
“The Gramsci Discourse” at University of California, Santa Cruz

Earlier this year Professors Tyrus Miller and Deanna Shemek at the University of California, Santa Cruz taught a twenty-week course on Gramsci, entitled “The Gramsci Discourse.” The course covered Gramsci’s primary writings, as well as topics on Italian history, literature, and film. Professors Miller and Shemek divided the course between two academic quarters. The first quarter began in January 2005, and the second quarter began in April. In the second part of the course, Professors Miller and Shemek included a two day conference on Gramsci, in which they invited speakers from UC Santa Cruz as well as speakers from outside the university to present papers on Gramsci’s life, work, and influence. The conference was sponsored by Cowell College and Stevenson College at UC Santa Cruz and open to the public. Professors Miller and Shemek consciously made the conference accessible to both graduate and undergraduate students. The papers from the conference covered a wide range of topics, with several papers incorporating close readings of Gramsci’s writings. Notably, Professor Angela Davis presented a paper that included a close and detailed reading of Gramsci’s prison letters.

Below we have included outlines from “The Gramsci Discourse” syllabus as well as a list of papers that were presented at the conference.

The Gramsci Discourse: Course Description

“Organic intellectual,” “the subaltern,” “hegemony”: Antonio Gramsci coined these and other terms that today serve as keywords within critical discourses in the humanities and social sciences. But Michel Foucault’s remark that Gramsci is an author more cited than read holds true. This seminar will offer participants a context in which to correct Foucault’s assertion through collaborative study of Gramsci’s writings and some of his key texts of reference. Main readings will be drawn from the Prison Notebooks of Gramsci, supplemented by some of his published pre-prison writings and by additional texts from relevant authors. Supplementary readings will include selections from Dante, Machiavelli, Marx, Lenin, Lukács, Croce, Gentile, Manzoni, Althusser, Marinetti, Pasolini, Hall, Laclau and Mouffe, Williams, Anderson, Jameson and others. In

connection with the seminar, we are also organizing a conference entitled The Gramsci Discourse, which will take place at UCSC in May of 2005.

Born to an impoverished family on the island of Sardinia in 1891, Gramsci left the south of Italy when he received a scholarship to study at the University of Turin. He was imprisoned for his leftist activism in 1926 by the fascist regime. Gramsci struggled for ten years in the face of isolation, censorship, lack of reference materials, lack of current news, harsh physical conditions, and illness. He nonetheless produced a large body of clandestine theoretical writings on a vast range of topics, from Italian intellectual and social history to reflections on the state, party organization and function, education, the relation of North and South in Italy, Marxism, the sociology of knowledge, literature, the arts, and philosophy. These writings – his prison notebooks – were saved and held in secret following Gramsci's death in prison in 1937, then published in the two decades following the end of World War II. Each generation since then, one might legitimately say, has invented its own Gramsci by selection from his rich body of work.

Gramsci's writings have thus been productive in ways similar to those of Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche, whom Foucault identified as "founders of discourses." In the *Prison Notebooks* resides such a "Gramscian discourse," a framework of concepts and terminology that has now been revisited by several successive generations, each time inspiring novel conceptions of political action, organization, and culture. Our seminar is designed to consider how such revisitation and innovation continue today, and how they might be projected into the future. Our route to the present state of things, however, will be through a rigorous reading of the notebooks in the context of Gramsci's own historical, political, and cultural concerns.

The Gramsci Discourse: Part I

Texts:

1. Althusser, Louis. *Machiavelli and Us*. Trans. Gregory Elliot. Ed. François Matheron. New York: Verso, 1999.
2. Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Cultural Writings*. Trans. W. Boelhower. Ed. David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1985.
3. ——. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Trans. and ed. Quintin Hoare and G. N. Smith. New York: International Publishers, 1971.
4. ——. *Pre-Prison Writings*. Trans. Virginia Cox. Ed. Richard Bellamy. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994.
5. Machiavelli, Niccolò. *The Prince*. Trans. and ed. William Connell. Bedford.

6. Manzoni, Alessandro. *The Betrothed*. Trans. Bruce Penman. London: Penguin, 1972.
7. Morante, Elsa. *History. A Novel*. Trans. William Weaver.
8. Course Reader. Available at Baytree (UCSC Campus) Bookstore.

