The Politics of Visibility

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Trending is visibility granted by the algorithms of a closed, private corporation — De-exceptionalize it!

“Twitter determines its trending topics through the site’s Trends algorithm, which Twitter has not released to the public.”

“I’m not afraid, Free Trade!”
— Don Mee Choi

Every time CNN points to “Trending” in order to discuss breaking news, we should laugh. That is, laugh at: CNN, journalists, experts, the simulacra. Smirking at the notion that privatized, opaque institutions of selective coverage are working with other privatized, opaque institutions of selective timelines to define what’s public, what’s universal, what’s important. Intellectual, digital, and digitized labor is important, and too often dismissed.¹ This interrogation of visibility coverage and trending isn’t a critique of online activism and discourse. Rather, I


want to examine the political pontification around “trending” and “tagging” — the politics of Twitter algorithms, the bird’s eye commentary of “surprise” and “dismay” at certain trends, and ultimately, alternative discourses.

The crisis of visibility

#Solidarityisforwhitewomen was a hashtag created by Mikki Kendall in August of 2013. The tag situated a structural critique of global north feminism and the oppressive dynamics underlying white feminist understandings of “empowerment” and “progress.” The tag was also a direct critique against white feminists who defended “male feminist” Hugo Schwyzer. The hashtag trended worldwide, prompted a fury of articles by supporters, surprised journalists and critical commentators.

Criticism of tags like #solidarityisforwhitewomen situated the trending of such conversations as an exceptional and at the same time misdirected, mis-use of digital energy by racialized and gendered users. However, hashtags like #happybirthdaytaylorswift and #happybirthdaydemilevato have yet to received “critical” scholarship, essays, exposes, and op-eds. This is because their themes are viewed as fitting into the dynamic and expectations of what is expectedly visible, what a trend might constitute, and what digital cyborgs are supposed to be interested in.

#solidarityisforwhitewomen curated a multitude of responses — I focus on Michelle Goldberg’s article in The Nation as 1. The Nation prides itself on being a platform for progressive news. Goldberg’s article generated a variety of responses by authors that both agreed and disagreed with her. Michelle Goldberg’s “Feminism’s Toxic Twitter Wars” focused on criticizing the digital labor of black feminists online, particularly Mikki Kendall

5 “Twitter Sparks a Serious Discussion About Race and Feminism,” NPR, 23 August 2013.
6 Michelle Goldberg, “Feminism’s Toxic Twitter Wars,” The Nation, 29 January 2014.
who created #solidarityisforwhitewomen. The crux of the argument focused on how surprised mainstream feminists were by critiques of their objectives, agendas, methodologies. Goldberg cites Kendall as being the originator of #solidarityisforwhitewomen and as one of the main critical voices of the tag #femfuture. The tag #femfuture came under scrutiny for its erasure of nonwhite voices, questionable Twitter ethics, flattening of difference, and concerns surrounding accessibility. What does it mean when a conference on feminist futures, revolution, and digital technologies at the Barnard Center for Research and Women, organized by Courtney Martin and Vanessa Valenti, does not consider accessibility to be of primary concern to its attendees? Goldberg defended that, “#Femfuture was earnest and studiously politically correct” and that organizers were “floored” to learn that feminists online were critiquing their efforts. How dare feminists disagree with #femfuture, and then go on to trend a movement of their own? Before addressing the claims of the critiques, Goldberg states that such conversations create a “toxic” environment for feminism online.

Goldberg’s analysis conveniently ignores how #solidarityisforwhitewomen and criticism of #femfuture were formed to critique white supremacy in feminism (a historical, ongoing, structural claim) — instead in the article Goldberg accuses black feminists of using their online “egos” to play up racial politics, thereby derailing the unification against patriarchy project (as if dismantling white supremacy are side games deployed by black feminists to mess the revolution up!!). This was and is Goldberg’s central and ongoing thesis: criticism of mainstream white feminism are side conversations hurting the “actual” work that feminism needs to do...

