

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)



www.gramsci-monument.com

September 9th, 2013 - Forest Houses, Bronx, NY

The Gramsci Monument-Newspaper is part of the "Gramsci Monument", an artwork by Thomas Hirschhorn, produced by Dia Art Foundation in co-operation with Erik Farmer and the Residents of Forest Houses

EACH "YES" COUNTS

EACH "NO" COUNTS

EACH DECISION COUNTS

ART SCHOOL N° 10
September 6 TH
Energy = YES!
Quality = No!

Jugement ABOUT WORK of:	Jugement of: TWANA	Alexander	Willma	Diana	Marcella	Orla	Kevin	Joc	Nathan	David
TWANA	X	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Alexander	YES	X	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES
Willma	NO	NO	X	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES
Diana	YES	YES	NO	X	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES
Marcella	NO	YES	NO	NO	X	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES
Orla	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	X	YES	NO	YES	YES
Kevin	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	X	NO	NO	NO
Joc	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	X	YES	YES
Nathan		YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	X	YES
David	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	X

JUDGEMENT CHART TABLE. ART SCHOOL 10

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Bronx, NY 10456
Monday
Partly Cloudy

75 °F | °C

Precipitation: 0%
Humidity: 61%
Wind: 11 mph

Temperature Precipitation Wind



11 AM 2 PM 5 PM 8 PM 11 PM

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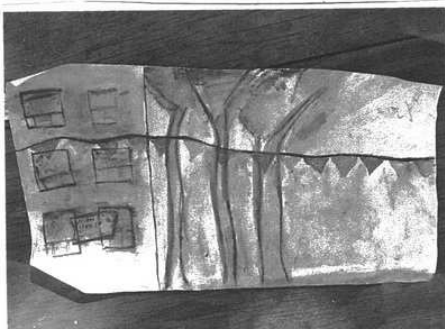
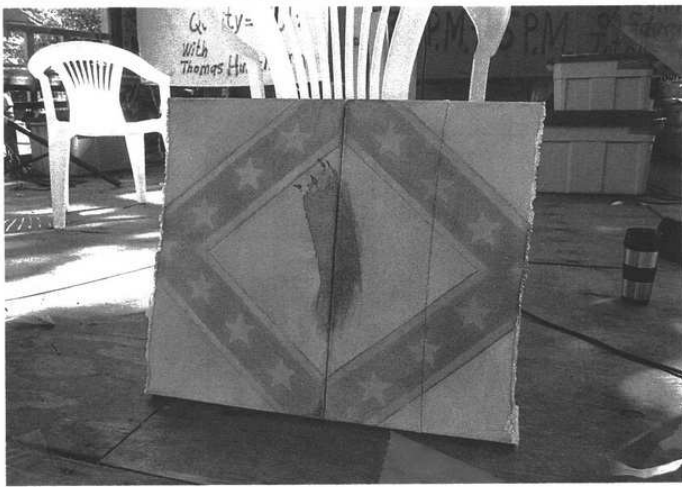
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EACH "YES" COUNTS

