created and fuelled by totalitarian terror was also about the whole world being threatened by totalitarian power... However, the former lunatic asylum, now crowded with women and men devoted to culture, warmed my heart. I thought, Adalgisa, the old lady I used to know, who had been locked up in this same “women's wing” and would write heartbreaking and poetic letters to her “dearest

doctor,” is here with us today. Adalgisa and others whom I loved so much.

Here with us talking about communication, especially the flagging communication between human beings under the senseless bombardment by the media described so well by Mario Perniola.

Could there be a better point to start from than loneliness, in this place? Loneliness is poor communication, I said. And poverty derives from the Latin *pauper*: giving birth to not much, sharing not much.

The shrewdness of tyranny lies in the fact that it convinces the people of its poverty while destroying the places where communication is created, the places where communication is still marked by mutual exchanges. Schools, for instance. Universities.

I suggested how each of us, from the first moments of his or her life, is born into communication.

There’s a vital need, in those very first moments, for mutual communication, for the presence of someone, of a mother, capable of listening and giving something in return. Someone who gives courage and says yes to your development, to your wealth as a growing human being. [...]

Notes

Here

notes from the present

“...there is an instinct that strives towards the original state of inertia, as if life were a transient episode overcome by the death principle, which is

Massimo Parizzi

expressed in the hatred, the aggression that works to destroy all that is alive.” (From Ernesto Balducci’s preface to Freud-Einstein, *Riflessioni a due sulle sorti del mondo*, Bollati Boringhieri, Turin, 1989, p. 13.)

If the “life principle” can be interpreted literally as birth, separation from the mother, and therefore its opposite, the “death principle”, as symbiosis with the mother in her womb—the “original state of inertia”—then “primitive” immediacy (of which Darwin, perhaps not coincidentally, provides examples above all in the field of aggression) and all immediacies, insofar as they establish a symbiosis between subject and object—an object that can be a thing or an impulse, a feeling, an idea, an act—would be examples of the death principle, the principle of indistinction. Whereas mediation, which separates—or symbolization, to use another word—would be an example of the life principle, the principle of separation.

But a symbol is only a symbol if it is shared, if in addition to a “tertium” between the subject and object, it is also a “tertium” between the subject and another subject, i.e., a form of *communication*. The passage from symbiosis with the mother to separation, on the one hand, and the “path of civilization”, on the other, would thus be the passage from action to communication.

It would be intriguing if “communication” could be interpreted as “common action”; and in Italian, the etymological dictionary of the Italian language “Zanichelli” would seem to suggest something rather similar. It includes *comunicazione* (“the act of communicating, conveying to others”) and *comunicare* (“to share, transmit”) under the entry for

comune (“belonging to more than one person”), which can be traced back to the Latin *commune(m)*: “carrying out a task (*munus*) along with (*cum*) others”. And thus, in the passage from action to communication, life would seem to become the “task” referred to by Manzoni (“Life is not meant to provide a treadmill for the majority and unending holidays for the few, but rather to furnish every one of us with a task to perform”, *The Betrothed*, trans. Bruce Penman, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1972, p. 401), the “common war” and “social band” “against inhuman Nature” spoken of by Leopardi (“The Genista”)!

The passage from action to communication, moreover, would seem to be the same one described by D.H. Winnicott when he writes about “transitional objects”: objects (like the sucked corner of a blanket or napkin, a teddy bear, etc.) that represent “the infant’s transition from a state of being merged with the mother to a state of being in relation to the mother as something outside and separate”. Their need is overcome, it would seem, only because “transitional phenomena have become diffused, have become spread out over the whole intermediate territory between ‘inner psychic reality’ and the ‘external world as perceived by *two persons in common*’, that is to say, over the whole cultural field”. He adds: “We experience life in the area of transitional phenomena, in the exciting interweave of subjectivity and objective observation, and in an area that is intermediate between the inner reality of the individual and the *shared* reality of the world that is external to individuals”. (Cited by C. Lasch, *The Minimal Self*, Norton, New York, 1984, pp. 194-195; the italics are mine.)

