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Creating the cultures of the future: cultural strategy, policy and institutions in Gramsci

### **Part Three: Is there a theory of cultural policy in Gramsci's prison notebooks?**

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#### **Introduction**

In this article, I argue that Gramsci's prison notes on questions of cultural strategy, policy and institutions, which have so far been largely overlooked by scholars, provide further analytical insights to those offered by his more general concepts. Together they enrich the theoretical underpinnings for critical frameworks of analysis as well as for radical practices of cultural strategy, cultural policy-making and cultural organisation.<sup>1</sup> On the basis of a detailed analysis of these notes, I then answer the question of whether they amount to a theory of cultural policy.

Cold War ideological conflict seems to have had a significant role in the neglect of this area of Gramsci's thought through the creation of an intellectual milieu hostile to the very notion of cultural policy. In 1952, two years after the first posthumous publication of Gramsci's Notebook 23, which included references to the concept of 'cultural policy' (*politica culturale*),<sup>2</sup> the prominent Italian liberal-socialist philosopher Norberto Bobbio, who would become an influential scholar of Gramsci, published an article titled '*Politica culturale e politica della cultura*'.<sup>3</sup> The article had no apparent relationship with Gramsci's notes on cultural policy, but was a response to appeals made by the recently constituted European Association of Culture to intellectuals of the world on the dangers of the relationship between politics and culture, particularly in the form of 'cultural policy'. The Association had been constituted in 1950 with the participation of intellectuals and artists like Julien Benda, André Breton, Marc Chagall, Benedetto Croce, Thomas Mann, Giuseppe Ungaretti, and Bobbio himself.<sup>4</sup> According to Bobbio, the appeals recommended that culture should be neither 'politicised or politically engaged' (*cultura politicizzata* or 'cultura impegnata') nor 'apolitical or disengaged' (*cultura apolitica* or 'cultura non impegnata').<sup>5</sup> In the first case, culture was seen as *instrumental* to social objectives pursued through political means: in this way it was 'subordinated' and therefore 'discouraged'. In the second case, culture was considered socially '*incommunicable*': in this way it was 'indifferent' and therefore increasingly 'aimless, sterile, capricious'.<sup>6</sup> The Association's prescribed approach was, instead, that culture and intellectuals had to be *above* politics and society.

It went under the name '*politica della cultura*' ('cultural politics' or 'politics of culture'), and consisted of 'politics made by men of culture for the ends of culture itself'.<sup>7</sup>

However, the most dangerous approach, and the real antithesis to the recommended one, was that of '*politica culturale*' ('cultural policy'), which consisted of 'culture made by politicians for political ends'.<sup>8</sup> Through this intervention, Bobbio presented himself as an accurate interpreter of the preoccupations of all intellectuals of his time: 'all men of culture, I believe, feel in this moment the danger of cultural policy from any side it might come'.<sup>9</sup> In the public debate that followed, Bobbio insisted that cultural policy was necessarily characteristic of totalitarian regimes: even liberal democracies, in his view, became totalitarian the very moment they started to have a 'cultural policy'.<sup>10</sup>

Arguably, this hostility to the idea of cultural policy, added to Croce's earlier strenuous rejection of Gramsci's philosophy of praxis as a reduction of philosophy to political interests that should not be promoted amongst the Italian masses,<sup>11</sup> constituted the background for the parallel strategic attempt, on the part of liberal-socialist intellectuals, to conflate Gramsci's ideas on culture with the cultural policy of the Italian Communist Party, and of both with Zhdanovism.<sup>12</sup> All this seems to have created, right from the beginning, an intellectual milieu hostile to an open discussion of Gramsci's reflections on cultural policy.

Problems of reception of Gramsci's notes on cultural policy do not seem to be limited to the Italian context, or to have disappeared with the end of the Cold War. English translations of Gramsci's expression '*politica culturale*' as 'cultural politics' in the *Selections from cultural writings* of 1985 have probably had the effect of obfuscating the actual meaning of the original expression for Anglo-American readers.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, the claim made by the Australian 'governmentality' school of cultural policy studies that Gramsci's concepts and theories are not suitable for the study of cultural policy and institutions<sup>14</sup> could be ascribed to the new forms of anti-Marxist prejudice that have characterised the post-1989 intellectual climate, rather than directly to the Cold War legacy. While Gramsci's reflections on the role of the cultural industries in modern culture have received increasing attention,<sup>15</sup> and his theory of hegemony has constituted the theoretical framework for the historical study of the emergence and development of cultural markets in Europe (also considered in relation to state intervention and regulation),<sup>16</sup> Gramsci's reflections on cultural policy have remained neglected.

The only scholar to have given any attention to Gramsci's use of the expression '*politica culturale*' ('cultural policy') is Wolfgang Fritz Haug. However, he has argued that with this concept Gramsci did not refer to what we today consider cultural policy in the sense of the activities of a cultural minister or of state funding of culture (in German '*Kulturpolitik*'). To make sense of Gramsci's expression, Haug has in fact coined the phrase *Politik des Kulturellen* (which can be translated as 'politics of the cultural'), referring to the political dimension of culture,<sup>17</sup> or, in Birgit Wagner's reading, to a strategic view of the political dimension of the cultural field, or to culture as the multiplication of the modes of expression of the political.<sup>18</sup>

In this article, I qualify Haug's claim by arguing that the expression *politica culturale* in Gramsci's prison notebooks did in fact mean 'cultural policy'. Although the concept had a broader meaning than the one normally ascribed to cultural policy as a governmental activity in today's cultural policy studies, Gramsci's concept was nonetheless more specific than Haug's '*Politik des Kulturellen*', and, as part of the theory of the integral state,<sup>19</sup> did also refer to the activities of a cultural minister and to initiatives of state funding and more general state intervention in the cultural sphere.

To demonstrate my point we first need to look at the particular way in which Gramsci resumed and developed, in his prison writings, the concept of culture and his interest in cultural institutions, which, as we have seen in Part Two, was prominent in his early political practice and writings. The tracing of this conceptual development is in fact essential for understanding Gramsci's prison notes on cultural policy.

### **Culture in the prison notebooks**

It was only in January 1934 that Gramsci eventually consigned to his prison notes a first full definition of culture, which he then perfected in a second draft between February and August 1934 at the very beginning of his special Notebook 23 on 'Literary criticism' – interestingly, the same notebook in which, as we will see, he went on to elaborate his concept of cultural policy.<sup>20</sup> It was inevitably a condensed definition, which encapsulated all his earlier and contemporary reflections on culture, and explained how culture should be understood in the context of the theory of hegemony and of the integral state. Culture was in fact defined here as 'a coherent, integral and nationwide "conception of life and man", a "lay religion", a philosophy that has become "culture", that is, one that has generated an ethic, a life-style and an individual and civil pattern of behaviour'.<sup>21</sup> Like his earlier definition, this later one had both an analytical and a normative character, as it also expressed how culture should be conceptualised in order to function in practice to contribute to political objectives.

Whereas the earlier definition was focused on individual self-knowledge,<sup>22</sup> the definition of culture formulated in this note shifted towards the collective, national dimension and no longer referred specifically to the proletariat, thus reflecting a shift in strategy from the earlier focus on the industrial working class as the privileged subject of revolution to the 'popular classes' or 'popular masses' of the whole nation. As a basis for his own definition, in fact, Gramsci referred to the concept of 'political culture' articulated by the nineteenth-century Italian literary critic Francesco De Sanctis, which had a national and mass dimension: it was only through the creation of a new unified *national* culture to be diffused amongst all social strata, that Italians could become, for De Sanctis, truly active politically. The creation of this new national culture was the responsibility of intellectuals, who should not remain isolated from society but should participate in its struggles.<sup>23</sup> Gramsci underlined the shift towards the national and mass dimension explicitly by adding that this understanding of culture 'required a new attitude towards the popular classes and a new concept of what is "national", different from that of the Right, broader, less exclusive and, so to speak, less "police-like"'.<sup>24</sup>

That culture was ‘nationwide’ also meant that it was expressed in the national language and that the whole of the nation was involved in its elaboration and fruition (whereas folklore, for example, was local-provincial, expressed in a dialect,<sup>25</sup> and of little or no use, for the national masses, for the task of creating a new culture and mobilising politically).<sup>26</sup>

Culture was a ‘conception of life and man’ in the sense that it was not merely a conception of art and literature,<sup>27</sup> but was involved in the creation of a whole new civilisation. It was a ‘lay religion’, where the emphasis was on ‘lay’, arguably in the sense of ‘a lay culture, (...) a modern “humanism” able to reach right to the simplest and most uneducated classes’.<sup>28</sup> It was ‘coherent’, arguably in the sense that it was organised by organic intellectuals (whereas existing popular culture, or folklore, was ‘not elaborated and systematic’ but a ‘confused agglomerate of fragments’ of conceptions of the world and could not be ‘politically organised’).<sup>29</sup> It was also ‘integral’, possibly because, against idealist notions of culture, it implied a complex relationship between civil society and political society in the context of the integral state, whereas Croce’s conception of culture implied its separation from politics and society (based on the separation of civil society from the state understood in the traditional sense as government -- in Gramsci’s terminology, ‘political society’), and Gentile’s conception implied the lack of a distinct civil society and its subsumption by political society.<sup>30</sup>

Culture was therefore ‘a philosophy that (...) has generated an ethic, a life-style and an individual and civil pattern of behaviour’, where another novelty with respect to the pre-prison writings was thus also in the expression ‘civil behaviour’ (*condotta civile*): it was only by generating a ‘civil behaviour’ as opposed to an individual one, that a new culture had the potential of becoming hegemonic. It is thus possible to say that Gramsci’s definition of culture referred to the development of a mass culture with particular characteristics as the necessary basis for the realisation of the revolutionary process and, after the achievement of state power, for the realisation of a full new culture, a full civil society, and a full hegemony.

