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Cultural Warfare

The Strategic Role of Culture in U.S. Early Cold War Policy Toward Italy
(1953 -1968)

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Introduction: Culture and Power in the Cold War

After World War II, the world witnessed the beginning of the Cold War and the new global rise of the American-led liberal order, pitted against the socialist order led by the Soviet bloc. One of the most powerful instruments of this new war, fought on both a political and ideological level, was culture, which played a crucial role in exerting influence and building an ideological legitimisation of the hegemony of the two rival superpowers.¹ In this new scenario of ideological clash, Italy assumed a central role as a border country between the Western and Soviet blocs. The country had emerged devastated from the Second World War.² The monarchy had fallen, and a profound ideological and political rethink was needed to help the country in its reconstruction process. Italy was one of the founding countries of NATO, but it was also the country with the largest communist party in Western Europe. At the same time the country experienced intense intellectual vitality and ideological tensions. With the birth of the Italian Republic in 1946 and the return, after twenty years of fascist regime, to a democratic, multi-party parliamentary system, the debate on the future of the peninsula became more intense and the ideological war between American liberalism and Soviet socialism dominated the Italian political scene in the following decades.

¹ Odd Arne Westad and Melvyn P. Leffler, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1–19.

² Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943–1988* (London: Penguin, 1990), 216–219.

In Italy, as in other European countries, the Cold War was also played out on a symbolic level, with cultural campaigns, festivals, public debates and magazines that contributed to building a lively cultural contest open to multiple political influences.

Some scholars of the 1990s, such as Akira Iriye and Nicholas Cull³, approached the study of cultural diplomacy as a generally benign tool for mutual understanding and dialogue. In contrast to these approaches, more recent studies, such as those by Hugh Wilford, Kenneth Osgood and Frances Stonor Saunders, have adopted a more critical perspective, revealing the secret and strategic aspects of cultural diplomacy and linking US intelligence operations to the ideological competition of the Cold War. The works of Jason Parker and Victoria de Grazia⁴ have emphasised the local and transnational dimensions of cultural processes, giving greater importance to the agency of European intellectuals instead of presenting them as mere passive receivers of American culture. However, even though much of the historiography has paid particular attention to the cases of France, Great Britain and Germany, Italy remains a relatively unexplored case, especially in the ways in which American strategies interacted with local intellectual networks. This thesis aims to make a small contribution to exploring this gap by examining the complicated relationship between American cultural strategies and the reception of local intellectuals, both liberal and communist. The thesis demonstrates how U.S. influence was negotiated, reinterpreted, and resisted within Italy's vibrant post-war intellectual sphere.

Considering these facts, this thesis will attempt to answer the following research questions: How did U.S. policy makers perceive Italy's political and cultural landscape in the early Cold War, and how did these perceptions shape American cultural diplomacy as part of the containment of Communism? How did Italian intellectuals, both communist and liberal/independent, receive, reinterpret, or resist this influence?

Answering these questions will illuminate how the Italian case reflects a broader trend on how in the history of the Cold War, local actors negotiated with external cultures and ideologies. This paper focuses on the notion of cultural diplomacy not only as a simple exercise of soft power but also as a complex and ambiguous form of ideological and psychological confrontation. Throughout this thesis, 'cultural diplomacy' is employed in a broad sense, encompassing both official cultural initiatives and more covert practices that overlapped with propaganda. Using as a starting point the thesis of authors

³ Iriye, Akira. *Cultural Internationalism and World Order*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.
Cull, Nicholas J. *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945–1989*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

⁴ Jason C. Parker, *Hearts, Minds, Voices: U.S. Cold War Public Diplomacy and the Formation of the Third World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

such as Kenneth Osgood⁵, American cultural diplomacy in Italy cannot be interpreted as a mere promotion of democratic values, but rather as a fundamental component of the US anti-communist containment strategy with the aim of orienting western public opinion and intellectuals towards the United States and isolating the communists. The instruments of this strategy were government institutions such as the U.S. Information Agency (USIA), the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency), and the Congress for Cultural Freedom, which acted through public initiatives (scholarships, academic exchanges, cultural events) and confidential channels (funding to pro-American magazines, organisations and intellectual circles) to spread American culture. Italy thus became a true 'frontier' laboratory of the cultural Cold War.

At the same time, this thesis is not intended to propagate an absolutist view of the spread of American culture and values as a form of uncontested hegemony. On the contrary, the core of this work focuses on the dynamics of negotiation, hybridisation and resistance that characterised the local reception of American cultural strategies. Two types of response can be considered central: on the one hand, the response of anti-communist but critical Italian intellectuals, such as Ignazio Silone and Nicola Chiaromonte, linked to the magazine *Tempo Presente*, financed with Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) funds, but run with strong intellectual autonomy. The second response concern the reaction of Italian communists who, through magazines such as *Rinascita*, constructed a discourse in total opposition to the United States and what they called 'American cultural imperialism'.⁶ The Italian case thus offers a privileged point of view to better understand how American cultural influence operated and how Italian intellectuals responded to it. Rather than considering Italy as a passive actor trapped between superpower competition this study highlights Italy's role as an active participant in shaping the forms of U.S. cultural diplomacy within its own historical and political context. By focusing on the Italian intellectual's responses this thesis demonstrates that cultural diplomacy was nor merely a positive exchange nor a one-way process of domination, but a dynamic exchange marked by negotiation, reinterpretation and contestation. This thesis challenges the view of American cultural diplomacy as a one-directional instrument of manipulation. By comparing CIA strategic narratives with the Italian case of *Tempo Presente*, it argues that U.S. cultural hegemony was not simply imposed but constantly re-negotiated and re-interpreted by local intellectuals. The autonomy of Italian actors, as Silone and Chiaromonte, demonstrates how cultural diplomacy functioned not only as an exercise of power, but also as a site of dialogue and moral resistance.

⁵ Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006),

⁶ Brogi, Alessandro. *Confronting America: The Cold War between the United States and the Communists in France and Italy*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011.

Rinascita. Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, Digital Archive: bibliotecaginobianco.it

Tempo Presente. Digital archive. Fondazione Biblioteca di storia contemporanea, Digital Archive: bibliotecaginobianco.it.

The methodological approach of this thesis is based on three main pillars. First, the sources. The research relies on both American and Italian archival material. On the American side, I use declassified CIA and USIA reports, as well as documents related to the Congress for Cultural Freedom. On the Italian side, I analyse digital archives of the journals *Tempo Presente* and *Rinascita*, together with secondary sources from the Italian political and cultural context. Second, the method. this thesis approaches the subject from the discipline of history and is based on a qualitative analysis of original historical documents. I examine the language and arguments used by American and Italian actors to understand how they framed ideological debates and constructed narratives of freedom, democracy, and culture during the Cold War. A comparative perspective is also adopted, as *Tempo Presente* and *Rinascita* are examined in parallel to highlight differences, intersections, and points of negotiation. Third, the theoretical framework. Here, I combine Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony with Joseph Nye's notion of soft power, and with more recent historiographical contributions by scholars such as Hugh Wilford, Jason Parker, Victoria De Grazia, and Penny Von Eschen.⁷

The work is divided into four chapters. The first analyses the evolution of the concept of cultural diplomacy in the historiographical debate between hegemonic interpretations and others based on local agency, applying these debates to the Italian case. The second chapter examines Washington's perception of Italy and the strategic objectives of its cultural action through the analysis of declassified CIA documents from the 50's. Involved institutions such as the USIA or the Congress for Cultural Freedom are analysed together with the CIA action. The third chapter reconstruct the intellectual debate within the journal, between Ignazio Silone and Nicola Chiaromonte, to study the ambiguity of *Tempo Presente's* intellectual autonomy and how Italian intellectuals reinterpreted American political and cultural action. Finally, the fourth chapter reconstructs the communist counter-narrative debate on American cultural hegemony in Italy through the analysis of magazines such as *Rinascita* from the 50's to the 60's. While the cultural Cold War in Italy has been the subject of several studies, most works have focused either on the political role of the Italian Communist Party or on the transnational activities of the Congress for Cultural Freedom at a global level. Less attention has been devoted to how American cultural strategies interacted with Italian intellectual debates in a concrete way, through specific journals and case studies. By focusing on *Tempo Presente* and

⁷ Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

Jason C. Parker, *Hearts, Minds, Voices: U.S. Cold War Public Diplomacy and the Formation of the Third World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

Rinascita, this thesis offers a specific comparative analysis of two opposite but equally influential intellectual discursive arenas. In doing so, it highlights how American cultural diplomacy was not simply imposed, but reinterpreted, negotiated, and resisted by Italian intellectuals.

Compared to other Western European countries such as France or Britain, Italy presented a unique context. The strength of its Communist Party, chronic governmental instability, and pivotal Mediterranean position made it a crucial arena for both Washington and Moscow. While cultural programs like Fulbright exchanges or film festivals were widespread across Western Europe, nowhere were the stakes as high as in Italy, where the outcome of ideological battles could influence the balance of the Western alliance itself.

