
“Passive Revolutions” after the Crisis of Globalization: Gramsci and the Current Culture of Populism

Yuri Brunello

Universidade Federal do Ceara

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Yuri Brunello,

"'Passive Revolutions' after the Crisis of Globalization: Gramsci and the Current Culture of Populism"

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Abstract: This article compares the ways in which two scholars, the anthropologist Kate Crehan and the philosopher Diego Fusaro, analyze Gramsci's thought, verifying its current relevance and effectiveness in interpreting populism. In Crehan's recent Gramscian studies the categories of *senso comune* and *buon senso* become crucial. Crehan utilizes categories such as "culture" and *senso comune* to explain both the Tea Party experience and Donald Trump's election. Fusaro, on the contrary, is an Italian public intellectual who declares himself a sovereignist and who often includes, among the theoretical references of Italian contemporary sovereignism, the author of *Quaderni del carcere*. In the book *Antonio Gramsci: la passione di essere nel mondo*, Fusaro aims to demonstrate how Gramsci's reflections arise within the theoretical horizon of philosophical idealism, both as regards his views on politics and the economy and his conception of culture: in Fusaro's opinion, Gramsci is still relevant today because he is anti-capitalist and because he is not hostile, idealistically, to the family and to the establishment of a popular and national state. However, a limitation of *Antonio Gramsci: la passione di essere nel mondo* is the reductiveness of Gramsci's conception of culture.

Yuri BRUNELLO

"Passive Revolutions" after the Crisis of Globalization: Gramsci and the Current Culture of Populism

1. Trump's Election as Passive Revolution

The day of Donald Trump's electoral triumph, the then vice president of Bolivia and Marxist intellectual Alvaro Garcia Linera defined the election of Trump in these terms: "the voters' endorsement of Mr. Trump's populist message shows how Americans, too, are questioning prevailing economic paradigms in 'a passive revolution,' this time coming from the right" (New York Times 2016). "Passive revolution" is a Gramscian concept of great importance in *Prison Notebooks*, indicating a cultural, political, and economic transformation that is only apparent, because it occurred from above, without the participation of the subordinate classes. A passive revolution includes some progressive elements, but they are not decisive. As Gramsci observes:

il "progresso" si verificherebbe come reazione delle classi dominanti al sovversivismo sporadico e disorganico delle masse popolari con "restaurazioni" che accolgono una qualche parte delle esigenze popolari, quindi "restaurazioni progressive" o "rivoluzioni-restaurazioni" o anche "rivoluzioni passive" (*Quaderni* 957)

[that "progress" occurs as the reaction of the dominant classes to the sporadic and incoherent rebelliousness of the popular masses—a reaction consisting of "restorations" that agree to some part of the popular demands and are therefore "progressive restorations," or "revolutions-restorations," or even "passive revolutions." (*Prison Notebooks* III, 252)]

Passive revolution is an organic phenomenon: it is economic, political, and cultural. "Revolutions-restorations" entails that supremacy continues to be exercised by the ancient ruling classes, even if it is expressed through, to quote anthropologist Kate Crehan, new "hegemonic narratives" (*Gramsci's Common* 52). In 2002, Crehan dedicated to culture, from a Gramscian perspective, the monograph *Gramsci, Culture, and Anthropology*, a study on the different conceptions of culture present in Gramsci's writings, from his early contributions to the mature reflections of *Prison Notebooks*, which stood out because they deepen aspects of Gramscian thought that until then had not been adequately unpacked. Crehan's attention in recent years has focused on populism and its narratives, interpreted in light of the Gramscian conception of culture present in *Prison Notebooks*. The Tea Party phenomenon is among the many topics analyzed in *Gramsci's Common Sense: Inequality and Its Narratives*. In the 2018 work, *The Common Sense of Donald J. Trump: A Gramscian Reading of Twenty-First Century Populist Rhetoric*, Crehan explores the formation of Trumpism, which made his election as the 45th President of the United States possible.

In these works, the anthropologist shows in a compelling way how some categories of Gramsci, elaborated in *Prison Notebooks*, are useful for interpreting populism. The theme of "hegemonic narratives" occupies a considerable space. In her critical investigation, Crehan proceeds by focusing on an analysis of culture, whereby populism has arrived at the elements through which to effectively articulate itself. Crehan conceives culture as Gramsci conceives it in *Prison Notebooks*: "Culture, for Gramsci, names shared ways of being and living that have come into existence as a result of the interaction of a myriad of historical forces, and that remain subject to history" (*Gramsci's Common* 53). From the perspective of his *Prison Notebooks*, which differs from that of his pre-prison writings, the idea of "culture," in the singular, also presupposes a plural perspective, the presence of different cultures and their combination. The situation to which Gramsci refers is, however, chaotic and fragmentary: "Certain cultures may appear to persist unchanged for long periods of time, nonetheless they are always inherently in flux: coming into being, undergoing transformation, passing away" (*Gramsci's Common* 53).

2. Kate Crehan and the Gramscian exegesis of *senso comune* and *buon senso*

Why does Crehan emphasize "hegemonic narratives"? There is no doubt that the discursive dimension is important in Gramsci. It is intertwined with the problem of hegemony, conceived in *Prison Notebooks* as that ideology or that set of ideologies, which—within a society—

tende a prevalere, a imporsi, a diffondersi su tutta l'area, determinando oltre che l'unità economica e politica anche l'unità intellettuale e morale, su un piano non corporativo, ma universale, di egemonia di un raggruppamento sociale fondamentale su i raggruppamenti subordinati. (*Quaderni* 457-458)

[tends to prevail, to dominate, to spread across the entire field, bringing about, in addition to economic and political unity, intellectual and moral unity, not on a corporate but on a universal level: the hegemony of a fundamental social group over the subordinate groups. (*Prison Notebooks*. II, 180)]

These Gramscian considerations and their references to the spheres of politics and economics clearly show that hegemony is more than a mere rhetorical strategy. Crehan is aware of this and takes such a consideration into account, differentiating herself in this point from post-Gramscians like the philosopher Ernesto Laclau.

