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Carlo Salinari, the PCI, and Transnational Exchanges in *Il Contemporaneo* (1954–1955)

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates from a hitherto neglected transnational angle the cultural strategies developed in the Italian Communist Party (PCI)'s literary journal *Il Contemporaneo* by the editor-in-chief Carlo Salinari in the years 1954 and 1955. In the form of editorial notes, foreign contributions and reviews of foreign literature, Salinari aimed at establishing an intellectual dialogue which would reach across national borders. Analysing the contributions published in the journal, the article explores the extent to which this transnational exchange related with the Gramscian 'national-popular' stance and helped to legitimate the journal within the Italian cultural field.

KEYWORDS

PCI; Carlo Salinari; *Il Contemporaneo*; Palmiro Togliatti; Antonio Gramsci; Translation

Introduction

After WWII, Italian Communist intellectuals sought to establish a form of weekly cultural journal, a *settimanale di cultura*, which would expand the reach of the 'official' periodicals of the Italian Communist Party (henceforth the PCI), such as *Rinascita*, to engage with a wider spectrum of leftist intellectuals. This strategy intended to bolster the party's position within the cultural sphere, and ultimately to establish its hegemonic role in society. Key journals included *Risorgimento*, published in 1945 by the left-wing publishing house Einaudi and edited by the literary critic Carlo Salinari, and the party literary journal *Il Contemporaneo* [1954–1962], again with Salinari as editor-in-chief. All projects, as emphasized by the contrapositions within the Cultural Committee, however, were ultimately unable to offer a univocal and satisfying response to the need of the PCI members to create a non-dogmatic platform, which would orientate the literary and cultural debates for democratic intellectuals in the decade after WWII.¹

This article examines the cultural strategies of *Il Contemporaneo* from a transnational angle, one which has largely been neglected by scholarship to date when analysing the journal. This lack of attention may be explained by the dominance of the narrative of the Gramscian 'nazional-popolare', which more generally informed the cultural policy of the PCI in the post-war years. As suggested by David Forgacs, the 'nazional-popolare', 'treated largely as a cultural concept and associated with progressive realist forms in literature, cinema and the other arts [...], became a sort of slogan for forms of art that were rooted both in the national tradition and in popular life, and as such it became identified with

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¹Albertina Vittoria, *Togliatti e gli intellettuali. La politica culturale dei comunisti italiani (1944–1964)* (Rome: Carocci, 2014), p. 117.

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an artistic style or styles.² Notwithstanding this national stance, it is possible to recognize a transnational drive in *Il Contemporaneo*. Why use the term ‘transnational’? The engagement with foreign intellectuals and writers sympathising or actively involved with the political struggle of the Communist parties in their respective country of origin was traditionally in line with the intents of the Communist international fora. These exchanges can be conceived as ‘inter-national’ in so far as they do not ‘dilute the national’,³ since they deal ‘with relations among nations as sovereign entities’, relations that are generally asymmetrical.⁴ The ‘transnational’ focuses instead ‘on cross-national connections, whether through individuals [...], or in terms of objectives shared by people and communities regardless of their nationality’,⁵ and suggests ‘how a particular phenomenon passed over the nation as a whole, how it passed across the nation, [...] or how it passed through’.⁶ Compared to international, the term ‘transnational’ fosters the idea of a movement (also in terms of tactics and discourses) across borders which intermingles with the national and attempts at transcending it, or at least at prompting change. This movement can occur in a plurality of forms, and in the pages of *Il Contemporaneo* took the shape of a tactical choice of editorial notes, foreign contributions and reviews of foreign literature, which contributed to develop a ‘dialogue’ beyond the national borders. However, somewhat paradoxically, ‘transnational ties can dissolve some national barriers while simultaneously strengthening or creating others.’⁷ Interests grounded in the national political or intellectual fields, although not specifically related to the nation-state, may influence this crossing of borders. The transnational dialogue in *Il Contemporaneo* was intended not only to facilitate exchanges and relationships with foreign intellectuals, but most importantly to connect the journal with the literary and cultural debates developing across national contexts, particularly with regard to the concept of realism, and tie them to current cultural debates in Italy. This aimed at granting some space for manoeuvre to the journal and its editors so that they could position themselves within the contemporary intellectual field in Italy.

The need to elaborate a unifying and unambiguous narrative synthesising transnational and national debates, whilst adjusting to the demands of the party, proved however difficult for Italian communist intellectuals. This study traces their inability by focusing on the editorial trajectory of Carlo Salinari (1919–1977) and primarily on his contribution between the years 1954–1955, that is, from just before his resignation as chair of the Cultural Committee in January 1955 but prior to the cultural watershed marked by the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Political prominence within the PCI and the Italian intellectuals in the first half of the Fifties notwithstanding, Salinari has received relatively little critical attention, and generally with a micro-historical focus. The few critical essays – with occasionally slightly apologetic tones – offer only a fragmented perspective on Salinari’s work and his relationship with other intellectuals and the PCI, in particular when it comes to *Il Contemporaneo*.⁸ Joseph Francese’s approach, which situates Salinari within the more general historical and social context of his time, is the most stimulating critical account to date.⁹ This article will build on Francese’s analysis by looking more closely at the range of contributions published in *Il Contemporaneo* to examine how Salinari calibrated the debates within the journal to reflect the dynamics underpinning both the national and the transnational intellectual field. If it is misleading to read Salinari’s approach only as attempting to

²Antonio Gramsci, ‘Il concetto di nazional-popolare’, in *Quaderni del carcere*, ed. by Valentino Gerratana (Turin: Einaudi, 1975, vol. III), pp. 2113–20; David Forgacs, ‘National-popular: Genealogy of a Concept’, in *Cultural Studies Reader*, second edition, ed. by Simon During (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 209–19 (p. 211).

³Robert Frank, ‘Conclusion’, in *Les relations internationales culturelles au XXe siècle. De la diplomatie culturelle à l'acculturation*, ed. by Anne Dulphy, Robert Frank and Marie-Anne Matard-Bonucci (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 667–85 (p. 672).

⁴Akira Iriye, *Global and Transnational History: The Past, Present, and Future* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 15. Specifically, although ‘Marxist theory had always stressed the cross-border solidarity of capitalists, workers, and other classes [...], the classical formulation of global linkages had often to compete with, and even been superseded by, nationalistic perspectives’ (p. 13).

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁶David Thelan, ‘The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on United States History’, *Journal of American History*, 86.3 (1999), 965–76 (p. 968).

⁷Patricia Clavin, ‘Defining Transnationalism’, *Contemporary European History*, 14.4 (2005), 421–39 (p. 431).

⁸*Atti del simposio di studi su Carlo Salinari*, ed. by Aa.Vv. (Matera: EDAD, 1986).

⁹Joseph Francese, *Cultura e politica negli anni Cinquanta: Salinari, Pasolini, Calvino* (Rome: Lithos, 2000). Francese’s book tends however to adopt an Italian perspective and the main contributions analysed relate to the well-known debate on Vasco Pratolini’s *Metello* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1955).

gain a ‘consenso pluralistico’,¹⁰ nonetheless his strategic development of a dialogue with and on foreign culture with the aim of simultaneously carving out the significance of the weekly within national borders and the contemporary debates on realism ultimately proved ineffective.

