

*No Tea,*  
NO SHADE

New Writings in Black Queer Studies

EDITED BY

*E. Patrick Johnson*

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS *Durham & London* 2016

## Black Data

SHAKA MCGLOTTEN



#howblackareyou

COMEDIAN, GEEK, AND AUTHOR Baratunde Thurston began his 2009 South by Southwest slide show “How to Be Black (Online)” with a very brief explanation of why black people are important: “we look good/history proves black people are the future/e.g. rock n roll/e.g. hip hop/e.g. ass/lip injections.”<sup>1</sup> His playful intro led into a more sophisticated, if also still comical, analysis of black online life. He noted in particular the waning “digital divide.” Blacks are online as much as whites if both tethered and wireless access are considered, and both groups tend to use the same sites, with a few exceptions.<sup>2</sup> Thurston also noted the persistence of racism on the web, a point also underlined by numerous scholars of race and the Internet.<sup>3</sup> Thurston focused specifically on black use of Twitter, which he links to the call-and-response game of insults known as the dozens.<sup>4</sup> Of course, tweeting blacks cause consternation among some whites: “Wow!! too many negros in the trending topics for me. I may be done with this whole twitter thing.”<sup>5</sup>

Thurston’s work on race and technology provides a template for my own efforts here. In this essay, I engage in a black queer call-and-response with a few key concepts circulating in network theories and cultures.

I use an eclectic group of artifacts—Thurston’s slide show, an interview with Barack Obama in the wake of the National Security Agency (NSA)

surveillance scandal, the artwork of Zach Blas, and a music video about technology and gentrification—to proffer the heuristic, “black data.” This heuristic, I suggest, offers some initial analytic and political orientations for black queer studies to more fully engage with the theories, effects, and affects of network cultures. Although there are significant bodies of literature in science and technology, as well as cultural and media studies, that grapple with race and a handful of works that address sexuality and new media technologies, black queer studies, itself still a developing, loosely organized group of scholars and cultural practitioners, has not generated many analyses of the particular ways black queer people are interpolated by or employ new media and other technologies.<sup>6</sup> Here, I use black data to think through some of the historical and contemporary ways black queer people, like other people of African descent and people of color more broadly, are hailed by big data, in which *technés* of race and racism reduce our lives to mere numbers: we appear as commodities, revenue streams, statistical deviations, or vectors of risk.<sup>7</sup> Big data also refers to the various efforts of states and corporations to capture, predict, and control political and consumer behavior. Black data is, then, a response to big data’s call, and here I offer readings that outline some possible political and affective vectors, some ways to refuse the call or perhaps even to hang up.

Black queer lives are often reduced to forms of accounting that are variously intended to elicit alarm or direct highly circumscribed forms of care. Statistics are used to mobilize people to fight HIV/AIDS—such as the fact that blacks account for 44 percent of new HIV infections.<sup>8</sup> They are used to direct attention to the omnipresence of violence in black life or to the specific forms of violence directed against black LGBTQ people, as in the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs’ 2012 report, which notes that LGBTQ people of color are nearly twice as likely to experience physical violence as their white counterparts and that transgender people of color are two and a half times as likely to experience police violence as their white cisgender counterparts.<sup>9</sup> Assigning numerical or financial value to black life, transforming experience into information or data, is nothing new; rather, it is caught up with the history of enslavement and the racist regimes that sought to justify its barbarities. Between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, more than twelve and a half million Africans were transported from Africa to the New World. Two million, and likely many more, died during the Middle Passage.<sup>10</sup> A typical slave ship could carry more than three hundred slaves arranged like sardines; the sick and dead would be thrown overboard, their loss claimed for insurance money, as

in the infamous Zong massacre. Other, more recent data circulate in the wake of the ongoing global recession and the protests against George Zimmerman's exoneration in the killing of seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin: black families saw their wealth drop 31 percent between 2007 and 2010;<sup>11</sup> in 2012, police and security guards killed 136 unarmed black men.<sup>12</sup> In the wake of a spate of police violence in 2014 and the failed indictments of the police who killed Michael Brown and Eric Garner, an analysis by the investigative journalism site *ProPublica* showed that black males were twenty-one times more likely to be fatally shot than young white males.<sup>13</sup> These realities have contributed to the growth of the Black Lives Matter movement.

It is tempting to ascribe these racialized accountings to the cruel systems of value established by capitalism, which seeks to encode—quantify and order—life and matter into categories of commodity, labor, exchange value, and profit. Indeed, race itself functions as such as commodity in the era of genomics—a simple oral swab test can help you answer Thurston's question #howblackareyou, and you can watch others' reactions to their results on *Faces of America*, a popular show about genealogical testing. Yet as Lisa Nakamura, Peter Chow-White, and Wendy Chun observe, race is not merely an effect of capitalism's objectifying systems; rather, race is itself a co-constituting technology that made such forms of accounting possible in the first place.<sup>14</sup> "Race as technology," Chun notes, helps us understand "how race functions as the 'as,' how it facilitates comparisons between entities classed as similar or dissimilar."<sup>15</sup> Race is a tool, and it was intrinsic, not anterior, to constructions of capital, as well as to ideas about biology and culture. As Mel Chen puts it, race is an animate hierarchy, in which the liveliness and the value of some things (whiteness, smart technology) are established via a proximity to other things positioned lower or further away (blackness, dumb matter).<sup>16</sup> "Wow!! too many negros in the trending topics for me" simply reiterates in the realm of microblogging hierarchical technics of racism that see black people as polluting and therefore as distasteful or dangerous or that would deny information/technology to the subjects of discrimination.<sup>17</sup>

Of course, the above statistics are familiar, and while useful, they tell only very partial stories, reducing black experience to an effect of capitalism (a vulgar Marxism if ever there was one) or to a kind of numerology of bare life. In what follows I sketch a few different trajectories for black data. I performatively enact black data as a kind of informatics of

black queer life, as reading and throwing shade, to grapple with the NSA surveillance scandal, new biometric technologies, and the tech-fueled gentrification of San Francisco. These readings (actings out?) also help to illustrate the ways black queer theories, practices, and lives might be made to matter in relation to some of the organizing tensions of contemporary network cultures: privacy, surveillance, capture, and exclusion. Black queers frame what is at stake in these debates insofar as we quite literally embody struggles between surveillance and capture, between the seen and unseen. Moreover, we have developed rogue epistemologies which often rely on an array of technological media and which help us to make ourselves present and to make ourselves disappear. In the reads that follow, I also gesture toward the virtual affinities black queer theoretical or political projects might share with cryptographic and anarchist activisms.

