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## Beyond rights as recognition: Black Twitter and posthuman coalitional possibilities

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### ABSTRACT

This essay analyzes the Black Twitter hashtags #IfTheyGunnedMeDown and #AliveWhileBlack to develop a revisionary theory of anti-racist activism that reveals how certain socially mediated protest movements, in insisting on the ability of the Black body and human to “matter,” encourage the recognition of alternative forms of humanity and embodiment to those offered by humanist, economic, and juridical models. I argue that the embedded, distributed modes of collectivity on Twitter can create critical posthuman *coalitions* and affirmative bonds (Braidotti, Chavez), not only by decentering hegemonic models of human value that often depend on the dehumanization of Black bodies, but also by disidentifying with the hypercapitalist composing practices of digital spaces. Ultimately, I argue that an epistemological framework for recognizing social protest that moves beyond a discourse of rights allows us to witness how activists build alternative rhetorical imaginaries and possibilities, even if they might sometimes draw from both inclusionary and utopian politics to cultivate new forms of recognition and possibilities for coalition.

### KEYWORDS

Black Twitter; posthumanism; social media protest; coalition; digital performativity; human rights

Describing in his official testimony his attempts to subdue a young, Black Michael Brown, White police officer of Ferguson, Missouri Darren Wilson vividly recalled the act of trying to hold onto Brown’s arm to subdue him before he shot and killed him. “[W]hen I grabbed him,” Wilson attested, “the only way I can describe it is I felt like a five-year-old holding onto Hulk Hogan.” Wilson went on to state that after he fired the first shot at Brown in the midst of their scuffle, Brown looked up at him “and had the most intense aggressive face. The only way I can describe it, it looks like a demon, that’s how angry he looked” (State of Missouri). About a year prior to Wilson’s testimony, White suburban homeowner Theodore Wafer, eventually prosecuted for the second-degree murder and manslaughter of Black woman Renisha McBride, described his interactions with McBride prior to shooting her in ways that are strikingly similar.

Attesting to McBride's superhuman strength much in the same way that Wilson would later in his account of Brown's death, Wafer expressed his disbelief that a single woman could make such loud, banging sounds at his doorstep. He admitted he shot her because he was in fear for his life ("Renisha McBride shooter").<sup>1</sup>

Such scriptings of Black men and women as demonic, aggressive, or violent in hegemonic cultural and legal discourses are not at all new. American Founding Father John Adams, the lawyer tasked with defending British soldiers in the 5 March 1770 Boston Massacre killing of Crispus Attucks, successfully utilized a similar defense. In the legal proceedings, Adams described the massacred men as "a motley rabble of saucy boys, negroes and molattoes, Irish teagues and outlandish jack tarrs" – or, in other words, as Kellie Carter Jackson points out, "thugs" (Jackson). As these examples show, Black people have always been and continue to be uniquely vulnerable to bodily violence under a state apparatus that not only, as #BlackLivesMatter co-founder Alicia Garza argues, has "built a program of genocide and repression mostly on the back of Black people," but also often utilizes the neoliberal rhetoric of autonomy to blame continuing racial inequalities on individuals who appear to make poor choices for themselves (Squires 6). However, because Black people are often framed in hegemonic discourse as particularly *invulnerable* and often even aggressively autonomous, they are usually unable to convincingly claim institutional, representational, and bodily vulnerability by virtue of race despite considerations of gender, sexuality, age, or disability that would in other contexts reveal one to be systemically vulnerable. Take, for example, George Zimmerman's framing of Trayvon Martin as violent and deviant, despite his then legal status as a child.<sup>2</sup> Or, perhaps, the ways in which McBride's presumed aggression by virtue of her Blackness obscured her legal and quite literal vulnerability as an intoxicated woman in need of help after a car accident.

Cases like those of Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, and Renisha McBride, among many others, however, also illustrate the ways in which the Black body is often explicitly devalued and consequently dehumanized through normative rhetorics of vulnerability.<sup>3</sup> In the examples above, for instance, both Wilson and Wafer encourage the recognition of their own bodily vulnerability by framing themselves not only as fearful victims, but also metaphorically as helpless children at the mercy of the superhuman and demonic bodies of Brown and McBride. The rhetoric of superhumanness, however, serves a dual role. As it constructs both Brown and McBride as unruly and deviant in their embodiment, it also seems to suggest that they are both exempt from and beyond normative cultural, economic, and juridical recognition as humans. After all, as testimonies like those of Wilson and Wafer show, the metaphor of demonism and superhuman strength serves not only to criminalize the bodies of Brown and McBride, but also to justify the violence done to them. This all too common deployment of the rhetoric of the superhuman and demonic to strategically dehumanize Black bodies thus raises crucial questions about the kinds of recognition strategies available to contemporary Black liberation protest movements. If, as these examples show, normative

conceptions of vulnerability often do not preserve Black lives, then what are some of the ways in which protest movements might critically *revalue* Black humanity? Can activists' efforts to revalue Black humanity and mobilize its unique vulnerability for performative political action sustainably exist and prosper within a police state of steadily increasing surveillance, militarization, and neoliberal capitalist exploitation that depends materially on the dehumanization of Black bodies?

In a 2015 public lecture, political science scholar Cathy J. Cohen noted that racism in our current neoliberal era is no longer the biological racism of Jim Crow but rather a force defined by "the violation of shared norms that creates white resentment against norm violators." In responding to this emergent form of racism, she argued, movements like #BlackLivesMatter or Black Twitter do not merely constitute an updated Civil Rights Movement, but rather a "reimagined transformative politics" characterized by a radical love and empathy that moves beyond the notion of rights. What does it really mean to advocate for harsher institutional punishment for oppressive systems of power, she asks, during a time in which the prison industrial complex has allowed police violence and militarized state surveillance and intervention to prosper? She argued, then, that we must remain attentive to the spaces in which those who are oppressed by neoliberalism might imagine their lives beyond struggle and cultivate new visions of freedom that do not depend on simply "taking to the streets." Cohen's talk raises key questions about social struggle under neoliberalism: Can empathetic narratives of shared Black bodily vulnerability and identity work as social protest? Could this kind of "reimagined transformative politics" allow for the recognition of the Black body and human beyond an exclusionary economy of rights?

