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Collaborative Aesthetics and the Politics of Trans-Subjectivity

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Comparative Literature

by

April Louise Durham

August 2013

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. James S. Tobias, Co-Chairperson  
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Dr. Sabine Doran  
Dr. Jeffrey Sacks

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The Dissertation of April Louise Durham is approved:

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION  
Collaborative Aesthetics and the Politics of Trans-Subjectivity

by

April Louise Durham

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Comparative Literature  
University of California, Riverside, August 2013  
Dr. Marguerite Waller, Co-Chairperson, Dr. James S. Tobias, Co-Chairperson

This dissertation explores how creative collaborative practice transforms subjectivity, before it is leveraged as an industrial resource. Raising key questions about the nature of collaborative practice itself, I discuss in detail the histories and processes of select collaborative groups in order to unfold an idea of intensity among participants that exceeds the boundaries of each artist without eradicating individuality. I argue that from the commingled exchange occurring in a material and discursive mash-up called “the mangle,” emergent onto-epistemologies arise that disrupt static physical and identity formations. From this disruption, the ways in which language or sense-making functions are transformed and begin to include alternative ways of knowing that occur in bafflement, the inability to comprehend, and dysfunction. I work rigorously to transform the chaotic status of these negative terms into something that can be understood as lively, creative, and transformative in their own right and not merely opposites of order, understanding, clarity, and sanity. Overall, the project is highly trans-disciplinary in that I analyze art works and art practices, films, musical performances, composition techniques, and my own long-term creative collaborative work with a group called Multipoint. Further, in a very focused effort to transgress disciplinary boundaries, I place Material Feminism and post-Marxist theory alongside the philosophical works of Deleuze, Wittgenstein, Agamben, and Derrida. Divided into five chapters, the project

addresses different aspects of intricate sharing and mangled time. The preface and the first chapter introduce the concept of trans-subjectivity and outline a chaotic, intense description of collaborative practice as I conceive it for this project, tracing a myopic history from the 1950s to the present to consider various forms of collaboration and their effects. The second chapter imagines networked, complex bodies in the video works of Natalie Bookchin and in installation art generally. The third considers the way language becomes complicated and remade through forms of virtuosity and incomprehensibility, while the fourth develops a theory of a-productivity involving lingering in conditions of highly queered time. The last chapter reads Giorgio Agamben's "whatever being" through Derrida's concept of impossible hospitality to envision the potentials for emergent forms of community.



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## **Preface: Collaboration, Time, and Becoming Trans-Subjective**

*Hypertext, Alephs, Queer Clock Ticks*

As a visual artist, creative writer, and scholar, my practice is deeply concerned with challenging the boundaries ascribed to disciplines or genres, remixing personal and cultural identities, and exploring the potentials for using language to form unexpected structures of meaning. Seeking to understand more elaborately who gets to speak and how they go about it, I look to foreground expression that comes from the places that even alterity studies marginalize, to make room for voices often unrecognized as articulate or viable sources of knowledge, and especially to emphasize unlimited states of “trans-.” The space and time of this is “queer,” to borrow Judith Halberstam’s term for discussion of activities deemed non-normative or marginalized.<sup>1</sup> Here the queerness continually complicates itself. As Halberstam has pointed out, queer can never really “arrive” as it would then cease to be queer; so the time and space evoked here are vastly complicated, neither oppositional nor stable, always shifting and requiring constant attention if they are to be apprehended at all, and playing with the margins, the details, the detritus, the center, the meta, and the influential.

States of always-emergent “trans-” occur actively in multi-actor, site-contingent, creative collaborative practice, where attention is paid to methods, processes, and positions. Even when collaboration is not entirely intentional or “successful” in terms of reaching pre-determined goals, I find there are forceful dynamics that render individual positions intensely porous and open to transformation. Before it becomes an industrial commodity and beyond its simple, pedestrian definition as a way to leverage shared

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<sup>1</sup> Halberstam states that “queer uses of time and space develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction” (2005 1). While I am drawing on Halberstam’s exhaustive study of queerness, from monsters to drag kings, I am interested to emphasize “queer” space for a playful clash of normally oppositional positions where “normal” and “marginal” are continually redefined and not limited to sexuality or gender.

competencies, the intensity of group work offers a complex relational ensemble of movements in time with great impact upon the potential for posing ongoing questions about aesthetic living and care of the self.

Really I am describing a vast network, where we can glimpse all space and all time as present at once. Jorge Luis Borges' "Aleph" offers an interesting figuration from which to imagine the bizarre space and the peculiar time in which conversations among ghosts, artists, madwomen, schools, animals, clairvoyants, and time are mapped. Fearing betrayal by a madman and seemingly mad himself, the fictional Borges says of his encounter with the material Aleph:

I closed my eyes; opened them. Then I saw the Aleph. ... In that single gigantic instant I saw millions of delightful and atrocious acts; none astonished me more than the fact that all of them together occupied the same point, without superposition and without transparency. What my eyes saw was simultaneous: what I shall transcribe is successive, because language is successive. Nevertheless, I shall cull something of it all (149-150).

The Aleph is both a semantic cipher and a physical thing. It is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, symbolic of beginnings and potentials; as well, in Borges' application, it is eternal time and endless space in one tiny point under a table in the cellar, visible only when lying uncomfortably at the bottom of the stairs in utter darkness.

The paradoxical situation of the encounter with and the ensuing description of the Aleph, where everything is available but only partially and incompletely accessible in terms of language, *is* the actual situation of the trans-subjective. I will describe and define this term in more detail shortly, but I will just say now that trans-subjectivity emerges in the complex ephemerality of relational dynamics. One effect of intense encounters within groups and at the same time an affect, the force of which draws participants together beyond and beside individual intentions and desire, trans-subjectivity is ambiguously

creative and evocative. Throughout this text I will develop a picture of the creative forces generating the affect of trans-subjectivity itself and the situations in which the effects of trans-subjectivity can be observed.

Like the fictional Borges in the story and the authorial Borges of history, I wonder “... how, then, to transmit to others the infinite Aleph, which my fearful mind scarcely encompasses?” (149). Despite the seeming impossibility of the task, I am compelled to defy simple logic and follow the successive structure of language in a way that circles back on its own linearity, that confounds its own rationality. I must evoke the very structures and systems, effects and sensations that are being analyzed. In examining trans-subjectivity through a study of collaborative practices and a consideration of texts and projects that are sometimes intentionally collaborative and sometimes unintentionally so, I will unfold the significance of group work when it is understood beyond the valorization of capital, beside the politicization of collectivity, and through the potentials of networked cognition and sociability.

If the successive structure of language limits the potentials for describing the infinity of the Aleph and the strange complexity of trans-subjectivity, the structure of the hypertext has the potential to make both navigable and sensible in a strange and emergent way. With its “blocks of text...and the electronic links that join them” (Landow 3), the hypertext is a system of “non-sequential writing—text that branches and allows choices to the reader” (Nelson 2), and as such it allows and fosters a nomadic movement which is neither that of an arrow nor that of a cycle (circle). The nomadic movement of the hypertext continually complicates itself. It neither avoids the linear nor eschews the erratic and non-sensible. It allows for constant ebb and flow between what commonly makes sense, what is usable and productive, and what defies efficacy in terms of the normal use of this word. It encourages labyrinthine exploration that includes dead-ends, failure, and wildly unpredictable successes.