My mother would carry our dirty washing to the concrete wash-house, where her brush and soap would have made shirts immaculate and removed stains from trousers. An alarm went off for my sister and me when we saw the danger looming over innocent ants forming a line under the still plugged tub. That's when our race started to save part of the incautious swarm which was unaware of the massacre that mother was about to cause with water and soap. A bit nutty those two girls, our neighbours must have thought, as they watched us picking up the tiny insects which could hardly be seen on the grey concrete.

In the course of time and with the thousands and thousands of ants I did not manage to save from the catastrophe, I have understood that small things always run the risk of being swept away. Revolutions and wars crush them, together with all that does not appear in statistics and great history books. All the tiny things that form and give life to a society eventually die when the tap of violent changes and wars is turned on.

The taste of fruit lost in memory, an afternoon spent talking without a mask on a neighbouring street corner, a calf trotting in a field unafraid of being sacrificed illegally, a glass of fresh lemon squash which hasn't cost you an hour's queue. All this is part of the swarm, even though the "laundresses" determined to bleach and wring a country regard them as insignificant whims.

I am still the same girl, frightened by those who want to change everything, suspicious of those who suggest using a brush and soap to deal with tradi-

tional structures. I trust the smallness of ants more, their endless walking and their slowly taking over spaces. It will be them, still swept away by gushes of water, who turn the taps off one day.

Lampedusa (Sicily). They faced the stormy sea, in a 30-knot wind and 10-meter-high waves, risking their own lives to save those of 650 people. An extraordinary example of courage and solidarity on the part of the Lampedusa Port Authority staff and the crews of four trawlers from Mazara del Vallo (Trapani). Thanks to them alone two boats laden with migrants did not sink; thanks to them alone a disaster—potentially the deadliest shipwreck ever of migrants in the Mediterranean—was averted.

From the Italian newspaper **La Repubblica**, November 28

It all started yesterday afternoon, when the two boats sailing the Strait of Sicily sent out an SOS via satellite: “Help us, there’s a storm and we risk being shipwrecked,” the desperate migrants cried, phoning their relatives in Italy for help. Rescue operations started immediately, coordinated by the Palermo Port Authority.

The first boat was sighted at dusk by a helicopter of the Guardia di Finanza [the Italian Finance police], fifteen miles off the coast of Lampedusa. On board were 300 people waving their arms to attract the crew’s attention. The second “floating wreck” was further off, in Maltese waters. But the SOS “passed on” to La Valletta authorities was left unanswered.

In the meantime, the situation in Lampedusa was feverish. Motor patrol boats could not leave port because of the terrible sea conditions. Only the big

trawlers of Mazara del Vallo, which were also stuck in port because of the bad weather, could face the storm. The officer in charge of the Port Authority, Lieutenant Achille Selleri, commander of the seventh squadron, summoned the fishermen of the Mazara fleet into his office: “Gentlemen, the means I’ve got at my disposal are not enough for the rescue. I need you and your boats. Shall we save those people?” The trawler captains did not hesitate one moment: “We’re ready.”

So five trawlers—Ariete, Monastir, Ghibli, Twenty Two and Giulia P.G.—put out to sea again. On board with the fishermen were the Coast Guards. It was pitch dark by the time they eventually found the boat. But sea conditions were too bad to transfer the migrants on board, so the “floating wreck” was escorted towards the coast, to a bay called Cala Grecale, where the undertow was not so strong and they could be transferred onto the larger trawler, the Twenty Two.

It was dawn when the fishermen finally managed to enter port with their human “cargo”: 303 people, including 21 women and some children, all deeply shaken. They told their compatriots at the migrant accommodation centre about their odyssey: “We left Libya two days ago, four of us fell overboard and we were not able to rescue them.”

