

# THE GRAMSCI MONUMENT.



# NEWSPAPER

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



July 11th, 2013 - Forest Houses, Bronx, NY

The Gramsci Monument-Newspaper is part of the "Gramsci Monument", an artwork by Thomas Hirschhorn, produced by Dia Art Foundation in co-operation with Erik Farmer and the Residents of Forest Houses

## THAT'S BLAXPLOITATION!

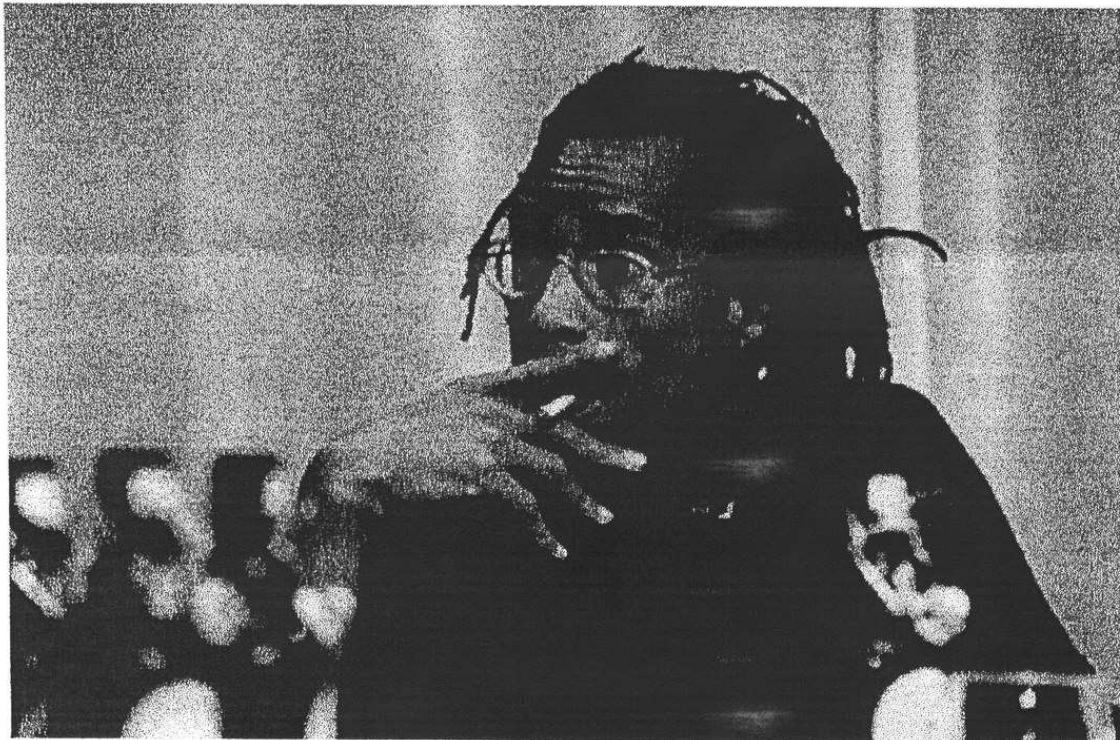


Photo courtesy of Darius James

Darius James. Dr. Snakeskin. The artist and author embraces both titles, but neither expresses the frenetic genius of the man himself. Born in Connecticut but raised at the intersection of Hoodoo culture and New York City's downtown literary scene, Darius James cut his teeth writing for various literary zines, as well as *Penthouse* magazine's "Ask Dr. Snakeskin" column. His first book, *Negrophobia: An Urban Parable* (1993), is the story of sixteen-year-old White teenager Bubbles Brazil and her frightening vision of African American culture. James's electrifying mix of screenplay, performance art, and poetry makes for a tasty gumbo that's sure to titillate your satirical palate. For his second book, the semi-autobiographical tome *That's Blaxploitation! Roots of the Baadasssss 'Tude* (1995), James mined the hazy days of his '70s youth. Through interviews with key figures in the blaxploitation genre and hilarious, pointed reviews of many blaxploitation films, James welcomes new-jack and seasoned fans alike.

Living in Berlin for the past ten years, James recently presented his new sound piece at a performance space in Brooklyn, New York, where I caught up with him. Over a few plastic cups of wine in between sets, I spoke with Mr. James about cinema and culture.

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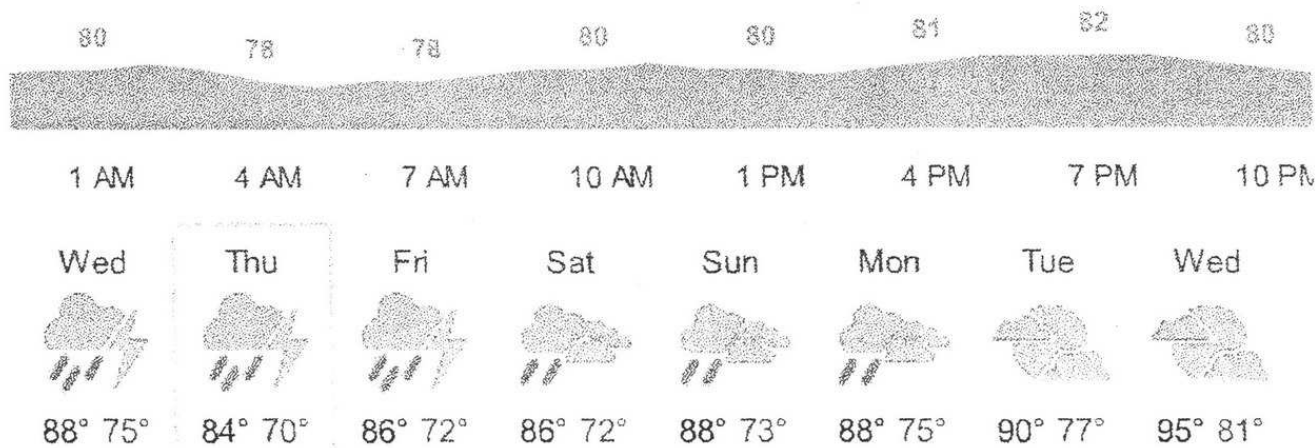
Bronx, NY 10456  
 Thursday  
 Thunderstorm



**84** °F | °C

Precipitation: 60%  
 Humidity: 65%  
 Wind: 9 mph

Temperature	Precipitation	Wind
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## INTERVIEW BETWEEN MELVIN VAN PEEBLES AND DARIUS JAMES

**MELVIN:** . . . I'm the world's greatest degenerate but I discovered a sly secret long ago: if you keep a modicum of sensibility about what you do, you can really eat shit. I hate running. I hate exercise. But I manage to stay in great shape, which allows you to do a lot of other things.

