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# ANTONIO GRAMSCI

(1891-1937)

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Many Italian intellectuals who have a place in European history spent their lives and wrote their best essays while in prison or in exile. The more relevant their thoughts and actions were for the people's cultural and educational development, the more repressed and the more deformed was their message.

Just as Tommaso Campanella (1568-1638) wrote the first Italian 'Utopia' (*La città del sole*) during his twenty-seven years of incarceration, so also did Antonio Gramsci write in prison the most important draft on the educational and political function of intellectuals: 2,848 pages of handwritten notes which are known today as the 'Prison notebooks' (*Quaderni del carcere*).<sup>2</sup>

What should have been, according to his original intention, a critical analysis of the history of Italian intellectuals, became a prophecy on the destiny of his own work, his message and the way others perceive him.

According to Gramsci's analysis, the best known and the most positive function of many Italian intellectuals has been (and perhaps still is) 'cosmopolitan', i.e. universal, and therefore more relevant to western or even world civilization than to Italy, i.e. relevant for the awareness and the growth of the cultural identity of Italian people. The reason for this lies in the historical separation, more evident in Italy than in other European countries, between cultural development, intellectual 'work' in a traditional sense, and political leadership.<sup>3</sup>

Education is a field where theory and practice, culture and politics inevitably merge together, and where intellectual research and achievement combine with social and political action. However, a distinction, if not an opposition, between these two aspects of education is not uncommon and the ideological use of culture and science often pushes toward both the 'neutralization' of the educational and political effects of cultural development and the 'justification' of the political power by domesticated theories, which, therefore, can be defined as 'ideologies'. It is difficult, within the traditional division and separation of disciplines and fields of cultural research, to define all of that 'education', since education is consistently related to the growth of children and the schooling of pupils, no matter whether from nursery school or university.

A profile of Gramsci as an 'educator', however, is not based on the few pages which can be found within his writings on school and education in a traditional sense, but rather on the assumption that the core of Gramsci's message and even the purpose of his writings is profoundly and largely 'educational'.

The early life and youth of Antonio Gramsci coincide with the first industrial and economic development of Italy. Despite the peculiarities of Italian society (i.e. the marked differences between North and South, the variety of regions, dialects and traditions, the long domination of different foreign powers and last, but not least, the domination of the Catholic Church centred on Rome), at the beginning of the twentieth century a great effort was made by the industrial and financial world to 'modernize' Italian society based on the model of central European countries. Within the 'positivistic'

approach to science, technology and education, a parallel development in the ‘scientific organization of work’ (i.e. taylorism for industrial production) and a scientific organization of culture and education was gradually implemented under the governments of Giolitti.<sup>4</sup> For a short time before the First World War Italy enjoyed a period of apparent social peace, imposed at the end of the nineteenth century by reactionary governments, justified by the need for colonial conquest and paid for by a large haemorrhage of southern Italians migrating abroad—to the Americas or to Australia.

Gramsci was born in Sardinia, one of the poorest regions of Italy, which, as is often the case with islands, has maintained its own strong cultural identity. It has its own language, history and culture, which differ considerably from those of the ‘Piemontese’ who ruled the Sardinian Kingdom from Turin in the northern part of the mainland. It was to Turin that Antonio Gramsci went to study at university, but which he eventually had to abandon due to lack of money and severe health problems. Turin was, at that time, the centre of Italian industrialization and the focus of the first organization of the Italian working class.

Gramsci started his political and educational apprenticeship during the First World War as a journalist and theatre reporter, attending, frequently in the evening, the meetings of the *Confederazione Generale del Lavoro* trade union and socialist party. After the war, within the core of ‘red’ socialist Turin, he created two journals, *Ordine Nuovo* and *Unità*, with an explicit function: to educate the new working class created by industry and the war.

The most prevalent theme of the *Ordine Nuovo* was the relationship between the ‘scientific management of work’ (taylorism and fordism) and the scientific management of education and training. However, this relationship, which has now been recognized by many as the beginning of the educational sciences, was not, for Gramsci, intended to be simply an intellectual exercise. A few years before the war, scientific research on Italian education had already been drastically marginalized and repressed by the dominant hegemony of the idealistic philosophers, Croce and Gentile, who considered this field of studies as a branch of philosophy, ethics or even religion. In 1923, Giovanni Gentile, the first secretary of State for education of the new fascist government, reformed the whole Italian school system by emphasizing the ideological division between technical and vocational preparation (for work), and cultural and scientific preparation for the ‘spiritual’ development of mankind and, of course, for political leadership.