In this paper, I analyze the Black Twitter<sup>4</sup> hashtags #IfTheyGunnedMeDown and #AliveWhileBlack to reveal how certain forms of mediated protest, in insisting on the ability of the Black body and human to "matter," allow for the recognition of alternative forms of humanity and embodiment to those offered by humanist, economic, and juridical models. Rosi Braidotti's theorization of critical posthuman subjectivity (2013), I argue, raises key ontological questions not only about how vulnerability might be articulated in protest, but also the kinds of embodied performative acts that can be recognized as protest. While the kind of mass recognition encouraged through high volume social media channels such as Twitter can indeed be risky and ungovernable, I argue that the embedded, distributed modes of collectivity and community (Braidotti 39) they offer can create critical posthuman *coalitions* and affirmative bonds (Braidotti 42). These kinds of activism thus also produce radical forms of resistance, not only by decentering humanist, economic, and juridical models of human value that often erase or undermine Black identity-specific concerns, but also by disidentifying with the hypercapitalist<sup>5</sup> composing practices of digital spaces. Ultimately, I argue that a posthumanist epistemological framework for theorizing and recognizing social protest not only unsettles the moral dichotomy of the human/nonhuman, but also the political dichotomy of the inclusionary/utopian. These activism therefore uniquely allow

us to recognize and revalue Black humanity in ways that, rather than simply disavowing the often material necessity of rights, critically and deliberately reveal their institutional, legal, and representational violences to build alternative rhetorical imaginaries and possibilities (Chavez 9).

### **Bodily vulnerability in protest and critical posthuman subjectivity**

The rhetoric of humanity has long been used as a recognition strategy for nonviolent protesters, the most iconic of whom include Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Cesar Chavez, abolitionists, pacifists, suffragettes, and trade unionists (Bowers et al. 42). However, since some bodies are often not granted the cultural and legal status of humanity even during our post-Civil Rights era of equality and inclusion (Titchkosky 122), many contemporary human rights protest movements have sought to remain critical of the material differences between embodiment and humanity, even while the rhetoric of humanity remains a key recognition strategy. Take, for instance, the slogan “Black Lives Matter,” which incisively – though nonetheless critically – unites the concepts of embodiment and humanity through both the implicit rhetoric of the embodied experience of living and dying and the specification of racial identity meant to point to the de/humanizing experience of Blackness. Judith Butler (2014) points out, however, that in addressing the ways in which protesters mobilize precarity and embodied vulnerability, we must also consider conditions of intense police surveillance or military occupation that might expressly keep certain bodies off the “streets.” These kinds of conditions, Butler argues, often necessitate the creation of alliances in other forms that seek to minimize bodily exposure (100), even as demands made in the name of the body – its protection, shelter, nourishment, mobility, expression – must sometimes take place “with and through the body,” the body thereby becoming the means and ends of politics (102). Possibilities of performative political action, she suggests, can emerge in the midst of precarity as long as precarity is exposed to oppose the conditions that produce it (111). While such a practice in social movements often means the deliberate public exposure of the body, Butler reminds us that it is crucial that we conceive of the body as being defined by the relations that make its own life and actions possible. In fact, she argues, we cannot understand the vulnerability of the body outside of its “constitutive relation to other humans, living processes, and inorganic conditions and vehicles for living” (103).

As cases like those of Brown, McBride, and Martin indeed show, Black bodies are particularly vulnerable to bodily violence “in the streets.” Moreover, the media’s recent public exposure and examination of Black bodies has not only further entrenched Black communities in increased conditions of vulnerability, but it has also explicitly prevented protesters from mobilizing precarity in order to oppose the conditions that produce it. To observe this fact, one need not look any further than the mainstream media coverage of protests in Baltimore surrounding the 19 April 2015 death of Black man Freddie Gray that wholly overemphasize the agency

and destructive influence of protesters, often describing them as “rioters” who are “violent” and “volatile” (McKay), while underemphasizing their vulnerability and precarity.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, these discourses work insidiously to not only demobilize protesters, but also to reinforce the state’s monopoly on the “legitimate” use of violence to employ physical force for political ends (Boyle 210).

Posthumanist interventions emerging from the field of feminist materialisms, I suggest, point to new forms of embodied exposure that not only mitigate these risks of bodily violence, but also create new forms of human recognition that consider more ethically the implications of unitary, atomistic ontologies of the body, the human, and what constitutes performative political action. In her now iconic *How We Became Posthuman* (1999), N. Katherine Hayles contends that atomistic ontologies of the body and the human not only restate the superiority of the liberal humanist subject whose manifest destiny it is to assert power and dominance in the natural world (288), but also obscure the ways in which the human, emerging from “networks at once materially real, socially regulated, and discursively constructed,” has perhaps always been posthuman (291). Rosi Braidotti’s more recent work *The Posthuman* (2013) fruitfully expands upon Hayles’s project. For Braidotti, posthumanism is the historical moment that in signifying “the end of the opposition between Humanism and anti-humanism,” traces a different discursive framework that looks affirmatively toward alternative ways of conceptualizing the human subject (31). Her notion of critical posthuman subjectivity marks a shift from unitary to “nomadic” subjectivity, thus rejecting the self-interestedness of the individual subject of classical Humanism (39). As a mode of resistance, Braidotti proposes, then, that we must move beyond simply an analytic posthumanism and instead toward an affirmative and critical posthuman subjectivity and politics that is inherently collective, networked, and coalitional. In this view, a critical posthuman subject expresses not only an embodied and embedded and hence “partial form of accountability,” but also works across differences even while remaining internally differentiated (39). This posthuman recomposition of human interaction, however, is not only contingent upon the bond of vulnerability. Rather, it is an affirmative bond that locates subjects in the flow of relations with multiple others (39). Affirmative *politics* for Braidotti thus combines “critique with creativity in the pursuit of alternative visions and projects,” ultimately encouraging a “leap forward into the complexities and paradoxes of our times” (42).

Notably, Braidotti’s posthumanism is not to be confused with *antihumanism* or a call to move beyond the material conditions and contexts of the human. After all, she asks, if discourses about the superiority of the West are often expressed in terms of the legacy of secular humanism while “the most vehement opposition to them takes the form of post-secular practices of politicized religion,” is there even a space for antihumanist positions? To be simply secular, Braidotti points out, would mean being complicit with neo-colonial Western supremacist positions, “while rejecting the Enlightenment legacy would be inherently contradictory for any critical project” (31). Therefore, she argues, the seemingly endless polemic

between Humanism and antihumanism reaches an unproductive dead-end. For her, then, posthumanism is a move beyond these “lethal binaries” (31), since delimiting humanism indeed reduces sexualized, racialized, and naturalized “others” to “disposable bodies” (17).

