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Senso comune, buon senso, and Philosophy in Gramsci

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Abstract

The vast and intricate theoretical development of Gramsci's concept of *senso comune* intersects with diverse themes in his thought, from hegemony and political parties to civil society, the state, and the role of intellectuals, to name but a few. This article contributes to the analysis of the concepts of *senso comune* and *buon senso* in Gramsci's pre-prison writings, *Prison Letters*, and *Prison Notebooks*, through its relationship with the development of his conception of philosophy. Engaging with the recent season of historico-philological studies of Gramsci's writings to pursue the diachronic development of Gramsci's conception of *senso comune*, this investigation reconsiders prevailing anglophone «images» of his thought, in relation to *senso comune*, in light of the resources of the critical editions of Gramsci's writings. While acknowledging the pitfalls of the unmediated and de-contextualised application of Gramsci's ideas to the present, this study suggests that a philological reading of Gramsci's conception of *senso comune* has value as a pre-requisite for a «dialogue with the present», and a strategic analysis of the contemporary conjuncture.

Keywords

Gramsci, *Senso comune*, *Buon senso*, Philosophy

Senso comune, buon senso e Filosofia in Gramsci

Abstract

Il vasto e intricato sviluppo teorico del concetto di *senso comune* di Gramsci si interseca con diversi temi del suo pensiero, dall'egemonia e dai partiti politici alla società civile, allo Stato e al ruolo degli intellettuali, per citarne solo alcuni. Questo articolo contribuisce all'analisi dei concetti di *senso comune* e *buon senso* negli scritti di Gramsci prima del carcere, nelle *Lettere dal carcere* e nei *Quaderni del carcere*, attraverso il loro rapporto con lo sviluppo della sua concezione della filosofia. Prendendo spunto dalla recente stagione di studi storico-filologici degli scritti di Gramsci, per perseguire lo sviluppo diacronico della concezione gramsciana del *senso comune*, questa indagine riconsidera, alla luce delle risorse delle edizioni critiche degli scritti di Gramsci, le «immagini» anglofone prevalenti del suo pensiero in relazione al *senso comune*. Pur riconoscendo le insidie di un'applicazione immediata e non contestualizzata delle idee di Gramsci al tempo presente, questo studio suggerisce che una lettura filologica della concezione gramsciana del *senso comune* ha valore come pre-requisito per un «dialogo con il presente» e un'analisi strategica della congiuntura contemporanea.

Keywords

Gramsci, *Senso comune*, *Buon senso*, Filosofia

Senso comune, buon senso, and philosophy in Gramsci

Robert P. Jackson

1. Introduction

Senso comune is a complex theoretical node in Gramsci's political thought, as Luigi Carpineti noted in his discussion of the topic at the 1977 international Gramsci studies convention in Florence.¹ The concept intersects with diverse themes in Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, which include «the concepts themselves of philosophy and culture, the moment of hegemony and of political parties, the relationship between civil society and the state, the role of intellectuals, as well as the value of referring to theoretical proposals such as those of Croce and Gentile, to French and Anglo-Saxon thought, [and] to Bukharin of the *Popular Manuals*».² With such a vast and intricate theoretical development, it is helpful to delimit a line of approach through which to conduct a study. This chapter contributes to a reading of *senso comune* in Gramsci's pre-prison and prison writings through its relation with the development of his conception of philosophy.³

The investigation reconsiders prevailing anglophone «images» of his thought, in relation to *senso comune*, in light of the resources of the critical editions of Gramsci's writings. It engages with the recent season of historico-philological studies of Gramsci to pursue the diachronic development of Gramsci's conception of

¹ L. Carpineti, *Il concetto di senso comune in Gramsci*, in *Politica e storia in Gramsci*, a cura di F. Ferri, Roma, Editori Riuniti, 1979, pp. 336-42. Following the practice established by Peter D. Thomas, I will minimise misunderstandings arising from the conventional meanings of «common sense» and «good sense» in English (the «discrepancy between linguistic registers and cultural systems») by retaining the Italian terms *senso comune* and *buon senso*; cfr. P. D. Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment. Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism*, Leiden, Brill, 2009, p. 16, n. 61.

² Carpineti, *Il concetto di senso comune in Gramsci*, cit., p. 336.

³ My reading draws on previous philological studies: G. Cospito, *Senso comune/buon senso*, «Materialismo storico», II, n. 5, 2018, pp. 73-97; F. Frosini, *Gramsci e la filosofia*, Roma, Carocci, 2003, pp. 168-82; G. Liguori, *Gramsci's Pathways*, Leiden, Brill, 2015; and Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment*, cit.

senso comune.⁴ The article begins with an analysis of *senso comune* (and *buon senso*) in Gramsci's pre-prison writings, and subsequently in his letters from prison and *Prison Notebooks*. This involves a contextualised reading of a selection of texts in which these concepts appear and their relation to a constellation of interlinked concepts, including ideology, conception of the world, and philosophy.

A general orientation can be drawn from Guido Liguori's account of *senso comune* in the *Notebooks*. For Liguori, *senso comune* «appears as a variant of the concept of ideology, understood in Gramscian terms as a conception of the world. It is the conception of the world of a social stratum, often characterised as a moment of passive reception with respect to the active elaboration of the leading-intellectual group of the social group itself». ⁵ The latter process of elaboration involves the creation of a «new *senso comune*» and its relation to the struggle for hegemony.⁶ Concerning philosophy, Fabio Frosini points out that Gramsci's initial understanding in the *Quaderni* «exhibits (as a direct legacy of his Turin writings) an extremely traditional understanding of philosophy, as a synonym for a general conception of life and of the world». ⁷ However, a new conception of philosophy emerges, in the «second phase» of his carceral project («from the middle of 1932 to the middle of 1933»),⁸ that seeks to encompass both traditional philosophies and the philosophy of praxis, the latter vital to the very «marrow» of this new philosophy.⁹

⁴ For the historico-philological approach to reading Gramsci, see G. Francioni, *Come lavorava Gramsci*, in *QC* [anast.], pp. 21-60; Id., *L'officina gramsciana. Ipotesi sulla struttura dei «Quaderni del carcere»*, Napoli, Bibliopolis, 1984.

⁵ G. Liguori, *Senso comune*, in *Dizionario gramsciano 1926-1937*, a cura di G. Liguori e P. Voza, Roma, Carocci, pp. 759-61: 759.

⁶ Q 8 [b], § 48 [G § 213] (March 1932): *QC*, p. 1071; A. Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks. Volume 3* (PN3), New York, Columbia University Press, 2007, p. 360. I have only italicised *senso comune* in quotations when Gramsci or other authors have done so. For the chronology of the notes, I refer to the appendix of G. Cospito, *Verso l'edizione critica e integrale dei «Quaderni del carcere»*, «Studi Storici», LII, 2011, n. 4, pp. 881-904.

