



**LOUIS M. MARAJ, PHD**

# **HASHTAG LITERACY**

**ANNOTATING (AS) ANTIRACISM**

Here I consider the classroom potentials for teaching race/Blackness and engaging students with Black resistance at a historically white institution through tags, while valuing them as culturally-marked linguistic tools that can reshape how we read/write/think/note-take. Hashtags represent a kind of marginalized out-of-school literacy, and through a foundational assignment I use in my writing/composition classroom— the “Tumblr Commonplace Book Assignment”—I consider tags deployed in the service of “viral Blackness” (Greene Wade) as a form of fluid digitalized counter/public commonplacing that engages in “Black annotation” (Sharpe). This talk offers hashtagging as a Black rhetoric with antiracist potentials.

# Black Annotation (Sharpe 2016) for viral Blackness (Greene Wade 2017)

#HL



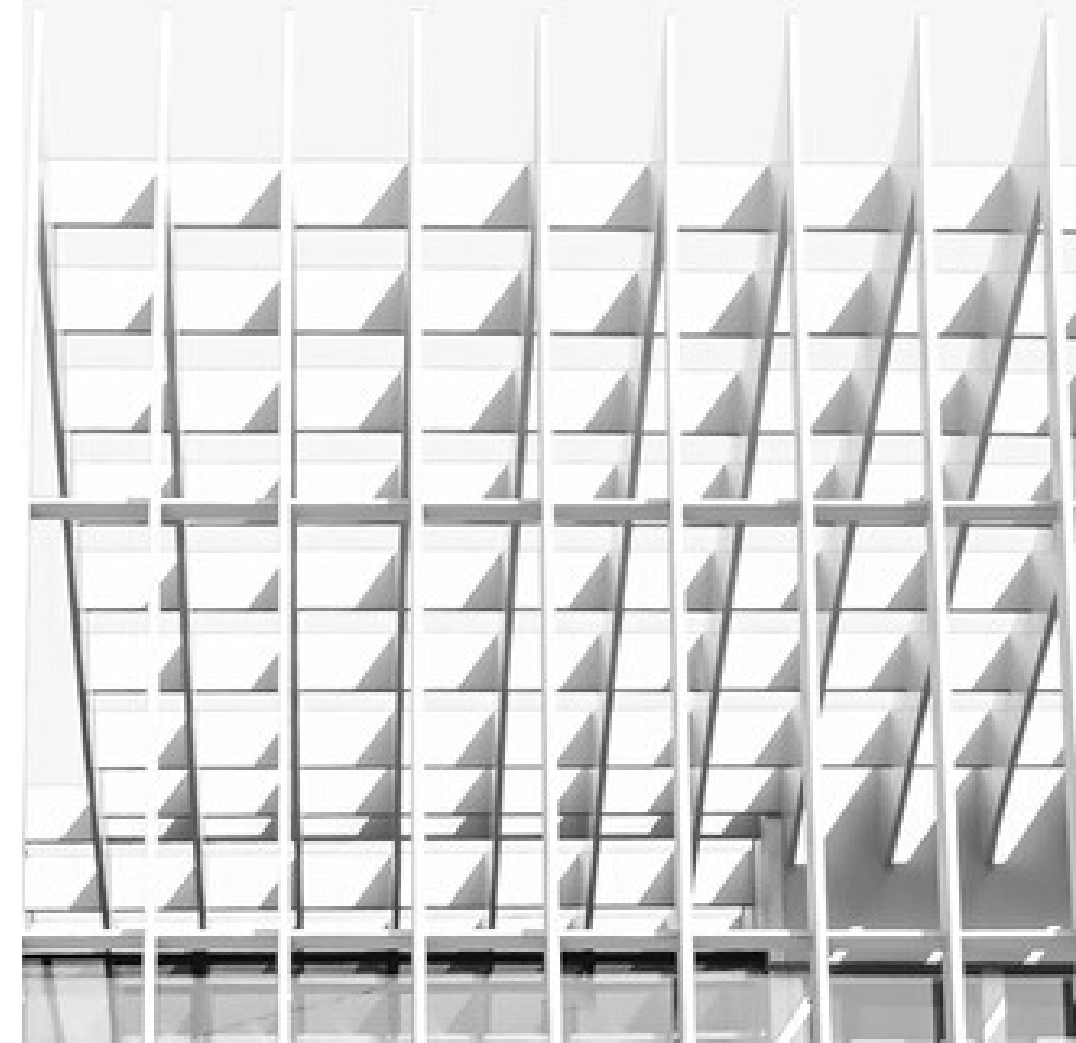