Much of our daily interaction with hypertexts on the Internet involve the pedestrian organization of linked web pages in an obvious “tree” (See Figure x.1) that mimics a linear paper catalog with a cover, main categories, and subdivisions of wares offered for purchase. The hypertext nevertheless retains, as media theorist George Landow continues to assert in ongoing

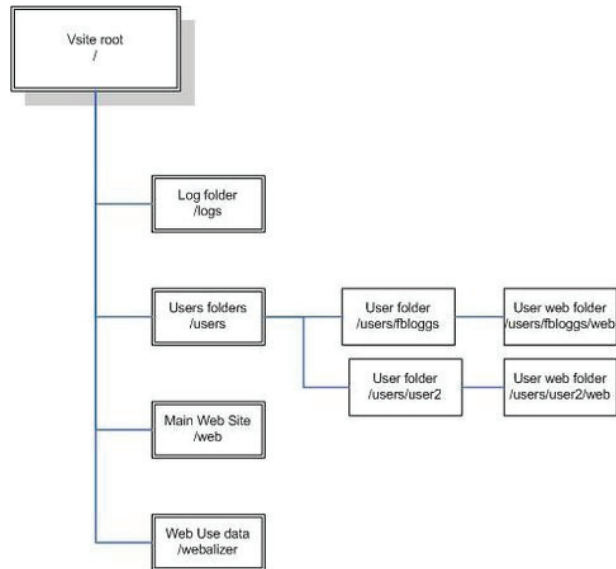


Figure x.1. Website file structure system tree

versions of his *Hypertext* series, its potential for making the complexities of time and space legible in a way that at once engages and escapes the linear narrative.

Many artists and poets have worked with the material specificities of the algorithmic hypertext to produce complex linked narratives exploring bureaucracy, daily life, geographies, and histories as intricate, non-linear layers. In Bruno Latour’s *Paris Invisible City* or Julie Mehretu and entroy8zuper’s *Twin Cities are East African Cities*, the multiple charting, narrating, picturing, and recording of movements around a city or a neighborhood aesthetically reflect on the desires of those depicted, the contingencies innate to the act of viewing or clicking, and the histories of spaces that are often invisible to the tourist, the ethnographer, or even the poet. Complicating the navigation of site-specific narrative beyond the “tree” structure, these projects engage the potentials of on-line hypertext to make the layered, simultaneous intricacies of life visible and audible.

In terms of style, I think and articulate more readily in a hypertext structure than I do in a traditional scholarly form that involves outlines and sequential progressions from one supporting idea and its example to the next. While of course the latter kind of rigorous structuring and legibility are necessary to build and support a convincing

argument, the complex, paradoxical, and ambiguous movements of trans-subjectivity require a treatment that exceeds linearity and common forms of logic. On many levels this project is a living hypertext with nodes in the academic institution and nodes in my largely collaborative art practice: some follow the *page-par-page* format of a book-format text, some are site-specific performances that enfold theoretical discourse, visual narrative, creative writing, and stylized physical enactment,<sup>2</sup> and yet others are expressly configured as web-based, linked narrative projects.<sup>3</sup> Even though this document follows a standard chapter arrangement, the ideas interact across one another more than build upon one another progressively. I have thought this project in a hypertext style where trans-subjectivity and creative collaboration function as a hub, and where various critical approaches to these topics function as “avenues,” extending from and leading back to the hub (Figure x.2 on page xxxii).

Guiding the navigation of the text is the ambiguous relation between the creative, affective force generated in intense group work and the resulting effects of commingled subjectivities, embodiments, and expressions experienced in the processes of collaboration, in the projects generated by this type of creative practice, and in fictional or composed accounts (like films and musical performances). While the potential impact of collaboration is not limited to these categories, in this project, with my experience in Multipoint as a guiding thread, I will consider five problems of trans-subjectivity and the specific histories informing them: these include the methods of collaboration and how

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<sup>2</sup> In 2012, I performed a work called “Hypermateral Encounters: On Language, Uncertainty, and Community,” at the media festival at *[dis]junctions*, the English Department graduate student conference at UC Riverside in Spring 2012. Conceived as an exegesis of the intersection between my creative and scholarly projects, rendered as a site-specific performance, the piece included a stage set with costumes and a Powerpoint “film” timed to coincide with my reading of a text. The piece can be found online in a slightly different form at [www.cyberurchin.com](http://www.cyberurchin.com) or as a printed article in Appendix A.

<sup>3</sup> Please see the following websites for examples of these projects:

<http://www.smallwonderfound.org/cb-trauma-map/trauma-mainpg.html>

<http://www.smallwonderfound.org/wonders/pages/index.html>

<http://www.smallwonderfound.org/chameleon-map/index-chameleon.html>

they define the nature of participation and exchange; the types of bodies that become possible in the trans-subjective where networked connections are not mere abstractions but bear upon the way bodies are re-configured in material trans-corporeality; the way that language reorganizes itself structurally and in terms of sense-making and systems of communicability; the potentials for playing with the determinacy and voraciousness of capitalism through making room for and tending to moments of “a-productive” loitering; and the potentials for community conceived in the violence of chaotic disruption and the conditions of continual unevenness and imbalance. Throughout the entire work, I will theorize an intricate notion of the nomadic, following Rosi Braidotti and Édouard Glissant following Deleuze and Guattari. Without stopping at the limits of the itinerant or the displaced, the cloned or the simply dispersed, the nomad here will straddle the worlds of the rooted and the peripatetic, failing to totalize yet continuing to infringe on borders among nations, identity positions, and potentials for being.

To unfold the dynamics between linked non-linear articulation and linear, progressive forms of argument, in this text, involves a movement between the detached voice of the critic and the intimate voice of the personal narrator. While this method is not unheard of in the history of scholarship,<sup>4</sup> especially in feminist scholarship, my impulse here is to integrate the analytic and the expressive voices in a pulsing, nomadic travel that reflects the movement in time where trans-subjectivity emerges and produces its consequences. With the mangled hypertext as a model, my methodology for exploring the theories of collaboration and trans-subjectivity in this project are layered, linked, and various: poetic language facilitates the complex movements of time important to the overall understanding of the project; first person accounts render lived experience part of the theoretical exposition and at the same time evoke vulnerability as a paradoxically

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4 E.g., *Writing Machines* by Katherine Hayles, *Avatar Bodies* by Ann Weinstone, and *Maternal Thinking* by Sara Ruddick.



weak force with incredible potency. A wide range of interdisciplinary approaches and objects collide in these pages, from visual art and performance, cinema, and music to political activism, Material Feminism, and post-humanism. Art history, labor theory, and cinema studies cooperate fluidly to allow a multi-disciplinary practice and to reveal hypertextual conditions of “trans-.”

