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Dessy-Liza Epie   April 12, 2022

The Cycle of Anti-Blackness: Digital Activism, Grammar, and (At)tending to Blackness

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Abstract

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By Dessy-Liza Epie

Anti-blackness maintains its existence by adapting to contemporaneous times. By continuously transforming its socio-political mechanisms, it captures, dispossesses, expropriates, and preserves the category of blackness. Social media sustains the antiblack structures that have readily been seen through slavery, colonialization, and neocolonization. In the wake of current black social movements operating primarily through social media, we must ask what is the relationship between black social death and desire for more black visibility? Can visibility become harmful, as digital social movements across the world are growing exponentially in the aftermaths of black deaths? In this project, I argue that social death is the price black experience pays for visibility; this in turn reifies the abject condition of blackness. More specifically, I contend that social media mirrors the antiblackness of slavery, colonization, and neocolonization. Though black social movements gain visibility via social media platforms, I attempt to show how such movements are caught in antiblack structures by presenting progress as cyclical rather than linear. I rely primarily on the works of black critical theorists like Christina Sharpe and Saidiya Hartman. As central figures in the growing scholarship on questions of blackness' relation to progress and time their interventions theoretically foregrounds my project. Via close readings of their texts, my project's central question – i.e. What does visibility afford us when it is purchased at the cost of black social life – is therefore taken up by attempting to understand what progress, visibility, and agency represent for black social movements at a time where social media is utilized as a site of resistance.

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Table of Contents

Introduction

What is the cost of going viral?

Anti-blackness maintains its existence by adapting to contemporaneous times. By continuously transforming its socio-political mechanisms, it captures, dispossesses, expropriates, and preserves the category of blackness. Social media sustains the antiblack structures that have readily been seen through slavery, colonialization, and neocolonization. In the wake of current black social movements operating primarily through social media, we must ask what is the relationship between black social death and desire for more black visibility? Can visibility become harmful, as digital social movements across the world are growing exponentially in the aftermaths of black deaths?

Digital activism is a "form of activism that uses the Internet and digital media as key platforms for mass mobilization and political action."[1] (Britannica). It is a very broad definition that encompasses the use of digital tools, such as the internet, mobile phones, and social media networks, to address and redress social and political issues. Due to the increasing accessibility and ability to communicate with millions around the world, the internet has quickly become a space where individuals, organizations, and communities are able to spread their social message to those not only near, but far. The internet allows for activism to no longer be limited to physical proximity. Those across the world are able to gain community and find those who share their social and political passions in order to go about enacting change in the ways they see fit. This can be

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[1] Marcela Fuentes, "Digital Activism," Britannica, *Britannica Encyclopedia,* March 29, https://www.britannica.com/topic/digital-activism.

through online petitions, social networks, and microblogs, which allow for the spread of information both easily and quickly.

Just like other mediums of activism, digital activism has its strengths and weaknesses. One of the biggest benefits of digital activism, is its ability to connect those across the world, almost simultaneously. This allows for the spread of information, resources, and support at an international level, allowing those who may not have been the face of movements in traditional media outlets to take a step forward. This can be seen in the spread of hashtags and movements like #BlackLivesMatter, #CongoisBleeding, and #EndSARs. These hashtags allow for those around the world to take part in social movements that they may physically never see or be able to support. Especially during a time like this where a global pandemic forces us out of the streets and into our homes.

As important as digital activism is, we must still critically analyze the ways we go about it, the audiences we have, and the ways in which we reify conditions that we are hoping to rectify. Like other mediums of activism, digital activism falls victim to a paradox, when organizing around blackness, as a condition, a political entity, and social movement. This is due to the heavy influence and necessity of visibility within activism and specifically digital activism through social networks. Social media allows for the experience of blackness to be visualized, continually reifying that image and the condition of blackness. Visibility is used to try to accomplish two ends, empathy and the counteraction of social death, that are supposed to converge; however, we are instead left with a paradox. Visibility is used to humanize blackness and gain empathy, however visibility becomes an instrument of empathy. And in our efforts to counteract social death through humanization, we instead reify and normalize black suffering and death.

Digital activism and specifically social media activism, hinges on the ability to represent black suffering, whether that be through images and videos of black suffering, infographics and written accounts, or any other form of representation. However, black suffering is unintelligible to those outside of blackness, and the pitfall that activism falls into is their attempt to translate black suffering to the masses. On platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, visibility and visual representations of black suffering are utilized as a method of translation. Through the translation of black suffering, the goal is to find ways to address and rectify the injustice that blackness experiences. The visual nature of digital activism, however, relies on empathy as the outcome to this translation. And in the desire to attain this empathy, black social movements utilize the visibility of pain as a grammar to translate black suffering. However, even in our continued attempts, there is no way to fully represent the unrepresentable, to fully translate the untranslatable. Every time we try to represent it, it gets co-opted for anti-black means, due to the ever-adapting nature of the climate of anti-blackness.

Each attempt at representation, through the use of the most painful and devasting moments of black existence, exacerbates the condition of blackness and instantiates its suffering. We must be critical of the ways in which the good intentions of digital activism fall short of their metaphysical goals. As we look towards an ever-growing archive of digital memory that details black death continually, we must recognize how the violence of the digital archive mirrors that of the academic archive. The digital archive facilitates the erasure of black social life due to its failure in depicting and documenting black lives. Blackness exists at the margin of the digital archive, yet

black social life as social death exists at the center of the archive, not as an account of black life, but as an account of the violence that is experienced.

What I am arguing in this project, is that social death is the price black experience pays for visibility; this in turn reifies the abject condition of blackness. Though black social movements gain visibility via social media platforms, I attempt to show how such movements are caught in antiblack structures creating a stage where social death can be enacted internationally and continuously. Black social death is a thing that affords a certain kind of coherence and a certain kind of livelihood of the digital world. Social media becomes so energized in these times and there becomes a certain kind of momentum that is provided through this black suffering and death.

Understanding what progress, visibility, and agency represent for black social movements at a time where social media is utilized as a site of resistance centers not only my work as an academic, but also as an activist who struggles with this paradox daily. The tension within my project is between the demand for redress, but at the same time the negative repercussions of one of the main sources of resistance that we utilize in present-day. My hope is that through this project I can answer the questions that guide both by academic and activist work – i.e. How do we not only narrate the demands for justice. but how do we resist as well? What are the means of resisting anti-blackness? How do we tell the stories that guide these movements without in turn reifying the abject condition of blackness?