The PCI, journals and intellectuals between 1945 and 1954

The political context of the publication of periodicals and the related debates which gave rise to *Il Contemporaneo* are key to understanding two synergetic perspectives: one stemming from the experience of *Risorgimento*, which affirmed the need for cross-political and cultural allegiances, and another deriving from Gramsci’s concept of ‘nazional-popolare’. In Italy, in the immediate aftermath of the war, the stance of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) had to be visibly consistent with the aim of all the democratic forces associated with the Resistance: to rebuild the country with an antifascist spirit. The leader of the party, Palmiro Togliatti, was well aware of the significance of new cultural projects that could reach beyond Marxist politicians and involve all sorts of democratic intellectuals in fostering such collaboration. In this context, journals offered a dynamic platform for discussion that could easily invite the (continuous or sporadic) contribution of diverse intellectuals.¹¹ In the years 1945–47, the relationship with the politically-oriented publishing house Einaudi represented for Togliatti an opportunity to dialogue with Italian intellectuals through such platforms as the short-lived *Risorgimento* (1945), and *Il Politecnico* (1945–47), edited by Elio Vittorini. However, their closure signalled the difficulty in striking a balance between intellectuals’ cultural autonomy on the one hand and the party’s controlling guidelines on the other.¹²

The year 1947 marked a dramatic shift in the cultural policy of the PCI, after the Christian Democrat Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi expelled in May both communists and socialists from the government. On 26 May 1947, the party decided to manage more closely the relationship with the cultural and intellectual field, and expand the presence of the PCI beyond the cultural pages of the newspapers, through a brand-new *settimanale di cultura*.¹³ This did not have a ‘carattere ufficiale di Partito’, but could offer ‘garanzie ideologiche e politiche’, and could address the specific audience of the ‘cultura militante’ to whom ‘né *Rinascita* né *Società* possono totalmente rivolgersi’.¹⁴ However, the rigid stance of the chair of the Cultural Committee, the historian and partisan Emilio Sereni, who was wholly compliant with the newly-founded Cominform – the official international forum to coordinate the Communist parties – failed to create that platform of debate and cultural action which was envisaged.¹⁵ The political defeat in the 1948 general elections further underlined the need to embrace a cultural

¹⁰Antonello Trombadori, ‘Un letterato nei GAP’, *L’Unità*, 27 May 1977, p. 3, in Francese, p. 39.

¹¹When Togliatti arrived in Naples in Spring 1944, one of his first actions was to found a new journal, *La Rinascita*, as a ‘strumento essenziale di una presenza forte e qualificata del partito’, Aldo Agosti, *Palmiro Togliatti* (Turin, UTET, 1996), p. 290.

¹²On *Risorgimento* see Albertina Vittoria, ‘Nascita della democrazia e impegno degli intellettuali in *Politecnico*, *Risorgimento* e *Società*, 1945–1948’, *Storia contemporanea*, 6 (1996), 1121–63; Mila Milani, ‘From *Risorgimento* to *Il Politecnico*: impegno and intellectual networks in the Einaudi publishing house, 1945’, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 21.1 (2016), 35–49; on *Il Politecnico* see Romano Luperini, *Gli intellettuali di sinistra e l’ideologia della ricostruzione nel dopoguerra* (Rome: Edizioni di Ideologie, 1971); Aa.Vv., *La polemica Vittorini-Togliatti e la linea culturale del PCI nel 1945–47* (Milan: Edizioni Lavoro Liberato, 1974); Franco Fortini, ‘Che cosa è stato *Il Politecnico*’, in *Dieci inverni (1947–1957): contributi a un discorso socialista* (Bari: De Donato, 1973) pp. 59–79; Marina Zancan, *Il progetto ‘Politecnico’: cronaca e struttura di una rivista* (Venice: Marsilio, 1984); Giuseppe Muraca, *Da ‘Il Politecnico’ a ‘Linea d’ombra’: le riviste della sinistra eterodossa* (Poggibonsi: Lalli editore, 1990); on Vittorini, see Guido Bonsaver, *Elio Vittorini: The Writer and the Written* (Leeds: Northern Universities Press, 2000).

¹³Fondazione Gramsci Rome [later omitted], PCI archive, Fondo Mosca, Serie Segreteria verbali, 26 May 1947.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 14 August 1947, speaker Fabrizio Onofri. See also Vittoria, *Togliatti e gli intellettuali*, p. 49–50. Closely connected with the PCI, the quarterly then bi-monthly journal *Società* was founded in Florence in 1945 by Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli, Romano Bilenchi, and Cesare Luporini. On *Società*, see also ‘La fondazione di *Società*’, in Piero Lucia, *Intellettuali italiani del secondo dopoguerra: impegno, crisi, speranza* (Naples: Guida, 2003), pp. 94–102.

¹⁵On Sereni’s administration see Vittoria, *Togliatti e gli intellettuali*, pp. 53–66; as Stephen Gundle points out in his seminal work *Between Hollywood and Moscow: The Italian Communists and the Challenge of Mass Culture* (Duke: Duke University Press, 2000), ‘[Sereni]’s dogmatic devotion to Soviet priorities [...] hindered the full development of the party’s potential in the cultural field [...], but if the PCI succeeded in shaping a cultural policy at this time that was articulated at various levels and well integrated with other dimensions of party activity, then much of the merit was his’ (p. 49).

policy more focused on Italian intellectuals and their work. Cementing the move in this direction, in 1951 Togliatti appointed Carlo Salinari as director of the Cultural Committee.

Carlo Salinari up to this point had combined active militancy and academic aspirations.¹⁶ He was not an executive member of the PCI, and this was for Togliatti a fundamental element of Salinari's suitability for the role: Salinari, it appeared, had exactly the kind of profile that could facilitate the appointment of a new generation of intellectuals and ensure that this generation had an autonomous position within the intellectual field.¹⁷ More interestingly, as suggested also by Vittoria, Salinari fitted Togliatti's strategy of finding 'an Italian way to socialism', that is of adapting the socialist framework to the specific issues and concerns of the national domain through the contribution of Italian intellectuals.¹⁸ Salinari indeed favoured a new cultural strategy, which instead of directly transplanting Soviet ideas into the Italian context, would emphasize instead the dialogue between Marxism and Italian culture and its democratic tradition.¹⁹ In particular, in his 'Per una cultura libera moderna nazionale', which was presented at the meeting of the Cultural Committee, on 3 April 1952, Salinari interpreted the term 'nazionale' as intrinsically linked to the Italian democratic tradition and opposed to conservative and parochial interests, and not, as Sereni had generally used it, in opposition to American culture.²⁰ However, Gramsci's model maintained that one element was 'essential for making one national culture translatable in the terms of another – namely, the similarity between the structures [...] ("structures" or "bases" in the Marxist sense)' of the two societies, understood in relation to either their current structures or their historical development.²¹ Given the differences between the Italian and Soviet traditions, for instance, this further complicated the strategy of intercultural exchange for *Il Contemporaneo*.

In 1953, in the light of the promising turn in favour marked by the general elections, a less radical opposition to Communism was, according to Salinari, evident in the orientations of such publishers as Einaudi, and such journals as the liberal *Il Mondo*, the left-leaning *Il Ponte* (1945-) on the political-legal front and *Nuovi Argomenti* (1953–61), on the literary and historical side.²² This was the perfect time to publish a cultural weekly fighting for 'una cultura nuova' à-la-Vittorini, thus signalling a continuity with the anti-fascist struggle and, vitally, continuity with *Risorgimento*, which though only lasting five issues, functioned primarily as part of the PCI post-war plans to provide a gathering point for all democratic forces. Equally, *Il Contemporaneo* was meant to gather together 'un gruppo di intellettuali omogeneo anche se non tutti comunisti' who, informed by an antifascist spirit, struggled to defend the national character of their culture against '[l]oscurantismo clericale' and intended to demonstrate how 'le posizioni degli idealisti, dei revisionisti, dei cosmopoliti siano contraddittorie e inefficaci e arretrate'.²³

Il Contemporaneo: battaglia per il realismo and the dialogue with the Soviet Union

On 26 November 1953, the plan for *Il Contemporaneo* was finally approved, with Salinari and Antonello Trombadori as main editors-in-chief, together with Romano Bilenchi. *Il Contemporaneo* had a print-run of about 7,000 copies sold at 100 Italian lira but, unlike *Il Politecnico*, it was distributed via news-agents and not through party circles.²⁴ As a weekly, it had a greater circulation than the bi-monthly

¹⁶Francese, p. 25.

