

THE GRAMSCI MONUMENT

NEWSPAPER

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



www.gramsci-monument.com

July 26th, 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

NEGRI ON OUR MIND!

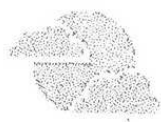


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Bronx, NY 10456

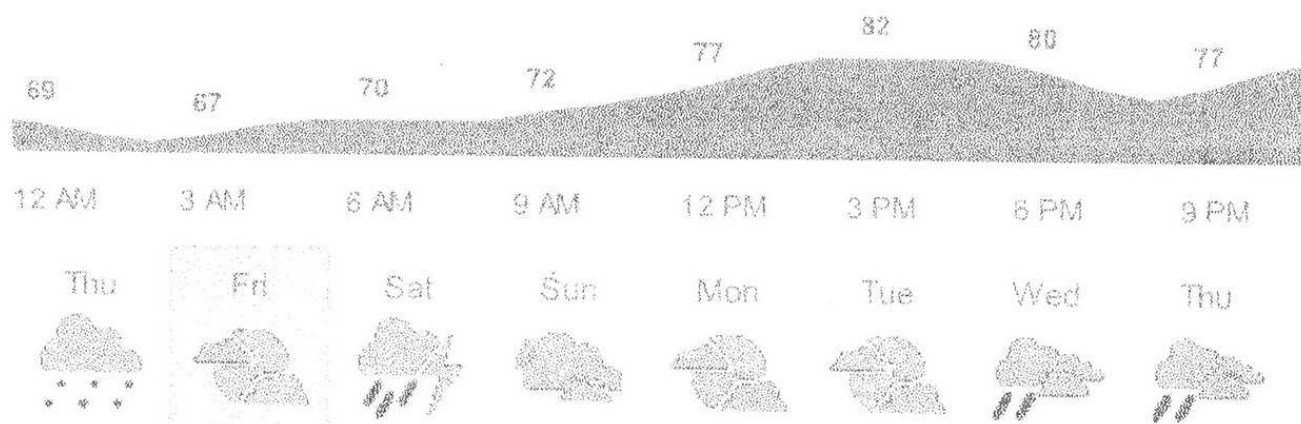
Friday
Partly Cloudy



84 °F | °C

Precipitation: 10%
Humidity: 52%
Wind: 12 mph

Temperature	Precipitation	Wind
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A NOTE FROM CLYDE THOMPSON

"The will must be greater than the Skill"

Muhammad Ali

This summer has been the embodiment of the very prophetic words of the great Muhammad Ali. In the many years of service to the community at Forest, no project has required the will of so many people to create an opportunity to share cultures, beliefs, ideas and mutual respect for things and ideas that we have so little experience or knowledge. Thomas Hirschhorn and the Dia Art Foundation have facilitated the bridging of gaps between people, cultures, thoughts and expressions that would otherwise remain parted. "Who is Gramsci?". So famously resounded this summer, but yet the positive feelings, attitudes and experiences that take place daily at the monument, tower what we do not know or understand about Gramsci. How could something so foreign, to so many, awaken our sense of community and respect for each other's voices. It is the value of our life experiences, as well as our differences that have been nurtured and fortified this experience. The challenge for our community will be to strengthen and sustain the hallmark of DIA, Gramsci and Thomas Hirschhorn upon completion of this outstanding effort.

It is the will of our community that has made this project and summer one of the most memorable times in the history of our Forest.

Clyde Thompson

Director of Community Affairs/ Training and Employment

AMBASSADOR'S CORNER NOTE

#21 BY YASMIL RAYMOND

"What is the connection with Toni Negri?" a visitor asked me a couple days ago pointing to the shelf of books in the exhibition space. Negri is one of the leading Marxist political theorists. His writing and activism has been highly influential across a diversity of fields including philosophy, literature, and visual arts. And yet, Negri's political engagement remains a source of discussion and controversy. Issue no. 26 of *The Gramsci Monument Newspaper* includes a short biography on the philosopher and explains the reasons why Negri is unable to travel to the United States.

WHO IS ANTONIO NEGRI?



