

ANNIVERSARY FORUM

Cirese 101

Rileggere le *Osservazioni sul folclore* di Antonio Gramsci

A cura di

Antonio Maria PUSCEDDU, Filippo M. ZERILLI



Alberto Mario Cirese e Jorge A. González, Universidad de Colima, Messico, 1986. Photo courtesy of Jorge A. González.

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Cirese 101: Rileggere le Osservazioni sul folclore di Antonio Gramsci
2022 | ANUAC. VOL. 11, N° 1, GIUGNO 2022: 7-86.
ISSN: 2239-625X – DOI: 10.7340/anuac2239-625X-5282



ANNIVERSARY FORUM

AMC 100 + 1

Introduzione

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Questo forum, che avevamo iniziato a preparare per ricordare la figura e una parte, influente ma non esaustiva, dell'esteso lavoro di Alberto Mario Cirese (1921-2011), nel centenario della sua nascita, è slittato ai 100 più uno. Il forum è costruito attorno al Cirese lettore di Gramsci, con la riproposta del ben noto saggio *Concezioni del mondo, filosofia spontanea e istinto di classe nelle Osservazioni sul folclore di Antonio Gramsci* (Cirese 1976), assieme ad alcuni brevi confronti critici col testo ciresiano, da parte di attenti lettori dell'antropologia di Gramsci: Kate Crehan, Riccardo Ciavoletta, Giovanni Pizza. A conclusione, un "saluto al modo antico", con tanto di colonna sonora (si vedano i link nel testo) di Jorge A. González, che ricorda la figura di Cirese e l'influenza della lettura ciresiana di Gramsci in Messico.

Più che una commemorazione, dunque, abbiamo cercato di rendere questo forum un'opportunità per rendere disponibile un testo, più volte pubblicato in Italia (l'ultima volta come Cirese 2008a), ma probabilmente meno noto e di non più facile reperimento in lingue diverse dall'italiano (cfr. Cirese 1974a, 1979, 1982). Per questo motivo abbiamo deciso di riproporne la traduzione inglese (da noi leggermente rivista e aggiornata), pubblicata nel 1982 col titolo *Gramsci's Observations on folklore*, nel volume *Approaches to*

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AMC 100 + 1: Introduzione

2022 | ANUAC. VOL. 11, N° 1, GIUGNO 2022: 9-16.

ISSN: 2239-625X – DOI: 10.7340/anuac2239-625X-5276



Gramsci, curato da Anne Showstack Sassoon, che ringraziamo per averci dato il permesso di ripubblicare il testo¹. Ci è sembrato avesse un qualche interesse riproporne la traduzione inglese, una lingua oramai ampiamente accessibile a buona parte della comunità scientifica internazionale, con l'esplicito intento di promuovere e favorire nuove letture e ulteriori percorsi interpretativi, rendendo possibile il dialogo e il confronto tra l'antropologia italiana e altre tradizioni intellettuali, come da alcuni anni ci proponiamo coltivando la vocazione internazionale e multilingue di *Anuac*, rivista della Società italiana di antropologia culturale (SIAC)².

Il saggio ciresiano era comparso per la prima volta col titolo *Concezioni del mondo, filosofia spontanea, folclore*, nel 1969, nel secondo volume di *Gramsci e la cultura contemporanea*, a cura di Pietro Rossi. I due volumi raccoglievano gli atti del convegno internazionale su Gramsci, tenutosi a Cagliari nell'aprile del 1967, a trent'anni esatti dalla morte di Gramsci. Il saggio di Cirese veniva pubblicato nella sezione *L'analisi dei fatti letterari e la concezione linguistica*, assieme all'unico altro contributo antropologico, quello di Luigi Maria Lombardi Satriani (1969), *Gramsci e il folclore: dal pittoresco alla contestazione*³. Proprio dalla verifica critica della lettura che Lombardi Satriani faceva delle pagine gramsciane sul folclore (non limitate, nella sua analisi, alle *Osservazioni sul folclore*), ovvero di un contenuto potenzialmente antagonista, contestatario e di un possibile uso "politico" del folclore, prendeva le mosse la rigorosa analisi formale di Cirese, secondo l'atteggiamento "analitico-parcellare", che ritagliando una porzione ben definita di realtà esegue tutte le disamine possibili alla verifica di una data ipotesi. Ci pare degno di nota il fatto che l'argomento di Lombardi Satriani⁴, almeno nelle sue linee generali e nell'impostazione di fondo, serpeggi, seppure implicitamente, nelle osservazioni critiche di Crehan e Ciavolella all'analisi ciresiana. Sono intanto utili

1. Si tratta peraltro di una delle poche traduzioni in inglese di Cirese, assieme al saggio sulla storia degli studi demologici italiani (Cirese 1974b) in un dossier monografico curato da Carla Bianco (1974) per il *Journal of the Folklore Institute*. In inglese è disponibile un profilo di Cirese (Clemente, Testa 1996). Per un elenco completo dei lavori di Cirese tradotti in lingue diverse dall'italiano (soprattutto spagnolo e francese), rimandiamo all'elenco completo degli scritti compilato da Eugenio Testa (2011).

2. La prima traduzione inglese integrale delle *Osservazioni sul folclore* è di poco posteriore alla traduzione del saggio di Cirese (cfr. Gramsci 1985: 188-195).

3. Mentre lavoravamo alla chiusura di questo forum, abbiamo appreso con profondo rammarico dell'improvvisa scomparsa di Luigi Maria Lombardi Satriani, il 30 maggio 2022. Ci proponiamo di promuovere una riflessione sul contributo importante di questo studioso agli studi demotnoatropologici in uno dei prossimi numeri di *Anuac*.

4. Una traduzione di Lombardi Satriani (1974), sullo stesso tema, veniva inclusa nel già citato dossier monografico (Bianco 1974).

alcuni elementi di contestualizzazione della lettura gramsciana del folklore (della sua interpretazione e del suo uso) all'interno degli studi demoetnoantropologici italiani (per usare una formula che ancora conserva la forte traccia di sistemazione ciresiana), in buona parte abbastanza noti in Italia, ma meno scontati altrove.

Le *Osservazioni sul folklore* di Gramsci, che danno il titolo ad uno dei quaderni speciali (come appare nell'edizione critica del 1975, a cura di Valentino Gerratana), il 27 (del 1935), in cui si trovano trascritte e rielaborate note redatte all'inizio della riflessione carceraria (1929-30), vengono pubblicate per la prima volta nel 1950, nel quinto volume dei *Quaderni del carcere, Letteratura e vita nazionale*, curata da Felice Platone con la supervisione di Palmiro Togliatti (Gramsci 1950). Quasi immediato il dibattito che si apre tra gli studiosi di folklore, come risulta dal seminario organizzato dalla Fondazione Istituto Gramsci nel 1951, dal titolo "Gramsci e il folklore", con relazioni di Ernesto de Martino, Vittorio Santoli e Paolo Toschi, cui fecero seguito, come apprendiamo dalla relazione dello stesso Toschi (1951), le comunicazioni di Emilio Sereni e di Alberto Mario Cirese. Ernesto de Martino, come noto, si era già in realtà reso protagonista di un celebre dibattito sulla rivista *Società*, che traeva origine dalla pubblicazione del lungo saggio *Intorno a una storia del mondo popolare subalterno* (De Martino 1949), in cui l'etnologo napoletano riprendeva e rielaborava diversi temi gramsciani, nell'intenso dibattito politico-culturale dell'immediato dopoguerra. Lo stesso de Martino (1951), probabilmente nella sua veste più "militante", avrebbe proposto l'idea del "folklore progressivo", se non del tutto derivata da Gramsci (anzi, come sappiamo, dalla conoscenza del dibattito interno all'etnografia sovietica; Cannarsa 1992), di certo legata ad una certa sensibilità politica per la cultura popolare, presente nella tradizione comunista (a partire dall'esperienza sovietica del *Proletkul't* di ispirazione bogdanoviana; si veda Bermani 2007). La stessa idea del "folklore progressivo" ("stoltezze", secondo un Cirese successivamente "pentito"⁵), da cui sarebbe germinata una lunga e ancora viva esperienza politico-culturale intorno al mondo popolare (per esempio, nell'attività dell'Istituto Ernesto de Martino, che vede lo stesso Cirese tra i fondatori), si colloca, in qualche modo, sulla stessa linea dell'argomento "politico" avanzato da Lombardi Satriani, poco dopo la scomparsa di de Martino.

5. Così in una nota del 2007 ad un breve articolo intervista comparso su *Rinascita Sarda* nel 1967, dal titolo redazionale, poco gradito a Cirese, di *Folklore come rivolta*: "Anch'io, per qualche momento, caddi nella trappola delle stoltezze di Ernesto De Martino sul 'folklore progressivo' ed ho sulla coscienza cantonate come quella del 'volgo protagonista'" (cfr. Cirese 2008b: 327). La nota e l'articolo sono reperibili al link: www.etesta.it/materiali/2014_2015_AMC_1967_FolkloreRivolta.pdf

L'influenza del pensiero di Antonio Gramsci sull'antropologia italiana è stata – come è noto – particolarmente produttiva e articolata, al punto da poter essere considerata un tratto distintivo della fase “fondativa” (o ri-fondativa) degli studi italiani di antropologia (o demoantropologia), dal dibattito sul folklore del dopoguerra (Cirese 1972; Clemente, Meoni, Squillacciotti 1976; Alliegro 2011; Satta 2017), sino alla polemica sulle “tendenze autarchiche” nell'antropologia culturale italiana (Remotti 1978). In certa misura, la presenza sotterranea di Gramsci si è mantenuta anche in fasi successive (siamo oramai negli anni '90, dopo l'oblio più o meno silenzioso degli anni '80), sia quando le categorie analitiche gramsciane filtravano quasi unicamente da tradizioni antropologiche di altri paesi (Pizza 2004; Palumbo 2008), sia infine nel corso di più recenti ritorni, riscoperte e andirivieni, di e intorno a Gramsci (Tosi Cambini, Frosini 2017) che arriva sino al primo decennio del nuovo secolo con il “Gramsci ritrovato” degli antropologi (Deias, Boninelli, Testa 2008). Ne fa ugualmente parte, nel segno di un recupero critico della tradizione demologica italiana, il dibattito sullo statuto degli studi demologici e sulla loro riconfigurazione attuale (Cirese 1994; Clemente, Mugnaini 2001; Dei 2012; Dei, Fanelli 2015).

Quella di Alberto Mario Cirese è stata una figura influente, finanche canonica, della assimilazione gramsciana nell'antropologia italiana, probabilmente più di Ernesto de Martino, il cui rapporto con Gramsci si è vieppiù teso a ridimensionare (Pizza 2013). La lettura ciresiana di Gramsci ha esercitato una forte influenza sui modi di intendere e praticare la demoetnoantropologia nel nostro paese, almeno per un buon numero di generazioni di studiosi e di studenti⁶ (forse in misura maggiore di quanto non esercitassero le sue ricerche ed elaborazioni sul tema delle invarianze, della parentela e dell'informatica). Per questo motivo abbiamo ritenuto opportuno ripubblicare un saggio particolarmente emblematico nella sua traduzione inglese, con l'obiettivo di allargare la condivisione di un tassello importante degli sviluppi antropologici italiani alla comunità internazionale di studiosi, in un momento di forte interesse, richiamo e dibattito intorno alla “antropologia” di Gramsci⁷.

6. Si pensi alle numerose edizioni e all'uso ampio e diffuso di un testo come *Cultura egemonica e culture subalterne* (Cirese 1973), la cui unica traduzione disponibile è quella spagnola (Cirese 1997).

7. In tal senso, sono interessanti alcune delle Postille incluse in Cirese 1976: 110-127, e in particolare *Attività e passività, originalità e degradazione dei fatti folklorici; Istinto di classe, folklore come protesta, folklore di protesta; La “connotazione” come elemento della concezione materialistica dei fatti culturali e come discriminante tra Gramsci e Croce; Gramsci, Tylor e il concetto di cultura.*

In questa prospettiva, abbiamo chiesto a Riccardo Ciavolella e a Giovanni Pizza – due colleghi che su e con Gramsci hanno costruito una parte importante dei rispettivi itinerari di studio e ricerca (Ciavolella 2019, 2020; Pizza 2012; 2020) – e a Kate Crehan – brillante e autorevole studiosa del rapporto tra Gramsci e l’antropologia (Crehan 2002, 2016) – di tornare a riflettere su quello che può ben dirsi un testo classico della tradizione demoetnoantropologica italiana, provando a immaginare percorsi inesplorati e stimolare letture inedite. Se nella puntuale contestualizzazione storico-critica di Pizza il testo di Cirese nella traduzione inglese sembra acquisire una rinnovata luminosità, il commento di Ciavolella aiuta a svelare aspetti del pensiero di Gramsci – e in particolare la dimensione della soggettività politica e delle sue potenzialità trasformative – che la lettura ciresiana lascia in ombra. Kate Crehan, dal suo canto, rileggendo il saggio di Cirese prova a dipanare il “bandolo del folklore”, oltrepassando il rigore analitico della proposta ciresiana per recuperare invece il carattere frammentario e non sistematico del pensiero di Gramsci e la sua spiccata sensibilità etnografica. Chiude il forum lo scritto di Jorge A. González (a cui ci siamo peraltro ispirati per il titolo di questo forum), un ricordo personale che rievoca l’incontro dell’autore con la traduzione francese del saggio ciresiano (Cirese 1974a), e offre nel contempo nuovi elementi storici e spunti interpretativi per ricostruire l’attività didattica di studio e ricerca di Cirese in Messico (Zanotelli 2022).

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ANNIVERSARY FORUM

Gramsci's *Observations on folklore*

Conceptions of the world, spontaneous philosophy and class instinct

Alberto Mario CIRESE

This essay was originally published with the title Concezioni del mondo, filosofia spontanea, folklore [Conceptions of the world, spontaneous philosophy, folklore] in 1969, in the conference proceedings Gramsci e la cultura contemporanea [Gramsci and contemporary culture], edited by Pietro Rossi (Editori Riuniti). An English translation was published in 1982, with the title Gramsci's Observations on folklore, in the volume Approaches to Gramsci, edited by Anne Showstack Sassoon for Writers & Readers, London. The present edition reproduces the 1982 English edition, with minor modifications. We have added the references to the English translation of Gramsci's Observations on folklore (SCW 188-195) and to other notes from the Prison Notebooks (PN2), not yet available when Cirese's essay was translated. We have translated the short unnumbered introductory section, omitted in the 1982 edition. Finally, we have expanded the title, following the version published in the book Intellettuali, folklore, istinto di classe [Intellectuals, folklore, class instinct] (Einaudi, 1976). More in general, the text was revised on the basis of the 1976 Italian edition, Concezioni del mondo, filosofia spontanea e istinto di classe nelle Osservazioni sul folklore di Antonio Gramsci. We thank Anne Showstack Sassoon for granting permission to republish the English translation.

(a.m.p., f.m.z.)

Gramsci's published writings cited:

LVN = *Letteratura e vita nazionale*, edited by Felice Platone, Turin, Einaudi, 1950.

PN2 = *Prison Notebooks. Volume II*, edited and translated by Joseph Buttigieg, New York, Columbia University Press, 1996.

QC = *Quaderni del carcere*, edited by Valentino Gerratana, Turin, Einaudi, 1975.

SCW = *Selections from Cultural Writings*, edited by David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, translated by William Boelhower, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1985.

SPN = *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1971.

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Gramsci's Observations on folklore: Conceptions of the world, spontaneous philosophy and class instinct

2022 | Anuac. Vol. 11, n° 1, Giugno 2022: 17-48.

ISSN: 2239-625X – DOI: 10.7340/anuac2239-625X-5277

The following notes were written with the limited purpose of checking the validity of certain past or recent formulations that authorize or deny the prospect, for Gramsci, of the political use of folklore. These notes then had in some way to engage with aspects that were far enough remote from the initial one. Nevertheless, whatever the actual results may be, the basic intention remained that of understanding the text and reconstructing its context, without pursuing any endorsement or condemnation.

Without the possibility of systematically and exhaustively going through all texts, and to avoid unspecified and intentionally preconceived selections, I preferred to run the opposite risk, namely that of an excessive restriction of the text to analyse, and its possible tightening. In fact, I have fundamentally examined the corpus of Gramscian observations that were assembled by the editors and published under the title of “Observations on folklore” in *Letteratura e vita nazionale* [LVN 215-221]. It is therefore a group of excerpts which was created by a will different from that of the author. In the impossibility of overcoming the diaphragm that still stands between the manuscript and the printed work, that group of texts, however arbitrary it may be, constitutes a legitimate unitary object of research, given that for over twenty years it has acted in this actual constitution and not in any other, hypothetical and unspecifiable*. Furthermore, even with all its obvious flaws, this choice has at least the advantage of leaving unaddressed, and instead of explicitly denouncing, the composition and limits of the text to which the investigation applies, and of forcing one to justify the moments and the ways of resorting to pages and passages that are beyond those limits.

It goes without saying that, also because of the perhaps excessive delimitation of the text-object, the analysis that follows is configured as an extremely partial attempt.

1.0. Looking at Gramsci’s discussion of folklore in the most general terms, we find: firstly, that he expressly rejects the view that folklore is of no importance (it should not be thought of “as something strange or peculiar or colourful”); secondly, that he is no less explicit in claiming that it is important (though only as an object of study). He not only makes the point generically (folklore is “something very serious that must be taken

* The book was already in print when the excellent critical edition of the *Quaderni* edited by Valentino Gerratana was published.

seriously”), but argues it from the statement that the whole phenomenon of folklore contains or expresses a “conception of the world and life” which can be precisely located in *socio-cultural terms* in relation to other conceptions of the world (SCW 191, 189).

This conception of life and the world, as Gramsci makes clear, is characteristic of certain strata of society, namely the “people”. The people is taken in the sense of “the sum total of the instrumental and subaltern classes of every form of society that has so far existed” (SCW 189), and its conception of the world is not only “different” or “very different” from official conceptions of the world, but is “in opposition” or “in contradiction” or “in conflict” with them. Alternatively, “official” conceptions, characteristic of “the cultured sectors of historically determined societies” or the ruling strata or the “State” (SCW 190, 189, 188, 190, 193, 188, 190), are, like “official society” in general, “in competition and conflict” with folklore (SCW 193, 190).

All of this leads to the crucial observation that “folklore can only be understood as a reflection of the conditions of the people’s cultural life”. This is the reason why “the spirit of folklore studies should be changed, as well as deepened and extended”. Thus, pure scholarship must give way to more adequate research-criteria, notably the principle that “the people themselves are not a homogeneous cultural collectivity but present numerous and variously combined cultural stratifications” which can be identified to a certain extent “on the basis of the greater or lesser ‘isolation’” of “specific historical popular collectivities” (SCW, 190, 191, 189, 195).