¹⁷Vittoria, *Togliatti e gli intellettuali*, p. 90.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 92; more broadly with regard to the 'Italian way to socialism' as a strategy of structural reforms, see Donald Sassoon, *Togliatti e la via italiana al socialismo. Il PCI dal 1944 al 1964* (Turin: Einaudi, 1980).

¹⁹Francese, p. 27.

²⁰PCI Archive, Fondo Mosca, serie Direzione verbali, meeting held on 20 July 1951. Salinari's document dates back to 11 July. See also Francese, p. 28.

²¹Derek Boothman, 'Translation and Translatability: Renewal of the Marxist Paradigm', in *Gramsci, Language, and Translation*, ed. by Peter Ives and Rocco Lacorte (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), pp. 107–33 (p. 122).

²²PCI Archive, Cultural Committee, November 1953. The PCI obtained 143 parliamentary seats, but not enough to form a government. With regard to the political events of the legislature II, see Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943–1980* (London: Penguin, 1990), pp. 186–209.

²³PCI Archive, Cultural Committee, November 1953.

²⁴Vittoria, *Togliatti e gli intellettuali*, p. 116.

Società (2,250), which tended to have a more 'academic' approach, but markedly lower sales than the 30–40,000 copies of *Rinascita*.²⁵ The broadsheet, black and white format of *Il Contemporaneo* reflected the competitors' weeklies, such as *Il Mondo*.²⁶ This initial lack of typographical colour also created a distance from both *Società* and especially *Rinascita*, and to an extent also from Albe Steiner's well-known graphics in *Il Politecnico*.²⁷ *Il Contemporaneo* was however thinner than *Il Mondo*, with about ten to twelve pages densely packed with wide-ranging information spanning Italy and beyond.

As a platform for discussion, *Il Contemporaneo* needed to acknowledge what was happening in the Western world, but also deal with the key issues for Italian Communist intellectuals, such as the conditions of the working class and the aesthetics of realism, which will be discussed presently. This two-fold objective is evident from the first issue published on 27 March 1954. The first couple of pages of the weekly were editorial notes concerned more generally with cultural projects and debates. Dedicated attention to Italian culture and the Italian intellectual sphere was emphasised by two columns, 'Le cose d'Italia', which offered a much closer look at topical issues in Italy, such as very short pieces on parliamentary interrogations, and 'Il caffè', giving a sarcastic overview of the periodical scene, with punchy reviews of more moderate journals such as *Paragone* and *La civiltà cattolica*. Through the words of contemporary Italian writers (Carlo Cassola in the first issue, but later on spanning a range from Italo Calvino to Luciano Bianciardi), the journal was also concerned with chronicles of life in the provinces. An excerpt from a recently published novel or short story of a contemporary Italian writer, generally left-wing and associated with the PCI, would normally conclude the issue, in a similar fashion to *Il Politecnico*.²⁸ This interest in Italian popular and intellectual life was balanced by an eclectic attention to economics, theatre, arts, music, cinema (with the column 'La lanterna') and books ('La nuova biblioteca') and, more interestingly, with a column dealing specifically with US news ('Notiziario dall'America').

The contributions of *Il Contemporaneo* seemed, on paper at least, to address contradictory viewpoints with its comprehensive overview of cultural life in Italy. The first issue opened with an editorial note bearing the exact same title, 'Cultura e vita morale', as Benedetto Croce's influential 1914 essay.²⁹ The content of this key piece can be seen on the one hand as reinforcing an essentially Communist approach towards the concept of realism, and on the other as diluting it with a welcoming attitude towards all forms of poetic expression. Whilst Ajello saw this attitude as a discontinuity with respect to both Togliatti's and Alicata's propagandistic tones in *Rinascita*, the use of Croce's key concepts could also be included in the Communist strategy of cultural appropriation of Crocean semantics that La Penna has outlined.³⁰ At the heart of the weekly lay the same crucial issue: the challenge of striking a profitable balance between Communist ideals and a perceivably less dogmatic approach to the literary field. The editors-in-chief presented the journal as an attempt to join the forces of 'un gruppo di persone che, con vari interessi, hanno lavorato e scritto, sino ad oggi, in ordine sparso', and promote a discussion resting on the shared assumption that intellectuals could not disregard the role and function of the working class in post-war national history.³¹ Italian intellectuals should instead place

²⁵PCI archive, Cultural Committee, 11 February 1953. The other main party publications included *Incontri*, 'the journal of young people', *Unione sovietica*, the bulletin of the Soviet-Italy association, and the more popular projects of *Teatro, cinema e letture* and *Calendario del popolo*.

²⁶Vittoria, *Togliatti e gli intellettuali*, p. 116.

²⁷On Albe Steiner see Marzio Zanantoni, *Albe Steiner, cambiare il libro per cambiare il mondo: dalla Repubblica dell'Ossola alle Edizioni Feltrinelli* (Milan: Unicopli, 2013).

²⁸By way of example, the authors and works published in 1954 were: *La carriera di Nini* (a novel by Vasco Pratolini); 'L'arresto' (a short story by the Tuscan painter and poet Quinto Martini); 'Noialtri' (a short story by the Sardinian writer Giuseppe Dessi); 'Furto e fuga' (a short story by Francesco Jovine); 'Il commendatore Martiri' (a short story by Neapolitan Carlo Montella); 'La nostra casa' (a short story by Tuscan Rolando Viani); *La battaglia di Porta Lame* (by Mario de Micheli from Genoa), and *La famiglia dell'emigrante* (by Mario La Cava from Calabria).

²⁹Benedetto Croce, *Cultura e vita morale* (Bari: Laterza, 1914). Yet, the dialogue with Croce was more generally informed by a Gramscian approach, as for instance in the piece 'Croce e l'Anti-Croce', published on 30 July 1955, clearly inspired by Gramsci's *Quaderni del carcere*, with Croce as the main interlocutor, as well as the antagonist.

³⁰Nello Ajello, *Intellettuali e PCI, 1994–1958* (Bari: Laterza, 1994), p. 318; Daniela La Penna, 'The Rise and Fall of Benedetto Croce. Intellectual Positionings in the Italian Cultural Field, 1944–1947', *Modern Italy*, 21.2 (2016), 139–55.

³¹'Cultura e vita morale', editorial note, *Il Contemporaneo*, 1.1 (1954), 1–4 (p. 1).

the relationship between the working class and national politics and society at the core of their ‘causa morale’. As a direct consequence, according to the editors, as far as art and culture were concerned, Italian intellectuals could no longer be satisfied with ‘esperienze genericamente avanguardistiche, né di restaurazioni di chissà quale classicismo, né di vistosità alla moda di tono “internazionalista”, né di un gretto, folcloristico sciovinismo culturale’, as these were only sterile, formal and external reforms.³² In this sense, the attempts at restoring individual artistic tendencies such as futurism, symbolism or abstract art were conceived as displaying an attitude ‘passivamente tradizionale, e quindi [...] evasiv[a]’.³³ In 1954, Salinari and Trombadori called instead for a neo-realist inspiration: literary works, movies and paintings should portray and denounce the issues affecting contemporary Italian society, and the working class in particular, but without falling into those individualist or decadent traps that turned the realist movement into evasive or pessimistic attitudes.³⁴ The unconvincing conclusion was that this conquest of a new ‘vita morale’, engaging with the social realities of the time and confident in the progress of humanity, would allow the editors to ‘eliminare gli equivoci che si annidano nello stesso movimento realista, e soprattutto di superare i mali tradizionali, endemici e accademici, della vita culturale italiana’, and ‘di appropriarci di [...] tutto ciò che di buono, di bello di vero’ in terms of literary and artistic results, regardless of their ideological labels.³⁵ The actual modalities of this synergy between a struggle for neorealism and a democratic search for poetry were however not revealed by the editors, who simply restated that they would not disregard any result that would not necessarily align with their political stance.