## BLACK ANNOTATION

Sharpe explains Black annotation as “trans\*verse and coextensive ways to imagine otherwise” (115): “Annotation appears like that asterisk, which is itself an annotation mark, that marks the trans\*formation into ontological blackness. As photographs of Black people circulate as portraits in a variety of publics, they are often accompanied by some sort of note or other metadata...in order that the image might travel with supplemental information that marks injury and, then, more than injury.” Because these Black images/texts are often co-opted to communicate hegemonic messages, such annotation becomes vitally necessary for Black being in the face of non-being (Sharpe 116).

#HL

As contagious digital objects (Sharma) Black hashtags mobilized through viral Blackness for Black annotation might evoke epidermalization, revealing the potentials for meaning-making in para/ontological Blackness. Here/in lies pedagogical possibilities.

# Para/Ontology



# Presentation Overview

#HL

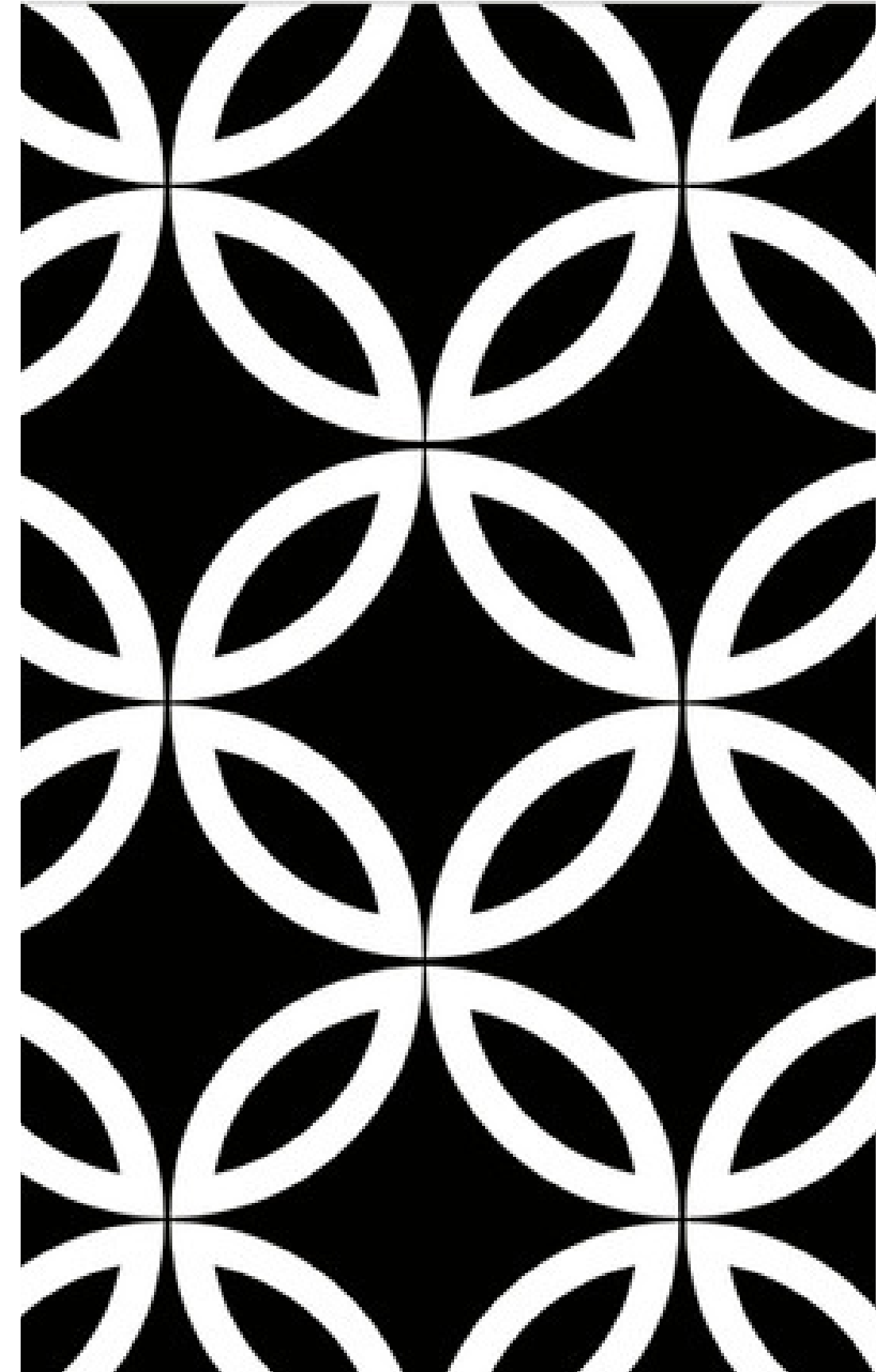
"Common sense ain't always common":  
Hashtags as Counter/Public Commonplaces

