

**POLITICAL AND AESTHETIC VISION:
THE PERIODICAL *SUD: GIORNALE DI CULTURA*
(1945-47) AND ANNA MARIA ORTESE FROM
“DOLENTE SPLENDORE DEL VICOLO” AND
“ROMA, LA CAPITALE” TO *IL MARE NON BAGNA
NAPOLI* (1953)**

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Sommario

L'articolo riconsidera la portata estetica e politica di Sud: Giornale di cultura (1945-47), soffermandosi anche su alcuni contributi che Anna Maria Ortese ha apportato alla rivista. Il saggio colloca Sud all'interno del più ampio panorama delle riviste fiorite nell'immediato dopoguerra, mettendone in luce i tratti distintivi. Segue un'analisi critica – inevitabilmente selettiva e non esaustiva – dei sette fascicoli della rivista, con attenzione alle sue dichiarazioni estetiche e politiche nonché ai contributi fondamentali nei campi del reportage, della poesia, della traduzione e della critica d'arte, letteraria e cinematografica, anche in prospettiva transculturale. Una lettura ravvicinata del racconto ortesiano “Dolente splendore del vicolo” e del reportage “Roma, la capitale: Corrispondenza di Anna Maria Ortese”, insieme a una discussione conclusiva dei paratesti aggiunti dall'autrice all'edizione del 1994 de Il mare non bagna Napoli, corrobora l'ipotesi che Sud abbia rappresentato un luogo cruciale nel dibattito politico ed estetico del secondo dopoguerra italiano e che Ortese, almeno fino alla pubblicazione de Il mare non bagna Napoli nel 1953, sia rimasta coerente con i principi ideologici della rivista (ad esempio universalismo, realismo, e utopia).

Keywords: *Sud*, periodici culturali italiani post-1945, questione meridionale, utopismo marxista, Anna Maria Ortese

“Ci allontaniamo meditabondi sbalorditi sulla strada dell’Ovest”
[We move away, thoughtful and astonished, on the Western road]
(Anna Maria Ortese, “La storia dell’anima è finita”
[The Story of the Soul Has Ended])

1. Introduction

This article aims to reassess the aesthetic and political significance of the cultural magazine *Sud: Giornale di cultura* [*South: Magazine of Culture*], published in seven issues in Naples from 15 November 1945 to September 1947 under the direction of Pasquale Prunas (Di Costanzo, 1994)¹. While one reason why this magazine is relevant today is that Anna Maria Ortese – a major figure in twentieth-century Italian and European literature – was one of its editors (alongside Luigi Compagnone, Raffaele La Capria, Luigi Incoronato, and others) and published several of her works in its pages, *Sud* is a corpus worth studying in its own right, as a relatively underexplored object of research². It is striking, according to La Capria and Giuseppe Di Costanzo, for the modernity of its language and arguments, its iconographic effectiveness, and typographical care, but also for its broader vocation, which is not simply Neapolitan but European (La Capria, 1992:21; Di Costanzo, 1994:11). Its editors, as Cathryn Baril also observes, were not, in fact, localists; rather, they reconnected the very concept of ‘Europe’ to Naples, a city that had embraced the Enlightenment and had long been permeated by Mitteleuropean culture (Baril, 2021:131).

Naples had been regarded as a “selected place of southern difference” in contrast to the civilisation of northern Italy, and it had long been a fundamental stop on the Grand Tour from the seventeenth century onwards (Baril, 2021:131). While, following the Bourbon repression of 1799, the Restoration, and national unification in 1861,

¹ Quotations from *Sud* are henceforth cited parenthetically, using the abbreviation “S”, followed by the year and issue number (in Roman and Latin numerals respectively), and the page number, all in brackets. Translations in the article are my own (unless otherwise indicated through quotation marks and references), and italics are as in the original texts.

² Among the specific writings on *Sud*, we may mention: Di Costanzo, 1994; La Capria, 1992; La Capria, 2003; Milani, 2016; Baril, 2021; on the *Sud* group, particularly in relation to the figure of Domenico Rea, now also: Farnetti, 2025.

Neapolitan culture had largely retreated into itself and its dialect – idealising its particularity and fostering local populism – the young intellectuals of *Sud* sought instead a deprovincialisation of Neapolitan culture. They pursued this by analysing the phenomenon of the Second World War and its social effects in both Naples and Europe – spaces in urgent need of reconstruction not only materially but also morally (Baril, 2021:132). La Capria writes that the interest of the *Sud* group in “scrittori e poeti d’Oltralpe” [writers and poets from beyond the Alps] responded to a desire instilled in them by Elio Vittorini and Cesare Pavese: to break free from a tradition that had become localist, in order to open up to the reality of being ‘Europeans’, and to discover voices that resonated with their idealism³.

Therefore, one must not underestimate the effort of those “quattro ragazzi ancora alle prime armi, senza una lira in tasca e con le idee non del tutto chiare” [four boys still green, without a penny in their pockets and with not entirely clear ideas], who had just emerged from the shelters of the most bombed city on the Italian peninsula during the Second World War – a city that was crucial for military strategy because of its port, from which ships carrying soldiers and supplies to Africa departed, and which exemplified the dynamics of violence in a context of total war, between incessant Allied bombings (since 1940) and Nazi reprisals (La Capria, 1992:21)⁴. Although *Sud* undoubtedly possesses unique formal characteristics, it is important to consider it in the context of a period immediately following the end of the Second World War that saw the publication of numerous cultural periodicals in Italy, many of which shared similar trends.

Elisabetta Mondello’s study, in particular – although it does not examine *Sud* specifically – is useful for understanding how the magazines that emerged in this historical moment were shaped by a vision that was never purely aesthetic (in the sense of an *ars gratia artis*, of a pure yearning for beauty), but also political, animated by a desire to give concrete visibility to the utopian dream of reconstructing a new

³ “Tutti gli articoli di questi sette numeri di ‘Sud’ alludono ad un riscatto dell’uomo, e più ancora ad un cambiamento della morale pubblica e di quella privata, al superamento dei vecchi vizi italiani, a un’imprecisata ma sinceramente agognata Rivoluzione Spirituale” [All the articles in these seven issues of “Sud” allude to a redemption of mankind, and even more to a change in public and private morality, to the overcoming of old Italian vices, to an unspecified but sincerely longed-for Spiritual Revolution]. La Capria, 2021:17; 22).