The editorial note not only stressed from the outset these internal discrepancies of the new venture of *Il Contemporaneo*, but also outlined the principles that informed the whole project in relation to neorealist aesthetics. Salinari’s system of thought was mainly influenced by three theoretical models: Francesco De Sanctis, Antonio Gramsci and György Lukács.³⁶ As outlined by Granese, Salinari did not engage directly with the European or Italian non-Marxist innovations (such as French structuralism or the *nouveau roman*, or Adorno and the Frankfurt School), nor less did he critically re-assess Marxist texts.³⁷ Instead, Salinari was one of the most convinced supporters of a ‘ritorno di De Sanctis’.³⁸ Following Gramsci’s recommendations in *Quaderni del carcere* (1947), Marxist critics had in fact re-established the figure of De Sanctis, particularly the need for a historicist approach to the relationship between poetry and society, as opposed to Croce’s aesthetic reading which emphasized the autonomy of the arts. As Tondo suggests, this use of De Sanctis as the most immediate and concrete militant model for Communist critics, was strategic due to the lack of a fully elaborated Marxist theoretical framework.³⁹ Bronzini underlines how through De Sanctis’s historicism, Salinari found a way to identify the historical and socio-cultural causes underlying literary phenomena, by carrying out an ideological analysis of the texts and an examination of the authors’ ideology as well as a socio-cultural investigation of the events.⁴⁰ De Sanctis also informed Salinari’s reading of Lukács and instilled the ‘battaglia per il realismo’ which was the main focus of the artistic and literary debates of

³² ‘Cultura e vita morale’, p. 1.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³⁴ In this regard, the debate surrounding the publication of Vasco Pratolini’s *Metello* was one of the key literary debates which sparked in 1955 and signalled a crisis in the interpretation of neorealism by Italian Communist intellectuals. Whilst Salinari welcomed enthusiastically the novel, Carlo Muscetta, amongst others, outlined the sentimental, and not yet realistic, character of the novel. For its transnational focus and space constraints, this article will not deal specifically with this literary debate, exhaustively discussed in Francese, pp. 48–50.

³⁵ ‘Cultura e vita morale’, p. 4.

³⁶ Nino Borsellino, ‘Carlo Salinari, critico militante’, in *Atti del simposio*, pp. 185–202 (p. 190).

³⁷ Alberto Granese, ‘La critica di Salinari tra avanguardie storiche e neovanguardie degli Anni Sessanta’, in *Atti del simposio*, pp. 29–98 (p. 59).

³⁸ Carlo Salinari, ‘Il ritorno di De Sanctis’, *Rinascita*, 9 (1952), 289–92.

³⁹ Michele Tondo, ‘Salinari e il ritorno di De Sanctis’, in *Atti del simposio*, pp. 111–20 (pp. 118–19).

⁴⁰ Giovanni Battista Bronzini, ‘Popolo, società e cultura nella critica letteraria di Carlo Salinari’, in *Atti del simposio*, pp. 121–36 (p. 123).

Il Contemporaneo.⁴¹ Fighting this literary diatribe in the name of realism, in line with the ideological triad which influenced most of the Communist intellectuals, seemed fully to comply with the PCI's guidelines and would therefore strengthen the 'orthodox' stance of *Il Contemporaneo*.

However, the concept of 'realism' that Salinari had in mind did not merely equate to 'socialist realism'. In his *La questione del realismo*, the focus would be more on 'neorealism', whose thematic concerns, more than the stylistic devices used to portray contemporary society, were conceived as a measure of the political awareness of the literary work.⁴² As Masiello acutely points out, Salinari's conception of 'neorealism' has to be seen in the broader context of the aesthetic debate in Italy, as both of rupture and continuity with the national tradition.⁴³ Salinari's support for neorealism could be seen as a fracture with the cosmopolitan attitude of some Italian intellectuals thus far – in relation for instance to literary avantgardes – and as a less aristocratic or academic way of developing the relationship between intellectuals and the working class.⁴⁴ However, Salinari was aware that neorealist works to a certain extent failed to represent a real innovation against decadent and bourgeois drifts, since they often lacked a critical analysis and ideological awareness of contemporary society. Salinari strove nonetheless to continue that 'battaglia per il realismo' which he outlined in his first editorial work for *Il Contemporaneo*, and remained coherent to his aesthetic reflections, and never fully embraced, or even accepted, the thematic or stylistic innovations of European symbolism and modernism (including, most notably, those of James Joyce).⁴⁵ But if Salinari's aesthetic reflections moved within the Gramscian framework of the Italian national tradition, as editor of *Il Contemporaneo* he also operated outside the national borders, in order to facilitate a dialogue with foreign intellectuals. This dialogue would favour the literary and intellectual relationships with the Soviet Union and, more interestingly, a subtle use of editorial notes, correspondence, contributions as well as translations which could project *Il Contemporaneo* into a transnational horizon, as we will now see.

From February 1948, the PCI had identified the need not only to maintain but to broaden substantially the cultural relationship between Italy and the Soviet Union.⁴⁶ The guidelines to help mutually reinforce the Soviet-Italian links were very clear, in theory, for PCI members. They were to follow the example of the PCF (French Communist Party), which was at that time – according to Salinari – successfully engaging France's working class, through strikes and demonstrations, and French elite culture, by promoting the cultural developments of the Soviet Union. This latter tactic took the form of 'delegazioni, scambi di pubblicazioni e di riviste, traduzioni di libri e di articoli, bollettini di informazioni, conferenze, dibattiti, edizioni di vario genere, corsi di lingua russa e di letteratura sovietica'.⁴⁷ In his intervention at the Cultural Committee in March 1953, Salinari indicated his awareness of the necessity of engaging with the Soviet Union from a cultural perspective. Although he praised in general the disseminating activities of the cultural pages of the Italian newspapers with regard to the innovations of the Soviet societies, he criticized a generally more ambivalent stance towards Soviet culture. In particular, Salinari outlined how the Communist intellectuals did not properly engage

⁴¹This point should be however further clarified. According to Salinari (*Preludio e fine del realismo in Italia* [Naples: Morano, 1967]), novels should be based on two fundamental elements: the ideological axis that sustains the work of art, and the character whose development follows the plot. In this regard, as Granese reminds us in 'La critica di Salinari', pp. 37–38, Salinari as a literary critic did not always agree with Lukács's positions, particularly in relation to foreign literature. For instance, Salinari believed, contrary to the Hungarian critic, that Zola's naturalism suited the needs of the working class in nineteenth century France. Salinari, *Preludio e fine*, p. 37.

⁴²Salinari, *La questione del realismo* (Florence: Parenti, 1959).

⁴³Vitilio Masiello, 'Letteratura e politica: progetto strategico e mediazione teorica nell'opera di Carlo Salinari', in *Atti del simposio*, pp. 11–28.

⁴⁴The term 'cosmopolitan' designates here 'an intellectual ethic, a universal humanism that transcends regional particularism' (Pheng Cheah, 'The Cosmopolitical – Today', in *Cosmopolitics. Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998], pp. 20–41 [p. 22]), generally connected with elite cultural practices.

⁴⁵Granese, 'La critica di Salinari', p. 61.

⁴⁶PCI Archive, Fondo Mosca, Segreteria Verbali series, meeting with Togliatti, Longo, Secchia and Scoccimarro, 11 February 1948.

