

ROUTLEDGE RESEARCH IN CULTURAL
AND MEDIA STUDIES

Reviving Gramsci

Crisis, Communication, and Change

Marco Briziarelli and Susana Martínez Guillem



Reviving Gramsci

Engaging debates within cultural studies, media and communication studies, and critical theory, this book addresses whether Gramscian thought continues to be relevant for social and cultural analysis, in particular when examining times of crisis. The book is motivated by two intertwined but distinct purposes: first, to show the privileged and fruitful link between a Gramscian theory of communication and a communicative theory of Gramsci; second, to explore the ways in which such an “integral” perspective can help us interpret and explain different forms of political activism in the twenty-first century, such as Occupy Wall Street in the US, Indignados and Podemos in Spain, or Movimento Cinque Stelle in Italy.

Marco Briziarelli is an Assistant Professor in the department of Communication and Journalism, at the University of New Mexico, USA. He is interested in critical approaches to media and communication, digital labor, and social movements. His work has appeared in *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, and *Triple C*.

Susana Martínez Guillem is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication & Journalism at the University of New Mexico, USA. Her research interests are in critical discourse studies and cultural studies. Her work has appeared in several internationally recognized journals, including *Critical Studies in Media Communication* and *European Journal of Cultural Studies*.

Routledge Research in Cultural and Media Studies

For a full list of titles in this series, please visit www.routledge.com.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 52 Barthes' <i>Mythologies</i> Today
Readings of Contemporary Culture
<i>Edited by Pete Bennett and Julian McDougall</i> | 59 Transgender Experience
Place, Ethnicity, and Visibility
<i>Edited by Chantal Zabus and David Coad</i> |
| 53 Beauty, Violence, Representation
<i>Edited by Lisa A. Dickson and Maryna Romanets</i> | 60 Radio's Digital Dilemma
Broadcasting in the Twenty-First Century
<i>John Nathan Anderson</i> |
| 54 Public Media Management for the Twenty-First Century
Creativity, Innovation, and Interaction
<i>Edited by Michał Głowacki and Lizzie Jackson</i> | 61 Documentary's Awkward Turn
Cringe Comedy and Media Spectatorship
<i>Jason Middleton</i> |
| 55 Transnational Horror Across Visual Media
Fragmented Bodies
<i>Edited by Dana Och and Kirsten Strayer</i> | 62 Serialization in Popular Culture
<i>Edited by Rob Allen and Thijs van den Berg</i> |
| 56 International Perspectives on Chicana/o Studies
"This World Is My Place"
<i>Edited by Catherine Leen and Niamh Thornton</i> | 63 Gender and Humor
Interdisciplinary and International Perspectives
<i>Edited by Delia Chiaro and Raffaella Baccolini</i> |
| 57 Comics and the Senses
A Multisensory Approach to Comics and Graphic Novels
<i>Ian Hague</i> | 64 Studies of Video Practices
Video at Work
<i>Edited by Mathias Broth, Eric Laurier, and Lorenza Mondada</i> |
| 58 Popular Culture in Africa
The Episteme of the Everyday
<i>Edited by Stephanie Newell and Onookome Okome</i> | 65 The Memory of Sound
Preserving the Sonic Past
<i>Seán Street</i> |
| | 66 American Representations of Post-Communism
Television, Travel Sites, and Post-Cold War Narratives
<i>Andaluna Borcila</i> |

