Critique littéraire et espaces postmodernes

Literary Criticism and Postmodern Spaces

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*Immanent Momentum*

**Some Observations about Gramsci’s Politics of Space**

The Geography of Hegemony

Over the last thirty years there has been a progressive and even more intense link between geography and critical theory, witness to which has been, among other things, the extension into the social sciences of terms such as margin, frontier, limit, and territory. Both the sphere of the humanities and that of geography, in all their ramifications, have been brought up to date from a hermeneutic point of view in line with the following fruitful osmosis: for in literary criticism, the visual arts, town planning and architecture, we are dealing with an important change of the epistemological stance in which we may single out the reaction to the decay of the certainties inherent in modernity from the ending, in Lyotard’s view, of the grand narratives to a general fluidification of the historical subject. This subject, which can no longer be encapsulated within foreseeable schema and which is forced to measure up to phenomena of hybridization and fragmentation, remains in a condition of constant instability.

The recurrent use of geographical metaphors in differing disciplines, from Jameson’s «cognitive mapping», to Said’s «travelling theory» to James Clifford’s «poetics of displacement» is confirmation that the cultural turn of the late twentieth century has found in geography one of its most fruitful fields of application of the idea of consciousness, which escapes the great deterministic systems in order to be entrusted to locus-specific practices and strategies.

As geography and the humanities converge, new topics are being suggested that require a transdisciplinary perspective and a combination of methodologies. From such fusions, a kaleidoscope of intellectual and artistic outputs is currently emanating. You can see it in the hybrid maps of radical cartographers and the artistic creations of experimental geography; or when philosophers and
literary theorists concerned to examine life’s fundamental spatiality engage with constructs of place and landscape.¹

During the same time, social theory has gradually shifted attention onto the concrete processes that direct and guide everyday life, by making use of geography as an indispensable support for understanding how human behaviour develops with time and, above all, spatially.

«Ideological and political hegemony in any society depends on an ability to control the material context of personal and social experience. For this reason, the materializations and meanings given to money, time, and space have more than a little significance for the maintenance of political power»². This is a line of research which, by involving disciplines that were initially distant from one another, such as anthropology, psychology and sociology, has finished up by locating geography at the centre of a paradigm that has become highly innovative in social research. We are dealing in effect with the latest phase of an evolution that, as Heidegger has clarified, has characterized the whole of western modernity, culminating in the idea that «truth has been transformed into the certainty of representation»³. This interpretation is consistent with the political nature of modern geography, which was born in Germany at the beginning of the eighteenth century with the declared aim of the «destruction of the feudal aristocratic State» in the light of a bourgeois social formation whose validation would be ever more closely bound to cognitive spatial goals as ‘spectacle’ or as ‘receptacle’ of vision itself.⁴ Together with a geography which, in the wake of Barthes’s semiotics gives pride of place to an analytic vision, in the same period of time that we have considered, political theory too is restructured, also adopting protocols of a geographical type, even if not necessarily bound to cognitive spatial modes⁵.

In particular this has involved those political formations, Marxism included, which focus on the conception of the Other as an interlocutor and herald relations of various kinds, from Bakhtin’s dialogical approach through Wittgenstein’s performative element and the re-proposition of an ethical code in De Certeau to the absolutization of the Other in Levinas. In all these thinkers we are witnessing a deployment of theory that depends on the building up of alliances and is manifest in a different and mobile spatial conformation.

Again, as from the Eighties of the last century against the background of this methodological and conceptual renewal of disciplines which are intertwined with space, studies on the work of Antonio Gramsci have grown exponentially. They propose a conception of Marxism that goes beyond the confines of historical materialism to appropriate areas of experience bound up, among other things, with feminist, anti-racist and postcolonial demands, in a perspective «on the relationship between history and culture [which] is mediated and intervened in by a very powerful geographical sense».

In Edward Said’s view, we find ourselves faced with a geographical vision that, in the first place, demarcates the dividing line from methodologies of analysis bound up with deterministic or deductive logics, entirely to the advantage of the comprehension of heterogeneous and dislocated phenomena such as those distinguishing the contemporary scene. «I shall argue that Gramsci’s geographical awareness makes it more appropriate for late-twentieth century criticism, which has had to deal with disjunctive formations and experiences such as women’s history, popular culture, post-colonial and subaltern material that cannot be assimilated easily, cannot be appropriated and fitted into an overall scheme of correspondences». Obviously, according to Said, it is not only that Gramsci was blessed with a marked understanding of geographical type — the italicization is by Said himself — but his interpretation through geographical protocols involves an open-minded and innovative use of those protocols.

And yet, until very recent times, Gramsci was not — except marginally — considered from this perspective so as to understand his writings. An analysis in which the appropriate comprehension of the social sphere requires a sifting-through of the spatial element came first of all through Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall, but only later did this perspicacity come to light in Gramsci. Analogies with the way in which Gramsci proceeded emerged from the materialist geography of David Harvey, and, again, through the socially oriented ecology that may be traced back to Donald Moore, but in all these cases Gramsci remained substantially a background figure.

It is thanks to the concept of «living philology» that a link is brought about between the method used and the conditions of inquiry, (meaning the geographical circumstances observed by Gramsci, and on which he based his judgements) defining a broader political project. This contribution maintains the hypothesis that Gramsci made use of concepts such as territory, site, scale and network of relationships in ways that are innovative as compared to the modern human geographies that have asserted themselves in parallel to the extension of the idea of mental space.

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7 Ibid.
In assessing the specific geographic aspect of Gramsci’s intellectual legacy, I advance the thesis that this new trend must, at least in part, be related to the subsequent renewal of an historical materialism eventually freed from the constraints of previous forms of Socialism, to be transformed by feminist, antiracist, anticolonial, and gay studies. Inspired by Gramsci’s interpretation of practices as historically and geographically situated, all these various strains of scholarship nowadays try to ground a philosophy and, at the same time, a philology of praxis within spatial conjunctures. In this vein, engagements with Gramsci have been influenced by the local conditions where scholars – political activists have worked and have resulted in the constant testing and interrogation of the conditions under which discourses originate, direct our communication and shape our existence. «The merit of Gramsci’s writings is that they precisely uncover the narrative behind the belief in the reality of the external world and, in so doing, they do much more in that they uncover the discursive (or perhaps intradiscursive) nature of all belief, of our approach to the so called world».

Ever since scholarship has increased exponentially, innovative forms of political praxis-based feelings and ideas concerning places and space have been eventually detected in Gramsci and his move against mechanic forms of sociology:

Human awareness replaces naturalistic ‘spontaneity’ […] the process whereby popular feeling is standardised ceases to be mechanical and casual (that is produced by the conditioning of environmental factors and the like) and becomes conscious and critical. Knowledge and a judgement of the importance of this feeling […] is acquired by the collective organism through ‘active and conscious participation’, through ‘compassionality’, through experience of immediate particulars, through a system which one would call ‘living philology’.

According to Edward Said, with Gramsci we are dealing with a geographic approach which, first of all, disposes of all those deductive methodologies intrinsic in deterministic Marxism, in favour of a fresh understanding of heterogeneous and dislocated phenomena as those characterizing the contemporary scene: for the Palestinian intellectual, not only is the Sardinian thinker endowed with a keen geographical comprehension – it is Said himself who writes the adjective ‘geographic’ in italics – but his spatial sensibility coincides with the modern acquisitions of the discipline.

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9 Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, ed. by Q. O’Hare, G. Nowell Smith), London 2007 (from here on SPN), 429.
Gramsci’s line of spatial research engages with anthropology, psychology and sociology, repositioning him «as a historical-geographical materialist avant la lettre»\(^{10}\). His survey/investigation of spaces and territories moves along the lines of Western modernization as exemplified by Heidegger, who claims that this process leads to the idea that «truth has been transformed into the certainty of representation»\(^{11}\). «The concept of cartography as a ‘science’ developed alongside the technological innovations and scientific discoveries of the Enlightenment and contributed to the development of a prevailing discourse of scientificity»\(^{12}\), an interpretation consistent with the political character of modern geography, born in Germany at the beginning of the Eighteenth Century with the explicit goal of «the destruction of the aristocratic feudal State»\(^{13}\), to be replaced by a bourgeoisie social structure whose persistence will be tied to a conception of the world as ‘spectacle’ or ‘receptacle’ of the same vision\(^{14}\). Gramsci’s geographical analysis of modernity comprises both the imaginary and the material aspects of territoriality in their anthropological density for a single-minded purpose of political effectiveness: a struggle over territory aimed at gaining consensus among those who live in those territories, confirming the tight connection between power and knowledge which characterizes modern political warfare. Gramsci’s «The Southern Question» and «Americanism» exemplify these trends, making it clear that, as samples of geopolitics, they should not be read simply as «a representation of power relations or as a trace of the power relations that influenced as their production. One must rather pay attention to the specificity of effects (...) solicited by a medium at a particular historical junction»\(^{15}\). Gramsci’s sensibility to theory’s embedment in place is part of his effort to conceive mapping as constitutive of political action, and political action rooted in the location of narratives which eventually shape our worldview.