EACH "NO" COUNTS

EACH DECISION COUNTS

PICTURES FROM ART SCHOOL 10



PICTURES FROM ART SCHOOL 10

EACH "YES" COUNTS

EACH "NO" COUNTS

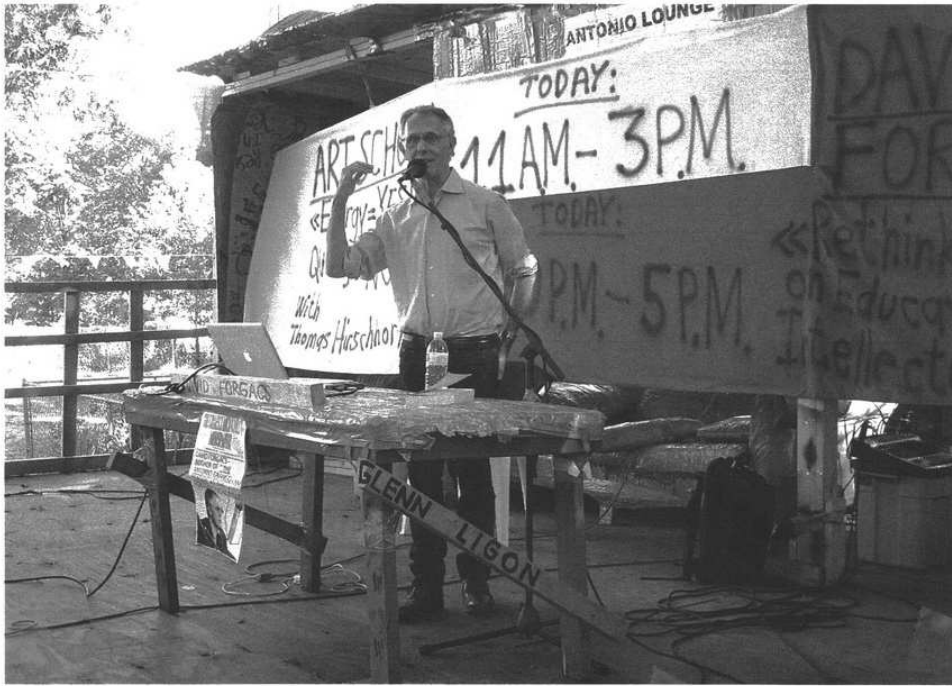
EACH DECISION COUNTS



GRAMSCI SEMINAR: DAVID FORGACS

“RETHINKING GRAMSCI ON EDUCATION AND INTELLECTUALS FOR 2010s”

FRIDAY, AUGUST 6, 2013



RETHINKING-GRAMSCI ON-EDUCATION-AND-INTELLECTUALS FOR THE 2010s

Gramsci Monument, Sept 6 2013

Was Gramsci an educational conservative?

No.

He was a revolutionary who believed that

- the right kind of education enabled people to develop a critical understanding of the world, with which they could act to change it
- this kind of education should be available to all.

But this kind of education involved disciplined learning and Gramsci saw value in parts of the traditional curriculum.

1. Was Gramsci an educational conservative?

No. I think this notion is completely wrong. It can be traced back to an influential book written by Harold Entwistle, published in 1979: *Antonio Gramsci: Conservative Schooling for Radical Politics*. In 1979 I had just moved back to Britain from Italy, where I had finished a PhD partly on Gramsci, and I thought this was a terrible title. "Conservative" is the name of the main political party of the right in Britain. When Entwistle's book came out I was in the first year of my career as a university teacher and the Conservatives, led by Margaret Thatcher, had just come to power. They were to stay in power for the next 17 years, which for those of us on the left who lived through them were the worst years in recent British history. The Conservatives managed a transition to new forms of capitalism, doubling the number of unemployed in their first 4 years in power, breaking the resistance of the labor movement, privatizing public services, including part of the health service. In their education policies, the Conservatives not only favoured private schools and a stratified, class-divided school system. They also wanted to turn back the tide against what they saw as 1960s liberalism. They advocated a "back to basics" approach to education, emphasised the need for a strong grounding in numeracy, literacy and grammar, and the teaching of national history to immigrants. Teaching national history meant, for them, teaching the history of the great British nation from the Romans onwards, its creation of the world's first parliamentary democracy, its enlightened monarchy. It didn't mean teaching the history of England's violent oppression of the Irish people, its role in the slave trade, its subjugation of the millions of indigenous peoples it colonized in India, Africa and Australia. So, of course I didn't like "conservative" and I confess I didn't read Entwistle's book at the time. I've only read it recently. Actually I find I agree with a lot of what Entwistle says about Gramsci, but he gets some key things wrong and I still think his use of the word conservative is inappropriate and misleading.

2. Gramsci was a revolutionary who believed that (1) the right kind of education enabled people to develop a critical understanding of the world, with which they could act to change it, (2) this kind of education should be available to all.