This may sound like a bit of an undisciplined mess, but thinking my method in terms of a hypertext dynamic that evades progressive models justifies the specificities of its mangled condition. Landow makes a comparison between hypertextuality and intertextuality where, as we well know, intertextual references in a given text make implicit links to cultural references involved in but properly existing outside that text. He uses James Joyce’s *Ulysses* as an example where the text itself clearly refers to the *Odyssey* of ancient Greece in its narrative structure but also to “the advertisements and articles in the women’s magazines that suffuse and inform [the character] Gerty’s thoughts, facts about contemporary Dublin and the Catholic Church, and material that relates to other passages within the novel” (35). The hypertext, for Landow, extends the potentials of this kind of intertextual reference by, at the same time, allowing for continued “reading in terms of author and tradition” and emphasizing the moves away from “the evolutionary model of literary history [toward]... a structural or synchronic model of literature as a sign system.” In this project as well, scholarly discussion and analysis collide with poetic and personal narratives such that interruptive styles force idioms and genres, territories and stakes to commingle, even awkwardly. Landow finds, and I agree, that eliminating one tradition in favor of another more “progressive” one is radical in a very pedestrian and uninteresting way, but complicating systems of referencing, indexing, and narrative construction are part of the “mangle of practice” that informs the materiality of a multiply engaged hypertext and of this text as well.

The “mangle” is a key descriptive word for the methodologies, processes, and resulting effects that I theorize relative to subjectivity and collaboration. I draw this term from science sociologist Andrew Pickering’s analysis of scientific practice as a messy, interrelated performance. I will discuss Pickering in more detail later when I describe Karen Barad’s theory of “intra-activity;” but here I want to emphasize the metaphorical and practical power of the mangle. The mix of writing styles I mention above exercise an effort at being clear without privileging assumptions about clarity or normative rationality. In this way logic and sense making become complicated in that they always seek to slip aside from containment, but they include a chaotic jumble of aggressive, timely, impositional, elegant moves. In the mangle and in this work, poetics and theoretics combine such that the writing pulses similar to the way time moves in the works being analyzed. They nurture a logics of chaos *not* directly opposed to civilization or order. Instead, the mangle’s chaotic logics actively and forcefully participate in conversation from which they have been banned fairly consistently, at least since Descartes. But these messy, maimed, vulnerable logics must be accepted on their own strange and unlikely, disruptive terms.

I am not speaking here of a punk approach to order, or of the valorization of mayhem; rather, I propose a very careful, cautious, and tender anticipation of disruption as its own dynamic. If disruption is not only that which destroys or opposes the stable and orderly, it can be thought as having a vitality, an ontology, an agential capacity and therefore, an ethics, of its own. With philosopher Mark Westmoreland, I ask, “in accordance with the Derridean question, ‘Is not hospitality an interruption of the self?’” (1). In the play of the trans-subjective gaps and near misses become apparent in in the light of Derrida’s proposal for impossible hospitality and in material constructions of the “self” that occur in ongoing activities that are shared with others (including humans, machines, animals, and institutions). If in a relationship beginning with the phrase “Come

in,” it is possible to become “both host and guest,” and to assume all the complications that this situation engenders, then complicating the self, as host and guest at once, an emergent giver and receiver of gifts in one gesture, hints at the messiness of the mangle.

The mangle is a violent metaphor, evocative of cars wrapped around trees, bodies maimed by bombs, uncomfortable teeth, and really messy relationships. When I found this word, first in an anthology of materialist feminism and then in Pickering’s 1995 book, *The Mangle of Practice*, I envisioned something like a tumbleweed, a big ball of branches from many kinds of plants, some with thorns, some with leaves, some short, some winsome, some heavy. Included would be limbs from animals and humans, wires from corporate networks, imaginary and real maps of places known and desired. I saw collaboration this way, in a similar image, as a tangled up, roundish, partly living, partly ossified bundle that grows and breaks and changes as it moves. Then the editors at *Forum Journal*, Lizzie Stewart and Laura Chapot, mentioned that, in the UK, a mangle is a “device for drying clothes” (Stewart). In fact it is an old-fashioned, rather diabolical looking apparatus that consists of rollers and an impressive iron framework to tighten the pressure between the rollers. A handle then assists in passing clothing through the rolling apparatus to press water out of cloth after it is washed. The result is completely flat fabric, unidentifiable as a dress or trousers or a shirt.

Obviously this is a dangerous, if simple, bit of technology with which to interact: “mangle” can describe the machine itself and what it will do to hapless body parts if they are submitted to its pressure. Combined with the blowing, random movement of the ball of weeds, the two descriptions together correspond to the violence that the process of the mangle of creative group practice. Collaboration, in its most radical forms, cannot merely assume an amiable social structure in which artists or composers, programmers or wiki contributors participate in egalitarian cooperation. Neither can it only indicate the product of state or institutionally mandated work habits. In fact it results from the

collisions, entanglements, and awkward embraces of unlikely partnerships. These can be forged through choice or as a matter of necessity; a project may start from a utopian impulse but quickly becomes extremely complicated as soon as actual actors, human, machine, animal, and institutional, become engaged. Collaboration is in fact itself a violent process, involving ongoing change and horrifying collisions. Like the function of the laundry mangle, the compression of practices and identities, bodies and histories certainly risks collapsing distinctions; it potentially damages functional elements beyond salvage, but it also transforms cloth from a sodden and unwieldy mess to a crisp unit, which can be hung on a line to finish drying before being submitted to the hot cast iron. If each component becomes, even temporarily, entangled with the others and blows free in a desert wind then, I propose outcomes that are at once possible to anticipate and completely unpredictable.

*Time as Collaborator: Queer Clocks Acting*

Conceiving collaboration as a mangle, both the compressing type and the tangled, bramble weed type, allows for extending the tasks of the laundress and the activities of windblown desert flora to the constitution of subjectivities in a complex apprehension of time. As the collaborative effects of networked sociability make the strangeness of network time more and more apparent, we must adjust our naturalized conception of clock time to one that is multiple, paradoxical, and complex. As she conceives a stateless community of individuals living cooperatively in a hostile natural environment Ursula Le Guin, in *The Dispossessed* (1974), proposes that change is inevitable and that “true voyage is return” (84). I will discuss this novel in more detail in chapter five. At this point, though I want to consider the way that, in the novel, time is both about a movement in difference and a circling back to starting places, which of course have changed themselves since the voyager departed.

Le Guin's protagonist, Shevek, is a physicist who develops a "General Temporal Theory," that unifies the concept of time moving in an arrow, but never being able to attain a given point as any trajectory is infinitely divisible,<sup>5</sup> and a concept of time that pulses and vibrates in many directions at once, like a collection of thick rubber bands stretching and relaxing at different rates. Shevek dreams as he works out this problem that "time turn[s] back upon itself, a river flowing upward to the spring. He held the contemporaneity of two moments in his left and right hands; as he moved them apart he smiled to see the moments separate like dividing soap bubbles" (113). Ephemeral and yet material enough to hold in the hands, time is paradoxical, comprehensible mainly in dream time, and delightful.