- 67 **Media and the Ecological Crisis**
*Edited by Richard Maxwell,
Jon Raundalen, and Nina
Lager Vestberg*
- 68 **Representing Multiculturalism
in Comics and Graphic Novels**
*Edited by Carolene Ayaka and
Ian Hague*
- 69 **Media Independence**
Working with Freedom or
Working for Free?
*Edited by James Bennett and
Niki Strange*
- 70 **Neuroscience and Media**
New Understandings and
Representations
Edited by Michael Grabowski
- 71 **American Media and the
Memory of World War II**
Debra Ramsay
- 72 **International Perspectives on
Shojo and Shojo Manga**
The Influence of Girl Culture
Edited by Masami Toku
- 73 **The Borders of Subculture**
Resistance and the
Mainstream
*Edited by Alexander Dhoest,
Steven Malliet, Barbara Segaert,
and Jacques Haers*
- 74 **Media Education for a Digital
Generation**
*Edited by Julie Frechette and
Rob Williams*
- 75 **Spanish-Language Television in
the United States**
Fifty Years of Development
Kenton T. Wilkinson
- 76 **Embodied Metaphors in Film,
Television, and Video Games**
Cognitive Approaches
Edited by Kathrin Fahlenbrach
- 77 **Critical Animal and Media
Studies**
Communication for Nonhuman
Animal Advocacy
*Edited by Núria Almiron,
Matthew Cole, and Carrie P.
Freeman*
- 78 **The Middle Class in
Emerging Societies**
Consumers, Lifestyles
and Markets
*Edited by Leslie L. Marsh
and Hongmei Li*
- 79 **A Cultural Approach to
Emotional Disorders**
Psychological and Aesthetic
Interpretations
E. Deidre Pribram
- 80 **Biopolitical Media**
Catastrophe, Immunity
and Bare Life
Allen Meek
- 81 **The Emotional Life of
Postmodern Film**
Affect Theory's Other
Pansy Duncan
- 82 **Social Memory Technology**
Theory, Practice, Action
*Karen Worcman and Joanne
Garde-Hansen*
- 83 **Reviving Gramsci**
Crisis, Communication,
and Change
*Marco Briziarelli and Susana
Martínez Guillem*

This page intentionally left blank

Reviving Gramsci

Crisis, Communication, and Change

Marco Briziarelli
and Susana Martínez Guillem

First published 2016
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

and by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2016 Taylor & Francis

The right of Marco Briziarelli and Susana Martínez Guillem to be identified as authors of this work has been asserted by them in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Briziarelli, Marco, author. | Martínez Guillem, Susana, 1976– author.
Title: Reviving Gramsci: crisis, communication, and change / by Marco Briziarelli and Susana Martínez Guillem.

Description: New York: Routledge, 2016. | Series: Routledge research in cultural and media studies; 83 | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2015040079

Subjects: LCSH: Gramsci, Antonio, 1891–1937. | Political science. | Sociology.

Classification: LCC JC265.G68 B75 2016 | DDC 320.53/2092—dc23

LC record available at <http://lcn.loc.gov/2015040079>

ISBN: 978-1-138-85444-4 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-72110-1 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon
by codeMantra

To our parents and our daughter, for helping us create and connect our pasts, presents, and futures.

Te convido a creerme cuando digo futuro.

Silvio Rodríguez

Occorre persuadere molta gente che anche lo studio è un mestiere, e molto faticoso, con un suo speciale tirocinio, oltre che intellettuale, anche muscolare-nervoso: è un processo di adattamento, è un abito acquisito con lo sforzo, la noia e anche la sofferenza.

Antonio Gramsci

Tu mi dirai: le cose sempre cambiano. «'O munno cagna.» È vero. Il mondo ha eterni, inesauribili cambiamenti. Ogni qualche millennio, però, succede la fine del mondo. E allora il cambiamento è, appunto, totale.

Pier Paolo Pasolini

the fight to give meaning to the words of one's own tradition and the fight to name things is probably the first autonomous act of the fight among ideas during the end of the twentieth century

Fernando Buey

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xi
1 Gramsci in/for Critical Times	1
2 Selective Gramsci(s)	18
3 Gramsci and Communication: Dialectics and Translation	37
4 Occupy Wall Street: The Limits of War of Position	60
5 Movimento Cinque Stelle: Dialectics of Passive Revolution	78
6 From Indignados to Podemos: Sublating Vernacular Rhetoric into National Popular Rhetoric	98
7 A Dialectical Image	120
<i>References</i>	141
<i>Index</i>	159

This page intentionally left blank

Acknowledgments

This project has haunted us for (too) many ups and downs during the last few years, and we suspect that, even though it is now formally ‘finished,’ it will continue to occupy our thoughts, conversations, and even dreams (nightmares?) for quite a long time. This is not because we wrote a particularly fascinating book, but because of the incredible amount of time, energy, and emotions that we put into it. Through all of this, we are grateful for the support and patience of those around us—including ourselves to each other—and hope to be able to offer the same kind of protecting net and encouraging shelter should they ever need one.

