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**The 'Battle of Ideas': The Italian Communist Party's encounter  
with American culture after World War II**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Even a brief look at the Italian society would reveal its evident and deeply American features, namely the prominence of individualistic consumerism, the centrality of television and the omnipresence of advertisement. American culture and various ways of life coming from overseas conquered the hearts and minds of Italians starting from the end of World War II when the country, finally liberated from Nazi-Fascism by the allied troops, was included in the United States' sphere of influence.

However, another force, numerically very powerful, had ambition of power in the post-war period: communists. The Italian Communist Party gained wide consensus in the country thanks to the great contribution given to the liberation and legitimately strived to conquer power through democratic means. In fact, general secretary Palmiro Togliatti based the party's new political course on the theoretical heritage of the deceased intellectual and communist martyr Antonio Gramsci, who suggested that the party should attempt to exert a 'hegemony' in the country by giving great attention to the realm of culture.

Keeping in mind the great influence of Gramsci's thought on the Italian Communist Party's cultural policy, this thesis tries to investigate the party's acknowledgement and response to the ongoing invasion of American cultural products and to the process of Americanisation of Italian society. My research focuses on the decade that spans from 1948 to 1957 when the communist party put the greatest efforts in its hegemonic plans. This period coincides with the escalation of the (Cultural) Cold War and with the great shock caused in the communist world by the revelation at the XX congress of the Soviet Communist Party of Stalin's crimes and the violent repression of the Hungarian revolt in autumn 1956.

My research analysis concentrates on two important cultural magazines, regularly issued in the time period of study, that were controlled by the Italian Communist Party and can therefore be considered as an integral tool of its hegemonic cultural project. I conduct my research using mainly a discourse analysis of those articles or reviews that dealt with American cultural products. The study reveals a general helplessness on the side of the Italian communists that overall took the form of a strong and blind refusal and condemnation of American culture seen as a threat for its corrupting escapist values. However, some exceptions were represented by forms of art belonging to the realist movement, thus considered as allied in the party's cultural struggle.

**KEYWORDS:** ITALIAN COMMUNIST PARTY, AMERICAN CULTURE, AMERICANISATION, CULTURAL HEGEMONY, MAGAZINES, ORGANIC INTELLECTUALS, GRAMSCI

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## INTRODUCTORY PART

### 1. INTRODUCTION, AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTION

25 April 1945 represents the date of the liberation of Italy's northern regions from the Nazi occupying forces and it is today celebrated as a national holiday and occasion for remembering the suffering, the dead, and the destruction of the war. By the time WWII was officially over on Italian soil, Italy was a country in ruins, tore apart both physically and morally. As Mussolini's regime dissolved and the old ruling class associated with it was removed, any future political and social development was possible. In the period that coincides with the country's return to pluralist democracy<sup>1</sup> after more than twenty years of fascist rule, the Italian Communist Party (PCI) planned to conquer power through democratic means, by pursuing "hegemony" in the field of culture.

At the time of stark political divisions and of a rapidly changing society, the party's leading figures guided by the party secretary Palmiro Togliatti decided to attempt to establish a "cultural hegemony" in the Italian society inspired by the theoretical legacy of Antonio Gramsci<sup>2</sup>. The unprecedented emphasis put by Togliatti on the realm of culture and intellectual activity represents the defining feature of the Italian Communist Party's political strategy in the period that saw the beginning of the Cold War and the consequent division of the world in two opposed blocs. The PCI's brave efforts to 'weld together a...progressive bloc and consolidate its hegemony in society'<sup>3</sup> deserve great attention if one considers the political and social situation in which the country found itself at the end of the Second World War.

On the one hand, the liberation brought about a new reconsideration of a shared Italian identity where the Fascist view of the nation as something grandiose and pompous was superseded by more 'left-wing' values such as the focus on common grievous experiences,

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<sup>1</sup> Already from 1943, as the Anglo-American troops began to liberate Italy from the Nazi-Fascist occupation, the different democratic forces rapidly returned to the country after many years of exile or underground activity and cooperated together in a series of national governments (*governi di unità nazionale*). The experience and leadership of the *Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale* ('National Liberation Committee') that united all the anti-fascist parties paved the way towards the democratic election of an Assembly in charge of the drafting of a new constitution, and a referendum on the choice between the monarchic or republican form of government. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June 1946 Italians, among whom women for the first time participated, chose to become a Republic and divided their votes among three main mass parties: the Christian Democrats (35.2 %), the Socialists (20.7 %) and the Communists (18.9 %); these were the first free elections held since 1922.

<sup>2</sup> An introduction of Gramsci's theories will be provided in Chapter 4.

<sup>3</sup> Gundle, 2000, p. 12.

solidarity, endurance and hope<sup>4</sup>. On the other hand, the first post-war years witnessed the rebirth of an interest for different and various forms of culture; Italy was again open to foreign influences and ideas which would play a decisive role in the reconstruction of the moral tissue of the nation. Above all, American products, films, comics, literature and music flocked to Italy and had a great impact on the everyday life of millions of Italians, including PCI's supporters.

The mass arrival of American cultural products and models to Italy represented a great problem for the Italian Communist Party's pursuit of its hegemonic project. These two diametrically opposed understandings of culture were intended to clash and only one would eventually win out. The Italian Communist Party considered culture a means to use in order to 'cultivate'<sup>5</sup> and emancipate the masses; an actor that would participate in a decisive way to 'social progress and the elaboration of mankind's happiness'<sup>6</sup>. *La cultura* acquired a universal and non-elitist meaning, something to which all working people could contribute in the future socialist society. In contrast to the faith in collective action and social solidarity, commercial American culture 'furnished a set of ideas and suggestions that favoured individual, private solutions to life's problems'<sup>7</sup>. In addition, American culture considered popular cultural products as goods available to the general public on the market, where the term 'popular' describes the appropriation by the whole population of this new form of culture no longer ascribed to a certain class, educated or elite groups. The great popularity that this second cultural model encountered in Italy clearly required a response on the part of the Italian Communist Party.

An additional problem for the PCI was represented by the fact that not every communist—active members, workers or 'fellow travellers'—hated the United States and the American forms of culture. On the contrary, as a committed Italian Communist Party supporter recalled his memories from the immediate post-war period:

One day some sellers of a prestigious publishing house from Turin came to the library of the local branch of the party with the books of Hemingway, Dos Passos and Steinbeck. This made us know a new world, a new culture, the America that we loved immediately. It was by all means not true that we read only Soviet books....During the first post-war years ideas, poems and texts that marked our education arrived to us: Walt Whitman, Lee Masters, Pablo Neruda, Clifton Odetz' theatre, the music of George Gershwin, Cole Porter, Irving Berlin, and jazz, and films<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> This view of the country is translated from the experiences of Neorealist cinema which adapted into culture Italy's new social and moral situation. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>5</sup> The term 'culture' has a very long and winding development that traces back directly to the Latin verb *colere*, 'to cultivate', which describes a process of natural growth. Williams, 1983, p. 91.

<sup>6</sup> Viazzi, 1949, p. 547.

<sup>7</sup> Gundle, 2000, p. 39.

<sup>8</sup> Martinelli and Gozzini, 1998, p. 462.

This personal account seems to show the groundlessness of the myth that depicts the Italian communist constituency as strongly anti-American and proves on the contrary how the communists were an integrated and not separated part of the Italian society. In consideration of these premises the study of the Italian Communist Party's cultural policy acquires significant meanings.

On the one hand, at the end of WWII the party leadership found itself in a very complex situation where its positions and decisions were the results of an increasingly tense international situation. The beginning of the Cold War forced the positioning of the Italian Communist Party on the side of Stalin's Soviet Union and against the United States and their Christian Democrat (DC) allies<sup>9</sup>. On the other hand, despite obvious differences between the two cultural models, the communist leaders made no attempt until the start of the Cold War in 1947 'to challenge or oppose the cultures and fashions of American origin that so markedly influenced tastes and customs in the mid-1940s'<sup>10</sup>, even among intellectuals. In effect, the United States was still considered an ally and the most compelling and immediate political and cultural actions had been taken on the front of contrasting in Italy the legacies of the fascist experience. The escalation of the Cold War eventually required the Communist leaders to readjust the party's cultural activity in a direction that took into greater account the international political reality.

In other words, the collapse of the fascist regime represented for the Italian Communist Party a great and unique opportunity, 'virtually without precedent in the history of the European working class movement'<sup>11</sup>, to forge 'a well-directed strategy aimed at achieving a hegemonic position within national thought and culture'<sup>12</sup>. However, the Communists' hegemonic plans clashed concretely with the great fortunes that American cultural products encountered among the Italian working masses. For a series of reasons that will be further explained, Italians were naturally fascinated and conquered by the American model and lifestyle. The lure of individualism, consumerism, wealth and modernisation was in fact stronger and more appealing than the PCI's messages of social progress and solidarity. The diffusion of American culture in Italy hence represented a great obstacle and a serious threat to the PCI's new strategy. In this thesis, I investigate the party's reaction and attempt of resistance to this process.

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<sup>9</sup> The decisive national elections held on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April 1948 represented an important watershed in the history of the Italian Republic as they saw the landslide victory of the Christian Democratic Party and the beginning of a relatively long period of political stability. The Italian Communist Party, severely defeated at the polls, was relegated to the opposition, a position they were going to occupy until the dissolution of the party in 1991.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem.*

Accordingly, my research question will attempt to address the relationship between the then occurring process of Americanization of the Italian society and the PCI's carrying out of its political and cultural strategy:

*How did the Italian Communist Party and its organic intellectuals acknowledge American cultural products<sup>13</sup> that were arriving to Italy? How were American literary works, films, visual art, etc., reviewed and commented for the communist readership in the decade spanning from 1948 to 1957?*

By examining two cultural magazines issued by the Italian Communist Party over the decade 1948—57, I will argue that the PCI's intellectuals and leaders were ultimately unprepared and helpless in the face of the invasion of American culture. The response of the communist writers was of a general strong refusal and condemnation and addressed in particular the escapist content of American cultural products like Hollywood films and comics. By analysing a great number of reviews and reports, I will highlight the substantial difference that existed between the closed and conservative approach to certain forms of art like painting, sculpture and music and the more open and receptive one to literature and poetry. In addition, by delving into communist magazines, I will attempt to reveal the Italian Communist Party's actual concept of culture which was based on a dichotomous opposition: on the one hand, a sustained traditional and national culture built on Italian traditions and centred on the realist artistic standard opposed on the other by the despised modern and international (often called 'cosmopolitan' by the communist reviewers) culture that was embodied by America<sup>14</sup>.

Considering the party press as the cornerstone of the PCI's cultural activity, I analyse two magazines, *Rinascita* and *Società* ('Rebirth' and 'Society'), which attracted the bulk of the 'organic intellectuals' who aligned themselves with the party after the liberation. For this and other reasons that I will further provide, I contend that these two magazines faithfully reflected the aims and purposes of the whole party's cultural policy and directly represented the political line of the PCI's leadership. By examining the way these journals dealt with American culture, I will

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<sup>13</sup> According to Raymond Williams, the term 'culture' has three distinct and broad categories of usage: the first refers to 'a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development'; the second 'indicates a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group, or humanity in general'; the third and last one 'describes the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity'. This far-reaching, yet precise interpretation of 'culture' best satisfies the purpose of my work. It is my intention to adopt a rather wide and all-encompassing understanding of 'culture' and 'cultural product'. Films, music, first broadcast TV-programmes and comics will receive in my study the same attention and consideration as literary works, poems, theatre, sciences, painting and works of academics. In addition, no distinctions will be made in this paper between the supposed level, register or intention of different cultural productions. Williams, 1983, p.91.

<sup>14</sup> This dichotomy is to some extent also revealing of the peculiarity of the Italian Communist Party's political and cultural new course. Members of the communist movement were proudly modern and international while the PCI, which adopted a national and tradition tendency, clearly rejected these same features about Americanism.

show the unprepared response of the Italian Communist Party's intellectuals to the process of Americanisation of Italian society.

## 2. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The PCI's cultural activity and the relationship with its organic intellectuals has been the subject of a considerable number of studies which have been used as secondary sources for this paper. However, very few works seem to address the problem at the centre of my study: the Italian Communist Party's cultural project facing the mass arrival of American culture to Italy. In effect, these two actors have been mostly studied separately. The historiography of the PCI focussed firstly on the role of its organic intellectuals. Already in the late 1970's the work of Nello Ajello, *Intellettuali e PCI: 1944—1958*, was published. The study traces the complicated relationship between the party and the intellectuals it courted and attracted, from the initial successes to the first frictions and incomprehensions, and ultimately the definitive rift caused by the PCI's response to the 1956 Soviet invasion of Hungary. A further work of Ajello, *Il lungo addio. Intellettuali e PCI dal 1948 al 1991*, published in 1997, deals specifically with the failure of the party's cultural project and the consequent separation of the Italian left-wing intellectuals from the PCI.

Historian Paolo Spriano published in 1967 the first volume of the thorough history of the Italian Communist Party. The book series is composed of 7 volumes, 5 written by Spriano and 2 by Gozzini and Martinelli, which cover the years from the foundation of the party in 1921 until the VIII congress in 1956. Gozzini's and Martinelli's work, *Storia del Partito Comunista Italiano. VII, Dall'attentato a Togliatti all'VIII congresso*, is the most extensive study on the history of the Italian Communist Party in the period spanning from 1948 to 1956. The authors dedicate an important chapter to the relationship between politics and culture. The scholars analyse on the one hand the cultural activity of the elite and intellectuals reporting important debates and strategies elaborated in the Cultural Commission, and on the other, they give space for a thorough study of the communist mass culture, the cultural transfer between the base and the higher cadres, the role of the Soviet myth and the importance of the party ideology that, they contend, represented for millions of supporters a sort of 'secular religion'<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Martinelli and Gozzini, 1998, p. 456.

In the wake of a recent and fortunate rediscovery of Gramsci's thought, many books analyse the role played by the Sardinian thinker's heritage in shaping the post-war political course of the Italian Communist Party. This new trend seems to confer even more centrality to the party's cultural activity. Young historian Francesca Chiarotto published in 2011 *Operazione Gramsci*, a study that deals with the use of Gramsci's figure and legacy by Palmiro Togliatti to conquer the Italian intellectuals.

The works of Stephen Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow* (2000) and *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War* (2007) (co-written with David Forgacs) are the most complete books written in the English language about the developments of the Italian mass culture during the Cold War. Through a careful study of the PCI's cultural activity the author aims at highlighting its flaws and the reasons why the Italian Communist Party failed in forging a cultural hegemony in the country. Gundle argues that the party adopted an outdated strategy to propose to carry out a structural renewal of the country that was needed and demanded—albeit in a different form. According to Gundle, due to their twenty-year absence from Italy, 'communist leaders took little account of the important new roles taken on by the state in welfare, entertainment, and recreation. They adopted a backward view that brought great success in recruitment of intellectuals but rather less in terms of wider social influence'<sup>16</sup>.

However, despite some scattered mentions of the communist intellectual's reception of American cultural products in the two above mentioned books, there is no real organised analysis of the party press' approach to the occurring process of Americanisation of Italian society. The few references on the theme generally report of a radical and univocal refusal of American culture on the part of the communist intellectuals with no real distinction made between Hollywood films and literary works, comics or paintings. To some extent my findings confirm Gundle's arguments. In addition, my study also fills a void by providing a detailed analysis of the different responses to and reviews of the various American cultural products that profusely reached Italy starting from the first years after WWII.

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<sup>16</sup> Forgacs and Gundle, 2007, p. 262.

### 3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

#### **Americanisation and ‘Mass Culture’**

The term ‘Americanisation’ describes a long lasting process of culture transfer of American values and models that, albeit starting at the beginning of the 20th century, peaked and ‘invaded Europe with... [great] intensity in the second half of the twentieth century’<sup>17</sup>. This process eventually changed the facets of the Old World by accelerating the development of modern mass societies. This rapid but not immediate development was arguably the consequence of two distinct factors: the first can be directly related to the events of the Second World War which brought millions of American soldiers to European soil where they were mostly welcomed by the citizenry as a liberating force. Moreover, for the first time both the rural and urban population could experience a first-hand contact with concrete examples of American culture, previously encountered only in Hollywood films. In the case of Italy, the populace could not resist the fascinating power and lure of American soldiers’ lavishness and generosity, their relaxed and friendly attitudes<sup>18</sup>.

The second factor is a direct result of the beginning of the Cold War. The lack of direct military combat brought the two arising superpowers to ferociously compete on the cultural front as well as on the economic, political and technological one. Hence, the export of the American model was also a strategic plan supported with any possible effort by a series of governmental, semi-independent and even CIA-funded bodies to win the minds of the Europeans and stem Soviet expansionism.

However this process may be considered, as planned or spontaneous, it is undeniable that Europeans posed very little resistance to embracing traits of the American lifestyle which arguably facilitated Western Europe’s astonishing post-war economic recovery: most important of all consumerism<sup>19</sup>. Images of a wealthy consumerist society were conveyed through a myriad of Hollywood films, magazines, exhibitions and popular novels. Images of a democratic, open and colourful America were ubiquitous in post-war Europe<sup>20</sup> and greatly shaped the mass transformation of Europeans’ way of life.

Mass or popular culture had for long time been linked to the image of American society before its preconditions for development started to appear in Europe as well. Indeed, already

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<sup>17</sup> Stephan, 2006, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 256.

<sup>19</sup> Stephan, p. 245.

during the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the United States could show an astonishing ‘mass’ status due to ‘its geographical expansion, its multicultural roots, the...developments of mass communication (telegraph), transport technologies (railroad)<sup>21</sup> and propensity for modernity. George McKay argues that the development of a mass culture in the 20<sup>th</sup> century became ‘increasingly a product of mass industrialisation, of technological developments and the rationalisation or routinisation of the workplace and the domestic sphere’<sup>22</sup>. All these factors, already present in America since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, were still lacking in most European societies and finally started to appear in the post-war era during the economic boom of the ‘50s, when material wealth became widespread as never before.

For the first time in history, a large stratum of the population, including the lower classes, was able to spend more time and money in leisure and escapist activities. These brought millions of people together, thus representing an unprecedented occasion for the creation of shared identities, values, symbols and models. According to Alexander Stephan, mass consumerist culture contributed to the dissolution of the clear-cut distinction between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture, where only the former was considered of any importance<sup>23</sup>. The above-cited view lies in a post-modern system of thought that increasingly stresses mass cultural products’ availability and multiplicity; ‘In the West popular culture [they] no longer [are] marginal, still less subterranean. Most of the time and for most of the people it simply is culture’<sup>24</sup>. The most important example is represented by the cinema which in the immediate post-war years rapidly became the most popular form of entertainment across the continent<sup>25</sup>.

America’s ‘relatively homogenous mass culture...valued entertainment, leisure, and unpretentiousness [in a way] that many Europeans found congenial’<sup>26</sup> in a moment when the most compelling task was to forget the recent tragedies of the war. Moreover, the images of the United State’s wealthy society stood in sharp contrast with the reality of devastated and poor, but also formal and conventional European societies. The younger generations proved to be the most prone to accept ‘the United States as the embodiment of a modernity that they hoped to realise in their own lives’<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Stephan, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> McKay, 1997, p. 18.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>23</sup> Stephan, 2005, p. 245.