⁷ F. Frosini, *Filosofia*, in *Dizionario gramsciano*, cit., pp. 305-8: 305 (and in English translation in this issue, in the section *Archive*).

⁸ Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment*, cit., p. 114.

⁹ Q 11, 2°, § 10 [G § 22] (July-August 1932): *QC*, p. 1424; A. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (SPN), London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1971, p. 435.

Gramsci's understanding of hierarchical gradations of elaboration of conceptions of the world brings *senso comune* into a dialectical and dialogical relationship with his conception of philosophy.¹⁰ Frosini states the fundamental significance of the connection between *senso comune* and philosophy by pointing out that this nexus is «the mode in which the relation between philosophy and politics is articulated».¹¹ In other words, it is through this nexus that the «reciprocal translation» between philosophy and politics takes place in Gramsci's conception of the «homogeneous circle» of philosophy-politics-economics.¹²

Gramsci's reflections on the theme of *senso comune* and philosophy can be situated in relation to contemporary philosophical debates on this topic in Italy and internationally in the 1930s (e.g. between figures such as Croce, Gentile, Missiroli, Caramella, as well as in French culture).¹³ Thus, Gramsci's use of these terms relates to his critique of Croce (as well as of Gentile and Bukharin) in the development of his conception of the struggle for hegemony. By engaging with this contextualised and diachronic reading, this article aims to uncover critical resources with which to reconsider prevailing anglophone interpretations of Gramsci's thought.

2. Pre-prison writings

Giuseppe Cospito has analysed the appearances of *senso comune* and *buon senso* in Gramsci's pre-prison political writings from 1916. Cospito finds that Gramsci's use of these terms corresponds largely to their wider usage in Italian intellectual and cultural life, where they are treated frequently as synonyms.¹⁴ Cospito distils five different meanings associated with Gramsci's usage: first, the terms indicate a «common aesthetic-moral feeling», second, a Cartesian philosophical meaning of *bon sens*, third, an opposition to

¹⁰ Liguori, *Gramsci's Pathways*, cit., pp. 89-90.

¹¹ Frosini, *Gramsci e la filosofia*, cit., p. 168.

¹² Q 4 [b], § 48 [G § 46] (October-November 1930): *QC*, p. 473; A. Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks. Volume 2* (PN2), New York, Columbia University Press, 1996, p. 196.

¹³ G. Cospito, *The Rhythm of Thought in Gramsci*, Chicago, Haymarket, 2016, pp. 184-85; Liguori, *Gramsci's Pathways*, cit., pp. 94-95. Santino Caramella (1902-1972) was a historian of philosophy and collaborated with Piero Gobetti. Mario Missiroli (1886-1974) was a well-known journalist subject to frequent criticism by Gramsci in the *Notebooks*.

¹⁴ Cospito, *Senso comune/buon senso*, cit., p. 73.

«abstruseness» and «scientific pseudo-knowledge», fourth, a «more generic and off-hand [*corrivo*]» use, and fifth, emerging after 1917, a pejorative sense relating to «the mentality of the more backward and conservative strata». ¹⁵ Cospito observes that this fifth sense is in tension with the other meanings, in particular the third. ¹⁶ In 1917-1918 Gramsci begins to employ modifying compounds to the term *buon senso*, including «philistine», «vulgar», «habitual», and «popular». ¹⁷

Gramsci deploys these meanings at times in subtly context-dependent ways. It is possible to offer comments on a selection of these texts to reflect on their thematic content. The terms *senso comune* and *buon senso* can be found thirty-eight times in thirty-two discrete pieces of writing in Gramsci's pre-prison political writings (1916-1926). Gramsci uses the term *buon senso* almost twice as often (twenty-five times) as he does *senso comune* (thirteen times). By comparison, he employs the term philosophy [*filosofia*] seventy-nine times in these writings. It is notable that philosophy appears in only three out of the thirty-two texts containing *senso comune*/*buon senso*, which are: *senso comune* in «Modesty» [*Il pudore*] («the so-called philosophy of language»; «so concrete and palpable that I remember it not having offended my *senso comune*»), *buon senso* in «Republic and Proletariat in France» [*Repubblica e proletariato in Francia*] («more indisputable than *buon senso* and morality»; «idealist philosophy») and in «Culture and Class Struggle» [*Cultura e lotta di classe*] («with all his *buon senso* and practicality, is an abstractionist»; «theoretical philosophy»). ¹⁸ In each of these cases, Gramsci's use of the terms *senso comune*/*buon senso* is not particularly proximate to his

¹⁵ Ivi, pp. 73-74.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* Cospito notes that Gramsci occasionally uses «*senso comune*» in quotation marks (or italics) to emphasise contrasts in meaning, sometimes with ironic/comic effect, prefiguring a similar but more systematic practice in the *Notebooks*. On the «philology of quotation marks», see D. Ragazzini, *Leonardo nella società di massa. Teoria della personalità in Gramsci*, Bergamo, Moretti Honegger, 2002, p. 17. The terms do not appear during Gramsci's time in Moscow and Vienna (1922-1924), albeit fewer texts were consulted from this period. The terms appear only twice during 1925-1926.

¹⁷ In 1920, Gramsci also deploys the formulation of a «*buon senso comune*» (A. Gramsci, [*Il fantoccio*' di O. Cantoni-Gibertini] («Avanti!», 4 August 1920), in *ON*, p. 851), which, for Cospito, is an example of the inferior meaning. Gramsci also refers to *buon senso* as a «critical sense» (Id., *Il complotto e il partito*, «Avanti!», 26 October 1920, in *ON*, p. 355).

¹⁸ Id., *Il pudore* («Avanti!», 12 February 1916), in *CT*, p. 125; Id., *Repubblica e proletariato in Francia* («Il Grido del Popolo», 20 April 1918), in *CF*, p. 837; Id., *Cultura e lotta di classe* («Il Grido del Popolo», 25 May 1918), in *NM*, p. 48.

discussion of philosophy in the text. Although, excusing the use of the future anterior, it is possible that these texts reflect the first stirrings of a mediated connection between *buon senso/senso comune* and philosophy in Gramsci's argumentation.

With caution, one might also search for traces of a distinctive Gramscian use of these terms, although, as Cospito's survey has demonstrated, it is difficult to establish a stable meaning for *senso comune* and *buon senso* independent from their general usage. The themes with which Gramsci is concerned in the three texts above presage some of Gramsci's later concerns in the *Prison Notebooks*. This includes, in "Modesty", the genesis and modification of moral norms, in "Republic and Proletariat in France", democracy as the nexus between moral doctrine and political life, and in "Culture and Class Struggle", the relation between the «precise philosophical language» of socialist concepts and popular propaganda.