⁴⁷PCI Archive, 11 February 1948; for a broader overview of the relationship between the PCF and the PCI see Marcello Flores, 'Il PCI, il PCF, gli intellettuali: 1943–1950', in *L'altra faccia della luna. I rapporti tra PCI, PCF e Unione Sovietica*, ed. by Elena Aga Rossi and Gaetano Quagliariello (Bologna: il Mulino, 1997), pp. 101–17, according to which, 'il PCF adattò e appiattì l'identità culturale [...] sull'appartenenza internazionale (l'Urss) in modo più marcato e prolungato' (p. 116).

with, for instance, Solmi's critique of Soviet art after visiting only one exhibition of Soviet painters in Milan, or Alberto Moravia's claim of the inexistence of Soviet culture whilst refusing to read any Soviet novels. According to Salinari, the PCI was responding to these accusations by disregarding them as Western propaganda and by reinstating the presence of Soviet writers and cultural figures in a generic way, simply praising them but without an in-depth critical engagement. Italian intellectuals and PCI members ought instead to critically assess the literary and cultural value of the Soviet works, compare them to contemporary cultural production in Italy, in order to refute the positions of some conservative intellectuals in Italy, dismissing them as propagandistic and anti-scientific.⁴⁸ It is therefore quite significant that, in the editorial note published in the second issue of *Il Contemporaneo*, Salinari re-affirmed that 'non vogliamo un'Italia cosmopolita e à la page, ma neppure un'Italia immobile, assorta in una divina solitudine della propria coscienza nazionale, a frequentare una sola compagnia di artisti "per bene", di scienziati "per bene", di pensatori e di politici "per bene"'.⁴⁹

Of particular interest for the purposes of this article are the 'suffocating' measures of the Scelba government regarding the cultural relationship between Italy and the Soviet Union.⁵⁰ Lamenting the lack of state support in fostering cultural exchange between the two countries, supported only by cultural associations that would inform the government and diplomats of their activities, Salinari framed the discussion within the parameters of the Cold War, opposing the opportunity for the Italian intellectuals to explore Soviet culture only via the restrictive measures of the Western bloc, which he even compared to Nazi Germany in 1933. The resulting image overturned this approach, 'più provinciale che europeo', welcomed by other Italian conservative journals, and this put *Il Contemporaneo* on a stronger and effectively transnational position.⁵¹ This was further developed in the following editorial note, published in the third issue of the journal. In 'Il commercio delle idee', Salinari drew extensively on the aforementioned report he presented to the Cultural Committee in March 1953 to signal a continuity between the internal debates of the PCI and how debates were articulated in the weekly.⁵² First of all, he took a position within the periodical field, by accusing Alberto Moravia, who wrote an article in *Nuovi Argomenti* about Soviet aesthetics, of a propagandistic and non-scientific approach, as the Italian writer was criticizing the lack of internal dialectics in the Communist party and the fact that all Marxists wanted an entirely 'arte sociale'.⁵³ Drawing on the concept of 'type' proposed by Lukacs, whose critical works were published in Italian translation by Einaudi in 1953, Salinari suggested instead that, as claimed by the Marxist critic, 'l'arte non può essere identificata nel contenuto storico-sociale, né nella forma, ma va ricercata nel carattere tipico della creazione artistica – la tipicità'.⁵⁴ Hence, Salinari developed a link between the Soviet critical literature and the topical debates evidenced in the Italian cultural field (i.e., the relationships between structure and poetry, between context and art work, the nexus between form and content). This link was exploited by the Soviet critics, who were interested in the achievements of post-war Italian cinema, but was disregarded by their Italian counterparts, who ignored the experience of Soviet critical literature and were not able to distinguish Sholokhov and Mayakovsky from other Soviet writers or poets. This lack of exchange of ideas between Italy and the Soviet Union was counterproductive for Italian intellectuals for two main reasons, Salinari maintained: not only would their ignorance ensure Soviet cultural hegemony over Europe, but most importantly, the view of the Scelba government, which according to Salinari

⁴⁸PCI Archive, Riunione della commissione cultura nazionale, 17 March 1953, speaker Salinari.

⁴⁹Carlo Salinari, 'Reciprocità del silenzio', *Il Contemporaneo*, 1.2 (1954), 1–2 (p. 2).

⁵⁰Ibid.; more broadly with regard to Mario Scelba and his policies against the PCI members in the 1950s, based on 'vigilanza' and 'controllo', as well as 'prevenzione' and 'sospetto', see Giuseppe Carlo Marino, *La repubblica della forza. Mario Scelba e le passioni del suo tempo* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1995), pp. 175–230.

⁵¹Salinari, 'Reciprocità del silenzio', p. 2.

⁵²Carlo Salinari, 'Il commercio delle idee', *Il Contemporaneo*, 1.3 (1954), 1–2 (pp. 1–2).

⁵³Alberto Moravia, 'Il comunismo al potere e i problemi dell'arte', *Nuovi Argomenti*, 1.1 (1953), 3–29 (p. 4).

⁵⁴Salinari, 'Il commercio delle idee', p. 2; in relation to realist representation, 'type' can be defined as 'a peculiar synthesis which organically binds together the general and the particular both as characters and situations. What makes a type [...] is that in it all the humanly and socially essential determinants are present in the highest level of development', in Georg Lukács: *The Fundamental Dissonance of Existence: Aesthetics, Politics, Literature. New Essays on Social, Political and Aesthetic Theory*, ed. by Timothy Bewes and Timothy Hall (London: Continuum, 2011), p. 26.

contributed to this ignorance, would ultimately betray the quintessentially antifascist struggle, that is the free exchange of ideas in the world. In this way, Salinari not only asserted that a strong relationship between Italy and the Soviet Union was beneficial to the Italian intellectual interest but reaffirmed *Il Contemporaneo* as the real antifascist platform for Italian intellectuals.

Transnational voices in the Italian cultural debate

Salinari not only sought to carve out Italy's role in a transnational debate through the use of the tools of Marxist criticism in the discussion of topical issues, particularly the question of realism. By drawing on international contributions, and especially well-known literary figures who were politically active in the European Communist Parties and who could support this 'battaglia per il realismo', Salinari's projection of Italy into a transnational arena aimed also to highlight the importance of the weekly on national turf: *Il Contemporaneo's* transnational dialogue *in theory* would enable it to inform more meaningfully debates on Italian soil and legitimate its position.

In November 1954, Salinari's 'Il fronte della critica' clarified that the 'battaglia per il realismo' should not be fought through 'l'appoggio incondizionato dei critici alle opera del movimento realista', but through a critical practice according to which, à-la-De Sanctis, 'il gusto sia mediato da un'attenta ricostruzione storica del processo di formazione dell'opera d'arte'.⁵⁵ A month later, on 4 December, the publication of the letter by the East German writer Anna Seghers to South-American authors Jorge Amado and Pablo Neruda was particularly timely in this regard.⁵⁶ By addressing Amado and Neruda, Seghers not only discussed the reasons why she researched the sources of Tolstoj's realism but, more interestingly, she used this occasion to enter a much broader debate, which had been sparked by a note by Soviet writer Ilya Ehrenburg concerning the need for artists to choose freely their own preferred form of literature and themes. Seghers claimed that the role of artists was not that of writing novels in order to align with external reasoning, such as the political representation of the workers' lives in the Soviet Union, since literary works had to satisfy other readers' expectations. However, she argued, commissioning a particular social theme could prompt the artist to research the topic carefully. The publication of this letter, written by an award-winning novelist in the GDR, and the broadening of the debate to include popular authors in Latin America, enabled *Il Contemporaneo* to outline more clearly the function of realism in literature and tie it in to the current debates in Italy.