⁴ See also Gribaudo, 2005; Gargiulo, 2018.

socio-cultural order (Mondello, 2012:235). Mondello explains how the declaration of war on 10 June 1940 represented, for many young Italian intellectuals – those belonging to the so-called “middle generation” – the beginning of a phase that led them, as Franco Fortini and Giaime Pintor famously noted, to participate in the final phase of Fascism and to move from the private sphere into the public sphere. Mondello describes this as a radical transformation that caused them to rethink their relationship with Fascism, to confirm an anti-Fascism they had more or less quietly practiced, or at least to confront the drama of war (Mondello, 2012:231-232). However, while the outbreak of war promoted this transformation among Italian intellectuals, it was not entirely a rupture. Interest in public affairs had already been evident among Italian intellectuals from North to South by the late 1930s, giving rise to several magazine projects – from the Milanese *Corrente* to the Roman *La Ruota* but also *Lo Stato operaio*, the PCI's magazine printed in Paris – which expressed youthful malaise and existential and ideological disorientation (Mondello, 2012:233). The experiences of these Italian magazines thus reveal, even before the conflict began, tendencies that also appear in *Sud*: alongside a condemnation of the contemporary state of affairs and a recognition of the deterioration of bourgeois European civilisation, there emerged ‘Americanism’ (the dream of a ‘new world’ opposed to the old one); a ‘poetics of commitment’, in which literature coincides with a politics that encompasses the social and cultural spheres in the broadest sense; a need for realism; an interest in regionalist questions; and a search both for the development of Benedetto Croce's idealist and anti-positivist tradition and, on the other hand, a more or less explicit attempt to disengage from the liberal tradition (Mondello, 2012:233).

So *Sud* (as is naturally evident from its pages) is grafted onto pre-existing cultural models and is specifically part of that wave of magazines and pamphlets that were born with an almost paroxysmal rhythm in the months following the Liberation of 25 April 1945 (with the end of censorship). These were printed in the context of paper shortages and considerable economic hardship – factors that contributed to their irregular publication and, as in the case of *Sud*, to their often ephemeral character⁵. With these magazines, *Sud* shared an

⁵ Among the magazines let us recall the Roman *Città*, *Cosmopolita*, *Il Costume politico e letterario*, *La cultura sovietica*, *La Domenica*, *Idea*, *Mercurio*, *Nuova Antologia*, *La Nuova*

interdisciplinary orientation that translated into a wide-ranging mix of political commentary, cultural criticism, short fiction, translations, and philosophical or literary essays. The debate unfolding in its pages – in this specific case, marked by a Marxist tendency – continued at least until 1947, when the complex of hopes, ideas, and myths that had characterised the immediate post-war period dramatically collapsed following the rupture of anti-Fascist unity with the expulsion of the Left from the government. This was the beginning of the ‘ten winters’, which, according to Fortini, marked the disillusionment of the ‘middle generation’ – a generation that witnessed the collapse of the illusion of a unified reconstruction of a ‘new society’ (Mondello, 2012:233, 250)⁶. By then, however, *Sud* had already folded, and the bitterness over its ephemeral nature would be voiced by Ortese – in tones that, as is well known, irritated her former associates – in the final text included in her 1953 collection *Il mare non bagna Napoli*, caustically titled ‘Il silenzio della ragione’ [The Silence of Reason]⁷.

In the remainder of this article, I will (I) examine the traces of *Sud*'s ideological foundations, both aesthetic and political (with particular attention to its poetics); (II) highlight its transcultural vocation in relation to the devastation caused by the war and its call for a reconstitution of European civilisation on new foundations; and (III) analyse several of Ortese's contributions to *Sud* – specifically the story

Europa, Poesia, Prosa, Risorgimento; the Florentine *Il Mondo, Il Ponte, Società, and Belfagor*; the Catanese *La nuova civiltà*; the Neapolitan *Aretusa, Quaderni della Critica, Acropoli*; the Barese *Il nuovo Risorgimento*; the Milanese *Costume, Società Nuova, Nord-Sud, Il '45, and Il Politecnico* (Mondello, 2012:233).

⁶ Fortini wrote in what would become his Milan: ‘In quegli anni gli inverni furono o mi parvero molto lunghi. [...] Erano inverni profondi, faticosi. Le rovine che avevamo intorno come l'allegoria di un riscatto possibile sparivano per dar luogo ad una città opulenta e meschina. Spariva l'Italia popolare e orgogliosa delle sue piaghe che un tempo aveva scoperto e amato se stessa fra resistenza e dopoguerra; [...] un'altra Italia veniva avanti, avviluppata nel cinismo dei settimanali, bruciata dalla speculazione, coperta di manifesti, piena di colore e di stanchezza coloniale’ [In those years, the winters were – or seemed to me – very long. [...] They were deep, exhausting winters. The ruins that surrounded us, once an allegory of possible redemption, disappeared, giving way to an opulent and petty city. The Italy that had been popular and proud of its wounds, that had once discovered and loved itself between the Resistance and the post-war years, disappeared; [...] another Italy was emerging, wrapped in the cynicism of weekly magazines, scorched by speculation, plastered with posters, full of colour and colonial fatigue]. (Fortini, 1957:11-12)

⁷ It is worth recalling Haas' notes, which report how these pages would be held against Ortese for the rest of her life (especially after the 1994 reprint), not only by her former friends from *Sud*, but also by voices entirely unrelated to that context, such as Erri De Luca (Haas, 2007:335).

“Dolente splendore del vicolo” [The Painful Splendour of the Alley] and her reportage “Roma, la capitale: Corrispondenza di Anna Maria Ortese” [Rome, the Capital: A Correspondence by Anna Maria Ortese] – in order to show how her adherence to *Sud*'s ideological principles profoundly shaped her literary style, at least until the publication of *Il mare non bagna Napoli*.

2. The Political Aesthetics of *Sud*

Starting with Pasquale Prunas's “Notice” on the front page of the first issue of *Sud*, the political intent behind the magazine's aesthetics is immediately evident. In fact, Prunas, born in Cagliari in 1924 but residing with his family in Monte di Dio since 1944⁸, explains how *Sud* originated from what he defines as a “spiritual need” in the aftermath of a war that sowed death and destruction. The need he identifies is not only for a material reconstruction of both Europe and Naples but also for a reworking of the traumatic experience, in order to learn from the violence endured and avert the danger of stagnation and repression. He writes that blood is wasted and can only be “un limite estremo d'angoscia” [an extreme limit of anguish] if it is not used for pedagogical and moral purposes (S I:1:1). The magazine was therefore founded to fulfill a “social and political” duty and to promote a moral revolution capable of restoring values that had been forgotten in the animalising interlude of war. It serves to vent the survivors' desperation and their “ansia di salvezza” [anxiety for salvation], thus aiming to create a collective body that produces a critique of historical reality (S I:1:2). The result is intended to be a magazine that allows for a re-examination of the human condition, or a “return” to it, expressing all people regardless of class, gender, or other differences – the living as, through them, the dead. In this article, Prunas also specifies the international spirit of the group that, together with him, gave life to the