7 See the #solidarityisforwhitewomen feed at https://twitter.com/search?vertical=default&q=%23solidarityisforwhitewomen&src=typd.
8 Dorothy Kim and Eunsong Kim, “The #TwitterEthics Manifesto,” Model View Culture, 7 April 2014.
And what might actual feminist work look like? While Goldberg does not address this in her article, writer Jessica Grose notes that #femfuture’s overall funding and conference goals were not interrupted.\footnote{Jessica Grose, “Is ‘Toxic’ Online Culture Paralyzing Feminism?” XXFactor: What Women Really Think (blog), Slate, 31 January 2014.} Visible online criticism of mainstream feminist agendas did not prevent Valenti and other organizers from securing necessary grants and proceeding with the conference as planned. Visible and direct critique — though the central concern in The Nation’s article — apparently had no bearing on the overall outcome of #femfuture. An analysis of why visible online critique did not affect the funding outcomes of #femfuture should be a central concern for digital humanities scholars — and key to conversations surrounding digital visibility.

The management/displacement of structural critiques

Visibility seems to be the central concern for Goldberg — not the critique of white supremacy within feminist discourse — but the visibility of critique. Goldberg’s attachment to the exceptional nature of such visible tags is that they are exceptional, singular. In her view, critiques of white supremacy within feminism are exceptional concerns so they should receive limited visibility. However, irrespective of material outcome (i.e., funding) they have received exceptional attention — and this must be rectified.

While visibility might be a central focus for white feminist’s like Goldberg, visibility is not always the central objective for trans, women of color, or black feminisms. Goldberg’s concern for visibility might be better interpreted as a PR concern — her critique centrally focused on discussions of certain tags and the “toxic” and “massive” presence of black feminists. The underlying argument seemed to be: Feminism is tenuous as it is — the visibility it receives is hackneyed and deployed haphazardly. Why is the focus on the wrongdoings of white women? Concluding that truly, #solidarityisforwhitewomen.
Almost a year since “Feminism’s Toxic Twitter Wars” was published, Goldberg has taken a slightly more critical approach to the question of visibility. However, questions of how visibility has not been a fixed condition, have historically and currently been taken up by black and woc feminists. At the “We Cannot Live Without Our Lives: A Conversation on Anti-blackness, Trans Resistance and Prison Abolition” forum at University of California, San Diego, activist and artist Reina Gossett problematized the function of visibility for black trans women. Gossett articulated that particularly for black communities, “Visibility is a pillar of criminalization, not a tenant of liberation.” In conjunction, Grace Hong has argued in The Ruptures of American Capital, that “for women of color feminist practice, visibility is a rupture, an impossible articulation.” Hong writes that while some have articulated invisibility as unnatural, “so too, is visibility is unnatural; it is also a kind of violence. […] [V]isibility is not inclusion, but surveillance.”

Visibility—while perhaps essential in the grab for legitimized forms of violence and power (state power, representational power, corporate power)—remains one condition of the expressions of structure. What’s visible is crucial because it’s a representational element of structure. But as Gossett and Hong have pointed out, to be exposed and figured in the surface has its own limits. Critics like Goldberg fixate on “what has become visible” to protect representations linked to the privileges of the status quo, rather than tend to the ongoing damage of structural violence.

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11 Michelle Goldberg, “Feminist writers are so besieged by online abuse that some have begun to retire,” Opinions; Washington Post, 20 February 2015.
Polar opposite examples: The management/displacement of structural critiquess

We see this refusal to engage the structural across a breadth of trending topics. #Gamergate is/was a movement entirely unlike #solidarityisforwhitewomen. In fact, they are of polar opposite camps, brought forth by entirely differing subject positions. However, I wish to posit that both hashtags highlight structural concerns (brought forth by entirely differing subject positions) to be managed ultimately as an issue of public relations.

The briefest background possible:

The #gamergate hashtag was formed, more or less, in conjunction with multiple conversations that were happening on Reddit and other media channels, and trended more or less because of actor Adam Baldwin’s tweets.¹⁴ The overarching claims of gamergate were criticisms of female game developer Zoe Quinn and feminist critic Anita Sarkeesian, and statements of support for critiques of Quinn’s games and Sarkeesian’s commentary on gaming culture. The tag demanded a maintenance of our status quo and our patriarchal norms, and directly opposed any potentially feminist commentary. The heart of the issue from the beginning was: who gets to criticize, who does not.

