Collecting the Algorithmic Self:
Surveilled Subjects in the Video Works of Natalie Bookchin

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis considers how contemporary digital art can underscore the urgency to be critical of the digital condition, especially within the context of surveillance and algorithmic culture. By considering the art practice of American artist Natalie Bookchin (b. 1962), case studies for this analysis include her video installation *Testament* (2009/2017) and film *Now he's out in public and everyone can see* (2009-2011, 2017). Amongst many others in her oeuvre, Bookchin collected and collaged found video confessionals and vlogs from social media sites and YouTube, where people (often alone in private spaces) face the camera to express their views about personal and/or social issues. Bookchin establishes connections between her subjects and draws them together in a type of choral orchestration. The thesis frames this art practice by drawing on contemporary art writing, media theory, and archival theory, while paying particular attention to recent scholarship about the politics of algorithms, and the field of surveillance studies. In doing so, this investigation complicates surveillance as a complex cultural phenomenon, rather than simply a top-down, omnipresent system of control; while search engine algorithms are analyzed because of the ways they influence how individual and collective digital histories are being organized, remembered and archived. Bookchin's art practice is important as it plays a powerful role in underlining the hidden architecture of online platforms and emphasizes the importance of engaging critically with the structures that shape digital culture.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of figures vi
Introduction 1
Surveillance and Participation 7
Surveillance as Motif 7
Surveillance Studies 9
Surveillance as Addressed by Artists and Art Writers 10
Digital Citizenship 12
Case Study: *Testament* (2009/2017) 14
Case Study: *Now he's out in public and everyone can see* (2009-2011, 2017) 19
Algorithms and the Shaping of Digital Social Memory 24
Algorithms 24
Natalie Bookchin: Algorithmic Collaborations and Critique 27
Visibility and Meaning-Making Through Information Hierarchies 28
Distorting Reality or Discovering Truths? 31
Alternative Archive 32
Remix and Appropriation 35
Conclusion 39
Bibliography 43
Figures 55

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 — Natalie Bookchin, *Mass Ornament* (2009). Single-channel video installation surround sound. *When We Share More Than Ever*, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg (June 19 to September 20, 2015). Image source: Natalie Bookchin. Accessed on March 1, 2019. https://bookchin.net/projects/mass-ornament/.

Figure 2 & 3 — Natalie Bookchin, *Mass Ornament* (2009). Exhibition documentation. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. Accessed March 1, 2019. https://vimeo.com/5403546.

Figure 4 — Natalie Bookchin, *Laid Off* from the series *Testament* (2009/2017). Exhibition documentation. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. Accessed March 1, 2019. https://vimeo.com/237790993.

Figure 5 — Natalie Bookchin, *My Meds* from the series *Testament* (2009/2017). Exhibition documentation. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. Accessed March 1, 2019. https://vimeo.com/237790993.

Figure 6 — Natalie Bookchin, *I am Not* from the series *Testament* (2009/2017). Exhibition documentation. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. Accessed March 1, 2019. https://vimeo.com/237790993.

Figure 7 — Natalie Bookchin, *Count* from the series *Testament* (2009/2017). Exhibition documentation. Video still from the exhibition *Portraits of the Multitude: Natalie Bookchin*, curated by Montse Romaní, La Virreina Centre de la Imatge, Barcelona, Spain (March 3 to May 27, 2018). Image source: Natalie Bookchin, *Portraits of the Multitude*. Barcelona: [La Virreina] Centre de la Imatge. 2018. Exhibition catalogue. Accessed April 10, 2019. http://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/lavirreina/en/exhibitions/portraits-multitude/231.

Figure 8 — Natalie Bookchin, *Now he's out in public and everyone can see* (2012). 18-channel video installation (16 min loop). *Portraits of the Multitude: Natalie Bookchin*, curated by Montse Romaní, La Virreina Centre de la Imatge, Barcelona, Spain (March 3 to May 27, 2018). Image source: La Virreina Centre de la Imatge. Accessed April 10, 2019. http://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/lavirreina/en/exhibitions/portraits-multitude/231#none.

Figure 9 — Natalie Bookchin, *Now he's out in public and everyone can see* (2017). Film, 24 minutes. Image source: Natalie Bookchin. Screenshot. Accessed March 1, 2019. https://vimeo.com/193426576.

Figure 10 — Natalie Bookchin, *Testament* (2009/2017). Multi-channel video installation. Exhibition documentation. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. Accessed March 1, 2019. https://vimeo.com/237790993.

Figure 11 — Six vloggers displayed alongside each other. Natalie Bookchin, *Laid Off* from the series *Testament* (2009/2017). Exhibition documentation. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. Accessed March 1, 2019. https://vimeo.com/237790993.

Figure 12 — Two vloggers juxtaposed alongside each other. Natalie Bookchin, *Laid Off* from the series *Testament* (2009/2017). Exhibition documentation. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. Accessed March 1, 2019. https://vimeo.com/237790993.

Figure 13 — A vlogger expressing his optimism for the future. Natalie Bookchin, *Laid Off* from the series *Testament* (2009/2017). Exhibition documentation. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. Accessed March 1, 2019. https://vimeo.com/237790993.

Figure 14 — A single vlogger is depicted at the beginning of this chapter. Natalie Bookchin, *My Meds* from the series *Testament* (2009/2017). Exhibition documentation. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. Accessed March 1, 2019. https://vimeo.com/237790993.

Figure 15 —Accumulating rows of vloggers. Natalie Bookchin, *My Meds* from the series *Testament* (2009/2017). Exhibition documentation. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. Accessed March 1, 2019. https://vimeo.com/237790993.

Figure 16 — A woman cries while explaining that she is switching medications. Natalie Bookchin, *My Meds* from the series *Testament* (2009/2017). Exhibition documentation. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. Accessed March 1, 2019. https://vimeo.com/237790993.

Figure 17 — A man in front of a microphone addresses the camera. Natalie Bookchin, *Now he's out in public and everyone can see* (2017). Film, 24 minutes. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. *Portraits of America: Two Films by Natalie Bookchin*, directed by Natalie Bookchin (Brooklyn, NY: Icarus Films, 2016), DVD.

Figure 18 — Windows/frames are organized in a composition that resembles open file windows on a computer desktop. Natalie Bookchin, *Now he's out in public and everyone can see* (2017). Film, 24 minutes. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. *Portraits of America: Two Films by Natalie Bookchin*, directed by Natalie Bookchin (Brooklyn, NY: Icarus Films, 2016), DVD.

Figure 19 & 20 — Amateur news graphics. Natalie Bookchin, *Now he's out in public and everyone can see* (2017). Film, 24 minutes. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. *Portraits of America: Two Films by Natalie Bookchin*, directed by Natalie Bookchin (Brooklyn, NY: Icarus Films, 2016), DVD.

Figure 21 — American flag backdrops are common throughout the vloggers depicted in this film. Natalie Bookchin, *Now he's out in public and everyone can see* (2017). Film, 24 minutes. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. *Portraits of America: Two Films by Natalie Bookchin*, directed by Natalie Bookchin (Brooklyn, NY: Icarus Films, 2016), DVD.

Figure 22 — A woman holds up her birth certificate as proof of her American citizenship. Natalie Bookchin, *Now he's out in public and everyone can see* (2017). Film, 24 minutes. Image

source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. *Portraits of America: Two Films by Natalie Bookchin*, directed by Natalie Bookchin (Brooklyn, NY: Icarus Films, 2016), DVD.

Figure 23 — A man looks up at his camera while asking, “who’s going to kill the black man.” Natalie Bookchin, *Now he’s out in public and everyone can see* (2017). Film, 24 minutes. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. *Portraits of America: Two Films by Natalie Bookchin*, directed by Natalie Bookchin (Brooklyn, NY: Icarus Films, 2016), DVD.

Figure 24 — A man wearing a Texas flag addresses the camera. Natalie Bookchin, *Now he’s out in public and everyone can see* (2017). Film, 24 minutes. Image source: Natalie Bookchin. Screenshot. Accessed March 1, 2019. https://vimeo.com/193426576.

Figure 25 — A young woman (Melinda Emilien) talks about her interests. Natalie Bookchin, *Long Story Short* (2016). Film, 45 minutes. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. *Portraits of America: Two Films by Natalie Bookchin*, directed by Natalie Bookchin (Brooklyn, NY: Icarus Films, 2016), DVD.

INTRODUCTION

In 2019, it could be said that the global network of the internet has become a projection of the private selves of the billions of people who participate in online culture. Within what is technically referred to as Web 2.0 – a web environment consisting of dynamic platforms that operate through the proliferation of user-generated content and the growth of social media that has existed roughly since 2004 – users are encouraged to participate and share online. In opposition to earlier versions of the web, where users could only passively view pages without directly engaging with each other – this current iteration of the internet has resulted in a never-ending influx of user-generated content that is eventually buried by new waves of data.[1]

In addition to these technical changes to the interface of the web, more importantly, the internet is no longer a separate space one might occupy or exist apart from offline reality. This contemporary digital condition is defined by the fact that one's online actions have real-life reactions, as more and more people are beginning to understand. Much scholarship in contemporary art and digital culture has arisen in the past few years, as the web has also permeated artistic production. This includes but is not limited to, anthologies such as: *No Internet, No Art: A Lunch Bytes Anthology*, *Mass Effect: Art and the Internet in the Twenty-First Century, You Are Here: Art After the Internet*; as well as publications like Melissa Gronlund's *Contemporary Art and Digital Culture*. It is key to understand this shift, and also how artworks historically categorized within the realm of 'new media art' can offer insight into one's reality and possibly one's future.

This thesis explores a selection of found-footage video works by American artist and filmmaker Natalie Bookchin (b. 1962). Based in Brooklyn, New York, Bookchin is situated within the larger domain of artists working at the intersection of art, digital culture and networked technologies. Over the course of her career, her work has taken on a variety of forms including web-based projects like games and websites, web performances, hacktivist interventions, multimedia installations and films. In many of her more recent works, the artist

[1] Paul Graham, "Web 2.0," Paulgraham.com, November 2005, accessed January 20, 2018, http://www.paulgraham.com/web20.html.; Tim O'Reilly, "What Is Web 2.0," oreilly.com, June 12, 2019, accessed January 20, 2018, https://www.oreilly.com/pub/a/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html; Darcy DiNucci, "Fragmented Future," *Print* 53, no. 4 (1999): 32; 221-222.

has employed a method of collecting and collaging found video confessionals and vlogs from social media sites such as YouTube, where her subjects are often people alone in their private spaces. Her most celebrated work of this nature, *Mass Ornament* (2009) (fig. 1), is a sonic and visual montage of found-videos consisting of people dancing in front of their webcams in domestic spaces for an online audience. Within each frame is a single individual, who, when placed alongside one, a few, or many other videos of a similar choreography or manner, becomes part of a collective chorus line (fig. 2 & 3). Bookchin's way of organizing her found material, drawing connections between her subjects as they come together as a type of choral orchestration, speaks to notions of vulnerability and mass surveillance in an age of algorithms and algorithmic bias. Through this process, her work most astutely shows how people desire to be seen and heard in a public sphere in a time of political and economic polarization; it often highlights the contemporary condition of simultaneous connection and alienation in a networked world. Ultimately, Bookchin's work emphasizes the complex social realities that exist within life as it is lived and performed online.[2]

As internet-users operate within the post-911 and post-Snowden era, the focus for many is generally concentrated on privacy the handling of personal information and data.[3] There has also been a response from artists and activists regarding these revelations – such as the work of artists such as Hito Steyerl, James Bridle, Trevor Paglen and others.[4] This must be seen within a larger tradition of artists who have addressed surveillance technologies and visibility in their work, such as Bruce Nauman, Dan Graham, Shana Moulton, Mark Leckey, Ed Atkins, Raphael Lozano-Hemmer, Vahap Avṣar, amongst many others. Therefore, this thesis will explore the following research questions: how does Bookchin's work underscore the urgent need to be critical about how one participates within surveillance culture? Finally, in addition to this

[2] Natalie Bookchin, "Bio," Natalie Bookchin, May 6, 2019, accessed November 10, 2018, https://bookchin.net/bio/.
[3] This optimism coincided with the perceived democratic potential for the early web. However, one must remember the military origins of the Internet, via the U.S. Defense Department's Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET), which was the first network of computers in 1969. Brian Engard, "An Internet History Timeline: From the 1960s to Now," Brian Engard, "An Internet History Timeline: From the 1960s to Now," Jefferson Online, November 14, 2018, https://online.jefferson.edu/communications/internet-history-timeline/.
[4] Notable works by these artists include Steyerl's *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File* (2013), Bridle's *Citizen Ex* (2015), and Paglen's *The Last Pictures* (2012).

question, I ask: how do invisible forces like algorithms influence the ways in which individual and collective digital histories are being archived?

Bookchin's series *Testament* (2009/2017), and her film *Now he's out in public and everyone can see* (2012/2017) will serve as case studies to explore the above propositions. Testament is a four-part series consisting of chapters titled *Laid Off* (fig. 4)*, My Meds* (fig. 5), *I am Not* (fig. 6), and *Count* (fig. 7). In this series, the artist stitches together found online video confessionals, diaries or vlogs against a plain black background, or multi-channel projection, in the form of a spatial and audio collage. Each chapter constructs a chorus, or collective testimony on a topic that is constructed from individual accounts that bear many similarities, pasted together in a way that highlight an interconnected narrative – blending together as each individual visually and audibly dissolves into the other. *Now he's out in public and everyone can see* is another compilation of collected vlogs, however this time Bookchin presents a series of individuals contesting viral media scandals involving unnamed male African American celebrities. Installed as an 18-channel video installation (fig. 8), and later remastered into a film in 2017 (fig. 9), *Now he's out in public* considers and generally explores the theme of racial anxiety in the United States. My analysis considers the film version of this work, and the implications it has towards such topics within surveillance culture as visibility, exposure, and the rise of media distrust and conspiracy. It is important to note that both works exist initially as immersive multi-channel installations.

With these ideas in mind, this art historical inquiry draws extensively from scholarship by writers, curators and media theorists who have contributed to this particular field of contemporary art over the past two decades. Many contemporary texts reference the importance of early publications like *The Language of New Media* by new media theorist Lev Manovich, in which the history and theory of cinema serves as a key conceptual lens for understanding the history of digital culture and new media in the twentieth century. Manovich's monumental *The Language of New Media* was written at the beginning of the new millennium, and provides a significant reflection on, and context for, the tenets that ran through the twentieth-century in terms of the development of new media art. With this in mind, how does one begin to understand contemporary art as it exposes the widespread technological condition of this moment? My research therefore encompasses contemporary art that is made in response to the internet and

current-day digital technologies.[5] According to curator Melanie Bühler, this movement is a shift away from earlier new media's focus on the technological medium or substrate. Bühler's anthology titled, *No Internet, No Art* describes this shift as an "[emphasis on] the increased flexibility and malleability that new media technologies has introduced to the process of artistic production, which moved between digital and physical formats ever more smoothly."[6] This shift is reflective of how, within the past ten to twelve years, as digitality becomes an engrained part of everyday life for so many people, so does the internet become a concern for artists.[7] This field of scholarship therefore establishes a broader context for contemporary art that reflects digital culture.

In order to consider my aforementioned research questions, my thesis is organized into two broad sections. My first section, titled "Surveillance and Participation" explores how Bookchin's video works such as *Testament* and *Now he's out in public* emphasize the realities faced by surveilled subjects since the advent of social media. Where users and the information they share are often subjected to the surveillance of data mining companies or other similar systems of observation, it is critical to consider the greater issue of what sociologist David Lyon refers to as *surveillance culture*. This chapter therefore explores how the culture of self, peer, and hierarchical surveillance relates to the subject matter of Bookchin's works. By engaging with theories about this issue put forward by the emerging field of surveillance studies, I analyze these case studies by considering the role digital citizenship plays in how subjects chose to participate and disclose themselves in the online realm. Here, I contrast the early optimisms of the internet

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[5] This can also be closely related to the field of 'post-internet art.' The term, although confusing, was coined by curator and artist Marisa Olsen in an interview in 2008 to describe "work that was created 'after' surfing the internet, suggesting a field of personal exploration rather than periodization." Lauren Cornell et al., "Net Results: Closing the Gap between Art and Life Online," Time Out New York, February 9, 2006, https://www.timeout.com/newyork/art/net-results. Although it seems to declare an era where the internet is somehow 'over,' (which is why some people disapprove of the term) it has been adopted to indicate a period of contemporary art that was heavily influenced by digital culture, has a relatively uniform aesthetic and was generally limited to a small group of artists in New York, London and Berlin from the mid-2000s to around 2015/16. I agree with Gronlund's criticism that this term is too narrow to describe the circumstances surrounding contemporary art that is concerned with themes that have been the product of the internet and digital technologies. Melissa Gronlund, *Contemporary Art and Digital Culture,* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 8.