It is important to note, however, that the rise of posthumanism in the 1990s has been subject to various critiques from critical race and postcolonial theorists, and rightfully so. In her seminal critique of humanism, Sylvia Wynter (2003) points out, for instance, the crucial differences between Man and human. For Wynter, Man does not literally signify human. Rather, Man’s overrepresentation and gendered, racialized, and sexualized universalization as if it were the human itself reinscribes colonial relations and their gendered, racialized, and sexualized forms of power (260). Therefore, we must avoid equating the human itself with the universalized colonial subject of the white, heterosexual man when we critique and resist the imperialist legacy of humanism. Furthermore, as Zakiyyah Jackson points out, posthumanist calls to become “post” human during the 1990s often came from a place of privilege. Since, for those who are not Black, humanity was already presumed, the posthumanist call to move beyond the human was inherently exclusionary (672). It was not simply that Black people were seeking a sort of fraternal inclusion to the category of Man (Jackson 672), but rather, they were seeking a new form of humanism beyond liberal humanism that would allow for a trenchantly political, collective effort against *dehumanization* (Shih 30). Given Wynter’s cautionary note that Man is merely a colonial genre and discourse not to be equated ontologically with the human, Jackson suggests that we need to reimagine the human as “an index of a multiplicity of historical and ongoing contestations.” In doing so, she argues, we should identify the relational operations of such contestations rather than assume the gendered, racialized, and sexualized colonial notion of the human to be synonymous with all articulations of the human (681).

While acknowledging the whiteness of posthumanism’s legacy, I see Braidotti’s intervention in posthumanism as productively leveraging the concerns Wynter, Jackson, and many others articulate. As Neda Atanasoski and Kalindi Vora point out, Braidotti’s position critically echoes Wynter’s concerns. Braidotti avoids looking toward a future overthrow of current human relations, but seeks rather to “hold the importance of corporeality while working against the assumptions of a given subject” that emerge through histories of colonialism, oppression, and domination (Atanasoski and Vora 12). Her theory of critical posthuman subjectivity, then, rather than focusing on the ontology of humanity itself, is instead an ethics of resistance that challenges the neoliberal myth of holistic harmony and the liberal vision of the autonomous subject (75) specifically as a way of suggesting an alternative discourse for *preserving* human life. In this way, Braidotti’s critical posthuman subjectivity and affirmative politics emerges not as a call to move beyond – or “post” – human, but rather as a call to human *recognition* that holds

the paradoxes and “lethal binaries” of humanism in generative, creative tension toward coalitional ends.

Using Braidotti, I argue in this paper that Black Twitter uniquely creates possibilities for performative political action and coalition not only by rejecting the virtual/real binary that flattens the complexity of networked mediums like Twitter, but also by enacting a critical posthuman affirmative politics that preserves a central focus on corporeality while resisting imperialist and liberal humanist views of the body and the human. As such, Black Twitter functions not just as a tool or accompaniment to “real” protests elsewhere, but rather as an alternatively embodied, relational rhetorical imaginary that affords multiple simultaneous spatialities and temporalities. Consider the genre of the hashtag itself: a performative composing medium that not only demands relationality through repetition, recirculation, and retweeting, but also acts as an *affirmative* mechanism that quite literally locates subjects “in the flow of relations with multiple others.” As I will show in the next section, however, hashtag protests also discursively extend posthuman epistemology as they exhibit a profound reflexivity about the notions of both embodiment and humanity and call for the recognition of both the Black body and human beyond humanist, economic, and juridical frameworks. By utilizing rhetorical composing practices that produce multiplicity, relationality, and embedded, networked embodiment, these protests thus build affirmative bonds and critical posthuman *coalitions* to critically recreate, reimagine, and revalue the materiality of Black humanity.

### **Black Twitter, #AliveWhileBlack, and #IfTheyGunnedMeDown**

Braidotti argues that on the electronic frontier, technologically mediated points of reference often appear to be neither organic/inorganic, male/female, nor especially White. In this sense, advanced capitalism appears to be a postracial system that, though no longer appearing to classify people on grounds of pigmentation, “remains nonetheless profoundly racist.” A strong theory of posthuman subjectivity, she argues, can help us reappropriate such complex advanced capitalist processes, both theoretically and politically, “not just as analytical tools, but also as alternative grounds for the formation of the self” (73). Indeed, as Braidotti suggests, digital technology and media have in many ways contributed to a widespread disavowal of the existence of racism. This process is particularly evident in the ubiquity of fetishistic popular discourses that suggest inaccurately that the advent of networked digital media has led to a new and equitable digital democracy, without fully addressing race, gender, and class disparities in computer access, training, and employment (Hill 13). As Logan Hill points out, this rhetoric exaggerates the myth of racial participation in the Web as a way to preserve the empty ideals of diversity essential to corporate “advertising pitches and market valuations” (14). Often used as a space for corporate marketing and publicity, Twitter is not immune to such practices and rhetoric. I argue, however, that Black Twitter not

only reappropriates these capitalist processes to alternatively construct and revalue Black materiality in Braidotti's sense, but also embraces multiple spatialities and temporalities to affirmatively reclaim and reimagine embodied experiences and narratives of Blackness. In these ways, the specific Blackness of Black Twitter emerges through both the deliberate performance of Blackness in the discourse of tweets and the subversion of normative, linear, and objectivist ways of knowing.

As activist Feminista Jones points out, Twitter has always been a popular social media platform for Black users even though "white America" was first introduced to Black Twitter as a protest platform during Zimmerman's acquittal for the 2012 shooting of Martin. According to a 2012 Nielsen report, at least half of Black mobile users own a smartphone with at least 58% using them to access the Internet. A Pew study of the same year noted that 26% of Black Internet users use Twitter as compared to only 14% of White users, while at least 11% of Black users reported using Twitter at least once daily as compared to only 3% of White users (Pew, qtd. in Jones). Interesting as they are, these statistics illustrate some of the key paradoxes of attempting to quantify the particular racial makeup of Black Twitter. One problem with this data, for instance, is that it risks reifying the racial categories of White and Black. Furthermore, the fact that Black Twitter as a countercultural movement does not necessarily only consist of Black users and not all Black users consider themselves to be a part of Black Twitter (Hilton) reveals an inherent limitation to essentializing the particular "race" of Black Twitter. As André Brock points out, that Black Twitter is often portrayed as representative of the entire Black community despite the heterogeneity of Black culture "speaks to the power of American racial ideology's framing of Black identity as monoculture" (546). This framing is reductive not only in that it undermines more nuanced analyses of Black Twitter, race, and participatory politics, but also because of how it limits our understanding of the intersections of racial identity and digital media to an online-offline/digital-analog binary.

