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Networked Bodies in Cyberspace: Orchestrating the Trans-Subjective in the Video Artworks of Natalie Bookchin

For decades, discussions of the impacts of technology on the material body have featured prominently in post-humanist discourse. From Donna Haraway's oft-cited "Cyborg Manifesto" (1991) to Katherine Hayles's *How We Became Post-Human* (1999) to Franco Berardi's *The Soul at Work* (2009), an uneasy relationship exists between the networked, electrified, mechanical functionality of computational systems and the material or "meat" bodies of human users of those systems. Whether embracing the potentials or decrying the alienation of "humanity" brought about by the affective gap between the sensual body and the networks it engages by the tap-tap-tapping of fingers on keyboards, anxiety continues to surface relative to how we perceive ourselves as corporeal beings in a largely flattened, detached, and fragmented cybernetic world.[1]

The specific concern with the alienation of the material from the informatic arises perhaps as a response to the long history of the "linguistic turn" of late twentieth-century cultural theory, in which the social or discursive construction of gender, power relations, and language itself has become commonly understood as the proper way to relate to the forms bodies can assume and the identities that arise from those forms. Recently, New Materialism, and more specifically Material Feminism, has responded to the sacrifice of the material to the discursive by conceiving a chaotic onto-epistemology in which physical bodies and linguistic relations commingle in changeable, ostensibly unstable transformative processes. The radicality of this line of thought resides in the way in which bodies and ideas, machines and rhetoric, cooperate curiously and make space for the emergence of new forms of life, new political arrangements, and new ways of understanding identities and bodies beyond the limitations of representation and opposition.[2]

Still, without the polemic between nature and technology, an active and ongoing co-creative project that constitutes bodies and networks, identities, and etho-political relations is messy and unpredictable. In this essay I consider the emergence of strangely mingled bodies and subjectivities through ongoing and layered instability by taking into account multiple orders of chaotic reality and time emerging in the situated processes of relational exchange. Looking at imaginative social, physical, and political affects reflected in the layered video installations by Natalie Bookchin, I will evoke and discuss a chaotic thinking-doing partnership that Elizabeth Grosz describes as "the whirling, unpredictable movement of forces, vibratory oscillations that constitute the universe [in which chaos] may be understood not as absolute disorder but rather as a plethora of orders, forms, wills."[3] In this analysis, chaos is defined not merely as a situation in opposition to order, but as a condition of emergence and transformation that occurs through intensity when machines and humans, information databases and art viewers, stressed emotional states and laptop video cameras interact.

In this consideration of the complex dynamics among institutions, technologies, humans, and art practices as joyous, horrifying, and unpredictable flux, I intend to flesh out the concept of "trans-subjectivity:" a contingent experience that occurs among multiple actors in site-specific creative practice (not limited to

1. While Haraway's famous manifesto from the early 1990s continues to be a complex and important text for feminists and technology theorists seeking to map potentially new territories for gender politics, identity formation, and understandings of subjectivity that moved away from the lack-oriented models of psychoanalysis, Haraway distanced herself from the cyborg as early as 1999. See, for example, *How Like a Leaf: An Interview with Thyrza Nichols Goodeve* (New York: Routledge, 2000), in which she dismisses the cyborg as too hopeful and ultimately denying the "real," material exchanges that she experiences in the rigors of training, for example, with Cheyenne, her Australian Shepherd dog.
2. See, for example, Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010); Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Susan Hekman, "Constructing the Ballast: An Ontology for Feminism," in *Material Feminisms*, ed. Stacy Alaimo and Hekman (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008); and Shannon Sullivan, *Living Across and Through Skins: Transactional Bodies, Pragmatism, and Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001).
3. Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 5.

Natalie Bookchin, detail of "My Meds," from *Testament*, 2009, multichannel video installation, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2009 (artwork © Natalie Bookchin)

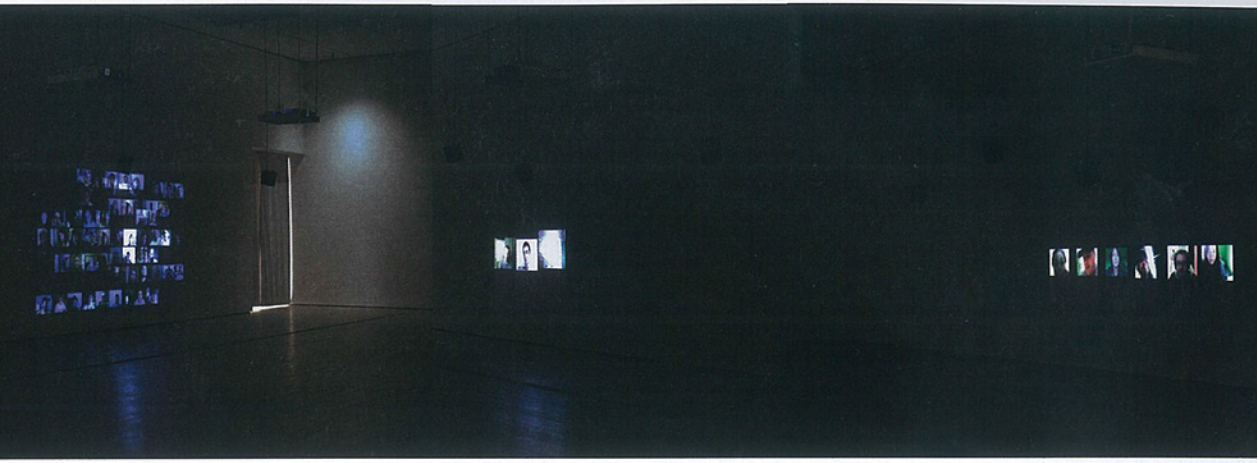
Natalie Bookchin, detail of "Laid Off," from *Testament*, 2009, multichannel video installation, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2009 (artwork © Natalie Bookchin)

art) who are engaging intensely such that the porosity of supposedly fixed boundaries becomes both visible and more permeable. Trans-subjectivity is not merely about losing the self in a collective vacuum; it is not simply described by an invasion of the differentiated self by its mad "other," although it might involve some of that. It is rather moving beside and through other currents of individuation and containment. Trans-subjectivity cannot be conceived as a universalizing condition that replaces individuality or singularity. It is more carefully understood as a playful, if frightening, slippage that seems unfamiliar but which occurs regularly whether we recognize it or not. As the trans-subjective emerges, a particular style of trans-corporeality also comes about to accommodate and account for the shift in subjective condition.