What I hope to provide is not a solution to the metaphysical structures and climate of anti-blackness, but a space in which we can critically reimagine, in our daily lives, how care and activism can go hand in hand. While the paradox of black resistance may be inescapable, it offers us space to theorize, analyze, and create methods of praxis

as we move forward in our academic and activist work. In whatever medium they may be.

Chapter 1: Empathy, Fungibility, and the Archive of Social Memory

Whether digital or otherwise, empathy is a founding ethical principle for activism. Empathy entails recognition and, when recognition is secured, the hope is that such recognition will result in lasting change. This assumption has guided activist movements around the world. Indeed, it is from this belief that visibility becomes very important for digital activism. Showing images of blatant suffering, therefore, becomes the mean to attain empathy, which ultimately will compel political and social change This method has been historically utilized by abolitionists, Civil Rights leaders, Anti-Apartheid organizers, and many more anti-oppression activists across the globe. For contemporary anti-racist activist movements, in particular, visibility became key to translate black suffering. Images of slain black bodies, indeed, have become a pivotal technology for mobilizing humanity's empathy or the willingness to attend to black pain.

For digital activism more specifically, visibility is an important instrument to bring about empathy for it is assumed that the physical manifestation of black suffering can be more impactful than any other strategies of documenting anti-black violence for emancipatory ends. But, empathy fails to a significant degree. For, to be empathic requires projecting oneself into the other's position in order to be moved by their plight. In doing so, however, empathy merely places the empathic self in the position of the suffering other. In the digital age of our contemporary neoliberal landscape, the predicament of black social movements is unfolding where visibility and empathy are inextricably tied to one another. This predicament has indeed reified and normalized black death.

In this thesis, I argue that while well intentioned, the digital use of images of black death naively relies on the purported powers of empathy and, as result, merely

reifies such deaths or ultimately desensitize viewers from the horrors of black suffering. I contend that using visual images of black pain cannot render such suffering intelligible. Thus, visibility is not an adequate technology for translating black suffering because, as the expression of the radically other, black suffering remains ethically unintelligible. Such unintelligibility, therefore, leads to the perpetual need for, recycling of, black social movements. The presence of black social movements in our society thus becomes compulsory, for black pain under such circumstances remains unintelligible. While change is registered at level of the quantitative proliferation of images of black death – for instance, via the number of spreads of print articles, the emergence of televised protests, or cellphone recording of state sanctioned anti-black murders black death – change remains scant at levels of the political or in the very organizing nature of these movements.

The precarious nature of empathy can be seen in Saidiya Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America*. In chapter one, Hartman establishes the moral double bind of empathy. The aporias of empathy are exemplified by John Rankin's epistle to his brother. An abolitionist with the hopes of exposing the horrors of slavery, Rankin ends up supplanting the place of the slave and exemplifying the dangers of empathy and white neoliberal politics. In an epistle to his brother, Rankin details the "obscene theatricality of the slave trade" by describing how slave traders "chained a number of [enslaved peoples] together, hoisted over the flag of American liberty, and with the music of two violins marched the woe-worn, heartbroken, and sobbing creatures through town."[2] Even as Rankin

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[2] Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 17.

acknowledged that the horrors of slavery, "far exceed[ed] the power of description", he still attempts to narrate it. The theatricality of the slave trade relied on spectacle. Rankin makes clear that the crimes of slavery are not only witnessed but staged." [3] This theatricality is for the amusement of the spectator. To convey these scenes, however, Rankin must act as a surrogate witness. In his account, the shocking images of whipping, mutilation, and humiliation, are meant to rouse the emotions of the reader. Rankin's exhortation, nonetheless, enables him to speak in place of the enslaved. He creates a scenario of shared emotions, projecting himself and his family into the imagined conditions of racial enslavement and making the slaves suffering their own. This, Hartman argues, is the danger of empathy. By projecting oneself into the place of the black slave, Rankin begins to feel for himself, and thus effectively removes the slave out of the scene of suffering.

Pain therefore becomes the conduit of identification, and it is only through Rankin's supplanting of the slave for himself and his family that he is able to make this suffering visible and intelligible. Thus, Hartman writes:

> "By providing the minutest detail of macabre acts of violence, embellished by his own fantasy of slavery's blood-stained gate, Rankin hopes to rouse the sensibility of those indifferent to slavery by exhibiting the suffering of the enslaved and facilitating an identification between those free and those enslaved."[4]

Rankin thus utilizes black pain to translate the injustices of slavery. As Hartman points out, Rankin assumes that "pain provides the common language of humanity; it extends

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[3] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection, 17.*
[4] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection,* 18.

humanity to the dispossessed and, in turn, remedies the indifference of the callous." [5] Pain becomes a grammar that is meant to be intelligible to humanity, but this pain can only be translated through Rankin's performed empathy. His empathy fails to observe the conditions of the slave; Rankin merely placing himself in its stead. His account not only attenuates the denial of Black sentience and the obscurity of black suffering, it also further instantiates such suffering. By supplanting the slave for his family, Rankin replaces facts for fiction and reveals the haunting anxiety that plagues abolitionist endeavors to make the suffering of black slaves legible. The conundrum of Rankin's empathy lies in the (de)valuation of Black life. When the black slave is removed from the experience of suffering, Black humanity is denied. Rather than having the fact of pain be recognized in the inhumane conditions of to the dispossessed black slave, the latter's pain is delegitimized until it is represented via the imagined or fictional pain of the empathic white abolitionist.

The brutality of slavery was quotidian; it formed the everyday of chattel slavery significantly enough that people became indifferent towards it. Yet, why is it that the expression of black pain was assumed to be the only language capable of transforming the slavery's racialized violence? Why was documenting black pain necessary to extend humanity to the enslaved black? What does it mean that it is only through Rankin's fictionalized pain that the abolitionist believes he could convey the ills of chattel slavery to the rest of the world?

The conundrum of Rankin's empathy lies in the (de)valuation of Black life. When the black slave is removed from the experience of suffering, Black humanity is denied.

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[5] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection,* 18.

