

# DESEGREGATING THE EXPERIENCE OF ART: A USER'S GUIDE TO *GRAMSCI MONUMENT*

Yasmil Raymond

Yasmil Raymond was the curator and ambassador of *Gramsci Monument*, in which she oversaw the project and led the weekly field trips for neighborhood children of all ages to visit various sites, including Dia:Beacon. She resided in an apartment in the Bronx and was present on-site daily for the entire seventy-seven days of the project, the construction, and the dismantling.

## Mission

In 2009, the artist Thomas Hirschhorn was invited to realize a solo commission at Dia Art Foundation, his first in affiliation with an arts institution in New York. Hirschhorn proposed *Gramsci Monument*, a work of art that he had originally imagined in 1999, attempted to make in 2005, and would finally accomplish in 2013.<sup>1</sup> “The mission,” which the artist outlined and published in a pamphlet prior to construction, had four distinct objectives:

- Establish a new term of monument.
- Provoke encounters.
- Create an event.
- Think Gramsci today.<sup>2</sup>

Written mission statements seldom accompany works of art. In contrast to the more typical artist statement, Hirschhorn's mission is an open-ended proposal into the future rather than a clarification of prior intent. His four-part proposition states the conditions of his undertaking while postponing a conclusion. Hirschhorn's rhetoric recalls the language of an oath or contract—it advances an agreement of principles—or a philosopher's thesis statement asserting a hypothesis or position on a given issue; in this case, the condition and characteristics of the monument. Instead of guarantees or assurances, he offers the terms of his ambition, and in the same gesture affirms his aptitude and competence as an artist. Everything that Hirschhorn writes on his work has the stamp of his earnest personality; his writing bears the marks of his coherent outlook and singular humor.<sup>3</sup> His voice is that of an amateur—as in lover of—reflecting a passion for what he is doing and why.

Yet what is immediately clear also in the mission for *Gramsci Monument* is Hirschhorn's frontal embrace of the form of the monument, a sculptural form with a historical track record polluted by its associations with imperial opulence and mythical nationalism. In the modernist period it came to a halt with the public rejection of Auguste Rodin's *Monument to Balzac* (1891–97), the failed commission that, like Hirschhorn's own monument series, was to be a public memorial dedicated to a literary figure.<sup>4</sup> The great paradox of the monument as it would be contested in the twentieth century is not only about who is commemorated and where but ultimately about artistic autonomy—in other words, art's right to the public sphere.<sup>5</sup>

1 Thomas Hirschhorn has noted how the initial idea of producing *Gramsci Monument* in New York City started with Tom Eccles, the former director of Public Art Fund. Around 2005 he traveled to the city and visited several housing developments including LeFrak City in Queens and Co-op City in the Bronx. In 2009, Hirschhorn would be introduced to Charity Scribner, who teaches comparative literature at LaGuardia Community College, and who mentioned the extensive library on Antonio Gramsci of the late John Cammett, housed in the City University of New York's John D. Calandra Italian American Institute at Queens College. Scribner invited Hirschhorn to lecture on his work on May 2010 at LaGuardia Community College, and it would be during this event where Dia Art Foundation's commission was announced publicly.

2 Mission, published as part of a two-sided poster by Dia and distributed by mail to 7,000 subscribers and at *Gramsci Monument*, with a total print run of 30,000.

3 For an excellent compilation in English of Hirschhorn's writings see *Critical Laboratory: The Writings of Thomas Hirschhorn*, edited by Lisa Lee and Hal Foster (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2013). This collection of texts includes writings by the artist from 1992 to 2012 to reveal how he uses language as an auxiliary support that permits him to formulate concepts, invent his own terms, and explicitly archive his responses and decisions.

4 In 1891, the Société des gens de lettres de France commissioned the sculpture only to reject it in 1898. Only twenty-two years later was the clay model cast in bronze posthumously.

5 Hirschhorn's engagement with commemorative sculpture can be traced back to 1997 in Geneva, when he presented *Piet Mondrian Altar* as part of a series dedicated to four artists and writers including Otto Freundlich (1998), Ingeborg Bachmann (1998), and Raymond Carver (1999). In 1999 he pursued two other series: the first titled *Kiosks* (1999–2002) commemorated artists and writers—Robert Walser, Otto Freundlich, Ingeborg Bachmann, Emmanuel Bove, Meret Oppenheim, Fernand Léger, Emil Nolde, and Liubov Popova—while the second—*Monuments* (1999–2013)—was solely focused on philosophers.

The monument came to embody the vulnerability of artistic autonomy to the theatrics of consensus subservient to the dominant forces of popular opinion, dependent on the approval of the state or patron, fundamentally limited to promoting a hegemonic image of culture, politics, and taste—which is to say, a product of compromised authorship in the name of the ruling power.<sup>6</sup> As articulated by the art historian Rosalind E. Krauss in her resounding 1978 essay “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” the quavering presence of the monument reached a dead end in the struggle for aesthetic validity. As Krauss contests:

With these two sculptural projects [Rodin’s *Gates of Hell* and *Balzac*, both failed endeavors], I would say, one crosses the threshold of the logic of the monument, entering the space of what could be called its negative condition—a kind of sitelessness, or homelessness, an absolute loss of place. Which is to say one enters modernism, since it is the modernist period of sculptural production that operates in relation to this loss of site, producing the monument as abstraction, the monument as pure marker or base, functionally placeless and largely self-referential.<sup>7</sup>

Krauss’s assessment of the nomadic “placeless” monument put into focus the volatile politics governing this form and how its inevitable expulsion from a communal location and civic space prompted a renegotiation of artistic autonomy, one that took sculpture into a lethargic monologue, arrogantly indifferent to its surroundings and muted to passersby. Witnessed a century later, Rodin’s censorship has been followed by a series of defeats in which artworks have been removed and dismantled systematically, and where artists have been encouraged to react rather than interact in public space, having internalized the deceptive arguments of collective spectatorship (often a disguise for suffocating private agendas—gentrification, entertainment, tourism) by which the public space continues to be depleted of political relevance.<sup>8</sup>

The question of the monument in the early twenty-first century cannot be divorced from the question of what kind of sovereignty art ought to have, what kind of relationship art holds to autonomy, and ultimately, what the political position of artists is in providing equal access to their work—that is, the desegregation of the experience of art from class, race, and gender difference. *Gramsci Monument* contrasted the question of site-specificity with one of audience-specificity, vindicating the experience of art as untethered from the social conformities that have let an exclusive minority monopolize it. In the absence of social and economically integrated exhibition spaces, art in public space remains the single most socially demanding and yet pluralistic platform available to artists, and *Gramsci Monument* affirmed this. There in the outdoors, the work of art is released from the reifying rhetoric of patrimony, the surveillance of guards and security cameras that equates the experience of art with prized value, and the social norms of comportment that endure inside the museum, the gallery system, and the private collection. The public sphere remains one of the last bastions where art can reconcile economic multiplicities, be inclusive of social differences, and where the modes of being of the spectator engender new spatial and political

6 This is a project not exclusive to the west. The Mansudae Art Studio has produced and supplied statues and monuments in Pyongyang since 1959. More recently, since 1974, they have also fabricated monuments in a number of countries in Africa, including Ethiopia, Madagascar, Togo, and Guinea. For an informative review of its history see the film *Mansudae Master Class* (2014) by artist by Onejoon Che (b. 1979, lives in Seoul), which was included in *Ghosts, Spies, and Grandmothers* in SeMa Biennial Mediacity Seoul 2014, curated by filmmaker Chan-kyong Park.