<sup>24</sup> McKay, 1997, p. 20.

<sup>25</sup> Tony Judt in his *Postwar: A history of Europe since 1945* reports the outstanding numbers of cinema attendance in the immediate post-war years, described as the ‘golden age of cinema’. In Britain 1700 million seats were sold in 1946; Italy had 10000 cinemas by 1956 and the attendance peaked at 800 million seats sold; In France and West Germany around 1000 new picture houses opened in the first half of the 1950’s. Judt, 2007, p. 230.

<sup>26</sup> McKay, 1997, p. 18.

<sup>27</sup> Stephan, 2006, p. 244.

In the case of Italy it is worth mentioning the great popularity of film magazines, comics and sports such as football and cycling<sup>28</sup>. These activities in fact, despite having existed in Italy already during Mussolini's regime, acquired then and for the time a mass dimension. According to Stephen Gundle, the development of a mass culture in Italy brought about

the incorporation of ever wider strata [population] into a pattern of consensus in which entertainment and material life were closely related aspects of a new model of society that had the consumption of goods as its primary rule of social conduct<sup>29</sup>.

The developments that interested Italian society during the decade at issue, according to Forgacs and Gundle, on the one hand 'helped make Italian society more visible and audible to its own members'<sup>30</sup> therefore increasing the participation in national politic and popular events like sport or music festivals, and on the other encouraged the circulation of images, words and sounds from foreign societies thus changing 'perceptions of what were deemed acceptable sexual behaviour and gender roles, and [driving] a wedge between generations, helping to create new social demarcation'<sup>31</sup>. According to the authors, this phenomenon was the natural consequence 'of a series of flows and exchanges of cultural goods between regions of Italy and between Italy and other countries'<sup>32</sup> that the different political forces could not prevent and control.

## American Cultural Diplomacy

The notion of cultural diplomacy<sup>33</sup> of the modern kind is directly associated with the communication and promotion of a positive image of a country abroad, its ideals, values and beliefs, with the clear intent to strengthen its political and economic influence. The French inaugurated this mass scale cultural activity already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with their secularised form of *mission civilisatrice* ('civilising mission'). Cultural diplomacy works through a variety of private, semi-private, government funded and even trans-national institutions that among the others promote the teaching of the language abroad, organise exhibitions and cultural conferences, award prizes to artists and writers and favour the exchange of students and scholars. However,

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<sup>28</sup> Gundle, 2000, p. 34.

<sup>29</sup> Gundle, 2000, p. 33.

<sup>30</sup> Forgacs and Gundle, 2007, p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> For a brief history of cultural diplomacy during the 18<sup>th</sup> century see Duignan and Gann, 1992, p. 420.

the operating principles and purposes of cultural diplomacy greatly changed with the beginning of the Cold War as propaganda increasingly became a cornerstone in the 'cultural war' fought by the two conflicting blocs of power.

After World War II the United States renounced its isolationist course and undertook an interventionist project aimed at spreading in Europe its model, the 'American way'. They put great effort and invested an enormous amount of money into funding different bodies and organisations promoting cultural exchanges<sup>34</sup> with the intent to reinforce the Atlantic alliance and contrast the communist threat. On the one hand, the United States had the use of a great weapon in this cultural battle represented by the natural and independent diffusion of American cultural products among Europeans which directly marked a great boost for the US reputation – these 'private enterprises' include 'publishers, jazz musicians, journalists, film producers and...immigrants [with their] enthusiastic letters to friends and relatives in the 'old country'<sup>35</sup>. On the other hand, it created a secretly organised consortium of faithful individuals and institutions funded and directed by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA, America's espionage arm established in 1947) that actively assisted and helped anti-communist bodies and eased 'the passage of American foreign policy interests abroad'<sup>36</sup>.

The central pillar of the US' cultural warfare was the Congress for Cultural Freedom: Frances Stonor Saunders, author of an extensive study about this secret organisation, contends that

the Congress for Cultural Freedom had offices in thirty-five countries, employed dozens of personnel, published over twenty prestige magazines, held art exhibitions, owned a news and feature service, organised high-profile international conferences, and rewarded musicians and artists with prizes and public performances. Its mission was to nudge the intelligentsia of Western Europe away from its lingering fascination with Marxism and Communism towards a view more accommodating of 'the American way'<sup>37</sup>.

The Italian branch of the CCF was founded in 1951 under the guidance of the former communist intellectual Ignazio Silone and directed the activity of a hundred different cultural groups which obtained substantial economic and material help from the CIA funded body.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Indeed, it is after World War II that American Studies became a discipline of study in many European universities. 'US academic institutions multiplied and played a predominant part in the world of scholarship, and history, art, literature, and the social sciences'. Duignan and Gann, 1992, p. 416.

<sup>35</sup> Duignan and Gann, 1992, p. 421.

<sup>36</sup> Saunders, 1999, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

A further concept closely related to American cultural diplomacy in Italy is that of ‘psychological warfare’ which is often used to describe ‘the covert and unofficial intervention by the United States in Italian domestic politics from 1948 to the mid-1950s’<sup>39</sup>. Despite aiming at winning the minds of Italians through a subtle and covert propaganda that persuaded them to support the Christian Democrat Party, the real purpose of the Americans was to obstruct with any means a possible success of the Italian Communist Party. As Mario Del Piero has evidenced, United States officials time after time strongly suggested the *DC*’s government to ‘reduce the organisational power of the PCI, deprive it of the buildings and structures occupied at the end of the war, and freeze the public funds going to Communist...press, schools, and various organisations’<sup>40</sup>.

However, the Christian Democrats always refused to consider taking such actions as they were deemed strongly undemocratic and they would increase the risk of provoking a civil war. Nonetheless, exaggerating the fear of a communist takeover in Italy, the US State Department never really ruled out the possibility of outlawing the Italian Communist Party<sup>41</sup>. Finally, it has to be remarked that, despite their importance for a clearer understanding of the historical situation, the Communist Party’s leaders were aware of neither American Cultural Diplomacy nor US ‘psychological warfare’. The existence of these more or less secret American Cold War strategies did not influence the PCI’s new political course and cultural activity.

#### **4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

##### **Gramsci’s theoretical reference**

In his first public speech on Italian soil after his return from Moscow in 1944, the leader of the Italian Communist Party Palmiro Togliatti pronounced the following words: ‘The best of us, Antonio Gramsci, died in prison, tortured and driven to an untimely end by Fascist beasts on the express order of Mussolini’<sup>42</sup>. Aside from the intention to remark the brutality of the fascist regime and the suffering the PCI and its members experienced in their twenty-year opposition, Togliatti’s words had arguably another purpose. In that particular moment of national turmoil

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<sup>39</sup> Del Piero, 2001, p. 1304.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1312.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem.*

with half of the country still under the Nazi occupation and yet with a concrete perspective of democratic rebirth, the PCI was in great need of an influential figure of reference that could be seen as an example of integrity, devotion to the national cause and commitment to the democratic and antifascist values for the whole populace. A figure that could also represent an ideological guide for the party and its members and whose ideas would inspire and lead the way for the party's new course.

However, in 1944 Gramsci was a personage almost unknown in Italy. Philosopher Norberto Bobbio, born 1909, recalled: 'it might sound incredible to people today but we, who lived until then under the Fascist regime, did not know anything about Gramsci; neither about his life nor his work'<sup>43</sup>. Gramsci was only remembered among early party members as the most important of the martyrs of the worker's movement. Furthermore, his life and intellectual activity during the imprisonment in the fascist jails were unknown even to his fellow party colleagues who were previously forced to flee Italy.

As a matter of fact, the PCI leaders had to wait until well after Gramsci's death in 1937 to come to know and gain possession of his extensive prison writings. The history, fate and publication of Gramsci's prison letters and notebooks are carefully reconstructed in the first chapters of Chiara Chiarotto's book *Operazione Gramsci: alla conquista degli intellettuali nell'Italia del dopoguerra* (2011) where the author highlights the role played by Palmiro Togliatti in the planning and carrying out of the discovery and diffusion of Gramsci's thought in post-war Italy. Indeed, the rich, modern and innovative contents of *The Prison Notebooks* served as a cornerstone for the PCI's post-war cultural policy and as an utter inspiration for the identity of the 'new party'. Furthermore, Gramsci's thoughts represent the most important theoretical background for this essay and the key tool to understanding the aim of my research.

Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, written in total seclusion over a period of six years (from 1929 to 1935), span a vast range of different and distant subjects: from Crocian philosophy to literary criticism, from a study of the *Risorgimento* to that of Italian folklore. However, the two most appreciated and studied topics and of great importance for this paper are those concerning the concept of 'hegemony' and the 'role of the intellectual'. Nonetheless, a discussion of the two above-mentioned requires a brief and explanatory overview of Gramsci's system of thought in order to highlight the peculiarity and modernity of his Marxist theory.

Antonio Gramsci was unquestionably a communist thinker committed to the radical change of society and to the overthrowing of capitalist economic relations of power by gaining control

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<sup>42</sup> Gundle, 2000, p. 16.

<sup>43</sup> Chiaretto, 2011, p. 47. The original quote goes: 'per quanto possa sembrare incredibile a un giovane d'oggi, noi, vissuti sino allora dentro il fascismo, di Gramsci non sapevamo nulla. Né della vita né delle opere'.

over the means of production<sup>44</sup>. However, Gramsci did not believe in the working class revolutionary consciousness as a factor that, through a violent military insurrection, would overthrow the dominant groups and culminate in the seizure of power by the proletariat, especially in western capitalist societies<sup>45</sup>.

Gramsci believed that western capitalist states were complex, flexible and resilient and therefore a 'more gradual and sophisticated strategy had to be adopted: a 'war of position'<sup>46</sup> fought on the front of civil society. In other words, there are different aspects pertaining social transformation where political and ideological factors play a decisive role as much as economic ones. And 'since political and ideological transformation [of society] cannot be achieved overnight, the change must be gradual and persuasive rather than sudden and violent'<sup>47</sup>.

As a consequence, Gramsci can be fundamentally considered as refusing Marx's economic determinism and disapproving the German philosopher's assumption that 'social development always originates from, or is determined by, changes in the economic structure'<sup>48</sup>. The Sardinian thinker argues that superstructural institutions stand somewhat independent and autonomous in society, having a decisive influence in integrating individuals in different systems of control. Indeed, it is also through the judiciary, bureaucracy, welfare and education systems that the dominant bourgeois class can impose its power and control over the proletariat. Summarizing, Gramsci considered the 'relationship between economic and non-economic institutions...as one of interaction and mediation [rather] than of cause and effect'<sup>49</sup>. According to the author, the close collaboration of the two kinds of institutions gives rise to a distinctive form of social and political control; the dominant groups exert hegemonic power.

In the works of Antonio Gramsci, hegemony is a form of power that combines on the one hand physical force (or coercion) and on the other consent in the form of intellectual, moral and cultural persuasion<sup>50</sup>. Given the state of modern and complex western society, Gramsci focused his analysis on the consensual aspect of the hegemonic power within civil society and superstructural institutions. According to Paul Ransome's interpretation, Gramsci's hegemony can be defined as an

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<sup>44</sup> Ransome, 1992, p. 20.

<sup>45</sup> Indeed, Gramsci argued that Lenin's 'war of manoeuvre' against the ruling group had been successful since the institutions of tsarist Russia were relatively simple and underdeveloped'. Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

order in which a certain way of life and thought is dominant, in which one concept of reality is diffused throughout society in all its institutional and private manifestations, informing with its spirit all taste, morality, customs, religious and political principles, and all social relations, particularly in their intellectual and moral connotations<sup>51</sup>.

It is therefore only by winning the conscious consent of the majority of the population that a social group can say to be dominant in society. Gramsci contends that the sole coercive state forces like the army, police and penal system are not enough to maintain social control. Conversely, large strata of the populace have to assimilate the hegemonic world-view and moral and ethical values of the dominant group. In addition, a social group or class aiming to be hegemonic has to aspire to represent, or be thought to represent, the interests of other groups or even society as a whole.

The future dominant group has to form alliances of interests with other related groups in the process of establishing a hegemony (the working class for instance should win the support of other subaltern classes). Gramsci called this alliance 'historical bloc' where the different groups previously 'developed a universal perspective which transcends the particular self-interests of its component parts'<sup>52</sup>. In other words, Gramsci argues that, in order to gain power, a future dominant social group has to actively create a consensual hegemonic control by taking the helm and the leadership of a historical bloc. Finally, when political and cultural hegemony is achieved and the new social group is firmly exercising the leadership of a historical bloc, the time to change the economic power balance has come: a violent revolution can eventually be necessary for the final overthrow of the previous ruling group.

Furthermore, Antonio Gramsci dedicated much attention to the process of creation of political and cultural hegemony valuing the role and function of a specific group in society: the intellectuals. The Sardinian thinker believes that intellectuals are crucial in the creation, organisation and leadership of a new historical bloc's system of values and ideas. They can be seen as the 'organisers and educators of society'<sup>53</sup>. Furthermore, intellectuals are defined not on the basis of individuals' cognitive skills but according to 'the relative function they perform within social practice'<sup>54</sup>. In other words, intellectuals are not characterised by a superior intelligence or sense of rationality but by 'the responsibility they have in society to produce knowledge and/or to instill that knowledge into others'<sup>55</sup>.

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<sup>51</sup> Cammett, 1967, p. 204.

<sup>52</sup> Ransome, 1992, p. 136.

<sup>53</sup> Fontana, 1993, p. 40.

<sup>54</sup> Ransome, 1992, p. 187.

<sup>55</sup> Crehan, 2002, p. 131.

The dominant group's intellectuals have the task to 'universalise the values and ideas of the ruling social group'<sup>56</sup> and to translate their specific interests into common and general ones. Moreover, Gramsci contends that 'it is developments within the economic structure which generate the need for intellectuals'<sup>57</sup>. More specifically, this implies that intellectuals are organically created within emerging class with the task to 'both represent the interest of that class and develop its ideational understanding of the world'<sup>58</sup>. This introduces the fortunate Gramscian concept of 'organic intellectuals'<sup>59</sup> whose specific characteristic is 'the fundamental, structural ties to [a] particular class' and whose main task is to win the consent, through the organisation of culture and knowledge, of related and unrelated social groups.

Therefore, Gramsci ascribed to organic intellectuals connected to subordinated classes a decisive role in 'constructing an alternative hegemony and in leading and organizing revolutionary practice'<sup>60</sup>. The author extensively analyses the different tasks of these intellectuals. Firstly, they have to 'challenge the authority and legitimacy of the current strata of intellectuals'<sup>61</sup> on the intellectual and cultural level as part of the process of deconstruction of the existing bourgeois hegemony. By doing this, they will help individuals to achieve a more mature form of consciousness and understanding of their position in society and to create a more articulated political and ideological discourse aimed at criticising the existing hegemonic power of the dominant classes. Secondly, working class organic intellectuals need to work as organisers and leaders of a new historical bloc and 'will be required to act as negotiators and arbitrators [in order] to convey from one group to another a clear understanding of their common interests'<sup>62</sup>.

The process of creation of a new hegemony, which involves both organic intellectuals and individuals, is intrinsically related to the 'development of organisations through which members of the emergent social group can express their hegemonic aspirations'<sup>63</sup>. Gramsci considers the political party 'the principal and indispensable [agent] for social change'<sup>64</sup>. More specifically, as

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<sup>56</sup> Fontana, 1993, p. 140.

<sup>57</sup> Ransome, 1992, p. 188.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.

<sup>59</sup> The concept of 'organic intellectuals' is generally related to that of 'traditional intellectuals' whose organic role has been taken on by other groups of intellectuals as the social development and economic structures have changed. Gramsci brings forward the example of the ecclesiastics who lost their monopoly on the organisational sphere of different services and institutions. In fact, from having a central power in some type of societies like the absolutist monarchies, they are now displaced and relegated to the periphery. They can serve a more neutral and impartial function useful for society as a whole. Ransome, 1992, p. 189—190.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.

<sup>64</sup> Cammett, 1967, p. 192.

Benedetto Fontana contends, Gramsci was a knowledgeable scholar of the Italian history who proposed an effective comparison:

the political party becomes the modern equivalent of the Machiavellian prince who attempts to transform [the] existing society into a new superior one. Thus to Gramsci the party performs the role as the prince does to Machiavelli: the prince was to have been the vehicle for the founding of a new and unified Italian state; the party is the force that will create the conditions for a superior socialist hegemony<sup>65</sup>.

The revolutionary party will attract the working class' organic intellectuals and will work as a platform for the articulation and diffusion of a new form of knowledge, culture and values. It will 'organise the discrete, particular wills of the [working] masses into a national-popular collective will by means of its intellectual and moral leadership'<sup>66</sup>. In other words, the revolutionary party will transform the proletariat needs and aspirations from particular to general, and will win the legitimacy and consent of other social groups. Once this hegemonic position is achieved the moment for the seizure of power has arrived.

### **Togliatti and Gramsci's heritage**

The discovery of Gramsci's intellectual work by Palmiro Togliatti coincided with Italy's return to the democratic regime after twenty years of Fascist rule and with a new beginning, if not even a real refounding, for every Italian political force. For Togliatti's 'new party' the figure and the ideas of Antonio Gramsci proved to be of fundamental importance. Having in mind the indissoluble ties with the Soviet Union and its foreign policy, Togliatti used the legacy of the former Sardinian comrade to highlight the new course and national identity of the Communist Party (the so called 'Italian way to socialism'). In the context of a broad 'operation Gramsci', the author's ideas were used to establish a bridging dialogue with the Italian civil society and as an essential reference for the organisation of the 'new party'; no longer Leninist but a mass party committed to the democratic constitution; a national rather than internationalist party, Italian as well as communist<sup>67</sup>.

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<sup>65</sup> Fontana, 1993, p. 148.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>67</sup> Chiarotto, 2011, p. 49.

Togliatti's endeavour to create a left hegemony in the cultural and political realm rested on the overcoming of a problem that had been central for Gramsci's analysis too: precisely, traditional intellectuals have historically had a detached attitude towards the Italian people and its social and economic conditions<sup>68</sup>. According to Togliatti, the solution could be found in a well-planned and effective 'social organisation of the culture'; the Italian Communist Party would attract the organic intellectuals arising from the working class who would in turn contribute to a widespread diffusion of left-wing culture in the whole society through the PCI's own channels. Finally, this process would create the conditions for the conquest of those already formed neutral intellectual strata. In other words, the PCI's mission was to broaden the intellectual support for the proletariat's requests paving the way to the formation of a new cultural hegemony.

Therefore, culture had since the Liberation a pivotal role in the party's strategy for the change of Italian society. Culture was considered as 'a vital sphere in the construction and maintenance of a social order [and] intellectuals...the "connecting tissue" of the nation'<sup>69</sup>. Togliatti, taking possession of Gramsci's theories, really believed that 'by winning the support for their ideas among artists and writers, and intellectuals of all types, leading Communists...could determine the ideas and values that were dominant in the nation'<sup>70</sup>. Hence, the PCI's cultural policy was strongly oriented towards a national model where inspiration from local cultures, traditions of community solidarity and recent experiences of collective action and mobilisation played an important role. Conversely, the party strongly refused to consider progressive, cosmopolitan and modernist forms of culture like those coming from overseas.