In her approach to Trump, Crehan does not explicitly mention a "passive revolution," a category that in *Prison Notebooks* is reserved for the Italian *Risorgimento*, fascism, and Fordism; instead, she makes use of two concepts of Gramsci in a pertinent and fruitful way, *senso comune* and *buon senso*:

[T]he standard translation, common sense, is a mistranslation [...]. For the English-speaker, common sense came to denote, in the words of the *OED*, "good sound practical sense; combined tact and readiness in dealing with the every-day affairs of life; general sagacity." *Senso comune*, by contrast, is a more neutral term that lacks these strong positive connotations, referring rather to the beliefs and opinions held in common, or thought to be held in common, by the mass of the population (*Gramsci's Common* 43-44).

Senso comune and *buon senso* (good sense) are both tangential to the category of passive revolution. In the 2010s, the hegemony of the populist vision became evident with Donald Trump's election victory, even though organic elements of Trumpian populism had long been present in the culture of the United States. The Gramscian *senso comune* is particularly useful for explaining the dynamic articulations that characterize a particular cultural context. *Senso comune*, according to Gramsci,

è la "filosofia dei non filosofi," cioè la concezione del mondo assorbita *acriticamente* dai vari ambienti sociali in cui si sviluppa l'individualità morale dell'uomo medio. Il senso comune non è una concezione unica, identica nel tempo e nello spazio: esso è il "folklore" della filosofia, e come il folklore si presenta in forme innumerevoli: il suo carattere fondamentale è di essere una concezione del mondo disgregata, incoerente, inconsequente, conforme al carattere delle moltitudini di cui esso è la filosofia. (*Quaderni* 1045)

[is the "philosophy of nonphilosophers"—in other words, the conception of the world *acritically* absorbed from the various social environments in which the moral individuality of the average person is developed. Common sense is not a single conception, identical in time and place. It is the "folklore" of philosophy, and, like folklore, it appears in countless forms. The fundamental characteristic of common sense consists in its being a disjointed, incoherent, and inconsequential conception of the world that matches the character of the multitudes whose philosophy it is. (*Prison Notebooks*. II, 333)]

Trumpian populism appropriates the discourse of the Tea Party, whose populist dimension was rooted in American society: "the populist message of the Tea Party resonated with so many. The various Tea Parties are the product both of top-down and bottom-up populism" (*Gramsci's Common* 187). Following the Gramscian approach, Crehan analyzes the way in which populism is constituted as an internal articulation of *senso comune*: "rather than arguing about whether or not the Tea Party phenomenon is inauthentic, Astroturf populism, progressives need to trace out, as Formisano, and Skocpol and Williamson do, the common sense that the Tea Party draws from and helps to create" (*Gramsci's Common* 187).

Nonetheless, the reference to *senso comune* can be clarified better by introducing another Gramscian concept that Crehan uses: *buon senso*,—"il nucleo sano del senso comune," "ciò che appunto potrebbe chiamarsi buon senso e che merita di essere sviluppato e reso unitario e coerente" (*Quaderni* 1380) ["the healthy nucleus that exists in 'common sense,'" the part "which deserves to be made more unitary and coherent" (Gramsci, *Selections from Prison* 328)]. *Senso comune* is configured, if opposed to *buon senso*, as a privileged space for the articulation of passive revolutions. *Senso comune*, in fact,

is not only a site of struggle for those trying to transform society. Dominant classes (who in their rise to power constituted their own historical bloc) may have the resources necessary to ensure that their worldview remains dominant—this is part of what defines hegemony—but their dominance is never completely won, never totally secure. It must be continually maintained and reproduced. This does not mean, however, the creation of new narratives by new organic intellectuals, but rather the effective dissemination of already existing narratives, recrafted to resonate with the concerns of a given historical moment. The simple, assessable common sense, on which such dissemination relies, remains rooted in the foundational narratives forged by the organic intellectuals the dominant class created in its rise to power. We can see the Tea Party phenomenon as an example of the effective dissemination of common sense, grounded in some old capitalist verities, which at a

particular historical moment resonated particularly strongly with certain section of the American public. (*Gramsci's Common* 119)

Crehan captures all the ambivalence of the Gramscian notion of *senso comune*, which contains the counterpoint of *buon senso*. Organic intellectuals in a progressive class have the opportunity to operate dialogically with subalterns, whose knowledge can be transformed in democratic ways, with *buon senso* as a basis. On the contrary, the populist "passive revolution" reconfigures the *senso comune* of a particular society, without profoundly changing power relations.

3. A Historical Example of Revolution-Restoration: Pirandello's Literary Subversivism

If we consider a historically realized passive revolution, namely fascism, and analyze it according to the methods indicated by Crehan, we must recognize in the modernist Luigi Pirandello one of the most illustrious Italian representatives of the "revolution without revolution" realized in the artistic field. Although he had produced several texts in the Sicilian dialect for the popular actor Angelo Musco, Pirandello, as part of the fascist culture, represented a sophisticated and experimental line. Gramsci had found a subversive modernism in Pirandello's theater as early as the 1910s, when he was a theater critic and defined Pirandello's texts as "tante bombe a mano che scoppiano nei cervelli degli spettatori e producono crolli di banalità, rovine di sedimenti di pensiero" (*La smorfia* 51) ["so many hand grenades that explode in the brains of the spectators, bringing down banalities, wrecking feelings and ideas" (*Selections from Cultural* 83)].