7 Rosalind E. Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986), p. 280.

8 The censorship incurred by artists over the past decades—Richard Serra’s *Tilted Arc* (1981), John Ahearn’s *South Bronx Park* (1991), and more recently Charles Ray’s *Boy with Frog* (2009)—comes to mind. This unresolved conflict between art and the specific context in time and space, whether it appears on public or private land, requires reconsideration through a close analysis of the logic that governs everything concerning its form. For an insightful analysis of art in public space in the United States from the early 1970s to the early 1990s, see Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004).

orders that make possible the unexpected to occur, where by lacking total control the fortuitous can interrupt the present and provoke a decisive event (in Alain Badiou's sense) in the spectator's experience.<sup>9</sup>

Hirschhorn's strategy for achieving the stated mission for *Gramsci Monument* begins with his often-quoted motto: "Energy=Yes! Quality=No!"<sup>10</sup> After more than a decade, his mantra endures by touching the heart of the question of the nature of art, shunning fetishized perfection, market value, attendance numbers, or Instagram likes in favor of artistic sincerity and intellectual conviction. Hirschhorn's theory of art is one of equality and inclusion but also of transgression and political economy (what the philosopher Georges Bataille called excessive expenditure of energy), where efforts and resources will be lavishly expended, in this case, to build a sumptuous monument—that is, a work of art where no part of it will be recuperable or monetarily profitable.<sup>11</sup>

Hirschhorn's position of "Energy=Yes! Quality=No!" is surely polemical, since his remains an emancipatory project that contests the speculative value of art, art that is rendered a commodity. Hirschhorn's work recognizes that the history of art, however, is one of great conflicts and struggles, an environment exceptionally crowded with national and private interests, that more often than not distorts the subtle difference between importance and value, significance and asset, and where regressive elements account for a tendency toward phony unanimity and stifling populism. What would become exceptionally evident in preparation for and during *Gramsci Monument* was how Hirschhorn ultimately delineated a method grounded in absolute accountability for each decision to guarantee the truthfulness of its form, a monument built "from the bottom to the top" in a profitless operation centered on three humanistic goals: "coexistence, friendship, and equality."<sup>12</sup>

### New Term of Monument

"The great intellectual, too, must take the plunge into practical life and become an organizer of the practical aspects of culture, if he wants to remain a leader; he must democratize himself, be more in touch with the times." —Antonio Gramsci<sup>13</sup>

Hirschhorn's initial proposal came with a whole reservoir of conditions, beginning with the specifics of the site.<sup>14</sup> *Gramsci Monument's* location was to be on the grounds of a public housing complex, preferably outside Manhattan. The construction crew was not to involve the staff of the institution or be outsourced to a construction company; instead, he was to be assisted by a group of residents—who might or might not have carpentry skills or previous construction experience. He had done this in past outdoor works, including *Bataille Monument* (Kassel, 2002); *Musée Précaire Albinet* (Aubervilliers, 2004), and *The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival* (Amsterdam, 2009). Quite precisely, *Gramsci Monument* would involve building a complex of rooms and elements—a stage, internet room, workshop, lounge, library, exhibition space, sculpture-pool, bar, banners, newspaper office, and radio station—and these spaces would be complemented by a series of daily and weekly programs, some scheduled in advance, others determined on-site by the residents or the artist.<sup>15</sup> In

9 For a succinct defense of Badiou's term, see Hollis Phelps, "Between Rupture and Repetition: Intervention and Eventual Recurrence in the Thought of Alain Badiou," in *Parrhesia: A Journal of Critical Philosophy* no. 5 (2008), pp. 60–72.

10 Hirschhorn coined the phrase in an interview with curator Francesco Bonami; see *Flash Art* 34, no. 216 (January/February 2001), p. 90. A year later he included it in the signage at the entrance of *Bataille Monument* and in consequent works including *Anschool* (Bonnenfanten Museum, Maastricht, The Netherlands, 2005).

11 Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share* (Volume I: Consumption), translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1991), p. 21.

12 This trio of virtues appeared in the first drafts of the proposal for *Gramsci Monument*, again in the map, and in the signage he kept in Erik Farmer's office throughout the duration of the project. "From the bottom to the top" was a saying coined by Forest Houses resident Joe Budda. In its original context, it prescribed the proper order for coordinating an outfit.

13 Antonio Gramsci, Notebook 6 (§10), in *Antonio Gramsci: Prison Notebooks*, trans. and ed. Joseph A. Buttigieg (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992–2007), vol. 3, p. 7.

14 Following the first proposal modeled after *The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival*, Hirschhorn presented a revised document in December 2010 where he outlined the daily and weekly events, structural components, and the names of potential guest speakers, authors who had written about Antonio Gramsci, and writers who made a living from their poetry. The list of participants, which originally included Judith Butler, Angela Davis, Antonio Negri, and Cornel West, was finalized by November 2012, eight months prior to the opening on July 1, 2013.

15 Guest performers for Tuesday's Running Events were invited and organized by residents, while Sunday's Open Microphone consisted of improvisations and was open to both residents and visitors.



Bataille Monument, Kassel, 2002.



addition, a website was dedicated to the project, providing readers with daily updates, documentation, and live-stream of the radio programs and lectures.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, Hirschhorn explicitly required that over fifty local residents be hired to fulfill temporary and daily positions: teaching assistants, librarians, radio DJs, IT technician, newspaper editors, field trip coordinator, maintenance and site caretakers, food service, actors, and security.<sup>17</sup> After seventy-seven days *Gramsci Monument* was to be demolished, hardware equipment and tools raffled among the residents, and the site returned to its original condition. Lastly, the artist was to relocate to New York City, reside in a rented apartment within walking distance from the location, and be involved throughout the six-week construction phase, the eleven weeks of programs, and the two-week demolition phase. Along with him would be four additional nonresidents hired to conduct distinct duties on a daily basis, who were also to stay in a rented apartment in the area.<sup>18</sup> Altogether a total of sixty individuals would constitute the staff that gave the face to *Gramsci Monument*, a troupe without a script, who subsequently made each day an attempt to displace institutional formalities by enacting new norms of convergence, solidarity, and friendship.

While the idea of temporality in art has been a referential term for theater and dance, it remains taboo within the existing traditions of conservation and conventions of ownership that inform the visual arts. For Hirschhorn, the limited timeframe and consequent destruction of his monuments articulate an insistence on a new form of commemoration that operates under the temporal register of an event, a once-in-a-lifetime occurrence. Impermanence is central, and it should be understood within a broader theorization aimed to realign the form of the monument with an emancipatory art that is strictly unique, unrepeatable, and conditioned to the present—an affirmation of the agency of memory. What many critics, including artists and curators, continue to disregard is the political precision of Hirschhorn's elaboration, that his concept of duration is compatible with an emancipatory type of monument.

At the beginning of what would become eighteen months of preparation, Hirschhorn set himself the task of visiting alone various housing developments owned and maintained by the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA).<sup>19</sup> The purpose of these site visits was not

16 Hirschhorn's distribution of information for visitors consisted of allowing the posting of timing and details for the daily events to appear on the web page only on the day of the event. Hirschhorn's approach, a restrained communication campaign, intentionally forced visitors traveling from outside Forest Houses to dedicate several hours to their visit and prioritized the access of information to the local residents who stopped to read the bulletin board where Hirschhorn wrote updates every morning.

17 Residents were paid an hourly wage of \$12, and staffing constituted 60% of the overall budget.

18 Marcus Steinweg, who conducted a philosophical lecture each day; artist Romain Lopez, who documented the project and acted as audio and visual technician; artist Lex Brown, who taught the children's workshops; and myself, the ambassador, responsible for offering suggestions to art-related questions and chaperoning the weekly field trips with local residents.