Furthermore, the Communist cultural policy intended to eliminate the historical divisions and contrapositions that existed between elites' and common people's culture in order to reach the largest audience possible. However, this goal demanded a great degree of organisation<sup>71</sup> that, with the intention to stem the intellectuals' individualistic and aristocratic tendencies, eventually resulted in a strong centralisation of decisional power in the hands of Togliatti and few other loyal men. As it concerns the party press at the centre of this study, this phenomenon negatively affected pluralism of ideas and the independence of thought of many of the intellectuals recruited for this endeavour who were required to show strong ideological rigor and discipline.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>69</sup> Gundle, 2000, p. 12.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>71</sup> This phenomenon will become evident and concrete with the institution of the *Commissione Culturale* in 1948. For more information and for reconstruction of the life of this committee see: Albertina Vittoria, 'La commissione culturale del Pci dal 1948 al 1956'.

## The Party and the Intellectuals<sup>72</sup>

Undoubtedly, the Italian Communist Party succeeded in attracting and recruiting a large, earnest and varied group of intellectuals already from the very first years after the liberation. The PCI's leading role in the *Resistenza* and its recent transformation into an encompassing national mass party represented a great appeal for a multitude of mostly young thinkers, artists and academics motivated to play an important role in the country's moral reconstruction. The party actively courted these people by offering them a new and 'vital role in the national life..., [valuing] them on their own individual merits and [regarding] their activities as essential to the destiny of the nation'<sup>73</sup>.

Furthermore, Togliatti personally flattered a number of intellectuals who had previously decided to cease their public involvement for reasons including even collaboration with the Fascist regime. In other words, 'the PCI's invitation to collaborate enabled members of the cultural elite to purify themselves, put the black period of the regime behind them and find a new justification for their existence in relation to a social project'<sup>74</sup>.

Many young intellectuals, among other Mario Alicata e Carlo Salinari who became two of Togliatti's closest collaborators, turned to the party bringing freshness, enthusiasm and immunity from the Bolshevik influence experienced during the exile period. Also several renowned men of culture aligned themselves with Togliatti's cause; to name the most prominent ones:

the philosophers Gaetano Della Volpe, Antonio Banfi and Cesare Luporini; the critic Natalino Sapegno; the historian Delio Cantimori and the archaeologist Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli; not to mention the painters Renato Guttuso and Mario Mafai and poets of the calibre of Umberto Saba and Salvatore Quasimodo [as well as] intellectuals like Massimo Bontempelli and Curzio Malaparte who had once been notorious Fascists.<sup>75</sup>

As argued by David Forgacs and Stephen Gundle, 'the great success of the PCI in recruiting intellectuals was due in part to the high status it offered them with respect to Fascism and even to bourgeois society itself'<sup>76</sup>. However, once having won the consensus and the services of these intellectuals, the party's cultural policy proved itself inadequate to help them in bridging the gap

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<sup>72</sup> The two most important studies dedicated to the PCI's relations with its intellectuals are Nello Ajello, *Intellettuali e PCI, 1944—1958*; and Albertina Vittoria, *Togliatti e gli intellettuali: storia dell'Istituto Gramsci negli anni cinquanta e sessanta*.

<sup>73</sup> Forgacs and Gundle, 2007, p. 261.

<sup>74</sup> Gundle, 2000, p. 20.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>76</sup> Forgacs and Gundle, 2007, p. 262. The authors on page 261 argue that the Fascist regime had barely tolerated intellectuals, trying to corrupt them and keep them occupied in outlets and apparatuses.

existing between the elite and the people and to fulfil the great task of cultural elevation of the masses. Despite numerous attempts, the communication between these two groups remained very difficult and the ideological propaganda represented the main and most efficient message with which the party leadership could reach its rank and file.

## **Issues and problems**

Gramsci's theories are used in this study as a central analytical tool to answer my research questions. However, Gramsci's ideas were also part of the PCI's strategy to win prestige among the intellectual spheres and in the arts and to define a modern and national identity for the party. I contend that studying the implementation by the Italian Communist Party of Gramsci's cultural hegemony using the Gramscian theory does not represent any problem or risk of bypassing or distorting important information. On the contrary, I argue that it constitutes an important advantage as it allows me to identify certain features of the PCI's cultural activity that are patently relevant in this study—for example the importance given to the cultural magazines that I will analyse.

In addition, the influence of Gramsci's ideas and works on the PCI's political course and even cultural policy was rather limited or at least partial during the period that is studied. After the publication in 1948 of the *Prison Notebooks*, the study of Gramsci's Marxism was rather gradual and its acceptance among the cadres and leading intellectuals was not immediate. More precisely, Gozzini and Martinelli argue that the importance of Gramsci within the party leadership significantly increases only after 1956 when Stalinist Zhdanovism could be essentially considered outdated.

However, the actual party's cultural policy was particularly open towards the concept of 'hegemony' and role of the intellectuals. Yet it was receptive in a revised and filtered form, leaving aside some of the Sardinian thinker's insights that did not match with the party's official Marxist-Leninist doctrine. As a consequence, the Gramscian notion of hegemony practically came to represent and embody the PCI's vision of its political struggle as mainly a long-lasting 'war of position' that would wear out the Christian Democratic Party and its allies<sup>77</sup>.

On the other hand, my understanding and use of Gramsci's thought is based on scholarly research that lasted several decades and started with great intensity only in 1975 with the publication of the new and complete edition of the *Prison Notebooks* revised by Valentino Gerratana. Therefore, my 'Gramscian' analytical tools are very different from those possessed by

Togliatti and the party leadership in the period spanning from 1948 until 1957. Moreover, the Italian Communist Party retained, considering the historical period and the tight relationship with the Soviet Union, a high degree of ideology firmly linked to the Marxist-Leninist doctrine that guided its political and cultural action during those years. For instance, following the official party ideology, Togliatti believed, contrary to what Gramsci postulated, ‘that capitalism was moribund and that the pattern of social relations associated with it was destined to inevitable decline [and therefore he] engaged in a struggle for hegemony that bypassed crucial structural issues’<sup>78</sup> related to the socioeconomic sphere of the life of the working class.

However, economic determinism was only one of the many forms of influence on the PCI coming from the Soviet orthodoxy. The party leaders were very attentive and receptive to the political guidelines coming from the Cominform (founded in 1947) and even the cultural policies of the party were greatly influenced by the doctrine of socialist realism<sup>79</sup> introduced by Andrei Zhdanov in 1934 at the Soviet Writers’ Congress. Additionally, the political life of millions of PCI’s rank and file in that period was characterised by the ubiquitous myth<sup>80</sup> of Stalin and the Soviet Union. This great form of reverence was extended from the membership base to the party cadres and exerted a great influence on the party decisions at every level.

Despite the fact that ‘the pro-Sovietism of the base was initially a more emotional and spontaneous phenomenon that found only a faint reflection in the official party line and media’<sup>81</sup>, the party leadership at a later stage found this very exploitable and profitable. After the PCI’s exclusion from national politics and the United States intervention in Italy’s domestic affairs became a concrete reality, the party leaders began ‘to foster a cult of Soviet superiority in the party press and in their formal statement’<sup>82</sup>. This strategy was meant to maintain and cultivate the party’s consensus in the face of a severe political defeat thus acquiring, according to Joan Barth Urban, a ‘surrogate ideological matrix for their doctrinally untutored rank and file’<sup>83</sup>.

The above-mentioned argument introduces an important distinction between the PCI’s cultural action directed to the masses and the *lavoro culturale* (‘cultural activity’) directed to and created by the aligned intellectuals. Gozzini and Martinelli argue in their study that the Italian Communist Party had an ambivalent approach towards the masses of activists and supporters: on

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<sup>77</sup> Martinelli and Gozzini, 1998, p. 495—496.

<sup>78</sup> Gundle, 2000, p. 21.

<sup>79</sup> Zhdanov saw the artist and the intellectual at the direct service to the people, the party and the cause of socialism. This topic and the influence on the cultural activity of the PCI as elaborated in the sessions of the ‘Cultural Commission’ are extensively covered in Albertina Vittoria, ‘La commissione culturale del Pci dal 1948 al 1956’.

<sup>80</sup> For more information see the paragraph ‘Il Mito Sovietico’ in Martinelli and Gozzini, 1998, p. 456—468.

<sup>81</sup> Urban, 1986, p. 190.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibidem*.

the one hand the party official policy was to strive for an illuminist and pedagogic action of diffusion of a secular culture in order to elevate the socioeconomic conditions of the working masses, while on the other hand the party was in practise mostly concerned with the maintenance and expansion of its electoral constituency and therefore always gave greater importance to the consolidation of the ideological preparation of its rank and file<sup>84</sup>.

Therefore, the party ideology, its faith in the Marxist-Leninist doctrine and the perennial crisis of the capitalist system, always represented the cornerstone of the message with which the party communicated with its base. Ideology was an indispensable and central tool for the party's hold on its constituency, an essential resource for the definition of its political identity<sup>85</sup>. On the other hand, the party's ideology served as a powerful 'reducer of complexity' for millions of supporters as it provided the key tools to tame the difficulties of reality and to create a shared identity<sup>86</sup>. In other words, there are reasons to contend that the PCI's cultural activity directed to the masses often took the form and contents of the official party ideology whilst the pure and earnest cultural debates and exchanges were mainly confined to the intellectual's sphere and the party's elite where obviously the magazines *Rinascita* and *Società* found their place.

## 5. SOURCES, PERIOD OF STUDY AND METHODS OF ANALYSIS

### The PCI between politics and culture

The tight relationship between political and cultural activity, the so called *Politica culturale* ('cultural policy'), represents a cornerstone of the post-war new course of the Italian Communist Party and a grand strategy that, through the establishment of a solid alliance between the party and the intellectuals, aimed at penetrating and conquering the (super)structures which created and spread culture in Italy<sup>87</sup>. As Celeste Negarville, an important spokesman of the party, declared in 1948: 'the working class [and] the Communist Party [had] to conduct their cultural action joining forces with all those intellectuals, of whatever political trend, [that shared the intent to] oppose the clerical obscurantism'<sup>88</sup>. The party's main goal was to spread across the lower strata of the

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<sup>84</sup> Forgacs and Gundle, 2007, p. 261.

<sup>85</sup> Martinelli and Gozzini, 1998, p. 495.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>87</sup> Martinelli and Gozzini, 1998, p. 449.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibidem*.

population a secular and illuminist culture with the intention of liberating them from ignorance, illiteracy and superstition. As part of this somewhat educational and pedagogic plan, ‘great stress was placed on reading, both as a tool of personal emancipation and as a necessary part of political preparation’<sup>89</sup>.

Additionally, central to the party strategy was the reintroduction and diffusion of Marxism in intellectual debates, party cadres’ formation and rank and file’s everyday political activity. In order to facilitate the planning and direction of this venture, the party decided to institute an ad hoc committee in charge of organizing and coordinating the party’s entire cultural activity: the *Commissione Culturale*. The ‘cultural commission’ was established in January 1948 as a subdivision of the central committee of the party and Emilio Sereni, an intellectual very close to Togliatti’s positions, was chosen as the person in charge of its guidance<sup>90</sup>.

Officially, the commission’s main task was to gather all the communist intellectuals supporting the PCI for the creation of “a large democratic and national front of the culture” in order to group the country’s lively cultural forces, to make them emerge from isolation and to ensure them the active support of the popular masses<sup>91</sup>. Concretely, the commission served as a tool for Togliatti’s direct control of the intellectuals’ activity. The leader demanded from them a high degree of compliance with the party’s political and ideological positions. However, the commission soon proved itself very efficient in creating a series of strongly dependent structures with the task of organizing the party activity in different and varied directions.

Pivotal in Togliatti’s strategy was the diffusion of the Marxist doctrine to both the party cadres and the common supporters. On the one hand, the *Commissione Culturale*’s first effort was that of setting up a number of internal structures with the task of educating the party cadres ‘on the basis of the doctrine and teaching of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin’<sup>92</sup>. Following the need for an ‘ideological reinforcement’, the committees for the party history, ideology and “Togliatti’s publications” were created as well as party schools in Rome, Milan and Bologna<sup>93</sup>.

On the other hand, a series of instruments directed outwards for the Marxist-Leninist education of the rank and file and the intellectuals were founded. The *Fondazione Gramsci* was established in those years with the intent to stimulate research in the field of Marxist studies. With the direction of publishing houses like ‘Edizioni Rinascita’ and ‘Edizione di Cultura Sociale’, the party also became publisher of many important books of literature (mostly narrative), current

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<sup>89</sup> Forgacs and Gundle, 2007, p. 261.

<sup>90</sup> Vittoria, 1990, p. 136.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

political events and classics of the communist ideology, all sold at very affordable prices<sup>94</sup>. Finally, great and increasing efforts were devoted to the party press, both periodical and daily, up to the point it became the main instrument of PCI's cultural activity.

The party press was considered by Togliatti as the most powerful weapon to fight the 'imperialist and clerical obscurantism' in the country<sup>95</sup>. More in detail, the party's newspaper *L'Unità* (Unity) which, with four different national issues (Rome, Milan, Turin and Genoa), had a circulation of circa 400 000 copies and was the third most sold daily in Italy<sup>96</sup>. More or less directly *Nuovo Corriere* (New Courier), *Il Paese* (The Country), *La Gazzetta* (The Gazette), *Milano Sera* (Milan evening) and *Paese Sera* (Country Evening) were also papers controlled by the Communist Party. Additionally, the party published a number of different magazines: *Rinascita* (Rebirth) and *Società* (Society) with a cultural nature, *Noi Donne* (We Women) directed to the female readership, *Vie Nuove* (New Ways) dedicated to general news and lifestyle, *Il Calendario del Popolo* (The People's Calendar) with an encyclopaedical approach, *Critica Economica* (Economic Critique) dealing with economic matters and *Il Pionere* (The Pioneer) directed to youth<sup>97</sup>.

### **Choice of the sources for the study: the magazines *Rinascita* and *Società***

*Rinascita* and *Società* were the two publications where the PCI concentrated most of its efforts in putting its cultural policy into practice. Both magazines had the major purpose of attracting and aggregating the diverse and scattered groups of intellectuals that after the end of Fascism landed on leftist positions, both inside and outside the Communist Party<sup>98</sup>. *Rinascita* and *Società* fiercely and unrelentingly supported the party's cultural and political course well after the conclusion of the period of de-Stalinisation. In effect, Palmiro Togliatti had an almost total control on the editorial line of both magazines thanks to his position as chief editor of *Rinascita* and his strong influence on the activity and decisions of the *Commissione Culturale*. Therefore, on the basis of these considerations, I believe that a study of a consistent number of issues of *Rinascita* and *Società* would be relevant and insightful in order to cast light on some aspects and contradictions of the Communist Party's cultural policy of the post-war period. It is through a study of their contents that I intend to highlight the party's reactions to the fortunes that

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<sup>94</sup> Martinelli and Gozzini, 1998, p. 470—471.

<sup>95</sup> Vittoria, 1990, p. 141.

<sup>96</sup> In 1953 the national circulation was 435 000 copies mostly sold in the northern regions. See: Martinelli and Gozzini, 1998, p. 478.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>98</sup> Chiaretto, 2011, p. 102.

‘imperialistic and clerical’ forms of culture encountered in the changing Italian society of those years.

*Società* was founded in Florence in the summer of 1945 by Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli, a newly converted Marxist intellectual, together with Cesare Luporini and Romano Bilenchi. The magazine, initially not tied to the PCI, was open to all those intellectuals determined to take on the proletariat’s position and work for the democratic renewal of the Italian culture<sup>99</sup>. *Società* was initially a quarterly publication and became bimonthly in 1954. The magazines’ favourite topics of research and debate were mostly History, Philosophy and Literature<sup>100</sup>. The discussions were open also to contributions by non-aligned scholars and thinkers with the clear intention of cultivating ‘intellectuals by subtle means, seeking to win cooperation through debate’<sup>101</sup>. An issue of *Società* was generally made up of three main parts: a series of long and articulated essays, coverage in retrospect of cultural events such as film festivals, art exhibitions, congresses or important publications, and finally a number of reviews of recently published books.

However, with the escalation of the Cold War tensions and the Communist Party’s exclusion from the coalition government in 1948, *Società* moved increasingly closer to the PCI’s official policy. Matters of political mark found greater attention and space among the magazine’s pages and the writers were mainly party leaders or supporters<sup>102</sup>. An example of this interference of political action with cultural research can be found in the reprimand by Togliatti in 1947 to the editors of *Società* and the exhortation for the magazine to come back on the tracks of national history and Marxism diffusion after having published a study on the American working movement with some suggestions for the Italian reality<sup>103</sup>. The case of *Società* represents a clear mirror of the difficulties existing in the relationship between leftist thinkers and politics that will continue until 1956 with the shock represented by the Soviet repression of the Hungarian revolt that caused a rift between the party and its intellectuals.

Arguably, *Rinascita* is even a more explicative example of the interference of political action with the intellectual and cultural sphere. As argued by Stephen Gundle, the magazine can be considered Togliatti’s ‘special standard-bearer of his whole politico-cultural project’<sup>104</sup> for the total control on the content the party leader exerted. *Rinascita* was published for the first time in June 1944 right after the PCI leader’s return from Moscow with the clear intention to reintroduce Marxism into Italy thus fostering a ‘rebirth’ and renewal of every intellectual and cultural activity.

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<sup>99</sup> Lucia, 2003, p. 93.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>101</sup> Gundle, 2000, p. 52.

<sup>102</sup> Lucia, 2003, p. 99.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>104</sup> Gundle, 2000, p. 18.

The magazine had a monthly publication and a circulation of approximately 30000 copies<sup>105</sup> and dealt with mostly politics, national and foreign, and Italian culture. Great attention was dedicated to international events seen from a pro-Soviet perspective. The articles were generally short (a couple of pages), the structure fairly articulated and the topics varied extensively: from economic to working class movements, from poems to short contemporary novels, from Marxist writings to education and from Italian history to cinema and fine arts. Finally a conclusive section named *La battaglia delle idee* ('the battle of ideas') gathered a considerable number of book reviews.

### **Period of study: 1948—1957**

The choice of the period of study 1948—1957 finds its main explanation in the intersection of two separate factors: firstly, a series of connected events that with the beginning of the Cold War in 1947 caused the PCI's exclusion from the government coalition thus putting an end to the experience of *Governi di unità nazionale* ('national unity governments') which ruled the country since the Liberation in 1944 and saw many communist politicians seating as ministers or in leading positions. Moreover, the subsequent national election of April 1948 sanctioned the victory and the conquest of parliamentary majority by the Christian Democrats and the beginning of a long period of opposition for the PCI.

Secondly and as a consequence, 1948 represents the beginning of the PCI's "cultural battle" inaugurated the same year with the publication of Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*. The party devoted much energy and efforts to the construction of an alternative cultural hegemony as a way of exerting influence and control over the whole society. In other words, Togliatti and the PCI's leadership strongly believed that 'culture was a sphere in which the party could assert a fuller influence than it could in the political arena, given the barrier against its participation in government'<sup>106</sup>.

