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Never a Complete Success, Never a Complete Failure: Thomas Hirschhorn's Commemoration of
Antonio Gramsci
by
Ryan March
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of
Arts in
Art History and Visual Culture
at
Lindenwood University

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Never a Complete Success, Never a Complete Failure: Thomas Hirschhorn's Commemoration of
Antonio Gramsci

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Art and Design Department
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts in Art History
at
Lindenwood University

by

Ryan March

Saint Charles, Missouri

April 2022

ABSTRACT

GRAMSCI MONUMENT: Thomas Hirschhorn's Commemoration to Antonio Gramsci

Ryan March, Master of Art History, 2022

Thesis Directed by: Kelly Scheffer, MA

This paper will analyze Thomas Hirschhorn's *Gramsci Monument*, examining the level of collaboration which took place among the participating community members. The *Gramsci Monument* is an artwork that took place in 2013 in the Forest Houses projects in the Bronx, New York. It was an artwork that functioned as a temporary community center, providing different facilities such as a library, radio station, computer lab, newspaper center, and art studio to local residents. Hirschhorn hired a team of residents to build this monument, which was made of everyday materials like plywood, recycled wood pallets, packing tape, and cardboard. While the artwork provided facilities and resources to the residents in the Forest Houses community, Hirschhorn made it clear that this was a work of art, not a community center. Hirschhorn's mission was to show the residents the power of art and to create a new type of monument, a less permanent one. This unconventional monument is dedicated to Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist philosopher, who was imprisoned in the early 1900's for his beliefs. One of Gramsci's central ideas was that every person is an intellectual. Gramsci meant that all people should be treated as intellectuals, with dignity and opportunity. While this idea was celebrated in Hirschhorn's monument, this paper argues that it, as well as other Gramscian ideals, could have been more authentically practiced if Hirschhorn had been willing to collaborate. Although he worked with others, Hirschhorn makes it clear that this is not a collaboration, but instead a "coexistence." The community members that worked on this monument did not provide their own ideas and did not have much authorship in the creation of this artwork. Collaborating, and allowing the residents more authorship, would better celebrate the Gramscian idea that every person is an intellectual.

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Introduction:

Thomas Hirschhorn is a Swiss artist who has been using a variety of artistic media for about 30 years. Born in Bern, Switzerland, the artist now lives and works in Paris, France. Originally trained as a graphic designer, Hirschhorn now specializes in installations that challenge ideas about politics, art, philosophy, and how people engage and participate in these fields. His work has been showcased in galleries, artist-run spaces, and public spaces around the world.¹ Hirschhorn is known to utilize certain types of everyday materials in his work, such as cardboard, foil, plywood, and most prominently, packing tape. These materials are used to blur the lines between “high” and “low” art. Challenging the standards and expectations of high art is Hirschhorn’s way of trying to create a more inclusive art world.

Before creating his first artwork in the United States, the *Gramsci Monument* (2013), Hirschhorn created three other monuments that were a part of a four piece series. All of these monuments were meant to redefine the meaning of the term “monument” while celebrating famous philosophers who are influential to Hirschhorn.² The first was the *Spinoza Monument* in Amsterdam, Netherlands in 1999. Followed by the *Deleuze Monument* in Avignon, France in 2000. Then, Hirschhorn created the *Bataille Monument* in Kassel, Germany in 2002. The series was concluded by the *Gramsci Monument*. The sites for these monuments were carefully selected by Hirschhorn, and all four were located in low-income communities.³ The monuments themselves were installations, which varied in size and complexity. The sites were either on the

¹ Randy Kennedy, "Bringing Art and Change To Bronx," *New York Times* Vol. 162 Issue 56183 (2013): 1-19, accessed July 7, 2020, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A335424368/CSIC?u=sain20269&sid=CSIC&xid=a7df196a>.

² Thomas Hirschhorn, *Gramsci Monument* (London: Dia Art Foundation and Koenig Books, 2015), 12.

³ Hirschhorn, *Gramsci Monument*, 13.

premises of project housing developments or in more public settings, like the sidewalks of the city.

In 2013, Hirschhorn created the fourth and final part of his series of monuments, the *Gramsci Monument* (figure 1), in commemoration of the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci. It took place at the Forest Houses projects in the Bronx. This artistic endeavor was commissioned by the DIA foundation, who had faith in Hirschhorn's vision to show the power art can have.⁴ If one was present in the summer of 2013, one would have seen residents utilizing many resources that were not previously present. They were broadcasting from their own radio station, talking about issues relevant to them. Residents of all ages were able to explore the internet at the computer center. Others took part in art workshops to learn skills and develop their own artistic practices. There were poetry, theatrical, and musical performances on a constructed stage. The stage was also used for philosophical lectures for those interested in growing as intellectuals.⁵

The large monument was located between the street and two of the buildings that are part of the Forest Houses projects. The monument was elevated using wooden pallets, which was accessible by stairs or a long ramp. The structure was mostly made mostly of plywood, 2x4's, and repurposed loading pallets. In keeping with Hirschhorn's previous work, there was an abundance of packing tape throughout the monument. Once on that elevated structure, people could then walk through the different sections of the monument, like the computer room, art studio, and stage area (figure 2 and 3).

⁴ Randy Kennedy, "Bringing Art and Change To Bronx," *New York Times* Vol. 162 Issue 56183 (2013): 1-19, accessed July 7, 2020, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A335424368/CSIC?u=sain20269&sid=CSIC&xid=a7df196a>.

⁵ Art21, Season 7, episode 1, "Investigation," directed by Nick Ravich, produced by Susan Sollins, featuring Thomas Hirschhorn, Leonardo Drew, and Graciela Iturbide, aired October 24 2014, <https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s7/investigation/>

The monument was not professionally constructed, and its appearance reflected this. Railings were crooked, layers upon layers of masking tape were used to round off sharp edges; murals and informative hand-made posters decorated the walls. The exposed, unpainted wood and tarps, related to a mantra Hirschhorn preached, “Energy Yes, Quality No”⁶ (figure 4). The idea behind “Energy Yes, Quality No” is that the criteria that is often associated with art can be exclusive to people who are not trained in the arts. Hirschhorn values the energy, enthusiasm, and idea over the aesthetic refinement most expect from a professional artwork.

This project was created to commemorate one of Hirschhorn's philosophical heroes, Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937). Gramsci was an Italian Marxist philosopher who was imprisoned because of his beliefs. A quote Gramsci is known for is “Every human being is an intellectual.”⁷ This quote was a main focus for the *Gramsci Monument*, and for Hirschhorn. This quote was seen painted in multiple locations throughout the monument, but was also verbally communicated during lectures and workshops by Hirschhorn with the participating residents.⁸

While the monument’s appearance was cause for some negative criticism, those that experienced this artwork as residents viewed it as a valuable monument, one that redefined the term completely.⁹ Instead of a conventional monument, which functions as a permanent fixture, this temporary public artwork aimed to create experiences that would make an impact.

Since the *Gramsci Monument* was a public artwork, it’s important to understand the nature of public artworks. Most people see public art as sculptures and murals outside. These projects need to be available for public consumption for it to be “public art.” In *Art in Public*,

⁶ Art21, “Investigation.”

⁷ Karl Thompson. “Gramsci’s humanist Marxism”, *Revise Sociology*, June 23, 2016. Accessed March 29, 2021. <https://revisesociology.com/2016/06/23/gramscis-humanist-marxism/>

⁸ Art21, “Investigation.”

⁹ Art21, “Investigation.”

Lambert Zuidervaar explains that the definition of public art varies, and can come down to funding, accessibility, or the concept itself.¹⁰ Like most artforms, the intention of public art varies. Public art can act as a monument. Public art can provide an opportunity for the public to access high art. It can beautify a city. It can provide a window for important conversations that are relevant to the community. Work with this intention is often referred to as “community-based public art.”

Community-based public art is accessible to the public and strives to enrich the community in some way. A very effective aspect that the community-based public art can provide is a hands-on, participatory experience for the community members. This provides an opportunity for creative production, which many people can not experience on their own accord. This participatory experience also gets community members more invested in the artwork itself because they are partially responsible. The *Gramsci Monument* had varying degrees of success and elicited plenty of varying opinions.

Comparing the *Gramsci Monument* with the ideals of the philosopher to whom it is dedicated is a logical evaluation tool. Gramsci's imprisonment took place during the reign of Benito Mussolini. While in prison, Gramsci continued to write on a variety of topics.¹¹ What he wrote during this time period was highly influential to others, especially to the next generation of Marxists. One concept Gramsci championed, which contributed to his field, was the concept of “cultural hegemony.” This is a Marxist idea in which the ruling class will use cultural institutions to withhold power over the working class. By using cultural institutions in this manner, the ruling class is able to define the status quo within a capitalist society. This is understood to be a method of wielding power and influence without the use of force.

¹⁰Lambert Zuidervaar, *Art in Public* (Cambridge University Press, 2010). 102

¹¹Thompson, “Gramsci’s humanist Marxism.”

There are other philosophies that Gramsci subscribed to which also relate to the *Gramsci Monument*. For example, in one of the many notebooks Gramsci filled during his imprisonment, he writes “Quality should be attributed to men, not to things.”¹² This relates to a mantra Hirschhorn communicates to the participating residents, “Energy Yes, Quality No,” in that it questions the quality of objects. Another quote from Gramsci’s writing that relates to the concept that everyone is an intellectual is “The intellectual function cannot be cut off from productive work in general, and the same is true for artists-unless they have effectively shown themselves to be ‘artistically’ productive.”¹³ This relates to Hirschhorn’s work, not just because of the quote’s focus on art, but because of Hirschhorn’s emphasis on production. An approach that Hirschhorn practices is “be present, be productive.”¹⁴ Gramsci here is also saying that the intellectual function is crucial to productivity in general. Something that Gramsci wrote that resonates with this paper’s focus is “In obedience there is an element of command, and in command there is an element of obedience (self-command and self-discipline).”¹⁵ Obedience, command, self-command and self-discipline all tie into the concept of autonomy, which ties into the Hirschhorn’s practice of utilizing coexistence instead of collaboration.