Unlike #solidarityisforwhitewomen, #gamergate was branded as a men’s rights, anti-feminist movement. But similar to #solidarityisforwhitewomen and #femfuture, #gamergate is the manifestation of structural violence, of the ongoing, well-documented culture of misogyny, rape, and patriarchy in tech and gaming cultures. If the conversation stemming from #solidarityisforwhitewomen is a structural critique of white supremacy of US feminism and global north feminist movements, the response to #gamergate was also structural critiques of the rampant misogyny of gaming culture. Both issues have been highlighted by

¹⁴ Caitlin Dewey, “The only guide to Gamergate you will ever need to read,” The Intersect; The Washington Post, 14 October 2014. See also Adi Robertson, “What’s happening in Gamergate?” The Verge, 6 October 2014.
visibility, but both issues have been managed as visibility issues and not as material, structural concerns.

The logics of PR were similar in the writings around #gamergate.

1. Obviously #solidarityisforwhitewomen and #gamergate are different, they were started by different people and trended for polar opposite reasons but both tags highlighted a serious structural issue: A. White supremacy in feminism, B. Rampant misogyny in tech and game culture. Rather than grappling with the damage of structural violence, commentators on all sides, across platforms jumped for damage control. Better for business maybe?15

2. The logic of “surprise and dismay” applies to both hashtags but in different ways — white feminists are sad that Twitter visibility belongs to not them (at least in that moment), leading proponents have to be on the offense about their defense of game tech culture.16

3. Both parties (the commentators, those that disapprove or are embarrassed by the trend) have an issue with the visibility of the problem, not with the fact that there are structural issues.

4. Gaming executives expressed dismay that the tag was “tarnishing our reputation as gamers,” while academics bemoaned: “We have been working for years to make games a legitimate tool for education and for study, and we were making progress… And then came GamerGate… now, when I go

15 Gamergate asks companies to boycott Gawker and The Verge for their reporting that gaming culture is misogynistic — #gamergate stated that such accusations were akin to bullying. In response to this, Adobe calls for “Anti-Bullying” in support of the rights of Gamergate, and pulls ads from Gawker. Mercedes Benz, Intel pulled from Gamasutra “in response to an article by journalist Leigh Alexander that criticized mainstream gaming culture.” See Leigh Alexander, “‘Gamers’ don’t have to be your audience. ‘Gamers’ are over,” Gamasutra, 28 August 2014. For coverage of this see Adi Robertson, “Adobe’s symbolic pro-Gamergate gesture frustrates victims,” The Verge, 21 October 2014.

to talk about games to industry groups or fellow academics, GamerGate always comes up as an example of how terrible and immature people who play games are… It will take years and years to repair the damage…” In both instance the issue seems to be in “damage control” “image” and “PR” rather than care for the damage, care for the issue, structural adjustments.18

5. And the logic of Twitter visibility in the case of #gamergate, extends across platforms. Twitter visibility is powerful — it travels. Due to #gamergate wikipedia editors have debated on how to “civilize” the editing process in regards to “gendered” narratives, or to potentially ban or curtail feminist editorship — this is a way to center (once again) anti-feminist narratives and methods.19 It is the ultimate “We want to be centered (again)” declaration cloaked by calls for civility, objectivity, the same ol’ tune too many of us know so well.

The algorithms of visibility

Panic driven by visibility is predictable. Zeynep Tufekci has argued that too often digital humanities or scholarship around the digital, “[R]arely goes beyond exploring big data as a hot, new topic and an exciting new tool, and rarely consider issues of power.”20 The “analyst” in focusing in on the function of technology, completely fails to discuss the structures and dynamics of power materialized every step of the way by this tech, the data and its users. And so it holds that while trends are provoking of such dismay and surprise so worthy of journalistic inquiry and coverage, there is little to no critical analysis of “trending” itself.

17 I would like to thank Shanley Kane, editor at Model View Culture for finding this quote.
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#Solidarityisforwhitewomen and #gamergate garnered attention for trending. So what are the algorithms of visibility? If trends are so formidable, so important, let’s look at the phenomena that’s being looked at, by critically defining “Trending”:

1. We don’t know why something trends. The algorithm is a locked secret, a “black box” (to the point where MIT professors have built algorithms attempting to predict trending tags. Fun fact: the same team have built algorithms predicting bitcoin prices: these are their explicit interests and concerns).\(^{21}\) The fine print: Trending is visibility granted by a closed, private corporation and their proprietary algorithms. As Tufecki says, “Algorithms have consequences.”\(^{22}\)

2. The visible trending box is supposed to vary according to personal preference. There are algorithms for localized trends, “neutral” US trends, global trends, and other a la carte options. The Fineprint: The algorithms can and should be adjusted according to personal preference — we want our reach to be individualized.