⁸ A brief biographical note on Prunas (1924-1985) is contained in (Ortese, 2006:145-146). Born in Cagliari, after a period in Naples with the *Gruppo Sud* and the promotion of various other cultural initiatives (including the founding of the weekly magazine *Città* in 1948, *Giustizia Democratica* in 1949, and the *Circolo Napoletano del Cinema* in 1950), he moved first to Milan, where in 1953 he created Italy's first weekly photojournalism magazine, *Le Ore*, and published the book *Incenso e polvere: Le immagini di ieri per il giudizio di oggi* [*Incense and Dust: Images of Yesterday for Today's Judgment*], with a preface by Alberto Moravia, and then to Rome, where he worked in cinema, contributed to the daily newspaper *Il Messaggero*, and engaged in various graphic projects.

magazine, explaining how their southern identity is inseparable from their “condizione di europei” [condition of Europeans], Europeans who know “che lo spirito non ha pesi e bilancie” [that the spirit has no weights and scales] and not even “latitudine” [latitude], even when this spirit requires an almost total renewal (S I:1:2). Similarly, Luigi Compagnone, in the article “Essi se ne vanno da Napoli” [They are Leaving Naples], also printed on the front page of the first issue of the magazine, underscores how *Sud* is deeply anchored to the Neapolitan space, yet at the same time has an international character: Naples, a city with a history of social injustice, poverty, and emigration⁹, was not the only reality afflicted by air raids, hunger and disease – Stalingrad, Warsaw, Budapest, and Paris were similarly devastated by a war that demonstrated how there are “degli uomini vivi ovunque” [*living people everywhere*], equally suffering in the dramas of history (S I:1:1).

Sud therefore aims to document nothing less than the universality of the experiences of those who lived through the Second World War, witnessing the degeneration of European imperialism, the rise of totalitarian regimes (Fascism, Nazism, Stalinism), and the use of technology against entire civilian populations¹⁰. In this framework, the art that the *Sud* group seeks to cultivate is an art that does not operate outside of history and that is realistic – overcoming, for example, the stereotypical images of myth and folklore in the representation of Naples and offering as objective a vision as possible of its present reality, of what Gianni Teulada (alias Pasquale Prunas), in the article ‘Scoperta di Napoli’ [Discovery of Naples], calls a “purgatorio in terra” [purgatory on earth] (S I:1:6). For Tommaso Giglio¹¹ – author of

⁹ Let us at least remember that Naples had been the epicentre of the Southern Question since the time of the Italian Unification. See (Nitti, De Masi, 2004).

¹⁰ To follow these developments, the classic reference is Arendt’s extensive treatment of the subject: Arendt, 1973.

¹¹ Tommaso Giglio (1923-1987) was born in Pontecorvo, in Ciociaria, but attended high school in Naples, where he became involved in the Neapolitan intelligentsia – first through the Gruppi Universitari Fascisti (GUF), and later with *Sud* and Radio Napoli. He began his career in journalism by travelling up the peninsula alongside the American armies with Totò Ghirelli, eventually settling in Milan to work at *L’Unità*, and later at *L’Europeo*, where he served as editor-in-chief from 1966. He helped shape a generation of investigative journalists and was instrumental in launching the career of Oriana Fallaci, sending her to report from Vietnam and Mexico. Giglio was also a translator, rendering into Italian the works of T.S. Eliot (translated together with La Capria) and other British and American authors, including John B. Scott Haldane, Lewis Carroll, Oscar Wilde, Joseph Jay Deiss, and Pamela Moore. See: Fini, 2021.

various poems for *Sud* ('Ballata d'amore e di morte' [Ballad of Love and Death], 'Lamento di una ragazza per uno che è morto nel fiume' [Lament of a Girl for One Who Died in the River], and 'Come l'uomo che si trova al bivio' [Like the Man at the Crossroads]), as well as Italian translations of James Agee ("Rapido transito" [Rapid Transit]) and Paul Éluard ("Il cimitero dei pazzi" [The Cemetery of Fools]) – art, and especially poetry, must be understood as "lotta, anche contro se stessi, contro quello che rimane in noi di un recente passato" [struggle, even against oneself, against what remains in us of a recent past], as a form of a cultural and moral commitment that seeks not abstraction and allusiveness but the "cronaca" [chronicle], the "fatto reale" [real fact], the "grido degli uomini e del mondo insieme" [the cry of people and the world together]¹².

Similarly, Compagnone in the preface to his "Cronaca" [Chronicle] – opened by the verse also referenced by Ortese in "Il silenzio della ragione" – argues that aesthetics must document "fame e disperazione, malattia e miseria e vergogna" [hunger and despair, disease and misery and shame], allowing the hermetic experience of the past to unravel "nell'ansia di un discorso qualsiasi" [in the anxiety of any discourse], remaining in any case, "un grido di operai di scrittori di pezzenti" [a cry of workers of writers of beggars], a voice "atta a rendere l'inferno di fame e di angoscia di quel primo dopoguerra" [capable of rendering the hell of hunger and anguish of that first post-war period] (S I:3-4:1). In the subsequent insert "Cadaveri squisiti" [Exquisite Corpses], Compagnone reinforces this idea, writing that art can no longer alienate itself from the "mondo vivo degli uomini" [living world of people], as had been the case with the Surrealists, "dosatori sapienti di effetti e giochi sintattici" [skillful dispensers of effects and syntactic games] (S I:5-6:1). While they locked themselves "nella torre d'avorio della loro impotenza umana" [in the ivory tower of their human impotence] as the world around them "crollava" [collapsed], the aesthete of the present must "collaborare a preparare un mondo umano, meno soggetto all'antica schiavitù del denaro e del pane" [collaborate in preparing a human world, one less subject to the ancient slavery of money and bread] (S I:5-6:1). Commenting on photographs of subjects from Southern Italy – women and children in a visible state of degradation

¹² The article in which Giglio expresses himself in these terms is titled "Momento polemico della poesia" [A Polemical Moment in Poetry] (S I:3-4:1-2).

and affliction – printed alongside the verses of Alfonso Gatto's poem "Alla mia terra" [To My Homeland] (1943)¹³, Prunas, in the insert "Umiliati, offesi" [Humiliated, Offended], adds that art is indecorous if it is detached from the pain of others, if it does not follow a precept of piety (S I:5-6:1).