Gramsci was developing a different approach to these problems, which did not fall into the positivistic arrogance of solving human problems through science and technology, nor into the idealistic illusion of the ‘independence’ of intellectual and cultural life from economic and political determinants. The link between the organization of work and the organization of culture was rather envisaged by Gramsci as the new ‘professional culture’, the new technical and vocational preparation needed by manpower (from the skilled worker to the manager) to control and to lead industrial development, as well as the society which this development inevitably generates.

After 1917, the soviet revolution captured the attention of the working class movements more than that of the internal problems of any other nation emerging from one of the worst European wars ever. The Socialist Party in Italy, as in many other countries, became split not only between the ‘reformists’ and the ‘communists’, but also between the ‘reformists’ and the ‘nationalists’, the latter soon becoming the populist section of the fascist party and, a few years later, the national-socialist (i.e. nazi) regime.

From 1922, the fascist regime in Italy brought to a complete halt any attempt to find democratic solutions, not only to economic problems, but also to the social, cultural and educational growth of the masses. In November 1926, Mussolini’s government adopted ‘special legislation’, which dissolved the Italian Parliament and all remaining opposition organizations, and also banned their

publications. Within the massive series of arrests that followed, Antonio Gramsci was jailed. He was 35 years old, a member of parliament and had been, from 1924, general secretary of the Italian Communist Party. At his trial, in 1928, the official prosecutor ended his peroration with the following statement to the judge: 'We must stop this brain working for twenty years!'

It was already evident to the fascist regime that the most dangerous opposition would come not just from political action in the traditional sense (i.e. an organization) or from an intellectual protest based only on principles, but rather from the blending of both intellectual and political criticism and action.

Gramsci's brain did not stop working in prison. On the contrary, soon after his arrest he began to make plans to conduct research on what is now considered as the most important analysis on 'hegemony', i.e. on the links between politics and education. In a letter to his sister-in-law, Tatiana, dated 9 March 1927,<sup>5</sup> he speaks about a project to write something *für ewig* (for ever), something which would also serve to absorb him and 'give a focus to [his] inner life'. The first point of the plan refers to a history of Italian intellectuals; then he speaks of studies on linguistics, on the theatre of Pirandello and on serial novels and popular literary taste. Even if the study plan was meant to be *für ewig*, which means for the sake of knowledge and not for practical or political purposes, the same letter already shows a common thread underlying all the different subjects. He defines the history of intellectuals as the process of 'formation of the public spirit' and, finally, he writes that the different topics of his plan have in common 'the creative popular spirit', i.e. the way the hegemony of a certain social group grows up, from the soul of the group, toward its political organization.

In fact, in another letter to Tatiana<sup>5</sup> he says: 'thinking "disinterestedly" or study for its own sake are difficult for me [...] I do not like throwing stones in the dark; I like to have a concrete interlocutor or adversary', and he speaks of the 'polemical nature' of his entire intellectual formation.

Gramsci died in 1937 without having had the possibility of completing his work. His thirty-three prison notebooks were saved by his sister-in-law, Tatiana, and smuggled out of Italy. He had written a good deal before his imprisonment,<sup>6</sup> but his reputation as one of the major Italian thinkers and educators rests on the 'Letters from Prison' and the 'Prison Notebooks'.

Only after the fall of the fascist regime and the ending of the Second World War, between 1947 and 1951, was a first edition of the prison writings brought out by the Turin publisher Einaudi in six volumes. They were edited by Felice Platone and directly supervised by the general secretary of the Italian Communist Party, Palmiro Togliatti. The first volume was a selection of Gramsci's letters from prison,<sup>7</sup> which received the 'Viareggio Prize', the most prestigious Italian award for literature.

1947 was the year when the alliance between the two largest and most popular political forces involved in the defeat of the fascist regime—the Christian Democrats and the Communist Party—led the country for a few months, and Gramsci would become the symbol of fascist persecution and anti-fascist resistance. However, it was also the beginning of a sort of sanctification of Gramsci within the Olympus of traditional intellectuals: Gramsci as a philosopher, as a historian, as a political scientist, as a literature reviewer and, quite incidentally, as an educator, inasmuch as he wrote some words on school and education. The structure of the first edition of Gramsci's prison notebooks reveals how much his work could have been 're-absorbed into more traditional forms of thinking'.<sup>8</sup> The six volumes of this edition are a thematic collection of the many notes, whose order is therefore rearranged according to the different themes:<sup>9</sup> philosophy first and, above all, 'Marxism'; secondly, culture, and intellectuals as a separate subject; then Italian history, politics and literature; and the remaining, apparently miscellaneous notes.