We are grateful to our editor at Routledge, Felisa, for giving us the opportunity to develop and publish this project. We also would like to thank our copy editor Christine Garcia, for your fine work. Portions of Chapter 4 appeared in Briziarelli, M. & Martínez Guillem, S. (2014). The Counter-hegemonic Spectacle of Occupy Wall Street: Integral State and Integral Struggle. *IC-Revista Científica de Información y Comunicación*, 11, pp. 145–166.

We thank those who have helped us think through the ideas exposed in this book, as well as balance our professional and personal lives in healthy ways. Our mentors, colleagues, and friends at (CU) Boulder: Andrew, Lisa, Pete, Janice, Megan, Jenn (Pep), Jorge, Carey, Leo, Jamie, Tobarish Olga, and Alyosha. Our UNM crew: compañera Ilia, Shinsuke, Myra, Tema, John, Karen, Stephen, Manel y Ana “marca España.” Our supporters back home(s): Marco’s Pattuglia Anitre silvatiche (Tafo, Mastro, Abu), Tommy, Crispo and Foyo, and Lorena.

We thank our families for the sacrifices that helped us get here, and for growing with us as we keep pushing our definition of “home.” We miss you. A especial mention goes also to Smuffo: thank you for keeping Marco’s legacy alive. ... To our daughter, Emma, for her amazing capability to patiently accompany us on this journey, and for inspiring us every day to be better people.

This page intentionally left blank

1 Gramsci in/for Critical Times

Gramsci Is Dead, or Is He?

Asking whether Gramsci's legacy is dead is not a stylistic move, but rather a legitimate inquiry. In our current context of crisis, and almost 80 years after his death, much of the social, political, and cultural ground that stood at the basis of Gramsci's considerations seems to have crumbled. The Russian revolution, the Communist party, the Fascist regime, even the revolutionary subject *par excellence*, the proletariat—understood as the industrial wage earner—have, in the context of Western capitalism, drastically changed its features.

Gramsci's most immediate political legacies, such as the Italian Communist party and its organ of information *l'Unità*, have also almost vanished. The Italian Communist party dissolved in 1991, after its leader, Achille Occhetto, declared the communist experience over, and today it only survives in fragmentary and increasingly weaker references in the political rhetoric of the Italian left. *L'Unità*, the Italian communist newspaper founded by Gramsci one year after Mussolini came to power, ceased its activities on July 31st of 2014 due to financial unviability. While the newspaper has been recently re-started, its transitory death confirmed to many commentators the end of an epoch in which *L'Unità* played as an intellectual referent for the left.¹

Nevertheless, at the academic level the question about Gramsci's relevance in contemporary times has triggered an important and lively debate. This debate can be synthesized into two recent publications whose titles eloquently reveal the distance of positions on this matter: on the one hand, in 2005, Richard Day published a book tellingly called *Gramsci is dead*, where he decries the “hegemony of hegemony” or the “assumption that effective social change can only be achieved simultaneously and *en masse*, across an entire national or supranational space” (p. 8). Joining the consistent body of literature—reviewed in more detail below—that advocates for a post-hegemonic framework of analysis as well as activism, Day claims that the anachronistic state-centered vision of Gramsci should be replaced by a post-anarchist and autonomist perspective, which more effectively acknowledges the heterogeneity and multilevel nature of contemporary struggles.

On the other hand, Peter Thomas (2010) argues in *The Gramscian moment* that Gramsci's thought should be revived for its substantial contributions to

2 Gramsci in/for Critical Times

contemporary philosophic and political questions. For Thomas, in order to recover the significance of Gramsci, we need to unpack what for many was just a euphemism for Marxism—the philosophy of praxis—as a theoretical and practical theory in its own right. This philosophy of praxis materializes in Gramsci's dialectics, absolute historicism, and immanentism. Thomas explains that these:

Can be considered as brief resumes for the elaboration of an autonomous research programme in Marxist philosophy today, as an intervention on the *Kampffplatz* of contemporary philosophy that attempts to inherit and to renew Marx's original critical and constructive gesture. (p. 448)

Day is representative of an important body of literature that, while recognizing the profound impact of Gramsci, evaluates his thought for its diminished capability to describe and understand the present, thus arguing, together with authors such as Beasley-Murray (2003, 2011), Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004), Lash (2007), Moreiras (2001), Thoburn (2007), Williams (2002), and Yúdice (1995), for the need to re-think 'Gramsci beyond Gramsci,' in a context of 'post-hegemony.' Conversely, Thomas is representative of a smaller strand of scholarship including authors such as Ives (2004) and Morton (2007) that aims at extracting from the complex Gramscian narrative a broader method of inquiry, rather than a historically constrained and specific content.