1.1. What Gramsci does then is to *validate* an object or area of study on the basis of a *definition* of the object itself. But, though they do not preclude it in principle, neither Gramsci’s validation nor his definition add up to an endorsement either of the view that folklore, or the conception of the world which it contains or expresses, or the ways in which it goes against official conceptions of the world are valid in themselves; or of the possibility that they might be put to valid politico-cultural uses.

In other words, Gramsci’s statement that folklore is “something very serious” cannot be applied to the politico-cultural uses that might be made of folklore. Not only is this statement limited to folklore as an object of study, but it comes in a context where Gramsci stresses the need to bring about “the birth of a new culture among the broad popular masses”, i.e. to do away with “the separation between modern and popular culture or folklore” (SCW 191).

All that we can say for the moment is that Gramsci is raising “research into folklore” from the level of pure scholarship to that of “science or knowledge” (SCW 191), as well as promoting folklore itself from being a curiosity to being a *conception of the world*. And he takes the further step of locating it socially and culturally “in the framework of a nation and its culture”: *characteristic of the subaltern classes* on one hand, and in *opposition to official conceptions* on the other.

And closer examination of these three cardinal features of Gramsci’s definition of folklore will show that his endorsement cannot be extended to the politico-cultural sphere.

1.2. If we now go on to analyze the three key-concepts, at least as far as they emerge from the passages referred to so far, and try to bring out the general principle underlying them, we find the following:

1) Describing both folklore and official, or, more broadly, cultured intellectual products as *conceptions of the world* puts them on the same *generic* level, but there is still obviously a *specific* difference. It is indicated verbally by the distinction, and opposition, between “official” and “popular”. If we agree, for the sake of clarity, to use the adjective “folkloric” instead of “popular”, the generic equivalence and the specific difference can be represented thus:

folkloric versus official
conception of the world

This formula is only partially satisfactory, but we can make do with it for the time being.

2) As well as the fact that the folkloric conception is in *opposition* to the official one, Gramsci explicitly makes the point that: the inverse relation obviously obtains as well, and that official conceptions of the world are in *competition* or *conflict* with those of folklore.

What is not clear for the moment is which of the two conceptions is active and which is passive — a provisional uncertainty which can be represented equally uncertainly thus:

(active or passive) versus (active or passive)
opposition

3) The socio-cultural location of the two specific kinds of *conception of the world* is shown by the use of a series of semantically oppositional pairs. Generally speaking only one term of each pair is stated explicitly while the

other is left implicit, though it is immediately obvious. Here the implicit term is indicated by an asterisk: subaltern/*hegemonic; instrumental/*non-instrumental; cultured/*uncultured; ruling/*ruled; dominant/*dominated, etc.

This series of pairs can be reduced in essence to just two opposites. The first has to do with the socio-political sphere, the second with the socio-cultural sphere, social class and intellectual “sector” or category respectively.

We can represent the first as follows:

a) subaltern versus hegemonic
social class

It does not seem arbitrary to use the term “hegemonic” here, despite its not appearing explicitly in the pages in question.¹

The second pair could be represented by automatically employing the term “uncultured” as the implicit opposite of “cultured”. But the resulting contrast between *cultured* and **uncultured* could give rise to some misunderstanding. For there are reasonable grounds for believing that in Gramsci's view the usual contrast between *culture* and *non-culture* is not exactly the same thing, and does not imply the same judgement, as that between *culture* and *ignorance*, meaning the “complete absence of any form or kind of culture”. He speaks, as we have seen, of “the conditions of the people's *cultural* life”; he places popular song “in the framework of a nation and its *culture*”; he uses the expression “popular *culture* or folklore”, and so on. We shall want to return to this point in due course, but, in order not to prejudge the issue, we should leave open the possibility that the opposition lies not so much between *culture* and *non-culture* as between different kinds of culture. It therefore seems right to avoid using the term “uncultured” which we shall replace by the very Gramscian word “simple”. Bearing these points in mind, we can represent the opposition in the socio-cultural sphere, as regards intellectual “sector” or category, as follows:

b) simple versus cultured
intellectual category

1. Apart from obvious considerations, the term can be inferred without a shadow of doubt from (SCW 189). Furthermore, it can be seen as a correct equivalent of “ruling” and “dominant”, which are used explicitly in the phrases “governing strata” (SCW 190) and “dominant class” (SCW 194).

1.3. The semantic connections and distinctions so far identified can now be recapitulated as follows:

1	conceptions of the world	folkloric vs official
2	in mutual opposition	(active or passive) vs (active or passive)
3	located respectively in:	
	a) social classes	subaltern vs hegemonic
	b) intellectual categories	simple vs cultured

Reading the table vertically, we can see at once that “folkloric” connects with “subaltern” and “simple”. Neither of these terms go very well with an “active” position, either in common usage or, still less, in Gramsci’s. By the same token, the evident connection between “official” and “hegemonic” and “cultured” does not square with “passive”. In other words, even if Gramsci were not explicit on the point, the ambiguity still surrounding “opposition” would have to be resolved by assigning “passiveness” to folklore and “activeness” to official conceptions. The logic of connective and oppositional coherence alone then would lead us to the conclusion that the proposition underlying Gramsci’s considerations takes the following form:

The <i>folkloric</i> conception	is to	the <i>official</i> conception
as the <i>subaltern</i> social class	is to	the <i>hegemonic</i> social class
as the <i>simple</i> intellectual category	is to	the <i>cultured</i> intellectual category
as <i>passive</i> opposition	is to	<i>active</i> opposition.

2.0. This conclusion was fairly predictable, but it is confirmed by the specific points Gramsci makes on the material of folklore itself, the conception of the world it embodies, and the opposition between both of these and official conceptions. His points are not merely statements of fact. Whether they have to do with *content* or *form* (by which we understand here mode of organization or degree of inner coherence), they are decidedly judgemental in character, and the judgement can very rarely be called positive. Even if Gramsci occasionally modifies his judgement and assesses folklore positively in certain respects, it does not seem to alter our impression that he is being quite deliberately systematic in his devaluation of folklore (beginning with those features which we have listed).

2.1. It is often hard to make out whether Gramsci is talking about folk-material as such or the conception of the world it expresses, but the attributes he assigns all point plainly in a negative direction.

Thus, in a context where the reference is definitely to the material itself, Gramsci states that there is “nothing more contradictory and fragmentary than folklore”. Elsewhere, where the reference is less certain, he notes that “folklore” has stayed “scattered and many-sided”. Referring to the folkloric or popular conception of the world, Gramsci says that it is “to a large extent implicit” as well as “unelaborated”, “unsystematic”, and “many-sided” (*SCW* 190, 189):

not only because it includes different and juxtaposed elements, but also because it is stratified, from the more crude to the less crude - if, indeed, one should not speak of a confused agglomerate of fragments of all the conceptions of the world and of life that have succeeded one another in history. In fact, it is only in folklore that one finds surviving evidence, adulterated and mutilated, of the majority of these conceptions (*SCW* 189).

The negative judgement, then, affects all aspects of folklore: both the way in which it is organized and the nature or indeed the content of the elements which make it up. The way that Gramsci thinks and talks about this material, whether in general terms or through specific examples, is as something essentially debased, the spill-over of cultured conceptions. And not only is it backward in relation to the developments of science and “cultured culture”: it is even out of touch with the conditions under which the people actually live.

In addition to the passages already cited, one might look at those in which Gramsci underlines folklore's dependence on the “culture of the dominant class”, or where he talks about how “certain opinions and scientific concepts, taken out of context, and more or less distorted, are for ever falling into the popular domain” where they are “assimilated in strange ways” (*SCW* 193, 189); or again where the “Ptolemaic conception” – which elsewhere is assigned to “common sense” (*SCW* 190; *QC* 1456; *SPN* 420) is regarded as “typical of folklore”; or, finally, where he points out that

certain conceptions specific to folklore remain even after these conditions [of the people's cultural life] have been (or seem to be) modified or have given way to bizarre combinations (*SCW* 190)

The “tradition”, in short, is a “mosaic” (*SCW* 189).

2.2. Passiveness and backwardness of content are of course simply a manifestation of the fact that the material is incapable of elaboration or systemization. With everything connected in this way, what we appear to have is an entirely homogeneous series of attributes. Whether Gramsci is

referring to the material of folklore or its conception of the world, its content or its form, he always attributes to it qualities that constitute the *weak* (or negative, low-value) term of an oppositional pair whose *strong* (or positive, high-value) term is reserved more or less explicitly for conceptions to be found on the side of official society and the ruling strata.

Looking first at formal qualities, we find explicitly associated with folklore: *contradictoriness, fragmentation, dispersal, multiplicity, implicitness, non-elaboration, un-systematicness, difference, juxtaposition, stratification, indigestibility*, etc. Explicitly stated qualities such as *elaboration, systematicness, political organization and centralization, organic systemization*, etc. are reserved for non-folk conceptions. But it would obviously not be a distortion to extend the list to include the negation of the remaining “weak” terms assigned to folklore (**non-contradictoriness, *non-fragmentation, *non-multiplicity*, i.e. **unity, *non-implicitness*, i.e. **explicitness*, and so on).

There are some nuances, but most of these pairs point to the fact that the manner of ordering collections of cultural phenomena and their respective conceptions of the world, and the results of that process, are in one case positive and in the other negative.

The qualities that refer particularly to the manner in which the process takes place are elaboration, systematicness, organization, centralization, organic systemization and the like, and their opposites, whether explicitly stated or not. If we agree to call the positive and negative poles “organic” and “unorganic” respectively, and to refer to the ordering-process as “combination”, the semantic connections and distinctions can then be schematized as:

unorganic versus organic
combination

Such qualities as *fragmentation, dispersal, multiplicity, stratification* and their opposites are concerned on the other hand with the results of the process. To indicate the two different kinds of internal organization we can use the terms “fragmentary” and “unitary”, which gives us:

fragmentary versus unitary
internal organization

One pair – *implicitness/explicitness* – is left over, and this we can take as referring to the mode of expression or manifestation, schematized as:

implicit versus explicit
mode of expression

As regards the material of folklore — in other words what is contained in its opinions or beliefs or practices — Gramsci emphasizes above all the fact that it is a *debased spill-over*. This is obviously in contrast to the original character of what is produced by “culture”, so that we can represent the opposition as follows:

debased versus original
content

If we now add these new pairs of attributes to those already identified, we get the following (simplified) table:

folkloric	<i>versus</i>	official
(active or passive)	<i>versus</i>	(active or passive)
subaltern	<i>versus</i>	hegemonic
simple	<i>versus</i>	cultured
unorganic	<i>versus</i>	organic
fragmentary	<i>versus</i>	unitary
implicit	<i>versus</i>	explicit
debased	<i>versus</i>	original

– which makes it increasingly unlikely that the quality of *activeness* can be attributed to folklore.

2.3. Gramsci has quite different ways of talking about the forms taken by the opposition between folk and official conceptions, depending on which of the two aspects of the relation he is considering, and it is these explicit statements that enable us finally to decide the question of activeness and passiveness.

Looked at from the point of view of folklore, the opposition is “for the most part implicit, mechanical, objective” (SCW 188). But when it is looked at from the other point of view, it completely changes character and becomes something active and organized. This is what is implied when Gramsci asks whether the “elaboration” and “systemization” of Catholicism wrought by “intellectuals and the Church hierarchy” were not in fact necessary “to keep folklore scattered and many-sided”. The opposition appears even more active and organized when Gramsci refers to the state as an entity which is “not agnostic, but has its own conception of life which it is its duty to disseminate through education of the popular masses”: this “educational activity”, as Gramsci observes, “is in competition and conflict with other explicit or implicit conceptions”, amongst which is folklore “which, therefore, has to be ‘overcome’” (SCW 190, 191).

Thus, from the point of view of folklore the opposition takes the form at best of resistance. It might be a tenacious resistance, but in kind it is mechanical, implicit and objective. On the opposite side, one has an activeness which at the least is involved in “keeping things in check”, but which has the power to “uproot”, “replace”, “hammer”, and so on (SCW 191).

2.4. Once again, then, the weak and strong terms are distributed on each side of a sharp dividing line, with the former linked to folklore and the latter to official conceptions.

There are here at least two recognizable semantic distinctions. There is the opposition between *implicit*, *mechanical* and *objective*, and **explicit*, **non-mechanical*, **non-objective*; and there is that between the *aggressive* character of official conceptions and folklore’s attitude of *resistance*. The first obviously has to do with the degree of consciousness or intentionality involved, and we can represent it by the terms “mechanical *versus* intentional” (drawing on other passages in Gramsci, the terms “spontaneity *versus* conscious leadership” could be used instead²) The second opposition, which is concerned with aggressive capabilities and force of expansion, can be represented by the terms “active” and “passive” as already used.

It does not seem appropriate to run these two pairs together, so the connections and distinctions concerning the “opposition” that Gramsci speaks about require two different schematizations. The first is to do with *consciousness*, the second with the *capacity to influence* on the outside. If we may agree to use the term “opposition” to link the two poles of consciousness, we shall have the following schema:

2. SPN 196-197: “*Spontaneity and conscious leadership*. The term “spontaneity” can be variously defined, for the phenomenon to which it refers is many-sided. Meanwhile it must be stressed that “pure” spontaneity does not exist in history: it would come to the same thing as “pure” mechanicity. In the “most spontaneous” movement it is simply the case that the elements of “conscious leadership” cannot be checked, have left no reliable document. It may be said that spontaneity is therefore characteristic of the “history of the subaltern classes”, and indeed of their most marginal and peripheral elements; these have not achieved any consciousness of the class “for itself”, and consequently it never occurs to them that their-history might have some possible importance, that there might be some value in leaving documentary evidence of it”.

Gramsci goes on: “Hence in such movements there exist multiple elements of ‘conscious leadership’, but no one of them is predominant or transcends the level of a given social stratum’s ‘popular science’ — its ‘common sense’ or traditional conception of the world”. For the continuation of this passage, see Note 3 below.

mechanical versus intentional
opposition

And if we further agree to use the term “conflict” to link the two poles of the *capacity to influence* and expand, the relation will be represented as:

passive versus active
conflict

In this way we have both confirmed the straightforward hypothesis that the qualities Gramsci attributes to folklore are homogeneous in a necessarily *negative* sense, and resolved the ambiguity surrounding the “opposition” between the two conceptions. The general proposition underlying his statements can now be formulated as follows:

<i>folkloric</i> conception	is to	<i>official</i>
as <i>subaltern</i> social class	is to	<i>hegemonic</i>
as <i>simple</i> intellectual category	is to	<i>cultured</i>
as <i>unorganic</i> combination	is to	<i>organic</i>
as <i>fragmentary</i> internal organization	is to	<i>unitary</i>
as <i>implicit</i> mode of expression	is to	<i>explicit</i>
as <i>debased</i> content	is to	<i>original</i>
as <i>mechanical</i> opposition	is to	<i>intentional</i>
as <i>passive</i> conflict	is to	<i>active</i>

2.5. Everything falls into place, then, but perhaps just a little too neatly. Presented in this way, the constant attribution of weak or negative terms to folklore and strong or positive ones to non-folk conceptions has all the marks of the deliberate systematicity we mentioned before, and can obviously look suspect. Might it not in fact be a mirage or distortion produced by the schematization and hence excessive impoverishment of an argument that in itself is a good deal more mobile and articulated?

There is no question but that Gramsci's considerations are richer than the proposition we have come up with. Apart from anything else, there are a number of “positive” attributes which we have passed over but which need to be taken into account, as well as other qualifications and nuances. But before we go on to consider these, the point must be made that the systematic quality to which we have drawn attention is explicitly confirmed by the text as we have examined it so far.

It is Gramsci himself who says that all the negative qualities listed above *must* be assigned to folklore, *before* moving on to an examination of its concrete manifestations, and perhaps even quite separately from them. This list of negatives and their attribution to folklore are to be argued by deduction from the very concept of “people”. If the people consists of all subaltern and instrumental classes, it follows “*by definition*”, as Gramsci writes, that “the people [...] *cannot* possess conceptions which are elaborated, systematic and politically organized and centralized in their albeit contradictory development” (SCW 189, *Italics added*). Elaboration, systematicness and centralization are in fact expressions of hegemony (even if not only of hegemony), which is precisely what those classes which are still subaltern lack.

So systematic a dichotomizing of the various attributes would seem to be a real characteristic rather than an arbitrary impoverishment of the text.

3.0. This being the case — at least so far as we can see — it is fairly obvious that Gramsci’s treatment of folklore moves along two separate lines, and that his assessment changes radically as he shifts from one to the other. *On the one hand*, he considers folklore as an object of study and as such he validates it in full. But *on the other*, he looks at it as a force or factor in real life and its process of development, and from this point of view he characterizes it with a long, and so far systematic and unbroken, series of negative, low-value, qualities.

In other words, folklore is allowed the rank of a conception of the world, but within this category of phenomena it is placed at a lower level in the hierarchy than that assigned to the official conceptions from which it is distinguished and which stand in opposition to it. *By definition*, it is denied all the formal qualities of coherence, unity, consciousness, etc., which are typical of the hegemonic classes and their “official” conceptions. Gramsci’s esteem goes entirely to the latter, quite independently of the specific content of the conception in question or what social class it belongs to.

The upshot is a mixture of tensions and conflicts that border on the edge of ambiguity. The cultural expressions of the social classes with which Gramsci solidarizes so clearly at the political level are assessed positively to the extent that they are to be considered simply as an object of scientific research — but are judged negatively when it comes to seeing them as factors in real life and its process of development. Alternately, the cultural modes of the classes which Gramsci opposes both politically and culturally are esteemed as permanent “values” and “forces”.

It is precisely these tensions or ambiguities which give rise to conflicting interpretations on the question of the political use of folklore. Thus, at one extreme there is the tendency to shift Gramsci's positive judgement on folklore as an object of study onto its potential use in politics, while at the other we find his negative judgement on the modes and content of folklore extended to the object of study itself.

Everything seems to revolve around the real or apparent ambivalence of the concepts of "subaltern" and "official". The text seems to allow of two different interpretations which can be summarized very roughly and schematically as follows. Depending on how they are affected by the context, both singly and in relation to each other, the two concepts may take the form of an opposition either:

- (a) between "subaltern = the modern proletariat which today is historically in the right even if it has attained power only in a few cases" (for Gramsci, the USSR) and "official = the modern bourgeoisie which today is historically in the wrong even though in many cases it still retains power"; or:
- (b) between "subaltern = those classes, past or future, that are lacking in or deprived of historical force" and "official = those classes whose hegemony, whether past or future, constitutes real history".

It is at this difficult point that we turn for guidance to those of Gramsci's observations that we have not yet taken into account.

4.0. These remaining observations are different from the foregoing inasmuch as they provide a more or less immediately *positive* description of folklore. Few though they are, this is not a reason for discounting their effect on the systematic distribution of strong and weak terms noted above, and we should examine them with a certain amount of care. Here to begin with is a brief list of the relevant points.

