

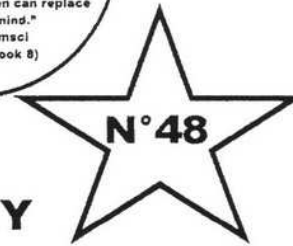
THE GRAMSCI MONUMENT.

NEWSPAPER



Editors:
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and
SAQUAN SCOTT

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



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HEGEMONY AND REVOLUTION

HEGEMONY AND REVOLUTION

A STUDY OF ANTONIO GRAMSCI'S
POLITICAL AND CULTURAL THEORY



Walter L. Adamson

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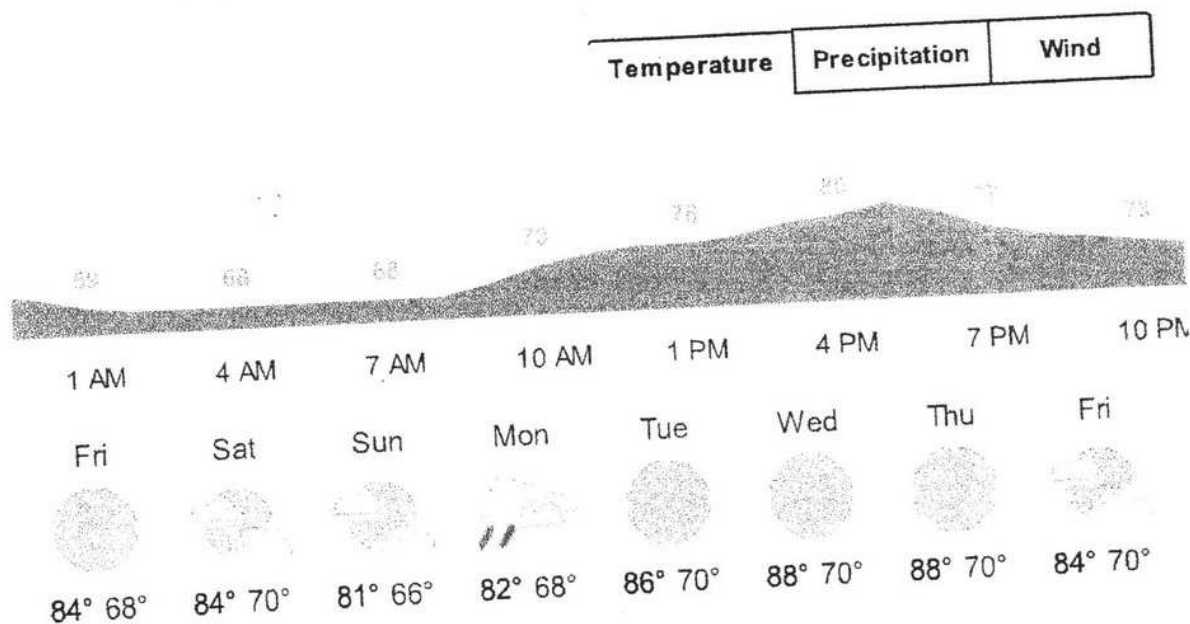
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Bronx, NY 10456

Sat
Partly Cloudy

 **84** °F | °C

Precipitation: 10%
Humidity: 46%
Wind: 8 mph



EXCERPT FROM WALTER L. ADAMSON'S HEGEMONY AND REVOLUTION (PART 2)

ESSAY FROM ISSUE 47 CONTINUATION



Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin (Russian, b. 1888 – d. 1938)

Bukharin, Croce, and Gramsci

Though acute, Gramsci's criticism of Lukács was stated tentatively, for he knew very little of his work.⁶⁸ Apparently, he knew even less of Korsch.⁶⁹ But he shared with both of them a driving desire to rediscover the "genuine Marx," the Marx whose work represented an *Aufhebung* of the bourgeoisie in its highest achievements: the French Revolution and German Idealism.⁷⁰ Indeed, of the three men, Gramsci was probably the first to take up the project. Well before he knew much concretely about the Russian Revolution, he had recognized its significance as a "metaphysical event" and a "revolution against *Capital*," i.e., against the sterile economism of the Second International.⁷¹ By the time he was helping to draft the Lyons Theses late in 1925, he had developed a sociological explanation for the "degeneration" of Marxism during the Second International.⁷² Marxism, he thought, had won control of the European labor movement with

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original Marxist "philosophy of praxis" to a "systematic revision rather than to advance its autonomous development."⁷⁶ The resulting practical failure only reinforced their attraction toward "economic determinism" or "fatalism" and away from an activist philosophy conceived of as political education. Second International theorists had donned "the clothing of the real and active will when in a weak position." The "mechanicist conception," Gramsci thought, had always been the natural "religion of the subaltern."⁷⁷

In the decade before World War I, Gramsci found some evidence of a new proletarian activism reacting against the dominant orthodoxy.⁷⁸ In many cases, however, this was led by theorists like Sorel whose commitments to Marxism were tenuous at best. Moreover, no thinker of the period possessed the imagination to make a full reformulation of Marxism either theoretically or in practice.⁷⁹ Instead, the tendency was to restrict political vision to the search for a new proletarian institution upon which to fix one's attention. The syndicates represented such a fixation for Sorel, just as the tight-knit, elitist political party later did for Bordiga.

This was the condition of Marxism which Gramsci believed he had inherited. His philosophical response in the *Notebooks* was the Hegelian Marxism portrayed briefly in the Introduction and to be elaborated below. Yet this philosophy is not merely expounded. It rests on a double polemic: against Bukharin's *Popular Manual*,⁸⁰ the latest and most advanced successor to Second International mechanicism, which Gramsci took as representative of post-Leninist stagnation and deviation; and against Croce, whose speculative philosophy of "immanentism" and the "ethical-political moment" was to be dialectically surpassed just as Marx had surpassed Hegel.⁸¹

The critique of Bukharin goes back at least to 1925. In the climate of Bolshevization then prevailing, Gramsci chose to publish two chapters of the *Manual* as a didactic device for the party school. Yet this was far from being a mere parroting of orthodoxy. As Leonardo Paggi has recently shown, Gramsci made several highly significant interpolations in the text which undercut Bukharin's view of Marxism as a sociology in favor of

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the expulsion of the Bakuninists from the First International. But the rapid pace of capitalist expansion in the following decades had compromised that victory and prepared fertile ground for the growth of economism and reformism. In their zest for higher wages and benefits, workers turned their attention away from politics and the state. In Germany, where the new "labor aristocracy" was particularly strong, forms of "democratic utopianism" became plausible among erstwhile Marxists for the first time. Moreover, as the industrial sector of production grew, increasing numbers of the petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry were driven into the proletarian ranks, causing "a new diffusion . . . of national ideological currents as opposed to Marxist ones."⁷³

This explanation for the Second International was characteristically Gramscian in the way it linked concrete economic developments and ideological trends into a practical political assessment. As Gramsci's interest in ideology became more concretely focused on the formation of intellectuals, this explanatory pattern was deepened. In the *Notebooks*, he drew an historical parallel between the formation and leadership of Second International intellectuals and those of the Protestant Reformation.⁷⁴ He argued that the Renaissance, for all its profound innovations in the arts and sciences, had been a reactionary movement that had ignored the plight of the popular classes. By addressing some of their concerns, the Reformation had swung the pendulum of counter-medievalism back in a more progressive direction. Unfortunately, this movement was flawed in its leadership. Reformation intellectuals were generally drawn from the traditional cultural elite, who, even in their most idealistic moments, could not make a full commitment to a popular cause. Gramsci thought that Erasmus symbolized the resulting "desertion of the intellectual . . . in the face of persecution and the stake."⁷⁵