Moreover, this decade showed a display on the part of the communist leaders and intellectuals of great zeal in and honest faith for the achievement of that cultural hegemony theorised by Antonio Gramsci. The Sardinian thinker's ideas played a decisive and central role in the organic elaboration of the party's cultural policy and as a consequence are used in this paper as a pivotal scientific reference for my research. Additionally, as argued by Gundle,

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<sup>105</sup> Martinelli and Gozzini, 1998, p. 478.

<sup>106</sup> Gundle, 2000, p. 6.

the years between 1948 and Stalin's death in 1953 would come to represent a sort of "golden age in which the PCI was hard-pressed and political battles infused with unprecedented animosity, but in which faith in Communist values was unquestioned and belief in the ultimate triumph of good over evil total"<sup>107</sup>.

Given these premises, I find very relevant and interesting how the party press, its leaders, and intellectuals reacted to a triple onslaught coming from outside: the Marshall Plan propaganda, the success of Hollywood and its stars and the arrival of a new American-inspired prosperity from the beginning of the 1950's<sup>108</sup>. Finally, the two-year period 1956—1957 represents a watershed in the PCI's cultural and political policy and arguably the end of that era of faith and hope. The Soviet repression of the Hungarian revolution and the PCI's defence of Khrushchev's orders were received with strong discontent by many supporting intellectuals and rank and file who decided to walk away from the party and resign their membership<sup>109</sup>. By losing the support of its own intellectuals, in Gramscian terms the Italian Communist Party could no longer hope to build a cultural hegemony in the country. Additionally, Khrushchev's revelations of Stalin's crimes at the XX congress of the Soviet Communist Party constituted another great shock for the communist world: '1956 represents the collapse of absolute certainties, the end of a myth and a model, the calling into question of a hypothesis of socialist transition without contradictions'<sup>110</sup>.

### **Methods for the empirical research**

I examined in January 2013 in Rome's 'Biblioteca di Storia Moderna e Contemporanea' about 120 issues of *Rinascita* and 48 of *Società*. The copies of the magazines were bound in a hardcover book that grouped all the issues of a calendar year. A final index of the year listed all the content of the issues dividing them in different sections and themes. This has been very helpful in detecting the sources that dealt with American cultural products. The articles and the material of interest have been copied and studied at a later stage.

However, due to the vast number of pages that makes up every yearly collection of issues (an approximate average of 650 pages for a single year of *Rinascita* and 750 for *Società* until 1953 and 1150 from 1954 when it became bimonthly) I can not exclude that some valuable material has been involuntary neglected. Additionally, the entirety of *Rinascita's* and *Società's* articles was

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>108</sup> Stephan, 2006, p. 262.

<sup>109</sup> This topic is extensively covered in Nello Ajello's book *Il lungo addio. Intellettuali e PCI dal 1948 al 1991*.

written in a formal and florid Italian and as a consequence the translation process of the sources into English might have involuntarily and slightly altered the theoretical and ideological message of the authors.

The empirical research of this paper is based on two different methods of research which are used separately on distinct parts of the sources: the first and main part of my research is conducted using a discourse analysis. I divide the material of interest from both *Rinascita* and *Società* (articles, reviews, reports, notes) into seven main categories:

- Cinema
- Comics
- Figurative Arts (with discussion of quantitative data)
- Music
- Literary works and Poems (with discussion of quantitative data)
- Cultural Relations (understanding of previous and current cultural transfers between the USA and Italy)
- American Society

I proceed in analysing the articles by searching for similar and compatible lines of arguments, criticisms or appraisals throughout the time period of analysis. The intent is to reconstruct the approach of the party's organic intellectuals to the different topics and delineate possible variations over the years in relation to national and/or international events. I aim to highlight both criticisms and appraisals of American cultural products in an attempt to identify different tendencies of approval or refusal. In other words, I intend to understand for example what artistic movements or styles were positively welcomed, as well as to identify what aspects of American culture or society were most criticised and attacked. An additional purpose is to investigate whether the party had one or different lines, if within the intellectual elite there existed active debates and evident discords and if the PCI's cultural activity concretely overcame the traditional division between 'low' and 'high' culture as they manifestly proclaimed. A conclusive intent is to show, through the analysis of the content, what comprehension the PCI had of the actual developments in Italian society.

In the second part of the study I carry out a quantitative analysis of the number of poems, excerpts of literary works and figurative art (paintings, sculptures and drawings) in the pages of

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<sup>110</sup> Liguori, 1992, p. 513.

*Rinascita*<sup>111</sup> with the intent to measure the presence of American artists/authors in comparison with Italian ones or coming from other foreign countries. The relevance of such research can be explained by the fact that these cultural products were published with no commentary of any kind and therefore this can show a hint of the party's and its intellectuals' willingness to expose the communist readership to American culture without providing any ideological filter. The different origins of such works are grouped together in order to measure the contrast between the cultural production of Western capitalist countries and socialist pro-Soviet ones. In conclusion, a content analysis of the American cultural products at issue is incorporated in the first part of the study and supports the arguments previously expressed in the discourse analysis. Finally, the tables are attached in the appendix section.

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<sup>111</sup> *Società* did not include such materials as it was mainly dedicated to long extensive articles in the first part and numerous book reviews in the second.

## RESEARCH PART

### 6. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

#### 6.1. CINEMA

*“The decadence and the constraint of freedom of cinematographic expression in a country are directly related to the power and level of development of the capitalist structure that controls its film industry”* (V. Tosi, 1948, “Sguardo all’attuale situazione cinematografica”, *Rinascita* N.1, p.33)

*“There are nowadays two opposed tendencies: the one which considers a film as artistic and cultural reality, participating in the human and social conditions of the masses, and the other which considers a film merely as a commodity, bearer of reactionary and conservative positions”* (Viazzi, 1950, “Il Festival cinematografico di Karlovy Vary”, *Società* N.2, p.710)

Cinema was definitely viewed by the Italian Communist Party as the most crucial and important form of cultural expression in the immediate post-war period greatly because of its immense popularity and the strong influence it exerted on the masses of film-goers. Articles that dealt with the current situation of the cinematographic art were ubiquitous in both *Rinascita* and *Società* up until 1954 and great attention was dedicated in particular to the ongoing ‘invasion’ of American films. The Italian Communist Party considered Hollywood<sup>112</sup> as a serious danger, a weapon of American imperialism, a concrete threat to the independence of the Italian film industry.

However, the communist intellectuals’ reaction was ambivalent. On one hand, they severely ‘criticised Hollywood’s tendency to invade Italian screens wherever and whenever possible’<sup>113</sup>— for example, Tommaso Chiaretti, a communist film critic, in the pages of *Rinascita* harshly criticised the mechanism of film selection for the 1952 Venice International Film Festival. According to Chiaretti a trend showed that Soviet films were systematically excluded from the competition while American cinema had been greatly represented in the past editions outnumbering other national productions, including the Italian ones. In the 1952 edition eight American films are screened in Venice while the maximum allowed number per country was

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<sup>112</sup> In the PCI’s intellectuals’ understanding Hollywood equalled the American film industry as a whole. As a consequence, no distinction is made in this paper between the two terms.

<sup>113</sup> Gundle, 2000, p. 122.

four. On the other hand, they challenged American films' great popularity dedicating to the topic many careful reviews and reports. They sought to distinguish between 'negative' films, those with a mere escapist character and conveyers of a ruling class' propaganda, and 'positive' ones, those with a realist essence that could somehow contain a criticism of American society. Particular attention was also given to Hollywood's distinctive capitalist and monopolist structure that ordered a real 'commodification' of the cinematographic art. Finally, *Rinascita* and *Società* extensively reported on the anti-communist investigations that interested Hollywood in the early 1950's and which represented, according to communist reviewers, a great threat to artists' freedom and cinema's true artistic value.

### **Capitalist features of American cinema**

The first articles that appeared in both *Rinascita* and *Società* (from 1948 to 1950) greatly stressed Hollywood's monopolistic and imperialistic aspects and highlighted its reactionary, harmful messages deemed to function as an out-and-out ruling class propaganda. It is no coincidence that these arguments were formulated during the escalation of the Cold War when American films were perceived by the Italian Communist Party as a weapon used to fight the advance of the 'democratic forces'. The Cold War climate dictated a sort of dichotomous approach to the analysis of the situation of cinema at that time: communist intellectuals considered Hollywood on one hand as the embodiment of the class enemy's ideology, and on the other as a threat to the independence and the artistic values of national cinematographic productions.

Glauco Viazzi, a very young communist reviewer, in an article from 1949 contended that a struggle occurred in every single country between the 'democratic and progressive' tendencies and the 'reactionary and imperialist' ones<sup>114</sup>. Between the production of committed realist films and escapist and corrupting ones, the latter were deemed to be subdued to the obscurantist and retrograde goals of the dominant class that sought through the cinema, described as 'an out-and-out 'opium of the people', to drug the working masses and to reduce their intellectual capability'<sup>115</sup>. In particular, American cinema's main task was thought to be a determined defence of the ruling class' obscurantist values and an everyday corruption and conquest of the masses to the American bourgeois lifestyle<sup>116</sup>. Carlo Lizzani, a young communist critic who would later become a prominent film director, writing in 1949, argued that Hollywood's bourgeois and

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<sup>114</sup> Glauco Viazzi, 1949, "Il Cinema Democratico a Mariánské Lázně", *Società* N. 3, p. 509.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>116</sup> Carlo Lizzani, 1949, "Per una difesa attiva del cinema popolare", *Rinascita* N. 2, p. 90.

imperialist productions were considered as having the goal of ‘detaching cinematographic art from the problems and lives of the masses and turning it into an instrument of *intorpidimento mentale*<sup>117</sup> (‘that creates mental torpidity’).

Young communist intellectual Virgilio Tosi believed that Hollywood’s ideological propaganda rested on a series of hypocrisies which permeated the whole American film industry: in the first place, American films dealt almost exclusively with the problems and the interests of the bourgeoisie seen always from the bourgeois point of view—a norm considered to be reinforced by the strict regulations of the Hays code<sup>118</sup>. The second ‘class hypocrisy’, related to the first one, was represented by the mere escapist and anaesthetising function of Hollywood films. For example, they generally depict ‘the poor’ enjoying being shown the life of the wealthy, a distorted image of their conditions which accordingly made the lower classes forget about their own misery. The third was the constant representation of an ideal worker owning ‘inexplicably and unrealistically’ a villa, a luxurious car and a giant refrigerator. According to Virgilio Tosi, Hollywood’s falsity and artificiality clearly showed an out-and-out fear of reality and revealed a premeditated and aware function of the American film industry as conveyer of middle-class propaganda. The various circumstances of the American film industry were considered to reinforce the national concept of culture as a privilege and a tool of the dominant class.

Additionally, an article from 1954 denounced Hollywood’s active collaboration in the United States’ efforts in the Cold War. Tommaso Chiaretti’s piece on *Società* reported some official statements made by Eric Johnston, the chairman of M.P.A.A. (the association of Hollywood’s six biggest studios), in order to reveal Hollywood’s commitment in the American government’s anti-communist fight: “films are a powerful instrument of ideological propaganda that can influence the spirit of millions of Americans”<sup>119</sup>; “it has to be understood that an American film it is not only the best contact but also the best American ambassador”<sup>120</sup>; and “American films can represent a great aid in our plans for the defence of the free world from Communism”<sup>121</sup>. The focus on these quotes makes rather evident that PCI’s organic intellectuals were aware of Hollywood’s aim to make the American way of life popular across the globe. Chiaretti remarked

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<sup>117</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>118</sup> According to Virgilio Tosi, the bourgeois moral values that guided Hollywood were promptly expressed in the ‘Motion Picture Production Code’ of 1930. Also known as Hays Code, it was a set of censorship guidelines that governed the American film industry until the late 1960’s. The three general principles of the Code reported that: ‘first, no picture shall be produced that will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence the sympathy of the audience should never be thrown to the side of crime, wrongdoing, evil or sin; secondly, correct standards of life, subject only to the requirements of drama and entertainment, shall be presented; and thirdly, law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation’. For more information see: Black, G. (1996). *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies*. Cambridge University Press.

<sup>119</sup> Tommaso Chiaretti, 1954, “La crisi di Hollywood”, *Società* N. 4, p. 652.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibidem*.

how Hollywood's propagandistic endeavour also paired with an outstanding promotion and diffusion of American films abroad that in most cases eluded the restrictions imposed by various countries to the import of foreign films.

Hollywood's ability to export its products worldwide was attributed to its immense economic power and its monopolistic control of the film markets. Already in 1948, Virgilio Tosi reported on the American cinema's major business concerns and Hollywood's primarily industrial and commercial features were highlighted. The author explained that it represented the United States' second most important industry, just behind the automotive sector, and that unlimited technical means and economic resources, paired with an outstanding number of produced films, allowed the American film industry to have in practice a world monopoly of the distribution market<sup>122</sup>. Glauco Viazzi, writing in 1949, contended that 'American cinema's clear imperialist ambitions represented a menace for the independence of film production in 'marshalled' countries'<sup>123</sup>.

Virgilio Tosi stressed additional negative aspects of Hollywood's rigid capitalist structure. For example, the mechanisation of the film production, a consequence of the constant research for higher profits that drives any capitalist industry, was deemed to inevitably lead to a 'commodification' of the cinematographic art and to a general decline of the films' artistic value. In other words, due to a 'rationalisation' of their work, Tosi contended that actors, directors and scriptwriters had no real possibilities to express their art. Conversely, the search for higher gains was considered a direct cause of controversial phenomena like the Star System, the exploitation of child-actors and the repression of independent film criticism by the big Film Studios<sup>124</sup>.

### **American Films' form and contents: praises and criticisms**

The analysis of the articles published in *Società* and *Rinascita* dealing with cinema clearly shows the diametrically opposed conception of the cinematographic art on the part of the communist intellectuals in respect to what was considered to be Hollywood's actual intentions and purposes. The PCI's intellectual Glauco Viazzi firmly contended that cinema's real artistic value lay in its emancipating function, in its participation in the 'social progress and elaboration of mankind's happiness'<sup>125</sup>. As a consequence, the Communist Party's inflexible criterion of cinematographic expression was that of realism. Realist films, often labelled as 'democratic and progressive', were

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<sup>121</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>122</sup> Virgilio Tosi, 1948, "Sguardo all'attuale produzione cinematografica", *Rinascita* N. 1, p. 32.

<sup>123</sup> Glauco Viazzi, 1949, "Il Cinema Democratico a Marianské Lazne", *Società* N. 3, p. 542.

<sup>124</sup> Tosi, 1948, p. 32.

<sup>125</sup> Viazzi, 1949, p. 547.

yearned for, exalted and energetically defended in their Italian, foreign and American form. Conversely, the party's thinkers harshly criticised escapist American films that detached themselves from the intellectuals' standard of realism—which was indeed largely thwarted in Hollywood—and vehemently proclaimed American cinema's irreversible artistic crisis.

Moreover, the PCI's magazines fiercely attacked Hollywood's film industry for their consideration of cinema merely as a form of entertainment. This conception of cinema that rejected its authentic function as a vehicle of progress and social communication was believed to be the paramount fault of American cinema. In addition, communist intellectuals engaged in a determined denunciation of American films' hideous subjects. Glauco Viazzi harshly criticised Hollywood's films for their 'pre-nazi' contents: 'constant depiction of sadomasochist and pseudo-Freudian themes, glorification of gangster violence, portrait of psychopath and racial homicides'<sup>126</sup>. Carlo Lizzani generally considered the American film industry as irremediably 'interwoven with vulgarity, triviality and gangsterism'<sup>127</sup>. In response to the negative and dangerous influence of Hollywood films, the PCI's organic intellectuals put great value in their work as careful and attentive reviewers and committed themselves to increasing their critical orientation activity in order to defend the working masses from the American films' harmful messages.

At the same time, it was considered of great importance to objectively evaluate those positive elements coming from American films. For instance, Carlo Lizzani suggested stressing the recognition of all the contradictions that involuntarily shone through Hollywood's films in order to help building a concrete and true image of the unscrupulous American reality. The author brings as an example two films directed by Frank Capra, *State of the Union* (1948) and *Meet John Doe* (1941) that 'could not hide the pitiful situation of the American voter, the ambiguous actions of US' politicians and the several and astonishing contradictions of American capitalist society'<sup>128</sup>. Another example comes from Lorenzo Quaglietti's review of *Death of a Salesman* (1951, by Laslo Benedek): despite a series of structural faults, the film was praised for its rather detailed denunciation of the American way of living. According to the young communist reviewer, the film in fact revealed 'the crisis of the average American, exploited and victim of a society that left him no other solution than suicide'<sup>129</sup>.

Other ambivalent opinions were addressed to Charlie Chaplin's works discussed throughout the years of my analysis. The films of the British-born artist received both criticism and acclaim. Specifically, communist intellectuals described Charlie Chaplin's artistic vision of the world as

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p. 542.

<sup>127</sup> Lizzani, 1949, p. 91

<sup>128</sup> *Ibidem*.

affected of ‘abstract humanism’<sup>130</sup>. In other words, despite the fact that Chaplin’s efforts to break away from Hollywood’s mainstream and to show the contrasting aspects of a capitalist city (wealth-misery) were appreciated, they remarked that a historical background for his characters was missing. Glauco Viazzi, in an article from 1950, contended that it seemed that in Chaplin’s works nothing else was happening in the world, thus making characters like Chaplin’s tramp (‘Charlot’) appear passive and immature<sup>131</sup>.

Nevertheless, Chaplin’s films of the 1950’s, after the author’s abandonment of the tramp figure, were generally praised. The then head editor of *L’Unità* Pietro Ingrao extolled *Limelight* (1952) for restoring the ‘importance of love and human solidarity, feelings that were depicted as stronger than injustice and death’<sup>132</sup>. Ingrao remarked on Charlie Chaplin’s intention to repel the cultural mystifications that had enveloped the Western culture for a long time and to reject distrust, disillusion and fright. On the contrary, optimism and human dignity seemed to triumph in Chaplin’s work. These concepts served, according to the reviewer, as an example of brave struggles for justice and solidarity. *A King in New York* (1957) was also positively received. The renowned film critic Umberto Barbaro praised the satirical and critical message of Chaplin’s film meant to expose the malfunctions of the American system and the rots of the capitalist society. The reviewer added in the conclusion that the character in the film ‘seemed to understand that there can not be happiness in the American way of life’<sup>133</sup>.

Additionally, communist intellectuals acknowledged that even among Hollywood productions there were courageous works made by directors working against the tide who tried to depict the true aspects of the American life. These films with realist aspirations were often cited for their critical exposure of the contradictions and flaws of American capitalist society. Among the films praised by communist reviewers, *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946, by William Wyler) was often mentioned and considered by Lorenzo Quaglietti as ‘one of the masterpieces of the post-war realist current of American cinema’<sup>134</sup>.

