

## Chapter 13 Bologna 1999



### Sunday, May 16, Bologna

Hmm, I can't type that name without having the Oscar Meyer jingle run through my head. Totally inappropriate!

I'm nearing the end of this trip, and only now sitting down to record it. It's not that I have been so wildly busy, but I haven't had things happening that I was necessarily aching to share. We'll see whether this journal has much to say.

The trip started almost a week ago, with the usual flight to Amsterdam. I used my “gold elite” card to board early, along with the first-class passengers, and easily stowed my bags and settled in. My seat in economy was on an aisle, just behind a bulkhead, which I always find a mixed blessing. It means you have a bit more legroom and no seat reclining back into your face, which is nice, but there is not the usual space under the seat ahead to stow a bag. I put my backpack in a compartment right above me and took out stuff to read, so I was satisfied. I settled in to wait for others to board, and to do the usual wondering about whether the seat next to me would be filled.

As the crowd started to come through, I noticed right away that many of them were carrying musical instrument cases – first just violins, but later a handful of others. Pretty soon, many of the seats around me (but not the one next to me, yet) were filled with college age kids, mostly girls. I learned they were the chamber orchestra from Hope College, in Holland Michigan. They were on their way to Europe to play in four countries in two weeks – Czech Republic, Austria, Hungary, and one other I’ve forgotten.

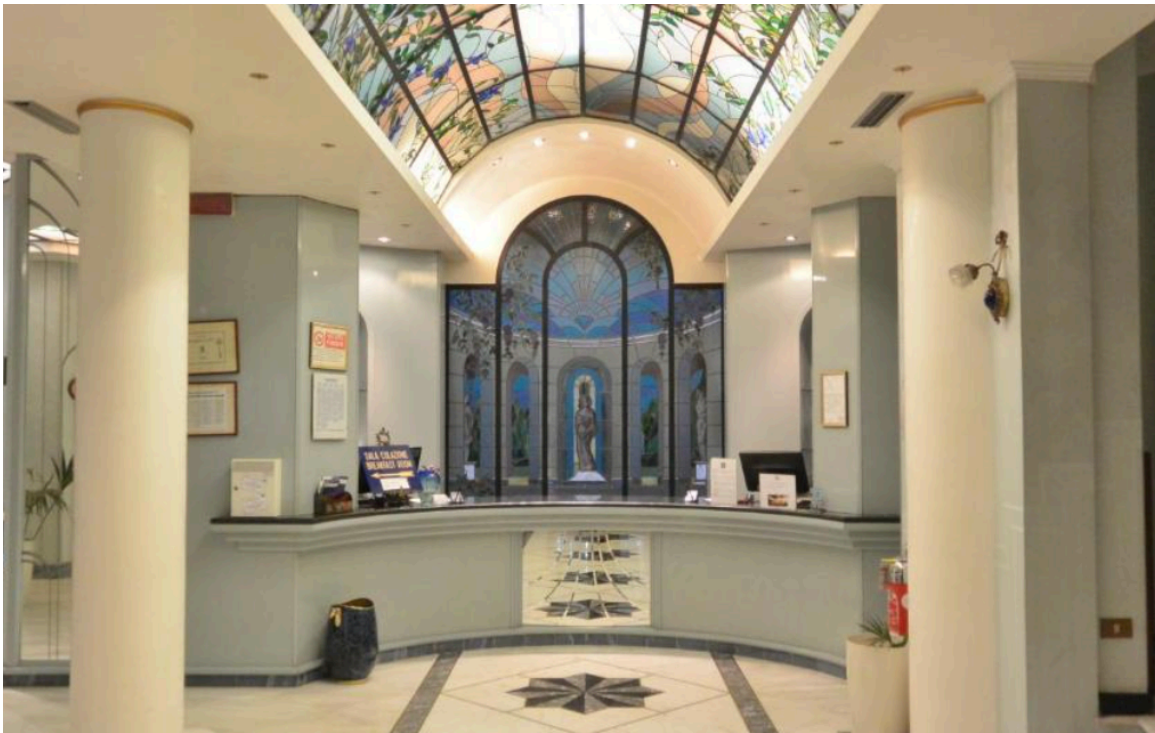
At one point a girl across the aisle from me got into a conversation with a large black woman sitting right behind me, about the fact that the woman was surrounded by their group. Somehow, I joined into this conversation, which soon moved on to the fact that this girl wouldn’t be able to tilt her seat back. This was because right behind her was her orchestra’s conductor, who was a man so tall that his knees were firmly wedged against the back of her seat. The black woman then chimed in with the information that I too wouldn’t be able to tilt my seat, because she had bad knees and would be in pain if I did. “The hell you say,” I thought to myself, and mumbled something about how of course I’d have to put my seat back on this overnight flight, in order to sleep. She then proposed that we trade seats, putting her at the bulkhead where she wouldn’t have this problem, and me behind her so that I could tilt all I wanted. Knowing that the bulkhead is usually considered a desirable seat, I was reluctant, but I couldn’t think how to say no without being an asshole. (Hmm, the spell checker on my laptop doesn’t know that word [but the newer version, as I revised this earlier, did! And the even newer version in 2023 knows the word but discourages its use]) So I agreed, and we switched. I then watched as every seat in the plane filled up except that one next to her!