From the Southern Question to Fordism

Debating Antonio Gramsci’s Southern Question, Frank Rosengarten claimed that this work – the only work by Gramsci, besides his massive writings as a journalist, published in his lifetime – «is relevant today in several ways. Not only do his writings shed


\(^{11}\) Martin Heidegger, Sentieri interrotti, Firenze 1968, 84.

\(^{12}\) Peta Mitchell, Cartographic Strategies of Postmodernity. The Figure of the Map in Contemporary Theory and Fiction, London 2011, 2.

\(^{13}\) Franco Farinelli, I segni del mondo. Immagine cartografica e discorso geografico in età moderna, Varese 1992, 95.

\(^{14}\) Jencks, op. cit., 1-25.

light on regional and interclass tensions in contemporary Italy, they provide a critical entry point through which to look at the dynamics of colonial and neocolonial power relations elsewhere in the world».

The Southern Question represents the first stage of a journey that involves Gramsci’s entire critical elaboration. This is characterized by a method which, even taking into account the limits on the action of the historical subject subsequently highlighted by post-structuralism, lays the foundation on which, through an immanent analysis, Gramsci then bases an effective political action. The innovative elements of this method concentrate on the territorial aspect that defines the Southern Question itself, as well as other arguments dealt with in the Notebooks, all considered from a perspective that may be seen as a forerunner to some of the intuitions of present-day cultural geography. In the course of his analysis Gramsci gives the lie to various commonplaces regarding the South which, from Montesquieu to Renan, have produced the vision of a backward region as compared with Northern Italy, and, more in general, as compared with Europe. What they depict is a stereotype of a country genetically incapable of economic and social development that reaches the standards of modernity. Paying attention to «the differentiated geography of textual production» Gramsci discovers «markedly different ways of participating in the circulation and production of representations of the south» and thus reconstructs a context that is at the same time both historical and territorial, in which the composition and the internal working of southern society are thrown into relief.

This society basically hinges around an agrarian bloc which contains the amorphous and disintegrated mass of the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie with its intellectuals, who function as a transmission belt between the state and the government of the South, and, lastly, the great intellectuals who enter into direct dialogue with the landowner grouping and the representatives of northern finance. By focusing on the role of the great intellectuals as guarantors of the alliance between government and capital, Gramsci confutes the southernist vulgate whose main representatives, Croce, Giustino Fortunato and Gaetano Salvemini, upheld an essentially Manichaean view of the North-South contrast.

The dynamic system of the alliances of capital which envelop the South in Gramsci’s geography confutes, moreover, the environmental determinism that in those


self-same years was penalizing geography as a scientific discipline\(^{18}\): in anticipating current practices in contemporary geography (human geography), Gramsci considers the Southern Question a «territorial problem, that is to say as one of the aspects of the national question»\(^{19}\), and his analysis therefore proceeds on various interconnected levels, respecting the logics and particularities present in each one of them. Consistent with his framing of this question, Gramsci brings out the way in which, despite the question involving Italy as a whole, account must be taken of the different impacts of modernization on the various regions, variants that impose a specific cultural – as well as political – approach with respect to each part of the South\(^{20}\).

From this point of view, the Notebooks contain an in-depth investigation of the relation between city and countryside in their historical development, denying the soundness of any natural or idealized conception of the countryside, and establishing a relation between the agrarian crisis that followed the reunification of the country and the management of public affairs, directed in essence from outside by Piedmont. Differently from a traditional and positivist historiography that considers countryside and city as stages of a linear development, Gramsci identifies in the Risorgimento a break in the development of the South, and in the two poles of city and countryside singles out what Stefan Kipfer considers «claims to urbanity and rurality as moments of hegemonic struggle», called on to undertake a crucial role «in an urbanizing world, where urbanism and ruralism paradoxically persist as sociocultural horizons»\(^{21}\).

As regards the new-born Italian nation, Gramsci also intervenes in the «Super-country» – «Supercity» polemic, where the former case conveys a nostalgic conception of rural life sheltered from the negative effects of modernization, and conformant to the fantasies and tastes of the urban bourgeoisie. At first, Gramsci liquidates the polemic as characterized by «meanness from both sides»\(^{22}\) but then ridicules Adriano Tilgher for having argued that the crisis of Neapolitan poetry was caused by

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\(^{18}\) «By the 1920s the isolation of Modern Geography and geographers from the production of social theory was well advanced. For most of the next fifty years, geographical thinking turned inwards and seemed to erase even the memories of earlier engagement with the mainstreams of social theorization»: Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies. The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, London 1989, 35.


\(^{20}\) See LV, 682.

\(^{21}\) Stefan Kipfer, «City, Country, Hegemony. Antonio Gramsci’s Spatial Historicism» in Ekers et al. (eds.), *op. cit.*, 83.

urbanization.\textsuperscript{23} Maintaining that Supercountry reduces the countryside to a series of reassuring stereotypes, Gramsci is also sarcastic in regard to Giovanni Papini’s Supercountry profession of faith, asking whether the unity of Italy could have been brought about without the decisive influence of the urban element;\textsuperscript{24} Catholicism itself would not have expanded if the Pope had not chosen Rome as his residence.

From the narrowness of Italian provincial life Gramsci turned his attention to the United States, seen from the inside of the North-South and East-West contrast, according to a territorial perspective pivoting around North American hegemony. The subject re-proposed here is the comparison between the Old and New Continents, which, on the one hand, is shown in their almost identical culture – «all they do in America is to remasticate the old European culture» – accompanied however by a fierce antagonism at the economic level, and by unpredictable consequences: «America, through the implacable weight of its economic production (and therefore indirectly), will compel or is already compelling Europe to overturn its excessively antiquated economic and social basis.»\textsuperscript{25}

The term ‘Americanism’ coined by Gramsci has the connotations of a synthesis of the cultural consequences that United States hegemony exerts over the rest of the world, more than a self-aware and concerted action of United States foreign policy. It is the prelude to a definitive transformation which in Gramsci’s interpretation narrows the distance between base and superstructure, emphasizing the economic element present in all forms of cultural manifestation and, at the same time, the structural nature of culture which accompanies any modification of the economic order.

Could Americanism be an intermediate phase of the current historical crisis? Could the conglomeration of plutocratic forces give rise to a new phase of European industrialism on the model of American industry? The attempt will probably be made (rationalization, Bedaux system, Taylorism, etc). But can it succeed? Europe reacts, setting its cultural traditions against ‘virgin’ America. This reaction is interesting not because a so-called cultural tradition could prevent a revolution in industrial organization, but because it is in the reaction of the European ‘situation’ to the American ‘situation’. In reality, Americanism, in its most advanced form, requires a preliminary condition: “the rationalization of the population”, that is, that there do not exist numerous classes without a function in the world of production, in other words, absolutely parasitic classes.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{23} Gramsci (1975), \textit{op. cit.}, 95 (Q1, §101); in English: Gramsci (2011), \textit{op. cit.}, vol. I, 192.

\textsuperscript{24} Gramsci (1975), \textit{op. cit.}, 2150-2151 (Q22, §4); in English: SPN, 287-289.

\textsuperscript{25} Gramsci (1975), \textit{op. cit.}, 2178 (Q22, §15); in English: SPN, 317.

