

To feel, to feel more, to feel more than

Fred Moten

1.

I think I share a certain evangelical obsession with Ben Hall. Somebody gave us something, some joker gave us a reefer, and I hope he won't mind me saying that we want to give you some. Or that he won't mind my trying to be an instrument—because he doesn't need me to be his instrument, no matter how much I want to be his instrument—through which he gives you some. See if you can see and hear and feel certain passages in and of a collective head arrangement, as if Lygia Clark were touring with a territory band.

2.

Now I have one radio-phonograph; I plan to have five. There is a certain acoustical deadness in my hole, and when I have music I want to feel

its vibration, not only with my ear but with my whole body. I'd like to hear five recordings of Louis Armstrong playing and singing "What Did I Do to Be so Black and Blue" -- all at the same time. Sometimes now I listen to Louis while I have my favorite dessert of vanilla ice cream and sloe gin. I pour the red liquid over the white mound, watching it glisten and the vapor rising as Louis bends that military instrument into a beam of lyrical sound. Perhaps I like Louis Armstrong because he's made poetry out of being invisible. I think it must be because he's unaware that he is invisible. And my own grasp of invisibility aids me to understand his music. Once when I asked for a

cigarette, some jokers gave me a reefer, which I lighted when I got home and sat listening to my phonograph. It was a strange evening. Invisibility, let me explain, gives one a slightly different sense of time, you're never quite on the beat. Sometimes you're ahead and sometimes behind. Instead of the swift and imperceptible flowing of time, you are aware of its nodes, those points where time stands still or from which it leaps ahead. And you slip into the breaks and look around. That's what you hear vaguely in Louis' music.

I went toward the microphone where Brother Jack himself waited, entering the spot of light that surrounded me like a seamless cage of stainless steel. I halted. The light was so strong that I could no longer see the audience, the bowl of human faces. It was as though a semi-transparent curtain had dropped between us, but through which they could see me -- for they were applauding -- without themselves being seen.

"May I confess?" I shouted. "You are my friends. We share a common disinheritance, and it's said that confession is good for the soul. Have I your permission?"

"Your batting .500, Brother," the voice called.

There was a stir behind me. I waited until it was quiet and hurried on.

"Silence is consent," I said, "so I'll have it out, I'll confess it!" My shoulders were squared, my chin thrust forward and my eyes focused straight into the light. "Something strange and miraculous and

transforming is taking place in me right now . . . as I stand here before you!"

I could feel the words forming themselves, slowly falling into place. The light seemed to boil opalescently, like liquid soap shaken gently in a bottle.

"Let me describe it. It is something odd. It's something that I'm sure I'd never experience anywhere else in the world. I feel your eyes upon me. I hear the pulse of your breathing. And now, at this moment, with your black and white eyes upon me, I feel . . . I feel . . ."

I stumbled in a stillness so complete that I could hear the gears of the huge clock mounted somewhere on the balcony gnawing upon time.

"What is it, son, what do you feel?" a shrill voice cried.

My voice fell to a husky whisper, "I feel, I feel suddenly that I have become more human. Do you understand? More human. Not that I have become a man, for I was born a man. But that I am more human. I feel strong, I feel able to get things done! I feel that I can see sharp and clear and far down the dim corridor of history and in it I can hear the footsteps of militant fraternity! No, wait, let me confess . . . I feel the urge to affirm my feelings . . . I feel that here, after a long and desperate and uncommonly blind journey, I have come home . . . Home! With your eyes upon me I feel that I've found my true family! My true people! My true country! I am a new citizen of the country of your vision, a native of your fraternal land. I feel that here tonight, in this old arena, the new is being born and the vital old revived. In each of you, in me, in us all.<sup>1</sup>

3.

