REFERENCES

Bronner, Ethan and Noam Cohen. 'Israeli Candidate Borrows a (Web) Page From Obama', *The New York Times*, November 15, 2008, sec. International / Middle East, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/15/world/middleeast/15bibi.html?_r=1.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé Williams and Gary Peller. 'Reel Time/Real Justice', in Robert Gooding-Williams (ed.) *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising*, New York: Routledge, 1993.

Gregory, Sam. 'Cameras Everywhere: Ubiquitous Video Documentation of Human Rights, New Forms of Video Advocacy, and Considerations of Safety, Security, Dignity and Consent', *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 2.2 (2010): 191-207.

Losh, Elizabeth. 'Government YouTube: Bureaucracy, Surveillance, and Legalism in State-Sanctioned Online Video Channels', in Geert Lovink and Sabine Niederer (eds) *Video Vortex Reader: Responses to YouTube*, Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2008.

Lynch, Mona. 'Punishing Images', *Punishment & Society* 6.3 (2004): 255 -270.

McLagan, Meg. 'Introduction: Making Human Rights Claims Public', *American Anthropologist* 108.1 (2006): 191-195.

Stelter, Brian. Videos Carry On the Fight Over Sea Raid. *The New York Times*, June 1, 2010, sec. World / Middle East, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/02/world/middleeast/02media.html?_r=2&adxnnl=1&adxnnlx=1284832821-QIx62AT77LxfPB2eYFomEw.

INCREASING THE VISIBILITY OF BLINDNESS: NATALIE BOOKCHIN'S MASS ORNAMENT

BRIAN WILLEMS

On Facebook, others can post pictures of you, tag your presence, and comment as they wish. These photos are added to your personal profile, thereby foregrounding the limits one (always) has to self-representation. This can cause problems. Friends from one milieu (work) are privy to tagged activities from another (play). On the one hand this is terrible; whatever control that was held over the different domains of life is decreased even further. On the other hand, however, this chaotic presentation of self comes closer to who we actually are, precisely because people other than ourselves have control. Social media can work to reveal aspects of ourselves that we would rather keep hidden, to which we would rather keep our 'friends', and ourselves, blind. It forces us, and others, to see a fuller picture of who we are. In this sense a site like Facebook, or the meta-information contained in the blogosphere, works towards a critical convergence, or what David Bordwell calls an 'intensified continuity', in which our blindness to who we are becomes more and more visible, for better or for worse.

I argue that social media like Facebook and YouTube have the ability to make that which Paul de Man would call the 'blindness of reading' visible. This qualitative difference is manifest through the ability to track, and hence see through tags and other meta-information, a number of connections between bodies that would otherwise remain hidden. What is important is to understand the manner in which these connections are made visible. I use two examples in order to discuss the visibility of blindness as it relates to YouTube in particular: first, Avital Ronell's argument from the early 1990s that video's inability to be read paradoxically visualizes the unreadable trauma of television; and second, the more contemporary example of Natalie Bookchin's *Mass Ornament* (2009), a piece of video art utilizing YouTube as an example of structuring a visualization of the unseen.

Reading, Trauma, Television

One way to approach the relationship between visibility and blindness is through the concept of *reading*. Reading is an activity that is both ubiquitous and challenging to pin down. The co-existence of ubiquity and ambiguity is paramount to the events of both reading and being-read. For Paul de Man, reading is never 'just' reading; it always refers to something beyond its direct referent. In the following, de Man discusses Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*:

> The allegory of reading narrates the impossibility of reading. But this impossibility necessarily extends to the word 'reading' which is thus deprived of any referential meaning whatsoever. ... Everything in this novel signifies something other than what it represents, be it love, consciousness, politics, art, sodomy, or gastronomy: it is always something else than is intended. It can be shown that the most adequate term to designate

this "something else" is Reading. But one must at the same time "understand" that this word bars access, once and forever, to a meaning that yet can never cease to call out for its understanding. [1]

The doubled meaning of *reading* becomes apparent: it is both active (it does something, it refers to something else) and substantive (static, describing a state, like the verb *to be*). These two meanings cannot be reconciled; rather, their coexistence functions as an engine for the process of becoming visible. We must proceed very carefully here, for by discussing reading's existence as something else, *and* its being a call for a ceaseless incompletion of understanding, we are coming very close to saying nothing at all, of becoming trapped in a self-assured understanding of a certain kind of dialectics. Therefore an example is in order.

