

# THE GRAMSCI MONUMENT



Editors:  
**LAKESHA BRYANT**  
and  
**SAQUAN SCOTT**

# NEWSPAPER

www.gramsci-monument.com

"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)



July 27th, 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



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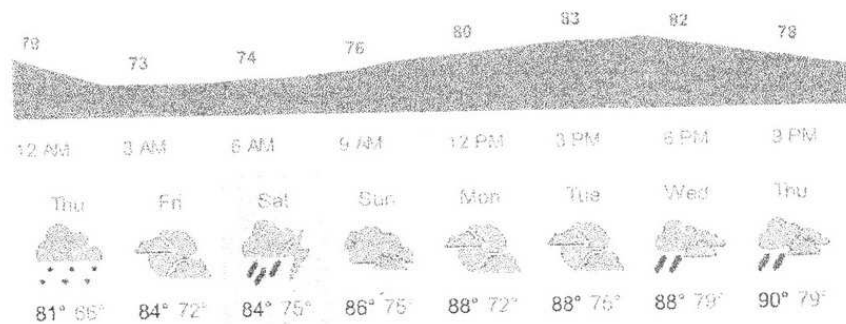
Bronx, NY 10456  
Saturday  
Thunderstorm



84 °F | °C

Precipitation: 30%  
Humidity: 56%  
Wind: 12 mph

Temperature	Precipitation	Wind
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# BIOGRAPHY OF ADRIAN PIPER

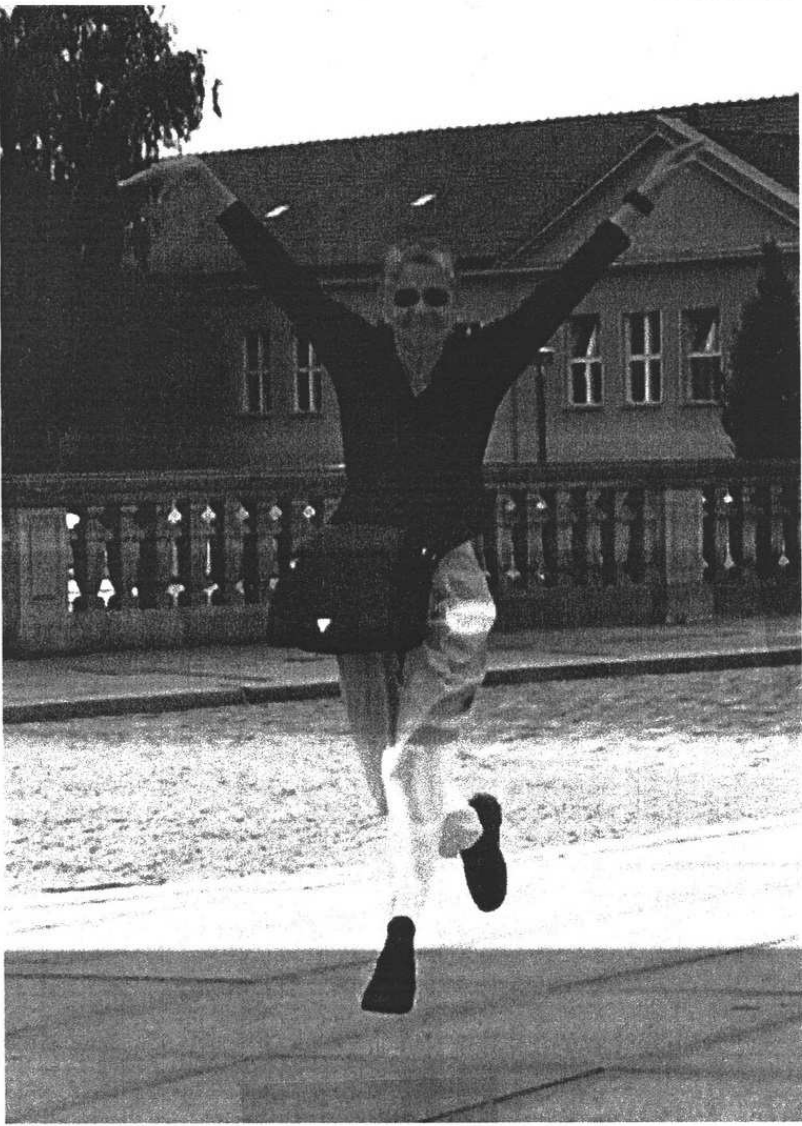
Adrian Margaret Smith Piper (b. 1948) is a first-generation Conceptual artist and analytic philosopher. She attended the New Lincoln School throughout grammar school and high school, and the Art Students' League during high school. She began exhibiting her artwork internationally at the age of twenty, and graduated from the School of Visual Arts in 1969. While continuing to produce and exhibit her artwork, she received a B.A. in Philosophy with a minor in Medieval and Renaissance Musicology from the City College of New York in 1974 and a Ph.D. in Philosophy from Harvard University in 1981 under the supervision of John Rawls; and studied Kant and Hegel with Dieter Henrich at the University of Heidelberg in 1977-1978. Her formal education lasted a total of 27 years.