### Obama's Face and Black Opacities

*Ima read.*<sup>18</sup> In this context, my black queer call-and-response takes the specific form of reading and shade, critical performative practices wielded by queers of color and made famous in the film *Paris Is Burning*. Reading is an artfully delivered insult, while shade refers to disrespectful behaviors or gestures, which can be subtly or not so subtly communicated. In *Paris Is Burning*, Dorian Corey describes it this way: "Shade is, 'I don't tell you you're ugly, but I don't have to tell you because you know you're ugly.' And that's shade."<sup>19</sup> Academics know how to be shady, but they usually dress it up in ideology or jargon. Part of my intervention here has to do with how I seek to occasionally sidestep some of these professional niceties.

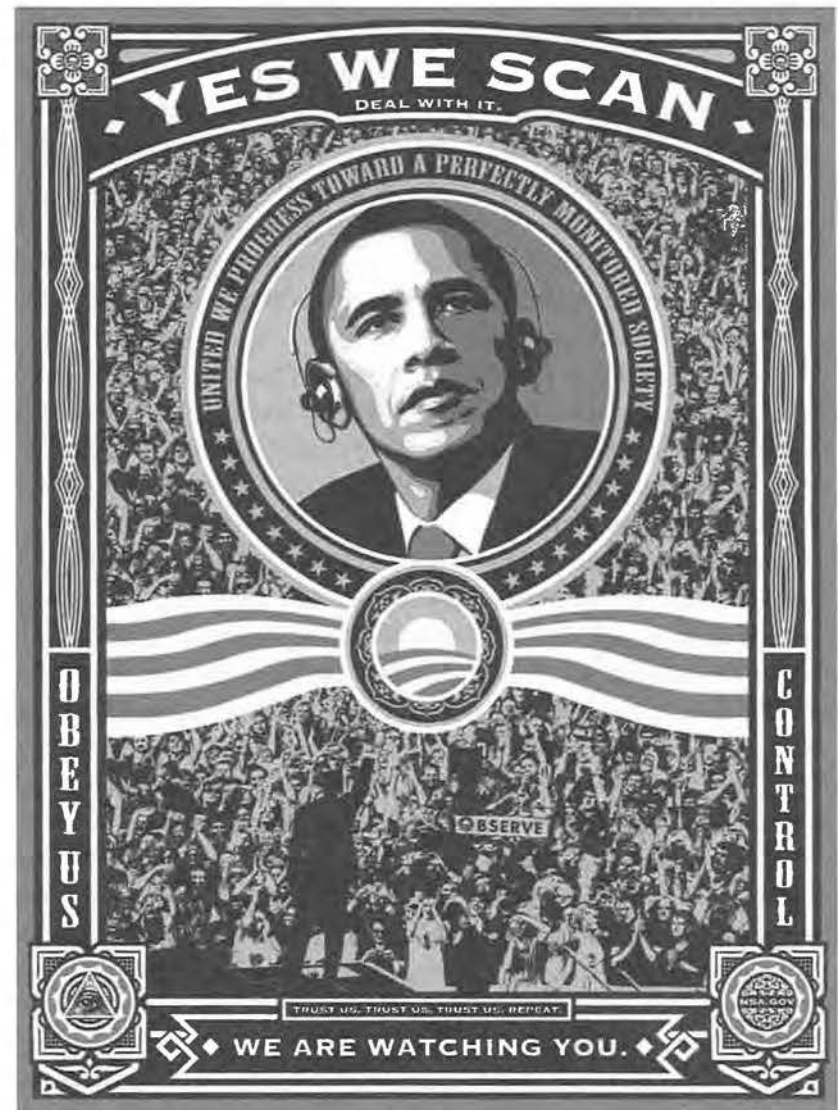
Obama was raised by white people, not drag queens, but he knows how to give good face. But in the moments before a 2013 interview with PBS's Charlie Rose, Obama's signature smile cracked, revealing instead an ugly mask. This mask held a tense set of ironies. The United States' first black president defended his unprecedented expansion of surveillance programs of the National Security Agency (NSA) to include the collection of the metadata of millions of Americans' and global citizens' telephone and e-mail correspondence. He accused Edward Snowden, a former NSA contractor turned whistleblower, of spying and called for his arrest, continuing a pattern of aggressively prosecuting leakers of governmental overreach.<sup>20</sup> The racial melodrama is striking: a black man authorizes the capture and arrest of a young white man, who by revealing the



spying program directly challenged the hegemony of U.S. imperialism, a project historically and presently tied to the control, domination, torture, and murder of brown and black people around the world.<sup>21</sup>

Obama's grin is a failed mask or the slippery gap that hosts the mask before its radiant, populist actualization: "Charlie, let me tell you . . . I want to assure all Americans . . ." In another era, and maybe still in this one, Obama's grin might embody the racist fantasy that all black people are animated by an animalistic desire to please or reassure white people. But here the mask is a more familiar code, a politician's lie—"don't worry, everything's fine, carry on." Although brief, Obama's expression arrested my attention, an attention shared with other queers and people of color, one that is always attuned, through calibrated and diffused looks, speculations, and modes of attention, to "the evidence of felt intuition," to the subtle or not-so-subtle gestures that indicate shared desire or the threat of violence.<sup>22</sup> My cynical intuition—Ima read—collides with nostalgia for a scene of optimism. I cannot help but juxtapose this rictus grin with Shephard Fairey's famous image of Obama gazing hopefully into the distance. To this juxtaposition we can add a meme that emerged in the wake of the NSA scandal—Yes We Scan.

For Giorgio Agamben and Emmanuel Levinas, faces condition our ethical encounters with one another. Agamben writes, "Only where I find a face do I encounter an exteriority and does an outside happen to me."<sup>23</sup> In the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, however, the face is something more ambivalent; it is operationalized as a regulating function



FIGS 13.1 AND 13.2. Two different faces of America's first postracial president: awkward and potentially all-seeing. Opposite: a screengrab by the author. Above: "Yes We Scan," courtesy of Rene Walter.



whose origins lay in racism. “Faciality” determines what faces can be recognized or tolerated.<sup>24</sup> The dozens, and black queer reading practices in particular, are uncanny inversions of faciality. Rather than serve to hierarchically order bodies into viscous clumps, dominating “by comparison to a model or a norm,”<sup>25</sup> reading Obama’s face in this way might yield a comic finality—“you’re so ugly, even Hello Kitty says goodbye” or “your grin is such a lie that not even your white grandmother would believe you.” But Obama’s grimacing mask is not merely a sign to be decoded, a truth to be unveiled. A read is a punctum that is also always an invitation, a salvo in a call-and-response.