- 1) Some of folklore's *weak* attributes are modified quantitatively by Gramsci at the level of general definition. Thus, he writes that the folkloric conception "is implicit to a large extent", and that its opposition to official world views is "for the most part implicit, mechanical, and objective" (SCW 189, Italics added).
- 2) Referring specifically to "morality of the people" — but without making it clear whether he is thinking of the conservative conceptions or the progressive innovations which he will distinguish between a little later on — Gramsci attributes a particular "tenacity" to certain folk-convictions: "imperatives exist that are much stronger, more tenacious and more effective than those of official 'morality'" (SCW 190).

- 3) Still in the area of morality, and also that of “juridical folklore”, Gramsci credits at least some folk-conceptions with the ability to “adhere and correspond spontaneously” to actual conditions of life and their process of development. Hence it can happen that:
- a) they are not always necessarily just the debased, inert, spill-over of dominant conceptions. So much is clear from the passage in which he speaks of

the ensemble of opinions and beliefs concerning one’s ‘own’ rights which circulate uninterrupted among the popular masses and are continuously renewed under the pressure of real living conditions and the spontaneous comparison between the ways in which the various social strata live (SCW 193).
 - b) they can sometimes have a progressive value which the analysis of cultural stratifications must take account of; thus, Gramsci underlines the need to “distinguish between different strata” in the sphere of popular morality as well:

the fossilized ones which reflect conditions of past life and are therefore conservative and reactionary, and those which consist of a series of innovations, often creative and progressive, determined spontaneously by forms and conditions of life which are in the process of developing and which are in contradiction to or simply different from the morality of the governing strata (SCW 189).
 - c) they may achieve a degree of expansive capacity that might throw official conceptions back on the defensive; thus, when discussing a certain kind of criticism levelled at “so-called natural law”, Gramsci notes that, behind its apparent objectives,

the aim of the controversy is in fact to curb the influence that the popular currents of “natural law” may (*and in fact do*) have, particularly on young intellectuals (SCW 193, Italics added).
- 4) Speaking about popular song — though there are indications that the point might be applied more widely Gramsci acknowledges that, even though folklore is generally speaking dependent on official conceptions, (i.e. the process of “cultural descent” from elites to masses is going on), the people is “itself” able to select according to its “own” criteria, these going more or less implicitly against official ones. Thus, he makes the point that even though popular songs “are written neither by nor for the people”, they have been “taken over by it because they conform to its way of thinking and feeling”; they are representative of “how it conceives life and the world, in contrast with official society”. This makes the phrases Gramsci uses elsewhere rather less generic:

folklore has always been tied to the culture of the dominant class and, *in its own way, has drawn from it* the motifs which have then become inserted into combinations with the previous traditions (SCW 194, Italics added).

5.0. It is fairly clear that there are two different ways in which what for the sake of brevity we shall call these “positive” remarks operate in relation to those already examined. Either they *introduce “new” qualities or aspects*, not previously taken into consideration, or which have not so far come to the fore; or they *modify in a quantitative sense* certain qualities already otherwise attributed. We shall examine these two aspects separately.

5.1.0. The following act in the first way and introduce “new” qualities: (a) the point about the particular “tenacity” of some popular conceptions; (b) the acknowledgement that folklore, at least in certain cases, is able to adhere “spontaneously” to real conditions of life as they develop; (c) the attribution of a “progressive” political value to some of the phenomena of folklore.

We must therefore introduce these new data into our previous table. But in so doing we have to observe that the positive remarks under examination, as is clearly stated, concern only *some* features or elements of folklore, while the negative characteristics equally clearly concerned the *whole* of folklore. This means two things: firstly, that these positive attributions are not to be placed at the same level as the negative ones already dealt with; and secondly, that assigning them to folklore *does not lead to* their negations being assigned to official conceptions *as such*, but at most to their affecting some aspects of the latter.

Thus, leaving aside the fact that the “tenacity” of popular attitudes is not always regarded “positively” (since it is also responsible for holding back the people in a manner deplored by Gramsci³), the statement “*certain* popular moral imperatives are more tenacious than those of official morality” means only that *certain* official imperatives are weaker than those of folklore. The

3. In this connection, cf. what Gramsci writes immediately after the passage cited in Note 2 above: “This is precisely what De Man, empirically, counterposes to Marxism; but he does not realize (apparently) that he is falling into the position of somebody who, after describing folklore, witchcraft, etc., and showing that these conceptions have sturdy historical roots and are tenaciously entwined in the psychology of specific popular strata, believed that he had ‘transcended’ modern science — taking as ‘modern science’ every little article in the popular scientific journals and periodicals. This is a real case of intellectual teratology, of which there are other examples: precisely, the admirers of folklore, who advocate its preservation; the ‘magicalists’ connected with Maeterlinck, who believe it is necessary to take up anew the thread — snapped by violence — of alchemy and witchcraft, so that science may be put back onto a course more fertile in discoveries, etc” (SPN 197).

same is true of the capacity to adhere to reality: some popular opinions have it, but this does not mean that non-folk opinions do not. But were any proof needed of the particular, *non*-universal, character of these positive qualities in folklore, one would only need to look at Gramsci's acknowledgement of the "progressive" value of certain popular beliefs or opinions. This acknowledgement rests on the creation of an explicit contrast between *progressive* and *reactionary* (or *conservative*) *inside* folklore itself — requiring, at most, an identical contrast inside official conceptions.

If, in short, we go on to fit these "new" qualities into the system of oppositions we have set up, we find that the latter is "extended" and also looks different on the page. Thus, if we agree to use the term "effective" for the capacity to adhere to reality, the table would be extended in the following (simplified) way:

	folkloric	<i>versus</i>	official

	(tenacious or not tenacious)	<i>versus</i>	(tenacious or not tenacious)
	(effective or not effective)	<i>versus</i>	(effective or not effective)
	(progressive or reactionary)	<i>versus</i>	(progressive or reactionary)

Only one of the oppositional pairs to which the extension is added appears to be affected in any way, and it is the one that concerns "content". From the point of view of folklore, content no longer appears as purely "debased": it might be "*occasionally* original", or even autonomous. This points forward to those quantitative modifications already mentioned which we shall be looking at more closely in due course.

Otherwise, the extension seems to leave the absolute nature of the oppositions and their distribution intact. The fact that folklore can sometimes be tenacious, effective and progressive (or rather, *more* tenacious etc. than official conceptions sometimes are) neither affects nor limits — if anything, to some extent it confirms and strengthens — the implicitness of the mode of expression, the unorganic character of combination, the fragmentation of internal organization, the passive-ness of the conflict, the simplicity or elementariness of the intellectual category, or in short the subaltern position of the social class to which folklore belongs. All that is affirmed is that the implicit mode of expression does not of itself preclude the presence of (some) progressive political values, that fragmentation or unorganicness nevertheless allow room for (some) strata of innovations, and so on.

The real consequence of the new group of oppositions is to be found at a different level. It is directly linked to the fact which makes it impossible to infer any positive judgement on folklore as such from what Gramsci wrote, the fact that the new oppositions *tenacious / not tenacious, effective / not effective, progressive / reactionary* do not coincide with the dichotomies *subaltern / hegemonic, un-organic / organic*, etc., but are added to them.

Because of this lack of coincidence, it is both possible and necessary to rearrange the whole system, no longer taking the opposition between *folkloric* and *official* as the point of reference but rather each of the new oppositions, most particularly that of an explicitly political kind.

The result is a complete reshuffling of the semantic connections and distinctions. What is revealed in the long run is that in Gramsci's text there exist implicit terms of conceptual reference which lie beyond the straightforward opposition between *folkloric* and *official* as it has been presented so far.

Pedantic though it may be, it could be of some use to represent the schema constructed in function of the dichotomy between *progressive* and *reactionary* in diagrammatic form. The schema would then offer us not two but four possible kinds of conceptions of the world. While the vertical connections between *folkloric* and *subaltern, implicit, unorganic*, etc., and between *official* and *hegemonic, explicit, organic*, etc. remain unchanged, the four kinds would take the following form:

folkloric and reactionary	official and reactionary
folkloric and progressive	official and progressive

5.1.1. One of the most immediately obvious features of this new pattern is that the concept of "official" is, so to speak, split in two. It is seen as capable of assuming at least one negative quality ("reactionary"), which interrupts the long and hitherto unbroken series of positive attributes – or of adding one further positive quality ("progressive") to all those preceding.

The first is hardly surprising, and it is moreover explicitly stated in the text with Gramsci describing some of the attitudes of the cultured and ruling strata as "the most narrow-minded conservatism" (SCW 193). This corrective to Gramsci's systematic acknowledgement of positive qualities is in any case perfectly consistent with the obvious gap between his own views and the "official" conceptions of the time and place in which he is writing and working. The compatibility between "official" and "progressive", on the other hand, might occasion some surprise, particularly since the text under consideration does not appear to offer any immediate indications or

concrete examples of a connection which we have brought out by purely formal and combinatory means. There is, however, no real reason for surprise if one reflects that the term “official” is really just a general heading for a number of highly valued qualities. So as regards its intrinsic qualities, the expression “official and progressive” can be translated, on the basis of the connections which we believe we have established, as: “a conception of the world that is organic, unitary, explicit, original in its contents, intentional in its opposition to other conceptions and active in its conflict with them, and finally, progressive”. Which obviously means for Gramsci the philosophy of praxis, historical materialism, Marxism — the point of view which he himself takes up. But “official” also means “pertaining to the cultured sectors and the hegemonic classes”: for Gramsci, both of these further conditions can be regarded as met only in the Soviet Union, whereas for the rest of the world only the first is satisfied. Thus it can be seen that, far from being produced by purely formal means, the combination of “official and progressive” stands in fact for the *goal* in view or the *model* which is referred to.

But there is a good deal more. By inserting this new combination, which in the first instance came about by purely formal means, the static nature of the opposition between “folkloric” and “official” is decisively broken. The four-term pattern above has no room either for Marxism as the conception of the world belonging to social forces that are not yet hegemonic or for those workers’ parties that are not yet in power. But it is that same pattern which demands their presence, based as it is on three terms denoting a given state of affairs and one which designates a goal and a model. The schema therefore represents a process, an action in time, and thus contains Marxism as not yet hegemonic, the workers’ parties as not yet in power, or more precisely the class-struggle. These are present not as terms or factors, but as mediators or *agents* which effect the transition from the given state of affairs to the new situation and transform a “progressive” that is still “folkloric” (i.e. still subaltern, implicit, fragmentary, etc.) into a definitively “official” (i.e. fully hegemonic) “progressive”.

5.1.2. Thus our formal repatterning of the schema in function of the political assessment explicitly stated by the text has led us to recognize from within the presence of an underlying context, of unspoken but decisive conceptual reference-points. It is precisely to the tacit but active presence of these references that the ambivalence or ambiguity mentioned above has to be related, for it comes about as the result of repeated, sudden shifts, not perhaps kept entirely under control, from one level or point of view to another.

a) If the level concerned is that of describing a given state of affairs, and as long as the factors taken into account are limited to *bourgeois* official conceptions on the one hand and folklore as reflecting the cultural life of *the great masses of the people* on the other, the oppositional, what one might almost call alternative, value of the folkloric conception is immediately apparent, and the way is opened to a recognition of its ability both to produce its own autonomous culture and to select products handed down from above for its own, opposite, ends.

In such cases, the text authorizes us to recognize the folk conception as a spontaneous form of the "spirit of cleavage", which Gramsci defines elsewhere as "the progressive acquisition of consciousness of [the innovatory class's] own historical personality", (PN2 52-53) and to see "progressive" or "protest" folklore at least as the manifestation of a *class-instinct* ("instinct" of course being understood as a "primitive and elementary historical acquisition", not a biological phenomenon) (SPN 199).

b) But this limitation of perspective to the level of pure description and the straightforward comparison between folklore and bourgeois conceptions is short-lived. Straight-away, reference to the essential terms comes into play, the tension opens up between things as they are and the goal in view, and we move from the area of static description to that of action or process. At this point, there are at least three sides to the comparison (folklore, bourgeois conceptions, Marxist conception), and all the decidedly negative limitations of folklore come to the fore, however progressive it might be in certain respects and however significant its opposition to the official conceptions of the bourgeoisie. At the same time, the way is cleared for an appreciation of all the formal qualities which are possessed by official conceptions (whether bourgeois or proletarian) and not by folklore in its role as the cultural expression of social classes that are still subaltern. When it comes to an appreciation of those formal qualities, Gramsci contrasts folklore with the Marxist conception of the world, not with bourgeois ones: what are now in question are *class-consciousness* and class-struggle, the Communist Party, proletarian hegemony, in other words, the aims and agents of a huge transformation of things as they are.

So it seems that the constant play of light and shadow falling across Gramsci's discussions of folklore and official conceptions is to be attributed to the fact that the beam is cast from a number of different angles. But it is controlled by a single switch movement towards a goal and adaptation to a model.

5.1.3. We cannot, however, ignore the point that in all the criss-crossing of levels and points of view, one perspective remains constant. This is the esteem afforded to certain qualities which we shall call intellectual and, which are the condition and expression of hegemony, *by whichever class it is exercised*. These qualities are presented, so to speak, as crossing class-boundaries: their possession or exercise is conditioned by class, but not their value, which is permanent. That is why one cannot be sure what hierarchical order all the terms, explicit and implicit, which the text relates to one another, should be put in, except for the entirely positive elements at one extreme (“official and progressive”) and the entirely negative ones at the other (“folkloric and reactionary”). The order of the middle terms remains uncertain, since it is impossible to determine whether more value is given to what is politically positive (which would put “folkloric and progressive” higher up the scale) or to what is formally positive (in which case it would be “official and reactionary”).

There is then a question whether a “progressive” content which is without formal capacities or intellectual force should not be considered inert, if not indeed “reactionary”, while formal and intellectual capacities, even though their content is “reactionary”, should of themselves ultimately be regarded as “progressive”.

A solution to this problem might be found if we look back to Gramsci’s examination of other forces. His interest in folklore as an object of study is consonant with his desire for “a more cautious and precise assessment of the forces acting in society”⁴. Undoubtedly he regards folklore as one of these forces.

4. PN2 52-53: “*Ideological material*. A study of how the ideological structure of a ruling class is actually organized: that is, the material organization meant to preserve, defend, and develop the theoretical or ideological ‘front’” [...].

The press is the most dynamic part of the ideological structure, but not the only one. Everything that directly or indirectly influences or could influence public opinion belongs to it: libraries, schools, associations and clubs of various kinds, even architecture, the layout of streets and their names. The position that the church has maintained in the modern world cannot be explained without knowledge of the incessant and patient efforts it makes to ensure the continuous development of its particular sector of this material structure of ideology. Such a study, conducted seriously, would be quite important: besides providing a living historical model of such a structure, it would inculcate the habit of assessing the forces of agency in society with greater caution and precision. What can an innovative class set against the formidable complex of trenches and fortifications of the ruling class? The spirit of cleavages—that is, the progressive acquisition of the consciousness of one’s historical identity—a spirit of cleavage that must aim to extend itself from the protagonist class to the classes that are its potential allies: all of this requires complex ideological work, the first condition of which is an exact knowledge of the field that must be cleared of its element of human mass”.

We have already seen him paying tribute to the “tenacity” of folklore, and pursuing this line a little further we would find more explicit statements elsewhere, as for example when Gramsci writes:

It is worth recalling the frequent affirmation made by Marx on the “solidity of popular beliefs” as a necessary element of a specific situation. What he says more or less is “when this way of conceiving things has the force of popular beliefs”, etc. Another proposition of Marx is that a popular conviction often has the same energy as a material force or something of the kind, which is extremely significant (SPN 377)⁵.

Another example would be his note on the “fanatical granite compactness of the ‘popular beliefs’ which assume the same energy as ‘material forces’” (SPN 404).

These observations might obviously allow us to regard “material forces” (and hence folklore in so far as it is comparable to material forces) as “content” and intellectual qualities as “form”, tending thereby “to reinforce the conception of ‘historic bloc’” (SPN 377). As a consequence we would be authorized by the text at this point to see the positive aspect of folklore as residing in the fact that it is a “force” or “energy” which is made the content of a “form” that takes shape elsewhere, *rather than* in particular items of content, however progressive they may be.

But on the other hand, the whole argument lends itself to oversimplification. Notwithstanding Gramsci’s declared intention to treat this

distinction between form and content [as having] purely didactic value, since the material forces would be inconceivable historically without form and the ideologies would be individual fancies without the material forces (SPN 377)

even the dialectical relationship between form and content is broken. The intellectual form is regarded as pre-existent or at any rate determining, while, if the material forces are regarded as essential, it is only at the instrumental level. Their content (as well as the “other” forms which this content cannot but take on) is completely devoid of interest. In spite of Gramsci’s statement to the effect that “the demands of cultural contact with the ‘simple’” must be “continually felt” (and therefore satisfied) (SPN 330f), the only point of interest in the simple is their material force, with which contact is made in political action rather than cultural or scientific research.

5. SPN 377. The passage goes on: “The analysis of these propositions tends, I think, to reinforce the conception of *historical bloc* in which precisely material forces are the content and ideologies are the form, though this distinction between form and content has purely didactic value, since the material forces would be inconceivable historically without form and the ideologies would be individual fancies without the material forces”.

This revision is by no means a trivial one. It involves a transition from quality to quantity which is consonant with certain of Gramsci's general procedures. But could all the contrasting pairs we have before us be revised in the same way?

It would make sense for "simple", "fragmentary", "unorganic" and "mechanical", but a good deal less so for the contrast between "subaltern" and "hegemonic". It is true that, forcing the issue a little, we could conceive of attenuations or exceptions in this case as well. Using words a little bit loosely, one could say for example that the proletariat today is *a little less subaltern* (or even, looking to the other side of a not precisely defined dividing-line, *a little more hegemonic*). Gramsci himself is basically presenting the dominant classes as *a little less* (or *not entirely*) *hegemonic* when he talks about the expansive power of certain popular beliefs. But such expressions have very little rigour about them and simply correspond to *a little stronger, a little weaker*, and so on. We know perfectly well in fact that "*a little more power*" is not "*power*", and that the difference between them is precisely "revolution".

It is in short extremely difficult to recast the qualitative contrast between "subaltern" and "hegemonic" as a simple continuous gradation of quantitative steps from "*more subaltern*" (or perhaps "*less hegemonic*") to "*less subaltern*" (or "*more hegemonic*"). But even if we did decide to do it, and push Gramsci's text in a "reformist" direction, so to speak, we would come up against further and not inconsiderable difficulties.

For even if Gramsci regarded *all* the qualitative contrasts he presents us with as quantitative distinctions, the fact remains that *by definition*, as he puts it, he systematically and nearly always *absolutely* assigns negative qualities to folklore, and almost without exception he expresses himself in terms of quality and discontinuity (words sometimes *betray* one's thought, as is well known, but also in the sense that they *make clear* what it really is).