One of Gramsci’s philosophical questions is “is philosophy independent from politics?”¹⁶ This inspired Hirschhorn to ask “is art independent from politics?”¹⁷ Hirschhorn’s artwork is often politically focused, and the *Gramsci Monument* is not different. For example, at an open-mic event held at the monument, residents dropped a basketball into either the hoop that is

¹² Hirschhorn, Thomas, “Gramsci Quotations,” Dia Art Foundation Accessed April 14, 2022. <https://www.diaart.net/gramsci-monument/page268.html>

¹³ Hirschhorn, Thomas, “Gramsci Quotations.”

¹⁴ Art21, “Investigation.”

¹⁵ Hirschhorn, Thomas, “Gramsci Quotations.”

¹⁶ Thompson, “Gramsci’s humanist Marxism,”

¹⁷ Art21, “Investigation.”

labeled “politics” or one labeled “love” in response to the performance.¹⁸ Politics is integrated into the *Gramsci Monument* in other ways, and this integration shows that for Gramsci and Hirschhorn, there is no separation. This question makes it clear how important Gramsci is for Hirschhorn’s process and inspiration in completing this project because of how they both see how different fields influence each other.

Hirschhorn’s monument could have been more closely related to these ideas if Hirschhorn had given the residents additional voice and authorship. While collaboration is not a necessary attribute of all public artwork, it would have enriched the *Gramsci Monument* considering that Gramsci advocated for the treatment of all people as intellectuals. Gramsci’s was that all people deserve to be treated as such.

Literature Review:

Although art historical scholarship on the *Gramsci Monument* is limited, the critical response to the work, as well as reactions from participants, is helpful in understanding the scope and function of the monument. *Gramsci Monument* received mixed reviews from critics and audience members. There was a marked difference in response between art critics and the participating residents at Forest Houses. The residents, for the most part, appreciated the monument because it brought engaging opportunities to their community.¹⁹ Some critics judged the final product of the artwork over the process, which led some to dissatisfaction.

Randy Kennedy highlights the experience of the residents of Forest Houses, before and after the *Gramsci Monument*, in his article "Bringing Art and Change To Bronx." In this article, Kennedy talks about the positive connections that are made between Hirschhorn and residents,

¹⁸ Art21, “Investigation.”

¹⁹ Art21, “Investigation.”

but also talks about challenging moments that occurred while Hirschhorn and the residents were working together. He also mentions others' perspectives who are involved in the monument, such as the director of the Dia Foundation and the artist himself. The director of the Dia Foundation, Philippe Vergne, is depicted by Kennedy as a supporter of the project, and had faith in Hirschhorn's vision. Kennedy not only described the monument as "an adult treehouse or makeshift beach cabana," but also noted the value of the artwork, which is the process and experience.²⁰ Even though Kennedy criticizes the appearance of the monument, he also acknowledges that the concept behind the physical appearance is the heart of this artwork, noting that the monument embodies the humanistic worldview of Antonio Gramsci.

Kennedy claims that this work is widely misunderstood for its appearance and function. People mistakenly see the materials used in the context of a housing project and assume that the materials were chosen because of the economic status of the community. Since the *Gramsci Monument* was located in an underserved community, some people assumed Hirschhorn's material choices were selected because of lack of funding. As stated earlier, these materials are a part of Hirschhorn's visual language and his attempt to bridge the gap between "low" and "high" art. Kennedy talks about the exclusion that takes place in the high art world, and suggests Hirschhorn challenges this exclusion by participating in important international projects while still advocating the importance of a "non-exclusive audience." Kennedy also clarifies the confusion of its purpose and function by emphasizing Hirschhorn's intentions.

Some critics and residents saw the facilities available and mislabeled the *Gramsci Monument* as a community initiative, or believed that Hirschhorn was acting like a hands-on

²⁰ Kennedy, "Bringing Art and Change To Bronx."

social worker. Kennedy clarifies that these ideas are not accurate, and that Hirschhorn was committed to creating an artwork, not a social work project. Hirschhorn voiced his intentions, saying “I tell them, ‘This is not to serve your community, per se, but it is to serve art, and my reasons for wanting to do these things are purely personal artistic reasons,’”²¹ Hirschhorn aimed to show the power of art in that it can evoke ideas within a person or community.

Kennedy seems to have a good understanding of the context of the project thanks to his work as a reporter for the New York Times. He did not just visit once and claim to understand the *Gramsci Monument*, but instead visited multiple days to gain a better understanding of how the monument’s construction was developing. He also refers to his past experiences at Forest Houses while writing a different story, about 20 years prior. Kennedy compares the monument in different stages of its production, but also compares the neighborhood from different time periods. His former experience in the neighborhood emphasizes the hardships the housing projects felt in the 1990’s, specifically in relation to drug-use, violence, and constant police presence.²² Kennedy notes that times have changed, and the area’s crime-rate has improved.²³ The monument did not function within a vacuum, and considering the history of this area helps us understand the perceived purpose of the artwork.

Kennedy shares some insights about the experience of the residents in his report. Kennedy notes that construction of the monument was not always a pleasant process. One of Kennedy’s visits coincided with a particularly challenging day for the crew, when it was pouring rain during a crucial day for construction — a day filled with tasks that needed to be done.

²¹ Kennedy, "Bringing Art and Change To Bronx."

²² Kennedy, Randy, “From Outrage, Recruitment of Civilian Officers in South Bronx,” *New York Times*, Section 1, Page 23. August 21, 1993. Accessed April 14, 2022.

²³ Kennedy, "Bringing Art and Change To Bronx."

Hirschhorn was adamant that the crew continued to work so the project did not fall behind schedule. This relentless persistence prompted some residents working on the project to accuse, “You just care about your work; you don’t love us.”²⁴

Kennedy also notes Philippe Vergne’s, the director of the Dia Foundation, perspective. The Dia Foundation supported and funded the project. Vergne hopes people will find their way to the site, and states that he and the DIA Foundation believe in the artistic power that Hirschhorn preaches. At the end of the article, Kennedy quotes Vergne: “People ask what will remain after the monument comes down in three months, and I think what will remain will be a certain way to think of the world — if only an urban legend of a Swiss artist who came from Paris to tell New Yorkers about a dead Italian philosopher, and people came to hear, and maybe they learned something that matters.”²⁵ This sentiment connects with Hirschhorn’s goal of redefining what a “monument” can be- something that creates memories, even if impermanent.

PBS’s television program *Art21*, which showcases contemporary artists, features Hirschhorn’s *Gramsci Monument* in their seventh season. Like Kennedy’s article, this *Art21* episode discusses Hirschhorn’s intentions, what the residents’ took away from the monument, and the general description and function of the monument.

In the first interaction with Hirschhorn seen in the episode, he talks about the importance of being present and being productive. He says that focusing on these two goals will create the *Gramsci Monument*. He does not mean the physical monument, but more of what the monument really means. He says, “What you see here is not the *Gramsci Monument*. It is just the structure

²⁴ Kennedy, "Bringing Art and Change To Bronx."

²⁵ Kennedy, "Bringing Art and Change To Bronx."

of the *Gramsci Monument*.²⁶ In saying this, Hirschhorn is describing how he is creating a new type of monument. He explains it's a new type of monument because it is in a residential area, and it is about memory. This distinction between the physical monument and the conceptual monument is elaborated on later in this paper. A resident reflects on what the absence of the monument will feel like, saying, "Now I understand what a monument means. It's something that stays in your heart and in your memory, because they only have it once."²⁷

The *Art21* interview also emphasizes Hirschhorn's ideas about working with others and his beliefs about authorship. He talks about a distinction he makes between "coexistence" vs "collaboration." He subscribes to coexisting versus collaborating because he says that it is more honest. Hirschhorn explains, "They are paid, like working with people at a gallery. The coexistence is 100% me and 100% them. That is coexistence. I do not want to interfere with what they are doing. This is unshared authorship."²⁸ Essentially the idea is that people participating in an "unshared authorship" have more say over what they want to be responsible for within the project. Hirschhorn explains that "collaboration" causes people to do things that they do not want to be a part of, like tasks agreed upon by the team working together. So, coexistence allows people to participate in whatever they want, to whatever degree they wish. Whether it be intentional or not, this expression of "unshared authorship," in conjunction with this idea of "coexistence" is a way for Hirschhorn to keep control and possession of the *Gramsci Monument*. An authentic, healthy collaboration would allow participants to come up with ideas that Hirschhorn would then incorporate into the project. This "coexistence" and "unshared authorship" allowed Hirschhorn to maintain control over the conception of the *Gramsci*

²⁶ Art21, "Investigation."

²⁷ Art21, "Investigation."

²⁸ Art21, "Investigation."

Monument and this crucial early phase of the production. While Hirschhorn does not want to interrupt or interfere with his team, because of their coexistence, he does teach them certain ideas about art during the construction phase.

Hirschhorn is shown teaching his construction team about public art in this *Art21* episode. Hirschhorn's communication with the residents is an important piece in understanding the roles each party plays. He says to a room full of participating residents, "working in public art, it is never a complete success, but it is never a complete failure."²⁹ Hirschhorn passes on his experience onto the residents that are his construction crew, demonstrating an inclusive, non-intimidating outlook. Art, especially public art, is not always as predictable or precise as the initial intention.

