Review Articles

Gramsci, No Longer a Communist?

*A Review of I Due Carceri di Gramsci, L'Enigma del Quaderno and
Il Professor Gramsci e Wittgenstein by Franco Lo Piparo*

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Abstract

In his last three books, Franco Lo Piparo (a philosopher of language who teaches in Palermo) presents fresh and contested interpretations of the last part of Gramsci's life. In his view, the Sardinian thinker was distancing himself from the Communist world, not just from the Soviet Union. In the first part of the review-essay I will introduce the three books; in the second part I will then highlight some passages in the books that present Gramsci as a non-Communist thinker; in the final part, I will discuss the comparative analysis of Wittgenstein and Gramsci that the author traces in his last book. I believe that while this can open up new avenues, it is ultimately based on unconvincing and/or vague arguments.

Keywords

Gramsci – Wittgenstein – Sen – linguistics – Italy – notebooks

Franco Lo Piparo, *I Due Carceri di Gramsci. La prigionia fascista e il labirinto comunista*, Rome: Donzelli Editore, 2012

Franco Lo Piparo, *L'Enigma del Quaderno. La caccia ai manoscritti dopo la morte di Gramsci*, Rome: Donzelli Editore, 2013

Franco Lo Piparo, *Il Professor Gramsci e Wittgenstein. Il linguaggio e il potere*, Rome: Donzelli Editore, 2014

Introduction

The study of the material history of Antonio Gramsci's works has seen in recent years a renewed attention, especially thanks to two major initiatives: the *Edizione Anastatica* of the *Quaderni del carcere* (that is, the exact reproduction of the Prison Notebooks as Gramsci wrote them), edited by one of the main Gramsci philologists, Gianni Francioni, and published in 2009; and the national edition of Gramsci's work, which is still underway.¹ These have been accompanied by publications by the scholars who worked on the long editorial process that led (or is leading) to the publication of these important works.² The books under review, all by Franco Lo Piparo, do not form part of these initiatives, but speak nonetheless to a strong interest in the material history of Gramsci's *Notebooks* and *Letters*. This is an interest that goes hand in hand with constant attention to political and personal details of Gramsci's biography; it is important to appreciate that in Italy this is not limited to the academic realm; discussions on Gramsci's life and real or (most often) alleged scoops fill the cultural and political pages of newspapers, are present on the web, and are discussed in book presentations, public discussions and other events which occasionally draw large audiences.³ Lo Piparo's *I Due Carceri di Gramsci* and *L'Enigma del Quaderno*, which were highly discussed and engendered heated polemics, intervened in this context.⁴ One of them, *I Due Carceri*, also won the most important literary accolade in Italy, the Viareggio Prize.

1 For the former, see Gramsci 2009. For the latter, see <http://www.treccani.it/catalogo/catalogo_prodotti/Le_collane/scritti_gramsci.html>.

2 Vacca 2011, p. 788.

3 Aldo Agosti and Marco Albeltaro have noted how 'it is a signal of the provincialism of a certain Italian intellectual class that it is busy with gossiping, instead of re-reading Gramsci and trying to use him, whenever possible (as it is done in other parts of the world)' (Agosti and Albeltaro 2014, p. 7). All translations from Lo Piparo's books and from other Italian sources, except Gramsci's works, are mine.

4 For a list of reviews and critical interventions on the two books, see <<http://www.donzelli.it/libro/g788860366788>> and <<http://www.donzelli.it/libro/g788860368379>> (under the

In *I Due Carceri di Gramsci* the author discusses how for Gramsci the Communist world to which he belonged became a sort of second jail (*due carceri*, two prisons) which, Lo Piparo argues, while less visible than the Fascist jail where he was imprisoned, still influenced his writings. The author claims that Gramsci rewrote early passages from *Quaderni*, eliminating Communist references and terminology. In this book we also find some sketches of the issue that occupies the entirety of the second book, *L'Enigma del Quaderno*: the issue of a supposedly missing notebook. Using a complex network of sources, often deliberately assembled for the author's convenience, Lo Piparo claims that a notebook which Gramsci wrote in the last period of his life, after 1935, is still 'missing'. The author first discusses how the *Quaderni* left Italy for Moscow, then analyses the role of Tania Schucht in this phase and how different hands (among others, the curators of Gramsci's work and the *Istituto Gramsci*, the Gramsci Institute) were responsible for material changes to the *Quaderni*, particularly to their covers. Finally, he highlights how the people who could see Gramsci's manuscripts just after the war do not seem to agree on the number of notebooks; Lo Piparo then concludes that a missing notebook should be searched for in Togliatti's and Sraffa's papers.

The third book, *Il Professor Gramsci e Wittgenstein*, has a seemingly different topic, one much closer to Lo Piparo's academic training as a philosopher of language (he teaches at the University of Palermo and is the author of a much-discussed book on Gramsci and linguistics from 1979). Lo Piparo takes up a hypothesis formulated by Amartya Sen⁵ and argues that Gramsci and Ludwig Wittgenstein not only were working on similar issues at the same time, but very likely also influenced each other through their common friend Piero Sraffa.⁶ While this is certainly a suggestive hypothesis that might help to shed light on some of the works of the two authors, we will see how it also presents many problems and incongruities. Some passages of the Gramsci–Wittgenstein parallelism are convincing, while some others are not: the attempt to demonstrate that the two thinkers discussed in similar fashion 'sense' and 'nonsense' is a bit confusing;⁷ while more persuasive is the contention that both scholars were probably somehow involved in thinking that people talk

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section 'recensioni'). D'Orsi (ed.) 2014, which will be discussed later, is largely a response to these two books.