In 1924, Pirandello was an internationally consecrated writer. The play *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* had already been brought to stages in London, Paris, and New York. In September Pirandello publicly took sides in defense of Benito Mussolini, as the fascist leader was at the center of an intense political crisis, standing accused of being involved in the killing of the opposition deputy Giacomo Matteotti. The same year Pirandello took over the direction of Teatro d'Arte, housed in Palazzo Odescalchi in Rome. The scholar Patricia Gaborik writes about the debut of Teatro d'Arte in April 1925, a few days before the release of the *Manifesto degli Intellettuali Fascisti*, which Pirandello signed: "Oltre agli spettacoli, la serata si annunciava già come un importante evento mondano. 'Non si danno recite popolari', aveva dichiarato Pirandello e il pubblico intervenuto alla prima contava effettivamente il meglio dell'alta società di allora (533) ["In addition to the performances, the event seemed important. 'Popular performances will not be performed,' Pirandello declared, and the audience attending the debut actually included the elites of high society of the time," (our translation)].

Pirandello will receive a public grant for his aesthetic and entrepreneurial project, with the aid of the fascist government, i.e. of the Italian state. Despite receiving state funding, the stage at Palazzo Odescalchi ensured that "popular performances are not performed." The Pirandellian revolution proves to be an aristocratic, elitist experience. Teatro d'Arte has a public inspiration, but not a democratic finality. A "passive revolution" takes place in the context of artistic production: engagement in the project is governmental, but certainly not popular. It is a revolution without revolution carried out by traditional intellectuals to the benefit of society's elites, using public funds to alienate the masses from the theater and imbue the space with an exclusive prestige.

According to Gramsci, Pirandello's limitation is precisely that he is not an organic intellectual:

Pirandello è criticamente un "paesano" siciliano che ha acquisito certi caratteri nazionali e certi caratteri europei, ma che sente in se stesso questi tre elementi di civiltà come giustapposti e contraddittori. Da questa esperienza gli è venuto l'atteggiamento di osservare le contraddizioni nelle personalità degli altri e poi addirittura di vedere il dramma della vita come il dramma di queste contraddizioni. (*La smorfia* 83-84)

[Pirandello is critically a Sicilian 'villager' who has acquired certain national and European traits, but who feels these three elements of civilization to be juxtaposed and contradictory within himself. Rooted in this experience is his attitude of observing the contradictions in other people's personalities and then of actually seeing the drama of life as the drama of these contradictions. (*Selections from Cultural* 145)]

Pirandello is a critic of *senso comune*, but *pars destruens* is not accompanied by a *pars construens*, that is Pirandello's theater does not create a new *senso comune*. It is chaotically split between dialectal, national, and European identity. Pirandello combines and subverts these three identities. The problem is that he proves incapable of producing a new and coherent discursive formation. In the Pirandellian theater, the feeling of an organic crisis is prevalent, but—to quote a Gramscian formula referring to De Sanctis—"masse di sentimenti rappresentati artisticamente" (*Quaderni* 2188) ["the mass of artistically

represented feelings" (*Selections from Cultural* 94)] lacks "coerenza logica e storico-attuale" (*Quaderni* 2188) ["logical, historical, and topical coherence" (*Selections from Cultural* 94)].

It is easy for fascism to exploit the Pirandellian deconstruction of *senso comune* in a reactionary direction (revolution-restoration). Pirandello himself in 1923 had interpreted his aesthetic project and the government action of fascism within a common vitalist and irrationalist perspective. He had written in a contribution to the newspaper "L'Idée Nazionale" that Mussolini can only be blessed

da uno che ha sempre sentito questa immanente tragedia della vita, la quale per consistere in qualche modo ha bisogno d'una forma; ma subito, nella forma in cui consiste, sente la morte; perché dovendo e volendo di continuo muoversi e mutare, in ogni forma si vede come imprigionata, e vi urge dentro e vi tempesta e la logora e alla fine ne evade: Mussolini che così chiaramente mostra di sentire questa doppia e tragica necessità della forma e del movimento, e che con tanta potenza vuole che il movimento trovi in una forma ordinata il suo freno, e che la forma non sia mai vuota, idolo vano, ma dentro accolga pulsante e fremente la vita, per modo che essa ne sia di momento in momento ricreata e pronta sempre all'atto che la affermi a se stessa e la imponga agli altri. (*Saggi* 1249)

[by somebody who has always felt the immanent tragedy of life, which, in order to exist in some way, requires a form, but which senses death in any form it assumes. For, since it is subject to continual change and motion, it feels itself imprisoned in any form. It rages and storms inside it and finally escapes from it. Mussolini has clearly shown that he is aware of this double and tragic necessity of movement and form, and hopes to conciliate the two. Form must not be a vain and empty idol. It must receive life, pulsating and quivering, so that it should be forever recreated and ready for the act which affirms itself and imposes itself on others. (Hamilton 47)]

The search for a consensus obtained through emotionality—rather than through the critical exercise of rationality—is one of the characteristics of the organization of culture and its narratives in the context of passive revolutions. Analyzing the reconfiguration of *senso comune* in emotional and irrational terms, Crehan explains Trump's success by arguing that

effective politicians, of both left and right, draw on pre-existing elements within the heterogeneous confusion that is common sense to create narratives that are emotionally powerful while reflecting 'realities' their supporters recognize. Before hearing what seems such common sense truth, they would have been hard put to articulate it, but now it seems no more than what they already knew. Trump's rhetoric with its transformation of immigrants, Muslims, the media, and above all Hillary Clinton, into figures of hate, explains to his supporters in an emotionally convincing way, why they feel they are losing their country, while holding out the promise that he, Trump, will take it back for them. (*The Common* 288–289)

In short, the passive revolution embodied by Trump allows many social groups of the old order to maintain cultural and political hegemony over American society through the new populist narrative.