A motto is posted in different areas of the monument, "Energy Yes, Quality No."³⁰ Hirschhorn explains that the criteria that typically surrounds "quality" can be exclusive. When the criteria for art is focused on high quality craftsmanship, people who are not trained artists can not meet these expectations. This, along with the lesson that artwork will never be 100% successful, communicates an inclusive message from Hirschhorn.

Jessica Rizzo's article, "Immanent Utopia/Utopia Imminent: Thomas Hirschhorn's *Gramsci Monument*," talks about Hirschhorn's goals for the project. Rizzo also considers the context of the work, and defends the value of the process over the physical product.³¹ Rizzo clearly states that Hirschhorn's mission with this monument was to 1) establish a new term for "monument," 2) provoke encounters, 3) create an event, and 4) think of Gramsci in today's

²⁹ Art21, "Investigation."

³⁰ Art21, "Investigation."

³¹ Jessica Rizzo, "Immanent Utopia/Utopia Imminent: Thomas Hirschhorn's 'Gramsci Monument'," *TDR (1988-)* 58, no. 4 (2014): 170-76, accessed June 18, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/24584994.

context.³² One way that he creates a new type of monument is the fact that the *Gramsci Monument* has a finite lifespan. This is not typical for a monument, but it does force people to carry it as a memory. Hirschhorn says that it is in fact a new type of monument because of the dedication, location, duration, and outcome.³³ Understanding Hirschhorn's goals and motives is useful when assessing his use, or lack, of collaboration would support Gramsci's ideas.

Rizzo argues that the value of this monument is the process, not physical product. Rizzo writes, "The collective experience of making something together so plainly takes precedence over the product that one is tempted to class the work as an example of social practice, rather than as a work of art."³⁴ Kennedy's article discloses that Hirschhorn would not appreciate the association with social work. He has made a clear effort to identify this as an artistic pursuit, not a social work.³⁵ Rizzo notes that projects like these should not be measured based on a straightforward criteria. She says that some critics disregarded the monument because of its ephemeral quality, but she explains that this is a part of the memory building process, which assists in creating Hirschhorn's new term for a "monument." While some critics, like Ken Johnson, felt that visiting this monument was not pleasing or comforting, Rizzo sees that Hirschhorn disregarding the critical response has created the opportunity for a richer experience for the participating community members.³⁶ Instead of catering to the expectations of art critics, Hirschhorn focuses on the residents' experience and the goals he sets out for this monument.

³² Jessica Rizzo, "Immanent Utopia/Utopia Imminent: Thomas Hirschhorn's "Gramsci Monument"."

³³ Jessica Rizzo, "Immanent Utopia/Utopia Imminent: Thomas Hirschhorn's "Gramsci Monument"."

³⁴ Jessica Rizzo, "Immanent Utopia/Utopia Imminent: Thomas Hirschhorn's "Gramsci Monument"."

³⁵ Kennedy, "Bringing Art and Change To Bronx."

³⁶ Jessica Rizzo, "Immanent Utopia/Utopia Imminent: Thomas Hirschhorn's "Gramsci Monument"."

Ken Johnson expresses his dissatisfaction in his article, “Summer Place in the South Bronx.” In this New York Times article, Johnson makes it clear that he is disappointed with the project. Johnson discusses the philosophical ideas of Gramsci, as well as the artwork’s general background information. Johnson starts the article saying he left the monument site feeling irritable and depressed. He describes the work as a “scruffy, ramshackle complex out of plywood, two-by-fours, blue tarps, brown tape and plexiglass. Resembling a home for post-apocalyptic survivors...”³⁷ The day he visited he watched what he thought was a failing attempt at an open-mic session, while the dozen audience members sat on “ugly white plastic chairs.”³⁸ Johnson says that the busiest room was the computer room, where kids were playing games. He notes that there is only one young man in the library, implying that not much learning was taking place. Johnson says, “The whole architectural structure was looking dismally decrepit after three weeks of variable summer weather.”³⁹ Johnson gives the benefit of the doubt that maybe he visited at a lull, in terms of seeing engaging, lively events. Johnson had higher hopes for the monument, but was disappointed for the residents of Forest Houses. “Ultimately, I suspect, it will be preserved in memory mainly by the high-end art world as just a work by Mr. Hirschhorn, another monument to his monumental ego.”⁴⁰

Rizzo claims that Johnson missed the point of the *Gramsci Monument*. While this may be true to a degree, Johnson does a thorough job of elaborating on Gramsci’s ideas. Johnson states that Gramsci’s key idea is based around hegemony. He says “hegemony for Gramsci was the

³⁷ Ken Johnson, “A Summer Place in the South Bronx,” *New York Times*, vol. 162, no. 56209 (2013): 17–20, accessed July 5, 2020, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=nfh&AN=89330437&site=ehost-live.

³⁸ Ken Johnson, “A Summer Place in the South Bronx.”

³⁹ Ken Johnson, “A Summer Place in the South Bronx.”

⁴⁰ Ken Johnson, “A Summer Place in the South Bronx.”

worldview of a whole society. Internalized through and through by rich and poor and powerful and powerless, hegemony keeps everyone in their place. It finds expression not only in relations between workers and employers but in all kinds of cultural products, including art and the system by which art is produced and circulated.”⁴¹ Hegemony thrives on the dynamic between powerless people and powerful people, and this was a very important focus in Gramsci’s philosophical pursuits. He did not believe in a violent revolution to overthrow capitalism, but instead that the disenfranchised groups could create their own institutions to self-educate and self-organize, to become more powerful. In an optimistic point of view, Johnson believes that perhaps the residents at Forest Houses could take the experience from that summer and nurture the self-empowerment they have been denied in the current “hegemonic state of affairs” Johnson writes that this monument has inspired an underclass culture to grow, but it itself was not an authentic Gramscian experience.⁴² The *Gramsci Monument* could have been more Gramscian if the residents had created their own monument, instead of following the lead of Hirschhorn, which is essentially the argument of this paper.

It is evident that there is a variety in critics’ approaches evaluating this artwork. Some judged the *Gramsci Monument* as a final product, while others looked at the process. The lens that is used to look at this artwork will yield different results. Therefore, using all of these perspectives will be beneficial, so we can gain a well-rounded understanding of the *Gramsci Monument*. Considering Rizzo’s perspective of valuing the hands-on, participatory experience, while considering Johnson’s criticism of the monument’s connection to Gramsci’s ideas will yield an appreciation and critical outlook on the *Gramsci Monument*.

⁴¹Ken Johnson, “A Summer Place in the South Bronx.”

⁴² Ken Johnson, “A Summer Place in the South Bronx.”

Chapter 1: The Sculpture and The People That Made The *Gramsci Monument*

To better understand the context of the *Gramsci Monument*, it is necessary to also analyze Hirschhorn's series, which the *Gramsci Monument* was a part of. It was a four-part series of public artworks, all of which were monuments dedicated to philosophers that Hirschhorn admires. The four monuments share many practices, but also have their differences. The first monument of this series was the *Spinoza Monument* which took place in Amsterdam, Netherlands in 1999 (figure 5). The philosopher himself, Baruch Spinoza, was an early thinker of Enlightenment.⁴³ The following monument in Hirschhorn's series was the *Deleuze Monument*, which took place in Avignon, France in 2000 (figure 6 and 7). Gilles Deleuze was a French philosopher who wrote about philosophy, literature, film, and fine art.⁴⁴ The third monument was the *Bataille Monument* in Kassel, Germany in 2002 (figure 8 and 9). The philosopher this monument is based on is Georges Albert Maurice Victor Bataille.⁴⁵ Finally, the fourth monument was the *Gramsci Monument*. As previously mentioned, Gramsci was an Italian Marxist who was incarcerated for his beliefs.⁴⁶ All of these monuments had an ephemeral and a physical quality. Some had more traditional monument qualities, like a large statue for example, but all of them functioned in a multifaceted way. Just like how the *Gramsci Monument* had multiple functions and facilities, these previous monuments had multiple purposes, just in a less evolved way.

The *Spinoza Monument* was the first of the series, being constructed in 1999. The *Spinoza Monument* took place in Bijlmermeer, Amsterdam. This monument had a stage for

⁴³ Jeroen Derks, "Thomas Hirschhorn Bijlmer Spinoza Festival 2009," YouTube Video, 13:19, June 4, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ThmdkP6v-0o>.

⁴⁴ Kennedy, "Bringing Art and Change To Bronx."

⁴⁵ Kennedy, "Bringing Art and Change To Bronx."

⁴⁶ Kennedy, "Bringing Art and Change To Bronx."

performances, a computer room, a library, and a sculpture.⁴⁷ On the city sidewalk, was a sculpture of a figure that represents the philosopher. It is a silver, angular figure with a realistic, silver head. In front of the figure were 3-dimensional block letters reading “SPINOZA.” We see that a majority of monuments share these characteristics. It resembled the *Gramsci Monument* in its use of plywood and 2x4’s to construct the stage.