Adrian taught philosophy at Georgetown, Harvard, Michigan, Stanford, and UCSD. Following in the steps of trailblazing pioneer Dr. Joyce Mitchell Cook, in 1987 she became the first tenured African American woman professor in the field of philosophy. For her refusal to return to the United States while listed as a Suspicious Traveler on the U.S. Transportation Security Administration's Watch List, Wellesley College forcibly terminated her tenured full professorship in philosophy in 2008. In 2011 she was awarded the title of Professor Emeritus by the American Philosophical Association.

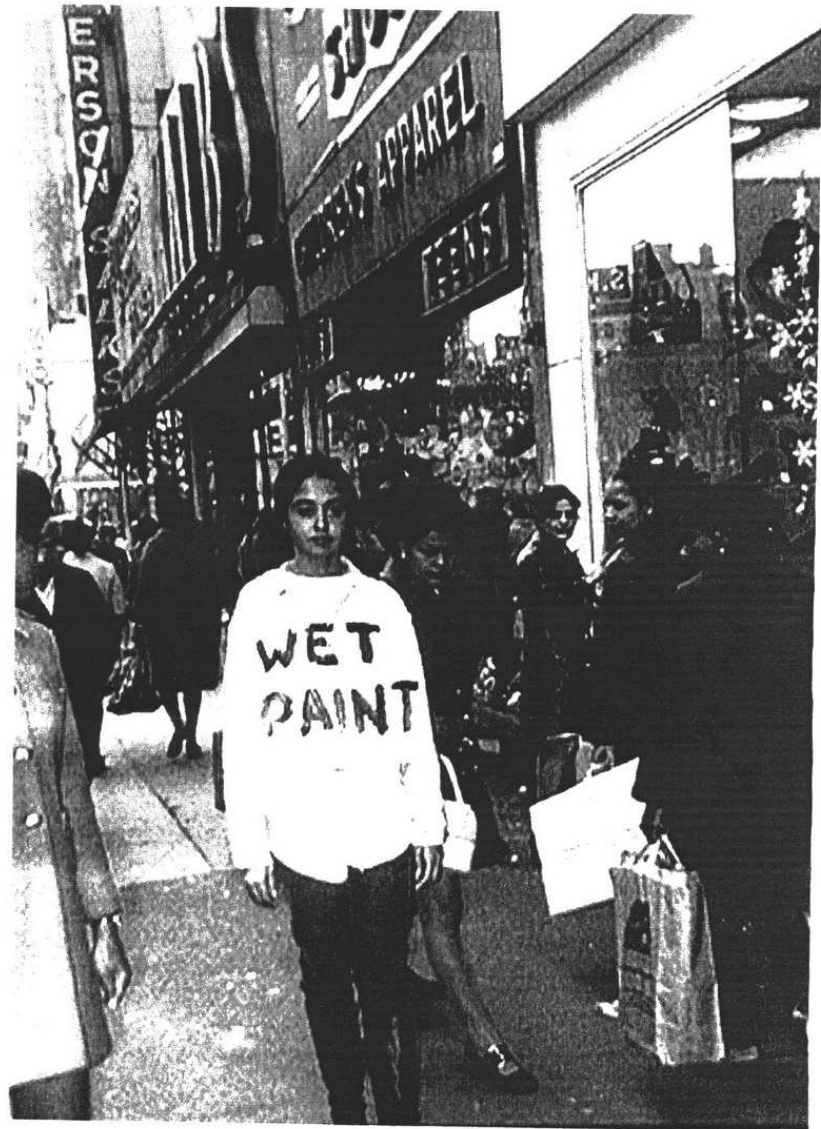
Adrian's principal philosophical publications are in metaethics, Kant, and the history of ethics. Her two-volume study in Kantian metaethics, *Rationality and the Structure of the Self*, Volume I: The Humean Conception and Rationality and the Structure of the Self, Volume II: A Kantian Conception, was accepted for publication by Cambridge University Press in 2008 and has been available since then as an open access e-book at <http://adrianpiper.com/rss/index.shtml>. This work critically surveys the major moral theories of the late 20th century, develops a Kantian metaethical theory anchored in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, and integrates standard decision theory into classical predicate logic. Her third book, *Kant's Metaethics: First Critique Foundations*, is nearing completion. Adrian introduced issues of race and gender into the vocabulary of Conceptual art and explicit political content into Minimalism. In 2000 she further expanded the vocabulary of Conceptual art to include Vedic philosophical imagery and concepts. Her artwork is in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, the Centre Pompidou, and the Generali Foundation, Vienna, among others. Her sixth traveling retrospective, *Adrian Piper since 1965*, closed at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona in 2004. Her *In the Margins Behind the Lines: Collected Writings*, a series of e-book volumes, is forthcoming from the APRA Foundation Berlin.