4. Is Gramsci a sovereignist?

Crehan uses Gramscian concepts to interpret the Tea Party experience or Trumpist populism and her training as an anthropologist pushes her to carry out rigorous systematization. Crehan, for example, is perfectly aware of the fact that the point of view on culture present in *Prison Notebooks* is the result of a rich and multifaceted path. It ranges from an initial notion of culture—as the January 1916 article *Socialismo e cultura* shows—"defined as the work of self-knowledge" (*Culture* 76) and passes through reflections on art and literature intended as the organization and development of an "embryonic proletarian culture" (*Culture* 74), a new paradigm, which came to maturity in January 1921, when Gramsci publishes *Marinetti rivoluzionario?*, where he writes:

Una fabbrica, passata dal potere capitalista al potere operaio, continuerà a produrre le stesse cose materiali che oggi produce. Ma in qual modo e in quali forme nasceranno le opere di poesia, del dramma, del romanzo, della musica, della pittura, del costume, del linguaggio? Non è una fabbrica materiale quella che produce queste opere [...]. Cosa resta a fare? Niente altro che distruggere la presente forma di civiltà (2017, 112). Having passed from capitalist power to workers' power, the factory will continue to produce the same material things that it produces today. But in what way and under what forms will poetry, drama, the novel, music, painting, and moral and linguistic works be born? It is not a material factory that produces these works [...]. What remains to be done? Nothing other than to destroy the present form of civilization. (*Selections from Cultural* 50–51)

Gramsci imagines proletarian civilization, within a future liberated society, as the result of a rupture with the culture of the bourgeoisie and as the result of radical voluntarism. *Prison Notebooks* innovates

these pre-prison theoretical positions. Refusing the existence of "autonomous, purely cultural 'systems,'" what Gramsci "is ultimately concerned with in mapping out what persists, and what does not, is the persistence, change, or transformation not of 'conceptions of the world' in themselves, but of the basic power relations of which such conceptions are, to use Gramscian terminology, an organic part" (Crehan, *Culture* 87).

The monograph *Antonio Gramsci. La passione di essere nel mondo* suggests that the Gramscian vision of culture considered for our present is limited to the first period of Gramscian reflections on culture. The author is a scholar, Diego Fusaro, who is also a sovereignist militant. Fusaro is an activist and a supporter—not of Trump or the Tea Party—but of Italian sovereignist populism. It should be remembered that the popularity of sovereignism in Italy is a relatively recent fact, following the crisis of Italian neoliberalism. To understand the decline among the right of neoliberalism and the rise of sovereignism, it is necessary to go back to 1994. This was the year of Berlusconi's first electoral victory in Italy, a phenomenon which, despite its enormous repercussion, does not constitute an episode of rupture.

Berlusconi's terms of government (1994–1995; 2001–2006; 2008–2011) guarantee the continuity of a political, economic, and cultural process in force for over a decade: the Italian version of the conservative revolution of Reagan and Thatcher. In the eighties and nineties neoliberalism spread as a phase of strong "modernization" in republican and anti-fascist Italy, characterized politically and culturally, since the proclamation of the 1946 Constitution, by policies of massive state intervention and, more or less markedly, social-democratic government. The sociologist Massimiliano Panerari has described very well what the advent of neoliberalism has meant in cultural terms for Italy: the loss of cultural hegemony by the left and the birth of a hegemony which he defines as "subcultural" developed by a center and a left that qualified themselves as reformists. In the 1980s, Panerari writes, the left loses its supremacy in the field of culture:

Nel giro di un decennio, quello dell'edonismo reaganiano, tutti si convinsero improvvisamente che era giunto il momento di spassarsela. Parola d'ordine: "Ci vogliamo divertire," e, per cortesia, si eviti di ammorbare l'esistenza, in qualunque modo, con la politica, la cultura, l'economia, e tutte queste "robe" [...]. E fu chiaro [...] che l'egemonia non nasceva più in fabbrica, come predicava Gramsci negli anni Trenta, ma stava prendendo forma all'interno degli studi di una televisione completamente diversa da quella in bianco e nero: la televisione della pubblicità e degli show con le ballerine scosciate (*L'egemonia*)

[Within a decade, that of Reaganite hedonism, everyone suddenly became convinced that the time had come for a good time. The keyword: 'We want to have fun,' and, please, avoid boring us, in any way, with politics, culture, economy, and all that 'stuff' [...]. And it was clear [...] that hegemony was no longer born in the factory, as Gramsci preached in the thirties, but it was taking shape inside the studios of a completely different television from the black and white one: the advertising and television shows with the sensual dancers," (our translation)].

For fifteen years the Italian right, led by the liberal Berlusconi with the support of the post-fascist Alleanza Nazionale and the populist party Lega Nord, has put this hegemonic project into practice (not cultural, but "subcultural"), implementing a crypto-Gramscian strategy.

When at the beginning of the 2010s the economic and financial crisis dramatically called on Italy and neoliberalism to reveal all its contradictions, Berlusconi's political proposal, which had been hegemonic for over a decade in the context of the Italian right, sank. Coming to the aid of the right (and bourgeois liberalism), allowing it to renew itself culturally, sovereignism emerged on an international scale, not only in the form of the so-called Tea Party, but also as the victorious Brexit and Donald Trump campaigns of 2016. Post-fascists, as well as populists and northern autonomists, discover in sovereignism the opportunity to question neoliberalism, without having to question the market, as long as it is a national one. The large-scale appropriation of the right of the sovereignist tactic is rapid, also because, in the perspective of sovereignism, capitalism and the market are not harmful in themselves, but are unfair and oppressive because of the predominance of finance and speculation, identified in the supranational European Union. In short, the field of the sovereign struggle is the economic "globalism," which is an enemy of idealized local and autonomous communities. The political dichotomy between right and left is abandoned. A significant part of the right no longer identifies itself as rightist, but chooses national sovereignty as its flag. Gramsci is back in vogue among the new right, but this time use of Gramscian thought is explicit. The reference to Gramscian texts, as well as to the writings of Ezra Pound (or of more recent authors, such as Alain Finkielkraut and Michel Onfray), shows how the sovereignists propose a discourse that transcends left-wing and rightist politics, uniting them in the same anti-globalist and communitarian struggle.