Deleuze Monument was a learning experience for Hirschhorn. The changes from the *Spinoza Monument* to the *Deleuze Monument* was the decision to hire residents as the construction team. Hirschhorn also decided to not be present at the monument after its construction. These two decisions yielded very difficult outcomes. Employing residents was a great decision for a couple of reasons. First, it gave those individuals an additional incentive to interact with the ideas and artwork. It being an employee-employer relationship also allowed Hirschhorn to hold the ownership of the artwork, which was important to him because pursuing his artistic career is important to him. He did not want to collaborate, but instead wanted a coexisting relationship.⁴⁸ Hirschhorn’s decision to leave the monument after it was completed led to it being vandalized and, consequently, deconstructed earlier than planned. Both decisions influenced the remaining monuments. Hirschhorn reflects, “Therefore, after the Deleuze Monument experience, I invented my Presence and Production guidelines.”⁴⁹ Hirschhorn acknowledges that he should have been more present at this public art site. He claims this to be

⁴⁷ Derks. “Thomas Hirschhorn Bijlmer Spinoza Festival 2009.”

⁴⁸ Kennedy, "Bringing Art and Change To Bronx."

⁴⁹ Simpson, “Thomas Hirschhorn: ‘The Gramsci Monument, like all monuments, is made for eternity’,”

an error in this artwork, and one that he does not wish to repeat.⁵⁰ Hirschhorn talks about this in the Art21 episode previously mentioned.

The best additions in *Bataille Monument* were the accessibility, incentives, and creative platforms. Accessibility in providing a shuttle service for those who wanted to attend. There were incentives like a free shuttle ride, as well as a snack bar. The addition of a TV station and art workshops provided the opportunity to be creative. Finally, Hirschhorn stayed at the monument through the day, like he had done for the *Spinoza Monument*.

Finally, the *Gramsci Monument* encompassed all of these qualities while adding some new features and revising others. A prominent decision Hirschhorn made was gaining the counsel of Erik Farmer. Utilizing the insider perspective is invaluable if trying to connect with that community. Another adjustment made was the exchange of the TV station for the radio station and newspaper at the *Gramsci Monument* (figure 10).

Looking at the entire series shows that Hirschhorn was trying to refine his production of interactive monuments. Therefore, we can assume the *Gramsci Monument* was informed based on previous experience from the artist. His writing and documentation on his artwork also supports that he was very intentional in his thinking of collaboration and authorship. He expresses his intent on the *Gramsci Monument* webpage through the Dia Art Foundation website, as well as his book *Thomas Hirschhorn: Gramsci Monument*.

Collaboration, or lack thereof, plays an important role in understanding how this artwork relates to its subject matter, Antonio Gramsci. Hirschhorn makes it clear that it was not a collaboration, but a “coexistence.”⁵¹ Hirschhorn stated that his intention was not to create a

⁵⁰ Skylstad, “Another Monument.”

⁵¹ Art21, “Investigation.”

social work, but instead an artwork.⁵² This is likely why he withheld most of the creative power throughout the process. He says that his goal is to better his artistic career.⁵³ There is a missed opportunity though; because if there was more collaboration, it would more closely relate to Gramsci's ideas. Gramsci believed disenfranchised people would need to create their own institutions.⁵⁴ He also believed that all people are intellectuals.⁵⁵ Hirschhorn withholding the authorship of the artwork prohibited the participants from making it their own, to full capacity.

The *Gramsci Monument* is a unique monument for many reasons. It is not a traditional monument in the sense that it is not a permanent sculpture, but instead was a temporary structure built from Hirschhorn's signature materials, like plywood, packing tape, and tarp. The *Gramsci Monument* was located between the street and two of the buildings as part of the Forest Houses in the Bronx, New York. The monument was elevated by use of stacked pallets, which was accessible by stairs or a long ramp. The structure was mostly made of plywood, 2x4's, and repurposed loading pallets. Since this was Hirschhorn's work, there was an abundance of brown packing tape throughout the monument, which is a material often used in his work. Murals made by the residents and informative hand-made posters decorated the walls. There is a bridge made to go over a concrete walkway that is a part of Forest Houses connecting two parts of the monument. Each side has a set of stairs, once again made out of 2x4s and plywood, then long planks of 12x4s are used to connect the stairs. The slow-incline ramp they constructed was a series of stacked palettes that gradually would reduce its height by gradually taking away a layer of palette from each stack, to create a slope (figure 11). Furniture, like couches and cushioned

⁵²Jessica Rizzo, "Immanent Utopia/Utopia Imminent: Thomas Hirschhorn's "Gramsci Monument"."

⁵³ Kennedy, "Bringing Art and Change To Bronx."

⁵⁴ Karl Thompson, "Gramsci's humanist Marxism", *Revise Sociology*, June 23, 2016. Accessed March 29, 2021. <https://revisesociology.com/2016/06/23/gramscis-humanist-marxism/>

⁵⁵Ken Johnson, "A Summer Place in the South Bronx."

seats, were wrapped in packing tape, which made them look uniform and waterproofed them. There is a shallow pool in the constructed platform. It is sunken about a foot or two into the raised, plywood platform, and uses blue tarp to contain the water.

The orientation and layout of the monument is important to consider because it was designed to play a part in how people interacted with the monument (figure 12). Hirschhorn elected to build two elevated sections that were connected by the aforementioned wooden bridge, which both had ramp and stair access. One section included the workshop pavilion, the lounge area, the bar, the stage, and the pool, while the other included the ambassador's office, the internet corner, the radio station, newspaper station, the library, and the archive. The monument featured five entrances, which allowed entry by ramp or staircase. If one entered from the ramp of the first section, they encountered the workshop first, followed by the stage, lounge, bar, and finally they would pass the small pool. Audience members would then have the option to cross the bridge, or exit using the stairs near the bridge. If they crossed the bridge instead of exiting, they would encounter the ambassador's office, which is attached to the internet corner of the monument. Upon entry, they would see the radio and newspaper stations, the library and the archive, which were all accessible from each other. From there, the audience member could exit the monument entirely from the second ramp. The ramps were positioned at the ends of the monument, whereas the three staircases were placed on the inside of the monument's layout, positioned next to the bridge. People who needed to use the ramps to access the monument would not be able to utilize the bridge, so they would have to use the ramp as an entrance and exit, then proceed to the other side of the monument, where they could use the second ramp.

The organization of the monument plays a role in how the monument was received by all audience members. One section of the monument seemed to have all of the media base attributes,

whereas the other section had more of the social functions located within it. The section focused on media had the internet corner, radio station, newspaper station, and the library. The socially focused section had the bar, pool, and stage. If Hirschhorn wanted to subscribe to this media-based and social-based division between the two sections, he could have switched the ambassador's office with the workshop. The workshop, which is where art classes took place, would be more appropriate for the media section. Likewise the ambassador's office would be more appropriate in the social section, rather than the media section of the monument. The arrangement of where these pavilions were placed plays a role in how people interacted with the monument. Of course the bridge connecting these two sections plays a crucial role in how people interacted with the facilities. Without the bridge audience members may have felt more comfortable visiting one of the sections and not the other. The bridge encourages the audience members to see the other side of the monument because of accessibility. Perhaps Hirschhorn chose to put the workshop on the social side and the ambassador on the media side to encourage people to see the other side. If the location of the ambassador's office and the location of the workshop were switched, and if there were no bridge, perhaps two sections of the monuments would gather two different audiences based on their interests.

Beyond the physical materials and qualities of the *Gramsci Monument*, other aspects, which are arguably more important, were the people involved. While there were many residents that played significant roles in this artwork, no one was more prominent than Erik Farmer. Farmer is a respected community leader and the president of the Residence Association at Forest Houses. Among the 46 New York City housing projects Hirschhorn visited, Farmer was the only person that was interested in the project and actually asked for information on Gramsci.⁵⁶ Once

⁵⁶ Kennedy, "Bringing Art and Change To Bronx."

he understood Hirschhorn's aim, Farmer wanted the project to take place in the Forest Houses community. He saw an opportunity, saying "There's nothing cultural here at all, it's like we're in a box here, in this neighborhood. We need to get out and find out some things about the world. This is kind of like the world coming to us for a little while."⁵⁷

Among many tasks, Farmer was in charge of hiring residents to perform the duties as the construction team. The crew members wore construction hats, red "Gramsci Monument" shirts, along with the rest of their own personal attire. They used power drills to connect all of the wood pieces. They used hand-held power tools to cut out the windows and create neater edges, so the plywood surfaces weren't jagged, and met each other somewhat flush. The plan was for the installation to take seven weeks, from May 13th to June 30th. The *Gramsci Monument's* open time, or active period, was for eleven weeks, from July 1st to September 15th. Finally, dismantling the monument was allotted a week, from September 16th to September 22nd.⁵⁸

What the residents experienced varied because they played different roles in the *Gramsci Monument*, but for the most part the residents appreciated the monument, as published interviews suggest.⁵⁹ Residents that worked on the construction team were pushed beyond their limits at times. While that did happen, some of those construction crew members said that being able to work hands-on on the *Gramsci Monument* allowed them to become more acquainted with the monument. One member in particular said that though he does not consider himself to be an artist, he said he feels like he is acting like an artist thanks to this experience. Other residents, who played a more passive role, still felt influenced by the *Gramsci Monument*. These are

⁵⁷ Kennedy, "Bringing Art and Change To Bronx."

⁵⁸ Thomas Hirschhorn, *Gramsci Monument*, 50.

⁵⁹ Art21, "Investigation."

residents who were frequently present, but did not have the hands-on participation experience. Residents interviewed in Art21 said they would miss the monument dearly, and that they loved having people from outside the neighborhood come visit when normally they would not have a reason to come.