[6] Melanie Buhler and Philipp Albers, *No Internet, No Art: A Lunch Bytes Anthology*, (Eindhoven: Onomatopee, 2015), 10.

[7] Beginning in the mid 2000's, the second phase of the internet, or Web 2.0, had begun. This was the result of a major influx of social-media sites and technologies such as the founding of Facebook (2004), YouTube (2005), Twitter (2006) and the iPhone (2007). The preceding stage of the internet's development, or, Web 1.0, can be described as the period in which the internet was much simpler and less interactive (and therefore less engrained in our day-to-day lives) as it is today. Gronlund, *Contemporary Art and Digital Culture,* 2.

as being a democratizing, limitless space for community and anonymity, with little fear of adverse consequences, with the contemporary condition of data breaches, surveillance capitalism, and peer-to-peer policing.

The notion of control as it is performed through social media is extended in the second section titled "Algorithms and the Shaping of Digital Social Memory." Bookchin describes her works like *Testament* and *Now he's out in public* as a "collaboration with and intervention into […] algorithms."[8] Foregoing the traditional method of using search engines to produce an algorithmically-organized list of search-term related content, Bookchin instead finds and connects her material in other ways – emphasizing her own human bias and inclination for pattern recognition. This chapter explores the nature of social media platform algorithms and their political implications by referring to innovative scholarship in this arena. Manovich's call to action, stated in his 2013 article "The Algorithms of Our Lives," urged academics in the digital humanities to consider software as "a layer that permeates contemporary societies," while he also posed the question: "what does it mean to be a citizen of a software society?"[9] I emphasize how Bookchin's work allows us as viewers, and as internet users, to uncover how algorithms effectively determine an individual's visibility or invisibility by enforcing information hierarchies. This concept is then further examined using contemporary artist and scholar Hito Steyerl's seminal essay "In Defense of the Poor Image," where online image quality and class politics intersect.[10] Through the algorithmic favouring of high-production-cost content, I therefore ask how one can consider, as Bookchin does in her work, the potential not only for poor content that is buried beneath waves of competition, but also how reality is shaped and visually organized online. How does this then affect how digital social memory is being shaped online? I argue in this chapter for a consideration of Bookchin's work as an archival gesture towards the preservation of these forgotten, invisible, or marginalized histories. I also focus on how her process of remix and appropriation of found footage can be considered as a digital archival method that is different from the dominant forms of web archiving that are currently in

[8] Natalie Bookchin, *Portraits of the Multitude* (Barcelona: [La Virreina] Centre de la Imatge. 2018), exhibition catalogue, accessed April 10, 2019, 6, http://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/lavirreina/en/exhibitions/portraits-multitude/231
[9] Lev Manovich, "The Algorithms of Our Lives," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 16, 2013, https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Algorithms-of-Our-Lives-/143557/. For more on his theorisation of software culture see: Lev Manovich, *Software Takes Command* (New York.: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).
[10] Hito Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image," in *Wretched of the Screen*, eds. Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood and Anton Vidokle (Berlin: Sternberg Press, e-flux, Inc., 2012).

development. In this way, I intend to highlight how through the appropriation and recontextualizing of forgotten content, meaningful alternative archives of documented experiences can be created.

Through the work of Natalie Bookchin, the contemporary digital artist's role as archivist, historian and archeologist will be investigated. In addition to these roles, I emphasize that Bookchin's work exemplifies and critiques a wide range of conditions that are the product of contemporary digital culture, especially that of surveillance and algorithmic culture. In the case of some of the aforementioned works, it has been a decade since their initial creation, but they have gained a new importance in a critical time where internet users continue to grapple with their relationship to the digital. I hope to highlight the importance of artwork that appropriates found materials in order to critique and document cultural phenomena, while emphasizing the responsibility of the artist as the archivist of digital detritus and the forgotten ephemera of digital lives.

SURVEILLANCE AND PARTICIPATION

Surveillance as Motif

Natalie Bookchin's art practice navigates the broader circumstances that surround digital life, bringing to the surface topics such as privacy, visibility, and surveillance. The discourse surrounding contemporary art and surveillance is one that many cultural writers, art historians, and scholars have discussed in great length. However, the multi-faceted nature of surveillance is not often addressed, and its perception is frequently reduced to an Orwellian trope. Although the power dynamics of surveillance are important to understand, and do pertain to my research, I intend to approach the phenomenon of surveillance as a complex contemporary issue. With this context in mind, the type of surveillance I will address in my thesis will be distinctly related to digital surveillance, or the kind of surveillance that is mobilized through the use of digital technology. This distinction is key, as surveillance encompasses many aspects and cannot be reduced to the technological intervention by a state or organization. In any case, surveillance does not purely imply the watcher, or *surveillor*, holding power and privilege, but also involves participation in which those being watched are complicit actors as well.[11] I therefore revisit surveillance within the context of algorithmically determined visibility hierarchies and their relationship to image quality in the next chapter.

As previously stated, many contemporary artists and scholars focus their attention on the omnipresent gaze or agent of surveillance (*surveillor*), while in many cases referring to the surveillance state. According to the *Guardian*, there are two reasons for the rapid expansion of surveillance programs in the last decade: "the fear of terrorism created by the 9/11 attacks, and the digital revolution that led to an explosion in cell phone and internet use."[12] In North America, digital surveillance came to public and academic attention most prominently after the events of

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[11] David Lyon, *Surveillance Studies: An Overview* (Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007), 15-16.
[12] Glenn Greenwald, Ewen MacAskill, and Laura Poitras, "Edward Snowden: The Whistleblower behind the NSA Surveillance Revelations," (*The Guardian*, October 11, 2018), https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/09/edward-snowden-nsa-whistleblower-surveillance.

9/11, and again after the 2013 Snowden NSA exposure.[13] In 2013, Edward Snowden, former NSA employee and whistleblower, provided the *Guardian* with top-secret NSA documents revealing details about US global surveillance programs targeting and collecting user data from phone and computer records. This subsequently has resulted in public mass awareness over online privacy concerns.[14] Additionally, the rapid growth and popularization of new technologies such as household computers, portable and digital cameras and video cameras, as well as the internet over the last twenty years also contributed greatly to surveillance culture as it relates to new kinds of social behaviour, organization, and general impact on society at large.

According to David Lyon, surveillance can be understood at its most basic level as a "focused, systematic and routine attention to personal details for purposes of influence, management, protection or direction."[15] Importantly, however, sociologist Gary T. Marx adds that, generally, "the definition of surveillance as hierarchical watching over or social control is inadequate," which is to say that the description of surveillance as an omnipresent system of control is too reductionistic and oversimplified, and more attention should be paid to the many layers and directions of different types of surveillance.[16] Ultimately, surveillance should be understood as a widespread cultural phenomenon, rather than exclusively as a malicious governing force. Therefore, this chapter seeks to link contemporary art writings to those from the field of surveillance studies in order to establish an understanding of surveillance and culture today that expands definitions of what surveillance involves, to question the position and agency of the individuals who are depicted within online footage which is subsequently used for the purpose of an artwork.

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[13] Edward Snowden is claimed by the *Guardian* to be "one of America's most consequential whistleblowers" resulting in him being charged with violating the Espionage Act of 1917, and his American citizenship being revoked. Snowden has been granted asylum in Moscow, Russia since 2017. Ibid.. Marx mentions this was also "related to greater awareness of the human rights abuses of colonialism, fascism, and communism and anti-democratic behavior within democratic societies." Gary T. Marx, "Surveillance Studies," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (Amsterdam: Elsevier Ltd, 2015), 734.

[14] Much concerns have been accelerated by revelations like that of the Cambridge Analytica leak in April 2018, for example. This revealed the harvesting of over fifty million Facebook users' personal data to profile U.S. voter habits. Emma Graham-Harrison and Carole Cadwalladr, "Revealed: 50 Million Facebook Profiles Harvested for Cambridge Analytica in Major Data Breach," (*The Guardian*, December 12, 2018), https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/17/cambridge-analytica-facebook-influence-us-election.

[15] Lyon, *Surveillance Studies: An Overview*, 14.

[16] Marx, "Surveillance Studies," 735. Marx defines this method of surveillance as "new surveillance," which excludes the routine, non-technological surveillance of everyday life. Ibid., 736.

Surveillance Studies

Surveillance as a topic of scholarly inquiry has been evolving since Jeremy Bentham's architectural metaphor of the Panopticon – an architectural structure designed in such a way that a watcher may observe the structure's occupants without them knowing they are being watched, ultimately leading the occupant to police themselves over fear of being punished.[17] In the mid-twentieth century, Michel Foucault revisited the panopticon in his writing. However, in analyzing the transformations of modernity, Foucault – who is often considered to be the central figure of contemporary surveillance studies[18] – defined the shift from punishment and spectacle to self-discipline, disciplinary society, and the effect of power over the body.[19] Where Foucault helps us understand the internalization, or normalization, of different power dynamics and how as citizens we must understand the complexities of different forms of power, he also helps us understand the notion of how the individual's or collective participation within normalized structures of power also maintains them. While Foucault's model of surveillance (amongst others) serves as a departure point for understanding aspects of algorithmic culture and contemporary Surveillance Studies, Lyon builds on these models in order to establish a more complex reading of digital surveillance today. Echoing Foucault, Lyon states:

> Surveillance today is found in the flows of data within networked databases, but these still relate to organizational practices, power and, of course, the persons to whom those data refer. How the powers of surveillance are realized in local and remote organizational contexts must be considered by looking at both the *system* and the *self* and at the intersection between the two."[20]

In his article, "Surveillance Culture: Engagement, Exposure, and Ethics in Digital Modernity," Lyon argues that in order to understand surveillance as it operates today, one must understand the concept of "surveillance culture", or, what has simply become a way of life: the phenomenon of "people actively participat[ing] in an attempt to regulate their own surveillance and the

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[17] Michel Foucault, "Panopticism," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 206–13. Thomas McMullan, "What Does the Panopticon Mean in the Age of Digital Surveillance?," (*The Guardian*, February 21, 2017), https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/jul/23/panopticon-digital-surveillance-jeremy-bentham.
[18] Marx, *Surveillance Studies*, 734.
[19] Lyon, "Surveillance Studies: An Overview," 4; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979).
[20] Lyon, "Surveillance Studies: An Overview," 4.

surveillance of others."[21] Unlike terminology such as "surveillance state" or "surveillance society", Lyon argues that little attention has been paid to the participatory and performative nature of surveillance. New terminology like "surveillance culture" can therefore not only contribute to the previous discourse of a "surveillance state/society", but also to the larger discussion regarding ethics and digital citizenship.

When turning to Bookchin's works, like *Testament* and *Now he's out in public and everyone can see*, it is apparent how the internet is relied upon for accumulating knowledge, communication, self-expression and community building; an enormous amount of trust is simultaneously put into these surveilling systems and lost through them. I therefore argue that this desire to analyse the surveilling system and the self under surveillance, along with the phenomenon of surveillance culture through sharing, is articulated by Bookchin through the work itself.

Surveillance as Addressed by Artists and Art Writers

Surveillance within the context of digital culture has been a preoccupation of many contemporary artists, art writers, curators and scholars in recent years. Where much of the discourse surrounding visual art and surveillance initially focused on the history of photography[22], it is only in recent years that the field has seen an influx of scholarship regarding the complex phenomena of how digital culture permeates life and art.[23] Thomas Y. Levin, Ursula Frohne and Peter Weibel's *CTRL[SPACE]: Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother* (2002), was the first survey of panoptic art within the early years of digital culture. Anthologies and single-author collections of essays such as Loren Cornell and Ed Halter's *Mass Effect: Art and the Internet in the Twentieth Century* (2015), Melanie Bühler's and Philipp Albers' *No Internet, No Art: A Lunch Bytes Anthology* (2015), or Melissa Gronlund's *Contemporary Art and Digital Culture* (2017), have been important contributions to the recent

[21] David Lyon, "Surveillance Culture: Engagement, Exposure, and Ethics in Digital Modernity," *International Journal of Communication* 11 (2017): 824.
[22] For example, the Tate Modern's exhibition and accompanying catalogue, Simon Baker et al., *Exposed: Voyeurism, Surveillance and the Camera* (London: Tate Publishing, 2010).
[23] This slowness, or lack of scholarly recognition, was met with much frustration by those who had been working within the net.art community as well as other digital or new media artists who had long been working with themes of digitized life. Melissa Gronlund, *Contemporary Art and Digital Culture,* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 3.

effort of establishing discourse around topics such as contemporary art and digital culture. Artists who have been included in such collections include Sophie Calle, Dan Graham, Bruce Nauman, Julia Scher, Cory Arcangel, Petra Cortright, DIS collective, Aleksandra Domanović, Jogging, Oliver Laric, Mark Leckey, Olia Lialina, Trevor Paglen, Seth Price, Hito Steyerl, Jon Rafman, Mark Tribe, Rafael Rozendaal, Olia Lialina, Eva And Franco Mattes, and Ryan Trecartin amongst many others.

In terms of the 21st century politics of image circulation, visibility and surveillance, Hito Steyerl is a prolific and influential voice on these topics. She calls surveillance culture, or networks of control, a "mutual mass surveillance," where "on top of institutional surveillance, people are now also routinely surveilling each other by taking countless pictures and publishing them in almost real time."[24] This is directly addressing how, since the advent of social media and its development into a basic form of communication, the publishing of photos online has become completely normalized. However, how does one negotiate the tension between the will to participate, and the need to participate in order to benefit from the connectivity offered by social media networks?[25]

As internet and social media users continue to actively participate in the technologies that in some ways might oppress them, and as the boundaries between online and offline continue to bleed into one another, the fear surrounding surveillance also becomes normalized. To quote Steyerl, "we might be unplugged, but this doesn't mean we're off the hook. The internet persists offline as a mode of life, surveillance, production, and organization."[26] Steyerl continues and states, "the all-out internet condition is not an interface but an environment."[27] It has been said that to not participate, today, means to virtually not exist. Subjecting yourself, or at least a part of yourself, is now the price you pay for access to basic information or online services that enable communication. In the "everyday world of exposure, surveilled subjects experience surveillance through a series of complex layers," says Lyon, adding that one should "not reduc[e] the

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[24] Hito Steyerl, "The Spam of the Earth: Withdrawal from Representation," in *The Wretched of the Screen*, ed. Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, and Anton Vidokle (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), 167.

[25] Lyon makes the important distinction that "there are many reasons why surveillance may be tolerated or even sought after, or why surveillance, negatively construed, may be seen as less significant in some situations than what are taken to be its positive benefits. The obvious example is engaging with social media […] even though users are aware of the ways that both corporate and government bodies may be tracking their activities. Lyon, "Surveillance Culture: Engagement, Exposure, and Ethics in Digital Modernity," 831.

[26] Hito Steyerl, "Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?" in *Mass Effect: Art and the Internet in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2015), 442.