The editorial construction of the image of Gramsci was justified and explained by the particular situation in which the notes were written and left. Given the incomplete nature of the work, its

‘fragmentary’ character and the uncertain status of Gramsci’s intentions, the editors were encouraged to give it a more coherent and readable form. The irony was that frequently Gramsci, in his notes, pointed out the difference between the writings of an author and his or her intentions, on the one hand, and their ‘fortune’, on the other, which it is necessary to observe whenever one wants to understand the real ‘educational’ meaning of the author’s message.

It was only in 1975, after important changes in the Italian political and cultural milieu, that a critical edition of the prison notebooks appeared,<sup>10</sup> reproducing the complete texts as they were written. This means, therefore, that they were reproduced in the same order and in the different versions that Gramsci had written them, sometimes crossed out with a thin pen-line and frequently re-written in another more ‘monographic’ notebook.

It has been shown, by a philological comparison of the two editions, that it is possible to have two quite different images of Gramsci.<sup>11</sup> The faithful reproduction of his work is much less ‘fragmentary’ than one would have believed; through the different themes, which in fact inspired most of the titles of the first edition, there is a deep unity, a strong common message, insistently repeated. By giving examples from different fields (philosophy, history, literature, the organization of culture and schools), Gramsci wished to discover (and wished to educate toward the discovery of) the real ‘intellectual function’ within societies, a function which is—always and inseparably—educational and political. Inasmuch as the first edition portrays Gramsci as a leading intellectual figure, emphasizing the traditional image of the intellectual, possibly a multifaceted Renaissance man, finding even in prison the road to spiritual freedom through reading, studying and writing for posterity, the centre of his image was missing. In the early 1950s it was probably not possible, either in the West and or in the East, to reveal the truth. The dominating force of culture, whether conservative or progressive, was not ready to be the ‘object’ of itself, to let someone reveal its own ‘material’ and political roots.

The central message of Gramsci is that the organization of culture is ‘organic’ to the dominant power. Intellectuals cannot be defined as such by the job they do, but rather by the role they play within society; this function is always, more or less consciously, that of the technical and political ‘leadership’ of a group, either the dominant group or another, tending towards a dominant position.

Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates organically, together with itself, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields.<sup>12</sup>

The first example of an ‘intellectual’ given by Gramsci is: ‘the capitalist entrepreneur’, who creates, ‘alongside himself, the industrial technician, the specialist in political economy, the organizer of a new culture, of a new legal system, etc. [...] The entrepreneur himself represents a higher level of social organization, already characterized by a certain managerial and technical (i.e. intellectual) capacity’. This is Gramsci’s definition of ‘organic’ intellectuals and their function, which is, at one and the same time, technical and political. However, we must understand why many intellectuals ‘put themselves forward as autonomous and independent of the dominant group’, and believe themselves to be a distinctive social group. This is because ‘every “essential” social group which emerges into history out of the preceding economic structure [...] has found (at least in all of history up to the present) categories of intellectuals already in existence and which, indeed, seemed to represent an historical continuity uninterrupted even by the most complicated and radical changes in political and social forms’.<sup>13</sup> Examples of this type of intellectual, which Gramsci defines as ‘intellectuals of the traditional type’, are the ecclesiastics and a full stratum of administrators, scholars, scientists, theorists, non-ecclesiastical philosophers, etc. It is not by chance that until now many of these intellectuals have been defined in

English as ‘clerks’, while other similar words derived from the Latin *clericus* describe, in many other languages, this traditional form of intellectual work.

If we want to find a ‘unitary criterion to characterize all the diverse and disparate activities of intellectuals and to distinguish these at the same time and in an essential way from the activities of other social groupings’, it is an ‘error of method’ to look only into ‘the distinctive nature of intellectual activities, rather than at the whole system of relations in which these activities [...] have their place within the general complex of social relations’.

Criticism of the traditional distinction between ‘manual work’ and ‘intellectual work’ is one of the most important steps toward a new theory of education. Following Gramsci, this distinction is ideological as far as it diverts attention from the real functions within social and working life towards the ‘technicalities’ of working.

In any physical work, even the most degrading and mechanical, there exists a minimum of [...] intellectual activity. [...] All men are intellectuals, one could therefore say: but not all men have the function of intellectuals in society. [...] There is no human activity from which every form of intellectual participation can be excluded: *homo faber* cannot be separated from *homo sapiens*.<sup>14</sup>

The educational implications of Gramsci’s analysis are developed throughout the twelfth notebook (from which we have taken the above quotations). This notebook is a long ‘monograph’ into which Gramsci incorporated several texts taken and partially rewritten from other notebooks. His message is not at all ambiguous and finishes with this famous conclusion:

The mode of being the new intellectual can no longer consist of eloquence, [...] but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer, ‘permanent persuader’ and not just a simple orator [...]; from technique-as-work one proceeds to technique-as-science and to the humanistic conception of history, without which one remains ‘specialized’ and does not become ‘directive’ (specialized and political).<sup>15</sup>

The separation between classical and technical education, which tends to reflect the social division between intellectual and manual work, must be revealed as ideological, hiding the real division, which is rather between ‘directive’ and ‘subaltern’ roles in society, no matter whether the job which characterizes a group of persons is called intellectual or manual. As far as education in a strict sense is concerned, Gramsci suggests that ‘in the modern world, technical education, closely bound to industrial labour even at the most primitive and unskilled level, must form the basis of the new type of intellectual’. This means education for all, therefore, and close links between school and work, as well as between technical and humanistic education.