Among the Italian parties that have renewed themselves, or that are born from the post-Berlusconi sovereignist wave, there is Vox Italia, founded by Fusaro and appreciated also by the nationalist party Fratelli d'Italia and by the Lega Nord, a populist political formation. Fusaro is author of several monographs on Marxism, idealist philosophy, and populism. He theorizes that there will be conflict between communitarianism and globalism. Thanks to his constant presence in the media, such as radio, television, and newspapers, which has allowed him to reach a large audience and high popularity ratings, Fusaro's visibility in Italy is considerable. His appeal to Gramsci is systematic, both in his radio and television appearances and in academic contexts.

Antonio Gramsci. La passione di essere nel mondo is totally focused on Gramsci. Fusaro proposes making "un tentativo di attraversare alcuni luoghi e alcuni plessi teorici della sua opera portandoli in tensione con il nostro presente" (2015, 17) ["an attempt to cross some places and some theoretical plexuses of [Gramsci's] work to bring them into tension with the present," (our translation)]. The study intends to answer the question "che cosa direbbe oggi Gramsci se fosse vivo?" (2015, 17) ["what would Gramsci have to say today if he were alive?," (our translation)]. Thus we learn that Gramsci's answer to the Italian crisis, according to Fusaro, would be populist sovereignism, as we read in the chapter that concludes the book, *Ripartire da Gramsci*:

Il marxismo eterodosso di Gramsci, del resto, ci permette anche di ripensare in forma alternativa il processo di emancipazione, abbandonando quell'internazionalismo che, oggi, diventa il semplice raddoppiamento caricaturale del processo della mondializzazione capitalistica. Tra i principali meriti teorici dei *Quaderni* figura, senz'altro, quello di aver impostato in forma originale il nesso tra nazionale e internazionale, intendendo il secondo come necessariamente mediato dal primo. (*Antonio Gramsci* 136)

[Moreover, Gramsci's heterodox Marxism also allows us to rethink the emancipation process in an alternative way, abandoning that internationalism which, today, becomes the simple caricatural doubling of the process of capitalist globalization. Among the main theoretical merits of *Prison Notebooks* there is, of course, that of having set up in an original form the connection between national and international, whereby the latter is necessarily mediated by the former," (our translation)].

In short, Fusaro chooses a perspective, which leads him to favor the notion of the national-popular developed by Gramsci in *Prison Notebooks*:

In Italia il termine "nazionale" ha un significato molto ristretto ideologicamente e in ogni caso non coincide con "popolare," perché in Italia gli intellettuali sono lontani dal popolo, cioè dalla "nazione" e sono invece legati a una tradizione di casta, che non è mai stata rotta da un forte movimento politico popolare o nazionale dal basso: la tradizione è "libresca" e astratta e l'intellettuale tipico moderno si sente più legato ad Annibal Caro o Ippolito Pindemonte che a un contadino pugliese o siciliano. Il termine corrente "nazionale" è in Italia legato a questa tradizione intellettuale e libresca, quindi la facilità sciocca e in fondo pericolosa di chiamare "antinazionale" chiunque non abbia questa concezione archeologica e tarmata degli interessi del paese (*Quaderni* 2116)

[In Italy the term "national" has an ideologically very restricted meaning, and it does not in any case coincide with "popular" because in Italy the intellectuals are distant from the people, i.e. from the "nation." They are tied instead to a caste tradition that has never been broken by a strong popular or national political movement from below. This tradition is abstract and "bookish," and the typical modern intellectual feels closer to Annibal Caro or Ippolito Pindemonte than to an Apulian or Sicilian peasant. The current term "national" is connected in Italy to this intellectual and bookish tradition. Hence the foolish and ultimately dangerous facility of calling "anti-national" whoever does not have this archaeological and moth-eaten conception of the country's interests. (*Selections from Cultural* 208-209)]

In Fusaro's effort to update Gramsci, the category of "national-popular" acquires a particular value:

la neutralizzazione della volontà nazionale-popolare e di quel pur contraddittorio primato della politica sull'economia tipico dello stato sovrano e dello *jus publicum europaeum* ha costituito un passaggio obbligato per la politicizzazione dell'economia e per l'imporsi dell'odierna dittatura del finanz-capitalismo. (*Antonio Gramsci* 137)

[the neutralization of the national-popular will and of that contradictory primacy of politics on the economy typical of the sovereign state, and the *jus publicum europaeum* has constituted an obligatory step toward the depoliticization of the economy and the imposition of today's dictatorship of financial capitalism, (our translation)].

By updating the Gramscian thought, therefore, Fusaro finds a continuity between the fascist dictatorship and what is qualified as the dictatorship of the European Union:

la declinazione gramsciana del nesso dialettico tra nazionale e internazionale può fecondamente essere metabolizzata e, di più, costituisce una preziosissima risorsa simbolica per pensare criticamente e agire conseguentemente al cospetto dell'ordine spoliticizzato con dominio assoluto del capitale finanziario pudicamente chiamato 'Unione Europea.' (*Antonio Gramsci* 137)

[the Gramscian declension of the dialectical link between the national and international can be fruitfully metabolized and, moreover, used as precious symbolic resource to think critically and act consequently in the presence of the depoliticized order with absolute domination of the financial capital modestly called the 'European Union,' (our translation)].