Popular interpretations connect Le Guin's concept of General Temporal Theory in the book to String Theory in quantum physics, a concept that posits many more than the four dimensions we normally perceive. As String Theory was still developing when Le Guin was writing this book, I would contend that her time theory has more to do with Henri Bergson's understanding of time as an elastic movement that ebbs and flows in a complex, multi-dimensional movement between past and future that are always already present. As Bergson's theory of time is legible in the difficult concepts of String Theory, it is perhaps irrelevant where Le Guin found her inspiration, but I would like to elaborate on Bergson's theory of duration here as it relates to later discussions of time arising in my analysis.

Developing a concept of human agency as immanent, Bergson detaches the actualities of time from those of space in order to conceive time as multiple and heterogeneous. If time is non-spatial, it cannot be made up of elements external to one another, as are things in space; rather, "it is of the very essence of duration and motion,

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<sup>5</sup> Obviously this draws from Zeno's arrow paradox which declares forward motion is an illusion (Huggett np)

as they appear to our consciousness, to be something that is unceasingly being done” (Bergson 1950 119). As duration and motion constitute the multiplicity of conscious states and the active, imaginative process of perception, time can be conceived as many, separate, simultaneous objects belonging to individual minds, spread out in historical time and in space. Thus Bergson proposes “duration” as a way to detach time from the false homogeneity with spatiality and conceive it again as “states” of interpenetrating dynamic consciousness. No two successive moments are the same in duration because it is the product of the continuous heterogeneous movement of the multiple consciousnesses, collecting incomplete images, constructing various realities, and creating and archiving memories. Made up of the “immediate data of consciousness,” the subtitle to Bergson’s 1910 treatise *Time and Free Will*, duration makes evident “two kinds of multiplicity: that of material objects to which the conception of number is immediately applicable; and the multiplicity of states of consciousness” (1950 87). Multiple states of consciousness include the innate ability to perceive, even if not to articulate, past, present, and future as layered simultaneity and not as linear progressions. They evade the containment and concurrence that would allow each or any to negate or cancel any other.

As an example of multipart, experiential time Bergson offers a clock chiming in his neighborhood as he writes. He doesn’t notice the clock has been chiming until four strokes in, and after he has questioned himself carefully “on what has just taken place, . . . I perceive that the first four sounds had struck my ear and even affected my consciousness, but . . . instead of being set side by side, [they] had melted into one another in such a way as to give the whole a peculiar quality, to make a kind of musical phrase out of it” (1950 127). This musical phrase did not add up precisely to the consecutive chimes of the clock but combined what Bergson perceived through his imagination of the past chimes added to those he was currently experiencing. Memory and actuality combine in an elasticized

relation to construct an experience that is “duration.” It remains in flux and in this way is a-historical even as it marks continuous points in which events occur.

Pointing to a passage where Bergson claims that “the past coexists with its own present,” Gilles Deleuze says of this relationship among the varieties of time that “pure present and pure past, pure perception and pure recollection as such, pure matter and pure memory...have only differences of expansion (*détente*) and contraction and thus discover an ontological unity” (1991 74).<sup>6</sup> The movement Deleuze describes makes possible a “new monism” that is not the homogeneity of the previous conception of space and time as a unity, but where “present infinitely contracts our past...[performing] the operation of contracting trillions of vibrations onto a receptive surface.” The monistic is at once vast Spinozan “substance” as a general kind of “is-ness,” and the jumbled heterogeneous singularity in the multiplicity of the mangle. This paradox, irreducible and impossible to categorize generally, is generative again of further creative affects with a force that bears upon ongoing relational effects, paradoxically operating in a constant, open process. Elastic passages of phenomenological memory, the expansion of a quality of experience realized as “nothing other than contracted quantity,” time emerging from physical sensation, all render the opposition of homogeneity and heterogeneity null as this tension of expansion and contraction shows time as passing “from one to the other in a continuous movement.”

In *Translating Time* (2009), cinema studies scholar Bliss Cua Lim makes the case that despite its apparent standardization in the industrial production of cinema, time can be construed as something more complex than the “cinematographic apparatus” in film reflecting a global system which is “... predominantly narrative, industrialized, and media-convergent, a social institution circulating among diverse publics” (44).

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<sup>6</sup> *détente* has various potential translations from French to English that include relaxation, trigger, and spring. Each of these relates to the style of movement and resulting affects occurring in the systolic/diastolic movement characterizing time of this order.

Rather than accept and critique the standardization of time in film, Lim uses instances of “immiscible times in cinema” (34) to critique the accepted temporal logics of cinema generally and specifically those attributed to nationalist cinema studies, because she claims that “a linear national present is precisely what splinters when *aswang* and ghosts return.” History cannot maintain its linear construction in the face of the uncontainable temporalities of the were-dogs and specters, despite its cinematic affiliation with this or that nation state.

Media scholar James Tobias takes this discussion of temporality and cinema a step further in his book on “hieroglyphic time.” Demonstrating the compounding of time through various cinematic and visual art instances of “musicality,” Tobias theorizes time as complex in terms of gesture, moving image, and synchronized relationship. Images, structures, styles, and idioms in films, musicals, and art works become “ciphers of hieroglyphic time” where specific instances of variously assembled technologies, media apparatuses, and historical material contexts operate as “... something more like queer clocks: devices that diagram, express, and interpret unfamiliar temporal relations” (2). The encryption of time in the material components of a film, for example, at once conceals and makes visible/audible stylized, synchronized, non-normative timekeeping devices, “queer clocks,” that trace and construct idioms of historicity generally and embodied affective labor specifically. For example, Tobias cites Hans Eisler’s musical scores for 1940s documentaries, which provide “sound effects and commentary apart from each film’s authoritative voice-over” (113). The scores develop, through their relation to the time of the moving images, another hieroglyphic time that renders musicality, as an additional order of idiomatic rhythm, an agency capable of building meaning beside and with the visual elements.

Significantly, the layering of idioms, through the affective rhythm of sound collaborating with images, and building a “time-become-hieroglyphic” reveals that



“temporalizing media devices *may* have no more value than as devices...for registering, storing, [and] exhibiting...the passage of historical or lived contemporary time ... [but their operation may also] mean that queer clocks are so powerful as to *determine entirely* their receivers’ capacity to know and to move in time” (2 emphasis added). Queer clocks, marking time through ongoing, creative doubling of rhythms, become active collaborators in the rendering of, and ethical reactions to, time itself.