These kids from Hope College were pleasant to talk to, as was their long-legged director, and the girl next to me was small enough that I was probably just as comfortable as with an empty seat there. I can’t complain. About that, at least. I can however complain about how these kids had no inclination whatsoever to try to sleep, for most of the night. Since they all knew each other, half of them were always in the aisles talking to the other half, or sometimes they were on their knees in their seats talking to others who were one (or more) rows behind. I tried listening to music to drown them out, but I could only find screeching opera on the plane’s music system. I did a bit of work and watched a movie. The movie was *Enemy of the State*, with Will Smith, and it was surprisingly good.

So, I don’t think I had slept at all when we arrived in Amsterdam, which is unusual for me. I drank some coffee in the club, then headed off for my flight to Milan. This involved going through immigration and customs there in the Amsterdam airport, as I

was entering the European Union. It was a long, slow line, but there was no problem when I reached the front of it. A fellow ahead of me was given a hard time, though. He was dark skinned, and his return ticket apparently had a date sometime in the past, which seemed to trouble the authorities. I guess he was using an old ticket and had just had the inbound portion changed. They didn't like that, and at one point asked him, "What are you, stupid." He wasn't stupid enough to answer that, at least, and they sent him back to KLM to get a new ticket that would show his return. As though that was going to make any difference to when he'd leave the EU. What are they, stupid?

My flight to Milan is lost in the mists of memory, or perhaps of sleep. I asked at an information counter how best to get to my hotel and got good directions for a bus and a tram. Then I ignored them and took a taxi, but I was well prepared with the map they'd given me, so I could follow the route, which was nice. The hotel turned out to be the same one that Pat and I stayed in several years ago, Hotel Liberty. I had forgotten the name, but easily recognized its small luxurious lobby. The room, too, was small and luxurious, with golden brass fixtures. There was even a gold reflecting ceiling in the bathroom – quite a surprise the first time you look up from the toilet.



Liberty Hotel, Milan, from Web 2023

This was Tuesday, and I wouldn't see Lucia (my friend and host, Lucia Tajoli) until late Wednesday morning, so I made good use of my free time in Milan: I slept. Frankly, I've been to Milan twice and I think I've seen what I want to see, so I felt no urge to sightsee. I slept the afternoon until 5:00 or so, went out and had dinner, then returned to my room and watched Larry King.

I came to Italy for pasta, of course, and my dinner was that. Except for some reason I picked one that had something extra, which turned out to be a six-inch-long sea creature of some sort, spread-eagled on top of the pasta and looking up at me. I ate the little meat that was in its tail, put it aside, and enjoyed the pasta. After sleeping all afternoon, by rights I shouldn't have slept the night, but I did, easily.

I even woke up in time to get breakfast in the hotel, which wasn't too bad, though not what I've learned to expect in Europe. The breakfast room was crowded by the time I'd finished, so I didn't feel comfortable asking for a second coffee. Instead, I crossed the street to a café of some sort, and had it there.

When I entered the café, I noticed an older woman, dressed in a nice dark blue suit, sitting alone at a table near me. What struck me was that there was nothing on the table. And that continued to be true after I'd ordered my coffee and drunk most of it. She was simply sitting, ramrod straight, but ordering nothing. After a while, though, she spoke to the waiter, who brought her a glass of water. And almost immediately, a tall gray-haired gentleman appeared, greeted her, said a few words, and then sat down alone at a table near hers. He pulled out a newspaper and became engrossed in that, as he drank his coffee. The woman, meanwhile, continued to sit straight, sipping her water, and glancing occasionally over at him.

Well, I diagnosed exactly what was going on. This woman was poor and proud, and very much hoping to snag this man. She came every morning to this café, and unable to afford coffee she sat with nothing until she saw him approaching, then quickly ordered a glass of water just for appearances. So far, although he was certainly cordial to her, he hadn't taken the bait.

Good, huh? Well, not quite. Soon after I had figured all this out, a younger woman arrived and joined the older one. It became clear that it was her she was waiting for – probably her daughter, was my guess. Oh well, I still wish her luck catching the old guy.

Lucia came to collect me at 11:30 for my 12:30 seminar.

Strangely, I didn't know at what institution I'd be giving the seminar. Lucia, I knew, teaches at a Polytechnic in Milan, so I had assumed it would be there. But when I checked into the hotel, they mentioned that my room was charged to Bocconi University, which is the well-known university that had hosted the conference on my first visit. In fact, when I mentioned to Gordon Hanson that I was giving a seminar in Milan, he asked if it would be at a certain institute at Bocconi, since I guess that is where the best people are, and I said I didn't think so. But it turned out that it was that institute after all. That was possible because Lucia, in addition to being at the Polytechnic, is also teaching trade as a visitor at Bocconi. She took me to several different buildings, where their economists are spread around, and introduced me to several of them.

The seminar went about as well as usual (I've given this paper many times), with perhaps the one exception being that I got very hot. It has been very pleasant the whole time I've

been in Italy, that day included, but without air-conditioning and with not much breeze, I was drenched in sweat by the time I finished. Worse, I saw myself in a mirror a bit later, and it was ... you don't want to know.

