

RETHINKING MARXISM

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MARCUS GREEN

GRAMSCI'S CONCEPT OF THE SUBALTERN

MARXISM AND WORKING-CLASS STUDIES

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[other ways / temporary occupations] Two video projects by Alex Villar focusing on everyday negotiations of social space. Both projects concentrate on ordinary acts of resistance and the possibility of their translation as dissent. The goal is to inflect the narrative conveyed by urban planning in the reverse direction of their formative subjectivization, accentuating a resistant potential that is already present in a residual state.

The video **[other ways]** shows a person walking through a variety of underground spaces, all located in the New York City subway. Not unlike a sequence of photographic stills on a filmstrip that simulates movement when played at a particular speed, the perception of bodies moving freely in these spaces is also the result of the acceptance of a given convention. That is to say, movement in public spaces exhibits a high degree of regularity. But the person shown in the video moves in adjacent relation to the paths designed for public flow, pursuing spaces that exist on the edge of the logic that organizes life in the city. The gaps that this body occupies usually result from inconsequential accidents in architectural planning; for example, negative spaces between columns, passages that lead nowhere, etc. Because of the existence of these spaces in an indistinct zone, such instants of incoherence or even redundancy in urban design provide an opportunity for rethinking the meaning of transitional public spaces. Without a doubt the logic that structures the organization of public spaces is particularized through the application of multiple subjectivizing codes; gender, race and class certainly count among them. It is, after all, characteristic of hegemony to operate in multiple registers. This theorization has corroborated the relevance of localized struggles, be it on a direct political level or on the mediated field of representation. Now, in order to operate effectively in the current context, which is marked by the dissolution of boundaries between inside and outside, it is necessary that a particular intervention sustain a metonymical linkage with a more general condition. This performative action should disrupt the apparent stability of the relational chain of significations that comprises the hegemonic system. Small spaces between things are not so different from spaces between words. Both spaces connect the parts around them. And, in both cases, there is the potentiality to alter signification. The insertion of a single character could change the meaning of the whole.



The [**other ways**] installation is comprised of a tubular structure wrapped in netting material that houses a video projection. The structure functions as a kind of provisional architecture. From the outside, it refers to a construction site—a site where work is ongoing. Once inside, the visitor has to negotiate the interior space with a scaffolding structure. **The previous page** shows the piece inside a shipping container which was parked on the outskirts of Chelsea in Manhattan, New York, 2001. It was part of a series of public projects curated by Sandra Skurvida and called Art Container. **This page** shows the installation at Galleri Tommy Lund in 2001. Installation photo on this page: courtesy of Galleri Tommy Lund, Copenhagen.





[temporary occupations] depicts a person running on the sidewalk in New York while ignoring the city's spatial codes and therefore resisting their effects upon the organization of everyday experience. The fenced spaces shown in the video are of a mildly functional order, most verge on the absurd. The logic behind their fencing departs from a desire to prevent these areas from being used by street dwellers. The performer does not try to propose ways in which the spaces could be used. The actions in the video simply articulate the continuity of these spaces with the remaining areas from which they were extricated, drawing attention to the boundaries that demarcate them. The video, as the straight line that the runner insists in pursuing, also deploys a linear structure. It presents a sequence of clips that range in subject from slight crossings to material trespassing. The change in the character of the actions is incremental, the transition between them gradual. In the process, a subject that starts by agreeing in a stoic manner with the limits set forth by fences and other delimiting devices ends up in the most outright demonstration of disobedience of the boundary that separates public from private property.





The [**temporary occupations**] installation recreates the situation the video depicts. Two parallel fences divide the space of a rectangular room. Both fences stop before meeting one of the walls, allowing the viewer to pass through the relatively narrow space between the two fences. The video is projected onto one of the fences, on rear screen material. The other fence is covered with a translucent black netting material. The video can be seen from the three sides of the fences. First

mediated by the obstruction caused by the netting, then very clear but too close and finally at an optimum distance but flipped because projected from the back. This series of detours in the viewing of the piece allow the viewer to negotiate a balance between the intellectual and performative dimensions of the experience. **This page and the next** show the opposite views of the installation at the Halle Für Kunst in Lüneburg, Germany, 2001. All installation photos: courtesy of Halle für Kunst.



[**other ways and temporary occupations**] are part of a long-term investigation of spaces of dissent in the urban environment. Grouped under the word de-tour, these video and photography mediated performative interventions have often taken the form of an exploration of negative spaces in architecture. Rather than a concept, that is, a term that contain what it describes, de-tour can be understood best as a thought that seats at the corner between intersecting arguments. It attempts to express the

meaning of conflicting relationships through the occupation of a constitutive gap. Similar projects can be seen on the de-tour archive at www.de-tour.org. Installation photos and video stills, unless otherwise noted, were taken by the artist.