\textsuperscript{26} Gramsci (2011), \textit{op. cit.}, vol. I, 167 (Notebook 1, §61).
Before entering into an in-depth analysis of this quotation, a methodological premise is needed: the attention that Gramsci pays to social change – in this case at a global level, after the incursion into the regional sphere – is summed up for that era in his analysis of the United States as the state-of-the-art of modernity. His analysis contains a critique of Crocean idealism with respect to the pragmatism of American culture, and constitutes an important example of how this transformation in all its import may be understood only in spatial terms. It is exactly here that cultural geography constitutes the most appropriate way to articulate in its entire breadth and variety the occurrence of a hegemonic condition. The theoretical work of the New Left, in this sense, contributed to rediscovering Gramsci in the 1970s, acknowledging his influence in cultural, economic and, last but not least, geopolitical policy. In the light of this new season of Gramscian studies, various aspects of the conception of hegemony have gone on to involve ever wider sectors, establishing unexpected relations between areas of the world in particular historical conjunctures. Given the accumulation of ever more numerous variables, hegemony must not, as a matter of principle, be considered as an acquired and lasting, even less as a stable, condition. Indeed, the subject of Americanism in the *Notebooks* demonstrates how extremely volatile hegemony is, placing it in a precarious equilibrium on a hypothetical ridge between the voluntary acceptance of a certain domination and, on the contrary, resistance to this. In the quotation regarding the two contraposed, even if historically intertwined, models of America and Europe, we become aware that Gramsci does not provide us with any possible definition of hegemony while he carries out an investigation of a series of actions and reactions. On the basis of these, «the structural opening and indetermination which characterize hegemony, which may become enclosed in a perpetual conflict which finishes up […] annulling the conditions of the progressive articulation of the differences, or may become (as Lenin and Gramsci thought, starting from the necessary alliance between the workers and peasants) the fundamental lever of a revolutionary process». This systolic-diastolic type movement regarding the relationship between Europe and America highlights how Gramsci’s enquiry ranges widely over those possible social set-ups, in what for his time was the foreseeable future, which were singled out along a geographical axis ranging from East (corresponding to the Russia of the Soviets) to West (with the United States and the laboratory provided by Fordism). And all this took as a starting point the preceding comparison between North and South in Italy, from the Risorgimento through to fascism. In this survey,

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there is also a diachronic dimension, grafted on in the form of European tradition (with its positive and negative connotations, changing according to the variables with which it comes into contact), which ends up by attributing a historical-territorial ‘density’ to the whole, and shows many points of contact with Geertz’s concept of ‘thickness’. In this comparison between societies that are either more or less oriented towards a modernity identified with the production parameter, the urban variable is also present, sometimes under a surprising guise: «Urbanism in Italy is not solely and not even ‘especially’ an industrial phenomenon. The largest Italian city, Naples, is not an industrial city».²⁹

The contradiction of Naples which, while it was the biggest city in Italy, was not actually a producer, but rather witnessed the proliferation of parasitism – well-represented by the figure of the «lazzaroni» – recalls indeed the parameter of production. This represents a line of demarcation, which may be applied at a global level, in which the dualism between Northern Italy and the South – the founding controversy in the future antagonism between the World of the North and that of the South – is reflected in the social unease of those who live the experience of subalternity and colonialism. What strikes us about Americanism and Fordism is the omnivorous progression of the problematics that it confronts, a characteristic not bound up exclusively with the fact that from his very first notes in Notebook 1, right down to the restructuring of the subject matter in Notebook 22, Gramsci carries out a series of adjustments of aim, as much as the geographical interconnection that it highlights between the economy and habits and customs. Here it puts the accent on the almost immediate side effects between the tendencies that show up at the level of world political order and set-ups and day-by-day praxis. The negative outcome of the demographic enquiry calibrated on the rationalization of production did not involve solely Italy, but «to a greater or lesser extent [this situation] exists in all the countries of Old Europe and exists, in a still worse form, in India and China, which explains the historical stagnation in these countries and their politico-military impotence».³⁰ Gramsci is here not hypothesizing a universally valid economic system but – rather – invoking a «law of definite proportions in demographic composition, its own ‘optimum’ equilibrium»; these are conditions which, if not satisfied, may have catastrophic consequences since they «dry up the wellsprings of national economic life, in addition to any other element of dissolution».³¹ Taken together, the «drying up» side and the recourse to «dissolution» dramatize the urgency of a set-up in any type of societal association, as a function of the encounter between consent and the state:

³⁰ GRAMSCI (1975), op. cit., 2145 (Q22, §2).
³¹ GRAMSCI (1975), op. cit., 2145.
What is called ‘public opinion’ is tightly connected to political hegemony; in other words, it is the point of contact between ‘civil society’ and ‘political society’, between consent and force. […] naturally, elements of public opinion have always existed, even in the Asiatic satrapies, but public opinion as we think of it today was born on the eve of the collapse of the absolutist state, that is, during the period when the new bourgeois class was engaged in the struggle for political hegemony and the conquest of power.\textsuperscript{32}

It is not only that the perspective of hegemony keeps the vital dialectic between political and civil society alive, but this very relation provides a key that allows an understanding of the way in which Gramsci evaluates various social scenarios, beginning from the given geographical one. On this point, we must take into consideration the fact that the very notions of West and East, even though demonstrably conventional constructs, «correspond to real facts, they allow one to travel by land and by sea and to arrive at the predetermined destination, to foresee the future, to ‘objectivize reality’, to understand the ‘real objectivity of the external world’. The rational and the real become one and the same thing».\textsuperscript{33} In the case of Americanism and Fordism the two expressions almost coincide through the potentiality that they both possess:

In America, rationalization and prohibition are undoubtedly related: inquiries by industrialists into the private lives of workers and the inspection services created by some industrialists to control the ‘morality’ of workers are necessities of the new method of work. Those who deride the initiatives and see them merely as a hypocritical manifestation of ‘puritanism’ will never be able to understand the importance, the significance, and the \textit{objective import} of the American phenomenon, which is also the biggest collective effort ever made to create, with unprecedented speed, and a consciousness of purpose unique in history, a new type of worker and of man.\textsuperscript{34}

Gramsci lays the emphasis on the breadth and depth of the intervention that is here being carried out at the cultural level on the American people, stressing that «the new methods of work and the way of life are inseparable».\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{32} \textsc{Gramsci} (2011), \textit{op. cit.}, vol. III, 213 (Notebook 7, §83).
\textsuperscript{33} Giuseppe \textsc{Prestipino}, entry «Oggettività», in: \textit{LV}, 594, citing textually the words of Gramsci in Q7, §25; see \textsc{Gramsci} (2011), \textit{op. cit.}, vol. III, 176.
\textsuperscript{34} \textsc{Gramsci} (2011), \textit{op. cit.}, vol. II, 215 (Notebook 4, §52).
\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Ibid.}
«The rational and the real become one and the same thing», as emerges precisely from the Notebook on Americanism: in the Fordist experiment the United States represented the vanguard of a form of modernity that could assert itself at the world level, and consequently Gramsci’s analysis entered into all the aspects of the American nation available to him: Americanism was to represent for him the primacy of industry over agriculture, that of the city over the countryside, and finally was to have its outlet in an imperialism of the United States. Nevertheless, to fully understand the geographical nature of Gramsci’s investigation, one must first bear in mind that «the important element that emerges from this picture [of globalization] is constituted by the interpenetration and interdependence of the various sectors of the world which came to be created between the two world wars ». Gramsci’s enquiry is born from an eminently political motivation, bound up with the need to understand structural transformations such as those which were coming about in the spheres of production, of finance and of civil society, the role of intellectuals in the modern state, in order then to arrive at family organization. All these came from an all-round recognition of the world’s set-up in the fifteen-year period following the end of the First World War, due among other things to Gramsci’s awareness of the failure of Lenin’s project for the spread of the revolution. Gramsci had been a fervent supporter of the conception expressed by Lenin in his 1916 pamphlet on Imperialism; and, after the revolution of 1917, on various occasions he had highlighted the analogies between Russia and Italy, ranging from the weakness of the state to the prominence of a rural culture in the two countries, thereby emphasizing the analogies between East and West, in the hope that this would have favoured the success of initiatives in Italy inspired by the soviet experience. Then, however, after having taken part in the Fourth Congress of the International, after the period spent in Moscow and after the death of Lenin, Gramsci’s geopolitical formulation changed appreciably. Between 1924 and 1926, with Stalin’s consolidation of power, we see a reformulation of the East-West dualism away from a soviet perspective, which stressed the ‘oriental’ peculiarities of the leading country, thereby, even in the long run, denying the possibilities of the spread of the revolution in Europe. A fruit of this rethinking by Gramsci is instead «industrialism, supported by an adequate political system» such as to make the standard of living a «recurrent theme of the Notebooks. In particular, in a comment that sounds like Keynesianism avant la lettre, he observes that the economic crises of the past have been overcome by raising the “standard of living for certain strata of the population or a relative

improvement of the standard of living of all strata”, where such a rise is also linked (Q3, §77) to intellectual progress».