5 Sen 2003.

6 A very short version of this thesis is presented in English in Lo Piparo 2010. Terry Eagleton already posed the link between Wittgenstein and Gramsci via Sraffa at the beginning of the 1980s (Eagleton 1982): this essay is mentioned neither in Sen nor in Lo Piparo.

7 Lo Piparo 2014a, pp. 39–46.

and think according to a certain grammar without consciously knowing it⁸ – which is what Gramsci refers to as ‘immanent grammar’, as opposed to a ‘normative grammar’. In general, it seems rather plausible that both Gramsci and Wittgenstein were trying to understand how grammar-rules work. What follows, in Lo Piparo’s work, is an application of Wittgenstein’s notion of a ‘language game’ to some passages in Gramsci,⁹ and the similarities of this concept with the Gramscian notion of praxis – and how supposedly this notion later appears in other forms in Wittgenstein.¹⁰ Furthermore, in this book the author also explores new – and ultimately unconvincing – arguments for his thesis that Gramsci was, in the second phase of his life, no longer a communist (or at best a *comunista liberale*, liberal communist, according to the definition given by Luigi Russo in 1947, as I will soon discuss). The three books, as D’Orsi noted, can be seen ‘without sarcasm’ as a ‘trilogy’.¹¹

One of the benefits of the three books reviewed here is how they help us to rethink and question some of the widespread assumptions about the context, more so than the texts themselves, of the *Quaderni*. We could say that Lo Piparo makes three large claims: that something went wrong in the process of labelling Gramsci’s notebooks and that not everything is clear concerning the history of such notebooks between 1937 and 1945; building on this, he concludes that there is a notebook missing, one in which Gramsci abandoned Communism, because – and this is the third claim – he was not a communist anymore. This third claim, as we will see, should be rejected: as many have demonstrated, such a claim lacks a documentary basis.¹² The hypothesis of the missing notebook may or may not hold true, and Lo Piparo does not present a convincing argument for it. Almost all the contributions in Angelo D’Orsi’s collection of essays¹³ also consider the existence of such a notebook to be unlikely (although many do not exclude it categorically),¹⁴ and dismiss the notion that it would include anti-communist claims as absurd. In particular, as Liguori ironically noted, those who believe that there is a missing notebook actually mean a notebook that was hidden by ‘Gramsci’s perfidious Communist comrades’.¹⁵ While the existence of such a notebook is difficult to demonstrate

8 Lo Piparo 2014a, pp. 48–61.

9 Lo Piparo 2014a, pp. 65–70.

10 Lo Piparo 2014a, pp. 74–8.

11 D’Orsi (ed.) 2014, p. viii.

12 For example, Vacca 2014.

13 D’Orsi (ed.) 2014.

14 See for example Angelo Rossi’s formulation: ‘The philological evidence that would prove the existence of a notebook does not seem decisive, but we cannot completely exclude the possibility that Gramsci wrote it.’ (Rossi 2014, p. 150.).

15 Liguori 2014, p. 70.

and Lo Piparo's claims are ideologically inflated, he does draw attention to the fact that there are still aspects of Gramsci's life – and more importantly, of the history of the notebooks – which are not yet fully known. Lo Piparo has not been alone in questioning the established interpretations of Gramsci's work: the historian and philologist Luciano Canfora recently wrote two books in which he questions what he refers as the *storia sacra* [sacred history] of Gramsci's work, arguing that it is necessary to return to the discussion of the *storia interna e la finitezza scrittoria* [internal history and writing 'completeness'] of the *Quaderni*.¹⁶ Even more importantly, Lo Piparo's books led to the creation of a committee, under the auspices of the Gramsci Institute in Rome, which, according to D'Orsi, did not ascertain anything relevant but 'had the benefit of highlighting the usefulness, it not the necessity, of an additional investigation into the problem of numeration of the Notebooks'.¹⁷ Nerio Naldi notes how the path that brought the notebooks, between 1937 and 1945, from Rome to Moscow and then back to Rome is 'non-linear', and the work of the Gramsci Institute committee 'highlighted the opportunity to reflect on the ways in which their numeration took place'.¹⁸ Sergio Luzzato, one of the many scholars who wrote in the press about the books under review, praised Lo Piparo for his ability to look at the material history of Gramsci's texts and concluded that Lo Piparo's argumentation 'does not deserve to be put aside as vulgarly sensationalist'.¹⁹ Finally, Sergio Luzzi notes that even though we may disagree with Lo Piparo's thesis, 'we cannot deny that a stimulating debate originated from them'.²⁰

Lo Piparo's books, especially the first two (which were also translated into French),²¹ received in fact wide – albeit mostly negative – critical attention in the media, larger than many other works on Gramsci published in Italy in recent years. There is a variety of causes for this. These books seem to have been written with the express intention of becoming a publishing sensation: published by Donzelli, a publishing house of academic work for a wider audience, they are short and inexpensive,²² written in a provocative and easy-to-read style; they make strong (but at the same time 'simple') and scandalous statements which seem to be of great interest for the Italian audience. Anti-communist stances

16 Canfora 2012b, p. 13, and Canfora 2012a, p. 16.

17 D'Orsi (ed.) 2014, p. xxii.

18 Naldi 2014, p. 128.

19 Luzzato 2013.

20 Luzzi 2014, p. 95.

21 Lo Piparo 2014b. On the importance of this translation, which was also reviewed in *Le Monde*, see D'Orsi (ed.) 2014, p. vii.

