

BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

Christian Fleck, Andreas Hess, and E. Stina Lyon, eds., *Intellectuals and their Publics: Perspectives from the Social Sciences*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008, 282 pp. \$US 69.95 hardcover (978-0-7546-7540-2)

The neologism “intellectual” has been a repeated interest in academic work since its conception with Émile Zola’s “protest of the intellectuals” during France’s Dreyfus Affair in 1898. *Intellectuals and their Publics* represents yet another attempt to detail intellectuals’ relationship with the “public” they may serve. By focusing on a selection of mostly European “public intellectuals” and related issues of the last two hundred years the editors hope to “deepen our understanding of what intellectual engagement meant in the past and what it means today.” While the individual chapters serve this goal well, the entire work suffers from a few key weaknesses which hinder its utility. The compilation is best described as a broad-ranging and slightly ambiguous account of what it means to be a public intellectual in the social sciences.

The editors are clear to situate the work in the contemporary understanding of “intellectual” labour. This is done with the recognition that academic-public engagement, like most things in higher education, has gone through a number of changes throughout the 20th century. The introduction speaks to intellectuals of the “third type,” in which academics are spokespersons for nations, social movements and civic ideals rather than “simple” scientific experts or artistically minded radicals. While the editors note that intellectuals of this type are being subjected to an incredible number of new pressures since the 1980s, such as “funding targeting” and academic capitalism, the articles they have selected for the compilation do little to engage with this phenomenon. There is thus a discrepancy between the editor’s contextualization of the concept and the insights the text actually delivers.

The compilation is divided into three segments: provocations, complications and case studies. In “Public Intellectuals and Civil Society” Jeffrey Alexander argues that intellectuals are pivotal to the “civil repair” of modern society. Mary Evans answers the question, “Can women be intellectuals?” by reiterating already well-debated arguments about women’s intellectual status during and after the enlightenment. Joseba Zulaika closes the “Provocations” with an auto-ethnographic account of

an anthropologist's relationship with a society that produces terrorists, when that society is his or her own.

Beginning the "Complications" section, William Outhwaite looks at the possibility of an academic becoming a pan-European intellectual with a transnational public, while E. Stina Lyon provides a more systematic attempt to frame public intellectualship according to public, state, and civil society engagement. In "Public Intellectuals: East and West" Stefan Auer attempts to explain why intellectuals in Central and Eastern Europe provided more accurate judgements concerning social change than their Western counterparts, particularly with regards to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Union. Anson Rabinback's "Public Intellectuals and Totalitarianism: A Century's Debate" is more concerned with the general historiography of the term "totalitarianism" than analyzing public intellectualship.

The final seven chapters of the book contain case studies aimed at examining a public intellectual or an aspect of public engagement. In "Tocqueville as a Public Intellectual," John Torpey seems more preoccupied with the fact that Tocqueville does not have a better reception among contemporary sociologists than he does with detailing the scholar's particular brand of public engagement. The same is true for John Garvin and Andreas Hess's chapter on Gustave de Beaumont. Dirk Kaesler examines whether Max Weber's visit to the United States affected his work as an academic, and argues that the scholar had already made up his mind about the accuracy of the *Protestant Ethic* before he left Germany. Sefan Müller-Doohm attempts to arrive at a sociology of intellectual styles of thought by examining differences between Adorno and Habermas. After a brief examination of the work of each the author essentially argues that despite their dissimilarities the scholars shared an "agonal" form of critique directed at the public sphere, though this insight can by no means be generalized to all public intellectuals. Per Wiselgren examines "Women as Public Intellectuals" through a biographical analysis of the lives of Swedish scholars Kerstin Hesselgren and Alva Myrdal. The two most valuable contributions conclude the case studies. Laurent Jeanpierre and Sébastien Mosbah-Natanson examine how French intellectuals use popular newspapers to shape their identities as public academics. Werner Reichmann and Markus Schweiger compare the rise and fall of two different social science subfields in Germany and attempt to explain why one received more public attention and prestige than the other.

This broad selection could be better integrated. Some chapters do not take the concept of public intellectual as their main focus and each seems to have a different understanding of what a public intellectual is.

The relations of intellectuals and publics is contested, and while the majority of chapters serve as a “sturdy defence of the public intellectual,” most do so uncritically, without problematizing the more controversial aspects of what it means to be “publicly engaged” as an academic. It is an unfortunate consequence of the book’s European focus that there is little engagement with the polemical debates in North American sociology that arose from Michael Burawoy’s call for a “public sociology.” As Per Wisselgren acknowledges, “apparently, almost everyone seems to agree that public intellectual is a good thing to be....” Despite these weaknesses, and with the recognition that competing conceptions are part of its character, those chapters which take the notion of a “public intellectual” as their centre are valuable contributions, and the text can be considered substantial for them alone.

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