On the one hand, Gramsci does not share the common sense of a romantic or populist origin, according to which everything that is natural is also positive, and, consistently with this, he is also very critical of any attempt to pass off the backwardness of a country as natural. Industrialism, considered as a stage in the secularization of the world, represents a victory as compared with the state of nature.

Industrialism is a continual victory over man’s animality, an uninterrupted and painful process of subjugating the instincts to a new and rigid habit of order, exactitude, precision. There is a mechanization during the period, or the aspect of a mechanization. But does not every new way of life appear as a mechanization during the period when it is asserting itself and is struggling against the old? This happens because until now the changes have occurred through brutal coercion, that is, through the imposition of one class over another. 39

Here Gramsci advances certain reservations regarding how the new shows itself: may it not be that, faced with all this, alienation is due to the coercion with which the new asserts itself? Amongst the doubts that come to the fore at the very moment when the potentialities of industrialism are increasing, he also sees the risk that the worker runs of being assimilated to a machine, 40 «to sever the old psychophysical nexus of skilled professional work in which the intelligence, initiative, and imagination were required to play some role, and thus to reduce the operations of production solely to the physical aspect». 41

In this way, the heritage of expertise and «creativity» accumulated by generations of artisans is effaced, and an irretrievable rupture is created between the workers, reduced

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38 Ibid., 235. The ‘quote within the quote’ is from Q8, §216 in the translation by J. Buttigieg: Gramsci (2011), op. cit., vol. III, 366.
40 «The ‘puritanical’ initiatives have just this purpose: to preserve a psychophysical equilibrium outside the place of work in order to prevent the new method from leading to the physiological collapse of the worker. This equilibrium is purely external; it is not yet internal. Internal equilibrium can only be established by the worker himself and by his own particular society through appropriate new means. The industrialist is concerned with the continuity of the physical efficiency, the muscular–nervous efficiency, of the worker. It is in the industrialist’s interest to put together a stable, skilled workforce, a permanently attuned industrial ensemble, because the human ensemble is also a machine that cannot be dismantled too often and renewed cog by cog without serious losses»: Gramsci (1975), op. cit., 490 (Q4, §52); Prison Notebooks, Notebook 4: Gramsci (2011), op. cit., vol. II, 216.
to an animal status through the effort to more and more resemble appliances, and the «professionals», integrated into the Taylorist system, responsible for its management,\(^{42}\) and called on to undertake more and more complex coordination tasks, for which the capacity for abstraction and calculation ends by alienating these intellectuals from the material aspects of production. The factory as the matrix of civil society and its anthropological consequences assume a particular importance in Gramsci, who, taking into account the law, from Marx onward, of the tendency of the rate of profits to fall, records the stages of this accelerated movement, both at the technological level and at the political one in the workplace, hypothesizing alternating cyclical phases, marked on the one hand by ever more sophisticated machinery and, on the workers' front, by the optimization, driven to the limit, of the workforce. Even the sexual question presents a similar divergence; on one side we have «a superior type [of worker]», disciplined, monogamous and a faithful spouse, since «the employee who goes to work after a night of ‘excess’ is no good for his work. The exaltation of passion cannot be reconciled with the timed movements of production motions connected with the most perfected automation».\(^{43}\) For Gramsci, therefore, the task facing the USA's ruling classes is to extend a coercive sexual ethic, which however will cause a «moral gap [in the United States] between the working masses and the ever more numerous elements of the ruling classes»\(^{44}\) with, in consequence, an overshadowing of the «‘tradition’ of the pioneers, the tradition of strong individual personalities in whom the ‘vocation of work’ had reached its greatest intensity and strength, men who entered directly, not by means of some army of slaves and serfs, into energetic contact with the forces of nature in order to dominate them and exploit them victoriously».\(^{45}\) With this, the discourse of the pioneers, the bearers on their broad shoulders of the myth of the exceptional nature of the foundation of the United States, thereby goes into crisis. On this point, Gramsci ironically lays bare the founding myth, that the conquest of the ‘Promised Land’ was the exclusive work of the pioneers, who – according to the myth – had not exploited the labour of slaves or of other sub-alterns in this undertaking.\(^{46}\) This deconstructive outcome is bound up with «the most

\(^{42}\) «Even the intellectual is a ‘professional’ who has his specialized ‘machines’, his ‘apprenticeship’ and his own Taylor system. It is illusory to attribute this ‘acquired’, and not innate, ability to everyone (...) the ability of the professional intellectual skillfully to combine induction and deduction, to generalize, to infer, to transport from one sphere to another a criterion of discrimination, adapting it to new conditions, etc. is a ‘speciality’, it is not endowed by ‘common sense’»: Gramsci (2011), op. cit., vol. I, 128 (Notebook 1, §43).

\(^{43}\) Gramsci (1975), op. cit., 2167 (Q22, §11); SPN, 305.

\(^{44}\) Gramsci (1975), op. cit., 2168 (Q22, §11); SPN, 304.

\(^{45}\) Gramsci (1975), op. cit., 2167; SPN, 305.

\(^{46}\) Gramsci here touches a bare nerve of United States historiography: in drawing up a balance sheet of the state of the art of these studies, Donald Pease underlines how: «In light of the linkages
important question of an ethical and civil order connected with the sexual question», in other words «a genuine independence in relation to men».\(^{47}\) One observes, in close connection with this exigency, the effects linked to potentially libertine morals, in which the American woman abandons her traditional role of ‘brood mare’ in favour of that of ‘dolly’\(^{48}\) encouraged by the new ethic of the ruling strata, divorced from the puritan sobriety of the Founding Fathers, which is now once again proposed – but in a crude form purely instrumental to production – in the new Fordist model. The failure that in the end Gramsci diagnoses in Taylorism as the perfection of Fordism and the «process of adaptation [to mechanization]»\(^{49}\) does not at all propose the return to pre-modern models. Against the background of a possible modernity – of which America is a metonym and which Gramsci, with «Americanism and Fordism», successfully explores by combining living, working, urban and rural spaces, and by connecting them to their statal representativeness without other ideological filters – «the big factories, Taylorization, rationalization etc.» are called into play as the «economic base of collective man».\(^{50}\) In what does this modern type differ from the preceding ones in history? Following Michels, Gramsci argues that the charismatic type – which however was still current in Weber – is now obsolete as a guarantee of social cohesion, and is substituted by the «collective man [who] is formed essentially from the bottom up, on the basis of the position that the collectivity occupies in the world of production».\(^{51}\) In America, more than anywhere else, we witness the «need to elaborate a new type of man conformant to the new type of work and productive process»; but this evolution is brought about through

Amy Kaplan has adduced between the founding mythology of American Studies and the official doctrine of American exceptionalism, the disciplinary map of the field of American Studies over the last fifty years can be understood in relation to the geopolitical fortunes of that doctrine: Donald E. Pease, «New Perspectives on U.S. Culture and Imperialism», in: Amy Kaplan, D. Pease (eds.), *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, Durham 1993, 23.

\(^{47}\) Gramsci (1975), op. cit., 2149-2159 (Q22, §3); SPN, 296.

\(^{48}\) Gramsci (1975), op. cit., 2148 (Q22, §3). «The male industrialist continues to work even if he is a millionaire, but his wife and daughters are turning, more and more, into ‘luxury mammals’. Beauty competitions, competitions for new film actresses (recall the 30,000 Italian girls who sent photographs of themselves in bathing costumes to Fox in 1926), the theatre, etc., all of which select the feminine beauty of the world and put it up for auction, stimulate the mental attitudes of prostitution»: Gramsci (1975), op. cit., 2169 (Q22, §11); SPN, 306.

\(^{49}\) «American industrialists have understood all too well this dialectic inherent in the new industrial methods. They have understood that the ‘trained gorilla’ is just a phrase, that the worker ‘unfortunately’ remains a man, and that [...] not only does he think, but the fact that he gets no immediate satisfaction from his work and realizes that they are trying to reduce him to a trained gorilla, can lead him into a train of thought that is far from conformist»: Gramsci (1975), op. cit., 2171 (Q22, §12); SPN, 309-310.

\(^{50}\) Gramsci (1975), op. cit., 862 (Q7, §12); Gramsci (2011), op. cit., vol. III, 165.

\(^{51}\) Ibid.
«arms taken over from the old European arsenal, bastardized and therefore ‘anachronistic’ compared with the development of ‘things’».