Something similar had happened to Marxism during the years of the Second International. While dynamics inherent in capitalist expansion were producing some proletarian intellectuals, the leadership of the European labor movement had still fallen to the "great intellectuals" of the "traditional intermediary classes." Perhaps unwittingly, these intellectuals had tended to subject the

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viewing it as a "general philosophy."⁸² In the *Notebooks*, this seed would sprout into a sustained elaboration of the connections between "sociology," "vulgar evolutionism," and political passivity on the one hand, and "philosophy," dialectics, and political activism on the other.⁸³ Though almost completely unknown outside Italy at the time, Gramsci can be seen in retrospect as a major participant in the Europe-wide debate on these issues involving Bukharin, Deborin, Zinoviev, Lukács, Korsch, and Marcuse.⁸⁴

Bukharin's evolutionist misinterpretation of Marxism was mirrored in the logical order of his exposition. Since evolutionism ignored the active role that men take in creating history, it was only natural that Bukharin's starting point should be Marxism's relation "to the great systems of traditional philosophy and the religion of the leaders of the clergy, i.e., the conception of the world of the intellectuals and of high culture."⁸⁵ A dialectical approach, on the other hand, would have recognized that

A work like the *Popular Manual*, which is essentially destined for a community of readers who are not professional intellectuals, should have taken as its starting point a critical analysis of the philosophy of common sense, which is the "philosophy of non-philosopher," or in other words the conception of the world which is uncritically absorbed by the various social and cultural environments in which the moral individuality of the average man is developed. Common sense is not a single unique conception, identical in time and space. It is the "folklore" of philosophy.⁸⁶

Having begun with common sense, the author could then have invited the reader to join in a journey toward reason through which a critical awareness of his presuppositions and their relatedness to those of his language, class, and epoch could perhaps be realized.⁸⁷ Only as a medium of political education can philosophy become a material force.

Yet, Bukharin's error was not only to have forgotten that philosophy is a "cultural battle to transform the popular 'mentality';"⁸⁸ it was also to have failed to understand that philosophy itself is a form of collective activity. Gramsci never denied the existence of the "professional or technical philosopher,"⁸⁹ but he did argue that philosophy's practitioners are "much more similar to the rest of mankind than are other specialists." While "there

can be specialists in entomology without everybody else having to be an empirical entomologist. . . , it is not possible to conceive of any man who is not also a philosopher, who does not think, because thought is proper to man as such, or at least to any man who is not a pathological cretin."⁹⁰ Philosophy is intrinsically a social activity because it is carried on by all people in everyday life. We think, we decide, we act, our actions affect others, we are affected by the results, and we think again. In this circularity, it is the social interaction that is important. Even the most traditional philosopher, who believed himself to be engaged in a pure and solitary contemplation, was intimately bound to the social order in his use of language, a totality of culturally produced notions, and in his practical intention, whether consciously or unconsciously expressed.⁹¹ At bottom, philosophical claims about men and the world have always represented attempts "by a specific class of people to change, correct or perfect the conceptions of the world that exist in any particular age and thus to change the norms of conduct that go with them—in other words, to change practical activity as a whole."⁹²

From this perspective Marxism could be understood as a becoming conscious of the full implications of philosophical activity and as a commitment by the new organic intellectuals of the proletariat to philosophy's full realization.⁹³ Such a commitment, however, would be subverted from the start so long as Marxism is conceived "objectively" as a positive science seeking the "laws" of historical development. Bukharin's concept of science presupposed "an extra-historical and extra-human objectivity" which entirely overlooked "the concepts of historical movement, of becoming and, therefore, of the dialectic itself."⁹⁴ This objectivity is "a hangover of the concept of God" transformed into a fetishism of science. An immanent alternative, however, is not a naive subjectivism; rather it entails recognizing that "objective always means 'humanly objective' which can be held to correspond exactly to 'historically subjective': in other words, objective would mean 'universal subjective.'"⁹⁵ Of course, any particular historical actor confronts a set of previously constituted social and political conditions which may thus be thought of as objective in an external way. In part for this reason,

revival of the philosophy of praxis in our own day," he was brandishing his major weapon in the struggle against the degeneration of Marxism that Bukharin represented.¹⁰⁴ Unconsciously and from a bourgeois perspective, Croce had taken over the development of the philosophy of praxis, and consequently he was indispensable to anyone who would further this reconstitution. At the same time, he was the political incarnation of a bourgeois anti-Marxism which, like Dühring, had to be openly confronted and repudiated.

The discussion of "laws of tendency" and prediction illustrates this nicely. As a staunch anti-positivist, Croce could be enlisted in the battle against Bukharin-style Marxism; yet he had gone to the opposite extreme of denying the possibility of historical prediction in any sense. We have seen that Gramsci had critically confronted this position already in 1919, and the point is reargued in the *Notebooks*.¹⁰⁵ Gramsci's pragmatological approach to prediction was an effort to mediate between the stark alternatives of Bukharin and Croce. Croce was right to deny the viability of prediction as a matter of pure theory, but he overlooked the possibility that prediction could be forged in the crucible of theory and practice, that it could acquire its only true objectivity when linked to a program whose realization would offer the verifying test.¹⁰⁶ Without a concept of prediction, Croce found direction in history only by smuggling in a concept of providence beneath the cover of a speculative retranslation of Vico.¹⁰⁷ In Gramsci's framework, "necessity" would be understood not as a logical or scientific category but as "an efficient and active premise, consciousness of which in people's mind has become operative, proposing concrete goals to the collective consciousness and constituting a complex of convictions and beliefs which acts powerfully in the form of 'popular beliefs.'"¹⁰⁸ When this relatively weak sense of necessity is applied to historical praxis, Croce's reduction of political practice to arbitrariness can be overcome while at the same time avoiding all transcendental incrustations.

Croce's object, as Gramsci had recognized since his university days, was to locate some common ground underlying mind and matter that would unite them as separate functions of a single

Gramsci constantly quoted the passage from the preface to the *Critique of Political Economy* to the effect that "society does not pose for itself tasks the conditions for whose resolution do not already exist."⁹⁶ Yet, from the point of view of totality, the "objective" world is constantly created.⁹⁷ History records a "struggle for objectivity . . . and this struggle is the same as the struggle for the cultural unification of the human race. What the idealists call 'spirit' is not a point of departure but a point of arrival, it is the ensemble of the superstructures moving towards concrete and objectively universal unification and it is not a unitary presupposition."⁹⁸

Contrary to Bukharin, then, history is lawlike only in a highly restricted sense. There can be no "question of 'discovering' a metaphysical law of 'determinism,' or even of establishing a 'general' law of causality." The most that can be hoped for is that the study of history will depict how "relatively permanent forces are constituted which operate with a certain regularity and automatism."⁹⁹ Conceivably, certain general statistical laws ("laws of tendency") might be developed from close empirical observations of society, and Gramsci conceded that such laws have some "practical utility," indeed that they may even represent one component in the process of "creating a collective will."¹⁰⁰ As practical instruments their truth value lies in their efficacy, which, however, is unlikely ever to be absolute. Paradoxically, such laws are absolutely accurate only to the extent that "the great masses of the population remain essentially passive."¹⁰¹ Because history records the unfolding of human activity and creativity, the most that one can "foresee" in future history is its general character as a struggle for objectivity, "not the concrete moments of the struggle."¹⁰²