22 On the contrary, it will suffice to note how the *Edizione Anastatica* is extremely difficult to find even in libraries, while the volumes of the *Edizione Nazionale* are expensive and their publication is progressing at a very slow pace.

in particular receive wide media attention, both in the right-wing and in the liberal press, which is very interested in creating Communist scandals, or in simplifying the history of Italian Communism. It also speaks to the difficulties of academic enterprises in reaching a wider readership, and the ways in which this happens. Lo Piparo's books are media events as much as they are academic books: this must be taken into account when discussing them, but it is not necessarily a reason to dismiss them out of hand.

Gramsci without Marx

Lo Piparo states that Gramsci, during his time in prison and clinics, was progressively distancing himself from the Communist world, and that he was becoming a liberal,²³ albeit a communist liberal. This, the author argues, is evident from reading his texts (*Notebooks* and *Letters*), which therefore must be completely reconsidered under a new light: 'The *Notebooks* and the *Letters*, emerging as witnesses to a tormented reflection [*ripensamento*] and critical overcoming of the Communist philosophical culture, have become, in the common perception, canonical works of Communist culture.'²⁴ This thesis spurred harsh polemics in Italy and it should not come as a surprise that a leading Italian right-wing newspaper welcomed and defended Lo Piparo's first book.²⁵ While the author's thesis is misguided,²⁶ I will highlight how, despite the author using a fairly deformed and inaccurate lens (i.e. one that implies that Gramsci was a non-Marxist thinker), we can find useful information and more importantly new fuel for discussions and archival research.

Lo Piparo reiterates his thesis in quite a few passages, among others in a detailed analysis of a letter that Gramsci sent to his sister-in-law Tania Schucht

23 This is clearly not a new thesis. Liguori argues in a recent book on the reception of Gramsci: 'Alongside this interpretation [Gramsci as a Communist], we find another one ... it is the liberal-democratic, liberal-socialist, *azionista* [from the Action Party] reading ... which presented a liberal and libertarian Gramsci, more an intellectual than a politician' (Liguori 2012b, p. 17).

24 Lo Piparo 2012, p. 76.

25 See Ottaviani 2012.

26 Lo Piparo himself, in response to a number of critics (in D'Orsi (ed.) 2014, pp. 75–80), seems to partially correct his statements.

on 27 February 1933.²⁷ Tania called this letter *esopica*, i.e. contorted and difficult to interpret.²⁸ The key part of the letter is when the prisoner says:

I thought that I should write to you [Tania] because it seems to me that I have reached a decisive turn in my life, when, without further delays, I must take a decision. This decision is taken. The line of conduct that I mentioned to you during our last visit and in my last letters is only a conditional aspect of these decisions. Sometimes I have thought that my entire life was a great (great for me) mistake, a huge miscalculation.²⁹

The decision Gramsci was talking about was, for Lo Piparo, his intention to leave Communist politics and ideology, and the miscalculation, the mistake of his entire life, was to have become a Communist in the first place.³⁰ Three points can be raised here: first, it is hard to decipher what Gramsci is talking about here, not just because of the nature of the letter (*esopica*), but because it refers to meetings that he was having with Tania, meetings of which we obviously do not have minutes, and of which we only have confused information from the letters of the two. This point regards a methodological issue, i.e. a certain tendency on the author's part to 'overread' Gramsci's texts to suit his own hypotheses.³¹ Second, Lo Piparo, in this passage and elsewhere, seems to conflate the Stalinist USSR with other possible forms of communism. As banal and clear as this point may be, Lo Piparo seems to forget it all too often.³² Finally, all things considered, Lo Piparo nevertheless has the merit of advancing a hypothesis for one of the most esoteric and yet crucial passages in Gramsci's writing. Other hypotheses can be made: is Gramsci referring to the choice of the splitting of the Communist Party from the Socialist Party in Livorno in 1921? Can that be the miscalculation he is talking about? Might he be talking about his relationship with Julka, who, as Lo Piparo makes clear, emerges in Gramsci's body of letters as a complicated character for whom Gramsci has mixed feelings? These feelings are present throughout this letter, especially

27 Lo Piparo 2012, pp. 9–50, mainly pp. 34–44.

28 Frosini notes how in the Russian revolutionary movement the term *esopico* was used to describe the attempt to deceive the censor. See Frosini 2015, p. 44, n. 4.