Lunch was sandwiches that were provided for everybody at the seminar. I ate a couple after I was done, and then we went for ice cream. I'm not sure I'd had that here before, even though Italy is known for it. They make it fresh right there in the stores that sell it, and they display it in wide metal tubs where it seems to have been poured while still soft enough to swirl into attractive shapes. Many of the flavors are a bit too colorful for my taste, but I easily found two that I could enjoy – one was tiramisu.

In the evening, six of us went to dinner at a restaurant that several seemed to know, but none knew how to get to. We got there OK, after a roundabout route that seemed to be necessary because of Milan's one-way streets, plus a walk down a narrow alley in what seemed to be an industrial slum. But the restaurant was excellent, with lots of people eating at tables outdoors behind it on a covered patio. We shared a variety of appetizers, including one of octopus that I just loved. It was so much more tender than squid that I wouldn't think them even related, except perhaps by their off-putting looks. We each then had our own dish of pasta, and then shared several meat dishes that I could have done without.

My pasta was linguini with a different name (and apparently a slightly different shape), with pesto sauce. The pesto was far better than I've had before, and done in the Genovese style, which meant that it included green beans and potatoes. Really. They fit right in.

The group was all economists, of course, mostly ones with at least some interest in trade, but we didn't talk much about trade or about economics. Instead, most of the conversation was about determination of salaries, promotion, teaching assignments, etc., for Italian academics compared to the U.S. As seems often the case when I visit academics in other places and especially in other countries, they have lots of complaints about how their institutions are being run, especially as it affects themselves. They tend to think that we in the U.S., or even we at Michigan, have it better. And they are absolutely right. I can't believe how much better run our university is than others, or what a great life our system and our particular employers provide us. Admittedly, I am near the top of our local heap, which helps, and these folks tend to be untenured younger people with considerable uncertainty ahead of them in their lives. But even accounting for all that, and recalling how it was before I had tenure, I think we've got it good.

On Thursday, I checked out and taxied to the train station ("statione," fortunately, is similar to English, since I had neglected to find out what to ask for). I'd been told that there were trains to Bologna every half hour or so, since it was on the route to Rome, so I hadn't worried about getting schedules or reservations. There were lots of ticket windows, but even more people in line at them, so it took me 20 minutes or so before I could ask for a ticket to Bologna. No problem. There was a "special" train leaving in just three minutes, and I could catch that. I paid and moved quickly to track 18, pausing just a moment to confirm with a railroad employee that this train did indeed go to

Bologna (since the sign said only Rome). Only when I was on board did I realize that, not having seen a timetable, I had no idea what time the train was supposed to arrive in Bologna, or therefore how to know when to get off. This was more or less resolved when I asked the conductor who took my ticket, but his vague answer of “one o’clock” still left me unsure when it would be, especially after the train sat still for a while at one point. At a quarter to one I collected my things and waited in the corridor until in fact we did arrive at about 1:05.

I’d made one mistake, by the way. When the conductor took my ticket, he frowned and then wrote some stuff on the back of it, before giving it back to me. Then he explained that I had been supposed to stamp it in one of the yellow machines before getting on the train. Who knew? I apologized.

In Bologna I again caught a taxi, showing the driver the address of the place I would be staying, which is called Collegio Universitario San Tommaso D’Aquino, located at 1 Via San Domenico. I had no idea what sort of place this would be, or where. It turned out that there is a large well-known church of San Domenico, and this is on a small street just behind it. Apparently, it was originally a convent, but it doesn’t look like what that sounds like, at all. For one thing, it is pretty new, especially compared to most of the buildings in Bologna. I’d say it must have been built in the 60s or 70s, at the earliest, and it is a very nice but Spartan residence hall. It doesn’t have a gold reflecting ceiling in the bathroom, or even carpets on the floor for that matter – it is all linoleum, everywhere. But it has all that I need. More, actually, since like the hotel in Milan, it has a bidet. There is no television, however, so Larry King will have to wait.



Collegio Universitario San Tommaso D’Aquino from Web 2023

I arrived in Bologna early afternoon, and this time did not put off getting out into the city. I'd already seen, on my cab ride, that it was a much more charming place than Milan, and that has been confirmed over and over, by now. Most of the buildings –all of them in most neighborhoods – are old and attractive. One distinctive feature of Bologna is that most of these old buildings have their upper floors built out over the sidewalk, supported at the street by columns topped by arched ceilings. When I first saw this, I wanted to call these “porticoes,” then realized I really didn't know what a portico was. But having now read something about the town, I can confirm that these are indeed porticoes. Bologna is proud, in fact, to have some 35 km. of porticoes within it. That is supposed to sound like a lot, but having now walked along so many of them, I'm surprised the number isn't bigger. Anyhow, the effect of this is to give the city a medieval feel, which I suppose is appropriate since at least some of the building date from then.



Porticos of Bologna are a symbol of the city,  
from Wikipedia 2023

Another distinctive feature of Bologna is its towers. Apparently in the late Middle Ages when the city was first prospering, rich local residents competed by building towers, many of which still stand. In addition to the many more usual churches and remnants of city fortifications, this gives the place quite a wonderful skyline. Our conference was held on the fourth floor (fifth, as we'd count it at home) of a building, where we could look out on the city's tiled roofs, towers, and spires. I hope to stop back there tomorrow with my camera.