Adrian has been a Non-Resident Fellow of the New York Institute for the Humanities at New York University since 1994 and was a Scholar at the Getty Research Institute in 1998-1999. She has been awarded Guggenheim, AVA, NEA, NEH, Andrew Mellon, Woodrow Wilson, Internationales Forschungszentrum Kulturwissenschaften, and Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin Institute for Advanced Study Research Fellowships, as well as the Skowhegan Medal for Sculptural Installation and the New York Dance & Performance Award (the Bessie) for Installation & New Media. In 2012 she received the College Art Association Artist Award for a Distinguished Body of Work, for having "since the late 1960s, ... profoundly influenced the language and form of Conceptual art."

Adrian began her study and practice of yoga in 1965 with the Upanishads and Swami Vishnudevananda's *Complete Book of Yoga*. She studied with Swami Satchidananda from 1966, became a svanistha in 1971 and a brahmacharin in 1985. Since then she has studied at Kripalu with Gitanand and with Arthur Kilmurray, Patricia Walden, Chuck Miller, Erich Schiffmann, Leslie Bogart, Richard Freeman, Tim Miller, David Swenson, Gary Kraftsow, Georg Feuerstein, David Frawley, and John Friend. In 2012, on her 64th birthday, Adrian Piper retired from being black. She lives and works in Berlin, where she runs the APRA Foundation Berlin and edits *The Berlin Journal of Philosophy*.



Adrian Piper in Berlin, 21.08.2006  
Photo: Albert Landau



# A TEXT BY ADRIAN PIPER AND ANNA KOWAJSKA

## Conzepte — New versions of political thought

Conzepte is a text-based art project. Socio-critical works by artists, theorists, and activists are presented in a new, experimental form. Two writers relate to a historical source text and link it with their own thinking in the present. The texts are published simultaneously in international print media. In this case, Conzepte cooperated with the Austrian daily newspaper *Der Standard* and the international art magazine *springerin*.

The second, corresponding text "Save Energy!" by Belinda Kazeem on Adrian Piper was published on October 15, 2011, in the Austrian daily paper *Der Standard*: [www.derstandard.at](http://www.derstandard.at)

A project by Jo Schmeiser; Editors: Nicola Lauré al-Samarai, Jo Schmeiser, Sabine Rohlf; Translations: Nicholas Grindell, Erika Doucette & Sam Osborn, Lisa Rosenblatt, Harold Otto; Graphic design: Büro Ferkl; Budget: Peter Janecek. All of the texts, as well as conversations with the authors, are available at:

[www.conzepte.org](http://www.conzepte.org)

conzepte

piper / kowalska

## Adrian Piper, 1986 My Calling (Card) #1 (for Dinners and Cocktail Parties)

Calling card, 9 x 5 cm, brown paper

Front

Dear Friend,  
I am black.  
I am sure you did not realize this when you made /  
laughed at / agreed with that racist remark. In the past,  
I have attempted to alert white people to my racial  
identity in advance. Unfortunately, this invariably causes  
them to react to me as pushy, manipulative, or socially  
inappropriate. Therefore, my policy is to assume that  
white people do not make these remarks, even when  
they believe there are no black people present, and to  
distribute this card when they do.  
I regret any discomfort my presence is causing you,  
just as I am sure you regret the discomfort your racism  
is causing me.

Back

© ANGRY ART 1986

## Anna Kowalska, 2012 Reflections on a performance of the third kind

Following a racist or sexist act or remark, a small card is handed over, without a word. Though Adrian Piper explains her decision to use this form of communication in many different ways, the emphasis is on her identity as an African-American woman who is perceived by those around her as white. American literature offers many descriptions of (light-skinned) black women who can "pass for white." Nevertheless, even in literature, it is clear that—at least as long as society is divided along racial lines—this is not the basis for a single identity, but for oscillating between the two.

Piper is generally perceived as an artist whose work engages strongly with her own identity. Even in her early performances, she was shifting between various identities, and the same is true of her philosophy and her art. In her *The Mythic Being* series, for example, she adopted a male identity. She went into the street "in drag," dressed as a man, repeatedly reciting a passage from her journal that she had learned by heart. The aim of this piece, as she has said in an interview, was to find out how society would react to someone with precisely her history but with a completely different outward appearance.

The *Calling Cards* made around 15 years later were intended as a "guerrilla performance" for private use: the first card was to be handed over at cocktail parties and receptions, the second in places like discotheques.<sup>1</sup> However much Piper wanted her cards to achieve more than is possible by directly confronting someone about their racist or sexist behavior ("which immediately ruins any party"), this new form of communication was also a failure, as she herself reports. She wanted to deliver her message discreetly so as not to spoil the overall mood or

**My Calling (Card) #2 (for Bars and Discos)**

Calling card, 9 x 5 cm, white paper

Front

Dear Friend,  
I am not here to pick anyone up, or to be picked up.  
I am alone, because I want to be here, ALONE.  
This card is not intended as part of an extended flirtation.  
Thank you for respecting my privacy.