The new type of man is situated at the centre of a cultural debate, bound up with the repercussions of the First World War in Europe, and whose protagonist is the worker. «The Worker, not the one freed from the constriction of external direction – like Apollo – but the one chained – like Prometheus – to routinized production line discipline, becomes the universal figure: he is the ideal-type representation of the generically human». The man-as-mass would not have been conceived, and neither would there have been discussion of him in political terms if, at the origin of everything, there had not been the First World War as the traumatic spatial experience. Ernst Jünger and Louis-Ferdinand Céline are just two of the authors who established a close connection between the totalizing and uniformizing past in the trenches and the analogous ones of the new Taylorized factory. The soldier first, and then the worker – thanks to the ability of both of them to dominate the new powerful means of technology – are transformed into the flywheel of hitherto unknown social dynamics, in which the type takes over from the individual. As seen in the project for the Taylorized worker, this change goes hand in hand with a metamorphosis which is physical, as well as ergonomic in its mechanized proto-cyborg gesturality, constituted by precise movements which, through the devices at the disposition of the worker, are aimed at synchrony so as to act on the surrounding space. That self-same space of the factory, endowed in the absence of history with a utopian character in the infinite potentiality that binds it to the tabula rasa, is an unconscious reminiscence of the artillery-flattened fields of battle. But while Jünger and Céline are prey to masochistic fantasies of a fascist stamp, Gramsci retreats in the face of the Americanist last frontier of these tendencies, probably the vestiges of the «old European arsenal». In his view, Taylorism establishes an equilibrium that is «purely external and mechanical, [and which cannot] become internalized [unless] it is proposed by the worker himself and not imposed from the outside, if it is proposed by a new form of society, with appropriate and original methods». The accent on the «new form of society» does not escape the attention of Alberto Burgio: «it is as if one is saying that the realization of rationality immanent in the new production system (in the new automatisms) presupposes the constitution of a new social form, founded on

52 Gramsci (1975), op. cit., 2146 (Q22, §2); SPN, 286. The literal «conformant» is here substituted for SPN’s «suitable», given the importance acquired by Gramsci’s discussions of social conformity in the context of the new collective man.

53 Marco Revelli, Oltre il Novecento. La politica, le ideologie e le insidie del lavoro, Torino 2006, 41.

54 Ernst Jünger, Der Arbeiter. Herrschaft und Gestalt, Hamburg 1932.

55 Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Voyage au bout de la nuit, Paris 1932.

56 Gramsci (1975), op. cit., 2166 (Q22, §11); SPN, 303.
the autonomy of labor. The whole of the reflection on the “American phenomenon” is developed on the basis of this idea.\(^{57}\) Taking for granted that «the reference point of the new world in gestation [corresponds to the] world of production, labor […]», the development of economic forces on new foundations and the progressive establishment of the new structure will heal the inevitable contradictions and, having created a new ‘conformism’ from below, will allow new possibilities for self-discipline – that is, new possibilities for freedom, including individual freedom».\(^{58}\)

Americanism must, finally, take on the profile of a constellation of spaces that are heterogeneous but condensed into an osmotic relationship, starting with the factory that encompasses all of them, and going on to a series of discourses that pivot around them. The first of them concerns the American worker who, no longer in the guise of the pioneer, needs a new frontier, a surrogate of the Wilderness, as the matrix of a new civic sense\(^{59}\) adapted to the yet un-encountered conditions of «industrial concentration and monopoly».\(^{60}\) As compared with its European origins, Americanism effects a sharp irreversible break with the corporatism of the Italian South and of fascism, in other words with the structures characterizing the Southern Question, with which it is placed in a dialectical relationship.\(^{61}\) But above all, as André Tosel noted, «all the main concepts of Gramsci’s Marxism have to be formulated with Americanism as the starting point, in order to avoid any ethicist and politicist manipulation, especially if one does not want to lose the benefit of the revaluation of the ethico-political moment».\(^{62}\) And this ethico-political stage takes on concrete form in the aspiration towards a «new structure», a space in which «an original, and not ‘Americanized’, system of living, to turn into ‘freedom’ what is now a ‘necessity’» is realized.\(^{63}\) Yet once more Europe, seen as the past, braves the interference, even if only «superficial and apish», of the American model. What attitude should then be adopted when faced with overturning «the economic and social basis» of Europe?\(^{64}\)


\(^{60}\) Gramsci (1975), op. cit., 2157 (Q22, §6).


\(^{63}\) Gramsci (1975), op. cit., 2179 (Q22, §15); SPN, 317.

\(^{64}\) Gramsci (1975), op. cit., 2178 (Q22, §15); SPN, 317.
Gramsci is contemptuous of the «fashionable titanism, [the] taste for wishful thinking and abstraction» of the fascist epigones of Nietzsche, with their senseless refusal of modernity and, instead, calls into play an Aufhebung regarding the Southern Question-Americanism spatio-temporal axis, thereby succeeding in transcending the past while metabolizing its message. The activity «of the past cannot but continue the past by developing it, cannot but graft itself onto ‘tradition’». The problem is, after considering all the pasts «of every social group», succeeding in understanding what the «line of real development» will be.

The methodology of «geographical historicism».

In this case too, the Risorgimento is the model – and together with that the «structure of feeling» – on which Gramsci’s attention is concentrated for understanding what the line of real development is. The concept of passive revolution, in fact, beginning with Vincenzo Cuoco’s diagnosis of the failure of the Neapolitan revolution of 1799, is a candidate for being a «a criterion of interpretation of the processes of formation of modern states», but also for being a «historical-theoretical form of the present and an underpinning for a science of politics». Gramsci looks to Quinet for «the meaning and justification of the formula according to which revolution and restoration are equivalent in Italian history [...]». One would say that both Quinet’s “revolution-restoration” and Cuoco’s “passive revolution” express the historical fact that popular initiative is missing from the development of Italian history, as well as the fact 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». The concept of passive revolution, understood as a measure of the progressive or reactionary nature of a social upheaval, involves, as we have already seen with the Southern Question and Americanism, a very close relationship between the local and international contexts: «if it is true that the concrete life of states is fundamentally international life, it is also true that the life of Italian states until 1870 – and therefore “Italian history” – is more “international

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65 Gramsci (1975), op. cit., 1267 (Q10II, §28); SPN, 369.
69 Pasquale Voza (LV, 724) refers to Q15, §62.
history” than “national history”. Passive revolution is not solely a metaphor but constitutes, rather, «an emergent spatialization strategy that structured and shaped state power in Italy». Proceeding in a «molecular» fashion, and thus avoiding any possible «residue of mechanicism and fatalism» in the assessment of the relationship between the past and present of different areas, Gramsci establishes that in the years after the First World War, social innovation in Europe was less substantial than it appeared, in other words the phase of a war of manoeuvre represented by the October Revolution was then followed by that war of position whose «ideological representative […] as well as its practical one» was fascism.

An assessment of this switch may be traced in note 24 of Notebook 13 where, using a military metaphor, Gramsci distances himself from a certain «war of manoeuvre applied to the art of war»; by so doing he takes into account the fact that «iron economistic determinism» – such as that which foresaw the rapid collapse of the capitalist economies – was none other than «out and out historical mysticism»; in the absence of «the element of speed» after the events of 1917, it was a case of studying «in depth» what the elements of civil society were which could undergo modification in a new era marked by a war of position.

However paradoxical it may seem, the concept of passive revolution, with its negative connotation, and Gramsci’s growing caution faced with developments after the October Revolution, brought out a series of exemplary scenarios that allow us to grasp the tendencies within contemporary geopolitics. From this perspective, Adam Morton has emphasized that if the term «passive revolution» designates a real and proper revolution, it ends up nevertheless by coinciding with the interests of the ruling élite, along the lines of the paradigmatic model of the coup d’état in Marx’s Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte. Passive revolution reveals a substantial subjugation in the presence of a revolution that is solely partial or one of façade; but we are also dealing with a state set-up typical of twentieth-century modernity, in other words when in the West «a molecular intensification of the primacy of politics» is realized, an

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73 Gramsci (1975), op. cit., 1774; SPN, 107.
74 Gramsci (1975), op. cit., 1229 (Q10I, §9); FSPN, 350.
75 Gramsci (1975), op. cit., 1613 (Q13, §24); SPN, 233, with an adjustment here bringing the translation into line literally with the original Italian.
76 Gramsci (1975), op. cit., 1614 (Q13, §24); SPN, 233.
77 Gramsci (1975), op. cit., 1616 (Q13, §24); SPN, 235.
intensification «understood as the power of production and government of processes of passivization, standardization and fragmentation»,

i.e. the very tendencies that characterize the Americanism that was reverberating throughout Europe. This process of spatialization of the relationship between classes, understood as the anatomy of the state, once more puts Americanism on a par with the Southern Question, whose forerunners regarding the genesis of the modern state may be traced in the *Notebooks*. Gramsci’s «geographical historicism»

is to be situated along this simultaneously political and cultural line: «within Gramsci’s recourse to understanding modern state formation there is discernible emphasis on the socio-cultural aspect of class rules».