In her 2004 article "Trans-Corporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature," Stacy Alaimo proposes "that we inhabit . . . 'trans-corporeality'—the time-space where human corporeality, in all its material fleshiness, is inseparable from 'nature' or 'environment.'"[4] She offers this as a way for feminist scholarship to allow a non-essentializing materialism to flow in and among discussions from the last several decades of the body as "text." In certain networked art practices, trans-bodies act in and through the condition of trans-subjectivity described above, such that the intensity of shared and mutating corporeality allows subject processes that include commingling with human others to emerge in a jumbled formation. The emergent arrangement exceeds the empathic containment of intersubjectivity, for example, and makes possible alternative identities situated to aesthetic processes rather than essentialist or discursive positions.

Natalie Bookchin is an artist whose work investigates the ways in which social and cultural experience are explored and expressed in amateur videos posted on the Internet. Appropriating footage from sources that range from private-security webcams to personal video narratives (vlogs) that reflect the growing ubiquity of

4. Stacy Alaimo, "Trans-Corporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature," in *Material Feminisms*, 237–64.



Natalie Bookchin, *Testament*, 2009, multi-channel video installation, installation view, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2009 (artwork © Natalie Bookchin)

public and private surveillance, Bookchin choreographs the expressive bodies of the documents in what could be considered a complex manifestation of Foucauldian biopower. With her compilation of the narratives and representations of alienation in technical sociality, there emerges a strange new form, a layered body comprising multiple networks of engagement, complex aesthetic practices, and the filmy deposits of palimpsestic memory continually coming about in multiple orders of time. The body (I use the singular here to denote the trans-corporeality of the form, but it does not represent a unified, contained materiality) that emerges in her work diagrams the layers of corporeality in the various creative gestures of the vlogger, the networks in which the videos are stored and disseminated, and the so-called hand of the artist; the layers include as well the history of media representation, traditions of speaking about "the self" from Augustine to Joan Didion, and the unseen movements of pop-cultural, corporate, health-providing, and religious bodies constructing dance styles, offering or rescinding jobs, inventing medications, and narrating "right" action. This body again is not a literal, technologized, combinatorial body, but one which involves multiple actors, engaging in expressive practices that temporarily shift the unity of single bodies into a mangled, shared, trans-body affected by the practice of layered creative activity.

Consider *Testament* (2009), a video installation in three chapters ("My Meds," "Laid Off," and "I Am Not") shown at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, for which each of three projections occupies a wall in the darkened exhibition space. The works play serially, activating discrete parts of the space, or simultaneously, filling the room with an overwhelming force of faces, voices, and movement. Stereo speakers dangling from the ceiling emit the staccato and harmonic expressions of anonymous individuals sharing intimate details of socially stigmatized positions that are part of a larger collective experience of loss, medical discipline, and oppressed sexual identity. Formally constructed around the notion of a Greek chorus, which Bookchin calls "the voice of the people reflecting on the turmoil caused by the gods," the work calls and echoes in a cycle of confused yet comprehensible pain.[5]

Each of the three chapters narrates a site of bodily expression that mourns the inability to participate in the manifest power of social control: the ability to

5. Natalie Bookchin quoted in Holly Willis, "Video Chorus," KCET website, November 10, 2010, at www.kcet.org/socal/voices/blur-sharpen/video-chorus.html, as of November 4, 2013.

work, the ability to feel or emote "properly," and the ability to subscribe to normative sexuality. In "Laid Off" a linear narrative establishes a history of economic decline since 2008 in which workers, young and old, have lost the possibility to participate in the means of production through no apparent fault of their own; in fact, many of the speakers angrily insist on their years of service to a particular organization or to society in general by "working really, really hard." "My Meds," installed to the left of "Laid Off," is formatted in a stacked and overlapping grid of twisted faces, uttering the list of prescriptions they take, have just stopped taking, or will soon take in an effort to restrain out-of-control emotional states. Echoing brand names cycle while extreme close-up shots express clear efforts to minimize the physical and psychical pain of requiring the drugs in the first place and then failing to respond to treatment. Finally, "I Am Not" projects a nonlinear checkerboard of young bodies asserting "I am not gay," "I am so gay," "I wish I were gay," "I used to be gay but I figured out it was wrong." Angry, articulate, pedantic, and fraught, the voice of this chorus is much more chaotic than those of the other two. It at once expresses ambivalence toward and a longing for clarity on personal sexual preference, as if legitimate existence depends on finding and sticking with a clearly elusive or even impossible foundational truth. The piece is structured around a single frame at the center, where a young man in a green T-shirt sets up the camera and then exits the frame. This rectangle remains static as the other pained faces cycle around it, until the young man reenters, angrily shouting, "I don't give a damn. Listen to me. I am a fucking homosexual baby. . . . I am so sick and tired and hurt." This occurs three-quarters of the way through the piece and then this central frame disappears and a conciliatory narrator fades in, assuring us that if the speaker told random interlocutors that he was gay, they would "say OK, for the most part."