Back

© ANGRY ART 1986

/

Adrian Piper, 2 calling cards, 9 x 5 cm, brown / white paper, © ANGRY ART 1986. *My Calling (Card) #1* and *My Calling (Card) #2* are part of Adrian Piper's series of *Guerilla Performances*. For images of the original cards, see: [www.iub.edu/~iuam/online\\_modules/aaa/artist.php?artist=8](http://www.iub.edu/~iuam/online_modules/aaa/artist.php?artist=8)  
Further information on the work of Adrian Piper is available at: [www.adrianpiper.com](http://www.adrianpiper.com)

impose her concerns on the company at large. The individuals in question were not publicly exposed, but they still avoided her and certainly did not engage her in conversation.

Piper organized two public discussions with differently composed audiences, allowing her to comment on her performance. Footage of these events was used to make the video *My Calling (Card) #1. Meta-Performance*.<sup>2</sup> Anyone who watches this video is taking part in a third performance.

The *Calling Cards* were not only personally distributed by the artist, but were also left out for people to take with them as a way, the artist has said, of involving others in the fight against racism. Who could use these cards? For a black person, both the content of the first card and finding an opportunity to hand one over would pose a problem. This person could hardly claim to have witnessed a racist remark without being identified. Nonetheless, a member of the predominantly black audience at the Studio Museum in Harlem says she as a black woman could use such a card, since racist comments are often enough made in her presence, allegedly not aimed at her directly. However, the fact that this needs to be specifically pointed out, as well as the ensuing amusement in the audience, shows that her idea is a creative adaptation of an originally different concept.

In this text, I deal with the idea that *My Calling (Card) #1* should and can be used above all by people who identify themselves as white or who are identified as white by others. Indeed, the card itself is already an appeal to question one's own WHITE identity.<sup>3</sup> The American anti-racism movement has a tradition of white people claiming to be black. In the 1960s, the Chicago Surrealist Group proclaimed the idea of "abolishing whiteness." According to this model, being white could be done away with if EVERYONE declared themselves black. Once everyone becomes "black," no one will be stigmatized as such any more. This idea is certainly very "American." Questioning one's own identity with regard to black ancestors has a long history in the United States. It is based on the "one-drop rule," the notion that even the most distant family connection to a black person "blackens" a person's "white" blood.<sup>4</sup>

I am white. I am black. It is not a matter of leveling these two statements, that is not the aim of the experiment. It is a matter of adopting a different identity in order to find out how society reacts. Adrian Piper does just that: though she outs herself in her work as black, she does so from a position that is white, at least to outsiders, from a position of solidarity that cannot tolerate the ongoing pervasiveness and acceptability of racism. She speaks of her dismay, her sense of involvement, and her need to find a form in which to express herself in such situations, but these are her inner motives. For an outsider, she is a white woman who suddenly confronts the other person with her "secret identity." Her outer appearance remains the same, but she takes on a different history.

Don't artworks that confront the audience with an (in many ways) exotic-artist identity often elicit a feeling of relief from their audience—relief that the whole thing has little to do with the audience members themselves?

Isn't one reason for seeking out and examining the artist's identity that it allows his/her actions to be

explained and also classified, so that the status quo is not shaken up? Isn't the interest in personal "history" so strong because it allows the position in question to be particularized and isolated?

Édouard Glissant, the Francophone writer and theorist of creolization, appeals in his writings for "the right to opacity." "It is not necessary for me to 'understand' the other," he writes, "that is to say reduce him to my own model of transparency, in order to live with this other or to build something with him."<sup>5</sup>

At the end of the interview in the video *The Mythic Being*,<sup>6</sup> Piper says that an artist is just as much a product of society as everyone else. In this talk, recorded in 1988 at the Studio Museum, she also says it is not possible to look into the hearts of other people. One can only communicate via behavior, she says. We might also apply this behaviorist approach<sup>7</sup> to Piper herself, looking only at what she does and how she does it. The artist would then be a black box whose identity and inner motives would remain unknown to us.

So Piper says one can only communicate via behavior. Racism cannot be eliminated by "being nice" to one another, she admits, but that would be a good start. For her it is important to be in the here and now, a form of attentiveness that permits new insights to be gained through experience. Instead of "being nice," one might also say "being attentive," attentive towards one another, but also towards oneself.

Such attentiveness might also be brought to bear on the many contradictions and conflicts highlighted by Piper's work. An interesting recent piece in this context is to be found on the Black Visual Archive website,<sup>8</sup> where Meg Onli discusses Piper's "Passing for White, Passing for Black."<sup>9</sup> In this text, Piper describes the complex issue of "passing" and rejects this option for herself while not clearly identifying herself as belonging to the black community. Using literary examples and her own history, she describes how difficult it is to escape the dynamic of racial attribution—a dynamic that permits only silent defection to the white camp or an existence that conforms to the norm within a predefined framework as a black person.

In Piper's work, Onli sees the counter-model of a subject who mediates between estranged communities rather than locking itself into alienation.

