

THE GRAMSCI MONUMENT

NEWSPAPER

"A periodical, like a newspaper, a book, or any other medium of didactic expression that is aimed at a certain level of the reading or listening public, cannot satisfy everyone equally; not everyone will find it useful to the same degree. The important thing is that it serve as a stimulus for everyone; after all, no publication can replace the thinking mind."
Antonio Gramsci (Prison Notebook 8)

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GRAMSCI TODAY: ALIENATION AND SUBALTERNITY



LECTURE OF CHRISTINE BUCI-GLUCKSMANN ON SATURDAY, AUGUST 31

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Bronx, NY 10456
Sunday
Chance of Storm

84 °F | °C

Precipitation: 50%
Humidity: 75%
Wind: 13 mph

Temperature Precipitation Wind

12 AM	3 AM	6 AM	9 AM	12 PM	3 PM	6 PM	9 PM
Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
88° 73°	84° 72°	88° 72°	86° 63°	81° 64°	82° 57°	79° 63°	82° 72°

Gramsci Today: Alienation and Subalternity

Before I take up Gramsci's thought and its relevance today, I would like to define my methods of analysis, and the questions that lead my thinking: Which Gramsci, and why today?

We live in a time of economic and social crisis, in a new phase in the history of capitalism, which is henceforth globalized and dominated by financial interests. A world that resonates with—but is still different from—that of Gramsci. The origin of both this resemblance and said difference is in the fact that Gramsci's great comeback did not occur mainly in the West, even if a number of his works and studies were recently republished,¹ but in the realm postcolonial studies, mainly related to India and South America. So much so that Gramsci, theorist of "the revolution in the West" and critic of the revolution in the East (in Russia, that is) has paradoxically returned to us from the Orient, along with his approach that all forms of "subalternities" beyond the determination of class in traditional Marxism. In the framework of globalization that creates hybrid cultural knowledge, as well as new forms of subalternity and poverty, does Gramsci all of a sudden become the thinker of a "democratic" post-Marxism?

All nations, split and heterogeneous as they are, are dedicated to a plurality of the times, that is, modern and postmodern and even premodern. Thus, I suggest that we take up Gramsci's thought and consider it from a multiple temporality, where past and future define the temporal constellations that establish the present according to Walter Benjamin. I will thus depart from the Gramscian concept of the crisis, which is so close to us today, in order to reconstruct, step by step, the grand articulations and moments of the *Prison Notebooks*, while focusing particularly on the turning point that is the years 1931–32, which saw an expansion of the concept of hegemony, taking into consideration Americanization and Fordism, both of which were such pressing questions that Gramsci did not hesitate to write, "*Whether America, through the implacable weight of its economic production (and therefore indirectly), will compel or is already compelling Europe to overturn its excessively antiquated economy and social basis?*"

I. The Crisis and Its Forms

In his August 1926 report to the Italian communist party (the PCI), Gramsci reflected on the new relationships between economics and politics during the crisis of capitalism: "*In the advanced capitalist countries, the ruling class possesses political and organizational reserves which it did not possess, for instance, in Russia. This means that even the most serious economic crises do not have immediate repercussions in the political sphere. Politics always lags behind economics, far behind. The state apparatus is far more resistant than it is often possible to believe; and it*

¹ See Razmig Keucheyan (ed.), *Guerre de mouvement et guerre de position* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2011) and Peter D. Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009). As for postcolonial studies, I am referring to the work of Spivak, Appadurai, and Homi Bhabha.



succeeds, at the moments of crisis, in organizing greater forces loyal to the regime than the depth of the crisis might lead one to suppose."

This indirect reflection on the failure of the worker's movement in the face of fascism sets all research of the *Prison Notebooks* and a deepening of the idea of a likely crisis on many levels and approaches.

1: The crisis of authority

In a general sense, the modern meaning of the crisis is never an event but a long process in which "the old dies and the new cannot be born." This contradiction between the old and the new is modeled after the long crisis of capitalism between the 1920s and the 40s and meant "an unstable—even dangerous—equilibrium of the forces at present." From that, Gramsci describes a number of symptoms that are also found in our present: (1) The appearance of morbid symptoms, and (2) the skepticism toward ideologies and traditional politics to the point that "the masses detach themselves from the ruling classes who no longer manage to resemble them." The crisis thus becomes "a crisis of authority," which particularly touches the youth who can no longer see their duties through and no longer have a sense of a future.

2: The organic crisis

This crisis could drive "a catastrophic equilibrium of forces in the present" which Gramsci called the "organic crisis" and that could lead to "their mutual destruction" and a decomposition of society to a point that would reach the "state as a whole"—that is, the domination-direction of class. In 1921, in *Colpo di Stato*, Gramsci already noted the doubling of the repressive apparatus of the state through the emergence of a violent and organized fascist movement.