Hashtags, Anti/Racism, and "Tumblr as  
Commonplace Book"

#HL

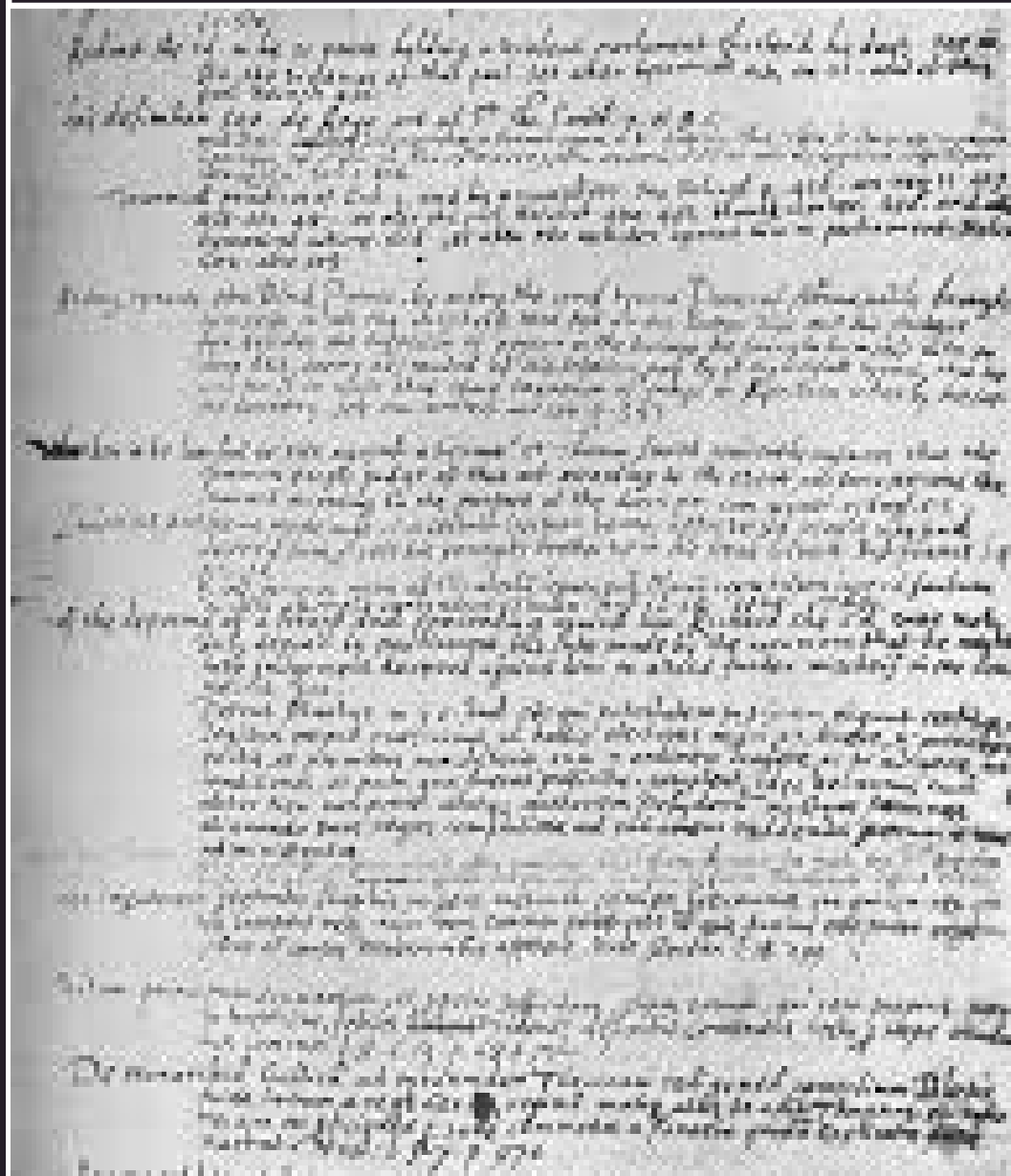
# Hashtags as Digital Counter/Public Commonplaces