Edward Snowden unmasked himself in part because he believed that by stepping out from the veil of anonymity, by revealing his identity and giving face, he might effect some degree of control over the representation of his decision to confirm the unprecedented scale of the NSA’s programs and to encourage others to come forward.<sup>26</sup> In addition, and unsurprisingly, he believed that his anonymity might endanger him, making him vulnerable to the intimidation, kidnapping, torture, and murder he knew the U.S. government was capable of. By coming forward/out, Snowden curiously mimicked some black and queer practices, which mix a performative hypervisibility (an awareness of one’s difference and visibility) with invisibility or opacity (an indifference or even hostility to the norm or to being read properly). James Baldwin, riffing on Ralph Ellison, expressed it somewhat differently in a 1961 interview in which he linked black in/visibility to whiteness: “What white people see when they look at you is not visible. What they *do* see when they *do* look at you is what they have invested you with. What they have invested you with is all the agony, and pain, and the danger, and the passion, and the torment—you know, sin, death, and hell—of which everyone in this country is terrified.”<sup>27</sup>

Snowden had gone stealth for years, passing as a mild-mannered analyst, keeping his civil libertarian streak on the down low. Snowden appeared, *carried it*, and then vanished.<sup>28</sup> Currently, Snowden remains in Russia, which has extended his asylum until 2017, while the United States continues to bully other nations into denying him egress. Snowden’s face (like that of convicted U.S. Army whistleblower Chelsea Manning) now appears on the placards of thousands of protestors around the world. Their faces have become screens and masks, standing in for or projecting a generalizable face—my face, your face, all our faces. And increasingly, as at a summer 2013 protest in Germany, the faces of these figures are worn as masks, barring access to an individual or specific face while calling

into existence a shared or collective one.<sup>29</sup> These faces/masks make a dual demand: transparency from the government, opacity for the rest of us.

In her study of the transatlantic performances of black women, historian and performance studies scholar Daphne Brooks uses the concept of “spectacular opacity” to retool colonial tropes of darkness, which have “historically been made to envelop bodies and geographical territories in the shadows of global and hegemonic domination.”<sup>30</sup> Like some uses of masks, or going stealth, darkness and opacity have the capacity to resist the violent will-to-know, the will-to-transparency. Martinican critic and poet Édouard Glissant says that “a person has a right to be opaque,”<sup>31</sup> a point echoed, in different contexts, by cypherpunks like Julian Assange and the hacktivist group Anonymous. For Assange, Anonymous, and others such as the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), developing cryptographic literacies is essential. This may involve using an anonymizing browser such as TOR, an array of browser add-ons, secure file transfer services, and encrypted chat, among many other techniques.<sup>32</sup> Encryption transforms information into codes that are unreadable by anyone without the appropriate cipher. Learning how to make oneself opaque is a practical necessity and a political tactic in this moment of big data’s ascendancy, in which clickstreams, RFID tags, the GPS capacities of our cell phones, CCTV, and new biometric technologies are employed by states and corporations to digitally log our movements and virtually every technologically mediated interaction. Yet states and corporations have made encryption more difficult, describing cryptographic tools as weapons and encrypted communications as threats to national security.<sup>33</sup> How can citizens challenge state and corporate power when those powers demand we accede to total surveillance, while also criminalizing dissent? How do we resist such demands when journalists, whistleblowers, activists, and artists are increasingly labeled as traitors or terrorists?<sup>34</sup>

Network theorist Alexander Galloway provides some conceptual and political starting points in his essay “Black Box, Black Bloc.”<sup>35</sup> In the essay he considers the ways the black bloc, an anarchist tactic of anonymity and massification, and the black box, a technological device for which only inputs and outputs are known, but not the contents, collide in the new millennium.<sup>36</sup> The black box provides a model for the individual and collective black bloc to survive: using an array of technological and political tools, we might turn to black-boxing ourselves to make ourselves illegible to the surveillance state and big data. To resist the hegemony of the transparent, we (a “we” I imagine as loosely comprising people opposed

to the unholy marriage of militarism, corporatocracy, manufactured consent, and neoliberal economic voodoo) will need to embrace techniques of becoming dark or opaque to better become present, to assert our agency and autonomy, or merely to engage in truly private interactions, without being seen or apprehended. We too can employ masks that lie, but unlike Obama's mask, these masks might help produce a sense of camaraderie. In the black bloc, or among the real-world protests organized by Anonymous and others, a mask anonymizes while also representing a shared collectivity, as evidenced by the ways the Guy Fawkes mask popularized by Anonymous is being taken up in contexts around the world: in the student protests in Quebec in 2014, as well as in protest movements in Europe and Brazil. In these contexts masks operate as part of a new politics of opacity, a form of black data that help make identities or identifying information go dark or disappear while simultaneously hailing an incipient multitude. Such a multitude is also reflected in mobilizations in the wake of George Zimmerman's acquittal in which protesters were arrayed in hoodies that declared, "I am Trayvon Martin."

Reading Obama's mask, or trying to decipher his real character or intentions, invites us to reflect on our own desires for transparency, for knowing or settling on a truth in an era in which transparency is always already staged. In an era of pervasive surveillance—by the NSA, Google, Apple, Microsoft, and Facebook, but also by our bosses, colleagues, students, parents, friends, and lovers—masks can offer a layer of protection rather than hide a real essence. A good mask, one resistant to efforts to decode it, may in fact provide us with a little room to maneuver, a little room outside the grasp of our "control society."

### Black Skin, Queer Masks

While the collection and interpretation of metadata—data about data—has become increasingly sophisticated, other racial and sexual profiling techniques remain crude. Currently, most of these techniques rely on the visual apprehension of another's difference. Stop-and-Frisk, the New York City Police program that began in 2002 and has resulted in four million stops, nearly 90 percent of them involving blacks and Latinos, is one example. The wanton murder of queers of color is another.

More recent work in biometrics and the study of movement presage new technologies for capturing and recording the body. Scientific research in facial recognition, for example, provides a basis for a biometrics

of queerness. On its surface the research gives credence to the concept of gaydar; a series of studies show that people are able to make very fast, above-chance judgments about sexual orientation.<sup>37</sup> How soon might these abilities be coded into facial recognition software? How difficult might passing become?

Christoph Bregler, a professor of computer science at New York University and director of its Movement Lab, is among the leaders of this research. In an interview with NPR's *On the Media* in the wake of the Boston Marathon bombing, he described the coming technologies. He began by noting his ability to identify other Germans while walking in New York City. This quasi-intuitive form of accounting happens almost automatically. A barely audible snippet of language, a person's gait, and body language all contribute to nearly subliminal processes of identification. He used this personal example to describe problems with identifying the Boston bombing suspects, Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev. Surveillance camera footage demanded that law enforcement spend many hundreds of hours combing through the footage.<sup>38</sup> Bregler believes that this work can, should, and will be automated. His own research teams can already identify national identity with 80 percent accuracy.<sup>39</sup>

Bregler imagines a world in which these technologies are more widely available and automated, making the identification of criminals or terrorists easier for law enforcement. Shoshana Magnet and Simone Browne, however, address some of the many problems with such approaches, emphasizing in particular the ways biometric technologies reproduce social stereotypes and inequalities. Magnet notes how biometrics works differently for different groups. Many biometric technologies, for example, rely on false ideas about race, such as the association of particular facial features with racial groups, and these technologies also reproduce the marginalization of transgender people. Browne links contemporary biometrics to a history of identification documents shaping "human mobility, security applications and consumer transactions," as well as to racializing surveillance technologies such as slave passes and patrols, wanted posters, and branding.<sup>40</sup> Details about a person's life, his or her experience and embodiment, are coded as data that do not, strictly speaking, belong to them and which are put to use by states and corporations in ways over which that person may have little control.