1. Rethinking Cultural Diplomacy: Historiography and State of Art

The concept of cultural diplomacy has long been regarded as an important means of projecting soft power: the ability of a state to attract and persuade other countries and communities to follow a particular political agenda rather than forcing them to do so. Joseph Nye describes soft power as “the non-coercive resources of a state, through which cultural ideals and models are disseminated across borders to increase its international influence”.⁸ In this framework, cultural diplomacy has often been framed as the set of programs, educational exchanges, artistic initiatives, exhibitions, language promotion and journals that aim to foster mutual understanding and build international goodwill. However, the historiography of recent decades has challenged this harmonious view by revealing how cultural diplomacy can also be used, in contexts of geopolitical competition, as an effective tool for the exercise of hegemony, ideological penetration and political conditioning.⁹ In the case of the Cold War, the ambivalent role of cultural diplomacy has reemerged with considerable force, opening new horizons for historiographical debate. Looking at its origins, cultural diplomacy was developed well before the Cold War. As early as the 19th century, imperial powers such as France and the United Kingdom had developed early forms of cultural influence even before the spread of mass communication tools, such as teaching their language and creating educational programmes in the colonies they controlled. The First World War was an important turning point: cultural propaganda began to be planned on a national scale using cultural instruments to mobilise internal and external public opinion in favour of their national strategy, thus methodically integrating the cultural and strategic dimensions.¹⁰ In the Second World War, the use of cultural and information instruments with persuasive purposes such as radio broadcasts, the BBC, the distribution of films and newspaper

⁸ Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), x–xi.

⁹ Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 12 – 25.

¹⁰ Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War*, 26–31.

articles, further consolidated the practice of cultural persuasion with strategic purposes of the previous decades, finally preparing the ground for its effective institutionalisation in the Cold War years. The Second World War was decisive in this field and enabled the United States to mobilise the use of cultural instruments on a large scale to promote the war effort and mobilise public opinion. The creation of the Office of War Information (OWI) and coordinated campaigns with Hollywood and magazines showed how culture was able to support political and strategic objectives. This set of experiences was inherited by American institutions during the Cold War, such as the United States Information Agency (USIA), the State Department and the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), which used culture as a weapon to shape ideologies and attitudes in an anti-communist key.¹¹

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, some scholars adopted an initial celebratory perspective. The work of Francis Fukuyama, *'The End of History'*, famously interpret the victory of Western liberal democracy over communism by defining liberal democracy as the ultimate model of government. Some historians adopt a celebratory and consensual perspective of the cultural exchanges that took place during the Cold War. Nicolas Cull for example presents cultural diplomacy as a form of intercultural dialogue capable of building bridges between peoples, stripped of negative and ideological connotations. However, since the late 1990s, wave of studies highlights the covert connections between cultural diplomacy and the American intelligence apparatus. Frances Stonor Saunders' *The Cultural Cold War* documents the CIA's involvement in funding Western cultural journals and intellectual circles hostile to communism, with the aim of countering Soviet hegemony.¹² Hugh Wilford in *The Mighty Wurlitzer* further demonstrate the mechanisms of covert influence of the US intelligence apparatus in the sphere of culture, highlighted in the same provocative title of Wilford's work that focus on how the US was able to make a multiplicity of voices "sound in unison", seemingly autonomous but part of a global strategy.¹³

These studies paved the way for a theoretical rethinking. Cultural diplomacy was reinterpreted in the light of the Gramscian concept of hegemony. In this perspective, culture is not only shown as a vehicle for consensus but a tool for establishing lasting and stable power relations, thus introducing the

¹¹ Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 98–104.

¹² Saunders, Frances Stonor. *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters*. New York: New Press, 1999.

¹³ Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer*, 75 -89.

concept of cultural hegemony. Cultural hegemony refers to the ability to shape narratives and interpretative frameworks that influence the political thinking of individuals and groups.¹⁴

Applied to the case of Cold War Italy, these elements demonstrate how the US aimed not only to counter the USSR but also to integrate cultural elites into an ideological framework compatible with its own political and economic model.¹⁵ At the same time, the concept of cultural hegemony can be analysed with a critical lens and without making the mistake of overlooking the importance of the autonomy of local actors in interacting with American culture. An important strand of studies in this direction is that developed by historians such as Jason Parker, who emphasised the transnational dimension and agency of local actors. Instead of seeing cultural diplomacy as a unidirectional flow from the centre to the periphery, this approach considers the mediation of intellectuals, institutions and local actors as central in mediating, reinterpreting and even resisting influences from abroad.¹⁶ This perspective is particularly suited to the Italian case, in which the lively post-war political and intellectual scene did not limit itself to a passive absorption of American culture, but it was reworked in a national key, often even instrumentalising it to its own ends. Building on these historiographical insights, this thesis argues that cultural diplomacy in Italy should be understood as a process of negotiated hegemony rather than unilateral domination. By analysing both CIA strategic narratives and Italian intellectual responses, it demonstrates how American cultural influence was constantly reinterpreted and adapted by local actors, revealing a dynamic interplay between power and autonomy at the core of the Italian Cold War experience.

Italy was profoundly marked by the ideological divide between the Western and Soviet blocs. Its historical role in Europe and its geographical position at the crossroads of the Mediterranean and the continent made it a strategic territory. The presence of a mass Communist party deeply rooted in Italian society and its culture, led the US to develop strategies to win over the Italian political elite. However, American support for cultural journals such as Ignazio Silone and Nicola Chiaromonte's *Tempo Presente* cannot be read merely as a one-way propaganda operation. *Tempo Presente*, despite its pro-liberal and anti-communist nature tried to build a space of intellectual autonomy that was not always linked to pro-American positions. Taking the Italian case as an example, cultural diplomacy thus becomes an essential key to understanding the Cold War as a total phenomenon that united political and military competition between superpowers with cultural competition, in which the

¹⁴ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, New York: International Publishers, 1971.

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ Jason C. Parker, *Hearts, Minds, Voices: U.S. Cold War Public Diplomacy and the Formation of the Third World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

difference between persuasion and manipulation, exchange and hegemony become extremely complex to distinguish. In addition to the empirical dimension, understanding cultural diplomacy requires terminological and conceptual clarification, as there is sometimes an overlap of terms in the literature, especially between expressions such as “cultural diplomacy” and “propaganda”. Nicolas Cull defines cultural diplomacy as that entity of diplomacy that operates through artistic and educational programmes with the aim of creating a climate of understanding between peoples.¹⁷ Jan Melissen, on the other hand, like Jason Parker, insists on the bidirectional character of cultural diplomacy, emphasising how its ability to influence also depends on its effectiveness in conveying messages and local reception.¹⁸ Authors such as Bruce Gregory and Paul Sharp also warn against reducing these concepts to mere propaganda tools, highlighting the fact that their effectiveness is also based on credibility built up over time.¹⁹ The distinction with propaganda is especially important in the case of the Cold War during which the two opposing blocs made use of numerous persuasive messages. Propaganda is defined as communication intentionally aimed at influencing opinion in favour of a certain political objective by using selective or manipulated information. Cultural diplomacy, on the other hand, while sharing with propaganda the goal of orienting public opinion, tends to operate in a more subtle, sustained and often disguised neutral manner such as exhibitions, festivals and academic exchanges. Propaganda possesses an overt intent that is unlikely to convince the more educated intellectual elite. According to Gramsci, political domination cannot stand on coercion alone, but rather on the ability to build consensus through the dissemination of shared values, ideas and norms.²⁰ In the context of the Cold War, this implied that the US not only sought to contain communism by military and economic means but also to shape the norms and common sense of European societies such as Italy, orienting them towards liberal models. In the case of Italy this translated into a twofold movement: on one hand the action of US institutions and agencies such as the CCF, under the supervision of CIA, to spread American cultural models and on the other the interpretation and adaptation of these models by local elites and cultural movements, such as the journal *Tempo Presente*, which could accept but also modify the original message on the basis of the sensitivity of its authors. The historiographical debate therefore invites reflection on the contemporary value of these studies. The Italian case in the Cold War is an important example of the struggle

¹⁷ Cull, Nicholas J. *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945–1989*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

¹⁸ Melissen Jan, ed. *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

¹⁹ Gregory, Bruce. “Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication: Cultures, Firewalls, and Imported Norms.” Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C., September 1–4, 2005.

Sharp, Paul. *Diplomatic Theory of International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

²⁰ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, New York: International Publishers, 1971

between conflicting narratives and ideologies and how local actors play a more important role than what historiography has recognised them.