In a larger story of the Foucauldian carceral body, managed by naturalized ideologies of state and community practice, *Testament* expresses the uncertainty evoked by the failure to comply with the disciplinary structures of power. Internalizing the external pressure of discursive governance, the vloggers seem intent on articulating their attempts to understand themselves as debilitated in terms of normativity, but desperately attempting, for the most part, to comply with the expectations of functional biopower. Further, Bookchin is clearly curious about the status of personal and intimate confession made for and placed in the uncertain public forum of Vimeo or YouTube; the work emphasizes the pathos, isolation, and common experience of each vlogger.

On one level, the work is deeply concerned with how sociability is constructed through the medium of Internet-hosted digital production. This, however, cannot be the end of the story; while criticality threads through the apparent importance of individual expression on the part of the vlogger, which is revealed as a practically universal and almost banal experience, an excessiveness emerges both in the percussive voicing of "self" found and reorchestrated by Bookchin, and in the sheer number of pained individuals attempting to connect with an unknown and potentially uncaring audience through this kind of vulnerable and awkward articulation. The excess produces a creative force that makes a trans-body and a trans-subject possible.

Mapping the layers of this strange and emergent trans-body begins with the vloggers, who are largely confined to bedroom or living-room desks, or some-

Natalie Bookchin, detail of "I Am Not," from *Testament*, 2009, multichannel video installation, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2009 (artwork © Natalie Bookchin)

times the interiors of cars. They speak only to the camera, maintaining their isolation further by framing themselves as "talking heads" in the style of television news broadcasters, presenting personal, emotional narrative as information or statement of fact. In part this is necessitated by the computer-based videography, but the blurring of the boundaries between diaries of intimacy and the no-nonsense presentation of information frames the vlogs as something beyond mere video documents. Frames-within-frames, however unintentional, like mirrors, posters, and family pictures, offer further layers of mediatized reproduction connecting the vlogger's bodily record to a larger network of images, styles, and idioms. The bodies of the vloggers are not, however, mere representations of persons in pain, of uncritical citizens duped by drug companies or affected by puritanical sexual mores; they are real bodies, transformed in a contraction and expansion of time as they engage with the prosthesis of their computers and digital recorders, with the situations in which they find themselves (medicated, unemployed, ostracized), and with the electronic network similar expressive bodies use for similar reasons.

The desire to be heard inherent in these records connects relationally to several larger networks: distribution networks for medications that seem to be applied universally to a diagnosis of shared mental pain; commercial networks seeking profit and disregarding worker competency or loyalty; cultural networks that statically delimit normal and deviant sexuality; and the electronic network of the Internet that reduces all gesture, expression, text, and form to the digital arrange-

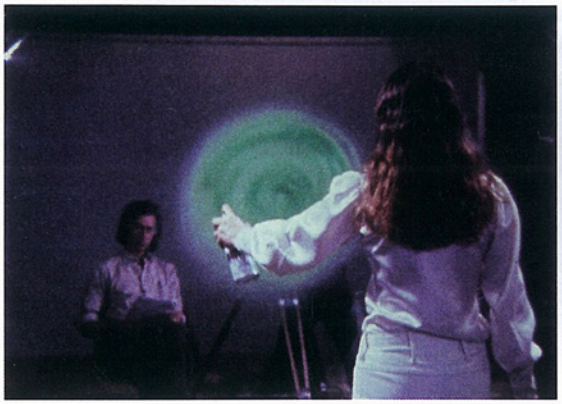
ment of zeros and ones. These networks, while human-generated, themselves act with the "agential realism" the feminist theorist Karen Barad posits in her reading of the physicist Niels Bohr's intra-active agency; post-posthuman agency "is not aligned with human intentionality or subjectivity . . . but is a matter of . . . an enactment [or a doing-being that is] not something that someone or something [inherently] has."[6] Barad is making an important case for a material-semiotic understanding of agency that redefines the material as actively participating in the creativity of being; her argument can certainly be extended to the lively intra-action occurring when seemingly discrete human bodies encounter the vast, wide-ranging webs of these ubiquitous and constantly changing sets of connections.

The layers of vlogged expressive and networked institutional bodies thus distinguished are selected and filtered by Bookchin and relationally orchestrated in the frame of her artistic vision. Using structures from cinema and literature, Bookchin orders the narrative images of the vloggers in a grid that plays out, sometimes rapidly and sometimes with lingering slowness, like a bank of surveillance videos in an underground closed-circuit TV observation post. While the nonlinear narrative emerges as coherent and cogent in terms of previously mentioned themes of loss, alienation, and lack of productivity, the intensity of Bookchin's orchestration diagrams another layer of relational material-subjectivity. The artist becomes a conduit, attracting the previously described complex, networked bodies and filtering them through her own relational expression, with the computer hardware and software as local prosthetic device and with the institutional space of the gallery as environmental milieu. Her form, invisible but connected to the same networks previously mentioned, becomes a hubbed vocal cord or voice box, one that shifts from the anonymous, randomly accessed webpage to the art-institutional exhibition space, maintaining a kind of unity, but one characterized by volatility, contortion, and absence of boundary.[7] By appropriating the vlogged body as material for her work, Bookchin creates a collaborative practice that, while unintentional on the part of the vloggers, shifts individual praxis into one that is shared, intimate, site-specific, and relational.