One senses the proximity of Hegel's owl of Minerva to these formulations, and a strong case can also be made for Sorel's influence, especially in the notion of history as a struggle for objectivity.¹⁰³ Yet the figure who casts the longest shadow over this discussion is surely Croce, even if his influence is rather convoluted. When Gramsci wrote that "just as Hegelianism was the premise of the philosophy of praxis in the nineteenth century . . . so Crocean philosophy ought to be the premise of a

process.¹⁰⁹ Croce believed that he had found such a grounding in the concept of history; for Croce, as for Hegel, history was an unfolding totality whose meaning was both the sum of our knowledge and the methodological premise of every partial science. Yet Croce, like Marx, repudiated Hegel's "world spirit" as a metaphysical construction: the only real history was human history; the only real spirit was the spirit of man. History was a stage constructed by men upon which they played out a drama which could be grasped as the reciprocal action of four moments: the aesthetic, the ethical, the true, and the useful. For Croce, however, these moments were not higher forces but heuristic aids, not component parts of a pan-logism but fully concrete representation of all of reality under each of its aspects. Not only Hegel's but all grand doctrines of philosophical history were discarded by Croce in favor of an "absolute historicism" which identified philosophy with history but which saw history as nothing more than the sum of human actions. Like the philosophies of the French Enlightenment, Croce's was not an "esprit de système" but an "esprit systématique."

For Gramsci this posture was wholly admirable; Croce's "greatest quality," he thought, "has always been the ability to disseminate his ideas about the world in a series of brief, unpedantic writings, which the public reality absorbs as 'good sense' and 'common sense.'"¹¹⁰ Gramsci also admired Croce's "unshakeable belief . . . that history is rational."¹¹¹ Yet, for all his pretenses to having abandoned every trace of transcendentalism, Croce was no more able than the classical idealists to go beyond the concept of an abstract human essence (Croce's "spirit of man") and to conceive of man in the terms of the sixth *Thesis on Feuerbach*: as the "ensemble of social relations."¹¹² Indeed, in some ways Croce's dialectic was even more abstract than that of his classical precursors.¹¹³ Not only did his "dialectic of distincts" suppress entirely the moment of antithesis, but it was conceived as a "pure conceptual dialectic," a mere tool of thought serenely unconnected with any concrete historical unfolding.¹¹⁴ The category of "becoming" in Crocean philosophy is therefore nothing but the "concept of becoming," and his "history as the story of liberty" can rest only on some "utopistic basis" or upon the implicit

determinism of a "hidden god."¹¹⁵ The "philosophy of praxis" can resolve these contradictions, Gramsci argued, because it "continues the philosophy of immanence but purifies it of all its metaphysical apparatus and brings it onto the concrete terrain of history."¹¹⁶

Croce's inadequate understanding even of the idealist dialectic was reflected for Gramsci in his mechanistic interpretation of Marxism which reduced it ultimately to a mere "canon of interpretation."¹¹⁷ Yet Croce's subsequent philosophizing had produced several formulations of decisive importance for a recomposition of the dialectical foundations of historical materialism. First among these, perhaps, was his theorization of the "ethical-political moment," which Gramsci credited, along with Lenin's concept of hegemony, as the chief inspiration for his own concept of hegemony. We will put off discussing this connection, however, until Chapter 6. Among the most important of Croce's other formulations were "absolute historicism," "the contemporaneity of history," and "immanentism."

Croce's affirmation of an "absolute historicism" identified history with human creation and philosophical truth, but this history was not a string of events wending its way forward from the infinite recesses of the past. All history was contemporary not merely because we inevitably introduce our presumptions and sensibilities as we relate it, but in the sense that we actively construct it. There exist no events "out there" to be related; there are only documents and monuments of a past which for us are present realities, just as our own memories of a personal past are encompassed by and not separated from the present.¹¹⁸ Gramsci did not abandon this notion of a contemporaneous history; he radicalized its double identity of history and philosophy into a triple identity of history, philosophy, and politics. "In the investigation of past deficiencies and errors (of certain parties or currents), the interpretations of that past are not 'history' but actual politics in the making."¹¹⁹ The active construction of history necessarily entails filtering it through present political needs; any effort to avoid this confrontation will only reduce history to the "external and mechanical."¹²⁰ Croce could not concede this point, since for him it would be tantamount to saying

fronts this enemy directly and thus is far more valuable to the proletariat than theorizations of materialism.¹²⁸ The chief problem with immanentist philosophies is practical: though they have been readily absorbed as common sense and even good sense, "they have not been able to create an ideological unity between the bottom and the top, between the 'simple' and the intellectuals."¹²⁹ Thus, though privately committed to atheism, immanentism allows "the teaching of religion on the grounds that religion is the philosophy of the infancy of mankind renewed in every non-metaphysical infancy."¹³⁰ Nonetheless, the philosophy of praxis is best thought of as a form of "immanentism," indeed "the only consistent 'immanentist' conception."¹³¹

The Pragmatological Dialectic

If Gramsci unabashedly accepted "immanentism" rather than "materialism" as his starting point, the full shape of his dialectic and its implicit tensions can only be appreciated after we have seen how he reappropriated Marx. Attentive readers of Gramsci have always recognized how highly selective he was in this reappropriation. In part this was inevitable: he never knew of important early Marx texts like *The German Ideology* and the *Paris Manuscripts*, which were published in the West only in 1932. Though he certainly read a large number of Marx's other works, including *Capital*, his references nonetheless concentrate heavily on the *Theses on Feuerbach* and the 1859 preface to the *Critique of Political Economy*—a dozen or so pages from a lifetime of Marx's writing. Marx's "basic innovation" is thus presented as "the demonstration that there is no abstract 'human nature,' fixed and immutable (a concept which certainly derives from religious and transcendentalist thought), but that human nature is the totality of historically determined social relations,"¹³² a proposition certainly derived from the sixth *Thesis on Feuerbach*. And the 1859 preface is referred to as the "most important authentic source for a reconstruction of the philosophy of praxis."¹³³

This latter assessment is perhaps surprising in view of the wide currency given to the "Preface" in positivist accounts of Marxism. Yet in Gramsci's reading no special attention is given to the

that history is only ideology. Philosophy was a universal or "high" value in Croce's view, politics was not. For Gramsci the distinction was artificial; "a man of politics writes about philosophy: it could be that his 'true' philosophy should be looked for rather in his writings on politics."¹²¹ Likewise any historical judgment must always be understood in terms of the political source for which it serves as a mediation.