Fusaro is even more explicit in another passage of the volume:

L'Unione Europea corrisponde, avrebbe detto Gramsci, a una "rivoluzione passiva" – dunque affine, nella sua essenza, al fascismo e all'americanismo – con cui i dominanti, dopo il 1989, hanno stabilizzato il nesso di forza capitalistico, rimuovendo la forza che ancora in parte lo contrastava (lo stato sovrano, con primato del politico). Si è trattato, gramscianamente, di una rivoluzione passiva anche per il fatto che, al pari di quella risorgimentale, non ha visto l'attiva partecipazione delle classi subalterne (*Antonio Gramsci* 137)

[The European Union corresponds, Gramsci would have said, to a 'passive revolution'—therefore similar in its essence to fascism and Americanism—through which the dominants, after 1989, stabilized the nexus of capitalist force, removing the force that still partially contrasted with it (the sovereign state, with the primacy of the politician). It was, using Gramscian concepts, a passive revolution also due to the fact that, like the *Risorgimento*, it did not see the active participation of the subordinate classes, (our translation)]

Fusaro uses the category of passive revolution to indicate that broader global movement, of which the current "subcultural hegemony" represents an articulation and against which it is necessary to redeem the "potenza statale come forza in grado di disciplinare l'economico e di aprire uno spazio in cui la decisione sovrana della comunità democratica possa imporsi" (*Antonio Gramsci* 139) ["state power as a force capable of regulating the economy and opening a space where the sovereign decision of the democratic community can impose itself," (our translation)]. According to Fusaro's thesis, the national-popular strategy would today play a decisive role due to its particular practical urgency.

5. Gramsci as Neoidealist

Fusaro's exegesis presents a problem. It overturns the Gramscian perspective. As Fusaro himself acknowledges, in fact, Gramsci understands the international as necessarily mediated by the national. Fusaro is, however, convinced that, if he were alive today, Gramsci would reverse this prospect: the national would be mediated by the international. However, it should not be forgotten that the Gramscian "national-popular" is a process of integration of the people and the nation, which reconfigures the conceptions of the latter and the former as articulated within the fascist narrative. In *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci reflects on the national-popular during the phase of the greatest consensus known by fascism. As the poet and literary theorist Edoardo Sanguineti has rightly observed, Gramsci's vision of the national-popular is constituted in marked opposition to fascist nationalism and populism. In the context of this antagonism Gramsci elaborates the concept of the "national-popular," aiming to capture, "in una strenua lotta contro nazionalismo e populismo, particolarmente nei modi in cui questi venivano coltivati e gestiti dalla cultura del regime fascista, quanto poteva essere ritorto, strappandolo all'egemonia del potere, contro quel potere medesimo" (205) ["in a strenuous struggle against nationalism and populism, particularly in the ways in which these were cultivated and managed by the culture of the fascist regime, how much could be twisted snatching it from the hegemony of power, against that power itself," (our translation)].

The national-popular strategy lays the foundations for new narratives, capable of opening up new spaces, within which it is possible to build a democratic and mass culture, on the horizon, Sanguineti claims, of *Weltliteratur* and global culture. The concept is clearly opposite to that of Gramsci as imagined by Fusaro, who—starting from the international—would return to the national:

oggi il punto di partenza nazionale è chiamato a costituire la base per la costruzione di un universalismo alternativo ("lo sviluppo è verso l'internazionalismo": [...]) alla "cattiva universalità" della globalizzazione, generalizzazione planetaria degli egoismi acquisitivi e predatori. Con Gramsci, la lotta nazionale contro l'internazionalismo della globalizzazione dei mercati e della finanza acquista lo statuto di medium in vista

dell'unificazione del genere umano, che "diventa sempre più un universale concreto, storicamente concreto." (Antonio Gramsci 139)

[today the national starting point is called to constitute the basis for the construction of an alternative universalism ("the development is towards internationalism:" [...] to the 'bad universality' of globalization, planetary generalization of acquisitive and predatory selfishness. With Gramsci, the national struggle against the internationalism of the globalization of markets and finance acquires the status of medium in view of the unification of mankind, which "becomes increasingly concrete, historically concrete," (our translation)].

The path would proceed from the international to the national and then from the local level it would move to a wider universal dimension, that of a harmoniously reconciled humanity.

The actualization of Gramscian thought proposed by Fusaro is not materialistic. On the contrary, it reveals a strong voluntarism, which is unsurprising. In Fusaro's view, in fact, Gramsci is unequivocally an idealist: in Gramsci "resta oggi vivo più che mai quello che, con una grammatica liberamente desunta da Vico, potremmo qualificare come il 'comunismo ideale eterno'" (Antonio Gramsci 140) ["what we could qualify as the 'ideal eternal communism,' with a grammar freely deduced from Vico, remains alive today," (our translation)]. What moves Gramsci's theoretical activity is, concludes the Fusaro's chapter, using a metaphor from Gramsci himself—the "rosa dell'Ideale, ancora oggi non realizzato, di dare a tutti la libertà, tramite la forza della giustizia e di un agire appassionato" (142) ["rose of the Ideal, still unrealized today, of giving everyone freedom, by force of justice and to act passionately," (our translation)].

This interpretation of Gramsci as an exponent of Italian idealism, together with Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile, moves from an assumption, that is, the presence of "un tratto costante" (2015, 27) ["a constant trait"] in Gramscian thought: Gramsci – "tanto nella sua fase precarceraria, quanto in quella della stesura dei *Quaderni* – intende la cultura come il fondamento del costituirsi del soggetto rivoluzionario, come la via da percorrere affinché esso diventi 'in sé e per sé,' cosciente di sé e dei propri compiti storici." (2015, 27) ["both in its pre-prison production and in that of the drafting of *Prison Notebooks*," Gramsci understands culture "as the foundation of the establishment of the revolutionary subject, as the way to go so that it becomes 'in-itself and for-itself,' conscious of itself and its historical tasks," (our translation)].

