

JOURNAL OF INTERDISCIPLINARY HISTORY OF IDEAS



2017

Volume 6 Issue 11

Item 6

– Section 4: Reviews –

Book Reviews and Notices

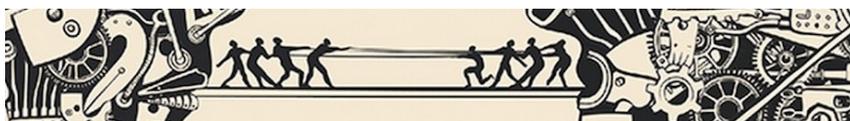
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Reviews of Kreps (ed.), Gramsci and Foucault: A Reassessment, Ashgate 2015, Routledge 2016; Zambelli, Alexandre Koyré in incognito, Olschki 2016.



1 DAVID KREPS (ED.), *Gramsci and Foucault: A Reassessment*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2015; then New York: Routledge, 2016, p. 210. ISBN 9781409460862, \$109.50.

The recent volume *Gramsci and Foucault: A Reassessment*, edited by David Kreps, addresses a crucial issue of recent leftist culture, namely the problematic cohabitation of Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault under one theoretical roof, and the merging of their perspectives. This encounter can be observed in the most varied fields, from the history of knowledge to subaltern studies and from medical history to political studies. In the introduction, Kreps mentions several studies dealing with this double legacy that are of particular interest for social and political studies, which is the main field of investigation for the contributions to the volume. A more comprehensive account and assessment of Gramsci and Foucault is still desirable, although it is too early to draw up a complete and exhaustive treatment of this twofold reception as it is still a process in the making.¹

¹ The merging of Gramscian and Foucauldian influences in leftist culture is too broad to be exhaustively dealt with here. I will limit myself to a few references. In intellectual history, Edward

This publication is in line with a recent trend, aptly termed the ‘The Gramscian Moment’ by Peter Thompson in the most up-to-date English treatment of Gramsci’s philosophy of the last decade.¹ The increasing attention devoted to Gramsci in academia is not affected by the general crisis of the left. As a matter of fact, Gramsci is one of the very few Marxist thinkers who have survived the turn of the Nineties and the end of the short twentieth century (1914-1991), to use Eric Hobsbawm’s periodization.² His concept of hegemony as a form of leadership co-opting subaltern groups without coercion, the attention he devoted to civil society as a space of political action escaping the direct control of institutional state politics, and his views of culture as a contested field, constitutive of historical emancipatory processes, are vigorously debated today. To be sure, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (1985) has strongly fostered this appropriation by bringing hegemony and Gramscian thought to the center of leftist political debates and movements.

Foucault has emerged as another major reference point of leftist culture after the ideological clashes of the Cold War era. One can say that Foucault has greatly benefited from an *allegedly* post-ideological turn, as he is often perceived as a critical thinker offering adequate *non-Marxist*—perhaps, *post-*

Said drew heavily on Gramsci in his classic study on the geo-politics of the making of scientific disciplines, *Orientalism* (1978), but also proposed a rather Foucauldian reading of Gramsci, whom he saw as an outlier ‘telling truth to power,’ in his *Reith Lectures*, delivered at BBC Radio, in 1993. See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00gmx4c/episodes/player> (accessed on August 5, 2016). Furthermore, K. Sivareamakrishnan deals with the presence of the originally Gramsci-inspired *subaltern studies* in the essay “Situating the Subaltern: History and Anthropology in the Subaltern Studies Project”, in *Journal of Historical Sociology* 8/4 (1995), p. 395-429. A similar shift from Gramscianism to Foucauldianism has been accomplished by scholars stemming from the British *New Left* in the history of science and medicine. For a reflection upon this issue, see my review-interview “The Critical Intellectual in the Age of Neoliberal Hegemony,” A discussion of Roger Cooter with Claudia Stein, *Writing History in the Age of Biomedicine* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), Review-Interview in *Journal for the Interdisciplinary History of Ideas* 4/7 (2015): p. 5:1-5:20.