Several consequences that follow from this triple identity are crucial in grasping Gramsci's effort to theorize a radically open dialectic. Since history is an as yet uncompleted totality, all philosophy, including the philosophy of praxis, is necessarily "non-definitive."¹²²

If the philosophy of praxis affirms theoretically that every "truth" believed to be eternal and absolute has had practical origins and has represented a "provisional" value (historicity of every conception of the world and life), it is still very difficult to make people grasp "practically" that such an interpretation is valid also for the philosophy of praxis itself, without in so doing shaking the convictions that are necessary for action.¹²³

Most Marxist-inspired political movements have therefore chosen to absolutize their principles into dogmatic ideologies which pretend to unlock history's secrets. In seeking to overcome this tendency, Gramsci revealed what was most revolutionary in his "absolute historicism" or "absolute secularization and earthliness of thought,"¹²⁴ namely, that whatever political innovations may occur in future history will be entirely the products of flesh and blood individuals joined together as a collective will engaged in collective action.

In reducing Marxist philosophy to ideological dogma, proletarian movements have tended to identify "historical materialism" with "traditional metaphysical materialism" in order to gain "an achieved and perfected system."¹²⁵ Though the opposition of metaphysical idealism and materialism had already been fully overcome in Hegel, "Hegel's successors destroyed this unity and there was a return to materialist systems on the one side and spiritualist on the other."¹²⁶ The philosophical enemy of the proletariat is not "idealism" but "metaphysics" in all its "reciprocally one-sided" forms.¹²⁷ Croce's concept of immanentism con-

famous remark that "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness."¹³⁴ He concentrated instead on two other passages, one portraying the "period of social revolution," the other the material limits of human creativity:

[a.] With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. In considering such transformations the distinction should always be made between the material transformations of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic—in short, ideological—forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. . . .

[b.] No social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have been developed; and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself. Therefore mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve; since, looking at the matter more closely, it will always be found that the task itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation.¹³⁵

The first passage offers a clear rationale for a subjectivist starting point: Marx is shown to have recognized the significance of consciousness and ideology in revolutionary struggle and, even more importantly, to have identified these factors with social relations generally and not merely with the economic structure. The second passage, however, seems to set limits to human creativity in history, not through a one-sided determinism but rather by suggesting how previous human objectifications structure collective choices and how real concrete choices are necessarily grounded in material preconditions. Taken together, the two passages represent a dialectical view of history and freedom which not only does not clash with, but even reinforces, the philosophical outlook of the *Theses on Feuerbach*.

Has Gramsci, then, rejected a positivist Marxism in favor of the "pragmatological" dialectic that Marx began to develop in 1845? Such a conclusion seems to follow from the Marxian texts to which he most often referred, and it is further suggested by his reference to Marxism as a "philosophy of the act (praxis,

development), but not of the 'pure' act, but rather of the real 'impure' act, in the most profane and worldly sense of the word."¹³⁶ The alternative is that Gramsci embraced some form of Marx's earlier "anthropological" dialectic. Yet, not only did Gramsci never use the language of "alienation," "species being," "human essence," etc., but he almost entirely lacked the reification problematic that Marx developed on the basis of these concepts. It is striking that in the "Americanism and Fordism" sections of the *Notebooks*, where Gramsci discussed the increasing rationalization of the worker in contemporary capitalism, he did not oppose this rationalization itself but only some aspects of its capitalist form. Americanism and Fordism "derive from an inherent necessity to achieve the organization of a planned economy";¹³⁷ Italian workers have championed rationalization, and their American counterparts have accepted even Prohibition in its name;¹³⁸ regulation of the sex habits of workers to improve output is "necessary";¹³⁹ and if Fordism "smashes" the "humanity" and "spirit" of the worker, this is only a repudiation of a particular form of rationalization, which nonetheless remains a revolutionary force.¹⁴⁰ We need not question the depth of Gramsci's insight into the nature of capitalism or the degree of proletarian oppression it involves; he had his own way of theorizing the overcoming of proletarian oppression, which we will come to shortly. But as it is posed in the anthropological dialectic, the problematic of reification simply does not lie within the purview of Gramsci's Marxism. Were it not for Lukács's brilliant reconstruction of a theory of capitalist reification upon such slender reeds as *Capital's* discussion of the "fetishism of commodities," one might be tempted to say that Gramsci *could not* have had such a problematic.

What exactly was entailed for him, then, in the pragmatological dialectic that he took over from Marx? We have already alluded to many of its elements: the grounding in subjectivity and intersubjectivity; the pragmatic conception of prediction; the concept of necessity as need made conscious; the repudiation of all transcendental and speculative notions, including traditional metaphysical materialism; and the concepts of history's contemporaneity, of the non-definitiveness of philosophy, and of phi-

losophy as a collective activity pursued for practical, historical ends. Gramsci's philosophical outlook resulted from his taking the radical assertions of the *Theses on Feuerbach* with the utmost seriousness: circumstances are changed by men; men are the ensemble of their social relationships; truth is neither abstract nor timeless and must be proved in practice. His position entailed a categorical denial of the separation of subject and object, of being and thought; one cannot know reality independently of man. Gramsci would have agreed wholeheartedly with Sartre that what is needed "is a theory which *situates knowing in the world* . . . and which determines it in its *negativity*. . . . Only then will it be understood that knowing is not a knowing of ideas but a practical knowing of things."¹⁴¹

The three key concepts here are man, knowing, and the world; let us begin with the first. To say that "man" is "the ensemble of social relations" is not to suppress the category of the concrete subject or individual person. The point is to conceive of the concrete subject who "knows, wishes, admires, creates" through "active relationships" with other concrete subjects and the world.¹⁴² And Gramsci insisted that, among these relationships, individuality is "perhaps the most important."¹⁴³ This provided him with the ontological basis for a view of human freedom as dependent both on "individuality" and on a properly constituted collectivity. At the same time, the individual is always situated in a particular present, however much he may believe that his individual thoughts express "the unity of the human spirit."¹⁴⁴ And his self-consciousness is necessarily intersubjective, since he "does not enter into relations with other men by juxtaposition, but organically, inasmuch, that is, as he belongs to organic entities which range from the simplest to the most complex."¹⁴⁵ Finally:

It is not enough to know the *ensemble* of relations as they exist at any given time as a given system. They must be known genetically, in the movement of their formation. For each individual is the synthesis not only of existing relations, but of the history of these relations. He is a *précis* of all the past.¹⁴⁶

Human beings also "enter into relations with the natural world . . . actively, by means of work and technique."¹⁴⁷ Yet this

world is not "objectively real"—a misconception of "religious origin"—but actively constituted by human subjects.¹⁴⁸ At the same time, the category of "world" is not simply identical with that of human objectification; Gramsci nowhere denied the existence of an independent material reality, or what Marx called the "natural substratum."¹⁴⁹ Human objectification, after all, presupposes a "stuff" to be worked on; it would be sheer nonsense, to use Gramsci's example, to suppose that one creates news by opening a newspaper.¹⁵⁰ Rather, the appropriation of the world in human objectification is a complexly mediated process guided above all by particular human needs and interests.¹⁵¹

A person comes to know phenomena not through arbitrary choice or caprice but as "qualities" which he "has isolated in consequence of his practical interests (the construction of his economic life) and his scientific interests (the necessity to discover an order in the world and to describe and classify things, a necessity which is itself connected to mediated and future practical interests)."¹⁵² This highly suggestive sentence posits two sorts of "interests" as underlying the search for knowledge: a "practical interest" (which seems to parallel what Jürgen Habermas calls a "technical interest"), and a "scientific interest" (roughly Habermas's "practical interest").¹⁵³ Interestingly, however, Gramsci portrayed these interests not as the analytically separate entities found in Habermas but as interpenetrating aspects of the unified nexus of subject and world.