By shedding light on how the various social classes intertwine, on their mutual competition and on the direction of flow of capital – and here substantially anticipating the lines of research of the celebrated study by Perry Anderson— Gramsci reconstructs the circumstances in which absolute monarchies and national states emerged, thereby giving the lie to that historical conception which postulates homogeneous developments for geographical areas of the same era.

The inability to create a national state, and hence Italy’s backwardness as compared with European absolutism, push Gramscian geography in the direction overcoming the usual categories of the state, in order to undertake a dispassionate analysis of the conditions that make it possible, and of the forms that it assumes, since «state does not mean only the apparatus of government but also the ‘private’ apparatus of hegemony or civil society».

During the Risorgimento, Piedmont gave life to a passive revolution, substituting itself as a state for the task which ought to have been that of a ruling group. The fact that a state should assume such a role finds its counterpart in France between 1789 and Louis Napoleon’s coup d’état, i.e. the period in which France was «the Piedmont of Europe», giving rise to a «dictatorship without hegemony».

Just as Said had observed with his «spatial sense of discontinuity», Gramsci deconstructs the fixed spatial categories of common sense, beginning with the state concept, which is then contraposed to a detailed examination of local specificities, with the complex dialectic between the statal body and the interests of the various classes.

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81 Morton, *op. cit.*, 50.
85 Gramsci (1975), *op. cit.*, 1823 (Q15, §59); SPN, 105-106.
But as Laclau notes,\(^87\) in this way Gramsci transcends even the conception, dear to Lenin, in whose terms political modification is the effect of the contradictions that accumulate in the existing conditions of production: «What had been so far presented as a necessary consequence of an endogenous development (...) became, escalating from Lenin to Gramsci, the result of a contingent process of political articulation in an open ensemble whose elements had purely relational identities».\(^88\) Again following Laclau’s reading, Gramsci moved on unexplored terrain, assimilable to the «hymen» that Derrida hypothesizes, in which persuasion and the recourse to force are integrated in turn to produce the hegemonic outcome, but within an articulation from which every element, foreseeable since it is endogenous or necessary, is radically excluded. The emphasis on the contingent element goes to the detriment of a trajectory that develops in time and predisposes an historical subject to behave according to the predictable and congruous options of a canonic historicism and of Crocean idealism. This gradual but constant shift of perspective finishes, instead, by giving pride of place to the geographic element: «Gramsci’s philosophy of praxis involves not only the historicization but also the spatialization of its analytic categories. These theoretical practices are deeply intertwined in his “absolute historicism”».\(^89\) In the view of Henri Lefebvre,\(^90\) in the course of his studies in the most advanced forms of the capitalism of his times, Marx did not adhere to the aims outlined in the *Grundrisse*, where he proposed to make an in-depth study of labor and production, in order to put exchange value at the centre of *Capital*. This is a methodological deviation which, in its potential opening, presents interesting affinities with the idea of a philosophy of praxis. The latter is a concept which, following on Labriola, Gramsci defines by starting from a negation of «matter», understood in the static sense, as in the natural sciences or as in «materialistic metaphysics»: «Matter as such therefore is not our subject, but how it is socially and historically organized for production, and natural science should be seen correspondingly as essentially an historical category, a human relation».\(^91\)

Matter and, together with it, space are included in the sphere of the «rational», and «more precisely that which “rationally conforms to the end to be attained”»,\(^92\) where the concept of the rational, considered the equivalent to a prefixed goal,

\(^{87}\) On this, see Morton, *op. cit.*, 67.


\(^{91}\) Gramsci (1975), *op. cit.*, 1442 (Q11, §30); SPN, 465-466.

\(^{92}\) «the adjective ‘scientific’ is used extensively nowadays, but its meaning can always be reduced to that of ‘conforming to the end’ insofar as such ‘conformity’ is rationally (methodically) pursued after the most minute analysis of all the elements»: Gramsci (2011), *op. cit.*, vol. III, 123 (Notebook 6, §165).
cannot – consistent with Gramsci’s more general polemic against Bukharin and positivism\(^{93}\) – be reduced to the concept of matter in the exact sciences. His point is that what is rational is, instead, \(\textit{produced}\), and its production is based on an unflinching analysis of the \textit{res extensa}. The idea of an innovative science that «constantly corrects our way of knowing, corrects and reinforces our sensory organs, formulates new and complex principles of induction and deduction»\(^{94}\) is grafted on to Marx’s concept of a rationality freed from any divine or teleological project. And Gramsci also returns to Marx for technology – what stems from science – and, together with this, the idea of production: «Production in the Marxist sense transcends the philosophical opposition between ‘subject’ and ‘object’, along with all the relationships constructed by the philosophers on the basis of that opposition».\(^{95}\) This comes about because already in Marx, as in Gramsci, production is organized on the basis of well-defined objectives which impose a spatio-temporal order on given operations: «from the start of an activity so oriented towards an objective, spatial elements – the body, limbs, eyes-are mobilized, including both materials (stone, wood, bone, leather, etc.) and \textit{matériel} (tools, arms, language, instructions and agendas). Relations based on an order to be followed – that is to say, on simultaneity and synchronicity – are thus set up, by means of intellectual activity, between the component elements of the action undertaken on the physical plane».\(^{96}\) The space described here by Lefebvre is the industrial organization, discipline, and synchrony of bodies as an extension-substitute of machinery; this inevitably is a passage which brings to mind analogies between Gramscian spaces and Foucaultian places, the epicentres of power and manifestations of the apparatus to which they are functional.

But immediately afterwards, Lefebvre extends his perspective to include in it the entire horizon of social space:

Social space is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: rather, it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their relationships in their coexistence and simultaneity – their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder. It is the outcome of a sequence and set of operations, and thus cannot be reduced to the rank of simple object. At the same time there is nothing imagined,  

\(^{93}\) «One of the elements that distinguishes the philosophy of praxis from other philosophies is its capacity to promote a more coherent and less contradictory scientific practice, insofar as it is a conception of the world that aims to contribute to the resolution of contradictions on the social and political terrain upon which science occurs»: Peter Thomas, The Gramscian Moment, Leiden 2009, 314.

\(^{94}\) Gramsci (1975), \textit{op. cit.}, 1455-1456 (Q11, §37); FSPN, 291.

\(^{95}\) Lefebvre, \textit{op. cit.}, 71.

\(^{96}\) \textit{Ibid.}
unreal or ideal about it as compared, for example, with science, representations, ideas or dreams. Itself the outcome of past actions, social space is what permits fresh actions to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others.  

Different from a single place, social space for Lefebvre subsumes places, reabsorbing them in its only apparently chaotic synoptic score. Characteristic of social space is, instead, its determinedness, a ‘situatedness’ à la Said, where nothing is there by chance but everything, while not being overdetermined, may be brought back to the network of relations that lies at its base. «Lefebvre wants to reassert a notion of the collective subject through social space, and to promote this over private and public spaces. In this respect, Lefebvre’s approach to space is analogous to Bakhtin’s approach to language (dialogism) which insists on the social nature of language […] the figurative site of exchange for Lefebvre is the traditional market».  