29 Gramsci 1994, p. 276.

30 Lo Piparo 2012, p. 41.

31 We can find other cases of this kind of over-reading in his books, for example in the analysis of a famous letter sent to Gramsci in jail by Ruggiero Grieco (Lo Piparo 2012, p. 26). More on this later.

32 And I am obviously not the first one to note this problem in his texts. See for example Cavallaro 2013.

when he says, 'I am convinced to this day that in my relations with Julka there exists a certain equivocation, a false bottom, an ambiguity.'³³ Moreover, a letter that Gramsci received from Tania the day before the 27 February 1933 letter (to which the letter of 27 February 1933 would presumably be the answer)³⁴ is largely dedicated to family matters. More hypotheses can be raised. Could he be referring to the hesitations of the Left in Italy, which was unable to face from a strictly military point of view the rise of the Fascist Party? Or even to the decision to withdraw from the factories during the Biennio Rosso?³⁵ Or may he be referring even to the possibility of committing suicide? Another option emerges if we read the preceding letter, where there are many references to the demand for parole or conditional release:³⁶ the decision may be referring to this issue. Aldo Natoli puts this simply: 'Which decision? We do not know.'³⁷ Another hypothesis can be made: Rosenthal translates as best as he can (with the word 'miscalculation') a very nuanced and rarely used word: *dirizzone*. In his paraphrasing of the letter Lo Piparo accurately notes what this word means in Italian (blunder, goof-up, or miscalculation),³⁸ but does not mention that in some local dialects and slang, *dirizzone* is also used as a synonym of *rettilineo*, or 'straight line'.³⁹ While *dirizzone* in the text follows *errore* [mistake] and seems to be used in a keen semantic realm, we cannot avoid noticing the use of a deeply nuanced word, one with different meanings and uses. Finally, it can be noted as well that in this period Gramsci was subjected to mental crises, and

33 Gramsci 1994, p. 275. See also Natoli 1990, p. 140. The idea that Julka/Julia/Giulia is a way to refer to the USSR as a whole can be safely rejected. See, among many, Tinè 2014, p. 183.

34 Gramsci and Schucht 1997, pp. 1207–9.

35 A theme which occupies some space in the *Quaderni*, as it is well known.

36 For example, Gramsci 1994, p. 257 (a letter to his wife Julka, 16 January 1933), pp. 260, 264, and, most importantly, pp. 269–70, where he discusses at length this issue (three letters to Tania, January 22, February 6, and February 13). But on this see also Sraffa 1991, pp. 109–11.

37 Natoli 1990, p. 151. Here Natoli makes two hypotheses: that Gramsci wanted to leave the party, and that he wanted to break up with Julka.

38 According to one of the standard Italian vocabulary texts the word means 'Obstinate and illogical holding on to an intention [*Ostinato e illogico attaccamento a un proposito*]' (Devoto and Oli 1982, p. 805). In an old *Vocabolario Nomenclatore*, 'Said of unwariness and obstinacy [*Detto a sconsideratezza e ad ostinazione*]' (Premoli 1989, p. 882).

39 References to this use can be found in popular forums online, especially from Tuscany. See for example a forum on motorbikes (<<http://www.cbr600.it/forum/in-pista/30-kmh-in-meno!/5/?wap2>>) and *Impara l'Aretino* [Learning the Arezzo Dialect] (<<http://amparalaretino.altervista.org/Vocabolario/D/dirizzone1.html>>). The word does not appear in Edoardo Sanguineti's interesting lexicography of Gramsci's peculiar words (Sanguineti 2004), nor in historical dictionaries of dialects from Tuscany (Nieri 1970): it is hard to establish whether or not *dirizzone* had this meaning in Gramsci's time as well.

was probably in the worst (from a psychological point of view) phase of his incarceration – in Gerratana's words, 'the most dramatic period of Gramsci's life in jail'.⁴⁰

It seems that Lo Piparo has a fairly orthodox take on Marxism, which could impede him from grasping Gramsci's heterodoxy (or an innovative interpretation of Marxism). This is evident in his analysis of the early article *The Revolution against Capital*. For Lo Piparo, here Gramsci welcomes 'The Soviet Revolution ... with arguments typical of a professor of philosophy of the anti-positivist school, completely detached from real historic events'.⁴¹ This seems odd in an article where Gramsci precisely claims that, 'Events have overcome ideologies ... [the Bolsheviks] have not used the works of the Master [Marx] to compile a rigid doctrine of dogmatic utterances never to be questioned. They live Marxist thought'.⁴² Lo Piparo seems to have a stricter and more unchangeable understanding of Marxist doctrine than Gramsci's.