The analysis of Gramsci on the educational and political levels is not limited to the twelfth notebook—which we consider, however, to be central—but is rather spread throughout all of his prison writings. The nineteenth notebook, again a monographic second draft of a collection of texts about the *Risorgimento* (Italian history preceding national unity), cannot be considered purely as an historical overview. The longest text of this notebook (twenty-four pages from page 119 onwards) deals with the ‘problem of political leadership in the formation and development of the nation and the modern State in Italy’.<sup>16</sup> There, we find the same analysis, explicitly based on:

the methodological consistency of a criterion of historico-political research: no independent class of intellectuals exists, but every social group has its own stratum of intellectuals, or tends to form one; however, the intellectuals of the historically (and actually) progressive class, in each particular circumstances, exercise such a power of attraction that, in the final analysis, they end up by subjugating the intellectuals of the other social groups; they thereby create a system of solidarity between all intellectuals, with bonds of a psychological nature (vanity, etc.) and often of a caste character (technico-juridical, corporate, etc.).

From the analysis of the development of a new ruling class, Gramsci makes an important difference between 'direction' and 'domination.' This had already been made by Lenin, in order to focus on the differences between the use of force (in the so-called 'temporary' phase of proletarian dictatorship) and the use of cultural hegemony to obtain the consent of the people. However, this distinction has a different meaning for Gramsci, as far as he speaks about society being 'directed' by a new social class 'before' this class enters the government. The function of 'organic' intellectuals is that of the 'intellectual and moral' leadership of society by means of education and the organization of culture, rather than by the traditional means of legal and forceful coercion.

Within the tenth and eleventh notebooks, dealing with 'philosophy' and an account of the important role played by the Italian intellectual Benedetto Croce during the First World War and the subsequent fascist regime, we find the same analysis and other important developments. The central theme is 'political hegemony' as an educational process.

It is essential to destroy—he says—the widespread prejudice that philosophy is a strange and difficult thing because it is the specific intellectual activity of a particular category of specialists or professional or 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.

This philosophy is contained in the language itself, in 'common sense' and in popular religion, i.e. 'in the entire system of beliefs, superstitions, opinions, ways of regarding things and of behaving'. The real problem, therefore, is not one of being a philosopher or not, but rather whether 'to take part in a conception of the world mechanically imposed by the external environment, i.e. by one of the many social groups in which everyone is automatically involved from the moment of his entry into the conscious world', or 'to work out consciously and critically one's own conception of the world and thus, through the labour of one's own brain, to choose one's sphere of activity, take an active part in the creation of the history of the world, be one's own guide, refusing to accept passively and apathetically the molding of one's personality from the outside'.<sup>17</sup>

One of the most debated topics within his theories of education is the relationship between 'spontaneity' and 'conformity'. Gramsci deals with this problem both in the analysis of the passage from 'spontaneous philosophy' to 'critical thinking', and in his notes on school, education and 'active education'. 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 behaving. We are all conformists of some conformity or another, always the man-in-the-street or collective man. The question is: of what historical type is the conformity, the human mass to which we belong?

A similar, though more crude, analysis on what 'conformity' is can be found in the twenty-second notebook on Americanism and Fordism. The new Tayloristic organization of work had created, for the first time in history, a radical 'massification' of the man at work, and Gramsci seems to consider it as a step forward from the primitive, even animal condition of human kind, toward a new type of man.

The history of industrialization has always been a continuing struggle (which today takes on an even more marked and vigorous form) against the characteristic of 'animality' in man. It has been an uninterrupted, often painful and bloody process of subjugating natural (i.e. animal and primitive) instincts to new, more complex and rigid habits of order, exactitude and precision, making possible the increasingly complex forms of collective life which are the necessary consequence of industrial development. [...] Up to now all changes in modes of existence and modes of life have taken place through brute coercion [...] The selection or 'education' of men adapted to the new forms of civilization and to the new forms of production and work has taken place by means of incredible acts of brutality which have driven the weak and the non-conformists into the limbo of outcasts or eliminated them altogether.<sup>18</sup>