So we are faced with an alternative. By explicitly introducing a number of quantitative modifications we would bring about a radical transformation in the system of qualitative contrasts that seemed to be emerging from the text. But there are strong arguments against such a transformation: the fact that it is difficult to give a quantitative sense to the fundamental contrast between *subaltern* and *hegemonic*; Gramsci's attribution of negative qualities to folklore and positive ones to official conceptions "by definition", and his use of an essentially qualitative terminology. All these factors indicate that his modifications should be relegated to the conceptual sidelines, and lend to his positive comments on folklore the banal character of exceptions which confirm the rule.

5.2.2. Once again, then, an ambivalence is created, two possible ways of reading the text.

One way might be to lay emphasis on the value of the positive comments and the quantitative modifications. But then we not only run into the difficulties which have just been mentioned, but also have to face the fact that folklore is the target of a whole series of negative qualifications which extend far beyond the terms presented here, and this is not easy to get round. Quite apart from the numerous remarks scattered through the rest of Gramsci's work, there is a rather revealing incongruence in the text of the *Observations* itself. Having just given a rigorous definition of folklore, Gramsci goes on to say that "it could be argued that all religions, even the most cultured and sophisticated, are 'folklore' in relation to modern thought", even if there is the "vital difference" that "religions... are, as has been said, 'elaborated and systematized' by (religious) intellectuals and the Church hierarchy" (SCW 189). With this statement, Gramsci goes against his own definition of folklore as characteristic of the subaltern classes and standing in opposition to official conceptions, and demonstrates that, in spite of the rigorous terms he himself has established, the idea that "folklore" actually means everything that modern thought (with its apex represented by Marxism) must sweep away is firmly entrenched⁶.

One can then resolve this ambivalence in the opposite direction, and the text gives us considerable authority for so doing. But we then find ourselves having to pose a much more important question to the text itself. The reasons for his negative assessment of folklore are clear enough, and at the same time it is understandable that Gramsci should take a serious interest in the subject on more than one occasion (not only is he forced to exercise his powerful intellectual curiosity on a large number of minutiae, but there is also that element of tenacity that makes folklore important for the purposes of knowing and transforming reality). But we still have to ask ourselves how he manages conceptually to define so "indigestible" a "mass of debased fragments" and debris as *a conception of the world*, when its essentially unorganic character is enhanced rather than diminished by the presence of a few conceptions that are progressive and effective.

6. Another slight divergence from the more rigorous concept comes where Gramsci says that "common sense" is "philosophical folklore" (SCW 189). But elsewhere Gramsci distinguishes between "popular" common sense, the common sense of "the more educated strata of society" and that of "the intellectuals" (cf. SPN 331). I think that this distinction *according to socio-cultural strata or levels* should be given more thought than it usually is in discussion of Gramsci's concept of common sense. In the first place, it confirms Gramsci's alertness to what I have referred to elsewhere as *connotation* (i.e. the solidarity between cultural phenomena and social groups). Furthermore, it warns us to be careful not to relate to common sense as a socially undifferentiated phenomenon what Gramsci relates, or might relate, specifically to the common sense of the cultured strata or that of the popular strata (which are in their turn internally socially differentiated): cf. his distinction between "different" Catholicisms (SPN 420).

6.0. Gramsci's definition of folklore as a *conception of the world* draws together into a single category phenomena that differ widely from each other, ranging from this indigestible mass to Marxism which he regards as the only truly "original and integral conception of the world", the harbinger of "an historical epoch", a conception that is incomparably superior to any non-Marxist official conception, however elevated, and one that will be superseded only with "the disappearance of political society and the coming of a regulated society" (SPN 381-382).

The range covered is so wide that one cannot help asking whether to speak of folklore as a conception of the world is anything more than a play on words. If not, then the common element has to be found which allows Gramsci to bring together under a single conceptual heading phenomena which he himself shows to be radically divergent from one another because they either have or do not have certain qualities regarded by him as being of decisive importance (originality, critical consciousness, organicity, centralization, etc.).

In short, what is it that makes them alike or brings them together in spite of such deep (and repeatedly emphasized) intrinsic differences?

There seem to me two different answers to this question.

The first answer is explicitly stated by Gramsci, but is the less persuasive. It is the solution he gives to the wider problem of the relations between "spontaneous" philosophy and "scientific" philosophy, of which the relation between un-organic conceptions of the world and critical conceptions are only a specific example. From it derives the quality of "spontaneity" which Gramsci explicitly attributes to folklore's capacity to adhere to reality (SCW 190, 192).

The second, and in my view, more valid answer is also to be found in Gramsci, but not in anything he says explicitly. Rather, it is contained in the very nature of the conceptual operation that he undertook specifically, but not exclusively, in respect of folklore.

6.1. The first solution alluded to above consists in the distinction which he makes (and it is already implicit in the *Observations*) between "differences of quality" and "differences of quantity".

Discussing the relations between "modern theory" (i.e. Marxism) and "the 'spontaneous' feelings of the masses"⁷, Gramsci asserts that

7. SPN 198-199: "At this point, a fundamental theoretical question is raised: can modern theory be in opposition to the "spontaneous" feelings of the masses? ("spontaneous" in the sense that they are not the result of any systematic educational activity on the part of an already conscious leading group, but have been formed through everyday experience illuminated by "common sense", i.e. by the traditional popular conception of the world — what is unimagatively called "instinct" although it too is in fact a primitive and elementary historical acquisition). It cannot be in opposition to them. Between the two there is a "quantitative" difference of degree, not one of quality. A reciprocal "reduction" so to speak, a passage from one to the other and vice versa, must be possible. (Recall that Immanuel Kant believed it important for his philosophical theories to agree with common sense; the same position can be found in Croce. Recall too Marx's assertion in *The Holy Family* that the political formulae of the French Revolution can be reduced to the principles of classical German philosophy".

there can be no “opposition” between them because “between the two there is a “quantitative” difference of degree, not one of quality. A reciprocal “reduction” so to speak, a passage from one to the other and vice versa, must be possible (SPN 199).

If one recalls that just before Gramsci had written:

It may be said that spontaneity is [...] characteristic of the “history of the subaltern classes”, and indeed of their most marginal and peripheral elements, [which] have not achieved any consciousness of the class “for itself” (SPN 196);

and bearing in mind the quality of spontaneity attributed to folklore’s capacity to adhere to reality, and, finally, the identification of the “people” with all the subaltern classes, it becomes clear that the *quantitative* continuity which Gramsci establishes between “modern theory” and “spontaneous feelings”, between the highest form of consciousness and the most unconscious experiences, can immediately be transferred to the relation between folklore at its most fragmented and official conceptions at their most organic. They are both *conceptions of the world* because the difference between them is one of “quantity”, *not* one of “quality” (SPN 347).

But the assertion that there is a quantitative continuity between Marxism and spontaneous feelings (in support of which Gramsci turns first to Kant and Croce and only subsequently to Marx: SPN 199) is simply a more specific and clearer application of a far more general principle: “the principle that all men are ‘philosophers’”: this idea too is not exclusive to Gramsci, and Gramsci himself regards it as in a certain sense a common sense truth (SPN 323, 330). What this means is that

between the professional or “technical” philosophers and the rest of mankind, the difference is not one of “quality” but only of “quantity” (SPN 347).

Admittedly, Gramsci adds at once:

The term “quantity” is being used here in a special sense, which is not to be confused with its meaning in arithmetic, since what it indicates is greater — or lesser degrees of “homogeneity”, “coherence”, “logicality”, etc; in other words, *quantity of qualitative elements* (SPN 347, Italics added).

In Gramsci’s view, the difference is not limited to the fact that the

philosopher [...] “thinks” with greater logical rigour, with greater coherence, with more systematic sense than do other men,

but consists primarily in the fact that

the professional or technical philosopher [...] knows the entire history of thought. In other words, he is capable of accounting for the development of thought up to his own day and he is in a position where he can take up a problem from the point which it has reached after having under-gone every previous attempt at a solution.

For that reason,

he has the same function in the field of thought that specialists have in their various scientific fields.

Nevertheless, a “qualitative” continuity between “the specialist philosopher” and “the rest of mankind” appears to be re-established by virtue of the fact that the philosopher is a specialist in an activity that is common to everyone, namely thought:

it is not possible to conceive of any man who is not also a philosopher, who doesn't think, because thought is proper to man as such, or at least to any man who is not a pathological cretin (*SPN 347*).

These statements are clearly the realization of the programme that Gramsci sets himself in the study of philosophy and culture.

It is essential to destroy the widespread prejudice that philosophy is a strange and difficult thing just because it is the specific intellectual activity of a particular category of specialists or of professional and systematic philosophers. It must first be shown that all men are “philosophers”, by defining the limits and characteristics of the “spontaneous philosophy” which is proper to everybody (*SPN 323*).

It is worth adding that Gramsci sees this “spontaneous philosophy” (or what he also calls “common and popular”: *SPN 328*) as being contained, “not only in language” and “in common sense and good sense”, but also

in popular religion and, therefore, also in the entire system of beliefs, superstitions, opinions, ways of seeing things and of acting, which are collectively bundled together under the name of “folklore”.

And finally that he goes on to say that

everyone is a philosopher, though in his own way and unconsciously, since even in the slightest manifestation of any intellectual activity whatever, in “language”, there is contained a specific conception of the world (*SPN 323*).

There is then more than enough to establish a direct link between Gramsci's concept of “spontaneous philosophy” and his definition of folklore as a “conception of the world”. Folklore, as Gramsci conceives it, is in fact a special form of “spontaneous” philosophy; thus, considerations about the latter could, it would appear in principle, be transferred to the former. On this basis, Gramsci's remark elsewhere that “‘pure’ spontaneity does not exist in history”: it would come to the same thing as “‘pure’ mechanicity” (*SPN 196*) may also be applied to the folk conception of the world.

This is further confirmation of the fact that elaborated and critical conceptions on the one hand and on the other the indigestible mass which folklore might be defined as can both be placed in the same category because the difference between them for Gramsci is one not of *quality*, but only of *quantity of qualitative elements*. The “positive” remarks on folklore, like the modifications to its negative attributes, are the more or less explicit pointer to this underlying conceptual intention.

This would seem to be the end of the matter, were it not for the difficulties we have already outlined in connection with the transformation of the resolutely *qualitative* system of characterization attributed by Gramsci to folklore and folkloric conceptions; and were it not further for the fact that the specific differences which Gramsci insists on as soon as he has connected things at a general level are always more radical and decisive than the affinities.

In addition to what has already been noted in connection with folklore, the reader’s attention is drawn to the decisive distinction between philosophy tout court – which alone is “an intellectual order” – and forms of spontaneous philosophy such as “religion and common sense”, which

cannot constitute an intellectual order, because they cannot be reduced to unity and coherence even within an individual consciousness, let alone collective consciousness (SPN 326).

6.2. The fact is that in order to maintain a link between the opposite terms of his repeated swings back and forth from identities to differences and from quantitative continuity to qualitative discontinuity, as Gramsci wished, he must be able to call on a precise, and more than purely verbal, criterion of distinction between *qualitative differences* (which would break the continuity he claims) and *differences of quantity of qualitative elements* (which on the contrary would not undermine the connection he seeks between the “specialist” philosopher and the “common” philosopher, “conscious leadership” and “spontaneity”, intellectuals and “simple people”, or, to use more current and realistic terms, between leaders and masses, central committees and the rank-and-file, and so on).

But in the absence of such a criterion – and it seems to me that it is absent, at any rate in the uses which more or less frequently we have *actually* made of Gramsci’s thought – in its absence, the link is broken; the subtle and indefinite dividing-line between *quality* and *quantity of qualitative elements* is erased; the constantly emphasized specific differences prove far more decisive than the attribution to a single common genus; to acknowledge the presence of a conception of the world even in the slightest

intellectual activity becomes a game of words without further consequence; to assert that “all men think” becomes a trivial banality in face of the fact that *some* men think *well* and *many* think *badly*, and does not so much as scratch the surface of the prejudice which Gramsci wanted to destroy.

All of this would matter very little if all that was involved were a few marginal questions concerning the debris of folklore. But far larger problems are involved, problems as important, precisely, as that of “conscious leadership”. Above all it would not matter were it not that — in the process of its becoming “the common sense of a [particular] environment”, as is the fate of “every philosophy” (SPN 330f) — the uneasy balance between quantitative continuities and qualitative separations was not in fact broken in favour of the second term. As a result, certain hierarchies of subject-matter and sectional interests traditional to our culture remain essentially intact. This is also meant, let me be quite clear, as a note of self-criticism.

6.3. Nevertheless, the extremely wide range that Gramsci allows to his idea of conception of the world, the way in which he extends it to include even the most bizarre, disparate and chance combinations of heterogeneous and indigestible elements, has an undoubtedly aggressive power in the face of traditional conceptions, their identification of *culture* with their *own* culture and their reduction of *history* to the history of the *upper reaches* of society.

This aggressiveness — which is active even in spite of other indications of Gramsci to the contrary — does certainly not originate from the generic principle that all men think so everyone is a bit of a philosopher. It would in any case be hard to find in this one principle any criterion whereby one might assign some form of *unity* to even the most indigestible masses of material — something that must be done if we are to distinguish one conception from another, let alone talk about a *conception of the world*.

The fact of the matter is that this aggressive drive springs from Gramsci's entire political and theoretical commitment.

It is this commitment which brings about, for example, certain sudden and even disquieting ruptures in the carefully weighted balance — whether of a didactic or a dialectical kind between form and content, intellectuals and common people, and so on. As an example, take the passage where Gramsci asks (but only in very indirect relation to folklore):

Is it possible that a “formally” new conception can present itself in a guise other than the crude, unsophisticated version of the populace? (SPN 342)⁸

8. The passage goes on: “And yet the historian, with the benefit of all necessary perspective, manages to establish and to understand the fact that the beginnings of a new world, rough and jagged though they always are, are better than the passing away of the world in its death-throes and the swan-song that it produces” (SPN 342-343).

But another, and very important, part of Gramsci's political and theoretical commitment is his tendency to set up a constant relationship between cultural phenomena and the social groups by which they are conveyed. At the same time as always being concerned with formal coherence and organicity, Gramsci pays continual attention to the links between indigestible masses of material as well as organic philosophies and one or other of the "many social groups in which everyone is automatically involved from the moment of his entry into the conscious world" (SPN 323). Precisely because he is aiming for a "more cautious and precise assessment of the forces acting in society", Gramsci does not draw up his observations on the basis of very general class-distinctions, but provides a working *scale-model*, articulated into categories, groups and sub-groups. He makes a distinction between "the common sense of the more educated strata of society", that "of the people" and that of the "intellectuals" (SPN 330f)⁹; he emphasizes the fact that

there is one Catholicism for the peasants, one for the petits bourgeois and town workers, one for women and one for intellectuals which is itself variegated and disconnected (SPN 420);

and still more directly he makes the point that

in acquiring one's conception of the world one always belongs to a particular grouping which is that of all the social elements which share the same mode of thinking and acting (SPN 324).

This "grouping" can sometimes consist simply of dispersed and isolated individuals, whose only link with each other is that of shared conceptions. However, it can also be a concrete social or socio-cultural group: it "can be one's village or province". Furthermore, though the conception of the world which holds sway there and is "mechanically" imposed on its members may be pieced together from other sources, it is born or can be born — whatever its more distant origins — from a cultural activity which is socially internal to the group and qualitatively homogeneous with it:

9. Elsewhere Gramsci writes: "Common sense is not a single unique conception, identical in time and space. It is the "folklore" of philosophy, and, like folklore, it takes countless different forms. Its most fundamental characteristic is that it is a conception which, even in the brain of one individual, is fragmentary, incoherent and inconsequential, in conformity with the social and cultural position of those masses whose philosophy it is. At those times in history when a homogeneous social group is brought into being, there comes into being also, in opposition to common sense, a homogeneous — in other words coherent and systematic — philosophy" (SPN 419).

On another occasion, Gramsci affirms even more explicitly: "Every social stratum has its 'common sense' and its 'good sense', which amount in effect to the most wide-spread conception of life and mankind" (QC 2271).

it can have its origins in the parish and the “intellectual activity” of the local priest or aging patriarch whose wisdom is law, or in the little old woman who has inherited the lore of the witches or the minor intellectual soured by his own stupidity and inability to act (SPN 323).

Thus the use Gramsci makes of the idea of *conception of the world*, at least when dealing with “spontaneous” conceptions, is constantly supported by a dense network of references to concrete social situations, however humble, whose “way of seeing and acting” is constituted by the cultural formation with which Gramsci is engaged at the time. Thus, any judgement on the formal qualities or content of such material is accompanied by the acknowledgement that, whatever its origins or level, that particular “combination” of cultural elements is the intellectual heritage of a particular social group. The group lives it and makes use of it from the inside, without realizing its contradictoriness, or at any rate not realizing it in the same way as somebody looking in from the outside. Thus, any combination of cultural elements which is embodied by an identifiable social group comes to constitute a kind of “*de facto* unity”. It can be looked at from the point of view of the group which recognizes itself in it and so can legitimately be called a “conception of the world” because, even if it is not so *for us*, it is *for others*. Not for nothing do phrases such as “in its own way” recur in Gramsci.

Gramsci's continual linking of cultural phenomena and social groups — and nowhere more clearly than in the pages on folklore — seems then to provide the real explanation for the way in which he is able to bring radically different phenomena under a single conceptual heading, without the concept itself dissolving. To regard folklore too as a conception of the world is not a mere play on words precisely to the extent that, if only for a moment, judgement is suspended on its content and formal qualities, and it is acknowledged as having a unitary existence for the “people”.

It is no less true of course that the moment of judgement is essential and decisive in Gramsci, than it is that the distinction between the two moments seems to be resolved in favour of the judgement, or rather the condemnation. For while the ways in which he uses the idea of conception of the world appear closer (with all due reservations) to the ethno-anthropological concept of “culture” than to the traditionally selective conception of culture as an elite-phenomenon, it cannot be forgotten that in a section entitled *Hegemony of western culture over the whole world culture* (SPN 416-418), Gramsci has left us one of the most inward-looking formulations both of the ethnocentric view of world cultural history and of the limitation of the European “cultural process” to the elites, to the definite exclusion of “popular cultures”.

But to refer to this passage must not in its turn lead us to forget all the rest, that is to say, what was actually achieved. Above all, it should not lead us to ignore the tensions, some of them serious, which build up in the course of the work. It is precisely the need prompted by these tensions to identify what Gramsci says and how, that enables him to be actively, and not just historically, present in the field of socio-cultural research today.

ANNIVERSARY FORUM

Gramsci di Cirese

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Contribution to *Anniversary Forum: Cirese 101. Rereading Gramsci's Observations on Folklore*, Antonio Maria Pusceddu, Filippo M. Zerilli, eds, *Anuac*, 11, 1, 2022.