19 NYCHA is the largest public housing authority in the United States, with a total of 334 developments throughout the five boroughs. <http://www.nyc.gov/html/nycha/html/about/factsheet.shtml>.

necessarily finding the ideal spot but to make “fieldwork,” as he described it, in the form of observations and notations on the character of the different housing developments—the architecture, public areas, street life—and more importantly to make contact with residents, obtain their names and contacts, and potentially schedule meetings where he could speak about his work one-on-one.<sup>20</sup> Hirschhorn wished to show that through fieldwork the artist, by her or his own presence, can understand and control the autonomy over location for the work. After forty-six site visits, his criterion was not whether this or that housing project was interesting, safe, or closer to the subway station, but whether he would encounter a resident who was ready to extend an invitation and deal with the consequences of being associated with an artist, a complete stranger who appeared one day out of nowhere, alone. The real quest for Hirschhorn was for a true act of “absolute hospitality,” to recall the term that the late philosopher Jacques Derrida left us to recognize and value this fortuitous encounter that holds the key to coexistence and is the basis of all friendships:

Absolute hospitality requires that I open up my house and that I give not only to the foreigner (provided with a family name, with the social status of being a foreigner, etc.), but to the absolute, unknown anonymous other, and that I *give place* to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names.<sup>21</sup>

Another way of saying this is that even though NYCHA is the landowner, the residents of public housing are the custodians of the public space, and Hirschhorn understood that only through an act of absolute hospitality would he get a chance to start a friendship with a resident that could enable preparing the ground, a strong foundation for the monument. The proposition that art could (and should) be regarded as a foreigner, a complete stranger seeking shelter, captures the vulnerability that art faces in the public sphere. Hirschhorn saw clearly that if his artwork was to be built in a spirit of equality, it must be formulated from a place of dependability and mutual accountability where decisions have real consequences, and that to begin building *Gramsci Monument* what was needed was the candor and handshake of one single resident. He would call this person the “key figure,” for his role was to open locked gates—and also mindsets.

In what can also be read as a demystification of the purpose of art institutions, we invited Thomas Hirschhorn for a breakfast and conversation with the New York-based employees of Dia early in December 2011, and asked him to present his proposal for *Gramsci Monument* to the staff. Why a conversation if the project had already been approved by the director? Why these investments in intimating with the artist and employees? The first step, it seemed to me, was to consider the staff at Dia part of his fieldwork and to challenge the internal skepticism over this incursion into the public again. At the time, it had been fifteen years since Dia’s last public commission, an extension of Joseph Beuys’s *7000 Eichen* (*7000 Oaks*, 1988/96), which brought twenty-three trees and basalt stones to West 22nd Street.<sup>22</sup> Being a partner of Hirschhorn’s *Gramsci*

20 Borrowing a term from anthropology, Hirschhorn conducted “fieldwork” in forty-six NYCHA developments over a period of a year and a half, creating dialogue and collecting observations and life histories. Because he is based in Paris, he had to make eight trips to New York, spending a week or two for each visit. This method followed an approach established during the preparations for *Bataille Monument* in 2002. See “Letter to Iris (Reflection on the Bataille Monument)” (2002), *Critical Laboratory*, pp. 231–33.

21 Jacques Derrida, “Anne Dufourmantelle invites Jacques Derrida to respond.” Mieke Bal and Hent de Vries, editors, *Of Hospitality: Cultural Memory in the Present* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 25.

22 Joseph Beuys’s contribution to Documenta 7 in 1982, which consisted of planting 7,000 oak trees around the city of Kassel, accompanied by a basalt column of approximately 1.2 meters, was partially financed by Dia Art Foundation. See *Portrait of an Art Performance: Joseph Beuys 7000 Oaks*, edited by Johannes Stüttgen, translated by Elisabeth Huhn (Dusseldorf: FIU, 1982). Between 1988 and 1996, with the permission of Beuys’s estate, Dia planted a variety of trees on 22nd Street from 10th to 11th Avenues. Each tree was paired with a basalt column.

*Monument* meant that the Dia staff needed to be fully implicated in the same act of absolute hospitality that he was searching for through the five boroughs of New York. It was essential that the partnership be grounded on meaningful exchanges and intelligent debates across all areas of the institution to secure clarity, generate a palpable spirit of solidarity, and encourage teamwork—a deliberate complicity beyond handling logistical steps and raising funds. Hirschhorn concluded that first meeting with the staff of Dia with a forewarning: “Work in public space is never a total success and never a total failure.”<sup>23</sup>

During his presentation to the Dia staff, Hirschhorn made connections between the proposed *Gramsci Monument* and *The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival*, a work that required him moving to the Bijlmermeer, on the outskirts of Amsterdam, so he could be present at the site for fifty-six consecutive days. As he recalled anecdotes from his experience, questions arose concerning potential institutional entrapments ahead: the bureaucracy of permits with city officials at the housing department, potential harassment by police and fire departments, vandalism, and the potential indifference of residents or even funders. Such scenarios of explicit difficulties were amusing and tantalizing for some peers; for others it was simply distressing and confusing. *Gramsci Monument* would be vastly complex, logistically demanding, and difficult to summarize for the massive orchestration of meetings, emails, and phone calls. It meant that every single member of the administrative staff would be involved in the production of the project on one level or another, and to this day is referenced in meetings as exemplary of achieving the impossible.

Hirschhorn’s use of the mission as a trope aligns him not only with missionary work and military campaigns, but also, to a more poignant extent, with institutions of learning such as museums and universities.<sup>24</sup> The polemical thrust of Hirschhorn’s interrogation of the museum as seen in the outdoor project *Musée Précaire Albinet, 24H Foucault* (2004, Palais de Tokyo, Paris), and *Anschool* (2005, Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht, The Netherlands) has been in defense of spaces and platforms of dissent, where the artist can bring into account unconventional conceptions of art, wrestle with conformist ideologies, and affirm an emancipatory politics as the sole mission of art. The issue of access to a plethora of knowledge has been a distinct trait in Hirschhorn’s production process as well as the form of his work. Printed text, in the form of photocopied articles and essays, mounds of books, and handouts for visitors to take away, became a signature feature of early works such as *World Airport* (1999) and *Cavemanman* (2002), while the format of the public lecture has taken precedent in larger-scale projects, recalling the space of instruction and exchange of the university, where he can enact the role of host.

Throughout the duration of *Gramsci Monument*, Hirschhorn was present, attending every event, always sitting in the front row and quick to ask the first question at the conclusion of the speaker’s presentation. Hirschhorn has remarked,

I want to confront the museum, as I would any other context that I must confront in my line of work. It is clear that the museum is not an ideal place for art—but public spaces, galleries, collector’s homes, and other spaces dedicated to art are not ideal places for

23 He reached this conclusion after *Bataille Monument*. “Work in public space can be neither a success nor a failure. Instead, it is about the experience, about exposing oneself, about enduring and working out an experience. A project in public space is never a total success or a total failure. I think working in public space does not need these criteria. Am I capable of making contact with people? Am I capable of creating events? Am I acting in earnest?” Hirschhorn, “Letter to Iris (Reflection on the *Bataille Monument*),” p. 238.