Another problem with this topic is Lo Piparo's belief that in prison Gramsci saw himself not as a militant but only as a scholar. There are dozens of letters (letters that Lo Piparo himself quotes) where Gramsci shows frustration at not being involved enough in political decisions, while we know from what fellow prisoners reported that Gramsci was as politically active in prison as was possible. But for Lo Piparo the first page of the *Prison Notebooks* becomes 'the explicit proof of his passage from political militancy to political philosophy'.⁴³ Consequently, Lo Piparo insists, already in the title of his book, on referring to Gramsci as professor.⁴⁴ He thus seems to exclude the possibility that being

40 Gerratana 1991, p. xlii. Sraffa writes to Tatiana on 27 February 1933: 'it is absolutely necessary that [Gramsci] should be visited immediately by a doctor we can trust' (Sraffa 1991, p. 114) and 'Nino's letters clearly demonstrate that he is going through a very serious crisis – and I am not sure how he will come out of it' (Sraffa 1991, p. 117). Even more strongly, Tania wrote to Sraffa: 'Seeing Nino produces an unpleasant, particular impression' (in Sraffa 1991, p. 227), later 'his physical condition is rather worsened' (in Sraffa 1991, p. 244), and 'he is really really bad' (in Sraffa 1991, p. 246. All letters are from February and March 1933). Gramsci had a crisis on March 7, which he described in subsequent letters (Gramsci 1994, pp. 281–4). Many details on these days are in a report that Tania wrote for Sraffa after having met Gramsci, which was published in Sraffa 1991, pp. 226–41.

41 Lo Piparo 2014a, p. 137.

42 Forgacs (ed.) 2000, p. 33.

43 Lo Piparo 2014a, p. 126.

44 'With the incarceration Gramsci is freed of his political engagement in the party and he can ... become again professor Gramsci' (p. 158, emphasis mine). Among many – including Gramsci himself – who claimed that he was indeed still engaged in the struggle, see Rossi 2014, p. 152.

a 'professor' (or, more accurately in Gramsci's case, a 'scholar') and being a militant are activities that are not necessarily incompatible. On this matter, the clumsiest part is when he tries to demonstrate that Gramsci, when he was confined in Ustica, was actually 'relaxed and felt lighter, given that he had forcibly lost the responsibilities of militant politics'.⁴⁵ He even attempts to argue that the school which Gramsci and others (Bordiga included) tried to organise on the island was not an 'ideological or party school',⁴⁶ somehow implying that Gramsci was not that interested in creating such a kind of school. We should also question Lo Piparo's assumption that the aforementioned letter sent by Grieco would have created an excessive reaction⁴⁷ on Gramsci's part because this came to 'obstruct the process of reconversion to the old professorial identity of a man of science ... who now has *chosen* the lengthy time of research'.⁴⁸ This line of thinking is extremely convoluted, and the suggestion that Gramsci would have chosen to leave politics is not supported by any of the available evidence. Trying to demonstrate that Gramsci was not a Communist anymore is such an important topic for Lo Piparo that he spends the last part of *Il professor Gramsci e Wittgenstein* on this subject. As we will see, it seems that he is mobilising even the Austrian philosopher for this goal, and in the final pages even Dante.⁴⁹

Something can also be said about the definition of liberal communism that Lo Piparo takes from Luigi Russo (an important literary critic from Gramsci's time), and on which he bases so much of his analysis. Russo's sentence is taken from an official speech for the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of Gramsci's death that the author gave at the Scuola Normale di Pisa, i.e. the kind of speech where hyperbole is not uncommon.⁵⁰ In the same essay Russo uses other definitions of which Lo Piparo would not approve. For example, Russo regards Gramsci as 'the only Communist who has hitherto tried to clarify speculatively the passage from Crocean historicism to what he called

45 Lo Piparo 2014a, p. 149. Before being sent to actual prison, Gramsci spent some time confined on the small Sicilian island of Ustica.

46 Lo Piparo 2014a, p. 153.

47 The reaction is due to the fact that this letter jeopardised Gramsci's plan to try to diminish his role in the PCI, something which was necessary in order to get a less severe punishment. Lo Piparo mentions, as evidence, that Terracini and Scoccimarro (two other leaders within the PCI) received similar letters and did not react like Gramsci. As D'Orsi notes (D'Orsi (ed.) 2014, p. xvii), citing the majority of interventions in his *Inchiesta*, there seem to be no strong reasons to believe that Grieco wanted to harm Gramsci in any way.

48 Lo Piparo 2014a, p. 159, emphasis added.

49 Lo Piparo 2014a, pp. 174–5.

50 Russo 1991, p. 223 and p. 225, curatorial notes.

philosophy of praxis'.⁵¹ He further notes that Gramsci was a 'peculiar and tenacious and very ardent militant of the party',⁵² adding that Gramsci may appear to transcend the party, but does not seem to abandon it. Finally, in the exact same lines that Lo Piparo quotes, Russo not only says that Gramsci's thought could go in the direction of what we can call 'liberal communism', but explains this kind of communism as 'a non-autocratic and non-policed communism'⁵³ – but it is definitely still a type of communism.

The Material History of the Notebooks and the *Quaderno mancante*

At the end of this research I think it is possible to state with a high degree of certainty that a notebook of twenty-six pages existed (and still exists?).⁵⁴

We should start looking for it in the papers of Togliatti and Sraffa. What does it contain? Something is certain. It needed to be hidden.⁵⁵

Lo Piparo mainly works on the last period of Gramsci's life to try to reconstruct the material history of Gramsci's corpus. This history is complex, non-linear, and full of black holes and unclarified passages. A few legitimate and correct points that Lo Piparo raises merit discussion. First, when Gramsci died he was not in prison, and not even on probation: he was free, albeit only for a week. He spent about two and half of his last years in clinics, not in prison (15 October 1934–27 April 1937). There are at least two reasons why this is not an insignificant detail: at this time he had slightly more freedom and could see his friend Piero Sraffa and his sister-in-law, sometimes even for entire days; a certain narrative, which began with Togliatti and his article published in *l'Unità* (the newspaper of the Italian Communist Party) on 30 April 1944 to commemorate Gramsci, states that the notebooks were *trafugati* [smuggled] out of Gramsci's jail when he died. Lo Piparo notes how this is a *falso storico* [a fabrication of history], and that '*falsi storici* are usually functional for something else'.⁵⁶ But for what,

⁵¹ Russo 1991, p. 229.