There's a key statement in Gramsci's early article "Socialism and culture", written in 1916 when he was 25: "man is above all... a creation of history, not nature" ("L'uomo è soprattutto ... creazione storica, e non natura.") What does this mean? It means that people develop within and are shaped by their social environment, which is a society divided into classes, with a particular structure of power. It also means that people can acquire consciousness of their historical situation and challenge the inherited ideas and values and social structures that keep them oppressed. An understanding of history is important here, but not so much the "events" or "facts" of history as the idea that societies and ideas *change*, i.e. that there is a *historical process*, because by knowing how the world has developed up to now, how it has changed, one can understand that it is possible to act to change it.

In this article Gramsci argues that real education involves taking students through the process of seeing how ideas are formed, how ways of thinking and understanding change, not filling them with pre-packaged bits of knowledge. He writes that we need to get away from seeing people as "mere receptacles to be stuffed full of empirical data and a mass of unconnected raw facts". Real education, real culture is something completely different: "it is organization, disciplining of one's inner self, ... understanding one's rights and obligations".

This can be connected up with Paulo Freire's arguments in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) against the "banking" concept of education. In the "banking" concept the teacher "deposits" bits of knowledge into the pupil, so s/he can store them up and draw on them later. S/he will take some of these bits of knowledge out of the memory bank to use/spend. Gramsci, just like Freire, said that this approach was wrong both because it made the pupil passive and because it didn't call into question the value of what was being taught. It was necessary to turn the whole approach around: to start with the learner, what s/he needed to learn, what s/he was able to understand and make use of. By turning the process around one could empower the learners, make them active producers of their own learning.

There is a straight line going from these arguments in 1916, when Gramsci was a young socialist activist in Turin, to his arguments in the prison notebooks, written 1929-35, that the school should have the function of moving young people away from the ideas and beliefs they have passively and uncritically absorbed from the environment (magic, popular religion, etc.) and from the social structures in which they have grown up (family, village, etc.) towards those ideas that can give them a *critical* account of the world. Page 313 in *The Antonio Gramsci Reader (AGR)* is a key passage here. In order to do this the school can't just drop bits of prepackaged knowledge in. It has to give young people the tools (concepts, ideas, methods, habits of thinking) that enable them to see for themselves how things work, how things really are. See also p. 314: "the truly active participation of the pupil in the school ... can only exist if the school is related to life." Gramsci in prison took an interest in schools, in both Europe and the USA, where active learning and open learning, e.g. the Montessori method or the Dalton Plan, were being tried out, but he also had strong reservations about them: they wouldn't work for children who had to abandon school (as he did); they were being used as experiments for elites, but they wouldn't work for the masses. "Many of these kinds of modern schools [based on leaving the child free to learn: Montessori, Dalton Plan] are of a snobbish [elitist] kind and they have nothing to do - except superficially - with the question of creating a kind of school that can educate the working and subaltern classes to a leading role in society, as a group and not as selected individuals." (Quaderno 9 para. 119, p 1183, written 1932).

3. But the kind of education Gramsci believed in involved disciplined learning and he saw value in parts of the traditional curriculum.

Where Entwistle was right was in pointing out that what Gramsci said about education went against the grain of quite a lot of the thinking on the left about education in the 1960s and 70s and yet his ideas nevertheless had a radical - better to say: revolutionary - purpose. Gramsci defended the "traditional school", particularly the traditional elementary school, and argued that children needed to acquire a disciplined approach, one of concentrated application to study, as exemplified by the

learning of Latin. He said a lot more things than this, but these are the bits that stand out as "traditionalist". For Gramsci on discipline see *AGR* pp. 315 and 319-20: "In education one is dealing with children in whom one has to inculcate certain habits of diligence, precision, poise [compostezza], even physical poise, ability to concentrate on specific subjects, which cannot be acquired without the mechanical repetition of disciplined and methodical acts. Would a scholar at the age of forty be able to sit for sixteen hours on end at his work-table if he had not, as a child, compulsorily, through mechanical coercion, acquired the appropriate psycho-physical habits?" (p. 315).