The publication of Seghers's letter indeed paved the way for another contribution from Salinari on 11 December.⁵⁷ On 20 November 1954, *Il Contemporaneo* published Paolo Chiarini's article on 'Problemi della critica sovietica', which reiterated the endless debate around the risk of a propagandistic drift for the artists who followed the guidelines of Soviet realism. According to Chiarini, Soviet novels often focused on the representation of the characters' social and political lives, instead of the complexity of their inner life. Salinari, on the other hand, insisted that the historical tendency inscribed in the artists' poetics could not be disregarded, reaffirming once again that the Soviet writers perceived mankind at the core of their literary activity even when the topic seemed to concentrate more broadly on farm life or other economic activities. Though Salinari failed to support his argument with clear examples, citing only briefly the upcoming Congress of Soviet writers, the contribution was strategically placed on the same page next to a short piece by Ehrenburg, 'Lettori che creano'. In this article, Ehrenburg compared the culturally alert readership and active literary debate of the Soviet Union to the situation in Western countries, where readers would hardly know the main literary figures or movements:

certo il nome di Sartre è noto al francese medio, ma non più del nome; nel migliore dei casi, borbottierà qualcosa sull'esistenzialismo, senza capire, in sostanza, di cosa parla. È poco probabile che i protagonisti del film *I vitelloni* leggano qualche cosa d'altro all'infuori della cronaca scandalistica dei giornali, e non credo abbiano sentito dell'esistenza di Moravia o di Carlo Levi.⁵⁸

⁵⁵Carlo Salinari, 'Il fronte della critica', *Il Contemporaneo*, 1.32 (1954), 1.

⁵⁶Anna Seghers, 'Lettera agli amici di Occidente', *Il Contemporaneo*, 1.36 (1954), 3.

⁵⁷Carlo Salinari, 'I personaggi umani', *Il Contemporaneo*, 1.37 (1954), 3.

⁵⁸Ilya Ehrenburg, 'Lettori che creano', *Il Contemporaneo*, 1.37 (1954), 3.

Implicitly, Salinari used Ehrenburg's reflections to dismiss the level of critical engagement that current journal practices elicited in the Italian audience, and to reaffirm the validity of the discourse of Communist critics.

The debates informing the Soviet literary scene were indeed opportune platforms for parallel reflection on the Italian cultural situation. The discussion of the proceedings of the Congress of Soviet writers provided the occasion for Salinari to harshly criticize the reactions of the conservative Italian newspapers, such as *Il Messaggero* and *Il Corriere della sera*.⁵⁹ The newspapers had interpreted the Congress as a step back from Ehrenburg's debate and a step closer to the Soviet propaganda, whilst Salinari condemned their view as myopic and partisan, and portrayed the Congress as a 'democratic' platform for discussion in which the Soviet writers even criticized the ideological perspective of some critics. As further evidence, *Il Contemporaneo* published in translation the contributions of key Congress figures such as Ehrenburg, Fadeyev, Sholokhov and Simonov in the same issue as Salinari's article. The Soviet literary scene displayed, according to Salinari, a lively and receptive interest in Italian contemporary literature, as demonstrated by the forthcoming translations of Carlo Levi, Francesco Jovine, Carlo Cassola and Eduardo De Filippo, and in turn it was perturbed by the 'calma e l'indifferenza dell'ambiente letterario italiano' towards Soviet authors.⁶⁰ Once again Salinari tried to prompt a reassessment of Soviet critics within Italy by lamenting the provincial attitude of the Italian cultural scene.

The publication of contributions from foreign intellectuals was particularly crucial within the context of the Cold War, in order to create a network of collaborators who could support the Communist cause. However, contributions were not simply Soviet-oriented, but intellectuals from other countries were strategically called upon to reinforce the position of *Il Contemporaneo*. This is the case, for instance, of the American playwright Albert Maltz who was jailed in 1950 for his relationship with the Communist party in the US.⁶¹ Taking a polemical tone against McCarthyism, in an article from September 1954, Maltz drew a parallel between the current anti-Communist policies in the US and Nazi-Fascist political persecution in Europe. As such, Maltz's contribution was strategically used to renew from a transnational angle the anti-fascist battle that the Italian weekly intended to fight. When it comes to foreign periodicals, one should note that the relationship between *Il Contemporaneo* and *Les Temps Modernes* was quite striking, especially if seen in opposition to other post-war journals, particularly *Il Politecnico*. In line with the *querelle* between Marxism and Existentialism, Fortini described the French journal, inspired by Sartre's existential philosophy, as a 'prodotto torbido e turbato del dopoguerra'.⁶² *Les Temps Modernes* initially exhibited a strong documentary attitude towards the Resistance movement and the working class, but gradually came to embody the radical opposition of French intellectuals against the French Communist Party, and so remained 'necessariamente la rivista di una minoranza intellettuale'.⁶³ The re-evaluation of *Les Temps Modernes* in the transnational periodical field gave the sense of the new relationship between the PCI-oriented journals and their foreign counterparts.

Reviews of Foreign Literature

The literary analysis of foreign authors was another tactic aimed at inserting the PCI journal in the literary, as well as political, debates happening across national borders. More specifically, foreign literary works were not reviewed in the name of a cosmopolitan trend, or simply in the name of obvious

⁵⁹Carlo Salinari, 'Gli scrittori sovietici', *Il Contemporaneo*, 2.2 (1955), 1–2.

⁶⁰Salinari, 'Gli scrittori sovietici', p. 2.

⁶¹Albert Maltz, 'La caccia alle streghe', *Il Contemporaneo*, 1.24 (1954), 1–2.

⁶²Franco Fortini, 'Les Temps Modernes', *Il Contemporaneo*, 1.21 (1954), 4. If *Il Politecnico* had translated contributions originally published in *Les Temps Modernes*, *Il Contemporaneo* offered to its readers an interview to Jean-Paul Sartre by *Le Monde*. The title defined explicitly Sartre as 'uno scrittore di sinistra'; on the *querelle* between Marxism and Existentialism, see Leonardo La Puma, 'Umanesimo e Marxismo in Vittorini e *Il Politecnico*', in *La mediazione culturale: riviste italiane del Novecento*, ed. by Giovanni Invitto (Lecce: Milella, 1980), pp. 141–86, and Laura Piccioni, 'Engagement – nuova cultura – Zivilisation: Les Temps Modernes, *Il Politecnico*, *Die Umschau* (1945–1948)', *Allegoria*, 5.13 (1993), 163–76.

⁶³Ibid.

'internationalist' ties with the Soviet Union, but in so far as they could be related to the debate on realism, which was orientating the cultural discussions in both the Eastern and, to some extent, the Western bloc. Their example, and the debates developed abroad around them, intended to strengthen the position of *Il Contemporaneo* within the cultural field in Italy and in the definition of the relationship between literature and society on the national turf. A telling example of this mechanism is the case of Ilya Ehrenburg's *Il disgelo*, a novel which had been harshly criticized by the Union of Soviet writers and dismissed as 'superficial' by Simonov's review on *Literaturnaya gazeta* [Литературная газета].⁶⁴ Published in 1954, the novel was written one year after Stalin died and voiced for the first time the relief that emerged after the dictator's death, while giving rise to other critical works denouncing the abuses of the Stalin era.⁶⁵ Salinari acknowledged the difficulty for a foreign reader to appreciate fully the terms of this debate but, drawing on De Sanctis, suggested that the criticism of Ehrenburg's characters on account of their negative portrayal of Soviet arts was sterile and implicitly dogmatic. It was more productive, Salinari argued, to consider the limited development of their intimate life in line with the real thesis of the novel: the economic development of Soviet society. Interestingly, despite the partially negative review of this novel, Salinari decided to publish it in instalments in *Il Contemporaneo* to spark debate; both to allow readers to 'conoscere direttamente il romanzo' and to disagree potentially with his comments.⁶⁶ Clearly, this was in line with the idea of empowering *Il Contemporaneo* as a platform for debate between leftist intellectuals in Italy. Calvino subsequently solicited Salinari's view on the opportunity to publish a translation of *Il disgelo* in the Einaudi 'I coralli' collection. There was a widely-held view within the Turinese publishing house that the book 'a parte ogni giudizio letterario – è un libro che editorialmente vale la pena di fare', and its publication would have allowed Einaudi to reaffirm strategically its interest in Soviet literature against the threat posed by the leftist publisher Feltrinelli, who was about to enter the publishing field in 1954 with a clear agenda focussed on Soviet culture.⁶⁷ Salinari's response to Calvino's request was positive and swift: he facilitated the process, sending the publisher the translation, and Einaudi was able to publish the book only one year later, in 1955.