Magnet and Browne thereby underscore the ethical dilemmas related to social stratification and intellectual property. They, and others, also describe the ways these technologies represent a desire for unerring precision



FIGS 13.3 AND 13.4. Masks derived from biometric data by artist Zach Blas. Images courtesy of Zach Blas.

and control that is and can never be achieved. As Wendy Chun notes, this control is first bound, paradoxically, to ideas that technologies will help us be free.<sup>41</sup> Second, the control represented by automated processes is not infallible; they fail. Magnet's work in particular underscores biometric failures, and she argues that "biometrics do real damage to vulnerable people and groups, to the fabric of democracy, and to the possibility of a better understanding of the bodies and identities these technologies are supposedly intended to protect."<sup>42</sup>

In recent and upcoming projects, artist-theorist Zach Blas offers creative hacks that disrupt new biometric technologies of the face. The collaborative *Facial Weaponization Suite* contests the ideological and technical underpinnings of face-based surveillance. In this community-based project, masks are collectively produced "from the aggregated facial data of participants" (Figure 13.4). His *Fag Face Mask* responds directly to the above studies on sexual orientation and facial cue recognition and offers ways to induce failures into these technologies. *Fag Face Mask* uses facial data from queer men, creating a composite that is then rendered by a 3D

printer. The resulting mask is a blob, an unreadable map. Thus far, two masks have been printed, one pink, the other black. In video documentation for the work, which self-consciously echoes the aesthetics of the videos released by Anonymous, a figure wearing the pink mask describes the ways biometric technologies seek to read identity from the body, reproducing in the process the notion that one could have a stable identity at all. A few moments into the video, the mask itself, now a pulsing animation, recounts in a synthetic voice the failures of biometrics: "Biometric technologies rely heavily on stable and normative conceptions of identity, and thus, structural failures are encoded in biometrics that discriminate against race, class, gender, sex, and disability. For example, fingerprint devices often fail to scan the hands of Asian women, and iris scans work poorly if an eye has cataracts. Biometric failure exposes the inequalities that emerge when normative categories are forced upon populations."<sup>43</sup> Blas goes on to ask, "What are the tactics and techniques for making our faces nonexistent? How do we flee this visibility into the fog of a queer-ness that refuses to be recognized?"

*Fag Face Mask* uses masks, aggregated faces of fags, as weapons to evade or escape capture. Explicitly linked to the masked, communal figures of the black bloc, the Zapatistas, and Anonymous, Blas's project invites us to share in an air of "deliberate mystery," an opaque queer fog.<sup>44</sup> Yet resisting biometric technologies of the face or introducing disruptions into this field of surveillance can also result in law enforcement agencies using yet more extreme approaches. As Blas observes in the video missive, Occupy activists and Afghan civilians alike became the object of biometric data collection, and the NYPD has criminalized the wearing of masks in public. And recently the *Washington Post* revealed that more than 120 million people have been unwittingly added to facial recognition databases when, for example, they obtained a driver's license.<sup>45</sup>

Techniques of refusal, such as anonymous massification vis-à-vis masks, are unevenly available. There are some for whom flight may not be possible and/or for whom it may be forced. For example, becoming clandestine or deserting are not really options for populations already subject to spatialized forms of control.<sup>46</sup> The Stop-and-Frisk program takes place almost entirely in black and brown neighborhoods, contexts in which people yearn to escape police harassment and violence but where efforts to evade surveillance or to contest it only result in heightened forms of scrutiny—hoodies and baggy pants or mascara and glitter are already sufficient to attract dangerous forms of attention. In these contexts, young



black and brown men and queers might be better served by technologies that could help them to pass, that would make them white, a dark wish encoded in the song I turn to next.

### Google Google Apps Apps

Queers, all the queers  
Queers, all the queers  
We're on the move  
Hey girl, where the fuck you moving to?  
Moving to the East Bay  
Living life the broke way

The Black Glitter Collective's 2013 music video "Google Google Apps Apps" is an angry lament for the death of queer San Francisco.<sup>47</sup> Latina drag queen Persia, together with collective members DADDIES PLASTIK, work it to an up-tempo beat, but the song itself is depressing. If the first two sections of this essay are concerned with the relationship between masks and the political possibilities represented by darkness figured as opacity, this last section employs the darkness of "black data" in a different way. I focus on the material effects those companies whose business is data have had on the spatialization of dark or unseen people, focusing in particular on the ways queers and people of color have been forced to flee the gentrifying processes effected by San Francisco's most recent tech boom. Here black data takes the form of "black ops,"<sup>48</sup> an angry, ambivalent, even masochistic queer of color response to the entwined logics of white supremacy and the "values" of the high-tech industry.

Persia wrote the song in response to the stress of her imminent unemployment. She was about to lose her job at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and Esta Noche, the gay Latino bar where she performed in San Francisco, was having trouble paying its bills.<sup>49</sup> In the song, she responds to the most recent wave of tech-fueled gentrification in San Francisco, which has resulted in astronomical increases in rents: the median rent for a one-bedroom apartment is now \$2,764 per month.<sup>50</sup> Unsurprisingly, these increases have disproportionately impacted already vulnerable populations, such as the poor, people of color, underemployed queers, activists, and a host of community organizations and nonprofits.

New technologies seek to transmute the base matter of bodies into code, into digital forms of information that are intended to enhance

communication and sociability, as well as, to borrow a category from Apple's apps, "productivity." They thereby also aid in the biopolitical management of populations and profit corporations like Google, Apple, Facebook, and Twitter, giants in a region also saturated with other smaller and midsize tech businesses and the venture capitalists who support them. Here we see the results of their success without requiring any complicated decryption algorithms; this is simple addition: they reap record profits, they work with city governments to bring jobs to the region and to "develop" city districts, rents go up.

Persia shouts, "SF keep your money/Fuck your money!" The song underscores the material effects the growth of digital technologies and economies have had on real-world spaces, in this case the forced exodus of the people and cultures that helped make San Francisco a political and creative laboratory, that made it home to so many freaks, artists, and sexual adventurers. In a now famous account, Richard Florida noted the appeal of quirky, diverse cities to high-tech companies, forward-looking entrepreneurs, and the "creative class."<sup>51</sup> Florida did not, however, account for the ways the emigration of white-collar creatives and geeks tends to fundamentally alter the very things that made the destination so appealing in the first instance. Persia's resentment, like that of the working class more broadly, does not figure into his analyses.<sup>52</sup> In a discussion about Silicon Valley's recent awkward and usually selfish forays into politics, the *New Yorker's* George Packer observes, "The technology industry . . . has transformed the Bay Area without being changed by it—in a sense, without getting its hands dirty."<sup>53</sup>

Importantly, the song's refrain links these processes of gentrification and displacement, as well as the underlying ideologies and practices of neoliberal capitalism, to whiteness. Persia and her crew sing:

Google Google Apps Apps  
Google Google Apps Apps  
Gringa Gringa Apps Apps  
Gringa Gringa Apps Apps  
I just wanna wanna be white!