Rather than having the fact of pain be recognized in the inhumane conditions of to the dispossessed black slave, the latter's pain is delegitimized until it is represented via the imagined or fictional pain of the empathic white abolitionist. In opposition to the good intention of those who aim to convey black humanity, the scenes of subjection and brutality instead, "increase the difficulty of beholding black suffering since the endeavor to bring pain close exploits the spectacle of the body in pain and oddly confirms […] the inability to witness the captive's pain."[6] The effort to bring the pain of blackness near is dissipated, regardless of good intentions. This is attributed to blackness's long history of racialization and the necessity to remove blackness from the category of the human, which then allowed for the fungible use of the enslaved. This is further complicated by the repressive nature of empathy.

Blackness' fungibility enabled to serve "as the vehicle of white self-exploration, renunciation, and enjoyment."[7] Hartman continues on to explain how the elasticity of Blackness – the fact that blackness is simultaneously everything and nothing at all – is due to the fungibility of the black slave's status as commodity. Due to the abstractness and immateriality of Blackness, Blackness can serve "as the vehicle of white self-exploration, renunciation, and enjoyment."[8] In the context of chattel slavery, Blackness and black humanity were represented through minstrelsy and its melodrama. As Hartman writes: "Melodrama presented Blackness as a vehicle of protest and dissent, and minstrelsy made it the embodiment of unmentionable and transgressive pleasures."[9] Through melodrama, abolitionist discourse could be fueled by stories of

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[6] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection,* 20.
[7] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection,* 26.
[8] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection,* 26.
[9] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection,* 27.

torture and the presentation of a subsequent ravaged body. For the melodrama to play out on the stage, white actors had to don blackface to embody Black characters. As mere minstrelsy or in its melodramatic renditions, Blackness could only be legitimized, and its experience rendered legible through the medium of whiteness.

The spectacular nature of the slave trade that Rankin attempts to depict can be seen in the context of chattel slavery and the economy of pleasure that was created. Despite the difference in use, blackness was embodied through minstrelsy and melodrama. As Hartman points out, "Melodrama presented blackness as a vehicle of protest and dissent, and minstrelsy made it the embodiment of unmentionable and transgressive pleasures."[10] Through melodrama, abolitionist discourses could be fueled by the heavy torture and the presentation of its ravaged body. These melodramas were meant to supplant the narratives of the minstrel shows, but they relied on the substituted the suffering black body for the docile black body. For the melodrama to play out on the stage, white actors still had to don blackface to embody black characters. Regardless of whether it was minstrelsy or melodrama, blackness could only be legitimized through the medium of whiteness. The fungibility of blackness is demonstrated in the variegated and ubiquitous uses of the black body for white affective exploration and meditations. In the case of minstrelsy, blackness is supplanted for the white renditions of black caricatures, while in the case of melodramas, white renditions of black caricatures replace the brutalized black body as a mean to meditate on the violence of the slave trade.

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[10] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection,* 27.

Activists today, much like Rankin in his time, continue to utilize pain as a conduit of identification and a resource to gain support. While I cannot say that one shouldn't post the realities of black suffering across the globe, especially when so many injustices are happening, I hope that we can question the uses of black pain as visual grammar symbolizing blackness. As Hartman asks: "What does it mean that the violence of slavery or the pained existence of the enslaved, if discernible, is only so in the most heinous and grotesque examples and not in the quotidian routines of slavery? As well, is not the difficulty of empathy related to both the devaluation and the valuation of black life?"[11] How do we place these images of black suffering in the archives of social memory? How and when are they valued? Is it solely through images of black death that black suffering can be legitimized?

When one extends Hartman's pointed reading of abolitionist empathy to the contexts of contemporary social movements and infographics, one readily recognizes a form of digital blackface that is now a necessary vehicle to fulfill liberal politics. Social media posts are meant to invite and cultivate an anti-racist moral education. By posting moments of anti-black violence and black death, social media activism calls for a certain kind of empathy for the victims of anti-black violence. However, similar to the case of abolitionists like Rankin, the possibility to feel empathy towards victims of anti-black violence requires the viewers' ability to substitute their own bodies for the murdered victim of such violence. Blackness thus becomes the medium for moral education on matters concerning race while the same viewers experience the forbidden "pleasures" of existing while black. Rankins's empathy is seen today in the liberal desire to alleviate

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[11] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection,* 21.

white guilt. White activism utilizes black pain as a conduit of identification and self-absolution. In order to foster morality, images of anti-black violence and black death are shared repeatedly, therefore restricting Black sentience and humanity. While such good intentions might be morally commendable, the use of the most heinous and painful moments of Black existence exacerbates the condition of black social death and instantiates and intensifies black suffering.

If "sentiment or morality are "'inextricably tied to human proximity'" as Zygmunt Bauman states, then the sentiments of empathy are tied to human proximity. In order to garner these sentiments, activists must establish human proximity to blackness. This proximity is established through the visibility of both the movement and suffering of the black body. When images of black death are constantly in the media, our screens, and thus our daily lives, such proximity is presumed to garner the sentiment of empathy. However, the problem lies in the fact that blackness'. humanity is determined in the general landscape of neoliberal activism via its relation to brutality and suffering.

While there may be good intentions, the use of black suffering exacerbates the condition of blackness and re-inscribes the violence of its suffering. What Hartman details in the abolitionist movement can be seen today as we move towards an era where social media is utilized as a site of resistance. The empathy's good intensions must be questioned as we look towards an ever-growing archive of digital memory that details black death continually. The violence of the digital archive mirrors that of the discursive archive. The images of Black death exist in the archive of digital history and social memory; and the lives behind those images are only rendered meaningful upon their corporeal death. Thus, the archive facilitates their social death. Their existence are

hardly every longer what is at stake, what matters is the continuous images of their death.

Black social movements call for the recognition, remedy, and the eradication of black suffering in a neoliberal landscape. However, due to the nature of black social movements, visibility and empathy are forged at the site of black death. Under these conditions, black social movements surreptitiously normalize black death and, eventually, reify the positionality of blackness as liminal.

While well intentioned, the visual nature of activism – specifically black social movements – relies on empathy which is gained through the visibility of black pain. Such visibility is meant to translate black suffering. However, as the figure of the radically other, blackness is unintelligible and it's suffering thus remains illegible. Hartman shows how empathy fails in the manner it requires the empathic person to project themselves onto the condition of the purported receiver of the empathic sentiment. In doing so, empathy exacerbates the existing distance from the other. By removing the other from view and translating their suffering through one's own pain, empathy speaking for and against blackness; it doesn't give voice to blackness. In the attempt to expand the space of the other, empathy complicates good intentions.