Nel 1982 il saggio di Alberto Mario Cirese *Gramsci's Observations on Folklore* chiudeva meritoriamente il libro curato da Anne Showstack Sassoon *Approaches to Gramsci* per l'editore londinese Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative Society, nel quale la celebre studiosa raccoglieva diversi scrittori gramsciani e gramsciologi, sulle nozioni di Stato e di strategia politica, sul lavoro e i lavoratori, sulla vita e il linguaggio stesso del pensatore politico sardo, sulla cultura popolare. Per dirne solo alcuni: da Eric Hobsbawm a Pier Paolo Pasolini, da Giuseppe Vacca ad Anne Showstack Sassoon, da Christine Buci-Gluksmann ad Alberto Mario Cirese al quale, appunto, fu affidato il compito di esaurire da solo la parte finale dedicata alla *popular culture*, attraverso la versione inglese del suo celebre articolo italiano. Il saggio ciresiano dal quale Showstack Sassoon traduceva è quello contenuto in Cirese (1976a). Apparso in italiano con diverse *Postille* (Cirese 1976b), nel volume Einaudi esso aggiornò e portò all'attenzione di molti un intervento che il maestro dell'antropologia italiana aveva tenuto diversi anni prima a Roma, nel 1967, e successivamente pubblicato negli *Atti* del convegno internazionale al quale aveva partecipato (Cirese 1969)¹.

1. Si noti che in questa prima edizione il saggio adotta, senza virgolette, la scrittura di "folklore" con la "c", tipica di Gramsci.

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Gramsci di Cirese

2022 | ANUAC. VOL. 11, N° 1, GIUGNO 2022: 49-53.

ISSN: 2239-625X – DOI: 10.7340/anuac2239-625X-5278



Venne così a comporsi un'antologia di testi di grandi intellettuali tradotti in inglese il cui dichiarato compito era quello di contribuire alla diffusione degli studi di Gramsci nel mondo. Una terra tutto sommato allora ancora incognita per molti, stanti le difficoltà di traduzione cui incorrevano, e tuttora incorrono, i testi italiani. Al punto che Kate Crehan, autrice della prima e della seconda monografia in inglese su Gramsci e l'antropologia (Crehan 2002, 2016), da New York invitata a Perugia nel 2003 per presentare il suo libro, confessava di essere un "irriducibile anglofona". Affermazione con la quale la nota antropologa anglosassone auspicava una traduzione italiana del suo libro, che successivamente sarebbe stata realizzata (Crehan 2010), anche per ripristinare nella nostra lingua le numerose citazioni gramsciane contenute nel testo britannico.

Nonostante il fatto che il marxismo fosse già in crisi all'avvio degli anni ottanta del Novecento, l'obiettivo di un'ampia diffusione dell'opera del noto pensatore politico del secolo scorso fu perseguito abilmente da Showstack Sassoon, che introdusse i singoli scritti tradotti in inglese in maniera ancora più comunicativa, accostandoli a una piccola biografia e ad alcune immagini, nonché producendo, in apertura, un avvio di lessico gramsciano di alcune pagine. Ella sperava così che i lettori anglofoni, sia tra quelli che non avevano mai conosciuto prima Gramsci sia tra gli specialisti, trovassero utile un volume collettaneo di traduzioni destinato alla popolarizzazione mondiale di una valutazione critica del pensiero gramsciano.

La traduzione di quei testi italiani, quaranta anni fa, svelò inoltre un falso dilemma, un'illusione che oggi sarebbe interessante esplorare storicamente ed etnograficamente: quando e perché si pensò in antropologia che Gramsci ci "tornasse" solo dagli Usa o dall'Inghilterra, dopo il picco aureo degli studi che corrisponde grosso modo alla prima metà degli anni settanta del Novecento? In Italia, che io sappia, c'è sempre stato un dibattito vasto, anche durante le varie crisi del marxismo e più di quanto si sia disposti a immaginare. Inoltre, se si tengono presenti anche le altre discipline, che devono poter dialogare con l'antropologia, le pubblicazioni presentano numerosissimi studi, dagli autori coevi a Gramsci fino alle attuali linee di rilettura.

Sono tra coloro che "Gramsci lo scoprono ora, al di fuori delle nostre vicende" (Cirese 2008: 351). Non per questo mi colloco tra gli studiosi stranieri: appartengo fortemente alla tradizione italiana, penso che un altro Gramsci antropologo sia possibile nel nostro Paese e provo a darne conto (Pizza 2020, 2022). In effetti ho cominciato a leggere Gramsci tardivamente, poco più di una ventina d'anni fa, con l'avvio degli anni 2000, vivendo poi nel 2001 l'emozione di una scoperta nuova. Contrariamente a quello che accadde a Pietro Clemente nel 1968, quando, per una serie di ragioni, "non

l'avev[a] considerato un autore interessante" (Clemente 2008: 337). L'anti-gramscianesimo iniziale di Clemente non si era verificato con Carlo Tullio Altan e Tullio Seppilli, che alla prima lettura percepirono un Gramsci folgorante e attuale, attivando un itinerario antropologico parallelo, a carattere marxiano, testimoniato poi con i loro scritti (Pizza 2020: cap. 2).

Certo sono finiti oggi i tempi in cui Ernesto de Martino e Cirese, ponendosi sul crinale tra politica e cultura, sulle colonne di riviste e quotidiani alimentarono quel "dibattito sul folklore" che durò lunghi decenni, coinvolgendo diversi antropologi tra i quali altri maestri del calibro di Luigi Maria Lombardi Satriani o di Alfonso Maria di Nola. Eppure, quella perdurante controversia fu ampiamente ricostruita dai primi allievi e collaboratori di Cirese, di Clara Gallini, di Seppilli, in diversi volumi, costituendo una manna anche per le attuali riletture antropologiche delle opere del sardo. Per esempio, è sulla base della storiografia lucida e sintetica di Fabio Dei (2011; 2018) che si può riuscire oggi a rileggere il saggio originale di Cirese in dialogo con Giorgio Baratta (2007). Proprio come riassumeva Baratta, in un intervento a quel colloquio a Nuoro al quale l'allora presidente dell'International Gramsci Society – Italia si riferiva, Dei individuava "un elemento di debolezza nell'analisi di Cirese, che si può riassumere con la denuncia di una visione un po' chiusa, eccessivamente disciplinare o sociologista, delle 'diversità culturali'" (Baratta 2007: 145), laddove dal punto di vista di Baratta essa "mantiene una validità per così dire assoluta" (*ivi*).

Personalmente tendo a concordare maggiormente con Dei quando dice che "la sociologia della letteratura non viene tracciata da Gramsci secondo una logica dicotomica, ma come un campo di sottili distinzioni, con molteplici sfumature e chiaroscuri" (Dei 2011: 508), in lotta tra loro, aggiungo io.

Invero a me pare che in inglese Cirese diventi vieppiù interessante. Sembra perdere un po' di quel carattere contrappositivo e dicotomico relativo alle opposizioni di un modo di ragionare strutturalistico da lui adottato nell'esaminare Gramsci. Secondo me, e su questo ha ragione Dei, Cirese era animato da una volontà di *legittimazione* della "demologia", una scienza nascente in Italia, cioè lo studio sistemico, strutturale e formalmente rigoroso della "visione del mondo" subalterna. D'altronde per Gramsci mettere insieme folklore e senso comune era un'esigenza fondamentale: per fare emergere i subalterni dai "margini della storia" e le due nozioni certo potevano anche variare, sia nel giudizio che se ne dava sia nella loro stessa forma di vita reale.

Non si tratta però di un'ambiguità degli oggetti in sé, quanto di un dinamismo dialettico che, di là dalle opposizioni, tende a caratterizzare, credo, il pensiero di Antonio Gramsci.

In inglese Cirese vede alleggerirsi l'estenuante ricerca di contrasti e opposizioni che lo conduce a produrre schemi sintetici e formali di lettura di Gramsci sul folklore, anzi sul *folclore* (con la *c*, come scriveva la parola il sardo), e guadagna in chiarezza sia dalla traduzione sia dall'introduzione al suo scritto.

Showstack Sassoon (1982: 212) introduce la versione inglese del saggio ciresiano con numerose domande pertinenti, riportiamone alcune:

But how then could the hegemony of the working class be based on popular ideologies? What was the relationship between beliefs held in an apparently spontaneous way and a conscious revolutionary leadership? What is the relationship between popular ideas and a coherent philosophy? These are some of the questions addressed by Alberto Maria Cirese's analysis of Gramsci's notes on folklore. According to Cirese, Gramsci is able both to criticize the limitations of popular ideology and to maintain a solidarity with those classes which are at the moment subaltern because he takes the ideology of the mass of the population as the starting point /or a transformation of things as they are.

Sarebbe vieppiù interessante oggi non indugiare sul Cirese di quegli anni progressivi, quanto su quello degli ultimi decenni della sua vita, allorché, mutando paradigma e riprendendo con lieve sarcasmo una domanda di Eugenio Testa sull'"esaurimento della spinta propulsiva" di Gramsci, considerò svuotata quella vena di ispirazione anche sulla scorta delle riflessioni svolte da Pietro Clemente nel medesimo contesto (Cirese 2008: 344). Affermazioni che, talora, tendono a contrastare lo stesso suo amore per l'argomento e a riecheggiare l'ultimo Claude Lévi-Strauss che denuncia il declino dei tempi.

Eppure, a mio avviso, Gramsci non muore se si ricomincia la ricerca dalla fine del saggio di Cirese, proprio quando dopo un'analisi formale delle dicotomie gramsciane (rappresentate dalle barre, dalle polarizzazioni, dai *versus*, che, numerosi, caratterizzano i suoi schemi analitici) egli afferma:

Above all, it should not lead us to ignore the tensions, some of them serious, which build up in the course of the work. It is precisely the need prompted by these tensions to identify what Gramsci says and how, that enables him to be actively, and not just historically, present in the field of socio-cultural research today (Cirese 1982: 244-245).

Vale a dire che Gramsci e Cirese ancora lottano insieme a noi.

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ANNIVERSARY FORUM

Gramsci's folklore bundle

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Contribution to *Anniversary Forum: Cirese 101. Rereading Gramsci's Observations on Folklore*, Antonio Maria Pusceddu, Filippo M. Zerilli, eds, *Anuac*, 11, 1, 2022.

In the years after the publication of the Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith's *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (1971) introduced Gramsci's writings to a wide Anglophone audience, the Sardinian Marxist was eagerly embraced by many would-be progressive, Anglophone anthropologists. Here, it seemed, was an intellectually rigorous left theorist with a serious interest in "culture", a Marxist who argued that "Folklore must not be considered an eccentricity, an oddity or a picturesque element, but as something which is serious and is to be taken seriously" (Gramsci 1971: 191). These anthropologists' knowledge of Gramsci frequently derived more from Raymond Williams' *Marxism and Literature* rather than the notebooks themselves. This perhaps helps explain why they often overlooked the notebooks' critical, indeed sometimes downright hostile, assessment of peasant culture and folklore, as when Gramsci writes scornfully of conceptions of the world shaped by "the little old woman who has inherited the lore of the witches" (Gramsci 1971: 323). One of Alberto Cirese's aims in *Gramsci's Observations on Folklore*, is to make sense of Gramsci's apparently contradictory attitude to folklore.

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Gramsci's folklore bundle

2022 | ANUAC. VOL. 11, N° 1, GIUGNO 2022: 55-64.

ISSN: 2239-625X – DOI: 10.7340/anuac2239-625X-5279



The definition of folklore

“Folklore” is certainly a shifting category in the notebooks. To understand these shifts, a passage quoted by Cirese is helpful. Gramsci writes of “the entire system of beliefs, superstitions, opinions, ways of seeing things and of acting, which are collectively bundled together under the name of ‘folklore’”(Cirese 1982: 240)¹. Note that the always careful and precise author of the notebooks describes this heterogeneous collection as “bundled together under the *name* of ‘folklore’”. In other words, he treats the concept “folklore” not as some actually existing, coherent whole, but rather as a way of labelling a disparate range of beliefs and behaviours – a bundling together that leaves open the possibility that they may not constitute a single entity. This is very characteristic of Gramsci, who rarely met an abstract concept without immediately calling it into question. As, for example, when he writes in *Some Aspects of the Southern Question* (an essay he was working on just before his imprisonment), “the peasant question is historically determined in Italy; it is not the ‘peasant and agrarian question in general’”(Gramsci 1978: 443). Similarly, in the notebooks we find him castigating the novelist Francesco Perri for ignoring historical particularities in his 1928 novel *Emigranti* in which “historical distinctions, essential for understanding and depicting the life of the peasant, are wiped out, and the confused whole is reflected in a rough and brutal way” (Gramsci 1985: 305). In Gramsci’s view, Perri has “lump[ed] together pell-mell all the generic motifs that in reality have very distinct temporal and spatial characteristics” (Gramsci 1985: 306).

At the same time, Gramsci recognises the need for broad concepts. *Aspects of the Southern Question*, for instance, ends with his insistence that Italian intellectuals from the North and the South need to understand that “only two social forces are essentially national and bearers of the future: the proletariat and the peasants” (Gramsci 1978: 462). The point is that the world we seek to map with our concepts is an ever-shifting mass of entangled relationships moving through history. The content of our categories have to shift depending on the questions we are trying to answer, and the particular realities and relationships involved.

Over the years, the apparent inconsistencies and contradictions inherent in the shifting, fluid nature of Gramsci’s concepts have led a number of scholars to attempt to tidy up, as it were, what they see as the notebooks’ disorder – a disorder often attributed to the difficult conditions under which they were written. In an essay originally published in the 1970s, which would

1. See Gramsci 1971: 323.

become one of the most influential essays on Gramsci in the Anglophone world, Perry Anderson argues that not only did Gramsci have “to produce his concepts within the archaic and inadequate apparatus of Croce or Machiavelli”, he

wrote in prison, under atrocious conditions, with a fascist censor scrutinizing everything that he produced. The involuntary disguise that inherited language so often imposes on a pioneer was thus super-imposed by a voluntary one which Gramsci assumed to evade his jailors (Anderson 2017: 30)².

The result, according to Anderson, is a text characterised by “spaces, ellipses, contradictions, disorders, allusions, repetitions. The reconstruction of the hidden order within these hieroglyphs remains to be done. [...] A systematic work of recovery is needed to discover what Gramsci wrote in the true, obliterated text of his thought” (Anderson 2017: 30).

Cirese, also writing in the 1970s, is more in tune with Gramsci's fluid and flexible thought than Anderson, noting that “the specific differences which Gramsci insists on as soon as he has connected things at a general level are almost more radical and decisive than the affinities” (Cirese 1982: 240). Nonetheless, he shares Anderson's desire to bring order to the notebooks. His aim is to “bring out the general principles underlying” what he terms “the three cardinal features of Gramsci's definition of folklore”, namely that folklore represents “a conception of the world” that is “characteristic of the subaltern classes”, and that is “in opposition to official conceptions” (Cirese 1982: 215). One problem with this, or any attempt to fix Gramsci's understanding of folklore in any definitive way is that “folklore” in the notebooks is such a shifting creature that it is difficult to identify *any* consistent principles beyond a lack of rigour and coherence: “there is nothing more contradictory and fragmentary than folklore” (Gramsci 1985: 194). And while folklore as a “conception of the world” is *primarily* associated in the notebooks with subaltern groups, those “social strata which are untouched by modern thought” (Gramsci 1992: 186), this resolutely secular thinker also writes: “all religions, even the most refined and sophisticated, are ‘folklore’ in relation to modern thought” (Gramsci 1985: 190). Further evidence of the instability of Gramsci's concept is that having linked folklore to those “untouched by modern thought”, he goes on to claim: “Even modern thought and science furnish elements to folklore, in that certain scientific statements and certain opinions, torn from their context, fall into the popular domain and are ‘arranged’ within the mosaic of tradition” (Gramsci 1992: 187).

2. See Green 2011 for an argument that the role of censorship in shaping the notebooks has been exaggerated.

In his article Cirese cites these passages indicative of the fluidity of “folklore” for Gramsci. At the same time he remains committed to his project of systematising the Sardinian Marxist’s understanding of this protean entity. But perhaps the very project of seeking a coherent and stable theoretical entity goes against the grain of the thinker we find in the notebooks – a thinker whose aim was not to create an armature of stable and rigorous theoretical concepts but to understand the particular, and ultimately unique, ways history unfolds in a given time and place? When we read the notebooks, maybe it is more productive to focus on the twists and turns of his thinking as their author moves from one topic to another, and the ways in which the meanings of concepts like folklore, the state, and civil society shift as they are deployed to analyse different historical realities? Joseph Buttigieg argues forcefully for just such an approach in his 1994 article, *Philology and Politics: Returning to the Text of Antonio Gramsci’s Prison Notebooks*, writing “the study of Gramsci’s thought in the corpus of the *Quaderni* [...] enables us to understand the extent to which Gramsci’s thought is alive and unified precisely *through* its fragmentariness” (Buttigieg 1994: 117, Buttigieg’s emphasis).

The importance of folklore

Like all of us, Gramsci was a product of his historical moment. While he explicitly rejected any simple teleological narrative³, he also saw human history as progressive. The outcome of the struggle between contending forces in society might be inherently unpredictable, the shape of the future unknown, nonetheless, human society was moving forward. Take, for instance, this passage in the notebooks:

We are all conformists of some conformism or other, always man-in-the-mass or collective man. The question is this: of what historical type is the conformism, the mass humanity to which one belongs? When one’s conception of the world is not critical and coherent but disjointed and episodic, one belongs simultaneously to a multiplicity of mass human groups. The personality is strangely composite: it contains Stone Age elements and principles of a more advanced science, prejudices from all past phases of history at the local level and intuitions of a future philosophy which will be that of a human race united the world over. To criticise one’s own conception of the world means therefore to make it a coherent unity and to raise it to the level reached by the most advanced thought in the world (Gramsci 1971: 324).

3. See Crehan 2002: 76-80, for Gramsci’s rejection of a teleological historical narrative.

It is worth noting the stress that Gramsci places on the need to adopt a critical attitude to whatever “conformism” we happen to have acquired in the course of our socialization – in large part because he recognises the power of the “conformisms” that possess us through an unconscious osmosis.

Conceptions of the world shaped by the kind of “folklore” (*folclore*) familiar to Gramsci from his Sardinian childhood, were conformisms that needed to be critiqued. This is a very different attitude to that of Italian folklorists of the time, who (to quote from a survey essay Cirese wrote for the *American Journal of the Folklore Institute*) believed in

the existence of a “people” representing the “spirit of the nation,” the complete authenticity of popular culture as opposed to the falsity of “foreign” political institutions, the absolute “spontaneity” of the products of the “popular spirit” and above all of the popular poems and songs, and the “artificiality” of literary artistic poetry (Cirese 1974: 14).