I like greasy food. And *rice*. You can keep the rest. That's all I'm interested in. That's what I eat so I have to pay the price. I'm up at five o'clock in the morning. Five-thirty I'm out of here.

**DARIUS:** Over the telephone, you said you started out as a writer. *The Story of a Three-Day Pass* was based on a novel you had written in France. And you were able to get your director's license there as a result. Had you written other novels prior to that?

**MELVIN:** Yeah.

**Melvin leaves the room and comes back with a photo book on cable cars in San Francisco.**

**DARIUS:** You used to be a cable-car operator in San Francisco?

**MELVIN:** Yeah.

**DARIUS:** And *The Big Cart* was your first book?

**MELVIN:** Yeah.

**DARIUS:** What years were you employed as a cable-car operator?

**MELVIN:** That would be about 1957. I was about twenty-five, twenty-six.

**DARIUS:** How long did you do this for?

**MELVIN:** I guess about a year.

**DARIUS:** So you came out of Chicago with aspirations of being a writer or a filmmaker?

**MELVIN:** *Oh, no no no no no no no!*

I came out of Chicago with aspirations of getting away. Just to get away from home. You didn't graduate out of the schools I came out of. You had to be big enough to climb over the walls.

I just left home and went to college. I didn't know sophisticated things like SATs or this, that and the other. Nobody in my family ever went to college. I didn't know that these cats passing out these tests were going to be giving me scores and stuff. [Warm chuckle.]

There was a nice guy who talked to me once when I was in

college. I was having financial trouble, you know? I had a partial scholarship and I mopped floors and things like that. This guy gave me seventy-five dollars a month just to study. That was great!

Except when I got out of college, he said: "Okay, now you're in the *Air Force!*"

*I was in the R.O.T.C.!* It was peace time and I didn't think there would be any more trouble. *Right!*

I was out of college thirteen days and I went into the Air Force as an officer. When I was twenty, I was already an officer. You didn't have to stay in long, just eighteen months.

They kept me three-and-a-half years. I learned the hard way.

**DARIUS:** Is the Air Force where you learned photographic and motion picture skills?

**MELVIN:** No. No, nothing like that. I was in radar for a bombardier navigator on a jet bomber. You see *Dr. Strangelove*?

**DARIUS:** Yeah.

**MELVIN:** That's what I used to do.

One day, I got tired of being inside. I lived in Mexico for a while where I was a portrait painter. Then I came back to the States. Even though I had a high specialty, the airlines wouldn't allow minorities into the cockpit so I ended up doing your basic old manual labor driving cable cars. And riding cable cars, people got on saying [speaking in the voice of a castrato Mickey Mouse], "Oooh! Oooh! Look this! Isn't this wonderful! I wish I knew more about this!"

I thought, *hmmmmmm* . . .

So I wrote an article and the article grew. I had taken some pictures and I put them all into a book and I published the book.

One day, somebody got on the cable car and said, "Oh, this is a marvelous book. How did you do this?"

"Well, I put some biography here and a photograph there . . ."

"Oh!" she said. "It's just like a film. You're a director!"

"Is that what that is?"

*Hmmmmmm* . . . so I made a movie. I made my first movie 'fifty-seven.

**DARIUS:** What was it called?

**MELVIN:** There were three of them, each shorts—I thought they were features. Each one turned out to be eleven minutes long.

I was trying to do features. I knew nothing. *Nothing!* You can even understand how *nothing* nothing is!

When I said to the guy, "I want to make a film," and the cat said "Well . . ."

Let's see if I remember what he said.

"Do you want to make it in sixteen or thirty-five?"

"What's that?"

"Millimeter."

"What's that?"

"Two feet or one foot wide."

"Which is better?"

"Thirty-five is more professional but I have a sixteen millimeter camera."

"So how long is a feature?" I had been going to triple features all my life.

"About ninety minutes."

"How much would that cost?"

"I don't know."

So I added it up and figured I could make a feature for five hundred dollars. That was the cost of ninety minutes of film.

I didn't know anything about shooting a film sixteen to one or ten to one or none of that shit. Then I forgot you had to develop film. And I didn't know you needed a work print. All I can say is that after I did one thing he would say, "Well, aren't you gonna put sound on it?"

And I would go, "Oh shit!"

That's all I could say.

"Oh shit! Oh shit!"

And my car—"Oh shit!" I haven't had a car since. My wife—"Oh shit!"—and I weren't getting along. All I could do was go—"Oh shit. Oh shit! Oh shit! Oh shit!"

When I finished those films, I took them down to Hollywood. I asked them for a job. They said, "Yeah, we can offer you a job."



"Really?"

"As an elevator operator."

"What do you mean? I want to *direct!*"

"Well, we'll get you a job dancing."

"*Dancing?* What the fuck I want with *dancing?*"

At that juncture, I went back to my second love, astronomy. I had been a celestial navigator along with my radar and physics and astronomy and all that crap. And I moved to Holland to study for my Ph.D. in astronomy.

On my way there, I had these films under my arm. I came here to New York to catch the boat because I couldn't afford a plane. Some guy took the films on rental and happened to show them in France.

And they said—"Jesus! This man's a genius! Where is he? He should be making films!"

"I think he's at the Cinémathèque!"

They didn't have Cinémathèques then like they do now. There was only one in France. The Cinémathèque wrote me a nice postcard, saying, *What are you doing? You should be making films!*

So I went to France. And they rolled out the red carpet. They took me to a screening room, showed my films. They came downstairs at the Champs Elysées. It was about nine o'clock at night. It was dark.