Because the chosen grammar to render black pain remains unintelligible to non-blackness, the need for black social movements becomes a perpetually cyclic. The continued presence of black social movements begins with the creation of the category of blackness and remains a compulsory event. The studies on black murders began with the spread of abolitionist epistles, they then spread to televised brutality during the Civil Rights Era, and have now intensified into the proliferation of cellphone images and videos of black death. The prospects of political change are deemed while black social

movements are caught in an unending paradox: Where they remain necessary for the continued fight against anti-blackness in each era, their efforts still reify and normalize the abject condition of blackness.

Chapter 2: **Social Death and the Dilemma of Ethical Grammar**

The concept of social death was first introduced by Orlando Patterson in his book *Slavery and Social Death,* a comparative study of the nature of slavery. In this book, Patterson argues that slavery is distinct from other forms of extreme domination because of the nature of its power relations. He describes the three facets of this peculiar relationship as social, psychological, culturally totalitarian. He also explains that the representation of social death in the institution of slavery was both intrusive and extrusive. The intrusive mode of social death conceptualized the slave as someone who did not belong to any social whole because he was an outsider while in the extrusive mode the slave became an outsider because he did not (or no longer) belonged to any social community whatsoever. This further complicated the existence of the slave because, although they remained socially dead, they remained a necessary element of society.

The contradiction of marginality and integration resulted in an institutionalized marginality, a liminal social status wherein, "its members exist in the hem of society, in a limbo, neither enfranchised [citizens] nor true [noncitizens]."[12] This state of social death was the ultimate outcome of natal alienation and the loss of honor and power. The master's authority was necessitated by the liminal state of social death. The master was the mediator between the socially dead and the socially alive. The slave existed only through the master, necessitating the slave's obedience in order to exist as a quasi-person. For Patterson, the power relations of slavery and, by extension, colonialism and

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[12] Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 46.

neocolonialism are not defined only by elements of property, domination, and violence.

They also fundamentally exist and legitimized through the aspect of social death. Social

death is thus a prerequisite for the authority of the master and his community because it

is through it that the slave's obedience is guaranteed. Social death is a process of loss; it

results eventually in a state and the existence of a quasi-being.

By utilizing Patterson's description of social death, I argue that the liminal state

created by social death exists in various existential aspects of our contemporary times

with the rise of today's digital space. I show that social media presents an era in which

social death can be discerned globally. Social media allows for the experience of

Blackness to be visualized, continually reifying that image and the condition of

Blackness. As I argued in chapter one, visibility is used to try to accomplish two ends: to

successfully rouse public empathy and to fight against blackness' social death. Though

both goals are meant to converge, I demonstrated in chapter one that they are instead

left with a paradox. Visibility is used to humanize blackness and gain empathy; but such

visibility becomes an instrument of a violent form (and ultimately antiblack) of

empathy. As I have shown, in our efforts to counteract social death through

humanization, we instead reify and normalize black suffering and the death that often

accompanies such suffering. Black social death shows further difficulty to the

eradication of antiblackness. It is an additional stumbling block for the possible

resolution of this paradox. In this chapter, I will try to show that the aporia of social

death, though arguably morbid, is theoretically productive because it allows us to

grapple with questions of visibility, resistance, and empathy.

While Patterson's definition of social death is important to my understanding of

social death, I think that through the work of Hartman and Jared Sexton, I am able to

not only connect the concept of social death to slavery. Their respective works have allow me to account for the interiority and potential agency of the enslaved. As Sexton explains, while Patterson's work indexes the concept of social death to slavery, it is unable and unwilling to fully accept the "agency of the perspective and self-predicating activity of the slave."[13] This approach to social death and social life as an "either/or" position is what Sexton as well as Hartman radically rethink. The implications of social death as it relates to black social life challenges not only academia, but organizers to question our understanding of a 'post-emancipation' society and the structural conditions of anti-blackness today.

By describing black social death as a liminal state, what I posit is that black social death exists in the interstices of life and death rather than as a transitional state. This distinction is specifically important as it changes my approach to activism and my understanding of the goals of resistance. This position at the nexus of life and death does not suggest that there is no black social life. Rather, it shows that black life, "is not social life in the universe formed by the codes of state and civil society, of citizen and subject, of nation and culture, of people and place, of history and heritage, of all the things that colonial society has in common with the colonized, of all that capital has in common with labor—the modern world system." [14] Black life is not lived in the world we dwell in, black life is lived in social death.

The distinction between a liminal in these interstices and liminality as transitional plays an important role for how academics and activists approach the

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[13] Jared Sexton, "The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism," in *Time, Temporality and Violence in International Relations*, ed. Kyle D Killian and Anna M. Agathangelou (New York: Routledge, 2016), 21.
[14] Sexton, "The Social Life of Social Death," 28.

concept of social death. When social death is understood as a transitional state, it suggests that there is a telos or solution to blackness can direct its life our modern world. By understanding black social death as an interstitial state, I argue that it resides between the modern world system and an un-signifiable community of blackness to come. This does not suggest that black social death negates black social life, but rather that this liminal state is where black social life might thrive, in the shared community in the blackness of existence.

Social death as an existential status rather than a way of living is another distinction that must clarified. The liminal state of social death is something that is experienced rather than done. This understanding of social death places the black as an active participant rather than a passive one. When delineating the experiences of social death, we see the various modes in which blackness experiences it. Beginning with the creation of the category of blackness and the events of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, social death has been experienced through slavery, colonialization, and neocolonization. Historically, however, we have witnessed various efforts at black resistance, which have demonstrated how blackness experiences social death in an active manner. Despite its liminal status in social death, nonetheless, blackness continuously finds new ways to exist in the world, creating a perpetual cycle of relived black experiences. The modern world system, as Sexton describes it, legally and extralegally enables black existence and ongoingly creates new tactics that lead to "the tragic continuity between slavery and freedom" or "the incomplete nature of emancipation."[15]

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[15] Sexton, "The Social Life of Social Death," 23.