This kind of situation is conducive to "passive revolutions" where the state stands in for the leadership of the weakest class, as was the case of the Piedmont in the Italian Union. The organic crisis could lead to the rise of a single leader in the model of the Caesars, be it progressive (like Napoleon I) or regressive (Napoleon III).

In these analyses Gramsci arrives at the idea that the crisis of capitalism isn't necessarily favorable for the revolution and that it always brings about a strategic vision, like the kind that opens Gramsci's research in the *Notebooks*: the distinction between the war of maneuver and the war of position, "the most important postwar theoretical question."

3: Crisis and strategy: war of maneuver, war of position

Said strategic distinction comes up at first from a reflection on the specificity of the revolution in the West in comparison to the Bolshevik revolution. In Russia, the war of maneuver by direct attack was possible because "The state was all." Counter to that, behind political domination in the West are the "tranches and fortifications" of a complex civil society connected the bourgeois revolutionists. To reach these fortifications of civil society, these casemates that serve to seal off the economic crisis, would require "a long-term strategy" and an "a new kind of front" which will necessitate "an unprecedented knowledge of hegemony."



Also: “the war of maneuver in politics is the concept of hegemony.” This idea of hegemony as an organization of consent in civil society is the subject of numerous analyses and debates. It sets in motion Gramsci’s prison research, and in a letter to Tatiana from 1931 he describes the kind of methods of organizing consent that lead to a domination of class, which are tied to intellectuals. He distinguishes the rural intellectuals who bring together “the southern agrarian bloc” from the modern intellectuals, like engineers, technicians, and more broadly, “the masses who work toward the functions of the organization.” Hence the famous formula whose implications we are analyzing here: “All men are intellectuals but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals.”

Modern crisis, organic crisis, strategic crisis—all these approaches intersect in a new concept of the state and civil society. As he told Tatiana in a letter dated July 3, 1931, Gramsci’s research on the intellectual originated in a “desire to deepen our conception of the state.” Since “in politics, the error occurs as the result of an inaccurate understanding of what the state (in its integral meaning, dictatorship + hegemony) really is.”

II. A New Conception of the State and Its Ambiguities

In the 1970s, in the aftermath of May ’68 in France and the return of dictators in Latin America (see Chile in 1973) that necessitated a new kind of war of democratic position, I wrote a book, *Gramsci and the State*, dedicated to this new conception of the state. It was a Gramscian historical moment, and this book was translated into six languages and sparked numerous debates. I wanted to take up some aspects of this work, dedicated to the expansion of the concept of the state, and reevaluate their impact while stressing their inherent ambiguities.

1: A new idea of state

This new conception is part of a critique of the liberal ideology of the state as a guardian of the order and an all-seeing body that is required only to respect the laws; a state reduced to being the guardian of the economy and the security of a pure domination of class. Now, the state is comprised of elements that must give back to civil society, it is part and parcel of a set of relations of forces within society because it “has to be accountable to groups on which it exerts its hegemony.”

This kind of “compromise equilibrium” developed by the state is therefore not without its ambiguity. Do we have to rethink the state from its expansion in civil society, or, inversely, privilege the new approach that civil society as linked to modifications in the role of the state (domination + hegemony)? A class-oriented vision of a domination of a growing class, or a new conflicting vision that derives from the transformation of civil society, which provoke social movements (like the factory unions of the *ordine nuovo*) and which could have an effect on the state, by reinforcing it or by weakening it.

2: From hegemony to the hegemonic apparatus

If the power relations between the political society and civil society are rooted in what Gramsci calls a “compromise equilibrium,” then we need to analyze the forms



of this equilibrium as the result of the complexity of superstructures. Not simply a reflection on the position based on the economical and Marxist mechanism of reflection (which Gramsci criticizes in Boukharine), nor a simple instrument of the domination of class, the superstructures have a cultural and material existence.

This materiality brings us back to a new equation in Marxist analysis: there is no hegemony without “**the hegemonic apparatus**” that is both the “trenches of the dominant class” but also a mode of societal organization. At the time, Gramsci considered the hegemonic apparatus as “organizations that are more varied: clubs, associations, unions, the school, family.” Today we could add to it also the media and the new technologies of communications (that is, the Internet and social networks).

The question of intellectuals and their function in society depends on the closely related hegemonic apparatus, where struggles play out for the upkeep or the conquest of cultural and political hegemony. In the case of developed capitalist countries, the conquest of said apparatus is the necessary prerequisite to hegemony of the state, in and through a long-term war of position that is “a new kind of offensive.”