4. Gramsci recognized that the existing school system, along with other things (the family, religion, etc.), reproduced class society.

"Undoubtedly the child of a traditional intellectual family acquires this psycho-physical adaptation more easily. Before he ever enters the classroom he has numerous advantages over his comrades". I don't think Gramsci would have disagreed with the "social reproduction" approach to education of Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (*Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, 1970) or of Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (*Schooling in Capitalist America: Education Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life*. New York: Basic Books, 1976). Bowles and

Gintis wrote (p. 147): "The perpetuation of the class structure requires that the hierarchical division of labor be reproduced in the consciousness of its participants. The educational system is one of the ... reproduction mechanisms through which dominant elites seek to achieve this objective." "These differences in the social relationships among and within schools, in part, reflect both the social backgrounds of the student body and their likely future economic positions. Thus blacks and other minorities are concentrated in schools whose repressive, arbitrary, generally chaotic internal order, coercive authority structures, and minimal possibilities for advancement mirror the characteristics of inferior job situations. Similarly, predominantly working-class schools tend to emphasize behavioral control and rule-following, while schools in well-to-do suburbs employ relatively open systems that favor greater student participation, less direct supervision, more student electives, and, in general, a value system stressing internalized standards of control." (p. 132)

5. For this reason, Gramsci favored the creation of a unified school system.

6. Education (not only in schools) should equip people with a secular, materialist understanding of the world: both the natural and the social world. Explanations of the world must not be religious or magical.

In peasant societies (and the Italy in which Gramsci lived was still largely an agricultural society, in which over half the population lived and worked on the land) there was a widespread belief that the world was governed by magical forces, by hidden spirits, and that these periodically either made things bad or made them better; or that there is a natural order of things in society, a natural hierarchy, that people cannot change. A good school, according to Gramsci, can enable children to learn that this is not true, that the way society is arranged is not natural, or given by God, but is the result of history, of the actions of people. The landlord's son will grow up and become a landlord himself not because this must be so, but because there is a social arrangement that makes it happen. Once one understands this, one also learns that one can struggle against it.

7. One can link this up to what Gramsci says in the prison notebooks about "common sense".

He argues that people's "common sense" ideas are not so much false as incomplete. People are missing certain bits of information that they need for a better explanation. What they have is not "false consciousness" but a "contradictory consciousness". See *AGR* p. 333.

One can apply this to more modern examples. Here are two:

(1) a male worker – let's say a factory worker or a transport worker – has heard from his friends that he needs to argue for "a fair day's wage for a fair day's work". But Marxism teaches that, under capitalism, his pay is never going to be fair because his employer is making a profit out of his work, extracting what Marx called surplus value, which enables the boss to get rich while the worker's pay stays more or less at the same level. Gramsci says that the worker knows, in his body, in his physical experience, that he is being exploited, made to work harder than he should, but his consciousness is counteracted, and neutralized, by the beliefs he has absorbed from tradition that this condition is natural and inevitable. Once he gains a critical understanding of his exploitation he can struggle against it.

(2) a young woman who gets married has absorbed, as she grew up, what her mother and her friends have told her: "a woman's place is in the home". This piece of common sense seems natural and normal, she thinks what she has to do is be a good homemaker, make her husband happy, at the table and in bed, put his career before hers, look after the children. But here too she experiences the oppression: she gets tired, lonely in the home when everyone is out, frustrated, sexually submissive or apathetic. So, again applying Gramsci's idea of contradictory consciousness, she has both the received wisdom shaping one part of her consciousness, the experience of oppression shaping another, and the one starts to react against the other, she gets some critical leverage on her situation.

Getting to this critical consciousness requires hard work and disciplined education.

Four things help explain Gramsci's particular attitudes to education and help us situate them in the time and place in which he developed them:

(1) His physical condition and the experience of growing up with it. At age four Gramsci became seriously ill, probably with Pott's Disease, a form of extrapulmonary tuberculosis that can affect the spinal column. He nearly died. As he later recalled in a letter to his sister-in-law, his mother had had a little coffin made and a little suit in which to bury him and she kept these till he was grown up and had left home. As a result of the illness he acquired a curvature of the spine that restricted his growth. As an adult his height was 4 feet eight inches, about metre and a half. Gramsci couldn't play physical games with his friends. But he made a pair of dumbbells to strengthen his arms. In prison he was recurrently very ill and he was eventually moved to a guarded clinic.