¹ Peter Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment: Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

² Eric Hobsbawm most emphatically stressed the lasting legacy of Gramsci in *How to Change the World: Reflections on Marx and Marxism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2011). See in particular Chap. 13, “The Reception of Gramsci”, p. 334-343. For the periodization of the short twentieth century, the obvious reference is, by the same author, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century (1914-1991)* (London: Joseph, 1995).

Marxist—tools for a (non-reductionist, non-economicist) understanding of contemporary *disciplinary* society. His theory of governmentality, alongside an understanding of power as diffuse and the emergence of the self as a product of modern population control, normalization and biopolitics, has been seen as a break with the Marxist architectonic metaphor of *Basis* (base) and *Überbau* (superstructure) while pointing to knowledge (in particular medical knowledge) as a crucial element of societal structuring.

His view of power as all-pervasive calls for individual revolt or, better to say, *resistance* to power. However, the outcome of such opposition looks blind, or at least uncertain. Such a *deficit* of Foucauldian politics is stressed by several scholars contributing to the volume, for instance by Marcus Schutzke in a chapter on “Power and Resistance” (cf. p. 60): What is the *value* of resistance if it can only lead to another form of power that cannot be judged better or worse than the previous formation? Gramsci’s *humanistic* emphasis on the collective construction of (counter-)hegemony is more suited to ‘transformation’ rather than to resistance alone, as pointed out by Efe Can Gürcan and Onur Bakiner in Chapter Eight, “Post Neo-Liberal Regional Integration” (p. 135).

The overall intention of the volume is to establish a Gramscian-Foucauldian theoretical foundation for useful approaches to socio-political studies. A criticism of disciplinary power, integrated by consideration of the constitution of historical collective subjectivities, should lead to “new patterns of emancipatory political agency,” as Stephan Gill names them in the Foreword (p. xiii-xiv). Kreps indicates the potential integration of micro-physics of power (Foucault) and of institutional politics at a macro-level (Gramsci) as a productive direction of inquiry, the outcome of which is still unclear and could take the form of either a *Gramscian Foucauldianism* or a *Foucauldian Gramscianism* (p. 1-2 and 5).

The contributors to this volume do not aim at an exhaustive theoretical comparison between the two authors. They rather zoom in on issues that are suited to compare these *maitres à penser* and apply their insights to special cases. As a result, the volume offers interesting—albeit scattered—conceptual clarifications and punctual assessments of the differences and convergences between the philosophy of praxis, on the one hand, and the archeological-genealogical approach, on the other. At once, the reader is offered a mosaic of heterogeneous studies, the minimum common denominator of which is the search for a theo-

retically grounded (new-)leftist perspective. One of the most challenging chapters from the viewpoint of theory is Alex Damirović, “The Politics of Truth”. The author addresses the issue of the relation between truth and power seeing as he views it as an issue about which both Foucault and Gramsci have something important to say. Both were engaged in a critique of the power of knowledge and its history and both saw knowledge as a crucial element in struggles for emancipation. Whereas Foucault’s approach could be better defined as an “ethics of truth”, Gramsci rather envisages a “politics of truth,” the former by focusing on the pair truth-power, the latter on science-ideology. Damirović illustrates through Foucault the political origin of the binding between *mots* and *choses* through discursive practices. Although Foucault encourages a struggle for a *new* ‘truth politics’, the inadequacy of his proposal lies in the lack of directionality (p. 16): “In the fight for truth [...] it is forgotten what is fought for”. In Damirović’s treatment, (a Foucauldianized) Gramsci comes to rescue the endeavor (p. 24): “Gramsci develops what we might—following Foucault—call a Politics of Truth of the subaltern aiming for the constitution of a new order of truth”. In another chapter, Schultzke synthesizes the essential difference between the two approaches as the distinction between an anti-humanistic project and a humanistic outlook (p. 63): whereas power is unintentional for the *structuralist* Foucault, it is linked to interests and intentions for the *philosopher of agency*, Gramsci. Notwithstanding these evident differences, Damirović emphasizes their shared concern for truth as something that not only floats on the surface of history but also determines collective phenomena. Hence, he acknowledges (in a note that is reminiscent of early-Lukácsian Marxism) that “consciousness and collective action are organically connected” (p. 26).