In the wider selection of pieces in which the terms *senso comune/buon senso* appear, we can find a litany of familiar topics in Gramscian thought, including theatre commentary, the constitution of manners, popular superstition and religion, moral education and discipline, censorship and the media, Rudyard Kipling's poetry, literature and language, Romain Rolland, abstractionism and the PSI, and the international working class movement, to list but a fraction. Gramsci's first use of *senso comune* appears during his scathing criticism of a theatre production of "Paolo e Virginia".¹⁹ Gramsci finds the play to be an «offense to good taste and *senso comune*», due to its «artificial» [*artificioso*], «contrived» [*volutato*] and «reflected» [*riflesso*] character.²⁰ The second usage of *senso comune* appears in "Modesty" [*Il Pudore*], a piece in which Gramsci interrogates the constitution of manners, the historically variable nature of «modesty» or «decency», and the possibility that «decency» is trapped in a pre-modern state of the «Middle Ages». While he acknowledges that such manners have an effective existence, Gramsci rejects any conception of them as an «abstract» or «transcendent entity» [*entità trascendente*]. Such a position would

¹⁹ The play was staged in January 1916 by Luigi Ambrosini and Gigi Michelotti at the Alfieri theatre in Turin.

²⁰ Id., «PAOLO E VIRGINIA» («Avanti!», 23 January 1916), in *CT*, p. 745.

offend *senso comune*, by departing from that which is «most concrete and most palpable».²¹

In “Witchcraft”/“Sorcery” [*Stregoneria*], Gramsci examines the renewal of popular interest in witchcraft and sorcery in the wake of the First World War and the spiritual needs that it addresses, drawing parallels with the laity’s experience of the priesthood in Catholicism and official religion. Gramsci hypothesises that these religious and mystical elements correspond to a felt need to interpret the «complex of historical energies» beyond the control of common people, and which escape the comprehension of their *senso comune*.²² Discussing the case of a suspected suicide in a house of correction for young people, Gramsci criticises «modern» disciplinary methods in “The Iron Bars of Science” [*Le inferriate della scienza*]. He diagnoses the failures of the positivistic understanding of character-formation and recommends «less pseudo-science, and more *senso comune*, and above all more affection and sincerity» in addressing the educational and emotional needs of children.²³

Commenting on journalist Giuseppe Bevione’s (1879–1976) writing on Leonida Bissolati (1857-1920), a minister without portfolio in the cabinet of Paolo Boselli (Jun 1916-Oct 1917), in *Heu pudor!* Gramsci remarks upon the retrospective acceptance and appropriation by the bourgeois media of the achievements of the early socialist movement in Italy. In this context, *buon senso* first appears when Gramsci invokes the dramatised riposte of «men [...] without buon senso» against contemporary socialists that wish to further transform commonly-accepted ideas.²⁴ The second incidence of *buon senso* appears in “Discourses that flow” [*Discorsi che corrono*], where Gramsci constructs an imagined dialogue that discusses those in Turin that hide their own shortcomings behind censorship from Milan. He reflects that «it is easy to say words, even words that are seasoned with buon senso».²⁵

Another source of *senso comune* emerges from Gramsci’s publication of an Italian translation of Rudyard Kipling’s famous

²¹ Id., *Il pudore* («Avanti!», 12 February 1916), cit.

²² Id., *Stregoneria* («Avanti!», 4 March 1916), in *CT*, p. 174.

²³ Id., *Le inferriate della scienza* («Avanti!», 17 June 1916), in *CT*, p. 380.

²⁴ Id., *Heu pudor!* («Avanti!», 7 August 1916), in *CT*, p. 475 (and in *Scritti*, vol.1, p. 564).

²⁵ Id., *Discorsi che corrono* («Avanti!», 9 December 1916), in *CT*, p. 633.

poem “If”. In “Breviary for the lay-men” [*Breviario per laici*], Gramsci explains that the poem is «an example of a morality not polluted by Christianity and which can be accepted by all men».²⁶ Gramsci’s translation include the lines: «If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue, Or walk with Kings - nor lose the common touch [senso comune]».²⁷ In “Italic Literature: 1) Prose” [*Letteratura italica: 1) La prosa*], Gramsci criticises the nationalist rhetoric of Piedmont lawyer Cesare Foà, a member of the *anti-German League*, and utilises the concept of *senso comune* to mock the latter’s campaign against the «debasement of the language of Dante».²⁸ The notion of «Italic literature» comes under scrutiny in the context of Gramsci’s rejection of racial determinism, favouring, as Enzo Traverso points out, a definition of the «Italian character (*italianità*) as the sentiment of belonging to a community of culture (established primarily by language) marked by a “cosmopolitan” imprint».²⁹

Discussing the launch of a new journal, *Les Cahiers idealistes français*, Gramsci appraises the contribution of an article by Romain Rolland (“The Winding Road” [*La Route qui monte en lacets*]). Rolland supports the young intellectuals involved in this project with «a supreme appeal to buon senso, to good will, to the moral courage of humanity».³⁰ In “Analogy and Metaphor” [*Analogie e metafore*], Gramsci polemicizes against the «abstractionism» of the reformist PSI deputy Claudio Treves, and the latter’s tendency to reduce the «collective life» of the proletariat to an «abstract scheme».³¹ Remarking on the transformation of the Italian proletariat and its experiences during the period of the First World War, Gramsci argues that Italian socialism «does not know all its own strengths, and it is agitated, or tends to become a larger organism and

²⁶ Id., *Breviario per laici* («Avanti!», 17 December 1916), in *CT*, p. 657.

²⁷ In Kipling’s original collection *Rewards and Fairies* (1910) the poem appears adjacent to “Brother Square-Toes”, a poem that celebrates (George Washington’s) resolute leadership against counter-veiling public opinion.

²⁸ Id., *Letteratura italica: 1) La prosa* («Avanti!», 17 April 1917), in *CF*, p. 125.

²⁹ E. Traverso, *The Jewish Question*, Leiden, Brill, 2018, p. 137.

³⁰ A. Gramsci, *Un appello di Romain Rolland* («Il Grido del Popolo», 26 May 1917), in *CF*, p. 178.