[27] Ibid., 443.

experience of surveillance to a one-dimensional or binary – 'compliance or resistance' – format and acknowledg[e] the variety of subtlety of responses [to] help us understand the lived realities of surveillance subjects."[28]

Digital Citizenship

As digital tools and platforms have been established as essential aspects of participating in society, the notion and meaning of digital citizenship becomes increasingly important to understand.[29] Digital citizenship, as defined in *Digital Citizenship: The Internet, Society, and Participation*, concerns "those who use the Internet regularly and effectively—that is, on a daily basis," or simply, "the ability to participate in society online."[30] However, it is important to distinguish how digital citizenship differs from being a citizen of a particular geographic place. In a recent study by the Digital Citizenship and Surveillance Society, Hintz et al. noted that "digital citizenship is typically defined through people's actions, rather than their formal status of belonging to a nation-state and the rights and responsibilities that come with it. It denotes citizens creating and performing their role in society"[31]

Although digital citizens may not have any formal status recognized by any nation-state, one must understand what is involved with being a citizen, as well as the role of the digital citizen within cyberspace.[32] Although the subject of citizenship studies is far beyond the scope of this chapter, the historical significance of the subject of the citizen is useful to consider when analyzing the complexities of these subjects as they perform online.[33] According to citizenship scholar Engin Isin and data sociologist Evelyn Ruppert in their publication titled, *Being Digital Citizens*, "what makes a subject a citizen is the capacity for making rights claims."[34]

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[28] Lyon, "Surveillance Culture: Engagement, Exposure, and Ethics in Digital Modernity," 832.
[29] Arne Hintz, Lina Dencik, and Karin Wahl-Jorgensen, "Digital Citizenship and Surveillance Society," *International Journal of Communication* 11 (2017), 731.
[30] The digital divide is important to remember here. This term can either mean "a division between those in favour of the extensive use of digital technology and those against it" or, "the gulf between those who have ready access to current digital technology and those who do not." "Digital Divide," in *Oxford English Dictionary,* https://www-oed-com.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/view/Entry/52611?redirectedFrom=digital+divide#eid6776543. Karen Mossberger, Caroline J. Tolbert, and Ramona S. McNeal, *Digital Citizenship: The Internet, Society, and Participation*, (2008: Cambridge, Mass): MIT Press. 14.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Engin F. Isin and Evelyn Ruppert, *Being Digital Citizens* (London, UK; New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 24.
[33] Ibid., 46.
[34] Ibid.

The internet as a space – or cyberspace – in which to enact oneself, still, in many ways, remains a kind of frontier to many who continue to believe in its liberating techno-utopian promises. This perception reminds us, in many ways, of the optimism surrounding the internet when it became publicly available in the early 1990s.[35] The metaphor of the frontier had been used to describe this early phenomenon of the popularization of this new medium of communication. Scholars such as Mitchell Kapor and John Perry Barlow had in 1990 coined the use of the term "frontier" in relation to cyberspace by stating:

> In its present condition, Cyberspace is a frontier region, populated by the few hardy technologists who can tolerate the austerity of its savage computer interfaces, incompatible communications protocols, proprietary barricades, cultural and legal ambiguities, and general lack of useful maps or metaphors.[36]

Today, as the web has since evolved past this type of digital landscape, many scholars have channeled similar optimism into believing in the democratizing effect of more recent digital platforms.[37] This optimism is outlined by Hintz et al. by noting how social media can be used as a tool to enact political change; for citizen journalism, or cultural production – and thus *might* empower citizens.[38] They state that the "effective use of the affordances of digital, mobile and social media, it is argued, can enhance participation in society and generate innovation, social change and public good.[39]

However, within the post-Snowden era, the focus for many has shifted away from this optimism and toward a public distrust of the handling of personal information and data. The definition of being a digital citizen must now also encompass the fact that "we increasingly live and operate in a data-fied environment in which everything we do leaves data traces".[40] In order to understand digital citizenship, internet users must understand that today, their actions online

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[35] Gronlund reminds us, "Edward Snowden's revelations about the National Security Agency's (NSA) internet surveillance program, in 2013, initiate[d] a sentiment of deep scepticism and anxiety over the internet that profoundly contrasts with the feeling of optimism it engendered among artists in the 1990s." Gronlund, *Contemporary Art and Digital Culture,* 4.
[36] This kind of utopian or colonial language resulted in the metaphorical understanding of cyberspace as a physical space, or frontier with a politics of its own. Mitchell Kapor and John Perry Barlow, "Across the Electronic Frontier," *Electronic Frontier Foundation*, July 10, 1990, accessed November 20, 2017. https://w2.eff.org/Misc/Publications/John_Perry_Barlow/HTML/eff.html.
[37] This has been the result of a major influx of social-media sites and technologies such as the founding of Facebook (2004), YouTube (2005), Twitter (2006) and the iPhone (2007). Gronlund, *Contemporary Art and Digital Culture,* 2.
[38] Hintz et al., "Digital Citizenship and Surveillance Society: Introduction," 732.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.

do not solely exist in some vaguely defined 'cyberspace'. Isin and Ruppert remind us that "confining the digital to the Internet or the online overlooks how digital citizens come into being through the meshing of their online and offline lives."[41] Ironically, as public awareness of data mining (i.e. data being captured, shared, stored, and sold by various agencies) becomes more commonplace,[42] it has not stopped the popularization of data monitoring devices as household items.[43] Scholar Shoshanna Zuboff has coined the term "surveillance capitalism," which implies the following contemporary condition:

> Surveillance capitalism […] qualifies as a new logic of accumulation with a new politics and social relations that replaces contracts, the rule of law, and social trust with the sovereignty of Big Other. It imposes a privately administered compliance regime of rewards and punishments that is sustained by a unilateral redistribution of rights. Big Other exists in the absence of legitimate authority and is largely free from detection or sanction. In this sense Big Other may be described as an automated coup from above: not a *coup d'état*, but rather a *coup des gens*.[44]

Zuboff refers to digital citizenship as the "information civilization", in "which populations are targets of data extraction." – all leading towards the capitalist goals of profit, new markets, and consumerism.[45] Therefore, it is important to recognize how surveillance has compromised and complicated liberating or democratic understandings of the nature of the internet.

Case Study: Testament (2009/2017)

Bookchin's work *Testament* (2009/2017) highlights many of these aforementioned issues. *Testament* is a four-part series consisting of chapters titled *Laid Off*, *My Meds*, *I am Not*, and *Count*. Topics discussed by each subject are all relatively personal – *Laid Off* features people recounting their recent termination from a job; *My Meds* focuses on vloggers listing prescribed psychiatric medications; the subject matter of *I am Not* consists of subjects publicly defending or denouncing one's rumoured sexual identity; and in the case of *Count*, a count-down of vlogger's current weight is stacked in descending order according to the numerical value being announced.

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[41] Isin and Ruppert, *Being Digital Citizens*, 24.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Examples of these devices include Amazon's Alexa or Google Home, as well as other smart-home devices and systems.
[44] Shoshana Zuboff, "Big Other: Surveillance Capitalism and the Prospects of an Information Civilization," *Journal of Information Technology* 30, no. 1 (March 2015), 30; 83.
[45] Ibid., 86.

Through her editing process, Bookchin creates video sequences and montage that utilize sound bites from each vlog, that blend together as each individual visually and audibly dissolves into the other. This grid-like presentation is reminiscent of a kind of distorted security CCTV feed, film reel, or more obviously, YouTube's thumbnail-laden interface. Sarah Whitcomb-Laiola describes this work by referring to the "gridded structure of frames within frames, each signaling an individual video that has been connected to the others through an organizational logic, to form a [kind of] social network."[46] What results across many of Bookchin's works constructed through similar processes, is a kind of chorus – where each individual represents one entity amongst many. Bookchin states that just "as in a Greek chorus, a choir, or a musical symphony, individuals echo, respond to, contradict, add refrains, iterations, and variations, join in, and complete solo narrations."[47] Within her work, she builds a narrative that aims to highlight the contemporary condition of the shared online self.[48] She intends through this work to "[reflect] a blend of intimacy and anonymity of the simultaneous connectivity and isolation of contemporary networked relations."[49] Documentation of this work notes that originally, *Testament* had exclusively existed as a multi-channel video installation, where projected images would flash across the projection surface (fig. 10). However, in 2016, these videos were re-edited for a single screen as documentation, resulting in two different ways of experiencing the work. For the purpose of this analysis, the single screen version of this work will be the primary frame of reference.

Testament's first chapter, *Laid Off*, is a collective account of people who were recently fired or laid off from their jobs. The piece begins as the viewer is confronted with the words "So today–" recited by six vloggers – each lined up horizontally across the screen within their

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[46] S. W. Laiola, "The Alt-Social Network of Natalie Bookchin's Testament," *Television and New Media* 18 no. 5 (2016), 462.
[47] According to the Oxford English Dictionary, *chorus* is defined as (in terms of Ancient Greek History): "An organized band of singers and dancers in the religious festivals and dramatic performances of ancient Greece." "Chorus," in *Oxford English Dictionary*, https://www.oed.com/start;jsessionid=9F50C1F939451A91BF49249185D53913?authRejection=true&url=%2Fview%2FEntry%2F32365#eid9578225. Additionally, Miriam-Webster defines *Greek chorus* as "a group of people who with persistence express especially similar views or feelings about a particular action or series of actions." "Greek Chorus," in *Miriam-Webster*, accessed March 3, 2019, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Greek%20chorus. Artist statement quoted from Ceci Moss, "Testament (2009 - Ongoing) - Natalie Bookchin," Rhizome, 2009, http://rhizome.org/editorial/2010/mar/11/testament-2009-ongoing-natalie-bookchin/.
[48] Natalie Bookchin, "Testament," Natalie Bookchin, September 9, 2018, https://bookchin.net/projects/testament/.
[49] Ibid.

respective frames (fig. 11). Each person has recorded themselves either in their home, car or other private space where they could be alone to deliver their individual version of the story to a webcam, cellphone, or other recording device.

The introduction continues: a middle-aged man is situated in his cluttered home to the left of the screen, juxtaposed alongside a young woman, shown in a black and white filter, to the right (fig. 12). They simultaneously resume what they were saying, and the man continues: “So today – I entered a new phase in my life.” The young woman simultaneously interjects, “So today – really, really, really…sucked!” Suspense builds as the viewer hangs on to every word as the story unfolds. A younger man picks up where the other two have left off: “I went into work…” Suddenly, all in unison on these words, more vloggers appear as if to burst out of one another into a row; they dissolve into the black background almost instantly thereafter. As the narrative, and simultaneous layers of footage unfold, the viewer is given a glimpse into a specific reality that is shared by a large group of people. Here, the context of *Laid Off* is the 2008 global financial crisis, which was the most significantly devastating financial crisis since the Great Depression. Here, as viewers we can see beyond the aesthetic parallels, and are now aware of the circumstantial similarities that affected millions of people worldwide.

As the chapter continues, the climax of the story builds up and is emphasized through a crescendo of several voices exclaiming the words “LAID OFF” coupled with a visual composition of individually framed vlogs spilling out into all directions across the screen. Throughout *Laid Off*, the viewer can start to recognize patterns amongst how these depicted vloggers not only share their similar stories, but also process their emotions. Through her editing process, Bookchin brings these symptoms to the forefront.

In a 2011 interview with Rhizome, Bookchin remarked that *Laid Off* “plays out the stages of grief in a manner that is both immediately predictable and profoundly heart-wrenching.”[50] This is exemplified throughout the last half of the chapter, wherein we have already seen anger, and are now entering a stage of outrage. A woman with red hair appears to the left, smiling sarcastically into her camera – “I have been at that place for nine years…” she

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[50] Rhizome is an organization housed in the New Museum that “champions born-digital art and culture through commissions, exhibitions, preservation and software development” and “has played an integral role in the history of contemporary art engaged with digital technologies and the internet.” “About,” Rhizome, 2019, http://rhizome.org/about/. Blake Stimson, “Out in Public: Natalie Bookchin in Conversation with Blake Stimson,” Rhizome, 2011, http://rhizome.org/editorial/2011/mar/09/out-public-natalie-bookchin-conversation-blake-sti/.

says through her smile. Finally, an optimistic shift occurs in the last part of the chapter. "So, some good news…" says a man with white hair – he seems to interrupt the cacophony of voices lost in their shock and disbelief (fig. 13). Many seem to share this optimism, as a man driving his car notes that he feels "kind of liberated." Many go on about how they will now use up all the "time [on their] hands." One woman mentions "maybe I'll make video blogs…I don't know, we'll see." At the end of the chapter, testimonies begin to dwindle, as does the short burst of positivity. A man simply states, "well anyways…that's my story […] I'm going to turn this camera around, so, I'm going to stop" and the chapter closes.

In a similar vein, *My Meds* presents the same sense of shared isolation, precarity and frustration. In keeping with Bookchin's arrangement style, the use of audio, spatial and visual collage are all dominant aspects of this chapter as well. This second chapter begins simply with a single frame – a woman sits at a table alone (fig. 14). She is alone in the composition, and alone in her vlog. She begins by stating: "So, um, without further ado, I'm going to introduce you to –." Suddenly, more vloggers are positioned within the frame, stating in unison the words: "…my medications." Thus begins a seemingly never-ending recital of pharmaceutical jargon, while rows upon rows of frames populate and fill the screen from left to right (fig. 15).

My Meds seems particularly disorienting due to the fact that most of the audio sampling is a muddled list of the names of different psychiatric medications. Additionally, the many medications listed, including Depakote, Risperdal, or Lithium (used to manage Bipolar disorder); Prozac, Duloxetine or Citalopram (used for depression); and other familiar names such as Ambien, Abilify, and Zoloft highlight the reality many share that involves cycling through multiple combinations of psychiatric drugs in order to alleviate the symptoms of various mood disorders. The commotion briefly calms down and the viewer is faced with yet another isolated woman in the corner of the screen (fig. 16). She says through tears looking downward, "I am in the process of switching medication." The listing then goes on in the same fashion, streaming across the screen, vloggers overlapping each other visually and audibly. As the wave of pharmaceutical terminology subsides, and the viewer is presented again with a false sense of optimism, multiple instances of the phrase "…and, I'm feeling much better" echoes amongst the fading chorus of vloggers.

As one's personal life and the information one shares is subjected to surveillance and data mining for profit and statistical insight, it must be acknowledged that through the subjection of

the self to social media platforms also comes a sense of community.[51] Bookchin states in an interview regarding *Testament*:

> "Though what they say may not always surprise, the fact that they are saying it in this environment and platform is pretty strange and compelling. We have entered another level of alienation when our equivalent of a public forum is a person alone in his or her room speaking to a computer screen. But, my work suggests, we are not alone in our need for public conversation and debate about the circumstances of our lives."[52]

In an effort to analyze these circumstances, Lyon outlines the urgency of the situation: individuals must consider digital citizenship and the role they play in managing their own visibility and how they conduct themselves through the internet. As the notion of complete anonymity or privacy diminishes, digital citizens need to be able to negotiate their in/visibility on their own terms.[53] Lyon uses Eric Stoddart's concept of "in/visibility" as a possible solution (or experiment) as opposed to popular privacy-based critiques.[54] In/visibility is defined as "the dynamic managing and negotiating [of] visibility in social space. [It is] the attempt to control one's relative position… [and is] engagement driven rather than defensive."[55] Stoddart's aim is to encourage a critical ethics of care, so that surveillance can be not necessarily "*of* people but *for* people."[56] Through this strategic method of controlling visibility, "this negotiating skill can inform attitudes to large internet companies as well as what to disclose, or not".[57] Lyon summarizes this concept:

> Negotiating visibility is indeed what dealing with surveillance is about. But seeking visibility is not the end of the story. Persons wish to be recognized for a sense of who they are, and the value accorded to them […] And identity develops through interaction with others; it is not something generated individually […] It also relates to dignity, a vital plan on which democracy rests." [58]

Although the gesture of negotiating visibility in this way may seem futile in the time of surveillance capitalism, it is worth considering the human aspect of this issue "rather than reducing humanness to data images."[59] Lyon concludes by stating that "to see the other not as a

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[51] Where the internet can be considered a network of connections and become a place for community forming, it can also function as a recruitment or radicalization tool, or place for hate groups to flourish.
[52] Stimson, "Out in Public: Natalie Bookchin in Conversation with Blake Stimson."
[53] Lyon, "Surveillance Culture: Engagement, Exposure, and Ethics in Digital Modernity," 835.
[54] Ibid., 834.
[55] Ibid., 834-835.
[56] Ibid., 835.
[57] David Lyon, *The Culture of Surveillance: Watching as a Way of Life* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), 432.
[58] Ibid., 436.
[59] Ibid., 437.

competitor or a component of one's own ladder to success, but as someone to be cared about, even to take responsibility for, would contribute to human flourishing rather than the shrinking of humanity."[60]

Case Study: Now he's out in public and everyone can see (2009-2011, 2017)

Now he's out in public and everyone can see (2009-2011, 2017) offers a different perspective on surveillance culture, by addressing peer-to-peer censorship, and how it can fuel conspiracy and function as an echo-chamber for harmful opinion. This work is another compilation of collected vlogs, however this time, the montage presents a series of individuals contesting the racial identity of unnamed male African American celebrities. Installed as an 18-channel video installation, and later remastered into a film in 2017, *Now he's out in public* considers and explores anxieties about race in the United States.