⁵² Russo 1991, p. 239.

⁵³ Russo 1991, p. 230; quoted in Lo Piparo 2012, p. 115.

⁵⁴ Lo Piparo 2013, p. 139.

⁵⁵ Lo Piparo 2013, p. 140.

⁵⁶ Lo Piparo 2012, p. 5. Another *falso storico* that Lo Piparo wants to debunk is the one which states that the *Quaderni* were transferred from Rome to Moscow via the Soviet Embassy: he thinks that this actually happened courtesy of the *Banca Commerciale Italiana* [Italian

in this case? It serves to create a mythology, to see and interpret Gramsci as a martyr of Fascism. And if Lo Piparo goes too far in arguing that Mussolini was explicitly protecting Gramsci,⁵⁷ it is undeniable that this *falso storico* has been reiterated through time, especially on the Left, and dismantling it could help us work more freely on the last period of his life; it could also help us to try to understand why he wrote so little in the last two years, since Lo Piparo seems to think that he was not as ill as the narrative has hitherto stated.⁵⁸ But in this case, too, an appropriate question on the part of Lo Piparo ('why did Gramsci write so little in the last period of his life?') leads him to an indemonstrable conclusion – that Gramsci did actually write more, and that the missing notebook, which does exist, is necessarily from that period. ('It is very likely that this notebook ... is a clinic notebook and not a prison notebook. It was entirely or partially written in the Quisisana clinic in Rome where Gramsci lived between 24 August 1935 and the morning of 27 April 1937.')⁵⁹

Something must be said at this point on the figure of Piero Sraffa, which was surely a complicated one: he was an economist of Jewish origin, friends with John Maynard Keynes and Ludwig Wittgenstein at Cambridge in the UK, and close to Gramsci and the *Ordine Nuovo* circle in Turin. He was related to two members of the establishment (his father was a renowned professor and his uncle a member of the Parliament) and at the same time he was the link between Gramsci and the Communist Party during his incarceration. Lo Piparo adds that he was also a cover agent for the Comintern: '[Sraffa] is more than a "hidden Communist". He has the authority of a high-ranking secret agent. He acts in tune with Togliatti.'⁶⁰ This is something that has been denied by several scholars:⁶¹ in particular, Naldi notes how arguing that he was an agent means 'not using all the sources we have on the topic',⁶² and in a very informed article which draws on a number of sources, he concludes that 'Sraffa certainly placed himself on the Communist side of the international political scene and became part of the political and organisational structure that the PCI was setting up in order to provide assistance to Gramsci and keep in contact with

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Commercial Bank], through the good relationship that Sraffa's family had with the director of the bank. See Lo Piparo 2013, pp. 34–6.

57 Lo Piparo 2012, p. 123. Mussolini's ambivalent attitude towards Gramsci the prisoner merits attention, however. See Lo Piparo 2013, pp. 20, 137.

58 Lo Piparo 2012, p. 97.

59 Lo Piparo 2013, p. 127. On this, see Canfora in Telese 2012.

60 Lo Piparo 2013, p. 104.

61 See several contributions in D'Orsi (ed.) 2014.

62 Naldi 2014, p. 131.

him. Nevertheless, Sraffa – though never forcing the constraints imposed by a context dominated by Stalin and the Russian Communist Party – seems to have maintained a considerable degree of autonomy.⁶³ No doubt Sraffa is the kernel of Lo Piparo's spy story. And like any *giallo*, there are still many mysteries that surround him: why do we have, on Sraffa's side, so little documentation on this period⁶⁴ and why was he so elusive when interrogated on the subject? And why did Sraffa leave all the curatorial work on the *Notebooks* to Togliatti? In fact, as Lo Piparo points out, Togliatti and the Party took the *Notebooks* and edited them, and Sraffa (whom Gramsci trusted and asked to deal with his intellectual heritage) had little role in it.⁶⁵

Lo Piparo puts together a list of small clues, incongruences, problems with translations, etc., that are supposed to demonstrate the existence of this missing notebook. One is an analysis of a single label of a notebook, in the short chapter entitled 'La sorprendente storia dell'etichetta XXXIII'.⁶⁶ Further, Lo Piparo concludes that 'Hence, a notebook of 26 pages that corresponded to the label XXXII hidden under label XXIX did exist. This notebook is missing.'⁶⁷ It is a story where even the smallest detail plays a significant role. For example, there is a lengthy analysis of the problems with the use of *trentina* [about thirty] instead of *trenta* [thirty] in letters that Togliatti and other people who knew about the *Notebooks* exchanged in the first years after the Second World War.⁶⁸ None of the clues he presents, however, constitutes 100% compelling evidence that this notebook actually exists, and the work of a committee created by the Gramsci Institute did not really solve this puzzle but only encouraged further analysis. The author himself seems to be aware of this when he claims that he is following 'phantasia logiké', that is 'imagination supported by arguments which are themselves anchored to real facts'.⁶⁹ But whether the notebook exists or not, Lo Piparo's work has forced a number of scholars to engage further with these matters. And this can only be positive.