³¹ Id., *Analogie e metafore* («Il Grido del Popolo», 15 September 1917), in *CF*, p. 333.

overflows here and there, incompletely, according to philistine buon senso, according to an unscrupulous conception of life».³²

Gramsci characterises the denunciation of prevailing Italian journalism by Giuseppe Pontremoli's newspaper *Il Secolo* as «throwing stones into a pigeon loft».³³ Gramsci quotes *Il Secolo* as saying that the public views this literature with disdain «according to the intuition and criticism of vulgar buon senso». Pointing out the hypocrisy of Pontremoli, Gramsci argues that he is as guilty of mediocre efforts to imitate the war correspondence of Luigi Barzini (*Barzjinismo*) as the journalists that Pontremoli criticises. In *Nottingham*, Gramsci notes the alarm of *The Times* at the spread of revolutionary ideas among younger generations of British workers. For Gramsci, these reports reflect a new spirit among the English proletariat. He quotes the surprise of a «French newspaper» that «English workers» should have enthusiastically greeted a speech by the Bolshevik ambassador, Maxim Litvinov, at a Labour conference in Nottingham, «whose nature should have hurt their habitual buon senso».³⁴

This brief survey represents only the first third of the relevant texts. However, as Cospito notes, Gramsci does not provide his own explicit theoretical analysis of *sensu comune* in the pre-prison texts.³⁵ It would therefore be difficult to pass judgement definitively on Gramsci's understanding of these terms across these early writings, although they provide a tableau of the heterogeneous forms of cultural life, what Thomas calls Gramsci's «extensive hinterland of cultural-political work»,³⁶ that underlie his later reflections on the porous border between non-philosophy and philosophy. As Frosini notes, there is evidence in the *Quaderni* that Gramsci's interest in the interaction between *sensu comune* and philosophy extends back to the *L'Ordine Nuovo* period in Turin.³⁷ Thus, Gramsci analyses the relationship between «spontaneity» and conscious leadership in Notebook 3, where he reflects on «mass

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Id.*, *Sassate in piccionaia* («Il Grido del Popolo», 1 December 1917), in *CF*, p. 464.

³⁴ *Id.*, *Nottingham* («Il Grido del Popolo», 2 February 1918), in *CF*, p. 622.

³⁵ Cospito, *Sensu comune/buon senso*, cit. p. 75.

³⁶ Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment*, cit., p. 408.

³⁷ Frosini, *Gramsci e la filosofia*, cit., p. 170.

politics», «philosophical theories», and *senso comune* (also in connection with Croce).³⁸

Frosini has pointed out that philosophy itself plays a central role throughout Gramsci's work. From his early pre-prison journalism, Gramsci is concerned with the Hegelian «idealistic turn (identified with modernity itself)», exemplified in Italy by the neo-idealism of Croce and Gentile.³⁹ For Frosini, Gramsci's identification of idealism with the heights of modern philosophy emerges from the former's emphasis on «the absolute immanence of the idea to the world, consequently entrusting humanity with the task of humanising reality». ⁴⁰ While viewing Marxism in his pre-prison writings primarily as a substantiation of this approach, its «practical historical universalisation», Gramsci would later devote his carceral project to the Labriola-inflected perspective of the autonomy and independence of Marxism, and the project to renew philosophy «from head to toe». ⁴¹ It is in this context that we can begin to trace the emergence of an increasingly intimate and complex articulation of the interconnection between *senso comune* and philosophy in his thought.

3. *Letters from Prison and Prison Notebooks*

There are seven letters containing *senso comune* (five appearances) and *buon senso* (three occurrences) in Gramsci's prison correspondence. These occur largely in letters to Gramsci's sister-in-law Tania. They appear in two letters from 1927, before Gramsci began work on the *Notebooks*, two from 1932, and three from 1933. Cospito notes that these letters provide for the most part further evidence of Gramsci's deployment of the term in the wider Italian usage. ⁴² Thus, Gramsci writes in March 1927 that he has «great faith» in Tania's «buon senso and in the soundness of [her] judgement», ⁴³ and again in November 1933, that he relies «on [her]

³⁸ Q 3, § 49 [G § 48] (June-July 1930): *QC*, pp. 330-31; PN2, p. 51.

³⁹ Frosini, *Filosofia*, in *Dizionario gramsciano*, cit., p. 305.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* See also R. P. Jackson, *Gramsci, Marx, Hegel*, in *Elgar Companion to Antonio Gramsci*, edited by W. K. Carroll, Cheltenham, Elgar, 2024, pp. 48-65.

⁴¹ Q 4 [b], § 12 [G § 11] (May-August 1930): *QC*, p. 433; PN2, p. 153.

⁴² Cospito, *Senso comune/buon senso*, cit., p. 75.

⁴³ A. Gramsci, *Lettere dal carcere*, a cura di S. Caprioglio e E. Fubini, Torino, Einaudi, 1973, 19 March 1927, pp. 57-60: 59.

buon senso». ⁴⁴ Similarly, in July 1927, he proposes (to Berti) a pedagogical project «that should function more as a circle than as a common school [*scuola in senso comune*]». ⁴⁵

In April 1932, Gramsci discusses with Tania his thoughts on Croce, reflecting that the philosopher's success during his lifetime has arisen from «circulating his conception of the world non-pedantically in a whole series of short writings in which philosophy presents itself immediately and is absorbed as buon senso and senso comune». ⁴⁶ Commenting on the prospects for an amnesty and pardon in December 1932, Gramsci remarks that «senso comune has summarised [the pitfalls] of this experience [of being too impulsive] in the proverb: “the hasty cat has blind kittens [*la gatta frettolosa fa i gattini ciechi*]”». ⁴⁷ This apparently off-hand comment reminds us of Gramsci's attentiveness to the sedimentation of knowledge in popular maxims and clichés. In August 1933, Gramsci requests from Tania a copy of Caramella's *Il senso comune. Teoria e Pratica*, signposting his study of the debate regarding *senso comune* and philosophy in Italy. ⁴⁸ The appearance of *senso comune* in Gramsci's engagement with Croce's philosophy is of greatest interest here and points towards the *Prison Notebooks* themselves.

There are approximately 276 uses of the terms *senso comune* and *buon senso* in the *Quaderni*, with the former utilised considerably more frequently (230 times) than the latter (forty-six appearances). Gramsci employs these concepts in eighty-four separate notes, and they are present, as Liguori has noted, from the earliest stages of Gramsci's preparations to organise his work in prison. ⁴⁹ Thus, «*senso comune*» appears as one of the «main topics» in Gramsci's list of «Notes and jottings» on 8 February 1929, in which he establishes already a connection with the «concept of folklore». ⁵⁰ It appears

⁴⁴ Ivi, 20 November 1933, p. 833.

⁴⁵ Ivi, 4 July 1927, p. 101.

⁴⁶ Ivi, 25 April 1932, p. 613. Thus, *pace* Benjamin Crémieux, Gramsci sees Croce as more the intellectual heir of Galileo than Manzoni, due to Croce's ability to express subjects scientifically «with great simplicity and with great strength at the same time» (p. 612).

⁴⁷ Ivi, 12 December 1932, p. 715; Similar in some ways to the anglophone idiom, “more haste, less speed”.