The fundamental principle of realism and documentarism affirmed in *Sud*, however, is not accompanied by feelings of resignation or apocalyptic despair in the face of reality, but – as Manrico Fiore¹⁴ writes in the essay "Apocalisse?" [Apocalypse?] – by the "incrollabile certezza che il male metafisicamente non può prevalere" [unshakable certainty that metaphysically evil cannot prevail], and therefore that there can be, with an explicit reference to Antonio Gramsci's interpretation of Croce, a redemption within history (S I:5-6:2). Aesthetics must pursue a revolutionism that is "storicamente critico, scientifico, cioè quanto meno è possibile irrazionale, mistico, fideistico" [historically critical, scientific, that is, as little irrational, mystical, or fideistic as possible], even if it is grounded in a teleological creed that is, in itself, fideistic (S I:5-6:2). This is consistent with Prunas's position in the editorial "Gli intellettuali, nel Mezzogiorno" [The Intellectuals, in Southern Italy], which opens the issue of 20 June 1946, where he condemns the "oscuro reazionarismo della classe intellettuale meridionale" [obscure reactionism of the southern intellectual class] that Gramsci had already observed, and professes faith in overcoming the fracture between social classes – between the bourgeoisie on the one side and the popular masses on the other side – as well as in levelling the disproportions between the North and the South of the peninsula, while avoiding cultural centralisation (S I:7:1).

¹³ Gatto (1908-1981), a poet traditionally associated with Hermeticism, emerged with his collection *Isola* (1932), in which a conflict between the self and history is already evident – the island serving as a monadic metaphor for the self, chosen in a desire for escape and liberation. A participant in the Resistance and a member of the Communist Party after the Liberation (which he left in 1951), he was also active in cinema, contributing to Pasolini's *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* (*The Gospel according to St. Matthew*, 1964) and *Teorema* (*Theorem*, 1968), Francesco Rosi's *Cadaveri eccellenti* (*Illustrious Corpses*, 1976) and Mario Monicelli's *Caro Michele* (*Dear Michele*, 1976). For a reading of Gatto's poem, portraying Naples' "body" as doubly tortured by the ancient evil of poverty and the new of the Anglo-American bombings of 1942 and 1943, see Sabbatino, 2023:63-64. Also quoted here: Taffon, 2007: 811-813; Pasquini, 2003:235.

¹⁴ A figure about whom little information is available, he was a translator of Benjamin Constant (1950) and the author of *Ponte sul Volturmo* (1950) and *La guerra, la pace* (with a foreword by Luigi Compagnone, 1983).

Aesthetics must be “morale, costume, umanità” [moral, custom, humanity], and by acknowledging a reality in which human beings have been reduced to beasts (in the South even before the war, but even more so during and immediately after it), it must promote redemption within the framework of an egalitarianism yet to be established – this is also the core of Alberto Jacoviello’s contribution (S I:7:2)¹⁵, entitled “Cafoni: come noi” [Yokels, Like Us], which quotes Carlo Levi’s *Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli* [*Christ Stopped at Eboli*], written in 1935-36 but published in 1945¹⁶.

To conclude the discussion of *Sud*’s political aesthetics – which clearly aspires towards a Marxist universalism that is nevertheless not opposed to the recognition of particularity¹⁷ – one need only consider the famous “Lettera al fratello” [Letter to my Brother] by the partisan Giaime Pintor¹⁸, who died in 1943 in Castelnuovo di Volturmo while trying to cross the lines to join the Resistance. The letter, partially

¹⁵ Javoviello (1920-1996) distinguished himself as a foreign correspondent for *l'Unità* e *la Repubblica*. Among his works are: *Appuntamento a Suez* (Rome: Edizioni di cultura sociale, 1952), *La coesistenza difficile: Otto anni di viaggi attraverso la diplomazia dell'Est e dell'Ovest* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1961), *Cuba frutto bomba* (Rome: L'Attico, 1964), *Capire la Cina* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1972), *Lettere dalla nuova Russia: I primi anni dell'era di Gorbaciov* (Milan: A. Mondadori, 1987), and *Nel regime fascista* (Rionero in Vulture: Calice, 1996).

¹⁶ By providing an ethnological portrayal of the Lucanian peasantry in his novel, Levi conveys the perspective of the people he observes: “Noi non siamo cristiani, non siamo uomini, non siamo considerati come uomini, ma bestie, bestie da soma, e ancora meno che le bestie, i fruschi, i fruscicchi, che vivono la loro libera vita diabolica o angelica, perché noi dobbiamo invece subire il mondo dei cristiani, che sono di là dall'orizzonte, e sopportare il peso e il confronto” [“We’re not Christians, we’re not human beings; we’re not thought of as men but simply as beasts, beasts of burden, or even less than beasts, mere creatures of the wild. They at least live for better or for worse, like angels or demons, in a world of their own, while we have to submit to the world of Christians, beyond the horizon, to carry its weight and to stand comparison with it”]. Levi, 1990:iv; Levi, 1964:1-2; Bronzini, 1996:32.

¹⁷ See also the essay by Raffaele Franchini, future university professor of philosophy, titled “Cultura, come?” [Culture, How?], (S I:7:2). A student of Croce, Franchini (1920-1990) was particularly interested in the question of progress from an anti-Enlightenment perspective. Among other topics, he wrote about political developments in the post-1945 period (*Cronache politiche di un lungo dopoguerra 1945-1960*, 1960), on progress (*Il progresso: Storia di un'idea*, 1960), on Vico (*Giambattista Vico e la storia della dialettica*, 1967), and on Croce (*Croce interprete di Hegel*, 1964; *La teoria della storia di Benedetto Croce*, 1966; *Intervista su Croce*, Naples: SEN, 1978).

¹⁸ Pintor (1919-1943), journalist, writer, and translator, was an admirer of German literature, particularly the work of Rainer Maria Rilke, which he translated for Einaudi in 1942. He was known for his anti-Fascist commitment and his connections with intellectuals around Einaudi, including Elio Vittorini, Leone Ginzburg, Felice Balbo, Cesare Pavese, and Carlo Muscetta. For a detailed analysis of his profile, see Monica Biasolo. 2010. *Giaime Pintor und die deutsche Kultur: Auf der Suche nach komplementären Stimmen*. Heidelberg: Winter.

reproduced on the first page of the January 1947 issue of *Sud*, is used by the *Sud* group to affirm how the Second World War transformed both Pintor and themselves – a transformation born of a much more visceral relationship with death, which politicised them, just as politics had politicised, according to Pintor, the last generation of German Romantics (S II:1:1). The declared aim of *Sud*, through Pintor, is to pursue a political aesthetics that contributes “alla liberazione di tutti” [to the liberation of everyone], since “le rivoluzioni riescono proprio quando le preparano i poeti ed i pittori” [revolutions succeed precisely when poets and painters prepare them] (S II:1:1).