As opposed to Foucault, for whom the analysis of the spaces in which power is articulated corresponds to a «definitive exit from the identification of political and statual that has been disposed by the modern concept of sovereignty», with a preponderance of the individual spatial dimension, in Gramsci one again finds the spatio-temporal coordinates envisaged by Lefebvre for a spatialization of collective entities, from the factory to the city up to the nation, where space is not only a product of, but also a means for the production of hegemony. If for Lefebvre the space par excellence for this synthesis is the market, for Gramsci it is the state in its entirety, in a holistic perspective which, yet again, stimulates a topographic reflection. «The state and each of its constituent institutions call for spaces – but spaces which they can then organize according to their specific requirements: so there is no sense in which space can be treated solely as an a priori condition of these institutions and the state which presides over them». Analogously to this, the Gramscian state is coextensive with what it represents, it expands over «the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to obtain the active consent of those over whom it rules». This is a plastic, an agonistic state, dramatized as a battlefield:

In the East the state was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West there was a proper relationship between state and civil society, and

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97 Ibid., 73.
99 Sandro CHIGNOLA, Foucault oltre Foucault. Una politica della filosofia, Roma 2014, 72.
100 LEFEBVRE, op. cit., 85.
101 GRAMSCI (1975), op. cit., 1765 (Q15, §10); SPN, 244.
when the state tottered, a sturdy structure of civil society was immediately revealed. The state was just a forward trench; behind it stood a succession of sturdy fortresses and emplacements. Needless to say, the configuration varied from state to state, which is precisely why an accurate reconnaissance on a national scale was needed.102

Here we have a famous military metaphor pervaded by hegemony, an image whose productivity at the geographic level is equivalent to that of a landscape, presenting the intentionality of this, in impeccably political terms. In fact, the functionality of a landscape in general is that of a schema against which reality is to be compared and measured, with the aim of illustrating specific elements that are meaningful of its empirical content. But this is exactly the problem. The ideal-type character is at most valid for single landscapes, not for the concept of landscape. Exactly because the former stem from the latter, the concept of landscape is clothed in a validity that is not only logical but, as Weber would say, also practical, in the sense that it functions as a model of what, according to the author’s conviction, the landscape must be.103

Given that we are dealing with a schema planned towards a goal, the instrument of a thesis, or, if you prefer, a hegemonic expression, the landscape of emplacements and trenches re-proposes the idea of a production from below the state. It is, yet again, matter bent towards a goal, and justified by that goal; it is, finally, language which pervades and metaphorically crosses the borders between the various confines of civil society and political society.

«All language is metaphor, and it is metaphorical in two senses: it is a metaphor of the ‘thing’ or material and sensible object’ referred to and it is a metaphor of the ideological meanings attached to words in the preceding periods of civilization (A treatise on semantics – for example Michel Bréal’s – can provide a catalog of the semantic mutations of different words)»104.

On this subject, the affinities, as regards what may be said, between the crisis after the First World War and the more recent ones are quite surprising: how is it possible to narrate these crises given that, among the various consequences, they have given

102 Gramsci (2011), op. cit., vol. III, 169 (Notebook 7, §16); some readers will have the alternative translation, SPN, 238, the latter editions of which amend the «Russia» of the first ones to the correct «East».
rise to language change even at the semantic level? «Processes of capital accumulation do not exist, obviously, outside of their geographical settings and these settings are by nature immensely diverse. But capitalists and their agents also take an active and prominent role in changing these settings. New spaces and space relations are constantly being produced», 105.

New spaces, new territorial relations: if we consider retrospectively the «exemplary landscapes» of the Southern question and of Americanism, we will observe that these important historical junctures, in their turn emblematic of a crisis of an era, in other words of hegemony, are confronted by Gramsci by taking account of the topographic economy characterizing them. It is thanks, among other things, to his linguistic expertise, that Gramsci was able to illustrate the dynamics of those geographical variables on which he was to found his political project: «Academic and political debates about language spread and unification gave Gramsci the opportunity to appreciate the complexity of immanent historical processes and social-political conflicts, as opposed to theoretical abstractions and crude revolutionary strategizing». 106

Having studied linguistics at the University of Turin, Gramsci knew hegemony in the various meanings and shades of meaning dealt with by glottologists, by means of which, after his personal «linguistic turn», he developed an acute perceptiveness regarding regional and national differences and it was, from a linguistic – semantic – stance (note here the reference to Bréal) that in the first place he formulated the Marxist theory of hegemony.107 As a pupil of Bartoli, here in reaction to the pragmatic approach of the Neogrammarians, whom he identified with positivism, Gramsci developed his linguistic expertise along a double spatio-temporal axis, making language a dynamic instrument of political analysis. «But is it possible to strip language of its metaphorical meaning? It is impossible. Language is transformed with the transformation of the whole of civilization, and it absorbs the words of previous civilizations and cultures as, precisely, metaphors». 108

As a receptacle of common sense, metaphors must be studied from the standpoint of their emancipation in the philosophy of praxis. 109 A comparison may be made between this mobility of language and Gramsci’s approach to social questions, whose

105 David Harvey, The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism, Oxford 2010, 143.
107 Peter Ives, Language and Hegemony in Gramsci, London 2004, 47.
local particularities drove him to review philosophical theory, comparing it minutely to the network of regional languages in their specificity: a linguistic geography, rather, a mapping of languages which, among other elements, is a vector that bears common sense. The «philosophy of praxis» which results from this work is «the science of dialectics or the theory of knowledge, within which the general concepts of history, politics and economics are interwoven in an organic unity».

For the philosophy of praxis one has to hypothesize «a relationship between the general and the particular that would not be a relationship of metaphysical subsumption but, rather, a circular relationship like that of a web. Dialectics is not the science of sciences, but, rather, a function of critical connectivity that is internal to the various kinds and levels of knowledge. Dialectics assumes the task of translating scientific languages [linguaggi], as «expressions of different stages of civilization». To the structuring on various levels of Gramsci’s political analysis, as compared with positivistic determinism, there corresponds, as we have seen, the recurrent appeal to a «studying in depth» of the relations of force internal to the state: the result is, then, a «philology», which in the various stages of writing the Notebooks, is proposed first to single out «the importance of particular facts understood as definite and specific ‘individualities’», then, afterwards as a «living philology», in other words as the system by which «the process whereby popular feeling is standardized ceases to be mechanical and casual […] and becomes conscious and critical» and the adhesion «by the collective organism» is acquired «by com-passionality». We then have cohesion of the group in respect of an even more extended organism, the multiplication of the conscious process of adhesion to a political demand or to a party, an ensemble which, finally, moves as a «collective man». The ethical choice of an individual’s adhesion to a statual organism indicates the distance between Gramsci and Gentile or Schmitt, but of the modern state there remains the expression of a society which «when it dissolves every corporative-traditionalistic order [is considered] from the quantitative,

110 Gramsci (1975), op. cit., 1448 (Q11, §33); SPN, 431.
112 The progressive supersession of the categories then current in a political and therefore a geographical context drives Gramsci to the search for an ever more rigorous and stringent method of analysis: «if one wants to study a conception of the world that has never been systematically expounded by its author-thinker, detailed work is required, and it has to be conducted with the most scrupulous accuracy and scientific honesty»: Gramsci (2011), op. cit., vol. II, 137 (Notebook 4, §1).
113 Ibid., vol. III, 159 (Notebook 7, §6).
114 Gramsci (1975), op. cit., 1430 (Q11, §25); SPN, 429.
mathematical and dynamic point of view». The taxonomic characteristic of this collective organism makes one think of a mapping and, at the same time, of the celebrated image of the Leviathan as the aggregate of individuals as pieces of a mosaic of the complete figure; in its turn, adhesion by com-passionality brings to mind a modernized version of the «mystical body» of the state – already in its time codified by Hobbes – of what was the community of the faithful in the Middle Ages. In this way Gramsci enters into that territory which has been designated by Jameson as the «geopolitical unconscious», understood as «attempts to refashion national allegory into a conceptual instrument for grasping our new being-in-the-world».

The linguistic terminology in the background of political science is re-presented in the concept of translatability which, as Derek Boothman noted, does not correspond to translation, since it presents an explicit epistemological connotation, which may be referred back to the paragraphs of Notebook 11 on the «Translatability of Scientific and Philosophical Languages», on the ways and methods by which natural languages and national cultures may be translated. In the wake of the acquisition of the pragmatist philosopher Giovanni Vailati and the liberal economist Luigi Einaudi regarding the possibility of confirming the same theorem in the different languages belonging to different schools of economic thought, Gramsci experiments with the inter-cultural translation of discourses «in sectors that on the surface are not correlated», but which reflect social processes that may be assimilated to the models elaborated by Marx and Levi-Strauss. For reasons of brevity, we cannot here specify the languages and variables that Gramsci takes into consideration in his comparison between paradigms or national discourses – as in the case of English economic theory as compared with German idealism – but an important methodological observation puts the extraordinary geographical synthesis of Gramscian translatability in relation to its political potentiality and opening:

There is a high degree of abstraction in Gramsci’s translatability notes but, at the same time, he also ‘descends’ to the practical level […] the passage from one language to another, here in the sense of natural languages, cannot be a direct passage from one to the other but is instead mediated, […] by the nature of the societies, both in their structures and superstructure arising on them in

115 Franco Farinelli, La crisi della ragione cartografica, Torino 2009, 62.
118 Derek Boothman, Traducibilità e processi traduttivi, Perugia 2004, 114.
119 For this and other related aspects see Ibid.
the various societies and which characterize the discourses of each of these societies.\textsuperscript{120}