24 See Claire Bishop, “Pedagogic Projects: ‘How do you bring a classroom to life as if it were a work of art?’” in *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (New York: Verso, 2012), pp. 241–74.

art either. Art does not need an ideal location to exist and it can shine wherever it is.<sup>25</sup>

In disposing of idealism, Hirschhorn turns our attention to a greater potential, the possibility of actually reinventing the terms, of measuring jubilation rather than victory, imagining accountability instead of the self-deception of popularity. The central thesis on his distinct understanding of the power play between institutions, audiences, and artists is outlined in his *Spectrum of Evaluation* (2008). This diagram depicts the relationship between three entities: spectrum of evaluation, the other, and artist. The first category encapsulated the art world's various professions: "institution-director, art critic, curator, gallerist, art historian, collector, art-professor."<sup>26</sup> The arrow sprouting out of this group, labeled "evaluation," is directed toward the circle labeled "artist" on the bottom of the page. A second dynamic is represented by an arrow labeled "the work" that comes out of the artist in the direction of the third group, "the other," who in return sends back "judgment" to the artist. A very singular differentiation is taking place here, for it is clear that the artist is directing the work not toward the institutional and theoretical community behind museums, schools, and galleries, but purposely in the opposite direction toward those who are not monetarily involved with art. This brings us to the radical axis that Hirschhorn draws on the overlapping of the other and the spectrum, which he names "the non-exclusive audience," a confluence of these two groups that constitutes Hirschhorn's primary spectator. So this is not just any spectator, but a viewer that is produced from the ideology of assessment and appraisal that conditions the development of art as much as from a subaltern group (in the Gramscian sense) formed by individuals excluded from the artworld. This admission, which in no way excludes the company of professionals, artists, and academics but simply qualifies it, recalls a sentiment shared by the artist David Hammons, whom Hirschhorn quoted in a bulletin board outside *Bataille Monument*:

The art audience is the worst audience in the world. It's overly educated, it's conservative, it's out to criticize, not to understand and it never has any fun. Why should I spend my time playing to that audience? That's like going into a lion's den. So I refuse to deal with that audience, and I'll play with the street audience. That audience is much more human and their opinion is from the heart. They don't have any reason to play games; there's nothing gained or lost.<sup>27</sup>

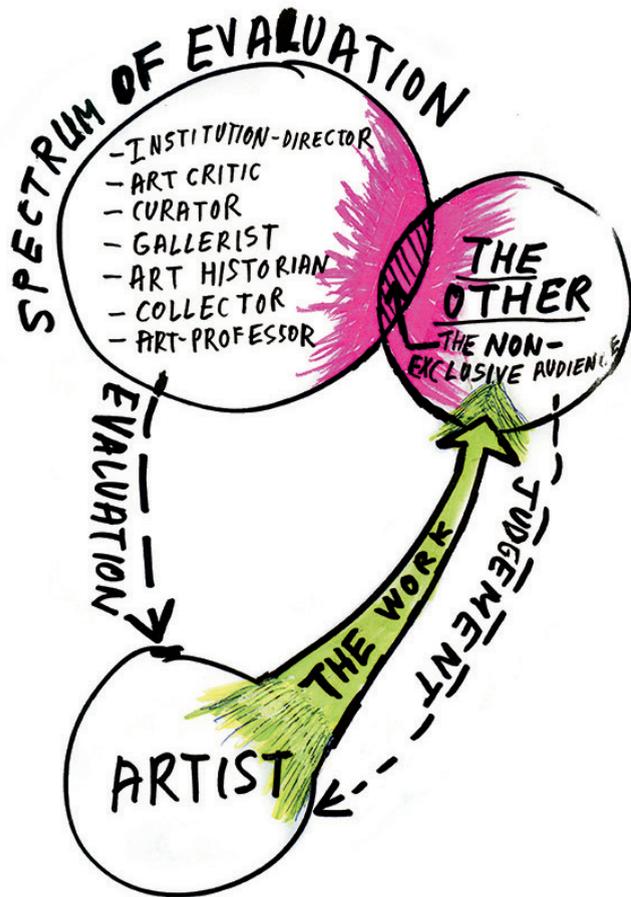
It is Hirschhorn's conception of a non-exclusive audience that points to a different terrain, a space of greater intellectual shifts, social diversity, and integration. The vision is one of an encounter between the various types of audiences: exclusive art professionals and subaltern social groups. The riddle in Hirschhorn's term is not only the blending of these audiences but that actual contact and recognition. In writing about the diagram a year later, Hirschhorn concludes:

What is crucial in my diagram is the fact that the "spectrum of evaluation" OVERLAPS with the circle of the other; the core of

25 "Becoming One's Own Museum: Conversation between Thomas Hirschhorn and François Piron" (2006/2009), *Habiter poétiquement le monde* (Lille: LAM, 2011), repr. *Critical Laboratory*, p. 369.

26 I first saw him use this theoretical model during a lecture at Cooper Union School of Art, New York, in October 2008. Hirschhorn's original drawing included a Freudian slip of sorts, as he mistakenly used the French word "spectre" for the German "spektrum" (instead of the English "spectrum"). In this first version, "Spectre of Evaluation" humorously insinuated the menacing aura of those in the position of evaluating art. Conversation with the artist, September 22, 2014.

27 David Hammons, quoted by Hirschhorn, in "Letter to Iris (Reflections on the *Bataille Monument*)," p. 237.



Spectrum of Evaluation, 2008

the “non-exclusive audience” is located in this overlap. No one is excluded from my work, no one is excluded from being able to judge it. I do not wish to create a new or other exclusivity with my diagram; on the contrary, I want to exclude nothing. But as an artist, I think I must determine the dynamic, the line of force, or the DIRECTION OF IMPACT. That is the reason for this diagram.<sup>28</sup>

At the core of Hirschhorn’s argument is a proposal for a new type of spectator, a body comprising individuals from different if not opposing economic and cultural stratas that must be considered in connection with the production of art as a way to protest the boundaries of exclusivity that have limited the experience of art to an affluent minority.

Over the years Hirschhorn has gathered materials and language, written and spoken, with the awareness that this is part of the archiving machine that can recount his decisions, intuitions, and also the logic of his process. This archive of notes and imagery has found its outlet in a singular format of mural-sized collages, which he titles Maps, and where he traces the movement of ideas and outlines his subject as territories that connect to lines of reasoning, to causes and effects, that together frame the interplay of references and offer a self-explanatory panorama of his vision.<sup>29</sup> This kind of mapping is one method Hirschhorn employs to communicate and to get people to understand him, to work with him, and also to dream with him. *Gramsci Monument* was no exception. Shortly after the breakfast meeting at Dia, he began producing

28 Hirschhorn, “Spectrum of Evaluation” (2009), *Critical Laboratory*, pp. 80–81.

29 Over the years he has amassed a series of maps and occasionally produced in collaborations with his friend and philosopher Marcus Steinweg, where together they bring a deliberately congested network of connecting lines that not necessarily aids comprehension but represents circuits of interconnection of multiple parts. These include *Nietzsche-Map* (2003), *Hannah Arendt-Map* (2003), *Foucault Map* (2004), *The Map of Friendship between Art and Philosophy* (2007), *Spinoza-Map* (2007), *The Eye-Map I (What the eye sees in red)* (2008), *The Eye-Map II (What makes the eye see red)* (2008), and *The Map of Headlessness* (2011).

*The Gramsci Monument-Map* (2013), adding images and statements as the project evolved and his trips to New York increased in regularity. On the top margin of the collage two decisive questions sum up the basis of Hirschhorn's inquiry: "Where do I stand? What do I want?" written in his energetic scrawl.<sup>30</sup> The answers to these questions come about as hasty lines connecting images and texts into a maze that finds anchors in his favored terms, including agreement, coexistence, equality, friendship, headlessness, presence and production, and universality.<sup>31</sup> Every element in the map is interconnected. With patience, the lines carry the eye to a concrete reference that in turn leads to his position and frames the subject of the investigation. For example, on the upper-right-hand side of the map are a network of images of existing monuments in New York City dedicated to famous Italians: General Giuseppe Garibaldi in Washington Square Park, Dante Alighieri in front of Lincoln Center, and Giuseppe Verdi on the Upper West Side. These conventional forms of commemoration are linked to images of Gramsci's home in Ghilarza (Sardinia) and the prison cell he was forced to inhabit, pointing to his absence in the pantheon of important Italians. The map, a score of the movement of Hirschhorn's thinking, evolved and acquired additions over the months, and it ultimately helped him ensure that his proposal would be understood by those residents who were willing to listen to him.