3. A Transcultural Magazine

It has been mentioned that *Sud*, although animated by intellectuals working within the Neapolitan context, was a magazine that aspired to transcend a localist tradition and to reconnect Neapolitan culture with a broader European one. In this sense, it was a transcultural magazine, whose texts invited a process of familiarisation both with the stark Neapolitan reality and with that of other European places (and, in some cases, of the Americas), which at that time could be known almost exclusively through indirect means¹⁹. *Sud* was transcultural in the contemporary sense of the term: it fostered the idea that transculturality is not the privilege of an elite, but must be within everyone's reach (Gildenan Nordin, Hansen, Zamorano Llena, 2013:ix-x). His dissemination of European culture – more or less contemporary – including poetry, prose, painting, theatre, and cinema, responded to the need for a political aesthetics capable of reviving, on a shared basis, the fortunes of a civilisation no longer merely perceived as in decline (following Oswald Spengler's diagnosis from the early 1920s), but one that had been quite literally reduced to rubble. Thus, while it was publishing, in preview, chapters from a central work of post-1945 Italian literature – Vasco Pratolini's novel *Cronaca familiare* ([*Family Chronicle*], 1947)²⁰ – and while it dedicated columns to Italian

¹⁹ On transculturalism: Gildenan Nordin, Hansen, Zamorano Llena, 2013:x-xi.

²⁰ An intimate and autobiographical text, but also political – not only because of its setting during the Fascist era, but also due to its focus on class conflicts. The text is mentioned in Ortese's *Il mare non bagna Napoli*, where, in “Il silenzio della ragione”, the venture of *Sud* is recounted: “Il Prunas aveva stampato, o si preparava a stampare su quel giornale di sua proprietà, che uscì in sette numeri, ognuno dei quali fu un'avventura, e costò vendite clandestine di oggetti

Neorealist cinema, reviewing films by Alessandro Blasetti, Luchino Visconti, Vittorio De Sica, and Roberto Rossellini²¹, *Sud* also presented a remarkable variety of authors and works drawn from various European traditions: from Russian to French, from English (and Anglo-American) to German, from neo-Greek to Spanish and Czech. In doing so, it pursued the goal of identifying voices – whether already politically kindred or made so through reinterpretation – for the group's universalist project.

Universalism is articulated, for example, through a poem by Ivan Turgenev, which asserts that Christ – an apt icon of both suffering and socialism – is present in every human being (“Allora soltanto compresi che proprio quel volto, simile a tutti i volti umani, era il volto di Cristo” [Then only did I understand that that very face, like all human faces, was the face of Christ]) (S I:2:1). A letter by Mikhail Gershenzon to Vyacheslav Ivanov reinforces the idea – already present in Prunas's editorial “Crisi del cattolicesimo” [Crisis of Catholicism] (S I:2:1) – that it is worthwhile to recover from Catholicism at least the universal notion of suffering, if not its metaphysical impulse. The transition from the Russian to the Neapolitan imagination is brief, for Turgenev's Christ appears, in La Capria's poem “Cristo sepolto” [Christ Buried], as a Dostoevskian or proletarian à la Blok image “nelle oscure gallerie della metropolitana, a Napoli” [in the dark tunnels of the subway, in Naples], in 1943, together with “tutti i poveri, i senza casa, i paria, che vengono in questa grotta a nascondere la loro miseria” [all the poor, the homeless, the pariahs, who come to this cave to hide their misery] (S

familiari, o pegni, o cambiali, e spesso collette fra i redattori più fortunati, il primo saggio in Italia sulla poesia inglese contemporanea; il primo saggio di Sartre sull'Esistenzialismo; le prime pagine di *Cronaca familiare*, di Pratolini; l'atroce *Cronaca di Napoli*, del Compagnone; certe poesie moderne e allucinate del Gaedkens, ch'era un italo-tedesco” [“Prunas, in his little magazine, which had seven issues, each one an adventure, and each one published thanks to the secret sale of some family heirloom, a loan, a promissory note, or a collection taken up among the wealthier of his contributors, had printed, or would print, the first essay in Italy on contemporary English poetry, Sartre's first essay on existentialism, the first pages of Vasco Pratolini's *Family Chronicle*, Compagnone's atrocious *News of Naples*, some of the astonishing modern poetry by the German-Italian Gaedkens”] (Ortese, 1994:113; Ortese, 2018:118-119).

²¹ The cinema of these authors that was regarded as a means of moral commitment (primarily against Fascism, the very repression Neorealism opposed). See also here: Haaland, 2012:3.

I:2:3)²². Mario Stefanile's essay on Émile Zola²³, "Poesia e verità in Emilio Zola" [Poetry and Truth in Emilio Zola], by extending the gaze to French culture²⁴, is instead essential in affirming *Sud*'s universalism and its attention to the worldly suffering of human subjects through a model of mimetic and naturalistic literature – a literature capable of reproducing a "mondo dove noi possiamo entrare quando ci piaccia" [world that we can enter when we like], "il mondo dei nostri giorni di cronaca, il mondo così come ci appare senza che noi dobbiamo compiere sforzi per impadronircene" [the world of our chronicled days, the world as it appears to us without our having to make any effort to take possession of it] (S I:2:2). It matters little that Zola's model was originally intended to represent the Paris of the Second Empire, the period between 1850 and 1870²⁵; his paradigm of artistically objective writing remains fully relevant to present needs.

Universalism, suffering, and objectivity/realism are characteristics identified within European culture as a response to a historical catastrophe – the Second World War – which European literature itself had in many ways already foreshadowed. This is evident, for example, in the novel *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939) by the British author Christopher Isherwood, translated into Italian by Longanesi in 1944 and reviewed by La Capria, where one finds a sense of 'crisis', the discontent of the working class and petty bourgeoisie, the rise of the Nazis – in short, the "patologiche condizioni della società moderna" [pathological conditions of modern society] set against the "tragico e caotico" [tragic and chaotic] background of post-war Berlin (S I:2:6). English culture – of which La Capria was one of the foremost connoisseurs within the

²² Here also quoted: La Capria, 1992:17. Of particular interest is the use of the term 'pariah' in its broader sense, referring to those excluded or marginalised (alienated) within the social system; in this context, the pariah condition affects everyone and stems from a total war that has rendered civilians as expendable elements. See Agamben, 2020.

²³ Mario Stefanile (1910-1977), journalist (notably for *Il Mattino*), literary and drama critic, published anthologies of Neapolitan literature (*Antologia di scrittori napoletani contemporanei*, Alpignano: A. Tallone, 1973), Campanian literature (*Narratori di Campania*, Milan: Mursia, 1968), and numerous critical articles on, for example, Roberto Murolo, Giuseppe Ungaretti, Eduardo De Filippo, Ada Negri, and Corrado Alvaro.

²⁴ Also represented in *Sud* through the poetry of deportees such as Jean Mercenac and André Porquet, as well as Stéphane Mallarmé – a poet who disarticulated discourse to reveal the crisis of the modern world.