3. The little bit of information the private developers have released is that a “trend” is based on a very specific definition of “now” and “new,” that us users do not have access to this precise definition. The fine print: Something cannot trend for too long, this isn’t their definition of a “now” and “new.” This is why #Ferguson failed to trend after a few days even though it was one of the most widely used hashtags — trending for a few days excluded it from the possibility of trending.\(^{23}\)

4. Concerns about why certain hashtags don’t trend (i.e., #occupywallstreet, #wikileaks, or the various other #occupy’s) will lead Twitter developers to tell you that perhaps something is not as popular as you think it is.\(^{24}\) The fine print: Trending is


\(^{22}\) Tufekci, “What Happens to #Ferguson Affects Ferguson.”

\(^{23}\) Ibid.

\(^{24}\) “FAQs about trends on Twitter,” Twitter, https://support.twitter.com/articles/101125.
what they believe is popular, a paradoxical assertion: private formulas declaring what is most public and “new.”

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Through this lens, trending is merely visibility granted by the algorithms of a closed, private corporation:

Trends — what is happening, new, now according to Twitter the corporation’s ever-changing algorithms
Trends — a moment in which the “public” space of the internet becomes concentrated
Trends — a concentration of trolls
Trends — concentrated energy
Trends — visibility granted by a closed, private corporation
Trends — the commons managed by a closed, private corporation
Trends — manifestation of algorithms
Trends — expected
Trends — unexpected

To further illustrate how much we don’t understand why something trends, I used Topsy to provide me with analytics on the usage of #FreePalestine, and compared it to the various trending tags on March 1, 2015 and October 19, 2015. This experiment was prompted by users throughout last summer and this year, observing how #KillAllMuslims trended recently but #FreePalestine has been unable to trend. In addition, how #BlackLivesMatter has been consistently and fiercely utilized but has only trended during select moments.

As of January 30th to March 1st, #FreePalestine has been utilized over 84,333 times.
Yet March 1st’s United States Trends were:

So how might #WeWantTheCup fare next to #FreePalestine?

That’s 767, total. Not 767,000 shortened.
Or #ExplainAMovieByItsTitle:

How might all of this fare next to the usage of #Ferguson?

#Ferguson has been used over 2,000 times on March 1st alone… clearly surpassing the usage of the current US trends of #WeWantTheCup and contending with the usage of #ExplainAMovieByItsTitle.
And on October 19th, 2015?

5,634 tweets compared to:

Almost 10k on the 19th and:
Over 5k — Twitter disavows the continuing conversation?

I have catalogued the usage of #BlackLivesMatter almost every day in 2015, and this pattern is not the anomaly but the standard. Countless, one-time “tags” with half the usages will “trend” — while #BlackLivesMatters will not trend. I encourage everyone to look up usage analytics, but I think you get the picture. Basically, #BlackLivesMatter should be trending everyday.

Of course this Topsy graph is limited to Jan 30–March 1 and from September 19–October 19, so all of these hashtags could’ve been utilized differently the months and years before. And of course, Twitter developers have already graciously explained that trending is their particular definition of “new” and “now” and so previous tags, or tags used continuously (such as Justin Bieber tags, which have been implicitly banned from trending) will not trend.25

I bring this up to interrogate the current framing of visibility via trending, and to point to how the “journalistic scholarship” around visibility and trending is misinformed, and misframed. The exceptional attention given to hashtag discourse by critics, news platforms, and journalists — to what they perceive to be evidence of visibility — takes the focus away from the spaces created by gendered and racialized users, and rewrites it as a singular confrontation racialized/gendered users are having with white audiences within a white space. This rewriting posi-

tions trending tags to be isolated explosions. It does not labor through the possibility of communal, ongoing engagement and sustainment, for better or for worse. Though this is clearly their fixation, this fixation should not prevent us from recentering the persistent and ongoing labors involving disobedience, disturbance, and cyborg mutations: alternative discourses.