The technological giants that aim to connect people everywhere are intimately tied to new surveillance regimes, something the song acknowledges early on when Persia tells her audience to "Twitter, Twitter me/Facebook, Facebook me." They are also linked to white privilege and class domination.<sup>54</sup> The new arrivals to San Francisco, these gringos and gringas,



terms that refer to English-speaking nonnatives, reproduce the violent fantasies of white manifest destiny. They are bringing civilization, in the forms of design-savvy gadgets, tweets, instant picture sharing, cat videos, augmented reality, biometric tagging, commercial data mining, and apps for everything, to the unwashed hippies and queers of San Francisco, as well as to billions of needy people around the world. Although they might give the impression of being insensitive—if such comments as “adapt or move to Oakland” are any indication—they do not have it out for anyone in particular.<sup>55</sup> They are rational self-evident social actors, self-evident because their motives are pure and transparent: technological mastery, professional achievement, economic success, white-collar comforts (like living in the Bay Area).

Their privilege is evident as well in the alarm and discomfort they feel in the wake of recent protests against their presence in the Bay Area. In a much-discussed Twitter image, protesters at a May 2013 antigentrification event smashed a piñata of a Google bus, a paper mache avatar of the cushy luxury bus shuttle service Google provides to its San Francisco employees. The buses (also used by other companies) transport workers to the Google offices and are equipped with high-speed Wi-Fi so that they can stay connected 24-7, so that they can optimize their workflows or gossip or sleep en route to work without having to mix it up with the masses.

In the video, DADDIES PLASTIK members Tyler Holmes and Vain Hein comically reflect on their own chances of becoming white:

How does one become white?  
A little bleach might do the trick  
Well I bleach my asshole—  
Does that count?

In this instance, the song ties bleached assholes, a trend that involves depigmentation of the skin around the anus, to whiteness more broadly. While this is a satirical jab at perceived white sexual hangups, the wish that underlies the chorus “I just wanna wanna be white” is nonetheless powerful and real. Whites want to become whiter (all over), but so too do many people of color. Whatever their political orientation, few queers of color can escape the lure of whiteness. Who doesn’t want to be beautiful, rich, and white? Who doesn’t want to possess technological, financial, and social power? Who doesn’t want to control space? Who doesn’t want to escape the darkness of violence, poverty, and exclusion? Why wouldn’t one opt instead for translucency, transparency, and technological control



FIG. 13-5. Vain Hein and Persia dance in whiteface against a digital backdrop of San Francisco.

and power? Venus Xtravaganza was not alone in the wish she expressed in *Paris Is Burning*: “I would like to be a spoiled rich white girl.”<sup>56</sup>

The song ambivalently expresses this wish. First, it articulates an erotics of gentrification that mixes sexual desire with domination through the ironic lyrics that link BDSM play to gentrification vis-à-vis an ode to Madonna’s “Justify My Love”—“Techies, take the mission/Techies, gentrify me/Gentrify me/Gentrify my love.”<sup>57</sup> Second, however, it underscores the grotesquerie that results when the cast-outs, the freaks and queers of color, do try to become white. Near the end of the video, Persia and her crew smear white paintstick over their faces and don blond wigs, while Vain Hein adds a Leigh Bowery-style doll mask over his already clownish white face. The chorus now takes on another meaning—one that makes the violence of the wish and the impossibility of its realization—more palpable. I wanna be white, but obviously, I never will be, not if that means having money or the ability to influence the shape of particular technologies or urban spaces rather than be the target consumers of high-tech firms or the chaff cities are trying to cull in their obsequious efforts to please tech companies.

Of course, this critique of the marriage of high-tech, gentrification, and whiteness is struck through with ironies. Persia wrote the lyrics to the song on her phone (I wrote most of this essay on a seven-year-old

MacBook Pro, if you're wondering). The song and video required considerable technical manipulation—audio engineering and video editing. It appears on YouTube, a Google property, and it has been circulated widely on Facebook and Twitter (where I found it), all in an effort to achieve some traction in network culture in which traction equals attention equals hits equals, Persia hopes, some form of remuneration. Maybe just enough to help her put down a deposit on her new East Bay gigs.

In the comments section of the video, an inevitable troll remarked on some of these ironies: "interesting that the lyrics of this song hostile to the tech industry were written on a phone." To which another poster sarcastically replied, "It's interesting how all those blacks wanted out of slavery even though they got free food, and home [*sic*]." <sup>58</sup>

The desire to become white is a shadow that haunts the lives of queers of color. Perhaps the most common reaction to such a wish is to deny it or to deconstruct it. But, following Jack Halberstam's more recent work on "shadow feminisms," I wonder if the urge to challenge the logic of whiteness in ourselves—the internalized and not-so-internalized violences engendered in us by white settler colonialisms—does not itself reproduce another set of violences, for racial authenticity or purity, for example. <sup>59</sup> Instead, we might embrace those forms of darkness in which identity is obscured or rendered opaque. There are no coherent, rational, self-knowing subjects here, just furious refusals. These refusals are a kind of black ops, a form of black data that encrypts without hope of a coherent or positive output. Queers and people of color might tactically redeploy black ops as techniques of masking, secrecy, or evasion. Rather than follow the logic of the "Black Hole," the government contractor Electronic Warfare Associates' wireless traffic intercept tool, <sup>60</sup> black ops imagines a world in which our identities and movement are our own, opaque to the securitized gazes of states and corporations. New black ops technologies might help us all play out our masochistic fantasies of becoming white, becoming animal, becoming other, or just pure private becoming.

Persia embraces a darkness that responds to the antisociality engendered by the tech giants with an ambivalent queer antisociality in turn. Her face morphs; masked, she affirms, yes, I want to be white like you. Twitter me, Facebook me, gentrify my love. I'll become white, jerky, stumbling, angry, cruel. Her crew's transformation parodies the awkwardness and un-sublimated violence of whiteness (and at least some white people). Their black ops is both a refusal and a rearticulation of the stuck frustrations activists, queers of color, and others feel in the wake of gentrification

and neoliberal economic policies more generally. This ambivalence is even present in their name, The Black Glitter Collective: black is for mourning (or encrypting), glitter is for queer fun (it gets *everywhere*).