Thus the general picture of human life which emerges in Gramsci's reappropriation of Marx is that of concrete individuals actively transforming the natural world in a collective process of social labor guided by shared practical and scientific interests. This praxis is not entirely open in the sense of a radical voluntarism; in Gramsci's dialectical view, men are both shaped by and shapers of their world. Yet there is an implied openness in the historical results of this praxis which, at the very least, seems to preclude any notion that history will necessarily turn out in a particular way. Gramsci's estimation of the philosophy of praxis itself—a "non-definitive philosophy" situated in a particular historical epoch—is entirely consistent with this view. A dialectical openness is also consistent with the philosophical mode that

he extracted from Croce: the anti-positivism and the critique of scientific fetishism which led him to deal so gingerly with the question of historical prediction, and the absolute historicism which seemed to rule out transcendental subjects altogether.

Yet whether it was because he sought to escape the threat of relativism or because he could not escape certain assumptions at the roots of the Marxist world view, Gramsci remained committed to certain teleological elements which strained and ultimately burst through the fetters set up by his pragmatological dialectic. The central such element, never critically examined in his entire corpus, is the view that the proletariat is a universal class whose inner meaning and historical mission are to achieve a breakthrough into the realm of "freedom" from that of "necessity." To be sure, Gramsci sometimes discussed this topic as if the transition were merely a possibility,¹⁵⁴ and he always treated it as something which would be produced by concrete human action.¹⁵⁵ Yet, in a passage we have already cited, he referred to Croce's "spirit" not "as a point of departure but as a point of arrival," one that *is* manifesting itself as "a concrete and objectively universal unification" of the human race.¹⁵⁶ In other passages as well, this unification is depicted not as something that *may* but as something that *will* happen.¹⁵⁷ The result appears paradoxical. The concept of a proletariat whose praxis holds the promise of an emerging "realm of freedom" seems to have led Gramsci to assert a quasi-essentialist image of the future he could not "predict."

Gramsci was not entirely unaware of this problem; indeed, he was sharply critical of Bukharin for his "unconscious teleology" presented in its "most infantile manifestations."¹⁵⁸ He argued, however, that an entirely immanent, Kantian form of teleology could be "maintained and justified by the philosophy of praxis."¹⁵⁹ The following is perhaps his most developed account of how this was possible:

Accepting the affirmation that our knowledge of things is nothing other than ourselves, our needs and interests, that is, that our knowledge is superstructure (or non-definitive philosophy), it is difficult not to think in terms of something real beyond this knowledge—not in the metaphysical sense of a "noumenon," an "unknown God" or an "unknowable," but in

the concrete sense of a "relative" ignorance of reality, of something still unknown, which will however be known one day when the "physical" and intellectual instruments of mankind are more perfect, when, that is, the technical and social conditions of mankind have been changed in a progressive direction. We are then making an historical prediction which consists simply in an act of thought that projects into the future a process of development similar to that which has taken place from the past until today.¹⁶⁰

An historical teleology seems to be implicit in the search for knowledge itself. Practical and scientific interests are a ground upon which the collective-historical and individual-subjective poles of the dialectic unite. For as human beings seek beyond the known to the unknown, they necessarily become implicated in the building of ever more powerful instruments for this pursuit. This telos is described modestly as a prediction, and Gramsci is perfectly justified in doing this. The problem is that he has no logical move from this limited prediction with its "progressive direction" to the grander one he wants to make: the coming of a realm of freedom as a "new intellectual and moral order."¹⁶¹

The same problem arises in the several other ways that Gramsci sought to ground a telos: in human nature generally, "which changes continuously with the changing of social relations" and thus "becomes";¹⁶² or in the category of "rational will," which he self-consciously placed "at the base of [his] philosophy."¹⁶³ Knowledge is founded upon a rational will "in so far as it corresponds to objective historical necessity," which is to say, when and if it should "come to be accepted by the many, and accepted permanently . . . by becoming a culture, a form of 'good sense,' a conception of the world with an ethic that conforms to its structure."¹⁶⁴ Action ordinarily implies a multiplicity of "various wills with a varying degree of intensity and awareness and of homogeneity with the entire complex of the collective will."¹⁶⁵ Through collective action, men can learn to transcend their givenness as products of nature and history, to become aware of their knowledge-gaining capacities, and thus to act with consciousness and will. In this sense, the concept of "human" is not a "starting point" but a "point of arrival."¹⁶⁶ But once again, the leap from this to a new cultural totality is a leap of faith presented as a logical entailment.

factor in historical outcomes as to anything in Labriola.¹⁷³ In Chapter 6, we will see how Gramsci drew on Sorel's notion of an historical "bloc" in theorizing the practical political dimension of this problem. Yet it was Labriola, not Sorel, whom Gramsci referred to as "the only man who has attempted to build up the philosophy of praxis scientifically."¹⁷⁴ And an inventory of Gramsci's conceptual commitments reveals the persistent presence of such Labriolisms as the elevation of praxis to a central position in Marxism,¹⁷⁵ the notion that Marxism is a "general philosophy,"¹⁷⁶ a commitment to an absolute historicism,¹⁷⁷ and an acknowledgment of the nonobjective nature of science and its grounding in human need.¹⁷⁸ Both efforts, moreover, were fraught with tension. If Labriola sometimes drifted toward economic determinism because of a desire to negate the idealist proclivities of the Italian philosophical tradition, Gramsci drifted toward a teleology of the proletariat as history's culmination because of a desire to sustain Marxist hope in a period of war, political crisis, and fascist repression.

From this perspective, the difference between Gramsci and Lukács is that while Lukács's anthropological dialectic implied a sense of historical closure even as it emphasized the category of praxis, Gramsci's pragmatological dialectic seemed to deny the necessity of an historical movement toward totality but then reintroduced this idea subterraneously in the concept of the proletariat itself. Lukács's "identity theory" may have been more coherent, but it was insufficiently concrete—it lacked crucial intersubjective and organizational mediations—while Gramsci's was so concrete that its broad historical contours were posited at the expense of logical coherence.¹⁷⁹ Lukács, one might say, suffered from a lack of patience characteristic of the armchair pundit, while Gramsci, whose long years as a PCI militant had taught him the virtues of patience and will, used theory in part to reach out for the hope and inspiration denied him by practice. In both cases, we find that the unmitigated rejection of positivist determinism led—whether as an escape from relativism or as a search for the absolute—to the reintroduction of deterministic elements of a more historicist sort, which flew in the face of the theorists' general intentions. Yet what Gramsci never accepted

To grasp the source of this difficulty, it may be helpful to follow the recent suggestions that Gramsci's critique of scientism, his immanentist and intersubjective philosophical starting point, and his conceptual apparatus of telos and the intentionality of consciousness amount to an incipient phenomenology.¹⁶⁷ For if what we have been calling his pragmatological dialectic can be viewed at bottom as a phenomenology, then a parallel between Gramsci and phenomenological Marxists like Merleau-Ponty would seem to be suggested.¹⁶⁸ As others have pointed out, phenomenology and Marxism are an explosive mixture.¹⁶⁹ Even one of its contemporary advocates concedes that "the forced synthesis of the two mechanically juxtaposed frameworks is bound to fail from the very beginning; either phenomenology dissolves in the dialectic, in which case it ceases to be phenomenology, or the dialectic is frozen in the phenomenological foundation and loses its dynamism, thus ceasing to be dialectical."¹⁷⁰ In Merleau-Ponty's case, the effort to reconcile phenomenology with a proletarian telos toward a final resolution of history's contradictions resulted in what one student has called the "muddled little tract," *Humanism and Terror*.¹⁷¹ Unlike Gramsci, however, Merleau-Ponty eventually overcame this tension by disavowing all essentialist attributions to the proletariat in his *Adventures of the Dialectic*. It seems almost gratuitous to add that Merleau-Ponty's insight was very likely promoted by Stalinism's self-presentation in the events of the Cold War, hardly an inspiring image for a Marxist millenarianism.