3: The hegemonic apparatus and the question of intellectuals

Gramsci sees this model of the war of position in Gandhi’s struggle in India and in strategies of “asymmetric resistance” that necessitate the struggle of a people. Also, this conquest of the hegemony returns it to models for the bourgeois revolution and to its capacity or lack thereof to create a “popular national bloc” based on the French model of the Enlightenment, which was an “intellectual and moral” revolution. To return to the Italian case and the far-away origins of fascism, Gramsci underlines the incapacity of the Italian bourgeoisie to “unify the people around itself.” The language wasn’t unified, the intellectuals formed a “caste,” the popular culture of serial novels and folklore, and a separation between the national and the popular characterized the Italian situation. It was also prone to Caesarism, of which “the police Caesarism” of fascism is one manifestation. We understand from this that Gramsci sees Machiavelli as a model for his Modern Prince (the avant-garde) who “makes himself the people” in creating the “organic intellectuals” and in organizing a power relations around him that are favorable in society. But how?

III. 1931 as a Turning Point: Americanism and Fordism

According to Athos Lisa, Gramsci’s brother visited him in prison (“an extraordinary event,” Gramsci wrote) and updated him about the new association of the Internazionale: class against class and social-fascism.² Gramsci, who never stopped thinking about a large union against fascism, did not agree with this stance, a disagreement that dates back to his differing opinion in the years 1929–30 about the collectivization forced in Russia. For Italy, in 1932, he pronounced himself for a time of transition in the name of the constituency. And in 1937, just before his death, he confided in Piero Sraffa, his longtime friend: “the popular front in Italy is the Costituente.”

² Athos Lisa, *Memorie in carcere con Gramsci*, Feltrinelli, Milan, 1973.



This kind of position will inflect all research in the *Notebooks*, which culminates in the notebook he wrote in Formia (1934), titled *Americanism and Fordism* and dedicated to the double analysis of developed capitalist countries and fascism.

1: Americanism and Fordism

Gramsci read Ford's book, *Today and Tomorrow* as early as 1927, and in 1929 he brings up the two books—that of Ford and that of Taylor on the rationalization of the productive apparatus in the United States. In a letter to Tatiana dated October 1930, he shows a particular interest in the "corps of inspectors who check on the private life of the workers," tying together the organization of work and the mode of life that this new class of Taylorized labor create. But the occasion to develop this subject was given to him in a book by Fovel, *Economy and Corporatism*, that sees in fascism the creation of a "productive industrial bloc," linked to the introduction of "American industrial systems." To this Gramsci replies, in an exploration of the contradiction between a productive industrial bloc and the middle class, without forgetting the underdeveloped classes, that this is not an "economic revolution," but rather a passive revolution practiced by the economic police, by force and repression.

But this debate expands into another, much larger one that touches on the transformations of the concept of hegemony as linked to a new reflection on the American and European capitalist development.

2: Hegemony and subalternity

The establishment of a Fordist stage in the capitalist development implies an enrichment of the hegemony, which is linked to this new Taylorized working class, and which has an effect on society as a whole. Because the rationalization of the production presupposes a new "mode of life" that touches on the family, sexuality, and the norms linked to social subalternity.

It is this new concept of subalternity that extends the Marxist analysis beyond classes and which will be picked up in all subsequent postcolonialist analyses. This "history of subaltern classes" that Gramsci ties back to the Roman Empire allows for a new relation between social fragmentation and hegemony to come into being in our contemporary societies.

Gramsci links subalternity to racial dimensions, to social minorities, and more than all, to the oppression of women. Because of the difference between classes and their elites, subalternity is heterogeneous in its composition as well as in its geography. Made of "parasite sediments of successive dominations" and borrowing various properties of the hegemonic apparatus, this subalternity makes the "spirit of division" difficult and seems to function like a mode of normal life. With great lucidity, Gramsci shows that the prohibition in the US was necessary for the development of a new kind of Taylorized worker. Puritanism, a corps of factory inspectors who control the life of the workers, woman's sexuality as both tied to reproduction but also a trophy, and the social hypocrisy of the elites are just as much constitutive norms as this socialized individuality. And this subalternity is double: it intensifies the politics of class specifically for "the subaltern classes," just as the alienation has become fragmentation and subalternity itself.

Also about women and their specific subalternity, Gramsci did not hesitate to write, "*The formation of a new feminine personality is the most important question of an ethical and civil order connected with the sexual question. Until women can attain not only a genuine independence in relation to men but also a new way of conceiving themselves and their role in sexual relations, the sexual question will remain full of unhealthy characteristics...*"

In the end, most of the struggles of the 20th century—for women's rights, for civil rights, for independence—were aimed at different forms of subalternity. The "marginalized movements" like the current feminist struggles in India and in Europe fall within this perspective of a society that is more and more complex and fragmented and that creates, under the guise of economic and social crisis, new marginalized classes, excluded from political representation just as they are from the hegemonic apparatus, schools included.