But when, how, and by whom was the development of such new culture undertaken? It was possible, for an emerging fundamental social group,<sup>31</sup> to start creating a new conception of the world, establishing its alternative organisations and institutions in civil society (including cultural ones), and building some degree of alternative hegemony *before* the achievement of state power. For a successful ‘supremacy’ it was actually *necessary* to ‘exercise [moral and intellectual] leadership’ (i.e., hegemony) of some degree before the achievement of state power.<sup>32</sup> It was however the creation of the new state that made it possible for an emerging social group fully to develop its new conception of the world (i.e. a new culture), consolidate its institutions, and build a full hegemony, while at the same time creating a new social structure by upgrading the previously existing one to the production needs of the new state.<sup>33</sup>

The creation of a new culture of an emerging social group was facilitated by the work of organic intellectuals, who could intervene on the basis of an analysis of the ‘situation’ or ‘relations of force’.<sup>34</sup> Presumably, they could do very little at the level of the relation of *social* forces, which was ‘closely linked to the structure, objective,

independent of human will'.<sup>35</sup> It was in fact 'a refractory reality: nobody can alter the number of firms or their employees, the number of cities or their given population, etc.'.<sup>36</sup> For Gramsci, however, the structure (i.e. the 'refractory reality') was not only economic but also cultural, involving, for example, questions of race and religion.<sup>37</sup> These were relatively intractable cultural entities, which, presumably, could only really change with the achievement of a full new hegemony.

Conceivably, the first significant stage of intervention of the organic intellectuals of an emerging social group was in facilitating the movement of the group from one level to the other within the relation of *political* forces, which expressed 'the degree of homogeneity, self-awareness, and organisation attained by the various social classes'.<sup>38</sup> This movement marked 'the decisive passage from the structure to the sphere of the complex superstructures',<sup>39</sup> to reach the purely political level, in which one's own interests 'transcend the corporate limits of the purely economic class, and can and must become the interests of other subordinate groups too'.<sup>40</sup> This was presumably the moment for the establishment of autonomous cultural institutions of the emerging social group as well as for the elaboration of cultural tactics and strategies, particularly the intellectual and moral reform as a long-term cultural strategy.

The other significant stage of intervention of organic intellectuals was, arguably, after the moment of the 'relation of military forces',<sup>41</sup> or the takeover of the state by the emerging social group. It was presumably at this stage that the cultural organisations and institutions created by the emerging social group before the achievement of state power became the cultural institutions of the integral state. After the takeover, initially there would be a concentration of the new state on the reorganisation of the structure, while 'the superstructural elements will inevitably be few in number, and have a character of foresight and of struggle, but as yet few "planned" elements'.<sup>42</sup> At this stage, the cultural plan 'will above all be negative, a critique of the past; it will be aimed at erasing from the memory and at destroying',<sup>43</sup> thus arguably in a Proletkultist manner.<sup>44</sup> 'The lines of construction will as yet be "broad lines", sketches, which might (and should) be changed at all times, so as to be consistent with the new structure as it is formed'.<sup>45</sup> This passage clearly implied that at a later stage, after the takeover of state power, there would be a more constructive cultural plan, with more 'planned' elements, to complete and consolidate the creation of the new culture -- although in terms of specific contents the planned elements would have to follow the development of the structure of society, and could therefore not be defined in advance.

In the two sections that follow, I suggest that by cultural policy Gramsci understood the whole of the role of culture in these two stages of the relations of force. This included cultural strategies, tactics, policies, and plans undertaken by organic intellectuals through cultural institutions and the state.

### **'Graveyards of culture' or 'intellectual public services': the role of cultural institutions**

In the prison notebooks, Gramsci's earlier discussion of cultural institutions was

initially resumed implicitly as part of the discussion of the concept of ‘hegemonic apparatus’ of the hegemonic group,<sup>46</sup> and later explicitly in the form of the *analysis* of cultural institutions in ‘modern society’.<sup>47</sup> Arguably, Gramsci used the notion of ‘modern society’ without any further specification to mean both bourgeois and socialist society, and therefore with general validity. However, a correction that he made to a note of June-July 1930 shows that the explicit normative discussion of the cultural institutions of *the proletariat* that had characterised his early writings was still in Gramsci’s mind in the summer of 1930 (combined with the discussion of the hegemonic apparatus of the bourgeoisie). After a false start, in fact, Gramsci crossed out the title (*‘Riviste tipo’*, ‘Types of periodicals’) and replaced it with a general one (*‘Argomenti di cultura. Materiale ideologico’*, ‘Cultural topics. Ideological material’). The note advanced the idea of undertaking a study of ‘how in actual fact the ideological structure of a dominant class is organised’, of ‘the material organisation intended to maintain, defend and develop the theoretical and ideological “front”’.<sup>48</sup> Yet this idea had been initially jotted down by Gramsci as part of a normative note on the organisation of a periodical of the proletariat, outlining the task, for a member of the editorial staff, of mapping and assessing the periodicals of the competing bourgeois ideological front.

The quantitatively biggest and most dynamic part is printed matter in general: publishing houses (which either explicitly or implicitly have a programme and are linked to a given tendency), political newspapers, journals of all sorts -- scientific, literary, philological and so on, periodicals down as far as the parish newsletter. Such a study made on the national scale would be gargantuan, so a series of studies could be carried out for a city or a series of cities. An expert local staff writer should have this study as a general outline for his work, or should rather do it on his own initiative: what superb articles could be written on these cities on this subject!

The printed word is the most dynamic part of this ideological structure, but not the only one. Everything that influences or may influence public opinion directly or indirectly belongs to it: libraries, schools, groups and clubs of different kinds, right up to architecture, street lay-out and street names. One would not be able to explain the position the Church has maintained in modern society if one were not aware of its continuous patient and persistent efforts to develop its particular section of this material structure of ideology.<sup>49</sup>

The rest of the note shows even more clearly that Gramsci was still intent on a normative reflection on the cultural institutions of the proletariat. In fact, he resumed a key argument of his youth about the Sorelian spirit of cleavage that should make the proletariat autonomous from bourgeois cultural hegemony, and linked it to the need to perform a strategic analysis of the ideological front of the bourgeoisie.

There would be a certain importance in making a serious study of this. As well as providing a living historical model of this type of structure, it would get people into the habit of a more cautious and precise calculation of the forces acting in society. What can an innovatory class oppose to this formidable complex of trenches and fortifications of the dominant class? The spirit of cleavage, in other words the progressive acquisition of the consciousness of its own historical personality, a spirit of cleavage that must aim at an extension from the protagonist class to the potential allied classes.<sup>50</sup>

More specifically, the mapping and assessment of the hegemonic apparatus was necessary because the first condition of the development of the autonomy was that the enemy camp of bourgeois hegemony had to be ‘emptied of its human mass element’.<sup>51</sup>

Eroding the hegemony of the bourgeoisie and depriving it of the consensus of the proletarian masses was therefore a preliminary step for the construction of the intellectual and moral autonomy of the proletariat as a condition for its full hegemony.<sup>52</sup>

In another note of the late summer of 1930 we still find a discussion of the cultural institutions of the proletariat, but this time in the form of an analysis of existing ‘traditional’ cultural institutions of the working classes *within bourgeois society*. It was in fact a reflection on ‘the origins and development’ of the system of popular public libraries that had been set up in Milan by the first leftist city government in 1903-4. The system was described by Gramsci as an ‘institution which has been the most remarkable initiative for popular culture in modern times’,<sup>53</sup> and an example, in Italy, of ‘unquestionable organizational ability in the field of workers’ culture, in a democratic sense’,<sup>54</sup> i.e. in a hegemonic context.<sup>55</sup> At the time in which Gramsci was writing this note, an important political factor influenced his research agenda. Having started to disagree substantially with the Communist International’s assessment of fascism in 1928-29, Gramsci was developing theoretically his idea of the preliminary need to overthrow Italian fascism and undertake a phase of democratic (hegemonic) struggle, a long transitional period of war of position within bourgeois society, before any thought of revolution could be entertained, to avoid a complete self-annihilation of the working class after the massive coercive reorganisation of the fascist state.<sup>56</sup> This was therefore the political background for his third distinct line of inquiry into the traditional cultural institutions of the working classes (institutions that Gramsci had criticised and written off in his youth), to investigate their potential role in the tactical perspective of a long hegemonic struggle dictated by the exceptional coercive character of the fascist regime.