Asked in an interview whether or not she integrates her separate "identities" as an artist, philosopher, and yogini, Piper answered that these elements are all facets of her personality: "There are no discrete selves to separate or integrate. My variety of professional activities are all different, equally essential expressions of one self."<sup>10</sup> This answer could also be understood as a reference to the possibility of existing with a multiplicity of identities and not just oscillating between them.

The artist passes this "splitting of identity" on to her audience, whose members can and should think about whether they identify themselves as white or black and why, discovering in the process how far they have already interiorized racism. It is not Piper's identity that is "split" or unclear, but the notions and concepts it must confront.

When mainstream society calls on "minorities" to participate in the discourse on identity, this can become a subtle form of racist violence. Those who are supposedly

"different" are caught up in endless "occupational therapy" and held at arm's length from the center of society. For all the political importance of identity discourses for the groups in question, it is regrettable that they should in themselves create a dynamic of exclusion.

Instead of this, Piper keeps her audience occupied. Her *Calling Cards* were born out of the pain that resulted from repeated experiences of—mostly verbal—racist violence. This pain made it impossible for her to go on casually and cheerfully informing those around her of their racism. Piper has said on several occasions that not only the experience of violence itself is painful, but also the act of resisting it.

Can a situation of racist violence be productively resolved by using a "Calling Card"? Probably not. This is precisely where the card's power ends. And this is also the disappointment faced by the artist: rather than serving as a catalyst for communication, the card breaks it off.

In a later work, Piper pursues the method of personal confrontation by other means. This time it is a video installation entitled *Cornered*,<sup>11</sup> made a few years after *My Calling (Card) #1 and #2*. The artist is seen on a screen that is placed in a corner and barricaded behind an overturned table. She starts talking about her own identity: "I am black." But her speech also touches the viewer, who is obliged to address her own self-identification as black or white. The artist no longer needs to be present in person when the viewer questions herself emotionally and intellectually concerning her own identity. She has managed to pass on something of her own analysis and her own struggle in such a way that—in accordance with the principle of entropy—there is no returning to the initial state of unknowing.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>) In this text, I only deal with *My Calling (Card) #1* because the material discussed here only mentions this part of the work.

<sup>2</sup>) *My Calling (Card) #1. Meta-Performance* (1987–1988, 00:58:00)

<sup>3</sup>) Since almost all of the texts referred to here, even the most recent, use the concept of "race," I consider it important to point out that the existence of different "races" of human beings was (only!) scientifically disproved in the 1990s, thanks to genetic research: the genetic differences between individuals—whatever their origins—are greater than the differences between members of supposedly different "races." This fact still possesses novelty value, as shown, for example, by Deborah Orr's article "The myth of 'race' was invented by racism, and

racism keeps it growing," in: *The Guardian*, February 17, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/feb/17/race-is-a-myth-deborah-orr>

<sup>4</sup>) Adrian Piper, "Passing for White, Passing for Black." Originally commissioned by *Harper's Magazine*. First published in: *Transitions* 58, '992, and reprinted in: Adrian Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Volume I: Selected Essays in Meta-Art 1968-1992*, Cambridge / Mass. 1996. <http://www.adrianpiper.com/docs/Passing.pdf>

<sup>5</sup>) In: Édouard Glissant, *Introduction à une poétique du Divers*, Paris 1995 (this passage translated from the German edition).

<sup>6</sup>) *The Mythic Being*, video (1973, 00:08:00)

<sup>7</sup>) Behaviorism views the individual as a black box whose behavior can only be decoded on the basis of its interaction with its surroundings.

<sup>8</sup>) This site documents and discusses cultural representation of blackness. It features essays, interviews, reviews, and videos. It is written by Meg Onli and edited by Gracen Brilmyer.

<sup>9</sup>) Meg Onli, "Passing, Passing." <http://blackvisualarchive.com/passing-passing/>

<sup>10</sup>) Andrew Blackley, "On Behavior," <http://blackvisualarchive.com/on-behavior/>

<sup>11</sup>) Adrian Piper, *Cornered*, video installation, Museum

Anna Kowalska lives as a writer in Paris. She translated Artur Zmijewski's book *Drżące ciała* (Trembling Bodies) into German as *Körper in Aufruhr* (2011).

Edited by Sabine Rohlf & Jo Schmeiser

Translated from the German by Nicholas Grindell, copyedited by Harold Otto

# A DAILY LECTURE BY MARCUS STEINWEG

*27th Lecture at the Gramsci Monument, The Bronx, NYC: 27th July 2013*  
THE SUBJECT OF PHILOSOPHY  
*Marcus Steinweg*

In *On Certainty* from 1949-1951, Wittgenstein showed that there is no reasonable ground not to put one's trust in what is groundless. The *language game* and the *way of living* on which our social and scientific evidence is based are without ground. They themselves cannot be grounded in reason. They reach into the groundless abyss. And therefore human beings are left with no other choice than to put their trust in this doubtful certainty which is indubitability itself. Indubitability is dubitable. It is a kind of problematic evidence. Like an invisible veil, it has laid itself over the abyss of chaos and namelessness. One could say that it merges with chaos since it is so inconspicuous, so efficient.