Antonio Negri, born in 1933, is an Italian philosopher, political theorist, and educator. Throughout the past fifty years, he has been an internationally recognized voice and influential figure in Italian politics. Negri served as a professor at the University of Padua and the University of Paris, a labor organizer in Italy, a political prisoner in Rome, a member of Italian parliament, and a political refugee in Paris. He is the author of more than forty books, including *The Politics of Subversion: A Manifesto for the Twenty-First Century* (1989); *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State* (1999); *The Savage Anomaly* (2000), *Time for Revolution* (2003), and *In Praise of the Common: A Conversation on Philosophy and Politics* (2008) with Cesare Casarino. Most recently, the success of his books *Empire* (2000), *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (2004), and *Commonwealth* (2009), written with Michael Hardt, has established him as a prominent theorist on globalization.

AUTONOMIA OPERAIA AND THE 7 APRIL ARRESTS

In 1969, Negri co-founded the influential Italian worker's organization Potere Operaio (Worker's Power). Potere Operaio evolved into Autonomia Operaia (Worker's Autonomy), of which Negri was a central figure. Autonomia Operaia emphasized the ability of the working class to be "autonomous" or "independent" of political parties and professional unions in mobilizing, while challenging the established systems of capitalism.

On April 7, 1979, Antonio Negri and twenty-two intellectuals, all former or active members of Potere Operaio and Autonomia Operaia, were arrested across Italy on charges of "armed insurrection against the state." These individuals were accused of affiliation with the underground terrorist group, the Red Brigades, and the kidnap and murder of Aldo Moro, former prime minister and then president of the governing Democrazia Cristiana (Christian Democrat Party). Evidence to prosecute these individuals was unfounded, yet the arrests continued. Thousands of people were unjustly incarcerated from 1979 until the trial's close in 1984.

At the time of Negri's arrest, he was serving as the Chair of State Doctrine and director of the Institute of Political Science at the University of Padua. Negri was arrested for his involvement in Autonomia Operaia, yet he was specifically targeted on suspicions of plotting the murder of Moro, and, by extension, the subsequent overturn of the Italian government. The charges brought against Negri were ambiguous and complex. The only concrete evidence presented in relation to Negri's case was a recording of a threatening phone call to Moro's wife. No voice interpreter has ever been able to match the voice on the recording to Negri's voice.

In 1980, the charges for the most serious crimes, including his prospective involvement in the murder of Moro, were all dropped. However, Negri remained in prison for only one charge: heading an unidentified and ambiguous "subversive organization". In 1983, while still in prison awaiting trial, Negri was elected as a representative for Rome, Milan, and Naples, to Italian parliament. His elected status granted him parliamentary immunity, and he was consequently released from prison without having gone to trial. Upon the opening of the Legislature that year, several Italian officials motioned to strip Negri of his immunity and called for his return to prison. During the debate over these motions, Negri escaped to France where he lived for 14 years, writing and teaching, protected from extradition in virtue of the Mitterand Doctrine.