As one of just a handful of scholars who have published work on Black Twitter, Sarah Florini has considered the notion of racial performativity in language and communication as central to delineating the Blackness of Black Twitter. Florini roots Black Twitter in the Black American Oral Tradition of *signifyin'* as theorized by Henry Louis Gates Jr. (1988). A deeply collaborative practice, *signifyin'*, Florini writes, is one of many mechanisms through which Black community and identity is created and preserved. Given the extent to which meaning often resides beyond lexical and syntactic elements of the message, interpreting *signifyin'* often depends heavily on cultural competencies and users' abilities to access culturally specific background knowledge. This required knowledge "can range from familiarity with Black popular culture and celebrity gossip to the experiential knowledge of navigating US culture as a racialized subject" (Florini 227). Ultimately, Florini contends, Black Twitter's performance of Black vernacular through language and communication challenge ideologies of colorblindness in our postracial era by creating "a social space" for Blackness that sustains the visibility of race (235).

Some activists have considered the racial politics of Black Twitter by identifying the ways in which social media more broadly allow marginalized groups to compose counternarratives to the mainstream media. Chicago-based activist Kelly Hayes contends that while social media played a central role in organizing protests in the streets in Ferguson, Missouri, it in many cases reversed the top-down circulation patterns of mainstream media. According to her, social media has made it more likely that mainstream media will notice an event through trails of photos and comments on Twitter and Facebook. “Before we had Twitter and Facebook,” she says, “the main chance for people to learn about our event was if the media covered it.” Now with social media, “we cover our own story” (Wells). Alderman and former journalist Antonio French recounts a similar experience. After reading an article in a mainstream news outlet that had referred to Ferguson protesters as a “mob,” he went to the protest to see it for himself. When he arrived, he noticed that there were no reporters from the mainstream media actually reporting on the protest. His role in those first few days, he says, “was kind of like a reporter.” Just from live-tweeting the protests, his Twitter following went from 4,000 followers to nearly 120,000 (Wells).

The frameworks of both racial performativity through language and the idea that Black Twitter merely suggests a counternarrative to the mainstream, however, do not satisfyingly reveal the complexity of Twitter’s specific affordances as a medium in generating anti-racist *epistemology*. Matt Richardson points out that Black vernacular modes and folk traditions that have been used to resist racism such as performance, blues, and jazz uniquely enable the creation of an alternative, affective, and fluid archive “from below” of memory, fantasy, narrative, and myth (14). These esthetic forms, he suggests, create a vernacular epistemology that embraces multiple knowledges and resists the notion of a consistent and tangible “home” as being dependent upon “a single physical site that holds the key to authenticity” (14).<sup>7</sup> I argue that Black Twitter enacts Richardson’s notion of vernacular epistemology to work against objectivist, linear, and temporally and spatially fixed modes of knowing and recognition. In a recent short documentary “#BlackTwitter After #Ferguson” generated by *The New York Times* on the one year anniversary of Brown’s death, for instance, activist and organizer DeRay McKesson recalls during an interview a tweet he posted after the non-indictment of Wilson. In this tweet, he wrote, “We live in a system of erased histories. Twitter has helped us tell our own story. We are sitting in history and making it.” “The power of Twitter,” he asserts later, “is the power of the story.” It paints “a picture about pain” (McDonald and Woo). In these remarks, McKesson not only embraces the notion of Black Twitter as generating a counternarrative to mainstream media, but he also identifies Black Twitter discourse and protest as being central to the anti-racist project of recovering erased histories *through* vernacular forms. For McKesson, then, Black Twitter, rather than offering objectivism, authenticity, or the mere subversion of hegemony, suggests, as in Richardson’s conceptualization of vernacular epistemology, an affective and revisionary history of pain “from below”

that does not depend on fixed physical sites, moments, or archives for legitimacy. I suggest that such nonlinearity and multiplicity is enabled even further by Twitter's form and genre itself. Hashtags, for example, do far more than simply enhance the unique content of a protester's tweet or declare their political engagements. They also quite literally link protest discourse together, constructing a seemingly infinite number of possible "timelines" and localities that problematize the notion of witnessing in "real-time." After all, tweets are themselves not inherently limited to a singular spatial context or timeline.<sup>8</sup> This idea is even furthered by the fact that time on Twitter nearly always appears ephemerally and in the past tense, with even the most recent tweets marked as having happened a few seconds ago (Berry 81).

Following Braidotti's call to resist the postraciality brought on by the electronic frontier of advanced capitalism, then, I consider in my paper the Blackness of Black Twitter as emerging most significantly through the enactment of vernacular epistemology as afforded by the medium of Twitter. This epistemological intervention not only deploys anti-racist protest and pedagogy by mobilizing the exposure of the Black body for performative political action, but also enables the affective multiplicity of Blackness to emerge relationally across space and time. I argue, then, that to consider the race of Black Twitter through the notion of posthuman epistemological *action* rather than through humanism's ontological fixity is to consider Black Twitter as an affirmative posthuman network. This network relies on the critical reappropriation of postracial logics of neutrality, inclusion, and equality embedded in social mediums like Twitter to enact not just "alternative grounds for the formation of self" in Braidotti's sense (73), but also alternative grounds for racial recognition.<sup>9</sup> Black Twitter thus enables through the composing affordances of Twitter the recognition of a new kind of Black *materiality* that critiques – and often even tends towards a rejection of – the humanist, economic, and juridical models of humanity that have for so long systemically dehumanized Black bodies.

Yarimar Bonilla and Jonathan Rosa specifically note Black Twitter's *revaluation* of Black materiality in their analysis of Ferguson-specific hashtags such as #HandsUpDontShoot, #NoAngel, and #IfTheyGunnedMeDown. They point out that while some racialized young people may not be able to contest the meanings ascribed to their bodies or impede the deadly force exerted on them by the police, they are able through their creative reinterpretations on social media to "rematerialize their bodies in alternative ways." With these creative acts, Bonilla and Rosa add, protesters can document, contest, and ultimately transform their "quotidian experiences by simultaneously asserting the fundamental value and particularity of their embodiment both on- and off-line" (9). Claims on social media such as "#Ferguson is everywhere," they contend, suggest there are also crucial connections between both online and offline forms of protest (11). Although I largely agree with Bonilla and Rosa's claim that Black Twitter protests indeed reconstitute and revalue Black materiality, I find their discussion threatens to shortchange some of the specific and crucial ways in which this occurs. Scripting these protests along an online–offline binary, for instance, does not fully capture the sophistication and

complexity of their recognitional performances. While claims such as “#Ferguson is everywhere” indeed draw connections between online and offline forms of protest as Bonilla and Rosa argue, they also, as I suggest above, reimagine protest spatialities and thus challenge the analytical utility of online–offline binaries and their normatively humanist investments. Furthermore, Bonilla and Rosa do not comprehensively address the ways in which these rematerialized Black bodies form collectives, movements, and coalitions to challenge or dismantle dominant cultural and political logics and systems of recognition. #AliveWhileBlack and #IfTheyGunnedMeDown show, however, that these protest performances do not, as Bonilla and Rosa argue, assert the fundamental value of Black embodiment as much as they recreate and thereby revalue Black humanity and corporeality beyond fundamentalist and liberal humanist frameworks of subjectivity.