There is yet another feature of Bologna – I don't know whether to call it distinctive or not, but one certainly appreciates it. This is not a place that many tourists come to. I guess because it lacks any famous works of art or particularly wonderful individual buildings, tourists just don't come here they way they do Florence, Venice, or Rome. As a result, there aren't the crowds, and it is not that strange to find yourself enjoying a square, a courtyard, a church, or whatever, all by yourself, or with just an occasional Italian passing by. There are also, therefore, not nearly as many businesses catering to tourists, so you may have to walk a little further to find a cup of coffee or a restaurant, or especially a souvenir. But except for the last, they are well provided for the local population.



The dome of Santuario di Santa Maria della Vita dominates the foreground; the Asinelli (higher) and Garisenda towers are seen on the right, from Wikipedia 2023

All this I saw in abundance that first afternoon, and I have been enjoying it ever since. If I get sidetracked telling you about the conference and so forth, don't forget that every time I walked back and forth to it, or walked with the group to a restaurant and back, I was doing it in this marvelous city, walking through these porticoed streets and looking at the wonderful buildings along them. I love it!

Of course, at some point I had to eat, and I'd been looking forward to having some pasta on my own. When the time seemed right (they eat late here, and the restaurants don't even open for dinner until 7:30 or 8:00), I asked at the desk in the Collegio (it is run a bit like a hotel) where they could suggest. The clerk gave me a typed list of four restaurants that were supposed to be nearby. I could only find one of their streets on my map, but that was enough, so I headed there. It was a considerably longer walk than I'd had in mind, but I found it easily. When I asked for a table, however, they told me it was full, if I didn't have a reservation, which of course I didn't. I must say, it didn't look full – only a few of the tables were occupied. But since I was still a bit on the early side, I guess it was believable that they really were fully booked. I didn't hold it against them.

But I sure did hold it against the fellow who had given me the list. Why in the world, I thought, would you send a guest to a restaurant that needed reservations even on a Thursday night? Of course, I didn't really care whether I found anything special, so I set out to walk the streets until I found something. That's when I learned that, perhaps because they lack tourists, Bologna doesn't have all that many restaurants. In other cities I think you'd find a couple in every block in the sorts of downtown neighborhood that I was in, but not here. I only found a couple of places in twenty minutes of walking, and they were not Italian! Without quite meaning to, I found myself back at the Collegio, so I went back in and made a fuss.

The man who'd given me the list, though I have since learned he is one of the regular attendants at the desk, speaks no English. He managed to find someone who did, perhaps not even an employee, and that fellow suggested a pizzeria that in fact I had noticed that afternoon. I didn't want pizza, of course, but he assured me that it would have pasta, and he was right.

It's the pizzeria O Sole Mio, and I've now eaten there four times. The menu has two whole pages of pasta of different shapes and with different sauces. Of course, I don't know what one or two of them are, but I've ordered blind several times and always been delighted with what I got.

In Milan I had finally asked to learn more about the Italian custom when it comes to ordering in restaurants. I'd always been confused by the fact that they have their pasta dishes listed, not just as pasta, but as "first courses." And then they have meat dishes listed as second courses. Does that mean they really eat a whole pasta dish and then a meat dish? Yep. Plus, an antipasto (appetizer) or two to start, and a desert after. You'd think then that the pasta dishes would be small, and sometimes (in the fancier restaurants, I think) they are. But in a place like my pizzeria, they are good sized.

Then I figured, if it is not only acceptable, but expected, that you will follow your course of pasta with something that anybody else would call a whole meal, then why can't you follow the pasta with pasta. I asked Lucia, and she seemed to find the idea amusing, but she couldn't give a reason not to do it. So that's what I've done now, twice, and I think my waiter is getting used to it. Others I've mentioned it to, like Lucia, also seem to find it amusing, but I don't really see why. I've only got a few days here, with more pastas on that menu than I'll be able to try even if I eat three of them at each meal. Why should I spend time, money, and appetite on meat dishes that I don't want (and that Italians are no great shakes at making anyway) when I can have pasta on top of pasta.

Of course, I couldn't do this at the conference meals, where the menus were preset for all of us. And occasionally there was a dish that was really good, like the risotto that they started us with at dinner the first night. But mostly they gave small portions of often-decent pasta plus meat dishes that were not that different from what I remember in TV dinners. One of the pastas incidentally, at dinner last night, reminded me exactly of the mixture I used to make of Kraft macaroni and cheese and browned hamburger. It was good, but I was glad, today, to get back to my pizzeria.

### **Monday, May 17, Bologna**

The conference: I looked carefully at the program only after I arrived, and I found that it wasn't to start until 3:00 PM on Friday. I probably could have started my trip a day later, it turns out, since I got here by early Thursday afternoon. That was OK, though. It gave me more time to see the place and eat pasta.

Oddly, the program did not mention where the conference would be, so I decided to hang around the lobby of the Collegio during mid-day, figuring somebody would turn up who

could tell me what was happening. That worked fine. I first met Matt Connelly and his fiancé Natalie, who had gotten a communication that I never received saying that the conference would be at the Johns Hopkins Bologna Center. The man at the desk drew us the route to that on a map, so we were all set. But I hung around the lobby after that anyway, wondering who I might see.