Such romanticism was totally rejected by Gramsci, who saw it as casting a sentimental veil over the harsh realities of the lives lived by most Italian peasants, a harshness stemming from the economic and political realities of post-unification Italy. As someone with close personal experience of rural Sardinia, he saw “folklore” not as some pure, “authentic” representation of the “spirit of the nation”, but as a collection of heterogeneous fragments that were in general retrograde. The primary value of these fragments, as he wrote in a note, which is at the heart of Cirese’s article, lay in the rare evidence they provide of “all the conceptions of the world and of life that have succeeded one another in history” (Gramsci 1985: 189). This evidence, however, is “adulterated and mutilated”. Not, it should be stressed, that Gramsci thought that somewhere behind these mutilated fragments lay an unadulterated, coherent conception of the world:

The conception of the world [underlying folklore] is not elaborated and systematized because, by definition, the people (the sum total of the instrumental and subaltern classes of every form of society that has so far existed) cannot possess conceptions which are elaborated, systematic and politically organized and centralized in their albeit contradictory development (Gramsci 1985: 189).

So why does this co-founder of the Italian Communist Party nonetheless insist that folklore is “something which is very serious and to be taken seriously” (Gramsci 1985: 191)? One reason, as Cirese notes, is Gramsci’s belief in the importance of education. If they are to be effective, educators need to understand the world, or worlds, inhabited by their pupils. This means that the study of folklore should be included in the teaching training provided by the state:

the state is not agnostic but has its own conception of life and has the duty of spreading it by educating the national masses. But this formative activity, which is expressed particularly in the education system [...] does not work on a blank slate. In reality, the state competes with and contradicts other explicit and implicit conceptions, and folklore is not among the least significant and tenacious of these; hence it must be “overcome”. For the teacher, then, to know “folklore” means to know what other conceptions of the world and life are actually active in the intellectual and moral formation of young people, in order to uproot them and replace them with conceptions which are deemed to be superior (Gramsci 1985: 191).

The idea that “folklore” should be studied in order to “uproot” and “replace” it is probably not one shared by many anthropologists, but it was undoubtedly a key reason for Gramsci’s interest, although not, I would argue, the only one.

As a political activist shaped by the struggles of the early decades of the twentieth century, Gramsci saw the industrial working-class as the primary source of social transformation. For him, “the Northern urban force” was primary among “the fundamental motor forces of Italian history”, the “locomotive” that when combined with the “most advantageous” alliance of the other major forces (the Southern rural force; the Northern-Central rural force; the rural force of Sicily; and Sardinia) is capable of creating “a ‘train’ to move through history as fast as possible” (Gramsci 1971: 98). As Gramsci’s scare quotes indicate, the metaphor of the train is not exact. There is no already-laid-down rail track, nor are the different carriages driven forward by the “locomotive” mechanical entities, but rather fractious collections of sentient beings with their own ideas of where the train is, or should be, headed. Notably, of the five “fundamental motor forces of Italian history” mentioned by Gramsci, four are rural. In Italy, as he wrote in *Aspects of the Southern Question*, the proletariat had to join forces with the peasants: *together* they were the “bearers of the future” (Gramsci 1978: 462).

Crucially, for this co-founder of the Italian communist party, there was no pre-determined road to that future, already mapped out by Marxism: Marxism, he wrote, was an unfinished project, “a new culture in incubation, which will develop with the development of social relations” (Gramsci 1971: 398). Tellingly, he endorses Rosa Luxemburg when she writes of

the impossibility of treating certain questions of the philosophy of praxis [Gramsci’s usual way of referring to Marxism] in so far as they have not yet become *actual* for the course of history in general or that of a given social grouping (Gramsci 1971: 403-404, Gramsci’s emphasis).

In the Italy of the inter-war years with its large rural population, progressives were doomed to failure if they treated peasants simply as an undifferentiated, and backward-looking mass who must blindly follow the lead of the working-class “locomotive”. Progressives needed to engage with the peasant masses and win their support, a process that begins with a genuine attempt to understand them in all their contradictory heterogeneity. Folklore provided vital evidence, albeit “mutilated and adulterated”, of how peasants saw the worlds they inhabited. “Folklore”, Gramsci writes, “can be understood only as a reflection of the conditions of life of the people, although folklore frequently persists even after those conditions have been modified in bizarre combinations” (Gramsci 1992: 187).

Peasant “conceptions of the world” in the notebooks may be characterised as not only fragmentary but generally reactionary, but this is not always the case. Within the contradictory heterogeneity of “folklore” Gramsci sees progressive as well as reactionary elements. For instance, contained within the popular forms of Catholicism prevalent among peasants – defined by Gramsci as part of the folklore bundle – are “[i]mperatives [...] that are much stronger, more tenacious and more effective than those of official ‘morality’” It is necessary, however, to

distinguish various strata: the fossilized ones which reflect conditions of past life and are therefore conservative and reactionary, and those which consist of a series of innovations, often creative and progressive, determined spontaneously by forms and conditions of life which are in the process of developing and which are in contradiction to or simply different from the morality of the governing strata (Gramsci 1985: 190).

Folklore for Gramsci emerged out of the realities of peasant life. One of the crucial insights of Cirese’s article is his stress on Gramsci’s “political and theoretical commitment” to the “relationship between cultural phenomena and the social groups by which they are conveyed” (Cirese 1982: 242).

An example of Gramsci’s interest in the complex and heterogeneous threads to be found in the “folklore bundle”, and their links to specific historical realities, is his note on the nineteenth-century millenarian, peasant revolutionary Davide Lazzaretti (Gramsci 1996: 18-20)⁴. His new Republic, Lazzaretti declared, would “not be the republic of 1848” but “the Kingdom of God, the Law of Justice that has succeeded the law of Grace” Other commentators had linked Lazzaretti’s millenarian vision to atavistic memories of 14th century legends. Gramsci, however, saw it as a phenomenon

4. All subsequent quotes in this paragraph are from this note.

related to its particular historical moment, connecting it both to the influence of an anti-monarchical priest, Onorio Taramelli (described by Gramsci as “a man of fine intelligence and wide learning”), and the peasant rebel’s “desire to differentiate himself from 1848, which had not left good memories among the peasants in Tuscany”. In short, who peasants are, what they believe, and the political movements to which they are attracted, can only be discovered through empirical investigation.

An effective, oppositional conception of the world that views the world from the vantage point of those subordinated by the existing capitalist order, and that challenges its hegemony in a serious way, has to be rooted in subaltern experience, and speak to that experience. Subaltern narratives emerge initially as incoherent fragments, the “rough and jagged” embryonic “beginnings of a new world” (Gramsci 1971: 343). This is inevitable given that subaltern groups – even urban ones – inhabit a world saturated with narratives of the world that view things from the vantage point of the dominant. Nevertheless, these “rough and jagged” beginnings are the foundation of that new world: “Is it possible that a ‘formally’ new conception can present itself in a guise other than the crude, unsophisticated version of the populace?” (Gramsci 1971: 342). In other words, there is no already-present, counter-hegemony waiting in the wings. The work of transforming the embryonic “beginnings of a new world” into coherent and effective political narratives is done by intellectuals. Not intellectuals as traditionally understood, but the organic intellectuals a subaltern group itself creates as it emerges from subalternity (see, for instance, Gramsci 1971: 334-335).

While Gramsci had no doubt that the *primary* force with the potential to drive history forward was the industrial working-class, he was equally clear that in the Italy of his day with its large rural population, progressives had to pay attention to peasants and take their understandings of their lived experience seriously. The “creative and progressive innovations” generated by peasants needed to be incorporated into the progressive narrative. A famous letter Gramsci wrote to his sister-in-law Tatiana Schucht soon after his arrest is relevant here. In the letter he lays out his study plans while imprisoned, mentioning four main topics: the history of Italian intellectuals; comparative linguistics; Pirandello; and the serial novel and popular taste in literature. For him, as he explains to Tatiana, “there is a certain homogeneity among these four subjects: the creative spirit of the people in its diverse stages and degrees of development is in equal measure at their base” (Gramsci 1994: 84). The “creative spirit of the people”, I suggest, was also present for Gramsci in folklore. Following that creative spirit through

time and space, however, demanded flexibility in the concepts used to capture it, and it is this flexibility that explains many of the notebooks' "spaces, ellipses, contradictions, disorders, allusions, repetitions" so frowned on by Anderson (2017: 30).

In the case of folklore, maybe it is more productive to accept the unstable, protean character of the relationship between "folklore" and "peasants", the specific nature of which can only be determined through careful, empirical investigation of the specific context, rather than attempting to identify some clear and constant, underlying "general principles" (Cirese 1982: 215)? As Gramsci writes in a note quoted by Buttigieg in his 1994 article:

If it is necessary, in the perennial ebb and flow of events, to establish concepts, without which reality would be incomprehensible, it is also necessary – indeed it is indispensable – to establish and to bear in mind that mutable reality and concept of reality must be historically understood as inseparably bound together, even though they are logically distinguishable ([QC, 1241] quoted in Buttigieg 1994: 120).

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ANNIVERSARY FORUM

Farsi soggetto politico

Considerazioni sul tradursi del folklore in politica

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Contribution to *Anniversary Forum: Cirese 101. Rereading Gramsci's Observations on Folklore*, Antonio Maria Pusceddu, Filippo M. Zerilli, eds, *Anuac*, 11, 1, 2022.

Tra le tante affinità che si sono cercate tra il pensiero gramsciano e l'antropologia (Crehan 2010; Pizza 2020) vorrei qui proporre di aggiungerne una: costituiscono entrambi delle pratiche teoriche (o delle teorie pratiche) capaci di sottoporre sé stesse alla propria interpretazione. In questo c'è ben di più del semplice carattere riflessivo o di una vocazione all'auto-analisi. Entrambi considerano ogni concezione del mondo e ogni gesto del pensiero – e dunque anche sé stessi – non un prodotto isolato e assoluto dello *spirito*, quanto un prodotto *storico*, intendendo con ciò non solo la loro iscrizione in un tempo dato, ma anche e soprattutto il loro legame con l'insieme dei rapporti sociali.

È noto che Gramsci considerasse in questa prospettiva la *filosofia della praxis* – formula con la quale nominava e al tempo stesso espandeva la teoria del marxismo – come una concezione del mondo capace di spiegare sé stessa. In altri termini lo ricorda anche Cirese (2008a: 485): il marxismo per Gramsci era una concezione del mondo che si rende necessaria *politicalmente* – e non *meccanicamente* – in un conflitto per l'egemonia, storicamente determinato, tra subalterni e classi dirigenti e per risolvere, a favore dei primi, la loro dialettica tra concezioni del mondo disorganiche e disgreganti da una

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2022 | ANUAC. VOL. 11, N° 1, GIUGNO 2022: 65-74.

ISSN: 2239-625X – DOI: 10.7340/anuac2239-625X-5280



parte e concezioni del mondo “ufficiali” e conservatrici dall’altra. È nel rapporto con quest’idea di superamento dell’esistente che Cirese identifica però una distinzione, non sempre netta ma presente – perlomeno per quanto riguarda l’epoca del suo scritto –, tra la *filosofia della praxis* nella versione gramsciana e l’antropologia: la concezione politica di Gramsci si distinguerebbe dalla concezione antropologica nella misura in cui porrebbe sempre in avanti l’intenzione della trasformazione del reale, mentre la seconda potrebbe in teoria accontentarsi (ma sappiamo che spesso non lo fa) dell’intenzione di descriverlo, muovendosi “sul piano della constatazione dei fatti” (Cirese 2008a: 485). Su questa questione dell’intenzionalità tornerò nel corso della disamina, poiché credo che sia centrale per intendere il modo in cui Cirese ha provato a tramutare Gramsci in una fonte della disciplina antropologica: il suo saggio è un tentativo di trasformare alcuni concetti gramsciani in vere e proprie *definizioni* d’ordine antropologico, ma così facendo l’autore si ritrova inevitabilmente a fare i conti con la parte che di Gramsci rimane irriducibile a quest’operazione, ossia la sua riflessione sul passaggio dallo stato di fatto alla politica della trasformazione.

Per cominciare, mi sembra utile ribadire che, pur tenendo conto di una distinzione tra antropologia e pensiero gramsciano sulla base del peso differente dato all’intenzionalità (da accogliere provvisoriamente come ipotetica), entrambi iscrivono sé stessi nella *storia*. In questo senso, la forza del pensiero gramsciano, che ne spiega peraltro la sua capacità a riproporsi come chiave di lettura in tempi e in contesti culturali differenti¹, sta nel fatto che i suoi concetti – da quello di *subalternità* a quello di *egemonia*, da quello di *società civile* a quello di *intellettuale organico* – non descrivono delle realtà atemporali, ma si declinano ogni volta in modi particolari. Gramsci li formulò cercando di riflettere su un’epoca specifica – quella dell’entrata delle masse nella storia e della loro trasformazione in “popolo” – e in un contesto socio-politico particolare – quello della lotta per l’emancipazione dei subalterni sotto il fascismo e più largamente all’interno del processo di formazione nazionale italiano e del suo inquadramento in un capitalismo ormai globale. Ma per fare ciò, non smetteva di riflettere su cosa potesse significare applicare quei concetti ad altri contesti: cosa significava, ad esempio, essere *subalterno* nell’Antichità con l’istituzione della schiavitù o nel Medioevo comunale? E in uno stato di formazione recente come l’Italia, dove il processo di modernizzazione capitalistica è frazionato e ineguale, cosa significa essere subalterno e cosa significa creare egemonia?

1. Tra le varie iniziative e pubblicazioni su questo tema vedasi la più recente, il convegno *Gramsci nel mondo di oggi* della International Gramsci Society (IGS) a Cagliari nel 2021.

Per pensare ciò, Gramsci sviluppava un altro concetto, quello di *traducibilità* (suggeritogli anche dalla sua formazione universitaria in studi linguistici) (Cospito 2017), che un po' sorprendentemente è perlopiù sfuggito all'interpretazione antropologica di Gramsci, anche se lo stesso Cirese ha avuto modo di insistere sull'importanza della linguistica nel pensiero gramsciano, a partire dai commenti che ne fece in proposito Vittorio Santoli (Cirese 2008b: 324). Per Gramsci l'atto di tradurre un'idea o una pratica – affinché sia dunque *traducibile* – richiede inevitabilmente una perdita di significato originario e un nuovo innesto nella nuova realtà; per questo costituisce un esercizio d'interpretazione ben diverso dalla semplice identificazione di analogie tra contesti differenti. La sua idea di *traduzione* partiva chiaramente da considerazioni di tipo linguistico per estendersi progressivamente verso un'idea di traduzione di concetti, poi a quella di traduzione – nel senso etimologico di “trasporto” – di esperienze politiche (cos'è stata la Rivoluzione in Russia e cosa sarebbe una rivoluzione in Occidente?), fino a un'idea di traduzione che ingloba tutte le altre: la traduzione *catartica* (Q 13) dallo stato determinato della soggettività (la fase *economico-corporativa*) verso una soggettività storica (la *fase etico-politica*) e dunque dalla subalternità a una nuova egemonia dell'emancipazione.

È in questo senso che il pensiero gramsciano ingloba sé stesso: esso prevede *già* di essere *tradotto* secondo i contesti. Questa vocazione alla traduzione, certamente, spiega anche perché il pensiero di Gramsci sia sempre stratonato tra usi sperimentali nel contemporaneo e in contesti molteplici (senza considerare addirittura un vero e proprio travisamento colpevole, come nel caso della sua appropriazione da parte di ideologie di destra) e ritorni ad analisi filologiche. Queste tendenze, per lungo tempo divergenti, sembrano oggi trovare luoghi di sintesi negli incontri tra gli studi gramsciani, soprattutto italiani, e gli *studies* internazionali, in cui, a mio parere, l'antropologia italiana ha certamente un ruolo primordiale da giocare, tanto per la sua capacità di dialogare con la filologia di Gramsci, quanto per la sua vocazione disciplinare per una comparazione che, come la *traduzione* gramsciana, non identifica semplicemente analogie, ma apre a una sorta di pensiero del multiverso umano che va oltre l'universalismo e il relativismo. Le tensioni tra una postura filologica nell'interpretazione e una postura innovativa nell'uso di Gramsci è pur sempre presente nell'antropologia italiana stessa: se nel saggio in questione Cirese si poneva chiaramente come *traduttore* dei concetti gramsciani in antropologia, in altre occasioni rimproverava all'Er-

nesto de Martino del periodo *gramsciano* del dopoguerra di aver innestato artificialmente su una postura che si voleva ispirata a Gramsci un concetto di “folklore progressivo” che in Gramsci non si trovava (Cirese 2008b: 324)².

Venendo dunque alle celebri considerazioni di Cirese (2008a) sulle *Osservazioni sul folklore* del Gramsci carcerario, si potrebbe dire, sulla base di quanto detto, che l’operazione dell’antropologo assomigli molto, essa stessa, a una *traduzione* dei concetti gramsciani di *concezione del mondo*, *filosofia spontanea* e soprattutto *folklore* in concetti antropologici. L’operazione richiede però a Cirese di sviluppare la sua analisi in due tempi distinti: una prima fase nella quale i concetti gramsciani vengono descritti, interpretati e reinnestati come concetti operativi per lo studio della cultura in senso antropologico, insistendo come noto sulla prospettiva dei *dislivelli interni* di cultura; e una seconda fase dove, chiedendosi se quanto presentato non sia troppo schematico (“i conti tornano, ma forse in modo troppo perfetto”, p. 477), Cirese si confronta, sempre dal punto di vista dell’antropologo, con quella parte del pensiero gramsciano che sembra sfuggire all’analisi antropologica: la parte dell’intenzionalità politica, della produzione di una concezione del mondo nuova, del rapporto tra *spontaneità* e *direzione consapevole* e dunque tra *masse* e *intellettuali*, della traduzione o passaggio, come detto, dai dati reali – quelli della subalternità espressa ad esempio dal folklore storicamente significativo ma inoperante – alla *politica*. Questa duplicità di fasi della disamina ciresiana si incrocia con un’altra, già messa in luce da Fabio Dei (2011: 502): quella tra una fase in cui Cirese cerca in un Gramsci teorico della cultura una legittimazione dell’antropologia come studio della cultura, e più particolarmente della cultura popolare; e una fase in cui Cirese riflette su un’apparente ambiguità di un Gramsci teorico politico nei confronti del folklore, tra la critica per “l’insieme di frammenti indigesti” e la restituzione ad esso di una dignità e di un significato storici e politici.

Per questa ragione, come altri ritengo che la riflessione di Cirese possa essere considerata, in una prospettiva storica sull’incontro dell’antropologia con il pensiero gramsciano, come il punto focale nell’articolazione del dibattito, un’articolazione intesa sia in senso temporale che in senso geografico:

2. Non ho qui lo spazio per addentrarmi nella questione, ma dalla ricerca che sto effettuando sulle tracce del campo etnografico di de Martino in Romagna all’alba degli anni ‘50, risulta chiaro quanto l’antropologo napoletano fosse stato influenzato dal fatto che, all’epoca, in Romagna sorgeva una cultura popolare di tipo nuovo, legata alla nuova classe sociale dei braccianti, slegati e spesso politicamente antagonisti della vecchia mezzadria legata a un folklore “tradizionale”.

tra quanto fu fatto e detto in Italia prima dell'articolo di Cirese (penso allo sviluppo della demologia italiana, agli stessi scritti gramsciani e ai lavori di de Martino e in particolare quelli sul *folklore progressivo*) e quanto è stato detto, fatto e scritto in Italia e soprattutto sul piano internazionale dall'antropologia politica, con un uso – talvolta molto disinvolto – dei concetti gramsciani. L'antropologia si è spesso ritrovata impelagata negli stessi dilemmi che sottolineava Cirese: ma Gramsci era un cantore delle forme subalterne di resistenza e delle concezioni del mondo popolari o ne era un fervente critico?