⁴⁸ Ivi, 23 August 1933, p. 812.

⁴⁹ Liguori, *Gramsci's Pathways*, cit., p. 85.

⁵⁰ Q 1, *Argomenti principali* (8 February 1929): *QC*, p. 4; A. Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks. Volume 1* (PN1), New York, Columbia University Press, 1992, p. 99. Recall that Gramsci is translating

again in the second list of «principal essays» in Notebook 8, under the heading «Folklore and senso comune».⁵¹ *Senso comune* and *buon senso* are distributed across nineteen separate notebooks, including 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 23, 24, 27, and 28, all containing a handful of notes (between one and five) employing the terms. There are ten notebooks, namely 2, 12, 18-22, 25, 26 and 29, that do not include any references. Finally, there are three notebooks, 8, 10 and 11, in which Gramsci's discussions of these concepts are most concentrated, containing 14, 13 and 10 notes using the terms, with 63, 28 and 103 appearances respectively.

This increased focus on *senso comune* and *buon senso* emerges during Gramsci's third series of «Notes on Philosophy» in notebook 8.⁵² According to Frosini's periodization, this coincides with the end of Gramsci's first phase of research (November 1931 – May 1932).⁵³ It is in these three notebooks that Gramsci develops most explicitly the connection between *senso comune*, *buon senso* and philosophy, in relation, on the one hand, to his critique of the thought of Croce and Gentile, and, on the other, to that of Bukharin. Against the tendency to read Gramsci's critical engagement with neo-idealist philosophy as a provincial and regressive concern,⁵⁴ Derek Boothman argues that it is precisely when «dissecting Crocean concepts» that «Gramsci's incisive style of polemical prose reaches an exceptional level of analytical and literary clarity».⁵⁵ Fifteen of the notes concerning *senso comune* and *buon senso*, a mixture of B- (seven single version) and C-texts (eight second version), have never been translated (or only partially) into English.⁵⁶ This fact is worth bearing in mind when considering the

the folk tales of the Brothers Grimm around this time in Notebook A [b] (February-March 1929). On folklore, see G. M. Boninelli, *Folklore, folklore*, in *Dizionario gramsciano*, cit., pp. 319-22.

⁵¹ Q 8, *Note sparse e appunti...* (November-December 1930): *QC*, p. 935; PN3, p. 231.

⁵² The first series appears in Q 4, and the second in Q 7, see Liguori, *Gramsci's Pathways*, cit., p. 70; Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment*, cit., p. 255.

⁵³ Frosini, *Gramsci e la filosofia*, cit., pp. 23-29; Thomas, *op. cit.*, pp. 113-16.

⁵⁴ Cfr. P. Anderson, *The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci*, «New Left Review», 1976, n. 100, pp. 5-78; recently republished: Id. *The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci. with a new preface*, London, Verso, 2017.

⁵⁵ D. Boothman, *Introduction*, in *Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (FSPN), Minneapolis, Minnesota University Press, 1995, p. 327.

⁵⁶ These texts include partially translated notes Q 13, §§ 20 and 37 and Q 17, § 18, as well as notes that are entirely untranslated until now, including Q 13, § 39, Q 14, §§ 34, 45 and 48 (G §§ 37, 48 and 51), Q 15, §§ 8, 13 and 65, Q 16, §§ 12 and 27, Q 23, § 33, and Q 28, §§ 1 and 11. For Gerratana's designation of A-, B- and C-texts, see J. Buttigieg, *Preface*, in PN1, p. XV.

Gramscian source material that forms the basis of most anglophone readings.⁵⁷

Cospito points out that the interpretation of *senso comune* and *buon senso* in the *Quaderni* is far from simple, due both to the extensive usage of these terms in the *Notebooks* and their «far from univocal meaning in the common language».⁵⁸ Cospito summarises the general development undergone by *senso comune* in the *Quaderni*, beginning in 1930 with a «setting out» of the concept, then a «period of crisis in 1931», a «“turning point” in 1932», followed by «detailed treatment in subsequent years leading to increasingly more open and problematic formulations».⁵⁹ The following will sample from these moments to give an impression of the development of *senso comune* and its relationship with philosophy in the *Notebooks*.

In the first appearance of *senso comune* in Q 1, § 16 (July-October 1929), Gramsci examines one of the «readers’ postcards» published in the newspaper *Domenica del Corriere*, noting that these «postcards» are «one of the most typical documents of Italian popular *senso comune*».⁶⁰ In this case, Gramsci discusses the empirical evidence that it provides for changing popular attitudes to former prisoners. He notes that having been in prison, a matter of direct personal relevance to Gramsci, «no longer rouses repulsion» since «one may have been there for political reasons».⁶¹ Thus, Gramsci implicitly criticises the writer Bruno Barilli for his outdated attitudes to prison uniforms as «that species of ignoble pyjama». Liguori observes that *senso comune* itself constitutes something of a low cultural bar for Gramsci, since Barilli attains an «even lower level» than the «classical philistines» of *senso comune*.⁶²

Senso comune next appears in Q 1, § 43 (February-March 1930), as part of the series *Types of Periodicals*, during a discussion of different media and the relation of intellectuals to the elaboration of culture. As Liguori notes, with this series, Gramsci «enters onto the terrain

⁵⁷ Some anglophone readers have also accessed the Gerratana critical edition, in which cases differences may rather concern questions of method.

⁵⁸ Cospito, *The Rhythm of Thought in Gramsci*, cit., p. 184.

⁵⁹ Ivi, pp. 168 and 197. Cospito notes that Gramsci’s transcription of A-texts into C-texts in the latter stages of this development may have caused some non-linearity by retaining earlier views compared with more advanced conceptions in B-texts «newly-drafted» at the same time.

⁶⁰ Q 1, § 16 (July-October 1929): *QC*, p. 14; *PN1*, p. 108.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Liguori, *Gramsci’s Pathways*, cit., p. 86.

of the organisation of hegemony, and thus of the consciously sought spread of an ideology». ⁶³ This terrain, of the extended conception of the state, and thus of civil society, says Liguori, «is fundamental to the creation of *senso comune*». ⁶⁴ Liguori focuses our attention on the links that Gramsci draws between «ideology, (popular) religion, folklore and (later in the note) *senso comune*». ⁶⁵ For Liguori, therefore, ideology belongs to a «family of concepts», which includes «philosophy, visions or conceptions of the world, religion, conformism, *senso comune*, folklore, and language». ⁶⁶ None of these concepts is reducible to the other terms, but together they make up a «conceptual network» central to an understanding of the struggle for hegemony, since they play a fundamental role in the process of «cementing a social bloc, and thus constituting it into a subjectivity». ⁶⁷ In this note, Gramsci also identifies a deficiency of *senso comune*, namely that it cannot bestow the capacity to adapt to new circumstances. It would, Gramsci says, be an «Enlightenment error» to believe that *senso comune* could enable someone with the ability «to generalize, to infer, to transport from one sphere to another a criterion of discrimination, adapting it to new conditions». ⁶⁸

In Q 1, § 65 (February-March 1930), another A-text from the series *Types of Periodicals*, Gramsci offers a more detailed reflection on *senso comune*, the first in which it appears alongside *buon senso*, here as equivalents. Gramsci draws *senso comune* explicitly into relation with philosophy. In this well-known passage, he argues:

Every social stratum has its own «*senso comune*» which is ultimately the most widespread conception of life and morals. Every philosophical current leaves a sedimentation of «*senso comune*»: this is the document of its

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Ivi, p. 10.