An important point of the discussion of the system of Milanese libraries was the uniqueness of that experiment in Italy, and the fact that it was already at least twenty-five years old at the time in which Gramsci was writing his note, thus offering a rare chance of studying and assessing a concrete socialist reformist cultural institution empirically. Having read an account of the system, Gramsci jotted down what he saw as the most interesting data:

the workers were the best ‘clients’ of the public libraries: they took care of the books, they did not lose them (unlike other kinds of readers: students, white-collar workers, professionals, housewives, the well-off (?), etc.); readers of “belletristic” literature represented a relatively low percentage, fewer than in other countries; workers who offered to pay half the cost of expensive books if only they could read them; workers who made donations of up to one hundred lire to the public libraries; a dye worker who has become a ‘writer’ and a translator from the French through his reading and studies in the public libraries, but who continues to be a worker.<sup>57</sup>

Gramsci also considered the availability of data about the popular reading public as a source of information about popular reading taste beyond the data that could be obtained indirectly by analysing the choices made by the publishing industry: he was interested in what was actually read, beyond what was published. ‘The literature on the public libraries in Milan should be studied to obtain some ‘real’ ideas about popular culture: which kinds of books and authors are read most, etc.’.<sup>58</sup> Special publications of the library system were also, for Gramsci, important sources of policy information on the character of the libraries, their cultural-intellectual ‘tendencies’, and their objectives



in political terms as organisations linked to the Milanese tradition of Socialist reformism.<sup>59</sup> The very existence of popular public libraries in certain cities rather than in others also generated broader social-political questions: ‘Why is this kind of initiative on a grand scale only in Milan? Why not in Turin and other large cities? The nature and history of Milanese ‘reformism’; Popular University, etc. A very interesting and fundamental topic’.<sup>60</sup>

The idea of mapping and assessing the hegemonic apparatus was resumed by Gramsci with a new emphasis in 1932, when he established detailed criteria for such a task, also indicating that cultural institutions should be studied and assessed in the context of a more general empirical study of the whole system of cultural organisation *at the national level*, rather than just at city level as he had previously written.<sup>61</sup> ‘It would be interesting to study concretely the forms of cultural organisation which keep the ideological world in movement *within a given country*, and to examine how they function in practice’.<sup>62</sup> It was the same shift to the national dimension which, as we have seen, was reflected in his definition of culture, which he first drafted at around the same time. Such a nation-wide study would consist of a strategic quantitative mapping of the relations of force in the different aspects of the cultural sphere.

A study of the numerical relationship between the section of the population professionally engaged in active cultural work in the country in question and the population as a whole, would also be useful, together with an approximate calculation of the unattached forces [*forze libere*].<sup>63</sup>

Cultural organisations and institutions, especially schools and the Church were fundamental elements to be considered in such strategic analysis of the relations of force because of the sheer number of intellectuals who were involved in their activities.

The school, at all levels, and the Church, are the biggest cultural organisations in every country, in terms of the number of people they employ. Then there are newspapers, magazines and the book trade and private educational institutions, either those which are complementary to the state system, or cultural institutions like the Popular Universities.<sup>64</sup>

The analysis should be extended beyond the cultural sphere strictly understood because all human beings conducted some degree of cultural activity, and in particular there were sections of civil society that implied a high degree of intellectual activity, particularly in terms of the organisation of social life: ‘[o]ther professions include among their specialised activities a fair proportion of cultural activity. For example, doctors, army officers, the legal profession’.<sup>65</sup>

A key element of the hegemonic apparatus to consider in terms of relations of force was the distance between the intellectual groups and the popular masses, which should be the object of specific analysis and assessment. Presumably, the distance between the intellectual groups and the popular masses was important for Gramsci not only as a warning for the construction of the hegemony of the proletariat, but also as an indicator of the possible weakness of the existing hegemonic apparatus of the bourgeoisie. It was therefore a general criterion, and this is further confirmed by a reference to ‘all countries’.

But it should be noted that in all countries, though in differing degrees, there is a great gap

between the popular masses and the intellectual groups, even the largest ones, and those nearest to the peripheries of national life, like priests and school teachers. The reason for this is that, however the ruling class may affirm to the contrary, the State, as such, does not have a unitary, coherent and homogeneous conception, with the result that intellectual groups are scattered between one stratum and the next, or even within a single stratum. The Universities, except in a few countries, do not exercise any unifying influence: often an independent thinker has more influence than the whole of [the] university institutions, etc.<sup>66</sup>

In a note of February 1933, another indicator of the strength of the hegemonic apparatus was identified by Gramsci in the fact that in a ‘modern society’ certain kinds of cultural institutions that were important for public education and culture should be supported by the state or by local authorities; if left to ‘private’, individual business initiative they would not be equally accessible to all social groups;<sup>67</sup> this would create a distance between intellectuals and the masses and therefore a weakness in the hegemonic apparatus.

Public intellectual services: over and above schooling at its various levels, what other services cannot be left to private initiative, but in a modern society *must* be ensured by the state and local authorities (town councils and provinces)? The theatre, libraries and museums of different types, the art galleries, zoological and botanical gardens, etc. A list should be made of institutions which are to be considered useful for public education and culture and which are indeed considered such in a series of nations, institutions which could not be accessible to the public (and which it is maintained must, for national reasons, be accessible) without intervention by the state.<sup>68</sup>

A comparison amongst modern nations was also useful in assessing the relative weakness of the hegemonic apparatus of a particular country. Gramsci in fact noted that cultural institutions were already considered useful for public education and culture ‘in a series of nations’, while in Italy they were elite business organisations.

It may be observed that it is just these services that are almost completely neglected by us, the libraries and theatres being typical examples. The theatres exist in so far as they are a business undertaking – they are not considered a public service.<sup>69</sup>

This was presumably to be considered an indication that cultural institutions in Italy were a weak element of the hegemonic apparatus: because of the way in which they were conceived, they were unable to attract the ‘element of human mass’; their role was perhaps limited to the restricted hegemony over allied classes. The fact that charitable cultural institutions replaced public cultural institutions did not improve the situation because they were badly administered and were also run as private businesses, rather than as public services, and functioned according to a paternalistic logic. Gramsci seemed here to imply that, even in large numbers, paternalistic initiatives did not replace public cultural institutions in terms of contributing to the strength of the hegemonic apparatus. ‘These elements [are] to be studied as national nexuses between governors and governed, as factors of hegemony. Charity as element of ‘paternalism’; intellectual services as elements of hegemony, in other words of democracy in the modern sense’.<sup>70</sup> It was therefore important to study existing cultural institutions in terms of power relationships in the light of the fundamental distinction between paternalism and hegemony.

This note and the previous one should be seen as having general analytical

validity because although Gramsci discussed the specific example of Italian bourgeois society, it is possible to extract a general normative principle of how cultural institutions should be organised in terms of the theory of hegemony.<sup>71</sup> The specific normative discussion of the development of proletarian hegemony was therefore not resumed by Gramsci as part of his reflection on cultural institutions but in the context of the discussion of two different themes: ‘journalism’ and, as we will see, ‘cultural policy’ -- the latter being of interest here.<sup>72</sup>

## Cultural policy

The concept of cultural policy first appeared in Gramsci’s prison work in a note drafted in November 1932, which Gramsci later included in second draft in the special Notebook 23 on ‘Literary criticism’. In this note, he related the concept of *politica culturale* to the development of a *new* culture (‘cultural creation’) conceived as a political activity.<sup>73</sup> This clearly means that the discussion of issues of cultural policy was first of all part of the question of the development of the *new* culture of the proletariat. However, as we will see, it did not remain confined to this specific context but was subject to generalisation.

Gramsci addressed the question of the creation of a new culture by resorting to the concept of *neolalismo*, by which he meant ‘a pathological expression of individual language (vocabulary)’,<sup>74</sup> i.e., a language disorder that is apparently characteristic of paranoid dementia, by which neologisms prevail over the words of the common language. He asked whether the concept could be used ‘in a more general sense, to indicate a whole series of cultural, artistic and intellectual manifestations’. Arguably, he was trying to establish an analogy between the process of creation of new words by a person affected by dementia and the process of creation of new cultural, artistic and literary expressions. Just as the person affected by a particular psychiatric illness created new words, in the same way ‘the most extensive and multifarious cases of *neolalismo* arise in periods of crisis’.<sup>75</sup> This was therefore an implicit reference to yet another indicator of the weakness of the hegemonic apparatus of the bourgeoisie: the proliferation of literary and artistic schools. This was possibly a sign that there had been a loss of coherence in the existing hegemonic worldview, and therefore that there was the possibility, for a new alternative hegemony, to emerge. Thus in the same way in which a particular mental illness opened the way to the creation of new words, a crisis in the bourgeois hegemony also opened the way to the creation of a new culture of the proletariat.<sup>76</sup>

But why was cultural policy related to the creation of a new culture? Consistently with Gramsci’s view of social change, the creation of a new culture did not happen spontaneously; on the contrary, it required a broad struggle: ‘[o]ne must speak of a *struggle* for a new culture, that is, for a new moral life that cannot but be intimately connected to a new intuition of life, until it becomes a new way of feeling and seeing reality’.<sup>77</sup> Arguably, cultural policy was seen by Gramsci as connected with such struggle.