Non essendo io un esegeta né uno specialista della figura e dell'opera di Cirese, quanto piuttosto un antropologo che tenta di *tradurre* i concetti gramsciani, per affrontare questi temi procederò prendendo in prestito lo stratagemma che fu di Palumbo (2008 : 303) per parlare del suo avvicinamento a Gramsci a partire da un'antropologia che ne era in parte estranea, ossia esplicitando brevemente il mio posizionamento e dando così al lettore qualche elemento per comprendere il punto di vista di chi scrive. Il mio interesse per l'antropologia e per Gramsci è nato in contemporanea, durante i miei studi universitari in Scienze internazionali e diplomatiche a cavallo del millennio, quand'era in gestazione, perfino nella provincia bolognese-romagnola, il cosiddetto movimento globale per “un altro mondo possibile”. Interessato alle forme terzomondiste e postcoloniali di una politica d'emancipazione, mi sembrava che Gramsci e l'antropologia potessero entrambi offrire elementi per pensare il qui e l'altrove, ancora una volta, non nei termini di un'analogia, ma *insieme*: cos'aveva a che fare la lotta del Sud del mondo con la provincia italiana? Una volta scoperta la “vocazione autentica” per l'antropologia, mi ritrovai in dottorato in co-tutela tra Milano-Bicocca e l'EHESS di Parigi, due contesti dove si parlava poco di Gramsci ma dove si lasciava certamente la libertà di farlo, e dove soprattutto si sviluppava un'antropologia del contemporaneo – a Parigi soprattutto nel solco di Balandier – che non rinunciava al rigore etnografico e alla profondità storico-etnologica pur aprendosi alla sperimentazione metodologica e dei linguaggi, con un'apertura critica alle diverse correnti internazionali³. Al di là della traduzione di alcuni concetti gramsciani per lo studio etnografico, storico-etnologico ed empirico di alcune realtà in Africa ed Europa, dal punto di vista epistemologico il mio itinerario di ricerca si è sviluppato in un periodo in cui l'incontro tra l'antropologia e Gramsci si faceva soprattutto in seno all'antropologia politi-

3. Fu poi quest'apertura internazionale che, dopo avermi condotto a Gramsci e all'Africa, per loro tramite sono stato “riportato” all'antropologia italiana, interessandomi in particolare al periodo più politico di Ernesto de Martino tra Resistenza e letture gramsciane.

ca internazionale, non solo sotto l'influsso degli studi postcoloniali, ma anche e soprattutto di una riflessione propriamente antropologica attorno al tema, in senso generale, della "resistenza" e dell'"infrapolitica" e sulle forme popolari o subalterne di azione, mobilitazione o enunciazione politica. A mio parere, quell'antropologia politica è rimasta ingarbugliata in un'interpretazione dicotomica del Gramsci politico – quella tra un Gramsci "alternativo", del "contropotere" e della resistenza contro l'egemonia e un Gramsci invece leninista, dirigista ed egemonico –; un'interpretazione che sul piano teorico si è tradotta, nella teoria critica e nelle scienze umane e sociali, in un'opposizione tra un Gramsci teorico della struttura del potere e di un Gramsci teorico delle forme subalterne del politico o addirittura antesignano dell'*agency*. Questa lettura biunivoca di Gramsci – che è legata intimamente a quanto criticato da Kate Crehan a proposito della versione *lite* del concetto di egemonia (Crehan 2010, vedasi anche Palumbo 2008) – è probabilmente legata al fatto che, nell'antropologia internazionale, Gramsci è spesso stato letto alla stregua di un autore post-strutturalista nella dialettica struttura/azione o potere/contropotere. Come ho cercato di spiegare altrove (Ciavolella 2019a; 2019b; 2020a), ciò non ha permesso di identificare l'elemento centrale della riflessione di Gramsci a proposito delle dialettiche tra subalternità ed egemonia, spontaneità e direzione, o altro: che il suo interesse non era quello di descrivere i due termini della dialettica come "stati", ma di intendere i processi storici che rendono possibile o meno il passaggio da uno stato, o meglio una *fase*, a un'altra. Questo corrisponde, a mio avviso, ad una particolare *antropologia* di Gramsci, nel senso di una particolare concezione dell'essere umano nella storia: quella dell'uomo come *soggetto storico* o, detto altrimenti – ma con senso equivalente, di *soggetto politico* (Ciavolella 2020b). Ciò significa certo restituire *dignità storica* alle forme popolari della cultura, in modi simili a quelli che fecero dire a de Martino che "il mondo magico" è *già* storia. Ma significa anche molto di più: che ogni gruppo è potenzialmente in grado di entrare nella storia dell'emancipazione, anche se tutto ciò è tutt'altro che scontato.

Tornando al saggio di Cirese, ci si potrebbe chiedere se questa concezione gramsciana dell'uomo come soggetto storico non sia una concezione prettamente politica, da intendersi operativamente come mezzo di lotta per la mobilitazione delle classi subalterne per la trasformazione del reale, e non sia dunque un concetto utilizzabile scientificamente dall'antropologia, come a voler identificare una verità, certo, ma nella quale la disciplina non può adentrarsi se non al prezzo di diventare altra cosa, essa stessa pura politica. Il mio punto di vista, credo sia ormai chiaro, è differente: l'antropologia, declinata appunto dall'aggettivo "politica", può assumere quella particolare con-

cezione antropologica dell'uomo come soggetto politico, senza per questo significare per forza una politicizzazione militante (che resta una scelta della persona, anche in funzione dei contesti di studio e di coinvolgimento). Sul piano epistemologico, ciò significa analizzare le situazioni etnografiche nel loro spessore storico, intendendo con ciò non soltanto una profondità temporale e una sedimentazione di fatti, ma appunto le condizioni e le possibilità nelle quali può – o non può – effettuarsi quel passaggio – che come dice bene Cirese è *qualitativo* – dalla subalternità alla soggettività politica. D'altronde, lo stesso Gramsci aveva definito – quasi in un atto fondante di una sociologia storico-politica – dei *criteri metodologici* per lo studio delle classi subalterne – nel famoso Quaderno 25 sulla *storia dei gruppi subalterni* che sfugge purtroppo all'analisi ciresiana – con i quali si tenta di comprendere come ricostituire una storia frammentaria della partecipazione dei subalterni alla storia stessa.

È dunque da una prospettiva che mette al centro quest'idea di storicità e di soggettività politica che mi sembra di poter ora tornare a un'ultima disamina critica del saggio di Cirese. Nello stesso modo in cui il carattere innovativo dell'interpretazione ciresiana sia da apprezzare in relazione al suo tempo (la fine degli anni '60), ogni interpretazione delle considerazioni gramsciane sul folklore e sulla cultura dovrebbe partire dal riposizionarle nell'epoca e nelle sollecitazioni del presente che fu di Gramsci – operazione che, ricordo, è il primo passo per poter effettuare in seguito una *traduzione* dei concetti gramsciani per studiare altri tempi e altri luoghi. Questo però non è nelle preoccupazioni di Cirese, quantomeno nel saggio in questione, dove le riflessioni di Gramsci sul folklore sono in un certo senso ipostatizzate e *tradotte* in *definizioni* d'ordine antropologico, non senza qualche eccesso schematico. Come ha avuto modo di affermare Fabio Dei, Gramsci aveva in mente specifiche concezioni del folklore, quelle degli studi positivistiche delle culture popolari di inizio Novecento; e quest'analisi critica serviva sia a comprendere come i mondi conservatori, borghesi o premarxisti avessero interpretato lo spirito delle masse subalterne, sia per trovare nuovi mezzi per comprenderli e innestarli sulla produzione di una nuova concezione del mondo per la loro emancipazione. Qualsiasi riflessione esauriente sul rapporto tra antropologia e Gramsci, quindi, dovrebbe includere un'analisi di come egli si posizionò criticamente contro gli albori delle discipline positivistiche: dalla critica dell'antropologia lombrosiana, certo, fino anche alla critica della sociologia di Henri de Man sull'adattamento *migliorista* dei proletari al loro sfruttamento, passando dalla critica – già presente ne *La questione meridionale* del 1926 – di antropologi come Alfredo Niceforo, il quale, da siciliano, giustificava il sottosviluppo del Meridione su basi razziali. Da que-

sto punto di vista, Gramsci faceva qualcosa – come nell’analisi del movimento di Davide Lazzaretti – che gli antropologi hanno tentato di fare spesso dal secondo dopoguerra in poi (penso alle analisi di Peter Worsley e Max Gluckman sul movimento Mau Mau) (Ciavolella 2016): sottrarre l’analisi dell’esperienza subalterna al discorso “ufficiale”, che tende ad identificare le ragioni della subalternità in una devianza iscritta naturalmente o culturalmente nei subalterni, per spiegarne invece le ragioni politiche.

L’assenza di un’analisi storicizzante della riflessione gramsciana non permette, a Cirese, non soltanto di capirne le ragioni e le sollecitazioni del suo presente, ma nemmeno di cogliere i modi in cui i significati di *folklore* o di *subalternità*, ad esempio, si *traducano* in tempi e in luoghi differenti. Per fare un rapido salto nel presente, ad esempio, sarebbe forse possibile considerare che i discorsi “ufficiali” delle élite liberali siano dominanti, ma sarebbe difficile considerare la diffusione di *fake news* e di teorie complottiste come fenomeni dal carattere puramente disorganico, siccome essi si fanno sempre più *senso comune* (Crehan 2016). Questo non solo perché le società contemporanee siano essenzialmente diverse da quelle del passato, con quella “trasformazione antropologica” identificata da Pasolini col consumismo che si è generalizzata nello spazio globale e nello spazio mediatico per rimescolare le carte dell’alto e del basso della cultura; ma anche perché la storia, come Gramsci insegna, è fatta di fasi, di cicli e soprattutto di crisi: di crisi dell’egemonia.

È su questo punto che mi sembra di poter identificare due problemi fondamentali nell’interpretazione ciresiana di Gramsci e che trovano la loro origine in quella ipostatizzazione dei *concetti* in *definizioni*. Prima di tutto, mi sembra che questo lavoro di sistemazione proceda attraverso una serie di ipotesi su equivalenze formali che trovano il loro comune denominatore nell’opposizione tra alto e basso della società. Ciò permette certamente di mettere in risalto – contro ogni presupposto della vecchia antropologia nel trovare omogeneità interne a culture intese come isole della storia – la dialettica insita all’approccio gramsciano allo studio di tutte le sfere della vita sociale: *folklore/cultura ufficiale* nella sfera culturale; *proletari/borghesia* nella sfera socio-economica; *subalternità/egemonia* nella sfera politica. L’operazione, tuttavia, ha come effetto di creare equivalenze formali tra tali differenti sfere: Cirese pensa al rapporto tra queste nei termini dell’*analogia* e non in quelli della *traduzione*, secondo i quali invece, in una prospettiva gramsciana, cultura, economia e politica sono interrelati *organicamente*, ma non per questo tra loro omogenei o isomorfi. In una prospettiva che supera sia il meccanicismo di un materialismo volgare, sia lo storicismo prettamente idealista, il loro rapporto è un rapporto storico, nel quale la dimensione

politica funge da motore propriamente umano di articolazione tra le condizioni storiche, strutturali se vogliamo, che limitano la libertà umana e l'impeto volontaristico e libertario. In questa dimensione propriamente politica, che è al contempo *embedded* nel resto delle dimensioni sociali e relativamente autonoma rispetto ad esse, si situa un punto nevralgico della formulazione gramsciana che non mi sembra colto da Cirese: le condizioni di subalternità ed egemonia possono sembrare consolidate e inscalfibili come dura pietra, eppure sono prodotti storici che possono essere modificati. La subalternità, ricordiamolo, non è solo un eufemismo per parlare di proletari, ma identifica una posizione politica e non per forza una condizione di classe: quella dei gruppi che "subiscono l'iniziativa delle classi dominanti". E l'egemonia, lungi da quell'idea di "discorso dominante" o "struttura del Potere" al quale ci hanno convinto di pensare i post-strutturalisti, è un successo storico, ma per questo relativo a un tempo e a un contesto dato, nel quale alcuni gruppi sociali riescono a produrre un'articolazione *organica* tra cultura, economica e politica attorno ai propri interessi. Per tornare, in conclusione, all'interpretazione di Cirese incentrata sugli aspetti culturali e solo sussidiariamente sugli aspetti politici, considerare la dialettica subalternità/egemonia come un riflesso dell'opposizione tra folklore e cultura ufficiale significa non darsi la possibilità di vedere che anche la cultura ufficiale, ciclicamente, perde il proprio carattere egemonico (e in tal caso gli intellettuali una volta *organici* diventano *tradizionali*) e l'egemonia può entrare in crisi (venendo surrogata magari da forme di *demagogia deleteria*, da *rivoluzioni passive* o da forme violente di *dominio*) e aprire quel periodo di *interregno*, che si paventa tanto al giorno d'oggi, nel quale nascono i mostri. Ma dal quale bisogna pur partire per costruire il domani.

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ANNIVERSARY FORUM

Cirese 101

Notas mexicanas con “un saludo al modo antiguo”

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Contribution to *Anniversary Forum: Cirese 101. Rereading Gramsci's Observations on Folklore*, Antonio Maria Pusceddu, Filippo M. Zerilli, eds, *Anuac*, 11, 1, 2022.

En este breve texto¹ expondré en forma de fichas de trabajo que en vez de analíticas serán más cercanas al registro biográfico de algunos de los puntos centrales de mi experiencia académica y personal con Alberto Cirese, con motivo de su aniversario 101. En el núcleo argumentativo está la influencia de su obra en mi propia trayectoria académica. Además de un riguroso científico, Cirese tenía una especial sensibilidad por las formas narrativas populares cantadas, en particular por el corrido mexicano y otras formas de canciones. Por esta razón, a lo largo del texto irán desplegándose algunas memorias sonoras significativas.

Primer contacto: 1976

Un día cualquiera, dentro de una sesión de asesoría con Gilberto Giménez en la universidad, sin la menor piedad para un estudiante, salí bajo el brazo con la revista francesa *Dialectiques* 4/5 dedicado por entero a Gramsci en la que tenía que leer un texto: “Conceptions du monde, philosophie spontanée, folklore” de un tal Alberto M. Cirese (1974). Como pude y con la inapreciable ayuda de Catherine Héau, poco a poco comencé a entrar en la lectura de Gramsci visto y trabajado desde la óptica de Cirese. Mi primer contacto con su obra fue en francés académico.

1. Agradezco a Antonio M. Pusceddu y a Francesco Zanotelli la invitación y la paciencia en la espera de esta breve y episódica colaboración. La revista *Estudios sobre las Culturas Contemporáneas* prepara un número especial sobre la influencia del pensamiento y la obra de Cirese en México y América Latina.



La particular posición gramsciana de Cirese sobre la cultura popular, cayó como agua fresca en medio de la aridez de una discusión de larga data en México que tocaba no solo cuestiones conceptuales, sino prácticas y políticas emanadas directamente del movimiento revolucionario de una guerra que duró más de una década en casi todo el país y que al romper la continuidad cultural de la Colonia española y del durísimo siglo XIX, en el que después de la independencia de España, México tuvo que sortear dos “emperadores”, invasiones de los Estados Unidos de América y de Francia, la pérdida de más de la mitad del territorio y la debacle económica del momento, la revolución triunfante se planteó la creación de una “nueva raza”, ni española, ni indígena, ni negra sino de su evolución mezclada.

Una mestizofilia (Stern 2000) por encima de cualquier diferencia y rezago sociocultural para “desindianizar” y desafricanizar lo más pronto posible esta *nueva nación*. Las políticas públicas se orientaron entonces a la confección de una inédita e imaginada Cultura Nacional por encima de las múltiples “culturas” étnicas que a su modo habían resistido siglos enteros de esclavitud, miseria, despojo y visibilización negativa que perdura hasta hoy en esta primera veintena del siglo XXI².

Mercedes Sosa
Cinco siglos igual

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eG6ux4ErAoM>

Diversas nociones se entrecruzaban y oponían en ese trance: ¿Cultura Nacional o culturas étnicas? ¿culturas populares o subalternas? ¿Cultura de clase o cultura de masas?

De un lado, románticos que suspiraban por la “verdadera” expresión del pueblo, del otro lado los modernos deslumbrados por las posibilidades de la cultura de masas, la de los llamados “medios de comunicación”. Estas divisiones también marcaban la especialización de las profesiones, de los estudios. Cada uno con su dominio, su objeto y su método.

Los antropólogos, al estudio de los pueblos indígenas. Los comunicólogos, a los efectos de la televisión, la radio, la prensa y el cine; los sociólogos a la lucha de clases como advenimiento del socialismo, los anticuarios recuperaban materiales “verdaderos” de la cultura campesina condenada a la extin-

2. Para el inicio de los años veinte del siglo pasado había decenas de “pequeñas” naciones indígenas y comunidades afrodescendientes con lenguas propias, concepciones del mundo operantes y comportamientos culturales que, para bien supremo del progreso, deberían enorgullecernos (por su imperial pasado, en el caso de los indígenas), pero disolverse en el presente.

ción. Y además de esta diversidad de enfoques, la posibilidad de entrecruzarse de modo metodológico o teórico estaba de inicio desactivada: cada uno en su propia y segura isleta.

Es en ese momento de finales de los años setenta en el que Cirese es traído a México por iniciativa de Gilberto Giménez junto con Guillermo Bonfil a ofrecer un seminario sobre su trabajo y enfocado al estudio de las culturas populares.

Cirese se titulaba en el mismo año en que yo nacía al otro lado del mar y en el que se publican en Italia los *Quaderni*. Cuando llega a México en el verano de 1979 a hacer un seminario intensivo de un mes de duración, yo había hecho un primer estudio de campo en un pueblo campesino en el que mi objetivo era describir y comprender las formas locales de comunicación y su relación con las formas industriales moduladas por enormes industrias especializadas en la edición de visibilidad pública. Ese trabajo tuve la osadía de dejarlo sobre su mesa en La Sapienza en 1977, al no encontrarlo personalmente en esa ocasión³.

Segundo contacto: verano de 1979

Yo terminaba la investigación de campo para mi disertación de maestría en sociología en las montañas de Veracruz y conocí personalmente a Cirese en su primera visita a México.

El efecto fue intenso. A la claridad y rigor lógico de sus textos que cada vez conocía mejor, se agregaba una erudita, jocosa y vívida manera de hacer sus lecciones. Siempre aprecié su sentido humano, su sensibilidad hacia los otros, su humor y diáfana claridad en las exposiciones que daba y en las preguntas que respondía. Cirese tenía la calidad para establecer relaciones de empatía con colegas de todas las profesiones y con toda clase de personas.