⁶⁵ Ivi, p. 77.

⁶⁶ Ivi, p. 80.

⁶⁷ Ivi, p. 81.

⁶⁸ Q 1, § 43 (February-March 1930); *QC*, p. 33; PN1, p. 128. There are interesting resonances with Edward Said's more recent problematic of «traveling theory», the phenomenon where theories gain or lose power when moving between contexts, see E. Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard U. P., 1983; Id., *Reflections on Exile: and Other Essays*, London, Granta, 2000. See also R. P. Jackson, *Rethinking Trajectories of the Intellectual: Edward Said and Antonio Gramsci*, «Notebooks: The Journal for Studies on Power», IV, 2024, n. 1, pp. 39-67.

historical reality. *Senso comune* is not something rigid and static; rather, it changes continuously, enriched by scientific notions and philosophical opinions which have entered into common usage. «*Senso comune*» is the folklore of «philosophy» and stands midway between real «folklore» (that is, as it is understood) and the philosophy, the science, the economics of the scholars. «*Senso comune*» creates the folklore of the future, that is a more or less rigidified phase of a certain time and place. (It will be necessary to establish these concepts firmly by thinking them through in depth.)⁶⁹

Gramsci implies that there exist, Liguori notes, «numerous “*sensi comuni*”, distinguishable by their social connotation and geographical area». ⁷⁰ While *senso comune* is unable to provide its bearers with the ability to adapt to new conditions, a “speciality” associated rather with professional intellectuals, these *sensi comuni* constitute, in their multiplicity, a dynamic and evolving historical tapestry, albeit an agglomeration of sedimentations. Liguori reasons that it is unlikely that these variations among *sensi comuni* are all of an equally low cultural level.⁷¹ Gramsci comments on the liminal position of *senso comune* between the poles of the philosophy/science/economics of the intellectuals and «real “folklore”». Thus, for Frosini, the position of *senso comune* is relational and it «represents a sort of *evanescent threshold* in permanent transformation». ⁷²

Following Frosini and Liguori, we can say that folklore, *senso comune* and philosophy occupy relative positions in a hierarchy of levels of elaboration along an «ideological continuum», mirroring social stratifications, and moving «from the maximum of disruption and incoherence – but also diffusiveness – of popular religion, to the minimum of disruption and incoherence – but also of diffusiveness – of professional philosophies». ⁷³ In Q 1, § 65, Gramsci also discusses the transformative aspect of «“buon senso” or “*senso comune*”» that attempts «to modify the average opinion of a particular society, criticizing, suggesting, admonishing,

⁶⁹ Q 1, § 65 (February-March 1930): *QC*, p. 76; PN1, p. 173.

⁷⁰ Liguori, *Senso comune*, in *Dizionario gramsciano*, cit., pp. 759-61: 759.

⁷¹ Id., *Gramsci's Pathways*, cit., p. 86.

⁷² F. Frosini, *Why does religion matter to politics? Truth and ideology in a Gramscian approach*, in *The Political Philosophies of Antonio Gramsci and B. R. Ambedkar*, ed. by C. Zene, London, Routledge, 2013, pp. 173-84: 174.

⁷³ Ivi, p. 173; Liguori, *Gramsci's Pathways*, cit., p. 89.

modernizing, introducing new “clichés”, albeit from within the «field of “senso comune”» itself.⁷⁴ Liguori points out that *senso comune* is «not, *in toto*, “an enemy to be fought”», but rather that the philosophy of the leadership of a social group must enter into a «dialectical and maieutic relation with *senso comune*».⁷⁵ In turn, *senso comune* can be «transformed and, indeed, transform itself, up until the conquest [...] of “a new *senso comune*”, which must be arrived at within the terms of the struggle for hegemony».⁷⁶ Despite its «Janus-face», traditional and conservative but simultaneously dynamic and malleable, *senso comune* is associated mainly with the passive moment in the ideological continuum of the philosophy-folklore relationship, the one that corresponds to those that Gramsci refers to as “the simple”.⁷⁷ For Liguori, this social strata largely operates on the «terrain of the *pre-intentionals*», although there is an underlying tension, as he points out, between its character of being «not *mobilised*, but *defined*» and the systematic «educational-formative work» consciously aiming to transform its cultural level.⁷⁸

In Q 3, § 49 (G § 48) (June-July 1930), under the heading *Past and Present*, Gramsci explores the relationship between «spontaneity» and «conscious leadership» in light of his own political experience of the «L’Ordine Nuovo» project during the *biennio rosso*. He says: «In these movements, then, there exists a “multiplicity” of elements of “conscious leadership,” but none of them predominates or goes beyond the level of “popular science”—“*senso comune*,” that is, the [traditional] conception of the world—of a given social stratum.»⁷⁹ Liguori highlights the proximity of *senso comune* to Gramsci’s understanding of the subaltern classes, and the relation between the limits of the subaltern’s fragmented «conception of the world» and their capacity to organise. However, Gramsci is also attentive to the traces of autonomous action and the seeds of their

⁷⁴ Q 1, § 65 (February-March 1930): *QC*, pp. 75-76; PN1, pp. 173-74.

⁷⁵ Liguori, *Gramsci’s Pathways*, cit., p. 87.

⁷⁶ Ivi, pp. 87-88. See also, Q 8 [b], § 48 [G § 213] (March 1932): *QC*, p. 1071; PN3, p. 360.

⁷⁷ Ivi; PN3, p. 359; See M. E. Green, *Gramsci’s Concept of the “Simple”: Religion, Common Sense, and the Philosophy of Praxis*, «Rethinking Marxism», XXX, 2018, n. 4, pp. 525-45. Green underlines Gramsci’s abiding critical concern with the Catholic Church’s paternalistic attitude towards «the simple».

⁷⁸ Liguori, *Gramsci’s Pathways*, cit., p. 89.