IV. Rethinking The Intellectual Function

"All men are intellectuals but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals."

With the current crisis and the development of neo-liberalism accompanied by a revolution of information and by unprecedented communications, we have passed from a fixed culture of closed systems to a system of flux that from now on will be globalized and will question "the grand narratives of the emancipation" that Lyotard describes, including the classical Marxist one. Echoing some of Fredric Jameson's ideas on postmodernism, we assist in "a cultural revolution on the scale of the modes of production itself," generating new relations between the cultural and the economic. Neither superstructural nor "national-popular," culture is now overrun by consumption and the market, integrating itself more and more in the economy on a hierarchical level (that is, controlled by the devices of the state) and the transversal (social networks). That's why the gap between the two propositions Gramsci makes—"all men are intellectuals" but not all "have the function of intellectuals"—has been simplified and transformed.

The two previous models of intellectuals—the organic Gramscian intellectual (of the avant-garde) and the intellectual critique of alienation (Sartre, Marcuse)—have, in this time of crisis, included the emergence of what Foucault already called "the specific intellectuals," particularly considering the "mass intellectuals" and a digital cultural that is potentially open to anyone. Immigration and multiple citizenships also created a "global intellectual." Facing the universalist humanism that is oftentimes abstract is a universalism open to others and differences, a universalism of the construction of the humanist and of a "**philosophy of relations**" that could have as its ethical imperative the idea that extends to all, developed by Glissant: "act where you are, think with the world."

We could propose three elements of this new "cognitive cartography" with and after Gramsci, as this cartography conditions the construction of a democratic hegemony, allowing the new to emerge under the guise of the crisis: (1) the build-up of the knowledge and its cultural value, (2) a new perception of subalternity and the social, and (3) the understanding of the critical role of art today in front of its "market-oriented aesthetics."

In *Poetics of Relation*, Edouard Glissant brings up the necessary displacement of values that is already taking place: from the center toward the archipelago, from one to the many, from the identity to the diversity, from the unique cause to the Deleuzian model of the rhizome, to multiple causes.³ Suffice to say that for a vision of globalization that is purely economic and liberal, we must oppose a cultural and intercultural globalization of the citizenship that Edward Said had called "worldliness." The individual is composed of multiple belongings that are both social and cultural, including virtual, and which allow him to communicate with the world and with all cultures, a situation radically new, which modifies all access to knowledge.

It is said that calling the binary and hierarchical logics into question in favor of networked logic entails a transformation of the "locations of culture" that Homi K. Bhabha developed in his postcolonial theory: "interstitial passage between fixed identities opens up this possibility of a cultural hybridity."⁴ This in-between, a complex third space that Hannah Arendt already claimed to be the condition of the experience of others and of all political citizenship, has become the "location" of a new work of the imagination in its social, local, and global dimensions. This is the location of a "deconstruction" of forms of subalternity in our societies, to use Gramsci's terms again, because we are part of the expansion of intellectual functions and therefore of the complexity of civil society, which forever changes the "compromise equilibrium" within the state.

Gramsci's relevance today is thus not without its paradoxes.

First paradox is that Gramsci prophetically saw the development of capitalism in American Fordism—and it is that industrial stage of the organization of work that is in crisis today, with its ongoing conflict: counter-revolution culture of conservatism and social struggles around the world (see for example the Arab revolutions and the enormous movements for social justice in India and Brazil).

Second paradox: he makes an effort to define the reality and the strategy of the revolution in the West, but it's in the "East"—in India, then in Latin America, both of which walk the paths carved by Edward Said—that a Gramscian postcolonialist theory that relies on the concept of subalternity is born. Because the colonial powers did not only develop the violence, the denial of the other, and the repression, but also the forms and the hybrid accounts that base its proper hegemony.

In addition to these two paradoxes, the existence of a new globalized network that is increasingly decentralized and that modifies the Gramscian "national-popular" and disbands the classic class struggle sheds light on the idea that the strong points of this philosophy of the relation and the otherness of the human is rooted in a Gramscian entanglement of the local and the global, which is made of codes, of thoughts, of differing knowledge, and of arts that are all increasingly hybridized. To the extent that I could develop an "**aesthetic of the hybrid**" on account of the passages between the artistic practices of the plurality of identities and the countries of origin, like the new forms of art linked to the flux of images online with their interconnected and ephemeral nature.⁵

This is what we find here and now in Thomas Hirschhorn's *Gramsci Monument*, with its map, its social and cultural diagram, and its multiple activities, all of which do not neglect the creativity and the intelligence of all those who participate in it. Because *The New Monument form* is "an act of emancipation," an experience in the fullest, where resistance meets universality and of which Gramsci is both the symbol and the theorist: "*The only justifiable enthusiasm is that which accompanies the intelligent will, intelligent activity, the inventive richness of concrete initiatives which change existing reality.*" A. Gramsci

Christine Buci-Glucksmann

³ Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relations*, trans. By Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

⁴ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (TK: TK, 1994), 5.