#AliveWhileBlack first began as a response to #CrimingWhileWhite, a hashtag protest that emerged after the grand jury’s decision not to indict White police officer Daniel Pantaleo who in 2014 murdered Eric Garner in Staten Island, New York.<sup>10</sup> Those who tweeted this hashtag were largely White people who shared stories about how their White privilege had affected their interactions with law enforcement. As Yesha Callahan of *The Root* points out, however, #CrimingWhileWhite, though originally intended to critique White privilege, actually ended up reinforcing it. This reinforcement happened not only through the centering of White voices in a discussion about racialized violence, but also through White peoples’ co-opting and appropriation of the tragedy (Callahan). Black Twitter users thus responded to #CrimingWhileWhite with the hashtag #AliveWhileBlack (Figures 1 and 2).

Not only does #AliveWhileBlack quite literally exemplify what it might mean to maintain the singular importance of Black identity while mobilizing bodily vulnerability, but it also, as in the case of “Black Lives Matter,” maintains an implied relationship between Black embodiment and humanity through both the rhetoric of living and dying and a sustained narrative of Black identity and



Figure 1.

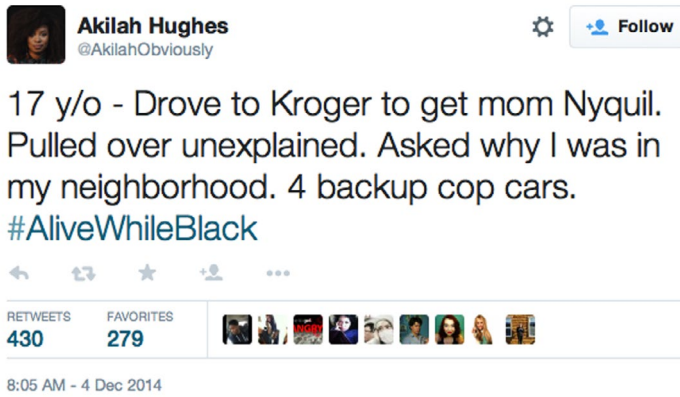


Figure 2.

experience. Where Kendall's tweet emphasizes the ways in which her Blackness leads to the increased state surveillance of her body, Hughes's tweet underscores the ways in which her presumed aggression as a Black person obscures what would be her presumed innocence as a child if she were not Black. Indeed, though #AliveWhileBlack does nevertheless appear to contain an underlying humanist appeal, its mobilization of such normative frames of humanist recognition is ultimately strategic. By deliberately using the same normative frames often used by cultural and legal discourses to evaluate subjects' lives when they experience trauma or death, these tweets critically expose the *failure* of such recognition frameworks to preserve specifically Black lives. In other words, they reveal how the cultural and legal protections often ascribed to both women and children are not equally applied to those who are Black, thus becoming a critique not just of systemic racial inequity, but also of normative recognition frameworks themselves.

The deployment and critique of humanist tropes in these tweets furthermore suggests a posthuman ethos. As Braidotti writes, a posthuman affirmative ethics approaches death and embodiment differently from humanism by introducing some critical distance from "the allegedly self-evident value attributed to 'Life' in our culture." Because some people in this world kill in the name of the "right to life," she argues, we must assume a more lucid tradition of thought that does not assume the inherent, self-evident, and intrinsic worth of life. Rather, this epistemology should stress instead the traumatic elements of life to recreate death as an affirmative, generative, and creative condition (96). A posthuman affirmative ethics thus entails a process of evacuating from our "bounded selves" and "merging into the mileu" to style the self as a differential, embedded, and embodied set of interrelations (99). Both Kendall and Hughes's tweets indeed maintain a critical distance from the humanist and self-evident idea of the "right to life" that is not equally available to all, focusing instead on the traumatic elements and

byproducts of the often uncritically assumed “right to life” rhetorics. As they utilize the affirmative composing form of the hashtag to literally and metaphorically link embodied experiences of Blackness to one another, these tweets as protest enact through their relational testimonies a posthuman process of recognition. Such a process critically resists the monocultural framing of Black vulnerability by accounting for the diversity of intersectional identity formations such as gender, class, and age while simultaneously embracing a temporally and spatially distributed vernacular epistemology of performance, story-telling, and improvisation. The massive, nearly unquantifiable number of such narratives of Black bodily experience generated by this hashtag (after all, users are still tweeting with this hashtag even today) uniquely allows for the possibility not just of coalition across space, time, and locality, but also the possibility for reimagining erased histories and multiple worlds.

#IfTheyGunnedMeDown is similar to #AliveWhileBlack in its broader intent to critique normative recognition frameworks, though it seeks specifically to interrogate the ways in which the mainstream media enacts representational violence on Black bodies. As Callahan points out, after Martin’s death, the media chose pictures of him that revealed him to be a “gold-grill-wearing, weed-smoking teenager” rather than “smiling with his family members or being just your average happy teen.” Brown was pictured similarly after his death. Callahan thus refers to this rhetorical strategy utilized by the mainstream media as the “Trayvon Martin effect,” a process whereby criminalizing images of murdered young Black men are framed so as to prove the men “deserved” what was coming to them (“#IfTheyGunnedMeDown”) #IfTheyGunnedMeDown, then, was created to draw attention not only to the ways in which the media creates racial bias when reporting on the lives and deaths of Black people, but also to the ways in which these framings dehumanize Black bodies. Take, for example, the following tweets (Figures 3 and 4):

Again, at first glance, these tweets and their respective dialectically opposing images mobilize an underlying humanist appeal, and problematically so. The “good” image on the right in Velvet R0pe’s tweet suggests a pro-military patriotic stance while the “good” image on the right in Goldman Blacks’ tweet suggests a sort of benevolent, Western humanitarianism. Such juxtapositions could lead one to conclude that both tweets intend to suggest that the visual narratives on the right – pro-military and pro-humanitarianism – are perhaps more “authentic” or desirable. As scholars such as Jasbir K. Puar (2007) have discussed at length, pro-military and pro-humanitarian stances such as those implied in these tweets can not only be imperialist, but are also systemically linked to issues of racial inequity and violence in the US, especially when they are employed for cultural, political, and legal inclusion. Puar illustrates this idea most clearly in her discussion of how the cultural, political, and legal inclusion of normative gay and lesbian subjects post-9/11 has subsequently led to an increase in the racial profiling of “deviant” racial subjects in the wake of the war on terror (Puar 119). Benevolent



Figure 3.

humanitarianism, then, stemming from neoliberal rationalities of diversity, inclusion, and liberal multiculturalism not only has certain exclusionary limits, but is also ultimately implicated in many of the same systems of surveillance, domestication, quarantine, and containment that lead to both governmentality and militarization (Puar 180). With these contexts in mind, then, one might at first read Velvet R0pe and Goldman Blacks' tweets, like in the case of #AliveWhileBlack, as defining the human through normative liberal frameworks of citizenship such as patriotism and humanitarianism.