The crude and realistic language used by Gramsci to describe the process of ‘educating’ large masses of people for adaptation to the contemporary transformations of the economy made many scholars believe that he was in favour of an authoritarian pedagogy.<sup>19</sup> On one side, he was superficially identified with various trends of Marxist education in the USSR, and therefore his ‘theory of education’ was considered nearer to Lenin’s theory of the ‘proletarian dictatorship’, if not with the Makarenko’s methods of re-education for maladjusted young people. On the other side, Gramsci himself wrote some pieces opposing ‘some principles of modern education’, such as those coming from the ‘Geneva tradition’ of Rousseau and Pestalozzi, for which the ‘spontaneous development of the child’s personality’ must not be disturbed or deformed by the intervention of the educator. In some of his letters and in one of the first notes he criticizes the ‘illusion’ about the ‘spontaneous development’ of the child: from the first moment of his or her life, the child is educated to ‘conform’ to the environment, and school is only a small ‘fraction’ of one’s life. ‘Education is always a struggle against the instincts related to the basic biological functions, a struggle against nature, to dominate it and to create the “actual” human being’.<sup>20</sup> And the effort of learning, the psychological and physical discipline necessary for studying and for any educational achievement are not ‘pleasant’: ‘it is a process of adaptation, a habit acquired with effort, tedium and even suffering’.<sup>21</sup>

While one could have some doubts about Gramsci’s actual opinion of ‘pedagogic’, i.e. teaching methods at school or in the family, because of the relatively small development of these topics within his work, the general theory of education coming from Gramsci’s thinking is unequivocal.

Any interpretation of Gramsci’s theory of education could be misleading if we do not differentiate between his ‘descriptive’ and his ‘prescriptive’ approach. The term ‘conformity’ does not mean for Gramsci the negative tendency of people to let themselves be driven and conditioned by ‘fashion’, but rather an instrument for the interpretation of the process through which the majority of the population, within any society and under any regime, usually follows tradition and sticks to the regulations.

Conformity, then, means nothing other than ‘sociality’, but it is nice to use the word ‘conformity’ precisely because it annoys imbeciles. [...] It is too easy to be original simply by doing the opposite of what everyone else is doing [...]. What is really difficult is to put the stress on discipline and sociality and still profess sincerity, spontaneity, originality and personality.<sup>22</sup>

The real problem for education is therefore in the awareness of the different types of ‘conformity’, i.e. socialization, which are proposed or imposed within a given society and the struggle for one rather than another. The real innovation of Gramsci’s general theory of education is the ‘scientific’ approach to what education really is, at any level, from political leadership to social ‘conformity’, and up to the school and family life. However, following the traditional value-oriented approach to education, one could ask some delicate questions. Does Gramsci’s theory necessarily imply a cynical perspective on education? Can we have criteria to ‘prescribe’ rather than purely ‘describe’ the type of education that would be preferable?

These questions imply the analysis of values and beliefs, i.e. the problem of ‘ideology’ and its function in the modern society. We can translate our questions in the following ways: can education be without ideology? If it cannot, how can we prefer one ideology to another?

In the first step of analysing ‘ideologies’, Gramsci clarifies that ‘ideologies do not exist in themselves’; they are deformations of theories resulting from a theory becoming a ‘doctrine’, i.e. not an instrument for understanding the reality but rather a set of moral principles for ‘orienting’ practical actions and human behaviour. This development from theory to doctrine and into ‘ideology’ is not ‘spontaneous’, arising from inside the theory itself, but rather ‘organic’ to the political use of theories,

which is itself 'ideological'. 'Ideology' is an adjective, one could say, given that we do not have ideologies in a proper sense, but rather the ideological, i.e. educational use of theories and doctrines.

One of the few notes which remained unpublished before the critical edition of the *Quaderni del carcere*, gives us Gramsci's definition of 'ideology': ideology is 'a scientific hypothesis which has a dynamic educational character and is verified and criticized by the actual development of history'.<sup>23</sup>

The critical function of education, which also seems to be essential in Gramsci's thoughts, could be put at risk if we believe it necessary to relate education to ideology. It is difficult to say what education should be according to Gramsci, since he seems to be more interested in revealing what education actually is.

Another similar 'case study', to which Gramsci frequently refers, is the one of Machiavelli. His name and the adjective 'machievellian' still recall the brutal and perverse aspects of political power, because he 'described' what politics really was (and perhaps always will be), rather than suggesting what politics could be.

Gramsci and Machiavelli leave us with an important question: what is the 'educational' function of a precise description of the mechanisms of political power, and, in the case of Gramsci, of the mechanisms of ideology? That of educating people toward a realistic approach and therefore towards the political struggle opposing one power with another, or that of revealing to the people the hidden side of politics, to make them diffident and independent from political power in living their lives and choosing their opinions?