In March of 1991, in an early case of what Steve Mann has termed 'sousveillance', [2] George Holliday videotaped the beating of Rodney King by a number of Los Angeles police officers, four of whom were later brought to trial. The role of the video in this trial was paramount, and it forms the crux of Avital Ronell's essay 'TraumaTV: Twelve Steps beyond the Pleasure Principle'. [3] Here, Ronell focuses on the way in which the video of King occupies the position both of being something else, and of referring to that something else, just as reading does for De Man. In other words, what the Rodney King video actually shows is how hard the video itself is to see.

First, the video foregrounds the question of whether King's getting up from the ground was an aggressive gesture or not. Even though the gesture was recorded and the video was examined frame by frame in court, the 'truth' of King's gesture is still impossible to 'see' (although it was perhaps made difficult to see for reasons other than the truth). Second, by showing the impossibility of reading, the video assumes the active function of referring to something other than itself, to something more than the contents of the video. The video shows how King's gesture slips beyond the tag of 'aggression'. This is reflected in the way King himself occupies a similar double-position, for he needed to be something other than himself in order to be beaten: to justify the beating, King *needed* to have been on PCP (for which he tested negative) and 'buffed out' as one of the officers claimed he appeared. As Ronell argues:

> What does it mean to say that the police force is hallucinating drugs, or, in this case, to allow the suggestion that it was already in the projection booth as concerns Rodney King? In the first place, before the first place, they were watching the phantom of racist footage. According to black-and-white TV, Rodney King could not be merely by

1.   Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*, New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1979, p. 77.
2.   Steve Mann, 'Sousveillance', Wearcam.org, 2002, http://wearcam.org/sousveillance.htm. This example is actually an illustration of the second subtype of sousveillance Mann describes, 'out-of-band sousveillance'.
3.   Avital Ronell, 'TraumaTV: Twelve Steps beyond the Pleasure Principle', in *Finitude's Score: Essays for the End of the Millennium*, Lincoln; London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994.

himself or who he was that night. In order to break Rodney King, or break the story, the phantasm of the supplemented Other – on junk, beside himself, not himself, more than himself, a technozombie of supernatural capabilities – had to be agreed upon by the police force. [4]

For Ronell, one of the reasons that King was allowed to appear as a figure of displacement and projection in the early 1990s was because the video of the beating was located within the medium of television. Television, according to Ronell, 'exists in trauma, or rather, trauma is what preoccupies television: it is always on television'. [5] Trauma, too, is also unreadable in two ways: 'as a memory that one cannot integrate into one's own experience, and as a catastrophic knowledge that one cannot communicate to others'. [6] The video of King, projected onto and out of television, is what made the trauma of communication visible. This is because the video was assumed to record the reality of the event, as is evident in its use as a perfectly objective eyewitness in court. However, what the video actually revealed was that it could be shown, but not read. King had been recorded but he was not communicating, at least not in the expected manner. His gesture of getting up off the ground could not be determined by the court to be aggressive, or otherwise. And then, repetition of the recorded and replayable video on transient television only foregrounded the unreadability of television itself. As Ronell points out: 'I am not saying that video is the truth of television, nor its essence. Rather, it is what is watching television; it is the place of the testimonial that cannot speak with referential assurance but does assert the truth of what it says'. [7]

As a medium, television is always something other than itself, 'when it mimes police work or when, during the [first] Gulf War, blanking out in a phobic response to the call of reference, it becomes a radio'. [8] However, Ronell argues, the central question regarding video on television is the doubled active/substantive role of the medium of television. Ronell describes this dual role using the language of blindness: television '*showed* itself not showing, and *became* the closed, knotted eye of blindness'. [9] For Ronell, television is both something else and refers to something else, and this position is foregrounded, or made visible, by the call of video. The reading of King shows that the question of the ability to see relates to the medium of video. What the reading of King shows is that the question of the ability to see relates to the medium of video, a question addressed by artist Natalie Bookchin's in her work that uses YouTube videos as material.