⁵ See *Vers une esthétique de l'éphémère, Art Absolument Hors série, Exposition Paris et l'art contemporain arabe*, 2011.

Théorie postcoloniale et hybridation dans Hybridation et Art contemporain, AICA/Al Dante 2013.



A DAILY LECTURE FROM MARCUS STEINWEG

63rd Lecture at the Gramsci Monument, The Bronx, NYC: 1st September 2013
ONTOLOGICAL DISTRACTION
Marcus Steinweg

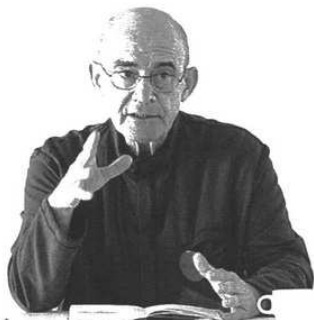
1. What is reality?
2. How does the subject hold itself in it?
3. What does it mean to love in the here and now of the one world, if we consider how elementarily what we call love remains tied up with the Christian tradition, which allows us to distinguish the concepts of *agápe* and *éros*?
4. Christianity, with its imperative of charity, forms a backdrop from which one does not depart by marking one's contemplations as atheistic.
5. As Jean-Luc Nancy has shown, we stand within the horizon of Judeo-Christian monotheism as long as we maintain—in reference to categories such as justice, the universal, the individual—the “motif of an infinite transcendence surpassing man”; and no thinking that does not wish to be obscurantist can afford to forgo seeking clarity regarding this nexus by analyzing the alliance between atheism and theism.¹
6. Yet this alliance is already that between immanence and transcendence.
7. It calls upon us to think a concept of reality that ultimately amounts to a contentious union of both orders.
8. The constitution of reality, like that of the subject, like the reality of love, requires the antagonism between the two orders, which we can describe as that of the finite and that of the infinite.²
9. Hegel's dialectics brings this antagonism back as a philosophical contention that compels him to reject both options—a simple materialism and a simple idealism—alike (Hegel's term for this rejection is *absolute idealism*).
10. Persistent at the heart of reality is an element that is explicit to it.
11. It is decisive that we situate this incommensurable (which we can easily enough call *God* or, as Levinas does, the wholly other, *tout autre*) within the immanence expanded by its implicit transcendence rather than retroactively re-theologizing it.
12. To do the latter would be to trust in a *pure transcendence*, one that would be at a total distance from a *pure immanence*.
13. Yet transcendence does not mark a higher reality; nor does immanence mean the dimension of what is controlled and known.
14. The alliance of both registers refers to their intertwinement, which remains the difficult inheritance of the history of metaphysics: “The infinite is no longer beyond (*au-delà*). What has long been known—that God is dead—means: the

15. It is the name of the truth of finite reality, its *ontological distraction*.
16. Reality is not simply a matter of fact.
17. Its status as incommensurable reveals that it is expansive and distract.
18. Toward what does reality open, to what does it expand, with respect to what does it distract itself?
19. How to think a world without transcendence and yet not substitute for it a phantasm of immanence that negates the possibility of thinking something new, negates freedom and decision, autonomy and the consistency of the subject?
20. How to back out of the alternative of finitude and infinity, reality and ideality, the possible and the impossible?
21. How to think an opening that opens toward something not-given—toward the nothing itself—; how to affirm this opening toward closure without depriving it of its characteristic openness?
22. How to think an opening that is not one?

¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, "A Deconstruction of Monotheism," trans. Gabriel Malenfant, in *Dis-Enclosure*, 32.

² Part and parcel of the infinity of love—which names its punctual intensity, not its temporal extension—is that the loving subject is *not immortal = finite*. The finitude of its life gives meaning to the infinity of love. I love, I die: this certainty can give rise to love, to the feeling of touching upon *the limit of life = its infinity*. The ontological dimension of love resides in the problematic X, which marks the status of the subject as intractable, its incommensurability. We ought not to presume that it has any sort of sublime meaning; it is nothing but the reverse of the subject's reality, which interferes with the real in *problematic* fashion.