Other appreciated realist films were *Crossfire* (1947, by Edward Dmytryk<sup>135</sup>), *Brute Force* (1947, by Jules Dassin) and *Till the End of Time* (1946, by Edward Dmytryk). Special attention was given to *Native Land*, a film endowed with deep and powerful realism, made in 1942 by Paul Strand and

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129 Lorenzo Quaglietti, 1952, “Il Festival cinematografico di Venezia”, *Società* N. 4, p. 731.

130 Glauco Viazzi, 1950, “Charlie Chaplin nella Critica Sovietica”, *Società* N. 2, p. 344.

131 *Ibidem*.

132 Pietro Ingrao, 1952, “L’ultimo film di Charlie Chaplin”, *Rinascita* N.12, p. 693.

133 Umberto Barbaro, 1957, “Come interpretare Charlot. ‘Un re a New York’”, *Rinascita* N. 10—11, p. 564.

134 *Ibidem*.

135 Dmytryk was later blacklisted for his alleged membership in the American Communist Party. He was one of the most prominent victims of McCarthyism that affected Hollywood in the later 1940’s and he is included in the list of the so-called ‘Hollywood Ten’

Leo Hurwitz. Glauco Viazzi considered the film a brave contribution for the cause of peace and democracy as it denounced overtly ‘American fascism’ (‘police, Ku Klux Klan, capitalist terrorist’) which was increasingly threatening the civil liberties of the workers and the American population as whole<sup>136</sup>. *Give us this day* (1949, by Edward Dmytryk) was praised for its proletarian setting and considered as one of the best works of ‘vanguard democratic cinema’. According to Viazzi, the drama of Italian bricklayers in New York during the Depression ‘is told with great humanity and antiracist sentiments and is received as a denunciation of the poor material conditions of living to which the workers are condemned by the capitalist system’<sup>137</sup>. *Strange Victory* (1948, by Leo Hurwitz), an independent documentary, was also praised by Viazzi for its anti-system contents which dealt with the contradictory issue of a recent anti-Nazi war while in the US ‘fascism, racism, jingoism and anti-labour persecution were proliferating’<sup>138</sup>.

On the contrary, negative reviews of single films were generally infrequent and very concise. Films were commonly torn to shreds in a couple of lines, if not even with few words. Negative or ugly films were mostly mentioned when screened at some film festivals (for example at different editions of the Venice Film Festival) and most of the time considered unworthy of their presence. This was the case of *The Heiress* (1949, by William Wyler), labelled by Viazzi as an escapist work, ‘formalist and decadent’ that fails to represent the reality of the structures of the 1800’s American bourgeois society<sup>139</sup>. Another film accused of escapism was *Catch a Thief* (1955) by Alfred Hitchcock, a director whose technical ability was seen by Umberto Barbaro as constantly at the service of the most frivolous entertaining<sup>140</sup>.

Additionally, harsh criticism was directed towards directors whose previous, but not repeated, works were praised for their realist content. For instance, Lorenzo Quaglietti took John Ford’s *The Quiet Man* (1952) as the demonstration of the director’s involution. Previously known (thanks to films like *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940) and *Stagecoach* (1939)) as a filmmaker very attentive to the utter essence of reality, the communist critic then labelled the director as ‘a tired, sated and quitter artist’<sup>141</sup>. The same applied to *Carrie* (1952) which, according to Quaglietti, arguably stood as an akin involution of William Wyler’s cinema. The director had in fact betrayed Theodore Dreiser’s novel (*Sister Carrie*), misinterpreting the nature of the characters and creating a pathetic love story completely neglectful of the realism contained in the book. However, the directors’ failures and lack of courage were blamed on Hollywood’s repressing milieu. The alleged current

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<sup>136</sup> Viazzi, 1949, p. 544.

<sup>137</sup> Viazzi, 1950, “Il Festival cinematografico di Karlovy Vary”, *Società*, p. 730.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 731.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>140</sup> Umberto Barbaro, 1955, “La XVI mostra d’arte cinematografica di Venezia”, *Rinascita* N. 9, p. 578.

<sup>141</sup> Quaglietti, 1952, p. 729.

artistic crisis of American cinema—as well as the scarcity of realist films—was directly ascribed to the lack of freedom of expression imposed by the anti-communist persecution of the McCarthyist era.

## Hollywood and McCarthyism

The PCI's organic intellectuals tirelessly persisted in trying to expose the intolerable situation of ideological and political persecution against Hollywood's 'progressive artists'. This topic was extensively debated throughout the whole period of analysis and considered the demonstration of the undemocratic and hostile nature of American cinema. The many articles published in both *Rinascita* and *Società* contended that the freedom of expression and intellectual dignity were patently put under attack and ostracised causing as a consequence the American film industry's inevitable artistic and economic crisis<sup>142</sup>.

Tommaso Chiaretti, in a long report from 1954, carefully reported on Hollywood's repression from the very first investigations on 'liberalism' of 1940—41 until the clamorous trial against the 'Hollywood Ten' in 1950. According to the communist critic, Hollywood carried out a vast and widespread 'antidemocratic' offensive directed against its antifascist, progressive and generally most talented film-makers with the clear intent to dismiss them. The House Un-American Activities Committee initially blacklisted a number of artists, around 300, who refused to collaborate (mostly through informings) to its anti-communist investigation and eventually conducted a trial to ten of them cited for contempt of Congress (Adrian Scott, Edward Dmytryk, Herbert Biberman, Albert Maltz, Dalton Trumbo, Alvah Bessie, Lester Cole, Ring Lardner Jr., Samuel Ornitz and John Howard Lawson)<sup>143</sup>. This judicial fabrication ended with the conviction of the Ten to several months of detention.

Hollywood's repressive actions were considered the direct consequence of the climate of instilled irrational fear for a mysterious and contagious danger—as the Soviet communism was propagandised—that pervaded the United States during the McCarthyist era. Chiaretti argued that fear was the dominating feeling in the American film industry: directors would be afraid of making nonconformist films and therefore risk their career (as it happened to 'the Ten'); producers would be afraid of seeing their films boycotted and lose for this reason huge sums of money.

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<sup>142</sup> Tommaso Chiaretti, 1954, "La crisi di Hollywood", *Società* N. 4, p. 636.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 640.

In addition, blackmailing would be present at every passage of film production and self imposed censorship would be taken as a norm. A concrete example came from the existence of The Production Code Administration, known also as Hays Code, accepted by the Motion Picture Association of America (that represents Hollywood's six biggest studios) as a self-control document which worked as a preventive ideological censorship of those themes dealing with social problems or controversies. Chiaretti contended that the real purpose of the Code was the defence of values, interests and privileges of the dominant class. This would largely explain, according to the PCI's reviewer, 'the constant condemnation in American films of 'racial promiscuity' as well as the preservation of social norms regarding sex, marriage, religion, crime and justice'<sup>144</sup>.

Tommaso Chiaretti's report examined the consequences of American cinema's persecutions: on one hand, they represented for many Europeans intellectuals the end of certain myths and illusions around the liberties granted by the American democracy. Nonetheless, on the other hand, it efficaciously purged certain troublesome artists and called a halt to the 'progressive' tendencies that were flourishing in Hollywood. Glauco Viazzi argued that Hollywood's persecution and imprisonment of left wing directors, as well as creative and technical cadres, resulted in a deep creative crisis and general lack of artistic ambitions that severely affected the Italian cinema and the Western one as a whole<sup>145</sup>.

### **American cinema as a threat to the Italian one**

The Italian Communist Party naturally sympathised with neorealist cinema as soon as Italian filmmakers, after the end of WWII, started to direct films whose themes were centred on 'the hopes and fears of the lower classes'<sup>146</sup>. This Italian film movement rapidly became famous worldwide and with the same rapidity it eclipsed at the beginning of the 1950's. Among the various reasons for the decline of Neorealism it has to be remarked the tireless criticism, attack and ostracism on the part of the Christian Democrats<sup>147</sup>. Nonetheless, the PCI's organic intellectuals conducted a determined battle for the defence of neorealist films trying to expose the

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<sup>144</sup> Chiaretti, 1954, p. 646.

<sup>145</sup> Viazzi, 1950, p. 710.

<sup>146</sup> Gundle, 2002, p. 50.

<sup>147</sup> A famous case is represented by Giulio Andreotti's letter of accuse directed towards *Umberto D.*, Vittorio De Sica's film from 1952. The then vice-minister of the De Gasperi cabinet expressed his discontent with the extreme pessimism of the film that would transmit a distort image of the country abroad. Andreotti accused the neorealist directors of '*lavare in pubblico i panni sporchi nazionali*' ('to air out the nation's dirty laundry in public'). For more info see, Tanzarella, S. (2007). *Gli anni difficili*. Trapani: Il Pozzo di Giacobbe.

ensorious behaviour of the US-allied Christian Democratic government and the invasion and control of the Italian film market by Hollywood productions. Ultimately, the communist intellectuals undertook a determined resistance against the attempts on the part of the ‘clericals’—as they referred to the Christian Democrats—to turn cinema into an instrument of the ‘DC regime’<sup>148</sup>.

Already in 1949, at the heyday of Neorealism, Carlo Lizzani denounced the ideological and economic attacks to the Italian neorealist cinema launched by Hollywood productions and the Christian Democratic government. This denunciation was restated in 1954, well beyond the generally accepted date that coincides with the end of the movement—1952<sup>149</sup>. The communist intellectuals accused the Christian Democratic government of impeding the fortunes and obstructing with every mean the production of Neorealist films. An unsigned report published in 1954 on *Rinascita* argued that the ‘clericals’ considered Neorealism highly troublesome ‘for its over-pessimistic focus on the contradictions of the post-war Italian society, for its being inspired by the ideals of the *resistenza* (‘resistance’) and for its being a cinematographic current deeply committed to social progress’<sup>150</sup>.

The DC government’s fight against Neorealism was conducted resorting to the use of a powerful tool: censorship. On the first place, a preventive censorship, based on financial blackmailing, negated funds and loans to neorealist film productions whose script had not previously been approved by the *Direzione generale dello spettacolo* (‘Directorate-General of show business’) –a governmental body. Secondly, an out-and-out censorship stopped film screenings or dictated edits and cuts. Conversely, the government refused to limit the import of American film productions (around 600 per year in 1949<sup>151</sup>) which as a consequence continued to control the greatest share on the Italian distribution market.

Additionally, the communist intellectuals argued in the same report on the situation of the Italian cinema in 1954 that the American film industry had launched a ferocious economic attack on the Italian one. For a series of reasons that included Italian cinema’s growth of production and increase of quality and Hollywood’s simultaneous decline, in the past years American films’ box office receipts drastically dropped from 80 % to 57 % of the total<sup>152</sup>. PCI’s intellectuals thus contended that for economic interests the American big studios were trying to destroy Italian cinema in order to regain greater market shares and favouring the recovery of Hollywood’s allegedly lost profitability.

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148 Unsigned report, 1954, “L’offensiva del Maccartismo contro il cinema italiano”, *Rinascita* N. 8—9, p. 628.

149 Tanzanella, 2007, p. 59.

150 Unsigned report, 1954, p. 628.

151 Carlo Lizzani, 1949, “Per una difesa attiva del cinema popolare”, *Rinascita* N. 2, p. 91.

152 Unsigned report, 1954, “L’offensiva del Maccartismo contro il cinema italiano”, *Rinascita* N. 8—9, p. 628—629.

Another word was frequently associated with the onslaught launched by the *DC* cooperatively with Hollywood: anti-communism. According to the editors of *Rinascita*, Italian films were accused of being an instrument of the communist propaganda and even a source of funding for the PCI's political action<sup>153</sup>. These reasons would explain the repressive and censorious measures taken against neorealist productions. Furthermore, a 1954 article published on *Rinascita* listed a long series of anti-communist films that were screened in Italian cinemas during those years. However, the authors remarked that very few of them had success. Especially the American ones were a terrible critical and box-office flop (worth of a mention are *The Red Menace* (1949, by Robert G. Springsteen) and *I Married a Communist* (1949, by Robert Stevenson). The only exception was represented by *Ninotchka* (1939, by Ernst Lubitsch) which arguably achieved success for starring a smiley Greta Garbo rather than for its anti-communist contents. The article highlighted that the most successful American film in Italy had been *Limelight* (1952) by Charlie Chaplin, a director who was forced to leave the United States during the McCarthyist era.

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<sup>153</sup> *Ibidem*.

## 6.2. COMICS

*“The interest of American readers for refined literature is every day deafened by TV and radio programmes, or movie theatres’ loudspeakers, so that they will not search for anything else other than the comics-like mediocrity they are offered since the childhood as an integral part of the American way of life”* (G. Corsini, 1952, “Cultura a fumetti”, *Rinascita* N. 2, p.110)

The only two articles dealing with the phenomenon of comics, described by Nilde Jotti, as ‘an out-and-out invasion’<sup>154</sup>, were extensively critical and left ultimately no space for praises or reconsiderations. Comics were vehemently attacked for both their form (‘a suppression of the creation and the conquests of the human intelligence’<sup>155</sup>) and their contents which were considered to have seriously harmful social and cultural consequences. Given the scarce number of mentions, it can be easily argued that communist intellectuals did not consider comic books as a form of culture worth of concern. On the contrary, Nilde Jotti and Gianfranco Corsini suggested to stem comics’ diffusion by posing greater attention on the younger generations’ moral and intellectual upbringing so that the youth would naturally prefer traditional and higher forms of literature.

### **Comics as the concrete representation of the American capitalist society**

Comics were essentially considered, for the stories they told, as counter-educational, morally harmful and misleading. Comic books’ subjects were most often adventurous stories where violence, brutality, scuffles and sexual instincts were exalted. Comic strips told almost exclusively horrifying stories where people were at war with each other, where they tended to solve any contrast with the scam, a punch or a gun and where they had no time to harbour feelings, ponder or reflect.

Nilde Jotti, a young politician who would later become a prominent figure of the party, believed that these features could be explained with the fact that comics had been invented in and come from the United States. They were deemed to embody the negative and hideous aspects of the American civilisation where everything was dictated by the sole concern for

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<sup>154</sup> Stephen Gundle reports that in Italy by 1950 a weekly comic book would averagely sell 2 million copies. Gundle, 2000, p. 34.

<sup>155</sup> Nilde Jotti, 1951, “La questione dei fumetti”, *Rinascita* N. 12, p. 584.

material success and where the more powerful person was always right. The authors argued that ‘a hero in such society, faithfully reproduced in comic books, can only be a gangster. And a delinquent is also a tycoon, a chief of police or the President who are together responsible for the sufferings of masses of poor and unemployed’<sup>156</sup>.

Nilde Jotti also analysed the form of comics: they were considered as a form of language written with basic and rudimentary images. The drawing was very poor and primitive and left out particulars and details. Comic strips were simply contrary to a discursive way of expression and reasoning and for this reason could only attract those minds who were not enough mature and demanding yet: children. Jotti considered comics of being particularly dangerous since, for their primitiveness, they did not stimulate children’s mind to comprehend the connections between happenings, to search for details, logic and discursive methods. Hence, comics were meant for minds that did not function and reflect and as a direct consequence became increasingly lazy.

In addition, Gianfranco Corsini, an important communist journalist, believed there was a direct relation between the widespread ‘consumption’ of comic strips by American youth (the young read averagely from 10 to 12 comics per week) to the decline of traditional books’ diffusion<sup>157</sup>. Nilde Jotti seemed to share this view when she argued that comics were a fundamental negation of traditional books: ‘they do not replace reading; on the contrary they suppress it’<sup>158</sup>. Both authors believed that youth who consumed comic books generally did not read books and this lack of education to thinking and reflecting could be considered as one of the main causes of restlessness, distance from the surrounding world, tendency to violence and brutality among the younger generations.

Finally, comics were deemed to embody the most vicious and negative aspects of the American capitalist society. They represented the cornerstone of a new form of upbringing permeated by the concept of ‘education to success’ that was eminently obscurantist and that negated the enriching and nourishing function of culture. Gianfranco Corsini considered comic books ‘as the standard-bearer of a programmatic boycott of ‘serious’ books and of a struggle against the real ‘culture’ planned by the ruling class’<sup>159</sup>.

As Gianfranco Corsini highlighted, most of the comic strips were published by the greatest and most powerful corporations of the publishing industry. Their profit interests overlapped with those of the capitalist ruling class that was to maintain as low as possible the intellectual level of the American public opinion. The communist writer argued that ‘Culture’, ‘with its power to

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<sup>156</sup> Nilde Jotti, 1951, “La questione dei fumetti”, *Rinascita* N. 12, p. 585.

<sup>157</sup> Gianfranco Corsini, 1952, “Cultura a fumetti”, *Rinascita* N. 2, p. 110.

<sup>158</sup> Nilde Jotti, 1951, “La questione dei fumetti”, *Rinascita* N. 12, p. 584.

<sup>159</sup> Corsini, 1952, p. 110.

emancipate the masses, constituted the greatest danger for the establishment and comics represented thereby a great weapon in the hands of the dominant class<sup>160</sup>.

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<sup>160</sup> *Ibidem.*

### 6.3. FIGURATIVE ARTS

*“We could now navigate in the thick fog represented by the abstract, semi-abstract and non-figurative paintings and sculptures made by young Italian artists who were profusely and generously invited or admitted to this exhibition. It would be an unpleasant navigation since there is really nothing to discover”* (P. Ricci, 1956, “Rassegna della XXVIII Biennale”, *Rinascita* N. 7, p. 377)

Articles that dealt with American painters or sculptors were only a handful as to show a refusal to and a lack interest in the newest developments and researches of contemporary art movements coming from overseas. American artists were only mentioned in the reports of the Venice Biennale, a major international art exhibition held in the Italian city every second year which attracted the most interesting works in contemporary art. As it emerges clearly from an analysis of these reports, the communist intellectuals adopted Social Realism as a standard of judgement for the works presented at the exhibition and those artists who did not meet this criterion were harshly criticised.

However, despite its mainstream popularity in the 1930’s, American Realism after WWII ‘became overshadowed by the dominance of abstract art movements’<sup>161</sup>, such as Abstract Expressionism. The American pavilion did not hesitate to display and promote Jackson Pollock’s ‘action painting’ and Alexander Calder’s abstract sculptures. Ultimately, I contend that the analysis of the Venice Biennale’s reports reveals the PCI’s narrowness of mind towards the developments of contemporary art—interestingly, Renato Guttuso’s negative judgement of the 27th Venice Biennale, summarised by the title of his review published on *Rinascita*, “Is art in danger of death?”, was mostly motivated by the choice of Surrealism as theme of the 1954 exhibition—and shows at the same time a stubborn and determined defence of (American) realism.

#### **American art at the Biennale**

Ricci’s quote in the opening of this chapter faithfully represents the PCI’s intellectuals’ approach to the new movements that started to appear in contemporary art after WWII. American artists were undoubtedly at the front line of these artistic innovations that shifted the attention from social themes, typical of the Great Depression, to the existential experience of

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<sup>161</sup> [http://www.moma.org/collection/theme.php?theme\\_id=10195](http://www.moma.org/collection/theme.php?theme_id=10195) last accessed on the 25th of April 2013

creating art. These new approaches were favoured by the climate of optimism and economic growth in post-war America that allowed artists to abandon social commitment in favour of a more individualistic and self-reflective artistic production. As it appears evident from the analysis of the articles, this self-referential and almost selfish way of doing art—where the painter ‘paints[s] just to paint’<sup>162</sup>—was thoroughly rejected by the communist intellectuals.