But there was no time for grief. The Coast Guard issued a new alarm: the second boat had been sighted by an Atlantic military plane, struggling through the waves nine miles off the coast. And the fishermen set out again to rescue the migrants, over 350 people packed like sardines in an old fishing boat. They were rescued—by the Ghibli this time—following the same procedure. They also

spent the night at Cala Grecale before they were eventually able to enter port. The important thing is that they are all still alive: over 650 people rescued in a few hours by the “sea angels,” as the Mazara sailors and the Lampedusa Coast Guards have been called, welcomed back to the applause of the people waiting on the quayside.

Milan, Italy, December 2

Giorgio Morale

Avola, December 2, 1968. For days we'd been wondering: “Will there be a strike or not?” On the second the dilemma was resolved by the day-labourers. Greeted with loud applause, they got everyone to leave (and amid the shoving and shouting we were very quick). I still remember the shutter coming down. Crash: school closed. Just like the shops and offices. Nobody knew for how long. Except someone was shouting for help: the caretaker was still inside. The school was reopened to let him out.

Orazio suggested going to the blockade on the main road to see the strikers. We went out of curiosity. Happy to take up the full width of the road and celebrate hours of unexpected freedom by asking for cigarettes from all and sundry.

As we got closer to the blockade the crowd became more dense, the talk more heated. The air was filled with the energy that's created when so many people, so much purpose and so much movement come together. Some of the strikers were sitting in a circle on the ground, others were busy explaining their case to motorists. On both sides of the road, here and there on either side of the

November 26, Mumbai, India. Coordinated terrorist attacks killed at least 172 people and wounded more than 250. Several targets—at least two-five star hotels, the city's largest train station, a Jewish center, a movie theater and a hospital—were attacked by militants wielding grenades and machine guns.

low stone wall there were the dying remnants of night-time fires. The sky was clear, as if to bless our holiday, but the air was cold, as if to emphasise the hardships. The weary, unshaven faces. I was struck by the control the day-labourers showed as they held the road. Everything proceeded as if obeying a natural order: so this was possible, to stand up for a right.

Young people known in the town as communists seemed to be in their element: they knew what they were talking about, they gathered in groups. They moved among the crowd according to needs apparent only to themselves. We recognised them from their appearance: big jumpers, long scarves, a look and a word ready for everyone. The mayor and the authorities were negotiating, highlighted by the empty space around them.

The police arrived half an hour after Orazio and I had left. War broke out among the olive trees. The wind blew the tear gas back at the police and they panicked: they found themselves surrounded by a thousand day-labourers and opened fire.

The news flew from mouth to mouth. In the afternoon, incredulous that this had happened where we'd been, Orazio and I went to the Communist party headquarters. But it was impossible to get in. Grief and anger formed a dense wall of people right up to the doorway. Bullets and stones remained on the road. There were two people dead and two kilos of lead.

Next day the landowners, who for days had stayed away from the meetings, turned up to sign the contract. On the day of the funerals the whole of Avola wore black. The procession took place on 4 December, in the rain, in a forest of black umbrellas.

I thought of my parents in the no-man's-land of emigration, of all those houses emptying for quiet farewells, the comings and goings on the North-South road, the sidelong glances of those remaining, who walked the pavements and stood on the threshold of unemployment.

I thought of my father's Christian Democratic Party card, put away in the drawer for things not used but not to be thrown away.

"Otherwise, when you were small, they wouldn't have let him work", my mother had explained.

I remembered one night when my father was later than usual: he'd been paid to put up Christian Democratic Party posters.

"If the Carabinieri come across him they'll arrest him", said my mother as we waited. "If the people from another party come across him they'll beat him up".

I was already asleep when my father came home: his voice woke me. He said there were a lot of posters: he'd brought most of them home. They ended up hidden in the bottom drawer of the wardrobe. For a long time I'd thought about them with a guilty feeling. I was cured of it on that 2 December.

"That much less propaganda for the Christian Democrats" I thought, and was pleased.