To my surprise, at one point one of the staff came over and handed me a fax. I was surprised he knew me, and surprised to get a fax, which I thought might be the missing communication that would tell me where to go. No, it was from my student, Ufuk Demiroglu. I forgot that I had given him my itinerary, and I also hadn't noticed that he'd failed to give me the Rackham form for his thesis defense before I left. This was it, faxed to me twice because he worried that the first transmission wouldn't fit on European paper.

At another point, a woman came over to talk to me, somewhat agitated. It turned out that she was one of the conference participants, and she had come here from Madrid. She too didn't know where the conference was going to be, and she was much more concerned about that than I had been. I told her what I knew, in English that she may or may not have understood.

Pretty soon the two Michigan organizers of the conference showed up, and they confirmed what we thought we knew. They are a man and woman whom I soon learned are husband and wife, and at that moment they were caught up in pacifying another participant. She was French and from Algeria, and she was apparently very unhappy to learn that nobody was going to take her to lunch. This was my first indication of a clash of cultures that was going to reappear in small ways throughout the conference.

Let me explain what this was all about. The conference was organized by the head of Michigan's Center for Middle East and North African Studies, which is a unit of the International Institute whose director apparently played a big role both in funding it and in putting it in Bologna. The topic of the conference is Algeria and Europe, with a focus – or so I thought – on the prospective Euro-Mediterranean agreement between Algeria and the European Union that would promote economic integration between them. In fact, the conference was much less focused than that, dealing also with other kinds of interaction between Algeria and Europe, both historically and in the present. The latter includes frictions between some Europeans, mainly right-wing French, and Algerian immigrants.

The conference was organized around these issues in three sessions. On Friday afternoon it was mostly history. On Saturday morning it was economics, at least in part. And on Saturday afternoon it was mostly politics. In each session, there was a mix of American academics from Michigan and European academics from several countries. What the latter had in common, however, was that they spoke French. In fact, everybody at the conference except me both spoke and understood French, and the Europeans mostly insisted on speaking French, even though they understood English. And the Algerian woman who had been upset about lunch did not speak or understand English at all.



Johns Hopkins Bologna Center from Web 2023

Given that the conference was about French-speaking Algeria and that it involved mostly experts on Algeria who naturally were accustomed to French, it wasn't surprising that French would be used at least as much as English. But it was a surprise to me, since economics conferences are virtually always in English.

The organizers had anticipated this, to a degree, and they had hired one of the Johns Hopkins students as a translator. She was a very attractive young woman named Gabriella, and she sat between me and the Algerian most of the time, translating for me when the speaker spoke French, and for the Algerian when the speaker spoke English. The first day she tried to do this by whispering to us, which didn't work all that well in that small room. The second day she switched to writing things down for us to read, and that worked better. But both ways, she was only able to give us the high points of what was said, distilling rather long speeches into single sentences. This didn't bother me too much, since I wasn't always very interested in what was being said anyway, and I was mainly just trying to fight boredom. Leaning close to this attractive translator served that purpose well, regardless of what was said. I suspect that the Algerian woman was less content with this arrangement than I was.

There was one thing that I think I learned from this experience: French must be just an incredibly easy language to speak. I decided that because the people who spoke it spoke so much of it. Invariably, once one of the French speakers got started talking, they wouldn't stop for a long, long time. This was true even (or especially) of the woman from Madrid for whom I presume French wasn't even her first language.

It was not unnatural that I was unable to communicate very effectively with the French-speaking participants. But I gradually learned from Matt and other Americans that in fact they had the same problem, even though they spoke French. It became clear that most of

the Europeans just had very little interest in listening to what the Americans had to say, regardless of the language. I think there were exceptions, on both sides, but it was hard for me to be sure.

I got this impression most clearly in response to something I said myself. On Saturday afternoon, I was doing my best to follow the action so that I could contribute something, and at some point I realized a connection between the morning topic (economic integration) and the afternoon one (strains of immigration). I decided to raise the issue, asking the group if they felt that the reduced incentives to immigrate that might follow from economic integration would be desirable and help to solve some of the problems they were discussing. This seemed like a useful question, not only to bridge the gap between economics and other aspects of the problem, but also to help me understand some of the values with which these other folks approached the issues.

Having decided to intervene, I then needed to get the attention of the person who was chairing the session, who happened to be that woman from Madrid. She spoke only French and for a while seemed to recognize only others who spoke French, so I wasn't at all sure I could break in. Furthermore, with no idea of what was being said, I couldn't tell when there were changes in topic or invitations to speak. However, after quite a while there was a very uncharacteristic pause during which I was able to catch her eye, so I spoke up and made my point.

I then sat back to see if anybody would answer my question. When nobody else volunteered to speak, the Madrid gal did, and I listened intently hoping to get some sense of what she was saying. My translator, unfortunately, had by then left for the day to go study. Eventually, I did hear a phrase that I understood: "Salmon Rushdie." That didn't tell me anything, but the second time I heard it, and the word "Islamist," I finally realized that she wasn't answering my question at all. I think it was at that point that I gave up and switched to reading Ufuk's thesis.

I shouldn't be too hard on them, I suppose. I've certainly noticed before that academics often are more interested in speaking what's in their heads than in responding to what others say, and I think this tends to be even more true of non-economists than economists. Also, with the language barrier, it may well be that most of them didn't even understand what I had said. But as far as I could tell, I was the only person there who was trying to get something positive out of this strange mix of people from different disciplines and cultures, and I was undeniably miffed at being ignored.