While the global historiographical debate has helped to redefine our understanding of cultural diplomacy in the Cold War, the Italian case remains relatively unexplored. Some studies by Italian scholars, however, provide interesting points of insight. Mario Del Pero in his work *Libertà e impero* (2017), argues that the United States global projection during the Cold War was supported not merely by military and economic tools, but by a moral and ideological background rooted in the concept of “freedom” as a universal value. This mission civilisatrice of liberal capitalism, as explained by Del Pero, often merged with cultural diplomacy and psychological warfare, making culture a tool to legitimise American leadership and to shape the ideological boundaries of the Western bloc. Within the Italian context, such an interpretation helps to frame U.S. cultural diplomacy not as an isolated strategy, but as part of a broader American narrative of moral superiority. Another scholar, Alessandro Brogi, in *Confronting America* (2011) examines the tensions between American political and cultural strategies and Italian political culture, identifying Italy as a laboratory for testing the limits and strategies of American mechanisms of influence. Silvio Pons in *L’Altra Guerra Fredda* (2014) instead focuses on the cultural and ideological evolution of the Italian Communist Party during the Cold War, showing how Communist ideology was also mediated and adapted to the Italian context as much as the American one. Alice Ciulla’s doctoral thesis (2018) provides another important insight into the complex network of relations between American and Italian intellectuals in the 1960s. Finally, the works of Cesare Panizza and Andrea Scionti²¹ clearly show the debate on the intellectual and political autonomy of the magazine *Tempo Presente* within the transnational network of the Congress for Cultural Freedom. Despite their thoroughness, these works nevertheless remain separated along separate lines of academic analysis that vary from diplomatic to intellectual history without showing in detail how American cultural diplomacy interacted with Italian intellectuals by giving practical examples. This thesis builds on that literature by analysing *Tempo Presente* and *Rinascita* side by side, to show how U.S. cultural influence was received, contested, and reinterpreted within Italy’s post-war intellectual landscape. In doing so, it bridges the gap between international histories of U.S. soft power and the local dynamics of Italian political culture.

²¹ Scionti, Andrea. *Not Our Kind of Anti-Communists: Americans and the Congress for Cultural Freedom in France and Italy, 1950–1969*. PhD diss., Emory University, 2015.

Panizza, Cesare. «*Tempo presente, Nicola Chiaromonte, Ignazio Silone e l’Italia*», In *Aspettando il Sessantotto*, Torino: Accademia University Press, 2017.

2. The American Cultural Strategy in Italy: Reports from the CIA

In this chapter I argue that the reports produced by the CIA and related to American foreign policy towards Italy in the years between 1948 and 1955, reveal how Italy was perceived as a fragile yet decisive actor in the global ideological struggle of the Cold War. This point becomes important in subsequently demonstrating how such American perceptions influenced US cultural and psychological strategies. The CIA documents do not simply describe Italian instability but reconstruct the narrative of it to American policy-makers in those years as a problem to be managed through persuasion, education and cultural legitimacy. I first demonstrate how the 1948 elections in Italy that saw a robust participation of the Italian Communist Party were perceived as such an existential threat as to justify the introduction of psychological warfare tools into policy towards Italy. I then examine how the CIA reports from 1951 to 1953 move from an analysis of elections and political reality to an analysis of more subtle instruments of influence: information campaigns, youth programmes, and intellectual exchanges. Finally, I analyse in the reports between 1953 and 1955 the gradual realisation by the US apparatus of the need to use local mediators such as journalists or intellectuals in promoting American culture with direct reference to the Congress for Cultural Freedom. The chapter therefore connects intelligence perceptions with policy outcomes, showing that U.S. cultural diplomacy in Italy was neither spontaneous nor uniform, but rather the product of a strategic narrative that evolved through trial, adaptation, and negotiation. This narrative operated through both official and covert dimensions, combining propaganda, cultural exchange, and intellectual engagement, and depended on the collaboration of local intermediaries who translated American messages into the Italian cultural idiom.

To understand how this strategic narrative was developed, it is necessary to return to the broader context of U.S. foreign policy toward Italy in the aftermath of World War II. In the post-war period, with the growth of Soviet influence in Europe, the American intelligence services had realised that Italy was not a western country like any other. Its democracy was facing a moment of profound fragility, made up of governmental instability and the strong advance of communist ideology in the country. For the United States, the stakes were high; despite its fragility, Italy remained a key strategic ally within the American security architecture in Europe. CIA documents produced between 1948 and the mid-1950s clearly show these perceptions of the US government. In a 1948 report, *Consequences of Communist Accession to Power in Italy by Legal Means*, CIA officers analysed the hypothesis of a Communist electoral victory scenario in Italy, emphasising its devastating consequences for American influence: not only Italy's exit from the Western bloc but also a very serious blow to American influence in Europe:

“The assumed Communist accession to power in Italy would be significant not only as the first actual extension of Communist (Soviet) territorial control (except in China) since the conclusion of World

War II, but also as the first instance in history of a Communist accession to power by popular suffrage and legal procedure. So unprecedented and portentous an event must produce a profound psychological effect in those countries threatened by Soviet or Communist aggression and still striving to retain their freedom.”²²

The democratic seizure of power by the communists represented a strategic nightmare for Washington especially because if won through consensus it would give the new communist government an international legitimacy that would be difficult to undermine. The idea that the struggle for cultural and ideological consensus was as crucial as military and economic consensus thus emerges strongly from the document.²³ A 1951 document, *Psychological Effect of US Effort in Italy*²⁴, offers a first concrete assessment of the effectiveness of American influence in the country. It notes that Marshall Plan aid had strongly reinforced the American image in Italy, especially among the middle and urban classes that had benefited most from it. However, among the popular classes, communist propaganda continued to increase its power. For the CIA, economic intervention was not enough, the psychological impact of American action had to be consolidated. The report is a significant early example of American cultural policy in the following years. The CIA called for a strengthening of educational exchanges and a more decisive targeting of young people and intellectuals.²⁵ The CIA’s internal evaluation of U.S. efforts in Italy acknowledged both the strengths and limitations of American psychological influence. The report noted that “almost without exception every step had an impact on the psychological climate of Italy usually favourable, sometimes unfavourable.” It stressed that concrete initiatives such as “the Marshall Plan, the North Atlantic Treaty and the American resistance in Korea have had more positive effect than any purely informational or propaganda effort.” At the same time, however, it underlined the necessity of propaganda to capitalize on these achievements: “without the information and propaganda programs to exploit such actions the net results would have been less favourable.” Finally, the report admitted the inherent limits of psychological operations, recognizing that “the delay in the Trieste question and the failure to solve Italy’s emigration problem have caused psychological reactions which no propaganda could have prevented.”²⁶ A CIA 1952 document, *Views of a High-Ranking Soviet Official in Italy*²⁷, confirmed American concerns. It contained statements by a Soviet official on the Italian case that the USSR

²² Central Intelligence Agency. *Consequences of Communist Accession to Power in Italy by Legal Means*. Washington, D.C., 1948.

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ Central Intelligence Agency. *An Evaluation of Psychological Effect of U.S. Effort in Italy*. Washington, D.C., 1953. cia.gov/readingroom.

²⁵ Central Intelligence Agency. *An Evaluation of Psychological Effect of U.S. Effort in Italy*. Washington, D.C., 1953. cia.gov/readingroom.

²⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷ Central Intelligence Agency. *Views of a High-Ranking Soviet Official in Italy*. Washington, D.C., 1954, cia.gov/readingroom.

intended to present itself as a reasonable actor to public opinion to make Italy a neutral actor in the ideological clash between the Soviet Union and the USA. The Americans began to fear that their overt interference in Italian affairs would fuel Soviet anti-American propaganda. This gave rise to the idea of adopting a two-pronged strategy: on the one hand material, economic and military support, and on the other cultural initiatives tailored on Italian sensibilities and mediated by local actors such as cultural and intellectual circles, without which such initiatives would have been severely limited.

These early reflections paved the way for a new phase of intelligence assessment in 1953, as the CIA sought to translate its psychological concerns into a broader political strategy. The 1953 report *Italy and the Western Alliance*²⁸ reiterated this point. The CIA observed that Italian support for NATO could not be taken for granted, since public opinion was volatile and easily influenced by communist propaganda, which described the Alliance as an instrument of American domination:

“Despite the present Italian Government’s complete Western orientation, an attitude of semi-defeatism. tending toward an incipient neutrality, tends to permeate the public mind [...] The existence of a strong Communist and pro-Communist minority which plays upon these fears obstructs the development of a strong will to resist”²⁹

Another document from the same year, *Probable Developments in Italy*³⁰, spoke of how Italian politics was characterised by the precariousness of centrist governments. This report also recommended directing American cultural initiatives in a twofold direction, on the one hand towards the cultural elites and on the other towards the working classes, young people and students, who are particularly vulnerable to communist fascination. By mid-1953, the CIA’s approach to Italy had become fully cultural: a matter not only of politics and security, but of identity, perception, and legitimacy.

The image that emerges from these documents is that of a strongly divided, unstable and vulnerable Italy in its precarious post-war condition. For the United States it was not only an ally but a political laboratory in which the failure of the Communist containment strategy would later be reflected on the entire Western architecture. In this sense, the declassified CIA reports prove to be important tools for framing American strategic thinking. In these reports, culture is conceived as a long-term weapon, destined to shape perceptions, consolidate alliances and solidify geopolitical positions. Parallel to the dissemination of these reports among the governmental officers, the US government moved to

²⁸ Central Intelligence Agency. *Italy and the Western Alliance*. Washington, D.C., 1955, cia.gov/readingroom.

²⁹ Central Intelligence Agency. *Italy and the Western Alliance*. Washington, D.C., 1955, cia.gov/readingroom.