Havana, December 13

Yoani Sánchez

As lengthy dossiers are being prepared for the semi-centennial of the Cuban Revolution, not many people are asking themselves whether we're celebrating the birthday of a living creature or just the anniversary of something that happened. Revolutions

*December 6, Athens.
Youths angry over the
killing of a teenager by the
police took to the streets
in Athens and other Greek
cities, burning shops, cars*

don't last for half a century, I say to those who ask. They end up devouring themselves and excreting themselves in the form of authoritarianism, control, and immobility. They die whenever they try to become eternal. They burn out because they want to remain unchanged.

What started on that January 1, to the minds of many, has been pushing daisies for years now. The only point in dispute seems to be the date of the funeral. According to Reinaldo (see <http://desde.cuba.com/reinaldoescobar>), it died that August in 1968, when our bearded leader applauded the entry of tanks into Prague. My mother saw the Revolution breathe its last when they sentenced General Arnaldo Ochoa to death. March 2003, with its arrests and perfunctory trials, was the final croak heard by a few stubborn souls who still thought it was alive.

I met it as a corpse, I tell them. In 1975, the year of my birth, Sovietization had wiped out all spontaneity, and there was nothing left of the spirit of rebellion that older people talked about. There was no more long hair or popular euphoria, just purges, double standards, and accusations. The scapulars they once came down from the hills with had already been banned, and those soldiers from Sierra Maestra had become addicted to power.

The rest was a long wake for what could have been, candles lit in memory of a dream that had swept up so many people. This January will once again mark the birthday of the dearly departed, there will be flowers, cheers, and songs, but nothing will get it out of the grave, bring it back to life. Let it rest in peace, and let's start another cycle, soon: a shorter one, with less rhetoric and more freedom.

and businesses in the worst rioting in recent years.

December 11, Zimbabwe. A ferocious cholera epidemic, spread by water contaminated with human excrement, has stricken more than 16,000 people across Zimbabwe since August and killed more than 780.

December 14, Baghdad. President Bush's fourth and final trip to Iraq was interrupted by an incident: a man threw his shoes at the president during a news conference, shouting in Arabic: "This is a gift from the Iraqis; this is the farewell kiss, you dog!"

Cornigliano, Italy. “Dirty Jew.” “This train goes to Auschwitz.” A 14-year-old boy on the Genoa-Savona regional train was insulted and physically assaulted by a 17-year-old who was later reported to the police. It happened two days ago between the stations of Sampierdarena and Cornigliano [two suburbs of Genoa]. Some shocked passengers called for the conductor who [...] was forced to stop the train and ask for the intervention of the Carabinieri corps. Members of a Carabinieri motorcycle squad boarded the train at the station of Pegli and found the frightened and shocked victim crying in a corner. [...]

From the Italian newspaper **La Repubblica**, December 18

From a letter

by Etty Hillesum

Here

notes from the present

The misery here is quite terrible; and yet, late at night when the day has slunk away into the depths behind me, I often walk with a spring in my step along the barbed wire. And then, time and again, it soars straight from my heart—I can’t help it, that’s just the way it is, like some elementary force—the feeling that life is glorious and magnificent, and that one day we shall be building a whole new world. Against every new outrage and every fresh horror, we shall put up one more piece of love and goodness, drawing strength from within ourselves. We may suffer, but we must not succumb. And if

From Westerbork nazi concentration camp, July 3, 1943; in *The Letters and Diaries of Etty Hillesum, 1941-1943*, trans. Arnold Pomerans, William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Mich., 2002, p. 616.

we should survive unhurt in body and soul, but above all in soul, without bitterness and without hatred, then we shall have a right to a say after the war. Maybe I am an ambitious woman: I would like to have just a tiny little bit of a say.

On 27 December Israel started bombing the Gaza Strip. In the days that followed, the newspapers spoke of hundreds dead, a third of them children. Not a day would pass without news of a hospital, a school, a shelter being hit. It's too much. Too much. We will close this issue of the magazine here, and write about it in the next issue.

You human brothers
in Israel
our well-mannered executioners
the short and bitter life
we left behind
in the only way that you allowed
should make you feel no blame.

