

OPINION

AN AMERICAN IN... SANSEPOLCRO?

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Contributing Writer

I'm here! Or there, depending on which country and time zone you're in. I still can't believe the trip is real. The houses are the different colors of sunshine at different times of the day, the roofs are weathered terracotta, and the fields are green and golden brown. The colors are less vibrant here—more delicate, dustier, like the rich tints of a fresco veiled by time. Every country house seems to have a vineyard and a silver-green olive grove on the back hill. I like the city, although it's difficult to retreat from the crowded streets and find peace: everyone's windows are open because of the heat, and I can hear a baby being consoled by his mother, kids shouting in the streets, the music from the next palazzo over, cars and Vespas, and lots of other unidentifiable sounds. It's poetic now, but it might not be when I'm trying to get homework done.

I've read that the Italians prefer beauty to utility. Judging from the fields and fields of jubilant yellow sunflowers, I'd have to agree. They may be a productive crop, but the view must be one of the main incentives for planting these sun-turners (or followers), as these flowers are called here. Unfortunately, we're a bit too late to see the fields in their full beauty. Some of them are still gorgeous, but most of the

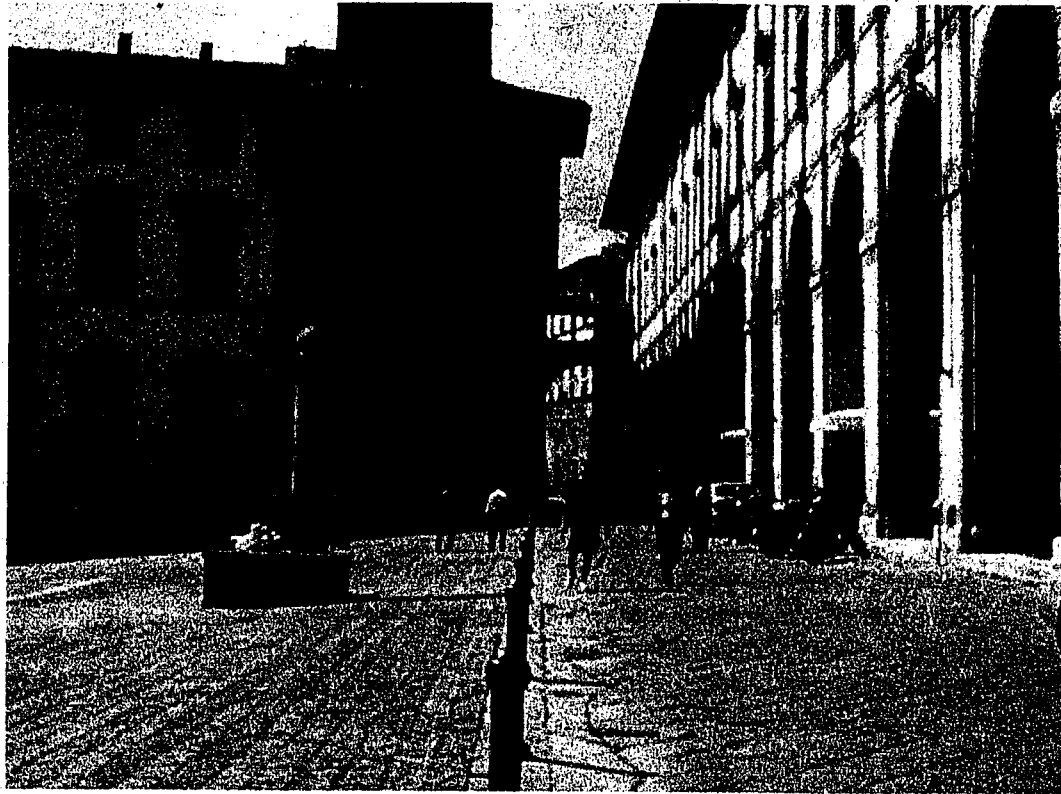


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plants have drooping brown heads, heavy with nutty seeds.

The bits of culture I have brought along feel odd here. I was expecting to cling to my e e cummings and Copeland's Appalachian Spring as reminders of home, but these American icons aren't as meaningful in Italy. The optimism, big skies and open spaces I heard in the music and poetry last week are

hard to find. When I open my eyes, I see narrow cobblestone streets, faded stucco, and bicycles. Even so, American music is everywhere. I get more irritated each time I hear English lyrics and pop tunes I recognize, especially the Michael Jackson tributes in book and music stores. Most of the movies and TV shows playing everywhere are originally in English and have

Italian voiceovers. No wonder people dislike American pop culture, since it seems to dominate European perspectives in all the worst ways. Why can't we seem to export any of our best art and music as well?

All the portions are smaller here: I expected more moderate portions of food, but this moderation seems to apply to much more. I hope American consumption of toothpaste isn't another example of our consumerism. The whole "buy in bulk" Sam's Club mentality is not apparent in the stores. Coming from a large family, I'm used to giant shampoo bottles, jumbo cereal boxes, and big toothpaste tubes. But with the birthrate as low as it is here in Italy, perhaps there aren't many families with more than two or three children. (Apparently the average number of kids in a family is 1.2)

We started classes this morning. Our Italian teacher is excellent; we spent most of our time talking, and I had to scramble to get my notes in—quite a relief after staring at the ceiling during Spanish. I'm sure the smaller class size helps. Our Italian culture course sounds like a lot of fun, involving a lot of interaction with the community. It's almost time for the literature/history class now, so I'll sign off. Ciao.

ATTENTION

MEREDITH STUDENTS!

Do you like to complain?
Starting next week, the Herald will start its new complaint column. We will be accepting 2-3 sentence complaints from students—complaints about absolutely anything that has to do with campus life. Make sure to use appropriate language, and do not specifically identify individuals. For example, instead of saying "Will the annoying girl in 323 Faircloth PLEASE shut up?" say "Will the annoying girl down the hall PLEASE shut up" Feel free to complain about ANYTHING or ANYONE that is bothering you: just remember to be subtle and not to use vulgar language.

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