.



# "Common Sense . . .

#HL



## COMMONPLACE BOOKS AND THE STRUCTURING OF THOUGHT

Prepare for yourself a sufficient number of headings and arrange them as you please, subdivide them into the appropriate sections, and under each section add your commonplace and maxims; and then whatever you come across in any author, particularly if it is rather striking, you will be able to note down immediately in the proper place, be it an anecdote or a fable or an illustrative example or a strange incident or a metaphor or a simile. This has the double advantage of fixing what you have read more firmly in your mind, and getting you into the habit of using the riches supplied by your reading (Erasmus 302).

**...Ain't that Common"**

## DECODING HISTORIES OF DOMINANCE

Black people, for a number of years, have been shown to make up a disproportional amount of social media's general and most frequent users. Statistical information from the Pew Research Center from 2011 highlights that "25% of online Blacks used Twitter, compared to 9% of online Whites" (Smith, Brock 529). While more recent data from 2018 suggests that more white folk now use Twitter (24% white adults as compared to 26% Black), such information still reveals numbers incommensurate with general population dynamics. In 2018, a larger percentage of surveyed Black internet-using adults used social media on most social media platforms (Facebook (70%); Instagram (43%); LinkedIn (28%); Twitter (26%)) than survey participants identified with other racial groups.



# Deep Rhetorical Ecologies

- Hashtags' archival function on social media networks provide users access to both commonplace points of reference and to opportunities to build ecologically on those points of reference, creating relational meanings with/in that building.