Arguing for a complex relationship between temporal technologies and artworks, Tobias offers “musicality” as a condition that emerges between the instrumentality of time-based media for marking time and its capacity for registering memory. Affect as an agential capacity of media function as a queer clock, generates potential with and through those experiencing the affect, who are also producers of temporal expression, in a rhythmic interchange that doubles the function of keeping time and the ways in which memory is repeatedly rendered. Time doubles but so does the response to it: affective labor becomes something beyond a mere industrial resource as it acts in excess of instrumentality; memory becomes something beyond the notation of a point in linear time where an event occurred, or a note appeared, shifting as well into the construction of capacities to generate further affect and to respond to resulting effects. Cinematic and musical “clocks,” which can be read as purely instrumental on one level, also act with a material agency that determines their reception and the way in which the viewer/listener proceeds to perceive and act within time afterwards. Time does not merely exist, passive and ubiquitous, in some homogenous relation to space, or as a cipher marked by a clock, calendar, or historical codex. It takes on, as *musicality*, an agential capacity wherein the materiality of time and that of the receiver/perceiver *collaborate* in the construction of new iterations of time itself as rhythm and as physical gesture.

This requires yet another “queering” of bodies, beyond the mere disruption of gender categories or species interaction. That is to say, time and perceiver, clocks and

people, are dancing, swaying, spinning, travelers in the elastic movement of musicality. They co-constitute each others' construction and reception, including the audible, visible, rhythmic material style that becomes apparent as separate and shared embodiment in any form. In this way, musicality far exceeds any pedestrian definition of "knowledge of music" and becomes an active sensitivity for de-ciphering the elastic contraction and expansion of time in media objects, art works, and collaborative groups. The ensemble encountering this type of queered clock and outrageously participatory memory generates further networks in which different ensembles arise. The mobility of ebbing and flowing groups in various stable and volatile networks, is a kind of nomadism that exceeds the mere proliferation of the rhizome, although it starts there. It also complicates the multi-national cycles of the itinerant traveler, although it also understands the necessity of crossing borders and eroding boundaries. I will say more about this kind of nomadic movement in queered time as we go along, in an effort to revisit Rosi Braidotti's notion of the "Nomadic Subject," and by extension Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizome and line of flight, especially as they bear upon the practice of creative collaboration I am unfolding here.

Collaboration is a practice that, when engaged in what Deleuze calls "intensity" or a situation where difference engages dynamic processes that drive becoming in terms of relation, takes place within the workings of queer clocks marking and producing complex orders of and relations of time. With this in mind, collaboration is not merely a situation of sociality or of political solidarity. Neither is it simply a kind of relinquishment of individuality understood as that which inheres in the individual. Rather, it implicates affective forces, velocities and masses acting upon one another, and embodied actors like humans, machines, animals, and institutions. Histories, language, labor and expression are all caught up in the "mangled" participation of collaboration, which at this point is a multi-layered ebbing and flowing condition and not merely a political or social choice.

The examples that follow in each chapter will expand on the queer time described above at length in terms of embodiment, labor, language, and community, but briefly, group work that matters relative to potentials for building inclusive and flexible communities and redefining labor that exceed the demands of capitalism, occurs in deeply layered arrangements of time that include the expanding bubble and the north-running river of Shivek's dream, the diagrams of "complex relations between [the contemporary] moment and the larger historical period" (4) that Tobias cites, and the rubbery referentiality that occurs in on-line social networks where an original post from years ago can be given new vitality when viewers find and comment on it "now." Networks and ensembles, teams and webs of relation are alternately situations of choice, organized around particular interests or tasks, and slipping, poetic, nomadic movements among streams of force that are barely perceptible, if at all. Beyond the masterful control of human agency, these movements recognize lines of flight and lines of stasis, webs of relation and webs of individuation, situations of compression and conditions of brambled entwinement essential to actualizing group work or collaboration in a way that sustains its radical ability to open up and transform closed systems of production.

*Chaos and Numbers, Group Logics*

Memory is an important component to this strange and elastic time. In Bergson's formulation, memory consists of the traces, the intuited images, of multiple vibrations of all possible forms of matter. The images move, "crossing over ... enormous periods of the internal history of things, [recalled as] quasi-instantaneous views" (1988 208). Recall and communication of the multiplicity is practically impossible, because it exceeds the containment of conceptualization and articulation. For Bergson, clarity is something for which we can only wish but which is practically impossible to obtain. Categories that fix events, classifications, identities, and bodies are always slipping, and if we are

not to run screaming from the darkness of mayhem, we have to understand these things through the complex structure of multiple, resilient orders of complex temporality which make multiple orders of logic possible. These are the conditions in which chaos becomes something lively and generative. The stability that is part of chaos becomes legible as we pass from the unified to the messy “in one continuous [non-linear] movement” (Deleuze 1990 74), and where the mangle is reasonable but always on its own terms, that is beyond the strictures and limitations of classification or standardization. In order to contend with the inevitable gaps and disorder that even standardization produces or succumbs to, willingness must be nurtured to forego ordering principles that seem logical in favor of those where habits are continually made open to the risk of chaotic movement. Care for the self requires recognition of and openness to contingency in all its possible, labyrinthine, dark or airy manifestations. Chaos must have its co-constituting, embodied moment(s).

To allow chaos a moment, in which singularity and sharing, giving and receiving, knowing and bafflement play as paradox requiring no reconciliation means navigating relationships, working situations, embodiment, and the violence of transformation as movements of uncontained networks that exceed the descriptions of “rhizome,” “distributed computing,” “interactivity,” and “connectivity.” Landow states “...within a hypertext environment all writing becomes collaborative writing, doubly so” (1997 104). He literally indicates the play between author/ programmer and reader/user, but he also nods toward to a strange form of repetition as we must wonder how something can be doubly collaborative; how exactly do we take account of doubled sharing? This perhaps returns us to the situation of being both host and guest, as in Landow’s statement, there is also an acknowledgment of the way in which linked, intra-active productivity, emerging across the relationships between writers and readers, constructors and viewers, speakers and listeners, rhythm and perception, becomes further complicated in the intricate and

problematic paradigm of cooperative, site-contingent, creative practice, and emerges as trans-subjectivity.

For more than ten years, I have worked with a self-directed artists' working group called Multipoint that arose from the transformation of an international post-diplôme residency in Nantes, France in 2001. It has continued in the US from 2003 to the present, changing membership from project to project, and moving physical sites to correspond with the members' geographic situations. Involving a variety of creative forms, which include installations, books, online magazines, video films, and performances, all of the projects involved site-specific, finite but long-term, intense engagements among two or more people, over multiple geographies, and with shared leadership responsibilities. This group is an actual manifestation of the mangle with which I have direct experience and will provide an ongoing point of comparison and reference in discussions of collaboration throughout.

The process of shared creative labor I have experienced is very complex, and the analysis provided here explores its methods and effects through focusing on the manifold networked processes that constitute intense exchange with real bearing upon forms of community and labor, and on the nurturing of individual identity and flexible or commingled embodiment. Even though interpersonal or relational exchanges are key to the production of work in collaborative groups, they are an aspect of collaboration that tends not to be foregrounded in art historical or other critical discussions of collaborative work. If we are to engage collaboration as the radical site it has the potential to be, there is a need to explore the nature of the intricate, difficult aspects of this practice in all of its grotesque and beautiful detail. The mangle organizes the un-organizable with the logics of chaos. Methods for caring for the self involve the mad, irreverent logics interesting to Foucault when he theorized subjectivities that were constantly emerging.

