

UNDER WHAT CONDITIONS DO BLACK POETS WRITE

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i.

what

what

what what

what what

whatwhatwhat

what

wut?

that context

that conditions

that conditions were ripe

right

right conditions

ripe

ripe conditions

 those conditions

 those right conditions

 that conditions can be right

 that conditions can be ripe

 that black

 that black conditions

also black poets

also conditions for black poets

also conditions under which black poets & only black poets

also conditions that are right

right ones

ripe ones
just ones
right ones
exact ones
sliced ones
diced ones
presented-on-a-plate ones
so pretty
are we allowed to eat these?

ii.

it was the right time
for sure it was the right time
fated time
destiny & such
 the guests were ushered in
 doors shut
 lectern set up like way before time
 introductions made
 drinks dranked
 drinks held
 (some drinks hoped for that would never arrive but that will never be the point)

& then it was night
& night time was glad time
& glad time was time for poetry

it was the right time
this night time
this night when the glass door at the gallery
kept the black
night out
kept
the unsavoury ones
the poor ones
the ignorant ones

the unknowing ones
the stupid ones
the silent ones
the silent ones
the silent ones
the ones that couldn't/ shouldn't be there
at bay

it was just us
us who wanted to be there
just us inside the glass doors
or us that were curious — what's going on here

it was a poet's night
tonight
it was a poet's night
a poet's rite
write
right
come
sit down
join us
crack open a beer
cheers
let's listen to a poet

the glass door at the back of the gallery won't reflect the moon
the glass door refracts the light from the lamp post
into tiny shards
spinning & glittery & beautiful
against the black night outside
inside the introductions are done
& guests are ready
to take it all in
listen:
under what conditions do black poets write?

iii.

see here
this kind of design is called tribal design
i don't know why
they're just tribal you know
like tribal
look at the simple lines & dot markings
it's nothing sophisticated you know
like you know
like

usually line dots are just that
line dots
you know
tribal patterns
like rows of chairs
like chairs in rows at the art gallery
like rows in chairs at the art gallery

they get them
the designs
the tribal designs
they get them
off of the floor
off of the sand
off of the sky
off of nature, you know?
you know right?
on to cloth
on to the page
simple stuff
good for the soul stuff
like chairs
like rows in rows
like rows in chairs

at the art gallery
good replication
makes good design
the replication
the replication
the replication is easy when it's tribal you know
like this
like this one also
like this one on the page
like this one on a cloth
pattern design tribal design
replication by a south african designer
who claims
you know
that slavery was such a long time ago
you know
& the layout of the ships
in replication
makes such a pretty pattern
you know that right?

iv.

it had to come to pass
& so now was the right time
& just like that
it was the right time nigger
it was the right time nigger
like who the hell do you think you are
like do you know who i am
like call the cops
like i'm not scared of the cops
like whatever motherfucker i listen to *wutang*
like whatever man i love rap & jazz
like whatever man rap saved my life
not like this shit not like you motherfucker

like nigger
like nigger
like nigger
like go back to where you came from
i ain't scared of the cops
like like like like like
bitch

the conditions were ripe
the spit against the glass door shimmered
a celebration of light against the shards
light on glass
a lamp post illuminates the street
to ward off the bad guys
to keep them at bay

V.

what the hell
what the fuck
a man lives
walks out of the gallery
intact & unhurt

don't fucking touch me he says
& no one fucking touches him
this is not the place
where others might have beat the shit out of him
he who walks out of the gallery
intact & unhurt

what these are
are the right conditions
the ripe ones
like context
like punctuation
like long nights & short days on a calendar

repetition
design
basic time
management
like basic patterns
like tribal patterns
like chairs & chairs of rows
like dotted lines on a page
a lectern
a poet marked by a dot
already introduced
like who are you
like where are you from
like what

vi.

it may be material
or materiality
or knowledge production
or brilliance
or black arts
perhaps conditions
perhaps this perhaps that

what are the conditions under which black poets
write right rite write rite
what are the rites of writing
the right writing
writhe writhe writhe squirm shift
autocorrect wutang as whiting
autocorrect a fucking gain
wutang as whiting
but
black is cool
black is beautiful

black is power
like the night sky beyond the glass door at the gallery
aesthetics black life context poetry jazz
like fred moten's animateriality
sectioned sliced diced time right time rite time
fuck

Postscript

In the fall of 2015, American poet & philosopher, Fred Moten, came for a visit in Vancouver. Poet, scholar, and professor of English, Phaniel Antwi introduced Fred in a gorgeous essay with the most awesome title: "Under What Conditions Do Black Poets Write; Or, When You, a Black Poet, Are Asked to Introduce Another Black Poet (a mentor you have never met) On Short Notice And You Have No Time – You Still Say Yes Because (1) You Want Your Mentor to Feel Welcomed in a City With Not Many Black Poets and People, or, Perhaps, More Accurately, (2) You Want Your Mentor to Feel Welcomed to an Event Where You Know There Won't be Many Black People in Attendance."

& then the evening unfolded.

Much appreciation & love to Cecily Nicholson who was there & bore the brunt of the initial force of a man's words. Gratitude to Andrea Actis for her care & offering a home to this poem at *TCR*.