If Gramsci's effort at a full philosophical reconstitution of Marxism seems in retrospect to have been doomed by the ingredients he selected, it nonetheless remains a powerful attempt. To round out our perspective on it, we will conclude this chapter with a brief glance back at Labriola and Lukács.

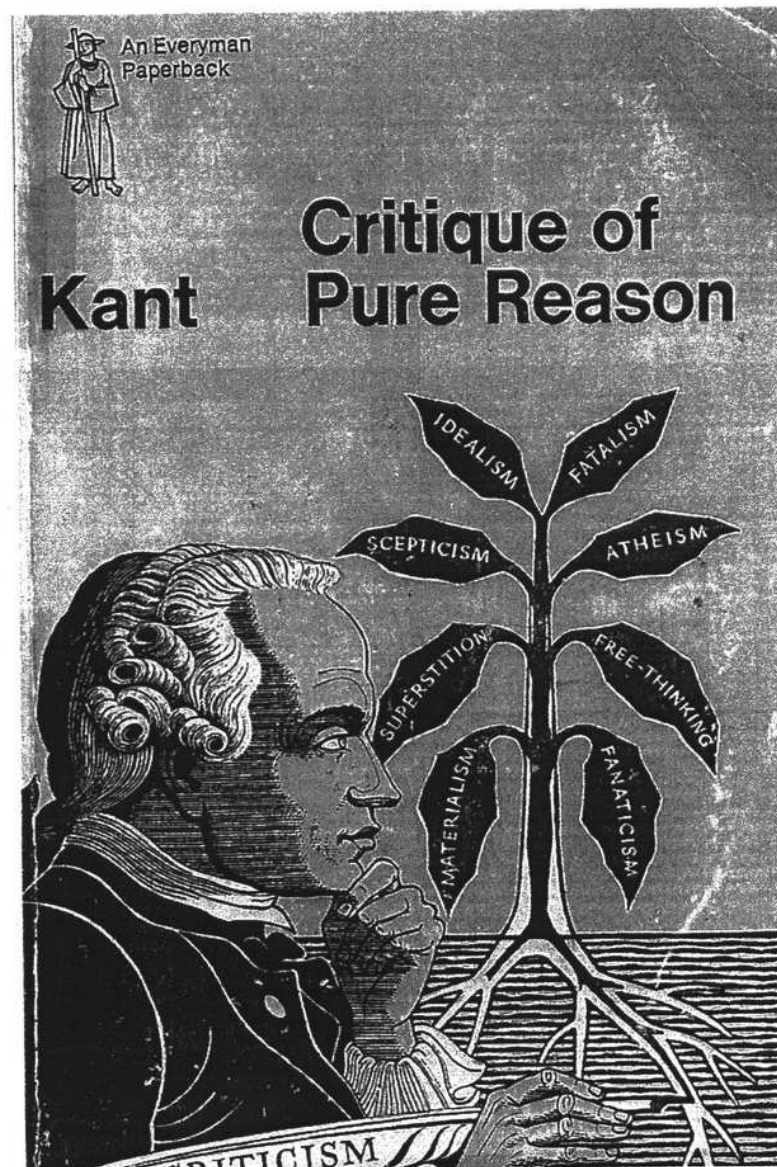
Unlike Labriola's, Gramsci's philosophical formulations were entirely devoid of all forms of economic determinism. Though both men sought to use Engels as an ally against vulgar Marxism, Gramsci made clear, as Labriola had not, how *Anti-Dühring* had provided the essential inspiration for Bukharin's and other versions of economism.¹⁷² Given these divergencies, some writers have suggested that Gramsci's Marxism owes at least as much to Sorel's concept of "myth" and his emphasis on subjectivity as a

was the idealist supposition, ultimately shared by Lenin and Lukács, that knowledge of totality could only be brought to the proletariat from outside. Rather, as we will now see, Gramsci attempted to work out the concrete mediations in the dialectical movement from "common sense" to full proletarian self-understanding, mediations grounded in the "school of labor" but incorporating as well a political education conceived of as the "intellectual/moral bloc" of workers and their "organic intellectuals."



Benedetto Croce (Italian, b. 1866 – d. 1952)

A DAILY LECTURE WRITTEN BY MARCUS STEINWEG

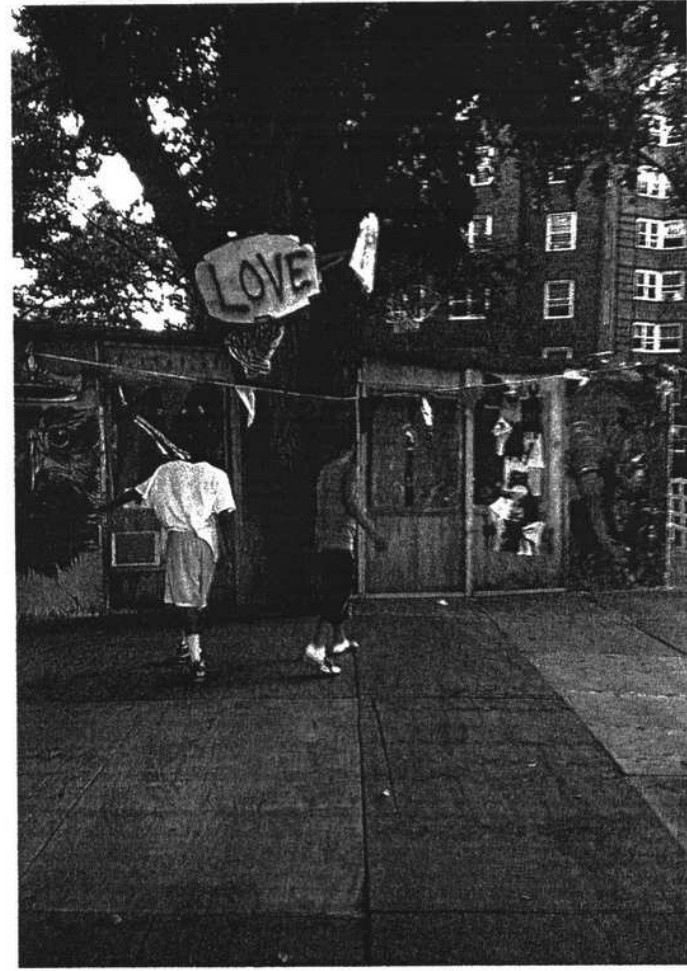


48th Lecture at the Gramsci Monument, The Bronx, NYC: 17th August 2013
THE SUBJECT OF ART
Marcus Steinweg