"When philosophizing," Wittgenstein writes, "one has to climb down into old chaos and feel well there". In philosophizing, the human subject touches chaos, the non-ground. It maintains an at least problematic contact with it. To feel well in chaos can mean nothing other than to integrate the uncanny, the incommensurable and unviable dimension which it represents into one's way of living. To feel well in chaos is tantamount inhabiting an uninhabitable region or, assimilating oneself to that which is *most disturbing*. That is the determination of philosophy which Deleuze and Guattari give when they say that "it is always a matter of overcoming chaos with an intersecting plane that traverses it". One inkles how much courage and high spirits (courage can only exist as high spirits) it requires to climb down into the non-ground of chaos in order to erect a plane of evidence over it, for it is a matter of acknowledging the power of chaos whilst minimizing its destructive power for the subject.

Chaos is also the name for the infinitude which death is as *absolute destruction*. To touch chaos means to give space to this destruction in one's thinking and life. The finite subject is only a subject insofar as it extends itself to the dimension of infinity. It is life related primordially to death. It juts out into the space of infinity. Because this is the case, it is a matter of giving the uncanny dimension which death is the status of something self-evident, of taking the non-evidence of death as evidence in order to affirm one's self as a finite subject, for it is this finiteness which *lives* and bears the infinity which death is. It is not the subject that is infinite, but death. But this infinity only exists for a finite subject. The subject that touches chaos comes back from chaos as if from the "land of the dead". It moves along a border that separates the sphere of life from the non-world of death — between language and silence, finitude and infinitude, knowledge and truth, life and death.



# WHAT'S GOING ON? FEEDBACK

The New York Times

Art & Design

ART REVIEW

## A Summer Place in the South Bronx

A Visit to Thomas Hirschhorn's 'Gramsci Monument'



Angel Franco/The New York Times

**Gramsci Monument** Thomas Hirschhorn built this participatory sculpture dedicated to the Italian philosopher at the Forest Houses. [More Photos »](#)

By KEN JOHNSON  
Published: July 25, 2013

On last Sunday's lovely, warm afternoon I visited Thomas Hirschhorn's "[Gramsci Monument](#)," a sprawling, participatory sculpture built on the grass outside a group of brick apartment buildings in the South Bronx. I left feeling irritable and depressed.

Mr. Hirschhorn is a Swiss artist internationally celebrated for his politically charged installations, which typically involve large quantities of quotidian materials like brown plastic packing tape and aluminum foil, as well as books and photocopies of

social theory texts, pornography, images of war and copies of artworks he admires. His works look as if they were made by a brilliant, crazily paranoid, autodidactic outsider.

Mr. Hirschhorn is not crazy. Rather, he's a canny conceptualist operator and an artist whose extravagant immodesty calls to mind the performance-art diva Marina Abramovic and Christo and Jeanne-Claude, the creators of grandiose, temporary outdoor sculptures. In recent years Mr. Hirschhorn has produced three major works that he calls monuments, each in a different European city and each dedicated to an admired philosophical writer: Baruch Spinoza, Georges Bataille and Gilles Deleuze. He has built them in poor and working-class neighborhoods and he has enlisted local residents to help build them.

For this, the fourth and, he promises, last in the series, he scouted the Bronx and settled on the Forest Houses in the Morissania section, where residents were paid to help him build a scruffy, ramshackle complex out of plywood, two-by-fours, blue tarps, brown tape and plexiglass. Resembling a home for postapocalyptic survivors, it has a library stocked with books on political and social theory; a radio station; a space for producing a daily newspaper; a snack bar; and a stage for musical and theatrical performances. There's a room equipped with computers and another with a small exhibition of the personal effects of Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), including a comb, slippers and a wallet.

[Enlarge This Image](#)



Angel Franco/The New York Times  
Thomas Hirschhorn's "Gramsci Monument" was built on the grounds of the Forest Houses with the help of its residents. [More Photos »](#)

There are also spray-painted banners and photocopied texts everywhere that present quotations from Gramsci's writings, like "Every human being is an intellectual" and "Reality exists independently of the thinking individual."

Gramsci was a leader of the Italian Communist Party in the 1920s and an influential journalist and writer of Marxist theory. From 1926 to the end of his life he was imprisoned by Mussolini's Fascist government. While incarcerated, however, he produced an extraordinary quantity of letters and essays that have influenced generations of leftist thinkers up to the present.

The key Gramscian idea is hegemony. More than just the political power wielded by a dominant group, hegemony for Gramsci was the worldview of a whole society. Internalized through and through by rich and poor and powerful and powerless, hegemony keeps everyone in their place. It finds expression not only in relations between workers and employers but in all kinds of cultural products, including art and the system by which art is produced and circulated.

Gramsci thought that the overthrow of capitalist hegemony should come not by violent revolution but through the rise of "counter-hegemonies" — alternative cultures developed by disenfranchised groups. Through self-education, self-organization and the creation of its own institutions, a proletarian culture might someday become powerful enough to displace the bourgeois culture of modern, industrial society.