Following *Il disgelo*, Salinari reviewed the two Italian translations of the latest novel by the Ukrainian writer Viktor Nekrasov, *Nella città natale*, translated by Vittorio Strada, and *Nella sua città*, translated by Piotr Zveteremich.⁶⁸ Though analysis of the translations looked simply at marginal discrepancies of words and structures, emphasizing the need for a careful revision in places, the review of Nekrasov appeared to be more strategic. Invoking the debate regarding *Il disgelo*, Salinari recalled the Ukrainian writer's negative review of Ehrenburg's novel and suggested instead that Soviet critics would ultimately recognize Nekrasov as the more accomplished writer. Whilst acknowledging the simplistic character development, overall in his review Salinari praised Nekrasov's 'romanticismo rivoluzionario' which gave voice to the contingent issues of the new Soviet generations by connecting with the nineteenth-century tradition. Although Nekrasov's novel – like Ehrenburg's – marked another departure from Stalinism and social realism, Salinari was advocating the re-appropriation of the themes of Russian realism, and this suggestion could be implicitly expanded to a reappraisal of the Italian realist tradition.

Soviet poetry was also used to discuss and reassess the Italian literary tradition. In his review of *Poesia russa del Novecento* (Parma: Guanda, 1954), edited by Angelo Maria Ripellino, Salinari praised the editor's decision to include contemporary Soviet poets in the anthology rather than limiting

⁶⁴Carlo Salinari, 'Gli equivoci di Eherenburg', *Il Contemporaneo*, 1.25 (1954), 1–2; Ilya Ehrenburg's *Il disgelo*, trans. by C.C. (Turin, Einaudi, 1955).

⁶⁵Michel Aucouturier, 'Dal disgelo alla dissidenza', trans. by Andrea Buonocore, in *Storia della civiltà letteraria russa*, ed. by Michele Colucci and Riccardo Picchio (Turin: UTET, 1997), pp. 467–86 (p. 68).

⁶⁶Salinari, 'Gli equivoci di Eherenburg', p. 2.

⁶⁷Luisa Mangoni, *Pensare i libri. La casa editrice Einaudi dagli anni trenta agli anni sessanta* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1999), p. 866n. Calvino to Salinari, 21 October 1954.

⁶⁸Carlo Salinari, 'Un reduce dall'URSS', *Il Contemporaneo*, 2.51 (1955), 5; Viktor Nekrasov, *Nella città natale*, trans. by Vittorio Strada (Turin: Einaudi, 1955); *Nella sua città*, trans. by Piotr Zveteremich (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1955).

chronologically to early twentieth-century poets such as Boris Pasternak.⁶⁹ Interestingly, Salinari drew a line of continuity between the ‘i poeti decadenti russi’, such as the Futurist Mayakovsky, considered ‘senza dubbio il maggior poeta futurista europeo, [...] anche e soprattutto il più grande poeta della rivoluzione’, and the social realist poets who found a place in the anthology.⁷⁰ The reappraisal of Mayakovsky was once again tactical in order to challenge the positions of the ‘bourgeois’ critics. On the twenty-fifth anniversary of his death, the Russian poet was still neglected by Italian critics, mainly, according to Salinari, because of the dominant ‘cliché’ of a Bolshevik and propagandistic poet. However, Salinari contrasted Mayakovsky’s Futurist experience with that of Italian futurism, which was dismissed as anti-democratic and quintessentially conservative.⁷¹ The Russian poet had been able to move beyond the formal innovations of the avant-garde to embrace a political and ideological representation of the lower classes and the revolution. Following Gramsci, Salinari did not suggest that Italian poets should see in Mayakovsky a model, which instead had to be found in the Italian tradition, and in particular in Leopardi. However, he wanted to differentiate the early twentieth-century Russian tradition of civil poetry to the avant-garde experiences in Europe. Most specifically, Salinari saw in the 1917 Revolution the triggering experience which linked Mayakovsky and such contemporary Soviet poets as Isakovsky, Surkov, Simonov or Marshak, who, according to him, did not express a ‘ritorno al provincialismo’, as the Western critics claimed, but a further and productive development of decadentism into a truly realist art.⁷² In sum, Salinari used the discussion on Soviet poetry to draw a line between the supposedly sterile and largely conservative avant-gardism of the Italian critical tradition and the legitimacy of neorealist expressions.

Though much attention was paid to contemporary Soviet literature, reviews of foreign literature more generally were not lacking in *Il Contemporaneo*. Whilst Salinari used foreign literature to legitimate his discourse on realism, the journal’s other contributors showed a more orthodox Communist viewpoint, clearly infused with Lukacs’ theories, which tended to look at the style as well as the content of the literary works. They also tended to reflect more strikingly the Cold War dynamics, especially in the positioning against US literature. When reviewing the first three foreign novels published by the Turinese publisher Einaudi in the well-known ‘I Gettoni’ collection, edited by Elio Vittorini, Donato Barbone disagreed with Vittorini’s suggestion that the novel *Il padre dell’eroe* by the experimentalist writer Wright Morris signalled a break from pre-war American literature.⁷³ In a somewhat dismissive manner, Barbone compared Morris’s satire to that of a ‘Ridolini contro Charlot’, thus stressing the banality of the humour employed by the American writer. The Marxist critical viewpoint also inspired Barbone’s review of the novel *Le notti di Chicago* by Nelson Algren, an American writer closer to Marxist ideals and known for his affair with Simone de Beauvoir. Although Barbone recognized some incoherencies in translating the American author’s rhythm, he also emphasised Algren’s apparent incapacity to make his representation of the Chicago slums truly ‘tipica’.⁷⁴ The label of ‘social realism’ could therefore not be applied to Algren. Barbone went as far as to question the appreciation of John Steinbeck’s realism, which he felt was probably due simply to the patronisation of key intellectuals such as Pavese and Vittorini. More positive was instead the review of *La specie umana* by the French writer Robert Antelme. The book, depicting the concentration camp experiences of Marguerite Duras’s husband (at that time a member of the PCF), was labelled as ‘unico’ and ‘universale [che riflette] sullo

⁶⁹Carlo Salinari, ‘Poeti russi del ‘900’, *Il Contemporaneo*, 2.15 (1955), 11; the relationship between Pasternak and the Soviet regime was never unambiguous: proclaimed the premier Soviet poet in 1934, he later encountered opposition, and his *Doctor Zhivago*, trans. by Pietro Zveterevich (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1957), aroused much criticism in the Soviet Union.

⁷⁰Salinari, ‘Poeti russi del ‘900’, p. 11.

⁷¹Carlo Salinari, ‘Majakovskij’, *Il Contemporaneo*, 2.18 (1955), 1; on the ‘Communist’ fame of Mayakovsky: ‘the most praised, both within Soviet Union and in the Western world by whom declared himself as Communist’, Danilo Cavaion et al, ‘La poesia del ventennio post-rivoluzionario’, in *Storia della civiltà letteraria russa*, pp. 328–95 (p. 363); despite the use of futuristic formal and linguistics devices, Mayakovsky was also profoundly different from Italian futurists, as he had a negative perspective on contemporary society and maintained his poetic subjectivity (p. 366).

⁷²Salinari, ‘Poeti russi del ‘900’, p. 11.

⁷³Donato Barbone, ‘I tre gettoni stranieri’, *Il Contemporaneo*, 1.27 (1954), 11; Wright Morris, *Il padre dell’eroe*, trans. by Giuseppe Trevisani (Turin: Einaudi, 1954).