The materiality of Bookchin's medium, the digitized, storytelling video-body, so different from the more traditional pigment, marble, or polystyrene of other art practices, is complexly posthuman in its integration of the digitized or machine-body, but even more so in that this trans-body, through Bookchin's orchestration, is deeply and intimately collaborative, producing a transformative accumulation of small but continual displacements that collect in textured, qualititative difference.[8] These changes are rendered in the very real materiality of this layered, networked, mediated body, which can be read sheet by sheet, but which can never be fully comprehended as to unity, containment, or legibility. In fact, the legibility of the commingled trans-body in Bookchin's work is made fully possible only in the moment of rupture and through the excessive collision of unstable layers of identity, physicality, institutionality, and expression. Further, these bodies are read or perceived through the transient embodied chaos that their intersection produces, whereby the me and you of atomistic subjects merge in a moment of shared subjectivity. This condition extends empathy and tolerance by at once consciously engaging in acts of meaningful commune, and generating intensity and a free-fall into nothing, a leaving of this "self" for a while.[9]

The situations of legibility and orchestration require consideration of

6. Karen Barad, " Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," in *Material Feminisms*, 120–54.
7. I thank Alex Juhasz for the notion of Bookchin as voice box, in a panel discussion at the January 2012 forum *Critical Digital Humanities* at the University of California, Riverside, which gave life to my inquiry.
8. See Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002).
9. I am paraphrasing a lyric from Tom Petty's "Free Falling"—a not-so-rare instance of alienation and loss in a pop lyric—from *Full Moon Fever* (EMI Music Publishing, Warner/Chappell Music, 1989).



Michael Snow, details from each side of *Two Sides to Every Story*, 1974, 16mm color film loop, installation views (artwork © Michael Snow; photographs provided by the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery)

Bookchin's work relative to the genre of installation art on the whole, which concerns itself largely with the interaction of and affect on the viewer's body. A discussion of the trans-corporeal, trans-subjective body arising in Bookchin's work necessitates a return to the specific materiality of video installation art in order to consider the experience of the viewer's body as part of the trans-body/subjectivity generated. Recontextualizing Internet vlogs as installation art posits the viewer's body as a site of reception, which forms a further layer of the networked engagement discussed above, another sheet of barely legible but implicated memory. This raises the questions: Is the viewer merely an ethnographer, observing the strange and excessive configuration of the emergent, networked body discussed so far? Are the encounters with the space created and the orders of time invoked in this work instances of representation only for the observer? Or is it possible that the viewer's body becomes mixed up in the orchestration Bookchin commences, but which I argue takes on an immoderate life of its own?

Art-historical criticism of installation art, especially that from the late 1960s on, asserts largely that these works create a space-time situation within the gallery that disrupts normative, object-oriented viewing habits, often making the apparatus of viewing and seeing materially apparent and implicating the viewer in the production and dissemination of information that is conveyed in the work. Kate Mondloch's 2010 book *Screens* discusses how works such as Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider's *Wipe Cycle* (1969) or Michael Snow's *Two Sides to Every Story* (1974) force the viewer (or her mimetic representation) into the narrative conveyed on the screen or screens in the installation, by either placing the body of the viewer in the work as a substitute for the camera (Snow) or transmitting the viewer directly to the bank of television monitors as she moves through the gallery (Gillette and Schneider).[10] Whether the effect is subtle or unambiguous, the works make the viewer aware of her body as she navigates the space, noticing at once the materiality of the screen or screens, as the position and depiction of her own body become clear. In an attempt to critically engage questions of viewer participation, which according to Julie Reiss is "integral to the completion of the work," these pieces foreground the viewer as active, even while challenging her ability or capacity to be critical about the interaction."

Mondloch offers a definition of installation art that comes from post-1960s art production and attributes clear intentions: "Installation artworks are participatory

10. Kate Mondloch, *Screens: Viewing Media Installation Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).
11. Julie H. Reiss, *From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).

sculptural environments in which the viewer's spatial and temporal experience with the exhibition space and the various objects within it forms part of the work itself" (xiii). This definition provides a way into considering the unstable nature of space and time in many installation pieces, and perhaps especially those engaging what she terms "screen-reliant" spectatorship, in which images on a screen or screens in the space are only one part of an entire gestural, environmental, psychological event. She makes the perhaps-now-obvious claim that the screen holds an object's place in the work and must be considered as such in the space, as well as an element for delivering information within the work. Elsewhere, defining the specificity of artworks that "inhabit" an entire space, Claire Bishop, in her general survey of installation art through the twentieth century, asserts foundationally that "installation art presupposes an *embodied* viewer whose senses of touch, smell, and sound are as heightened as their sense of vision."[12] Bishop investigates questions of spectatorship and experience in works specifically designated (by the artist, the institutions, or both) as "installation art" proper. These studies find that the body of the viewer is incorporated and affected in such a way that it cannot be disregarded when considering the overall functioning and meaning of the artworks.

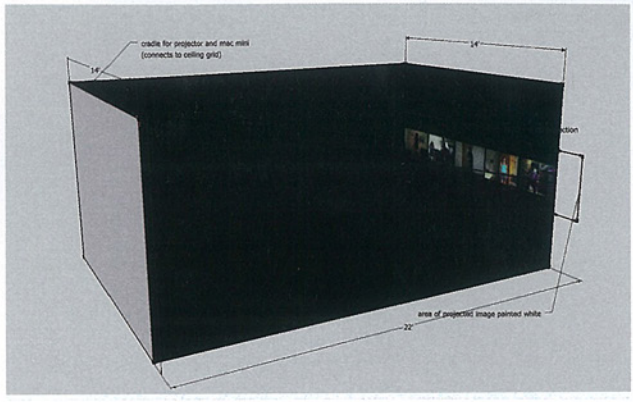
Although the spaces arranged by Bookchin express clear awareness of and engagement with these histories, her choices neither follow the definitions offered by Mondloch nor provide the full-body immersion of the works Bishop cites.[13] Rather they involve the institutional space and the viewer's corporeality, via projections and sound in a darkened room, to evoke something uneasy in the gaps among cinema, installation art, and desktop computer use. Bookchin develops tense questions about installing, viewing, context, content, access, and embodiment that previous works had addressed phenomenologically, psychologically, and historio-environmentally. The uneasiness I am pointing to here has to do with the way Bookchin's work ultimately immerses the viewer in multiple orders of time relative to history, memory, interactivity, and networked mediality.