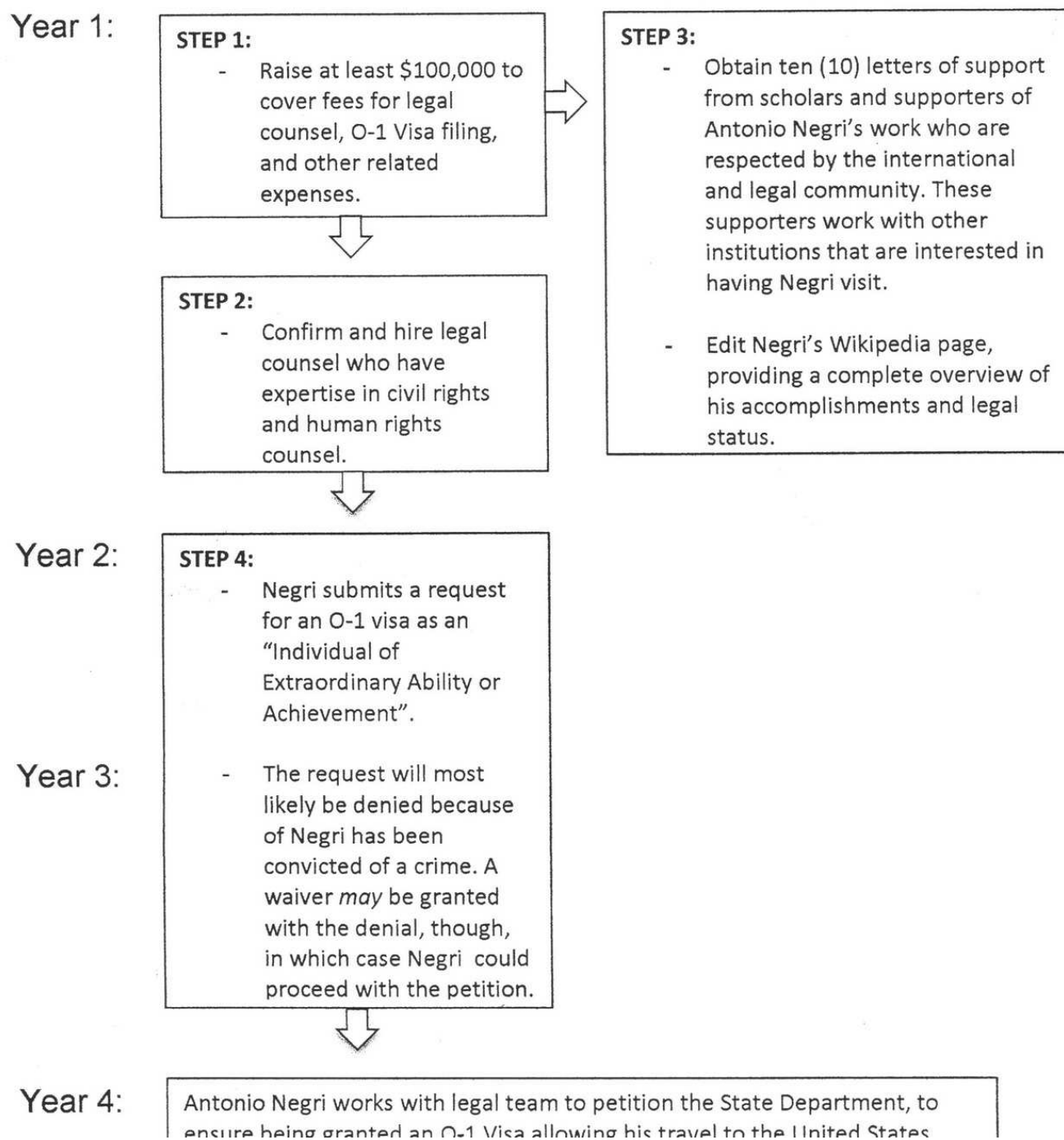
“Prison, with its daily rhythm, with the transfer and the defense, does not leave any time; prison dissolves time: This is the principal form of punishment in a capitalist society.”

-- Toni Negri



In 1997, after an appeal reduced Negri's sentence from 30 to 12 years, he voluntarily returned to Italy to serve the end of his sentence. Although Negri was cleared of all the most serious charges against him, he has spent most of his political and intellectual career either in exile or in prison. Negri was granted full parole in 2003 and is now free to travel and teach throughout Europe and South America. Despite great interest from universities, fellow intellectuals, political organizations, and art institutions, he has never been able to enter the United States due to his former arrest and imprisonment. While the legal process involved in bringing Antonio Negri to the United States will be difficult, the following plan of action sketches out the legal process involved with a Visa petition.

POTENTIAL PLAN OF ACTION: HOW TO BRING ANTONIO NEGRI TO THE UNITED STATES



A TEXT FROM THOMAS HIRSCHHORN

Tribute to Form

The "Gramsci-Monument" is a Form, it is a new Monument Form. It is a new Monument because of its Dedication, it is new because of its Location, it is new because of its Duration and it is new because of its Outcome. Everything related to it and coming from it is new and is - above all - 'Form'. The "Gramsci-Monument" is a tribute to Form and my answer to the question: What is Form?

To give Form requires making a Statement, fighting for it and being at War for it, it means understanding Form as Resistance and thinking its Universality.

Form is essential in Art, Form is the most important thing. By 'Form' I mean something coming from myself, from my own, something that I am the only one to see and perceive as logic, something that only I can work out and can give. The decision to Dedicate a Monument to Antonio Gramsci is Form. The "Gramsci-Monument" - in its precariousness - is Form and the decision to do a time-limited Monument is Form. The decision about the Duration of the "Gramsci-Monument" is Form. It is necessary to understand 'Form' as non-splittable, non-negotiable and - even - non-discussable. 'Form' only exists as something entire, undividable and complete, as an atom or a core - this is hardcore - and this 'hardcore' is Form. 'Form' and 'Aesthetic' are interdependent but not to confuse. 'Form' is what gives ethic, preciseness and clarity in the incommensurable, complex and chaotic world we are living in, today. 'Aesthetic' is the answer to the question: What does this Form look like? How is it made? What materials are used? Form never seeks a function, Form is not reductive, Form is never exclusive and Form can never be qualified with terms such as "the good Form".