Chapter Nine, “The Hegemony of Psychology” by Heather Bruskell-Evans is particularly relevant to epistemology. The author raises the question of whether the implementation of psychological medical treatments for children in post-invasion Iraq can be seen as a means to Westernize Iraqi society, although such a project is not intentionally embraced by the scientists and physicians involved. As she argues, this process can be read both through Gramscian lenses as well as through Foucauldian, either as the implementation of US American cultural hegemony or as the expansion of US domestic governance. However, the legitimate criticism of science in its link to power (in either perspective) should be circumscribed to a criticism of science in *its link to capitalism and its*

values (p. 168). Hence, she suggests that progressive Iraqi intellectuals should strive toward a transformation of science and its values as part of a wider political-cultural struggle.

In Chapter Six, “Subalternity In and Out of Time,” Sonita Sarker reflects on the hegemonic relations inscribed in multiple narratives of time and history by drawing upon subaltern studies. The exclusion from *history* of subaltern classes, deemed to be trapped in (cyclical, ahistorical, natural) *time*—or fragmented *histories* only sporadically emerging to the surface of history - mirrors patterns of marginalization and exclusion. The exclusion from history makes a discursive pair with the ambiguous inclusion/exclusion from statehood enacted upon the (Gramscian) *subalterns* or, which is the same, upon the (Foucauldian) *subjugated*. Subalterns are here defined, following Gayatri C. Spivak’s definition, as those occupying “a position without identity” (p. 92). The appropriation of history is a key element of the struggle towards the empowerment of the subalterns within “a dialectic of identity and position” (p. 92). While Gramsci helps Sarker to conceive of hegemonic relations as inscribed in historical narratives, the added value brought by Foucault to such an approach rests in an explicit reflection on the *constructed nature* of dominant history—a reflection which she sees as marking “the shift from modernity to postmodernity (p. 99).

I would like to briefly recount two case studies from the volume. In “Passive Revolution of Spiritual Politics,” Jelle Versieren and Brecht de Smet deal with the Iranian Revolution and its consequences, which they regard as a historical case in which Islam served as an *articulation of modernization*. In their argument, the authors resort to the Gramscian concept of “passive revolution”. The comparative case is modern Italy, where the bourgeoisie was unable to create a society permeated by its values, as happened in France through the revolution, and thus compensated its insufficient hegemony through alliances with other social classes and the support of their ideologies. In this manner, it negotiated and gradually introduced *modernizations* that would foster its corporate interests. *Pace* Foucault, who welcomed the Iran revolution as a non-Western way to do politics escaping Marxist analysis, it is here argued that *orientalist blindness* made him neglect the fact that the Iran revolution was a “deeply modernist” phenomenon (p. 123). Religious elites were the *passive revolutionary* agents of modernization, as they used modernization as a means to preserve their power while making concessions to the economic interests of other groups. As the

authors explain: “The passive revolution, by separating the leadership of allied and opposing classes from their organic base, deprives these social groups of their own political instrument and creates an obstacle of their constitution as autonomous classes” (p. 126).

Chapter Eight, on “Post Neo-Liberal Regional Integration” deals with another intriguing case study. The Gramscian (rather than Foucauldian) concept of hegemony is used to address the globalization *from below* of ALBA (*Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América*), a project of interregional integration of Latin American countries launched by Cuba and Venezuela in 2004. This is seen as a counter-hegemonic project running against “efficiency-driven market integration projects” (p. 121). By fostering the participation of institutions from civil society in the process, e.g. trade unions, and financing educational and welfare projects, ALBA should escape the pitfalls of integration processes decided and imposed *from above* and the resulting *deficit of democracy*, as has lamentably been the case with the history of the European Union. ALBA embodies at once an alternative model of economic growth, based on solidarity and economic support contrary to the policies of World Bank and International Monetary Fund (p. 143), and a counter-hegemonic cultural project. The last aspect is most clearly evidenced by the creation of a Latin-American TV, *Telesur*, contrasting the communication monopoly of northern broadcasters.