"*It's wonderful! You're a genius!*"

Everybody kissed me on both cheeks and drove off down the Champs Elysées. Left me with two cans of film, wet cheeks and not a fuckin' penny in my pocket.

**DARIUS:** And that's when you got a job translating *Mad* magazine into French.

**MELVIN:** I had to learn how to speak French first.

**DARIUS:** But, initially, weren't you writing in French?

**MELVIN:** Initially, I was begging.

I couldn't play an instrument so I got a kazoo. My big numbers were "La Bamba" and "Take Me, Tammy."

You know what's being said in the music magazines and all, this crap about how I invented rap? What happened was when I got back to the States, I was really taken by the fact that there were no protest songs by our folks. It was all Bob Dylan and Joan Baez.

**DARIUS:** There's Odetta . . .

**MELVIN:** They're singing the same songs but they weren't writing them the same way. There was Odetta and Richie Havens and so forth.

When I did it, what I wanted to say, the form didn't fit. So I said, "What the fuck, I'll do my own form."

At the time, people didn't know what to call it. "Well, it's spoken poetry." *No no no no no!*

In fact, there's a German term for it. It's called *sprachgesang*.<sup>2</sup> Each song I had done was a monologue and made up the play *Ain't Supposed To Die A Natural Death*—which did theatrically what *Sweetback* did cinematically. It broke a lot of barriers for us.

And also what happened was that the revolutionary message was pre-empted and became counter-revolutionary—subliminally counter-revolutionary—without people ever realizing. And it was still being hawked as a revolutionary message, i.e., *Shaft*.

Nothing like that had ever happened before *Sweetback*.

Being self-taught had its advantages. Since it was all new to me, I just did it the way I felt it should be done. Have you ever heard any of my early records?

**DARIUS:** Yeah. They used to play them on WYBC in New Haven Sunday afternoons. As I thumb through your books, I realize that this kind of work isn't really being done anymore. It had real impact. It was extremely influential. There were a number of people, including yourself, who were working in this radical mode. And it seems to have disappeared.

**MELVIN:** That got pre-empted into the full politicism of current rap and the almost-retro eighties macho attitude that's now been taken and passed back to young people.

**DARIUS:** In *Sweetback*, I thought what you were able to accomplish filmically was what The Last Poets were able to do orally. *Sweetback* is urban visual-poem.

**MELVIN:** That's why it's called *A Baadasssss Song*. My stuff pre-dated The Last Poets. I did that. And I knew The Last Poets. They began to use that form and it was great. The music to *Ain't Suppose to Die . . .* pre-dated *Sweetback*.

You see, I was always good at guerrilla warfare. I did not have enough money to do theater. I did not have enough money to do a double album, so I talked people into letting me do one album. Through the album, I then sold it as a play. I just did it step by step. None of this was immediate.

That's the deal. Learn how to do that.

Now, of course, there's a price. You're talking about my books and all. I own those things, the copyrights, etc.

Most people don't even know I'm a writer. Most people think of me as a filmmaker. Some people think of me as something else, theater people think of me as a theater man. But I'm primarily just a writer who got tired of getting dissed.

And *hmmmmmm . . .* I figured there's got to be a way of figuring this thing out and I did. Step by step.

For example, it's when somebody says you can. Like when my first book was compared to a movie.

**DARIUS:** One of the things that impressed me about the *Sweetback* phenomenon was the fact that Huey Newton devoted an entire issue of the Black Panther Party's newspaper to it when it first came out.

**MELVIN:** When all the niggas was running for cover, behind your an' shit, vis-à-vis the Panthers, I was saying the Panthers were great.

**Melvin walks off and returns with an album. He points to the caption on the back. It reads, Free Huey.**

**MELVIN:** My first album *Brer Soul*. This was long before *Sweetback*. All the lyrics are printed on the album. I got a phone call one day from a guy working at some bad boys schools here in New York. He said, "We've been trying to teach kids to read, and with your album they're reading because they're interested in what the words say."

**Melvin plays the album for me. Backed by minimalist Mingus-like music, it is "spoken-word" performance at its raw best. detachable MTV-penis here. This is the real shit.**

**DARIUS:** This is amazing. When *Brer Soul* came out with your Free Huey comment, what happened?

**MELVIN:** That was my thing. I didn't know of the Panthers or anything else. Everybody was ducking for cover. Those people who had a chance to say something weren't saying it. And I didn't give a shit.

They said I was going to lose sales but what's it all about, Al? You know what I mean? I'm saying what needs to be done. Later on, I was able to get contracts but this was before *Sweetback*.

**DARIUS:** A recurring theme in this discussion is that you present a particular kind of message in your work that is constantly co-opted and switched. Do you want to talk about that?

# AMBASSADOR'S CORNER YASMIL RAYMOND NOTE # 7

## Ambassador's Note 7

By now there is the appearance that a certain routine has been established at the monument. Janet unlocks all the pavilions and turns on the lights, fans and air conditioners a quarter to ten o'clock. The team at the bar prepares coffee and improvises breakfast according to their mood. The librarian Marcella replaces the daily rose and checks for water leaks in the exhibition space. Lakesha, one of the newspaper editors is always the first to arrive to the newsroom, she prints the daily issue and stacks the desk in my "office." Thomas can be found either on stage preparing the banner for the main event of the day or updating the information on the boards. And at the radio station Phil sets up the equipment and prepares to go on "air" by 11 am. The children have also figured out their own flow, there is a group that walks straight to the Internet Corner to secure a computer while the rest march to the Workshop for Lex's daily art class. With this informal choreography, a kind of "warm up" the form is restored to the monument on a daily basis. Put differently, the nature of social life itself is a reconstruction, situations are constantly surfacing, something or someone needs attention, a problem arises and needs to be resolved, and a position needs to be rearticulated. The monument seems to be regularly actualizing itself, self-producing and self-referencing its own present in a sequences of spontaneous movements and improvisations. All the parts can be readjusted.