In late December 2012, after three repeated visits to Forest Houses in the South Bronx, where he met with community organizers Diane Herbert and Clyde Thomson, Hirschhorn would be encouraged to attend the monthly meeting of the residents association and meet with a resident by the name of Erik Farmer. Hirschhorn, who possesses considerable social charm as well as an acute sense of empathy, made a positive impression upon the group and on Farmer, who immediately inquired about Antonio Gramsci, his origins and work, and asked for a copy of his *Prison Notebooks*. Hirschhorn thought his quest for a location could only stop upon meeting the "key figure," an individual with enthusiasm and determination to help him realize his idea and garner support from the residents. Sometimes Hirschhorn speaks of "grace" (with a nod to philosopher Alain Badiou's laicized grace, or a "grace without God") to qualify occurrences that by carrying more precision and more certainty than mere chance reveal an awareness of the interplay of the unexpected.<sup>32</sup> Naturally, the meeting with Farmer was one of those rare moments where he felt the encounter qualified as an act of "grace," and it brought the year and a half of research to an end. In a matter of days, Farmer's photograph and name along with a picture of Forest Houses would be added to *The Gramsci Monument-Map*, and he would become Hirschhorn's ever-present companion throughout the construction, running, and dismantling of the project.<sup>33</sup>

30 These paired questions have been a recurring interrogation by Hirschhorn that was first articulated in the schema "Where do I stand? What do I want?" included in the solo exhibition *Stand Alone* at Arndt Gallery Berlin in summer 2007, where photocopies were available for visitors to take away. See "Why 'Where Do I Stand?' and Why 'What Do I Want?'" (2008) in *Critical Laboratory*, pp. 67-71.

31 These terms are recurring leitmotifs in Hirschhorn's writing. See e.g., "Letter to Elizabeth (Inventing My Own Terms)" (2010) and "The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival" (2009), *Critical Laboratory*, pp. 89-97 and 299-301.

32 Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (London: Verso, 2001).

33 Forest Houses was completed on November 12, 1956. The 19.62-acre development is bordered by East 163rd and East 166th Streets, and Trinity and Tinton Avenues, in the Bronx, and as of 2013, it housed 3,376 residents in a total of 15 units with 1,349 apartments.



*The Gramsci Monument-Map, 2013, installed in Erik Farmer's office, Forest Houses, Bronx, New York*

## Provoke Encounters

“Quality should be attributed to men, not to things.”  
 –Antonio Gramsci<sup>34</sup>

*Gramsci Monument* was the last of four outdoor works in Hirschhorn's monument series, where he memorialized authors whose writings are personally important to him: Baruch Spinoza, Gilles Deleuze, Georges Bataille, and Antonio Gramsci. Because this is a list of favorites, any attempt to call into question their compatibilities would be irrelevant. And yet, when asked to explain his reason for dedicating his monuments to these specific writers, Hirschhorn ripped a sheet of paper from a notepad and drew a circle, which he divided into four equal sectors and labeled each one with the following words: love, philosophy, aesthetics, politics. These he called the “form- and forcefields” of his work.<sup>35</sup> Hirschhorn went on to explain that the commonalities among these literary figures lay not in their methodology but solely in how their life and work influenced his own thinking. Then he wrote their names on the edges of the circle: above the line dividing the “forcefield” between the categories of love and philosophy, he jotted Spinoza; on the border of the terms philosophy and aesthetics he added Deleuze; Bataille was placed on the edge of aesthetics and politics; and finally, on the borderline of politics and love, he concluded with Gramsci.

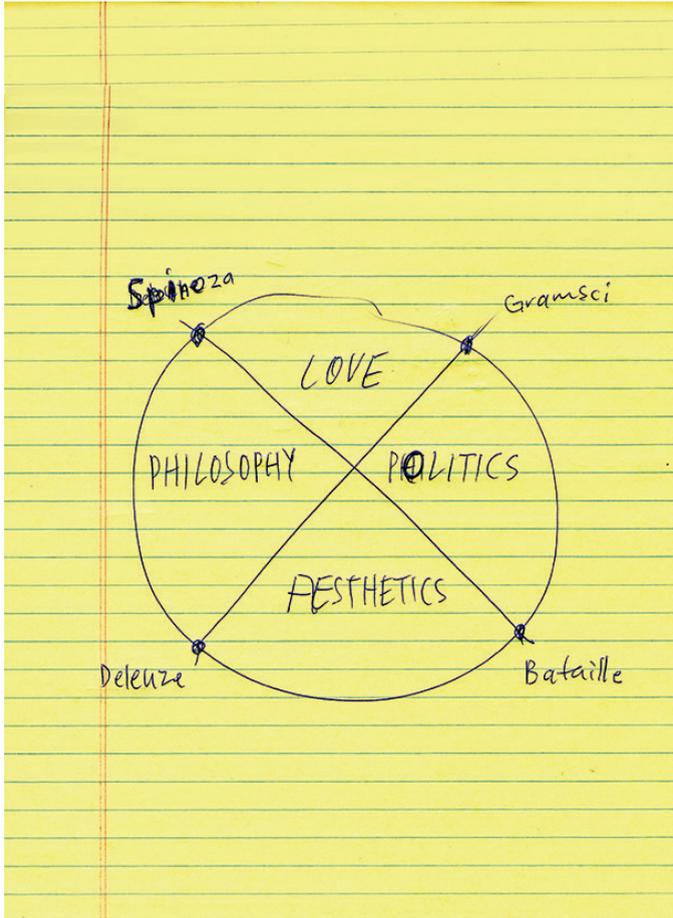
Within the convention of philosophy, intellectual affinities are produced in writing. Excepting Spinoza (whom Deleuze wrote on for his second doctoral thesis),<sup>36</sup> the common subject among Bataille, Deleuze, and Gramsci, all twentieth-century authors, was Karl Marx—the analyst of class struggle and predominant exponent of the evolutionary theory between language and capital. Hirschhorn's celebration of the work of philosophers and political theorists follows what seems a two-part desire—on the one hand, to retake the polemical form of commemorative sculpture; and on the other, a truly autodidactic project, to feed his interest in accessing knowledge. As he wrote in 2003:

I want to make it possible first to be in contact with information, to read about the work, the philosopher, and then afterwards

34 Gramsci, Notebook 1 (§143), vol. 1, p. 226.

35 The explanation that I am describing took place in the office of Anthony Julian Tamburri, the Dean of the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute at Queens College, CUNY, in New York, where we had gone to secure the loan of five hundred books that once belonged to the late John Cammett, a revered scholar of Italian Modern History who taught at CUNY Graduate Center and is credited for translating Gramsci's writing into English in the United States. Cammett was the author of *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism* (Stanford University Press, 1967) and edited the *Bibliografia Gramsciana, 1922–1988*. We remain indebted to the generosity and enthusiasm of Sandi E. Cooper, Cammett's widow, a member of the history faculty at the CUNY Graduate Center and the College of Staten Island.

36 See Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza and the Problem of Expression* (New York: Zone Books, 1992).



"Four Philosophers" Schema, 2012

to look at the statue. I want the monument to be diversely accessible. Thus, the monument is not just standing there; it offers the possibility for the viewer to be informed—about its meaning and furthermore about the thinking of these philosophers. . . . This monument will not intimidate. It does not come from above. It is made through admiration; it comes from below.<sup>37</sup>

By naming these four authors, Hirschhorn indicated his deepest desire to achieve the creativity that derives from absolute freedom, an unhampered production grounded on the concept of universality that places art within Marx's political project.<sup>38</sup> This is, in fact, the common political and ontological locus of the quartet, an immensely productive and absolutely crucial question for each of them, the question of what constitutes autonomy. We might see Spinoza's understand of autonomy as relinquishing the fear of death, whereas for Bataille it perhaps rests in the sovereignty of gift trading, for Deleuze in the concept of multiplicity, and for Gramsci in his emancipatory conception of the intellectual.