In this sense, while certainly recognizing the important task of historicizing Gramsci, we align with Thomas in claiming that, within the wealth of Gramsci's intellectual legacy, there is a critical method of inquiry and evaluation that is still remarkably valid. We see the continuous relevance of Gramsci particularly amplified in the context of the current all-encompassing Western crisis, as we consider him the Marxist theorizer of the dialectical outcomes of critical times. In fact, historicizing his thought, it is important to remember that one of the factors that contributed to the characteristics of his thinking—i.e., its intrinsically dialectic, fluid, and flexible aspects—derived from the object of his reflections: a social context profoundly marked by crisis, the tumultuous years after the end of World War II and the 1929 Great Depression.

We thus believe that the enormous intellectual effort of Gramsci, in trying to capture the contradictory and complex phenomena produced by the crisis of those years, and the significant parallelisms of that crisis with the present one in the West, provides us with powerful tools to understand and evaluate current critical circumstances. We also think that the level of analysis proposed by Gramsci allows us to counter the call for a post-Gramscian framework. This call is pushed by arguments about the transition from a Fordist to a post-Fordist mode of production, as well as about the process of de-territorialization and de-centralization of national-states under the current pressure of globalization.²

It is in this context that the present study must be situated. Our book examines the communicative aspects of several contemporary episodes of social mobilization in the West, in critical times—Occupy Wall Street (OWS) in the United States, Movimento Cinque Stelle (M5S) in Italy, and Indignados/Podemos in Spain—through a Gramscian lens in order to demonstrate the continuous relevance of a Gramscian framework, as well as its privileged relation with communication. The project engages with the following fundamental questions: what are the conditions that (do not) allow for social mobilization and its specific communicative strategies to develop? How do these same conditions influence the extent to which these practices are successful? What is the relationship between a particular movement's objectives and its participants' rhetorical means to achieve such goals? How can particularistic and individualistic economic interests be translated into a collective and ethical-political project? How does the tension between progressive and regressive interests and practices both produce and constrain social movements?

More concretely, in relation to the existent body of scholarship that in critical and cultural approaches to communication has dealt with Gramsci's body of work, in this book we advance two main perspectives: first, a 'positive' idea of hegemony beyond its most prevalent conceptualization as a modern theory of oppressive power—a prevalence that is certainly significant in communication literature, as we discuss later in this chapter. From our reading of Gramsci, hegemony can be constructively embraced as a concrete and practical evaluation of the historical conditions that allow for a given group to shape a particular social order.

Second, as will become more clear throughout our three case studies in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, a practical approach that advances the revolutionary doctrine of the united front—intended as an interclass alliance against the ruling class—invites the examination of the whole spectrum of social actors that can be mobilized for social change. Thus, as the three experiences we study here demonstrate, the potential for social mobilization for change comes from not only the most marginalized sites in civil society, but also from actors that have a more direct experience with privilege, as they operated closer to the 'center' before the economic crisis began in 2008.

Altogether, we use the three social movements analyzed in this book to constructively historicize Gramsci. Thus, while not necessarily following the same venues indicated by Thomas, we agree with him on the crucial relevance of Gramsci in the current circumstances, and we have tried with this book to complement his monumental theoretical work with an empirical engagement of concrete social phenomena. In this sense, we offer an operationalization of Gramscian tools for the understanding and evaluation of three influential social movements in three different Western countries. However, as we explain in more detail below, our own detection of a "Gramscian moment" is historically determinate as it is linked to the idea of an organic crisis.

Social Change in Critical Times

In the summer of 1989, Fukuyama's (in)famous article, "The end of history," argued that human socio-cultural development had reached an end point, the final stage that would lead to the universalization of liberal democracy. His essay spelled out the capability of capitalism to ideologically reduce history to a category of nature, thus creating the myth of its eternal presence by "treat[ing] labor and the division of labor as human *natural* force in general, ahistorically linking the latter to capital and rent" (Mészáros, 2011, p. 277).