The shift in paradigm, understood in the Kuhnian sense, which Gramsci brings into play, quite evidently takes on an immanent connotation in which geopolitical data find a greater consistency and confirmation in the historical past of a certain geographical area, and works in such a way as to catalyze a political action. «Gramsci’s historicism is not to be taken so much as a concrete theory of history, in the sense that it specifies his thinking on concrete social phenomena; but rather as a foundation for the social sciences in general, in the sense of a set of guiding principles for social research».\textsuperscript{121} The principles to which the historiography in question refer have nothing of the transcendental but are empirical and circumstantiated observations, in which history itself takes on the connotation of social history, in which as a contingent element the geographical datum plays a preponderant role. Gramsci’s geographical historicism does not therefore recognize demiurges, since the social reality which it observes is «a network of “social relations” into which individuals enter reciprocally as active or passive subjects, modellers and modelled. Hence the individual can no longer be thought of independently of these relations […]. In other words, human nature itself is historical, modifiable, indeed self-modifiable, since it is the individuals themselves who constitute social relations at the moment when they come to be constituted by them».\textsuperscript{122}

\textbf{(A Possible) Conclusion: Gramsci’s Geo-Travelling Theory}

Nigel Thrift poses the question: «How is it possible to describe an almost/not quite intellectual project? That requires an almost/not quite concept. Such a concept is available in the form of Raymond Williams’s notion of a “structure of feeling”. Williams’s conception is, of course, notoriously elusive».\textsuperscript{123} But if the concept of structure of feeling was ridiculed for its in-determinedness in the years when structuralism was predominant, the moment has now arrived for its rehabilitation, for a series of reasons that Thrift himself lists. These begin with the fact that it is posed as a process and not a condition, and that this process challenges what may be said, situating itself

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\textsuperscript{120} Derek Boothman, «Translation and Translatability: Renewal of the Marxist Paradigm», in: Ives, Lacorte (eds.), \textit{op. cit.}, 129.
\textsuperscript{122} Fabio Frosini, \textit{Gramsci e la filosofia. Saggio sui Quaderni del carcere}, Roma 2003, 83.
\end{flushleft}
«at the very edge of semantic availability»: as such it is compatible with today’s propensity towards everything that is liminal, nearly ineffable and which tends towards the difference, i.e. «differend» to use Thrift’s own word, as well as also being «present», «moving», «active» and «formative».

The reasons for Thrift’s reassessment of Williams also hold for Williams’s geographical thought. On this subject, one may add that the notions of hegemony to be found in Williams and the closely correlated ones of «Dominant, Residual, and Emergent» go back to a rich phenomenology of Gramscian hegemony, which also considers forms of resistance or archaic forms, such as those which Gramsci identifies in folklore or in common sense. It is Gramsci, after Lucien Goldmann, who provides Williams with a theoretical framework for structuring his geographic intuitions, still bound as they are to a humanistic conception traceable to F.R. Leavis.

And in this perspective, the pioneering recognition of places, communities and styles of life of *The Country and the City* is to be read according to the theoretical glossary of *Marxism and Literature*, in which Gramsci occupies a prominent position. It was then mainly in an English-speaking context that an oppositional position pivoted around Gramscian geography was developed, starting with the rewriting of postcolonial Indian historiography by Ranajit Guha’s *Subaltern Studies* collective. Guha complains of «the absurdity of the idea of an uncoercive state, in spite of the basic drive of Gramsci’s own work to the contrary».

On a par with Eric Hobsbawm with his trilogy on the subalterns, many English-speaking historians have come back to an involvement with the South, since various authors «like Antonio Gramsci teach us that the Southern Question is an imaginative resource that enables writers to say things that they might not otherwise say, and to say them in a way that makes us listen». Moe here clarifies how, in Gramsci, a subject expands to a global

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124 “It is a structured formation which, because at the edge of semantic availability, has many of the characteristics of a pre-formation, until specific articulations – new semantic figures – are discovered in material practice”: Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford 1977, 134.

125 “the concept of ‘hegemony goes beyond ‘ideology’. What is decisive is not only the conscious system of ideas and beliefs, but the whole lived social process as practically organized by specific and dominant meanings and values”: *ibid.*, 109.

126 *ibid.*, 121-127.


dimension, assuming – as happens for the South of the World – the characteristics of a world-wide paradigm. In these cases, imperfect faithfulness to Gramsci’s text by the person taking it as a reference point, especially in a geopolitical context, is secondary, compared to the ways – also here borrowed from Gramsci – that define how a discourse is received. «For Gramsci and Vico, interpretation must take account of this secular horizontal space [in which history and human society are made up of numerous efforts crisscrossing each other, frequently at odds with each other] only by means appropriate to what is present there. I understand this to imply that no single explanation sending one back to a single origin is adequate». 131

The appropriate means that Said hopes for in order to confront this secular horizontal space are for Gramsci translated into immanence: «the term ‘immanence' in Marx has a precise meaning, and this should have been defined; in fact such a definition would really have been ‘theory’. Marx continues the philosophy of immanence, but he rids it of its whole metaphysical apparatus and brings it to the concrete terrain of history». 132 As Fabio Frosini explains: against Bukharin, Gramsci sees, in the metaphorical form that Marx uses, «a form of personal use, that form which in language traces a discontinuity between present and past, the passage of an era or (as in this case) a theoretical innovation, at the same time as recognizing its own debt to a certain past». 133 A conception such as this, where political praxis and theory coincide, articulates immanence not in Kant’s meaning, but in a secular form which, in the first place, advises extreme caution as regards the tools of judgment used for different geopolitical areas. It stems from this that the accuracy of judgment is bound up with the historical sources used to understand that area, considered in a «molecular» fashion, i.e. in the ensemble of the local historical events and the international context. In the light of these premises, it is not surprising that a Gramscian approach to a geopolitical context should give rise to an «uprooted geography in which attention to historical detail and local ecologies dislocates a cartography previously secured in the abstract universalism of discriminatory mapping». 134 Neither would it seem unusual for there to emerge – from the debate on the geopolitical equilibria of the post-Second World War period – demands that up to then were ignored in the West: «First, [Fanon] puts the global ‘South’ back into the centre of

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133 Fabio Frosini, La religione dell’uomo moderno. Politica e verità nei Quaderni del carcere, Roma 2010, 129.
accounts of the Cold War. Second, he is alert to the agency of racism in moulding social and political life in the colonies and in the metropoles. Last, a historicism that understands history as «rationality and irrationality, free will and necessity, i.e. it is life, with all the weaknesses and strengths of life, with all its contradictions and its antitheses» quite evidently goes against Ranke’s conceptual framework and the relative teleological cover given to the colonial undertaking, thereby anticipating Chakrabarty’s accusations in his attack on a Europe that is identified at the global level with imperialism. More precisely, Gramsci does not limit himself to «locating particular geographical theories, methodologies, representations, schools of inquiry, and so on, in their intellectual context, their social space, their physical setting» in his case one may speak of a dislocation of critical instruments in view of their new contextualization, of the task of defining the spaces of uncertain environments and institutions, which lies instead with certain groups (and not social classes) whose historical role up to now has remained in the shadows. «Gramsci located the positive attributes of subaltern groups almost exclusively in the cultural and political realm. He does not appear to have seen any appreciable strengths in the economic activities and social organization of the subalterns, at least not of those in the countryside».

Arnold’s judgment on the absence of an economic analysis in Gramsci as regards the subalterns in the rural areas is inexact, and it would suffice to refer to the essay on the Southern Question to give the lie to it. But, however paradoxical it may seem initially, even the Taylorized worker, under certain conditions, may be numbered among the subalterns, simply because it is social relations in their precarious equilibrium of forces that determine the collocation of his «persona».

An effort of imagination is required to accept this possibility in order to understand how spaces in Gramsci, both in the prosaic everyday dimension and in the changeable symbolic context, must be numbered among «traveling theories»: «there are particularly interesting cases of ideas and theories that move from one

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136 Gramsci (1975), op. cit., 1326 (Q10II, §41XIV); FSPN, 375.
140 Among the spatial attributes in Gramsci’s theorization, Peter Thomas illustrates the complex implications of the strictly individual one, derived from the theater, of «persona» as an «anti-subjectivist historical explanation of the category of the subject»: Thomas, op. cit., 397.
Such movement into a new environment is never unimpeded. It necessarily involves processes of representation and institutionalization different from those at the point of origin. This complicates any account of the transplantation, transference, circulation and commerce of theories and ideas."^{141}

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