Gramsci also used the concept of '*politica di cultura*' ('politics of culture') with a meaning similar to cultural policy but seemingly restricted to the normative element (i.e., cultural policy-making), suggesting that for establishing, organising a *politica di cultura* it was indispensable to analyse cultural creation in terms of historical stratification of modes of communication.<sup>78</sup> The stratified modes of communication ranged from the 'provincial-dialect-folklore grade', to the 'national popular', to the grade of civilisation (expressed in religion and, in the modern world, in political currents), and, in the case of the arts, to 'the cosmopolitan expression of musical, pictorial and other types of language'.<sup>79</sup> This analysis, Gramsci specified, was even *fundamental* for establishing and organising a *politica di cultura* of the popular masses'.<sup>80</sup> We can see that while the discussion of cultural institutions remained analytical and general, in the discussion of the normative element of cultural policy Gramsci also referred specifically to the case of the proletariat. However, at the same time he did not limit his reflection to this specific case because the analysis of the stratification of modes of communication was 'indispensable' in any case, i.e., in general. This means that from this fragment Gramsci extracted a general criterion about *politica di cultura*, or the normative element of cultural policy.

Arguably, the analysis of cultural stratification was fundamental because hegemony should be achieved at the national level: it should have national-popular character and scope. Hegemony of a local-provincial character and scope was clearly not sufficient. Linked to this issue was Gramsci's preoccupation with the question of the consolidation of a common national language, shared by the national popular masses, as a condition of the achievement of their full hegemony -- hence his indication that 'the new literature must necessarily manifest itself "nationally", in relatively hybrid and different combinations and alloys'.<sup>81</sup>

An example of a phenomenon in Italian cultural history that for Gramsci should be considered and analysed as an early act of '*politica culturale-nazionale*' ('national-cultural policy'), and therefore related to the creation of a new national culture in relation to a new hegemony, was Dante's treatise *De Vulgari Eloquentia*.<sup>82</sup> In this treatise, written at the beginning of the fourteenth century, when most Italian writers still preferred to write their works in Latin, Dante compared Latin with vernacular Italian, arguing that the vernacular was nobler because it was a natural and living language, while Latin had been rendered artificial and inexpressive by its exclusively scholastic use. For Gramsci, because 'what is called the "question of language" has always been an aspect of the political struggle',<sup>83</sup> Dante's essay amounted to an explicit act of national-cultural policy which exemplified the development of language as part of the process of creation of a new culture, and ultimately the creation of a whole new civilisation by an emerging class as a form of political struggle.<sup>84</sup> Cultural policy was thus an active hegemonic struggle undertaken by the organic intellectuals of an emerging social group. 'Language is transformed with the transformation of the whole of civilisation, through the acquisition of culture by new classes and through the hegemony exercised by one national language over others'.<sup>85</sup> The cyclical re-surfacing of the 'question of language' in Italy was in fact for Gramsci a symptom of intensified political struggle and of hegemonic readjustment and consolidation:

[e]very time the question of language surfaces, in one way or another, it means that a series of other problems are coming to the fore: the formation and enlargement of the governing class, the need to establish more intimate and secure relationships between the governing groups and the national-popular mass, in other words to reorganize the cultural hegemony.<sup>86</sup>

For Gramsci, Dante's essay also showed the poet's tactical awareness of the fact that artistic achievements could function as legitimisation of the prestige of a new language, favouring its emergence as a hegemonic language: 'the Italian intellectuals of the most thriving period of the communes "broke" with Latin and justified the vernacular by raising it up against Latinizing "mandarinism", in the same period in which the vernacular had such great artistic expressions'.<sup>87</sup> Something similar could be seen to happen in the more general case of the creation of a new culture: artistic achievements could always function as legitimisation of a new culture. This general principle could therefore also be applied to the case of the proletariat of Gramsci's time. If popular literature could produce prestigious artistic achievements, such achievements would contribute to legitimising the new culture as hegemonic.

But how could the working classes concretely achieve such an objective? How could a new popular literature be created organically, i.e. without it being engineered? It seems that for Gramsci the organic creation of a new culture could at least be accelerated.<sup>88</sup> It is possible to argue that this acceleration was a key task of cultural plans that were part of the broader process of cultural policy-making.<sup>89</sup>

Gramsci saw in the analogy with architecture the possibility of extracting the general principles that could be applied to such acceleration. In the early 1930s, at the time of the debate on rationalist architecture in the Italian press, Gramsci wrote that 'the concept of rationalism or "functionalism" in architecture' seemed to be 'rich in consequences and principles'<sup>90</sup> for *politica culturale* ('cultural policy'),<sup>91</sup> arguably in the sense of understanding how a new culture could be created.

By the time Gramsci wrote this note (February 1933) architectural rationalism, which had previously been ostracised by Italian conservative critics, was widely acclaimed by the fascist regime. Gramsci noted that rationalism in architecture was consistent with the broader changes in the organisation of the state that were common to all advanced capitalist nations: '[i]t is no accident that the concept arose in the present period of "socialization" (in the broad sense) and of attempts by central forces to organize the great masses against the remnants of individualism and the aesthetics of individualism in *politica culturale*'.<sup>92</sup> He therefore explored the question of whether the phenomenon of rationalist architecture could be taken to correspond to a conception of 'literature based on a plan or on a pre-established social course, in other words, "functional" literature'.<sup>93</sup>

Given that functionalist-rationalist architecture was being used to build housing for the popular masses, Gramsci asked the question of why critics found it so easy to accept rationalism in architecture on the ground that architecture was a practical art that responded to a social need of vast popular masses, while there was no perception of the other arts and literature as generating an equivalent social need; on the contrary, 'the

products of the other arts are necessary only for intellectuals, for the cultured',<sup>94</sup> and precisely because there was no such perception, the notion of a literature according to a plan was typically rejected by critics as a form of 'social coercion'.<sup>95</sup> To Gramsci's mind, criticism of the idea of a functional literature responding to a mass social need was typically expressed by 'traditional and traditionalist intellectuals who are prepared, at most, to concede that innovations can be brought in little by little, gradually',<sup>96</sup> as they felt threatened by functionalism and preferred the decorative arts. For Gramsci, the point was not whether a functionalist literature responding to a social plan, a social need of the masses, should be considered 'coercion' for the writers, but rather whether rationalism in literature could respond to an 'authentic', a 'real' functionalism simply 'obtained by an accelerated method',<sup>97</sup> or whether this would amount to an external imposition. In fact, even in the case of general industrial production he argued that the state should not 'accelerate, through coercion imposed from outside, the growth of discipline and order in production',<sup>98</sup> and presumably this held true also for cultural production.

In his discussion of the analogy between literature and architecture, Gramsci was highly polemical on questions of 'social coercion' in the cultural sphere.<sup>99</sup> Presumably this polemic referred to the criticism, by Italian critics, of the Soviet attempts to develop a new literature according to centralised planning. The implication of Gramsci's polemic seems to be that the reason why cultural policy in fascist Italy did not give art a 'plan' responding to broad social needs was that unlike in the Soviet Union, art literature had remained largely a preserve of the elites and was detached from the people-nation despite the regime's populism and nationalism. Gramsci in fact went on to ask whether what tended to be considered by critics as 'coercion' in relation to artistic plans had in reality always existed historically, at least in forms exercised unconsciously, as a form of 'rationalism' against individual will.<sup>100</sup>

In any case, Gramsci regarded functionalist architecture as an adequate model for a functional, collective, accessible literature: 'architecture, in itself and through its (immediate) connections with the rest of life, seems to be the most reformable and "disputable" of the arts'.<sup>101</sup> It 'is "collective" not only as an "occupation" but also in terms of "judgement"'.<sup>102</sup> He therefore opposed the opinion that architecture should be considered an industrial product and therefore non-art. 'When art, especially in its collective forms, aims to create a mass taste, to elevate this taste, it is not "industrial", but disinterested: i.e. it is art'.<sup>103</sup>

The idea of accelerating the development of an authentic rationalism-functionalism in literature through the organisation of cultural plans also made it possible, for Gramsci, to look at innovation, novelty and originality in a new way, leaving behind the Romantic view of the innovator as someone involved in creative destruction, as 'someone who wants to destroy everything that exists, without worrying about what will happen afterwards since one already knows that in a metaphysical sense every destruction is creation, indeed one only destroys what is then replaced by a new creation'.<sup>104</sup> Gramsci thus stressed that originality in the development of a new popular literature should be seen not as mere opposition to repetition, but as authenticity in relation to a function.