4.   Ronell, 'TraumaTV', p. 307. This projection can also be seen as an example of what Frantz Fanon terms 'collective catharsis' in *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox, New York: Grove Press, 2008, p. 124.
5.   Ronell, 'TraumaTV', p. 313.
6.   Ronell, 'TraumaTV', p. 314. Slavoj Žižek calls trauma an 'unknown unknown' in counter distinction to the 'unknown known' of the Unconscious. Trauma is 'the violent intrusion of something radically unexpected, something the subject was absolutely not ready for, and which it cannot integrate in any way', *Living in the End Times*, London; New York: Verso, 2010, p. 292.
7.   Ronell, 'TraumaTV', p. 316.
8.   Ronell, 'TraumaTV', p. 316.
9.   Ronell, 'TraumaTV', p. 316.

Visibility, Video, Girl-Kultur

In her 2008 work *Trip*, her 2009 work *Mass Ornament*, and her latest piece at the time of writing, *Testament* (exhibited October 2009-January 2010 at the Los Angeles Country Museum of Art), Natalie Bookchin has based her work on online video collocated around a number of related meta-tags. Her methodology is to choose and then explore these videos through the similarities and differences she finds that extend between people separated by time, space and culture. In *Trip*, Bookchin collates videos found on YouTube that feature road trips; from traveling with friends, to video of an improvised explosive device explosion in Iraq. What first seems to hold these disparate videos together is that they were shot from cars and other means of transportation. However, what emerges from the mixture of languages, cultures and situations, is that what has actually been recorded is an attempt – both failed and successful – to traverse borders, the inherent promise of every trip.

The focus here, however, will be Bookchin's *Mass Ornament*, a piece of video art which compiles YouTube videos featuring people dancing alone in a room. Bookchin reinforces the commonalities between the clips through the music she occasionally uses to accompany the images, including the song 'Lullaby of Broadway' from Busby Berkeley's 1935 film *Gold Diggers of 1935*, and pieces, mainly those of Wagner, from another film released in the same year, Leni Riefenstahl's work of Nazi propaganda, *The Triumph of the Will*. [10] In order to understand this work, and its relevance to reading and blindness, it is necessary to briefly discuss the text from which Bookchin has taken the title of *Mass Ornament.*

Siegfried Kracauer's essay 'The Mass Ornament' first appeared as a feuilleton in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in 1927, and was later reprinted in 1963 in a collection which was titled after the essay. In 'The Mass Ornament', Kracauer states that it is the unconscious production of an era, rather than its conscious critical output, that can provide access to 'the fundamental substance of the state of things'. [11] Kracauer's example of unconscious production is the chorus girl or line dancer. 'These products of American distraction factories', Kracauer states, 'are no longer individual girls, but indissoluble girl clusters whose movements are demonstrations of mathematics'. [12] The group of line dancers Kracauer refers to, the Tiller Girls, were themselves English, the precision products of Manchurian ex-textile manufacturer John Tiller. [13] For Kracauer, they signify the way in which people (*Volk)* become the mass (*Masse)*. People, for Kracauer, are burdened with burdening others with meaning, while the mass 'are mere building blocks and nothing more'. [14] The mass is ornament, and 'The ornament is an

---

10. *The Triumph of the Will,* (dir. Leni Riefenstahl, 1935).
11. Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. Thomas Levin, Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press, 1995, p. 75.
12. Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament,* pp. 75-6.
13. Peter Jelavich, '"Girls and Crisis": The Political Aesthetics of the Kickline in Weimar Berlin', in John Roth (ed.) *Rediscovering History: Culture, Politics and the Psyche*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994, p. 226.
14. Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament*, p. 76.

end in itself'. [15] The Tiller Girls are de-eroticized, their movements 'take place in a vacuum'; 'they are a linear system that no longer has any erotic meaning but at best points to the locus of the erotic'. [16] These 'girl-units', Kracauer states,

> drill in order to produce an immense number of parallel lines, the goal being to train the broadest mass of people in order to create a pattern of undreamed-of dimensions. The end result is the ornament, whose closure is brought about by emptying all the substantial constructs of their contents. [17]

They become 'purely' referential, taking on the double position of referring to the shape of a star, square or circle, and being that referent themselves. In this sense, following Kracauer's argument, they are vehicles of the unconscious, a medium allowing the un-thought elements of capitalism to seep through to consciousness.