³ Mehdi Belhaj Kacem, *L'esprit du nihilisme. Une ontologique de l'Histoire*, Paris 2009, 80–1. Belhaj Kacem's concept of a pure emptiness (*vide pur*), which, thus his claim, inscribes itself upon Blanchot's, Deleuze's, and Foucault's concept of the outside (*dehors*) as its limit to the extent that even that which is most outside (*le plus 'extérieur'*) is part of this emptiness, fails to take into account the fact that Blanchot, Deleuze, and Foucault described the outside not in categories of the interior and the exterior, since it marks the other of interiority and exteriority—the ontological emptiness.



Jean-Luc Nancy is a Professor of Political Philosophy and Media Aesthetics at the European Graduate School in Saas-Fee, Switzerland, where he teaches an Intensive Summer Seminar.



Mehdi Belhaj Kacem is a French-Tunisian actor, philosopher, and writer.

HIRSCHHORN

Dear Sabine,³²

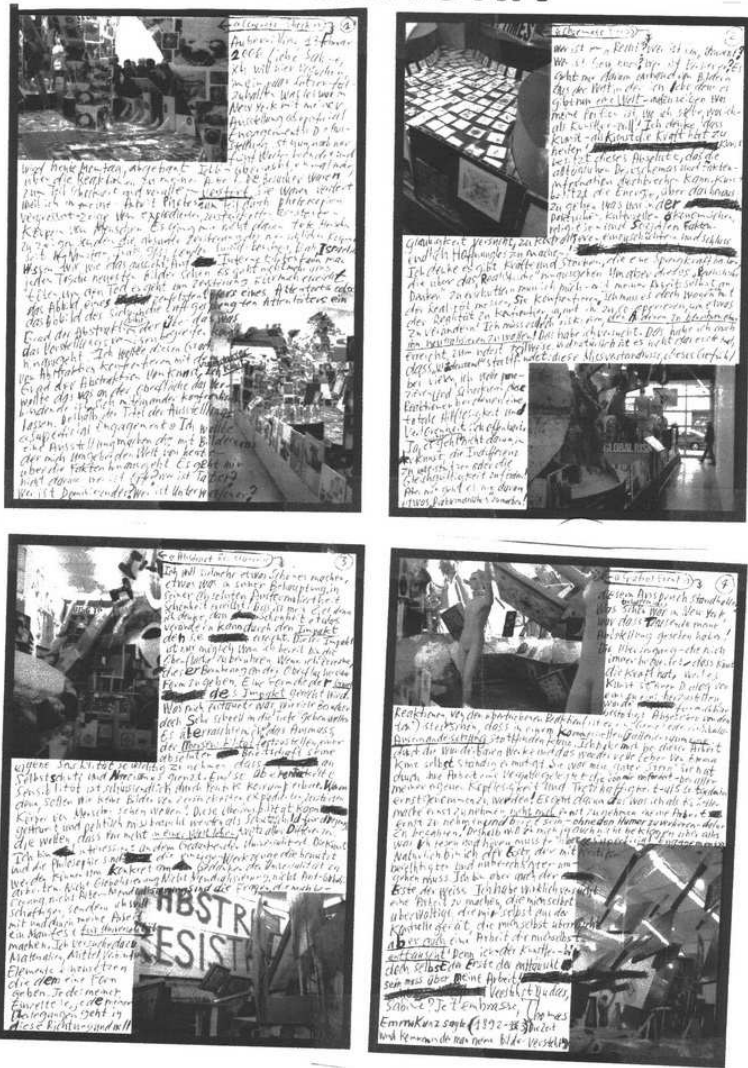
I want to try here to record in just a few sentences what happened in New York concerning my exhibition *Superficial Engagement*. The exhibition has now ended after five weeks and will be disassembled today, Monday. I am, once again, surprised by the reactions to my work. The visitors were partly shocked and above all disturbed. They were disturbed because in my work I show photos—some enlarged by photocopying—of exploded, dismembered, destroyed human bodies. My concern was not to show dead people but to show the absurd destruction of human bodies from Afghanistan, Iraq, 9/11, London suicide bombers, Bali, Israel, etc. We do know what that looks like! On websites we can see the latest images every day. It is no longer about killing, about death; it is about destruction. For me, the image of a mangled victim of a bomb attack or the image of a suicide bomber reaches a degree of abstraction way beyond what we can conceive with our imagination. I wanted to confront this degree of abstraction with the degree of abstraction of art, of abstract art. I wanted the different connections on the surface to confront one another. Therefore the title of the exhibition, *Superficial Engagement*.