Another important community member was Clyde Thompson, director of Community Affairs/Employment and Training at the Southeast Bronx Neighborhood Center. Farmer and Thompson participated in an interview in which they shared their experience working on the *Gramsci Monument*. The interview, by Kelly Kivland, highlights the positive effects of the *Gramsci Monument*. Farmer says, “I never met a gentleman with a bigger heart than Thomas.”⁶⁰ This is an important testimony because it indicates how the artist was perceived by the community members. Thompson says, “The genius of the project was that it tapped and motivated a lot of people who were not working. So here was an opportunity to pick some folks that normally would get passed over.”⁶¹ Here, Thompson is indicating that the community members were given an opportunity that was not common for them to have. Farmer also refers to the change in attitudes amongst the community members, saying “...there were people that would walk around that didn’t even speak to each other. Didn’t even speak to me, and I’m their Tenant Association president. All of them speak to me now. Lady in my building on the first floor never spoke. Now she speaks to me every day.”⁶² Thompson continues, “...When they started working, I see cats walking with purpose, you know? ‘Hey, Clyde! How you doing?’ They got on their red

⁶⁰ Thomas Hirschhorn, *Gramsci Monument*, 442.

⁶¹ Thomas Hirschhorn, *Gramsci Monument*, 442.

⁶² Thomas Hirschhorn, *Gramsci Monument*, 442.

Gramsci shirts. They're going to the store to get lunch, and they're rushing to be back to the job on time, because Thomas has these expectations."⁶³

This monument not only gave these individuals purpose, but it also gave the rest of the community something to do throughout the summer. Thompson shares, "And last summer was just crime-free for seven weeks. We didn't have any shootings. I don't know what art does to reduce crime, violent crime, but that was incredible."⁶⁴ Thompson here is giving the monument credit for reducing the amount of crime in the neighborhood. Thompson mentions the variety of people that visited the neighborhood. He says, "You had Bill De Blasio, who is now the mayor of New York City, and his son, Dante. You had Councilwoman Vanessa Gibson. You had the Chairman of Housing, John Rhea. That's an incredible force of influential people."⁶⁵ Visits by politicians likely validated the community's efforts. Other residents also comment that the monument attracted people to the neighborhood that usually would not visit.

Farmer and Thompson remarked upon the significance of coming together as a community to work on a shared project. Thompson says, "We are working toward having political influence, by trying to get our people to understand that if we band together, we are really a force to be reckoned with."⁶⁶ Farmer continues the sentiment,

It made people see, we can do some things together. We can get along with each other. And *Gramsci Monument* brought the community together, more so than people even wanted to realize. Now, we just gotta figure out how to keep it going and make it go to an even bigger thing. Like now that we're all speaking some, now we've got to try to get them into Tenant meetings and come and interact with us, so we could all make a change.⁶⁷

⁶³ Thomas Hirschhorn, *Gramsci Monument*, 442.

⁶⁴ Thomas Hirschhorn, *Thomas Hirschhorn: Gramsci Monument*, 443.

⁶⁵ Thomas Hirschhorn, *Thomas Hirschhorn: Gramsci Monument*, 443.

⁶⁶ Thomas Hirschhorn, *Thomas Hirschhorn: Gramsci Monument*, 444.

⁶⁷ Thomas Hirschhorn, *Thomas Hirschhorn: Gramsci Monument*, 444-445.

The *Gramsci Monument* gave people an opportunity to be creative and nurture the intellectual side of themselves. Most people living in the area would not have the opportunity to participate in an artwork like this one on their own accord. Hirschhorn employed his resident construction crew, based on Farmer's recommendation. This employment was not only an economic gain for these residents, but it enticed these residents to participate in the creation of this artwork. A resident reflects, "you work on something like this, and after a while it's not like a job. You start thinking it's your thing, too, I mean, I'm no artist, but I'm making a work of art here."⁶⁸ Another resident continued this sentiment stating, "He did not want people focusing on money. He wanted people to know about this guy Antonio Gramsci."⁶⁹

There was a good deal of engagement for the community members. For example people were given access to resources, such as computers, a stage for performing, and a library. The philosophical lectures and various workshops that were available during that summer exposed people to new ideas and perspectives. And even though there were hard times for the construction team, we hear accounts of them saying they feel proud of the work. They were a part of an unusual occurrence to take place in a public space, also their home. In addition, they were given an opportunity to earn some money through hard work.

Art critics that visit for a half day are not experiencing the same thing as residents who have spent the entire summer at the *Gramsci Monument*. They did not have the same frequency of exposure and did not share the same perspective as the residents. Based on the many reflections through documentaries, articles, and books, this monument meant a lot to many of the residents. Based on a few art critics' reflections, the monument was a disappointment.⁷⁰ The only

⁶⁸ Art21, "Investigation."

⁶⁹ Thomas Hirschhorn, *Gramsci Monument*, 442.

⁷⁰ Ken Johnson, "A Summer Place in the South Bronx."

change really is the audience perspective. This is relevant for this thesis because the residents' experience is crucial in considering whether or not this artwork was "Gramscian" enough.

The *Gramsci Monument* not only provided cultural materials but also brought different people to this neighborhood. There were people visiting the monument that would not normally come through this neighborhood. These were mostly art enthusiasts that knew of Hirschhorn's work and wanted to see this public exhibition. An elderly resident reflects, "I met people from all walks of life. I love that,"⁷¹ referring to new people coming to this residential area, especially people from the art world. The resident continues, "And if it wasn't here, they wouldn't have come. Why would they if it wasn't here?"⁷² This specific resident appreciated meeting people to share perspectives, yet another way culture is coming to this housing development.

Another resident reflects, "It's going to be hard when it goes. It's gonna be something lost here. Like someone died."⁷³ Another joins in saying, "Now I understand what a monument means. It's something that stays in your heart and in your memory."⁷⁴ This quote shows that a bond has been created between artwork and community members that participated. An art critic, Ben Davis of the online journal Blouin Artinfo, foresees this void saying, "A monument to an absence- to institutions, organizations, and movements that still need to be built."⁷⁵ This shows that there will still be the absence that existed before Hirschhorn arrived at Forest Houses. The residents will still need to make their own institutions, according to Gramsci. The monument, perhaps, could have planted the seed of inspiration, but may have been more effective if

⁷¹ Art21, "Investigation."

⁷² Art21, "Investigation."

⁷³ Art21, "Investigation."

⁷⁴ Art21, "Investigation."

⁷⁵Jessica Rizzo, "Immanent Utopia/Utopia Imminent: Thomas Hirschhorn's "Gramsci Monument"."

Hirschhorn had brought the residents in on the conceptualization phase of the monument, so they could have really taken ownership. Hirschhorn conceptualized the monument, and invited the residents in on the production too late for them to really have a hand at the designing and genesis of the monument.

Hirschhorn's intentions are crucial in assessing how this work could have been better aligned with Gramsci's ideas. Like Kennedy says in his article, Hirschhorn clarifies his intentions, "I tell them, 'This is not to serve your community, per se, but it is to serve art, and my reasons for wanting to do these things are purely personal artistic reasons,'" ⁷⁶ Here we clearly see his motive. Hirschhorn continues, "My goal or my dream is not so much about changing the situation of the people who help me, but about showing the power of art to make people think about issues they otherwise wouldn't have thought about." ⁷⁷ Hirschhorn wanted to start a conversation about deconstructing cultural hegemony, but isn't interested in putting it into practice during this opportunity.

As previously stated, Hirschhorn wanted to redefine the term "monument." ⁷⁸ He did this by creating a temporary monument devoted to creating a memory rather than a permanent installation. ⁷⁹ He also wanted to create an event and encourage encounters. Finally, and most importantly to this thesis, Hirschhorn wanted people to think about Gramsci in today's context. ⁸⁰ This is important to identify because the artist's intentions should be considered when analyzing their work. Hirschhorn also said he did not intend for this to be a collaborative experience, but

⁷⁶ Kennedy, "Bringing Art and Change To Bronx."

⁷⁷ Kennedy, "Bringing Art and Change To Bronx."

⁷⁸ Jessica Rizzo, "Immanent Utopia/Utopia Imminent: Thomas Hirschhorn's "Gramsci Monument"."

⁷⁹ Art21, "Investigation."

⁸⁰ Jessica Rizzo, "Immanent Utopia/Utopia Imminent: Thomas Hirschhorn's "Gramsci Monument"."

instead a coexistence. He also says it is not meant to be a social work, but is a sculpture.⁸¹ These intentions are important to determine whether or not collaboration should have been utilized more in the *Gramsci Monument*. When not considering his intentions, we can see that Hirschhorn should have included the resident more, in a more authentic collaborative way, so that it relates to Gramsci's ideas. While the work may have been successful according to Hirschhorn's assessment, some of his intentions interrupt the connection to Gramsci's philosophies. For example, his focus to serve art over serving the community leads him away from relating to Gramsci. If he had served the community more, showing them how to create this type of home-grown establishment, it would not only serve the community but would also serve his goal to think of Gramsci in today's text.⁸²

In an interview with Skylstad, Kristian, Hirschhorn reflects on the *Gramsci Monument*. Hirschhorn uses this opportunity to talk about how he feels about the artworks short-comings. He says,

“I made a lot of errors, and the process had a lot of flaws. The problem is not what I understood. The problem is not to do a work without lacks and errors, because dealing with this is a waste of time. The important thing is to create work where errors and lack are not important. *Gramsci Monument* is an accumulation of failures.”⁸³

Here Hirschhorn is accepting the imperfections of his artwork, which are reminiscent of two ideas. First, this connects to his mantra “Energy Yes, Quality No.” It also relates to the lesson he teaches to his construction crew about the fact that art is never 100% success or 100% failure.

In an interview with Veronica Simpson, Hirschhorn explains his perspective of how things went for the residents involved with the *Gramsci Monument*. Hirschhorn says, “I can't

⁸¹ Art21, “Investigation.”

⁸² Jessica Rizzo, "Immanent Utopia/Utopia Imminent: Thomas Hirschhorn's "Gramsci Monument"."