Rather than treating trending as an exceptional event of well-directed, or misdirected energy (that can be channeled for other, and better purposes!) — I am suggesting that it might be more fruitful to frame current trend algorithms as expressions of de-exceptional events, and to inquire into the idea of the “commons”—a space marked for public debate and protest—instead, so that we may support the tools (information transparency, anti-doxxing, privacy tools to start) users need to claim this ground.

To exceptionalize trending takes it out of the realm of the commons. A trend should not be of public and broadcast interest because it is exceptionally racialized, exceptionally gendered—but because it seems to seamlessly fit into and inside sets of opaque algorithms. #Gamergate is a tag that fits into the discourse of public trending. The tag is rooted in consumer activism, misogyny, and violent calls to preserve patriarchy. However, criticism of #gamergate, similar to criticisms of #femfuture, dramatically highlighted and shifted the hashtags’ primary narrative. High five to that. The trending of #solidarityisforwhite-women #Ferguson #BlackLivesMatter #mediablackout, and the usage of tags like #FreePalestine demonstrate that radical conversations are not exploding or momentary in the Twitter commons: they are ongoing and variegated. In the commons, there are leaps of politicalized conversations in what was supposed to be an apolitical, private sphere. Trending highlights what they want us to see, what they’re allowing us to see. But the commons is bigger than their grasp, and linked in uncontrollable ways.
“Ancestral, not marginal”

Especially in the case of Goldberg’s take on #femfuture and #solidarityisforwhitewomen (and similarly to Wikipedia’s Community Advocacy Director Phillippe Beaudette’s call for civility) the tackling of visibility posits white liberalism as the only possible ally — while they belittle and besmirch online activism and take no part in such efforts — their instructions, suggestions, and criticisms must be taken seriously and will be aggressively applied (their suggestions: don’t be too visible and you must be “civil” in critiquing misogynist gamers). Trusting and utilizing the secret formulas of Twitter and liberal logic, the journalists dissect who is, and is not on our side — why this is a problem, and ultimately, how to appear “better” the next time “we” are visible. This is their primary complaint — we didn’t appear pretty enough, nothing was polished, we focused on the wrong issues, we were too angry, we seem childish — and everyone saw.

In this visibility-centric frame — and because utilizing only the result of the trend, the “analyst” misses the genealogy of online conversations, how plentiful they are — as Twitter selected trends or not. Rather than situating certain events as marginal concerns, or the marginal infringing into the dominant — as Goldberg, Wikipedia’s Board and others have done — I am more interested in framing the events/conversations as ancestral, rather than marginal (this is a poetic framework I’m borrowing from the poet Lucas de Lima). Rather than fringes, minor and eclipsing — to think of such conversations as digitalized fragments of political ancestry; as ongoing, replenished, connected to and beyond its current framework.

Imagine: sustained communities that congregate through their desire for anti-racists, anti-patriarchal, anti-colonial discourse. Imagine: the continuity of online communities irrespective of normative blessings!

Hacking a commons

Indeed, Twitter is not designed as public even as it fundamentally derives from public input and data, and parades as common grounds. Luis Martín-Cabrera offers that, “Karl Marx saw the appropriation of the commons as one of the elements of ‘primitive accumulation,’ a ‘ground zero’ of ‘surplus value.’” That is, the shifting of the public, and the taking of the commons is the basis of privatization — a process that exists to exploit the majority for a minor few. However, you don’t have to be a Marxist to follow the argument that: privatization is antagonistic to notions of the commons, and explicitly closing the definition of “the public” to the public is manipulative and deceitful. Twitter developers might reply that if their algorithms weren’t proprietary, then their business model wouldn’t be protected. But if your business is about facilitating conversations between people and breaking the news, highlighting the new — could you at least define how you’re using the term “new”? They make asking for accountability feel like a business secret, a privilege — and it’s not. Trending highlights only what they want us to see, what they’re allowing us to see. Fixating on trending/visibility is the secondary layer of their gaze.