However, despite the powerful neoliberal rhetoric of T.I.N.A. (i.e., There Is No Alternative) and its reification power, capitalism can still find moments of demystification. One of those occasions has been recently provided by the Western financial/economic crisis that started in 2008 and the shrinking of life chances for a wide segment of the middle class that followed it (Marshall, 2010). In this context, current economic interests are pushing (not only particular groups—some of them relatively integrated until recently—but also entire nations) toward a peripheral, precarious status where painstakingly won rights are no longer guaranteed.

When seen from a broader point of view—as Gramsci did—a crisis represents a complex phenomenon with contradictory outcomes. In fact, in this book, our treatment of crisis parallels Schumpeter's (1992) treatment of capitalism, i.e., we understand it as an ambivalent phenomenon that creates by destroying and destroys by creating. Thus, in the current dramatic scenario, it is important to point out that not everything has been loss and devastation; rather, loss and devastation have not affected all segments of the implicated economies equally. As the etymological origin of the word "crisis" reminds us—from the ancient Greek κρίσις: a turning point, an unstable situation—destruction is intrinsically linked to production.

Certainly, one constructive element of the crisis is its capacity to estrange people. Thus, if capitalism achieves its own hegemony by transforming "history" into "nature," an alleged crisis of hegemony has the potential to denaturalize the class-driven interests that move capitalism by producing painfully concrete contradictions in society. An especially telling example of this dialectical process is provided by the role that rating agencies such as Moody's, Fitch, or Standard and Poor have played—and continue to play—in the current economic turmoil. Thus, as suggested by the Italian government in a fairly recent initiative to file a law suit against them (Onado, 2012), these agencies may have disseminated false figures and information in order to manipulate the financial markets, thus producing gains for their shareholders at the expense of the most vulnerable nations—which have in turn placed the burden of the crisis on increasingly wider sectors of their populations.

The concurrence of both reproductive and transformative elements in the current crisis has thus shown the dialectical nature of such processes.

Hence, while the destructive forces of capitalism impoverished most people, fund managers and financial brokers have still found spectacular ways to accumulate financial capital. In other words, and to borrow Marx's account, "the violent destruction of capital" took place "not by relations external to it, but rather as a condition of its self-preservation" (1993, p. 750).

In this context, a particularly interesting product of the crisis of capitalism is the wave of protest movements that demanded radical change. In the European context, the recent assistance conceded by the 'Troika' (the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund) to countries such as Greece, Ireland, Portugal, and Spain derived into a series of imposed "austerity measures" in these nations that have seriously damaged their welfare states, impoverished vast segments of their populations, and dramatically raised unemployment rates (Robinson, 2013).

As the ethically charged term implies, austerity characterizes a condition marked by severity and frugality, which, in the case of the many countries on which the measures were applied, implied the cast of strict moral judgment on allegedly irresponsible financing, extravagance, or lack of work ethic—ultimately suggesting that people were responsible for their own predicament (Krugman, 2015). In the US, even though the recession officially ended in 2009, the average household income has continued to decrease, thus exacerbating the social distance between the economic elite and the rest of the population (Chossudovsky & Marshall, 2010). In this sense, the three political projects examined in this book represent a historical product of the crisis, based on the explicit rejection of either anti-austerity measures or a series of economic policies that accentuate an already highly stratified society.

In the European context, what was presented as a cure for allegedly reckless spending has been so plagued by its contradictory outcomes that different patients/countries are starting to see it as the "cause" for their misery. In fact, so far austerity has only created a condition for more "punishment" (more austerity) because the rigorous impositions on a struggling economy have frequently suppressed the internal demand, hindering companies' willingness to invest and encouraging households to save instead of spend—a propensity that ultimately shirks the demand even further. Finally, as the economy contracts, government revenues decline, and public debt increases, *de facto* calling for more austerity by forcing further public-spending cuts.

According to Markantonatou (2013) the social cost of the crisis and its accompanying policies has systematically been: a constant drop in the affected countries' GDP, the shrinking of domestic demands, loss of jobs, dramatic increase of youth unemployment, aggravation of working conditions due to the loss of workers' rights under processes of "flexibilization" of work, marked impoverishment of the most precarious social strata, and last, but definitively not least, a dramatic increase in suicides. Especially in countries such as Italy and Spain, where the state has historically been