Many signals lead us to believe that Gramsci's aim was not purely 'descriptive' and he suggests a strategy for a new type of education.

First of all, his interpretation of 'machievellian policy': when writing about the role played by Machiavelli in the scientific description of 'politics', Gramsci poses to himself and to all of us these questions: 'whom' was Machiavelli addressing when writing *The Prince*? and what was his aim and his 'policy'? It seems to be evident that he did not wish, and he did not need, to teach rulers how to achieve power and how to maintain power, but rather he wanted to explain and make known the real mechanism of politics. The 'policy' of Machiavelli is not 'politics' according to Machiavelli, because the educational effect of a critical understanding of politics made new classes more aware and therefore more powerful against the old aristocratic ruling class.

Secondly, the scientific and 'descriptive' process in itself introduces a new conception of 'critical thinking'; according to common sense, criticism is a sort of opposition against what we do not want; on the contrary, 'critical thought' is not, for Gramsci, a theoretical game which opposes one theory with another, one ideology with another, or the 'idealistic illusion' that theory, culture and, therefore, education could be 'independent' from their historical 'material' basis. For Gramsci, critical thinking is the continuous research and discovery of the material bases of theory, i.e. criticism of the ideological use of theory. Finally, Gramsci is not 'scientifically neutral' in his educational strategy. In his opinion, there is one particular ideological, i.e. educational, approach which is preferable to any other, not for theoretical reasons, for one is 'true' and the others are 'false', but rather for practical reasons: that is the 'philosophy of praxis', an ideological instrument for widening the awareness of the masses about the mechanism of politics and culture, awareness about the historical and economical determination of ideas, and therefore rendering them more able to master their own lives, to 'lead their own society and to control those who lead'.

Here is the focus of different and perhaps opposite interpretations of Gramsci's 'profile'.

'Philosophy of praxis' was identified by the editor of the first edition of Gramsci's notebooks purely and simply with 'Marxism' and 'historical and dialectic materialism'.<sup>24</sup> It was argued that Gramsci, in the work he wrote in prison, used to conceal behind key-words or paraphrases the names

and definitions which could have made the censor interrupt his work. This is only partially true, if we consider that it was not unknown, both inside and outside the prison, that he had been sentenced to jail as the leader of the Italian Communist party. In the case of the expression 'philosophy of praxis', it is evident that it is not the equivalent of 'Marxism'.

An analysis of the many points of discord between Gramsci and the 'official' and 'orthodox' doctrine of Marxism, which was being developed in the USSR while Gramsci was in prison, would take much more space than is available in a 'profile' about Gramsci. It is enough to note that Gramsci wrote many notes strongly critical of the vulgarization of Marxism conducted by Bukharin on behalf of Stalin (before Bukharin himself became the victim of Stalinism). Moreover, it is known that Gramsci in prison disagreed with many of his comrades from the Italian Communist party on the development of Marxism in Europe.

'Philosophy of praxis' is, for Gramsci, an autonomous term to define what he saw to be a central characteristic of Marx's heritage: the inseparable link it establishes between theory and practice, thought and action. The originality of 'philosophy of praxis' stands, according to Gramsci, in that it is the only 'ideology' which could be critical of itself, i.e. able to discover the 'material' (i.e. economic and political) roots of all doctrines (including, therefore, Marxism itself) and to adapt theory and practice continuously to each other.

One of the last ideological uses of theory, science and information seems to be, at the end of the twentieth century, the widespread message that 'ideologies fall' and 'ideologies have failed'. Within this doctrine, the old image of Gramsci as 'one of the major Marxist thinkers'<sup>25</sup> seems to be out of date and may vanish together with the disappearance of all Marxist ideas. We believe, however, that a different image of Gramsci can be found within his great work. He opened up new ways of thinking, political action and education during the 1930s, a period of world history when the three movements of dictatorship, social organization and strong conformity were in competition with each other up to the final holocaust of the Second World War. Many differences exist, of course, between Soviet stalinism, German nazism and American fordism, particularly on the constitutional and political side. However, from the point of view of the largest part of the population living under these different regimes, their conditions of work, the circumstances of their lives and the educational conformity of their societies did not allow any particular space for 'critical thought' and personal development.

This is why we believe that Gramsci's message, as it now emerges from the shadows of that historical epoch, helps us to discover a new approach to education, which is scientifically critical of all kinds of ideological and educational processes.

The main hypotheses of this theory and practice of education, which we have derived from Gramsci, are the following.