³⁰ Central Intelligence Agency. *Probable Developments in Italy*. Washington, D.C., 1953, cia.gov/readingroom.

mobilise its cultural instruments. In 1953, the United States Information Agency (USIA) was born. As Nicholas Cull demonstrated, the USIA inherited numerous tools and techniques of wartime propaganda, using film, radio and libraries to spread the image of a modern, democratic and prosperous America.³¹ Yet, beyond this official framework, the United States also relied on a covert cultural network that operated in parallel with formal diplomacy.

In Italy, this resulted in the broadcasting of Hollywood films, radio programmes such as *Voice of America* and the spread of American cultural centres in major Italian cities. The USIA represented the official dimension of American cultural diplomacy, but alongside it, operated a vast covered network that historiography has analysed in detail. As documented by Saunders and Giles Scott Smith, the CIA provided substantial secret funding to the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF). Founded in Berlin in 1950 with the aim of building an international intellectual platform against totalitarianism, the CCF established itself as a key component of the CIA's international cultural influence strategy. The CCF was able to finance journals, conferences and conventions that were presented as autonomous initiatives of free intellectuals but at the same time constituted a cog in the wheel of American global strategy.³²

In Italy, the most significant case linked to the CCF concerned the magazine, *Tempo Presente*. Published from 1956 onwards. The journal offered an important space for critical intellectual debate in which both Italian and European intellectuals converged. Although financed with CCF funds, it cannot be denied that the magazine's authors maintained a strong autonomy, often also voicing criticism of the United States and its policies. Silone and Chiaromonte themselves criticised the idea that the defence of freedom should always coincide with American power. They criticised the superficiality of American mass culture and gave *Tempo Presente* a humanist, profoundly Italian mission, in contrast to the American consumerist society. Voices critical of CIA operations and funding must confront the evidence of a local intellectual autonomy that cannot be overlooked. Giles Scott-Smith insists precisely on this aspect when speaking of the CCF itself.³³ Although funded with CIA funds, its capacity for capillary control remained limited and this opened spaces for autonomous voices. Saunders also showed how this blanket network of funding had an impressive reach: international conferences, art exhibitions, translations. The aim was to isolate the communists, and at

³¹ Cull, Nicholas J. *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency*, cit.

³² Coleman, Peter. *The liberal conspiracy. The Congress for Cultural Freedom and the struggle for the mind of postwar Europe*. New York: The Free Press, 1989.

³³ Giles Scott-Smith, *Networks of Empire: The US State Department's Foreign Leader Program in the Netherlands, France, and Britain 1950–70*, Brussels: Peter Lang, 2008.

the same time build an alternative cultural network that would give to non-communist intellectuals greater international prestige. It is no coincidence that, as Hugh Wilford notes in *The Mighty Wurlitzer*, Italy was one of the “main keys” that the CIA knew how to play in unison, transforming “spontaneous voices into a more functional chorus” for American objectives.³⁴ The case of *Tempo Presente* thus stands at the crossroads between U.S. orchestration and Italian intellectual autonomy. This tension between orchestration and autonomy reflected the dual nature of American cultural policy, at the same time hierarchical and negotiated, reliant on the independence of its local agents.

Besides magazines and intellectual networks, a crucial role was played by cinema, music and cultural consumerism. Victoria De Grazia has shown how the American lifestyle exerted a powerful fascination on Europe, and how the dissemination of American cultural products can be directly linked to that of cultural strategy, with the function of reinforcing its influence.³⁵ In Italy, festivals such as the Venice Film Festival became arenas of confrontation with the USA and the USSR, in which Soviet and Hollywood neo-realist cinema confronted each other. Louis Armstrong's jazz, American literature, Coca Cola, blue jeans and supermarkets constituted the first vanguard of American penetration into Italy and the European continent in stark contrast to the austerity and misery embodied by Soviet Communism. The CIA documents do not speak explicitly of these cultural forms but insist on the need to make American prestige materially visible and ideologically justifiable and to associate the image of America with modernity in Italy. In this sense, the symbolic impact of cinema and consumption could play an important function as that of intellectual magazines. Through these more popular forms of soft power, the American message became embedded in everyday life, reinforcing the ideological battle on a broader social scale.

The picture that emerges from the intertwining of CIA reports and historiography is therefore that of a multi-level strategy. The CIA reports highlighted the risks: the strength of the PCI, the fragility of governments, the vulnerability of young people. Historiography shows us the concrete responses: the activation of a cultural arsenal that ranged from the USIA to Fulbright programmes, from the CCF to magazines, from cinema to mass consumption. All these elements had in common the need to build a long-term consensus, neutralise communist propaganda and maintain Italy as a reliable member of the Atlantic alliance.³⁶ The American strategy in Italy was thus characterised by both a public and a

³⁴ Wilford, Hugh. *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008.

³⁵ De Grazia, Victoria. *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth Century Europe*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005.

³⁶ Parker, Jason C. *Hearts, Minds, Voices: U.S. Cold War Public Diplomacy and the Formation of the Third World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

secret component, elitist and popular, intellectual and every day. It was not always successful and despite its pervasiveness, it clashed with the complexities and ideological liveliness of a country which proved capable of effectively reworking inputs from outside. Moreover, as also emerges from the CIA reports themselves, the country was not easily influenced by overt and direct propaganda, the limited effects of which were initially felt in a widespread sense of anti-Americanism. The limits of American cultural action found a more effective solution in the adoption of local cultural mediators, such as Silone and Chiaromonte, who achieved the indirect task of spreading pro-US ideology. However, this awareness casts doubt on the very definition of cultural hegemony, which must therefore necessarily be reinterpreted, taking due account of the fact that without effective local cultural mediation, every initiative of cultural diplomacy or propaganda achieves very limited effects.³⁷ As the following chapter will show, this dynamic of negotiated influence found its most vivid expression in the work of Ignazio Silone and Nicola Chiaromonte on *Tempo Presente*, where American support intersected with a distinctly Italian search for intellectual freedom.

3. Ignazio Silone, Nicola Chiaromonte, and the Autonomy of Italian Anti-Communist Intellectuals on the Journal *Tempo Presente* (1956 – 1968)

In this chapter I argue that *Tempo Presente* (1956 - 1968), the Italian Branch of the CCF, constitutes a solid example of the dual nature of American cultural diplomacy in the Cold War. This duality is clearly visible in the tension between intellectual independence and structural dependence on American funds, a tension that, far from cancelling the journal's credibility, made it one of the most effective laboratories of American cultural influence in Europe. Although it was financially supported by the CIA through the CCF network, the magazine also exposed a distinctly Italian intellectual debate on the concept of freedom and morality. The chapter therefore explores how Ignazio Silone and Nicola Chiaromonte negotiated their autonomy despite their transnational connections to the United States by giving a uniquely Italian definition to the concept of anti-communism. First, it analyses the intellectual origins of *Tempo Presente*, situating Silone and Chiaromonte within the broader European network of the CCF and their earlier experiences in *Preuves* and *Encounter*. Second, it examines the main themes of the journal, moral responsibility, totalitarianism, and the critique of mass culture, to show how these writers sought to articulate a “third way” between American liberalism and Marxist orthodoxy. Finally, I analyse the limits of this autonomy, revealing

Giles Scott-Smith, *Networks of Empire: The US State Department's Foreign Leader Program in the Netherlands, France, and Britain 1950–70*, Brussels: Peter Lang, 2008.

³⁷ Parker, Jason C. *Hearts, Minds, Voices: U.S. Cold War Public Diplomacy and the Formation of the Third World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Pera, Marcello. *L'antiamericanismo nella storia d'Italia*. Napoli: Istituto Universitario Suor Orsola Benincasa – Senato della Repubblica, 2002.

the contradictions between the magazine's proclaimed independence and its structured participation within the network of American cultural diplomacy. By analysing *Tempo Presente* as both a product and a critique of American cultural diplomacy, this chapter complements the previous one, which traced the formation of U.S. strategies in CIA reports, by revealing how those strategies were re-interpreted and contested by Italian intellectuals themselves.

The birth of the journal *Tempo Presente* in April 1956 represented a fundamental moment in Italian intellectual history. As described by Cesare Panizza³⁸, the birth of the journal should also be read in a broader European context marked by major international events: the 20th Congress of the Russian Communist Party and the denunciation of Stalinist crimes, the Anti-communists uprisings in Warsaw and Budapest, and the Suez crisis. In 1956 European culture was going through a crucial moment in which the rift between East and West appeared more dramatic and needed new interpretative tools. In this intellectual climate, the creation of *Tempo Presente* symbolised Italy's entry into the transnational arena of Cold War cultural debate.

In this chapter, I argue that *Tempo Presente* operated as a hybrid space funded by the CCF, but capable of rearticulating (not just receiving) the frames of the American cultural war, translating them into an Italian critical humanism that limited any purely manipulated act. From the very first issue, *Tempo Presente* defined its identity as that of a militant journal opposed to totalitarianism but not ideologically aligned. In his introductory note, Chiaromonte categorically rejected the logic of replacing one political orthodoxy with another:

“We have no ideology or line to propose. The point of view we take is the one that, today, seems to us the most necessary: the one that, in a globalised world caught between interests and ideals, assigns the individual the irreplaceable responsibility of judgement and conscience.”³⁹

From the very beginning, *Tempo Presente* framed its mission as a defence of individual conscience against ideological absolutism, a position that would remain constant throughout its history.