²⁵ Recall his cycle *Les Rougon-Macquart* (1871-1893).

Sud group, thanks to his contacts with William Weaver²⁶ – had already produced earlier voices that denounced the atrocities of war and thus offered a model for *Sud*: the poets of the First World War, such as Isaac Rosenberg, Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, and Wilfred Owen, who, according to La Capria, had “levato la loro voce piena di amaro sarcasmo e di disperazione, ma anche, specie quella di Wilfred Owen, piena di un bruciante amore per gli uomini” [raised their voices full of bitter sarcasm and despair, but also, especially the voice of Wilfred Owen, full of a burning love for humankind]²⁷. La Capria also presents the figures of T.S. Eliot (author of *The Waste Land*, 1922), W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, and C. Day-Lewis to argue that – despite individual differences – all of these authors had revealed a specifically European condition of “disorder”, a forewarning of conflict between nations, and a subsequent atmosphere of “desertification” (S I:3-4:3-4). The German and Austrian literature assimilated by *Sud* included, above all, the poems of Rainer Maria Rilke (who had been already translated into Italian by Pintor) – alongside Expressionism, the satire of Germanism by Georg Grosz, and, most significantly, the work of Franz Kafka. The renewed interest in Kafka was sparked by the Italian reissue of *Il processo* (*The Trial*, orig. *Der Prozess*) and the publication of *America* (orig. *Der Verschollene*) both in 1945 and both translated by Alberto Spaini. Kafka is presented as a Jew “fuori dalla religione” [out of religion], disregarded by his co-religionists and excluded from the Czech literary canon because he wrote in German, and from the German canon – until 1945 controlled by the Nazis – because he was Jewish. He is therefore appreciated by the *Sud* group (the author of the insert “Immagine di Franz Kafka” [Image of Franz Kafka] is anonymous) as a pariah who lived “una vita breve, oscura, chiusa in sè stessa” [a short, obscure life, closed in on itself], marked by “solitudine, innocenza,

²⁶ Weaver was a volunteer on the front lines as a Red Cross stretcher bearer when the front was still on the Voltorno. La Capria writes that there was a constant cultural exchange between him and Weaver: “Io gli passavo Ungaretti, Montale, Penna, Quasimodo, glieli traducevo e glieli spiegavo. E lui faceva lo stesso con me, traducendomi e spiegandomi i poeti inglesi e americani più amati dalla sua generazione” [I passed him Ungaretti, Montale, Penna, Quasimodo; I translated them and explained them to him. And he did the same with me, translating and explaining the English and American poets most loved by his generation]. (La Capria, 1992:18).

²⁷ The essay by La Capria from which the quote is taken is titled “Aspetti della poesia inglese contemporanea: Eliot, Auden, Spender, Day Lewis” [Aspects of Contemporary English Poetry: Eliot, Auden, Spender, Day Lewis], (S I:3-4:3).

incubo della malattia, l'arte" [loneliness, innocence, the nightmare of illness, art] (S I:3-4:8). But above all, Kafka is received because his characters – first and foremost Joseph K. in *The Trial* – represent human beings trapped in absurd systems of existence that offer no way out, within a “mondo misterioso nel quale si snoda, segreto ed inamovibile, un preciso meccanismo di leggi” [mysterious world in which a precise mechanism of laws unfolds, secret and immovable], a world devoid of “*Grazia*” [*Grace*] (S I:3-4:8). It is thus clear that Kafka's figure – although he died years before the rise of National Socialism and the Second World War (in 1924) – is appropriated by *Sud* to support a critique of authoritarianism in Europe and of the war-driven regression it engendered, from which there was now a need to rise again, in the hope of futures different from those depicted in his novels.

If, in conclusion, we consider the neo-Greek poems of Giorgos Seferis, Odysseas Elytis, Demetrios Capetanakis, and Pandelis Prevelakis; the inserts dedicated to Francisco Goya (an artist famously committed to an aesthetic that also served as a critique of war in early 19th-century Spain); the anti-militarist satire of the Czech writer Jaroslav Hašek (*Osudy dobrého vojáka Švejka za světové války* [*The Fateful Adventures of the Good Soldier Švejk During the World War*]); and numerous Russian texts by Sergei Yesenin, Boris Pasternak, Mikhail M. Zoshchenko, and even Lenin – it becomes evident how *Sud*'s vast European reception served to nourish the group's revolutionary dream (the ‘spiritual revolution’ of which La Capria wrote). The transcultural and universalist project of *Sud*, set against the backdrop of war's rubble, therefore hoped for the rebirth of a European culture grounded in pacifist, anti-authoritarian, egalitarian, and moral principles – above all, in the recognition of the other's suffering as one's own.

4. Ortese's Writing in *Sud*: “Dolente splendore del vicolo” and “Roma, la capitale”

We must finally consider the role that Anna Maria Ortese played in the magazine *Sud*. While a full archival study would be essential for a precise reconstruction of the ways and times in which Ortese collaborated with the magazine – and of the dynamics she developed with the various members of the group (for example, through the

group's correspondence)²⁸ – and while tracing the evolution of Ortese's aesthetic and political consciousness in relation to *Sud* would deserve a dedicated study in its own right²⁹, in the space of this contribution I instead propose to examine the prose texts Ortese published in *Sud*: namely, the short story “Dolente splendore del vicolo” (which appeared in two parts in the issues of 20 June 1946 and January 1947), and the reportage “Roma, la capitale” (published in the final issue of July-September 1947)³⁰. Finally, I will examine the paratexts Ortese added to the 1994 edition of *Il mare non bagna Napoli*, as they are significant in establishing a connection between her experience in *Sud* and her subsequent trajectory as an author.

“Dolente splendore”, a first-person narrative, represents the Neapolitan social and environmental landscape immediately after the Liberation – a space to which the narrative *I* returns only to shut herself away at home:

Appena scesa a Napoli, subito dopo l'arrivo delle truppe alleate nel Nord, mi sono chiusa in casa e vi ho fatto il mio anno di disperazione profonda [As soon as I returned to Naples, immediately after the arrival of the Allied troops in the North, I shut myself up in my house and did my year of deep despair there]. (S I:7:5)³¹

This *I*, which, according to Garofano, echoes Ortese herself and refers to her return with her family to the home in Via del Piliero, which had been severely damaged by the air raids that devastated the port area (Garofano, 2005:93). The narrator describes the condition of the house and the urban and natural environment it overlooks, highlighting its transformation from the pre-war period to the post-war years: from a

²⁸ The letters Ortese wrote to Prunas, collected in the volume *Alla luce del Sud* (2006), are in fact insufficient for such a purpose.

²⁹ Some notes can be found in Clerici, 2022.