In a note titled '*Governi e livelli culturali nazionali*' ('Governments and national cultural standards'),<sup>105</sup> Gramsci also sketched some criteria for the assessment of the '*politica culturale*' ('cultural policy') of existing governments. These were general criteria valid for both bourgeois and socialist society because he did not indicate a specific context for their application.

Every government has a cultural policy that it can defend from its own point of view, demonstrating that it has raised the country's cultural standards. It all depends on how this standard is measured. A government might improve the organization of high culture and downgrade popular culture. Furthermore, within the sphere of high culture, a government might choose to improve the organization of the sector concerned with technology and the natural sciences by paternalistically providing that sector with funds that were not previously made available to it, etc.<sup>106</sup>

The only criterion for establishing whether the government had truly raised the country's cultural standards was by assessing whether its cultural policy was 'repressive' (which for Gramsci meant top-down and disjointed from the popular masses) or 'expansive' (which meant bottom-up and involving the whole mass of the population).

There is only one criterion of judgement: is the system of government repressive or expansive? And this criterion can be articulated even more precisely: is a government repressive in certain respects while it is expansive in other respects? A system of government is expansive when it facilitates and promotes growth from the bottom upward, when it raises the level of national-popular culture and thus enables the emergence of a variety of 'intellectual heights' across a more extensive area. A desert with a cluster of tall plants is still a desert; indeed, it is characteristic of a desert to have small oases with clusters of tall palms.<sup>107</sup>

Gramsci's specification that in this note he was discussing the cultural policy of *governments* further confirms that for him cultural policy should *also* be understood, in a restricted sense, as an activity carried out by governments, i.e. an activity located in political society, while the concept of cultural policy without further specification should be understood as broader than governmental activity.<sup>108</sup> Cultural policy in the modern integral state was in fact not restricted to governmental activity but was extended to civil society, it was also part of the hegemonic struggle within civil society.<sup>109</sup> It is in fact possible to argue that in a Gramscian scheme it was only in the Fascist theory of the state, which did not contemplate a separate civil society but subsumed it under the state-as-government,<sup>110</sup> that cultural policy could be conceptualised as the exclusive activity of political society. On the other hand, in Gramsci's theory of the socialist state cultural policy would remain, after the gradual withering away of the state-as-government, an exclusive activity of civil society. In any case, from the analytical point of view, within the perimeter of the theory of the integral state it is possible to include two such extreme forms of cultural policy as well as any intermediate possibilities.

## Conclusion

Cultural policy in Gramsci's prison notebooks was referred to 'modern' societies, i.e., societies run by hegemonic means through an integral state, and included both analytical and normative questions. It was in fact an umbrella concept to refer to the active, coherent work of organisation carried out by organic intellectuals to favour the development of a new hegemonic culture both before and after the achievement of state power by an emerging social group. It included questions of cultural strategy such as the establishment of autonomous cultural institutions of an emerging social group, the elaboration of the intellectual and moral reform, the national-popular character of culture or the need to involve the popular masses; questions of cultural tactics such as Dante's legitimisation of the vernacular language; questions of cultural policy-making and of long-term cultural plans by the state such as the development of a popular literature according to rationalist-functionalist criteria. Gramsci's concept of cultural policy had the character of a general theory because it referred not just to a specific social context but, in a general sense, to *any* 'modern' society characterised by a significant level of reciprocal interaction between the state and civil society.

For us today, thinking about cultural policy through a Gramscian lens means thinking in terms of relationships between political society and civil society within the theoretical perimeter of the integral state. Governments intervene in civil society to regulate and fund cultural practices and activities, but at the same time governmental cultural policy is not isolated from the interests that exist in civil society. For example, governmental cultural policy is rarely fully independent of religious questions, never really isolated from business interests, hardly free from interference from lobby groups in civil society. A Gramscian lens seems particularly relevant for analysing cultural policy in social contexts characterised by deep reciprocal links between civil society and political society -- as is typically the case of neoliberal societies, in which legislation and major policy decisions are often dictated by private organisations, lobby groups, and think tanks backed by private corporations, while massively interventionist states bail out companies and financial institutions.<sup>111</sup>

As a general conclusion to my three-part essay, it is possible, on the basis of the analysis carried out, to provide a response to the claims of unsuitability of Gramsci's concepts and theories to the study of cultural policy and institutions which have been made by the Australian 'governmentality' school of cultural policy studies.

- 1) Gramsci's theory of cultural policy is not based on the idea of culture as 'whole ways of life'; on the contrary, culture is defined in relation to politics.
- 2) Existing popular culture is not legitimised in Gramsci's writings as an object of 'symbolic opposition to culture in its more restricted dominant and aesthetic form'; on the contrary, it is replaced with a new national-popular culture that will also develop its own aesthetic forms (as in the discussion of rationalist-functionalist popular literature).
- 3) Gramsci's theory of cultural policy is not based on the theory of hegemony in civil society, but on the broader theory of the integral state, which also includes political



society, i.e government.

4) As a general theory valid for any modern state (capitalist or socialist) it does not focus *exclusively* on class conflict, but more generally on power dynamics amongst social groups (in fact classes are supposed to disappear in the socialist state); nonetheless, a focus on social class seems useful for an analysis of cultural policy in contemporary neoliberal societies, which tend to the concentration of wealth and the restoration of class power.<sup>112</sup>

5) It does not assume an agency based on class, race and gender because the socialist society is based on the principle of equality amongst all human beings, without class and race division or gender exploitation.

6) It does not conceive the organic intellectual as 'unable to connect with policy-makers'; on the contrary, the organic intellectual *is* a cultural policy-maker (as in the example of the poet Dante Alighieri).

7) It does not rely on 'signifying or discursive means' but on the analysis of the 'relations of force'.

8) It does not ignore 'institutional conditions' which 'regulate different fields of culture'; on the contrary, in Gramsci cultural institutions are central to both analytical and normative questions of cultural strategy, tactics, policy-making, and plans -- and it is actually possible to say that cultural institutions are probably more central in Gramsci than in most other cultural and political theorists.

9) It does not ignore 'forms of social life and conduct', but instead of being generated by 'history' as Bennett would expect, these are generated by the requirements of the modes of production, and are delivered by the hegemonic element of the integral state. The cultural policy of governments is in fact likely to be involved in upgrading the cultural level of the population to the needs of the mode of production. Gramsci's analysis of Americanism and Fordism was precisely about the generation of forms of social life and conduct -- not generated directly by the mode of production itself, but by the pursuit, by the state, of a particular social philosophy to which the contribution of industrialists was not extraneous and which was not independent of their interests: prohibition of alcohol and extreme puritanism in the sexual sphere were generated in workers for the sake of maximum productivity in the factory.

Likewise, the neoliberal state surely does not keep its population at the cultural level needed for a mode of production of, say, 50 years ago. It generates its own specific forms of social life and conduct that are consistent with its particular modes of production and are inspired by neoliberal conceptions of the world -- for example, they will probably be based on ideas of individual freedom, individualism, flexibility, fatalism, narcissistic consumerism.<sup>113</sup> But what Gramsci *also* tells us is that the integral state does not necessarily need to do this through measures introduced by the government; as long as civil society is able to produce and promote the new worldview effectively to a hegemonic dimension, the state will not need to intervene: as Gramsci explained, in the modern capitalist state force and consent are variously balanced, but there is never too much coercion when it is not needed.<sup>114</sup>

While the Australian 'governmentality' school of cultural policy studies seems to assume that cultural policy can only serve governmental purposes of social

reproduction (therefore implying that the social groups in power will necessarily remain in power), in Gramsci's theory this is not necessarily the case, and in fact cultural policy has a role to play in the hegemonic struggle: it has to do with cultural creation as a political activity with a fundamental role in enabling the formation of a new culture, and therefore of a new hegemony of an emerging social group. Therefore, while the governmentality model is just descriptive, Gramsci's theorisation of cultural policy is also normative; and although it assumes that the precise content of cultural policy cannot be predetermined in abstract terms but needs to be developed on the basis of the organic evolution of a society, Gramsci discusses the *criteria* that cultural policy-making should follow if it is to contribute to the creation of a genuine hegemonic relationship.