What we can observe in Black social movements are attempts at resisting social death by trying to enter the modern world system as its legitimate citizens capable of utilizing all of its citizens' prerogatives. Black people have historically attempted to create legal change, advance economically, and 'get a seat at the table'. These efforts have used structural facets of the modern world like the codes and principle of its nation-states, its civil societies, and at times hoped to borrow its economic power to resist black social death. The belief is that through legal, economic, and institutional change or advancement, the positionality of blackness will be adjusted. Visibility plays a role in this because it is meant to be a visual mean to translate the experience of black suffering through images of blackness's existence and its material conditions. Visual representations of black death as a visual grammar to convey and affirm both the value of black life and the existence of black pain is a technology historically utilized by black social movements. Videos of police brutality, images of black death and suffering, to name just a few, are meant to mobilize the masses and enact lasting change. By believing that these images hold the same weight as images of non-black suffering, we fall prey to what Frank B. Wilderson named, in *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*: The ruse of analogy.

Wilderson begins his seminal book's introduction with two personal anecdotes about his time as a student at Columbia University and UC Berkeley. His first account details a Black woman who would stand outside the gates of Columbia and yell at "Whites, Latinos, and East and South Asian students, staff, and faculty as they entered the university… [accusing] them of having stolen her sofa and of selling her into

slavery."[16] His second account details a Native American man sitting on the sidewalk of Telegraph Avenue: "On the ground in front of him was an upside-down hat and a sign informing pedestrians that here they could settle the "Land Lease Accounts" that they had neglected to settle all of their lives." [17] Both experiences, Wilderson deemed "crazy". However, what Wilderson calls us to understand is "the grammar of their demands—and, by extension, the grammar of their suffering."[18] What he will call an ethical grammar. Ethics usually addresses suffering. We might turn to ethics when faced with a case of suffering in order to limit that suffering. The purpose of ethics is to translate pain into an intelligible demand. However, according to Wilderson, ethics remains impotent in dealing with black suffering.

What allows us to believe in the grammar of ethics is the belief that blackness can exist in the same ways as those around it. Wilderson thus calls this the 'ruse of analogy': "The ruse of analogy erroneously locates Blacks in the world."[19] This "attempt...is not only a mystification, and often erasure, of Blackness's grammar of suffering (accumulation and fungibility or the status of being non-Human) but simultaneously also a provision for civil society, promising an enabling modality for Human ethical dilemmas." [20] What makes this analogy dangerous and pointless is the fact that even in the case when the master and slave may have the same interests or fantasies, their grammar of suffering is irreconcilable. In the case of Whiteness, it relies on this grammar of suffering to monumentalize its subject capacity in relation to the slave's

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[16] Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 13.
[17] Wilderson, *Red White & Black,* 13.
[18] Wilderson, *Red White & Black,* 13.
[19] Wilderson, *Red White & Black,* 50.
[20] Wilderson, *Red White & Black,* 51.

incapacity. In the assumptive logic of anti-blackness, which is essentially the world in which we live according to Wilderson, the name black suffering amounts to an oxymoronic claim. The ethical grammar is not equipped to account for black suffering because it is only in experiencing black social death that one can truly understand the metaphysical properties that enable the material conditions of anti-blackness.

Using the ruse of analogy to attempt at placing blackness in the world when blackness never fully and legitimately inhabited its modern order works to erase blackness's suffering. The ruse analogy also gives credence to the ethical grammar of western humanism. It gives power to this ethical grammar insofar as ethics is now believed to be powerful as a political tool against oppression. Under these conditions, therefore, blackness can be convinced that if it asks for the same thing as any other human, such as civil rights for example, black people could be able to one day attain the fully realized form of that request. The ruse of analogy gives power to the ethical grammar of humanism insofar as one thus believes that ethics has the capacity to enact justice against anti-blackness. This, according to Wilderson, is fabricated by western humanism and becomes further entrenched by the forms of analogy that such ethics proffers.

In relation to my work, one can see that the ruse of analogy unfolds when discussing how black and white death is publicized. In the case of black social movements, the use of this grammar of suffering is apparent. Here, black existence is reduced to moments of extreme violence. Black lives are either accounted for through this violence or via claims of their inherent criminality. The humanity of black existence is often suspended for black social movements. Instead, death and violence become the measures of black humanity and, ultimately, the means through which white empathy

both becomes possible and is eventually offered. The ethical dilemma of black social movements is providing a grammar capable of accounting for the unspeakable, the illegible, and the unintelligible.

Black suffering is usually compared, juxtaposed to other forms of suffering to give it legitimacy. The ruse of analogy becomes the preferred tool to render black suffering intelligible for those who aren't black in the world. This assumes the complete translatability of black suffering. If we connect this to social movements throughout history, we see that social justice often uses this ruse as a way of occluding the violence of the lack of such black grammar. Every political action is caught in this paradox because that is the structure of the anti-black climate. My project is only a microcosm of this paradox. What I question is the reliance on solutions and its subordinating action. Why do we pretend to overcome a paradox that supersedes its solution?

Due to the liminal state of social death existing in various modes, and with the rise of digital space, social media presents a stage in which social death can be discerned globally. The experiences of slavery, colonialism, and neocolonialism act as modes through which blackness experiences social death on the global stage. What must also be understood is that due to blackness' liminal status as social death, it continuously finds new ways to endure in the world. This, as I have tried to show in chapter one, creates a perpetual cycle of relived black experiences.

The goal of social movements is to find the ethical grammar that can create successful political change. With the use of social media, this ethical grammar is often found through visual representations of suffering. Social media allows for the experience of Blackness to be visualized, continually reifying that image and the condition of Blackness. In our efforts to counteract social death through humanization, we instead

reify and normalize black suffering and death. Social death offers no solution as an approach to this paradox because it is inescapable even in our attempts to counter social death. Contrary to conventional positions, however, reading this inescapability might be theoretically productive as it allows us to grapple with questions that can guide both academic and activist work.

Rather than focusing on solution through immediate urgencies of direct political action, what I continue to question is why political action becomes subordinated to the viral hopes for solutions. Can political actions be approached away from the constraining demands for "finding a solution"? Reducing political action and activism to the properties "problem solving" might carry its form of violence. Under these conditions, action is only enacted when the prospect of the global overthrowing of racist structures is guaranteed. Being attuned to the inescapability that I refer to above does not mean that black resistance is obsolete. Rather it reveals why those black resistance must remain important. What I'm pointing to is the ineffable and deeply difficult philosophical dilemmas, which black resistance is continuously faced with, and often times with no possible answers in view. My work sits with such dilemma and attempts to trace its violence. I'm thus questioning the conditions that keep such aporia unsolvable. What I thus hope to distinguish between actions of black endurance and actions reduced to the defeating *logic of solutions*.