#HL

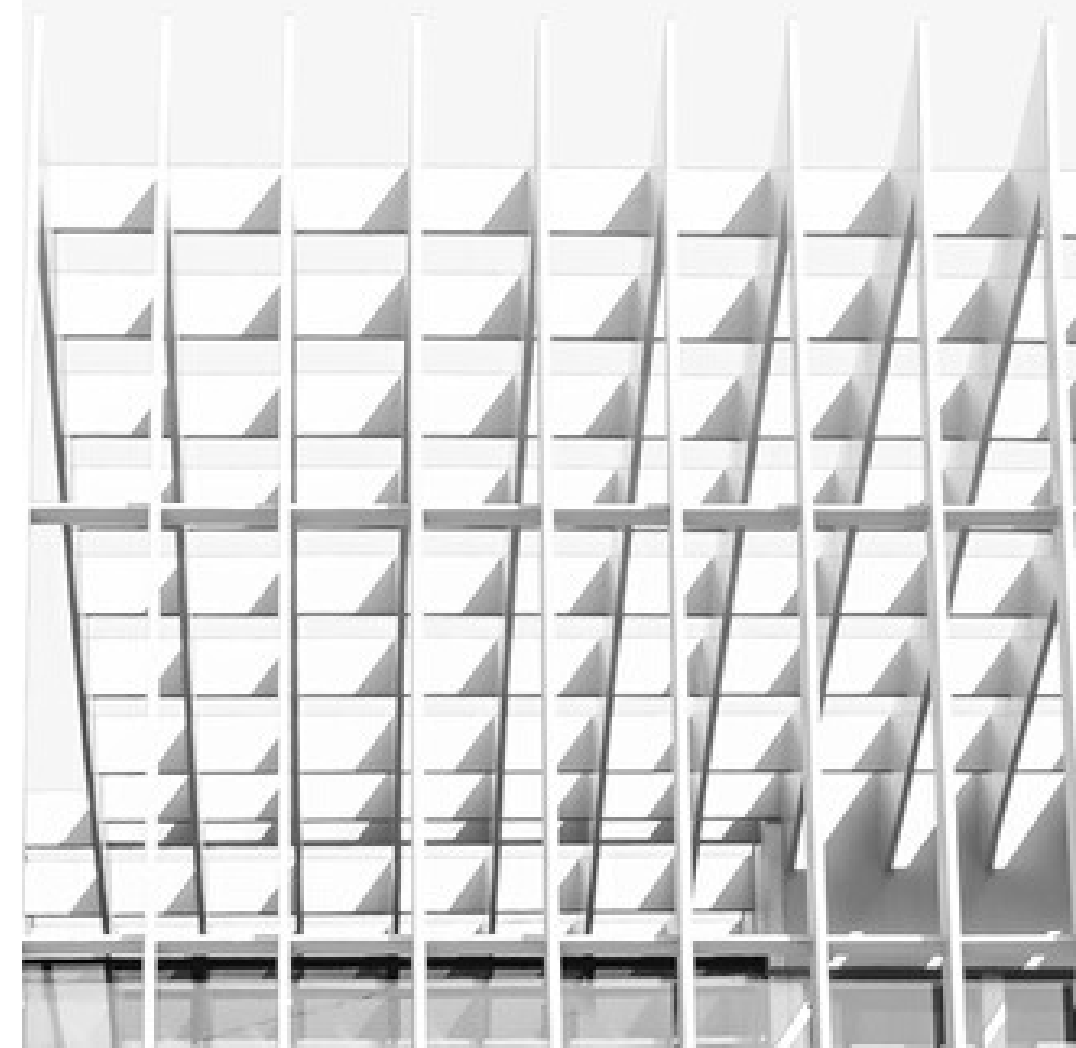
# Deep Rhetorical Ecologies

- Hashtags, however, not only reproduce that referential affordance/constraint but also allow users to build upon, resist, and create relational and rhetorically deep ecological relationships with other tags and thus other archives.
- 
-

#HL

Black hashtagging as antiracist rhetoric suggests a *process* of making, a politics of inventive possibility...Since hashtags reveal specific potentials to world-make both through a paraontology that irreversibly disturbs ontology's time and place (Moten "Blackness" 739) while still operating as ontologized rhetorical objects (thus opening spaces for para/ontology), they allow us to consider the very question of the human vis a viz Blackness.

