

Blackness and Futurity: Malcolm X

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It is by way of futurity as passage, by motionless erudition, that we, today, are now about to exist in the future. What incalculable suffering that remains wrought in the historicity of Black Nationalism, what contorted reproachment supposedly brought back, or to, from the Hajj, against the horizon of America's dialectical fantasy. What's at stake is an interior reckoning that is irreconcilable and inconsolable, the inability to push against or through the hedonic excess of temporality that abstracts Malcolm's blackness from the meaning of our lives. What's at stake, to invoke Aime Cesaire, is the "never exhausted thought"¹, which is blackness.

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It turns out, for Black Nationalism, that Malcolm's militancy and dissent² were, necessarily, mutually inclusive to its general incompleteness. Dissent, here, means the reclamation of loss in the hollow zone at the epicentre of Black Nationalism's political sentiment. Malcolm's ideological angle, to the extent that he maligned American political life, in the context of futurity, or *work*, cannot be characterised any longer as de/re(con)structive in its separatist valour. Both pathways are set about by the futurity of work, by what it means to be existing and not exist yet. Whatever position upheld by the [socio-]political, [socio-]economic apparatuses instantiated to relieve the conscious strife of African-Americans (the abstinence based drug rehabilitation initiatives circulated in the ghettos for example), Black Nationalism's own socio-relationality preceded any irrational suspicion of a utopian ideal as an imposition to the paradigm of America's auto/onto-theo-constitutional veneration; its socio-ethical imperative precluded any inkling of affirmative exclusion on the part of black Muslims; deterred what spiritual self-internment the black populous felt impossible to deface; and vied against the *de facto*, real isolationist norm of the everyday threat of anti-blackness. Black Nationalism's [socio-]ethical alignment to African-Americans was already ante-dialectical, sutured into the nomos of "political death"³. It was not at all intent on advancing a secular world view through the negation of [inter]action. Its activity, under its principled ethic, instead exhausted, or worked, the futurity of political death in, through and as social life. Whatever denigrations are conferred upon Black Nationalism's logic, Malcolm ultimately propounded and exceeded it from the outset in and as a symptom of a failing, consistently inadequate diagnostic in America's attempt to mitigate an intolerable history of race relations; he promulgated its immediate conditions to reveal the world in its complicity, in how it felt, in how it has always felt to have been like, in how it will feel like if it remained. Black Nationalism

¹ Aime Cesaire, *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land*: Aime Cesaire, The Collected Poetry, University of California Press, 1983.

² I'm referring here, with "militancy and dissent" to a talk I headed on the topic discussing 'Malcolm's Militancy and the Dissent of Black Nationalism', organised and convened by the ReSister's Reading Group.

³ Fred Moten, 'Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)'.

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was not a deferred socio/proto-political ideology by virtue of its unabiding dissent, but because Malcolm enabled it, by way of dissent, to return to work's incompleteness, to go back to a "time without finality"⁴, to the pure spatiality of no time and no place, where work can occur, where our futurity is, where blackness comes to us in, through, as and by way of the presence of nothing, back to what Aime Cesaire would call "non-time"⁵.

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The problem Malcolm poses for us today broadly pertains to the understanding of *what it means to be a problem*, to what discontents distastefully enable us to hold ourselves up as our own problem to work on. It means to embrace that which is sojourned and suppressed by the camouflage of the daily lexis, to emphatically call out the unacknowledged corpse in the street, the black bodies swinging, to call myself out as the onto-epistemological, para-empirical totem of social death, to admit, to echo what James Baldwin would call, the intellectual "shock"⁶ of *being a/the problem before you discover that you are a/the problem*. In discovering that you are the problem at the core of America's collective unconscious means more than to come to know the other better than they know themselves. It entails holding yourself up as the other's futurity, as their ethical apparition, in acting up. To act up, in the non-performance of protest, is to force an entry in the spirit of misbehaving; it means to refuse what is given in the refusal, which is the subterfuge of sovereignty, the idea of home, of somewhere else to go; to inhabit forgone terrain so to treading some porous soil, to turn some leaky corner. It means to refuse that very thing we are prohibited from claiming, that very thing which is said not to belong to us, but would otherwise be inconceivable, uninhabitable, even unspeakable, without the muted anguish of millions of African-Americans, which is home. That which we are discouraged from extricating is something we can't give back. What we can't give back is what we are in. What ensues is what was prophesied in our advent that Malcolm sought to lay. And to pine for any excursion of the illicit articulation, in and as dehiscence⁷, is to be *at the threshold of both disclosure and concealment*. We, who are thee, are that which Malcolm disclosed, that which was concealed to him. We "his they"⁸, who were struck out all along. Being in(between) this place, which is not a place, gets to me in another kind of demand: to come to know the other as not myself, to get ahead of who I am, not to a futurity that is not just said to not belong to me, but which has not arrived yet, which is, along with Malcolm, held out into [the] nothing⁹, to hold myself out as [the] nothing, outside of existence, as existence's futuration, from within the bareness of being¹⁰ that black people are, at once, impoverished and mobilised by. This exercise in futuration, the reappraisal of the state of being about to exist, of being in the future, is the inalienable spirit of *work*. Work imbues the presence of the thing we are forced to acknowledge and work with in its material afterlife. Work invokes the flesh of the thing, the renewed brevity for the feel of the thing, in the locutions the necropolis of the muse of

⁴ Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*.

