

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

White Skin, Black Masks?

Robert Wood · Wednesday, September 30th, 2015

When [Bernie Sanders](#) was pushed from a Seattle stage by Black Lives Matter activists in August, I wondered about the efficacy of the action. That one speaker called the crowd ‘white supremacist liberals’ seemed only to highlight a misreading and a disjuncture. Could these activists have done damage to someone who is in a functional solidarity with them regardless of his subject position and in so doing alienated important allies? What was the opportunity cost of interrupting this politician rather than say occupying a cop shop, bank or courthouse? This is not at all a question of disrupting the narrative or of acknowledging the problems of liberalism, rather than a question of effective actions.

To be sure there is a historical tradition of the left that sees itself as having many fractions and fissures, factions and in-fighting. And that is born out by various –isms particularly when they were more pronounced in decades past. But that might be to misread all of politics – the right is full of fighting too. It might only be that people on the left often do not read as much about what conservatives are up to. That the ‘60s in the West dominates our conceptual understandings of what constitutes the polis is problematic too. Where did the pop understanding of the ‘30s go? But in the aestheticisation, adolescence and capitulation of the ‘60s we might do better to recover a certain utopianism rather than rely on a past-directed knowledge that seeks to submerge such impulses.

For poetry that means genuinely imagining what kind of artistic and political world we want to live in, and not simply as a negation. Outlining visions of poetry will depend of course on one’s past as much as it will depend on one’s situation. In the same week that Sanders was pushed off the mic, the Mongrel Coalition Against Gringpo (MCAG) gave its most extensive interview yet to [Brooklyn Magazine](#). It read with energy, but was typically lacking.

To be sure there is a kind of propulsive force to the Mongrel Coalition’s propaganda, but in its particular turns of phrase, its repetitive banalities, its textbook protest it relies on cliché (especially formal) and in so doing aestheticises politics, tending as Walter Benjamin would have it, to fascism. That it wields a denunciatory authority, utilising ‘with us/against us’ rhetoric, all with a secretive almost paranoid anonymity recalls some iteration of an authoritarian, totalitarian regime. Marinetti is alive again, just not as we know him.

When asked, one of their stated goals was ‘decolonisation’. A thorough going decolonisation might find sympathy in the Mongrel Coalition, but the Coalition still functions within and as part of the superpower of our times. That the Coalition has failed to re-cognise its nationalism is curious.

Even in transnationalism the state matters, maybe especially so. As someone who lives in a ‘minor outlying island’, ‘a colony’, ‘a follower’ the assumptive insularity of their discourse is troubling. They are inescapably American. They are part of the soft power corollary to the hard power occupation of our country.

Elsewhere they stated ‘of course MCAG is not the only way to fight back.’ To even suggest as much is to open up the possibility that such a view is a possibility, and that this is a type of permission, a sanctioning that allows others to go on their way. Why thank you Mongrel Coalition for allowing me to do so. This is only to highlight what I mentioned earlier – that their totalizing authority warrants interrogation.

Of course, MCAG is prepared for this, claiming:

*Nota: AGAINST POC WHO ALIGN WITH WHITENESS TO GAIN AND EXERT POWER. AGAINST POC WHO FLAUNT THEIR OTHERNESS AS CAREERIST CAPITAL, BUT REFUSE TO ENGAGE IN THE “DRAMA” OF FIGHTING WHITE SUPREMACY. AGAINST POC WHO PLAY THE GAME AND ARE THEREFORE COMPLICIT. AGAINST POC WHO SELF-SILENCE/SILENCE OTHER’S RAGE AND MOURNING.

The irony of this statement does not need unpacking, especially for a materialist and person of colour like myself. Authenticity is valued. Embodiment is valued. Authority is sacrosanct. MCAG claims an essentialising legitimacy that shuts down the space for people of colour to dissent against their hegemony. That the editors closed the ‘comments section on this post at the MCAG’s request’ seems only to highlight the point.

While the left cannibalises itself, the prize on offer shrinks, walks away, hides. With all the energies directed here, there is no need to counter the hegemonic lyricism, the government malfeasance, the political corruption. While a credible opposition fights each other, the capitalists, the supremacists, the real enemy grows stronger and stronger. I’m proud to be a person of colour. I’m proud to be a union member. I’m proud to work with Indigenous organisations. I’m proud to name myself and my work. In other words, I’m proud to be responsible. That Mongrel Coalition is not begs the question of whether they have as much relevance as they have so far been accorded. But let it be said, we are not each others’ enemies.

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