Throughout the four chapters of the film, Bookchin explores public commentary through vlogs published online which contest, defend, dissect or interpret a controversy in the media. Each celebrity who is subjected to these critiques is accused of being undeserving of their power and influence, and face accusations of lying about their true identities, their ethnicity, their class, their relationships and more.

"Facts" is the title of the first chapter of the film. It begins with a clip of a man in an empty light blue room. (fig. 17) He wears a suit jacket over a t-shirt – possibly in an effort to reinforce his credibility as a citizen reporter, as he takes his position in front of a microphone. He begins: "I have a feeling that things would have turned out differently…but before we jump to conclusions –" He is then interrupted, and the full screen clip minimizes itself – much like a computer desktop window can – to reveal a collage of framed clips of other vloggers against a stark white background, uttering in unison the words " – the facts" (fig. 18). Clips begin to cycle through, one after another, a narrative unfolding through fragments of phrases pieced together. Some scenes depict amateur newsroom set-ups complete with crudely animated graphics (fig. 19 & 20) and American flag backdrops (fig. 21). Other people are simply in their homes, cars, or

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[60] Ibid. This observation can be likened to that of Sarah Whitcomb Laiola's in her essay *The Alt-social Network of Natalie Bookchin's Testament*. Here, Laiola argues that Bookchin's work *Testament* represents an *alt-social network* that allows for the imaginative possibilities of "empowered online participation." Laiola, "The Alt-Social Network of Natalie Bookchin's Testament," 460.

backyards – private spaces in which they feel the freedom to fully express themselves without consequence, as they mull over evidence, rumours, truths and fictions. The citizenship conspiracy of former U.S. President Barack Obama is the main topic of discussion here. Birthers, as these conspiracy theorists are called, hold up their own birth certificates as one elderly woman sitting in front of an American flag says, “here’s my birth certificate…where’s yours?” (fig. 22).[61] The chapter continues with the repeated visual minimizing and opening of windows of vlogs across the screen, cycling through questions regarding the true and authentic identity, ethnicity and citizenship of celebrities like Barack Obama, or Michael Jackson, who are never actually mentioned by name, but alluded to via the collective ‘he’ that recurs throughout the work.

The next chapter, “Line” shifts the topic slightly. The essential message here is: step outside the line, and you face the consequences. Where some express their ideas as cautionary advice, told in solidarity through a shared experience with these unmentioned celebrities, others come across more authoritative, but with warning as well. An African American man stares up into a camera positioned above him: “Who’s going to kill the black man?” he says (fig. 23). The idea of celebrity and the deification of celebrities is discussed throughout the stream of vlogs, as if the vloggers are having a debate with each other. The chapter concludes with more of an acknowledgement of the ‘race issue’ at hand. An African American man states, “and that brings me to the other thing…everyone is all upset—", as someone else’s voice begins to overlap with his, “…because he’s—", the screen populates with dozens of windows, stacked in no particular order all over the screen. The vloggers state in unison: “because he’s black.” Each window then minimizes out of frame completely, and a white man is left, who says “there, I said it” as if to address the elephant in the room. This part comes to a close with a series of African American vloggers concluding that “they just wait for you to do something wrong.”

This chapter bleeds into the next titled “Money,” where the economic status and class of these celebrities is discussed as being undeserved or even seen as a betrayal, as expressed by some of the African American vloggers. These celebrities are noted as living in “predominantly white neighbourhoods,” which are “gated communities” considered to be very “affluent.” A

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[61] Birthers or birtherism refers to a group of conspiracy theorists in the United States that facilitated and instigated the conspiracy surrounding the American citizenship of Barack Obama, who was the 44th president of the United States (2009-2017). Those who believed in this conspiracy had falsely claimed Obama was not eligible to be president due to being born outside the United States.

white man in a blue shirt states "a few years ago, this guy would've been serving me coffee" as he raises his mug and takes a sip. The image fades out and reveals an impassioned African American man exclaiming, "you draw attention to yourself, black man, when you go living in an all-white neighbourhood." They conclude on a fragmented detail of one of these celebrities having to break into his own home with a golf club – alluding to scandals like those surrounding Tiger Woods or O.J. Simpson. Details become increasingly muddled and disorganized as vlogs are layered on top of each other sonically and visually as they continue to discuss the levels of power they believe these men should or should not be allowed to have because of their race.

The final section of the film begins with the all-too-familiar disclaimer: "I am not racist." The conversation continues as a man wearing a Texas flag as a bandana, in addition to its being framed on the wall behind him, recounts that he "grew up and had many good friends who were black" (fig. 24). An uncomfortable amount of silence is produced by Bookchin as the viewer waits to hear the inevitable "…but" that is looming. Amid the colour-blind statements and coded racism, the viewer arrives at the end of the film, as it concludes with a discussion about public and private life. One African American man states, "there's a time and a place to show your blackness" as another man chimes in that "he messed up the minute he walked out that door […] Now he's out in public, and everybody knows."

As stated above, Bookchin remade this material into a film in 2016, which was a moment of extreme political polarization in the United States that continues today. What Bookchin does through her work is not expose something new, but rather she demonstrates that racism is a well-established discourse, and that it continues to be one of the major traumas underlying American history and contemporary life. What she does is dig up and piece together what has always been there. Racism, just as it has been before the internet, has always been persistent. The irony Bookchin is underlining in this work is that these opinions rarely exist in the mainstream, but when they are aired publicly through the internet, everyone can see. The play between different kinds of visibility, whether it be online vs. offline, celebrity vs. non-celebrity, rich vs. poor, vlog vs. post, white vs. non-white is the main focus in this work. She comments, however, on the difference between today's fashion of expressing oneself online versus that of almost a decade ago in a recent interview:

> "The film also archives and documents a period in media history which no longer exists, before Google had figured out how to monetize YouTube. There are no product placements in these videos, just expressions of raw desire and attitude […] today, people

> are less likely to make vlogs and more likely to post opinions about current events on platforms like Twitter. Something is lost for me when you can no longer see the face and gestures of the speaker […] All that presence is lost on Twitter, where all you get is a disembodied short text from an often-anonymous writer (or bot!)."[62]

By revisiting Bookchin's work nearly a decade after some of the sourced content was created, it is evident how the collective use and understanding of social media has changed in an era of constant participation and surveillance. As well, peer-to-peer shaming, censorship or online policing have since intensified amongst social media users.[63] Furthermore, the rise of media distrust and 'fake news' has divided many populations.[64] The role of the citizen journalist, as demonstrated in *Now he's out in public* becomes an important counter-force against these efforts emanating from the sphere of right-wing politics.[65]

Now he's out in public is a critically important work to revisit today, as the echo chambers of the divided corners of the web continue to exist and produce content on much larger scales than ever before. In terms of visual content specifically, today YouTube is considered one of the leading platforms that acts as a news source for young people.[66] In a recent report published under Data & Society's Media Manipulation research initiative, Rebecca Lewis writes of the alternative influence of right-wing broadcasts on YouTube. She states, "influencers express a distrust of the 'mainstream' news media and a desire to use YouTube to create a better, alternative media system. In some cases, they refer to themselves collectively as the 'alternative

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[62] Eden Osucha, "Presence + Polarization: Natalie Bookchin's Portraits of America," *The Chart*, June 20, 2017, https://thechart.me/presence-polarization-natalie-bookchin-portraits-of-america/.

[63] This is otherwise known as a 'call out,' 'cancelling,' or 'call out culture' which is generally the act of using social media platforms to publicly call attention to the oppressive actions of others.

[64] A buzzword since 2016, 'fake news' refers to disinformation or propaganda usually disseminated through social media sites. This term has been used to describe news that is genuinely not credible, often published through unverified social media accounts or bots. It has also been used to describe news sources that do not align with one's own political views and opinions.

[65] Citizen journalism, used in the context of this thesis, is understood as the act of a public citizen collecting and disseminating information in the form of user-generated content that is explicitly intended to contribute to and formulate a larger public discourse, especially on the internet. Professor of journalism Melissa Wall has written extensively on the history of the phenomenon of citizen journalism. For a concise overview of the state of research on citizen journalism, see: Melissa Wall, "Citizen Journalism," *Digital Journalism* 3, no. 6 (February 3, 2015): 797–813. For more extensive reading see either: Melissa Wall, *Citizen Journalism: Practices, Propaganda, Pedagogy* (London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2019); or: Melissa Wall, *Citizen Journalism: Valuable, Useless, or Dangerous?* (New York: International Debate Education Association, 2012).

[66] Becca Lewis, "Forget Facebook, YouTube Videos Are Quietly Radicalizing Large Numbers of People — and the Company Is Profiting," NBC News (NBC News, October 4, 2018), https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/forget-facebook-youtube-videos-are-radicalizing-millions-young-people-company-ncna916341.

media.'"[67] This alternative media has resulted in an entire network of reactionary 'influencers' whose intention is to turn young people away from mainstream media (the 'fake news'), and possibly encourage them to embrace racist, misogynist and white nationalist views.[68] In summary, this is the contemporary reality that reverberates through *Now he's out in public*, and when considered alongside works like *Testament*, one can begin to reflect on the contemporary conditions of surveillance culture and the role some individuals play in managing or regulating their own visibility, as well as the visibility of others.

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[67] Rebecca Lewis, "Alternative Influence: Broadcasting the Reactionary Right on YouTube" (New York: Data & Society Research Institute, September 18, 2018), 15.
[68] Lewis identifies and names what is considered to be the 'Alternative Influence Network' in the 2018 report titled "Alternative Influence: Broadcasting the Reactionary Right on YouTube." Here, Lewis describes such figures as being primarily libertarian or conservative YouTubers. Lewis catalogues over eighty YouTube channels across numerous ideological positions. Figures included in this study include influential media pundits like Jordan Peterson, white nationalists like Richard Spencer, or anti-feminist figures like Carl Benjamin. Lewis traces their influence as well as where these figures have collaborated or intersected with each other through their YouTube channels. Lewis, "Alternative Influence," 9.

ALGORITHMS AND THE SHAPING OF DIGITAL SOCIAL MEMORY

Algorithms

This chapter seeks to explore the question of how invisible forces like social media platform or search engine algorithms influence the ways in which individual and collective digital histories are being remembered or archived.[69] The work of Natalie Bookchin engages with this question, asking us to consider the role of algorithms in determining or influencing content, as she herself filters for and compiles material to include in works such as *Testament,* and *Now he's out in public*, among others in her oeuvre.[70] It is therefore important to define the current-day reality of algorithms, and what is alluded to particularly when referring to these very specific organizational systems online.[71] Why do algorithms matter, and why are they important to understand in relation to these case studies by Natalie Bookchin?

In order to continue this investigation, I will outline a set of definitions and terminology.[72] Scholarship around the current algorithmic media landscape online has been growing significantly in the past few years. However, scholarship concerning algorithms and the image, visual culture, or art has been inadequate. Where much insight has been provided by scholars like Wendy Hui Kyun Chun, Lev Manovich, Safiya Umoja Noble, David Joselit, Boris Groys or Michael Pepi, this area of understanding is still relatively limited.[73] Manovich established the fundamental importance of software (which employ algorithms) in his text,

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[69] I use the terms 'platform' and 'social media' interchangeably in this analysis.

[70] Other works where Bookchin has sourced found-footage include *Location Insecure* (2006), *Round the World* (2007), *Zorns Lemma2* (2007), *Trip* (2008), *Parking Lot* (2008), *Mass Ornament* (2009), and most recently, *The Rise and Fall of Silicon Valley* (2018-work in progress, working title).

[71] It is important to clarify that I am focusing on Bookchin's work and its relation to the political implications (in terms of world-making) and power of algorithms, and not because it is considered "algorithmic art" – a separate art movement that employs computer algorithms and machines to create designs. Taina Bucher, *If ... Then: Algorithmic Power and Politics* (New York Oxford University Press, 2018), 3.

[72] The term "algorithm" is multi-faceted and can be used in many different contexts beyond that of this thesis. Algorithms have been defined as "a set of instructions for how a computer should accomplish a particular task. Algorithms are used by many organizations to make decisions and allocate resources based on large datasets. Algorithms are most often compared to recipes, which take a specific set of ingredients and transform them through a series of explainable steps into a predictable output. Combining calculation, processing, and reasoning, algorithms can be exceptionally complex, encoding for thousands of variables across millions of data points." Robyn Caplan et al., "Algorithmic Accountability: A Primer," *Data & Society* (Washington, DC: Data & Society, April 18, 2018), https://datasociety.net/output/algorithmic-accountability-a-primer/.

[73] The scholarship surrounding algorithmic power and politics as it specifically relates to contemporary art, according to my own understanding and research, is not very extensive.

"Software Takes Command." Here, he underscores how it is critical to understand the invisible influences of software on societies, and the resulting cultural effects. He states:

> Search engines, recommendation systems, mapping applications, blog tools […] and, of course, platforms which allow people to write new software—iOS, Android, Facebook, Windows, Linux—are in the center of the global economy, culture, social life, and, increasingly, politics. And this "cultural software"—cultural in a sense that it is directly used by hundreds of millions of people and that it carries "atoms" of culture—is only the visible part of a much larger software universe.[74]

In the specific context of personalized feeds produced by social media platforms like YouTube,[75] or the search engine results produced by Google, hierarchical organization of content through algorithms is fundamentally a part of social media due to their infrastructures. By understanding algorithmic organization in this way, as well as how this contributes to social media's place in public discourse, as users we can, as Tarleton Gillespie argues in his book *Custodians of the Internet*, "reconsider what platforms are, and ask new questions about their power in society."[76]

With this in mind, the work of communications scholar Taina Bucher provides much insight into how software, specifically algorithms, shape everyday life, communication, and cultural production, as well as how these systems affect many individual's encounters with the world.[77] Bucher defines these algorithmic systems "as the coded instructions that a computer needs to follow to perform a given task." She continues in stating that, "algorithms are deployed to make decisions, to sort and make meaningfully visible the vast amount of data produced and available on the web […] tell[ing] the story of how our lives are networked and connected."[78]

Additionally, author Ed Finn describes in *What Algorithms Want: Imagination in the Age of Computing*, that the term "algorithm," in this context, involves:

> […] a range of computation processes including close surveillance of use behaviors, "big data" aggregation for the resulting information, analytics engines that combine multiple forms of statistical calculation to parse that data, and finally a set of human-facing actions, recommendations, and interfaces that generally reflect only a small part of the cultural processing going on behind the scenes.[79]

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[74] Lev Manovich, *Software Takes Command* (New York Etc.: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 7.
[75] YouTube is the specific platform Bookchin engages with, but this applies to other social media giants like Facebook (Instagram, WhatsApp), Twitter, and more.
[76] Tarleton Gillespie, *Custodians of the Internet: Platforms, Content Moderation, and the Hidden Decisions That Shape Social Media* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 14.
[77] Bucher, *If… Then*, 19.
[78] Ibid., 2-3.
[79] Ed Finn, *What Algorithms Want: Imagination in the Age of Computing* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2017), 16.

A critique of what happens "behind the scenes" is important to Bookchin's works like *Testament* and *Now he's out in public*, as both works are motivated by the desire to not only raise questions about the invisible nature of platform algorithms, but also to uncover user generated content being published online that the greater public might not see.