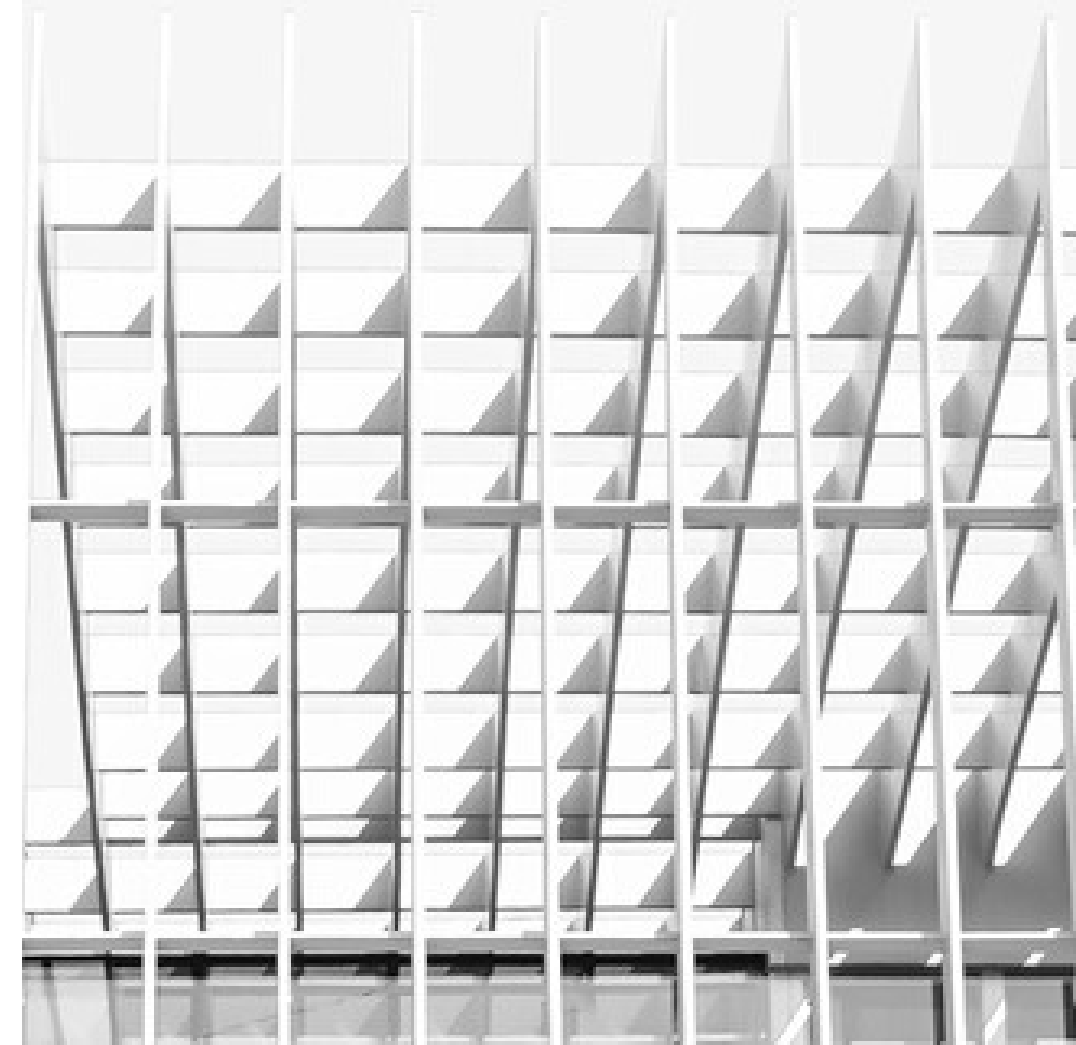
# Para/Ontology



#HL

Hashtags as Black rhetoric facilitate, mark, and open space for such epistemic rupture; they cull a place and a no place, a para/ontological thought and a no thought always evolving. In its spread, worlds make possible alternative ways of non/being. Hashtags in this way may not just serve as objects of study but as forms of rhetorical performances that can make alternate realities through the entangled narratives that permeate from them.