³⁰ Ortese also published in *Sud*, in the July-September 1947 issue, the poems “La storia dell'anima è finita” [The Story of the Soul Has Ended] and “Io sono per morire” [I am for Dying] (S II:2:27). These texts are marked by strong mystical symbolism, lamenting the loss of the soul “on the Western road” and the absence of comfort for the dying subject.

³¹ The story, in what would become its full version, was published as “Il mare non bagna Napoli” in Ortese, (1948:430-431 & 434); (Ortese, 1950:3); and as “Il mare di Napoli” in the collection *L'infanta sepolta* (1950); Garofano, (2005:93).

time when the alley was “tranquillo e remoto, profumato dai limoni di qualche solitario giardino, visitato dal vento di mare” [quiet and remote, perfumed by the lemons of some solitary garden, visited by the sea wind], to a state in which the alley had become crowded with the “sinistrati del Lavinaio (uno dei più squisiti ghetti europei del Mediterraneo)” [disgraced of Lavinaio (one of the most exquisite European ghettos of the Mediterranean)], eventually becoming unrecognisable (S I:7:5). While the natural landscape is described as unchanged – “Il cielo, su in alto, era sempre lo stesso splendente cielo degli anni buoni; il mare, nello sfondo, sempre il puro celeste mare in riva al quale battè le ali la nostra prima giovinezza” [The sky, up high, was always the same shining sky of the good years; the sea, in the background, always the pure, celestial sea on whose shore our early youth flapped its wings] (S I:7:5) – the urban environment is devastated, as is the life of its inhabitants (“la grazia del linguaggio” [the grace of language] and “la gentilezza del gesto” [the kindness of gesture] are said to have been lost, and a superficial cheerfulness masks “un senso immobile nei cuori di disfacimento, di fine” [a motionless sense in the hearts of decay, of the end] (S I:7:5). Naples is depicted as “un immenso, fitto, diabolico mercato” [an immense, dense, diabolical market], where everything is for sale – cigarettes, bread, one’s body – and where everyone has been reduced to “mendicanti” [beggars] (S I:7:5). The I’s act of withdrawal into the home is thus revealed as a protective gesture in response to the material and moral degradation brought by the war (“il popolo farsi selvaggio” [the people become savage]). It echoes the domestic retreat typical of the Biedermeier period, which was itself shaped by the trauma of the (Napoleonic) wars: “desiderai d’isolarmi, di chiudermi in casa, di non vedere se non un pezzetto di cielo, oltre i muri cupi” [I wanted to isolate myself, to shut myself up in the house, to see nothing but a little piece of sky beyond the gloomy walls] (S I:7:5). As Zaganelli and Marino have pointed out, the space of Naples is configured here as a space-landscape of dysphoric, negative passion, and the subject attempts to escape it either by taking refuge at home or by following, with the gaze, trajectories of flight – towards the sky or the sea – that lead to spaces of positive, euphoric passion³². However, the remainder of the narrative focuses

³² Giovanna Zaganelli and Toni Marino (2019) have argued that “Dolente splendore del vicolo” is entirely focused on the “gaze tour” of the protagonist’s eye (Zaganelli, Marino, 2019:480).

less on the *I*'s mental evasion and more on her observation of the surrounding social context. The narrator watches Eugenio Santillo and his sister Angelina, who live across the alley, noting their moral corruption and expressing a mix of hatred and pity towards them as she listens to their “cinici discorsi” [cynical conversations] and “canti pieni di disperata allegria” [songs full of desperate joy]. She wishes that they emigrate to South America – a place where they can begin living “una vita pulita” [a clean life], decent and honest once again (S I:7:5). The other residents of the alley, however, can no longer sing at all, but their voices are described as “orrende, deturpate, spezzate, non più umane, voci di esseri coperti di pelo, con zanne, becchi, artigli: pecore, lupi, porci e galline” [horrendous, disfigured, broken, no longer human, voices of beings covered in hair, with tusks, beaks, claws: sheep, wolves, pigs, and chickens] (S I:7:5). It becomes clear here that the text develops a critique of the (war-driven) process that leads to the “animalisation of the human being”, that is, a regression to *zoē*, the biological substratum upon which *bios*, the domain of qualified social life, had previously been built³³. Between this animalisation and the depiction of criminality, and the emphasis on bodily disease, “Dolente splendore” anticipates the themes of the stories later collected in *Il mare non bagna Napoli*. It returns us the image of an urban reality so devastated by history that it is stripped of any semblance of qualified life (S I:7:5; Garofano, 2005:94-95). This is a city where Ortese's gaze is clouded by a “dark lens” and driven by “an internal neurosis” (Garofano, 2005:94), where the roar of trucks alternates with the “lampe di qualche coltellata” [flash of a few stab wounds], where an “allegria orgiastica” [orgiastic joy] animates religious processions devoid of “qualsiasi sentimento del sacro” [any sense of the sacred], where unacceptable inequalities persist between those who have bread (offered by the Allies) and those who do not – and where, once again, the subjects reveal an inability to process the trauma of the war they have lived through³⁴.

³³ I return once again to Agamben (Agamben, 2020:1): “The Greeks had no single term to express what we mean by the word ‘life’. They used two terms that, although traceable to a common etymological root, are semantically and morphologically distinct: *zoē*, which expressed the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods), and *bios*, which indicated the form or way of living proper to an individual or group”.

³⁴ “Alcune vecchie evocavano la voce del figlio che non è più tornato. Giovani reduci pensavano alla guerra passata e all’inverno che doveva venire” [Some old women evoked the voice of

The reportage “Roma, la capitale” also resembles, both in content and style, the texts later included by Ortese in “Il mare”. However, the setting changes: whereas “Dolente splendore” and the texts of “Il mare” are all situated in Naples, “Roma, la capitale”, as the title already indicates, takes place in the capital – a city to which Ortese would much later dedicate the collection *Estivi terrori* (*Summer Terrors*, 1987) and several writings included in *La lente scura* (*The Dark Lens*, 1991). It is also Ortese’s birthplace, the city where she was born “casualmente” [by chance] and which she soon left with her family, moving first to other places in Italy, then to Tripoli, and finally to Naples (Maraini, 1998:22-24), and the one where she returned to in 1947 – the year she wrote her correspondence for *Sud* – and again in 1958, from 1961 to 1962, then again after a brief stay in Genoa, from 1962 to 1965, and from 1969 until her final move to Rapallo in 1975 (Sgavicchia, 2019:73-75). The piece that Di Costanzo considers Ortese’s strongest among those she published in *Sud* – a “lucid application of the poetics of the ‘false’ and the reality of unreal life” (Di Costanzo, 1994:28) – reveals a disoriented subject, dropped off by “un treno che veniva dal Nord” [a train that came from the North] at Termini Station and from there engaged in a flânerie “lungo le vie che mi erano state note” [along the streets that had once been familiar to me], passing by the Quattro Fontane, the Triton Fountain, the Spanish Steps, Via del Babuino, and Via degli Studi. The city – one of the key places of Western civilisation, the “eternal Rome” which for Goethe had been the only place where humanity and happiness could be discovered³⁵ – is now rediscovered as a space for wandering and observation, where the narrator sees “sui vetri dell’autobus le lagrime, sempre più frequenti, del cielo annuvolato” [on the bus windows the increasingly frequent tears of the cloudy sky] (S II:2/6:11). It is a city where street performers make do with whatever means are available; where filmmakers and photographers stand out in the crowd for the ‘cruelty’ of their gaze; where the blue eyes of a woman “venuta dal Canada” [who had come from Canada] to witness “lo sfacelo d’Europa” [the collapse of Europe] smile (S II:2/6:11). It is a city where metaphorical death is reflected, and where the subject –

the son who never returned. Young veterans were thinking about the past war and the winter to come] (S II:1:27).