⁸³ Kristian Skylstad, “Another Monument.” *Kunstkritikk*, vol., no., March 28, 2014. Accessed July 5, 2020. <https://kunstkruttikk.com/another-monument/>

assure anyone that Gramsci's ideas took root at Forest Houses, but I can reassure everyone that the residents of Forest Houses offered their loyalty to the thinking of Gramsci. The Gramsci Monument is a monument built in, and with, friendship, and if you ask me what is left of it, I can answer for sure: friendship!"⁸⁴ Hirschhorn here is saying that even though Gramsci's ideas may not have resonated with the residents, there was still a success among the community, which was also communicated by Farmer and Thompson. Hirschhorn explains that this success was their connection with each other. Hirschhorn goes on to talk about the construction crew,

"The 15 members of the team were the only ones who knew and measured how fragile, uncertain, complicated, complex, beautiful – and also how fun – those 35 days of construction were. Working with them was an incredible experience and an incommensurable challenge. Everyone in the team was important, everybody was equally necessary and everybody's work was equally important – contrary to common social, economic or cultural habits"⁸⁵

This quote highlights the fact that the construction crew experienced something no one else experienced. They experienced the highest level of participation among the residents. This quote also has Hirschhorn speak to the importance of every person on the construction team. This appreciation for his construction team is seen in how Hirschhorn gives them credit in his book *Gramsci Monument* and the website created for this monument. Both the book and website include a list of people that played a role on the construction team. He also included a list of people that helped dismantle the artwork. People who were not a part of the construction crew could still be participating with the monument. Hirschhorn talks to Simpson about the weekly events offered,

"The daily events were scheduled each day of the week: On Monday, the Gramsci Theater, a play written by Marcus Steinweg, which I directed myself, was performed by

⁸⁴ Veronica Simpson, "Thomas Hirschhorn: 'The Gramsci Monument, like all monuments, is made for eternity'." *Studio International*, February 15, 2017. <https://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/thomas-hirschhorn-interview-the-gramsci-monument-is-made-for-eternity>

⁸⁵ Simpson, "Thomas Hirschhorn: 'The Gramsci Monument, like all monuments, is made for eternity'."

11 residents. On Tuesday, we had a poetry lecture and workshop. Wednesday was “funning events” with music or dance performances, acting or discussions, proposed by the residents. On Thursday, we had field trips – for example, a visit to the New York Times offices to see how other newspapers are produced, and visits to an organic farm, a post office and museums. On Friday, there was art school. I did the art school. It was open to everyone, visitors and local residents. Everyone had to bring a work, which was discussed and judged on the criteria: “Does this work have Energy?” On Saturday, we had the Gramsci seminar with 11 Gramsci scholars invited to give talks. On Sunday, there was the open microphone: anyone could take the microphone to talk or sing.”⁸⁶ Hirschhorn’s excerpt “*Gramsci Monument* at Forest Houses, The Bronx, NYC” was

written in February 2013, months before the *Gramsci Monument* was created. Here Hirschhorn talks about his decision to create the monument at the Forest Houses, “...I visited forty-six projects in the five boroughs, then reduced the visits to fifteen sites in three boroughs...I finally focused on seven sites, all in the Bronx...”⁸⁷ Out of all those visits, Erik Farmer was the only person to ask for literature on Antonio Gramsci, and wanted to pursue this opportunity. In a way, Farmer picked Hirschhorn just as much as Hirschhorn picked the Forest Houses as his artwork’s site. Hirschhorn acknowledges this “Cooperation may occur as a gift of the residents. It is not me- the artist- who has the pretense to bring help; on the contrary it’s me- the artist- who is asking for help! My proposal is: ‘Can you and do you agree- as residents of this neighborhood- to help me- the artist- do the *Gramsci Monument*? Can we do it together in cooperation and coexistence?’”⁸⁸ Hirschhorn is in need of access to these grounds and community, so he can make his statement.

⁸⁶ Simpson, “Thomas Hirschhorn: ‘The Gramsci Monument, like all monuments, is made for eternity.’”

⁸⁷ Hirschhorn, *Gramsci Monument*, 56.

⁸⁸ Hirschhorn, “Gramsci Monument,” 56.

Chapter 2: Power Dynamics, Autonomy , and Other Public Works

Comparing the power dynamics seen in other community artworks is helpful in assessing the impact of the authority given, and not given, to the community members who participated in *Gramsci Monument*. The power dynamics between Hirschhorn and the residents participating in the *Gramsci Monument* varied based on the residents' role. According to varying testimonies, the dynamics between the artist and residents were confusing for the residents. There were mixed signals being sent by Hirschhorn about the amount of influence the residents had. On one hand, they were taught and told that they are intellectuals and should create their own establishments and wield the power of art. On the other hand, they were told that Hirschhorn is the artist and they must stick to the plan set before them.

When choosing where to build *Gramsci Monument*,, Hirshhorn exclusively searched for low-income housing projects.⁸⁹ While one can assume he makes this choice to connect with the “disenfranchised” people Gramsci wrote about, this also plays a role in the power dynamics between the artist and the residents. Hirschhorn is giving instructions and spearheading this project, while the construction crew and participating residents are being paid for their efforts. The employer-employee dynamic, as well as Hirschhorn's expertise in the arts, likely discouraged residents to confidently suggest or do something that was not “okayed” by the artist. Hirshhorn stated, “They are paid, like working with people at a gallery. The coexistence is 100% me and 100% them. That is coexistence. I do not want to interfere with what they are doing. This

⁸⁹ Thomas Hirschhorn, “‘Bataille Monument’ (2002),” Thomas Hirschhorn, accessed July 6, 2020, <http://www.thomashirschhorn.com/bataille-monument/>.

is unshared authorship.”⁹⁰ Artists typically do not allow gallery employees to make conceptual decisions for their artwork, and Hirshhorn makes clear that residents are not collaborators.

One instance that indicates the residents did not understand the dynamics or expectations was the rainy workday mentioned earlier. In the article by Kennedy, they mention that the residents were being pushed to their limit to the point when one of them exclaimed, “You just care about your work; you don’t love us.”⁹¹ Hirschhorn responded that his goal was to push his own artistic profession, which more accurately conveys his perception of this relationship.⁹² Residents were receiving mixed messages - they were taught about Gramsci’s philosophies, but were, in practice, more like gallery workers than artists with creative input. Hirschhorn’s workshops about art and public art, where he discussed what it means to be an artist, may have also contributed to the confusion felt by residents regarding their roles.

Hirschhorn discusses “unshared authorship” in his book, *Gramsci Monument*. This passage was written in February 2013, the winter before the *Gramsci Monument*. He writes, “...in Unshared Authorship- I don’t share the responsibility of my work nor my own understanding of it; that’s why the term; Unshared. But I am not the only author!”⁹³ Hirschhorn continues, “The Other can be an author, completely and entirely, in his/her understanding of the work and regarding everything about the work. That’s why, again, the term: Unshared.”⁹⁴ This quote suggests that he considers the residents as authors and that they are permitted to do as they please, but this was not always true in practice. If they had autonomy, construction crew members could have stopped working during the rain storm Kennedy mentions in his article.

⁹⁰ Art21, “Investigation.”

⁹¹ Kennedy, "Bringing Art and Change To Bronx."

⁹² Kennedy, "Bringing Art and Change To Bronx."

⁹³ Hirschhorn, *Gramsci Monument*, 54.

⁹⁴ Hirschhorn, “Gramsci Monument,” 54.

Thompson mentions that the construction crew members would run back from lunch because of Hirschhorn's high expectations, contradicting the "unshared responsibility" practice that comes with "Unshared Authorship."

Unshared means saying yes to complexity, and implies multiplication, not division. Today's issues about claims for 'responsibility' come from those 'shared responsibilities,' which push you to the 'I am not responsible for this, I am only responsible for that!' excuses. Unshared Authorship- we could also say 'Unshared Responsibility' - allows me to take responsibility for what I am not 'responsible' for. Furthermore, Unshared Authorship allows me to be an author even when I am not the 'author.' This is the essential, this is the time.⁹⁵

Initially, Hirschhorn claims "unshared authorship" means that he and the construction crew do not share responsibilities. In contradiction, Hirschhorn says that it "allows me to take responsibility for what I am not 'responsible' for." This complex and seemingly contradictory stance may have been the root of the confusion felt by some of the construction crew.

In Lex Brown's section, "Monument Time," of Hirschhorn's book, *Gramsci Monument*, Brown provides a reflection of her time as the leader of the *Gramsci Monument*'s art workshop. Brown says, "What unshared authorship offers is the richness and complexity that results from a group of individuals working in acceptance of each other. Responsibility isn't shared, so neither is blame. No one is a leader. Things get done because people want to do them, not because they are afraid others won't."⁹⁶ This approach reflects a key Gramscian concept: everyone is an intellectual. then it could be considered Gramscian in a way because it respects everyone as intellectuals. Brown continues, "Whereas collaboration trades on approval, unshared authorship works by acceptance. I had to accept my choices and abilities, and as I accepted the choices and abilities of others, I also had to let go of control."⁹⁷ Hirschhorn, however, does not let go of all

⁹⁵ Hirschhorn, *Gramsci Monument*, 54.

⁹⁶ Hirschhorn, "Gramsci Monument," 231.

⁹⁷ Hirschhorn, "Gramsci Monument," 231.

control. While he did not oversee all workshops and activities that took place at the monument, he dictated its form and duration, and he was present at the site to discourage alterations.