For Kracauer, the solution to the ornament is not a return to nature or to 'the human', but a more extreme calculability, a stricter rationality. At the close of his essay, Kracauer uses rhythmic gymnastics as a failed example of such potentially extreme rationality, for it 'goes further and expropriates the higher mythological levels, thereby strengthening nature's dominance all the more'. Therefore, Kracauer writes, 'It is just one example among many other equally hopeless attempts to reach a higher life from out of mass existence'. [18] Rhythmic gymnastics does not fit the bill because it is too romantic, it lacks 'more' rationality. We can only move forward 'when thinking circumscribes nature and produces man as he is constituted by reason. Then society will change'. [19]

In part, Kracauer's description of the Mass Ornament recalls Elizabeth Losh's account of the protagonists of YouTube videos:

> There may be real human beings populating the audience constellations of YouTube, but they satisfy stock roles, such as griefer, self-promoter, parodist, pundit, and seconder of motions. In other words, YouTube is often a culture engine of popularity instead of populism, in which the power laws by which it functions largely protect the status quo rather than challenge it. [20]

---

15. Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament*, p. 76. Adolf Loos' *Ornament and Crime*, from 1908, should also be indicated here, although Loos adds a lack of moral evolution to those that are immersed in ornamentation. See Adolf Loos, *Ornament and Crime: Selected Essays*, trans. Michael Mitchell, Riverside: Ariadne Press, 1998.
16. Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament*, p. 77.
17. Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament*, p. 77.
18. Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament*, p. 86.
19. Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament*, p. 86.
20. Elizabeth Losh, 'Government YouTube: Bureaucracy, Surveillance, and Legalism in State-Sanctioned Online Video Channels', in Geert Lovink and Sabine Niederer (eds.) *Video Vortex Reader: Responses to YouTube*, Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2008, pp. 111-112.

On the surface, Bookchin's video piece seems to agree with Losh's assessment, and to call attention to the dehumanizing aspect that Kracauer identified. Indeed, as Bookchin herself states in relation to her own work: 'The Mass Ornament reflects the abstraction involved in capitalist profit formation. Workers in a factory, like dancers in a stadium, laboured to produce surplus value that existed for its own sake'. [21] However, I believe that what is in fact evident is the more extreme rationality that Kracauer calls. In the hyper-structure of Bookchin's video collection of single figures dancing alone in their rooms, it is this more extreme rationality that allows the 'unconscious' aspects of contemporary culture to shine through. As in the example of social networking sites discussed in the opening of this essay suggested, extreme rationality can actually take the form of an extreme sociability. In order to understand the role of this kind of rationality, the structure of *Mass Ornament* will be described in some detail.

Bookchin's video may be broken down into the following four 'autonomous segments': [22]

A) Amidst a black background there appear first one, then two, then more, then fewer bedrooms in a horizontal row. As Bookchin says of the piece, the blocks appear across the screen as 'a chorus line but [they] also [reflect] the viewing conditions of YouTube, where videos are shown with an accompanying row of thumbnail images linking seemingly similar videos'. [23] There are no people in these rooms, although sometimes, when a video first appears, a hand can be seen quickly moving out of the frame, probably having just turned the camera on. Each of these pictures has the number of views put underneath it, recalling the function on YouTube. Some of them even report 'Removed by user'. They show a number of empty rooms, until a hooded figure enters.
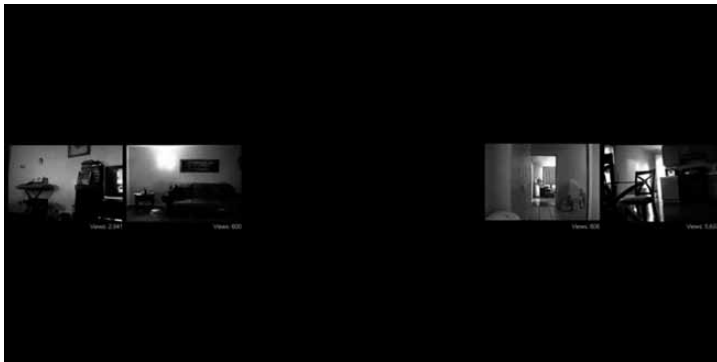
Mass Ornament (2009) - the setup. All images are courtesy of the artist.