Later, at the reception, where we all stood around in groups sorted by language, the organizer thanked me for my effort to communicate across the lines. He apparently had ruffled some French feathers by cutting off their discussion sooner than they'd have liked, so it didn't sound like he had succeeded any better than I in making this one conference rather than two.

I said earlier that there were some exceptions on both sides. On the French side was a demographer who served as the commentator (in economics we'd call him the discussant)

for the Saturday morning papers. He was not only friendly, but he actually seemed to listen and think, and I appreciated having him in the room.

On the American side was a woman from Michigan, an anthropologist, whom I probably should have heard of, but hadn't. The reason she was an exception was that, as I perceived it, she was more French than the French, or at least wanted to be. I never could tell whether they took her seriously (Matt thinks not), but like them, she certainly took them seriously.

She was also interesting in that she used emotion and emphasis in place of argument. My first hint of that was when she spoke at the end of my own session, criticizing trade agreements for standard left-wing reasons. But then, in the afternoon, she gave her own paper, which was a diatribe against the right-wing political forces in France, which she classified as racist. It is hard to convey the approach that she took, except that in both her written and spoken words, most sentences seemed to end with exclamation points. The effect on me was that, if I wasn't a racist at the start of her talk, there was a good chance I would be by the end. She was one of those people whose personality causes them to promote a cause by arguing against it. Sadly, I gather that she is a tenured professor at the University of Michigan. That happens, of course, but I can't help but suspect that she may have been promoted because of this, not in spite of it. Is it any wonder that economists keep to themselves?

One other thing that this anthropologist did, and that I gather is quite standard within disciplines like hers, was that she used the word "discourse" a great deal. That word is only barely in my vocabulary, and certainly not with any meaning that would justify its frequent use. I'd like to think that it is a word that has acquired a different and more precise meaning for use by her and others like her, and perhaps that is the case. The impression that I got, however, was the opposite. It seemed to be the word to use when you didn't know what you meant. It is intriguing to think that she may have been just as ignorant of what she was saying as I was, but didn't know it.

There was one other difference in style at this conference that was hard for me to ignore, although it had little substance. All the other speakers sat at the table while they spoke, and most of them partially or totally read their remarks directly from the papers that they had submitted for the conference. Some would depart from their texts a little, or jump around, but most didn't even do that. This was feasible for most of them, incidentally, since they had written papers that were short enough to be read in the available 20 minutes or so.

My paper was way too long for this, and it is not my custom anyway (or that of any other economist I know) to read our papers aloud at conferences. Since I was going to depart from local custom by speaking extemporaneously anyway, I decided to go all the way and do it on my hind legs and with the help of transparencies. In other words, I gave the sort of talk that I always give. This just accentuated the gulf that separated me from the others.

The anthropologist, by the way, also claimed to be unprepared for the practice of speakers reading their papers. In her case, however, she said that she had expected that papers wouldn't be presented at all, instead being read beforehand and just discussed. That wasn't entirely credible, since she didn't make her own paper available until after the conference had begun. But in any case, she too had written a paper that was far too long to read in 20 minutes. She said that she had considered whether she could summarize it in 20 minutes but found that to be impossible. So instead, she just started reading it and left it to the session chair to cut her off when time was up!

Did I get anything out of the conference? Yes, of course. I learned a great deal about how academics behave in other disciplines and in other countries. Unfortunately, I can't trust anything I learned to be widely valid – this may have been an unusual bunch. I also learned a little about Algeria, and this I think I can probably trust. In short: Algeria is an utter mess, for all sorts of reasons that are not going to change soon.

Now, back to my life as a tourist. I've spent the last two days wandering Bologna, taking pictures, drinking coffee, and eating pasta. I think that I've covered all the old neighborhoods that I can reach on foot. I've also gotten pictures of a couple of things off in the distance that perhaps I should have tried to reach.

Yesterday, I first headed to the northern side of the city, toward a park that I had noticed on the map. That was disappointing, as was the neighborhood around it, which was newer than the buildings in the city center and far less interesting, or at least less attractive.

To my surprise, many of the newer buildings have the same portico arrangement as the old buildings, except that they are constructed differently. The columns supporting them at the street tend to be just steel or concrete beams, not round or octagonal ones of stone or brick like on the older buildings. And the ceilings are not arched, but just flat, straight across. And of course, they lack the occasional crookedness and unevenness that you find on the old buildings, which were built more haphazardly and have settled over time.

Also interesting is how the two have weathered. The old buildings and porticoes, which are sometimes bare brick, sometimes covered in stucco, have weathered, been painted, then weathered again many times over centuries. All of that adds to their rich charm, even when objectively they may be shabby. Many of the new buildings of concrete and steel, on the other hand, have weathered just as much, but the effect there is purely shabby. I don't know why. Perhaps they too will look better after a few centuries, but I doubt it. I'll have to come back then and check.

I headed back southward on the west side of town, wondering if I would see anything more that was worth the walk. I didn't think I would, but I then noticed the sound of some sort of music up ahead. A block later I met up with a religious procession crossing the intersection in front of me and turning the corner away from me.