Hirschhorn is known to have dedicated several works to other beloved literary figures and artists. His altars and kiosks similarly speak of the commemorative nature of sculpture, but diverge from the monument series in the extent that the realization of the latter work is dependent on the contribution of others.<sup>39</sup> The emphasis on implicating neighboring residents is part and parcel of the logic of the

<sup>37</sup> Hirschhorn, "Statement: Monuments" (2003), p. 51 in this volume.

<sup>38</sup> See "Letter to Coraly (On Joseph Beuys and 'Capital')" (1994), *Critical Laboratory*, p. 21; "Letter to Elizabeth (Inventing My Own Terms)," pp. 93–94.

<sup>39</sup> "[I]n contrast to the altars which are personal commitments, these monuments are conceived as community commitments." "Statement: Monuments," p. 51.

monument series. For example, a sex shop owner provided access to electricity to light *Spinoza Monument* (Amsterdam, 1999), residents of Cité Champfleury maintained *Deleuze Monument* (Avignon, 2000), and in *Bataille Monument*, the building crew recruited for the fabrication of the work consisted of residents of Friedrich-Wöhler Siedlung.

It is necessary to differentiate Hirschhorn's decision in *Bataille Monument* to ask for assistance for the construction of the work from the local residents, as it can be mistakenly equated with that of artists who outsource their production and hire skilled fabricators—industrial designers, computer engineers, metalworkers, and welders—to translate an idea, model, or image into a flawless object. The originality and virtue of *Bataille Monument* and consequent works was the plea for help; that is, an honest acknowledgment of his limitations rather than an ingenuous claim to “collaborate” with the local residents. Having professional architects and specialists supervise the production would have aligned Hirschhorn's work with the ideology of durability and permanence that has been reflected in the authoritarian model of public sculpture that art critic Lucy Lippard famously termed “plunk art.”<sup>40</sup> As Hirschhorn observed: “The assistance by especially talented, fast, or specialized technicians is not needed; assistance by the residents is needed! For the simple reason that the project is being done here! . . . I could not complete my project on my own, and that is why I posed the question and demand: Don't do it my way! Let's do it together!”<sup>41</sup>

It is precisely this affirmation and identification with the so-called ordinary people that in Hirschhorn's case, whether the work is made by him or with the support of residents, the resulting form is characterized precisely by the refusal of refinements and expertise, pristineness or quality. By conceiving the creative process from the standpoint of immediacy, deliberately prioritizing speed and haste over skill or craftsmanship, the defective character of Hirschhorn's work introduces an ethic of here-and-now where each decision is made at the moment within the scope of a given situation or parameter. Here, Hirschhorn exercises a radical break with functionality and utility to advance a politics of sincerity that finds systematic coherence in imperfections. His methodology inscribes tension onto works of art because the production itself interrogates and crystallizes a political standpoint, the interruption of an ideology dominated by guarantees of perfection that he understands to be deadly for artistic autonomy. This is the ideological battlefield; through the impermanence of art Hirschhorn unapologetically centralizes labor in his work in public space. He has identified art's vulnerability, its exposure to damage and vandalism, as “le précaire” (the precarious), a condition of displacement where there are no guarantees. In acknowledging precariousness, the hazardous and unpredictable nature of working in public, and integrating it into the reality of his work without delusions of grandeur, his work amplifies social and political oscillations of public space.

This understanding of the place of art in the arena of social life gained form in *Timeline: Work in Public Space* (2012), a collage measuring thirty feet in length that was exhibited in an empty garage in Manhattan, prior to the opening of *Gramsci Monument*. *Timeline* chronicled an extensive archive of images and written statements dating back

40 Lucy Lippard, “Looking Around: Where We Are, Where We Could Be,” in Suzanne Lacy, ed., *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995), p. 121.

41 Hirschhorn, “Letter to Iris (Reflections on the *Bataille Monument*),” p. 239.

to 1989 and registered the conditions and consequences of over sixty works Hirschhorn has presented in public space, from spontaneous interventions on the sidewalks or in empty lots to infamous cases where the works were burned or vandalized. What is the nature of the exchange of art in the public sphere? The latent violence of the public space, as seen in the vandalism against Hirschhorn's work, renders art perilous to the legal and political system, and hence is a criterion for a precarious presence that mediates a relationship between potentiality and act, alternating between the virtual and the actual.<sup>42</sup> A turning point in Hirschhorn's thinking happened after a five-year hiatus from exhibiting outdoors, and it raised the issue of the fundamental principle concerning the common struggle for absolute autonomy in the production of subjectivity. One of the most striking elements of the principle he named "Presence and Production" is the proposition that daily presence, a type of performance endurance, combined with the encounter with the viewer and guest participants generates production. As he stated, "I am the one who must give something of myself first, in order to invite the other (the inhabitant) to give something in turn."<sup>43</sup> During the past decade or so—and especially after *Bataille Monument*—this dimension of productive presence (that is, of a presence that transforms the very thing it produces) will play an indispensable role in Hirschhorn's regard of precariousness. What he is doing by attending every day, over periods of fifty, sixty, one hundred days, is implicitly reformulating through the channels of endurance the duration of a work of art that becomes an event. At *Gramsci Monument* he observed a nine-hour work shift, seven days a week, for seventy-seven days, which required obtaining a temporary O-1 visa that allowed him, as a Swiss citizen, to live in the United States beyond twelve consecutive weeks.

In Hirschhorn's methodology his recognition of the relevance of remaining on-site, meeting with residents, partaking of the daily activities, introducing the guest speakers, and standing alongside the visitors follows the model of the artist Joseph Beuys. It was Beuys who demonstrated the value of establishing contact with audiences, first with his students, and then more broadly at his *Information Office* at Documenta 5, in 1972, where he set up a desk and engaged in conversations with visitors for the one-hundred-day duration of the exhibition. Later on, during his first visit to the United States, Beuys conducted a durational work titled *Energy Plan for the Western Man* (1974), a ten-day lecture tour consisting of public appearances and discussions to a packed audience of students at the New School for Social Research in New York, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Minneapolis School of Art.<sup>44</sup> Hirschhorn shares with Beuys the fearless commitment to being accessible to both amicable and hostile audiences in a discursive space. This openness demonstrates a vivid view of reality as experienced in the present; that is, the choice to remain visible makes clear the potency of their expectation of the viewer. Works of art have the ability to display their internal logic and generate productive activity from their surroundings, and more specifically, in Hirschhorn's case, he understands that his presence brings about human interaction and this in turn materializes a type of production as a result of that interaction: a political consumption. This also means that whenever Hirschhorn speaks of presence and production he is identifying a virtue

42 Apart from twenty drills, two iPads, and a projector that went missing shortly after the lecture by artist Alfredo Jaar, all other equipment and the entire contents of the library remained intact at *Gramsci Monument*. The security system consisted of a bicycle lock per door. Keys for each lock remained under the supervision of one resident whose job consisted of unlocking them at around 10:45 am and locking them each day at 7 pm.

43 "The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival," p. 299. Hirschhorn coined the term "Presence and Production" in preparation for *The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival*.

44 For a summary of Beuys's tour see Douglas Davis, "The Man from Düsseldorf" in *Newsweek* (January 21, 1974).



Thomas Hirschhorn in conversation with Hal Foster during *Timeline: Work in Public Space*, September 15, 2012, Dia:Chelsea, New York

of accessibility and readiness, redeploying Beuys's rhetoric of action to reveal the extent to which art is a conduit to reveal the unperceivable and to affirm truths.