“Ballad of the Gaza Dead”,
by **Ennio Abate**

What blew us to bits
running towards the *cast lead*
that for its future Good
you bestowed from above upon Gaza the ungrateful
was ourselves, by ourselves.

And you good people in Europe,
take your time.
Wait for this well-handled task
to be brought to completion.
Our mothers and sisters

duly disembowelled, the children
turned to ashen mannikins,
the elderly charred like dry tree
trunks,
the too-limber young limbs
ripped off.

The ruins of Gaza the ungrateful
can be visited afterwards
in religious silence
like Auschwitz
draws absent-minded, contrite tourists.

Come afterwards to buy
relics of Gaza the ungrateful:
the bloodied dolls,
the blankets
that filth excrement and cold
have stiffened
yet left intact, from *back then*.

And the stones, the pathetic slingshots, the terrible
weapons of mass destruction
with which we played at offending you
classify them all meticulously
in sparkling museums of remembrance.

Unforgiven, you have brought us to our deaths.
Forgive yourselves by yourselves, if you can.

Contributors and translators

Here

notes from the present

Ennio Abate was born in Baronissi, Italy, in 1941. Since 1961 he has lived in Milan. He has worked in an office and as a telephone operator, and taught until 1998, painting as an outsider artist and actively involved in poetry, politics, and history. His poem was translated by Johanna Bishop.

p. 79

Johanna Bishop was born in Chicago in 1974, and lived in Pennsylvania and New York before moving to Tuscany in 1998. She translates from Italian into English. In this issue she has translated the diary pages by Sebastiano Buonamico and Yoani Sánchez (13 December), the “Notes” by Massimo Parizzi, and the poem by Ennio Abate.

Sebastiano Buonamico lives in Milan, Italy. A graphic designer and a photographer, his photographs have been shown in several exhibitions. He is the author of the covers of this magazine. His diary page was translated by Johanna Bishop.

cover and p. 55

Maria Burnett, originally from Italy, has studied in both Italy and the US and has been living in the US for 34 years. She’s been involved in translation for 23 years. In this issue she has translated the poem by Marco Saya.

p. 81

Lidia Campagnano was born at Verdello (Bergamo) and lives in Rome. For 17 years she was an editor for the Italian newspaper “Il manifesto”. Her diary pages come from the blog *Scrivo con la matita* (<http://scrivoconlamatita.splinder.com>). We thank her for allowing us to publish them. They were translated by Brigitte Ciaramella (11, 20 and 30 June), Claudia Ricchiari (13, 16 and 17 June, 1 September and 13 November). pp. 25, 26, 30, 34, 36, 40, 49, 67

Brigitte Ciaramella (brigitte.ciaramella@fastweb.net) was born in 1966 and was brought up bilingual Italian/English. She is a freelance translator with a special interest in literary works. In this issue she has translated the texts by Yoani Sánchez (31 May, 10 June, 22 September and 13 November), Attilio Mangano, and Lidia Campagnano (11, 20 and 30 June).

Laila El-Haddad, born in 1978, is a journalist and divides her time between Gaza and the United States, where her husband Yassine, a Palestinian refugee denied his right of return to Palestine, resides. They have a son, Yousuf, and a daughter, Noor. Her diary pages come from the blog *Raising Yousuf and Noor: diary of a Palestinian mother* (<http://a-mother-from-gaza.blogspot.com>). We thank her for allowing us to publish them. pp. 44, 47, 48, 53, 63

Hao Wu, born in 1974 in Chengdu, Sichuan, is a documentary film maker. His diary pages come from the blog *Beijing or bust* (<http://beijingorbust.blogspot.com>). We thank him for allowing us to publish them. pp. 6, 11, 29, 45

Heba: “I’m a Palestinian woman born in 1979. I worked in different humanitarian NGOs in Gaza, which helped me come into contact with the general context of Gazan people. I struggle everyday to bring up my two young daughters in a very changeable environment”. Her pages come from the blog www.contemplating-from-gaza.blogspot.com. We thank her for allowing us to publish them.

pp. 5, 22, 43, 60

Jack Hirschman was born in 1933 in New York City and lives in San Francisco. A poet and social activist, he has written more than fifty volumes of poetry and essays. In this issue he has translated the poem by Jaime Gil de Biedma.