Pietro Sraffa's letter to the *Manchester Guardian* published Oct 24 1927 about G's poor health. His weight in the first 5-6 years of his imprisonment was around 50 kilos, that's about 110 pounds. He died aged 46. I think biographical hunches can be wrong, and I wouldn't want to push this too far, but I'm fairly sure that there was a connection between the body Gramsci had,

and his experience of living in it, and the attitudes and ideas he developed. The fact the Gramsci had a disability has often been written out of accounts of him and a heroic but unreal image of him – including a visual image – has taken the place of the real one. This view needs to be changed.

(2) The fact that he had to interrupt schooling for 2 years, from ages 11 to 14, because of the financial hardship of his family after his father was arrested and imprisoned (for alleged misdealings in the tax office where he worked in Sardinia). Gramsci wrote about the fatigue when he had to carry heavy files all day at age 11. His resentment against the injustice that allowed the richer kids to attend school when he couldn't made him a socialist, he later wrote. But it also gave him a lifelong appreciation of the importance of education. Learning requires effort, application.

(3) The belief that shoddy or imprecise thinking was a sign of intellectual weakness and it would hold back the labor movement, and the belief that a revolutionary movement needed a strong secular culture, were not peculiar to Gramsci. Rather, these beliefs were widely shared in the international communist movement: the communists were disciplined, this is what distinguished them from the anarchists, the revolutionary socialists, as well as from the bourgeois political parties.

(4) Cultural situation of Italy in his lifetime (1891-1937): low literacy rates, limited diffusion of national language, persistence of popular religion, magic and superstition in many areas.

7. What did G mean by “intellectual”?

Best to start here by saying what he *didn't* mean, since this term is often misunderstood.

He wrote that “Every human being is an intellectual” (AGR, p. 304, Quaderno 12, para 1), and this might sound like a great slogan when you take it out of context in which he wrote it. But it doesn't mean that G thought that every person was, deep down, a brilliant thinker. The sentence goes on “but not everyone in society has the function of an intellectual” and “Just because everyone, at some time in their life, might fry a couple of eggs or patch up a hole in their clothes it doesn't mean that everyone is a cook or a tailor.” His point is to say that every individual has an intellectual capacity but few people have an intellectual function in society. Everybody carries out intellectual activities some of the time but only some people have that specialized social function.

But – and this is the whole point of where G wants to arrive – the intellectual capacity or potential that is present in everyone needs to be expanded so that many more people can exercise the social function of intellectuals: which means using your mind

to organize, educate, direct other people. See AGR pp. 320 ff., “Intellectuals and non-intellectuals”.

Gramsci's study of Italian intellectuals, one of his key projects in prison, needs to be seen as part of his wider analysis of social structures and political alternatives, which he also carried out through international comparisons. Traditional intellectuals were holding Italy back from economic and social development. In the USA there was, he said, a more streamlined social structure, intellectuals were more functional to economic production, there were no parasitic groups, no “pensioners of economic history” (Notes on “Americanism and Fordism”, 1932).

Gramsci made some interesting reflections here on the “mechanization of the worker”, suggesting that the repetition of mechanical “manual” tasks, rather than deadening workers' minds, can free up their minds to think. Just as you develop the ability to walk without thinking about how you're moving your feet, and you can therefore think about other things during a walk, so you can think about other things even when carrying out a complex manual task, once you have mastered it.

8. What can we take out of all this for our own time?

What has changed?

