

**UNTITLED.  
(1-5)**

**Nazareth Hassan**



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## Nazareth Hassan names his sorrows

### *Introduction by Tavia Nyong'o*

*Untitled. (1-5)* is the score to a new and needed ritual. Its arrival gives our aggrieved and grieving chorus another opportunity for a "great shout," to quote Nazareth Hassan quoting Frantz Fanon.<sup>1</sup> It is a shout that rises up out of our common need to expel the violence at the scene of our making, which is also the scene of our everyday remaking and unmaking. It is not, as Fanon insists, a black shout, but it may be, as Zakiyyah Iman Jackson amends, a black(ened) one.<sup>2</sup> From what depths does the pollution of this violence arise? How do we survive the catastrophe of its climate?<sup>3</sup> And, what happens when we drag the collective breath to the ragged edge where the last particles of this pollution get exhaled?

Hassan has written a Black litany that is also a Black liturgy. *Untitled. (1-5)* is a chanting down of Babylon without and Babylon within. It takes the staccato collapses of composure under duress, and drums them into a crazy rhythm. This is a chant that wields laughter against comedy, but preserves the humor within the grotesque. It gradually builds sound into a wave that crashes over any remaining threadbare notions of a sovereign self.

For night cares nothing for we humans;  
as neither do pine, nor wave,  
nor the lunatic stars  
contemplate our names or sorrows.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by Richard Philcox. New York: Grove Press, 2008. Original French Edition 1952, 13.

<sup>2</sup> Jackson, Zakiyyah Iman. *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiracist World*. New York: New York University Press, 2020, 3.

<sup>3</sup> On racism and/as the weather, see Sharpe, Christina. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Duke University Press, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> D. Rubin Green, "Names and Sorrows" in Essex Hemphill, ed., *Brother to Brother: New Writings by Black Gay Men* (Boston: Alyson, 1991), 62.

These lines from a poem in the germinal anthology *Brother to Brother* returned to me when reading Hassan's introductory essay. In his essay, Hassan conjures with the shade of Ralph Ellison's invisible man to extoll a "real, unwavering invisibility" that is far beyond the insecure conformism that we most often mistake for invisibility. Like D. Rubin Green's lament to his lover, this idealization of inexistence can be a tough pill to swallow. Tougher than, I think Hassan might agree with me, the currently fashionable preference for 'social death,' a preference which still chains the subject to a desire to be historical. In the will to invisibility there is, by contrast, a full-throated desire to be erased, a desire I would liken to the way *becoming-imperceptible* is described in the writings of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.<sup>5</sup> For the ritual of *Untitled. (1-5)* is not a ritual of sacrifice, nor does it produce a sociopolitical subject as its outcome. In its movements, we are thrown somewhere beyond racial abjection and martyrology. This performance score takes up the torque of language on a Black tongue as if it were throwing paint on a canvas, or soldering metal into sculpture. It is not representing anything or anyone. It is projecting figures, figures that are blasted onto a landscape capable of receiving the imprint of just about anything but the uchromatic blackness of being.<sup>6</sup>

I welcome this exhilarating new conductor of voices to the scene of our re-masking. For a ritual can also be a portal to elsewhere, a signpost to that fabled underground railroad. But then, I've already probably said too much...

5 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (New York and London: Continuum, 2001), 232-309.

6 See my blog post: Tavia Nyong'o, "Black Survival in the Uchromatic Dark." *The Feminist Wire* (blog), 18 2012. <https://thefeministwire.com/2012/12/black-survival-in-the-uchromatic-dark/>.

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Thank y'all so much.

## essay

I can sit on the train and pretend I'm invisible, but I know I'm lying. To myself. To everyone else. I will never be as invisible as I want to be. I don't want you all thinking I want to be invisible because I feel sorry for myself. I actually love myself quite a bit more than I ever have. I also want to acknowledge the amount of work it takes to love yourself after spending the majority of your life not loving yourself as much as you should. It takes tenacity, and I have tenacity, so don't feel sorry for me.