Chapter 3: Care as Practice and Praxis

Weaving care into activist work allows for the reimagining of how we not only present black social death, but also how we present black social life. It forces us to continually put breath into the black body even as the state aims to take that breath away. As we continue to work as activists and academics, we must critically analyze the paradoxes of black being and how these paradoxes affect our activism, whether it be digital or not. What this project hopes to do is create a distinction between actions of endurance and actions that are made towards solutions. This is where I believe the process of wake work, a concept created by Christina Sharpe, provides us with praxis. By utilizing *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* by Christina Sharpe, as my theoretical foundation I aim to imagine how wake work can be utilized to (at)tend to the paradox of black resistance and offer us not only hope, but reason to continue our work as academics and activists. What Sharpe offers is an understanding of black being in the wake as consciousness. What I posit is that this consciousness that is necessitated by and necessitates being in the wake is what I would understand as endurance. Wake work is thus the actions of care and endurance that categorize black being in the wake. When this concept is utilized as a tool to imagine not only digital activism, but activism as a whole, we can assess the ways our advocacy and activism can reify the condition blackness, but also how we can utilize care as a vantage point of black endurance as a method of resistance.

Sharpe begins her novel by considering the many meanings and manifestations of the term 'wake'.

"Wake: in the line of recoil of (a gun).

Wake: the track left on the water's surface by a ship.

Wake: the watching of relatives and friends beside the body of the dead person …

Wake: the state of wakefulness or consciousness."[21]

She begins autobiographically, wading through the experiences of the deaths of her sister, her nephew, and her brother, all of which occurred in the span of 10 months. She describes her mother who through the death of her father and the loss of income tried to make a small path through the wake. "She was attuned not only to our individual circumstances but also to those circumstances as they were an indication of, and related to, the larger antiblack world that structured all of our lives. Wake; the state of wakefulness; consciousness. It was with this sense of wakefulness as consciousness that most of my family lived an awareness of itself as, and in, the wake of the unfinished project of emancipation."[22] This consciousness that is necessitated by and necessitates being in the wake is what I would understand as endurance. This state of consciousness is not something that one works towards attaining, however. It is innate, necessitated by the existence *of* the wake and the simultaneous action of being *in* the wake.

Sharpe explains that, "one might approach black being in the wake as a form of consciousness."[23] She uses "the wake", "the ship", "the hold", and the "weather" to categorize different modalities of black being ever since slavery. By shifting the language and meanings of these words to apply to blackness in and beyond slavery she collapses linear temporality, stating that blackness is a/temporal and anagrammatical. Where "the past that is not the past, reappears always to rupture the present" and normative

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[21] Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 121.
[22] Sharpe, *In the Wake,* 15.
[23] Sharpe, *In the Wake,* 14.

systems of meaning such as the concepts of mother, girl, and child are rearranged in their contact with the signifier "black".

Sharpe proposes that, "to be in the wake is to occupy and to be occupied by the continuous and changing present of slavery's as yet unresolved unfolding."[24] It means, "living the history and present of terror, from slavery to the present, as the ground of our everyday Black existence."[25] Rather than forgetting the past and abandoning the idea of the future, Sharpe proposes that being in the wake means existing as a/temporal, "in and out of place and time putting pressure on meaning and that against which meaning is made."[26] Blackness as it is recreated and blackness as it relates to time, is in and out of place and time. This atemporality is unable to be articulated due to the unintelligibility of grammar. Regardless of what grammar is utilized, due to the signifier of "black", grammar is unable to articulate black existence and the modes in which it exists. This grammar fails to signal and materialize the afterlives of slavery in the structural, political, and material experiences of blackness.

We see how this relates to the codification of the black body, removing it from the present by changing its meaning. "We see again and again how, in and out of the United States, girl doesn't mean "girl" but, for example, "prostitute" or "felon," boy doesn't mean "boy," but "Hulk Hogan" or "gunman," "thug" or "urban youth." We see that mother doesn't mean "mother," but "felon" and "defender" and/or "birther of terror" and not one of the principal grounds of terrors multiple and quotidian enactments."[27] Without a true linearity or position of temporality, blackness is relegated to

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[24] Sharpe, *In the Wake,* 24.
[25] Sharpe, *In the Wake,* 25.
[26] Sharpe, *In the Wake,* 87.
[27] Sharpe, *In the Wake,* 87.

a/temporality, slashed identity. This leads to blackness being codified & that which codifies others. Blackness as a/temporal and anagrammatical leaves it untranslatable. This inability to translate blackness forces black suffering to be unintelligible on its own, regardless of the grammar that is utilized to address it. Even the use of visual representations of black death as a grammar to convey and affirm not only the necessity of black life, but the existence of black pain, is unable to translate black experience to those in the modern world order.

Sharpe's use of language throughout her novel allows us to understand the a/temporality of blackness, especially in the climate of anti-blackness. As she indicates, "In the United States, slavery is imagined as a singular event even as it changed over time and even as its duration expands into supposed emancipation and beyond. But slavery was not singular; it was, rather, a singularity—a weather event or phenomenon likely to occur around a particular time, or date, or set of circumstances. Emancipation did not make free Black life free; it continues to hold us in that singularity. The brutality was not singular; it was the singularity of antiblackness."[28]

A singularity as defined by Merriam Webster is, "a point or region of infinite mass density at which space and time are infinitely distorted by gravitational forces and which is held to be the final state of matter falling into a black hole."[29] Blackness as a singularity could be seen as the point at which space and time are distorted. The black body is distorted by the gravitational force of the weather that surrounds it and this is compounded by the singularity of slavery. The singularity of anti-blackness is as

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[28] Sharpe, *In the Wake,* 116.
[29] Singularity. *Merriam-Webster online*. (1996). Merriam-Webster.

pervasive as the climate. It cannot be changed, and it has no end. The only thing we remain certain of is its pervasiveness in black life.

Being in the wake is not only living in/with "the continuous and changing present of slavery's as yet unresolved and unfolding."[30] To be cognitively in the wake is to recognize the categories of the wake, the ship, the hold, and the weather as "the ongoing locations of Black being."[31] To think through the conditions of Black life and death in the aftermath of slavery is to do the work of bearing witness to the conditions and locations of black life. Black endurance is thus metacognitive. It is cognition that knows it is of cognition, of itself. What I am offering is black endurance as a recognition of the climate of anti-blackness and awareness of its inescapability, but also as the actions that we take to (at)tend to the material conditions of it.