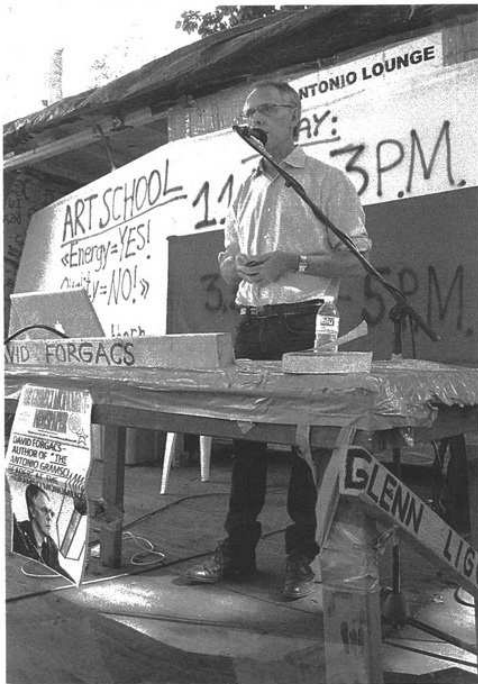
- There is not an international communist movement of any real significance any more. This is an important difference between Gramsci and us because a lot of what he said about education presupposed a revolutionary movement, a disciplined party, intellectuals who, through the party and other organizations could create a new form of hegemony. All this has had to be rethought: the party form, indeed the whole way in which we are able to do politics, has changed. Movements of protest now develop more “spontaneously”, without the old kind of party organization to channel them, and they don't always have the same duration. Think of Occupy Wall Street, or the Arab spring revolutions. So new kinds of political strategy are necessary, and this may require some of Gramsci's ideas about education to be rethought.
- The belief that Marxism, or a form of thinking rooted in Marxism – what Gramsci called the philosophy of praxis – can provide the basis of a new secular culture, a new “common sense”, is also impossible to sustain now. This is not just because that belief went hand in hand with the existence of a strong communist movement, but also for other reasons. One has been the

failure of Marxism, so far, to develop really effective political forms that can deliver on its promise to provide a more just and equal society and not just a more equitable economic system. Another reason is that the world has moved away from the idea of a single totalizing secular philosophy underpinning progressive social change, in which Gramsci believed. This idea does not allow space for religious movements, or for debate between different positions and for radical dissent. Think of the emergence since G's death of the women's movement and its critique of patriarchy, of black activism and its critique of white supremacy, of LGBT politics, of the huge importance of a discourse of human rights, the idea of children's rights.

What has remained valid?

- Emphasis on importance of education and study for self-empowerment.
- Idea that this empowerment can happen by gaining an understanding that the society we live in and the strong collective ideas that are around have been shaped by history, which means by the actions of *people* over time. And if they have been shaped by people, then we as people can change them.
- Importance of learning skills, in particular *learning how to learn*, which require time, application and discipline. No short cuts, no easy way through school or through life.
- Idea of expanding the intellectual function to more people, of getting a better balance between manual and intellectual work. Creativity in the workplace. Work must not just be mechanical and deadening. It must involve a freeing up of the ability to think.

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71st Lecture at the Gramsci Monument, The Bronx, NYC: 9th September 2013
SUBVERSION & AFFIRMATION
Marcus Steinweg