The title *Tempo Presente*, as defined by Chiaromonte in the introductory note, was defined as a 'critical space in which the intellectual could exercise his autonomy of thought against the totalising ideological pretensions of the century'. Silone, in his article *Ideologies and Social Reality* from the same year, developed an analysis along the same lines as Chiaromonte. For him, ideologies, and

³⁸ Panizza, Cesare. «*Tempo presente, Nicola Chiaromonte, Ignazio Silone e l'Italia*», In *Aspettando il Sessantotto*, Torino: Accademia University Press, 2017.

³⁹ Chiaromonte, Nicola. “Nota introduttiva.” *Tempo Presente*, Anno I, n. 1 (aprile 1956).
Tempo Presente: original articles in Italian, every translation is provided by me.

communist ideologies in particular, are interpreted in the same way as religious dogmatics, capable of reducing realities to abstract and extremely simplified formulas. Silone's criticism hit both Marxism and the West without even sparing the United States itself:

“The Leninist theory of terror is nothing but sophistry: as if it were possible to deprive enemies of freedom and safeguard the internal freedom of the vanguard of the proletariat. But all freedoms stand in solidarity. Whoever suppresses the contradictory suppresses freedom itself (...) There is no society that does not tend to fabricate its own official ideology. It is not only a question of totalitarian regimes. Even the most solid democracies, such as the American one, shouldn't decay in building and imposing a collective myth, made up of dogmatics, stereotypes, religious surrogates”⁴⁰

Silone and Chiaromonte thus positioned themselves as moral critics of all ideological systems, Marxist or capitalist, that sought to subsume individual judgement under collective myths. They showed themselves from the magazine's manifesto to be in favour of a humanitarian and libertarian socialism distinct from both Soviet communism and western capitalism. From its founding moment, the financing of the CCF with CIA funds does not seem to have spared the editors strong criticism of the United States itself. In the first issue of the journal, in another article, Chiaromonte deepened his analysis of the mass society that was taking shape in the 1950s. In the essay *Mass and Individual*, he spoke of the risk of reducing the individual to an autonomous cog in an impersonal social machine, whether a product of communism or the wildest industrial capitalism. As the author stated: “Freedom is not defended as one ideology among others, but as an elementary condition of human existence, which mass society threatens to dissolve”.⁴¹ As Panizza noted, the editorial line of the journal was configured as a project for a new liberal humanism built on the Italian historical tradition, capable of resisting communist orthodoxies as much as American conformism. *Tempo Presente* did not set itself the goal of becoming a showcase for Atlanticist ideology but a laboratory for a critical European consciousness. An important choice of the magazine was to construct an alternative intellectual identity to the two blocs that drew references from different worlds and authors. In the essay *Tolstoy and the Paradox of History*, Chiaromonte reinterpreted the Russian writer as a symbol of the autonomy of the individual conscience, a clear contrast to the Marxist myth of necessity and at the same time a reiteration of the need to build a critical spirit.⁴² By drawing on diverse intellectual sources, from Tolstoy to Weil and Camus, the editors articulated a form of critical humanism rooted in European moral tradition yet responsive to contemporary crises.

⁴⁰ Silone, Ignazio. “Ideologie e realtà sociale.” *Tempo Presente*, Anno I, n. 1 (aprile 1956).

⁴¹ Chiaromonte, Nicola. “Massa e individuo.” *Tempo Presente*, Anno I, n. 1 (aprile 1956).

⁴² Chiaromonte, Nicola. “Tolstoj e il paradosso della storia (I).” *Tempo Presente*, Anno I, n. 8 (novembre 1956): 633–638.

Panizza, Cesare. «*Tempo presente*, Nicola Chiaromonte, Ignazio Silone e l'Italia», In *Aspettando il Sessantotto*, Torino: Accademia University Press, 2017.

Silone and Chiaromonte attempted to build an autonomous and alternative intellectual reality by acting as a bridge between the challenges of the present in contrast to the communist ideology and the relentless advance of American hegemony. 1956 was also a year marked by numerous international events that were addressed in the journal without ideological filters. The Suez Crisis was analysed in the journal in a short article by Chiaromonte in which he analysed how European colonial powers such as France were incapable of understanding the newly emerging nationalisms, such as the Arab one, and the transformation of the international system. In the same year, the Polish author Gustav Herling's article on the anti-communist uprisings in Poland and Budapest, was published on *Tempo Presente*. The article '*Warsaw and Budapest: Two Revolutions*' offered a first-hand account of Eastern Europe. Herling writes:

“In both Budapest and Warsaw, we realised that, despite the dominance of the modern totalitarian state, intellectuals, if left a little freer and a little less afraid, can, as in the past, create revolutionary ferment, and that at the heart of it must be the rebirth of free criticism (...).”⁴³

Tempo Presente's decision to publish it was an act of open solidarity with the Polish and Hungarian insurgents that constitutes a rare example in the Italian political landscape of the time. While much of the left wing hesitated, Silone and Chiaromonte had no doubts: the defence of freedom and human dignity came before the logic of the opposing blocs.⁴⁴ This editorial stance consolidated the journal's image as an independent moral voice within the Italian left, unafraid to challenge both Soviet repression and Western complacency. This stance was crucial because it defined *Tempo Presente* as a magazine that refused alignment as a measure of legitimacy and highlighted intellectual independence as the core of its civic mission.

As Panizza notes, this choice made the magazine unique on the Italian scene, closer to the experiences of *Encounter* or *Preuves*, all magazines linked to the Congress for Cultural Freedom but with a similar critical approach in the shape of their articles.⁴⁵ Between 1959 and 1963, *Tempo Presente* entered a phase of consolidation, both from the point of view of the international network and in the definition of its role and positioning with respect to the Italian political scene and the United States. The

⁴³ Herling, Gustav. “Due rivoluzioni: Varsavia e Budapest.” *Tempo Presente*, Anno I, n. 8 (novembre 1956): 587–592.

⁴⁴ Cull, Nicholas J. *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945–1989*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Pera, Marcello. *L'antiamericanismo nella storia d'Italia*. Napoli: Istituto Universitario Suor Orsola Benincasa – Senato della Repubblica, 2002.

⁴⁵ Panizza, Cesare. «*Tempo presente, Nicola Chiaromonte, Ignazio Silone e l'Italia*», In *Aspettando il Sessantotto*, Torino: Accademia University Press, 2017.

consolidation of new parties in Italy, the rise of a geopolitical context that saw Italy increasingly linked to the United States and the oppressive authoritarian drifts of the communist regimes in the East profoundly influenced the editorial choices of the magazine. The magazine continued to defend the cardinal principle proclaimed from the beginning, the autonomy of the intellectuals, applying it to a double front: on the one hand to the confrontation with the great European philosophical debates on freedom and democracy and on the other hand to the criticism and internal degeneration of the Italian political system. By the early 1960s, *Tempo Presente* had evolved into a forum for ethical reflection on democracy itself, anticipating debates that would later animate the European intellectual scene.

In the history of the journal, it is clear from the beginning that the editors' intention was indeed to maintain a critical autonomy. The relationship with the CCF remains central to interpreting its parable but without lapsing into the opinion that it controlled the content of the journal. A careful analysis of the articles shows that the CCF had no influence whatsoever in the choice of content to be published or of the authors selected, an observation that allows us to re-dimension, at least in the Italian case, the assertions of authors such as Hugh Wilford who in his work describes the CCF as an instrument totally piloted by the CIA and capable of exerting almost total influence on the journals and circles it financed.⁴⁶ This is also evident in the 1959 publication of Isaiah Berlin's article '*Two conceptions of freedom*'. Berlin writes:

“Freedom also brings with it the risk of tyranny (...) whether it is a party, a church or a democracy that claims to embody the true will of the people (...) there are slaves of ideas and words, of seemingly unobjectionable rational concepts, that can turn into instruments of domination. Recent European history has shown us this: the constructions of reason, born to liberate man, have been used to reduce him to servitude.”⁴⁷

Berlin's contribution encapsulated the dual identity of *Tempo Presente*: a publication situated within American cultural networks, yet capable of questioning their ideological boundaries. His text was destined to play a major role in the philosophical and political history of the 20th century. The author spoke in critical tones about the possibility that individuals in a regime of 'positive' freedom could be deceived and degenerate into absolutized forms of government and domination under the pretence of so-called collective freedom. This text is not presented as an apologia for the West. It is a philosophical analysis that also showed the risks of authoritarian drifts within democratic systems themselves. The choice to host such an essay confirmed the cosmopolitan and critical vocation of the

⁴⁶ Wilford, Hugh. *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008.