Building a monument to Antonio Gramsci in the United States would have been a challenge under any condition. Gramsci was one of the founders of the Italian Communist Party, and his ideas were overlooked outside of selective academic circles during the Cold War period.<sup>45</sup> Hirschhorn's proposal required a deliberate clarity and confidence, in the face of skeptics who doubted the willingness for residents in low-income housing to take an interest in the work and life of the Marxist theorist.<sup>46</sup> Considering the enthusiastic response that *Gramsci Monument* received from hundreds of residents at Forest Houses, we are left to speculate that Hirschhorn's strategy provided an inexhaustible source of motivation and empathy to those in a living environment civically impoverished and extraordinarily deprived of governmental support. Hirschhorn's power to impose his vision was not only the act of an artist reclaiming artistic autonomy—autonomy to decide the location, autonomy to decide the duration, and more importantly, autonomy to decide who to honor—but a conscious exam for those ready to engage in an exercise in thinking equality and justice.

### Create an Event

"The only justifiable enthusiasm is that which accompanies the intelligent will, intelligent activity, the inventive richness of concrete initiatives which change existing reality."

—Antonio Gramsci<sup>47</sup>

On January 22, 2013, less than a month after Hirschhorn's encounter with Erik Farmer, and only four months prior to the scheduled first day of construction, an ambiguous and noncommittal approval was granted by former chairman of NYCHA John Rhea to move forward with preparations. His lukewarm support was essentially an "I won't stop you." It was Farmer's "approval" that the project really needed. During the meeting in the NYCHA offices in downtown Manhattan, in the middle of a snowstorm, Farmer answered the chairman's question "Why should

45 "In the English-speaking world, it was only in the late 1960s and early 1970s that Gramsci's ideas became more widely known. The publication in 1971 of *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* made his ideas available to a wider audience." Mark McNally and John Schwarzmantel, eds., *Gramsci and Global Politics: Hegemony and Resistance* (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 3.

46 Gramsci's decadelong imprisonment resonated with a number of residents who had served time in prison and alarmed at least one city official, who asked if we (Dia) "wanted to start a riot."

47 Gramsci, Notebook 9 (§130). See "Introduction," in *Antonio Gramsci: Prison Notebooks*, vol. 1, p. 12. The fourth volume of Buttigieg's translations is yet unpublished.

this happen at Forest Houses?” with an unflinching “Because nobody is offering anything else.” The decision to address NYCHA only after identifying the location and having the full commitment of one resident was entirely Hirschhorn’s tactic, one that exerted power over the remarkably bureaucratic machinery of an organization with 11,000 workers. Although there was no financial obligation and NYCHA’s involvement would remain symbolic, Chairman Rhea’s endorsement was logistically necessary in helping Dia obtain a construction permit, establish a comprehensive emergency plan, and draft legal terms for the temporary occupation of a section of the public grounds at Forest Houses.<sup>48</sup>

Hirschhorn’s reputation is that he is uncompromising when it comes to the specificities of his work—location, program, staffing, operation costs—but he exhibited “low control” over the physical qualities—that is, the architectural shell of the monument.<sup>49</sup> The stakes were sharply functional: the structure had to be safe for visitors and handicap accessible. He shrugged off details such as doorknobs or windows and focused on instructing the crew to work in groups and alternate on tasks according to their individual skills and “competence” using power tools.<sup>50</sup> Hirschhorn’s basic point is clear: he was guiding assistants rather than overseeing employees. His refusal even to take attendance revealed his personal commitment to a spirit of creative play for the whole undertaking.<sup>51</sup>

It took Hirschhorn a year and a half to find the location for *Gramsci Monument* and only six weeks to build it.<sup>52</sup> The resulting stage-like platform that covered an area of approximately 8,000 square feet deceptively shadowed the mass of wooden pallets that were delivered over five days.<sup>53</sup> The quantity of materials reflects the ambition of the undertaking:

4500 recycled wood pallets  
500 4’ x 8’ plywood sheets  
10,000 linear feet assorted lumber  
720 rolls 2” PVC tape

Hirschhorn zigzagged between his roles as artist and laborer, instilling a distinct atmosphere of camaraderie while also achieving productivity and a sense of mutual accountability. The two ramps went up by the second week and the staircases and a bridge to connect the two main platforms shortly after. Braving the challenges of organization and punctuality, Hirschhorn’s rationale of presence and production began to materialize into a work ethic: the process of production of a work of art demands complete commitment. Those who skipped work or arrived late simply forced the ones present to work harder. Farmer was the leader of the installation crew and responsible for the selection of the team; Hirschhorn’s only condition was that they be residents of Forest Houses.<sup>54</sup> The process confirmed the artist’s own refusal to consider artistic production a specialized activity. Rather, Hirschhorn’s vision for the construction phase of *Gramsci Monument* centered on reinforcing an atmosphere of productivity, where the real question was one of enthusiasm rather than dexterity, where everybody experienced together the common revelation: art is a connective force.

48 Behind the scenes, for a period of four months, Dia’s finance director Ashley Mitchell and assistant curator Kelly Kivland would chisel a 15-page memorandum of understanding with NYCHA and together with the director of human resources conduct the hiring process for over fifty residents.

49 To give some examples, Hirschhorn welcomed the signage and graffiti made by residents and their friends. The food menu at Gramsci bar was the decision of the group of residents running the business and the decision to produce T-shirts and hats came from Erik Farmer.

50 Each day a fifteen-minute briefing was conducted at 9:15 am and a debriefing at 4:45 pm. The discussion centered on the goals for the day and the week. On a number of occasions Hirschhorn planned short presentations; Philippe Vergne was invited to speak to the crew about his job as director of Dia Art Foundation, and I also gave a short talk about my role as curator of the institution.

51 Where for Hirschhorn the residents were not employees but individuals who helped him realize his work, for the residents the monetary reward that this opportunity enabled was considered employment and was sorely missed after the dismantling of the project.

52 As Hirschhorn had estimated, the construction phase started on Monday, May 13, and ended on Sunday, June 30.

53 During the first week, two staff members from Dia Art Foundation drove from Beacon, New York, at five in the morning to the Bronx to operate a forklift to unload the pallets since neither the artist nor the residents in the construction crew—fourteen men and one woman—had the required license to operate heavy machinery.

54 During the first weeks of construction it was immediately brought to my attention that Latino residents, primarily Puerto Rican, were unaware of the job opportunities even though flyers were posted throughout all fifteen buildings. Or, to put it more precisely, Hirschhorn was accused of favoring the African American residents. In truth what was at play was an expression of something integral and latent to power dynamics; that is, racial segregation and economic inequality are intimately related and even linked to one another on the basis of exclusion. And just as *Gramsci Monument* brought this hard truth to the surface, there is also a distinct development that occurred throughout the programmatic phase that undermined this powerful condition.

To understand how this occurred, it seems appropriate to frame the discussion around a critical moment during the construction, as it bears relevance to Hirschhorn's conviction of the emancipatory nature of art. During one of the many rainy days that month a quarrel unfolded. The collective sentiment among the group that day was that the rain had become too much. The ponchos that Dia had ordered were cheap, and their clothes were getting wet. By late morning the comments turned into phone calls to Farmer, who was in Atlanta for a funeral, and escalated into serious complaints about the dangers of using power tools and being under trees during lightning. The crew gathered under the blue tarp where the portable table saw was stationed. Hirschhorn was reluctant about missing a day of work because of rain. Walter, one of the senior members of the group, said aloud what they were all feeling: "Thomas, you don't love us. You only love your work." Just as easily as voices had been raised, there was now absolute silence, for he had spoken the truth. It was understood that the workday, at this point, had ended. As we each grabbed a tool to take back to the office where they were stored overnight, people found themselves smiling, because they had understood a devotion and stubbornness that made Hirschhorn an artist. Recognizing that determination, with its symbolic defiance that some dismiss as absurd but for others signifies a distinctive sincerity, crystallized his character for the residents, and inquiries about the project itself started to grow.