To give Form is a Statement and an Assertion I have to stand-up for. To give Form is an act of emancipation, it is a resolution and a decision I myself, must take. No one asked me to do the "Gramsci-Monument" and no one asked me to do it in The Bronx. The decision about Location of the "Gramsci-Monument" in The Bronx is Form. I am responsible for this Form. No one 'needs', no one 'wants' and no one 'waits' for the "Gramsci-Monument". This work is an absolute Affirmation, and therefore cannot be reduced to any supposed function. I am doing it because I authorize myself to do it. Working out Form is a matter of production, of taking pride and dignity in this production. Form is never a fact, and Form never refers the only factual. Form is never an opinion and doesn't appeal to opinion. Form is never a comment and doesn't need to be commented.

In standing-up for a Form it is clear that I have to pay for it, and as the artist I must be first to pay. Why? Why be ready to pay the price for the "Gramsci-Monument" and for all my other artworks? Because to do a work of Art is a kind of War - not against something or somebody - but for something, for a Form. Because being at War implies to fight, to insist, to struggle, to make sacrifices and to have a strategy. Because I understand Form as a mission, and doing the "Gramsci-Monument" is a mission. I am "on mission", as artist I have my own mission, it's an art-mission, something to accomplish, something to absolutely fulfill and something to live or die for. 'Mission' is a War term - War for Form - never a religious term. To do the "Gramsci-Monument" is perhaps an impossible mission but - in any case - it's a mission. Form - as mission - is a commitment, an engagement and a position. To struggle for a Form is the opposite of thinking "career" and playing tactics. And thinking about 'Targets' and 'Opportunities' has no place in this War for Form.

As a warrior for Form I must appeal to Art as Resistance. Art - because it's Art - is Resistance as such. Resistance toward aesthetical, cultural, political habits. The problem to me - as artist - is: How can I do a work today, in my time, which resists the actuality of today? How can I do a work in my historical context today that reaches beyond its historical time? And how can I do a work which is, in any case, A-historical? The "Gramsci-Monument" wants to be Resistance - Resistance as such. Other terms for Resistance are Belief, Creation, Risk, Dynamic, Positiveness. The "Gramsci-Monument" is resolutely based on Positiveness but this doesn't guarantee a positive outcome, it means that - as a work of Art - it is created in Positiveness, because Positiveness is Resistance. The "Gramsci-Monument" in its Outcome, is Form. This Outcome will be the 'Resistance'. Resistance is never based on Solution or Justification. Resistance stands opposite to Argumentation, to Academicism, to Contemplation. In doing the "Gramsci-Monument" I need to resist all kinds of phantasms. The "Gramsci-Monument" is not a phantasm - it is a Dream and as a Dream it will be rebuilt - everyday - as new.

Art - because its Art - is based on Universality, consequently the "Gramsci-Monument" wants to be a universal artwork. There is no Art which doesn't own 'Universality'. Universality of Art is the condition granting to touch the Other, the Reality and the 'Truth'. As an artist, Universality is my belief and my will. My aim is to be in touch with the Reality, with the World, with the one and with the unique World we are living in. It is only by aiming at 'Universality' that one can implicate a "Non-Exclusive Audience", and it's only by aiming at Universality, that I can bring 'Politics', 'Love', 'Philosophy' and 'Aesthetics' into the core of the "Gramsci-Monument". Universality is just another term for 'Equality' and for 'Justice'. To aim with insistence at 'Universality' is a way of fighting 'Tradition', 'Identity', 'Culture', 'Particularism' and 'The Personal'. The "Gramsci-Monument" wants - through its Dedication, its Location, its Duration and its Outcome - to be a Form, a Universal Form.