21. Carolyn Kane, 'Dancing Machines: An Interview with Natalie Bookchin', *Rhizome.org*, 2009, http://www.rhizome.org/editorial/2653.
22. Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. Michael Taylor, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991, pp. 24-28.
23. Kane, 'Dancing Machines'.

These frames abruptly disappear, in a cut to the title of the piece. The initiatory stance of this sequence is reinforced by the diegetic sound and music, which features an opera singer, television news and conversation, and the song 'Lullaby of Broadway', which will form a central motif for the whole video. The levity of this song, which was written in the midst of the Great Depression in 1935, at once hearkens back to the Roaring Twenties, which was perhaps the last time one could flaunt one's self without shame, and a mourning for the loss of those times – a send-off, or lullaby. A different era is now approaching, one in which a self-critical stance is paramount, as one is surrounded by so much suffering. This introduction to Bookchin's piece ends with its title, although the song begins again before we cut away from the title, signifying a new section is about to begin.

B) Next, one of only two optical devices that separate the images is used. As the music plays on, the title fades out and a new segment with a new format fades in: one image which is larger and in the centre of the screen. The content of this piece is a scene from an old movie showing a couple dancing. This single shot, which provides an autonomous segment in itself, then fades into a shot of a young woman walking up to her mirror, and adjusting her gold lamé belt. Reflected in the mirror is a computer, to which the young woman turns. This image is followed by a jump cut to five other women, in five other bedrooms, who all walk up to their computers and bend over to turn them on, supposedly completing the action that the first woman was about to begin. The next cut is to three slightly larger screens with close-ups of computer monitors and single arms waving up and down, as if disconnected from the body of a belly dancer.

What follows is a number of arrangements of people who are 'just about to dance': six images of mirrors, with women stepping in front of them, facing the camera. The music at the beginning of the piece is light, musical-like. There are then six images of women bending down into the camera, having just turned it on, their faces at times out of focus from coming so close to it. Then, three women, and two men, are shown in their five screens preparing to begin a dance. They are not dancing, but are braced for the beginning of their routine. In the next shot, we see five empty rooms, into which a person walks and turns to face the camera, then three girls who have their midriffs exposed; then nine screens show people backing away from the camera so their whole body can fit in the frame. Then twelve do. Then eighteen.

Eighteen Dancers.

C) A change occurs at about the 2'45" mark, signaled in a number of ways. The diegetic room noise takes over the lighter musical piece, and *Mass Ornament* takes on a more serious, and even sinister, tone. As the extra-diegetic music fades out, there is once again a single shot to focus on. As with the black and white image of the dancing shadows, there

is now a single shot in the centre of the frame. 'Lullaby' has finished and there are at first only diegetic sounds, and then a more sinister single synthesized note. What is seen is an image of a midriff in front of a television.

Two disembodied bodies.

This is a shot of a reflection of culture reflected in a midriff reflecting onto the video screen. On the one hand, this makes a rather trite statement about the role of the culture industry; on the other it returns us to Ronell's reading of the relationship between television and video. Ronell, recall, did not claim that video posed an ethical call to television, but that video helped to make the unreadable trauma of television visible. To put it briefly, in Bookchin's work, video makes 'YouTubed' connections between videos visible. These connections, mapped out in different 'semantic fields' [24] or tags, such as *midriff*, *mirror* and *turning on computer*, are made visible by the availability, replayability and connectivity of videos presented together on a video sharing platform such as YouTube or Vimeo. The ubiquity of these connections is partially assumed in this scene: people have 'always' been dancing in their rooms with the same gestures, influenced by television or another medium, but they were always hidden. It is only now that we can see them doing so, that the new, meaningful patterns of the culture industry may be understood.