Here, it is worth stating explicitly that the nature of algorithms is not limited to the organization of content and the construction of personalized social media feeds. While this will be the focus in this chapter, the broader implications of algorithms are vast and well beyond the scope of this analysis. However, many of these algorithmic systems that are employed by social media platforms use machine learning systems. Machine learning systems are essentially "trained" by a collection of data, to build algorithms that are capable of recognizing patterns in order to categorize content in many ways.[80] Additionally, the categorization of social media users based on their provided data and engagement with platforms ultimately inform targeted advertising – a mechanism that, many scholars have argued, contributes to the clouded perception of reality as it presented through social media, as well as being largely impacted by the influences of surveillance capitalism, as discussed in the previous chapter. Addressing the urgent need for archivists to better understand these systems, Director of the Coalition for Networked Information Clifford Lynch states that "these [machine learning] mechanisms are definitively part of (and often viewed as one of the more threatening aspects of) this 'Age of Algorithms'."[81] Most importantly, it is the biases and limitations that are understood through the data used to train such algorithms that then inform the information one user might see, or not see, in their social media feed.[82] This is of great concern for stakeholders and archivists who argue for more transparency, as these embedded biases limit access to information and the possibility of creating reliable and meaningful records of the contemporary moment for present and future use.[83]

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[80] Clifford Lynch, "Stewardship in the 'Age of Algorithms,'" *First Monday* 22, no. 12 (December 2, 2017).
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Lynch elaborates on this note by saying "Nevertheless, understanding and documenting such personalized and targeted system behaviors might be of real interest to consumers and consumer advocacy groups in the present, and certainly to scholars in the future […] for the insight that they give into behaviors of the population and the way opinion is shaped and choices are made." Ibid.

Natalie Bookchin: Algorithmic Collaborations and Critique

Through her process of "crawling"[84] YouTube's database to access the user-made footage she collects for these works, Bookchin simultaneously works with and against Google's algorithms. She states that:

> The work I've done over the past decade lies somewhere between a collaboration with and intervention into Google's algorithms. I dig into online databases to collect the videos that I use in my work, and by varying search terms and going deep into search results, I aim to circumvent the search's algorithmic biases.[85]

By sifting through and evading algorithmically determined recommendations and search results, the artist actively mines YouTube's platform for content that is not easily accessible though basic search queries. The artist states that "YouTube's algorithms can't easily detect subtext or irony, falsehoods, or disinformation."[86] Therefore, awareness of human bias is present in Bookchin's work. With regard to the organization or filtering of social media content, Gillespie reminds us that "our anxiety about how humans may make [similar] decisions in biased ways fuels the faith in technical solutions."[87] He continues by stating that "this faith is, sadly, misplaced, in that even automated tools and complex algorithms are designed and tested by people, enacted and maintained by people, and deployed or overridden by people."[88] Where the biases of these algorithms are not always visible, Bookchin makes her own biases apparent through her choice of editing through montage – allowing for larger social truths to reveal themselves and become hyper-visible through her work.[89] Bookchin's work therefore critiques the opacity of social media platforms and search engines. Through the contrast of subject matter depicted within works like *Testament* and *Now he's out in public*, and also due to similar mining processes for both works, the artist draws attention to what is being made visible in terms of user-generated

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[84] Here I reference a method of web archiving called "crawling" which refers to an automated script that "aims at discovering the web pages of a web application by navigating through the application. This is usually done by simulating the possible user interactions considering just the client-side of the application," which are then archived by web archivists. Seyed M. Mirtaheri et al., "A Brief History of Web Crawlers" (School of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science University of Ottawa, 2013), https://arxiv.org/pdf/1405.0749.pdf.
[85] Bookchin, *Portraits of the Multitude,* 6.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Gillespie, *Custodians of the Internet,* 97.
[88] Ibid. Gillespie reminds us that we must be conscious of the invisible labour force behind content organization and moderation; the most prominent of "human computation tasks" Ibid.*,* 123. This labour (filtering through violent, hateful and obscene content) is mostly outsourced to low-paying third-party companies. Although this reality is important to consider, it is beyond the scope of this analysis, which is focused on content as it is organized in a hierarchical list, without looking at what is removed outright from platforms.
[89] Bookchin, *Portraits of the Multitude,* 6.

content and the flattening of this content that is facilitated by algorithms. Although these works elicit a spectrum of sentiments in their viewers, where *Testament* might invoke empathy or solidarity and *Now he's out in public* could give rise to feelings of outrage or condemnation, these works are born out of the same process of content organization by the artist. In doing so, Bookchin emphasizes the invisibility of these algorithms or other forms of content organization, where the "content we do see seems like it is simply there, a natural phenomenon – including whatever racist, homophobic, obscene, or abusive content is allowed to stay."[90]

Visibility and Meaning-Making Through Information Hierarchies

It is evident, as discussed above, that Natalie Bookchin intervenes in and critiques algorithmic content organization. The next aspect of this analysis will consider how search results or news feeds are reflective of this organization, as well as how meaning is generated through the types of content that are being made available. Although the customized organization of content is part of the service social media companies provide for their users, the lack of transparency regarding the biases of their organizing algorithms is, I argue, affecting how culture and memory are being shaped online.

Where the news feed is a continuous stream of algorithmically filtered updates on a social media user's home page, search results or generated lists of recommendations on sites like YouTube are similarly edited and governed by machine learning algorithms.[91] Due to the fact that algorithms deliver content in many different ways, there are many points where a social media platform might actively withhold or conceal content.[92] Referring to the opaque nature of the criteria that drive these algorithms, Gillespie states that "selective interventions fracture the public," meaning, that "selective moderation can undercut the potential for, and faith in, shared space of [discourse]."[93]

The question of visibility arises within the context of surveillance culture and algorithmically determined hierarchies of content online. Where in the previous chapter notions of visibility were addressed in terms of privilege or, generally, the hypervisibility all users face in an age of surveillance capitalism, this analysis will additionally focus on the visibility of algorithms in

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[90] Gillespie, *Custodians of the Internet,* 124.
[91] Bucher, *If…Then*, 74.
[92] Gillespie, *Custodians of the Internet,* 22.
[93] Gillespie, *Custodians of the Internet,* 187; 195-196.

general, as well as their effect on what kind of information internet users do and do not see. Wendy Chun outlines this best in *Programmed Visions* regarding the transparency of these technological systems:

> "It's combination of what can be seen and not seen, can be known and not known – its separation of interface from algorithm; software from hardware – makes it a powerful metaphor for everything we believe is invisible yet generates visible effects, from genetics to the invisible hand of the market; from ideology to culture."[94]

As algorithms display hierarchically organized content, the notion of visibility within this context becomes, alternatively, a reward or a scarcity, rather than a threat imposed by panoptic surveilling systems.[95] Bucher outlines the competition for visibility within this sphere when she states that:

> "The problem is not the possibility of constantly being observed but the possibility of constantly disappearing, of not being considered important enough. In order to appear, to become visible, one needs to follow a certain platform logic embedded in the architecture of [the platform]."[96]

Therefore, borne out of the risk of disappearing or becoming buried by other user-generated content or advertisements, visibility in this sense becomes reimagined as an exclusive privilege granted only to those who understand the competition, rather than something to avoid.[97]

The privilege of visibility within social media platforms or search results often relates to the value ascribed to the content in question.[98] The extent to which visibility and algorithmic bias intersect with racial visibility has been addressed by scholars Wendy Chun and Safiya Noble, amongst others. They argue for more nuanced understandings of how invisible algorithms can perpetuate and reinforce oppressive systems and create new methods of racial profiling. Noble, for example, aims to highlight the failures of search engine algorithms like Google's, referring to "algorithmic oppression" and "technological redlining," where the people behind the decision making in building algorithms perpetuate their own values, "many of which openly promote

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[94] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Programmed Visions: Software and Memory* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2013), 17.
[95] Bucher references Foucault in regard to algorithmic systems as gatekeepers of visibility. She argues that, "Foucault's idea of an architecturally-constructed regime of visibility as exemplified in the figure of the Panopticon makes for a useful analytical and conceptual framework for understanding the ways in which the sensible is governed in social networking sites." Bucher, *If…Then*, 74.
[96] Ibid., 84.
[97] Bucher states, "In order to appear, to become visible, one needs to follow a certain platform logic embedded in the architecture of [the platform]." Ibid.
[98] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Programmed Visions: Software and Memory* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2013), 66-67.

racism, sexism, and false notions of meritocracy."[99] Chun has also analyzed how computer interfaces enact racist ideology, even while neither of these elements are immediately visible; she writes: "we are expected to be as blind to software as we are to race; but race and software both act: both maintain visual literacy in an age of waning indexicality."[100]

Hito Steyerl has in turn addressed visibility in relation to high quality, or rich images, where the contemporary hierarchy of images is based on their materiality, or specifically, their resolution.[101] Where rich images are defined as "high resolution […] brilliant and impressive […] more scary and seductive,"[102] poor images are "the debris of audio visual production, the trash that washes up on digital economies' shores."[103] This argument can be extended to signify the obvious privileges that come as a result of economic class, where the disparity between affluent and disenfranchised users is represented through a portion of online content's visual appearance. Within the contemporary landscape of capitalist image production and social media infrastructures whose algorithms associate visual quality with profitability and meaningfulness, the technical nature of an image becomes its class signifier – what Steyerl calls the "class society of appearances."[104]

In the case studies that have been presented, Bookchin intentionally sets out to uncover what has been buried under the constant influx of competing content, and what voices are being considered valuable in both the online and offline sphere. She highlights her fascination with poor images throughout her artistic career:

> My interest in the 'bad' image began with a series of videos I made between 2005 and 2007 that documented anonymous landscapes I found by looking through online security webcams. In relation to that work, I wrote about the poetics of the images I collected—low resolution and highly pixelated—unmanned by a human operator and indifferent to blinding bursts of light or hours of darkness, and how they bore the marks of their travels across low bandwidths of electronic networks.[105]

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[99] Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 24-32.
[100] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Programmed Visions: Software and Memory* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2013), 66-67; 179. For more on how human prejudice might emerge through algorithmic structures and culture, see: Clemens Apprich et al., *Pattern Discrimination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; Lüneburg: Meson Press, 2019).
[101] Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image", 33.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid., 32.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Among the works by Natalie Bookchin that were created using online security webcams include *Zorns* Lemma2 (2007), *Round the World* (2007), and *Location Insecure* (2006). Bookchin, *Portraits of the Multitude,* 5.

In these more recent works, Bookchin refers to the hierarchy of rich versus poor images as a state of "hypervisibility," where "it can be difficult to notice what we're not seeing."[106] Within works like *Testament* and *Now he's out in public* Bookchin positions low-quality, amateur vlogs into a sphere of privilege that comes with visibility online – existing as both an artwork in a privileged space such as an installation in an art gallery, but also as film or documented footage of an artwork in the form of a video uploaded to the artist's social media and personal website. However, while considering the differences in topics within *Testament* and *Now he's out in public*, Bookchin's work highlights the damaging effects of content organization facilitated by platform algorithms. In the case of *Testament*, we experience the stories of marginalized voices: the mentally ill or the unemployed, for example. These voices, just as in offline communities, are often invisibilized by the algorithms in question. Bookchin states her intention in this work is to "[imagine] a more *social* media. It visualizes individual stories as part of larger collective conversations, highlighting links and commonalities between disparate online voices."[107] Moreover, in *Now he's out in public*, the viewer experiences a layering of the voices of the visible and invisible (or hyper-visible). In this work, the artist seeks to call attention to how often algorithms favour content that speaks to scandal and conspiracy.[108] In this sense, it is clear that through her work Bookchin gives attention to the nature of social media platforms as systems of simultaneous control and freedom, of factual and fictious informants, of being alienated yet connected, all underneath the guise of platforms that brand themselves as places for community forming and as trusted information conduits. Bookchin's work therefore speaks to the algorithmic aspects of how information is circulated and accessed, as well as facilitating a critique of the visual hegemonies perpetuated by neoliberal configurations of power.[109]

Distorting Reality or Discovering Truths?

The distortion of reality by way of algorithmic systems of organization can also lead to a symptomatic desire to comb for truth amongst what Steyerl calls the "sea of data".[110] Here, I

[106] Ibid.
[107] Natalie Bookchin, "Out in Public," in *No Internet, No Art: A Lunch Bytes Anthology*, ed. Melanie Bühler (Onomatopee, 2015), 162.
[108] Natalie Bookchin, "Now he's out in public and everyone can see," Natalie Bookchin, April 26, 2019, https://bookchin.net/projects/now-hes-out-in-public-and-everyone-can-see-2/.
[109] Joaquin Zerené Harcha and Paula Cardoso Pereira, "Revolutions of Resolution," *TripleC* 12, no. 1 (March 21, 2014), 325.
[110] Hito Steyerl, "A Sea of Data: Apophenia and Pattern (Mis-)Recognition," *E-flux Journal*, no. 72 (April 2016): 2,

argue that Bookchin, through her method of collecting and articulating meaning through poor imagery, is essentially building out and recognizing patterns in a way that is similar to how Steyerl describes the phenomenon of *apophenia*, or the perception of patterns within random data.[111] In the case of Bookchin's work, the resulting data is not random, however, but carefully mined and choreographed. In her essay, "A Sea of Data: Apophenia and Pattern (Mis-) Recognition," Steyerl unpacks the separation of "signal" and "noise," where "signal" stands for useful information, and the "noise" is the surrounding disposable, messy detritus of the data-sphere. She emphasizes that as an internet user, one is a projection of the data one is associated with:

> In practice you become coextensive with the data-constellation you project. Social scores of all different kinds – credit scores, academic scores, threat scores – as well as commercial and military pattern-of-life observations impact the real lives of real people, both reformatting and radicalizing social hierarchies by ranking, filtering, and classifying.[112]

Here, I echo Baron, whose analysis of Bookchin's body of work describes the ability "to trace patterns within the digital archive and thereby reestablish some kind of (human) coherence and sense through these patterns."[113]

Alternative Archive

Within the deluge of user-generated content that floods the internet daily, one is presented with countless primary sources for the construction of cultural and societal memory as it unfolds online. Today, the internet is a main resource for "externalized human memory whether as individual memories or as an array of shared memories in which the individuals take part."[114] The notion of social memory can be introduced here; it is defined by Richard Rinehart and Jon Ippolito as "how and what societies remember – the long-term memory of civilizations […] allow[ing] a civilization to persist beyond the lifetime of one individual or generation."[115] When

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accessed March 30, 2019, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/72/60480/a-sea-of-data-apophenia-and-pattern-misrecognition/.

[111] Ibid.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Jaimie Baron, *The Archive Effect: Found Footage and the Audiovisual Experience of History* (London: Routledge, 2014), 150.

[114] Niels Ole Finnemann, "Web Archive," *Knowledge Organization* 46, no. 1 (2019), 52.

[115] Richard Rinehart and Jon Ippolito, *Re-Collection: Art, New Media, and Social Memory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2014), 14.

referring to *digital* social memory, the *how* and *what* must then encompass the vast range of platforms which mediate the collective experience of groups of individuals and how it is being memorialized online.[116] Now, archiving practices continue to evolve in order to accommodate the preservation of a digital social memory, adopting web-specific protocols and tools in order to do so. This is reflected in the practice of web archiving, which is largely specific to institutional bodies that have facilitated methods and software for archiving the web.[117] However, in the words of archival media theorist Wolfgang Ernst, the internet is "only ever temporary", as it is in a constant state of change and dynamic rewriting. Therefore, digital social memory is often represented through ephemeral snapshot-like images, adding to the challenge web archiving faces as a developing field of scholarship. However, what value can the method of producing these snapshots serve within the context of Bookchin's work? How might her work uncover new narratives; ones that can be forged through the material that has been largely buried and forgotten?

Broadly, web archiving is considered to be the practice of using the web and social media to document events; this presents an enormous opportunity for the transformation of the practice of social memory.[118] However, traditional web archiving methods face an enormous challenge of not only navigating the digital landscape that is shaped by algorithms, but also the subjectivity of these landscapes – as they are largely informed by a user's personal preferences. Additionally, as algorithms are constantly being updated or changing through machine learning, the task of reliable and reflective web archiving becomes increasingly difficult under these circumstances.[119]

Therefore, it is worth asking: how do the algorithmic infrastructures of social media platforms inform web archives? More specifically, how does Bookchin subvert the dominant, capitalistic and algorithmically determined archives that are being created through social media platforms through her work? This section will unpack how Bookchin creates what I am

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[116] Michael Connor, "What Is Digital Social Memory?," Rhizome, 2016, https://rhizome.org/editorial/2016/feb/18/what-is-digital-social-memory/.