Thomas Hirschhorn, December 2012

A DAILY LECTURE BY MARCUS STEINWEG

26th Lecture at the Gramsci Monument, The Bronx, NYC: 26th July 2013

DECISION VERSUS CHOICE

Marcus Steinweg

1. The wrong choice chooses unfreedom.
2. It decides against decision, against the condition of possibility of decision, by refusing freedom and the will to freedom.
3. It selects options, arranges offers.
4. It subordinates itself.
5. It is the expression of fear, convenience, passivity or indifference.
6. The subject of responsibility is not indifferent. It is a passionate, an impassioned subject. It wants to be neither fearful, nor convenient nor indifferent. It demands of itself a certain courage.
7. This is the courage to be free, the courage to be responsible.
8. The capitalist machine today produces a lack of courage. It lays down what the subject has to desire. It relieves the subject of its will, its desire, its freedom and responsibility.
9. It decides in place of the subject. By controlling its desire, it constitutes the subject's passivity as a receiver of decisions.
10. There is no active consumption. In the objectivity of the consumer, the subject becomes controllable. It is disciplined, calmed down, tranquillized and put out of action.
11. The subject of capitalism as this receiver-subject is a subject reduced and restricted to its capacity to consume.
12. It does not decide for itself because it decides only for decisions offered by others.
13. Its decisions are passive syntheses. They are prefigured by the interests of capital.
14. The subject of capitalism does not assume any responsibility and it is not supposed to assume any responsibility.
15. It is expected to fulfil its role.
16. It is supposed to consume.

17. It does not even desire what it consumes. It desires nothing but its desire, the passivity of a desire that is almost indifferent to what it desires as long as it is New.
18. The wrong choice chooses its own lack of choice. It withdraws from the horror of a genuine decision. It no longer expects anything of itself.
19. Let us call reality the dimension of the possible in which the subject assures itself of the evidence of its facts and options as the subject of choice. And let us call the real the implicit, but extreme limit of the spectrum of reality marking a radical impossibility.
20. No subject will succeed in inscribing itself in one of these orders without killing itself as a subject, without neutralizing its status as a subject.
21. Obviously, the subject must cast off the false alternative between reality and the real, between the possible and the impossible, between that which is and that which is not, in order to be a border inhabitant of this border area which Heidegger has called the ontological difference.
22. For politics not to defuse itself in the administration of its institutionalized understanding of itself, it requires an opening toward the impossible. In order not to exhaust itself in the relation to the impossible in a necessarily narcissistic gesture of self-passivization, grand politics includes an alertness for the possible, for the pragmatism of situational intelligence.
23. What I call the *politics of the subject* would be the conflict-ridden alliance or conflictual compossibility of these two models, *small* and *grand politics*.
24. In the subject, the great binary oppositions of Western metaphysics cross. The subject is nothing other than the point of their incompatibility: activity/passivity, freedom/unfreedom, idea/matter. As this point, the energy of conceptual conflicts is intensified in the subject in which, despite their incompatibility, they participate in common.
25. There is a positive concept of participation in relation to this idea of political subjectivity. That is the participation in conflicting elements or concepts at the heart of the subject.
26. The subject is neither a hole in the structure of facts, nor the stabilizer of the architecture of facts. It is *in between*. It participates in the hole without sinking into it; it enters a coalition with established reality without assimilating itself to it. It keeps a double contact to both sides. It moves along the separating line, this extremely thin membrane between the abyss and reality.
27. It is an infinitesimal subject because it keeps contact with the dimension of nothingness as well as that of beings.
28. An infinitesimal is a maximal minimum. It marks the minimum distance between the order of being, of social, political, economic, cultural texture, and the order of nothingness, of the real which cannot be described and represented in the register of reality.

DID YOU KNOW ANTONIO GRAMSCI?

International Gramsci Society

THE LIFE OF GRAMSCI

An Introduction to Gramsci's Life and Thought

by Frank Rosengarten

Antonio Gramsci was born on January 22, 1891 in Ales in the province of Cagliari in Sardinia. He was the fourth of seven children born to Francesco Gramsci and Giuseppina Marcias. His relationship with his father was never very close, but he had a strong affection and love for his mother, whose resilience, gift for story-telling and pungent humor made a lasting impression on him. Of his six siblings, Antonio enjoyed a mutual interest in literature with his younger sister Teresina, and seems to have always felt a spiritual kinship with his two brothers, Gennaro, the oldest of the Gramsci children, and Carlo, the youngest. Gennaro's early embrace of socialism contributed significantly to Antonio's political development.

In 1897, Antonio's father was suspended and subsequently arrested and imprisoned for five years for alleged administrative abuses. Shortly thereafter, Giuseppina and her children moved to Ghilarza, where Antonio attended elementary school. Sometime during these years of trial and near poverty, he fell from the arms of a servant, to which his family attributed his hunched back and stunted growth: he was an inch or two short of five feet in height.

At the age of eleven, after completing elementary school, Antonio worked for two years in the tax office in Ghilarza, in order to help his financially strapped family. Because of the five-year absence of Francesco, these were years of bitter struggle. Nevertheless, he continued to study privately and eventually returned to school, where he was judged to be of superior intelligence, as indicated by excellent grades in all subjects.