Following this image, the 'Lullaby' music returns a few seconds before cut to three screens of scantily glad girls who are posing, then dancing for the gaze of the camera. Then we see three more doing the same - although now there are men included - and then three more. Then four, then three, then six, then nine. The memes of television are spreading, dehumanizing, 'ornamentizing'. The chorus music fades out. A single shot, with what sounds like an 'Arabic' piece of music, begins. [25] This new music ac-

24. David Bordwell, *Making Meaning*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989, pp. 105-128.
25. Bookchin used to have this video piece up on YouTube but it had to be removed, not because of copyright issues with the images, but because of the music. At the time of writing, the video appears only on Vimeo.

companies a single screen, with similar framing to the shot showing only a midriff and television; here, however, the dancer has her back to the camera, and her head is hanging down, supposedly to dramatically whip her hair up over her shoulders. However, as a *punctum* to this *subjectum*, a portrait hangs on the wall, as if to compensate for the body's facelessness. This pencil drawing shows the soft, innocent face of a girl with long hair. Whether this is the girl in the video is not really important. Rather, we see that the portrait has taken the place occupied by the television in the previous shot. If nothing else, the memes of the culture industry have been completely absorbed by the subject, and then by the two girls who subsequently appear on the screens next to this one, along with their own portraits. As these three become six, the 'tag' for portrait widens to include any kind of painting or reproduction, which changes the meaning from self-image, to the image in general. Then, some other 'tags': dancing in front of ironing boards, Christmas trees, and then computers themselves (in one of which it is possible to see that the person is watching a YouTube video).

D) At this point, at 4'03", and just past the half-way mark, the final segment is about to begin. Once again, the change is signaled by a single, larger frame in the centre of the screen. This shot shows a lone computer playing an unidentifiable YouTube video.

YouTube, alone?

As has been continuously signaled by the varying 'view counts' and 'removed by user' titles under all of the videos, the viewer is at this point seemingly being asked to reflect on the specific nature of the electronic medium through which these images are being transmitted. This is a scene of blame. The view count is 411,823, which is relatively high for these videos. The music also underscores the change, with an operatic voice accompanying the images of bodies and hands sliding along walls. The extra-diegetic sound fades out, so the sound of flesh against object can come forth. Rubbery hand against plastic-y cupboard. Then we return to mirrors, with the music turned low, and the sound of ungraceful feet pounding against cheap floors. Then we see images of stretching and waving, spinning and more sliding, pushing against walls and dancing against walls in

small rooms and tight, cramped corridors not conducive to dancing. Now, the 'Lullaby' is back. People are now jumping together and raising their hands in the air. For the first time, more than one row of screens appear, which then snake and twirl their way up the screen. Then, handstands and other attempts at gymnastics, as music from *The Triumph of the Will* plays over images of arched backs, indicating the complacency these acts of freedom have in a structure beyond (or behind) their movements.[26] Cartwheels and back flips, rather than dancing, symbolize the inclusion of rhythmic gymnastics into the fold of the ornament, which Kracauer warned against. The extra-diegetic sounds of tap dancing from an unseen performance accompany images of people doing the 'Macarena'. As the images begin to shrink, it is no longer really important what they are doing. There are no real clear tags tying these dancers together. They are just people alone in their rooms shaking their hips back and forth.

The following cuts once again feature dancers and the 'Lullaby' theme. Eventually, there is such an abundance of connections being made between videos, and so many videos with these connections, that the specific tags grouping these figures together become irrelevant to images too small to make out such details. This is an increased level of connectivity, of 'rationality' that, in Kracauerian fashion, reveals the larger issues that cause these images to appear together, rather than just their individual marks or motifs. The individual videos are becoming too small to see, and they disappear with the ending of the song.

Structure, Tags, Blindness

What is interesting about the structure of Bookchin's *Mass Ornament* is how clearly it is marked out, both through music and image, according to the classic three-act formula of Hollywood cinema: Induction/Setup, Conflict, and Closure (or Climax). Bordwell describes this structure in the following manner. 1) The Setup 'establishes the characters' world, defines the main characters' purposes, and culminates in a turning point near the half-hour mark'.[27] 2) The traditional second act is comprised of a 'Complicating Action' and 'focuses or recasts the film's central goals. Either the protagonist changes tactics for achieving her goal, or she faces an entirely new situation – a sort of "counter-setup"'.[28] 3) The Final act is the Climax. 'Often following the 'darkest moment', the scene in which a crisis forces the protagonist to take action, this section revolves around the question of whether or not the goals can be achieved'.[29]