Monxo Lopez, A writer from the Bronx, frequented the open mic nights at the *Gramsci Monument*. In Lopez's article, "Gramsci's Gramsci and Hirschhorn's Gramsci," he writes about the ephemeral quality of the *Gramsci Monument*,

"It speaks volumes of Hirschhorn's character that he decided to be physically present on-site every single day of *Gramsci Monument* when he had no clear idea of where his experiment might ultimately lead. I, for one, feared a revolt once the last day of the monument approached. I imagined people demanding the monument be monumentalized, wanting the monument to become permanent (defeating the main purpose of it all), or, conversely, I imagined crowds calling for Hirschhorn's head, angry and resentful for taking it all away from them."⁹⁸

Lopez's assertion that leaving the monument intact would be "defeating the main purpose of it all" reinforces that Hirschhorn had the ultimate authority to dictate the course of the monument's life. But in limiting the existence of the monument, Hirschhorn forces it to function only in memory but, perhaps, spark further action by those exposed to it. Lopez continues, "*Gramsci Monument* was a powerful reminder that places are the physical locales where we make revolution happen. Places are first and foremost the ground where we become free."⁹⁹

Hirschhorn adjusted his approach from monument to monument in the series. Practices that Hirschhorn used in the *Gramsci Monument* that were beneficial are incentives to participate, providing creative opportunities, providing learning opportunities, increasing accessibility, employing people from the community when possible, utilizing community members' insights, and being present for maintenance and functional purposes.

⁹⁸ Hirschhorn, "Gramsci Monument," 133.

⁹⁹Hirschhorn, "Gramsci Monument," 134.

Despite some positive critical response and resident experiences, *Gramsci Monument* falls short of the ideals set forth by its namesake philosopher. Instead of modeling and allowing the community to participate in the *Gramsci Monument*, Hirschhorn could have facilitated a process that allowed the community to act as the designers of these monuments. This idea of facilitating would not act as a social work, which Hirschhorn would disprove of, but would still be an artwork trying to connect with Gramsci's ideals. Hirschhorn says, "My goal or my dream is not so much about changing the situation of the people who help me, but about showing the power of art to make people think about issues they otherwise wouldn't have thought about."¹⁰⁰ It seems that he is happy to introduce Gramsci's core concepts, but not fully put them into practice. Hirschhorn could have led them closer to these ideals by creating a more authentic Gramscian experience, one that allowed for more authentic input from the Forest House residents. Rizzo speculates in her article, "It may not have mattered to Hirschhorn whether the people undertaking had equal control over the form the piece would take, but it seems to have mattered a great deal that on some level they "got it"..."¹⁰¹ Workshops and discussions allowed his audience to *understand* Gramsci's ideas, but the lack of community input did not allow them to put Gramscian ideals into practice. Hirschhorn successfully engaged the community members, but did not authentically empower them. In John Spencer and A.J. Juliani's book *Empower*, the authors suggest that engagement is the prerequisite to empowerment but the work must be done by the audience, "It's not about giving them a roadmap for learning. It's about helping them create their own maps."¹⁰² Although this book's focus is on authentically educating students in a

¹⁰⁰ Kennedy, "Bringing Art and Change To Bronx."

¹⁰¹Jessica Rizzo, "Immanent Utopia/Utopia Imminent: Thomas Hirschhorn's "Gramsci Monument"."

¹⁰² John Spencer and A. J. Juliani, *Empower: what happens when students own their learning*. San Diego: Impress, 2017. 45.

school setting, the central concepts can be extended to any type of participatory artwork, like the *Gramsci Monument*. Spencer and Juliani propose that participatory art learning “...need[s] to shift from providing choices to inspiring possibilities.”¹⁰³ The *Gramsci Monument* was accommodating to the many residents who participated, but only to the capacity it offered. It was a positive, resourceful center, but residents were participating in activities and facilities that were set before them. They are merely being given options, not practicing autonomy.

Playing devil’s advocate, Johnson writes that this monument is Gramscian in that Hirschhorn could have inspired an underclass culture to grow, but again, it would have been more inspiring and more authentic if Hirschhorn had the residents play a more significant role in the idea generating and conceptual element to this undergoing.¹⁰⁴ Hirschhorn put in the effort to teach the residents about his ideas about art, and specifically about creating public artwork, through art workshops he conducted while the monument was standing. He took the effort to teach them about Gramsci and his vision for the monument, but the lack of resident participation in the conceptual phase of the project did not align with Gramsci’s ideals. This would require Hirschhorn to let go of his authority and authorship, which is in conflict with his stated desire to further his career.

Hirschhorn could have facilitated a monument more closely related to Gramsci by having residents participate in discussions relating to the conceptualization of the monument, including physical design and what types of lectures and activities would take place. Kennedy talks about this monument potentially inspiring this community to build their own institutions, but were the residents exposed to the designing phase enough for them to duplicate a similarly successful establishment? Hirschhorn, or others working with Hirschhorn, could have provided a

¹⁰³ Spencer and Juliani, *Empower: what happens when students own their learning*, 45.

¹⁰⁴Ken Johnson, “A Summer Place in the South Bronx.”

workshop on how to build sustainable, resourceful institutions, tailored to the wants and needs of the community.¹⁰⁵

In Whitney Kimball’s article, “How Do People Feel About the *Gramsci Monument*, One Year Later?” Kimball interviews a number of Forest Houses residents to see how the *Gramsci Monument* resonated with the community after it was dismantled. She interviewed Farmer, who asserts that everyone in the community would love to have the monument back in their lives, but funding is a hurdle. Farmer says, “The money that was spent...it’s going to be really hard to find somebody to fund that. It was really expensive.”¹⁰⁶ Money was not the only issue preventing the construction of a permanent monument like Hirschhorn’s ephemeral *Gramsci Monument*. Susie Farmer, Erik’s mother, said:

And nobody has the knowledge to build that [structure] the way that Thomas did, in the time that he had to do it. Nobody was going to do it, unless they had someone here with them who knows how to do construction work like that. I really don’t think so. I mean, we have a lot of people who know construction work, but it’s not *building* [from scratch].¹⁰⁷

Unfortunately there were significant gaps in the ability of residents to construct something like the *Gramsci Monument*. While the construction crew, workshop participants, and others that utilized the monument learned about how works of art could function in their community, they were not taught how to create it for themselves.

Reviewing examples of successful and failed community artworks illuminates the strategies and options that Hirschhorn missed. OBAC’s *Wall of Respect*, William Cochran’s *Community Bridge Project*, and Polly Brennan’s *Avant-Gardening* are examples of successful community collaborations.

¹⁰⁵ Art21, “Investigation.”

¹⁰⁶ Whitney Kimball, “How Do People Feel About the Gramsci Monument?” Artcity, August 16, 2013. <http://artcity.com/2013/08/16/how-do-people-feel-about-the-gramsci-monument/>

¹⁰⁷ Kimball, “How Do People Feel About the Gramsci Monument?”

The *Wall of Respect* prompted many other murals to be created in neighborhoods known for their diverse populus (figure 13).¹⁰⁸ This mural was created by the Organization of Black American Culture (OBAC) in Chicago. OBAC was formerly known as the Committee for the Art (CFA) and was formed in February, 1967. By May that year, the CFA evolved to be what is now known as OBAC. The change in name reflected their intention of going beyond the arts and serve the Civil Rights Movement. The *Wall of Respect*, created in 1971, was a mural featuring many heros and heroines of African-American History. This project took place in Chicago, on the corner of 43rd St. and Langley Ave, in an area known as the “Black Belt” because of its predominantly black population. The intention of the *Wall of Respect* was to celebrate African-American culture, and consequently unite members of this community. Even when it caused them to change course, the artists of OBAC took community feedback to heart. Martin Luther King Jr. was completely painted on the mural when community members decided he should be replaced by Stokely Carmichael, a civil rights activist and leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). In an effort to authentically connect, the artists, OBAC, used the community’s voice to generate the content of their artwork. They were flexible, responsive, and considerate. This was a huge success in that it inspired the production of many other murals throughout the city, and the nation. After this mural, there was a monumental increase in murals created in other neighborhoods throughout the United State. The artists listened to what the people wanted, so their artwork would embody something that would resonate with the community.

¹⁰⁸ Donaldson, Jeff. 1998. “The Rise, Fall and Legacy of the Wall of Respect Movement.” *International Review of African American Art* 15 (1): 22–26.
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=aft&AN=505714982&site=ehost-live>.

While he clearly wanted to make an impact in the community, Hirschhorn did not allow resident feedback to shape his design, as OBAC did with *Wall of Respect*. OBAC was willing to change a major part of their mural after it had been produced, which Hirschhorn did not do in the *Gramsci Monument*. One way Hirschhorn could have listened to the community to alter the monument was by changing the ephemeral quality of the monument.¹⁰⁹ Residents wanted the monument to last longer, but it was important to Hirschhorn for it to be an ephemeral artwork. Perhaps Hirschhorn could have provided the community with an opportunity to adjust aspects of the *Gramsci Monument*. This way he would be assuring the responsiveness seen in OBAC's *Wall of Respect*.

The intention of William Cochran's *Community Bridge Project* was to mend two segregated, neighboring communities separated by a park (figure 14). Within this park is a wall that runs along the "dividing line." Cochran used community input from both communities to create a mural, on both sides of the dividing wall. He asked all participants, "Which object represents the spirit of community to you?"¹¹⁰ With this question, community members were able to participate by providing input about what imagery should be included in the mural. The project was preceded by a year-long community outreach initiative including mailers, performing public speeches, creating a website, and engaging other forms of communication. This outreach initiative was responsible for the participation of well-over 100 community members. Cochran and his team held events at the park after the art's production was complete. The park was filled with community members, and the response was positive across the board.