For example, Corrado Maltese, a PCI’s art historian who would leave the party in 1956 after the Soviet repression in Hungary, severely criticised the 1950 American exposition for its focus on abstract art. The abstract expressionist art movement was defined by Maltese as an ‘absolute nullity’, a symptom of ‘New York’s extreme degenerations’<sup>163</sup>. Jackson Pollock’s paintings, which represented the United States at the exhibition, were considered by the communist reviewer as pathetic *sbrodolature* (‘botches’) made by a mediocre *imbrattatele* (‘dauber’). Antonello Trombadori reserved a negative comment also for the abstract sculptor Alexander Calder whose works were defined ‘*alessandrine*, difficult to understand and hedonistic’<sup>164</sup>. The communist art critic even expressed dissatisfaction with the jury’s decision in 1952 to give his sculptures an award<sup>165</sup>. Additionally, mentions to American Abstract Expressionism, after these initial criticisms, ceased to appear on both *Rinascita* and *Società* as to demonstrate the PCI’s intellectuals’ rejection of the movement.

Conversely, mentions of Realism, also in its American form, continued to appear throughout the reports of the different editions of the Venice Biennale as to restate the importance for the PCI of this movement in the art panorama. The 26<sup>th</sup> edition of the Venice Biennale in 1952, characterised by a longed ‘realist initiative’, was promptly acclaimed by the reviewers. Trombadori reported that traces of realism seemed to appear also in the American pavilion as to demonstrate that ‘even in the most arid and dissolute realities the artist had possibilities of rebellion against the decadence and chances of continuation of the most valid national artistic tradition’<sup>166</sup>—realism indeed.

Trombadori praised the exposition of the works of a characteristic and noteworthy painter unjustly ignored by the official critics and the international jury: Edward Hopper. The PCI author described Hopper as a keen and precise reporter of the solitude of America’s concrete suburbs and small towns where the painter was able nonetheless to light up vivid and warm

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<sup>162</sup> This quote is attributed to Jackson Pollock and describes his way of approaching the moment of artistic creation. It continues with: ‘the gesture on the canvas was a gesture of liberation, from value – political [a]esthetic, moral’. The quote appears at page 22 on Jones, A. (2006) *A companion to contemporary art since 1945*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

<sup>163</sup> Corrado Maltese, 1950, “La XXV Biennale di Venezia”, *Società* N. 3, p. 536

<sup>164</sup> Antonello Trombadori, 1952, “La XXVI Biennale: il pro e il contro”, *Rinascita* N. 6, p. 374.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibidem*.

colours (a turquoise flower or a blonde head of hair)<sup>167</sup>. A realist painter who created art that deeply and profoundly talked about the United States. In the pages of *Società* Antonio Del Guercio described Edward Hopper as a painter of ‘US’ middle-towns and suburbs that clung to the unrewarding theme of the solitude of the American life, whose denunciation granted the artist a certain undeniable lyricism<sup>168</sup>.

A realist critique of American society was brought to fore also in the report of the 1956 Biennale. According to Paolo Ricci, amid the general greyness and monotony of the 28<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, the American pavilion, set up by the Chicago Art Institute, stood out for its interesting and unique theme: ‘the American painters and the city’. From this collection of different paintings the American city, be it New York or Chicago, small or big, appeared shrouded in terrible melancholy and squalor. Ricci contended that from every painting emanated a bottomless desperation and misery and the painters seemed to pride themselves on excluding any sympathy for and faith in the mankind and society<sup>169</sup>. Works of Edward Hopper (*Early Sunday Morning*, *Nighthawks*), Lyonel Feininger and Ivan Albright were mentioned.

Together with Edward Hopper, great attention was dedicated to another artist who ‘talked about reality’<sup>170</sup>: Ben Shahn. The name of this American artist stood out in the obstinate defence and praise of Realism. Renato Guttuso, a prominent painter and PCI’s senator in the late 1970’s, described him as a free, passionate and authentic representative of the American people and traced a comparison between his works and those of the best American writers (Whitman, Dreiser, and Faulkner)<sup>171</sup>. The critic Antonio Del Guercio contended that Ben Shahn’s works were among the most significant experiences in contemporary painting. His works were praised for their explicit social consciousness and their everyday life themes. His mural paintings and posters were indeed full of illustrative and narrative power where every strident contrast of the American society was clearly exposed. Del Guercio argued that Ben Shahn gave voice to the ‘feelings of workers, paltry strata, exploited, ‘democratic combatants’ and dreamers of a more human happiness’<sup>172</sup>. It was rather evident that Shahn’s political affiliation (he was a renowned left-winger) was also appreciated.

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<sup>167</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>168</sup> Antonio Del Guercio, 1952, “Il Realismo alla Biennale di Venezia”, *Società* N. 3, p. 537.

<sup>169</sup> Paolo Ricci, 1956, “Rassegna della XXVIII Biennale”, *Rinascita* N. 7, p. 377—378.

<sup>170</sup> Renato Guttuso, 1954, “È l’arte in pericolo di morte?”, *Rinascita* N. 10, p. 696.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>172</sup> Antonio Del Guercio, 1954, “La XXVII Biennale di Venezia”, *Società* N. 5, p. 837.

## Results from the quantitative data

As shown in the table 3 attached in the appendix section, *Rinascita* published a significant number of paintings during the ten years of study. These 435 pictures were scattered throughout the magazine's issues and bore no description of the works—with the only exception of a small caption that included the name of the author and the title of the painting. The analysis of the data casts lights on the PCI's approach to figurative arts, reaffirming the party's preference for national painters and social realist themes<sup>173</sup> and style. It additionally demonstrates the disregard of communist intellectuals towards America's new art movements that had nonetheless raised lively debates at the Venice international exhibitions of the decade. The table also shows how the magazine's editors appreciated the leftist political affiliation of certain artists whose style of painting was however not directly related to social realism.

Out of 435 total paintings published on *Rinascita*, only 5 were works made by American artists. Additionally, each one of these paintings belonged to the social realist style: 3 murals by Anton Refregier, 1 by Ben Shahn and 1 oil by Edward Hopper. It is important to remark how Shahn's and Hopper's works were shown in occasion of their presence at the Venice Biennale whereas the same did not happen when Pollock's or other abstract expressionist works were present at the exhibition. This can be explained with the communist intellectuals' attitude of total rejection and even superiority that they took towards American contemporary art movements. In addition, there are reasons to believe that the very limited presence of American paintings in the pages of *Rinascita* reveals the communist thinkers' feeling of total discouragement and resignation towards the recent developments of the American artistic world where Realist painting no longer played any primary role.

The vast majority (299 out of 435) of the paintings appearing in the pages of *Rinascita* were made by Italian artists. This seems to demonstrate the Italian Communist Party's intention to ground the country's cultural rebirth on national and traditions. It appears also evident how French art was considered close and akin to the Italian one: 40 out of 136 'foreign' paintings were made by French artists. *Rinascita* published works by important realist painters like Courbet and Fougeron as well as by impressionists like Renoir, Utrillo and Manet, the fauvist Matisse and the cubist Cezanne. In addition, from the choices of *Rinascita* it appears clear that the political belief of some artists was taken into account: 19 paintings or drawings by the Spanish exiled Pablo Picasso, member of French Communist Party, were printed over the various years even though

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<sup>173</sup> 41 out of 131 of foreign paintings or sculptures came from Soviet-allied countries where Social Realism was in fact the official art form adopted by the various Communist parties.

they belonged to the artist's cubist period. Finally, 6 murals of Diego Rivera, a renowned Mexican communist artist, were published in 1957.

## 6.4. MUSIC

“The history of the musical art of the last decades has clearly demonstrated that the authentic and enduring values of contemporary music are represented in the realist operas and not in the abstract and stillborn experiences of formalist composers” (A. Khaciaturian, 1954, “Risposta a Howard Taubman sull’arte sovietica”, *Rinascita* N. 5, p. 334)

The lack of attention to musical genres coming from the United States seems to demonstrate how communist intellectuals openly ignored the great popularity that jazz, swing and boogie woogie—only to cite some—encountered in post-war Europe. In the period of study 1948—1957 PCI’s intellectuals made no real attempt to deal with and interpret the phenomenon of jazz music. A short and awkward approach was only attempted in response to the publication in Italy of two studies of jazz written by Anglo-Saxon experts.

On the one hand, communist reviewers argued that jazz was not a form of art worthy of being included in the classical music tradition<sup>174</sup>—as to remark the inferiority of a genre that was probably too modern and experimental. On the other, it was contended that jazz was not a music style ascribable only to the *razza negra* (‘negro race’) but it was on the contrary ‘class music’ belonging to both white and black proletariat of America’s southern states. The author of the short and unsigned review highlighted New Orleans’ economic conditions at the time of the birth of jazz music as to remark the achievement of the working class to ‘elaborate, against every aesthetic, moral and social certainty, a new and revolutionary music language’<sup>175</sup>. However, *Rinascita* and *Società* did not explain how this emancipating and liberating genre, created by the oppressed American proletariat, could influence the Italian masses and why jazz in Italy had been mostly welcomed as an escapist form of music.

The idea of music as a leisure experience, a form of mass entertainment was completely opposed. Conversely, the party’s intellectuals kept on holding in high regard only those genres belonging to a classical and humanist tradition such as opera, concerts for piano, violin and ballet. It is evident how Italian Communist Party encountered serious difficulties to fully understand the occurring process of music popularisation<sup>176</sup>. In particular, American-style music, for its links to a newly discovered desire for ‘physical and spiritual liberation’<sup>177</sup> and its ability to satisfy Italians’

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<sup>174</sup> Unsigned short review of Barry Ulanov, 1952, “A History of Jazz in America”, *Società* N. 4, p. 782.

<sup>175</sup> Unsigned short review of Jon Lang, 1951, “Il Jazz”, *Società* N. 1, p. 192.

<sup>176</sup> For more information related to the development of radio broadcast and popularity of American music styles in Italy, see Forgacs and Gundle, 2007, p. 185.

<sup>177</sup> Gundle, 2000, p. 32.

great demand for entertainment and distraction, was seen with patent hostility and rejection by communist intellectuals.

## 6.5. LITERATURE AND POETRY

*“Americans’ indifference to literature can be blamed on the business’ commercialism which, despotically extended even in the cultural field, domineers to the extent that real culture is relegated to the academia or to a very limited circle of fortunate initiates”* (E. Oddis, 1951, “Alcune considerazioni sulla letteratura americana”, *Rinascita* N. 7, p. 366)

*“For this reason we bid today farewell to Hemingway in an affectionate way. Like for others goodbyes said to our dreams, delusions and myths of our tender age, it would be ungenerous not to recognize the importance he had in making us become who we are”* (I. Pizzetti, 1955, “Un Addio a Hemingway”, *Società* N. 1, p. 45)

From the analysis of the articles published on *Rinascita* and *Società* it appears evident that the PCI’s intellectuals considered literature and poetry to belong to the elite culture, only accessible to a small group of well-read<sup>178</sup>. I have reasons to contend that these two forms of art coming from overseas were not considered truly ‘dangerous’ or capable of exerting a negative—neither a positive—influence on the working masses. The reception of American books appears to be less laboured and more relaxed. There is no patent attempt to channel and guide the tastes of the communist readership and it seems that communist intellectuals had no official line for reviewing and debating American literature and poetry.

Moreover, the PCI’s intellectuals proved to have a deep knowledge of American literature, to be fond of many authors of the antebellum period whom they heartily recommended<sup>179</sup>. Nonetheless, for ideological reasons dictated by the Cold War climate, they made an effort, though not always very convincing, to trace a negative and harmful profile of certain post-war American authors. However, criticisms mostly concerned the threatening capitalist economic system that would cause the excessive isolation of the American writers and the consequent decline of popularity of the country’s refined literature.

The reviews of American literary works were plentiful, yet there were no recurrent arguments of criticism that related them over the different years—unlike with cinema or figurative art. This seems to demonstrate that communist intellectuals were freer to approach the various works in a

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<sup>178</sup> It can be brought forward as a demonstration of this approach the presence, on different 1952 issues of *Rinascita*, of 5 poems written by Paul Eluard and published in French without any translation in Italian. Conversely, some poems written in dialect, considered as a poorer language, were duly translated.

<sup>179</sup> Throughout the different literary reviews many references appeared to various American writers whose works were praised and recommended without nevertheless a deep analysis of either their form or content. To give some examples, Whitman’s *Leaves of grass* was defined a ‘noble work of poetry’; Herman Melville’s *Pierre: or, The Ambiguities* and *Moby Dick* were considered two great masterpieces of American Romanticism; Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* as one of the masterpieces of American literature; Sinclair Lewis as a ‘great American writer’; William Faulkner like a ‘writer with a splendid talent for evocation and narrative creation’.

more independent and autonomous way. There were of course numerous stylistic comments, yet they were personal and made by single reviewers on single authors. With the exception of T.S. Eliot, arguably for his very conservative views<sup>180</sup>, no other author was lambasted by communist reviewers. For example, the criticisms of Faulkner's, Fitzgerald's, Hemingway's or Whitman's works, to name some, always paired with a demonstration of respect and regard for the authors' literary career. Additionally, the literary genre of reference was still realism, though this time not exalted with excessive dogmatism. Writers belonging to left-wing tradition were extolled for their being conveyers of a severe disapproval of the American society and a mention was made to brave authors who were victims of the McCarthyist persecutions.

### **The writer's solitude**

Communist intellectuals expressed repeatedly their concern for the fate and condition of the American writer in relation to the alleged crisis affecting American literature in the post-war period—according to them, clearly demonstrated by the lack of a masterpiece in the 1940's. The articles published on *Rinascita* and *Società* attempted to investigate the causes of the decline of popularity of 'serious literature'. The PCI's writers focussed on its social and economic causes and tried to relieve the contemporary American writers of the responsibilities for their condition of 'isolation'—as it was described by the overseas commentators.

Gianfranco Corsini contended that the crisis of American literature could be explained with the rapid and negative changes of Americans' reading habits: the author reported that people read much less than in Europe and 10 % of the entire adult population only would buy 70 % of the books sold in the whole country<sup>181</sup>. Furthermore, a twentieth part of this 10 % would read the greatest share of these publications while the rest was represented by occasional novel readers<sup>182</sup>. Additionally, Corsini remarked that approximately 60 % of the books sold belonged to the genre of crime or western novel—not exactly an example of refined literature.

These statistics were shown as to demonstrate the irrelevant position that a book and a writer had in the American capitalist society. Gianfranco Corsini also argued that the cause of this indifference towards 'serious' literature was the ongoing process of mass scale 'commodification' of spiritual and cultural values which increasingly directed the readers' attention and preferences

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<sup>180</sup> The PCI's organic intellectuals hold T.S. Eliot in harsh contempt and described him as a '*pallone gonfiato*' ('big headed'). He was criticised for his conservative and obscurantist ideas but also for his obscure and difficult poems and for his incapability to deal with any form of reality. His style was considered as a 'negation of poetry'. Hope Robbins Rossel, 1950, "Il mito di T.S. Eliot", *Rinascita* N. 4, p. 216.

<sup>181</sup> Corsini, 1952, p. 109.

on the most advertised products rather than on the most meritorious. Accordingly, a writer with no audience lived and worked in an isolated condition. However, the PCI's intellectual contended that the authors' solitude was the direct result of the isolation created around them by the competitive American capitalist society which, for exclusively economic and profit reasons, 'considered superfluous and not beneficial the commercialisation of good quality books'<sup>183</sup>.

Hence, according to Corsini, literature had become simply a product subject to the laws of the market, though its chance to compete with other commercial publications was made practically impossible by its difficult and refined contents not conceived to satisfy millions of 'consumers'. As a consequence, commercial publications were the form of literature—though hardly deserving to be defined so—that received the market's and the dominant class' approval. Edoardo Oddis, a communist literary critic, harshly criticised these fleeting literary works for their poor and reactionary contents and for their reinforcing the obscurantist and conservative values of the dominant class. It is worth underlining how the severe attack on commercial literature greatly reminds of Hollywood's accusation of carrying out a silent ideological propaganda meant to win the mind of the masses.

Edoardo Oddis described commercial publications that were constantly flooding the publishing market as 'literature of happiness' or 'literature of inner peace'. The communist commentator accused these books of 'drawing extensively from psychoanalysis, psychiatric and philosophy of emotions'<sup>184</sup>—all sciences rejected by left-wing intellectuals—and of aiming at 'reassuring and instructing the patients after having blamed them for an illness that belonged on the contrary to the corruption of the American society'<sup>185</sup>. Additionally, according to the communist author, these books (some titles were mentioned: *Peace of mind*, *Explore your soul*, *Our inner conflicts*, *The security of emotions* and *How to avoid preoccupations and start living*), heavily advertised on magazines, billboards and radio and sensationally reviewed by presumed critics, were openly approved and supported by the establishment for their ability to avert any possible criticism of the many social diseases<sup>186</sup>. In conclusion, Oddis contended that such mystifying literature, where psychoanalysis goes hand in hand with religion, offered an atmosphere of optimism and happiness where the reader was lead to passively accept the negative influence of the external environment and where 'social pathologies were rationalised and justified as the result of personal faults'<sup>187</sup>.

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182 *Ibidem*.

183 *Ibid.*, p. 110.

184 Edoardo Oddis, 1951, "Alcune considerazioni sulla letteratura americana", *Rinascita* N. 7, p. 370

185 *Ibidem*.

186 *Ibidem*.

187 *Ibidem*.

## American literature's reception: acclaims and criticisms

Edoardo Oddis in an article from 1951 published on *Rinascita* engaged in a broad analysis of the American literature of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This was the only attempt appearing on the communist magazines of the time to formulate an all-encompassing and definitive appraisal of the various American literary works that would make clear the PCI's intellectuals true reception of the subject. Oddis contended that the real defining character of American literature was 'evasion': the writer had to escape from social and moral obligations, from the struggle as the real source of art, from the objective reality to take shelter in selfish pessimism<sup>188</sup>.

For these reasons Oddis argued that American literature was more 'informative than formative, descriptive than representative, innovator in the form yet not creative in the essence'<sup>189</sup>. In addition, the communist thinker argued that writers failed to tell the true spirit of the American people for their constant tendency to seek refuge in the frivolous cosmopolitan world where the bourgeoisie anaesthetised the demands of change and transformation of the society –Oddis evidently referred to the so called 'Jazz Age' and named books of Sinclair Lewis, Thornton Wilder and Francis Scott Fitzgerald. He mentioned also works of the rioting 1930's like *Gone With the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell, *Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck, *Sanctuary* by William Faulkner or Eugene O'Neill's poetry that nonetheless had strongly conservative purposes.

Nevertheless, it appeared from Oddis' analysis that some authors truly sensed the collective euphoria, though described as sometimes naïve and sterile, that characterised the protest movements of the 1930's and attempted to shape a new American spirit, to give life to social discontent and to change the mind of the American people. Oddis called this literature 'sincere' and considered it as the progenitor of the political committed, 'democratic' and pacifist one that originated in the 1950's. These authors, largely reviewed on the communist magazines, belonged to 'a left-wing' literature that did not compromise with the American warmongering establishment and therefore represented the real artistic consciousness and interpret of the American people.