## Conclusion

I have sought to enact a form of black data that is different from discussions of black life that reduce it to lists of bare accountings, which are incomplete and misleadingly suggest that black queer life must always and only be subtended to historical and contemporary traumas or victimization. Instead, I have used interpretive and performative black queer practices—reading and throwing shade—to cultivate a notion of black data tied to defacement, opacity, and encryption. Black queer reads can shame a face (in this case, Obama's), and they can also articulate an opaque, encrypted point of view, one that resists being fully apprehended or made transparent. Throwing shade, in the context of drag and Kiki Balls, for instance, does not require any specific enunciation to deliver an insult; rather, it uses looks, bodily gestures, and tones to deliver a message at once clear ("ratchet") and open-endedly sneaky ("I didn't *say* anything"). I have suggested that such black queer practices, figured here as "black data," might be usefully brought to bear on discussions about network culture, especially those related to surveillance and the relationship and impact of communication technologies on spaces and mobilities. I have moreover allied the political possibilities of a black queer conception of black data with the orientations of anarchists and cryptographers. I hope that these perhaps unlikely alliances might yield new, creative, and viable forms of black ops, encrypted forms of regnant reading and refusal imbued with a dark optimism toward the present, in which political and corporate interests collude to produce an ever-expanding web of ruin, a vast system of surveillance and capture that seeks to transform us all into code. <sup>61</sup>

## NOTES

*I am grateful to E. Patrick Johnson for the invitation to participate in this volume and for his thoughtful feedback on earlier versions of this essay. Two anonymous reviewers also made suggestions that improved my discussion here. Key ideas in this essay emerged from discussions with Zach Blas. Other readers who offered important insights include Hentyle Yapp, Amit Gilutz, and Bill Baskin. This essay was completed in part through the support of a fellowship provided by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.*

1. Baratunde Thurston, "How to Be Black (Online)," *Slideshare.net*, accessed July 1, 2013, <http://www.slideshare.net/baratunde/how-to-be-black-online-by-baratunde>.
2. At the time of Thurston's presentation, for example, blacks tended to use Yahoo! and MySpace more than whites. Thurston, "How To Be Black (Online)."
3. For an extended but not exhaustive list, see Beth E. Kolko, Lisa Nakamura, and Gilbert B. Rodman, eds., *Race in Cyberspace* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Lisa Nakamura, *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Nakamura, *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Nakamura and Peter Chow-White, eds. *Race after the Internet* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Cameron Bailey, "Virtual Skin: Articulating Race in Cyberspace," in *Immersed in Technology: Art and Virtual Environments*, ed. Mary Ann Moser and Douglas MacLeod, 29–49 (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996); Mark B. N. Hansen, "Digitizing the Racialized Body or The Politics of Universal Address," *SubStance* 33, no. 2 (2004): 107–33; Jennifer González, "The Face and the Public: Race, Secrecy, and Digital Art Practice," *Camera Obscura* 24, no. 1 (2009): 37–65; Andil Gosine, "Brown to Blonde at Gay.com: Passing White in Queer Cyberspace" in *Queer Online: Media Technology and Sexuality*, eds. Kate O'Riordan and David Phillips, 139–53 (New York: Peter Lang, 2007); Shaka McGlotten, "Ordinary Intersections: Speculations on Difference, Justice, and Utopia in Black Queer Life," *Transforming Anthropology* 20, no. 1 (2012): 123–37.
4. For recent treatments of the dozens, see Ali Colleen Neff's discussions in *Let the World Listen Right: The Mississippi Delta Hip Hop Story* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2009); and Elijah Wald, *The Dozens: A History of Rap's Mama* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). For discussions of black Twitter, see Farhad Manjoo's (in)famous "How Black People Use Twitter," *Slate*, August 10, 2010, accessed July 1, 2013, [http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/technology/2010/08/how\\_black\\_people\\_use\\_twitter.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/technology/2010/08/how_black_people_use_twitter.html); and Shani Hilton, "The Secret Power of Black Twitter," *Buzzfeed*, accessed July 16, 2013, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/shani/the-secret-power-of-black-twitter>. For an excellent critical account, see Sanjay Sharma, "Black Twitter? Racial Hashtags, Networks, and Contagion," *New Formations* 78 (2013): 46–64.
5. "OMG! Black People!," last updated July 1, 2009, <http://omgblackpeople.wordpress.com/>.
6. For a few notable examples of literature in science and technology that addresses race, see Donna Haraway, *Modest Witness@Second-Millennium.FemaleMan-Meets-OncoMouse: Feminism and Technoscience* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Thomas Foster, *Souls of Cyberfolk: Posthumanism as Vernacular Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Wendy Chun, "Introduction: Race and/as Technology; or How to Do Things to Race," *Camera Obscura* 24, no. 1 (2009): 7–35; Chun, *Programmed Visions: Software and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011). On sexuality and new media technologies, see Campbell, *Getting It On Online*. Also see the essays in

O'Riordan and Phillips, *Queer Online*. For recent discussions in black queer studies, see Allen, "Introduction," and Shaka McGlotten and Dana-ain Davis, eds., *Black Genders and Sexualities* (New York: Palgrave, 2012). Also see E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson, *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005). For exceptions to the lack of studies on the ways black queer people are interpolated by or employ new media and other technologies, see Dwight McBride, *Why I Hate Abercrombie & Fitch: Essays on Race and Sexuality* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 88–133; Shaka McGlotten, *Virtual Intimacies: Media, Affect, and Queer Sociality* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2013); McGlotten, "Ordinary Intersections"; Herukhuti, *Conjuring Black Funk: Notes on Culture, Sexuality, and Spirituality*, vol. 1 (New York: Vintage Entity Press, 2007).

7. The notion of race as a technology is discussed by Lisa Nakamura and Peter Chow-White, Wendy Chun, and Beth Coleman, among others. Nakamura and Chow-White, for example, discuss the "enforced forgetting" that deprived slaves of information (data) about their pasts: racism is a technology, "a systematic way of doing things that operates by mediating between users and techniques to create specific forms of oppression and discrimination" (3). Beth Coleman makes the connection to *techné* more explicit (and also thereby echoing Foucault). For Coleman, *techné* refers to an applied, reproducible skill; race thus emerges as a productive technique of power. See Nakamura and Chow-White, "Introduction—Race and Digital Technology: Code, the Color Line, and the Information Society," *Race after the Internet*, 1–18; Coleman, "Race as Technology," *Camera Obscura* 24, no. 1 (2009): 176–207. See also Chun, "Introduction: Race and/as Technology." For a discussion of discriminatory social costs that result from data mining, see Anthony Danna and Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., "All That Glitters Is Not Gold: Digging Beneath the Surface of Data Mining," *Journal of Business Ethics* 40 (2002): 373–86.

8. "New HIV Infections in the United States, 2010," *Centers for Disease Control*, accessed June 1, 2013, [http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/pdf/HIV\\_infographic\\_11X17\\_HR.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/pdf/HIV_infographic_11X17_HR.pdf).

9. "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, and HIV-Affected Hate Violence in 2012," *National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs*, accessed June 4, 2013, [http://www.navp.org/storage/documents/ncavp\\_2012\\_hvreport\\_final.pdf](http://www.navp.org/storage/documents/ncavp_2012_hvreport_final.pdf), 9.