1. Theodor W. Adorno quotes the passage from Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* where the latter says of the artist that, "as a free subject," he seeks to "strip the external world of its inflexible foreignness," impressing on it "the seal of his interiority" in order to "enjoy in the shape of things only an external realization of himself."¹
2. The "effort to do away with foreignness,"² Adorno writes, touches upon the fundamental operation of enlightenment, which renders commensurable to man what remains incommensurable.
3. The dialectic of commensurability and incommensurability pervades the concept and the history (it is not yet concluded and is not even coherent in its inconclusiveness) of enlightenment itself, which—a sort of negative dialectics—enacts the conflict of two elements that defy speculative conciliation.
4. Because the incommensurable remains incommensurable, foreign and unfamiliar, it must appear as such in the work of art; to this end, the latter must not merely accept but in fact actively articulate its irreducibility to the known and familiar.
5. That is the point of the word *appearance*—Adorno speaks of an *apparition* κατ' ἐξοχήν, what "appear[s] empirically yet [is] liberated from the burden of the empirical"³—which names the emergence of the incommensurable from the field of commensurable fact; we might also speak of the *event* that interrupts the order of being with its uncontrolled manifestation.
6. In any case, the incommensurable presents itself as a rift in the structure of reality without marking the impact of an absolute outside.
7. It articulates the truth of reality as something that—excluded from it—evokes its fundamental trait; a non-integral element to which pre-rational consciousness or what Adorno calls the "pre-artistic stratum of art" affords access, whereas it has no immediacy at all to it, coming to negative apperency only by virtue of the mediation of the artifact the work of art is.
8. We might speak of an aporetic organization of the work of art, an organization to which every sentence of the *Aesthetic Theory* labors to be adequate.
9. Adorno begins with an affirmation, he concludes the thought in a critical register; where a sentence begins with a negative, delimiting, or subversive turn, it ultimately opens up in affirmation to what it had dismissed.
10. The same is true of the work of art, which Adorno defines in numerous such sentences.

11. It is affirmative and subversive at once.
12. It confirms and negates.
13. It is empirical and yet not.
14. It captivates, but not from the outside.
15. It seduces, but to reflection. It reflects, yet blindly; etc.
16. The work is aporetic because it draws its intensity from its opening-up toward a boundary it affirms rather than crossing it.
17. Its artificiality transmits what it negates, "the shudder as something unmollified and unprecedented."
18. It surpasses "the world of things by what is thing-like in [it], [its own] artificial objectivation."⁴
19. It remains forever committed to what is impossible, for the possible collaborates with what already exists, with power and established authorities.
20. The work, by contrast, requires the affirmation of the unknown and the pact with contingency.
21. And yet it must not dissipate its power in esotericism, in magic and the mystical obfuscation of reality.
22. The work of art includes the knowledge that such sublimity as is possible is part of reality as what is impossible to it; as its boundary and its inconsistency, as what is repressed or nameless, as the outside implicit in it, in short, as its indisponible element.

¹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), vol. 1, 31.

² Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 106.

³ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 106-7.



GRAMSCI MONUMENT a poem

We all heard about "the forest"
NYC Housing Authority
Boogie down Bronx
Built in 1959
None of our fathers worked on its construction
No jobs then, no jobs now
Negroes and Puerto Ricans left to scramble
You know how we do
Chickens and goats left hungry in someone else's yard
Wall to wall sour
The return of heroin
In ghost ships crewed by methdonians
The lost legions of crack heads everywhere
Beyond memories of vials and caps
Looking like rainbow candy for the dead
Down on the block
We still hungry and hunted
Trips to Bronx criminal court our odyssey
Handcuffs as jewelry
Young men doing long bids
Returning as old men lost in silent sorrows
They saw Canada from their cell windows
But will never visit another country
Accept other badlands
With blood filled skies
For the forgotten and the forbidden
This is the real South Bronx
Pastel colored "nines"
Shotguns under the overcoats
Thug life tattoos not required
The votive candle monuments
More holy than Woodlawn
Where we are never buried now
When our bodies remain unclaimed
Lonely cadavers
On the shelves at the morgue
My students live on forest
In their young memoirs

They write
"my father was killed here"
"my mother died on that corner"
So we always looking for a way out
We need work, jobs, training, opportunity
We also need Art and knowledge
so we will read some Gramsci
Italian radical dreamer of a new world
True believer in our capacity
To build a new world
Love is a wooden spider web
Delicate and sturdy in the rain
Plywood and two by fours as a monument
To our survival
Thomas Hirschorn speaking in tongues
Plywood and two by fours
Like pyramids at Giza
Marking our way home.

