

# 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*.