³⁵ I am referring to Goethe’s observations in his correspondence with Johann Peter Eckermann, as cited in: Zapperi, 1999:238.

Ortese herself – meditates on the need for a “rebirth”, evoking the Austrian theosophist Rudolf Steiner³⁶ and the Indian mystic Jiddu Krishnamurti:

Penso al mare che ho lasciato la sera prima, ai miei amici, alle rose, a Steiner, e a quel piccolo [sic] Krishnamurti coi capelli divisi in mezzo che [...] scriveva come il perfetto iniziato debba sentirsi a servizio di tutto ciò ch'è vivente, e moltiplicarsi in atti cortesi perfino agli animali e alle piante.

[I think of the sea I left behind the night before, of my friends, the roses, Steiner, and that little Krishnamurti with his hair parted in the middle, who [...] wrote that the perfect initiate should feel in service to all that is alive, and multiply themselves in gracious acts – even towards animals and plants]. (S II:2/6:11)

Indeed, the semantics of life and rebirth serve to contrast with the condition that characterises not only Rome, but, as “C.” states, all post-war metropolises – from Rome to Naples, from Paris to New York and Shanghai – are

[...] profondamente ferite, ubbriache, dormono un sonno di morte all'ombra delle case demolite, e le mosche vanno loro nel naso e sui piedi bianchi di polvere.

[deeply wounded, drunk, they sleep a death-like sleep in the shadow of the demolished houses, and the flies crawl into their noses and onto their feet, white with dust]. (S II:2/6: 11)

Elsewhere in this “correspondence”, we also read how, when a war ends, the “Spirito della Vita” [Spirit of Life] rises from the earth – and thus also from the heart of cities – towards the vault of the sky, becoming increasingly distant from human beings, now deprived of “Arte e Poesia” [Art and Poetry], which “nascondevano il volto tra le

³⁶ Ortese's letters to Prunas contain various references to Steiner and mention works by him that she would like to read (*Il mondo dei sensi e il mondo dello spirito, Le entità spirituali, Fisiologia occulta, L'azione del Karma*, and others) (Ortese, 2006:78-79).

ginocchia, agli angoli delle strade” [hid their faces between their knees, at the corners of the streets] (S II:2/6:11). The city Ortese finds herself in after a brief stay is thus a city whose ‘symbols’ are veiled in “nebbia e desolazione” [fog and desolation] – a city whose society (not reduced to *zoē*) appears marked by indifference. Among the various figures of Rome’s intellectual life remembered by Ortese (Maria Bellonci, Alberto Moravia, Elsa De Giorgi, Alba De Céspedes, Palma Bucarelli, Paola Masino, Sibilla Aleramo, and Marino Mazzacurati), it is the author of *Gli indifferenti* (*The Indifferent Ones*, 1929) who best embodies, for her, the spirit of Rome – a city haunted by the ghosts of Fascism, and one from which politics must be re-founded (S II:2/6:12).

5. Conclusion: The Link between *Sud* and *Il mare non bagna Napoli*

If “Dolente splendore” and “Roma, la capitale” are texts that undoubtedly transform urban space into a site of memory and critique of European civilisation – understood as one founded on a politics of war and an anti-vital impulse – then we must also observe the proximity of these two texts not only to the aesthetic and political framework outlined through the analysis of the other writings in *Sud*, but also to *Il mare non bagna Napoli*, Ortese’s most realist work, which exposes the dehumanising conditions in which a large segment of the population still lived until the publication of the collection in 1953 (Gramone, 2001:97-98). In “Il ‘mare’ come spaesamento” [“The ‘Sea’ as Disorientation”], a preface added to *Il mare* in 1994, Ortese writes that the book originated in the context of an Italy that “usciva piena di speranze dalla guerra” [came out of the war full of hope], and reflected a “neurotic” gaze upon reality – that reality which “da molto, moltissimo tempo, io detestavo con tutte le mie forze, senza quasi saperlo” [“for a very long time, I hated with all my might, almost without knowing it”] (Ortese, 1994:9-10; Ortese, 2018:9-10). This hatred derived from the perception of the transformation and destruction of things over time, a perception that “l’esperienza personale della guerra (terrore dovunque e fuga per quattro anni)” [the personal experience of war – terror everywhere and four years of flight] had exacerbated, leading to that “disorientation” that found a paradigmatic site of expression in Naples – so much so that the city

came to represent “una lacera condizione universale” [“a universal condition of being torn apart”] (Ortese, 1994:10; Ortese, 2018:10). If we turn to the second paratext added by Ortese to *Il mare* in 1994 – “Le Giacchette Grigie di Monte di Dio” [“The Grey Jackets of Monte di Dio”] – we see how the writer expresses her gratitude towards Pasquale Prunas for having encouraged her to express the “*intollerabilità del reale*” [*intolerability of reality*], first in *Sud* and later – despite what would also become the caustic portrait of the group in “Il silenzio della ragione” – in *Il mare non bagna Napoli* (Ortese, 1994:173; Ortese, 2018:189). In fact, she observes that if she was moved in her work (despite all its stylistic evolutions) by a utopian project, she owed it to the group of Neapolitan friends who gathered at Monte di Dio with Prunas (“la bandiera dell’Utopia, se sventola ancora, almeno nel mio cuore, la devo alle ‘Giacchette Grigie’ di Monte di Dio” [“if the flag of utopia still waves, at least in my heart, it is because of the Grey Jackets of Monte di Dio”]) (Ortese, 1994:173; Ortese, 2018:189). *Sud*, in fact, had been an “oltranzista, a suo modo rivoluzionario” [“extreme and in its way revolutionary”] fortnightly magazine urging a material and moral rebirth of Naples, Italy, and Europe (Ortese, 1994:175; Ortese, 2018:191).

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