This latter point is closely linked to the question of the role of the organic intellectual. While in the governmentality model cultural policy is a matter of technocratic initiative, in Gramsci, as Anne Showstack Sassoon has rightly emphasised in the context of a more general discussion, 'technocratic solutions of any sort (...) are bound to be inadequate before the enormously complex needs of society. The only way to "know" reality involves understanding popular feelings'.<sup>115</sup> Organic intellectuals thus need to understand common sense in order to criticise it.<sup>116</sup> And therefore '[r]ather than a populist glorification of the ideas of the people, Gramsci argues that it is in their practical activities and their feelings that the population provides problems for organic intellectuals to study and resolve'.<sup>117</sup>

Because cultural policy was for Gramsci an aspect of the hegemonic struggle, it is clear that in his scheme a politically 'neutral' cultural policy undertaken by experts 'above' politics in a technocratic-reformist fashion (as recommended by the governmentality model) was not a real, authentic possibility, but only an idealist cover up of what was in fact, necessarily, a political activity.<sup>118</sup> In fact, contrary to the governmentality model, Gramsci's theory of cultural policy does not hide the close relationship between culture and politics; on the contrary, it includes it as a key factor in both the analysis and the normative element. In the light of Gramsci's concept of hegemonic apparatus and in the context of his theory of the integral state, civil society is not neutral or benign.<sup>119</sup> It is therefore not through the reformist participation in the expansion of *the existing* civil society that an emerging social group can advance objectives of radical social change; on the contrary, by helping consolidate the existing hegemony it would make its own hegemonic struggle more difficult and lengthy. This clearly means that reformist cultural policy-making is ruled out as counterproductive by Gramsci's theory of cultural policy. The emerging social group needs to develop *its own* autonomous cultural strategies, tactics, institutions, policy and plans aimed at the development of its new culture and hegemony. There is therefore no role for the intellectual as a technocrat. In the context of the hegemonic struggle, the intellectual needs to be 'not only a scientist' but 'a partisan, a man of powerful passions, an active politician, who wishes to create a new balance of forces and therefore cannot help concerning himself with what "ought to be" (not of course in a moralistic sense)'.<sup>120</sup>

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## Abbreviations

- SPN Gramsci, A., *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, edited and translated by Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, New York, International Publishers, 1971.
- SCW Gramsci, A., *Selections from Cultural Writings*, translated by William Boelhower and edited by David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1985.
- FS Gramsci, A., *Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, translated and edited by Derek Boothman, Minneapolis, Minnesota University Press, 1995.
- Q Gramsci, A., *Quaderni del carcere*, edizione critica dell'Istituto Gramsci a cura di Valentino Gerratana, 2nd ed. (1st ed. published in 1975), 4 vols, Torino, Einaudi, 2001 [1929-1935].
- A Gramsci, A., *Quaderni del carcere*, Edizione anastatica dei manoscritti a cura di G. Francioni, Cagliari, Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, e Unione Sarda, 2009.
- PN1 Gramsci, A., *Prison Notebooks*, edited by J. Buttigieg and translated by Joseph A. Buttigieg and A. Callari, Vol. I, New York, Columbia University Press, 1992.
- PN2 Gramsci, A., *Prison Notebooks*, edited and translated by Joseph A. Buttigieg, Vol. II, New York, Columbia University Press, 1996.
- PN3 Gramsci, A., *Prison Notebooks*, edited and translated by Joseph A. Buttigieg, Vol. III, New York, Columbia University Press, 2007.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this article, when discussing Gramsci’s writings, I provide references to the page numbers of the available English translations. When more than one translation is available, I reference the older most widespread anthology. References to the Italian critical edition of the prison notebooks (Q) are added in parenthesis; they also allow a rapid location of the notes (although not of the page numbers) in the first three volumes so far published of the English critical edition of the prison notebooks (PN). Where no published translations are available, translations are my own. A list of abbreviations of editions and anthologies of Gramsci's writings cited in this article is provided with the list of references. Concordance tables of the anthologies of English translations with the Italian critical edition of the prison notebooks are available at [http://www.internationalgramscisociety.org/resources/concordance\\_table/index.html](http://www.internationalgramscisociety.org/resources/concordance_table/index.html). For the dates of Gramsci’s prison notes, I refer to G. Francioni, *L’officina gramsciana. Ipotesi sulla struttura dei “Quaderni del carcere”*, Napoli Bibliopolis, 1984.

<sup>2</sup> CW 122 (Q 23, 7, 2193). The notebook was titled *Literary Criticism* ('*Critica letteraria*'). It was published as part of an anthology of Gramsci's cultural writings under the title *Literature and national life* ('*Letteratura e vita nazionale*'). This was the fifth of a series of six thematic volumes of Gramsci's prison notebooks published with editorial coordination by the Italian Communist Party between 1948 and 1951.

<sup>3</sup> N. Bobbio, 'Politica culturale e politica della cultura', *Rivista di filosofia*, XLIII (1), January, 1952, reprinted in N. Bobbio, *Politica e cultura*, new edition, Torino, Einaudi, 2005 [1955], pp. 18-30.

<sup>4</sup> Website of the Association, available at <http://www.societaeuropeacultura.it/>, accessed 15 July 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Bobbio, 'Politica culturale e politica della cultura', p. 20.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 20-21, my translation.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 22-3, my translation. The inherent sexism of the statement is in the original. Bobbio position in this article came to coincide with the reversal, by Western Marxism, of the Stalinist understanding of politics as above intellectuals (see C. Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1980 [1975], p. 15). In any case, it is worth noting that Bobbio went well beyond Benedetto Croce's separation between culture and politics. On Croce's justification of such separation see 'Introduction' to Section II in Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings* (p. 89).

<sup>8</sup> Bobbio, 'Politica culturale e politica della cultura', pp. 22-3, my translation.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 22-3, my translation.

<sup>10</sup> N. Bobbio, 'Difesa della libertà', *Società*, VIII (3), September, 1952, reprinted in N. Bobbio, *Politica e cultura*, new edition, Torino, Einaudi, 2005 [1955], pp. 31-40.

<sup>11</sup> '[I]t seems to me imprudent to persist in the propaganda of those volumes that is being made in the Communist Party press, as if they contained a new philosophy and a new culture that Italians should adopt. There is still some good sense in the brains of our people, who ask which new philosophy and new culture could Gramsci ever give, even supposing that he adopted the Marxist premise that thought is nothing else than the practical interest of the different social classes, and that therefore the point is not to understand the world but change it'. B. Croce, 'Recensione a A. Gramsci, *Il Risorgimento*, Torino, Einaudi, 1949', in *Quaderni della Critica*, V, 15, 1949, p. 112, quoted in R. Mordenti, "'Quaderni del Carcere" di Antonio Gramsci', in A. Asor Rosa (ed.) *Letterature italiana Einaudi. Le Opere*, Vol. IV.II, Torino, Einaudi, 1996, p. 77, my translation.

<sup>12</sup> On the accusations of Zhdanovism, see G. Liguori, 'Gramsci e la politica culturale del Pci dal 1945 al 1955', *Critica Marxista*, 2, 1982.

<sup>13</sup> While in SPN and PN Gramsci's original expression '*politica culturale*' is translated as 'cultural policy' (see, for example, SPN 263 and 341, and PN3 126), in CW it is translated as 'cultural politics'. The Italian language, however, has only one word for 'politics' and 'policy' ('*politica*'), and therefore the meaning cannot be determined independently of a detailed analysis of Gramsci's use of the concept.

<sup>14</sup> See my discussion in Part One.

<sup>15</sup> Marina Paladini Musitelli has considered Gramsci's investigations into the nature and function of literature in a modern industrial system of cultural production, re-evaluating Gramsci's notes on the cultural industries against earlier Italian critics who considered them as a mere adjustment to the allegedly degraded taste of the popular publics. See M. Paladini Musitelli, 'Osservazioni gramsciane di "politica culturale delle masse"', *Problemi*, 112, 1998, (paper delivered at the conference *Fortuna e eredità di Gramsci*, Florence, 14-15 November 1997). However, although the concept of cultural policy has appeared in the title of her paper, it is not mentioned in the text, nor in what seems a later expanded version as M. Paladini Musitelli, 'La funzione della letteratura e il concetto di nazionale-popolare', in F. Giasi (ed.) *Gramsci nel suo tempo*, Roma, Carocci, 2009.

<sup>16</sup> See D. Sassoon 'On cultural markets', *New Left Review*, 17, September-October, 2002, pp. 113-26 and D. Sassoon, *The Culture of the Europeans: from 1800 to the present*, Harper Collins, 2006.

<sup>17</sup> W.F. Haug, 'Gramsci und die Politik des Kulturellen', *Das Argument*, 167, 1988. Haug referred to Gramsci's note in CW 122 (Q 23, 7, 2193).

<sup>18</sup> B. Wagner, "'Argomenti di cultura". I 'Quaderni del carcere' alla luce delle scienze culturali', in R. Medici (ed.) *Gramsci. Il linguaggio della politica*, Bologna, Clueb, 1999.