Antonio continued his education, first in Santu Lussurgiu, about ten miles from Ghilarza, then, after graduating from secondary school, at the Dettori Lyceum in Cagliari, where he shared a room with his brother Gennaro, and where he came into contact for the first time with organized sectors of the working class and with radical and socialist politics. But these were also years of privation, during which Antonio was partially dependent on his father for financial support, which came only rarely. In his letters to his family, he accused his father repeatedly of unpardonable procrastination and neglect. His health deteriorated, and some of the nervous symptoms that were to plague him at a later time were already in evidence.

1911 was an important year in young Gramsci's life. After graduating from the Cagliari lyceum, he applied for and won a scholarship to the University of Turin, an award reserved for needy students from the provinces of the former Kingdom of Sardinia. Among the other young people to compete for this scholarship was Palmiro Togliatti, future general secretary of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and, with Gramsci and several others, among the most capable leaders of that embattled Party. Antonio enrolled in the Faculty of Letters. At the University he met Angelo Tasca and several of the other men with whom he was to share struggles first in the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) and then after the split that took place in January 1921, in the PCI.

At the University, despite years of terrible suffering due to inadequate diet, unheated flats, and constant nervous exhaustion, Antonio took a variety of courses, mainly in the humanities but also in the social sciences and in linguistics, to which he was sufficiently attracted to contemplate academic specialization in that subject. Several of his professors, notably Matteo Bartoli, a linguist and Umberto Cosmo, a Dante scholar, became personal friends.

In 1915, despite great promise as an academic scholar, Gramsci became an active member of the PSI, and began a journalistic career that made him among the most feared critical voices in Italy at that time. His column in the Turin edition of *Avanti!*, and his theatre reviews were widely read and influential. He regularly spoke at workers' study-circles on various topics, such as the novels of Romain Rolland, for whom he felt a certain affinity, the Paris Commune, the French and Italian revolutions and the writings of Karl Marx. It was at this time, as the war dragged on and as Italian intervention became a bloody reality, Gramsci assumed a somewhat ambivalent stance, although his basic position was that the Italian socialists should use intervention as an occasion to turn Italian national sentiment in a revolutionary rather than a chauvinist direction. It was also at this time, in 1917 and 1918, that he began to see the need for integration of political and economic action with cultural work, which took form as a proletarian cultural association in Turin.

The outbreak of the Bolshevik revolution in October 1917 further stirred his revolutionary ardor, and for the remainder of the war and in the years thereafter Gramsci identified himself closely, although not entirely uncritically, with the methods and aims of the Russian revolutionary leadership and with the cause of socialist transformation throughout the advanced capitalist world.

In the spring of 1919, Gramsci, together with Angelo Tasca, Umberto Terracini and Togliatti, founded *L'Ordine Nuovo: Rassegna Settimanale di Cultura Socialista* (The New Order: A Weekly Review on Socialist Culture), which became an influential periodical (on a weekly and later on a bi-monthly publishing schedule) for the following five years among the radical and revolutionary Left in Italy. The review gave much attention to political and literary currents in Europe, the USSR, and the United

States. For the next few years, Gramsci devoted most of his time to the development of the factory council movement, and to militant journalism, which led in January 1921 to his siding with the Communist minority within the PSI at the Party's Livorno Congress. He became a member of the PCI's central committee, but did not play a leading role until several years later. He was among the most prescient representatives of the Italian Left at the inception of the fascist movement, and on several occasions predicted that unless unified action were taken against the rise of Mussolini's movement, Italian democracy and Italian socialism would both suffer a disastrous defeat.

The years 1921 to 1926, years "of iron and fire" as he called them, were eventful and productive. They were marked in particular by the year and a half he lived in Moscow as an Italian delegate to the Communist International (May 1922- November 1923), his election to the Chamber of Deputies in April 1924, and his assumption of the position of general secretary of the PCI. His personal life was also filled with significant experiences, the chief one being his meeting with and subsequent marriage to Julka Schucht (1896-1980), a violinist and member of the Russian Communist Party whom he met during his stay in Russia. Antonio and Julka had two sons, Delio (1924-1981), and Giuliano, born in 1926, who lives today in Moscow with his wife.

On the evening of November 8, 1926, Gramsci was arrested in Rome and, in accordance with a series of "Exceptional Laws" enacted by the fascist-dominated Italian legislature, committed to solitary confinement at the Regina Coeli prison. This began a ten-year odyssey, marked by almost constant physical and psychic pain as a result of a prison experience that culminated, on April 27, 1937, in his death from a cerebral hemorrhage. No doubt the stroke that killed him was but the final outcome of years and years of illnesses that were never properly treated in prison.