In certain respects, then, Mr. Hirschhorn's project is a Gramscian action. He has planted seeds from which might grow an underclass culture whose participants might achieve a self-empowerment denied them by the present hegemonic state of affairs. He insists, however, that what he has created is a work of art — a variation on the form of the monument.

He sees himself as a kind of formalist. "As a warrior for Form," he declares in one of his numerous texts printed in a colorful broadside for the monument, "Art — because it's Art — is resistance as such. Resistance to aesthetical cultural, political habits."

Thus Mr. Hirschhorn aligns himself with avant-garde traditions ranging from Dada to the utopian populism of Joseph Beuys. In so doing, he pre-empts conventional criticism, which will always be seen as partial and conservatively blinkered compared with his expansive vision. (It shouldn't go unnoted, however, that Mr. Hirschhorn is represented by the blue-chip capitalist gallery Gladstone and that he created "Gramsci Monument" in fulfillment of a [commission by the Dia Foundation](#), a pillar of the American art establishment.)

All I can say is that I was not inspired by his monument. The day I visited there wasn't much going on. On the stage an audience of about a dozen sitting in ugly white plastic chairs listened to a band playing Latin music, after which a man tried without much success to get folks to step up for an open-mike session.

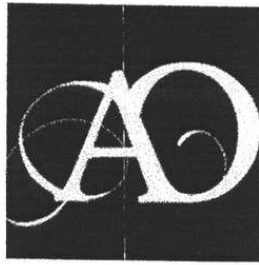
The busiest spot was the computer room, where children were engaged by digital games and not, as far I as could tell, reading up on Gramscian theory. I found one young man perusing a book in the otherwise vacant library. The whole architectural structure was looking dismally decrepit after three weeks of variable summer weather.

A bulletin board showed that seminars, lectures and field trips are scheduled every day in the coming weeks. So it's possible I happened along when there was a lull in an otherwise terrifically energetic evolution of a new hegemony. As it was, it all made me sad: I had a vision of the great man descending upon the benighted residents of Forest Houses to spread his manna and impregnate the community with an embryo of hope, but one that was doomed to fade after the construction is dismantled at the end of the summer.

It's too soon to know whether Mr. Hirschhorn's work will be remembered in the South Bronx as a more or less amusing diversion or as something more Gramscian. Ultimately, I suspect, it will be preserved in memory mainly by the high-end art world as just a work by Mr. Hirschhorn, another monument to his monumental ego.

*Thomas Hirschhorn's "Gramsci Monument" is on view through Sept. 15 at the Forest Houses, Tinton Avenue between 163rd and 165th Streets, the Morissania section of the Bronx; [Gramsci-monument.com](#).*

A version of this review appeared in print on July 26, 2013, on page C19 of the New York edition with the headline: A Summer Place in the South Bronx .



## WHAT'S GOING ON? FEED BACK

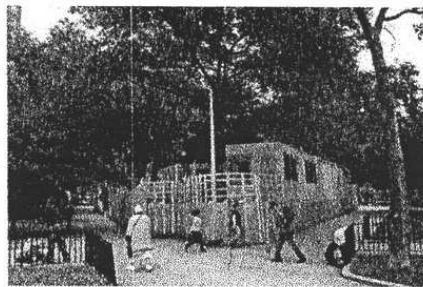
### New York – Thomas Hirschhorn: “Gramsci Monument” at Forest Houses Through September 15th, 2013

July 21st, 2013



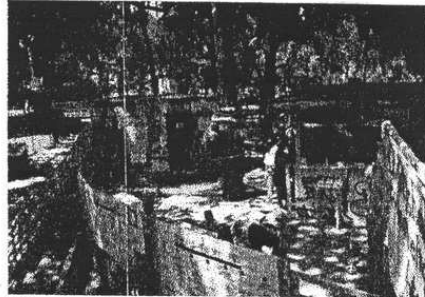
Thomas Hirschhorn, *Gramsci Monument* (2013), via Daniel Creahan for Art Observed

“Everyone is an intellectual.” These words by Italian anarchist/Marxist Antonio Gramsci adorn the walls of *Gramsci Monument*, the fourth and final entry into Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn's monumental installation series to his favorite thinkers and writers, currently open in the Forest Houses housing project in the South Bronx. Opening the platform to cultural dialogues, political research and community art efforts, *Gramsci Monument* continues Hirschhorn's efforts at destabilizing the spatial encounters of a work of art, broadening its scope to a space where all participants are welcome to create their own meaning.



Thomas Hirschhorn, *Gramsci Monument* (2013), via New York Times

A vocal opponent of the Italian fascists in the early 20th century, Gramsci was eventually imprisoned by the state, where he died after years of poor health and neglect. What remains are the writer's dense, brilliantly written notebooks, challenging notions of state-held power, and creating a new analytical approaches to power, control and oppression within a Marxist framework, which has since become a fundamental touchstone of post-war political and philosophical thought.