When we apply this reading to activism, we see a connection between linear temporality and the lack of grammar to address and affirm black suffering. When activism utilizes the ruse of analogy, as discussed earlier, it places blackness in the modern world order that it never inhabited. This gives power to western notions of humanism. It gives credence to ethical grammar, insofar as it is seen as an ethical political tool to combat oppression. This is seen in the subordination of actions under solution. This subordination of action as a fundamental property of solutions, can be violent due to the creation of a standard wherein anything that acts must then believe in global transformation of structures. All actions must then lead or believe to lead to teleological forms of global transformation as solutions. This adherence to teleological temporality cannot address black suffering due to blackness being a/temporal and

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[30] Sharpe, *In the Wake,* 14.
[31] Sharpe, *In the Wake,* 16.

anagrammatical. Black existence remains untranslatable and as a result of this adherence to temporality, activism becomes tied to western notions of humanism, rather than focusing on the material conditions of those who are suffering.

This is what I consider to be the difference between actions of endurance and actions that are made towards solutions. Actions that are made towards solutions focus primarily on this linear temporality and due to that, are focused primarily on a metaphysical goal of ending modes of black existence such as colonialism and imperialism. These metaphysical goals are meant to provide us with hope to keep resisting, however, the path to achieve these goals have only been thought through the state and the modern world order. These goals utilize the ruse of analogy in order to give blackness legitimacy through comparison to the world and placement in the world Within the white liberal framework of western humanism, the structure of empathy is an integral part of trying to translate black suffering, however, due to the nature of empathy, whiteness must supplant the place of blackness to understand black suffering and make it translatable. When black social movements advocate within this framework, they must adjust blackness's real structural position as a/temporal and anagrammatical. By using a certain grammar, there is the belief that political, structural, and institutional demands can be brought to a state power. However, it is only through borrowing that institutionality and temporality that one can make that demand in the first place.

Black endurance as metacognitive provides us with recognition of not only the climate of anti-blackness, but the a/temporality and anagrammatical nature of blackness. With this consciousness in place, actions of endurance become focused on the material condition of blackness and the modes in which blackness exists. This means that rather than working towards metaphysical goals of ending imperialism or

colonialism, actions of black endurance work towards addressing and advocating against the increased physical, sexual, and political violence that is faced due to these very real, but nonetheless metaphysical structures and apparatuses. Material conditions are the state where theory and practice meet. You can see the theoretical maneuvers in material conditions at the same time as practice. I see material conditions as the physical manifestation of metaphysical and structural apparatuses. Thus, actions of endurance are meant to address the physical manifestations of metaphysical and structural concepts. By moving away from linear temporality, we are able to better address black suffering and place black endurance as at the forefront of activist projects.

When we collapse this adherence to teleological temporality we can better understand and (at)tend to blackness in our activist work. This is where I believe wake work can be applied to digital activism as we continue to endure. Wake work is not about changing the climate of anti-blackness, rather, wake work is laboring within the space of the paradoxes that surround black social life and black social death. It is a mourning, commemoration, and imagination of black social life and black social death. Wake work, as Sharpe explains it, is, "a mode of inhabiting and rupturing this episteme with our known lived and un/imaginable lives. With that analytic we might imagine otherwise from what we know now in the wake of slavery.[32]" As we continue to work as activists and academics, applying wake work means (at)tending to the complexities and paradoxes of black existence and resistance.

Activism as wake work is meant to (at)tend to the paradox of black resistance, not offering a grand solution, but reason to continue actions of endurance. "The constant

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[32] Sharpe, *In the Wake,* 18.

production of Black death is and as necessary returns us to the singularity. But just as the weather is always ripe for Black death, the singularity also produces Black resistances and refusals.[33]" The production of black resistance and refusal is a necessary aspect of black existence in the wake, but it is only through actions of endurance that activism can move away from western humanist ideals and instead focus on (at)tending to blackness and caring for it. The paradox of black resistance, especially black digital resistance lies in visibility and empathy. Visibility is used to humanize blackness and gain empathy, however visibility becomes an instrument of empathy. And in our efforts to counteract social death through humanization, we instead reify and normalize black suffering and death.

Wake work addresses and affirms blackness as a/temporal and anagrammatical, allowing us to labor between the space of the paradoxes of black existence, such as the paradox of black resistance, and imagine otherwise from what we know. While I believe the paradox is inescapable, wake work provides us with care as a vantage point, radically changing how we can approach the necessity of visibility, the resulting empathy, and the failure of the two when they are met with the signifier of black. Rather than pushing for hypervisibility, especially on social platforms that allow images of black death to be seen across the world continuously, wake work pushes us to rethink and reimagine how to utilize care in our actions of endurance. It does not force us to create a grammar for the anagrammatical or adhere to temporality for the atemporal. Rather wake work, pushes for aspiration.

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[33] Sharpe, *In the Wake,* 124.

Sharpe explains that, the word that she arrived at for, "such imagining and for keeping and putting breath back in the black body in hostile weather is aspiration (and aspiration is violent and life-saving)."[34] This continued action of putting breath back in the black body is an action of endurance. Allowing us to recognize the climate and actively resist it through our continued existence and actions. This aspiration is violent in the sense that it recognizes the climate that surrounds the black body, and also actively resists. It is lifesaving in the sense that it breathes life back into a body surrounded and plagued by black death. Aspiration is the action of black endurance that exists due to black social life as and in black social death.

Wake work, I believe, aims at harnessing the shared status of blackness and utilizing this shared understanding to focus care in all our work, whether it be activism or academia, or a mixture of the two. What I am offering is hope in the sense, that care is what we should strive for, rather than adhering to western humanist ideals. By practicing wake work, we focus on actions of endurance, rather than actions that are subordinate to solutions. Sharpe presents black being in the wake as consciousness. And what I argue is that this consciousness that is necessitated by and necessitates being in the wake is endurance. Wake work is thus the actions of care and endurance that categorize black being in the wake. It does not offer solutions to the metaphysical structures and climate of anti-blackness, but allows us to critically reimagine in our daily lives how we can utilize care, as aspiration, or any other method that we may put words to. When this concept is utilized as a tool to imagine not only digital activism, but activism as a whole, we can assess the ways our advocacy and activism can reify the

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[34] Sharpe, *In the Wake,* 113.

condition blackness, but also how we can utilize care as a vantage point of black

endurance as a method of resistance.