From loudspeakers somewhere ahead was coming a man's voice, singing something religious sounding that the members of the procession would then respond to. Some sort of liturgy, I guess, but very pretty. The procession at first looked like it was made up of priests, separated into groups one after another with everyone in a group pretty much dressed the same. After the priests came other groups that I'd guess were monks, plus an occasional small group carrying banners and one with quite a large thing that might have had a person inside it. There was a crowd gathered on both sides of the street watching this procession, and as the last of the monks went by, the crowd filled in behind and followed. Many were singing along with the chant, which changed now and then to something new and different. I followed along too, getting pictures when I could. The whole thing came to a stop in a large square in front of a church. Then after a short time, the crowd dispersed, and so did I.

A few days ago, someone advised several of us to beware of gypsies, who would try to pick our pockets. I said I was sure I wouldn't know a gypsy if I saw one, and they assured me that I would. I immediately moved my wallet to my front pocket, and from then on kept my hand on it as I walked the streets whenever I was anywhere close to a person who might be a gypsy. College students, for example, began to look threatening to me, and there are a lot of those here. I'm told this is a city of about 400,000 people, and there are 100,000 college students.

Anyhow, today as I walked through a portico near the center of town, a woman who was unquestionably a gypsy approached me. She was dressed in a colorful costume and carrying a small baby, which she thrust into my face as she asked for money. I tried first to ignore her, then to brush her off, but she was pressing my arm with her hand and wouldn't go away. Then another woman came up and joined the first, this one also with a baby who was feeding on her bare breast while she accosted me. She too started grabbing me with her free hand. Only then did it sink in that their obnoxious behavior wasn't really designed to get me to give them anything, but to allow them to take it. I grabbed for my wallet, which was still in my pocket, shouted "No!" (I think) and ran away from them.

So now I think I do know what a gypsy looks like. What I don't understand is why they look like that. Surely if they want to pick your pocket, they'd have more luck looking like one of the crowd.

By early afternoon today, I'd had my fill. When it started to rain this afternoon, I wasn't disappointed that it would drive me inside, or at least under the porticoes. I found a café near a busy square and drank coffee while inhaling the exhaust from buses and motor scooters. Not the best choice, and I soon moved on.

I may have had my fill of pasta, too, believe it or not. I had planned on eating twice today at O Sole Mio, only to find it closed for the day. I had wondered when the man who waited on me – apparently the only waiter, and probably the owner – would get a day off, and I guess this was it. I had to be more enterprising than I'd planned and find other places to eat pasta. I managed that easily, but by the time I finished my second first

course at another pizzeria a few minutes ago, I was feeling stuffed. I don't mind at all, as I thought I would, that I'll have to leave for the airport tomorrow before lunch time.

## **Tuesday, May 18, Amsterdam**

I certainly didn't expect to still be writing, or even to still be traveling. I'm staying in Amsterdam, after my flight from Bologna was delayed sufficiently that I missed my flight to Detroit. The next one is at 10:45 tomorrow morning.

Otherwise, the day went perfectly as planned. The Collegio, which I knew in advance wouldn't take a credit card, charged me exactly what they'd said they would, and I had the cash. They ordered me a taxi, which arrived promptly and got me to the airport well ahead of any need. As I walked in the door, I met Matt Connelly and Natalie, who I'd known would be on the same flight. They had just arrived back from two days in Venice.

It was a bit too early to check in, so we killed time. I had coffee, but I had to stand to drink it, as is the custom in Italy. I also spent a few minutes waiting for the men's room to be cleaned, and I watched how other men responded to the surprise of its being unavailable. Most waited impatiently, but at least one used the women's room, and several used a third restroom that was reserved for the handicapped. I suppose I'd have done the same, if I needed to badly enough, but I was just killing time, so I sat and watched.

The most interesting thing that I saw in that airport was a machine that, for a fee, would wrap your bag in plastic and guarantee its contents with Lloyds of London. I could see how the plastic part worked, but not the insurance, nor the relevance of the plastic for the insurance. I'll never know.

I chatted with Matt and Natalie for a while, and learned more than I've known before about the Michigan history department. I also learned what Matt's next line of research is going to be: the history of efforts to control population growth. That is very different, or so I thought, from, the history of Algeria that he has worked on up until now, and it is vastly more interesting in my opinion. I told him so, and I think he was a little hurt that I hadn't been that interested in Algeria. He also explained that population growth has been a big issue there, and a cause of the frictions that developed between Algeria and France.

Our flight was scheduled for 1:10, and we were sitting right next to the gate, where the time was posted. At about 12:30, they posted its estimated departure time as 1:50. We checked our schedules and speculated whether we would make our connection to Detroit. I think we would have, if the flight had actually left then, but it didn't board until after 2:00, and it didn't take off until 2:45. By then it was clear that we'd miss our connection. The flight crew explained the delay as resulting from waiting for "slots" from the air traffic controllers, first for the incoming flight to land in Bologna, and then for our own flight to take off.

The flight was on KLM, I should have said, and they treated us very well, both during the wait and during the flight. There was a nice lunch, including for dessert a “cake” that they brought onto the plane whole and cut ample slices of for each of us. I’d never seen that before on a flight, and the cake – some sort of cream cake with a pistachio filling – was delicious.