# Para/Ontology





#HL

Hashtags,  
Anti/Racism, and  
“Tumblr as  
Commonplace Book”

# Assignment Guidelines

1. Students are asked to set up a Tumblr blog (either set to public or private) at [www.tumblr.com](http://www.tumblr.com). They then share their blog's URL on the Discussion Activity board on [MwSU's online learning management system] with fellow students. Students should 'follow' their classmates' blogs and the instructor's blog.
2. For every text discussed in class (provided on MwSU's online learning management system), students should pick their favorite line, image, sentences, lyrics etc. and post quoted material onto their Tumblr page before we read that text in class. For alphabetic material, they should quote directly. For images, they should screenshot. For multimodal texts, they can choose either. In either case, they should name the source and the author in their posts.
3. Along with the quotations or screenshots posted, students should use a series of hashtags to describe and analyze each text.
4. On days when "Reblogs" are due, students should locate a peer's post that they find interesting and reblog it to their own blogs with two to three sentences of explanation as to why they found it interesting. Reblogged posts can use hashtags as well.
5. As indicated on the syllabus, the Tumblr blog will be examined twice during the semester for completion and adherence to post format (as opposed to content).

# Assignment Purposes

1 .

To get students to begin analyzing what they find most interesting in a text through hashtagging: with those details categorized/described as concise, digestible concepts, each demonstrating an interpretation of that text and allowing for further readings with conjunctional hashtags;

2 .

2. To use hashtags for practical composition and research purposes: as the basis for in class discussion; for foreseeing and preparing for difficult and controversial topics; for terms in library searches; in coming up with research proposals and identifying topics and artifacts of interest to each particular student; and as a repository of info for their final papers;

3 .

To engage students with ongoing critical discussions of hashtags as activism, such as debates on the #BlackLivesMatter, #Ferguson, and #[X]SoWhite movements, reflected on the course syllabus in articles by Jones, Faithful, and Bonilla & Rosa; and

4 .

To create a digital classroom where students interact with their peers without instructor input.

#HL

Creating Relational Meaning



Figure 1  
tcb37 Olson  
Post

#blacklivesmatter #ferguson #police #police brutality #innocent  
#unnecessary force #racism

1 note Jan 12th, 2017





Figure 2  
tcb37  
Jones Post

“When they work together, this collective is proving adept at bringing about a wide range of sociopolitical changes. It doesn’t take much effort to get users to rally together behind causes that may have an impact on their lives.”

— Jones, “Is Twitter the Underground Railroad of Activism?”

#community #together #racism #change #revolution #social media  
#equality #blacklivesmatter

Jan 20th, 2017



#HL

Creating Relational Meaning

#HL

Creating Relational Meaning

““I didn’t notice the size nor nothing else  
only the color”. And  
there are tapes to prove that, too.”

— “Power”, Lorde

#racism #police brutality #evidence #injustice #blacklivesmatter  
#institutionalized racism

Feb 14th, 2017



Figure 3  
tcb37 Lorde  
“Power” Post

## FIGURE 4 TCB22 HILL COLLINS POST

#HL

“However, in contrast to this body of literature whose celebration of women’s power is often accompanied by a lack of attention to the importance of power as domination, Black women’s experiences as mothers, community other mothers, educators, church leaders, labor union center-women, and community leaders seem to suggest that power as energy can be fostered by creative acts of resistance.”