Educational processes develop in a large variety of ways and they must be studied and mastered with particular attention to the educational moments that are not usually considered educational in a strict sense. School, vocational training, adult education and university could be considered as a façade, on which the organization of culture and political power seem to be in conflict, while most of the actions of 'permanent persuasion' are taking place behind and outside the formal education system: decisions taken within the world of the media and the world of publishing, changes made in the organization of work, choices between one technology rather than another in industry and services, the system for selection and appointment of union and party officers and leaders and their function in the daily life of society, are the main arenas of the modern educational processes—concealed rather than immediately evident.

From Gramsci we can derive both a method of analysis and of educational action, focused on the types of intellectuals and the type of function they have in society, and a new educational strategy,

which can also rejuvenate the education system in a strict sense, i.e. primary, secondary and tertiary education.

As far as Gramsci's general theory of education is concerned, we believe that the new type of intellectual in modern society can be more easily found within the administrators and managers of industry and services, within the upper echelons of State administration and in central and local bureaucracy, as well as within the teaching profession and the growing sector of vocational and occupational training, rather than among the traditional 'academic' intellectual who still, however, seems to be an opinion leader. The latter is, more or less consciously, becoming rather an ideological shade for political and cultural operations, decided and implemented not *by* him, but through him.

One could disagree with Gramsci's analysis and educational strategy. But it cannot be denied that a study on the history of intellectuals, on the history of the organization of culture, has never been attempted. Intellectuals of a traditional type seem to be expert and specialists on all subjects other than themselves. This is rather meaningful and it can be explained by the arrogance (and the illusion) of believing to be the 'subject' rather than the 'object' of knowledge. However, for the intellectual function in general, and for intellectuals of a new type, the lack of awareness of their real role in society could engender a greater risk for democracy: it could mean that the real decision-making processes, namely those which are related with the cultural and political hegemony within society, are displaced from their 'natural', i.e. institutional and constitutional, ground, where popular control could be easily exercised, and are assumed by hidden powers, beyond any democratic control.

Finally, as far as the visible education system is concerned, Gramsci's approach does not mean that school and university education are irrelevant within the strategy of educating for critical thought. It suggests rather innovations in methods, contents and organization of study which should be consistent with the following main points: tighter links between school and work, and between theory and practice; a growing attention to the history of the organization of work and of the organization of culture, and therefore more interest toward the study of the 'fortune', i.e. the different interpretations, of classics and theories; and last, but not least, an open debate on the aims of education and the values on which educational action is based in a given society.

Moreover, this new educational strategy and method affects the professional status of teachers, as far as teachers do not perceive themselves as traditional intellectuals, and therefore independent from both social and political pressures. Education as a process of conformity and hegemony could disturb most teachers, particularly those who work toward helping their pupils or students to achieve more freedom and personal independence. However, the teacher's awareness of political hegemony as an educational process, for good or bad, could be the starting point for a new professionalism of teachers and educators.<sup>26</sup>

## Notes

1. *Attilio Monasta (Italy)*. Lecturer in experimental education at the University of Florence and co-ordinator of the European Communities' Network of Inter-university Co-operation Programmes in Education (NICOPED). Professional experience as a teacher in upper secondary schools (history, philosophy, psychology and education), trade union work and the management of training for industry and for trainers in Tuscany. Present interests concern the theory and history of education, the function of intellectuals in society, and the relationship between education and ideology. His most recent publication is *L'educazione tradita: criteri per una diversa valutazione complessiva dei Quaderni del carcere di A. Gramsci*
2. Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, edited by Valentino Gerratana, Turin, Einaudi, 1975 (identified as *Q* in these notes).
3. The English version of Gramsci's writings refers to the first large (though not complete) English translation of the notebooks (*Antonio Gramsci: Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, edited and translated by Q. Hoare and G.