[117] The largest initiative for web archiving has been led by The Internet Archive, who have developed software like the Wayback Machine: a website capturing service that records snapshots of web pages as they change over time, with recorded functionality of pages depending on the quality of the capture.

[118] Statement from the National Forum on Ethics and Archiving the Web, organized by Rhizome and hosted at the New Museum in New York City March 22-24, 2018. "National Forum on Ethics and Archiving the Web | March 22-24 2018," Rhizome.org, 2018, https://eaw.rhizome.org/.

[119] Lynch, "Stewardship in the 'Age of Algorithms.'"

considering an *alternative archive* to the dominant methods of memory preservation online through her practice of collecting, interpreting, and (re-)contextualizing *poor content*; this alternative archive or archival artwork circulates both online and offline. I want to argue that as the framework of socio-technical systems such as algorithms affect web-based archival practices, archival artworks like Bookchin's can offer an alternative mode of understanding and engaging with digital social memory – one that memorializes the voices that have long been buried under heaps of data trash.

In order to situate the archival nature of the work of Natalie Bookchin, various theories of the archive are helpful – particularly those of Michel Foucault and Hal Foster. Foucault conceived of the archive for what it is not, rather than what it is.[120] Foucault was concerned with how knowledge is born and how it articulates itself – the archive therefore can no longer stand as the collective knowledge of a specific time in history, and instead becomes representative of how knowledge is organized – and also, what is included or excluded. Foucault states that the archive "is the system of its own functioning…it is that which differentiates discourses in their multiple existence and specifies them in their own duration."[121] In line with his writings on knowledge and power, Foucault conceives of academic disciplines as discursive formations or systematic conceptual frameworks that define their own truth criteria.[122]

Dominant institutions ultimately influence and define the criteria for truth and what is worth collectively remembering and upholding, thus shaping mainstream discourse and history. Therefore, one can consider, as stated earlier in this chapter, how content-moderating algorithms developed by social media companies shape public discourse based on the power they hold in deciding what is seen (and not seen) as digital social memory is being recorded and stored online. The potential archives that are being created through web archiving services are complicated and the content they collect can be affected by platform algorithms. Therefore, Natalie Bookchin, who actively attempts to evade these algorithmic influences, builds a type of alternative archive that is focused on more accurately representing the realities that exist within the public spheres of the internet, highlighting questions of visibility and hierarchy.

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[120] Marlene Manoff, "Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines," *Portal: Libraries and the Academy* 4, no. 1 (2004), 18.
[121] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 1989), 129.
[122] Manoff, "Theories of the Archive," 18.

Through works such as *Testament* and *Now he's out in public*, Bookchin is a clear example of what Hal Foster described as the "artist-as-archivist" in *An Archival Impulse*.[123] Here, Foster outlines a methodology whereby an artwork is archival not merely because it employs found information; the main purpose of archival art is to "make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present."[124] This is present in Bookchin's work through her process of collecting content for her multi-media installations, where she "freeze[s] and archive[s] artifacts made impulsively for the present moment, and interrupt[s] the continuous flow, pausing it to reflect on what it might say about who we think we are today."[125]

Additionally, Foster points out that the materials employed by the archival artist are "familiar, drawn from the archives of mass culture, to ensure a legibility that can then be disturbed or *detourné;* but they can also be obscure, retrieved in a gesture of alternative knowledge or counter-memory."[126] Again, Bookchin exemplifies this through her excavation of poor images as the main content of the archival works she creates – ultimately remixing a montage of what can be considered 'counter-memories' as they exist on the margins of dominant discourse as it is borne online. In fact, the internet as a source for found materials is further heralded by Foster as "the ideal medium of archival art."[127]

Bookchin states in her writing that she intends through her installations to "make meaning and sense of fleeting disposable data trash."[128] This data trash, or poor imagery, is the residue that is excluded from dominant representations of subjective experiences online. In her work, Bookchin treats this residue as valuable material, as documents that, in her words, "reveal our present state of affairs," honouring the people appearing in the supposed trash for "their revelations into shared attitudes about ourselves and the world around us."[129]

Remix and Appropriation

If we are to think back to Steyerl's emphasis on the circulation of the poor image, we see how the content Bookchin employs is subject to the phenomenon "of worldwide distribution [as

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[123] Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse", *October* 110 (2004), 5.
[124] Ibid., 4.
[125] Bookchin, "Out in Public," 158.
[126] Foster, "An Archival Impulse," 4.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Bookchin, "Out in Public," 158.
[129] Ibid.

well as the] ethics of remix and appropriation, [enabling] the participation of a much larger group of producers than ever before," or the online culture of remix[130] Remix culture generally refers to "the act of using pre-existing materials to create something new as desired by any creator." It has come to be associated, as Margie Borschke explains, "with the democratization of media production, a shift from the passive consumers of the broadcast era (think couch potatoes) to the active participants of Web 2.0 (think citizen journalists)."[131] She continues, "Many scholars see remix as a form of empowerment and resistance […] represent[ing] a wedge against corporate power structures and a challenge to the commodification of culture."[132] It is noted that this concept of remix culture is closely associated with what Henry Jenkins describes as 'participatory culture,' where the web has become a free and open archive of material to be reused and made into something new.[133] By re-appropriating and repositioning the found material, or data trash, she uncovers, Bookchin's work lends itself to the broader scholarly critiques of both the ethics of remix and appropriation, as well as the ethics of web archiving and the agency of the actors depicted in her work. In addition, her editing style can be compared to what is known as the "supercut." The history of the supercut is closely tied to that of YouTube, the social media website in which Bookchin sources her found footage. In order to situate Bookchin's work within this online trend, I refer to Brian Raftery's *Wired* article where he establishes that "the first supercuts had begun popping up on YouTube shortly after the site's 2005 launch" adding that in 2008 they reached "web-wide awareness […] after writer and net-culture observer Andy Baio first coined the term 'supercut' in April" of that year. Bookchin, as Steve Anderson has described her, "elevate[s] the remix genre of the supercut to the status of art."[134] The supercut – the "rapid and obsessive succession of clips focused on a specific phenomenon, usually a behavior, word, or phrase" – is the editing format the artist is referencing

[130] Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image," 40.
[131] Margie Borschke, "The Extended Remix: Rhetoric and History," in *The Routledge Companion to Remix Studies*, ed. Eduardo Navas, Owen Gallagher, and xtine burrough (New York: Routledge, 2015), 107-108.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Nicola Maria Dusi, "Remixing Movies and Trailers Before and After the Digital Age," in *The Routledge Companion to Remix Studies*, ed. Eduardo Navas, Owen Gallagher, and xtine burrough (New York: Routledge, 2015), 155. Henry Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).
[134] Steve F. Anderson, *Technologies of Vision the War between Data and Images* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2017), 83.

through works such as *Testament* and *Now he's out in public*.[135] However, where the supercut might be used to create a parody, or to elicit a playful reaction in response to clichés, the productive result of these works by Bookchin lies in her way of re-formatting an archive of isolated experiences. Both Chun and Baron describe these works by Bookchin as exemplifying what they term a "found collectivity," wherein new ways of understanding and remembering can be experienced through this method of remix.

In today's context, Bookchin's *Testament* and *Now he's out in public* have acquired additional meaning since the time of their respective creation. This is to say, the vlog-style videos that Bookchin appropriates for her work represent a particular episode of social media history that, in some ways, no longer exists today. The candid, unedited and low-quality testimonials that are given from a camera-phone, camcorder or webcam are one aspect, however it is the platform-trusting and naïve nature of the mode of self-production that today is somewhat of an anachronism. Today, vlogs of similar diaristic or opinionated intention are more popular than ever. The nature of footage used in works such as *Testament* and *Now he's out in public* is in contrast to today's social media audio-visual economy, where high-production value social media content is either trying to compete aesthetically with, or are in paid-partnership with, advertisement agencies. In addition to the material quality of the footage used, the method of remix and appropriation is also mirrored in the way these files travel through the internet over time – finding themselves in new contexts, associated with new authors, for better or worse, through image manipulation, remix, and sampling by others.

The landscape of the internet in 2019 is paved with fragments of individual memory that have been thrust into viral circulation – ultimately becoming part of a collective memory through their remixing and appropriation. Baron calls contemporary appropriative work such as Bookchin's "a form of digital historiography" that generates what she calls a "digital archive effect."[136] This effect is described as an attempt to understand one's relationship to the past and the present through the associations that can be made through found and appropriated materials published online.[137] Regarding audio visual production online, Paula Cardoso Pereira and

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[135] Diran Lyons, "An Aesthetics of Deception in Political Remix Video," in *The Routledge Companion to Remix Studies*, ed. Eduardo Navas, Owen Gallagher, and xtine burrough (New York: Routledge, 2015), 497. Brian Raftery, "I'm Not Here to Make Friends: The Rise and Fall of the Supercut Video," (*Wired*, August 30, 2018), https://www.wired.com/story/supercut-video-rise-and-fall/.
[136] Baron, *The Archive Effect,* 143.
[137] Ibid.

Joaquín Zerené Harcha state that “the fragmentation of cinematic experience resulting from the popularization of websites like YouTube, where disembodied clips of films or short recordings of mobile phone cameras circulate without context, has motivated the development of a visual vocabulary to comprehend and understand the function of these images even when torn away from the larger narrative they were a part of.”[138] This visual vocabulary, in turn, might then be considered an alternative mode of circulating, understanding or making meaning from such images. Pereira and Harcha add that through the “peer-to-peer exchanges of archives” this seemingly lost content “[comes] back as poor images, perhaps losing their original ‘quality,’ but they gain circulation in new circuits of exchange and exhibition, reaching very new and many time unexpected publics.”[139] Through the use of appropriated and cut-and-paste aesthetics in works such as *Testament* and *Now he’s out in public*, Bookchin not only mirrors and materializes through her films (and installations) the remix culture of the internet today, but also memorializes a particular moment in social media (as well as Western) history in doing so. Through her intentional use of marginalized voices, often in the form of low-resolution footage that has been neglected from the algorithmically determined feeds, Bookchin therefore creates in her works like *Testament* and *Now he’s out in public* a kind of alternative archive – one that operates counter to traditional modes of memory preservation, or machine-generated web archives, and acknowledges privileges of visibility, and the vulnerability of online subjectivity.

[138] Zerené Harcha and Cardoso Pereira, “Revolutions of Resolution”, 322.
[139] Ibid., 323.

CONCLUSION

As I finish writing this thesis, I am compelled to reflect on the last year and a half of this research. Throughout this process, the topics I have discussed have further developed, especially in the areas of digital citizenship and algorithmic awareness. When I began writing, I knew I had wanted to explore the ways in which these concepts are affecting broader discourse, and therefore how one comes to understand and remember collective histories as they are developed and are contained online. Bookchin's work has resonated with me for the way it demonstrates these ideas; for how it represents moments of collective digital histories through such an evocative method while also offering much insight into how internet users engage with each other today, and possibly for the future. In 1964, Marshall McLuhan proclaimed that the medium is indeed the message: this is to say that "the personal and social consequences of any medium—that is, of any extension of ourselves—result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology."[140] He also reminded us of the possibility for artists to be considered, in some cases, as prophetic actors where "they [pick] up the message of cultural and technological challenge decades before its transforming impact occurs," therefore being integral to how one comes to understand the past, present and future through new technologies.[141] We can especially understand how these works by Bookchin, some of which are about ten years old as I write this, have gained new and important relevance today. The argument for this phenomenon as it relates to digital culture and contemporary art was explored in art historian Claire Bishop's "Digital Divide: Contemporary Art and New Media," an influential essay published in *Artforum* in 2012. Bishop outlines the history of new media art theory and its themes of appropriation, of engaging with archival practices, and aggregation, calling attention to the question of why mainstream contemporary art and the institutions that present it were so reluctant to acknowledge the affective conditions of the digital revolution as a *theme* of the work itself.[142] However, since that time, as exhibitions such as *Art Post Internet* curated by Robin Peckham and Karen Archey in 2014 at the Ullens Centre for Contemporary Art in Beijing, aimed to highlight how new art movements and languages were emerging as a result

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[140] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, 1964, Reprint (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997), 1.
[141] Ibid., 13.
[142] Claire Bishop, "Digital Divide: Contemporary Art and New Media," *Artforum*, September 2012, 436.

of the conscious understanding of how the internet has affected art making, and consequentially, everyday life.[143]

More recently, major institutions, especially in the United States, have offered allegedly comprehensive surveys of the impact of internet culture on visual art. Such retrospectives include the 2018 group exhibition *Art in the Age of the Internet, 1989 to Today* at The Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston, as well as Rhizome's *The Art Happens Here: Net Art's Archival Poetics* from early 2019. In the case of the ICA Boston's exhibition, it had featured sixty artists working across a variety of mediums, and was considered to be the first major thematic group exhibition in the United States to examine the radical impact of the internet on visual art.[144] Rhizome's exhibition followed soon after, although it had been in development since the launch of their research initiative and online exhibition *Net Art Anthology*, which has been a major archival effort to trace the history of, and define a possible canon for, net art.[145] Its related exhibition, *The Art Happens Here*, featured a selection of sixteen works reflecting this archive and the history of artworks that circulate on and respond to the internet.[146] This collective movement and its history is still fragmented in itself, and only just gaining main-stream momentum within institutions and the broader art historical record. Although not included in these block-buster retrospectives, I want to situate Bookchin's work together with these artists', as I believe her work exemplifies and critiques most comprehensively the wide range of conditions brought about through the contemporary digital moment.

Alongside this rise in institutional recognition for contemporary art of this nature, the urgency for better web archiving practices, in regard to how artists adopt archival practices in their work, how institutions can best preserve internet-borne artworks, and how archivists can navigate the endless streams of documents on the web, has been set in motion over the past

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[143] Although this exhibition was specific to one group of artists and is additionally among many exhibitions now that have paid attention to these shifts, it was nonetheless a ground-breaking show and critically important art historically. Karen Archey and Robin Peckham, eds., "Essay," in *Art Post-Internet* (Beijing, China: Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, 2014), 8–9.
[144] "ICA Opens First Major U.S. Exhibition to Examine the Impact of the Internet on Visual Art | Icaboston.Org," Icaboston.org, 2018, https://www.icaboston.org/articles/ica-opens-first-major-us-exhibition-examine-impact-internet-visual-art.
[145] Here it is worth reiterating the difference between net.art and artwork created about the internet. Net.art is a term to describe a specific group of artists primarily concerned with internet as a medium and is specifically related to a generation of artists working in the mid-90s, however, the movement continues today. Gronlund, *Contemporary Art and Digital Culture*, 104. "The Art Happens Here: Net Art's Archival Poetics," Newmuseum.org, 2019, https://www.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/view/the-art-happens-here-net-art-s-archival-poetics.
[146] Ibid.

couple years. Significant effort has been made at the institutional level and spearheaded by such events as The *National Forum on Ethics and Archiving the Web*, organized by Rhizome and hosted by the New Museum in the spring of 2018.[147] This conference brought together activists, librarians, journalists, artists, scholars, developers and designers to discuss the pressing need for dialogue about the ethical risks and opportunities that web-based archives present to both those documenting and those documented. This was hosted by Rhizome not only in keeping with the significant role it has played in presenting the history of contemporary art engaged with digital technologies and the internet, but also due to the part it has had in developing new archival tools such as their Webrecorder.io software.[148] The ethical concerns that are raised through works documenting real people (like those depicted in *Testament* and *Now he's out in public*) are an important part of projects such as these.[149] Additionally, the ethical risks of these works as they exist as archival artworks that circulate online as well as in galleries or museums remains a compelling question to be explored. Therefore, it is important to ask: what responsibilities does an artist then assume through the handling and reinterpretation of publicly available found materials?

I believe that Bookchin addresses such ethical concerns in the way she presents the testimony of a young woman who is interviewed in her film *Long Story Short* (2016) (fig. 25).[150] In the film, a young mother is asked what her interests are, and she responds "I love to read, I love knowledge, I love computers, and I like being a mom […]." She continues to elaborate by stating "I like Facebook, it takes me out of my situation because you can be anyone you want to be on a computer – not that I want to be somebody different." Most interestingly, however, she continues: "I like reality shows – but reality shows [are] reality. Not like it's really reality,

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[147] This event was also a collaboration with the University of California at Riverside Library (UCR), the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities (MITH), and the Documenting the Now project (DocNow). "National Forum on Ethics and Archiving the Web | March 22-24 2018," Rhizome.org, 2018, https://eaw.rhizome.org/.