⁴⁷ Berlin, Isaiah. “Due concezioni della libertà (I).” *Tempo Presente*, Anno IV, n. 6 (giugno 1959).

journal, which was configured as "a properly European journal even if written in Italy".⁴⁸ For Italian and European readers in 1959, this article had a double implication. It unmasked the communist rhetoric that legitimised dictatorship in the name of liberating the proletariat. At the same time, it acted as a warning to the West, seeking to prevent the risk that by turning freedom into a dogma it would end up taking on negative and absolutizing connotations.⁴⁹

Alessandro Brogi emphasised how confrontation with European liberal thinkers was a priority of the American cultural legitimisation strategy piloted by the CIA. Through the CCF, the circulation of texts that could strengthen the autonomy and distancing of intellectuals from communism was encouraged. As Saunders points out, the fact that magazines such as *Tempo Presente* also published texts critical of the West is not surprising. This fact shows that the most important point in the existence of these publications was the promotion of critical thinking that would move away from totalitarianism. This resulted in an intellectual dialogue in which the authors maintained wide margins of autonomy. In this sense, the publication of Berlin is emblematic of the dual nature of the journal: part of an international network indirectly supported by the CIA, but at the same time a place where European thought found room for critical autonomy.⁵⁰

In continuation of Berlin's ideas, Silone continued his reflections on Italian democracy with an important article published in 1960, *Democrazia cifrata*. Silone denounced in very strong tones the partyocratic degeneration of the new Italian republican system. According to Silone, 'Democracy does not live by numbers and seats, but by civic spirit and responsibility. Where this spirit is lacking, even the most perfect parliamentary arithmetic is reduced to a simulacrum.'⁵¹ Italian democracy now seemed more like a façade masking a vacuum of real participation by ordinary people, who cared little whether they were part of the western bloc or communist. This criticism was aimed at all parties, both those pro-American and close to the Catholic Church and the communists and socialists. In this way, Silone reaffirmed the need to build a democratic civil ethic that started from individuals and their civic responsibility and critical thinking. As Panizza notes, this article marked the magazine's continuity with Silone's personal journey, who had already spoken of a "democracy without parties" in the 1930s. In *Tempo Presente* this vision found new definition in the denunciation of Italian partocracy and universal reflection on the crisis of mass democracies.

⁴⁸ Scionti, Andrea. *Not Our Kind of Anti-Communists: Americans and the Congress for Cultural Freedom in France and Italy, 1950–1969*. PhD diss., Emory University, 2015.

⁴⁹ Berlin, Isaiah. "Due concezioni della libertà (I)." *Tempo Presente*, Anno IV, n. 6 (giugno 1959)

⁵⁰ Panizza, Cesare. «*Tempo presente, Nicola Chiaromonte, Ignazio Silone e l'Italia*», In *Aspettando il Sessantotto*, Torino: Accademia University Press, 2017.

⁵¹ Silone, Ignazio. "Agenda. Democrazia cifrata." *Tempo Presente*, Anno V, n. 4 (1960)

Alessandro Brogi also recognises Silone's critique of the Italian political system as being part of a context that cannot be reduced to the cultural struggle and communism and an apologia for the West, but it was seen as a desire to regenerate Italian democracy without taking a clear-cut side with one super power or another. In his reflection on encrypted democracy, Silone brought the review closer to the themes that would also be addressed in the 1960s by many other European intellectuals such as Habermas in Germany or Marcuse in France. The themes addressed were similar, such as the reduction of politics to a bureaucratic dimension, the transformation of citizens into passive actors or the use of the media as instruments of mass manipulation. The thinking of *Tempo Presente* in line with other European authors warned against the degeneration of democracy that could sometimes unwittingly lead to new forms of domination and oppression.

In the European political debate Magazines associated with *Tempo Presente* by common funding from CCF funds were Encounters, in England, and Preuves, in France. But in contrast to these journals, which were well embedded in the political reality of their respective countries, *Tempo Presente* looked at the broader European and world panorama with the active participation of foreign authors such as Mary McCarthy, Herling and Berlin who made it possible to compare the Italian case with the broader world politics of the time.⁵²

After more than ten years of publication, the final parabola of *Tempo Presente* was consummated in a dramatic but crucial two-year period between 1966 and 1968. Far-reaching political shocks put the magazine's existence to the test: the rise of student and youth protest movements together with the revelation of the CIA's covert financing of the CCF. These two intertwining factors led to the end of an autonomous intellectual experience that for a decade had acted as a political laboratory in opposition to an external hegemonic will from the United States as well as the Soviet Union. In February 1967 Nicola Chiaromonte published *Cronaca. I giovani e la politica*⁵³ a text in which he tackled the emerging activism of the new generations with a lucid gaze. While recognising the reasons for the protests, the author warned against the temptation to transform rebellion into a new form of oppression and ideological cult. In continuity with the positions expressed by numerous authors in the journal, Chiaromonte denounced communism as a secular religion and therefore an ideology now cloaked in the same conformism as western capitalism. Cesare Panizza and Brogi themselves emphasise how Chiaromonte saw Sixty-Eight as a new form of 'collective faith', as dangerous as 20th century ideologies.

⁵² Scionti, Andrea. *Not Our Kind of Anti-Communists: Americans and the Congress for Cultural Freedom in France and Italy, 1950–1969*. PhD diss., Emory University, 2015.

Wilford, Hugh. *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008.

⁵³ Chiaromonte, Nicola. "Cronaca. La rivolta degli studenti." *Tempo Presente*, Anno XIII, nn. 3–4 (marzo/aprile 1968): 6–8.

Chiaromonte, Nicola. "A lume di ragione." *Tempo Presente*, Anno XIII, nn. 3–4 (marzo/aprile 1968): 16–23.

In the same year, the June issue of the magazine published an important article by Mary McCarthy, *Vietnam Report*, a long critical reportage against American actions in Vietnam. The text represented a truly interesting editorial choice, a magazine born out of CCF funds hosting an American voice radically hostile to Washington's foreign policy. As the author quotes in this passage:

“Every war has its profiteers, and it was already ridiculous that everything was so unequivocal. The absence of austerity that usually accompanies war, the absence of civilian sacrifice, of rationing, of shortages, of blackout as in London, or even in New York during the war singularly lacked. In this singular war, not even the newspapers carry the big headlines of blood and death (...) The Americans neither hide their intent nor seem to feel the need for it, except in words: for example, napalm has become incendiary-jell, a word whose sound evokes that of powdered jelly.”⁵⁴

According to Saunders, one of the hallmarks of the CCF was precisely its ability to include dissenting voices in order to strengthen its credibility. But in the case of *Tempo Presente*, McCarthy's publication took on a further significance: it showed that Chiaromonte and Silone intended to concretely assert their editorial autonomy. Hugh Wilford pointed out that the CIA's 'Mighty Wurlitzer' was not a monolithic organ, but a space in which intellectuals could manipulate the mechanism in turn even against the original hegemonic and manipulative will itself.⁵⁵ The choice to host an article by a radical voice like McCarthy shows how *Tempo Presente* was able to use the CCF network to assert its own critical agenda at the expense of any external will.

In May 1968 Chiaromonte published one of the last and most relevant texts in the history of the journal, which can be considered as the culmination of ten years of publications. *Modern Tyranny* was a radical diagnosis of contemporary society that identified the new totalitarian enemy in the subtle forms of social conformism, media manipulation and bureaucratisation. An invisible tyranny that just as cultural influence operated with subtle silent mass pressure.⁵⁶ As Cesare Panizza also illustrated, Chiaromonte's thought was no longer directed only at communism but also at the very heart of western civilisation. In the November-December issue appeared a short anonymous editorial entitled *Tempo Presente. Commiato*⁵⁷, in which it was admitted that it was impossible to continue with the magazine. The closure was strongly linked to the CIA funding scandal at the CCF, which had led to the credibility of all the magazines in the CCF circuit being compromised. As Giles Scott-Smith observed, the scandal did not erase the intellectual value of these experiences but marked their

⁵⁴ McCarthy, Mary. “Rapporto dal Vietnam.” *Tempo Presente*, Anno XII, n. 6 (giugno 1967): 5–41

⁵⁵ Wilford, Hugh. *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008.

⁵⁶ Chiaromonte, Nicola. “La tirannia moderna.” *Tempo Presente*, Anno XIII, n. 5 (maggio 1968): 6–19.

⁵⁷ *Tempo Presente. Commiato.* *Tempo Presente*, Anno XIII, nn. 11–12 (novembre/dicembre 1968): 2

political and cultural decline.⁵⁸ The final phase of *Tempo Presente* revealed both the coherence and the limits of a magazine that, for over a decade, had embodied the autonomy of the intellectual. The CCF funding scandal of 1967–68 did not erase its legacy but exposed the fragile balance between independence and dependence that defined the cultural Cold War.

This apparent contradiction between autonomy and dependence is exactly what made *Tempo Presente* an effective instrument of American cultural diplomacy. Its ability to criticise the United States increased its credibility with the public and among European intellectuals who would have repudiated more open and visible propaganda. By proposing a humanist and anti-totalitarian vision, the newspaper indirectly reinforced the principles of liberal democracy that were at the heart of the western project. In this sense, even when *Tempo Presente* questioned American policies, it still advanced U.S. strategic interests by shaping a moral consensus against communism and authoritarianism through a language of freedom that was recognisably Western but not overtly American.