While #IfTheyGunnedMeDown indeed invokes the cultural politics of liberal recognition, it does so to expose and critique the alienating function of dialectical recognition itself, specifically "the dialectical notions of political subjectivity predicated on trauma and subjection" (Hesford 546). This critique is most evident in the ways in which each tweet deliberately utilizes two strategically simplified, morally opposing narratives: while the images on the right suggest caring, selfless subjects with commitments to national service and the law – and, by extension, humans with normatively legible economic and political worth – the images on



Figure 4.

the right suggest the dehumanized, deviant, and economically unproductive criminal or “thug.” #IfTheyGunnedMeDown’s strategic dialectical opposition, and, I would add, #AliveWhileBlack’s exposure of the exclusionary politics of normative humanist appeals, de-essentialize normative models of recognizing humanity, life, and death. In doing so, they point toward a sort of posthuman subjectivity that, in maintaining a critical distance from, and even rejecting, economic, juridical, and humanist models of recognizing humanity and bodily vulnerability, reimagine and enact the human as a critically posthuman subject constituted in and by multiplicity (Bradotti 39). It is the virtual inaccessibility and even irrelevance of “authentic” subjectivity in these narratives that uniquely preserves the focus on Black bodily vulnerability to suggest, as Braidotti writes, “untapped possibilities for bonding, community building and empowerment” (42) that not only critically resist whitewashing and normalization, but also recreate the human body as a multiply-constructed, and often radically illegible, networked medium.

In a broader sense, then, both #AliveWhileBlack and #IfTheyGunnedMeDown allow for the mobilization of an entirely different kind of protesting body through the metaphysical commentary of bodily exposure contained, quite literally, within a body of tweets each archived under networked hashtags. Although present in both hashtags, such metaphysicality is particularly evident in #IfTheyGunnedMeDown, a protest that, constructed through a body of tweets, strategically exposes the

visible spectacle of the Black body in order to mobilize its precarity. Both hashtags, shared and appropriated by users to narrate different accounts of Black bodily exposure and dehumanization, facilitate a sort of relational, networked embodiment and thus what we might tentatively identify as an affirmative bond (Braidotti 42): they are relational in that each user's unique narrative of bodily exposure to both state and media institutions centers around the condition of being alive while Black, and networked in that the tweets can be – and, in these examples, are – retweeted and remixed by hundreds or even thousands of users, nearly limitless in their reach.<sup>11</sup>

In re-envisioning the protesting body, these protests also create new forms of authorship and collectivity. As Jim Ridolfo and Dànielle Nicole DeVoss write, composing practices in networks like Twitter radically destabilize conventional ideas about the circulation and production of texts by deprivileging the humanist and romanticized notion of the solitary author. When academics uphold the ideal of the author/producer, they argue, we not only render our analyses uncomplicated, even acontextual, but we also overlook the ways in which production and authorship have become slippery in digital spaces and within remix projects (Ridolfo and DeVoss). Remix culture – which, in the context of Black Twitter, we might read as the retweeting and appropriation of hashtags in order to mobilize Black bodily vulnerability through cultural and political counternarratives – requires therefore that we consider authorship as a distributed, horizontal, and shared force (Ridolfo and DeVoss).

Power relationships often uncritically assumed between author and reader can thus be denaturalized on Twitter through the implied merging of the two roles via a heightened emphasis on circulation and distribution. As David Sheridan, Anthony J. Michel, and Ridolfo argue, the brevity of tweets – 140 characters – seems almost purposely designed for quick circulation. In privileging circulation almost to the exclusion of other concerns, composers' decisions anticipate future considerations of composing, "the moment of circulation inhabiting the moment of composition" (Sheridan et al., qtd. in Penney and Dadas). In this way, Black Twitter protests like #AliveWhileBlack and #IfTheyGunnedMeDown achieve a networked counternarrativity that expressly depends on the accumulation and collective mobilization of 140-character micronarratives. Such composing processes, in their explicit focus on interaction and connectivity, therefore render networked mediums like Twitter amenable to not only shared, distributed forms of authorship, but also potentially non-hierarchical protest movements and solidarities across multiple spatialities and temporalities. The notion of *sharing*, in this regard, is revealing: while it refers to the culture of remixing, retweeting, and reappropriating, it simultaneously implies a sort of shared role between author-reader, protester-collective. By embracing and fostering an interconnectedness and relationality, then, these protests indeed perform through their distributed counternarrativity a vernacular epistemology and affirmative posthuman ethics.

## Posthuman ethics and coalitional possibility

These horizontal, distributed forms of collectivity also offer a viable alternative to both inclusionary and utopian activist politics and narratives by creating critical posthuman coalitions. In Braidotti's view, affirmative bonds and ethics prioritize relations and embrace the experience of not-Oneness, which is constitutive of the non-unitary subject. Affirmative ethics in this regard give way to a materialist politics of posthuman differences that "works by potential becomings that call for actualization." Materialist politics of posthuman differences, then, enacted through collectively shared, community-based praxis ultimately express an affirmative process of "becoming-posthuman." Becoming-posthuman not only entails a gesture of collective self-styling, but also the actualization of a community that, rather than being bound negatively by shared vulnerability, compassionately acknowledges their own interdependence with multiple others (Braidotti 74).