[148] Webrecorder.io is both a tool and a platform developed by Rhizome with a focus on 'dynamic web content'. Unlike earlier digital preservation, Webrecorder" focuses on all that dynamic content" like that of "individualized social media feeds" in order to create interactive recordings of any website a user chooses to record. "Webrecorder," Webrecorder, 2019, https://webrecorder.io/_faq.

[149] Such questions have been raised by audience members during recordings of Bookchin's artist's talks, while I was also asked about ethical issues when presenting this research to my colleagues.

[150] In this film, Bookchin builds an alternative archive in a different way, while still addressing the politics of visibility and memory. Here, the artist had interviewed one hundred people at homeless shelters and other resource agencies in northern and southern California between 2012 and 2013. In the case of *Long Story Short*, Bookchin filmed people herself instead of sourcing footage from online platforms. "Long Story Short," Longstory.us, 2016, https://longstory.us/#press-kit.

because it's edited, but what's happening is live, [it's like] in a book, you can create your own ending, […] your own beginning, even though it's someone else's story that they're telling – and I like that."[151] Through such statements, the viewer is reminded of the optimism and empowerment technology can have in terms of portraying the self. Through the re-appropriation of these systems, and by bringing to light otherwise forgotten voices and faces, Bookchin's work is a valuable contribution to this on-going discussion.

[151] Melinda Emilien is quoted from her interview in Natalie Bookchin's film *Long Story Short* (2016). *Portraits of America: Two Films by Natalie Bookchin*, directed by Natalie Bookchin (Brooklyn, NY: Icarus Films, 2016), DVD.

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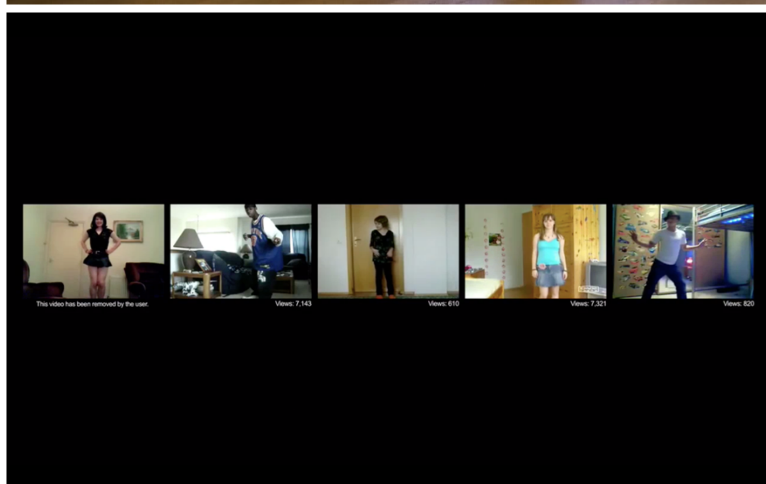
FIGURES



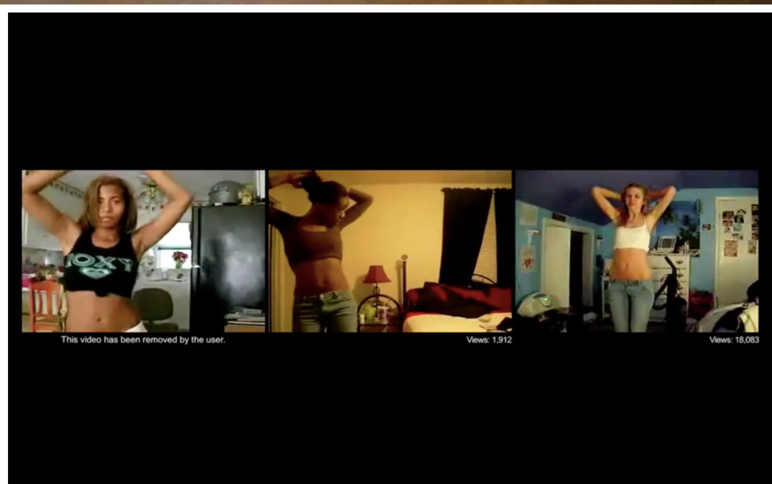


Figure 1 — Natalie Bookchin, *Mass Ornament* (2009). Single-channel video installation surround sound. *When We Share More Than Ever*, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg (June 19 to September 20, 2015). Image source: Natalie Bookchin. Accessed on March 1, 2019. https://bookchin.net/projects/mass-ornament/.

Figure 2 & 3 — Natalie Bookchin, *Mass Ornament* (2009). Exhibition documentation. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. Accessed March 1, 2019. https://vimeo.com/5403546.

Figure 4 — Natalie Bookchin, *Laid Off* from the series *Testament* (2009/2017). Exhibition documentation. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. Accessed March 1, 2019. https://vimeo.com/237790993.

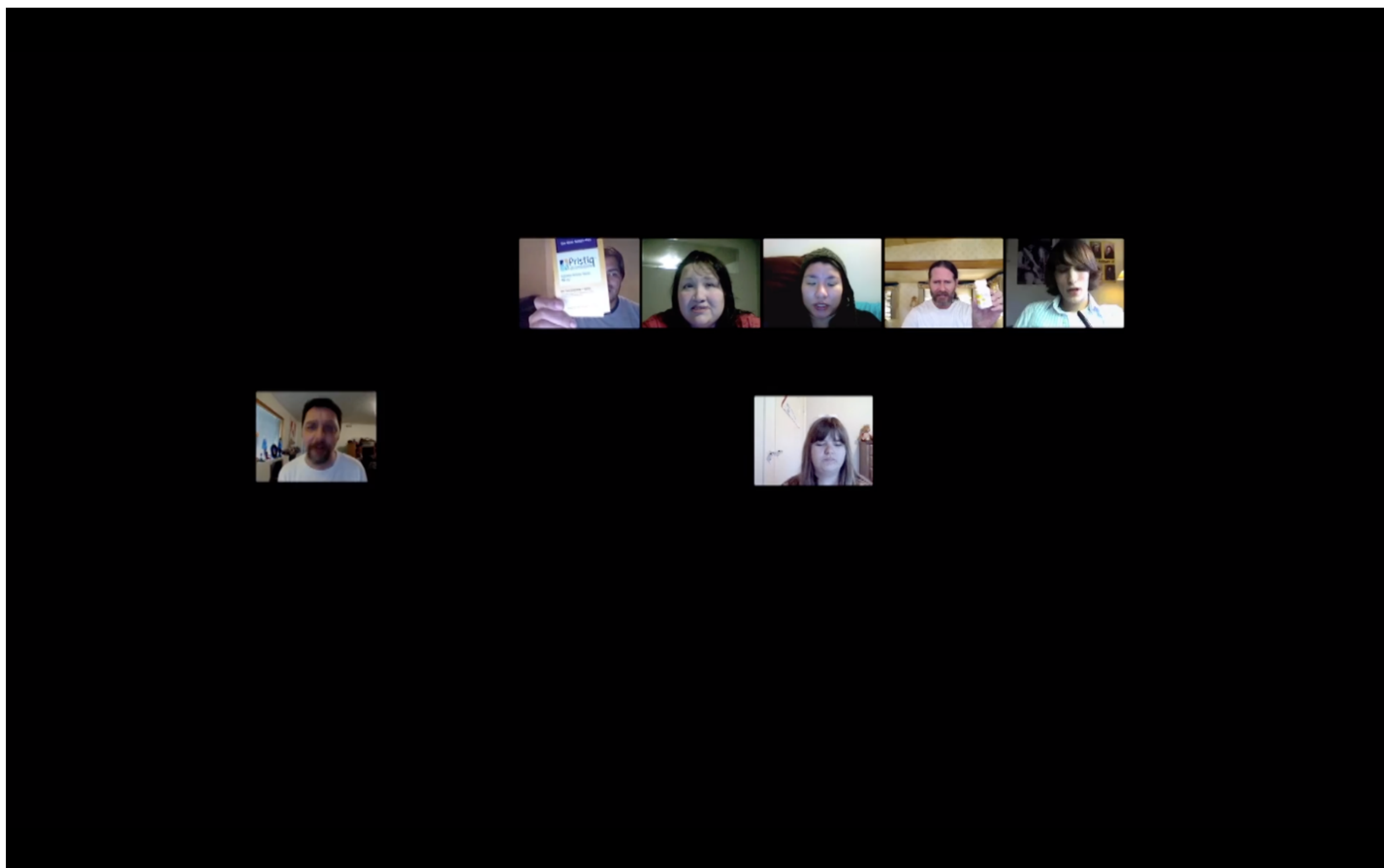


Figure 5 — Natalie Bookchin, *My Meds* from the series *Testament* (2009/2017). Exhibition documentation. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. Accessed March 1, 2019. https://vimeo.com/237790993.

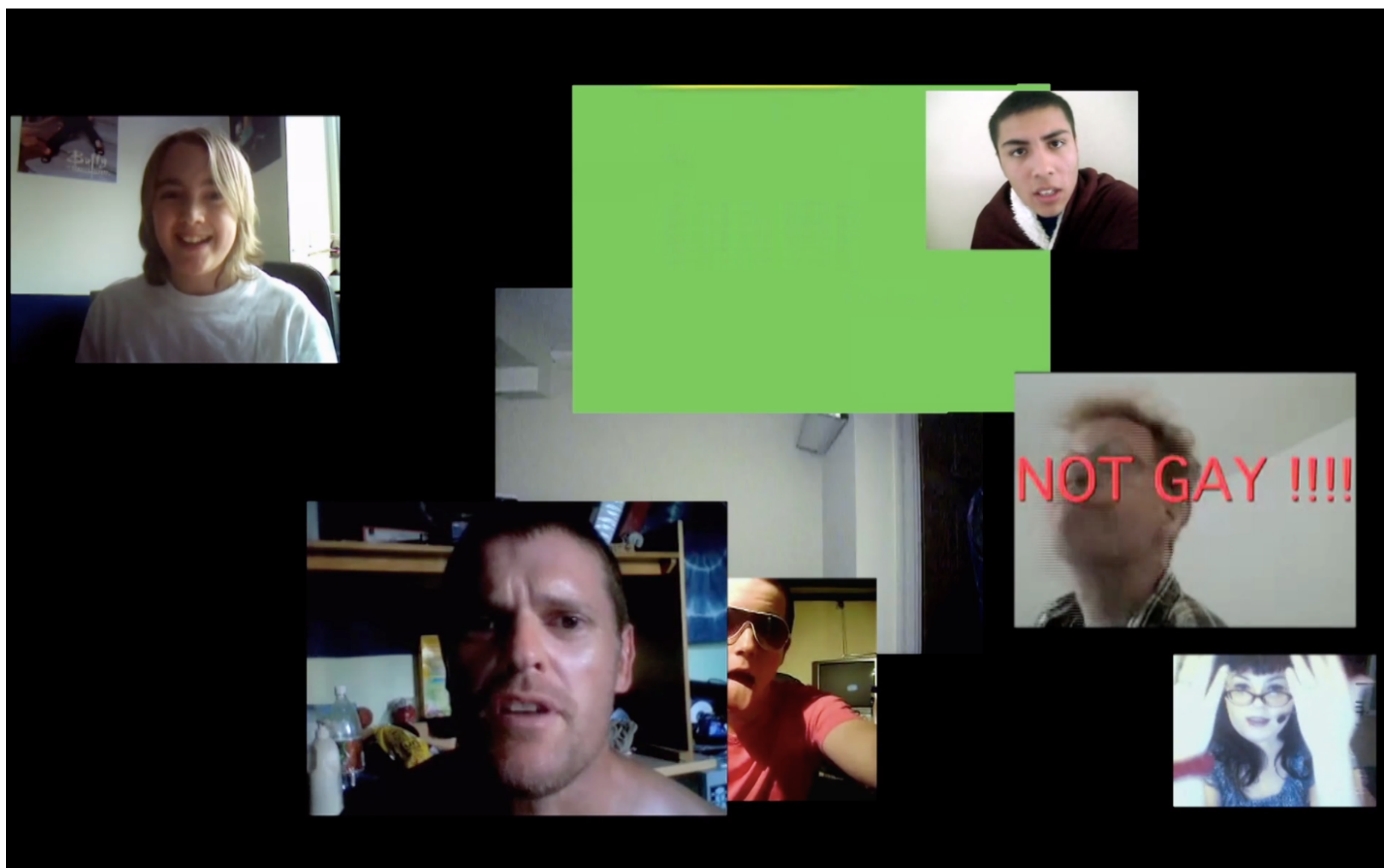


Figure 6 — Natalie Bookchin, *I am Not* from the series *Testament* (2009/2017). Exhibition documentation. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. Accessed March 1, 2019. https://vimeo.com/237790993.

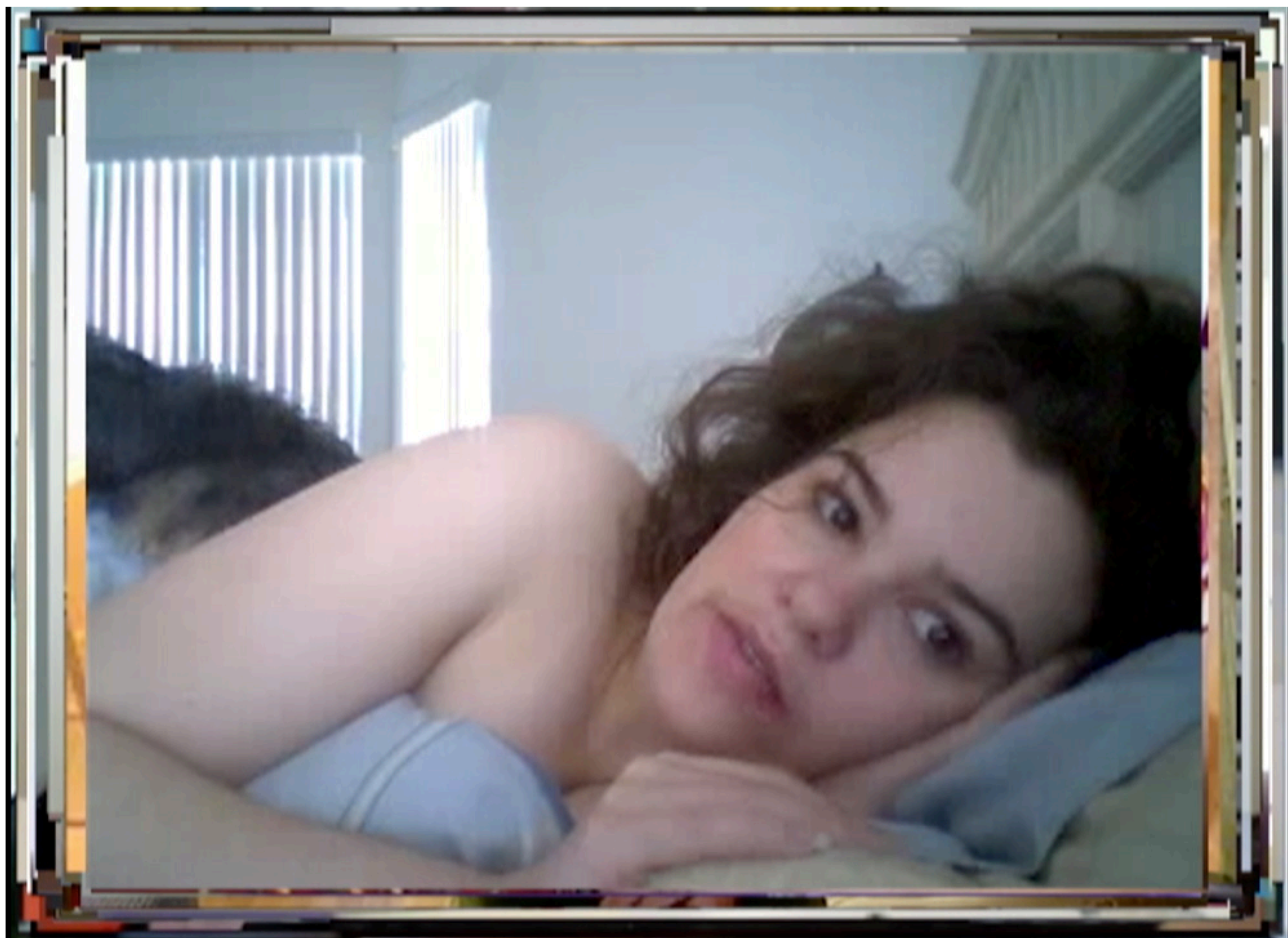


Figure 7 — Natalie Bookchin, *Count* from the series *Testament* (2009/2017). Exhibition documentation. Video still from the exhibition *Portraits of the Multitude: Natalie Bookchin*, curated by Montse Romaní, La Virreina Centre de la Imatge, Barcelona, Spain (March 3 to May 27, 2018). Image source: Natalie Bookchin, *Portraits of the Multitude*. Barcelona: [La Virreina] Centre de la Imatge. 2018. Exhibition catalogue. Accessed April 10, 2019. http://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/lavirreina/en/exhibitions/portraits-multitude/231.