Course Schedule by Week

1. Introduction. Biography. Keywords. Historical Survey from the Risorgimento to Eurocommunism.
2. **Topic 1: History and Individual Resistance.**
Readings. In *Pre-Prison Writings*: “Socialism and Culture”; “History”; “Critical Criticism”; “Class Intransigence and Italian History.”
 Elsa Morante, *History. A Novel*.
 In Course Reader: Richard Bernstein (from *Praxis and Action*), “Marx and the Hegelian Background.”
3. **Readings.** Continue Morante.
 Selections from Gramsci on Philosophy of Praxis in *Selections from Prison Notebooks*.
 In Course Reader: Georg Lukács (from *The Historical Novel*), “The Historical Novel of Democratic Humanism”
4. **Topic 2: The Modern Prince as Historical Activist.**
Readings. From *Selections from Prison Notebooks*: “The Modern Prince.”
 Machiavelli, *The Prince*.
5. **Readings.** Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*.
 From Course Reader: Hankins, “Humanism and the Origins of Modern Political Thought”; J. G. A. Pocock, (from *The Machiavellian Moment*), “The Medicean Restoration: Machiavelli’s *Il Principe*”;
6. **Topic 3: Gramsci on War and Revolution.**
Readings. In *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*: “State and Civil Society.”
 From Course Reader: Machiavelli, *Art of War*, Book 7; Karl von Clausewitz, (from *On War*) “What is War?”; Anne Showstack Sassoon (from *Gramsci’s Politics*), “The War of Position”; “Passive Revolution”; “Party as the Decisive Element.”
7. **Film Screening:** Luchino Visconti, *Senso*.
 In *Selections from Prison Notebooks*: “Notes on Italian History.” In Course Reader: Perry Anderson, (from *English Questions*), “The Notion of Bourgeois Revolution.”
8. **Topic 4: Literature and National Life**
Readings. *Selections from Cultural Writings*: “Manzoni”; “Popular Literature. Content and Form”; “Concept of ‘National-Popular’”; Manzoni, *The Betrothed*, Ch. 1-18.
9. Manzoni, Ch. 19-38.
 In Course Reader: Fredric Jameson (from *The Political Unconscious*), “Magical Narratives.”
10. **Screening.** Giuseppe Verdi’s *MacBeth*.
 Readings. In *Selections from Cultural Writings*: “The Operatic Conception of Life”; “Popular Literature: Opera”; “Popular Literature: Operatic Taste.” In Course Reader, *Macbeth* libretto; Theodor W. Adorno (from *Sound Figures*), “Bourgeois Opera.”

The Gramsci Discourse: Part II

Texts:

1. Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Cultural Writings*. Trans. W. Boelhower. Ed. David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1985.
2. ——. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Trans. and ed. Quintin Hoare and G. N. Smith. New York: International Publishers, 1971.
3. ——. *Pre-Prison Writings*. Trans. Virginia Cox. Ed. Richard Bellamy. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994.
4. Lampedusa, Giuseppe Tommasi di. *The Leopard* (New York: Pantheon, 1991).
5. Stendhal, Henri. *The Charterhouse of Parma* (New York: Modern Library, 2000).
6. Verga, Giovanni. *The House by the Medlar Tree* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1984).
7. Course Reader available at Baytree Bookstore.
8. Selected texts on Electronic Reserves (ERes) McHenry Library

Course Schedule by Week

1. Topic 1: Intellectuals , Civil Society, and the State.

Readings. In *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, “Intellectuals.” On ERes: Pier Paolo Pasolini, “The Ashes of Gramsci”; poems from “Transhumanize and Organize.”

2. Topic 2: The Southern Question I.

Readings. In *Pre-Prison Writings*: “Some Aspects of the Southern Question”; Giovanni Verga, *The House by the Medlar Tree*.