Joseph Ubiles



BLOUIN ARTINFO

Published on *BLOUIN ARTINFO* (<http://www.blouinartinfo.com>)

Thomas Hirschhorn's "Gramsci Monument" Transcends Its Own Conceit



Courtesy Dia Art Foundation / Photo: Romain Lopez

by Ben Davis

Published: September 5, 2013

I came prepared to dislike *Gramsci Monument*. Thomas Hirschhorn's Dia Foundation-funded monument-cum-pop-up community center-cum-play structure, sited in the Bronx among the Forest Houses Projects. In the abstract, it seems to evince the same kind of vampiric impulse as [the recent Venice Biennial](#)—that is, that contemporary art is so enervated that it needs a blood infusion from non-art communities in order to achieve the semblance of life.

But the truism that you have actually to visit Hirschhorn's odd participatory installations—this is the fourth in a series of works dedicated to vogueish European philosophers (previously, Bataille, Spinoza, and Deleuze)—in order to appreciate them proves true. Such public projects really are of a different order than the famed Swiss artist's gallery works. In traditional art spaces, his signature rough-and-ready, fucked-up aesthetic reads like big-budget professional art in self-taught art drag. Here, the unevenly planed surfaces and slightly rickety construction come across as an invitation to use.

The tale of the *Monument* is [by now familiar](#). Hirschhorn visited dozens of housing projects, finally settling on Forest Houses when he met the enthusiastic President of the Resident Association, Erik Farmer, who helped advocate for it. The artist built it with a team of locals. The finished structure houses an art studio where classes are taught, a radio station, a daily newspaper produced by volunteers, a community-run food stand, and a regular program of open mics and lectures by thinkers from Stanley Aronowitz to Gayatri Spivak. There's an always-bustling computer lab where kids sit, supervised, playing games and sharing YouTube videos.

Compared to these activities, the library of books and artifacts dedicated to the Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci comes across as an incongruous afterthought—though the structure and housing blocks around it are studded with such Gramscian bon mots as "Destruction is difficult; it is as difficult as creation," spray-painted on white sheets. The philosopher's presence is important to Hirschhorn's artistic project of "rethinking the monument," and it is part of what makes this a pilgrimage site for white art worlders in a way that a straight

community center would not be—but Gramsci is essentially just a pretext for what makes *Gramsci Monument* lovable.

Few thinkers of the 20th century have been as distorted and abused. A revolutionary anti-fascist who died in prison, a victim of Mussolini, Gramsci penned his *Prison Notebooks* as an attempt to theorize the cultural component of anti-capitalist strategy. Written essentially in code because of censors (“Marxism” is rendered “the philosophy of praxis,” and so on), they were vulnerable to creative misreadings. In the '80s they became totemic in cultural studies departments, and thereafter this Marxist somehow became a key influence on post-Marxism; a thinker whose project was linking the political struggle for economic justice to culture morphed into a thinker for whom struggle was purely cultural, intellectual, abstract.

With regard to its fundamental themes of art and community uplift, Hirschhorn's *Gramsci Monument* seems by and large to pay homage to this latter soft-focus Gramsci, not the steely Machiavellian of the *Notebooks*. Without connection to a sustained activist organization with a concrete program and political goals, cultural intervention would have been only an idle concern for the author of “The Modern Prince.” And while the *Monument* is many wholesome things, it will not be sustained.

That's no reason to dismiss the whole thing. When Will Brand and Whitney Kimball did the invaluable work of actually interviewing area residents about what they thought of the project, they found that everyone was at the very least bemused by it. It has offered something for the kids to do and a bit of summer distraction in a community that is starved for resources. That, in my book, is a very cool thing. As for the nagging concern that the *Monument* turns a down-trodden neighborhood into a kind of novel spectacle for art tourists, well, you can view residents as using Hirschhorn and his art world resources as much as you can view him as using them for his career and credibility.

“A lot of people up there have said they're gonna cry when it's down,” Erik Farmer's mother said, when asked about the meaning of the work. In the end, I'd think of the *Gramsci Monument* as neither a finished project nor a neat feel-good story. It is and can only be a monument to an absence—to institutions, organizations, and movements that still need to be built.

Thomas Hirschhorn's The Gramsci Monument is at the Forest Houses, off Tinton Avenue between 163 and 165 Streets, through September 15.



RESIDENT OF THE DAY



VALARIE SALTERS