Karma R. Chávez's work on queer coalitional politics (2013) allows us to better understand how affirmative politics point to posthuman coalitional possibilities. Following José Esteban Muñoz and Maria Lugones, Chavez uses "queer" to mean the intermeshing of horizon and condition in that it depends upon an intermeshed understanding of identity, subjectivity, power, and politics "located on the dirt and concrete where people live, work, and play." It is a product and process of "theory in the flesh" (7). When we understand queer as orienting us not toward the "not yet" – or, in other words, the utopian – but rather toward coalition, we are able to theorize vital alternatives to both inclusionary (rights-based) and utopian politics (7). Coalition as the horizon itself is not a utopian pursuit in that it is not hoped for or imagined, but is rather "a present vision and practice that is oriented toward others and a shared commitment to social and political change" (7). To underscore coalitional politics' focus on the present, Chavez prefers the terms coalitional possibilities and moments to more fixed and static notions of coalition. Coalitional moments, she argues, occur when political issues coincide in the public sphere in ways that "create space to reenvision and potentially reconstruct rhetorical imaginaries." Since the term "moment" possesses both temporal and spatial qualities, the notion of coalitional moment allows us to recognize the possibility, fleeting or enduring, "of a coming together, or a juncture, for some sort of change." When we analyze coalitional politics through the lens of coalitional moments, she argues, we are uniquely able to witness activists' creative rhetorical crafting, which "sometimes points in the directions of inclusion and utopia but also shows how activists inventively draw resources toward building alternative rhetorical imaginaries and possibilities for livable lives" (9).

While the queer coalitional politics Chavez suggests depend upon an intermeshed understanding of identity, subjectivity, power, and politics "located on the dirt and concrete where people live, work, and play" (7), I argue that her concept of coalitional possibility also invokes a posthuman ethics. Consider, for instance, the spatial and temporal coalitional qualities of the hashtags #AliveWhileBlack and

#IfTheyGunnedMeDown. These tags in the composing space of Twitter suggest a fleeting yet nonetheless enduring coalitional moment as they manifest across space and time as performative political actions meant to protest temporally, spatially, and historically inflected racialized violences. This notion is furthered by the tags' intermeshing of horizon and condition, a process that emerges most saliently not just through their emphasis on interaction, reproduction, and recreation, but also through their intertextuality as protests surrounding similar forms of racialized violences. If, then, we can understand these protests as producing coalitional possibilities, what would it mean to consider these kinds of posthuman protesting bodies as posthuman coalitions? Indeed, the horizontal, distributed forms of circulation and authorship in these spaces uniquely allow for unexpected, geographically-dispersed posthuman coalitions that may not be possible "in the streets," where Black bodies are often particularly vulnerable to state violence and dehumanization. Thus, while protests like #AliveWhileBlack and #IfTheyGunnedMeDown may not conventionally suggest the kind of "theory in the flesh" Chavez has in mind (7), they do perhaps constitute an entirely different kind of flesh – one that, in critically resisting the humanist fantasy of totality and universality, is multiply constructed, relational, and compassionately interdependent in its collective pursuit of alternative rhetorical visions and projects.

### **Paradoxes and critical disidentifications**

In a post-Civil Rights era of neoliberalism, movements like Black Twitter generatively assert alternative and, perhaps, more ethical ways to recognize activist movements that seek to preserve life. Enacting Braidotti's call for a theory of critical posthuman subjectivity to reappropriate the processes of an advanced capitalism that remains profoundly racist under a guise of equality and democracy (73), I offer this essay as a crucial epistemological intervention during a time in which Black bodily vulnerability and humanity are often not recognized or preserved by humanist, juridical, or economic models of human value. When we analyze coalitional moments like those on Black Twitter, we are able to witness how activists build alternative rhetorical imaginaries and possibilities, even if they might sometimes draw from both inclusionary and utopian politics to cultivate new forms of recognition and opportunities for coalition. In this sense, movements like Black Twitter do not explicitly reject the material necessity of rights themselves, but rather encourage the recognition of bodily vulnerability in ways that critically and creatively reveal the exclusionary and racialized nature of reformist, rights-based frameworks themselves. They hold the lethal binaries and paradoxes of the inclusionary and utopian in generative, creative tension to critically tend toward a post-rights imaginary, even if this future may remain forever beyond the horizon. The emergence of movements like Black Twitter during a time in which cultural, political, and legal discourses often fail to recognize the widespread national project of anti-Black violence in the US demand that we as

rhetorical scholars and activists consider more rigorously the kinds of protests and coalitional possibilities that proliferate in spaces that, at first glance, may not even seem to be protest spaces at all. Such an intervention requires that we work to remobilize and repoliticize movements like Black Twitter by further interrogating and dismantling the hegemonic logics and frameworks that render only certain constructs of vulnerable human bodies as valuable, recognizable, or capable not just of life, but also of protest.

To conclude, I return again to Braidotti's call to "leap forward into the complexities and paradoxes of our time" (42). Although this phrase is perhaps intentionally broad, it is nonetheless relevant to Black Twitter protest, especially if we consider how Twitter could easily foster a sort of neoliberal progressivism that does not actually challenge the distribution of wealth and power in contemporary societies (McRuer). However, I am reminded here of Muñoz's seminal work *Disidentifications* (1999). For Muñoz, disidentification is a process through which minoritarian subjects can reconstruct and scramble hegemonic identificatory practices in order to "resist the social matrix of dominant publicity" and expose the "rhetorical/ideological context of state power." In doing so, they are able to give birth to radical counterpublics that are both survivalist and critical (168). While counterpublics are not automatically realized through disidentifications, he writes, they are suggested, rehearsed, and articulated as a way to create "a possibility for freedom" (179). Although Muñoz does not reference in his work the idea of posthuman coalition, he affords us yet another way to consider Black Twitter's leveraging of the inclusionary and the utopian, the horizon and the condition. As a space of critical disidentification that mobilizes the hypercapitalist networking and composing logics of Twitter to create new forms of embodiment, humanity, and coalition, Black Twitter is, after all, far more than just a critique of racism and power to ensure survival. It also radically exposes, articulates, and enacts new possibilities for freedom.

## Notes

1. On 9 August 2014, white police officer of Ferguson, Missouri Darren Wilson fatally shot and killed 18 year old Black man Michael Brown, whom he believed to be one of two men who had shoplifted cigarillos from a nearby convenience store earlier that same day. Wilson presented evidence to a St. Louis grand jury starting on 20 August 2014 to prove that he had not committed a crime and had simply acted out of self-defense when he shot Michael Brown. Despite sufficient witness evidence that challenged Wilson's own recollection of the altercation, the grand jury eventually decided on 24 November 2014 not to indict Wilson for murder (Clarke). Similarly, on 2 November 2013, almost a year before the death of Michael Brown, 19 year-old Black woman Renisha McBride was shot and killed by Theodore Wafer, a suburban homeowner in Dearborn Heights, Michigan. Having crashed her car in Detroit, McBride walked to a nearby neighborhood for help where she knocked on the windows and doors of Wafer's house. Although Wafer argued in his testimony that the shooting was accidental, activists, scholars, and popular media sources have