To aptly summarize the state of experiential intoxication unleashed after opening day, Monday, July 1, not only would be futile (as it would be infused with a single personal narrative), but further would elide the essential property of *Gramsci Monument*, the aspiration to be an intimately private experience for the sake of a social circumstance and potential encounter between individuals, the non-exclusive audience. Moreover, there was an aspiration to pinpoint very precisely the notion that art's autonomy is at the heart of an interrogation of its production, to make this transaction intelligible and the experience edifying, to bring visitors—residents and nonresidents—together in a distinct field of human activity where the singularity of the event separates past from present. *Gramsci Monument* dislocated time to influence a redistribution of the language game of possibilities, intentionally collapsing social divisions and adequately recognizing the urgency of having people who are not used to being together encounter one another.

### Think Gramsci Today

Antonio Gramsci died in Rome, on April 27, 1937, a Tuesday. The previous day, across the Tyrrhenian Sea, air bombs had stunned civilians in broad daylight and made of the Basque town of Guernica ruins. Unbeknownst to Gramsci, the tragic event in Spain would foretell the growing totalitarianism that has been the agent of annihilation, trauma, and perpetual war ever since. It was while mourning Gramsci's death that Tatiana Schucht, his sister-in-law, opened a safe at the Banca Commerciale in Rome to protect his notebooks, which she had smuggled out of prison with the help of his last cellmate.<sup>55</sup> In fact, Schucht's transgression, like the ones Sophocles illustrated for us in the actions taken by both Antigone and Electra, expressed the suffering of reckoning

55 David Forgacs, ed., *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916-1935* (New York: NYU Press, 2000), p. 24.

with the incontestable silence of death. Gramsci's imprisonment, from which he could not liberate himself, would be vindicated by the publication and translation of his notebooks and correspondences, reclaiming his thoughts and passions, what was finite and rendered infinite. As we already know, Gramsci, who experienced total defeat as a political prisoner, would be commemorated for both his work and life, remembered, and read posthumously.

Let's once again take up the discussion from the beginning. Gramsci fell between the lines of love and politics in Hirschhorn's force field. Hirschhorn's monument centered on the fundamental reconfiguration of a transformative and desegregated experience, an experiment that soberly captured the prevailing disproportion and elitism that subtracts and annuls universal access to works of art. The system of thought and action that structured *Gramsci Monument* was one that unequivocally protested the troubling and isolating path taken by museums and civic institutions supporting the status quo. Or, to put it more precisely, the audience-specific character of *Gramsci Monument* gave physical presence to the Italian thinker's perpetual analysis of the social and political forces outside the hegemonic power structure.

The cross-cultural rationale of *Gramsci Monument* was an intertwining that gave central stage to the only published texts by the Marxist literary critic, his *Prison Notebooks* (first translated into English in 1957) but also, and of equal importance to Hirschhorn, Gramsci's personal correspondences (first translated into English in 1973). Already evident in the monument's sculpture-pool, Gramsci's work was the reflective body where one could cool off—abandon pessimism and regenerate a capacity for reconstruction, for turning in a different direction. As the late Stuart Hall pointed out, "There is nothing more crucial, in this respect, than Gramsci's recognition that every crisis is also a moment of reconstruction; that there is no destruction which is not, also, reconstruction; that, historically nothing is dismantled without also attempting to put something new in its place; that every form of power not only excludes but produces something."<sup>56</sup> In many of the conversations leading to the project and in its aftereffects, the innovative, new, and finite character of Hirschhorn's idea of the monument, in which every physical aspect is recycled, shattered, or trashed, remains a volatile and radical element, as it affirms the notably complex ordering system of radical politics. *Gramsci Monument* was not a false utopia but rather a "paradise"—as Hirschhorn has repeatedly conceded—an offensive gift in the sense that it generates a course of action where the sequences of encounters and the creative spirit of individuals enable agency and expressions of determination and pride. The Gramscian act in Hirschhorn's *Gramsci Monument* remains its latent continuity of recollections, reflections, and friendships that defeated the powerful allure of the physical presence with the deceptively inconspicuous memories turning up in conversations, marking the before-and-after of a period, establishing parameters and identities, and ultimately, encouraging us to return to Gramsci's writings. "The monument will not remain there for eternity," Hirschhorn wrote, adding, "What shall remain are the thoughts and reflections. What will stay is the activity of reflection."<sup>57</sup>

56 Stuart Hall, "Gramsci and Us," *Marxism Today* (June 1987), p. 19.

57 "Statement: Monuments," p. 51 in this volume.

The proposition put forward by Hirschhorn with boisterous enthusiasm is whether by redistributing the subjectivities of artistic license in terms of both location and audience, and by intentionally understanding the site and the public as a political instrument with dialectical implications, the experience of art becomes a willful affirmation. Every action is the construction of absolved interaction with real politics, of contact points with reality. In trying to understand human vulnerability, the creative process (where the end is never an end but the beginning of something else) juxtaposes thinking and differences—that is, the oppositions and complexities of protesting real injustice, real inequality, and in turn discovering a bastion of comrades. Class difference is the commonplace that in Hirschhorn’s *Gramsci Monument* confers identity, which as Hall concludes, is Gramsci’s decisive lesson:

Of course Gramsci always gives a central place to the questions of class, class alliances, class struggle. Where Gramsci departs from classical versions of Marxism is that he does not think that politics is an arena which simply *reflects* already unified collective political identities, already constituted forms of struggle. Politics for him is not a dependent sphere. It is where forces and relations, in the economy, in society, in culture, have to be actively *worked on* to produce particular forms of power, forms of domination. This is the production of politics — politics as a production. This conception of politics is fundamentally contingent, fundamentally open ended. There is no law of history which can predict what must inevitably be the outcome of a political struggle. Politics depends on the relations of forces at any particular moment.<sup>58</sup>

There were a great many lessons from Gramsci’s work and life that filtered and resonated in Hirschhorn’s *Gramsci Monument*, but the most enduring must be his disarmingly honest affirmation that only “solidarity among all intellectuals” can yield progressive political change.<sup>59</sup> It is Gramsci’s new class of citizen, his “organic intellectual” reclaimed in Hirschhorn’s non-exclusive audience, that delineates the future as the space of a truly desegregated experience of art.<sup>60</sup>

58 Hall, p. 20.

59 Gramsci, Notebook 1 (§44), vol. 1, p. 138.

60 In one last act of “grace” (in Hirschhornian fashion) Stephen Hoban, editor of this publication, came across a memorandum in the NYCHA’s archives that revealed an unsung achievement of historical significance: Forest Houses was the first successfully desegregated public housing development in New York City. In 1954, the Forest Neighborhood Committee began a self-organized campaign to integrate the initially all-black housing by inviting outside families to take up residence. They presented their results to New York’s Mayor Robert F. Wagner in 1956: “The Committee emphasized that their successful desegregation of the housing project area was only the first step in an on-going process. . . . [T]he presence of Negroes, Whites, and Puerto Ricans in the formerly all Negro neighborhood has resulted in a revolution of thinking and shedding of outmoded attitudes amongst these groups. . . . Such understandings are trickling down into family discussions and mores. The ultimate result of the amalgam of different people living together in understanding has tremendously raised the standards of the community and is resulting in enhanced neighborhood pride. Whereas twenty years ago this section of the Bronx was a community slipping into a slum, its leaders now feel that they have arrested the descent and are beginning to move back toward better standards of good citizenship and neighborhood improvement.” “New York’s First Desegregation Project a Success,” Office of the Mayor Press Release, December 21, 1956, box 59, folder 687, Wagner Papers. See also Evelyn Diaz Gonzalez, *The Bronx* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp. 114–15.