In *Mass Ornament,* Part A functions as a kind of induction scene, whereas Part B functions as a setup: the real action of dancing has not begun, but we are introduced to the different

26. And remember that the National Party Congress held in Nuremberg in 1934 was mainly staged to be filmed. See Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, trans. Patrick Camiller, London; New York: Verso, 1989, p. 69.
27. David Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006, p. 36.
28. Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It*, p. 36.
29. Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It*, p. 38.

players. Part C is introduced with a conflict: the body before the television being shown on video. This could even be described as a 'counter-setup', in that we need to revise some of the preceding images in a more critical light. Part D offers a closure to the piece: a single video featuring a computer, alone, playing a YouTube video. The images eventually become too small to read individually, thereby becoming so intense that they foreground the process of viewing (reading) itself.

What is more interesting, however, is the relationship of *Mass Ornament* to Bordwell's main thesis, which is that modern cinema does not deviate from the classical structure per se as much as it exhibits an 'intensified continuity'.[30] Modern films, taken as roughly post-1960, are not less structured but rather hyper-structured; they do not eschew the three-act structure but rather follow it even more closely, providing an over-abundance of motifs and connections between acts. In a similar manner, Bookchin's video has an overabundant number of semantic fields linking one video to the other, so that the videos eventually become too numerous to pick out individually. This foregrounding is achieved not by making the tags more stable, but by exploding their referentiality through combination and selection. If Bookchin's video is able to make unseen connections visible, this is through intensification and combination, rather than paring down and separating. It is maximalism, not minimalism.

In *Mass Ornament*, the relation of visibility to meta-information is realized through greater structure, rather than less. In order to understand this relation Jan Simons' theory of tags and tagging will be discussed. According to Simons, the 'problem' with finding content using tags does not only lie in the system's inherent polysemy, homonymy and synonymy[31] – such as tagging a computer with 'apple' and then retrieving a piece of fruit – but rather with a lack of understanding of the intuitive way in which users tag their products.[32] The problem with tags is that they occupy the place of a double-bind: on the one hand they incorporate some of the ambiguity inherent within language; on the other they are one-word, limited utterances and are therefore seemingly devoid of grammar.[33] At the core of both this ambiguity and non-grammaticism is: a) the way that tags refer to things other than themselves; and b) the way that tags are themselves always something other than themselves. This dual structure is, recall, also emblematic of reading, and the strength of Simons' argument is the recognition that this ambiguity needs to be incorporated into the actual structures of tagging.[34] Because tags are usually created by non-expert, but fluent, users of language, tags themselves will incorporate some of the same ambiguities of language. It would seem logical, therefore, that tags will also incorporate and reproduce some of the same structures of reading. In order to illustrate this point, Simons ends his article with a paragraph highlighting the visibility of blindness:

30. Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It,* pp. 121-89.
31. Jan Simons, 'Another Take on Tags? What Tags Tell', in Geert Lovink and Sabine Niederer (eds) *Video Vortex Reader: Responses to YouTube*, Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2008, p. 240.
32. Simons, 'Another Take on Tags?', p. 243.
33. Simons, 'Another Take on Tags?, p. 244.
34. Simons, 'Another Take on Tags?, p. 245.

Since taggers tap into the same cognitive and linguistic resources that allow for the impressive flexibility and adaptability of language, it is very unlikely that tagging practices will eventually converge in something like a controlled vocabulary. Tag-elese is not a "language without a grammar", but its grammar is largely concealed – or "repressed" as a Freudian would say – by the very design of tagging systems and – it should be admitted – by the very purposes proponents of folksonomies had in mind for tagging practices. Nevertheless, as the "purloined letter" in Poe's famous story, the grammar of tag-elese has been staring us in the face all the time while we were looking for it at the wrong place. [35]