- argued that Wafer's shooting of McBride was primarily a result of racial profiling ("Renisha McBride, 19, Was Shot"). Although the murders of Brown and McBride are just two of many other such deaths (some others include Tamir Rice, Eric Garner, Akai Gurley, and Freddie Gray), I argue that Brown's death in particular has given rise to expansive mainstream dialog in the US about the institutional nature of racism (cultural, political, and legal). Not only has this mainstream dialog led to polarizing beliefs about the nature of racism in the US through an increased public awareness and critique of white privilege, but it has also meant greater visibility for national protest movements such as #BlackLivesMatter and Black Twitter. As such, I consider these movements as widespread and geographically dispersed activist groups that are spatially and temporally constructed by and through the cases of racialized violence I name in this paper. In this way, movements such as #BlackLivesMatter and Black Twitter, even as they intersect, overlap, and work together, are not just activist groups, but also spatial and temporal moments.
2. On 26 February 2012, 17 year-old Trayvon Martin was shot and killed by George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch volunteer in Sanford, Florida. That evening, Martin was walking home alone after having purchased a drink and some candy from a nearby convenience store when Zimmerman called the police to report Martin for suspicious behavior. Zimmerman then had a brief altercation with Martin which eventually ended with Zimmerman shooting Martin in the chest. Although Zimmerman was eventually charged with second-degree murder and manslaughter for having killed Martin, the jury ultimately acquitted him. Like in the case of Brown and McBride, Martin's murder was not the first of its kind. Many activists and scholars, however, have argued that Martin's death, like Brown's, became an iconic turning point in the public's awareness of racialized violence. #BlackLivesMatter in fact emerged as a result of Martin's death, first as a hashtag and then as a formal protest movement (Garza).
  3. By normative rhetorics of vulnerability, I am referring most specifically to post-identitarian theories of vulnerability that stress the universality or shared nature of vulnerability such as legal scholar Martha Fineman's "The Vulnerable Subject: Anchoring Equality in the Human Condition" (2008) without taking into account issues of identity. Fineman in fact argues against an identity politics perspective in understanding vulnerability because of the ways in which she believes it erects hierarchies among identities and oppressions rather than focusing on systemic manifestations of inequality (Selberg and Wegerstad 6). As many others since Fineman have argued, however, considering vulnerability through a post-identitarian lens not only obscures an understanding of the ways in which implicit biases, stereotypes, and perceptual discrimination produce the racialized nature of cultural, political, and legal institutions themselves (Dowd 59), but it also may prevent certain groups from making visible their specific vulnerability in a particular space and time (Kim 146). As Eunjung Kim rightfully argues, then, to speak of the vulnerability of an individual or group requires that we maintain a focus on identity by making "specific claims about differential power" and acknowledging a speaker's own capacity "to be wounded by others and to wound other bodies" (146). My usage and understanding of vulnerability most closely aligns with that of Kim.
  4. Black Twitter has been used widely as a heuristic in mainstream media to describe a countercultural movement on Twitter among mostly Black users, other people of color, and allies. As Shani O. Hilton of *Buzzfeed* describes, users who might be considered members of Black Twitter are almost always interested in issues of race in the news and pop culture ("The Secret Power").

5. Twitter and social media more broadly can be hypercapitalist spaces because of the ways in which social media platforms – especially those as public as Twitter – uniquely facilitate the invisibilization of market forces as users are often either unsure or unaware of the extent to which their information is sold and/or monitored. Twitter users are especially vulnerable to such exploitation due to both the quick pace of the platform and the volume of content most users produce on a daily basis. According to Twitter, there are as many as 500 million tweets sent per day and 288 million monthly active users (“About Twitter”).
6. On 12 April 2015, Freddie Gray was arrested for possession of an illegal switchblade in Baltimore, Maryland. After having been transported in a police van shortly after his arrest, Gray fell into a coma and died seven days later on 19 April 2015. The medical examination conducted after Gray’s death found that he had sustained the injuries while being transported in the van without wearing a seatbelt or proper protection, suggesting that the arresting police officers had deliberately planned to injure Gray. This practice of driving police vehicles in such a way as to deliberately injure arrested individuals is known as a “rough ride” (Payne, Almasy, and Pierson).
7. Richardson originally develops his notion of vernacular epistemology to theorize a Black queer archive that works against heteronormative notions of Black memory and history by embracing affective and queer esthetic forms. In his book, he theorizes a queer archive of literature written by Black lesbian women whose work has been marginalized or elided in literary scholarship and African diaspora cultural criticism. I do not intend in this paper to follow Richardson in suggesting that Black Twitter constitutes a queer esthetic form, though I do believe such an argument could be made.
8. Hashtags appear on Twitter not just as text, but also as hyperlinks. Users may click on these hyperlinks in order to access a separate timeline that displays tweets utilizing that hashtag in an automatically updating and chronologically organized aggregation, the most recent tweets appearing at the top of the feed. One may also search for hashtagged content using keywords derived from the hashtags themselves. Doing so often generates a broader range of results that include alternative phrasings of the same hashtag or even strategic appropriations of the original. Hashtags may also be aggregated through users retweeting hashtagged tweets or responding to them in conversation. As such, hashtagged tweets can appear in a nearly infinite number of timelines and contexts, depending on how users choose to interact or converse with them.
9. In regards to the racial participatory politics of Black Twitter, Wendy Hesford questions what it might mean for non-Black protesters to mobilize protest rhetoric such as “We are Trayvon Martin.” Specifically, she wonders if this practice could permit the disavowal of White privilege (547). Although Hesford is right to point out these risks, it’s important to note that they are not contained only to digital forms of protest. These kinds of appropriations can – and often do – happen in analog contexts as well. Furthermore, for the purposes of this paper, I choose only to analyze the Black-specific hashtags of #IfTheyGunnedMeDown and #AliveWhileBlack that only invite participation from Black users.
10. On 17 July 2014, Eric Garner, a 43-year old Black man, was placed in an illegal chokehold by Staten Island, New York police officer Daniel Pantaleo for resisting arrest for illegally selling cigarettes. Garner was pronounced dead a short time later as a result of the chokehold. Pantaleo was not indicted (Eversley and James).
11. I acknowledge, however, that the near limitless reach of these tweets can also be ungovernable and risky, especially since the mere act of composing and posting a

public tweet potentially exposes one to silencing, appropriation/co-optation, and even discursive violence. Consider, for instance, a situation in which a user retweets a tweet from #AliveWhileBlack in order to publicly refute it or attack it in another tweet that could easily be quickly retweeted and recirculated by others. Or, perhaps, the recreation of #BlackLivesMatter to #AllLivesMatter as a way to allow users to take part in discussions about racism under a guise of intersectionality. Although these are indeed valid risks, I argue that the ungovernability of composing and circulation in this space can also be radical in its ability to facilitate more democratic solidarities and coalitions.

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