# A DAILY LECTURE BY MARCUS STEINWEG

11th Lecture at the Gramsci Monument, The Bronx, NYC: 11th July 2013

ON DERRIDA

Marcus Steinweg

Deconstruction — the procedure to which Derrida has given this name, which is irreducible to a law, a principle or a method and is therefore always a singular procedure — has always appeared as self-deconstruction, as deconstruction of the selfness of the self and the same by this self. From the outset it is the name of a self-complication that describes the movement of self-development and self-distancing in one. Therefore, the self-deconstruction of a self through itself is the moment of a certain madness, of a terrifying and uncanny aporia. It is the ghostly moment of a suicidal resurrection, the moment of a self-surviving of a self that experiences itself as the witness and object of its de-selfing, as the object of a desubjectivization. The self-deconstruction of the subject is perhaps nothing other than the subjectivity of this subject. It abandons the subject to the *perhaps as such* (if one can say such a thing), a transcendental or quasi-transcendental *perhaps* about which Derrida says in his *Politiques de l'amitié* that it belongs to a "vocabulary that must remain essentially alien to philosophy, to philosophy, that is, to certainty, to truth, indeed to veracity".<sup>1</sup> The *perhaps* allows philosophy to step outside the domain of traditional concepts of certainty and truth and abandons it to the frenzy of undecidability. It demands of the subject of philosophy that it traverses, transgresses and surpasses itself, its own, in order, in the act of this traversal and transgression, to persist as the 'subject' of the experience of a certain self-dissolution. The experience of the *perhaps* would be even more than the experience of the loss of self-certainty, the experience of the persistence of what dissolves and vanishes. In the *perhaps*, a non-substantial, non-Cartesian, non-cogitating subject of self-transgression or self-surpassing is announced which has broken with the modern idea of consciousness. The *perhaps* destabilizes and unsettles philosophy, causing it to become divided within itself. It puts philosophy into a commotion by marking the event of a sustained disturbance. It inscribes a radical incongruity into the idea of a philosophy which followed a more or less consistent Plato-Aristoteleanism of the one, the true and the good in order finally to recognize this following as its history. It thus inscribes a radical incongruity into philosophy itself.

Now it is important to know that this incongruity, which is another name for the self-inequality or the abyss of negativity, originally belongs to philosophy or metaphysics as such, sometimes as something which has remained unknown to it, sometimes as a part of it which is denied, contested and fought against. It seems that this *perhaps* indicates the taboo law at the heart of the logos. 'Law' before the law that is condemned to renouncing by definition the name, 'law', because it itself is the name of that which precedes the logic of naming, the logic of name-giving and the name itself, the sameness of the name and everything named as its *opening up*. "No response and responsibility will ever be able to abolish this *perhaps*, [...] this *perhaps*, which can no longer be determined as a doubting or sceptical *perhaps*, the *perhaps* of that which remains to be thought, done, lived (in extremis). This *perhaps* does not only come *before* the question (the investigation, the research, knowledge, theory, philosophy); it would even precede that originary assent by virtue of which, in anticipation, the question has already been assented and committed to the other."<sup>2</sup> Obviously, from its origin, philosophy is given over to the dimension of this *perhaps*, to the logic of an otherness that precedes the concept of the other, the self-identity of the other with itself. No matter how much it remains embedded in the history of knowledge in general, in the historicity of the true and the asserting of truth, in the presence of its phenomenal manifestations, the primordially of the *perhaps* seems to wrench it from time as such. The *perhaps* would correspond, even more than to the beginning of time (and to the recollection and multiplication of this beginning as *history*) to an unrest transgressing space-time and any time-space — to a 'time' that does not cease to resist its elimination in concepts, spatializations and temporalizations. The *perhaps* therefore does not outline any beyond (of time or of space); rather, it is the rule of an otherness without contour that refuses the logic of the other, of its identifying fixation in dialectical contradiction. It refers to a beyond without beyond, to a heterogeneity dedicated to the *here-and-now*.

This heterogeneity can be given the name of *inequality*. Inequality is the element of philosophy. Because inequality exists there is something to be thought. Because the world — the spectrum of

institutionalized realities — is a world of unequals (not only of unequal subjects), it is not only a living space but a space of thinking opening up the possibility of holding up one reality against another in order to hand over the subject to the manifold of unequals, in order to expose it to the chaos of irreducible multiplicities which is the subject's proper living space. Any promise of coherence, any hope of identification and non-ambiguity, of equality and self-equality, of sameness, remains open to the *chaos of unequals* that grinds up the logic of a lack of contradiction. And yet, no thinking can rely on chaos by making itself into chaos, by articulating itself as chaotic thinking. Thinking that gathers courage to traverse the desert of unequals includes a minimum of orientation in hypothetical, if not axiomatic, consistencies. It is indebted to a minimal consistency that preserves it from being shot through by the incommensurable, thus becoming impossible. Before the incommensurable takes possession of thinking, the thinking subject has inscribed a commensurable resistance into the incommensurable, thus a resistance which, from the side of the incommensurable, itself seems incommensurable. Thinking is not only a confrontation with the incommensurable, the *desert of inequality*; it is an affront to it insofar as it presents itself as resistant against destruction. Deleuze & Guattari have said the same thing about the chaos which philosophy, art and science (the *chaoids*) confront by simultaneously withdrawing from it.<sup>3</sup> The double movement of opening and closing in relation to chaos is the movement of a thinking that attributes to the *world* (to the totality of being) a higher complexity than do obscurantism and scientism. The thinking of inequality reveals itself to be a thinking that asserts minimal inequalities, infinitesimal consistencies over the abyss of the incommensurable. Thinking includes this assertion of resistance that makes of its subject a subject of assertion that withdraws from the power of the incommensurable and the violence of opinions in order to rely on nothing but this minimal consistency which makes of it a thinking, this almost-nothing of identifiability, this nameless quantum of energy. It makes sense to call this almost-nothing *equality*, an equality that interrupts the incommensurable by inscribing in it a measure that makes it itself identifiable *ex negativo*. In the negative light of minimal consistencies, the incommensurable gains a forbidden legibility which it will not cease to contradict because the incommensurable is the name of that which must remain illegible and indecipherable in order to be *itself* the principle of an impossible sameness, equality and identity. Obviously, in order to be thinking at all, thinking must resist these two conformisms that threaten to assimilate it to the space of established philosophemes: 1. The conformism of equality that withdraws from being locked out by ontological inequality or incommensurability instead of confronting it. 2. The conformism of an inequality whose purified shape raises it to the phantasm of difference that is without any connection with reality, without any exchange with the world as it is known to us, without reference within the domain of familiarities of the always shared and communicated context zone called reality.