In the concluding chapter, Kreps considers whether the Gramsci-Foucault interface could constitute the basis for a new approach to social studies which would escape reductionism. He sees an opportunity to develop this paradigm in a *complexity turn*. This is an approach to socio-political phenomena that looks at such processes as having emerging properties that cannot be explained by the reduction to their parts. Although this approach might be reconcilable with a revised (Foucauldian?) *structuralist* study of society, it seems rather unlikely that this could be suited to Gramsci’s *humanism*, where the accent is rather set on collective agency. Kreps derives the concept of ‘complexity’ (as opposed to mechanical ‘complicacy’) from environmental biology. Again, such a (tendentially positivist and depersonalizing) paradigm does not suit Gramsci’s criticism of scientism as alienating historical agents from their capacity to shape history and their world. Kreps’ proposal of a Gramscian-Foucauldian path to complexity is not articulated in detail and its value rests more in the questions it raises than the answers it sketches out.

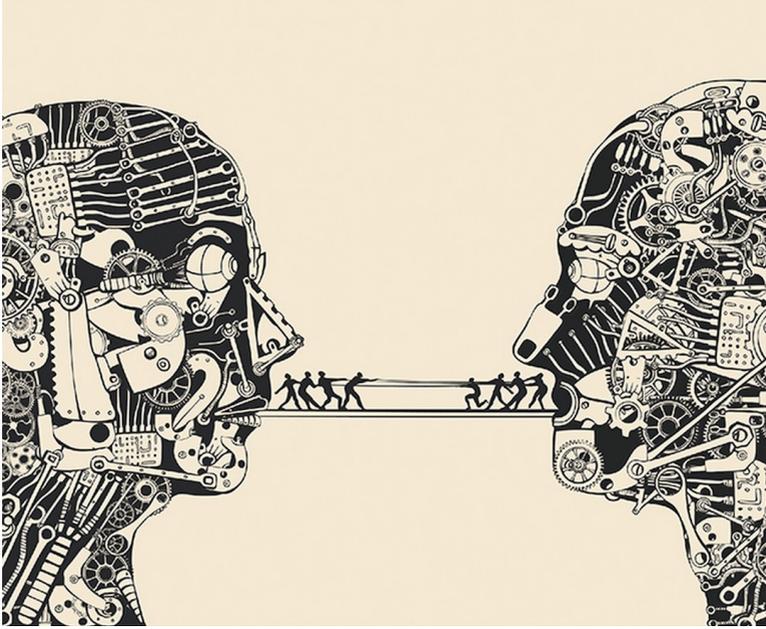
It is to be expected that more works inspired by Gramsci and Foucault in social, political, cultural and intellectual studies will really lead to a richer shared discourse oriented to the future. But this cannot happen within the isolation of a scientific ivory tower. As is amply shown by this volume, Gramsci and Foucault already constitute two points of reference for critical thought and social movements. However, connecting the elements that emerge from both thinkers is still an endeavor that is tentatively pursued. One should openly acknowledge that deep and enduring political-cultural transformations cannot be expected from academic exercises. Nor can a political legacy be reactivated in isolation from society. As Gramsci argued, no revolution of thought can possibly be separated from societal change, since “ideologies do not generate ideologies”. Rather, it is “history, revolutionary activity, that generates the *new humanity*, that is, new social relations” (*Prison Notebook* 6, 733). To be sure, this volume is symptomatic of a shared concern among engaged scholars for the renewal of leftist culture. It sends an important signal: that closer connections should be established between academic culture and society. In the light of future developments it will be possible to fully assess the validity of today’s manifold pursuit of a novel alliance between theory and praxis.

Pietro Daniel Omodeo



2 PAOLA ZAMBELLI, *Alexandre Koyré in incognito*, Firenze: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 2016, p. 288. ISBN 9788822264497, €32.00.

Aleksandr Vladimirovič Kojre, widely known as Alexandre Koyré (1892-1964), is mainly identified as an important scholar in the field of history of science and history of philosophy and as a historian who dealt with classical authors like Descartes, Galilei, Newton but also Anselm, Böhme, Paracelsus and early modern alchemists. He is also known as a disciple of Husserl and Scheler and he



Detail from the cover of Kreps (ed.), Gramsci and Foucault: A Reassessment.