Trans-subjectivity sets the very notion of love, desire, and care into a delightful kind of nonsensical orbit around multiple bodies, existing simultaneously in multiple spaces.

*Love in the Time of Chaos: The Emergence of Trans-Subjectivity*

At its core, this project is concerned with the complex ways subjectivity is formed, disrupted, and trans-formed in multi-actor, site-contingent creative collaborative practice. There is a we and an I that shift in a strange, out of sync, yet cooperative movement, an awkward rhythm, where forces beyond the control of an individual or even a collective whole act upon and beside familiar social dynamics, personal identities, and power structures. This strange and awkward movement is trans-subjectivity and it acts in and through individual subjectivity without replacing it. The movement I describe here, the one that effects and engenders moments of trans-subjectivity, happens despite our acknowledgement of it. It appears in fleeting situations where the boundaries of what we know, what we feel, what we consider to be true about ourselves become quite porous and begin to move, flow, travel, migrate among others such that determinate first or second person pronouns [sets of I, You, We] cease adequately to describe what emerges. While a group may have goals that progress from inception to completion, beginning to end, trans-subjective movement and time occur in a rubbery interchange, like a spring, or an elastic and therefore, productivity as such becomes complicated in terms of material definition.

Certainly, this movement of mangled and unintentional or quasi-intentional or deliberate sharing, cooperating in and with this really queered time, carry profound but subtle violences: it appears as powerful enactments upon bodies and their literal, corporeal constitution; intense challenges to social roles and the identities that come with assuming a profession, belonging to a tribe, subscribing to sets of beliefs; and disturbing access to what appears irrational, nonsensical, and chaotic. Still, however frightening

all of this is, the transformation that occurs in the movement of trans-subjectivity has a wonderful potential that evades the pressures of normalization, remedy, and resolution important to other considerations of violence, trauma, and insanity. Ultimately trans-subjective flows are intricately involved in collaborative practice.

A kind of collaboration craze has been building for decades, especially with the increasing significance of networked culture for daily life: it appears in mission statements, department directives, exhibitions, and election campaigns. The expressed need, or even demand, for pooling our resources, sharing our competencies, and working together is ubiquitous and not always welcome by the participants. We imagine collaboration as a salve for the wounds of ongoing alienation. We smile slightly and sit up eagerly as we speak of its potential, an excited glitter chafing the underside of our eyelids as we picture a scenario where we play, think, work, make, eat, love, etc., in community. We believe with almost religious fervor that if we can just “work together” at something besides buying the world a Coke, we will figure out the problems of capitalist sorcery, the psychic life of power, or the eight technologies of otherness.

As might be clear, I am describing my own eager and perhaps kooky impulse toward collaboration which, despite over ten years working in many fraught creative collectives and the melancholy they can evoke, remains a situation I actively seek, and one which organizes my own chaotic experience of the conditions of contemporary life. I know that the intensive commingling that occurs in what physicist and feminist theorist Karen Barad calls “intra-acting”<sup>7</sup> is powerful and chaotic among participants, fruitful and messy, life altering and intensely stressful. Indeed to engage in collaborative practice of the sort I describe here is actually to invoke a condition of vulnerability, and demands of participants a very different consciousness than that required when working

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<sup>7</sup> I will discuss this term in great detail in Chapter 1, but briefly it comes from Barad’s work on performative accounts of “material-discursive” knowledge production practices in science discussed in *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007).

alone in one's room. Even when joining competencies on a job, where those skills remain as separate expressive components (e.g., programming and graphics or sculpture and text) throughout the project, characterizing much of what is dubbed "collaboration" today, what is most interesting, most radical, and most creative about these projects is the slippage among competencies and the way an individual is remade or complicated by becoming permeable to the Other, in the immediate, material ensemble and in the ongoing production of the networks of operation and cooperation.

Because this analysis involves a foregrounding of the systolic/diastolic movement of trans-subjectivity, I begin by unfolding the specifics of a type of "relational poetics" between the "ensemble" and "the network" found in creative collaboration. Described by Édouard Glissant as a situation "in which each and every identity is extended through relationship with the Other" (11), the "Poetics of Relation" provides a way to conceive of mobile, "nomadic" interactions without predatory or totalizing drives. Nevertheless, networks need nodes that have identifiable addresses and at least moments of stasis; ensembles require bodies, time, and timing to cooperatively develop an archive of their labor, the gift of their art. The active diagram produced in this document will generate alternative kinds of histories and potential models for forging paths that are not merely either together or separate, neither cooperative nor self-sufficient. Nomadic movements that are rhizomatic, poetic relations will fly and stay put, at the same time. Time will tick on and move back on itself, expand, contract, and shoot out. The goal of this study, then, is to explore the ways in which the combination of analysis and poetry, the ensemble of histories and documents, archives and objects, the network of subjectivities, desires, and relationships can make trans-subjectivity, its affects and effects, apparent and meaningful as a political, aesthetic, and theoretical condition.