Both conformisms suppress the complexity of a thinking that keeps itself up to the mark of the irreducible conflict between the knowable and the unknowable, the measurable and the incommensurable, the equal and the unequal. There is no thinking at all that could bend to the temptation of such simplifications. The rigour of any thinking lies in the refusal of all simplifications that stop it before it begins to rise, for the beginning of thinking will not have been concord or consensus. Simplification, however, works toward the consensual levelling of differences which are the lasting tinder for thinking. Thinking includes the moment that it refuses, on the one hand, the option to become assimilated to a quietist conformism of a conjuring of reality (of the obscurantism of facts), and on the other hand, the adoration of impossibility which is the monumentalization and sacralization of an absolute difference in order to articulate itself along the separating line between the two alternatives as a decisive affirmation of their compossibility. There is no thinking that could be anything other than a *thinking of the possible* or of *the impossible*. Any thinking deserving the name derives its tension from the conflict in these constructions while it affirms this conflict as incommensurability proper, as the difference-of identity and difference.

# GRAMSCI THEATER WRITTEN BY MARCUS STEINWEG

## SCENE 4: DEATH

(The location of the scenes is to be announced by an actor holding up a sign, in this case "IN THE FUTURE.")

Enter: Duras, Gramsci, Müller, Lacan, Brecht

DURAS  
Let us look at atrocity, at death.

GRAMSCI  
No one wants to die as a consumer.  
Money opposes death.  
So money devours death by producing the dead.

MÜLLER  
Humankind simply can't cope with its shit!

LACAN  
Like I said!  
Shit is what differentiates man from animals!

BRECHT  
Money shits money.  
Money shits on death.

GRAMSCI  
Capitalism as a cesspool.

BRECHT  
Capitalism that shits the dead.  
Capitalism is a shit house.

GRAMSCI  
But a house.

DURAS  
At least a house.

GRAMSCI  
A prison is a house, too.  
A mortuary.

BRECHT  
You should know.

## MATERIAL 4: VIRTUAL ECONOMY

The virtualization and fictionalization of the economy, the termination in 1973 of the Bretton Woods Agreements which led to the uncoupling of the world of finance from a system of fixed exchange rates and the gold standard, its openness toward aneconomic factors and self-unbounding toward inconsistency, toward a "regime of free-floating signifiers with no anchor or measure, unsecured by a transcendental signified," which takes place in the "transition from commodity money to credit money, from backed to unbacked currency systems" (Joseph Vogl), corresponds to the philosophical self-

## SCENE 5: THE DESERT GROWS

(The location of the scenes is to be announced by an actor holding up a sign, in this case "IN THE PRESENT.")

Enter: Gramsci, Duras, Kluge, Nietzsche

GRAMSCI  
God is narcissistic.  
God is the void.  
God is money that circles around itself.  
Egocentric money.

DURAS  
Money needs man as little as God does.

GRAMSCI  
There is no beyond of narcissism.

KLUGE  
Here we stand. That is the situation.

NIETZSCHE  
The desert grows.  
In which a dead man is resurrected.

DURAS  
Let the world perish—that is the only politics.  
The world should go and meet its downfall.

"REFRAIN" SPOKEN BY SEVERAL OR ALL OF THE ACTORS  
God survived on the capital markets.  
God is not dead.

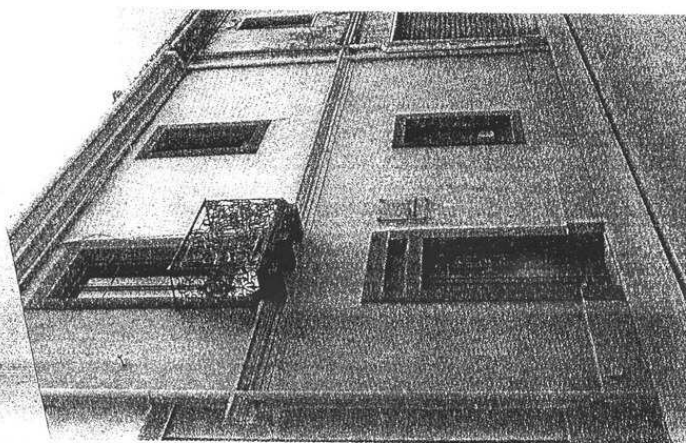
## MATERIAL 5: WORLD THEATER

God is dead, the transcendental subject and the grand other do not exist, which means that the absolute guarantor of consistency—the bank with inexhaustible reserves—does not exist, or only as a player in a world theater that negotiates its *realities*—its evidences and consistencies, its symbolic and economic valences, i.e. the entirety of its *facts*—above the abyss of ontological inconsistency, instead of manifesting them within a divine horizon of meaning.