⁵ Aime Cesaire, *Lagoon Calendar*, 'Lyric and Dramatic Poetry'.

⁶ Referring to the televised debate at Cambridge University between James Baldwin and William Buckley.

⁷ A concept of Maurice Merleau-Ponty meaning an outcry.

⁸ Nathaniel Mackey, *Irritable Mystic*.

⁹ Martin Heidegger, *What Is Metaphysics?*

¹⁰ The "bareness of being" in Hegel's *Phenomenology* is precisely what self-consciousness detracts from.

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history¹¹ prevail over and against what lively homogenous moral strictures are in place to contort the astonishment of the thing.

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Malcolm's leave to the Hajj is vital. A series of circumstantial instances placed him within a worldly, proximal corporeality, a rich hapticality¹² of the flesh, with an illuminated, emphatic sense of fungibility more external than what reciprocity could provide. Where reciprocity, the vehicle for recognition, is, to its own freely detestable demise, non-exchangeable, the one who lives for recognition nullifies, in the end, from the start, the capacity to attain a freedom independent of the body. He frequents the times he was met with unconditional hospitality and appreciation on behalf of Muslims across complexion and convention. Which is to say, as a prominent black presence outside of America, Malcolm no longer felt to be the spectacle. The spectacle reinforces, all at once, the subordination of the Many to the One, the inherent congeniality of the One, the *anonymity of ritual* displayed in and by the Many against the spectacle of the One as subdued presence, movement in stasis, lynched body, muted anguish, (meta)physical extradition. Being the spectacle precludes, but also conditions by way of this preclusion, *the movement of the heart*, in which the heart refuses a metaphysical loneliness in freedom, to, instead, find its preordained despondence in that which it is estranged from, which is, exactly, the matter of life, heart of the matter, where the sphere of human influence takes place, which is blackness. Loneliness does not invoke the premise, by, through and from existing frameworks of exclusion, that nothing is ever completely excluded on the basis of the being-in-the-world of black people; it means to bring the outside in. Here, the otherness, the blackness, of the other can't be known to, or as, a subject dialectically, as an/the absolute intentional object of and for [self-]consciousness, but through a *working out from within* the modes of interdiction that any dialectic already imposes before the other, through such [an] "absence or excess [...] given to us only in and by way of a kind of failure or inadequacy—or, perhaps more precisely, by way of a history of exclusion, serial expulsion, presence's ongoing taking of leave—so that the non-attainment of meaning or ontology, of source or origin, is the only way to approach the thing [the black/the other] in its informal (enformed/enforming, as opposed to formless), material totality"¹³. Work, working out from within, means to get ahead of the other, which is you. Work itself works itself out of this time, our time, into the spatiality of non-time, into blackness, compresses time into something to have and to hold—to let go.

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Work is rendered both troubling and illuminating in the figures that mark Malcolm out as a disembodied subject. One is the field nigger, the slave whose work never ends, whose condition of possibility comes from work, and for which the work s/he did is the work we are now forced to examine, the work which was Black Nationalism's, and which is now our

¹¹ *The Muse of History* is the title of an essay by Derek Walcott in his book of essays 'What the Twilight Says'.

¹² Fred Moten, *The Undercommons*.

¹³ Fred Moten, 'The Case of Blackness'.

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futurition. The other comes by way of the metaphysics of the castrated one as impotent progenitor, giving rise *to action in action*, as *inaction*¹⁴, generative incompleteness, in h/er lesser but irreducible body, in h/er hypervisibility, where s/he becomes more than what and who they are, and more than what or who they could ever be. Both constitute, and are derived from, the background of Michel Henry's "hyle"¹⁵, the raw (un)constituted mass, unrefined quanta—the pure possibility of what is purely possible—what Will Alexander would call “unstudied purity”¹⁶—the estranged matter at hand, the elided heart of the matter, the work that still needs to be done, which is the work that blackness enables us to resume. Malcolm's work, which is our work, was to get us to *come together to learn how to be together*. We have to keep on learning how to be together by getting together and staying together in happenstance. We have to get together and stay together to learn how not to be One, to understand what it means to be more and less than One. We have to get together for and with those for whom we love, whom we would want to love, whom we can't be with, whom we will never meet or know, but for whom “the earth would not be the earth”¹⁷.

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Blackness in the ethics of what separation works to proliferate its incompleteness, its modes of futurity, its futurition that grants our posture and begs us to come together and differ as One.

Blackness in the One of/in the Many. The Oneness of/in the Many. The other's One, who is not my One, in the anonymity of ritual. The suspension of that or this or my One at the threshold of disclosure and concealment, the One held out into the nothing, in the coming together of blackness, to reveal the rest of us.

Blackness in and of the movement of the heart that moves us to the matter at hand, which is us, that the coming together, made possible by the apositionality the field nigger and the castrated ones enable, in what material afterlife in the futurity of things in their purely iridescent, encrusted edges, illuminate.

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¹⁴ Arthur Schopenhauer describes his will in *The World as Will and Representation* as “giving rise to both its world and its actions” and “omnipotent”.

¹⁵ Michel Henry, *Material Phenomenology*.

¹⁶ Will Alexander, *Kaleidoscopic Omniscience*.

¹⁷ Aime Cesaire, *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land*.