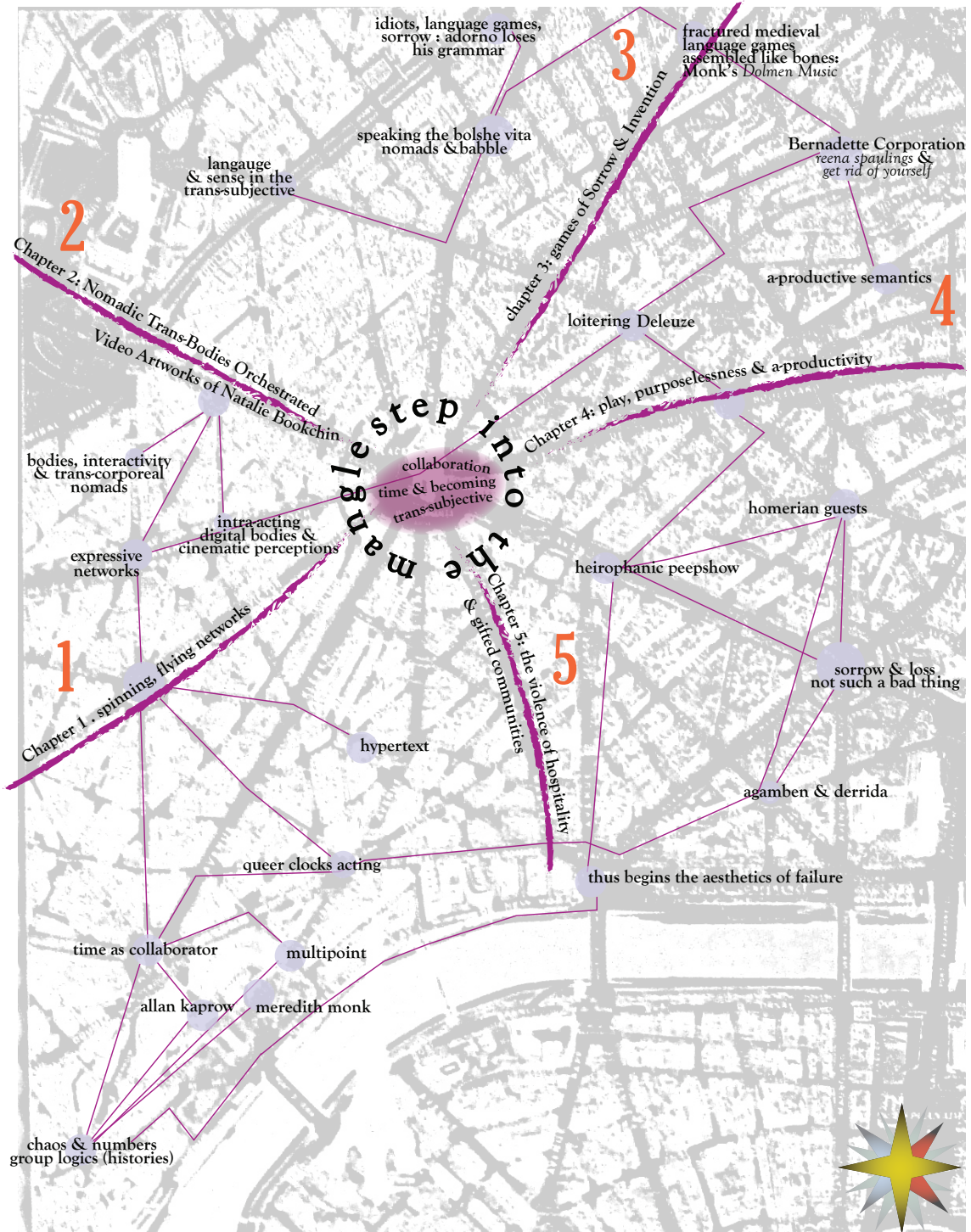


Figure x.2. Mangled hypertext structure

## *Chapter 1: Spinning, Flying Networks*

### **Trans-Subjectivity and Collaborative Ensembles**

“Ensemble: the conceit or delight in togetherness in an increasingly anomic, fragmented world. Playing or working together to create finished or unfinished works. Chamber musicians, criminals, code-hackers and documentarists form ensembles. Artists try to.”

-- from *Raqs Media Collective* “A Concise Lexicon of/for the Digital Commons”

We and I: shifting from one to the other as if movement and time were out of sync but attempting together to forge an uncertain and awkward new rhythm. A cooperation of forces, beyond and beside known social dynamics, personal identities, and power structures, collaborative commingling materializes as a slow dissolve through madness and order. Collaboration, a horrible word, overused and sometimes connoting “traitorous cooperation with an occupying enemy,” (Etymology) is yet a format for making and doing that continues to appear as if its potential were not on trial, holding its promise for transformation of personal and public, private and political. While perhaps generally always a mode of working for human beings attempting to accomplish a goal beyond the strength of an individual contributor, collaboration has gained footing, increased in popular recognition over the last fifty years, in every sector of society from the arts to business, physics to psychology, activism to product placement and content development.

With the rise, and maybe we could say dominance, of the digital, everything can be or already is collaborative. In 1997, French media scholar Pierre Lévy coined the phrase “collective intelligence” as a way to describe the potential the internet offers for democratizing information. He draws loosely, and I find inaccurately, on Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of the rhizome, re-purposing it to leverage the potentials he imagines for shared, distributed knowledge production. Ultimately, it is clear that this can only result in a utopian enabling of global capitalism, but he carries on with his research at his Collective Intelligence Lab at the University of Ottawa. His theories do not work

out in the broadly liberating ways he imagines, if we notice even the unreliability of the information on a user-generated resource like Wikipedia, where expert knowledge can be disallowed in favor common knowledge.<sup>1</sup> They rather become quite neatly applicable to the ubiquitous productivity of affective labor<sup>2</sup> and thus, even with their much-lauded potential for leveraging collective intelligence, on-line communal efforts are at the very least difficult, at the worst beastly and exclusive in their inclusivity.

Lévy's thesis hinges on a playful sharing of competencies among amateurs and experts in ongoing, largely uncompensated, and unvetted "productive" circumstances. Demanding play in service to capital, however, exhausts people. Drained of creativity, collaboration appears useless at best, oppressive and terrifying at worst. A number of books and articles have recently been published which reproach the way collaboration is deployed as a forced methodology for "creative" thinking in the workplace. In her *New York Times* article, a précis of her book *Quiet* (2012), Susan Cain spells out how "Groupthink," a clear Orwellian reference, is in fact oppressing creative introverts who are "not joiners by nature" (Cain *Times* np). She further asserts that the forced play corporations impose upon their workers in the name of creative progress is ineffective and alienating. In an article in *The New Yorker* from January 2012, Jonah Lehrer addresses the topic from a similar point of view. He argues that group brainstorming practices are ineffective in fostering innovation, despite the research from the 1940s that made them popular. He cites evidence, from research and anecdote, that a formulaic

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1 See for example the NPR story from October 3, 2012 about the 1886 Chicago Haymarket bombing, where the posting of a professor, reflecting his singular access to primary source archival materials about the event, was repeatedly removed because his corrections did not reflect "accepted truth." Notably the professor who had published scholarly articles on the event based on the trial transcripts and who would be considered an expert on the topic in any academic setting, received the equivalent of an online "scolding" from Wikipedia editors for not adhering to what "reliable published media," or other secondary sources had said about the topic. See [www.npr.org/2012/20/03/162206092/wikipedia-politicizes-landmark-historical-event](http://www.npr.org/2012/20/03/162206092/wikipedia-politicizes-landmark-historical-event) for the full NPR story.

2 See Jenkins *Convergence Culture* (2006) for an elaboration on the way collective intelligence makes for an engaged consumer. Jenkins celebrates this type of productivity in this text with little criticism for the instrumentalizing effects.

approach to collaborative creativity as a resource to be mined by constant engagement with co-workers forces avoidance behavior, dishonesty, and ultimately a lack of creativity.

If ever there were a perfect platform for collaboration one might argue, it would be the Internet. It facilitates long-distance communication and file exchange, easily and for free. It is available to a lot of people, via libraries, internet cafés, and even pirate or piggybacked access. Indeed there are wonderful examples of political web sites that use cross-posting of articles with similar sites to expand their potential for generating content. Truth-out.org, for example, will feature an op-ed piece from one of its own contributors on the home page and provide a list in a sidebar of links to related headlines on other, similarly left-leaning news blogs. This is a functional kind of sharing that expands AP-type subscription services through cooperative sharing. It registers as helpful, inclusive, and community building, but in terms of collaboration, its capacity to engage intensity with interactive viewers is relatively limited.

