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"Burning All Illusion':

Abstraction, Black Life and the Unmaking of White Supremacy"

What are the ethics of seeing and viewing black death in our contemporary moment? When does visual representation of black death become spectacle and when does it serve efforts towards justice? What are appropriate forms of artistic commemoration? Many artists and movements for social justice have attempted simultaneously to assert black humanity and to critique white supremacy through the figural, or thorough visualizing the vaunted yet contested category of "the human." But perhaps the way to commemorate the dead and move towards a more just vision is through the genre of abstraction. In this paper, I focus on the assemblage work of Samuel Levi Jones and the video work of data artist Josh Begley who each create art in memoriam to victims of police brutality that turn viewers' attention away from black bodies and the burdens of representation those bodies are made to bear. Instead, Begley and Jones redirect us toward the systems of power that produce blackness as fungible commodity and black life as expendable. Through different though "classic" forms of abstraction-- Jones' employment of the grid and Begley's use of the map, specifically the technology of Google maps--each challenge the ways we are disciplined to "see like a state."