The argument is clear and shows how Fusaro takes into consideration, when proposing a modern adaptation of Gramsci, a unique concept of culture, more precisely of the view of culture developed in Gramsci's early works. Fusaro elevates such conception to the essential meaning of Gramsci's reflections on the theme of culture:

In quanto "disciplina ad un ideale," la cultura è il fattore decisivo dell'organizzazione operaia. Essa permette ai proletari di rivelarsi a se stessi. In questo senso, la cultura è, socraticamente, una maieutica, un "conosci te stesso" rivolto alla classe operaia, di modo che quest'ultima – secondo l'hegelismo che informa di sé l'intera riflessione gramsciana – acquisti lo statuto dell'inseità e della perseità. Il tema hegel-marxiano dell'acquisizione dell'autocoscienza nel conflitto viene da Gramsci declinato nel senso dell'acquisizione della cultura (Antonio Gramsci 27-28)

[As 'discipline to an ideal,' culture is the decisive factor of the workers' organization. It allows proletarians to reveal themselves. In this sense, culture is, Socratically, a maieutic, a 'know yourself' addressed to the working class, so that the latter—according to the Hegelism that informs the whole of Gramscian reflection—acquires the status of inseity and perseity. The Hegelian-Marxian theme of the acquisition of self-consciousness in the conflict is by Gramsci conceived in the sense of the acquisition of culture, (our translation)].

The idea of culture considered as "disciplina ad un ideale" (Gramsci, *Masse* 58) ["discipline in striving for an ideal" (Gramsci, *The Gramsci Reader* 59)] is found in *Socialismo e cultura*, where culture is defined as

organizzazione, disciplina del proprio io interiore, è presa di possesso della propria personalità, è conquista di coscienza superiore, per la quale si riesce a comprendere il proprio valore storico, la propria funzione nella vita, i propri diritti e i propri doveri (*Masse* 57)

[organization, discipline of one's inner self, a coming to terms with one's own personality; it is 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 (*The Gramsci* 57)].

The limits of this operation are evident. Just look at how Fusaro reads the relationship between Gramsci and Pirandello in *Prison Notebooks*. As we have seen, for Gramsci, Pirandello's problem is the inability to subvert the *senso comune* of fascist Italy, strengthening its—irrational, subjective—aesthetic. Fusaro does not evoke the question, even remotely. According to Fusaro, Pirandello's fragility would consist in the inability to popularly spread anti-positivist subjectivism. "Le coppie dicotomiche 'vecchio-nuovo' e 'distruzione-creazione'" (*Antonio Gramsci* 117) ["The dichotomous pairs 'old-new' and 'destruction-creation'"] would constitute "categorie capitali dell'estetica dei *Quaderni*" (117) ["capital categories of *Prison Notebook's* aesthetics"]. Fusaro adds, in Pirandello

la dialettica tra le due coppie dicotomiche poc'anzi menzionate trova, probabilmente, nell'analisi dell'opera di Pirandello la propria applicazione più felice. Per un verso, Pirandello rappresenta la distruzione del vecchio costume teatrale e della mentalità positivista e cattolica tramite una feconda – sia pure condotta al grado iperbolico del relativismo – opera di deoggettivazione dell'esistente in direzione del momento soggettivo. Per un altro verso, l'opera teatrale pirandelliana (eccezion fatta per *Liola*, il testo preferito da Gramsci) è intessuta di elementi filosofico-intellettualistici che la rendono ancora troppo distante dalla vita nazionale-popolare delle masse. (117)

[the dialectic between the two dichotomous couples mentioned above probably finds its happiest application in the analysis of Pirandello's work. On the one hand, Pirandello represents the destruction of the old theatrical costume and of the positivistic and Catholic mentality through a fruitful—albeit conducted to the hyperbolic degree of relativism—work of de-objectification of the extant in the direction of the subjective moment. On the other hand, the Pirandellian theatrical work (except for *Liola*, Gramsci's favorite text) is woven with philosophical-intellectual elements that make it still too distant from the national-popular life of the masses, (our translation)].

Reading carefully the Gramscian considerations of Pirandello, it is easy to discover that the opposite is true. Gramsci in *Notebook 14* comes to praise Pirandellian humor, precisely because it was conceived "con apporto minimo di carattere libresco." (*La smorfia* 81) ["with a minimum contribution of a bookish nature" (*Selections from Cultural* 144)] in its anti-subjectivist condition: "Sarebbe da vedere se nell'arte del Pirandello non predomini l'umorismo, cioè l'autore non si diverta a far nascere certi dubbi 'filosofici' in cervelli non filosofici e meschini per 'sfottere' il soggettivismo e il solipsismo filosofico." (*La smorfia* 81) ["One should see whether humor is not the predominant element in Pirandello's art, whether the author does not amuse himself by raising certain 'philosophical' doubts in unphilosophical and narrow minds in order to make fun of subjectivism and philosophical solipsism" (*Selections from Cultural* 144)].

5. An Already Existing Narrative: *Pretty Woman*

In short, Fusaro's intention, as an idealist, is to valorize "the subjective moment," which would preside over Gramsci's dynamics of praxis, accompanied by self-consciousness. Fusaro in the concluding chapter writes:

"Il solo modo per ereditare Gramsci, nel tempo del fanatismo dell'economia, è ripartire dal suo progetto incompiuto, dal sogno desto di un'emancipazione garantita unicamente dalla costellazione composta da autocoscienza, cultura e prassi trasformatrice. (*Antonio Gramsci* 129)

[The only way to inherit Gramsci, in the time of the fanaticism of the economy, is to start from its unfinished project, from the lucid dream of an emancipation guaranteed only by the constellation composed of self-consciousness, culture, and transformative praxis, (our translation)].

It is relevant Fusaro's insistence on the idealist Gramsci and on a conception of culture as an experience largely independent of the economy and politics, relegating the "organic" and articulated vision of culture (the vision so well deepened by Crehan) to the margins.