1. Evidently belonging to art and philosophy is the ongoing invention of art and philosophy: Art and philosophy exist in the moment when they generate a concept of art and philosophy.
2. Typical of the critical-affirmative character of art and philosophy is the analysis and deconstruction of their concept.
3. Likewise characteristic of them is the affirmation and invention of a new self-understanding.
4. Criticism is evaluation of what was and is.
5. Affirmation supports what could be and does not (yet) exist.
6. There is no art and no philosophy which does not imply both aspects, the critical as well as the affirmative: Reflection and profection.
7. Let us venture, in analogy to a famous passage from Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, (1781/87), the following statement: Affirmation without criticism is empty, criticism without affirmation is blind.¹
8. Criticism and affirmation cooperate.
9. Art and philosophy affirm themselves as critical still in relation to themselves.
10. At the same time, they do not exhaust themselves in negativity.
11. They imply an affirmative element which indicates their receptivity to an inconsistency for which every originary artistic or philosophical position must find a form or a name.
12. The affirmative aspect of art and philosophy has nothing to do with the confirmation or acceptance of the social-political status quo, as is believed by the pseudo-critical Doxa.
13. On the contrary, it indicates the inconsistency of a religiosity of factuality which misinterprets itself as critical, whereas it actually conforms to a model of reality which no longer subjects it to inquiry.
14. Affirmation is affirmation of the inconsistency of the promise of consistency deemed to be "reality."

¹ Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B 75: "Gedanken ohne Inhalt sind leer, Anschauungen ohne Begriff sind blind." ("Thoughts without content are empty, contemplations without concepts are blind.")

AMBASSADOR'S NOTE #29 BY YASMIL RAYMOND



The two basketball hoops that serve as props in the Gramsci Theater on Mondays reiterate the question: love or politics, politics or love. Could we say, perhaps, that the point is not to choose between these two different but urgent priorities? Could we say, in other words, that the challenge is to contend with both? Elevated a couple feet from the ground, the monument functions as an enormous stage where people play out their game. And it is precisely this kind of elevation what gives a lift only to put emphasis between intention and action.



FEEDBACK



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FINANCIAL TIMES

August 16, 2013 7:49 pm

A happening in the 'hood

By Erica Wagner

The Gramsci Monument 'has to be, every day, improved. It's never a finished project'

I'm in the South Bronx, under the trees that shelter the gardens of Forest Houses, a public housing project in a neighbourhood that (certainly in the years when I was growing up in New York) was once synonymous with urban decay and violent crime. This was "Fort Apache", no-man's land.

But on this overcast August morning, I'm talking with Erik Farmer, president of the Forest Houses residents' association, about art. For Farmer was integral in bringing to fruition the "Gramsci Monument", the latest work by Swiss-born artist Thomas Hirschhorn. This is an artwork that takes the form of a sequence of rough-hewn plywood buildings in the middle of the project: there's a library here, a daily newspaper, a radio station; there are art classes and lectures and a computer room for kids to use.

It's not like a museum; it's like a neighbourhood – and it's like nothing Farmer had ever seen. "Everyone's involved, everyone gets something out of it," he tells me. "Whatever age you are, whoever you are. Whether it's a lecture, or the kids going on trips. They can use the computers, they use the radio station – everyone finds a way to use it."

Hirschhorn's work is site-specific. He uses only materials that are widely and easily available: plywood, duct tape, cardboard, foil and plastic wrap. More than a decade ago, he began a series of projects dedicated to the philosophers he most admires: to Spinoza in Amsterdam in 1999, to Gilles Deleuze in Avignon in 2000, to Georges Bataille in Kassel, Germany, in 2002. They are works made and built in public housing projects, and made and built not by Hirschhorn alone but in collaboration with the people who live in those projects.

The one at Forest Houses, the largest yet by far, is inspired by the work of Antonio Gramsci, Italian political theorist and one-time leader of Italy's Communist party, who died in 1937, at the age of 46, following his imprisonment by Mussolini's regime. Here, banners with quotations from Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* hang from trees and are stretched between lamp-posts: "The content of art is art itself," says one. Taped to a plywood wall is another: "The dry twigs are indispensable for making the log burn, but not in and of themselves. Only the log, by burning, changes the surroundings from cold to warm."

Hirschhorn – here at his project every single day – wants us all to be logs. Commissioned by the Dia Art Foundation, his Gramsci Monument opened on July 1 after seven weeks of construction by Hirschhorn and 15 residents. It will close on September 15, when it will be dismantled and much of it (computers, equipment and so on) distributed to the people who live here.

Once you arrive at Forest Houses, it's not hard to find Hirschhorn, a lanky figure in thick black glasses, already sweating through his pale blue shirt. We sit at a table outside the newspaper office where an issue of 14 pages is produced every day: the one I take away with me has neighbourhood news, extracts from a book about Gramsci – and poems by Rudyard Kipling.

...

Hirschhorn wants to make, he tells me in his elegant if occasionally eccentric English, "a new term of monument". A monument, as most of us think of it, is fixed, immovable, and nearly always about the past. The Gramsci Monument is just the opposite. "It's an ongoing project which has to be, every day, improved. It's never a finished project. This is a project about production." When I ask how hard it was to get the residents involved in his work, he shrugs. Not because he doesn't care: but because it's his problem, not theirs.

"The problem is, do I do a work which wants to involve the residents? Which is based on friendship, which is based on equality? Which is based on the belief that everybody is an intellectual, everybody is an artist? I wanted to make something out of the city centre, where people are living together in a neighbourhood that touches reality. This is how I want to see the world."

Just over halfway through the Gramsci Monument's lifespan, it feels as if this is exactly what Hirschhorn has done. Residents and visitors – most of whom, like me, look as if they've never been to the South Bronx before – mingle happily, as DJ Baby-Dee mans the radio station, pouring out Prince and the news of the day. For Farmer it's been a transformational experience – and not just because it gave the residents dozens of jobs.

"Visitors love it," he says, with wonder in his voice. "And that's not normal. They're like, 'Wow, you can come up here.' And we think they're afraid – because everyone lives differently, looks at things differently. But I tell them all the time, we're the same. We all believe, we all pray, we all have ambition. Colour doesn't change much. Don't believe what you hear. And that's why I think this is so special. Because people thought this couldn't happen."

To get back into Manhattan, I hop on the 5 train, the Lexington Avenue Express; I get off at 86th Street, perfect for the Metropolitan, the Guggenheim, the Frick. But today, I'm not sure I want to go to those places. I want to keep the Gramsci Monument in my mind. Art, Farmer said to me, "is for everyone. It has a lot to do with our daily lives. It took me until now to realise that. And that's incredible." And he's right.

www.gramsci-monument.com

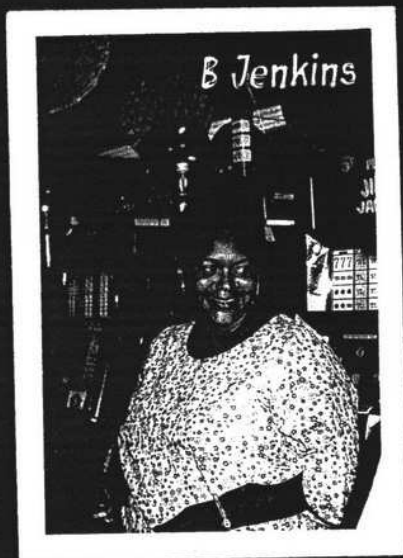
To hear a podcast of this column, go to www.ft.com/culturecast