In *Mass Ornament* (2009), an installation Bookchin mounted at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery as part of a City of Los Angeles residency exhibition, she offers a darkened space that ostensibly functions as a cinematic black box; a large, long projection sits on one wall, and five surround-sound speakers stand on black plinths at the front and back of the gallery. The work features ambient sound from the vlogs and selections from the sound tracks of two films of the 1930s, Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* and Busby Berkeley's *Gold Diggers of 1935*. The sound encircles the viewer, creating a rhythmic soundscape that displaces, without replacing, the architectural certainty of the cinematic black box. The piece begins with noise from the home videos that make up the material of the work, but this is quickly intercut with a few bars of a popular tune from the Berkeley film. As the dancing figures appear a few seconds into the piece, one recalls the industrialized dancing "girl-units" of the Siegfried Kracauer critical text from which the piece takes its name.[14] About halfway through the piece, bodies disappear, and a computer screen takes center stage, potentially standing in for the dancing human; a clip from the sound track to *Triumph of the Will* resonates through the space. The symphonic grandeur of this track portends doomed pathos that seems considerably overstated in comparison with the blurred, inhuman precariousness of the laptop pictured. This section quickly gives way to scenes of dancing bodies

12. Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 6, emphasis in original.

13. Compare Bookchin's work, which offers only minimal distance from the computer desktop or the cinematic screen, with for example, the hairy, complicated disorientation evoked by Judy Pfaff's room-size manifestion of the inner ear (*Ear to Ear*, 1996, site-specific installation for Williamson Gallery, Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, California), or James Turrell's light installations that make the viewer feel as though walls, floor, and ceiling have disappeared and been replaced by a vague mist (for example, *Shallow Space Constructions*, 1968).

14. Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).



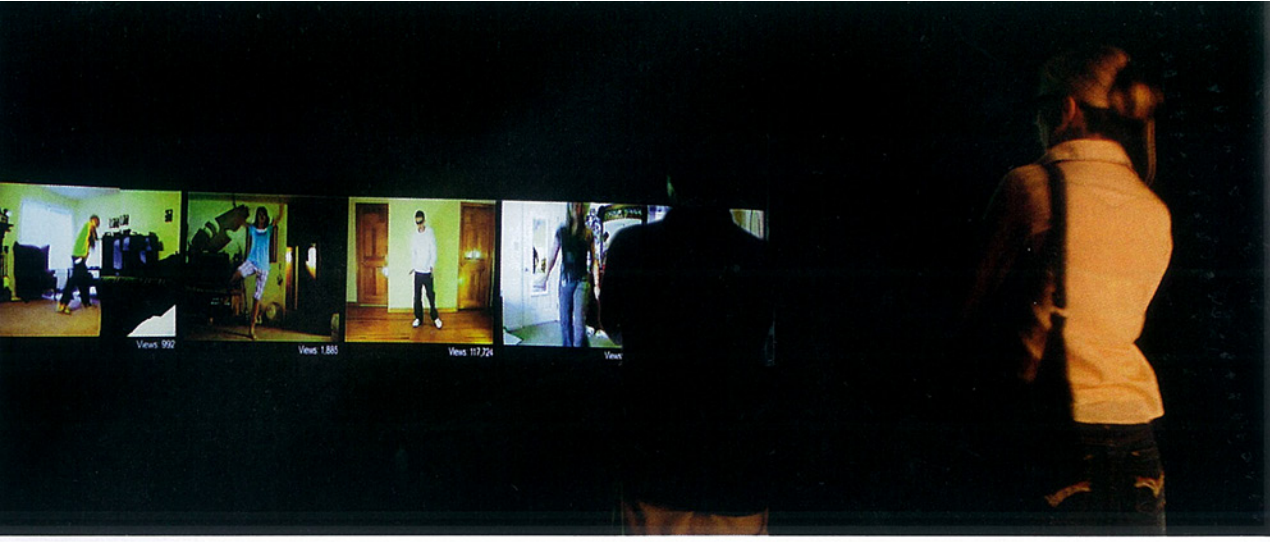
Natalie Bookchin, *Mass Ornament*, 2009, installation diagram (diagram © Natalie Bookchin)

collapsing against large furniture or closet doors in domestic settings, resonating with the trace of the laptop image and appearing ultimately as embarrassing anti-climax, when the bodies and architectures in the images deflate. The unnerving movement in the work among technology, dancer, and history begins to act on the viewer in the space.

Usually no chairs are provided for viewing: Bookchin states that the work "sometimes has been installed with a bench, but I prefer without," making clear her preference for a standing viewer.[15] Nevertheless the gallery roughly follows a format for displaying video works in museums and galleries that mimics cinematic architecture; but at the same time it evokes a strange relationship between the work and the body of the viewer. Despite the common experience over the past several decades of seeing cinematically styled artworks in museums and galleries, something more complex than mere architectural displacement functions in Bookchin's installation, something that at once complicates notions of space, the body of the viewer, and the possible function of the "cinematic" narrative at work in the piece. Materially, the impression of cinematic idiom is foiled as the projection is on a wall, not a screen, and is situated at or below eye level. Partly, this is practical, as Bookchin formats the film clips of *Mass Ornament* in a row that expands and contracts with the number of videos included at any given moment, maintaining the linear construction of the projection, presumably to index the chorus line that the images in the video eventually comprise. But it shifts expectations for installation art to affect the body as the viewer is at once drawn in and distanced.