⁷⁹ Q 3, § 49 (G § 48) (June-July 1930): *QC*, p. 1071; PN2, p. 49.

«tenacious resistance and opposition».⁸⁰ For Gramsci, says Liguori, the «“spontaneity” of “movements”” has deficiencies that are in some measure *inevitable* on account of the very formations of “senso comune” as a subaltern “worldview” within a given socio-economic order».⁸¹

Thus, in Q 4 [b], § 19 (G § 18) (May-August 1930), entitled «*The technique of thinking*», Gramsci considers Croce’s paraphrasing of Engels’s comment in *Anti-Dühring* that there is no innate «art of working with concepts», but rather a historically acquired «labour of thought».⁸² This leads Gramsci to reflect on the «deformities of the modes of thinking of senso comune», comparing this technique with «the most advanced modern thought».⁸³ Thus, as Liguori points out, *senso comune* «appears to Gramsci with precise weaknesses, also of a logical type: the “distortions” of his “way of thinking” must be corrected, also because they are linked to the “oratory and declamatory” formation of a “philosophy of the man in the street”».⁸⁴

Cospito offers a classification of the different valorisations of *senso comune* or *buon senso* in their appearances during 1930 and early 1931, as neutrally (=), negatively (-) or positively (+) connoted, understood as «intermediate between folklore and philosophy», «closer to folklore» or closer «to philosophy» respectively.⁸⁵ Thus, in Q 7 [b], § 1 (November 1930), there is a neutral valence to Gramsci’s observation that Croce is «continuously flirting with the “senso comune” and the “buon senso” of the people».⁸⁶ By contrast, Gramsci’s reflections on the «common-sense objection» to scepticism in Q5, § 39 (October-November 1930) is positively

⁸⁰ Liguori, *Gramsci’s Pathways*, cit., p. 58.

⁸¹ Ivi, p. 62.

⁸² Q 4 [b], § 19 (G § 18) (May-August 1930): *QC*, p. 439; PN2, p. 159.

⁸³ Ivi, PN2, p. 160.

⁸⁴ It might be interesting to confront Habermas’ criticism of the «acclamation style» in the public sphere with Gramsci’s analysis of the «logical weaknesses of a culture formed by oratory and declamation», *ibid.*; see J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Cambridge (MA), MIT Press, 1991, pp. 211-22. Note, however, Gramsci’s valorisation of the transmission of Hegelian thought orally to Marx, Jackson, *Gramsci, Marx, Hegel*, cit., p. 53. See Q 1, § 152 (May 1930, after the 20th): *QC*, pp. 134-35; PN1, pp. 231-32).

⁸⁵ Cospito, *The Rhythm of Thought in Gramsci*, cit., pp. 188-90.

⁸⁶ Q 7 [b], § 1 (November 1930): *QC*, p. 853; PN3, p. 156.

evaluated.⁸⁷ Finally, there is a negative valence in Q 7 [b], § 29 (February 1931), in which Gramsci judges Bukharin's *Popular Manual* to have capitulated before «senso comune and vulgar thought».⁸⁸

After a period in 1931 during which *senso comune* and *buon senso* do not appear in the *Notebooks*, Cospito suggests that by early 1932 Gramsci «felt an increasingly urgent need to distinguish in some way between meanings that were so different».⁸⁹ Cospito observes that this marks a «turning point», for which Gramsci drew inspiration from his study of literature, in particular Manzoni's *Promessi Sposi*.⁹⁰ Thus, in Q 8 [c], § 19 (G § 19) (January-February 1932), Gramsci takes note of Manzoni's use of the distinction between «senso comune» and «buon senso», in which *buon senso* «was not lacking; but it stayed in hiding, in fear of senso comune».⁹¹

The relation between *buon senso* and *senso comune* has puzzled interpreters, caught between different emphasises, of *buon senso* as a moment of *senso comune*, or as an updated «new common sense», not to mention intermediate stages. Cospito's diachronic reading suggests «it is not a case of continuous, incoherent waverings but of an evolution, though not always linear from the first meaning to the second, and finally to a “conception” that was evident at the start of 1932».⁹² Thus, Liguori has pointed out both positive and negative valences found in Gramsci's various uses of *buon senso*, despite the more well-known definition of this term as «the healthy nucleus of senso comune».⁹³ There are also positive evaluations of *senso comune*, such as Gramsci's reflections in Q 8 [c], § 151 (G § 151) (April 1932) on the revealing hints at the «historicity of human nature» provided by the «commonsense mode of expression» regarding «second nature».⁹⁴ However, in Liguori's assessment, it

⁸⁷ Q 5, § 39 (October-November 1930): *QC*, p. 571; SPN, p. 374.

⁸⁸ Q 7 [b], § 29 (February 1931): *QC*, p. 877; PN3, p. 179.

⁸⁹ Cospito, *The Rhythm of Thought in Gramsci*, cit., p. 192.

⁹⁰ Ivi, pp. 192-93, n. 49. This influence is reminiscent of Gramsci's pre-prison gathering of insights through his theatre and literary criticism. Although, Cospito notes other component influences, including Missiroli and Engels/Labriola.

⁹¹ Q 8 [c], § 19 (G § 19) (January-February 1932): *QC*, p. 949; PN3, p. 245.

⁹² Cospito, *The Rhythm of Thought in Gramsci*, cit., p. 185.

⁹³ Liguori, *Buon senso*, in *Dizionario gramsciano*, cit., pp. 89-9: 89; Q 11, 1°. *Alcuni punti preliminari di riferimento* (G § 12) (June-July 1932): *QC*, p. 1380; SPN, p. 328.

⁹⁴ Q 8 [c], § 151 (G § 151) (April 1932): *QC*, p. 1032; PN3, p. 321.

must be admitted that Gramsci's negative judgements on *senso comune*, both explicit and implicit, are «a great deal more numerous and also qualitatively significant».⁹⁵

A full account of the specificity of Gramsci's transformation and «extension» of these concepts, including the complexities introduced by the «philology of quotation marks» and the redrafting of notes in their C-texts, would require a wider survey than possible here.⁹⁶ However, we might note that the development and evolution of these concepts interacts with Gramsci's preparation of materials for his ongoing *Anti-Croce*. Frosini points out that Gramsci's engagement with the discussion of *senso comune* in Croce's thought is part of the wider «immanent critical process» of engaging the Italian philosopher's work. For Gramsci, it is one necessary aspect of the formation of the philosophy of praxis that it must reckon with Croce's work, as an «ideological cornerstone of the present epoch», one that it is necessary «to criticise if one wants to understand one's time and become the heir of it».⁹⁷

4. Conclusion: Anglophone «images» of Gramsci

After reading Gramsci's concepts of *senso comune*, *buon senso* and philosophy, it is possible to indicate some resources that a philological reading could provide for existing «images» of Gramsci in the anglophone literature. I will consider briefly two examples. On the one hand, Maurice Finocchiaro has argued that Gramsci's criticism of Croce is «largely internal and logical, and hence more or less Crocean in a number of identifiable ways».⁹⁸ On the other, Alastair Davidson has examined the significance of the relationship between the *senso comune* and *buon senso* for Stuart Hall's creative appropriation of Gramsci's thought. Thus, Davidson argues:

To be frank, I do not think that we can find in the *Prison Notebooks* a clear theory of the creation of “buon senso” out of “senso comune”, although this

⁹⁵ Liguori, *Gramsci's Pathways*, cit., p. 91.