Peter Aspden is away

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

SAQUAN SCOTT

THE OTHER DAY A MUCH OLDER MAN THAN I APPROACHED ME AND ASKED "WHAT IS ART" I'M GUESSING THAT THE IMAGE ABOVE IS THE DEFINITION OF ART, BUT THE MAN SAID "ART IS WHAT YOUR EYES SEEK IT TO BE." MY DEFINITION OF ART IS NOT WHAT THE WIKIPEDIA DEFINES ART TO BE, ART TO ME IS EVERYDAY LIFE. YOUR EVERY FEELING, YOUR EVERY EMOTION. I WAS TOLD BY THE SWISS ARTIST THOMAS HIRSCHHORN THAT "ART IS BIGGER THAN JUST A PAINTING OR AN IMAGE." ART IS LIFE AND EVERYTHING WE DO IN EVERYDAY LIFE IN SOME WAYS ARE CONNECTED TO ART. EVEN WHEN IT COMES TO CONVERSATION OR SPEAKING PERIOD THAT PLAYS A MAJOR PART IN ART. ART TO ME IS TRUE LOVE, A PERFECT RELATIONSHIP WITHOUT DRAMA. ART IS THE BIRTH OF A CHILD, THE RAISE OF A BEAUTIFUL MORNING SUN. ART HAS VARIOUS DEFINITIONS, BUT THE ONE THAT STICKS TO ME IS ART IS JUST YOUR EVERYDAY LIFE!!! THIS IS YOUR EDITOR AND THAT'S WHAT ART MEANS TO ME.



FRED MOTEN

POETRY BY FRED MOTEN FROM THE BOOK NAMED
AFTER HIS MOTHER WHO PASSED AWAY IN 2000
“B JENKINS” FEEL HIS MOTHER PERSENCES
THROUGH IS POEMS.

b jenkins

Her territory sunflower, insurgent floor time in real time in the field
museum—bertha lee and her lyric ways and her urban plan. up and down
the regular highway and every two-tone station, passing through
to cure, for preservation to unfold it all away, she put the new thing
in the open cell, one more time about the theory of who we are.

In the names away in blocks
with double names to interrupt and
gather, kept dancing in tight circles
between break and secret, vaulted
with records in our basement, where
the long-haired hippies and afro-
blacks all get together across the
tracks and they party, everybody sown
like grain and touched in stride.

Now the cold new reckoning is tired and you've been
waiting for a preferential song. the multiplex should be in the
frame like bodies in a house way back in the woods, fled in
suspended projects like the real thing, posed for the midnight
trill. essential shtetl of the world stage, born way before you
was born, move the administered word by breathing, to hand
beautiful edge around.

gayl jones

my daddy drank red soda pop.
once he wanted a fleetwood,
then he wanted a navigator,
so he could navigate, check out
his radio towers, deliver flowers,
drive back to give me long kisses,

watch mama burn her books. said nancy

wilson can't sing but she can style—
hold back the force of random operators/
return to the line refuse to punctuate. a moon—
but his actual drive was watching clay circle,
tight-breath'd hunch, tight shoulder. sweet

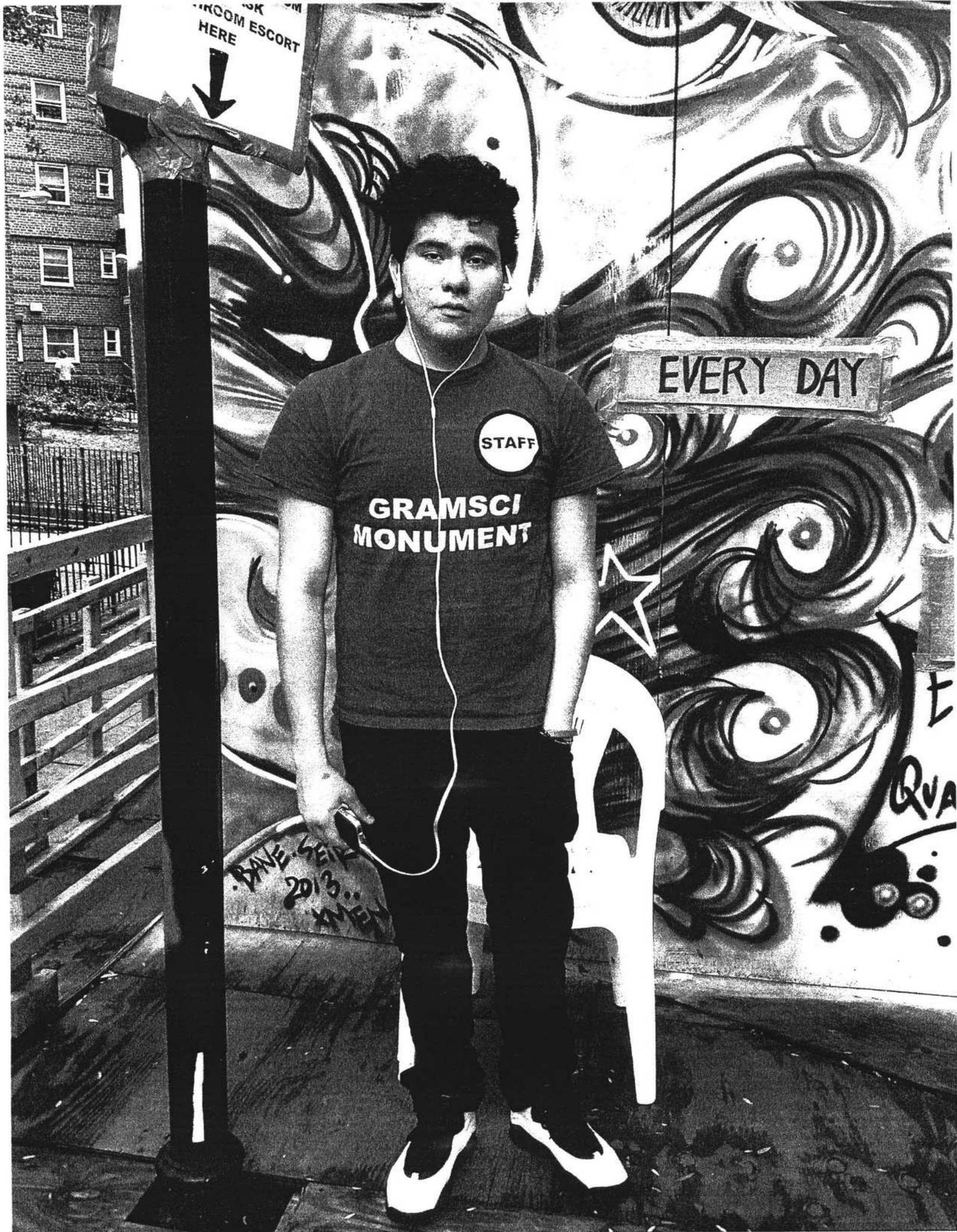
nancy wilson was just cold analytics:

the difference between a new coat and the
one with ink on the pocket, calculate
like a fat young minister, strokin' like
clarence carter, increase like creflo
dollar. mama and me stayed up over

the club, cried sometimes in the same
broke off the same piece left each other

the last piece practiced the same piece
got warm on the same. however,
I'm so full this morning I have
to try and make you understand

RESIDENT OF THE DAY



DAVID POVEDA