Figure 8 — Natalie Bookchin, *Now he's out in public and everyone can see* (2012). 18-channel video installation (16 min loop). *Portraits of the Multitude: Natalie Bookchin*, curated by Montse Romaní, La Virreina Centre de la Imatge, Barcelona, Spain (March 3 to May 27, 2018). Image source: La Virreina Centre de la Imatge. Accessed April 10, 2019. http://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/lavirreina/en/exhibitions/portraits-multitude/231#none.

Figure 9 — Natalie Bookchin, *Now he's out in public and everyone can see* (2017). Film, 24 minutes. Image source: Natalie Bookchin. Screenshot. Accessed March 1, 2019. https://vimeo.com/193426576.

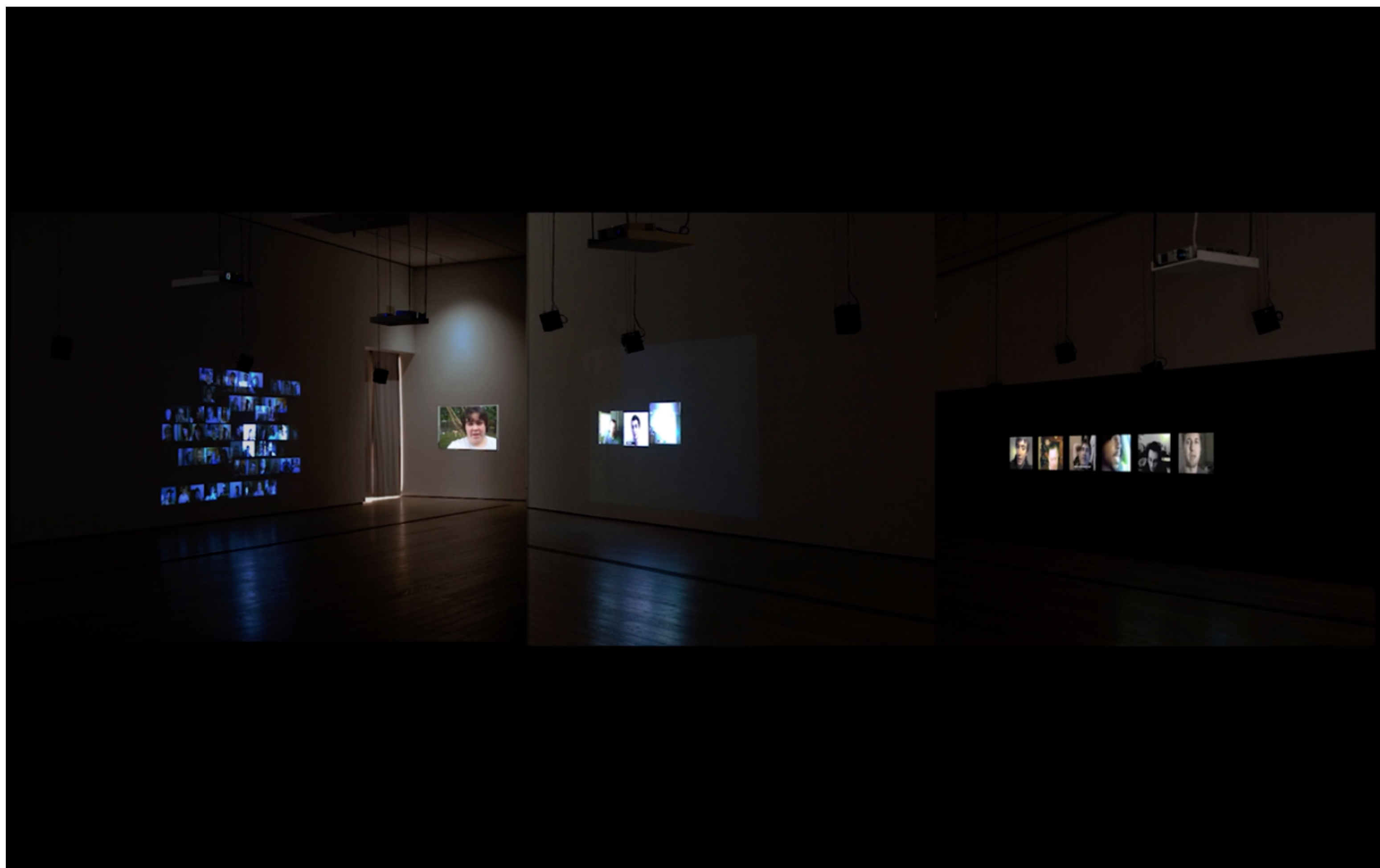
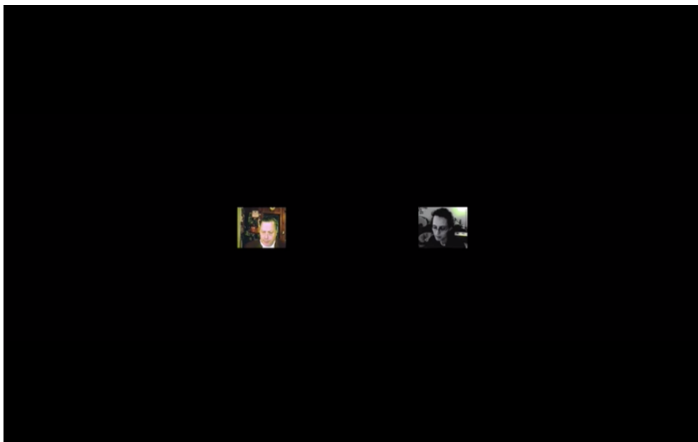


Figure 10 — Natalie Bookchin, *Testament* (2009/2017). Multi-channel video installation. Exhibition documentation. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. Accessed March 1, 2019. https://vimeo.com/237790993.

Figure 11 — Six vloggers displayed alongside each other. Natalie Bookchin, *Laid Off* from the series *Testament* (2009/2017). Exhibition documentation. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. Accessed March 1, 2019. https://vimeo.com/237790993.



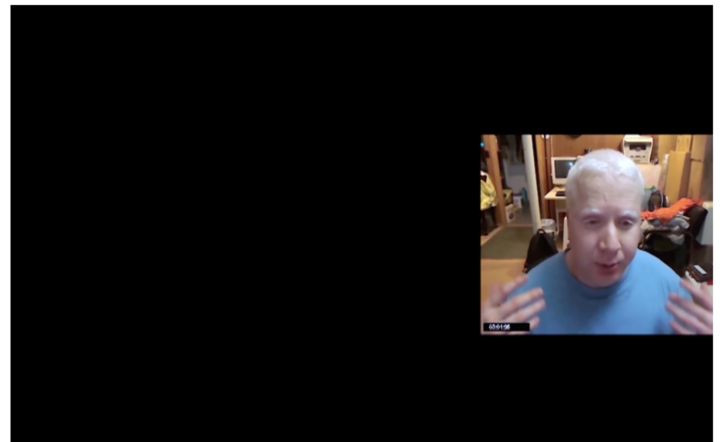
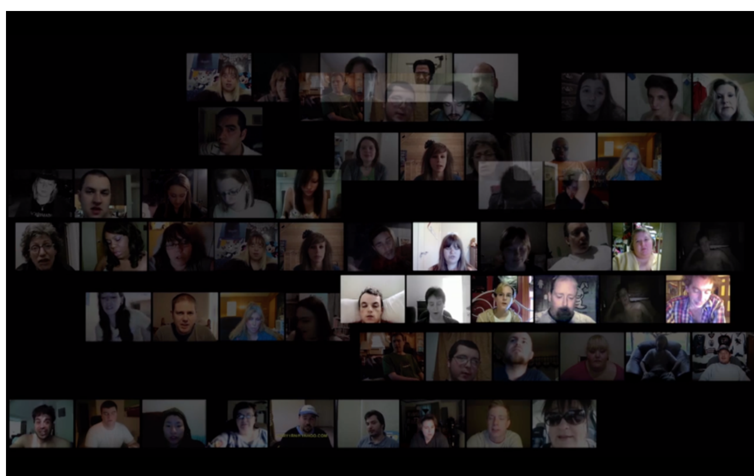


Figure 12 — Two vloggers juxtaposed alongside each other. Natalie Bookchin, *Laid Off* from the series *Testament* (2009/2017). Exhibition documentation. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. Accessed March 1, 2019. https://vimeo.com/237790993.

Figure 13 — A vlogger expressing his optimism for the future. Natalie Bookchin, *Laid Off* from the series *Testament* (2009/2017). Exhibition documentation. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. Accessed March 1, 2019. https://vimeo.com/237790993.

Figure 14 — A single vlogger is depicted at the beginning of this chapter. Natalie Bookchin, *My Meds* from the series *Testament* (2009/2017). Exhibition documentation. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. Accessed March 1, 2019. https://vimeo.com/237790993.



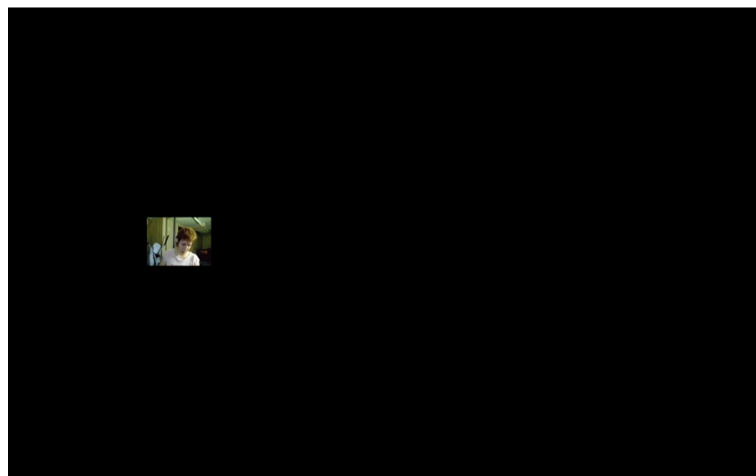


Figure 15 —Accumulating rows of vloggers. Natalie Bookchin, *My Meds* from the series *Testament* (2009/2017). Exhibition documentation. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. Accessed March 1, 2019. https://vimeo.com/237790993.

Figure 16 — A woman cries while explaining that she is switching medications. Natalie Bookchin, *My Meds* from the series *Testament* (2009/2017). Exhibition documentation. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. Accessed March 1, 2019. https://vimeo.com/237790993.

Figure 17 — A man in front of a microphone addresses the camera. Natalie Bookchin, *Now he's out in public and everyone can see* (2017). Film, 24 minutes. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. *Portraits of America: Two Films by Natalie Bookchin*, directed by Natalie Bookchin (Brooklyn, NY: Icarus Films, 2016), DVD.

Figure 18 — Windows/frames are organized in a composition that resembles open file windows on a computer desktop. Natalie Bookchin, *Now he's out in public and everyone can see* (2017). Film, 24 minutes. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. *Portraits of America: Two Films by Natalie Bookchin*, directed by Natalie Bookchin (Brooklyn, NY: Icarus Films, 2016), DVD.

Figure 19 & 20 — Amateur news graphics. Natalie Bookchin, *Now he's out in public and everyone can see* (2017). Film, 24 minutes. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. *Portraits of America: Two Films by Natalie Bookchin*, directed by Natalie Bookchin (Brooklyn, NY: Icarus Films, 2016), DVD.

Figure 21 — American flag backdrops are common throughout the vloggers depicted in this film. Natalie Bookchin, *Now he's out in public and everyone can see* (2017). Film, 24 minutes. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. *Portraits of America: Two Films by Natalie Bookchin*, directed by Natalie Bookchin (Brooklyn, NY: Icarus Films, 2016), DVD.

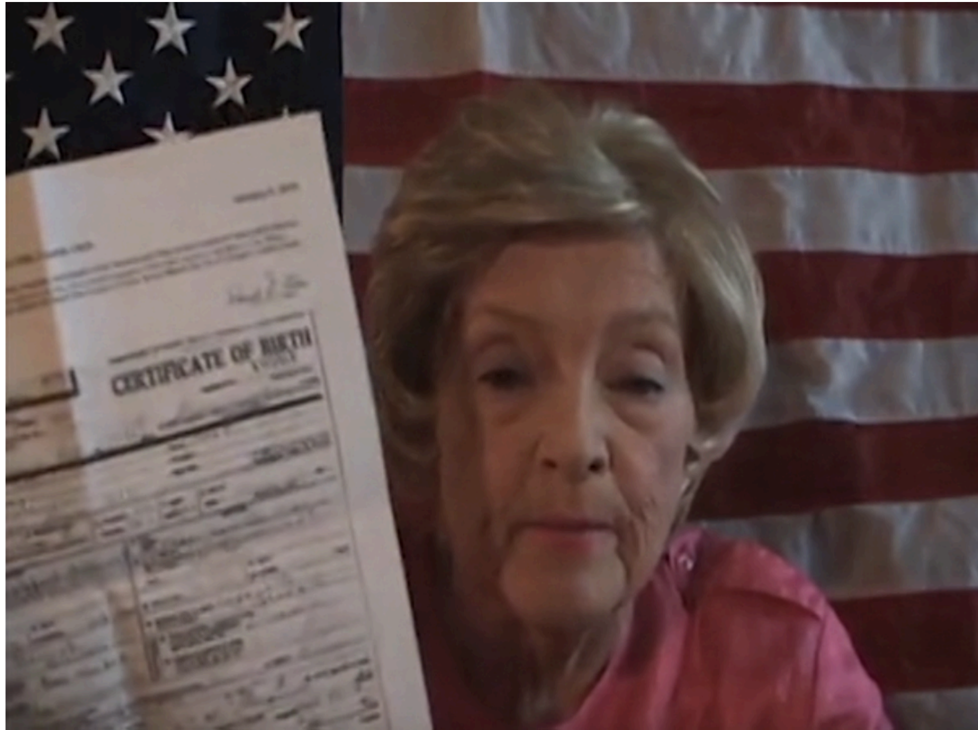


Figure 22 — A woman holds up her birth certificate as proof of her American citizenship. Natalie Bookchin, *Now he's out in public and everyone can see* (2017). Film, 24 minutes. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. *Portraits of America: Two Films by Natalie Bookchin*, directed by Natalie Bookchin (Brooklyn, NY: Icarus Films, 2016), DVD.

Figure 23 — A man looks up at his camera while asking, "who's going to kill the black man." Natalie Bookchin, *Now he's out in public and everyone can see* (2017). Film, 24 minutes. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. *Portraits of America: Two Films by Natalie Bookchin*, directed by Natalie Bookchin (Brooklyn, NY: Icarus Films, 2016), DVD.

Figure 24 — A man wearing a Texas flag addresses the camera. Natalie Bookchin, *Now he's out in public and everyone can see* (2017). Film, 24 minutes. Image source: Natalie Bookchin. Screenshot. Accessed March 1, 2019. https://vimeo.com/193426576.

Figure 25 — A young woman (Melinda Emilien) talks about her interests. Natalie Bookchin, *Long Story Short* (2016). Film, 45 minutes. Image source: Natalie Bookchin; Screenshot. *Portraits of America: Two Films by Natalie Bookchin*, directed by Natalie Bookchin (Brooklyn, NY: Icarus Films, 2016), DVD.