Additionally, the speakers positioned visibly on plinths in the room, three in front of the projection area and two at the back, suggest human-size forms in the space. They make the "body" of the sound overt and conspicuous, even though the mechanisms remain relatively inactive as objects, as they are black and unavailable for adjustment by the viewer in the blackened space. The human-size intrusions into the viewing space distance the installation from the architectural idiom of the cinema, in which the speakers are usually high overhead and indiscernible, as the projected image of the film becomes the focal point of perception. Through the positioning of the projection, the speakers, and the viewer's body, the viewer is made aware of her potential for joining in the dance she watches, swaying to the tunes, physically cringing at the Nazi and dystopian references

15. Natalie Bookchin, e-mail to the author, October 19, 2012.



Natalie Bookchin, details of *Mass Ornament*, 2009, single-channel video installation, installation view, *C.O.L.A. 2009 Individual Artist Fellowship Exhibition*, Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, 2009 (artwork © Natalie Bookchin)

made by the sound tracks, shifting in embarrassment at the awkward near-nakedness of the dancers in some clips.

Bookchin begins *Mass Ornament* with images, not of bodies, but of furnished rooms, private spaces like kitchens, living rooms, bedrooms, and offices, where refrigerators, couches, and beds loom large in the closely framed mise-en-scène; they offer a Warholian repetition of (in some cases) cramped and awkward domesticity displaced to the public space of the gallery that mirrors the repetition within each frame of windows, mirrors, and pictures, and of the dancers in the projected line. Bookchin calls attention, certainly, to the private space in which the video document was generated, but also emphasizes the unconsidered environment of the vlogger, constrasting it abruptly with the overtly aestheticized space of the institution-cum-cinema.

Further interfering with the connection of the work to traditional cinematic spaces used in some installation art, the artist is at pains to post much of her oeuvre, at full length, on the same Internet video websites from which she gathers her raw material.[16] While she did not conceive the pieces specifically as Internet artworks, hypertexts, or websites on their own, the perhaps democratic move on her part to post them as traces of the physical installations in the art gallery complicates their materiality as art objects. Perhaps more important, the repetition of video upon video, website within website, engenders an interesting feedback loop that is "noisy" in its organizing logics, critically forcing the artwork into reflection on its own materiality. While the viewer's immediate engagement with time in the space of the gallery is complicated by her relationship to the networked trajectories of the piece, the work continues to engage the multiple orders of time that are apparent in its re-rendering on the Internet.

In many earlier installation projects, by Bruce Nauman or Dan Graham for example, the intention to foreground individual subjectivity and its relation to the environment is primary. More recent works by artists such as Olafur Eliasson directly address "non-prescriptive individuality" relative to viewer response, where even titles (*Your natural denudation inverted*, or *Your windless arrangement*), imply, as Bishop indicates, "the priority (and uniqueness) of *your* individual experience."[17] While Bookchin definitely intends to consider the problematics of contemporary subjectivity in mass media and technologized social negotiations, thinking about

16. The video clip of *Mass Ornament* can be found at http://vimeo.com/5403546; the video clips of the three components of *Testament* can be found at http://bookchin.net/projects/testament.html.
17. Bishop, 10, emphasis added.

her work and its affective resonations in terms not of cost, but of generative engagement offers a way to understand what unknown, perhaps monstrous, but also curious, creative, and joyful materialities can emerge.

The material nature of Bookchin's work lends it to analysis on an ethnographic basis, with attendant implications of disinterested observation, data collection, and reporting as to cultural groups and their use of technologically mediated social networks. In light of the discussion of installation art as a medium that includes the viewer, in Bookchin's pieces the consideration of viewer as objective observer becomes complicated. Further, if we take seriously the trans-corporeal subjectivity generated within the work itself, also discussed above, then the notion of a detached engagement by the viewer becomes even more difficult to sustain. Instead, we might understand the viewing experience as a transubstantiating participation, a collaboration wherein the viewer's body momentarily commingles with the orchestrated trans-body in the piece, such that time and space might be understood as multiple processes rather than specific positions and trajectories.

To return to the material elements of the piece, the video clips include status "stamps" on the lower right edges reflecting the number of views, or in some cases indicating that a video was removed by the vlogger, connecting each clip directly to the social networking site from which it originated and to the conditions of presenting self-documentation for a random and unknowable audience of friends, fans, followers, and other viewers. This positioning and provision of network-specific data clearly remind the viewer that she is not experiencing a cinematic narrative, however artful or spectacular the result, but it also clearly places the social structures of creative expression and creative consumption into the material realm of data. Bookchin's crafting of the work depends on the aesthetic and expressive labor of the vloggers; she is orchestrating but does not control. The viewer's interaction is not mere observation, nor even simple consumption by which the viewer understands a range of possible meanings generated by the work; the viewer is also implicated in a movement from bodies as individual units, informatic or otherwise, to bodies and selves as information that can perform (or express) in excess of their intended contribution to or participation in prescribed data flows.