But there are some tools being utilized to circumvent Twitter’s original design, to disobey aggressively, to claim Twitter as a true “commons” — a space marked for public debate and protest. This commons is bigger than their grasp, linked in uncontrollable ways, and subject to reclamation, to subversion… to hacking. The trending of #solidarityisforwhitewomen was a hack of opaque, proprietary algorithms. Rather than what is being granted visibility, I am interested in these, and related efforts of affirmative, intimate sabotage:


• communities that congregate around tags, regardless of their trends
• users that notice when important topic (such as #Ferguson) are not trending, and use alternative tags (such as #mediabrackout)
• users who pre-emptively create “when in jail” accounts (planning the heist!!!)
• anti-doxxing collectives
• and so much more

This is the ongoing praxis that actively questions the stakes of power in our privatized digital publics. Intimate sabotage: In becoming close to the opaque, being fed by it yet reproducing otherwise. Refusing replication: becoming its expert and traitor. Learning everything about it — disenchanted of its awe, seamlessly wandering inside of it, finding novel ways of attack.

Intimate sabotage of Twitter is a provocation: that any sense of the public in this privatized milieu will have to be reimagined. “The commons” should not be a corporate feel-good initiative, but a provocation that any sense of the public in this privatized milieu will have to be reimagined. In discussing the potentiality of the commons, Martin-Cabrera extends, “[T]he potentiality of the commons can only be actualized when we actively disobey and when we actively ‘connect and fight.’” The baseline for a commons as fighting ground? The idea of unmanageable as the commons: the deployment of intimate sabotage as communal building; the algorithms hacked, broken, reworked for purposes beyond the immediate reach of private formulas, private means.

Tufekci argues that we continue to live with ineffective models/tools against our oppression; she suggests that “We need to update our nightmares.”29 The nightmare before may have been — some of us are invisible — before such concerns can be remedied — the update indicates that invisibility can no longer be exchanged evenly for represented visibility. Other updates

may be: our visibility is our surveillance (Hong), our visibility must be contested (Gossett), our visibility is not very particular — and we must find the tools to sabotage it.30

Post-script

Since writing this article there are two developments that I’ve wanted to discuss: 1. The closing of many and most real time analytic companies and 2. Twitter’s ongoing stock concerns. I’ve been thinking about how the very analytic tools that were helpful for me in interrogating the notion of trending have been acquired and made obsolete within a year. For example, Topsy has been “absorbed” into Apple’s search functions — or so it is advertised.31 Going to Topsy.com will now lead you to apple.com where Siri functions are displayed. Topsy was a “real time” social media analytic tool — it was the tool I — and many others — heavily relied on to compare Twitter data — this is not a service that Apple will provide for its users in the foreseeable future. The acquisition of Topsy by Apple is the end of another strain of free, social media analysis for users.

Since learning of Topsy’s closing I have been researching into the infrastructure of our digital tools. It turns out that major search engines such as: Google and Bing — search engines previously not known for their “real-time” analytic reports, have since set out to incorporate real time results into their search algorithms. Or in the case of Apple, they are acquiring such companies, and then claiming for their tools to be part of their platforms.

Before there was an interest in “acquiring” or incorporating real time results, real-time analytics had been its own product by companies such as: Oneriot, crowdeye, Topsy — however

30 Shanely Kane, ““Internet Famous”: Visibility as Violence on Social Media,” Model View Culture, 30 June 2014.
these have all closed or been absorbed. Companies such as Collecta (and keyhole.co) have moved into “ad-based” centered firms. Which leads me to my secondary understanding of social media analytic tools (which apparently are being made more obsolete by the day): the marketing for these tools was and is to serve a “branding” purpose. The idea is that there is a real-time analysis of a word, trend, phrase — and this has a marketplace value. Wouldn’t branding services like to know what is happening in the moment, in order to capitalize on the issue/thought/moment? Because there is a “marketplace” for analytics for “business and branding” purposes, sites and apps like Crowdfire may continue to exist. Twitter has taken this approach as well. Twitter’s own analytics tool is about the individual brand on Twitter. Analytics on Twitter focus on individual, personal analytics — for personal branding growth we are to assume.

The closing of analytic search firms is perhaps part of the larger narrative of the tech industry — unabashedly neoliberal on all fronts, obsolescent as a rule, and unapologetically on a path to appropriate/conquer. However, the tools that we — users, researchers, educators, writers — need in order to think about the web, and web-based interactions, cannot and should not abide by the obsolescent narrative. So what to do?