<sup>19</sup> Gramsci defined the concept of ‘integral state’ synthetically as ‘State = political society + civil society, in other words hegemony armoured by coercion’ (SPN 263; Q 6, 88, 763-4), where ‘political society’ was the state as traditionally understood (i.e., as governmental function). The first successful example of a modern, integral state was the French state produced by the Jacobins after the French Revolution (Showstak Sassoon, *Gramsci’s Politics*, p. 150), while after 1870 the model tended to be found in a less successful, ‘passive’ form of gradual evolution towards social welfare as a response by the ‘interventionist’ state to the birth of mass political parties and working-class organisations -- an evolution that had started with Disraeli’s Act of 1875 and Bismarck’s reforms in Germany in 1883 (SPN 262; Q 26, 6, 2302) and had been widely imitated in Europe. The theory of the integral state is considered fundamental for conceptualising the socialist society of the future as consisting of a state without the state traditionally understood as coercion. ‘In a doctrine of the State which conceives the latter as tendentially capable of withering away and of being subsumed into regulated society, the argument is a fundamental one. It is possible to imagine the coercive element of the State withering away by degrees, as ever-more conspicuous elements of regulated society (or ethical State or civil society) make their appearance’ (SPN 263; Q 6, 88, 763-4). The integral state of advanced capitalism, however, made it possible for the proletariat to start a qualitative transformation of politics already in bourgeois society through the work of intellectuals and a range of working-class institutions, particularly the political party (Showstak Sassoon, *Gramsci’s Politics*, pp. 131-2).

<sup>20</sup> The term ‘special notebook’ is normally used to refer to Gramsci’s thematic notebooks, in which, from 1932, he started to systematise, in second draft, some of the notes he had previously written.

<sup>21</sup> CW 92 (Q 23, 1, 2185-6). The first draft of this note (Q 17, 38) lacked the adjective ‘integral’, which only appeared in the second draft.

<sup>22</sup> In the pre-prison definition, discussed in Part Two, culture was ‘organization, discipline of one’s inner self, a coming to terms with one’s own personality; (...) the attainment of a higher awareness, with the aid of which one succeeds in understanding one’s own historical value, one’s own function in life, one’s own rights and obligations’ (PW1 11; SP 18).

<sup>23</sup> F. De Sanctis, ‘La cultura politica’, *L’Italia*, 13 June 1877, reprinted in *Scritti politici di Francesco De Sanctis raccolti da Giuseppe Ferrarelli*, 3rd ed. Napoli, Morano, 1900, pp. 70-74. In his essay, De Sanctis also clarified that the the creation of a new national culture was not the responsibility of a minister of education, but Gramsci did not pick up this point, arguably because, as we have seen in Part Two, he ascribed a fundamental role to the public education system.

<sup>24</sup> CW 92-3 (Q 23, 1, 2186). In CW, ‘Right’ is given as translation of Gramsci’s original ‘*destra storica*’, which referred specifically to the political right in power in the sixteen years (1860-76) during which the Italian unification was realised.

<sup>25</sup> CW 123 (Q 23, 7, 2194).

<sup>26</sup> From the perspective of today’s concept of multiculturalism the idea of a nationwide culture might be considered questionable; however, Gramsci’s emphasis was on overcoming the limitations of localism and provincialism, which could undermine mass political mobilisation.

<sup>27</sup> It does not seem just coincidental that Gramsci clarified, in the first note of this notebook, that ‘returning to De Sanctis’ did not mean “to return” mechanically to those concepts on art and literature that De Sanctis developed’. CW 92 (Q 23, 1, 2185).

<sup>28</sup> CW 211 (Q 21, 5, 2119).

<sup>29</sup> CW 189 (Q 27, 1, 2312).

<sup>30</sup> SPN 271 (Q 6, 10, 691).

<sup>31</sup> Gramsci’s discussion of the emerging social group clearly referred to the proletariat, but was expressed in terms of a scheme valid in general, arguably beyond his time, for any fundamental social group.

<sup>32</sup> This was in fact part of the general theory of hegemony as enunciated by Gramsci in SPN 57-8 (Q 19, 24, 2010-11).

<sup>33</sup> See A.S. Sassoon, *Gramsci’s Politics*, 2nd ed., Minneapolis, Unwin Hyman and University of Minnesota Press, 1987 [1980], pp. 132-4, and 260-1.

- <sup>34</sup> The study of the ‘situation’ was, in Gramsci, the study of long-term, ‘organic’ social transformations and was linked to questions of ‘strategy’ and ‘propaganda’ (whereas the study of the ‘conjuncture’ was the study of economic fluctuations and was linked to questions of ‘tactics’ and ‘agitation’). See SPN 177, note 79 (Q 6, 130, 797). For a detailed discussion of Gramsci’s analysis of the relations of force, see Buci-Glucksmann, C., *Gramsci and the State*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1980 [1975], pp. 71-91, Sassoon, *Gramsci’s Politics*, pp. 184-7, and G. Francioni, *L’officina gramsciana*, Bibliopolis, Napoli, 1984, pp. 184-6.
- <sup>35</sup> SPN 180 (Q 13, 17, 1583).
- <sup>36</sup> SPN 181 (Q 13, 17, 1583).
- <sup>37</sup> FS 424 (Q 17, 12, 1917).
- <sup>38</sup> SPN 181 (Q 13, 17, 1583).
- <sup>39</sup> SPN 181 (Q 13, 17, 1584).
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>41</sup> SPN 183 (Q 13, 17, 1585).
- <sup>42</sup> SPN 263-4 (Q 8, 185, 1053). For a broader interpretation of this and the following passages, see Sassoon, *Gramsci’s Politics*, pp. 133-4.
- <sup>43</sup> SPN 263-4 (Q 8, 185, 1053). In this note, SPN translates Gramsci’s original ‘*piano culturale*’ (‘cultural plan’) as ‘cultural policy’. However, arguably ‘cultural plan’ should be understood as a particular element of cultural policy; as we will see, Gramsci used the expression ‘*politica culturale*’ (‘cultural policy’) to refer to a much broader phenomenon.
- <sup>44</sup> See my discussion of Gramsci’s relationship with the Russian Proletkult movement in Part Two.
- <sup>45</sup> SPN 264 (Q 8, 185, 1053).
- <sup>46</sup> Christine Buci-Glucksmann has emphasised the fact, already highlighted by Althusser, that Gramsci referred to cultural organisations and institutions as being part of the ‘hegemonic apparatus’ (Buci-Glucksmann, C., *Gramsci and the State*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1980 [1975], p. 48). More specifically, Gramsci used the concept of ‘hegemonic apparatus’ to mean the ‘cultural and intellectual organisation’ of the hegemonic group (FS 17; Q 6, 87, 763) or the prevailing organisations and political parties of the hegemonic group (SPN 264; Q 6, 136, 800). According to Gianni Francioni, however, the concept of hegemonic apparatus was later generalised by Gramsci as a consequence of his ‘theoretical turn’ in late 1930, when the problems of hegemony and of hegemonic apparatus became key elements within the theory of the integral state. Francioni, *L’officina gramsciana*.
- <sup>47</sup> FS 153 (Q 14, 56, 1714-5). The concept of ‘modern society’ in the prison notebooks seems to refer, in a general sense, to a society characterised by the existence of an hegemonic relationship: ‘of hegemony, in other words of democracy in the modern sense’. FS 154 (Q 14, 56, 1715).
- <sup>48</sup> FS 155-6 (Q 3, 49, 332-3)
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>51</sup> FS 155-6 (Q 3, 49, 332-3), my translation. In FS, Gramsci’s original verb ‘*svuotare*’ (to empty, to drain) has been translated as ‘to clear’, which however seems to have a slightly different meaning, especially in the context of this note.
- <sup>52</sup> Gramsci would later write of the need ‘to destroy one hegemony and create another as a necessary moment of the overturning praxis’ (FS 395; Q 10-II, 41-XII, 1369).
- <sup>53</sup> PN1 331 (Q 2, 88, 245).
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>55</sup> Gramsci referred to hegemonic rule as ‘democracy in a modern sense’. FS 154 (Q 14, 56, 1715).
- <sup>56</sup> This tactic was put forward by Gramsci amongst his comrades in Turi’s prison under the slogan of a struggle for a constituent assembly. See Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the state*, where this tactic is analysed in the context of Gramsci’s critique of economism, pp. 237-290.
- <sup>57</sup> PN1 331 (Q 2, 88, 245). The adjective ‘belletristic’ (‘*belletristica*’ in the original) referred to the French expression ‘*belles-lettres*’ (‘fine letters’).
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> SPN 341-2 (Q 11, 12, 1394). Although the passage discussed here appears in a grouping of notes in second draft, it is a new fragment that does not appear in earlier notes.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., my emphasis.

<sup>63</sup> SPN 342 (Q 11, 12, 1394).

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> FS 153 (Q 14, 56, 1714-5).

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.. The verb 'must' is underlined in Gramsci's handwritten original. See A. Gramsci *Quaderni del Carcere, Edizione anastatica dei manoscritti*, a cura di G. Francioni, vol. 16, Cagliari, Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, e Unione Sarda, 2009, p. 68. Gramsci had already analysed the theatre industry, in his early writings, as an exploitative cultural business in Italy. On Gramsci's early work as theatre critic in Turin, see G. Davico Bonino, *Gramsci e il teatro*, Torino, Einaudi, 1972, and R.S. Dombroski, 'On Gramsci's theater criticism', *boundary 2*, 14 (3), 1986, pp. 91-117, as well as the anthology of Gramsci's articles in CW pp. 54-86.