¹⁰⁹ Whitney Kimball, "How Do People Feel About the Gramsci Monument?" Artcity, August 16, 2013. <http://artcity.com/2013/08/16/how-do-people-feel-about-the-gramsci-monument/>

¹¹⁰ William Cleveland, "Trials and Triumphs: Arts-Based Community Development." *Public Art Review* 13 (2001): 17–23.
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=aft&AN=504979347&site=ehost-live>.

This effort took years and thousands of dollars to complete. So, Cochran and his team focused on reaching out in multiple forms of communication, so he could really utilize the community's voices.

Hirschhorn, like Cochran, made an effort to communicate effectively with the residents of his artwork. Hirschhorn communicated through lectures and workshops at the monument, as well as the website devoted to the monument. In comparison, Cochran was more thorough in his communications. Cochran's use of mailers and surveys, to engage a variety of residents, could have been utilized for the *Gramsci Monument*.

Polly Brennan's *Avant-Gardening* is an arts and environmental project aimed at engaging all sectors of the community with environmental and sustainability issues through art, gardening and food. Brennan and her teammates created workshops and facilitated conversation. This is an ongoing project that has a number of chapters throughout the UK. *Avant-Gardening* has been operating since 2009 and has spread to different locations. This project made it clear that education, like lectures and workshops, can play a significant role in engaging community members in public artworks. Perhaps the workshops and lectures held in conjunction with the *Gramsci Monument* could have been designed or even led by the community members.

Avant-Gardening is an ongoing project, whereas *Gramsci Monument* was open for a predetermined window of time. It would be interesting to see, if given the opportunity, what the Forest Houses community would have done with the *Gramsci Monument* if Hirschhorn let them take full control of it after a certain amount of time. The community would have the autonomy to either continue it, dismantle it, or adjust it, and the monument could have functioned without Hirschhorn's direct involvement

When comparing these works of community art to Hirschhorn's piece, it is evident that Hirschhorn did many things that brought him success. He educated the community, he communicated with the community in multiple ways, and he utilized their perspectives along the way. If Hirschhorn had gone the next step further in all three of these strategies, he would have created an even more authentic experiential monument that truly empowered the community and connected with Gramscian ideals.

Conclusion:

Although critical responses to and the resident's experiences of the *Gramsci Monument* were generally positive, Hirschhorn's strategies could have been refined to better reflect Gramsci's philosophies. Collaboration, on the conceptual level, could have resulted in residents taking more ownership and would have truly empowered them.

Hirschhorn's use of "unshared authorship" plays a significant role in how the participating residents implement their own ideas to the *Gramsci Monument*. The idea of "unshared authorship" was confusing because the term sounds as if Hirschhorn was not willing to allow others to play the role of author in the production of this artwork. As mentioned earlier, Hirschhorn uses this term to express an idea that people have full autonomy, when the term itself sounds like Hirschhorn is not willing to share any degree of authorship. Not only does it sound confusing, but the idea of this full-autonomy is a fallacy though for a number of reasons. The full-autonomy is corrupted because of circumstantial power dynamics.

While the monetary compensation was a great incentive for the residents to join the construction crew, it also played a part in identifying roles and expectations between those

workers and Hirschhorn himself. Since they were being paid, they were expected to perform specific services. This employee-employer dynamic compromises the idea that everyone involved had full-autonomy. While some residents, like Lex Brown, experienced the value of the “coexistence approach,” other residents resented being asked to work in suboptimal conditions. . This prompted some residents to question if Hirschhorn actually cared about these residents or if it was just about his own artwork. Hirschhorn is clear that he was there to create an artistic expression, but the point is that if this artwork was truly produced under the system of coexistence and full-autonomy, then the crew members would have been able to stop working on their own accord.

Beyond typical employer/employee dynamic, Hirschhorn was also seen as the “boss” because of his level of success. He came into the Forest Houses environment as an internationally successful artist with an opportunity. Because of his experience, he was in a position of power compared to people in the community. This does not align with the Gramscian ideas about the issues with cultural hegemony that Hirschhorn preached to the Forest Houses community. The practice of “unshared authorship” and coexistence did not yield the authentic autonomy idealized by the *Gramsci Monument*’s namesake.

Figures



Figure 1. Thomas Hirschhorn. *Gramsci Monument*, 2013, Bronx, New York.
<https://www.diaart.net/gramsci-monument/page268.html>



Figure 2. Thomas Hirschhorn. *Gramsci Monument*, 2013, Bronx, New York.
<https://www.diaart.net/gramsci-monument/page268.html>



Figure 3. Thomas Hirschhorn. *Gramsci Monument*, 2013, Bronx, New York.
<https://www.diaart.net/gramsci-monument/page268.html>



Figure 4. Thomas Hirschhorn. *Gramsci Monument*, 2013, Bronx, New York.
<https://www.diaart.net/gramsci-monument/page268.html>



Figure 5. Thomas Hirschhorn. *Spinoza Monument*, 1999, Amsterdam, Netherlands.
<https://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/thomas-hirschhorn-interview-the-gramsci-monument-is-made-for-eternity>



Figure 6. Thomas Hirschhorn. *Deleuze Monument*, La Beauté, Avignon, 2000.
<https://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/thomas-hirschhorn-interview-the-gramsci-monument-is-made-for-eternity>

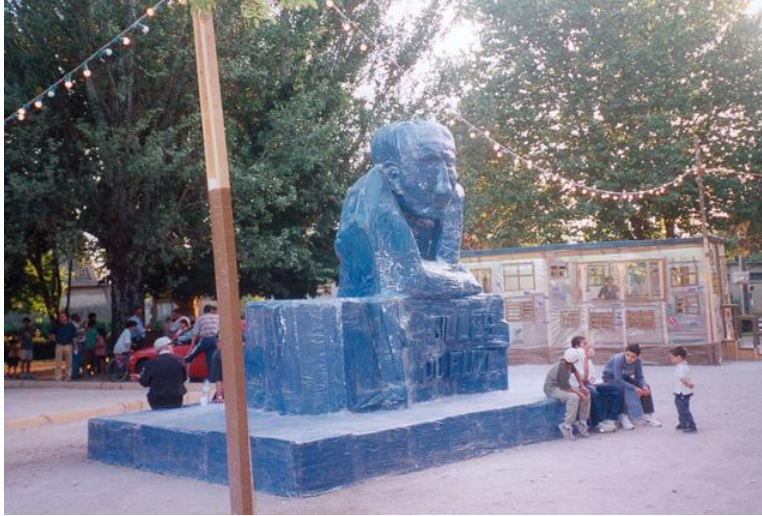


Figure 7. Thomas Hirschhorn. *Deleuze Monument*, 2000, Avignon, France.
<https://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/thomas-hirschhorn-interview-the-gramsci-monument-is-made-for-eternity>



Figure 8. Thomas Hirschhorn. *Bataille Monument*, 2002, Kassel, Germany.
https://library.artstor.org/#/asset/ARTSTOR_103_41822003721683



Figure 9. Thomas Hirschhorn. *Bataille Monument*, 2002, Kassel, Germany.
<https://the4libraries.wordpress.com/2014/01/11/thomas-hirschhorn-bataille-monument/>



Figure 10. Thomas Hirschhorn. *Gramsci Monument*, 2013, Bronx, New York.
<https://www.diaart.net/gramsci-monument/page268.html>



Figure 11. Thomas Hirschhorn. *Gramsci Monument*, 2013, Bronx, New York.
<https://www.diaart.net/gramsci-monument/page268.html>

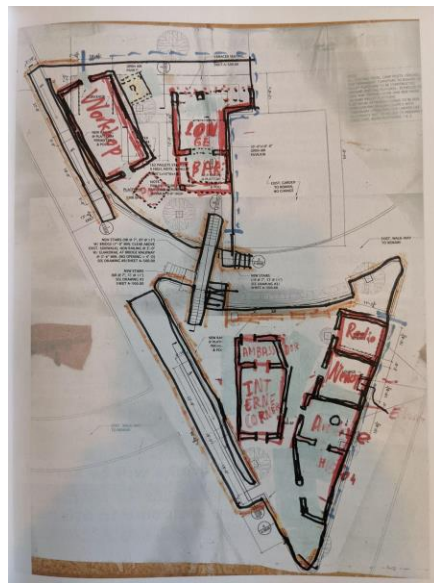


Figure 12. Thomas Hirschhorn. *Gramsci Monument Floor Plan*, 2013, Bronx, New York.
<https://www.diaart.net/gramsci-monument/page268.html>



Figure 13. OBAC. *Wall of Respect*, 1971, Chicago, Illinois.

https://www.jstor.org/stable/43496988?searchText=Black+Community+Involvement+as+a+Strategy+for+Overcoming+Barriers+to+African-American+Participation+in+Health+Research%E2%80%9494+What+Is+Community+Involvement&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3Fquery%3DBlack%2BCommunity%2BInvolvement%2Bas%2Ba%2Bstrategy%2Bfor%2BOvercoming%2BBarriers%2Bto%2BAfrican-American%2BParticipation%2Bin%2BHealth%2BResearch%25E2%2580%2594+What%2BIs%2BCommunity%2BInvolvement%253F%26so%3Drel&ab_segments=0%2FSYC-6398%2Fcontrol&refreqid=fastly-default%3A1d1d503919d5444881ce52b7e21bead1&seq=1



Figure 14. William Cochran. *Community Bridge Project*, 2007, Frederick, Maryland.

<https://web.p.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=4&sid=30f3495d-6947-48a4-a6e5-ab18566c2d2c%40redis>

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