The analysis of the project, characteristic of fascism, of reconfiguring *senso comune*, understood as immediate perception, into aestheticizing terms (as compensation and replacement of political feeling and understanding) is not only a prerogative of Gramsci, but a necessity to remember the considerations, chronologically close to the Gramscian ones, developed by Walter Benjamin on the aestheticization of politics (242). Reflecting on the dialectic between *senso comune* and *buon senso*, Gramsci shows in a peculiar way and with surprising originality how based on common sense, the subalterns and their intellectuals, using the tools of rationality and criticism of culture, can produce a new philosophy. The process is, however, immanent and does not depend on abstract ideas or eternal ideals. It originates within the formless mass of materials that cultures spread in the context of a society.

In the final chapter of *Antonio Gramsci: la passione di essere nel mondo* there is a reference to another volume by Fusaro, *Il futuro è nostro. Filosofia dell'azione*, in which the topicality of Gramsci's thought is affirmed, but from a sovereigntist perspective and with an attachment to militant political reality:

La larvata teleologia della logica di precarizzazione è orientata alla trasformazione – mediante l'inedita "elaborazione forzata di un nuovo tipo umano," per impiegare la formula utilizzata da Gramsci in relazione all'americanismo – della precarietà in una dimensione naturale: e questo in modo che tutto (dal lavoro alla professione, dai rapporti sentimentali a quelli esistenziali) diventi flessibile e precario. La disarticolazione delle due istituzioni borghesi della scuola e della famiglia – promossa dalla struttura capitalistica e santificata dalla sovrastruttura di sinistra e postmoderna – si iscrive in questa logica e, di più, ne segna il compimento. (*Il futuro* 115)

[The larval teleology of the precarizing logic is oriented towards the transformation—through the unprecedented "forced elaboration of a new human type," to employ the formula used by Gramsci in relation to Americanism—of precarity in a natural dimension: and this in a way that everything (from work to profession, from sentimental to existential relationships) becomes flexible and precarious. The disarticulation of the two bourgeois institutions of school and family—promoted by the capitalist structure and sanctified by the left and postmodern superstructure—is part of this logic and, moreover, marks its fulfillment. (our translation)]

According to this particular interpretation of Italian populist sovereigntism, Gramsci's topicality would consist in the possibility of obtaining a theoretical framework from *Prison Notebooks* and pre-prison writings, which justifies a fight against financial capitalism aimed at restoring a civilization founded on the values of the family and the homeland, "already existing narratives." Fusaro observes that between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—until 1968—the proletariat and the bourgeoisie converged in the struggle against reification:

Il segreto della fase dialettica sta nell'unione della lotta del servo proletario con la coscienza infelice borghese [...]. Nasce, per questa via, una reazione borghese al capitalismo o, se si preferisce, una borghesia anticapitalistica che, in forza della coscienza infelice, lotta insieme con il servo in nome dell'emancipazione universale. (*Il futuro* 261)

[the secret of the dialectic phase lies in the union of the struggle of the proletarian servant with the unhappy bourgeois conscience [...]. In this way, a bourgeois reaction to capitalism or an anti-capitalist bourgeoisie is born which, by virtue of unhappy conscience, fights together with the servant in the name of universal emancipation, (our translation)].

The national-popular character of Italian populist sovereignty postulates class conciliation within the community space under the banner of resistance to financial capitalism. Industrial and productive capitalism is spared from this battle. This is not surprising, since the idealism that underpins the vision of culture of Fusaro's sovereigntism suggests an abstract idea of culture, destined to ignore the material conditions of production that affect the aesthetic form. It is no coincidence that one of the artistic products valued as most emblematic of the post-1968 anti-capitalist resistance is the film *Pretty Woman* (1990), in which, according to Fusaro, "l'incompatibilità strutturale tra la donatività dell'eros e la rapacità individualistica del capitale liquido-finanziario è efficacemente raffigurata, con forte impatto visivo." (2018, 63) ["the structural incompatibility between the donativeness of eros and the individualistic rapacity of liquid-financial capital is effectively depicted, with a strong visual impact," (our translation)].

The fact that *Pretty Woman* comes from a hyper-reified film production circuit does not matter. Nor does it seem relevant that the actors' style is clearly mimetic and the film openly commercial and sentimental (and therefore fully included in the discursive field of *senso comune*). It is sufficient that the film contains "the idea" of anti-"financial capitalism." The distance from Gramsci's broad anti-capitalist conception is great. Gramsci's critique of culture is in conflict with both financial and productive capital and obsessively attentive to the bourgeois material conditions of production. We must not forget what Gramsci wrote in 1919 about acting in the theater:

Il teatro, come organizzazione pratica di uomini e di strumenti di lavoro, non è sfuggito dalle spire del *maelström* capitalistico. Ma l'organizzazione pratica del teatro è nel suo insieme un mezzo di espressione artistica: non si può turbarla senza turbare e rovinare il processo espressivo, senza sterilire l'organo 'linguistico' della rappresentazione teatrale. (Gramsci, *La smorfia* 109)

The theatre, as a practical organization of people and tools of trade, has not escaped from the coils of the capitalist maelstrom. But the practical organization of the theatre as a whole is a means of artistic expression. One cannot upset it without upsetting and ruining the expressive process, without sterilizing the 'linguistic' organ of the theatrical performance. (Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural* 68)]

There is no trace of idealism here, as there is no trace of the conceptual richness of Gramsci's thought in Italian populist sovereignism, which qualifies as Gramscian.

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Author Profile: Yuri Brunello is professor of Italian Studies at Universidade Federal do Ceará. His current areas of research include Dante, Latin American literature, and Modernism. He is the author of a book *Nelson Rodrigues pirandelliano* (2016). Email: <yuri.brunello@ufc.br>