<sup>69</sup> FS 153-4 (Q 14, 56, 1715).

<sup>70</sup> FS 154 (Q 14, 56, 1715).

<sup>71</sup> In this article, I adopt the method used by Gianni Francioni for distinguishing between specific discussions and the extraction of general concepts in Gramsci's prison notebooks. According to Francioni, by analysing historical phenomena which presented similarities with contemporary ones that he wished to interpret, Gramsci constructed an 'analogic model' to test hypotheses that could then be extracted as general categories of political science and applied to the analysis of contemporary phenomena on the grounds of the isomorphism of the laws governing the two processes; for Francioni this was the method used by Gramsci to construct the concept of hegemony. See Francioni, G. *L'officina gramsciana*, Bibliopolis, Napoli, 1984, p. 177.

<sup>72</sup> A discussion of Gramsci's notes on journalism falls outside the scope of this essay. For an introduction and anthology of relevant notes, see CW 386-425.

<sup>73</sup> CW 122 (Q 23, 7, 2193).

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.. In CW, Gramsci's original word '*neolalismo*', is translated as 'neology' (p. 122), which would be re-translated, in Italian, as '*neologismo*'. However, Gramsci's mention of the pathological element confirms that he did not refer to 'neologismo', which is the outcome of the normal creation of new words in a language, but to the Italian medical term '*neolalia*', which refers to a 'disorder of expression that is characteristic of paranoid dementia, by which, in language, neologisms prevail over the words of the common language' ('Neolalia', in *Dizionario Treccani della lingua italiana*, online edition, accessed 25 July 2011, my translation). Apparently *neolalia* is a more specific disorder than the mere introduction of neologisms consisting of words composed of fragments of different words or of words used out of context, as in schizophrenia ('Neologismo', in *ibid.*).

<sup>75</sup> Q 23, 7, 2193, my translation. In the quotation, I have replaced the translated word 'neology' with Gramsci's original 'neolalismo'. See Note 38.

<sup>76</sup> This could be seen as one of the ways in which Gramsci's studies in linguistics constituted a general paradigm for understanding the role of culture in social relations. For analyses of how Gramsci's studies in linguistics constituted a basis from which he developed his particular understanding of the concept of hegemony, see F. Lo Piparo, *Lingua, intellettuali, egemonia in Gramsci*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1979, P. Ives, 'The grammar of hegemony', *Left History*, 5 (1), Spring, 1997, and P. Ives, *Language and Hegemony in Gramsci*, Pluto Press, 2004.

<sup>77</sup> CW 98 (Q 23, 6, 2192), my emphasis. For a broader analysis of Gramsci's critique of spontaneism, see Sassoon, *Gramsci's Politics*, p. 133.

<sup>78</sup> In CW Gramsci's original expression '*politica di cultura*' is translated as 'cultural politics', the same term used for Gramsci's expression '*politica culturale*', but no explanation is given for this choice. Yet, the fact that Gramsci used two different expressions within the same note should be taken to mean that in this particular case he felt the need to express two different concepts. Given that the Italian verb 'stabilire' used by Gramsci in this passage means 'organise in a definitive way, establish, constitute' (G. Devoto and G. Oli, *Vocabolario della lingua italiana*, Le Monnier, 2011), '*politica di cultura*' should be understood as a normative concept rather than as a merely analytical one as in 'cultural politics' (see note 13). As a consequence, it should be translated with a normative concept distinct from the general concept of 'cultural policy'.

<sup>79</sup> CW 123 (Q 23, 7, 2194).

<sup>80</sup> CW 123 (Q 23, 7, 2195).

<sup>81</sup> CW 100 (15, 58, 1820).

<sup>82</sup> See CW 187 (Q 29, 7, 2350). CW translates Gramsci's expression '*politica culturale-nazionale*' as 'national-cultural politics'. However, there is little doubt that Gramsci here meant 'cultural policy' rather than 'cultural politics'.

<sup>83</sup> CW 187 (Q 29, 7, 2350).

<sup>84</sup> See P. Ives, 'Language, Agency and Hegemony: A Gramscian Response to Post-Marxism', *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 8 (4), 2005, p. 465.

<sup>85</sup> SPN 451 (Q 11, 24, 1428).

<sup>86</sup> CW 183-4 (Q 29, 3, 2346).

<sup>87</sup> CW 188 (Q 29, 7, 2350).

<sup>88</sup> CW 130 (Q 14, 65, 1725).

<sup>89</sup> However, it seems that for Gramsci there was a fundamental difference between the creation of a new culture and the creation of new art. Although the arts were part of culture, they could not be a *direct* object of cultural policy-making because new art was (and should be) an organic consequence of the establishment of a new culture (or civilisation): 'art is always tied to a definite culture or civilization and (...) by fighting to reform culture one comes to modify the "content" of art and works to create a new art, not from the outside (by professing a didactic, moralistic or prescriptive art) but from deep within'. CW 201 (Q 21, 1, 2109).

<sup>90</sup> CW 130-31 (Q 14, 65, 1725).

<sup>91</sup> See note 13.

<sup>92</sup> CW 131 (Q 14, 65, 1725). In the quotation, I have replaced the translated expression 'cultural politics' with Gramsci's original '*politica culturale*'.

<sup>93</sup> CW 129 (Q 14, 65, 1724).

<sup>94</sup> CW 130 (Q 14, 65, 1724).

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> CW 130 (Q 14, 65, 1725).

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> SPN 301 (22, 11, 2164).

<sup>99</sup> CW 130 (Q 14, 65, 1725).

<sup>100</sup> CW 130 (Q 14, 65, 1724-5).

<sup>101</sup> CW 128 (Q 14, 2, 1656).

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> CW 130 (Q 14, 65, 1725).

<sup>104</sup> CW 125-6 (Q 14, 67, 1726).

<sup>105</sup> PN3 126 (Q 6, 170, 821).

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> PN3 126-7 (Q 6, 170, 821).



<sup>108</sup> It is possible to argue that what is understood as cultural policy in today's cultural policy studies (i.e. cultural action by the state traditionally understood, or political society), to which Gramsci referred as 'the cultural policy of governments', was for him typical of bourgeois society, while in socialist society it constituted a phase that only lasted until the coercive element of the state withered away by being absorbed by civil society. With the concept of cultural policy without further specification, in fact, Gramsci seemed to understand the broader phenomenon within the integral state, encompassing the development of cultural institutions, strategies, policies, and plans.

<sup>109</sup> Civil society 'operates without "sanctions" or compulsory "obligations", but nevertheless exerts a collective pressure and obtains objective results in the form of an evolution of customs, ways of thinking and acting, morality, etc.' (SPN 242; Q 13, 7, 1566).

<sup>110</sup> SPN 271 (Q 6, 10, 691).

<sup>111</sup> D. Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005. Harvey's critical analysis of the neoliberal restructuring of the relationship between state and civil society draws on some of Gramsci's concepts and seems influenced by Gramsci's theories of hegemony and of the integral state.

<sup>112</sup> D. Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*.

<sup>113</sup> Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*.

<sup>114</sup> PN1 156 (Q 1, 48, 59) and Q 13, 37, 1638.

<sup>115</sup> A.S. Sassoon, *Gramsci and Contemporary Politics. Beyond Pessimism of the Intellect*, London and New York, Routledge, 2000, p. 40.

<sup>116</sup> Sassoon, *Gramsci and Contemporary Politics*.

<sup>117</sup> Sassoon, *Gramsci and Contemporary Politics*, p. 41.

<sup>118</sup> As we have seen in Part One, Gramsci's theory of cultural policy has been construed by the Australian school of cultural policy studies as in antithesis to a 'governmentality' theoretical model extrapolated from Foucault, on the basis of the alleged compatibility of the governmentality model with a reformist-technocratic conception of cultural policy and with a neoliberal conception of the governmental function. It is not within the scope of this article to carry out a critique of the 'governmentality' model of cultural policy studies. However, to avoid a misunderstanding of Gramsci's theory of cultural policy as a consequence of a comparison with what is in fact a particular interpretation of Foucault, it is perhaps useful to point out that such an interpretation is open to question, as Foucault seemed critical of the neoliberal strengthening of the governmental function. Significant similarities as well as differences between Gramsci's and Foucault's understanding of issues of ideology and culture have been noted (see, for example, Ives, *Language and Hegemony in Gramsci*, pp. 138-144). In relation to questions of cultural policy, the idea, put forward through the allegedly Foucauldian 'governmentality' model, that from the 18<sup>th</sup> century the government started to be seen as 'acting on the social' seems compatible with Gramsci's theory of the integral state.

<sup>119</sup> In support of this argument see J.A. Buttigieg, 'The Contemporary Discourse on Civil Society: A Gramscian Critique', *boundary 2*, 32 (1), 2005, pp. 33-52.

<sup>120</sup> SPN 172-3 (Q 13, 16, 1577).