

Fred Moten, from /B Jenkins/

barbara lee

[THE POETICS OF POLITICAL FORM]

Even since Plato, some poets remain surprised that they don't run shit, that they ain't even citizens. But black poetry suffers its politics of non-exclusion. Abide with this distress for the deformative and reformative stress, the non-normative benefits, the improper property of the ones who have been owned, who are without interests, who are feared, who disappear in plain, escaped, unfree.

Counterinsurgency only ever offs the possibility incompletely. A state of race war has existed with its immense poetry of tread water, worked ground, houses sawed in half. That's where the socially off hold on, try to enjoy themselves.

There is a history of the embrace of degraded pleasure. Poetry responds, cantedly, to the slander of motivation. Poetically man dwells, amped, right next to the buried market, at the club underneath the quay, changing the repeat, thrown like a new thing, planning to refuse until the next jam, at a time to be determined and fled.

Poetry investigates new ways for people to get together and do stuff in the open, in secret. Poetry enacts and tells the open secret. Getting together and doing stuff is a technical term that means X. Something going on at the sight and sound center of sweet political form.

[ STATEMENT IN OPPOSITION ]

speaker, members,  
heavy, but risen  
against muted,  
I had to rely on  
the inside songs.  
welcome to the same  
new world. I, the  
runaway, say don't go  
off. somebody blew  
us up. welcome  
to the state of  
mourning. come  
look at the difficult  
broken flesh. stay  
a little while. don't  
let him do what  
he just did. suffer  
with me tonight  
in my native hue.  
I want to be the  
opposite.

[THE UNACKNOWLEDGED LEGISLATOR]

According to Shelley, poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world. Let's say the world is a zone from and within which life is constantly escaping. Poets sing the form of that endless running, that ongoing running on, always busting out of the sentence or cutting being-sentenced; but those broken songs, even in their incessant breaking away, cannot but bear the heavy burden of being-held. At stake, here, is a complex of weighted departure, of flight in seizure, of an emergent statelessness submerged beneath the state of emergency. There's always a trace on the ones who want to go. Nevertheless, unacknowledged legislators sing diversion out of turn. They instigate small passages. Their envois strive to more than correspond.

Somewhere between being one of the elect and having been elected, the unacknowledged legislator operates on the edge of things, resisting that desire for inclusion that eviscerates politics-as-the-politics of escape. When brutal attacks on the simultaneously real and symbolic centers of brutal power constitute a reactive, reactionary chance to open the books of legitimate anti-politics, so that associates can become made men, the unacknowledged legislator chooses to remain unmade and unacknowledged. The maker remains unmade even when she is subjected, momentarily, to the glaring hyper-visibility intermittently trained on the ones whose differences periodically re-initialize ante-politics. Veering off from state-sanctioned rhetorical reserves and out of national pseudo-humanist discursive frames, her sound reveals that she is thinking and, therefore, marginal; and that she keeps thinking about what it means to be on the outskirts or part of the outwork of the Republic. But she is, at the same time, constrained to offer her musicked speech in the already given idiom of anti-politics. Her veering off from and out of occurs inside, in the name of that other, outer interiority. So she turns what is turned against into a vestibule, an ante-room. She takes this turn in a cramped, cracked stanza, homelessly

acting like she at home by taking flight, held still in forced movement. That weight compels the unacknowledged legislator to love (the way to get to) what hasn't happened yet, to care for the way what hasn't happened yet is in the midst and on the edge of its negation, to turn in and on negation's language until it comes out, if not comes out right, as ante-nation language.

This language that is before the nation is, finally, more than international. In this sense, unacknowledged legislators aspire to be real ambassadors. The ante-national language of diplomacy is a bent poetics in which the one who inhabits a history of displacement speaks the ethics that attend that history by way of interstitial jargon, tones and fragments that get under the skin of the standard, words and phrases that slip or seep into the underground of the *patria*, that re-emerge as a set of broken claims to patriotism or a set of claims breaking patriotism, depending on how you hear. This off- or sub- or super-standard poetics links political speech to songs for *distingué* lovers or other such distressed, seemingly simple gifts. What is left to the listeners, the strangers, the ones who will have gone on to practice or to rehearse this music, this poetry, this poetics, is a general responsibility of advance, where what it is to move on is all about having gone back into and under the ark of displaced social life, that outer space structured by inner sound, which is where the poetics of political form lives, where that poetics takes up and is taken up by its life, which is a form of life, cloaked, clothed, veiled, given in a sumptuary law of motion. The unacknowledged legislator is ante-American, secreted in the raiment that loved flesh secretes. This aura of the dispossessed is owned shade, claimed shadow, the wrapt shawl of the poor.

The unacknowledged legislator is Barbara Lee.

Fred Moten, from The Service porch

### it's not that I want to say

It's not that I want to say that poetry is disconnected from having something to say; it's just that everything I want to say eludes me. But if I caught it I wouldn't want it and you wouldn't want it either. Maybe poetry is what happens on the bus between wanting and having. I used to think it was what happened on the bus between oakland and berkeley. And it was, too, like violet texas in people voices, all kinda subtle transmission broke off by stops and bells, repercussive riding, mobile contact, slow symposium. Now, even in the absence of my office, I still want to move and so I have to move but never get there in this whole extended region of not being there, of stopping and saying not here, not here, and of that being, in the end, pretty much all I have to say. What I want to say is that having something to say is subordinate in the work of being true to the social life in somebody else's sound and grammar, its placement in my head, my placement in the collective head as it moves on down the line. The itinerant ensemble arrangement of the 40, and sometimes of the 15, is where I started studying how to live in poetry. I want to transfer study as a practice of revision on the edge, where ethics and aesthetics are in parallel play. Some kind of homeless shift between reading and writing that emerges in a set as our cut-up schedule, a willow's diverse list of things, point to point restlessness, interlocking schemes of material breaks, the constantly renewed syllabus of a new composers guild in the middle of enjoying itself. What we come together to try to do starts to look like what we do when we come together to enjoy ourselves, handing saying what we want for one another to one another in and out of words.