10. See the important and rich resources available at the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, accessed June 4, 2013, <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/index.faces>.

11. Signe-Mary McKernan, Caroline Ratcliffe, C. Eugene Steuerle, and Sisi Zhang, "Less Than Equal: Racial Disparities in Wealth Accumulation," *The Urban Institute*, April 26, 2013, <http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/412802-Less-Than-Equal-Racial-Disparities-in-Wealth-Accumulation.pdf>.

12. Arlene Eisen, "Operation Ghetto Storm: 2012 Annual Report on the Extrajudicial Killing of 313 Black People," *Malcolm X Grassroots Movement*, April 7, 2013,



<http://mxgm.org/operation-ghetto-storm-2012-annual-report-on-the-extrajudicial-killing-of-313-black-people/>.

13. Ryan Gabrieleson, Ryann Grochowski Jones, and Eric Sagara, "Deadly Force, in Black and White," *ProPublica*, October 10, 2014, <http://www.propublica.org/article/deadly-force-in-black-and-white#update-note>.

14. Nakamura and Chow-White, "Introduction—Race and Digital Technology"; Chun, "Race and/as Technology."

15. Chun, "Race and/as Technology," 8.

16. Mel Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

17. Nakamura and Chow-White, "Introduction—Race and Digital Technology," 3.

18. Zebra Katz, "Ima Read" (Mad Decent, 2012), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5a7toRopmig>. Black queer rapper Zebra Katz explicitly links his song to the art of insult developed in the queer black and Latino Harlem ball scene and popularized in Jennie Livingston's *Paris Is Burning* (1990, Miramax Films).

19. Livingston, *Paris Is Burning*.

20. More accurately, the Obama administration has aggressively pursued *unauthorized* leakers. The administration, like others before it, itself leaks information to the media in order to influence public opinion. As has been widely reported, Obama's administration has leveled charges against seven people, including convicted U.S. Army private Chelsea (then Bradley) Manning, for leaking information to news media; all previous administrations totaled three such prosecutions. As a candidate, Obama had promised to protect leakers and whistleblowers.

21. A long list of historical examples comes to mind, from the legal techniques employed to turn black people into chattel, to Jim Crow, COINTELPRO, the Wars on Drugs and Poverty, as well as extrajudicial murder. Terroristic "antiterrorism" programs have a long history of field testing within the United States and across the globe. The new drone wars in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Yemen are only the most recent expressions of these policies.

22. Phillip Brian Harper, "The Evidence of Felt Intuition: Minority Experience, Everyday Life, and Critical Speculative Knowledge," in *Black Queer Studies*, 106–23.

23. Giorgio Agamben, *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 100; Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969). For related discussions, see Arun Saldanha, *Psychedelic White: Goa Trance and the Viscosity of Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); and Mel Y. Chen, "Masked States and the 'Screen' between Security and Disability," *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 40, nos. 1–2 (2012): 76–96.

24. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

25. Janell Watson, "Theorizing European Ethnic Politics with Deleuze and Guattari," in *Deleuze and Politics*, eds., Ian Buchanan and Nicholas Thoburn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 209.

26. Others, including such news organizations as the *Guardian* and WikiLeaks, had already gleaned many insights and published information about these programs. As an insider, Snowden was uniquely positioned to confirm them. See Julian Assange, *Cyberpunks: Freedom and the Future of the Internet* (New York: OR Books, 2012).

27. Fred L. Stanley and Louis H. Pratt, eds., *Conversations with James Baldwin* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1989), 6.

28. To carry is to work it. See the explanation of Leo Gugu, artist, stylist, and performer, "Speaking with Distinction," accessed June 4, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UX3BrPe4dxc>.

29. Chen, "Masked States and the 'Screen' between Security and Disability," 77. Chen's discussion also underscores the relationship between masks and screens and "securitized, nondisabled whiteness," a compelling reading I nonetheless do not pursue here.

30. Daphne Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850–1910* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 8.

31. Quoted in Manthia Diawara, "Conversation with Édouard Glissant aboard the Queen Mary II," August 2009, accessed August 1, 2013, [http://www.liv.ac.uk/media/livacuk/csis-2/blackatlantic/research/Diawara\\_text\\_defined.pdf](http://www.liv.ac.uk/media/livacuk/csis-2/blackatlantic/research/Diawara_text_defined.pdf), 6.

32. For a discussion of these techniques and tips on how to use them, see Seth Schoen, "Technology to Protect against Mass Surveillance (Part I)," *Electronic Frontier Foundation*, July 17, 2013, <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2013/07/technology-protect-against-mass-surveillance-part-1>.

33. See the discussion between Jacob Appelbaum, Andy Müller-Maguhn, and Jérémie Zimmerman in the chapter "The Militarization of Cyberspace," in Assange, *Cyberpunks*, 33–40.

34. See, for example, Glenn Greenwald, *No Place to Hide: Edward Snowden, the NSA, and the U.S. Surveillance State* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014).

35. Alexander Galloway, "Black Box, Black Block," in *Communization and Its Discontents: Contestation, Critique, and Contemporary Struggles*, ed. Benjamin Noys (New York: Minor Compositions, 2011).

36. For the last few decades the anarchist "black bloc" has been both hypervisible and absent. Governments and mainstream media have ignored anarchists' emphasis on mutual aid, self-organization, and voluntary association and have instead presented

anarchists as terroristic threats to state power. The black bloc is unfailingly represented as hoodlums intent on the wanton destruction of property. But the black bloc's origins lay in social protest movements in Germany in the 1970s and 1980s, where members sought to protect demonstrators from police violence and arrest. Their black clothing and masks were meant to help other protesters identify them while maintaining their own anonymity, a fact exploited in the 1999 WTO protests when law enforcement themselves donned similar clothing to infiltrate and discredit the protestors (a technique widely employed since). The black bloc's secondary role, the contours of which are hotly contested in anarchist communities, is to act as the militant direct action wing, which can include precisely the sort of destruction of property with which anarchism is synonymous in mainstream media. For refreshing anarchist indymedia, see <http://stimulator.tv/>.

37. See Nicholas O. Rule and Nalini Ambady, "Brief Exposures: Male Sexual Orientation Is Accurately Perceived at 50 ms.," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 44 (2008): 1100-1105; and Nicholas O. Rule, Keiko Ishii, Nalini Ambady, Katherine S. Rosen, and Katherine C. Hallett, "Found in Translation: Cross-Cultural Consensus in the Accurate Categorization of Male Sexual Orientation," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 37, no. 11 (2011): 1499-1507.

38. Although there was a widespread effort to crowdsource the Boston Bombing suspects, this ultimately proved fruitless, with epic racial profiling fails, as well as ever more shameful missteps by the *New York Post*, which published the images of two Arab-looking men as suspects—they were a local coach and a high school athlete.