I wanted to make an exhibition that reaches beyond facts, with images from the world around me today. For me, it is not a matter of: Who is the victim? Who is the culprit? Who is the subjugated? Who is the oppressor? Who is the oppressed or the subjugated? Who is in the "right"? Who is in the "wrong"? Who is the winner? Who is the loser? For me, it is a matter of showing, by using images from the world in which I live—because there is only one world—what my position is, where I stand, what I want to achieve as an artist! I think that art, as art, has the power to heal! Art possesses this absoluteness that can break through the everyday frame of thought and factual information. Art possesses the energy to go beyond that which, in the political, cultural, economic, religious, and social belief in facts, tries to control us, to intimidate us, and ultimately to make us lose hope! I think there are forces and strengths that have an explosive power that goes beyond the "realistic." In order to disrupt this "realistic thinking," I must, however, through my work, measure myself with this reality and confront it. I must risk confronting reality myself—yes, indeed—and even cooperate with it in order to change something! I must risk touching the other without neutralizing him or her. That is what I have tried to do. I have achieved this, at least in part, and of course it is not the first time there has been "resistance." These misunderstandings, this feeling many people had that I wanted to provoke and shock—these are reactions revealing a total helplessness and lack of orientation. Indeed, in art the point is certainly not about supporting or promoting indifference! But I am not concerned with "problematizing" anything!

Rather, I want to make something beautiful, something that—in its assertion, in its absolute detailed formulation—achieves beauty! That is my aim because I think beauty can change something through the impact it attains. This impact is possible only if I am prepared to touch the surface, if I succeed in giving a form to this touching of the surface, a form that is appropriate to the force of the impact. What amazed me was how many visitors wanted to go quickly into the "depths." I was also surprised by the degree of hypersensitivity, by the absolute readiness to consider one's own sensibilities as so important, to the point of self-protection and narcissism. Such an overly refined sensibility is ultimately open to being corrupted by politics. Why, then, should we not want to see any images of dismembered, exploded, destroyed bodies of human beings? This hypersensitivity can be controlled and abused politically as a protective shield for those who want us not to live in the one world, despite all differences. I am interested in the idea of universality. Art and philosophy are the only tools that can be used to work concretely on the idea of universality. My concern is not globalization, not antiglobalization, not alternative globalization, but rather to make, with and through my work, a manifesto for universality. In order to do this, I try to employ the materials, means, connections, elements that give this thought a form. Each of my individual works, each of my thoughts, follows this direction and wants to live up to this ambition.

The nice thing in New York, despite everything, was that thousands of people saw my exhibition! The belief, which I always have in mind, that art has the force, because it is art, to create a one-to-one dialog was here confirmed. Apart from the reactions, the exaggerated reactions—Is he a genius or a charlatan?—the nice thing was that a critical, engaged discussion could take place in a commercial gallery space. As I was working, the beautiful works and the wonderful life of Emma Kunz constantly encouraged me. She was my "guiding star." With her work she achieved something exemplary that, as a guiding thought and despite all my own headlessness and refractoriness, demanded to be taken seriously! It means to take seriously what I do as an artist, not to take myself seriously, but to take my work seriously and be prepared, without losing my sense of humor, to pay the price for it! Therefore I won't complain about all I read and heard about *Superficial Engagement*. Of course, I am the first one to deal with justified and unjustified criticism. I am, however, also the first one who knows I have really tried to make a work that overpowers me, that escapes my own control, that surprises me, but also a work that disappoints me! For I, the artist, I am the first one who has to be disappointed by my work! Do you understand that, Sabine?

Emma Kunz (1892–1963) said, "The time will come when people will understand my paintings."



Original letter



Thomas Hirschhorn
 «Superficial Engagements», 2006
 Gladstone Gallery, New York, 2006
 Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York

FEEDBACK

New York

What

Things to do or see in New York

Thomas Hirschhorn, Gramsci Monument

Art
Sculpture Bronx Until Sun Sep 15



Romain Lopez

Thomas Hirschhorn, Gramsci Monument, 2013

Time Out rating: *Not yet rated* Be the first...