⁹⁶ See Cospito, *The Rhythm of Thought in Gramsci*, cit., pp. 196-98.

⁹⁷ Frosini, *Gramsci e la filosofia*, cit., p. 55. Liguori notes that Gramsci criticises Croce for the «pretence of holding philosophy and ideology, cognitive activity and political activity in separation», Liguori, *Gramsci's Pathways*, cit., p. 81; see Q 10, § 2, (G II, § 2) (first half of April 1932): *QC*, pp. 1241-42; *FSPN*, pp. 382-3.

⁹⁸ M. Finocchiaro, *Gramsci and the History of Dialectical Thought*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 8.

is essential to the part of Hall's theory that discusses a socialist hegemony. The problem is that the *Notes* do not address at length how *buon senso* is created out of *senso comune*, while making abundantly clear that the imprisoned Gramsci increasingly regarded the latter in a completely negative way.⁹⁹

Davidson argues that Hall's creative appropriation of Gramsci's notion of «discourse» relies on the extrapolation of a fully theorised *senso comune/buon senso* relationship from Gramsci's comments about the «popular creative spirit» in his 19 March 1927 letter to Tania.¹⁰⁰ Although a wider analysis of Hall's reception of Gramscian thought is beyond the remit of this chapter, I would suggest that a philological reading of *senso comune/buon senso* and their relation to the philosophy, continues to offer rich and underexplored resources (even if Hall, perhaps by necessity of the availability of translated material, had recourse to imaginative extrapolation) to understand this relationship.

While Gramsci's immanent criticism of Croce may appear *prima facie* proximate to a Crocean position, for Gramsci, it is a prerequisite for a thoroughgoing supersession of the philosopher's thought. We might contrast Finocchiaro's foregrounding of Gramsci's immanent criticism of Croce, with Peter Thomas's approach that balances different aspects of Gramsci's project of an *Anti-Croce*. On the one hand, Gramsci explores the «weaknesses and internal contradictions» of Croce's thought, while, on the other, advancing the positive construction of an alternative framework. Thus, as his critique of both Croce and Bukharin develops in Notebooks 10 and 11, Thomas argues, «Gramsci has moved from a limited moment of immanent critique, to a more aggressive *prise de position* on the *Kampfplatz* of contemporary philosophy, confronting the two revisionists no longer merely as a dissenter, but as a rival».¹⁰¹ We might suggest that the nexus of *senso comune*, *buon senso* and philosophy leads to «open and problematic» formulations that move beyond the impasses of both Crocean-ism and increasingly dogmatic forms of «orthodox» Marxism.

⁹⁹ Davidson, *The Uses and Abuses of Gramsci*, «Thesis Eleven», vol. 95, n. 1, 2008, pp. 68-94: 78.

¹⁰⁰ Gramsci, *Lettere dal carcere*, cit., 19 March 1927, pp. 57-60: 59.

¹⁰¹ Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment*, cit., p. 271.

Richard Bellamy has cautioned against anglophone attempts, such as that by Hall, to use Gramscian concepts as a guide to the political present.¹⁰² Bellamy argues that these applications fail to address the ways in which Gramsci's thought was «constrained» by the socio-political context of the 1920s and 30s and the «distinctive cultural tradition» of Italy.¹⁰³ Bellamy's criticism of such unmediated applications of Gramsci's ideas resonates somewhat with Gramsci's own philological warning of the dangers of «importuning the texts».¹⁰⁴ However, Bellamy is at risk of discarding the baby with the bathwater, if this scruple is taken to claim that Gramsci has little relevance to a renewal of socialist analysis in our own time. Far from «addressing problems that do not concern us»,¹⁰⁵ a philological reading of Gramsci's conception of *senso comune* can have value as a pre-requisite for a «dialogue with the present», and a strategic analysis of the contemporary conjuncture.¹⁰⁶ Kate Crehan's study, *Gramsci's Common Sense*, provides ample and concrete evidence of this.¹⁰⁷ Crehan considers Gramsci's conception of the formation of a «new common sense» as a resource that informs her analysis of two twenty-first century socio-political phenomena in the United States, the Occupy Wall Street movement and the right-wing Tea Party project.¹⁰⁸ Likewise, in *Radical Politics*, Thomas deploys a Gramscian lens to frame his analysis of recent cycles of emancipatory mobilisation and neoliberal re-entrenchment.¹⁰⁹ Reconstructing the «multi-layered richness» of Gramscian concepts and refraining from providing «sound bite» versions of his thought, Crehan, Thomas, and others, demonstrate its enduring relevance to an understanding of the lived

¹⁰² R. Bellamy, *Gramsci, Croce and the Italian Political Tradition*, «History of Political Thought», vol. 11, n. 2, 1990, pp. 313-37.

¹⁰³ Ivi, p. 313. Elsewhere Bellamy has argued that Gramsci's critique of Croce misfires, see R. Bellamy, *A Crocean critique of Gramsci on historicism, hegemony and intellectuals*, «Journal of Modern Italian Studies», vol. 6, n. 2, 2001, pp. 209-29.

¹⁰⁴ Q 6, § 198 (December 1931): *QC*, p. 838; PN3, p. 141.

¹⁰⁵ Bellamy, *Gramsci, Croce and the Italian Political Tradition*, cit., p. 337.

¹⁰⁶ G. Baratta, *Antonio Gramsci in contrappunto: dialoghi col presente*, Roma, Carocci, 2007.

¹⁰⁷ K. Crehan, *Gramsci's Common Sense: Inequality and its Narratives*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2016.

¹⁰⁸ Ivi, chapters 6 and 7.

¹⁰⁹ P. D. Thomas, *Radical Politics: On the Causes of Contemporary Emancipation*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2023.

experience of class exploitation and different forms of oppression and inequality in contemporary political realities.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Ivi, p. 14. See also M. E. Green, *Gramsci and Subaltern Struggles Today: Spontaneity, Political Organization and Occupy Wall Street*, in *Antonio Gramsci*, edited by M. McNally, New York, Palgrave, 2015, pp. 156-78.