Bookchin's intention, as stated in an interview with the media theorist Holly Willis, is to remove the original vlogs from their mass, unmediated context on

Natalie Bookchin, detail from *Mass Ornament*, 2009, single-channel video installation, *C.O.L.A. 2009 Individual Artist Fellowship Exhibition*, Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, 2009 (artwork © Natalie Bookchin)

the Internet; she agrees with Willis's assessment that she is "taking individual voices off of a small screen and making 3-D spaces that assume a collective resistance to alienation and isolation."[18] It is important that Bookchin's emphasis on "making 3-D spaces" points to the impact of the institutional environment on the process of differentiating the voices of her "protagonists" from the general roar of discontent heard on Internet vlogs as a whole. In fact, it displaces the experience of viewing vlogs from the isolation of the individual desk, where the home or office computer sits and forces one kind of material interactivity, to a space that challenges the terms of isolation and individualized observation. While each video is recognizable as something one might have once clicked in an idle moment while surfing YouTube for a demonstration on making paella or changing the oil in a Toyota, in Bookchin's work it is no longer clickable. You wonder if you are one of the 10,747 viewers of the girl on the left, or the 259 viewers of the boy in the middle, but you are ultimately overwhelmed with the seemingly endless number of bodies shaking, undulating, sliding, flopping, flexing, and bending. Ultimately, the viewer is hindered from "consuming" the bodies; they are too fleeting, as if existing in another plane of dimensionality. Calculation, legibility, and sense-making of accumulated parts do not create a whole; the viewer—implicated from the start as possible dancer, poster on YouTube, counter of bodies, rememberer of hypertextual navigations in geographies of desire—enters the piece in a state of curiosity, perhaps with anxious memories of posting or watching such videos on YouTube in the past, and as a future interpreter of the artist's account. This movement in time is nomadic and rhythmic, corporeal and imagined, fleeting and perpetual, and engages a radical form of "musicality" that opens space for resistance and, ultimately, for transformation.

In his complex and subtle contemplation of time in cinematic and media musicality, the media theorist James Tobias traces the way in which affective labor "conditions the transposition of one 'historical apparatus' into another: the transposition of *bioenergetic* ontologies, epistemologies, and ethics into *bioinformatic* ones that displace but rely on thermodynamic processes." His accentuation of thermodynamic processes is discussed in various places in the book but can be glossed as a creative labor that "trumps decaying, or entropic, waste," combining material and affective labor in "a cinematic diagram of networked mass culture asserting [creative] labor as the mediator of personhood and publicity."[19] The "cinematic

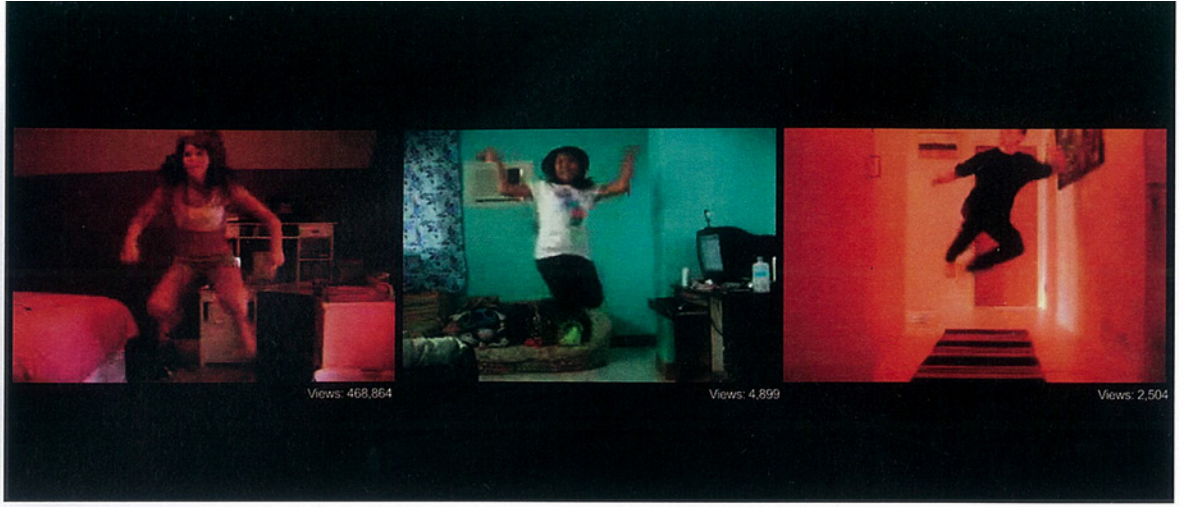
18. Bookchin quoted in Willis.
19. James Tobias, *Sync: Stylistics of Hieroglyphic Time* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 215, emphasis added, and 41.

diagram" referenced here is the kind discussed by Deleuze at length in his book on Foucault. This type of diagram does not represent a territory the way a map would or even the way Bookchin's installation drawing figures space, but forms an actual, material force, functioning playfully and creatively to unfold relations among various "machine" elements.[20] In this type of diagram, nothing is wasted, and all change is transforming (even infinitesimally) what is known materially or actually in exchange with its potential or virtual companion. Ongoing and persistent, the interchange between virtual and actual orchestrates the potential and the material in an ebbing and flowing, an elastic musical pulsing that makes interesting, if unexpected, use of what comes its way. Quite beautifully, no one diagram makes Everything: there are many concurrent diagrams, layered, intersecting, floating above and below each other.

Tobias's use of the term "musicality" overtly focuses on the form of sound in cinematic or media works, but his more intricate and refined meaning has to do with conveying the radical power of layered and multiple orders of time acting through rhythmic movement. In discussing the cinematic animations of Oskar Fischinger, works he refers to as "music paintings," he posits "musicality as [transformative] gnosis," and asserts that the complex movement between sense, as "the divergent seriation of psychic and corporeal identity" and sensibility, as corporeal resonances in the "reception of diagrammatic rhythm" are "sensual logics . . . entangled with one another, where musical instrumentality mediates authorial style and technocultural idiom."[21] This entanglement implicates visuality, aurality, composition, presentation, and reception as site-specific moments in which space and time are distorted from what we imagine to be rational, reasonable, functional, and containable. Time is co-constituent with space such that data, memory, and rhythmic movements (corporeal, sonic, and immaterial) in memory work together to diagram the shifting psychic and corporeal engagements across bodies, which ultimately work and play collaboratively. Understanding Bookchin's installations by means of the musicality evoked in Tobias's discussion is important to the possibility of considering a complex experience of site-specific collaboration by and with the viewer and the networks discussed above, and in the trans-corporeality and trans-subjectivity posited here.