Conclusion

In this paper, I sought to address a gap within digital studies and philosophy. By relying primarily on the works of black critical theorists like Christina Sharpe and Saidiya Hartman as central figures in the growing scholarship on questions of blackness' relation to progress and time, their interventions theoretically foreground my project. Via close readings of their texts, my project's central question – i.e. What does visibility afford us when it is purchased at the cost of black social life – is therefore taken up by attempting to understand what progress, visibility, and agency represent for black social movements at a time where social media is utilized as a site of resistance. This question is of utmost importance not only because of the increasing use of social media as a tool of resistance, but also due to the role of social media in the digital archive.

In chapter one, I focused primarily on visibility and empathy as major aspects of activism. I argued while well intentioned, the visual nature of activism – specifically black social movements – relies on empathy which is gained through the visibility of black pain. Such visibility is meant to translate black suffering. However, as the figure of the radically other, blackness is unintelligible and it's suffering thus remains illegible. Because the chosen grammar to render black pain remains unintelligible to non-blackness, the need for black social movements becomes a perpetually cyclical.

By utilizing *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* by Saidiya Hartman, I sought to analyze the precarious nature of empathy through the introduction of John Rankin's epistle to his brother. In chapter one, Hartman establishes the moral double bind of empathy. The aporias of empathy are exemplified by John Rankin's epistle to his brother. An abolitionist with the hopes of

exposing the horrors of slavery, Rankin ends up supplanting the place of the slave and exemplifying the dangers of empathy and white neoliberal politics.

Rankin's story offers me the chance to critically analyze how activists today utilize pain as a conduit of identification and a resource to gain support White activism utilizes black pain as a conduit of identification and self-absolution. In order to foster morality, images of anti-black violence and black death are shared repeatedly, therefore restricting Black sentience and humanity. While such good intentions might be morally commendable, the use of the most heinous and painful moments of Black existence exacerbates the condition of black social death and instantiates and intensifies black suffering. Through these analyses, this chapter's final call was for the good intentions of empathy to be questioned as we look towards an ever-growing archive of digital memory that details black death continually. Even as we see changes in the medium of how we get people's attention, we still do not see changes in the nature of these movements. The continued presence of black social movements begins with the creation of the category of blackness and remains a compulsory event. The studies on black murders began with the spread of abolitionist epistles, they then spread to televised brutality during the Civil Rights Era, and have now intensified into the proliferation of cellphone images and videos of black death. The prospects of political change are deemed while black social movements are caught in an unending paradox: Where they remain necessary for the continued fight against anti-blackness in each era, their efforts still reify and normalize the abject condition of blackness.

In chapter two, I focused on the concept of social death and its relation to the visibility and empathy. As I argued in chapter one, visibility is used to try to accomplish two ends: to successfully rouse public empathy and to fight against blackness' social

death. Though both goals are meant to converge, I demonstrated in chapter one that they are instead left with a paradox. Visibility is used to humanize blackness and gain empathy; but such visibility becomes an instrument of a violent form (and ultimately antiblack) of empathy. As I have shown, in our efforts to counteract social death through humanization, we instead reify and normalize black suffering and the death that often accompanies such suffering. Through the use of *Slavery and Social Death*, by Orlando Patterson, I was able to gain foundational understanding of the concept of social death and utilize that understanding to argue that the liminal state created by social death exists in various existential aspects of our contemporary times and with the rise of today's digital space, I show that social media presents an era in which social death can be discerned globally.

However, it was through Jared Sexton's article, "The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism", that I was able to not only connect the concept of social death to slavery, but also recognize the interiority and agency of the enslaved. I focused on moving away from approaching social life and social death as an "either/or" position and instead viewing black social death as a liminal state. By describing black social death as a liminal state, what I posit is that black social death exists in the interstices of life and death rather than as a transitional state. This position at the nexus of life and death does not suggest that there is no black social life. Rather, it shows that black life, "is not social life in the universe formed by the codes of state and civil society, of citizen and subject, of nation and culture, of people and place, of history and heritage, of all the things that colonial society has in common with the colonized, of all that capital has in common with labor—the modern world system" (Sexton 28).

By bringing in Frank B. Wilderson III's novel, *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms,* I also introduce the concept of the ruse of analogy, and the ways it is displayed in digital activism. Using the ruse of analogy to attempt at placing blackness in the world when blackness never fully and legitimately inhabited its modern order works to erase blackness's suffering. The ruse analogy also gives credence to the ethical grammar of western humanism. It gives power to this ethical grammar insofar as ethics is now believed to be powerful as a political tool against oppression. This ethical grammar of western humanism reduces political action and activism to the properties "problem solving", which might carry its own form of violence. Under these conditions, action is only enacted when the prospect of the global overthrowing of racist structures is guaranteed.

I go into the danger and violence of this in my third chapter, where I argue that, we must create a distinguish between actions of black endurance and actions reduced to the defeating *logic of solutions*. In this chapter, I bring up the process of wake work, a concept created by Christina Sharpe, as a possible praxis in activist work. By utilizing *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* by Christina Sharpe, as my theoretical foundation I aimed to imagine how wake work can be utilized to (at)tend to the paradox of black resistance and offer us not only hope, but reason to continue our work as academics and activists. Activism as wake work is meant to (at)tend to the paradox of black resistance, not offering a grand solution, but reason to continue actions of endurance. Wake work addresses and affirms blackness as a/temporal and anagrammatical, allowing us to labor between the space of the paradoxes of black existence, such as the paradox of black resistance, and imagine otherwise from what we know. While I believe the paradox is inescapable, wake work provides us with care as a vantage point, radically changing how

we can approach the necessity of visibility, the resulting empathy, and the failure of the two when they are met with the signifier of black.

The significance of this project lies in the intersection of theory and praxis, especially as academics and activists. There is a repetition of a failure in digital activism that makes the very desire for racial progress become impossible because there's never a moment of self-reflection where it comes to understand how it reproduces mechanisms of anti-blackness in its very desire to transcend or go beyond anti-blackness. Until digital activism is able to accomplish this self-reflective move whereby it thinks about its own relationship to anti-blackness and the visual representation of black death and what black death means, it will continue to repeat its failure, not letting it get anywhere near its desired goal. We must learn how utilize care in activism and understand not only how visibility helps and harms our movements, but also who our audiences are. I hope that my project leaves us questioning, what is the cost of going viral?

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