Veronica Khokhlova was born in 1974 in Kyiv, and moved from there to Moscow in December 2006. Her diary pages come from *Neeka’s back-log* (<http://vkhokhl.blogspot.com>). We thank her for allowing us to publish them.

pp. 35, 38, 60

Attilio Mangano, born in Palermo in 1945, lives in Milan, Italy. A high school teacher for thirty-five years, he is now retired. For fifteen years he was a political cadre of the new left, then he dedicated himself to historical research with numerous works on the ’68 revolts. His diary page was translated by Brigitte Ciaramella.

p. 20

Barbara McGilvray lives in Australia. For many years she has been translating from Italian into English and visiting Italy whenever possible. In this issue she has translated the Foreword and the texts by Giorgio Morale.

Giorgio Morale, born in Avola (near Syracuse, Sicily) in 1954, lives in Milan. Since 1989 he has been teaching high school literature. He is the author of several novels. His diary pages were translated by Barbara McGilvray.

pp. 39, 74

Massimo Parizzi was born in 1950 in Milan, Italy, where he lives. A translator, he is the founder and editor of this magazine. His diary page was translated by Claudia Ricchiari, and his “Notes” by Johanna Bishop.

pp. 58, 68

Claudia Ricchiari (claudiaric@libero.it) was born in Palermo in 1971. She works as a freelance translator with a special interest in art and literature. In this issue she has translated the texts by Lidia Campagnano (13, 16 and 17 June, 1 September and 13 November), Yoani Sánchez (3 and 8 September), Massimo Parizzi (2 October), Tiziana Zaino, and the excerpts from “La Repubblica”. Her translations were edited by Carole Greenall, CIO.L.

Liza Rosenberg, 40-years-old, was raised in Schenectady, NY, and has been living in Israel for 17 years. She lives in Karkur with her husband and their son, and works as a technical writer in a hi-tech firm. Her email address is mashehu_mashehu@yahoo.com. Her diary pages come from the blog *something something* (somethingsomething.blogspot.com). We thank her for allowing us to publish them.

pp. 15, 42, 66

Yoani Sánchez was born in 1975 in Havana, where she lives. Her diary pages come from the blog *Generación Y* (<http://www.desdecuba.com/>)

generaciony). We thank her for allowing us to publish them. They were translated by Brigitte Ciaramella (31 May, 10 June, 22 September, and 13 November), Claudia Ricchiari (3 and 8 September), and Johanna Bishop (13 December). pp. 17, 22, 50, 51, 54, 71, 76

Marco Saya was born in Buenos Aires in 1953 and now lives in Milan, where he works in the field of IT. His poem was translated by Maria A. Burnett. p. 11

Tiziana Zaino (demian.t@libero.it) was born in Borgomanero, Italy, in 1983 and lives in London. Her diary page was translated by Claudia Ricchiari. p. 59

Laura Zanetti was born in 1949 in Telve di Val-sugana, Italy. He lives between Verona and Telve. She's an ethnographer, a journalist and writes poetry. In this issue she has translated the poem by Jaime Gil de Biedma.

Subscription

Here

notes from the present

The cost of a **subscription** to 3 issues, either the Italian or English edition, is 25 Euros in Italy, 30 in Europe and the Mediterranean area, 35 in the rest of the world. However, since these prices are too high for many countries, you may ask for a **reduced-price subscription**. You can subscribe by **credit card** providing us via fax or phone (0039 -02-57406574), or email (massimoparizzi@alice.it), with its number, expiry date, and security code (or CVV2: the three-digit number printed in the signature space on the *back* of the card; or, in the case of American Express, the four-digit number printed, not embossed, on the front of the card); or you can send the money through a **postal money order** to “Qui-appunti dal presente”, via Bastia 11, 20139 Milano, Italy; or pay by **bank transfer** on the following bank account registered in the name of “Qui-appunti dal presente”: international bank code (IBAN) IT03V0558401624000000025101. Please, remember to indicate your name, address, the object of payment and which edition you wish to receive.