While Simons' conclusion brings together a number of threads developed here, I believe his final use of Freud, and then of the example of 'The Purloined Letter' famously used by Lacan, misses the point in a slight but profound way. Simons states that we were looking for the grammar of tag-elese (the 'language' of tagging) in 'the wrong place', implying that if we were to look in the correct spot, we would be able to locate this allusive grammar. This spot is right in front of our noses, i.e. in the way tags themselves work. However, Poe's story, along with Lacan's use of it, is not about looking in the right place, as much as it is about how we can come to see that we are actually looking in the wrong place. This is what Poe's story seems to indicate: the best place to hide a letter is out in the open. The question that this raises is not how we see the letter, but how it is that the letter is ever missed. Or, put in the language of this essay, how is it that blindness becomes visible? Tags seem to be part of this equation because they *reflect* the ambiguity of language: yet, how is such reflection able to take place? Bookchin's *Mass Ornament* offers one answer to this question. The work's intensified continuity does not clarify anything at all; rather, it makes the blindness and ambiguity of the connections between videos visible. [36] Bookchin's piece points towards a new level of blindness particular to the internet; a quantitative increase that becomes qualitative, as it allows for a stricter and more 'rational' set of coordinates between these instantiations of blindness to come forth.

We can still ask, however, how it is that an ability to see the unseen can 'come forth'? In closing, I will briefly make use of a concept developed in the third section of Giorgio Agamben's essay 'What is the Contemporary?'. Here, Agamben defines the contemporary as a person who 'firmly holds his gaze on his own time so as to perceive not its light, but rather its darkness'. [37] For Agamben, the activity of seeing darkness defines the contemporary: 'those who do not allow themselves to be blinded by the lights of the century, and so manage to get a glimpse of the shadows in those lights, of their intimate obscurity'. [38] The role of the contemporary is, then, to turn towards this darkness: 'The contemporary is the one whose eyes are struck by the beam of darkness that comes from his own time'. [39]

---

35.   Simons, 'Another Take on Tags?, p. 252.
36.   This is what Bordwell's 'recalcitrant data' wants to do, *Making Meaning*, p. 30.
37.   Giorgio Agamben, 'What is the Contemporary?', in *What is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*,
      trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009, p. 44.
38.   Agamben, 'What is the Contemporary?', p. 45.
39.   Agamben, 'What is the Contemporary?', p. 45.

Much like the 'purloined letter', darkness is that which is already there, but remains difficult to see. Bookchin's work demonstrates how YouTube may be used to bring this darkness forward, to position the spectator in front of its black rays: through hyper-structuring and combination, it becomes possible to turn towards this darkness, and to make it visible.

REFERENCES

Agamben, Giorgio. 'What is the Contemporary?', in *What is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009.

Bordwell, David. *Making Meaning*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989.

_____. *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox, New York: Grove Press, 2008.

Jelavich, Peter. '"Girls and Crisis": The Political Aesthetics of the Kickline in Weimar Berlin', in John Roth (ed.) *Rediscovering History: Culture, Politics and the Psyche*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994.

Kane, Carolyn. 'Dancing Machines: An Interview with Natalie Bookchin', *Rhizome.org*, 2009, http://www.rhizome.org/editorial/2653.

Kracauer, Siegfried. *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. Thomas Levin, Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press, 1995.

Loos, Adolf. *Ornament and Crime: Selected Essays*, trans. Michael Mitchell, Riverside: Ariadne Press, 1998.

Losh, Elizabeth. 'Government YouTube: Bureaucracy, Surveillance, and Legalism in State-Sanctioned Online Video Channels', in Geert Lovink and Sabine Niederer (eds) *Video Vortex Reader: Responses to YouTube*, Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2008.

de Man, Paul. *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*, New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1979.

Mann, Steve. 'Sousveillance', Wearcam.org, 2002, http://wearcam.org/sousveillance.htm.

Metz, Christian. *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. Michael Taylor, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Ronell, Avital. 'TraumaTV: Twelve Steps beyond the Pleasure Principle', in *Finitude's Score: Essays for the End of the Millennium*, Lincoln; London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994.

Simons, Jan. 'Another Take on Tags? What Tags Tell', in Geert Lovink and Sabine Niederer (eds) *Video Vortex Reader: Responses to YouTube*, Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2008.

Virilio, Paul. *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, trans. Patrick Camiller, London; New York: Verso, 1989.

Žižek, Slavoj. *Living in the End Times*, London; New York: Verso, 2010.