63 Naldi 2012, p. 14.

64 Lo Piparo 2013, p. 62.

65 See Lo Piparo 2013, pp. 105–6, for a letter that Tania wrote to her sister on the subject, where she states that 'according to P.[iero] we should not let ... anyone claim the right to finish what Antonio did not finish'. See also Santomassimo 2014, p. 156.

66 Lo Piparo 2013, p. 67.

67 Lo Piparo 2013, p. 125.

68 There is a lengthy discussion on numbers: see 'Il balletto dei numeri' (Lo Piparo 2013, pp. 88–97).

69 Lo Piparo 2013, p. 122. Liguori, among many, does not agree with this way of arguing, and does not think that historians should work like this. See Liguori 2012a. The synthesis of this 'storia dell'etichetta' is now in Lo Piparo 2014a, pp. 80–4.

Gramsci and Wittgenstein via Sraffa

In 2003 Amartya Sen published an essay entitled *Sraffa, Wittgenstein and Gramsci*, which received some attention⁷⁰ but never received such an ample discussion as Lo Piparo's book. To understand Sen's thesis we need first to highlight a decisive turning point in Wittgenstein's philosophical trajectory, i.e. the employment of what has been called the 'anthropological turn': in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) Wittgenstein sees language 'in isolation from the social circumstances in which it is used', while 'the *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) emphasises the conventions and rules that give the utterances particular meaning'.⁷¹ This passage in Wittgenstein's thought was aided, inspired, and facilitated by habitual conversations that the philosopher had in Cambridge with Sraffa, who was familiar with Gramsci's work on the philosophy of language – and Gramsci's work supposedly resonates in Wittgenstein's texts. In Sen's words, 'there is *considerable evidence* that what appeared to Wittgenstein as new wisdom was a common subject of discussion in the intellectual circle in Italy to which Sraffa and Gramsci both belonged'.⁷² However Sraffa, when questioned by Sen himself, said that the points he was making were rather obvious ones.⁷³ Further, while it is possible that Sraffa talked about Gramsci with Wittgenstein, there is no documentary evidence to prove this.⁷⁴ The issue here is whether or not one finds the *considerable evidence* to which Sen is referring convincing. Lo Piparo finds it convincing, and his main critique of Sen is only that he focused mostly on economic theories, leaving aside the linguistic content of the dialogue [*dialogo*] between Gramsci and Wittgenstein.⁷⁵ How is this dialogue to be explored? 'Since sources are lacking, only a comparative and philologically accurate examination of [Gramsci's] *Notebooks* and [Wittgenstein's] *Investigations* can open a crack'.⁷⁶ This is the key theoretical move on Lo Piparo's part, and one that can create disagreements: he is claiming that only by looking at their texts can we understand whether or not Gramsci and Wittgenstein were somehow in dialogue.

This is not the place to retrace Wittgenstein's complicated relationship with Cambridge (and possibly with academia in general), and the circumstances

70 For example, Sinha 2006.

71 Sen 2003, p. 1242.

72 Sen 2003, p. 1244, emphasis added.

73 Sen 2003, p. 1243.

74 Eagleton 1982, p. 84.

75 Lo Piparo 2014a, p. 12.

76 Ibid.

that brought Sraffa to Cambridge. It is enough to note how Keynes facilitated the arrival of the Italian scholar in 1928 in the UK and the return of the Austrian philosopher in 1929, after he had graduated from Cambridge in 1913. Lo Piparo describes at length the relationship between Sraffa and Wittgenstein, a relationship that he calls asymmetrical, being unbalanced on the Italian economist's side, to the extent that at a certain point 'I [Sraffa] had to stop our regular conversations – I was somewhat bored'.⁷⁷ According to Lo Piparo's account, they had 'a *strange* relationship which was probably not only intellectual but also erotic-sentimental'.⁷⁸ Although this may appear a minor detail, Lo Piparo seems to suggest that this could have had a role in their estrangement; that is, the decision to stop regular conversation may have been due also to a lovers' quarrel. However, an explanation of how a *normal* (as opposed to a *strange*) relationship should look is not provided, and this argument seems tenuous and, again, not based on documentary evidence. What is important here is that 'Sraffa was, for Wittgenstein, a precious philosophical treasure trove. ... On the contrary, Sraffa was convinced that he used the vulgar metal'⁷⁹ of obviousness in their conversations. The thought that Gramsci was developing in prison and in the clinics was the treasure which *Sraffa brought unconsciously with him*.⁸⁰ What is left out in this passage, a passage that echoes Sen's paper, is Sraffa's role. The economist becomes a sort of mouthpiece for Gramsci.⁸¹ He is not considered to be someone who could have philosophically influenced Wittgenstein himself, but only by bringing with him unconsciously Gramsci's thought.⁸²

This puzzle can (perhaps) be solved only by reading Sraffa's unpublished papers, as Ajit Sinha started doing in a very interesting response to Sen, concluding that:

77 Sen 2003, p. 1243.

78 Lo Piparo 2014a, p. 25, emphasis added.

79 I have translated *miniera* as 'treasure trove', but this word in Italian also means 'mine': hence the play on words with metal.