⁷⁴Barbone, p. 11; Nelson Algren, *Le notti di Chicago*, trans. by Gilberto Fortin (Turin: Einaudi, 1954).

specchio della propria la coscienza offesa dell'umanità'.⁷⁵ One could suggest that this was not simply a question of universal themes, but that these remarks signalled a shift of perspective from the pre- to the post-war times in relation to Western, and particularly American, literature. As a case in point, when Ernest Hemingway won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954, Calvino reassessed the literary value of the American writer. For *Il Politecnico*, Hemingway was a key transnational figure because his model of political engagement and literary realism was admired across the globe and, through it, the Italian Resistance could be linked to the broader anti-fascist narrative of the Spanish Civil War. If Calvino still recognized that Hemingway's dry language was 'limpidamente realistico della prosa moderna', Calvino's tone appeared nonetheless less apologetic towards Hemingway than his predecessors.⁷⁶ In a similar fashion, William Faulkner was criticized for his 'distacco' from the social world as he claimed not to have a deep knowledge of the characters he invented.⁷⁷

Nor did reviews centre solely on contemporary Soviet or American authors, but included South-American authors.⁷⁸ However, they showed a good degree of caution when moving away from the PCI cultural guidelines. Interestingly, for instance, Dabini put the Argentinian playwright Héctor Alberto Álvarez, better known under his pen name of H. A. Murena, next to Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams. To a certain extent, they represented those existentialist tendencies that the PCI deterred its readers from. Prudently, though, Dabini did not suggest imitating Murena, but simply outlined the measure of 'quella certa atmosfera morale, psicologica e culturale oggi dominante in gran parte del mondo, e che si trova per esempio in O'Neill, in Betti, in T. Williams, nell'esistenzialismo'.⁷⁹ Dario Puccini's review of the late Spanish poet, Antonio Machado, was more in line with the general attitude of the PCI vis-à-vis existentialism. Puccini praised Machado's 'linguaggio scarno' which resisted the influences of French symbolism and the South-American Modernism of Rubén Darío, and imitated instead the traditional lines of popular poetry in Andalusia.⁸⁰ There was also room for more 'peripheral' literatures, chosen however within a politically committed horizon. In 1954, for instance, the editors proposed a short story by Icelandic author Halldór Laxness, who won the Nobel Prize a year later. The choice of Laxness, who had Socialist tendencies, travelled extensively in Europe and to the Soviet Union, and had translated Ernest Hemingway into Icelandic, was aligned with the polarization induced by the Cold War. In a similar fashion, the review of Doris Lessing offered an outline of contemporary South African literature, with the accent on her political representation of class and social conflicts.⁸¹ An Indian correspondent gave a detailed overview of the contemporary poetry scene in India, emphasizing how poetry was not only a popular genre but a politically committed one.⁸² Once again, foreign literature seemed to be inscribed within safe 'ideological' lines. Though reviews of foreign literature and engagement with foreign intellectuals resembled the project that Salinari had been trying to promote since *Risorgimento*, it lacked that welcoming attitude that the editorial note 'Cultura e vita morale' had proposed.⁸³ Foreign literature did legitimise *Il Contemporaneo* and linked the journal to a wider, transnational discourse on realism, but the rigidity and orthodoxy of some reviews ultimately rendered the journal incapable of reaching out to national democratic forces as an effective 'platform for debate'.

⁷⁵Barbone, p. 11; Robert Antelme, *La specie umana*, trans. by Ginetta Vittorini (Turin: Einaudi, 1954).

⁷⁶Italo Calvino 'Hemingway e noi', *Il Contemporaneo*, 1.33 (1954), 3.

⁷⁷Giancarlo Croce, 'L'operazione Faulkner', *Il Contemporaneo*, 2.38 (1955), 3.

⁷⁸Dario Puccini, 'Le poesie di Pedro Salinas: Un dialogo insufficiente', *Il Contemporaneo*, 2.37 (1955), 5. Here Dario Puccini lamented the lack of attention paid at a scholarly and publishing level towards South-American literature, whilst Rome appeared to be a centre of aggregation for young South-American authors. See also 'Lettere argentine - il gaucho ribelle nella poesia cantata' (*Il Contemporaneo*, 2.40 [1955], 5) on militant poetry for political independence.

⁷⁹Attilio Dabini, 'Un poeta sudamericano', *Il Contemporaneo*, 1.26 (1954), 4.

⁸⁰Dario Puccini, 'Un poeta esemplare', *Il Contemporaneo*, 2.8 (1955), 8; including the poem 'Todo vendido' and its translation.

⁸¹'Notizie dal Sudafrica', *Il Contemporaneo*, 2.33 (1955), 5.

⁸²'Notizie dall'India', *Il Contemporaneo*, 2.29 (1955), 5.

⁸³On *Risorgimento*, see Milani, p. 42.

Conclusions

As recalled by Joseph Francese, on 30 June – 1 July 1954, after the publication of the fourteenth issue, the Cultural Committee met to discuss pressing issues; namely, that collaboration with intellectual forces was perceived to be too strictly limited to intellectuals based in Rome, that PCI members were not using the journal as a ‘strumento di lavoro’, and that attention to literature was superseding the section related to technology and sciences.⁸⁴ In particular, complaints were raised against the ‘discussioni disorganiche e generiche’, which would alienate intellectuals based in other cities, such as Milan and Turin.⁸⁵ *Il Contemporaneo* was therefore falling into a similar trap as the one that had ultimately put an end to *Risorgimento*, with too localized a focus. It ran the risk that, like *Il Politecnico*, its eclectic platform was becoming inadequate in providing a coherent interpretation of the Marxist debate by means of productive exchanges outside Italy. In other words, *Il Contemporaneo* risked being confined within either a strictly national horizon, which could relate only to ‘internationalist’ links, or within what the PCI could perceive as a sterile ‘cosmopolitanism.’⁸⁶

Salinari’s vision had clashed with the centralized perspective offered by Togliatti and by other, more organic, party members, but ended by dissatisfying even those party members who were working against an excessive bureaucratic party, namely Carlo Muscetta, who harshly criticized the programmatic lines of *Il Contemporaneo*.⁸⁷ On 13 November 1954, due to disagreements within the Committee itself and the Party, Salinari was forced to resign. On 28 January 1955 Mario Alicata was appointed at the leadership of the Cultural Committee until 1962, and stressed the need for a centralized political line, rather than cultural diversity, among intellectual members. The modalities of the debate may have been different, but ultimately the PCI was resolving this further failure as it had done ten years earlier: by adopting a stricter and more ‘hegemonic’ attitude, which would soon lead to ensuing defections ignited by the Hungarian crisis of 1956.

The criticism of Salinari’s *Il Contemporaneo*, however, did not take account of the, at least tentative, transnational strategy that, through foreign contributions, aspired to legitimate the journal’s position within the national field by linking it to Marxist debates happening beyond national borders. Whilst it is certainly true that the journal drew consistently on contributions from Rome-based members of the PCI, Salinari – unlike his peers at *Risorgimento* – had been able to engage with foreign intellectuals and to voice foreign cultural debates, particularly on realism, which were shared across Europe. And unlike *Il Politecnico*, in *Il Contemporaneo*, as we have seen, these contributions were elaborated in a tactical and not simply pluralistic manner: gradually, the interest in foreign literature and foreign contributions became more systematic but with a tendency to emphasize the relationship between Italy and the Soviet Union albeit from a rather ‘orthodox’ perspective. Where *Il Contemporaneo* failed was in its inability to make these contributions (whether reviews, articles or correspondence) communicate meaningfully with other democratic forces in Italy beyond the aesthetic debate on realism or the Cold War dynamics. Being so preoccupied with developing links with the debates pursued transnationally for its own cause, *Il Contemporaneo* ended up being often tendentious in their use, thus forgetting that its first objective was that of acting as an effective platform for debate: the relationship between transnational and national stances was ultimately unproductive in relation to this purpose.

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⁸⁴Francese, p. 39.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁸⁶For a definition of ‘cosmopolitan’, see footnote 51.

⁸⁷Francese, p. 42.