Yet as everyone familiar with the trajectory of Gramsci's life knows, these prison years were also rich with intellectual achievement, as recorded in the *Notebooks* he kept in his various cells that eventually saw the light after World War II, and as recorded also in the extraordinary letters he wrote from prison to friends and especially to family members, the most important of whom was not his wife Julka but rather a sister-in-law, Tania Schucht. She was the person most intimately and unceasingly involved in his prison life, since she had resided in Rome for many years and was in a position to provide him not only with a regular exchange of thoughts and feelings in letter form but with articles of clothing and with numerous foods and medicines he sorely needed to survive the grinding daily routine of prison life.

After being sentenced on June 4, 1928, with other Italian Communist leaders, to 20 years, 4 months and 5 days in prison, Gramsci was consigned to a prison in Turi, in the province of Bari, which turned out to be his longest place of detention (June 1928 - November 1933). Thereafter he was held under police guard at a clinic in Fomia, from which he was transferred in August 1935, always under guard, to the Quisisana Hospital in Rome. It was there that he spent the last two years of his life. Among the people, in addition to Tania, who helped him either by writing to him or by visiting him when possible, were his mother Giuseppina, who died in 1933, his brother Carlo, his sister Teresina and Grazietta, and his good friend, the economist Piero Sraffa, who throughout Gramsci's prison ordeal provided a crucial and indispensable service to Gramsci. Sraffa used his personal funds and numerous professional contacts that were necessary in order to obtain the books and periodicals Gramsci needed in prison. Gramsci had a prodigious memory, but it is safe to say that without Sraffa's assistance, and without the intermediary role often played by Tania, the *Prison Notebooks* as we have them would not have come to fruition.

Gramsci's intellectual work in prison did not emerge in the light of day until several years after World War II, when the PCI began publishing scattered sections of the *Notebooks* and some of the approximately 500 letters he wrote from prison. By the 1950s, and then with increasing frequency and intensity, his prison writings attracted interest and critical commentary in a host of countries not only in the West but in the so-called third world as well. Some of his terminology became household words on the left, the most important of which, and the most complex, is the term "hegemony" as he used it in his writings and applied to the twin task of understanding the reasons underlying both the successes and the failures of socialism on a global scale, and of elaborating a feasible program for the realization of a socialist vision within the really existing conditions that prevailed in the world. Among these conditions were the rise and triumph of fascism and the disarray on the left that had ensued as a result of that triumph. Also extremely pertinent, both theoretically and practically, were such terms and phrases as "organic intellectual," "national popular," and "historical bloc" which, even if not coined by Gramsci, acquired such radically new and original implications in his writing as to constitute effectively new formulations in the realm of political philosophy.

POEMS FROM THE POETRY
WORKSHOP OF ELENA RIVERA

My experience of water
is that I am in love with it.

It is very calming to the soul &

allows me to clear the mind & forget about
my troubles. Water fills ~~the~~ my soul & spirit.
~~that~~ It makes me want to cry, smile, & laugh @
the same time. There are times that just ~~of~~ the
~~being~~ thought of being next to beautiful clear
water makes my heart sing. When I feel as
if a black curtain is all I see is a black
curtain or I feel as if a ~~situation~~ ladder
is going to crash on me or that I feel as
dead as an old book that has been on a ~~shelf~~ shelf
for many years ~ I take my self into a
dream of sitting on a beach w/ blue green water
letting all of those stressful feelings melt away.
Water is the source of ~~all things~~ life and renewed
life it gives me & w/ that I act upon it.

J. Broadway

POEMS FROM THE POETRY WORKSHOP OF ELENA RIVERA

red roses in a vase
graffiti on the walls
kids playing around
walking away coming back running
don't run!
the doors must stay always open
dancers throw themselves on the stage
people sit around, mobiles shut down
someone did not show up
a father raps to his daughter
she's wearing an orange dress
I'm not good at guessing age
the tenderness of his voice
makes me five

Anna Kowalska

FEEDBACK

Art Review:

Dispatches From New York

Politics, race, guns and art

By Jonathan T.D. Neil



Thomas Hirschhorn, Gramsci Theater, from Gramsci Monument, 2013, Forest Houses

It's the dog days, and wouldn't you know it; politics is in the air in New York. In the comic mode, former US Representative Anthony Weiner (former for having sexted pictures of his namesake to numbers other than his wife's) has been gaining support in the city's mayoral race; and former New York Governor Eliot Spitzer (former because of the fallout from paid time spent with a companion other than his wife) has been leading in the Democratic race for New York City comptroller. Sex sells in the Big Apple, and apparently it wins votes too.