Screening: Luchino Visconti, *La Terra Trema* [The Earth Trembles]

3. Intermezzo: Gramsci as Prisoner

Readings: Selected *Letters from Prison* (on E-Res)

4. The Southern Question II.

Giuseppe Tommasi di Lampedusa, *The Leopard*. Gramsci, “The Agrarian Struggle in Italy”; “The Peasants and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat”; “Workers and Peasants”(2); in *Pre-Prison Writings*: “The Historical Role of the Cities”; “The Mezzogiorno and Fascism”

5. Topic 3: Education and Humanism

Readings: Gramsci, “On Education” in *Selections from Prison Notebooks*; Giambattista Vico, Selections from *On Humanist Education* and from *The New Science*.

6. Topic 4: Language, National Culture, Modernity.

Readings. In *Selections from Cultural Writings*: “The Question of the Language and the Italian Intellectual Classes”; “Sources of Diffusion of Linguistic innovations in the Tradition and of a National Linguistic Conformism in the Broad National Masses”; “The So-Called Question of the Language”; A Single Language and Esperanto.” In Course Reader: Dante Alighieri, Selections from *De Vulgari eloquentia*; Pier Paolo Pasolini, Selected essays on language.

7. **Readings:** In *Selections from Cultural Writings*: “The Futurists”; “Marinetti the Revolutionary”; “A letter to Trotsky on Futurism;” in *Selections from Prison Notebooks*: “Americanism and Fordism”; In Course Reader: F. T. Marinetti, “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism”; “Destruction of Syntax---Imagination Without Strings---Words in Freedom”; “Electrical War”; “Futurist Synthesis of the War”; “Beyond Communism”; “Portrait of Mussolini.” Leon Trotsky (from *Literature and Revolution*), “Futurism.”

8. UCSC Conference: The Gramsci Discourse. Friday, May 20 and Saturday, May 21

9. Topic 5: Collective Identity and Individual Revolt.

Readings: Henri Stendhal, *The Charterhouse of Parma*. In *Selections from Cultural Writings*: “Cultural Themes: Rationalism”; and “Popular Literature.”

10. Film Screening. Bernardo Bertolucci, *Before the Revolution*.

Reading in Course Reader: Franco Fortini, “The Writer’s Mandate and the End of Antifascism.”

The Gramsci Discourse Conference

An interdisciplinary conference sponsored by Cowell College and Stevenson College, with special thanks to the Siegfried B. and Elisabeth Mignon Puknat Endowment

Friday, May 20

9:15-9:30: Deanna Shemek (UCSC), Greetings and Opening Remarks

Session 1: 9:30-11

Chair: Giulia Centineo (UCSC)

Marguerite Waller (UC Riverside), “Antonio Gramsci’s Southern Question and Ours”

Nelson Moe (Barnard College), “Geography, the Southern Question, and the Risorgimento”

Session 2: 11:30-1

Chair: Robert Meister (UCSC)

Eleonora Pasotti (UCSC), “Gramsci Revisited: Italian Politics in the 1990s”

Kate Crehan (College of Staten Island/Graduate Center CUNY), “Using Gramsci in the 21st Century: The Concept of Culture in New Labour Britain”

Session 3: Keynote Presentation: 2:30-4

Chair: Chris Connery (UCSC)

Joseph Buttigieg (U Notre Dame), “Gramsci’s ‘Unhoused Rebelliousness Against Systems’”

Session 4: 4:30-6

Chair: Dana Frank (UCSC)

Susan Gillman (UCSC), “Gramsci’s Relevance for American Studies”

Guillermo Delgado-P. (UCSC), “Crises of Authority, Hegemony, and the State: Notes on Latin America”

Saturday, May 21

Session 5: 9:30-11

Chair: Catherine Soussloff (UCSC)

George Lipsitz (UCSC), “Identity and the Struggle for Hegemony”

Dennis Looney (U Pittsburgh), “Freedom Readers and Southern Questioners: Dante, Gramsci, and African-American Emancipation”

Session 6: 11:30-1

Chair: Margaret Brose (UCSC)

Tyrus Miller (UCSC), “The Ashes of Civic Poetry: Pasolini and Philology After Gramsci”

Jason Jacobs (UCSC), “Soliciting Consent: Epic Poetry and Popular Performance in an Italian Song of Roland”

Session 7: Keynote Presentation: 2:30-4

Chair: James Clifford (UCSC)

Angela Davis (UCSC), “Prisoner Number 7047, Turi Penitentiary: Antonio Gramsci as Political Prisoner”