On the contrary, you should feel happy for me. I feel happy for me. I have discovered a new sense of me inside my desire to be invisible, and we all know what it takes to reinvent oneself. I don't feel it necessary to explain how its different because I feel its inherently true if you think about it hard enough. It's just clear.

I think people assume wanting to be invisible is to acquiesce to the world's grip. I'm sure that is true for some of us who are weaker than others and haven't developed the skills to be the self they can be destined to be. But for me, being invisible takes as much strength as being the center of attention. People are predisposed to want to be either invisible or the center of attention, the star, but both take some grooming and practice to perfect. To be the star, one has to channel the adrenaline that comes as a survival mechanism and turn it into positive energy. The fact that the star can stand in front of a huge group of other humans is against our nature. What we call stage fright is really our fear for our bodily safety. The star is outnumbered, and everyone who's watching knows it. I guess it takes restraint from the watchers to not ravage the star for their valuables. To not gut the star and eat their bowels is harder than anyone can consciously calculate.

I have respect for the star for this reason, and I think most of you also do. It is almost inhuman to overcome that level of fear in the body, and people make a living doing it. I would like to ask you all to extend that respect to the people who crave invisibility as well. Everyone loves the star because they exhibit strength most of us do not possess. We all believe we have the strength to be invisible because the feeling of invisibility has been simulated throughout much of our lives. We have all, at one point, felt alone or unheard. We have all believed our thoughts would pass in and out of our heads without ever making a dent in the frame of the world. This is not true invisibility.

Real, unwavering invisibility requires a desire to no longer exist. I am not implying death, for in death, the memory of you still exists in the hearts of loved ones, in the minds of enemies, and in the souls of one's inevitable followers. Depending on the framework of a given society, rejecting existence can look like a lot of things. In the society I belong to, it means to be apolitical. This does not mean to be uninvolved in the governmental and societal goings on. It means refusing to define oneself by the given hierarchy of power.

I still want my body. I still crave sound mind. I still want to run into the ocean and come back out alive. I still want to take drugs and dance through the night. But I want it without the mirror that has been placed behind my eyes. I can't escape that mirror. Really no one can, but there are bodies that become aware of that mirror much younger than others, mostly for safety. These bodies must keep their eyes on the mirror at all times to make sure they are playing well enough with others to keep on living. The mirror becomes the lens through which these bodies enjoy life, process information, hold conversation, eat, sleep, shit, masturbate. This mirror is political. Don't look away from this mirror or the illusion of control will slip from your hands.

## Untitled. (1-5)



All I know is that anyone who tries to read in my eyes anything but perpetual questioning won't see a thing—neither gratitude nor hatred. And if I utter a great shout, it won't be black.  
—Franz Fanon

And it begins, he walks outside for a cigarette break and thinks, “how many cigarettes does it take?”  
...It ain't your fault, you want identity.  
—Q-tip

Might invisibility be regarded not simply as a refuge, but as a condition with its own meaning and power?...The impulse to escape notice is not about complacent isolation or senseless conformity, but about maintaining identity, propriety, autonomy, and voice.  
—Akiko Busch

## Ppl

6 performers (1 2 3 4 5 6)

All performers are blk

You may cast performers of any age,  
but I encourage a wide age range  
they should all be dressed neutrally and exactly the same.

## Space

A neutral space  
with 6 mics

## Notes

Lines down the side of the page are time passing.

Focus on the rhythm. Create your own. Make music of this piece.

This piece is as much for the actors as it is for the audience. Both parties should be in a trance by the end. lol.

Stage directions

(Actor directions/asides)

Speech is represented by a dash (- speech) or in a column.

Speech with dashes demarcates the separation of lines. You can decide who says each dashed line.

## Black Man Laughing in the Dark

965,955 views



On The Body.

- On the body.

light

darkness

sounds of skin on hard surfaces

bare feet?

face?

slapslapslap

sounds of stifled breath

sounds of moisture

sounds of crusts falling

sounds of synchronization

of breath

of bones

of thought

sounds of disjointment

sounds of holding

sounds of the individual