Last issues

Number 18 (February 2008), “Hao Wu’s diary” - back cover: Once we got used to the opposite of the true, it took no effort at all to adjust to the opposites of the good and the beautiful (a young Chinese man, from the generation born in the Eighties, to Hao Wu) - **contents:** Hao Wu’s diary, June 22, 2005-July 29, 2007; *A different visit*, by Saverio Caruso; *Are there fireflies in China?*, by Marco La Rosa; *Somewhere close by, asphalt*, by Andrea Inglese; *Between ideology and consumer culture*, by Giorgio Mascitelli - **Hao Wu**, born in 1974 in Chengdu, Sichuan, is a documentary film maker. He got back to Beijing after living in the USA from 1992 to 2004. On the afternoon of 22 February 2006, he was arrested by State Security agents. No one has ever said what he was accused of. He was freed nearly five months later, on 11 July 2006.

Number 19 (June 2008), “borders” - back cover: The Ortigara frontier; Cuba’s boundaries; the border between Iraq and Syria; the frontier between Serbs and Albanians in Gorazdevac, Kosovo; the frontier between Sunnites and Shiites at Al-Hassa, Saudi Arabia; the boundary of SOS Central Station, in Milan; the Rafah border between the Gaza Strip and Egypt; borders in the Schengen Area; the border between Bethlehem and Jerusalem. - “Our homeland is the whole world / our law is freedom / and a thought...” (Italian anarchist song, 1904) - “Crossing frontiers; loving them, too, since they define a reality, thus rescuing it from vagueness” (Claudio Magris) - “On the map - a place’s exposed / ... / The land is split - a pole ax / Is the border pole.” (Marina Tsvetaeva) - **contents:** diary pages from Cuba, El Salvador, Syria, Gaza, Ukraine, Kosovo, Saudi Arabia, the United States, Italy, France, China, Russia, Palestine; *Borders*, by Laura Zanetti; *Departures I*, and *Departures II*, by Yannis Ritsos; *The stranger*, by Marco Saya; *Always on the other side as well*, by Claudio Magris; *If the air was free...*, by Mario Rigoni Stern; *False directions*, by Giorgio Caproni; *Rafah*, by Laila El-Haddad; *On the map - a place’s exposed*, by Marina Tsvetaeva; *The world of yesterday*, by Stefan Zweig; *To cross the border*, by Ryszard Kapuscinski.

Number 20 (November 2008), “memories” - contents: *Memories*, by Massimo Parizzi; *Tangiers, my birthplace*, by Jihane Bouziane; *The house where I was born*, by Maria Granati; *Progress and memory*, by Jacques Revel; *The fullness of memory*, by Giorgio Morale; *The art of oblivion*, by Andrea Inglese; *As autumn falls*, by Giovanni Quessep; *Palestinian ruins*, by Jonathan Boyarin; *Remembering our Nakba*, by Rana Qumsiyeh; *War is a state of mind*, by Uri Avnery; *Let’s keep an eye on our humanity*, by Massimo Parizzi; *From Palermo to Milan*, by Attilio Manganò; *My first disappointment*, by Renata Borghi; *Light and shadows*, by Marina Massenz; *History begins in reverse*, by Marco Saya; *November 4, 1966*, by Laura Zanetti; *I was twenty*, by Nives Fedrigotti; *The personal sense of history*, by Oksana Kis; *My yesterdays*, by Maria Ofelia Zuniga; *Addirittura*, by Johanna Bishop; *But with my camera...*, by Veronica Khokhlova; *Old memories*, by Hao Wu; *The memory of contemporaneity*, by Roberto Bordiga

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