- Nowell Smith, London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1971; identified as *N* in these notes). However, many other excerpts from the prison notebooks have been translated into English and published in another volume: *Antonio Gramsci: Selections from Cultural Writings*, edited by D. Forgacs and G. Nowell Smith. London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1985; identified as *CW* in these notes. It is interesting to note that the English translator had to make numerous references to particular difficulties of translating some words which play a central role in Gramsci's analysis, such as: 'the group of words centred around the verb *dirigere* (*dirigente*, *direttivo*, *direzione*, etc.). Here we have in part followed the normal English usage dictated by the context (e.g. *direzione* = leadership; *classe dirigente* = ruling class), but in certain cases we have translated *dirigente* and *direttivo* as "directive" in order to preserve what for Gramsci is a crucial conceptual distinction between power based on "domination" and the exercise of "direction" or "hegemony". In this context it is also worth noting that the term "hegemony" in Gramsci itself has two faces. On one hand it is contrasted with "domination" (and as such bound up with the opposition State/civil society) and on the other hand "hegemonic" is sometimes used as an opposite of "corporate" or "economic-corporate" to designate an historical phase in which a given group moves beyond a position of corporate existence and defence of its economic position and aspires to a position of leadership in the political and social area. Non-hegemonic groups or classes are also called by Gramsci "subordinate", "subaltern" or sometimes "instrumental".' (pp. xiii-xiv)
4. The first Italian translation of F.W. Taylor's *The Principles of Scientific Management* dates from 1911. In 1909 Maria Montessori, the first Italian female university graduate in medicine, had published *Il metodo della pedagogia scientifica applicata all'educazione dell'infanzia* (The Method of Scientific Education Applied to Early Childhood).
  5. Antonio Gramsci, *Lettere dal carcere*, edited by S. Caprioglio and E. Fubini, Turin, Einaudi, 1965, p. 57-60.
  6. Letter on the 15 December 1930, *ibid*, p. 389-92.
  7. Gramsci's writings of the period before his imprisonment were published by Einaudi after the six volumes of the prison notebooks (see below, note 9). Most of these writings are collected in a series of five volumes: Antonio Gramsci. *L'Ordine Nuovo (1919-20)*, Turin, Einaudi, 1954; *Scritti giovanili (1914-18)*, Turin, Einaudi, 1958; *Sotto la mole (1916-20)*, Turin, Einaudi, 1960; *Socialismo e fascismo: L'Ordine Nuovo (1921-22)*, Turin, Einaudi, 1966; *La costruzione del Partito Comunista (1923-26)*, Turin, Einaudi, 1971. His famous essay on the 'southern question', which Gramsci was writing when arrested and therefore remained unfinished, was published in 1966 (Antonio Gramsci, *La questione meridionale*, Rome, Editori Riuniti, 1966).
  8. Antonio Gramsci, *Lettere dal carcere*, Turin, Einaudi, 1947, now superseded by a more complete edition (see note 4).
  9. Leonardo Paggi, *Gramsci e il moderno principe. I - Nella crisi del socialismo italiano*, Rome, Editori Riuniti, 1970, Introduction, p. xi.
  10. Antonio Gramsci, *Il materialismo storico e la filosofia di Benedetto Croce*, Turin, Einaudi, 1948; *Gli intellettuali e l'organizzazione della cultura*, Turin, Einaudi, 1948; *Il Risorgimento*, Turin, Einaudi, 1949; *Note sul Machiavelli, la politica e lo Stato moderno*, Turin, Einaudi, 1949; *Letteratura e vita nazionale*, Turin, Einaudi, 1950; *Passato e presente*, Turin, Einaudi, 1951.
  11. See note 2.
  12. See Attilio Monasta, *L'educazione tradita: criteri per una diversa valutazione complessiva dei Quaderni del carcere di Antonio Gramsci*, Pisa, Giardini, 1985. (2nd edition: Florence, McColl Publisher, 1993.)
  13. *Q*, p. 1513 (*N*, p. 5).
  14. *Q*, p. 1514 (*N*, p. 6-7).
  15. *Q*, p. 1516.
  16. *Q*, p. 1551 (*N*, p. 10). The central part of the twelfth notebook is dedicated to an analysis of the Italian school system and the need to development away from the old classical 'educational principle' to a new one, on which the unified and comprehensive school for all should be based. In the first edition of the prison notebooks, the texts in the twelfth notebook were split up into three different parts: the conclusion was included within the first part as a simple explanation of the definition of the new-type intellectuals and the longer texts on the school and 'in search of an educational principle' were postponed until after a long series of notes on several types of 'intellectuals'. The traditional gap between 'intellectuals' and education was therefore reinforced.
  17. *Q*, p. 2010 (*N*, p. 55). The title of this note in the first version is even more meaningful: 'Political leadership before and after the conquest of the government'.
  18. *Q*, pp. 1375-1376 (*N*, p. 323-324).
  19. *Q*, pp. 2160-2161 (*N*, p. 298).
  20. Harold Entwistle, *Antonio Gramsci: Conservative Schooling for Radical Politics*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980.

21. *Q*, p. 114 (our translation).
22. *Q*, p. 1549 (*N*, p. 42).
23. *Q*, p. 1720 (*CW*, p. 124).
24. *Q*, p. 507 (our translation).
25. See the Glossary at the end of the Foreword to Antonio Gramsci, *Il materialismo storico e la filosofia di Benedetto Croce*, op. cit., p. xix-xx.
26. See Nigel Grant's review of H. Entwistle's book in *Comparative Education* (Abingdon, UK, Carfax), Vol. 17, No. 1, March 1981, p. 97.
27. Attilio Monasta (ed.), *The Children of Japhet: a European Programme for the New Professionalism of Teachers and Trainers*, Florence, McColl Publisher, 1989.

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