The algorithms for all of the social media and search sites most popularly used are proprietary, and we very much need the tools that are actively being shut down.

Topsy helped me analyze how Twitter’s “trend” is what they have decided should trend. With Topsy gone and with Twitter adding its own analytic tools (they seem to want to show you how many tweets are being generated per each tag, who knows what it’ll be next month) — it’s implied that we — users, educators, researchers — need not double check, need not research further.

Without analytic tools guiding user experience — all methodologies and readings become positivist, fraught, full of more questions. We desperately need public, non-proprietary search functions, and analytic tools for our search endeavors.
Second and relatedly, is Twitter’s stock price and the mining of user experience as “future” development projects. Twitter has had a consistent flow of stock problems since it began to be publically traded. In fact, there’s been a 65 percent drop in share price from the last year from an IPO of $26 on November 7, 2013, to around $17 March of 2016. Everything from: growth expectations to growth realities, Twitter — to its dismay — has not been as profitable as other companies.

In an attempt to “innovate” its platform, the latest CEO of Twitter Jack Dorsey tweeted in January of 2016 of the possibility of changing its 140 character policy. The decision for this, he stated, is based on user habits. Users are uploading photographs of texts — shouldn’t they be able to display the full text in the platform, and be able to search for these texts? Dorsey explained in the tweet,

34 Philip van Doorn, “It’s Twitter’s birthday, and its executives are getting huge stock-based gifts,” Opinion; MarketWatch, 22 March 2016.
35 But why should any of these companies be profitable? Peter Sunde, founder of Pirate Bay questions the relationship between capitalism and the web. He states, "Look at all the biggest companies in the world, they are all based on the internet. Look at what they are selling: nothing. Facebook has no product. Airbnb, the biggest hotel chain in the world, has no hotels. Uber, the biggest taxi company in the world, has no taxis whatsoever…These are insane amounts of money for nothing. That is why the internet and capitalism are so in love with each other." Sunde argues that, "We are trying to recreate this capitalistic society we have on top of the internet. So the internet has been mostly fuel on the capitalistic fire, by kind of pretending to be something which will connect the whole world, but actually having a capitalistic agenda." Twitter not being profitable, or being not as profitable could be way for us to think about why the expectation for capital growth of web-based companies is modeled after some kind of capitalist utopian endless growth formula — and how this expectation effects or might effect our understanding of user, tool — or any potentiality of the “commons.” See Peter Sunde, interviewed by Joost Mollen, in “Pirate Bay Founder: ‘I Have Given Up,’’ Motherboard, 11 December 2015.
We’ve spent a lot of time observing what people are doing on Twitter, and we see them taking screenshots of text and tweeting it. Instead, what if that text… was actually text? Text that could be searched. Text that could be highlighted.\textsuperscript{36}

Dorsey’s statement is a curious gesture—the “observing” of user behavior and creating “tools” around them—it is a gesture that I hope we can examine closely in the future. On one hand we have the dissolution of user tools, the dismantling of their functions into the platform (as either completely dissolved, or said-to-be-recapitulated, such as Topsy), and on the other hand, we have a mining of user habits for tools in hopes that these new developments will result in a better-functioning and more profitable future company. A completely vertical, top-down relationship with little to no room for inquiry or contest.

In this scenario I am reminded of what mathematician Joel Nishimura has described as a: Technology Dividend. Nishimura argues that “new” technology is made up of research and development that comes inextricably out of public practice and research—and therefore, a “tech dividend” that “functions exactly as an unconditional basic income” could and should be implemented.\textsuperscript{37} I am interested in Nishimura’s proposal in that it brainstorms a way all kinds of public, visible and illegible engagement might be acknowledged and compensated for partaking in research and development. A “Tech Dividend” moves away from current neoliberal, opaque, top-down economic models and provide us new ways to think about the commons, the center, and the politics of visibility.

\textsuperscript{36} Jack Dorsey (@jack), Twitter post, 5 January 2016, 5:07 p.m.
\textsuperscript{37} This is from an unpublished article draft provided by Joel Nishimura.
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