— Patricia Hill Collins, “Black Feminist Thought in the Matrix of Domination

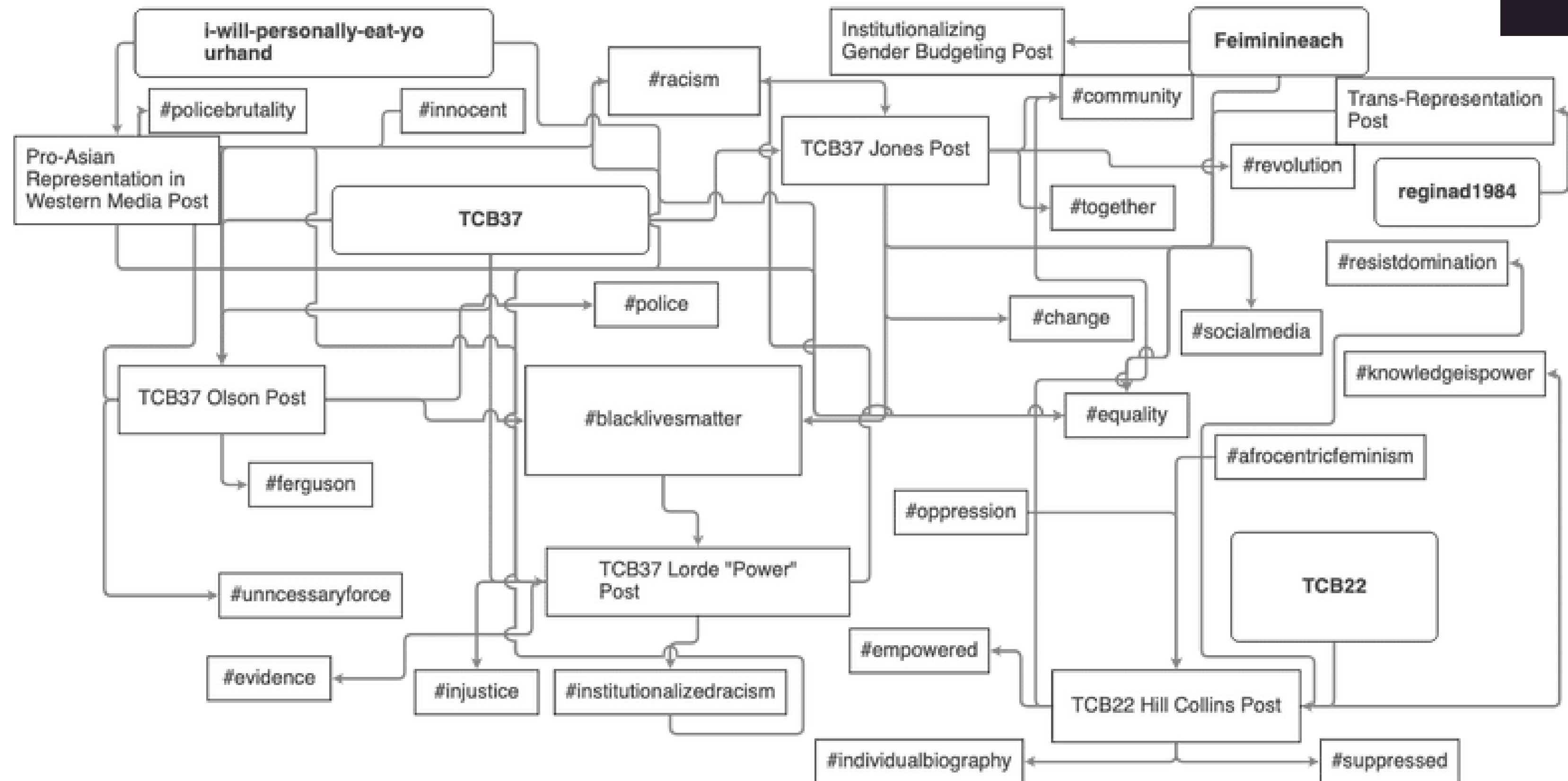
#afrocentric feminism #knowledge is power #oppression #empowered  
#community #individual biography #resist domination #suppressed

1 note Feb 7th, 2017



# HASHTAG ECOLOGY

#HL



# Conclusion