80 Lo Piparo 2014a, p. 27. As Sinha puts it, 'Sen's solution to the puzzle is that Sraffa most likely was making the "point" that was apparently commonplace among Gramsci's circle in Italy to which Sraffa belonged before coming to Cambridge in 1927.' (Sinha 2006.).

81 The same, in Lo Piparo's books, seems to be true for Tania. He writes, 'After Gramsci died, Tania's judgements on Togliatti, which we presume repeat those of her brother-in-law...' (Lo Piparo 2012, p. 99). No explanation is given as to why we should presume that.

82 As he puts it elsewhere, Sraffa had, thanks to his friend Nino, 'the theoretical tools to contribute to ... the theoretical crisis of the author of the *Tractatus* and suggest to him the path to go through to find alternative solutions' (Lo Piparo 2013, p. 80).

We shall argue that Gramsci's philosophical concerns or problems are not the same as Wittgenstein's and that there is evidence to show that Sraffa from early on had started to think about Wittgenstein's problem, which does not have much trace in Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*.⁸³

While we wait to learn more from these papers, we can note how even in his *Il Professor Gramsci e Wittgenstein* Lo Piparo comes back to the topic he is most interested in: understanding what happened in the last two years of Gramsci's life and how much of what he wrote was accessible to Sraffa, and finding out whether he wrote another notebook which was 'directly' inspired by Wittgenstein. In fact, Lo Piparo is convinced that Sraffa was using arguments that he knew from reading the *Notebooks* as Gramsci was writing them, at least from 1934.⁸⁴ It takes a stretch to move from this hypothesis to saying that it is highly unlikely that '[Sraffa] in Cambridge would have not used Gramscian arguments in the meetings ... with Wittgenstein'.⁸⁵ And another stretch is necessary to state that the temporal coincidence of *Notebook* 29, completely dedicated to grammar and written in 1935, and the manuscript of the *Investigations* (1936) 'could not be just accidental. And what if Gramsci's highly disciplined analysis that we find in the *Notebook* [29] was indeed stimulated by Sraffa's communication of the problems in linguistic philosophy that Wittgenstein was working on? ... Amartya Sen is right: Gramsci and Wittgenstein are intellectually associated through Sraffa'.⁸⁶ And yet, although there is some resemblance between the two scholars, especially with respect to concern for the concept of grammar and the use of it, this does not seem enough to fully justify the idea that they were working on the same issues, or even more that they influenced each other; and none of the examples that Lo Piparo brings seems to clarify doubts; in some cases, they remain rather vague, such as, 'To interrogate language is not, for both, business only for a category of specialists'.⁸⁷ As Sinha puts it, 'The problem with this story is not that it is incorrect but rather that it does not go deep enough in understanding the nature of the break in Wittgenstein's philosophy of language and

83 Sinha 2006. Eagleton recognises some general common interests when he notes, 'Yet Gramsci was like Wittgenstein concerned to demystify philosophy' (Eagleton 1982, p. 90.).

84 Lo Piparo 2014a, pp. 27–34.

85 Lo Piparo 2014a, p. 36.

86 Lo Piparo 2014a, pp. 36–7. The word used in Italian is *frequentati*, which can be rendered as *associated* or *hang around together*.

87 Lo Piparo 2014a, p. 5.

meaning.⁸⁸ Even more problematic is when, in attempting to show intellectual consonance between Gramsci and Wittgenstein, Lo Piparo goes on trying to find biographical affinities among the two, claiming that World War I had completely changed ‘not just their understanding of the world but before anything else the way they felt about the world’;⁸⁹ something which is surely true for the two men, but also for millions of people in Europe.

To conclude, Lo Piparo’s work has the merit of posing philological questions about the material history of the *Notebooks* and of highlighting problems and contradictions that have characterised the archival work on the *Letters* and *Notebooks*. No less fruitful is his highlighting of the triangle Wittgenstein–Sraffa–Gramsci, which hopefully will be explored further when more documentation becomes available. Unfortunately, his analysis often leads to conclusions which have not yet proven convincing, and in some cases (for example on Gramsci’s anti-communism) are strongly ideologically inflated and not supported by documentary evidence. The polemics that his books generated in Italy also demonstrate how Gramsci is, despite everything, still alive in Italian culture, even if more often in the realm of gossip or curiosity about his life than in engaged critical discussion. Nevertheless, Gramsci’s continuing strong presence in the press and in the cultural-political debate can be the basis for serious political and scholarly analysis of his work and help to suggest ways in which we can still use Gramsci’s ideas in the contemporary world – despite, but also thanks to, Lo Piparo’s books

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88 Sinha 2006.

89 Lo Piparo 2014a, p. 121.

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