4. Autonomy or hypocrisy? The Communist response to the scandal of CIA funding for the CCF on the magazine *Rinascita*

The year 1967 marked a decisive turning point in the cultural Cold War. In March, Ramparts magazine revealed the scandal of covert CIA funding of the CCF, exposing a vast network of affiliations that also included *Tempo Presente* magazine. The disillusionment of the Western intellectual world was profound. Many writers had long proclaimed their independence of thought by publishing in various magazines associated with the CCF and now found themselves accused of being instruments, conscious or not, of the US cultural strategy of communist containment. For the Italian left and the circle of thinkers who gravitated around the communist magazine *Rinascita*, the scandal confirmed that the so-called freedom of the West was inseparable from the imperial power structures that underpinned it. The unmasking of the CCF damaged the credibility of *Tempo Presente* and its editors, as well as the entire liberal concept of the autonomous intellectual.⁵⁹ The authentic ideal of an autonomous moral space in which *Tempo Presente* had believed from the outset was shaken by the material evidence of dependence on a network of power. Yet the scandal did not interrupt the debate on intellectual autonomy but rather revived it. If the concept of the autonomous liberal thinker had collapsed in the face of contradictions, communist thinkers wanted to present themselves as a valid alternative. Between the spring and summer of 1967, *Rinascita* seized the opportunity to

⁵⁸ Giles Scott-Smith, *Networks of Empire: The US State Department's Foreign Leader Program in the Netherlands, France, and Britain 1950–70*, Brussels: Peter Lang, 2008

⁵⁹ Silvio Pons, *L'altra guerra fredda: Il PCI dal 1943 al 1991* (Torino: Einaudi, 2014), 164–170.

reaffirm the ethical consistency of Marxist intellectuals against what it described as the 'hypocrisy of bourgeois consciousness'. Through a series of articles and commentaries by Luca Pavolini, Giuseppe Boffa, Giovanni Giudici and Luciano Gruppi, *Rinascita* transformed the crisis of the CCF and *Tempo Presente* into an act of self-legitimation.⁶⁰ This chapter analyses *Rinascita*'s discourse after the revelations of CCF funding, exploring how the communist magazine redefined the notion of intellectual autonomy through a language of ideological transparency. Analysis of these articles shows that the debate on autonomy was not a clash between freedom and control but between two different moral principles, the liberal and the communist, both seeking to legitimise themselves as true bastions of free thought. The tone of *Rinascita*'s articles in April 1967 was not only sensationalist but strongly reiterates that the truth it had long claimed was correct. That intellectual autonomy, if separated from social commitment, inevitably degenerates into hypocrisy.

In the article '*Lo Shock dell'Enciclica*' (The Shock of the Encyclical), Luca Pavolini adopted an almost theological tone to interpret the crisis of Western conscience. 'The shock of the crisis,' he wrote, 'was comparable to that of a believer who suddenly discovers the corruption of his own church'. The tone adopted was deliberately ironic and scathing towards the rival faction of liberal intellectuals, so proud of their independence when in fact they received their 'encyclical' directly from Washington. Pavolini did not explicitly mention *Tempo Presente*, but the subject of his discourse was clear. "The priests of freedom," as he called them, had preached autonomy and freedom while living under the hand of an invisible master, and "their sermons on conscience now sound empty because they were dictated by those who provided the money and funding." Pavolini's language reflected *Rinascita*'s broader strategy of exploiting the scandal to transform itself into the new voice of moral conscience and expose the hypocrisy of liberalism. Pavolini suggested that the liberal notion of intellectual independence was itself a form of ideology that masked the Western cultural system's longstanding affiliation with imperialism and domination. His powerful conclusion was that 'it was not communism that corrupted the mind but capitalism that corrupted the conscience' in a world that confuses the balance of power and dependence with freedom.

On the same issue, Giuseppe Boffa's article 'On security and pan-European dialogue'⁶¹ expanded the communist critique to geopolitics. Boffa believed that the new enthusiasm for European dialogue that had emerged in liberal circles was merely a new guise for American hegemony, which aimed to unify

⁶⁰ Cesare Panizza, "Tempo presente, Nicola Chiaromonte, Ignazio Silone e l'Italia," in *Aspettando il Sessantotto* (Torino: Accademia University Press, 2017), 45–52.

Andrea Scionti, *Not Our Kind of Anti-Communists: Americans and the Congress for Cultural Freedom in France and Italy, 1950–1969* (PhD diss., Emory University, 2015), 121–134.

⁶¹ Giuseppe Boffa, "Sulla sicurezza dialogo pan-europeo," *Rinascita* 24, no. 15 (aprile 1967): 3–4.

Europe to better control it. For *Rinascita*, this discourse on 'pan-European dialogue' represented the latest ideological mutation of the same imperial logic that had underpinned the CCF. Boffa's article redefined the scandal as a symptom of a deep structural geopolitical dependence. In his reading, the CCF becomes the visible surface of a vast machine of cultural control. As the author wrote, 'the instruments may change, but the melody remains American'. His critique anticipated subsequent Marxist analyses of cultural imperialism, linking intellectual disillusionment to the geopolitical reaffirmation of American leadership over the West. Both Pavolini and Boffa, apart from adopting different arguments to condemn so-called 'bourgeois hypocrisy', claimed that communist ideology was intellectually honest. Where *Tempo Presente* had extolled individual freedom, *Rinascita* called for ideological clarity. In this case, the ideology affirmed by *Rinascita* was that of class struggle, presenting itself as the guardian of cultural authenticity in an Italy riven by deep political divisions.

While Pavolini and Boffa used the CCF scandal to expose the obvious contradictions of supposed liberal autonomy. Italian communist intellectuals interpreted this crisis through the lens of events unfolding in Eastern Europe, the main one among them the Prague Spring. However, their interpretation of this phenomenon was profoundly different from that of Czechoslovak reformist intellectuals. The Italian communists did not face the threat of Soviet repression and always operated within the protection of a democratic state where the only real threat came from the conservative establishment and its alliance with the Catholic Church. For this reason, the comparison with the communists in Prague became not so much a political model of reference as a moral and ideological mirror. For the Italian left, the reformers in Prague embodied the possibility and dream of a socialism capable of facing internal criticism with transparency and a spirit of innovation. These were the same values that the intellectuals of *Rinascita* defended and which they believed distinguished them from their liberal counterparts compromised by the CCF scandal. The events in Prague were not interpreted by the Italian communists as a revolt against Moscow but as confirmation that the values of true socialism contained the tools for self-correction and political transparency. This interpretation allowed Italian communists to appropriate the Prague Spring rhetorically while distancing themselves from its anti-Soviet implications. In this way, the events in Prague became part of an effort by Italian communist intellectuals to redefine the political rhetoric on autonomy after 1967. Where *Tempo Presente* had insisted on the importance and centrality of the autonomy of consciences and individuals, *Rinascita* reaffirmed the centrality of intellectual transparency. The moral courage of Czech intellectuals facing internal corruption was presented as analogous to the courage Italian communists claimed in denouncing Western hypocrisy. By framing the Prague Spring as a struggle

for transparency rather than political rebellion, *Rinascita* could connect the CCF scandal to a broader European crisis of legitimacy while affirming its own identity as a party committed to ethical renewal.

In this sense, Prague became part of the Italian communists' effort to redefine autonomy after 1967. Where *Tempo Presente* had grounded autonomy in the independence of individual conscience, *Rinascita* grounded it in ideological sincerity and collective responsibility. The moral courage of Czech intellectuals facing internal corruption was presented as analogous to the courage Italian communists claimed in denouncing Western hypocrisy. By framing the Prague Spring as a struggle for transparency rather than political rebellion, *Rinascita* could connect the CCF scandal to a broader European crisis of legitimacy while affirming its own identity as a party committed to ethical renewal.

Two short but symbolically powerful articles published that year, Giovanni Giudici's *Note da Praga* (Notes from Prague, April 1967) and Luciano Gruppi's *La chiesa e il Marxismo*⁶² (The Church and Marxism, June 1967), clearly express this shift from denunciation to the reconstruction of meaning of the Italian communists. Giudici's reflections, which analysed the situation of Prague's intellectuals, capable of regaining moral authority through their ideological sincerity, contrasted with *Tempo Presente's* loss of credibility. Their courage in denouncing corruption even within socialism offered strong credibility. With Giudici's article⁶³, *Rinascita* demonstrated its desire to present itself as a new centre of intellectual autonomy but redefined in Marxist terms. In their conception, autonomy no longer consisted in detachment from political structures but rather in the awareness of being part of them and maintaining one's ideological honesty. Socialism had to demonstrate its purity through critical transparency.⁶⁴

Two months after Giudici's article, Luciano Gruppi published *La Chiesa e il Marxismo* (The Church and Marxism), a deeply philosophical article. Gruppi believed it was necessary to overcome political intolerance, which had almost 'sectarian' traits, and to initiate a genuine dialogue with the Catholic world (which the author considered to be strongly connected to the liberal world, in the Italian case). The dialogue was to build the basis not for alliances or agreements but rather for an ethical and moral recognition of one's adversary and of common concerns. His article referred to a 1967 encyclical by Paul VI denouncing the inequalities and failures of capitalism in the world. Instead of reading it yet another act of bourgeois reformism, Gruppi read it as a demonstration that there could be points of contact between Christian and Marxist humanism. This interpretation, particularly in conjunction

⁶² Luciano Gruppi, "La Chiesa, il marxismo, il dialogo," *Rinascita* 24, no. 26 (giugno 1967): 13–14.