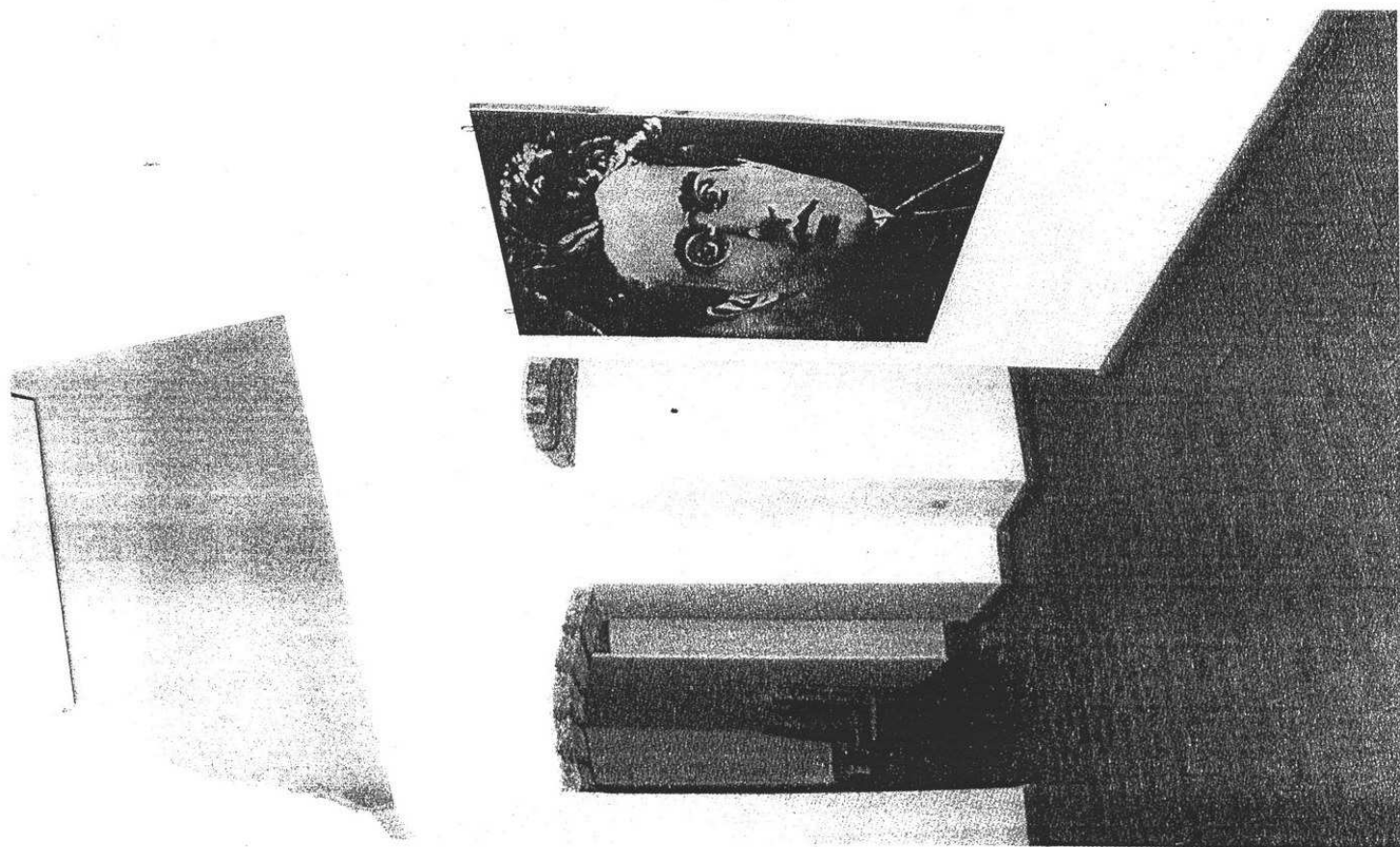
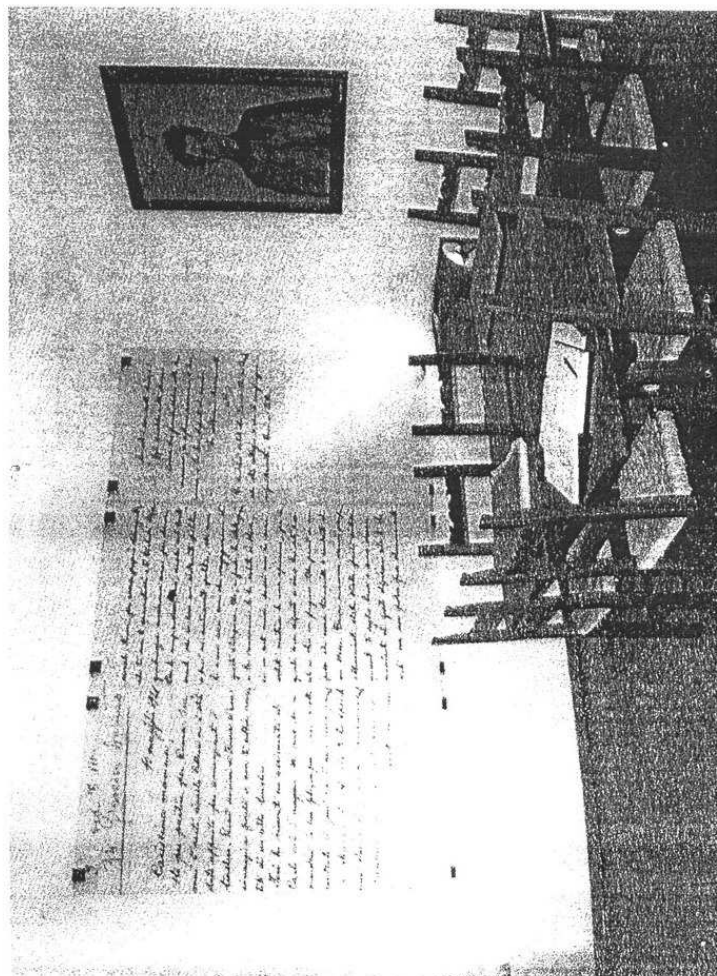