Ese seminario de 1979 en el Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social (CIESAS) fue determinante en mi necesidad de profundizar en la obra de Gramsci y de Cirese, quien amablemente me ofreció “patrocinio científico” en el desarrollo de lo que pudiera requerir.

Ello comenzó con el comentario de aquella disertación de licenciatura que dejé en Roma. Su respuesta, siempre con interés y humor, parafraseando a Lenin, fue que mi trabajo era “un paso adelante y dos atrás”. Orientado por Giménez, que había utilizado la semiótica de Greimas dentro de la perspectiva etnosociológica con la que estudió procesos de religiosidad popular en

3. Ese trabajo fue publicado como *Dominación cultural, expresión artística, promoción popular* (Gonzalez 1980).

México (Giménez, 2013), yo había usado esquemas actanciales para el análisis de varias obras de teatro que mediante un largo proceso de investigación-acción realizamos con jóvenes campesinos. Supe de su amistad con el mismo Greimas establecida en la estancia que realizó con Levi-Strauss en el Musée de l'Homme en París y de las críticas que a su modelo le había formulado directamente Cirese, artillado con una lógica formal muy rigurosa. “El *carré semiótico* de mi querido amigo Greimas, no es ni cuadrado, ni es semiótico”, decía muy serio y de ahí pasaba a explicar detalladamente las razones de su argumentación.

De repente, sin más, un joven (yo) que iniciaba apenas su carrera conversaba con un académico en plenitud que conocía personal y críticamente a muchos autores de los que yo leía. Otro de sus comentarios resultó de magna importancia a lo largo de toda mi formación: “Cuando encuentres en tu trabajo un nudo que no sabes cómo resolver, siempre muéstralo al lector y evita el *pasticcio*. Esa frase suya me la he aplicado personalmente como norma y la he recomendado a decenas de mis estudiantes.

De Cirese puedo decir que aprendí que el trabajo académico es un servicio, por lo que debe ser hecho de primera calidad y para poder hacerlo, se requiere cultivar diversas virtudes, entre ellas, la humildad, la escucha atenta, la rigurosidad, la disciplina y la pasión por conocer lo desconocido, lo escondido y por hurgar en algunos de los enigmas que nos tejen.

Irma Serrano

Goza, goza, mariposa

www.youtube.com/watch?v=OFKZPydoZVA

Tercer contacto: 1981, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Xochimilco (UAM-X)

Fue precisamente en 1979, por una invitación de Antonio Paoli, que comencé mi carrera como profesor-investigador con dedicación completa en la carrera de comunicación. En ella prevalecía un decidido giro semiológico francés que privilegiaba el análisis del discurso, las relaciones de poder y la producción de mensajes alternativos.

Mi propuesta se centró en balancear esa perspectiva semiológica y económica con el estudio de la producción cotidiana de la hegemonía en las zonas que por lo general no habían sido trabajadas en los estudios mexicanos y para ello nadie mejor que la visión marxista de Gramsci y la visión lógico-demo-antropológica de Cirese.

Por esos tiempos formé y coordiné un área de investigación que llevó el nombre de “Comunicación, Hegemonía y Culturas Subalternas”⁴. Difícilmente se podría negar la impronta gramsciana y ciresiana. Para reforzar el trabajo, invité a Cirese a dar un seminario de todo un mes en esa universidad. A él acudieron estudiosos de varias partes del país, no solo antropólogos. A diferencia del Seminario de 1979, en esta ocasión lo que le pedí a Cirese fue que desarrollara con amplitud su concepción de *desniveles de cultura* y la conceptualización de la hegemonía en Gramsci, concepto que después de mis dos primeras investigaciones académicas, se volvió el centro de mi trabajo. Debo decir que ese segundo seminario me permitió conversar, discutir y polemizar con una amplia red de colegas que me dio una visión del campo y amplió mi capital social en el campo de los estudiosos de la cultura en México.

Es 1981 el año en que me gradué de maestría. Mi trabajo, asesorado otra vez por Giménez, tuvo tres ejes conceptuales y una construcción metodológica bien definida. El estudio de la cultura de campesinos mestizos e indígenas de una zona muy alejada y asilada con técnicas etnográficas lo había encarado conceptualmente desde tres ejes: los desniveles internos de cultura (Cirese), la formación del habitus de clase (Bourdieu) y las lógicas de producción del valor (Fossaert).

Como dicho texto tenía una genealogía del concepto de cultura que aprendí directamente de Giménez, la UAM-X la publicó en los Cuadernos del TICOM y se usaba como material de trabajo para los estudiantes. Posteriormente la Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, Campus Mexicali lo publicó como libro (González 1990)⁵.

Así, las enseñanzas de Cirese comenzaron a ser estudiadas en México, pero no en las escuelas de antropología o sociología, sino en las de comunicación. El texto fue muy bien recibido, y siguiendo los consejos de Cirese, a pesar de haber mostrado mis lagunas, comprendí que lo que de verdad me había propuesto, es decir, aportar elementos para comprender *cómo se construye la hegemonía* en esa zona tan aislada social y geográficamente, no lo logré. Después al revisar críticamente mi trabajo de la sierra, comprendí que la relación social de hegemonía tenía que construirse no en lo que separa a las culturas, sino en lo que pueden *compartir*. La propuesta de Cirese sobre

4. La carrera de comunicación de la UAM-X fue diseñada como una excepción a las demás carreras de la disciplina. Se pretendía formar estrategias de la comunicación.

5. Ese mismo texto fue traducido al portugués (Gonzalez 2016).

las “formaciones culturales transclasistas o elementalmente humanas” me daba una dirección muy relevante. De ahí salió mi propuesta de los *Frentes Culturales*⁶ como una categoría teórica y metodológica para estudiar la construcción de la hegemonía más cerca de la vida cotidiana, que le debe mucho a Cirese y su interpretación de Gramsci al estudio de lo popular en las culturas.

Lalo González

El corrido de Gumaro Sotero

www.youtube.com/watch?v=MUaLnAMSNCg

Cuarto contacto: 1982

Una vez pasado el efecto de aquel seminario intensivo con Cirese y con la nueva red de relaciones que se generó a partir del seminario de 1981 y otros contactos que aportó Guillermo Bonfil, desde esa área de investigación en la UAM-X convocamos en julio de 1982 a un encuentro internacional de discusión que me permitió traer de Italia a Pietro Clemente (Siena), Amalia Signorelli (Napoli) y de nuevo a Cirese (Roma) para conversar con otros académicos. En ese mismo año, la Ciudad de México fue sede del X Congreso Mundial de Sociología de la International Sociological Association (ISA) donde fui encargado de organizar una mesa temática sobre las Culturas Populares. Ahí presenté por primera vez los rudimentos de la propuesta de los Frentes Culturales⁷.

El efecto se multiplicó y poco a poco la lectura *ciresiana* de las ideas de Gramsci comenzaron a dialogar con otras perspectivas desde la comunicación, la educación, la sociología y otras disciplinas. La exploración crítica de estas se construyó como el *filón gramsciano* en los estudios no solo políticos o de análisis de coyuntura, sino en los estudios sobre la cultura y la comunicación tuvo una recepción especialmente importante en Brasil (Marques de

6. Esa fue la idea que organizó mi trabajo para estudiar el doctorado. Todo estaba listo para ser parte de la primera generación de la apertura de este grado en Roma con Cirese, pero por diversas cuestiones no se abrió en ahí sino en el sur de Italia. Regresé de Roma y me inscribí en la Universidad Iberoamericana, que aceptó la tutoría teórica de Cirese y la tutoría metodológica de Rolando García (González 2018: 303-305).

7. Una síntesis de mi tesis sobre las ferias urbanas como Frentes Culturales (González 1991) fue premiada en el 1st. Worldwide Competition for Young Sociologists, organizado por Daniel Bertaux en el XII Congreso de la ISA en Madrid, 1990.

Melo y Fernández 2013). Sin embargo, no conozco traducciones de alguna obra de Cirese al portugués. Las ideas de Gramsci circulaban en el sur del continente, especialmente en Argentina donde los usos de Gramsci (Portantiero 1977) estuvieron muy cercanos a la militancia política y resistencia en los tiempos de la Operación Cóndor y las dictaduras en el cono sur de América y el Gramsci de la renovación del interés por el estudio de la hegemonía son dos ejemplos de las diversas lecturas de su obra⁸. La construcción de la hegemonía tendría que hacerse (y se ha hecho en la historia) sobre formas simbólicas en las que puedan reconocerse diferentes clases sociales.

En la marea posmodernista y la declarada defunción de los grandes discursos, la reflexión de Cirese sobre Gramsci y Croce respecto a la poesía popular resultó central. La perspectiva marxista de Gramsci era capaz de enriquecerse con la propuesta de Croce. Al contrario, la propuesta del llamado Papa Laico, revienta por completo si le incorporamos la relación entre cultura y clases sociales. La teoría de Gramsci es más potente.

Al mismo tiempo, la obra de Cirese alerta contra el “pansemiotismo”, del que a partir de su concepto de fabrilidad, signicidad y lo elementalmente humano hace, en mi opinión, una demoleadora crítica a esas derivaciones de la lectura de Levi-Strauss. Muchas lecciones en la mesa. La perspectiva marxista y gramsciana de las clases sociales no se deja diluir entre las formas complejas para expresar sentimientos complejos, pero hay que investigarla. Del otro lado, la perspectiva semiótica tiene pertinencia en la especificidad del análisis, no se puede separar de su componente material: también hay que documentarla, analizarla y discutirla detalladamente.

La Dinastía de Tuzantla
El campesino y el sol⁹

www.youtube.com/watch?v=KiPBKygbtG4

8. Mi primera traducción de un texto de Cirese dentro del campo académico de la comunicación, fue publicado en 1983 como pieza central de un dossier sobre las culturas populares en el número 10 de la revista *Comunicación y Cultura*, dirigida por Héctor Schmucler y Armand Mattelart y editada por la UAM-X: “Cultura obrera, cultura popular y lo “elementalmente humano”.

9. Esta versión se basa en la original que se cantaba poco antes de la revolución mexicana, con una letra ajustada, pero conserva el mismo sentido que la que le encantaba escuchar a Cirese.

Quinto contacto: 1986 El Programa Cultura de la Universidad de Colima

A finales de 1983 fui a vivir con mi pequeña y joven familia a Colima, en parte para estudiar en el terreno la Feria de Colima (ciudad capital del estado del mismo nombre en el occidente de México) y en parte para armar otro proyecto de vida familiar y académica. Renuncié a mi posición definitiva en la UAM-X y entré a la Universidad de Colima para fundar, junto con Jesús Galindo y otros colegas, el Centro de Investigaciones Sociales, dentro del cual coordiné el Programa de Estudios sobre las Culturas Contemporáneas (Programa Cultura).

A diferencia de la situación de la Ciudad de México, en Colima había que hacer prácticamente todo. Iniciamos 1985 un programa de seminarios con invitados internacionales con los que queríamos contrastar nuestras ideas: Miquel Moragas i Spa (catalán), José Marques de Melo (brasileño), Graham Murdock (inglés), Jesús Martín (español-colombiano), Mabel Piccini (argentina) y Robert Fossaert (francés). Al mismo tiempo negociaba con Cirese una estancia más prolongada donde después de mucho tiempo volviera a hacer trabajo de campo (Fig. 1).



Fig.1: Cuaderno de campo de Cirese en Suchitlán (Comala, Colima), verano de 1986. Photo courtesy of Jorge A. González.



Fig.2: Programa sobre el calendario maya que Cirese desarrolló en Comala, 1986. Photo courtesy of Jorge A. González.

Para 1986 Cirese vino con Liliana Serafini a vivir a Comala y ambos trabajaron incasablemente en el archivo parroquial de Suchitlán, uno de los llamados “pueblos de indios” a ocho kilómetros al norte de Comala. El material recuperado sirvió para alimentar los datos para su modelo informático de análisis del parentesco (Fig. 2).

Alguna conferencia dio en la carrera de Comunicación de la Universidad de Colima, pero la mayor parte del tiempo lo invirtió en el trabajo de campo, asesorías sobre las cuestiones que yo trabajaba y la convivencia familiar que le fascinaba y nutría.

Su asesoría en el estudio de la relación de las telenovelas mexicanas con la sociedad fue determinante por su claridad y efectividad haciendo etnografía de las situaciones en que las familias ven dichos melodramas¹⁰. Así podemos ver que la presencia de Cirese en áreas completamente ajenas a su idea y su obra anterior, comenzaron a tener vida. También desde 1986 que fundamos *Estudios sobre las Culturas Contemporáneas* la traducción de textos de Cirese difundieron su pensamiento en el área de influencia de nuestra revista¹¹.

Su obra pensada para el campo de la antropología cultural italiana comenzó a circular y a difundirse poco a poco en otras áreas, especialmente en las de comunicación. Por una parte, eso fue una ventaja, pero al mismo tiempo una limitación debido a la relativa poca consistencia de un campo de estudios al que le cuesta mucho trabajar textos con el rigor que Cirese realizaba los suyos y que además durante décadas se ha regido por una pulsión por hacer estudios de casi cualquier cosa, a partir de modas académicas volátiles que en mi opinión le ha impedido consolidar una teoría científica de los procesos de transformación de los objetos en el dominio de la comunicación social (ver González 1997).

Tal vez este rasgo ha *silenciado* la productiva y original aportación de Cirese hacia otros campos. Mi concepción de los *Frentes culturales* y su evolución hacia la investigación y desarrollo de cibercultur@ (González 2019)¹²,

10. La relación con Italia y una beca que conseguimos con el gobierno mexicano hizo posible la estancia académica de Fabio Mugnaini, discípulo de Pietro Clemente y Piergiorgio Solinas en Colima. Con Fabio publicamos un texto a partir de lo que Cirese llamaba jocosamente el “hegemonómetro” que nos sirvió para la etnografía de hogares de diversas ciudades de México (Mugnaini, González 1986). El uso de dicho protocolo estuvo detrás del primer premio nacional de tesis en toda la historia de la Universidad de Colima y el estudio realizado por tres estudiantes de comunicación, fue publicado como (Covarrubias Cuéllar, Bautista y Uribe 1994).

11. Nuestra revista ha publicado traducciones de cuatro textos de Cirese desde 1986 y su circulación cubre toda América Latina, España, Portugal, Estados Unidos de América y más recientemente en formato digital, China. Descargables en: www.redalyc.org/revista.oa?id=316.

12. Esta obra ha sido publicada en 2007 en Argentina y fue traducida al portugués en 2012. En ella hay 21 referencias directas a siete obras distintas de Cirese. Sin embargo, no veo que se haya percibido su importancia teórica en Iberoamérica.

entendida en el mundo anglosajón como “cultural governance” (Tufte, 2017: 106-123) es impensable sin su obra. A pesar de las traducciones y referencias constantes a su legado, me parece que la obra de Cirese se ha relegado al silencio en un campo al que mucho le ayudaría conocerle.

Atahualpa Yupanqui
Le tengo rabia al silencio
www.youtube.com/watch?v=k5IUqqE7RX8

Sexta: de salida

Después de su estancia de campo en Comala, me metí de lleno a coordinar la investigación sobre la relación entre la sociedad mexicana y el melodrama televisivo. Ese proyecto realizado por una red de varias instituciones y ciudades del país se llevó seis años completos. La colaboración estrecha con Cirese bajó el ritmo y siempre que podía, pasaba a saludarle a su casa de Piazza Capri 11. Cuando viene a Toluca en 1987 estábamos en pleno proceso de campo y prácticamente no tuvimos contacto. Después por cuestiones de concursos y alguna dolencia agravada con la edad, le impidieron regresar a México.

Todo el diseño del Sistema Nacional de Información Cultural (SNIC) que realicé en 1991 a petición de Guillermo Bonfil para el Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes de México siempre tuvo como alter la rigurosa pasión lógica con la que nuestro profesor enfrentaba los retos. En julio de ese mismo año, unas horas después de que conversamos por teléfono sobre los avances en las metas de la producción de los sistemas y los discos compactos que por convenio se firmaron con la Universidad de Colima para el SNIC, Bonfil muere en un desafortunado accidente. Yo había sido invitado a la Universidad Complutense de Madrid para realizar un año sabático en 1992. Esto me sirvió para poder escribir *ex post facto* el marco metodológico que desarrollamos para las tres grandes fases del proyecto del Melodrama Televisivo.

A mi regreso a México, es en 1993 cuando con muchas dificultades retomamos el módulo de información básica del SNIC y comenzamos el trabajo de investigación sobre la Formación de las ofertas culturales y sus públicos en México. El objetivo era formar, capacitar y desarrollar una red nacional de investigación básica sobre la cultura en México que pudiera nutrir el SNIC y pudiera ser usado para documentar la toma de decisiones en políticas culturales. La producción de esa investigación involucró la coordinación de más de 150 colegas en 10 ciudades de México durante un año.

Para tal empresa, tuve como asesores a un pequeño grupo de especialistas con los que discutí y mejoré el proyecto y sus partes: Paul Thompson (Essex), Daniel Bertaux (CNRS), Pierre Bourdieu (College de France), Eugenia Meyer (UNAM), Elizabeth Jelín (UBA) y por supuesto, Alberto Cirese de Roma. En el proyecto más ambicioso y complejo que realicé, Alberto siempre estuvo cerca para escuchar, comentar, recomendar, prevenir.

Lo vi algunas veces más en su casa, ya bastante disminuido de salud, pero siempre lúcido y memorioso de los agradables momentos que vivió en México.

Cirese, desde que apareció en mi vida académica en aquel texto en francés, cumplió cabalmente su ofrecimiento de procurarme “patrocinio científico” (agrego, permanente) en mi carrera. Lo recuerdo muy bien, su voz, su eterno cigarrillo en la mano, su delicada y amorosa relación con mi familia, sus ojos vivaces y llenos de energía.

Su humor y su caminar con su inseparable bolsa al lado, que se fue encorvando cada vez más con el paso del tiempo y el golpe de los accidentes y enfermedades.

Por eso me gusta recordar lo que él mismo le escribió a Vittorio Lanternari:

In questa tarda vigilia, e breve, che ci resta, caro Vittorio, ci dà forza la onesta coscienza dei doveri che abbiamo sentito come nostri, e ci tiene uniti il rinnovarsi tra noi del tuo caro saluto al modo antico. Alberto (Lombardozzi & Mariotti, 2008: 299)

Alberto Cirese, querido Alberto, que tomó esta profesión como un servicio y lo cumplió con alegría, con calidad y con reconocimiento.

Y “para que la pena no parezca tanto pena”, como dicen los payadores, cierro con una de las canciones que más le gustaba que cantara.

Siempre me la pedía. Siempre se la cantaba. Como al *modo antiguo*.

Atahualpa Yupanqui

El alazán

www.youtube.com/watch?v=KtRYttkAH7A

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