⁶³ Giovanni Giudici, "Note da Praga," *Rinascita* 24, no. 16 (aprile 1967): 28.

⁶⁴ Giovanni Giudici, "Note da Praga," *Rinascita* 24, no. 16 (aprile 1967): 28.

Luciano Gruppi, "La Chiesa, il marxismo, il dialogo," *Rinascita* 24, no. 26 (giugno 1967): 13–14.

with the CCF scandal, can be considered a gesture of considerable significance. Gruppi called for the construction of a new terrain of shared responsibility and presented a new possible dialogue between Christianity and Marxism as a new attempt at dialogue and a new form of intellectual autonomy. He wrote: ‘recognising the other as a moral subject, even when one does not share their faith’. His language recalled the rhetoric of conscience used by Silone and Chiaromonte in *Tempo Presente*. But while the liberal editors sought an autonomous moral space detached from ideology, Gruppi placed autonomy in the act of encounter between opposing ideologies. In this way, *Rinascita* contributed to enriching the intellectual discourse on autonomy by seeking to revive a Marxist idea of class struggle but enriching it with an Italian and European humanist interpretation based on the concept of dialogue and ethics. *Rinascita* sought to contribute to what can be defined as a humanist turn in Italian communism, seeking through articles such as those by Giudici and Gruppi to offer Italian and European readers an image of socialism as the heir to the European tradition. Their writings would be followed by the debates of the 1970s, which saw Enrico Berlinguer's PCI (Italian Communist Party) as the protagonist, a movement that presented itself as a moral force for renewal in a Europe that was a battleground between superpowers. In this sense, *Rinascita*'s reaction to the CCF scandal was not merely defensive but marked the beginning of an ideological realignment that aimed to occupy the moral ground abandoned by liberalism.⁶⁵ Now it was communism that set out to defend 'freedom of thought' against manipulation. However, there was a paradox in this apparent triumph. The moral purity that Gruppi and Giudici spoke of was fundamentally premised on freedom of expression, which was non-existent in the communist world. The Prague experiment, greatly admired by Giudici, would end a year later with the violent Soviet repression of dissidents. Thus, the concept of autonomy and dialogical encounter expressed by Gruppi demonstrated the same ideological fragility as its liberal counterpart.⁶⁶

The scandal of 1967 highlighted the ideological divide that split Cold War Europe. On one side were the liberal humanist thinkers of *Tempo Presente*, founded on the idea of independent freedom of conscience without political alignment, and on the other were the communist humanists of *Rinascita*, who insisted that truth could only emerge through ideological commitment and purity. Both ideas sought spaces of freedom in a world dominated by the power of superpowers, and both, in different ways, revealed the impossibility of this project. When *Tempo Presente* collapsed in the aftermath of the scandal, Pavolini and Boffa of *Rinascita* interpreted it as the moral unmasking of Western civilisation. But in denouncing this dependence, the communist magazine entered the same logical dimension as *Tempo Presente*, proposing a model of intellectual autonomy and ideological purity that

⁶⁵ Giovanni Giudici, “Note da Praga,” *Rinascita* 24, no. 16 (aprile 1967): 28.

⁶⁶ Luciano Gruppi, “La Chiesa, il marxismo, il dialogo,” *Rinascita* 24, no. 26 (giugno 1967): 13–14.

did not really exist, as would be demonstrated by the brutal repression of socialist dissent in Prague. In retrospect, *Rinascita's* reaction to the CCF scandal appears to be the mirror image of *Tempo Presente's* self-narrative. For Chiaromonte and Silone, it was a matter of personal conscience, while for Pavolini and Gruppi, it was a matter of collective responsibility. The problem is that both ideologies and political groups were, in different ways, part of a political and ideological ecosystem that prevented their real autonomy. *Tempo Presente* secretly received funds from the CIA, while *Rinascita*, albeit more transparently, was financed directly by the Italian Communist Party, which received funds from Moscow in a pro-Soviet capacity.⁶⁷

Both magazines, in different ways, revealed the impossibility of the autonomy project they were aiming for. The image of *Rinascita* appears to be the mirror image of *Tempo Presente*. Both magazines engaged in a narrative of intellectual autonomy through opposing concepts of ideology and morality. Each projected its ideal adversary onto the other: the liberal feared ideological subordination, the communist feared moral corruption. The result was a shared anxiety, the awareness that no intellectual space could truly be autonomous in the polarised cultural economy of the Cold War.

Conclusion

This study of the cultural Cold War, applied to the Italian intellectual micro-context, allows us to understand important factors. What emerges is not only a history of manipulation and control in the shadow of the superpowers, but also intellectual fragility. From the Congress for Cultural Freedom to *Tempo Presente* and *Rinascita*, the struggle for cultural hegemony in the Cold War was characterised by an important paradox: the more intellectuals sought to assert their independence, the more evident their dependence on power systems in the great geopolitical game between Russia and the United States became. What the CIA and the PCI shared, despite their ideological differences, was the idea that culture was a fundamental tool for asserting power and, consequently, an extension of military and political confrontation. Under the aegis of the CIA, the CCF did not limit itself to spreading propaganda but built a moral infrastructure that aimed, while leaving apparent spaces for autonomy, to influence the entire European intellectual debate in favour of American interests as well as the concepts of freedom and democracy according to the American model. By funding magazines such as *Tempo Presente*, the United States did not simply export doctrines, but the very conviction that freedom was not the absence of power, but its ethical refinement. *Tempo Presente* was certainly a local Italian expression of a broader American project. Silone and Chiaromonte, for their part, did not see themselves as American tools but as truly autonomous, rational intellectuals and guardians of

⁶⁷ Silvio Pons, *L'altra guerra fredda: Il PCI dal 1943 al 1991* (Torino: Einaudi, 2014), 143–150.

a long tradition of European thought hostile to totalitarianism and capitalist conformism, defending the individual against all forms of tyranny. Of course, the paradox of this ethic lay in its hidden dependence on American government funding. The discovery in 1967 that *Tempo Presente* had been financed through the CIA did not simply discredit its publishers but revealed the structural impossibility of moral autonomy in a world where every idea circulated through networks of influence. If *Tempo Presente* represented the shattering of the liberal illusion of independence, *Rinascita* embodied the shattering of communist coherence and morality. The so-called socialist values defended by the magazine would be shattered by the violence of Soviet political repression that crushed the Prague Spring. The comparison and study of *Rinascita* and *Tempo Presente* thus reveals similarities that are much deeper than their ideological differences. Both magazines attempted to preserve a space of truth and intellectual autonomy within the system of spheres of influence, and both failed. In the bipolar world, intellectual autonomy and transparency became a language of legitimisation. The collapse of the CCF network forced European intellectuals to confront the foundations of their discourse on the concept of freedom and laid bare the contradictions inherent in it. For a brief period, between 1967 and 1968, the debate on intellectual freedom became a more general reflection on power and how it is capable of shaping culture and knowledge according to its ultimate goals. The Italian case, with its intense intertwining of Catholic humanism, Marxist ethics and liberal dissent, condensed this global tension into a single cultural scene.

Both the cultural diplomacy promoted by the CIA and that promoted by the PCI operated according to a logic full of paradoxes, namely convincing others that they were autonomous without really being so, as well as denying that they were part of a power system while being part of it. The intellectuals trapped in this system, whether they were communists or liberals, were not naive but tried to carve out real spaces of autonomy without understanding that in the bipolar world, culture had become an extension of the geopolitical struggle. In this way, the scandal of 1967 did not mark the end of the illusion of intellectual autonomy but the revelation of its nature in that particular historical period. The end of *Tempo Presente* and the criticism of *Rinascita* are both part of this reflection, which led to the realisation that the only way for culture to critically reflect on its links with power was first and foremost to be aware of them. Thus, the history of Italian intellectuals during the Cold War and their links with the broader conflict between superpowers provides an important starting point for reflection on the limits of the concept of intellectual autonomy in the context of strategic conflict between powers. The good will of individual thinkers did not matter if it was framed and secretly driven by strategic intentions. Amidst the rubble of disillusionment, Chiaromonte, Silone, Giudici and Gruppi continued to hold on to a simple and stubborn idea: to try to think for themselves, even when everything around them was pushing in the opposite direction. To tell the truth, however

uncomfortable, even within the games of power. Theirs was not the end of autonomy but an attempt to preserve it despite the larger forces at work.

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