How to remain human. Does anything remain of the human? Should anything

remain of the human? How might we animate the remains of the human? How can we enact the remainder? In *Invisible Man* the question concerns intermittent moments in which, somehow, one feels more human. And the question is: can one feel more human? Can one be human? Or is one, is the very idea of one, a constraint that is placed on human feeling and humanness so profound as to only leave the transient possibility, given in certain thwarted experiences or strained celebrations of (the) mass, of a feeling more human that is also immediately an index of being less. What if what both *Invisible Man* and *Invisible Man* meant to say was that at that moment he/it was feeling more than human? And what if his recess, its retreat, their anchoritic withdrawal is just a further attempt to renew the capacity to feel more (than) human? That's where Louis Armstrong comes in; that's where Ben Hall comes in again, to carry out a prescriptive fantasy. This blur, this blue entanglement in seriality, the song that is more and less than one, as Nate Mackey says in his ongoing and glorious preface

4.

If one is human, as a matter of sheer biological determination, then to feel more human, which is given only in the experience of having been made to feel less human, is, in fact to feel more than human, which is given, in turn, only in the experience of having been made to feel less than human. What if the human is nothing other than this constancy of being both more and less than itself? What if all that remains of the human, now, is this realization? What if the only thing that matches the absolute necessity of remaining human is the absolute brutality of remaining human? Is there any escape from the interplay of brutality and necessity? Serially excessive of itself in falling short of itself, brutally imposing the necessity of its retention as the only justification and modality of its retention,

the human is only ever visible as the more than complete incompleteness from which it cannot quite be seen. Invisible Man marks and is the blindness and insight of this impossible point of view. Invisible Man can't quite see when he tells us how he feels; and when he tells us how he feels he does so by way of a paradox that is contained by the very feeling that it cannot quite approach. All we know about what it is to feel, to feel suddenly that one has become more human, is that it is to feel immeasurably more than that. The immeasurable, here, denotes every earthliness that remains unregulated by human distinction and distinctiveness. At stake is the sheer, slurred, smeared, swarmed seriality of mechanical buzz, horticultural blur, geometrical blend, an induced feeling's indeterminate seeing Ben Hall musically instantiates in his art. The sound of Let the gallery's held logisticality explode into the Brotherhood's improper displacement. Give a sign. Shake a hand. Dance.

5.

Charismata—the gift of spirit of which Cedric Robinson and Erica Edwards teach—is conferred upon the one who cannot see by the ones who see him, in their hearing of him, in the touch of their eyes and the feel of their ears. It's as if he fades into their senses, them, the ones who in being so much more and less than one can only be figured by science as the mob. To be held in what is called the mob's embrace, in the wound and blessing of their shared, accursed sensorium, is to be made unaware of one's own invisibility—to feel, to feel more, to feel more than. Can you hold one another tonight in the blur, so that one and another are no more? A table is prepared for your common unawareness, for the disinheritance you might not know you long to know your share, the share you're blessed to share right now that only unawareness of yourself will let you know. Invisible Man had withdrawn, if only for a moment, into the external world, which responsible subjectivity rightly understands to be no world at all in the brutality

of their wrongful attempts to eradicate it. Adrian Piper, pied, in motley, blind, silent in her consent not to be single while, at the same time, loud, and felt, in the intensity of her confession, leads us out of the art world and into this exteriority with that same pentaphonic song Armstrong was always playing no matter what song he played. No matter what song he played, they were the ones who were not one who were playing it. That's what Ben Hall plays. DJ Crawlspace's repercussive counterweight in a stair well, in a golden light well, in the sound booth, in a reverberate hold of feel. Armstrong's plex, which Hall has given us elsewhere—in *Some Jokers (For 5 Turntables, basement, ice cream and sloe gin)*—is regifted as Paolo Freire, vocoded, digitized into uncountability by an unaccountable sonority he would now recognize, by way of Hall, his instrument, whose instrument I would like to be. In the glow and blur of the collective head's collective embrace, more precisely and properly valued in its disruption of valuation, in its radical unbankability, in its inappropriable impropriety, light and sound are the materiality of our living, the basis of our revolutionary pedagogy, the ground of our insurgent feel.

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<sup>1</sup> Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, (New York: Vintage International, 1995) 7-8, 341, 344-45.