In the tragic mode, people have been taking to the streets to protest the acquittal of George Zimmerman, the Neighbourhood Watch coordinator who shot and killed seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida. There was a scuffle. There was a shot. Martin was dead and Zimmerman claimed it was self-defence. Whether race was a motivating factor (Martin was black, Zimmerman is not) is an open question, as is why it should be legal for anyone not in actual law enforcement to carry a gun. One excellent place to pose these questions is Thomas Hirschhorn's temporary 'monument' to Italian political theorist and Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937), presented by Dia Art Foundation, which is running throughout the summer in the central court of the Forest Houses housing project in the Bronx.

GRAMSCI MONUMENT FOLLOWS HIRSCHHORN'S GUIDELINES FOR 'PRESENCE AND PRODUCTION' IN A WORK IN A PUBLIC SPACE

FEED BACK

Constructed in the form of an outdoor pavilion, with elements including an exhibition space, library, theatre and bar, all built and run by the residents of Forest Houses, Gramsci Monument follows Hirschhorn's guidelines for 'Presence and Production' in a work in a public space, meaning that the artist will be based in the South Bronx and onsite, making work, for the duration of the project. The monument also keeps to Hirschhorn's commitment to materials that 'do not intimidate'. The two 'wings' of the construction, one housing the bar, workshop, classroom and theatre, the other a museum, library, newspaper, computer room and radio station – all fundamentals of civil culture – are constructed from low-grade two-by-fours, plywood, packing tape, and tarpaulins. There are philosophy lectures and kids workshops, weekly theatrical performances, open mic sessions, field trips (led by monument 'ambassador' and Dia Art Foundation curator Yasmin Raymond) and art classes (led by Hirschhorn himself). Everything is open every day from 10am to 7pm and documented in running fashion online.

Gramsci Monument is the fourth and final work in Hirschhorn's Monuments series: works in public space focused around the ideas of figures whom Gilles Deleuze (who himself got a Hirschhorn monument, in Avignon in 2000) would have called 'dissident philosophers'. Monuments to Spinoza (in Amsterdam in 1999) and Bataille (for Documenta XI in Kassel in 2002) being the other two.

ArtReview found its way to Gramsci Monument before the Zimmerman

acquittal, on a day when it threatened rain but never made good on it. The closest subway stop is Prospect Avenue, an above-ground platform, which does nothing for one's sense of direction when hitting the street. There are few feelings that match the subtle dread that can set in when emerging from public transit into an alien neighbourhood that doesn't appear to cater to tourists. Your dress, your face, your skin – everything about you can feel 'other'. And you feel that everyone who looks at you knows it.

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AND TO TAKE PART.**

But here's the thing: most won't care, and those that do only want to make sure you get to where you're going. Nevertheless, when you go, take that early apprehension with you as you walk to the Forest Houses, because it's part of Hirschhorn's project. It's the physiological embodiment of your decision to come, to see and to take part. Every decision is a commitment, one that belongs to you, one that has effects, has consequences – or rather is consequent – and this, in large part, is what Hirschhorn's work is about.

As the artist states over and over again, his work is for 'energy' and against 'quality'. Energy is what we invest in things and people, such as radio shows, newspaper columns, classroom lessons and conversations over coffee while perched on rudimentary bar stools. It's present in decisions that take us out of our way and out of our depths. It's present in a work of art – and this is a paraphrase of Hirschhorn's lesson from the Monument's Friday art class – when that work of art offers evidence of the energy, decision and consequent thought that went into making it.

When Gramsci stated that 'every human being is an intellectual,' his point was not that we are all equally gifted with intelligence, but that everyone has the capacity to harness the power of ideas. Such capacity requires effort. It requires making a decision, such as taking a train to the Bronx and walking to the Forest Houses, and having a conversation, perhaps about Weiner or Spitzer, but more likely about Gramsci, or about race, or guns, or art.

Thomas Hirschhorn: Gramsci Monument, to 15 September, Forest Houses, Bronx, New York. Dia Art Foundation

WHAT'S GOING ON?

RESIDENT OF THE DAY



MARIA ELENA ROMERO