39. Bob Garfield, "The Future of Surveillance," *On the Media*, April 26, 2013.

40. Shoshana Magnet, *When Biometrics Fail: Gender, Race, and the Technology of Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Simone Browne, "Digital Epidermalization: Race, Identity, and Biometrics," *Critical Sociology* 36, no. 1 (2010): 132.

41. Wendy Chun, *Control and Freedom: Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006).

42. Magnet, *When Biometrics Fail*, 3.

43. Zach Blas, "Facial Weaponization Suite," accessed July 7, 2013, <http://www.zachblas.info/projects/facial-weaponization-suite/>.

44. Gabriella Coleman, "Anonymous—From the Lulz to Collective Action," *The New Significance*, May 9, 2011, <http://www.thenewsignificance.com/2011/05/09/gabriella-coleman-anonymous-from-the-lulz-to-collective-action/>. See also G. Coleman, *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy: The Many Faces of Anonymous* (New York: Verso, 2014).

45. Craig Timburg and Ellen Nakashima, "State Photo-ID Databases Become Troves for Police," *Washington Post*, June 16, 2013, [http://www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/technology/state-photo-id-databases-become-troves-for-police/2013/06/16/6f014bd4-ced5-11e2-8845-d970ccbo4497_story.html)

[/business/technology/state-photo-id-databases-become-troves-for-police/2013/06/16/6f014bd4-ced5-11e2-8845-d970ccbo4497\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/technology/state-photo-id-databases-become-troves-for-police/2013/06/16/6f014bd4-ced5-11e2-8845-d970ccbo4497_story.html).

46. The radical left French journal *Tiqqun* advocates forms of autonomous secession through the creation of an imaginary politics, clandestinity, and a politics of refusal. For a sympathetic critique, see John Cunningham, "Clandestinity and Appearance," *Mute* 2, no. 16 (2010), <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/clandestinity-and-appearance>. Such a politics of secessionist refusal served as part of the rationale for the arrest of the Tarnac 9, a group of French anarchists who had taken up in a grocery in a small village. They were accused of sabotaging the French rail network (there were no injuries). One of the rationales provided for their arrest is that the group were "pre-terrorists"—their anarcho-autonomist tendencies were reason enough for suspicion. Michèle Alliot-Marie, then interior minister, said, "They have adopted underground methods. They never use mobile telephones, and they live in areas where it is very difficult for the police to gather information without being spotted. They have managed to have, in the village of Tarnac, friendly relations with people who can warn them of the presence of strangers." Quoted in Alberto Toscano, "Criminalising Dissent," *Guardian*, January 28, 2009, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/libertycentral/2009/jan/28/human-rights-tarnac-nine>. Toscano goes on to observe: "The very fact of collective living, of rejecting an astoundingly restrictive notion of normality (using a mobile, living in cities, being easily observable by the police) has itself become incriminating." See also "Tarnac Nine," *Wikipedia*, last modified June 13, 2013, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tarnac\\_9](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tarnac_9).

47. Persia and DADDIES PLASTIK, "Google Google Apps Apps," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5xyqbc7SQ4w>.

48. I am riffing here on Fred Moten's sketch of a fugitive black imagination in "Black Optimism/Black Operation," unpublished conference paper, 2007, <http://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/politicalfeeling/files/2007/12/moten-black-optimism.doc>.

49. Marke B., "Gentrification-Eviction-Displacement Electro Theme Song," *San Francisco Bay Guardian Online*, May 29, 2013, <http://www.sfbg.com/noise/2013/05/29/heres-your-gentrification-theme-song>.

50. Kuchar, Sally, "Mapping the Average Rental Rate of a One and Two Bedroom in San Francisco," *Curbed SF*, May 23, 2013, [http://sf.curbed.com/archives/2013/05/23/mapping\\_the\\_average\\_rental\\_rate\\_of\\_a\\_one\\_and\\_two\\_bedroom\\_in\\_san\\_francisco.php](http://sf.curbed.com/archives/2013/05/23/mapping_the_average_rental_rate_of_a_one_and_two_bedroom_in_san_francisco.php).

51. Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class (and How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life)* (New York: Basic Books, 2004).

52. For a critique of Florida and an analysis of the effects the creative class can have on urban environments, see Joshua Long, *Weird City: A Sense of Place and Creative Resistance in Austin, Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010).

53. George Packer, "Change the World," *New Yorker*, May 27, 2013, e-version.

54. This statement is complicated, but not undermined, by the fact that half of high-tech workers in California are Asian. Asian Americans hold slightly more jobs in the Bay Area. See Dan Nakaso, "Asian-American Citizens Hold Slight Edge over Non-citizen Asians in Bay Area Tech Jobs," *San Jose Mercury News*, December 9, 2012, [http://www.mercurynews.com/business/ci\\_22147394/citizen-asians-hold-slight-edge-over-non-citizen](http://www.mercurynews.com/business/ci_22147394/citizen-asians-hold-slight-edge-over-non-citizen). The presence of people of color in the tech industry does not fundamentally alter the organizing ideologies of Silicon Valley, insofar as the owners, managers, and venture capitalists who shape the industry are overwhelmingly white.

55. See the comment thread in response to Rebecca Bowe, "Vanishing City," *San Francisco Bay Guardian Online*, May 21, 2013, <http://www.sfbg.com/2013/05/21/vanishing-city?page=0,0>.

56. Livingston, *Paris Is Burning*.

57. Persia and DADDIES PLASTIK, "Google Google Apps Apps."

58. See the comments section for Persia and DADDIES PLASTIK, "Google Google Apps Apps."

59. Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

60. "Black Hole: Wireless Traffic Intercept, Reconstruction and Analysis," *EWG Government Systems*, <http://www.ewa-gsi.com/Fact%20Sheets/Black%20Hole%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>. Electronic Warfare Associates is a leading contractor in the development of new biometric facial recognition technologies.

61. Alexander Galloway, "Networks," in *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, eds. W. J. T. Mitchell and Mark Hansen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 283.

14

## Boystown

### *Gay Neighborhoods, Social Media, and the (Re)production of Racism*

ZACHARY BLAIR



IN *BLACK QUEER STUDIES: A CRITICAL ANTHOLOGY*, Charles I. Nero asks the question, "Why are gay ghettos white?" and proposes that the answer to this question has to do with two interdependent areas that have historically reinforced each other: gay strategies that have focused on integrating into the middle classes, and white hostility toward African Americans.<sup>1</sup> Recent studies have expanded Nero's analysis by looking at how various gentrification and anticrime projects create exclusionary gay neighborhoods, particularly in New York City.<sup>2</sup> These studies have looked at urban development, LGBT activism in the streets, and larger political economic factors but have largely ignored the role of digital engagements in the (re)production of the white gay neighborhood. Based on five years of field research and media ethnography on Boystown, a designated gay neighborhood in Chicago, this essay reexamines the question, "Why are gay ghettos white?" and analyzes how neighborhood residents reproduce racism by constructing homonormative urban space through both digital and social neighborhood practices. More specifically, I analyze how digital social networking—a medium that has been regarded as a vehicle to