The most prominent author as well as the initiator of American 'democratic' literature was considered to be Theodore Dreiser. The Italian Communist Party's intellectuals extolled his realist novels, notably *Sister Carrie* (1900) and *An American tragedy* (1925), which 'profusely showed the terrible consequences of the amoral capitalist world on the life conditions of the working masses'<sup>190</sup>. Dreiser's works painted an accurate picture of the repressive and hypocritical

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., p. 367.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>190</sup> Unsigned short review of Theodore Dreiser, 1952, "Nostra Sorella Carrie", *Società* N. 2, p. 187.

American society of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup>, the period of greatest expansion of American capitalism<sup>191</sup>, using a sober yet powerful style that exalted the thoughts, actions and lives of the characters. In addition, communist reviewers remarked Dreiser's personal political commitment and its membership in the American Communist Party, for which reason the bourgeois critics had attempted to diminish his literary value.

Another writer praised for his political commitment was Howard Fast, described by Edoardo Oddis as *una voce dell'avvenire* ('a voice for the future')<sup>192</sup>. *Rinascita* published a contribution of the author where he told about the difficulties he had experienced in trying to publish his fortunate 1952 novel *Spartacus*. Six publishers, intimidated by the anti-communist investigations of the McCarthy era, refused to consider the work of a writer known for his left-wing positions. Eventually, Fast decided to self-publish his novel which nonetheless became a unique success. The communist magazine brought Howard Fast as an example of the true American culture's symbolic struggle for freedom and democracy in the country<sup>193</sup> that was considered to be able to eliminate the climate of ignorance, intolerance and censorship gripping the United States of the early 1950's. Additionally, *Rinascita* published two anti-war poems<sup>194</sup> by Howard Fast meant to show the pacifist commitment of American democratic authors.

Other attention was given to writers whose political views were evidently akin to those of the Italian Communist Party. The works of Albert Maltz, a screenwriter blacklisted by Hollywood, were largely appreciated. His denunciation of the American society's racism and violence was highlighted in the reviews of the screenplay for the film *Naked City* (1948, by Jules Dassin), the books *Black Legion*, *The Journey of Simon McKeever* and *The Cross and the Arrow*<sup>195</sup>. In addition, A contribution written by Jack London appeared on *Rinascita*<sup>196</sup> and was meant to represent a testimony of the difficult life conditions of the American working class where the author claimed to belong.

An autobiographical novel written by V. J. Jerome, *A Lantern for Jeremy*, 'one of the most brilliant Marxist critics in the American cultural world'<sup>197</sup>, was described as one of the most humane and touching books of the recent literature of the United States<sup>198</sup>. A short review published on *Società* describes John Reed's fortunate personal accounts of the Bolshevik

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191 Unsigned short review of Theodore Dreiser, 1955, "Il Finanziere", *Rinascita* N. 5, p. 382.

192 Edoardo Oddis, 1951, "Alcune considerazioni sulla letteratura americana", *Rinascita* N. 7, p. 369.

193 Howard Fast, 1952, "Come è stato scritto in America un romanzo su Spartaco", *Rinascita* N. 3, p. 169.

194 Howard Fast, 1952, "Aaron Klein and Arthur Dombrowski", *Rinascita* N. 12, p. 676.

195 Roberto Boncio, 1956, review of Albert Maltz' "La freccia di fuoco", *Rinascita* N. 5—6, p. 328.

196 Jack London, 1950, "Ciò che la vita significa per me", *Rinascita* N. 7, p. 361

197 Unsigned short review of V.J. Jerome, 1952, "A Lantern for Jeremy", *Società* N. 4, p. 770.

Revolution, *Ten Days that Shook the World*, as an indispensable tool to understand those crucial historical events<sup>199</sup>. Finally, Stefan Heym's two novels, *Goldsborough* and *The Crusaders*, were praised for their dramatic and harsh denunciation of the politically oppressive climate triumphant in the United States. The reviewers considered Heym's works to belong to the 'proletarian literature' whose themes were the struggles of the working class, and praised his books for their realist features 'deemed worthy of the finest American contemporary realist tradition'<sup>200</sup>.

However, unlike what happened with other forms of art, the PCI's intellectuals only moderately emphasised the realist features of American literature. Among the few works belonging to this literary trend that were acclaimed, it is worth mentioning *Spoon River Anthology* by Lee Masters that was extensively reviewed in occasion of the author's death in 1950. Dario Puccini, a communist literary critic who left the party in 1956 after the Soviet repression of the Hungarian revolt, explained that Lee Masters, belonging to the naturalist school of Chicago and characterised by pessimist realism, accused the American bourgeoisie of 'superstitious Puritanism' and backwardness<sup>201</sup>. Puccini remarked that poetry became for the author a naked and sincere confession that could only originate from the voices of the dead. The dead, more than the living ones, could tell the grey squalor and the silent tragedy of the existence in a small puritan town like Spoon River. The communist reviewer saw Lee Masters' verses as a condemnation of the modern American life and its moral values<sup>202</sup>.

Finally, an interesting analysis of Ernest Hemingway's writing appeared in a long article entitled *Un addio a Hemingway* ('A Farewell to Hemingway') published on *Società* in 1955, the year after the American author's novel *The Old Man and the Sea* had won the Nobel Prize in Literature. Ippolito Pizzetti, the author of the piece, told the process of separation from Hemingway's compositions that had interested a generation of attached readers on whom the American writer had previously exerted an immense influence. Specifically, the writer had the clear intention to address the whole body of the communist intellectuals and their past relationship with the American Nobel Prize winner.

Pizzetti wrote: 'to a great part of us Hemingway had a lot to say and teach. He and his heroes are by now part of our youth but they were left behind with it...While I was reading his last book, *The Old Man and the Sea*, the sense of separation that I had already felt with *Across the River and Into the Trees* became even stronger'<sup>203</sup>. These words were used to express the communist readers'

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198 *Ibidem*.

199 Unsigned short review of John Reed, 1957, "Dieci giorni che sconvolsero il mondo", *Società* N. 5, p. 988.

200 Rino Dal Sasso, 1957, review of Stefan Heym's "La città è nostra", *Rinascita* N. 6, p. 330.

201 Dario Puccini, 1950, "Epica dell'illusione in 'Spoon River'", *Società* N. 1, p. 63.

202 *Ibid.*, p. 65.

203 Ippolito Pizzetti, 1955, "Un Addio a Hemingway", *Società* N. 1, p. 24.

changed approach to Hemingway's themes and values: the old heroic myths that the left-wing intellectuals identified with had actually been superseded with more concrete and human desires and ambitions. To them Hemingway appeared by then a monotonous writer, without development, without possibilities of evolutions. Puccini considered Hemingway incapable of proceeding beyond his juvenile conscience that was characterised 'by an irreparable rift between his and his desperate heroes' personality and the world he lived in'<sup>204</sup>. Hemingway's pessimism, his heroism as a vocation, the tragedies of his 'lost generation', lost in fact meaning as the catastrophes of World War II closely affected this generation of intellectuals who subsequently moved beyond the American writer in search of a new conscience.

### **Results from the quantitative data**

As showed in Table 1 and 2, only 6 American literary works, between excerpts from books and poems, were published in ten years of *Rinascita*. I argue that this fact can be explained with the reluctance on the part of the communist intellectuals to expose their readers to American cultural products which had not been previously introduced or commented. The 6 contributions present in *Rinascita* were made by authors who either had political beliefs clearly akin to the PCI's intellectuals or had been previously reviewed in the magazine. For example, the politically persecuted Albert Maltz and Howard Fast had already been taken as example of the courageous 'democratic' literature of the US and Walt Whitman had previously been introduced in a long article in 1948 where his poetry collection *Leaves of Grass* was exalted for its evocative and innovative style.

In general, I believe that the choice of narrative works to be published on *Rinascita* was dictated by the research for socialist themes and messages, as it appears evident from the origin and the political affiliation of the authors. However, the small number of foreign excerpts (14) does not allow me to draw further conclusion. Additionally, I believe that the landslide majority of narrative works written by Italian authors confirms the Italian Communist Party's strategy to focus their hegemonic project on the national culture.

Conversely, the analysis of the table collecting the data of the poems published on *Rinascita* shows an approximate balance between the number of Italian and foreign writings. A closer look to the origin of the 'foreign poems' reveals nonetheless how their authors for the greatest part were committed leftist intellectuals who joined the Communist Party of their own country: Aragon, Eluard and Leger in France, Alberti in Spain, Neruda in Chile and Fast in the United

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

States. Including the poems written by authors coming from Soviet-allied countries, I argue that these data demonstrates the PCI's magazine's intent to give testimony of the communist intellectuals' international alliance for the defence of peace, socialism and democracy. Poetry more than narrative was considered to be a tool with which the writers could efficaciously listen to and communicate the working masses' refusal to war and violence, need for social justice and equality. In other words, poetry was seen as the purest and most suitable form of art with which the intellectuals could communicate with the people and considered as a synonym of political commitment.

## 6.6. CULTURAL RELATIONS

*“The New Man will be enabled to live his own culture that is to believe in it, to produce it for the others. Not in the abstract but in a daily and prolific exchange of life experiences. It goes without saying that this society will be the socialist one, and its future developments will be in the direction of a deeper and more aware socialism”* (C. Pavese, 1950, “Cultura americana e cultura democratica”, *Rinascita* N. 1, p. 110)

A series of articles published on the PCI's magazines dealt directly with phenomenon of Americanisation that was interesting the Italian society of the post-war period. The analysis of their arguments reveals a clear picture of the party's reception of American cultural products and shows the PCI's intellectuals' awareness of their role in this unprecedented 'battle of ideas' between two opposed and irreconcilable ideologies. On the one hand, the communist intellectuals constantly remarked the unbridgeable distance existing between the American bourgeois understanding of culture and the democratic progressive one. On the other hand, they engaged in a determined and open confrontation with American culture whose purpose was to lift the veil of hypocrisy and falsehood that facilitated its popularity.

The prominent writer Cesare Pavese attempted in a short editorial published on *Rinascita* to make a distinction between the ideals and principles inspiring American culture and the 'democratic' one. Pavese contended that American culture, in the form diffused in Italy by numerous magazines like *Selezione dal Reader's Digest*, vulgarly mortified the noble concept of culture. It was deemed as 'false culture', mirror of Americanism's propaganda. However, besides the political motives behind it, Pavese attacked American culture for the process of its creation that did not require exertion, strain and involvement of the recipients. American culture was considered 'false' because it was portrayed as 'something easy, restful, and reducible to a joke or an advertisement'<sup>205</sup>. On the contrary, 'democratic culture' should be produced independently and consciously by the people through their everyday activity and work. The masses should take possession of culture and not abandon it to so-called 'qualified experts'—which Pavese believed to be ultimately the American reactionary point of view<sup>206</sup>.

In general, American culture was perceived by the vast majority of communist thinkers as carrying values that intended to deprive human beings of their social participation and their ability of rational thinking. The true goal of American literature, films and art was to invigorate the dominant class' attempt to transform the masses in docile tools in their hands, to turn

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<sup>205</sup> Cesare Pavese, 1950, “Cultura americana e cultura democratica”, *Rinascita* N. 1, p. 110.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibidem*.

workers into obedient robots<sup>207</sup>. In order to achieve this purpose, American bourgeois intellectuals and artists resorted to pessimism and ignorance apology, total rejection and manipulation of reality, depiction of violence and exaltation of war. Furthermore, American culture was strongly characterised by imperialist features and expansionist goals that aimed at conquering foreign audiences and markets recurring in most cases to distorted and false portrayals of the American lifestyle. The idyllic image of the United States that was sent to Italy was only the creation of a skilful propagandistic organisation<sup>208</sup>.

PCI's intellectuals believed that American culture, which was indeed penetrating the heart of the Italian society in the 1950's, was indissolubly tied to and thoroughly representing the current political and social situation of that country. It was a culture that promoted the United States' aggressive imperialism and embodied the corrupting values of a society afflicted by political persecutions, racial intolerance and lack of freedoms and civil rights<sup>209</sup>. However, communist intellectuals also recognised that American culture was still largely associated with the set of clichés relating to *il mito Americano* ('the American myth') that had been very popular and fascinating for many decades—arguably also reinforced by the stories of millions of Italian who emigrated to the United State seeking their fortune. Americanism, the admiration for anything coming from overseas, was very deep-rooted in the Italians' collective imagination and the United States became to represent, especially under Mussolini's regime, a great symbol of democracy and freedom.

Communist thinkers manifested great awareness of the influence that American culture had on antifascist intellectuals and of its still present legacy. Combative and libertarian American literature found way into the hearts of young Italian antifascist intellectuals becoming for them almost a synonym of 'culture' in a democratic, new and modern sense<sup>210</sup>. However, it was argued that this process had ostensibly been overstated by the fascist experience and the American reality had appeared for long time through the deforming and exaggerating lenses of a dictatorship. As a consequence, the task for the PCI's intellectual, at the time of the escalation of the Cold War, was to eradicate these mystifying views of American culture and root out the

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<sup>207</sup> Alexander Faadev, 1948, "Il congresso di Wroclaw", *Società* N. 3, p. 306

<sup>208</sup> Two articles published on *Rinascita* in 1953 and 1954 discussed the functions of the United States Information Service (USIS), an organisation dependent on the CIA-funded Congress for Cultural Freedom and to be considered as part of the US cultural diplomacy; interestingly, the communist magazines described the propagandistic purposes of this powerful organisation whose official task was indeed to 'spread in Italy the knowledge of the level of development and civilisation in the United States illustrating their concrete aspects as well as their social, spiritual and artistic characteristics'. Orazio Barbieri, 1954, "I Rapporti culturali con l'estero e il principio della reciprocità", *Rinascita* N. 6, p. 423

<sup>209</sup> Gianfranco Corsini, 1953, "Gli intellettuali europei di fronte al fascismo americano", *Rinascita* N. 10, p. 562.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 564.

American myth through an attentive analysis of the United States' capitalist society that would reveal the true face of the country.

Finally, the Italian Communist Party's thinkers indicated the 'lively and multiform reality of the American left'<sup>211</sup> as a great ally in this mission. Their intent was to tell the stories and the testimonies of American progressive intellectuals and artists in order to inform the Italian audience about the degenerations of the United States' capitalist society. Their struggles for justice and freedom, their refusal to war, their political persecutions during the McCarthyist era were largely reported on the PCI's magazines in order to expose the Italian (and European) intellectuals to the real image of the American myth.

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid., p. 565.

## 6.7. AMERICAN SOCIETY

*“The black worker Willie McGee, father to four children, was killed in Laurel, Mississippi, in front of a bloodthirsty crowd of 500 people on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May, few minutes after 2 AM. A portable electric chair, pride of the modern American industry, was purposely installed in a room of Laurel’s penitentiary and several rows of seats were occupied by the privileged spectators of the execution. A group of Ku Klux Klan’s members spectated through the open windows rejoicing for the ‘perfect functioning’ of the justice of the South”* (G. Corsini, 1951, “L’assassinio di Willie Mc Gee”, *Rinascita* N. 5, p. 242)

The dismantling of the positive American myth was assigned to a significant number of reports that critically dealt, throughout the whole period of analysis, with disparate characteristics of the United States’s society. These articles, ubiquitous in both *Rinascita* and *Società*, reveal the party’s intellectuals’ total repulsion for America’s social and economic order and offer a clear image of the communist thinkers’ involvement in the Cultural Cold War. They relentlessly denounced the cruel and sad aspects of the American way of life: corruption, crime, racial and political persecutions, exploitation and poverty—among the most mentioned topics—were always related to the flawed and moribund capitalist system. Additionally, the obvious purpose of these articles was to reveal and tell the communist readers the true face of the United States’ society which was contrarily and carefully concealed by the US-supported *regime democristiano* (“Christian Democrat regime”).

Several articles published on the communist magazines referred to the climate of racial hatred that pervaded the everyday life of America’s southern states. Different reports investigated the executions of many black men who had been accused of alleged crimes against the white population and whose sentences had been based on false and extorted confessions. PCI’s authors argued that the justice of American southern states deliberately sentenced to death innocent black people only to satisfy the blood lust of mobs driven by a racist psychosis—the recurrent cases of lynching on the part of Ku Klux Klan’s members were often mentioned. Gianfranco Corsini highlighted the inconsistency of American justice putting forward the outrageous example of three innocent black men put to death in Martinsville, Virginia, on the same day when Alfred Krupp and other Nazi war criminals were freed by the American High Commissioner in Germany<sup>212</sup>.

In addition, communist writers highlighted the leftist political affiliation of some of the black men persecuted by the American Law. This spark led to the formulation of a Marxist

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<sup>212</sup> Gianfranco Corsini, 1951, “L’assassinio di Willie Mc Gee”, *Rinascita* N. 5, p. 243.

interpretation of racism in the United States where the black population's 'enslavement' was considered in terms of class division and in relationship between capitalist structure and superstructure<sup>213</sup>. It was therefore argued that a class struggle for a radical change of the material origins of racism would represent the most immediate and concrete tool for a complete elimination of the phenomenon.

Another recurrent topic of debate was the reigning climate of 'witch hunt' that pervaded every aspects of the American society in the 1950's. The so-called McCarthyist era, with its political and intellectual persecutions, was often brought forward as the example of America's true undemocratic and illiberal essence. The critical analysis of the methods used to investigate and imprison anyone suspected of anti-American activities was largely conducted by the PCI's intellectuals in relation to the artists and authors reviewed in the other chapters of this research part. Nonetheless, they attempted to report further cases of the dysfunctions that were affecting the United States' judiciary in order to reveal the whole truth about the falsehood and corruption, spirit of informing and fear which dominated America's everyday life.

Great attention was dedicated to the case of the conviction and subsequent execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, two married left-wing American citizens who had been accused of espionage. Despite the lack of any evidence that the two had passed reserved atomic information to the Soviet Union, the Rosenbergs were nonetheless put to death in 1953. Gianfranco Corsini argued that their execution, described as a 'legalised murder', had to be actually considered on the basis of their political ideas. The couple was considered to fall victim of the same anti-communist hysteria that twenty-five years before had killed the innocent Italian anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti<sup>214</sup>.

This 'Second Red Scare', an out-and-out collective neurosis, had caused severe negative consequences on the American legal system and political institutions which in the name of the defence against the communist threat were endangering the civil liberties of the whole population. *Rinascita* and *Società* reported on the FBI's fundamental role in fostering a fear psychosis that would justify the repression of any alleged anti-American activity<sup>215</sup>. In addition, the Italian Communist Party's reporters highlighted the abuses and falsities of the American justice by casting light on the role of 'governmental witnesses' whose task was to fabricate false evidences with which the state's attorney could sentence the accused. A book written by the former FBI's agent Harvey Matusow, *False Witness*, was considered the proof that the testimonies

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<sup>213</sup> Unsigned short review of Herbert Aptheker, 1957, "Toward negro freedom", *Società* N. 2, p. 394.