Layering the banal sounds of the YouTube dance videos, which include breathing, scraping, and shuffling, with the Depression-era pop giddiness of sound tracks by Harry Warren and others and the bombastic clip from Riefenstahl's intensely nationalistic and controversial work, makes for a chaotic resonance that is at once inelegant and graceful. As *Mass Ornament* gets going, the grunting, shambling noises made by the dancers are paired at the same volume with the peppy, clear tones of the song "Lullaby of Broadway," which then shifts to similar tunes, fragmented enough not to be entirely coherent. The "toe-tapping" quality of the show tunes asserts constant tension with the awkward groans and scuffling of the dancers, emphasizing the unwieldy, incomplete presentation of the dancing bodies. The viewer feels this awkwardness conflicting with her own desire to distance herself from the embarrassing and vulnerable display, an opposition that is never resolved. The musicality here is not elegant or transcendent; it does not leave the viewer wishing she could move or look "like that," as do the bodies, for example, in a film such as *Rize* by David LaChapelle. Rather, exceeding the immediate and empathic "cringe"

20. See Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Sean Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 70–93.
21. Tobias, 87 and 88.



Natalie Bookchin, details from *Mass Ornament*, 2009, single-channel video installation, *C.O.L.A. 2009 Individual Artist Fellowship Exhibition*, Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, 2009 (artwork © Natalie Bookchin)

moment when the viewer wonders what motivates such self-documentation, time becomes overwhelmingly complex through movement, animation, and gesture, but with an accompanying sense that the animation involves much more than just the moving images of bodies culled from YouTube: this is the movement of rhythmic relationship among the vast and varied networks comprising the technologized self, the artistic practice, the public presentation of artworks, and the reception of those works, which are then re-rendered in discussion on art blogs, online magazines, texts like this one, and the Internet sites hosting the original source videos.

So the viewer, caught in this transformative rhythm and denied the opportunity merely to observe or consume the work, takes on a complicated relationship to the networks involved in the work, through the opening of higher orders of time provided by the rhythmic movement of image, sound, and space. Bodies, technologies, and networks are swept up in the sensibility evoked, not by pathos, but by rhythmic movement and, more important, through the legibility of movement in, through, and with the various networks. The timed movement, following Henri Bergson's notion of time as ebbing and flowing in manifold complex movements (including but not limited to historic time), necessarily involves a certain relation to memory. This is not memory caught in a past recollection and projected on a future, but a memory that is contained in both past and present, where the "present does not cease to pass and the past is presupposed by the present as the pure condition without which the present would not pass."[22] This particularly complex equation implies an interiority that is always accessing its own exteriority, a substance (in Baruch Spinoza's terms) or a force (in Friedrich Nietzsche's) that is forever positive in its generation of itself, whatever the outcome. The memory of the exchange between various human and non-human bodies involves not merely noticing the self in the other (wondering if you too have made a dance video that was posted on YouTube and if you thought to take it down once you realized potential employers look these things up), but also in understanding that actions thus executed are part of a larger bioinformatic patterning that moves with the strangely multiple time found, for example, in Fischinger's psychedelic film-paintings.

How is the viewer's memory subjected to this kind of diagrammatic function in Bookchin's work? It is a matter of understanding the implications of the situa-

22. Elizabeth Grosz, "Deleuze's Bergson: Duration, the Virtual, and a Politics of the Future," in *Deleuze and Feminist Theory*, ed. Ian Buchanan and Claire Colebrook (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 227.

tion in which "contemporary bioinformatics exhibit synchronization at deeper levels of materialized temporality."[23] If memory resides in the past and present in the way that Bergson asserts; if we understand Bookchin's work as a node in a complex collaborative engagement that involves not only making the artwork, but also expressing the self publicly and privately; and if we imagine repeated and specific navigations of multiple and multiplying networks of distribution, sociability, and politicization, then what emerges from an engagement with Bookchin's work is an understanding of art as a process in which the edges of the self become permeable to those vast webs of relation. Importantly, the viewer is not outside this ontology, but is folded into it at the moment of engagement.

Dystopian fears connected to the evolution of human corporeality into a bioinformatic system stem from an unwillingness to imagine ourselves as other than what the humanist ideal has posited. Afraid of losing a core of humanity, we insist on individual positions despite the way in which that individuality is filtered through cultural sieves, formed in language, and executed in stylized gestures we did not invent. Bodies and selves that move through states of containment, mangled commingling, and back again, even if horrifying to imagine and dangerous to clear definitions of humanness, comprise the nature of the bioinformatic form. Recognizing the complexities of the exchanges that are already happening through, with, beside, and among us as humans, as interrelated members of a species, as individuals, and as creative collaborators with other humans, nonhuman animals, and machines offers a way to engage in a new kind of critical dialogue. We might consider openness and malleability as conditions in which to wonder about potential engagements, possible creative generation, the ordering principles that might work in flexible systems that are always reknowing and refiguring themselves in relation, and to listen carefully to voices not fully audible, sometimes human and sometimes not, with a comprehension that is open, humble, and without boundaries.

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23. Tobias, 218.