# PICTURES OF CASA GRAMSCI- ANTONIO GRAMSCI'S HOUSE IN GHILERZA, SARDEGNA, ITALIA.

36. *La Casa Gramsci oggi.*



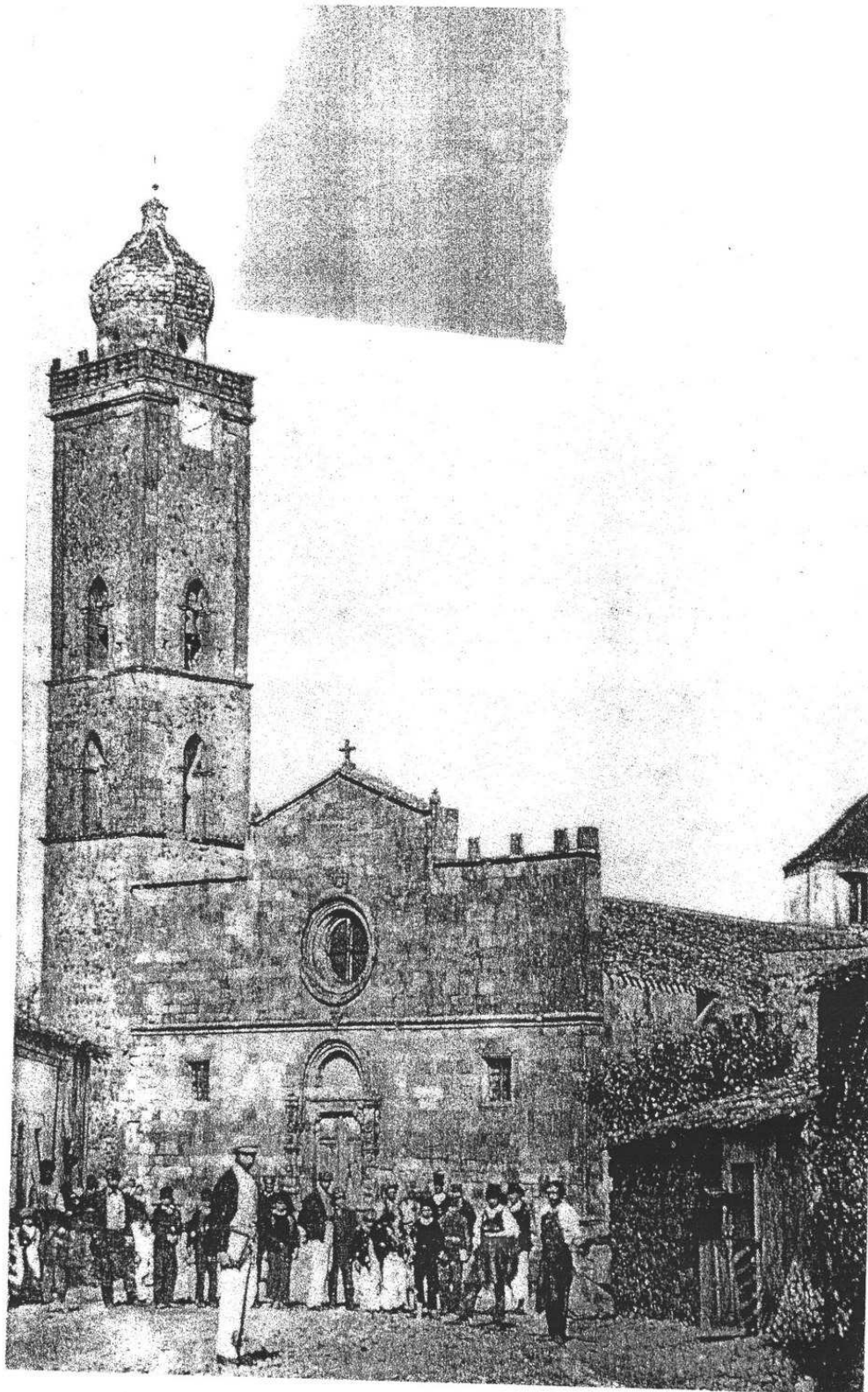
37. *La sala con alla parete  
la copia anastatica della lettera  
scritta da Gramsci alla madre  
il 10 maggio 1928.*



35. *L'ingresso della Casa Gramsci.*



# PICTURES OF ANTONIO GRAMSCI FAMILY CHURCH

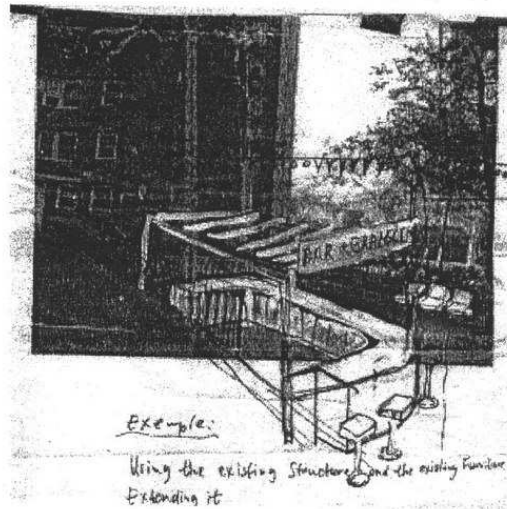


ANTONIO GRAMSCI FAMILY WERE CATHOLIC  
HE WAS ALSO BORN CATHOLIC AND LATER  
TURN ATHEIST.

# FEED BACK OF THE DAY!

## 'Thomas Hirschhorn: Gramsci Monument' at Forest Houses

By Maika Pollack 7/09 2:59pm



Preparatory drawing by Hirschhorn for the 'Gramsci Monument.' (© Thomas Hirschhorn/Dia)

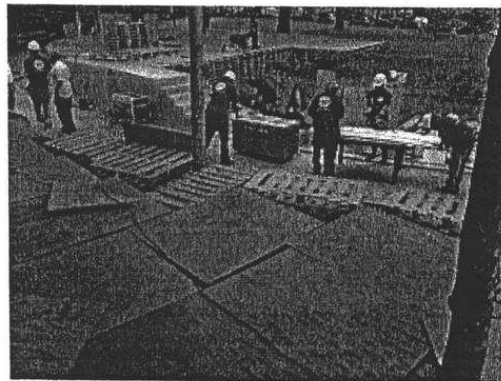
I visited Thomas Hirschhorn's *Gramsci Monument* as a skeptic. The artwork, dedicated to the 20th-century Italian political theorist Antonio Gramsci and located in the Forest Houses project in the South Bronx, sounded awfully theoretical—art meant to be experienced on paper, like something dreamt up by students of the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program. The *New Yorker* in me wondered if the politics of Mr. Hirschhorn's placement of high art in the South Bronx weren't condescending to our city, as if we New Yorkers lacked locally grown heroes and needed a Swiss artist to import an obscure Italian revolutionary for our collective edification.

Surrounded by rainbow-colored flags, it was initially hard to tell if I had located *Gramsci Monument* or stumbled across a children's birthday celebration. A sprawling, treehouse-like structure fashioned largely from plywood and packing tape, it is located in the center of 15 residential towers where the rent averages \$436 a month. The Dia Art Foundation, which commissioned the project, reportedly paid residents of Forest Houses \$12 an hour to build it (no construction background required).