Time Out says

Fri Aug 30 2013

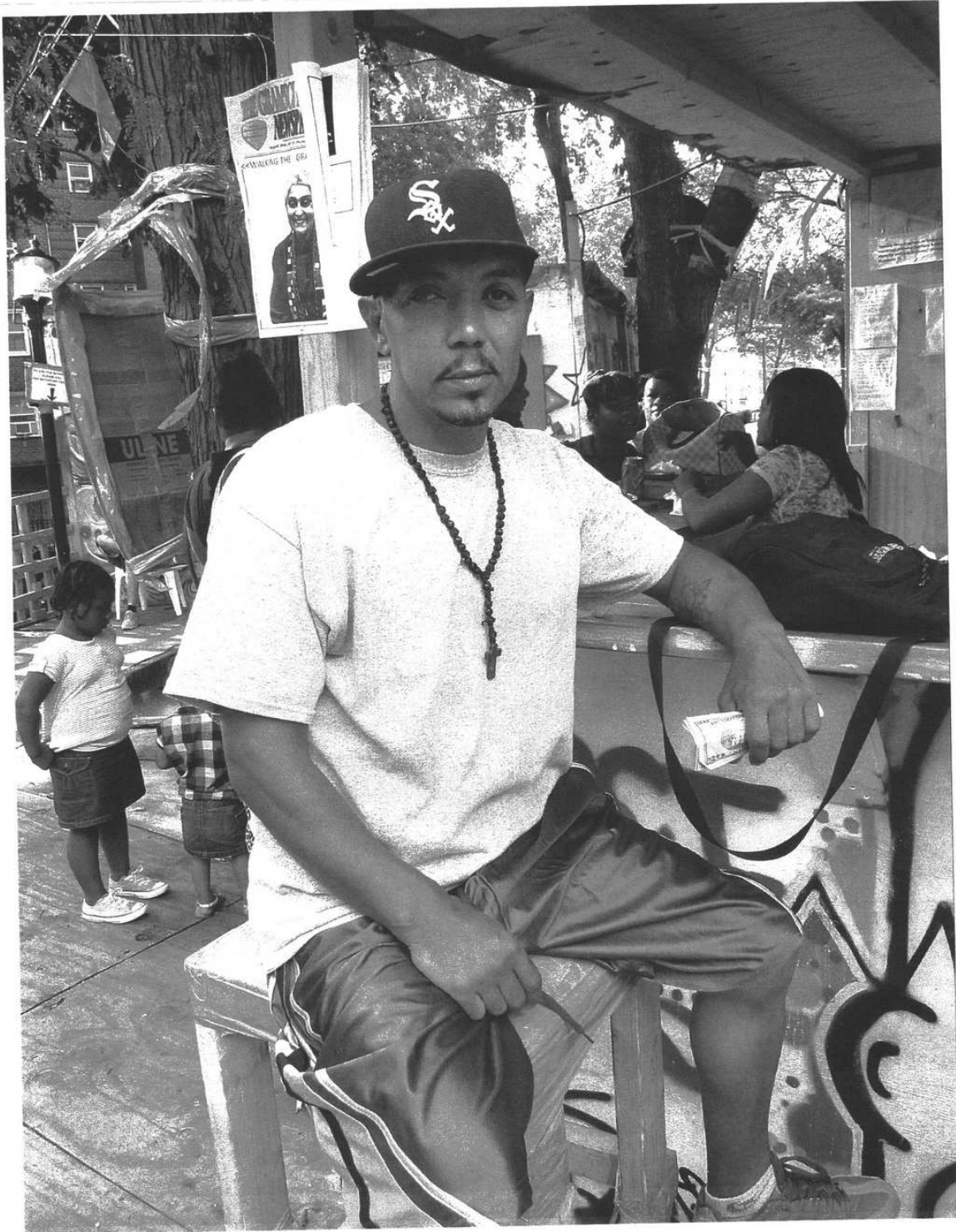
Dia-sponsored public art project with an insidious problem at its heart. The monument is part shantytown, part cultural center, created out of the artist's signature materials of plywood, blue tarp and reams of brown plastic packing tape. It houses a stage, Internet center, library, newspaper office, radio station, café, art studio and kiddie pool, all on the grounds of a South Bronx housing project. The community, who have assisted in building and running the facility, are thrilled with the results, actively engaging with them in ways that are rarely solicited by white-cube exhibitions.

The presence of this piece has been so galvanizing that it is almost possible to ignore its Eurocentric homage to Antonio Gramsci, the Marxist philosopher and founder of the Italian Communist Party, who was jailed by Mussolini and died in prison in 1937. Hirschhorn's agenda, then, is insufferably elitist, especially notable when, for example, academic Marcus

Steinweg took to the stage to deliver a lecture while the locals fled. This issue has been raised by all of Hirschhorn's recent "monuments," stationed, like this one, in various housing projects throughout Europe. But here, his efforts only underscore his hero's questionable relevance to the African-American community.

Nevertheless, *Gramsci Monument* has been clearly empowering for the residents of the Forest Houses. It would have been better if the piece had been dedicated to someone like the Afro-Caribbean writer Frantz Fanon, whose text *The Wretched of the Earth* fueled the Algerian liberation movement. The addition of his name would have been all the more revolutionary in this context.—Barbara Pollack

RESIDENT OF THE DAY



MOSES BERMUDEZ