I was surrounded on the plane by three men, Italians I think, who were on their way to Montreal. They became very concerned when they realized they might miss their connections. I assured them that the airline would take care of them and get them there. I was at best only half right. When we arrived in Amsterdam and went to the transfer desk, we were told we’d been booked on tomorrow’s flight and that KLM would do nothing to put us up for the night! The reason was that the delay was “not their fault,” being instead due to the chaos of Italian air traffic control. One agent actually called it an “act of God,” which seems to show more respect than he intended for the Italians. This was a new policy, we were told, that went into effect on April 1. I think perhaps it was an April Fools joke gone awry.

I was not pleased, and I was complaining mildly to the agent I was dealing with, when I overheard Matt and Natalie with raised voices talking to another agent at a nearby desk. Matt was outraged and letting them know it. My approach didn’t work, and neither did his. When we’d finally gotten our reservations and tickets for tomorrow, the three of us went on to try to find a hotel. As we waited in line at the tourist office (the wait there must have been 30 minutes, at least), we shared our irritation with how we’d been treated.

The reason it took so long at the tourist office was that most of the hotels in Amsterdam were already full. I had no interest in going into the city, myself, since I’ll be here again in a month or so, so I just asked for a room at one of the hotels at the airport. All were full. In town, their computer found only two single rooms, and both were gone by the time the woman tried to reserve them. Then she found another at the place I’m now staying. It was a single in a “one-star” hotel and was surprisingly affordable. I wondered if it was a flop house, not really knowing what that is, and I wasn’t far off. I took the train into the city, then a taxi, the driver of whom had to study the map quite a while before he found the address.

It bills itself as a “budget hotel,” and boy is it not impressive, although it seems to be clean and safe. Some rooms have “facilities,” others don’t. For about \$5 more, I got facilities, which consist of a bathroom that has been built as a small unit into the corner of what otherwise would have been a normal sized square room. What’s left is pretty small, although I guess the bed is actually bigger than the one at the Collegio.

The man at the desk who runs the place sounds English, and he is sufficiently vague and absent minded that I think he is probably on drugs. The whole neighborhood seems to be of that sort – there’s a coffeehouse half a block away called the Mellow Yellow. But within only, say, fifteen minutes of my arrival, he had me booked into room 3, and after only another ten minutes he had found a key for it. He also gave me important and useful instructions on how to get into the building later, and on where to find places to eat.

There is no phone in the room, so the first thing I did after he had finished with me was to place a couple of calls to Ann Arbor from a pay phone to explain my delay. The phone was in the hallway (I'd hardly call it a lobby) with a convenient sign posted over it listing toll-free numbers for calling different countries. The U.S. number didn't work, however, until I noticed that somebody had penned in a faint extra zero at its start. It wasn't a touch-tone phone, but AT&T's computers have mastered voice recognition now and I was able to speak all my numbers.

I then followed my man's directions to find a restaurant. These led me along a canal for just two blocks before I found a place on a corner with outside tables, a posted menu, and quite a few people seated and talking in English. He'd said there would be lots of restaurants. I didn't see any others, so I sat down and prepared to order. When the waitress came and I started to ask for onion soup, she interrupted and said that they only served lunch, which was over, as it clearly stated on the menu. I should continue the way I had come, and I'd find lots of restaurants. I did, and as soon as I rounded a bend in the street, sure enough: an entire district of restaurants appeared before me. Most had brightly lit signs, and as I walked through the district, the side streets were filled with restaurants too. I felt especially foolish for having tried to get food from the only place within a mile that didn't serve it.

The restaurants were of all sorts, including many ethnicities. I found one that said it was Dutch. It was fairly well filled with people, most sitting at long tables side-by-side. I told the waitress that I was just one, and she said I could sit anywhere I'd fit. I did, and ordered soup, plus a meatball with potatoes and some sort of cooked green. It was delicious, although I was so squeezed in I was hardly comfortable.

I'm back in my hotel now, where I hope to go to sleep early and then get up early and go to the airport. As I've been writing this, I've gotten one more clue to what kind of place this is: someone is playing a guitar in another room.

#### **Thursday, May 20, Ann Arbor**

I'm back now, with only a couple of more things to add. One is that the Amsterdam hotel I stayed in can't have been too awful. I slept well, and when I woke up, I wanted as usual to continue lying in that bed for as long as possible. By then it felt very comfortable. This time, though, I forced myself to get up.

I took the tram back to the train station. That wasn't hard, except that when the first tram arrived, those of us waiting to get on found we had to board at the back entrance. The man nearest that entrance dropped his bags, blocking the way for a moment, so that by the time three of us reached the door, it was closed. We pushed a button and pounded on the door, but the driver didn't open it and instead rolled off. A woman in our group became furious and said "Typical Dutch tram conductor! They are so rude!" I mention this only because in an earlier journal, years ago, I believe I had a very pleasant interaction with a Dutch tram conductor who went out of his way to help me. Perhaps

that one was atypical. Anyhow, a second tram appeared seconds after the first had left (which may well be why the first one moved on), and we boarded easily.

The flight from Amsterdam to Detroit was close to on time and uneventful. This time the middle seat next to my aisle seat was already taken when I boarded, so I didn't repeat the suspense of whether anyone would take it. But to my surprise, after most had boarded, the girl in that seat got up and moved back three rows to a middle seat there, apparently with her family. The seat next to me then remained empty throughout the flight, perhaps the only empty seat on the plane. It seemed fitting, after my flight over, and I enjoyed the space.