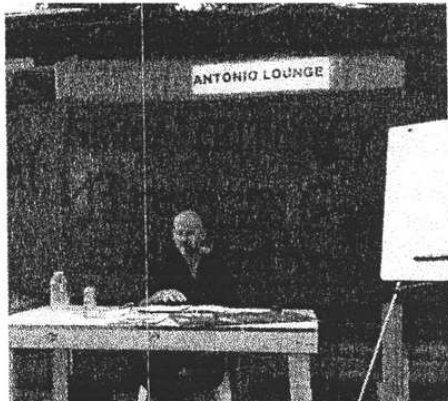


Thomas Hirschhorn, *Gramsci Monument* (2013), via Daniel Creahan for Art Observed

It is this tradition that Hirschhorn works to revive, and his monument takes on certain aspects of Gramsci's oppositional thought. Built from plywood, tape and nails, the appearance of the work is rudimentary to say the least, serving its temporary needs as efficiently and unceremoniously as possible. The monument almost bears resemblance to a child's fort, made all the more appropriate by the endless presence of children running from room to room for art classes, lessons and other events. The monument also includes a restaurant/cafe, radio station, library, museum (including a pair of Gramsci's slippers and some of his original prison notebooks), and a common area, where the artist presents teaching programs, workshops and classes.

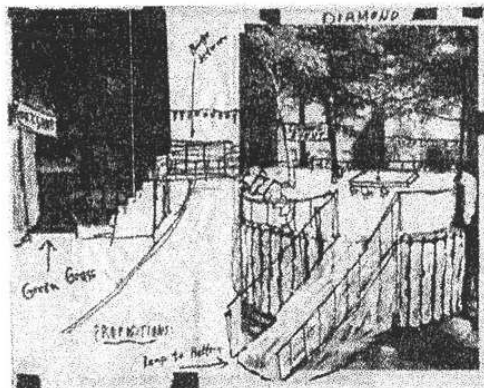


Refusing to confine itself as a wholly “community” driven initiative or art world conceptual exercise, the *Gramsci Monument* works on the level of open space. Visitors are welcome to roam freely, pausing to read, talk, chat or take part in various panel discussions or lectures. While the exhibition does not force any critical reception of Gramsci, his work or his historical place, there is something to be said for a space where any visitor can walk in on the community radio station, and one can hear 10 year old children discussing what they think art over the airwaves. Complementing the information available at the monument, Hirschhorn has welcomed a number of highly recognized philosophers, writers, artists and political theorists to join him for a series of panel discussions and lectures, discussing Gramsci’s life and work.



Philosopher Simon Critchley Lectures at the *Gramsci Monument*, via Daniel Creahan for Art Observed

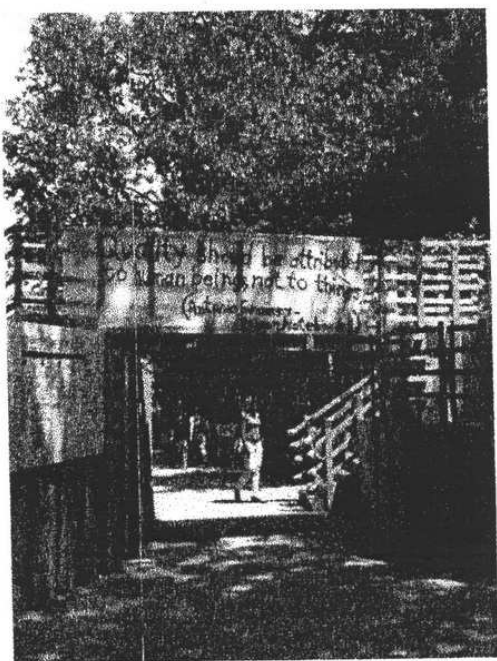
Perhaps the most interesting aspects of the monument is its awareness of its own roles and origins. Commissioned by the Dia Art Foundation, the backing for the project is distinctly established by the elite power structures of the mainstream art world. With his last piece, Hirschhorn turns his eyes directly towards the cultural hegemony of this system. The monument does not become a radical departure from the “status quo,” so much as it marks a moment of tacit acknowledgement of its place, and uses that platform to launch a broader discussion of the systemic forces that have established it. The *Gramsci Monument* does not seek to enact swift and rapid change, but instead provides the tools for analysis, however initially idiomatic they may seem.



Thomas Hirschhorn, *Gramsci Monument Sketch* (2013), via Dia

Taken as a whole, the *Gramsci Monument* is something of a blank space, open to the efforts and interpretations of its visitors, workers and the artist himself. While participation is a fundamental aspect of the work, Hirschhorn does not impose his will for action on the visitor, instead allowing them to experience the work on their own terms. While the writings and life of Antonio Gramsci offer a compelling reappraisal of art, culture and politics, it is up to the viewer to embrace it.

The *Gramsci Monument* is open until September 15th. A full list of events, workshops and discussions can be viewed at the [project’s website](#).



Thomas Hirschhorn, *Gramsci Monument* (2013), via Daniel Creahan for Art Observed