Inside, Styrofoam cups caught water percolating through the wet roofs from recent summer rainstorms, and boards creaked across the bridge joining the structure's two sections. There are computers, food, an art center replete with supplies ("flag-making class today!" read a spray-painted sign—house font style is freehand spray paint), a lecture area, and a makeshift exhibition on Gramsci, where a wooden comb, felt slippers and other items from his 1930s imprisonment are on display. In the "Internet corner," a half-dozen kids played video games.

Furniture upholstered with duct tape and small AC units and fans made the rooms surprisingly comfortable despite the heat. One room holds a well-appointed collection of books lent by the Italian American Institute at CUNY's Queens College (sample title: *Fascism in Italy: Its Development and Influence*). In another section of the structure, editors assembled a daily free newspaper with scissors and rubber cement and a pirate radio station, modeled on Italian political pirate radio and Japanese micro radio stations, broadcast light jazz. There is an in-house librarian (Bronx native Marcella Paradise) and a cafe (\$5 bought a lunch of stewed chicken and rice).

There was a full roster of activities. I had missed the morning's excursion (a field trip to Dia Beacon), but could still catch a lecture, "Art Between Immanence and Transcendence," at 5 p.m. *Gramsci Monument* looks less like a traditional work of art than a bustling makeshift community center.

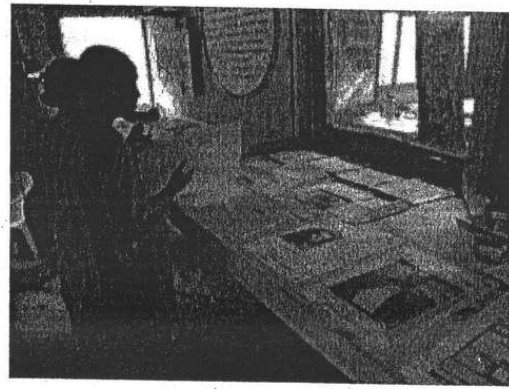


The construction of the work. (© Thomas Hirschhorn/Dia)



# FEED BACK OF THE DAY!

But Mr. Hirschhorn is not putting on the kind of interactive spectacle offered by artists like Carsten Höller or often found in programs at PS1 or the New Museum. His earnest work has none of Liam Gillick's hands-off participatory pizzazz. There is instead in his project some of the omnivorous bricolage of Kurt Schwitters's *Merzbau* (1933) and some of the self-created street-salvaged fiction of Claes Oldenburg's *The Street* (1960) and *The Store* (1961). Mr. Hirschhorn's best-known edict, "Energy=Yes! Quality=No," captures *Gramsci Monument's* enthusiastic DIY aesthetic. And the project's egalitarian approach channels the spirit of the late, idealistic German artist Joseph Beuys. Here, complementing Gramsci's belief that "every human being is an intellectual," is Beuys's dictum, "Every human being is an artist." Driving this point home and echoing Beuys's policy of admitting anyone to his art academy, Mr. Hirschhorn, who is living in the Bronx all summer, is teaching art classes at *Gramsci Monument* every Friday, to all comers.



The newspaper production room. (© Thomas Hirschhorn/Dia)

Mr. Hirschhorn has an admirable way with people. Although his English is not perfect, he is intensely present in every person's experience of his sculpture—making art with kids, talking about the project with visitors, fussing over the leaks in the roofs and timesheets with the staff. (He tirelessly oversees every aspect of this artwork, which seems to depend on his presence to inflect it with the intended meaning.) And the people who work at *Gramsci Monument*, in turn, are kind and supportive hosts to the earnest, mildly fanatical alien who has landed in their midst. In fact, his

charismatic utopianism benefits unduly from his being an outsider to the forces of race and class that make a trip to the South Bronx more *Bonfire of the Vanities* than Art Basel for most of us. As you negotiate the encounters you have at *Gramsci Monument*, you are ultimately forced to question who you are and what you are doing there. This is interesting, although when you think about it, a well-meaning, idealistic and well-funded European man telling a group of ordinary nonwhite folks to work on a monument to a hero of his own choosing is really nothing new.

Mr. Hirschhorn has made monuments (and altars, and "kiosks") dedicated to other cultural and political figures, among them Georges Bataille, Baruch Spinoza, Gilles Deleuze, Piet Mondrian, Raymond Carver, Robert Walser and Meret Oppenheim. But he does not claim to be an academic or a political theorist, and he will tell you that these things are "pure art." He does what he does well—a great deal of thought has been put into the execution of *Gramsci Monument*, and in his work with community members there is earnestness, goodwill and genuine commitment. In its own way, his art proposes a model of resistance to dominant modes of structuring contemporary social relations. As art, it is a fascinating project. Whether or not his efforts represent or can effect real change is, of course, another matter altogether, and one on which I remain a skeptic. (Through Sept. 15, 2013)

PHENOMENAL WOMAN BY MAYA ANGELOU

Pretty women wonder where my secret lies.  
I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion model's size  
But when I start to tell them,  
They think I'm telling lies.  
I say,  
It's in the reach of my arms  
The span of my hips,  
The stride of my step,  
The curl of my lips.  
I'm a woman  
Phenomenally.  
Phenomenal woman,  
That's me.

I walk into a room  
Just as cool as you please,  
And to a man,  
The fellows stand or  
Fall down on their knees.  
Then they swarm around me,  
A hive of honey bees.  
I say,  
It's the fire in my eyes,  
And the flash of my teeth,  
The swing in my waist,  
And the joy in my feet.  
I'm a woman  
Phenomenally.  
Phenomenal woman,  
That's me.

Men themselves have wondered  
What they see in me.  
They try so much  
But they can't touch  
My inner mystery.  
When I try to show them  
They say they still can't see.  
I say,  
It's in the arch of my back,  
The sun of my smile,  
The ride of my breasts,  
The grace of my style.  
I'm a woman

Phenomenally.  
Phenomenal woman,  
That's me.

Now you understand  
Just why my head's not bowed.  
I don't shout or jump about  
Or have to talk real loud.  
When you see me passing  
It ought to make you proud.  
I say,  
It's in the click of my heels,  
The bend of my hair,  
the palm of my hand,  
The need of my care,  
'Cause I'm a woman  
Phenomenally.  
Phenomenal woman,  
That's me

POEM OF THE DAY BY  
MAYA ANGELOU