<sup>214</sup> Gianfranco Corsini, 1952, "Un nuovo delitto della 'giustizia' americana", *Rinascita* N. 10, p. 546.

<sup>215</sup> Unsigned review of Max Lowenthal, 1952, "The Federal Bureau of Investigation", *Società* N. 1, p. 184.

against the citizens accused of communist affiliations were directly invented by the prosecutors<sup>216</sup>. This lying and immoral method was deemed to cast a shadow on the integrity of American justice and would reveal the groundlessness with which the American government imprisoned and even sentenced to death dozens of its own citizens.

In addition, a huge amount of articles dealt with the capitalist features of the American society. A series of reports described the more concrete features, deemed as negative and reproachable, of the American economic and social order. Great emphasis was given to the phenomenon of ‘gangsterism’, various nets of organised crime that heavily influenced the political, social and economic life of the country. These mobsters were depicted as practically above the law, able to accumulate billions of dollars with the control of clandestine gambling houses and horse races, the exploitation of prostitution, commissioned killings, drug dealing and even the funding of electoral campaigns<sup>217</sup>.

Paolo Spriano, a communist historian, attacked the so-called ‘democratic’ American political system arguing that it ‘fits like a glove to the greedy hands of these gangsters’<sup>218</sup>. These criminals were described as truly bipartisan as they could buy and finance indifferently a Democratic congressperson or a Republican senator. They could also ‘elect’ governors, sheriffs and state’s attorneys and the police force was so corrupt that they basically protected the criminals. In other words, Spriano contended that the image of the United States was that of a country where the workings of reciprocal corruptions and blackmails permanently governed the relationships between the political and the criminal world<sup>219</sup>.

In conclusion, the plague of the slums was investigated in a long article published on *Rinascita* in 1953. With reference to the Soviet housing program which had built more than 30 millions residential units in the post-war period 1945—1951, the American case was brought forward in order to demonstrate the capitalist system’s structural inability to solve the housing shortage that afflicted more than 3500 cities in the United States<sup>220</sup>. Luigi Cosenza, important architect and author of the article, argued that ‘the scourge of slums was considered as threatening for the citizens’ health, fostering crime and costly for city budgets’<sup>221</sup>. According to the author, the real causes of this phenomenon could be found in the uncontrolled exploitations of the capital that accumulates the immense wealth of the country in the hands of a tiny minority and leaves large

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<sup>216</sup> Gianfranco Corsini, 1955, review of “False Witness”, *Rinascita* N. 6, p. 445.

<sup>217</sup> Paolo Spriano, 1953, review of “Il gangsterismo in America”, *Rinascita* N. 2, p. 110.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>220</sup> Luigi Cosenza, 1953, “La piaga dei tuguri negli Stati Uniti d’America”, *Rinascita* N. 12, p. 691.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibidem*.

strata of the population in total misery. As a consequence, the dominant class was deemed as too selfish to comprehend and solve the problems of its citizenry.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The analysis of hundreds of articles published in the pages of *Rinascita* and *Società* offers a clear overview of the Italian Communist Party's response to the mass arrival of American cultural products to the country. Despite the presence of different approaches in relation to certain forms of culture, I contend that the PCI's intellectuals' overall reaction was that of a strong refusal and condemnation. The rejection and disregard of American culture was motivated by the escalating tension dictated by the Cold War events. Political contrasts surely played a great role in the response of the magazines' writers to American films, paintings or books. However, my study seems to demonstrate that the communist thinkers' critical discourse did not vary significantly during the time period of interest. Albeit the language used tended to become more lax over the years, *Rinascita's* and *Società's* criticisms continued to address certain specific aspects of American culture—its propagandistic and corrupting purposes, its consumerist features and its embodiment of the dominant class' values.

American cultural products were understood to represent in most cases an escapist form of leisure and entertainment. For this reason they were vehemently and continuously rejected as well as attacked by the communist intellectuals. Escapism was considered the original sin of the great majority of Hollywood's films, comics and popular literature. Communists rejected this because they believed it had the harmful effect of anaesthetising the masses and diverting their attention from their material and social condition of living.

For the reasons highlighted above, American culture was essentially considered to have 'obscurantist' functions and to be conveyer of a ruling class' propaganda since it was created by the bourgeoisie to reinforce their dominant values and win the resistance of the oppressed groups. This hostile analysis of American culture seemed to be supported by the American government's attack on leftist cultural figures in the "red scare" of the McCarthy era, which the journals frequently discussed. Moreover, communist intellectuals understood the crucial role that American films, books and music had in exporting a positive image—though promptly defined as false and mystified—of the United States of America abroad. American cultural products were effectively considered as an out-and-out powerful propagandistic weapon in the unprecedented confrontation between two superpowers and their radically opposed ideologies and world-views.

Nonetheless, from the analysis of the articles also emerges an ambivalent approach to American commercial and escapist forms of culture. On the one hand, communist intellectuals committed themselves in a critical orientation activity that would protect the working masses from the negative and harmful influence of the most reproachful Hollywood films. At the same

time they proposed to dedicate more attention on the younger generations' moral and spiritual education so that they would certainly and firmly avoid to be trapped in the comic books' intellectual mediocrity. On the other hand, they totally refused any sort of acknowledgment of certain cultural products deemed to lack artistic values and therefore not worthy of any consideration. An example of this attitude can be found in the approach of the communist reviewers to American crime and western novels and to the abstract art movements coming from overseas.

I argue that the intellectuals' different response can be explained with the extent to which an American cultural product was considered to be able to exert an influence on the Italian working masses. From the study of the various articles it clearly emerges how comics and Hollywood's films were perceived as truly dangerous and dreaded for their power to capture the attention and the preferences of large strata of the population. On the contrary, it is rather evident how the PCI's intellectuals did not believe that American commercial literature or abstract paintings and sculptures could be accessed by the Italian masses and therefore represent a threat to their cultural hegemonic project.

Additionally, I contend that communist intellectuals maintained, unconsciously or not, a neat separation between high, elite culture and low, popular one. They repeatedly implied that only the former had true artistic values and was worth being considered and enjoyed by the masses. Nonetheless, the real contradiction of the PCI's cultural policy lies in the fact that the progressive and emancipating culture that the communist intellectuals were required to create and transmit to the proletariat was arguably too high and difficult to be accessed and understood. The articles published on *Rinascita* and *Società* were generally written using a complicated and refined language and most often discussed very specific and theoretical subjects. There are reasons to believe that they must have appeared rather beyond the average reader's comprehension in a country where in 1951 the illiteracy rate was still 12.9 %<sup>222</sup>. It is therefore rather difficult to believe that the persistent focus of the PCI's intellectuals on such inaccessible forms of art could have stemmed the fortunes that American cultural products encountered among the Italian working masses.

Moreover, my analysis of the cultural press of the Italian Communist Party in the period from 1948 to 1957 clearly indicates the party's failure to take account of the development of a mass society in the country and shows the communist intellectuals' refusal to acknowledge and investigate the fascination and appeal that American culture had on the Italian proletariat. Communist thinkers never attempted to consider the workers' desire for entertainment and distraction. On the contrary, they strongly defended their 'progressive', emancipating and revolutionary concept of culture and never abandoned the realist standard of art. Realism was

searched for and extolled when concerning American art works and peremptorily defended when considered under attack. Communist intellectuals highlighted the McCarthyist persecutions of ‘progressive’ directors and presented Hollywood’s expansionism as a threat to Italian Neorealism. Furthermore, communist thinkers held in great consideration traditional and national forms of culture and refused to embrace anything that seemed modernist and cosmopolitan. Their disregard toward American cultural products appears logically motivated.

Nonetheless, modernisation<sup>223</sup> based on the American model eventually won out in Italy. Cultural historians David Forgacs and Stephen Gundle have extensively investigated this phenomenon by highlighting the crucial role played by ‘commercial mass culture and the spread of forms of cultural consumption associated with it’<sup>224</sup>. Mass culture certainly helped shaping Italians’ sense of national belonging and identity, yet it did not allow political forces to control and guide this development. This can be explained with the fact that, especially after the fall of Mussolini’s regime, ‘cultural industries and consumer tastes [could not be] subjugated to effective political controls’<sup>225</sup> and Italians could therefore easily find ways to satisfy their strong fascination for foreign goods and lifestyles that were barely tolerated even by the Catholics.

Given these premises, it appears evident how difficult and unlikely it was that the Italian Communist Party would succeed in establishing cultural hegemony in the country. Yet, my analysis demonstrates how their genuine effort was sustained by an abiding and unshakable belief in their mission that never failed throughout my period of study—not even in 1957 after the great shock caused by the Khrushchev report and the repression of the Hungarian revolt on the part of the Soviet Union in 1956. Nevertheless, *Rinascita*’s and *Società*’s articles also reveal what scholars have generally considered to be the greatest flaw of the party’s cultural policy: the impossibility of the party’s leaders and intellectuals to read the developments of Italy’s civil society. Stephen Gundle in his analysis has summarized this point arguing that ‘Togliatti betrayed an archaic conception of culture separate from the real socioeconomic context and therefore extraneous to the life of the mass of the people, their customs and preferences’<sup>226</sup>.

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<sup>222</sup> <http://cronologia.leonardo.it/analfa1.htm> last accessed on the 26<sup>th</sup> of April 2013.

<sup>223</sup> Forgacs’ and Gundle’s definition of modernisation coincides with a value-neutral one that did not include various stages of growth from traditional to modern society; on the contrary, they base their understanding of ‘modernisation’ on different yet intertwined units of analysis: at the economic level they highlight the transition to capitalism, industrialisation and market dominancy; on the political level they remark the formation of nation states with legitimate armies and police forces; in administration, they consider the growth of centralised bureaucracies; and in the cultural realm they indicate the development of mass communications media, independent public opinion and imagined national community. Forgacs and Gundle, 2007, p. 19—20.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>226</sup> Gundle, 2000, p. 22.

And yet the failures and contradictions of the party's elite cultural activity paired with the PCI's outstanding mass dimensions and deep-rootedness that granted the party electoral support until its dissolution in the early 1990's. It can be argued that on the one hand the Italian Communist Party failed to exert a cultural hegemony at a national level but on the other succeeded in creating a dominating 'communist subculture'<sup>227</sup> in certain regions of the Centre-North of the country—arguably Toscana, Marche and Emilia-Romagna which are still called today '*regioni rosse*' ('red regions'). Gozzini and Martinelli contended that, in consideration of the party's exclusion from power, the Italian Communists intended to organise a 'negative integration' of its represented social classes that would isolate them and make them autonomous from the dominant cultural sphere<sup>228</sup>. The communist subculture can be therefore considered as a 'counterculture' that was created in order to compensate for the party's political inferiority and marginalisation<sup>229</sup>.

There are reasons to believe that the party's popular level of cultural activity—generally directed and shaped by local branches and less dependent on the leadership's decisions—was arguably more successful in defining a true Communist, and at the same time Italian, identity. *L'associazionismo comunista* ('the communist collective cultural activity') offered indeed various and generous opportunities for socialisation and recreation and came to form 'a significant pole of community life'<sup>230</sup>. Some of these party organisations, for example the yearly *Feste de l'Unità*<sup>231</sup> (the fest of the PCI's newspaper 'Unity') and the cultural association *ARCI*, are still popular nowadays. However, external factors, namely the development of consumerist mass culture, did influence and affect the Communists' popular cultural activity which had 'to compromise or modify their goals accordingly'<sup>232</sup>. In other words, the Italian Communist Party had also a 'low' approach to culture, especially though its associational activity. The party's 'low' cultural activity appears to be more receptive and conditional on the civil society and its growth<sup>233</sup>. This was more successful but it was also more flexible and adaptable in the face of American forms of culture.

In conclusion, the development in Italy of a commercial mass society based on the American model can be considered to have been the main cause of the failure of the cultural hegemonic

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<sup>227</sup> The term is used both by Stephen Gundle and Giovanni Gozzini and Renzo Martinelli; the latter argue in their study that a political subculture can be defined as an 'accentuated state of symbiosis between political ideology and popular culture that occurs in limited areas and that creates the conditions for a party's organisational rootedness and electoral consent'. Martinelli and Gozzini, 1998, p. 452.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 453.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>230</sup> Gundle, 2000, p. 7.

<sup>231</sup> From 2007 they are called *Feste Democratiche* ('Democratic fests') after the birth of the new center-left party *Partito Democratico* successor of the Italian Communist Party.

<sup>232</sup> Forgacs and Gundle, 2007, p. 3.

<sup>233</sup> Martinelli and Gozzini, 1998, p. 452.

project planned by the Italian Communist Party. My study demonstrates that the party's intellectuals were aware of the Americanisation of the country. Nonetheless, there are also reasons to believe that the same consumerist American culture despised by the authors of *Rinascita* and *Società* came to represent at a later stage a central reference for the party's 'way of being'. In effect, as the party slowly opened up to modernisation from the 1960's, consumerist culture was eventually integrated in its mass ideology<sup>234</sup>. A future analysis of this bottom-up cultural transfer that interested the Italian Communist Party would certainly cast light on the sometimes contradictory relationship between politics and culture that I consider to be the most defining feature of the life of the biggest communist party in the West.

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<sup>234</sup> *Ibidem*.

## 8.APPENDIX

•TABLE 1. Excerpts from literary work

YEAR	No. EXCERPTS	AUTHORS' ORIGIN PER COUNTRY	
		ITALY	OTHER COUNTRIES
1948	2	1 (G. Leopardi)	1 Austria (J. Roth)
1949	6	3 (F. Jovine, V. Pratolini, R. Viganò)	1 Soviet Union (V. Fomenko) 1 Denmark (M. Andersen Nexø) 1 United States (A. Maltz)
1950	5	4 (L. Bigiaretti, I. Calvino, F. Jovine, C. Pavese)	1 United States (J. London)
1951	7	4 (L. Bigiaretti, F. Chilanti, E. Taddei, R. Viganò)	1 Czechoslovakia (K. Ciapek) 1 Soviet Union (B. Polevoi) 1 United States (A. Maltz)
1952	8	8 (L. Bigiarelli, I. Calvino, L. Incoronato, B. Perotti, V. Pratolini, D. Rea, 2 R. Viganò)	/
1953	7	6 ( 2 L. Incoronato, S. Micheli, D. Rea, M. Spinella, R. Viganò)	1 China (Jou Shih)
1954	7	4 (L. Incoronato, C. Bernari, S. Micheli, M. Puccini)	2 Soviet Union (E. Rykhteou, G. Ulanova) 1 France (D. Diderot)
1955	8	6 (C. Bernari, R. Bilenchi, S. Cacciapuoti, C. Cassola, C. Montella, M. Puccini)	1 China (Mei Lan-Fang) 1 Not Ascertained (R. Beyer) <sup>235</sup>
1956	5	5 (M. Venturi, S. Strati, R. Viganò, L. Incoronato, fiaba siciliana)	/
1957	/	/	/
<b>TOT.</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>14</b>

<sup>235</sup> I was not able to identify any writer called Roland Beyer; nonetheless based on his name and surname I presume his non Italian origin. Roland Beyer's excerpt, titled "I vecchi" ("The Elderly") can be found in *Rinascita*, Anno XXII (1955), N. 6, p. 425.

•TABLE 2. Poems published in the pages of *Rinascita*

YEAR	No. POEMS	AUTHORS' ORIGIN PER COUNTRY	
		ITALY	OTHER COUNTRIES
1948	6	2 (S. Aleramo, G. Belli)	2 France (P. Eluard, L. Aragon) 1 Soviet Union (W. Majakovski) 1 United States (W. Whitman)
1949	3	/	1 Chile (P. Neruda) 1 Soviet Union (A. Pushkin <sup>236</sup> ) 1 Bulgaria (N. Vaptsarov)
1950	13	8 (2 S. Aleramo, 4 C. Currà Tringali, G. Piovano, R. Vigano)	1 Bulgaria (B. Dimitrova) 1 Turkey (N. Hikmet) 2 Chile (P. Neruda) 1 Hungary (A. Petöfi)
1951	10	7 (S. Aleramo, R. Bortolotti <sup>237</sup> , M. Dazzi, C. De Murtas, S. Tanzini, R. Vigano, folk song from the worker in the paddy fields)	1 Spain (R. Alberti) 1 Soviet Union (M. Gorki) 1 Chile (P. Neruda)
1952	16	8 (R. Bartolotti <sup>238</sup> , 2 M. Dazzi, M. Farinella, R. Pascutto, A. Santi Baffè, R. Vigano, R. Viviani)	5 France (P. Eluard) 2 United States (H. Fast) 1 Chile (P. Neruda)
1953	10	7 (3 M. Dazzi, A. Dramis, R. Liberale, G. Piovano, G. Sellitti)	1 Spain (R. Alberti) 1 Soviet Union (G. Giabayev) 1 Cuba (N. Guillen)
1954	2	1 (B. Spaventa)	1 Poland (J. Tuwin)
1955	6	4 (R. Bartolotti, 2 S. Quasimodo, D. Russo Lo Presti)	1 Soviet Union (W. Majakovski) 1 Poland (A. Mickiewicz)
1956	3	1 (V. Mucci)	2 France (L. Aragon, F. Léger)
1957	/	/	/
TOT.	69	38	31

<sup>236</sup> Alexander Pushkin (1799—1937) lived under Tzarist Russia well before the Bolshevik Revolution and the birth of the Soviet Union; however, I decided to classify the great Russian poet as Soviet for the evident intent of the PCI's intellectuals to introduce their readership and incline them towards the modern and contemporary (therefore Soviet) Russian culture.

<sup>237</sup> Poem is written in the dialect from Romagna, the area south-east of Bologna, published with an Italian translation.

<sup>238</sup> See the note above.

•TABLE 3. Figurative art published in the pages of *Rinascita*

YEAR	No. PAINTINGS, SCULPTURES OR DRAWINGS	AUTHORS' ORIGIN PER COUNTRY	
		ITALY	OTHER COUNTRIES
1948	37	25	7 France (Renoir, Matisse, Cezanne) 1 Austria 1 Slovenia 1 Hungary 1 Spain (Picasso) 1 Not ascertained
1949	36	19	2 Mexico 2 China 3 France 2 United States (A. Refregier) 6 Spain (6 Picasso) 1 Chile 1 Not ascertained
1950	29	17	5 China 3 Mexico 1 France 1 Germany 1 United States 1 Spain
1951	76	55	4 France 3 China 6 Soviet Union 4 Poland 2 Spain (2 Picasso) 1 Switzerland 1 East Germany
1952	51	46	1 France 1 Mexico 3 China
1953	45	29	4 Soviet Union 6 Spain (6 Picasso) 4 China 1 Lithuania 1 Denmark
1954	36	20	5 Holland 7 France (Courber, Matisse) 2 Spain (2 Picasso) 1 United States (Ben Shahn) 1 Not ascertained
1955	55	40	11 France (Fougeron, Manet) 1 Spain (Picasso) 1 Soviet Union 2 Not Ascertained

1956	36	27	5 France (Cezanne, Leger) 1 Spain 1 Germany 1 Soviet Union 1 Great Britain
1957	34	21	6 Mexico (6 Diego Rivera) 4 East Germany 1 United States (Hopper) 1 Holland 1 France (Fougeron)
TOT.	435	299	136

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