Blogs, social sites, photo or video sharing sites are certainly under utilized in terms of their collaboration potential. In fact there are already vast claims that collaboration on networked social media is fomenting revolution and ousting governments. I absolutely agree that the potential is there. But it remains entirely untapped as fixed subject positions, the cult of the celebrity, and a society of surveillance are what dominate rather than free and open exchange of ideas and information. If it were really free and open there would be more escape from the instrumentalizing power of global capital. Further, the freedom, the openness, and the collaborative practice would recognize and understand more clearly that the mobile phone is only one node on the network and that there are also actual, life threatening interventions by on-site protesters, for example, that feature in any coups, ousters, shifts, changes, or mobilizations.

On one hand they provide access to countless networks intersecting in unbelievably complex ways. Facebook, for example, connects a user to acquaintances from childhood, relatives in other lands like Afghanistan or Texas, and political, business, or other concerns that can be of interest. Aside from the diabolical data collection the corporation of Facebook itself performs on their subscribers, which is too large a topic to receive justice in this short discussion, it potentially offers connection among users that would never be possible in face-to-face interaction. Nevertheless, there are countless ways Facebook and comparable social networking sites foster alienation and oppression over collaboration and intense sharing of the type that concerns me at this time.

Speaking to literary scholars in *Hypertext 2.0*, George Landow notes that while “most of our intellectual endeavors involve collaboration, ... we do not always recognize the fact ... [as] the rules of intellectual property and authorship ... do not encourage such recognitions” (106). While cultural constructions of authorship are threatened by the slippages that occur in collaborative practice, this is in part because we know what it means to be an individual author, we know the security of counting only on ourselves for “successful completion” of a project, whatever that might mean. Further, recognizing radical slippage in subject positions and individual identities makes us even more precarious in terms of laboring subjects with legal status. Cain and Lehrer also point to the way that capitalism homogenizes even creative play, forcing introverts, for example, to provide a narcissistic performance of “team work” or “brainstorming” that doesn’t really involve each bringing his or her core competencies, in all their vulnerable awkwardnesses, to a respectful and thoughtful table. Rather, everyone is forced into some kind of beach ball tossing of ideas that becomes merely a stylized version of the potentials found in play. Thus, Cain and Lehrer ultimately speak to questions of precarious affective labor and ultimately neo-liberal co-options of creativity. Clearly over-determined and excessive implementations of creative practice intended to increase

productivity are problematic.<sup>3</sup> The critiques are, however, really best directed to the modalities of capitalism.

So beyond these instrumental and oppressive orders of collaboration, we still wonder about the potential for collaboration (or perhaps some other catchy word will emerge to signify a complex if imbalanced swaying between individual and group) as an ontological structure where unknown being, doing, thinking-styles emerge together in an erratic movement of time. The MIT Center for Collective Intelligence, a different enterprise entirely from that of Pierre Lévy, asks on their website home page “How can people and computers be connected so that – collectively – they act more intelligently than any individuals, groups, or computers have ever done before?” (MIT np). While this fascinating question is, unfortunately, outside the scope of my current project, it points to a notion of ensembles or collectives that simply seek to investigate how smart, how creative, how intuitive they can be within a set of given interactions and producing a set of unforeseen questions.

Raqs Media Collective call themselves after the “state that whirling dervishes enter ...when they whirl” (Frieze np). Revolving is considered a fundamental movement of all matter, including electronic data, and by moving thus, the dervishes intend to “intentionally and consciously participate...in the shared revolution of other beings” (Whirling np). Raqs Media Collective’s conception of the networked ensemble is informed by this kind of movement, a rhythmic rotating that extends the bodies moving thus out to other bodies, all spinning. Raqs Media Collective consists of three artists working in New Delhi on projects ranging from installation to political performance actions. They also produce talks and articles for websites. They curate other art as an art

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<sup>3</sup> For a more complex elaboration on the problem of leveraging play for productivity in the workplace, see Ross 2003.

practice. Their primary medium is what they call the “systemic field of contemporary relations,” which is broad enough to encompass everything.

Their image of rotating as enabled sharing plays with the concept of the network as womb. Sadie Plant notes that “matrix,” another word for the web thanks to the Wachowski brothers, is the Latin word for womb, not a linear form certainly. Not even a logical form, if we rely on Aristotle for our definition of logic. If the network is a womb, its logics get a bit messier than those that can only reside in the rectilinear spaces of the grid. This means that the network culture of e-business and online social sites, Twitter revolutions and Facebook coups, is only one part of a much more vast and complex, undulating, enfolding space where time is cyclical and yet varied. Anything that can be inscribed in, or actually limited to, that long ago tree from Figure x.1, is missing the potential of the trans-subjective intra-acting whatever being.

In this chapter, I will theorize a type of collaboration that involves situated, intense, and long-term interaction around a creative project. The end result of a collaborative session may be a visual artwork, musical composition, or e-literature. It includes a prolonged kind of engagement that is also finite. It is taken seriously as an integral part of the work and the interactions being produced through the exchange. I will discuss some historical examples of work that is considered collaborative, and I will describe some of my own experience with Multipoint, the group with whom I have worked for much of my professional art career. I will trace the chaotic logics of layered subjectivities co-created through relational play. I will describe something that is difficult, fraught, and full of heartache. I will consider this pain to be part of the success of the group.

Creative ensemble, a promising description of fugue-like layers of play, strumming and tapping, turning and bending in orchestrations and choreographies intended and spontaneous, is in fact hysterical messiness made consummate. Promising

cohesion in disjuncture, or delight in fragmentation (for Raqs Media Collective), shared work can create more disintegration than wholeness, more crumbling of edifices, further loss of unity, and not only or anything even close to the “wholeness” that collectivity implies. Coming together as disparate “I”s, hopeful in the potential discovery that will most certainly be the result of painstaking joint exploration and commitment, “We” willingly court chaos, a sketchy and unpredictable lover without a recognizable body and certain to acquit itself in some more or less intolerable manner, again and again and again.

Even though a large part of my art practice for the last ten years has involved working with a self-directed artists’ working group, I am not going to say that this type of practice fixes things or makes everyone more creative, communal, or kindly. I am committed to the potential in multi-actor, site-contingent, creative engagement, theoretically and practically, but I want to be careful about maniacally declaring its benefits without being frank about its complications, especially in an analysis of process. The problems as well as the potentials of collaborative practice are important to consider at length as they reveal no utopian or microtopia<sup>4</sup> organization. They do, however, hold space for unanticipated threads of creativity, unstable systems of movement to emerge as the stability of chaos unfolds in caring for selves in an aesthetic mode of life.

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4 Nicolas Bourriaud uses the term “microtopia” to refer to the practices of artists working in what he calls “relational aesthetics,” where their art works produce “in that split second a micro-community, one made up on immigrants brought together by collective laughter which upsets their exile (*sic*) situation, formed in relation to the work and in it” (17). While the idea is terrific, I am in agreement with Claire Bishop (2006) and Grant Kester (2011) in their critique of the exclusivity art institutions generally and the hip Parisian, London, and Los Angeles scenes Relational Aesthetics fosters, especially relative to how the microtopias he envisions actually get played out as exclusive art world events that are clearly only open to the standard set of museum goers and not an ailing public that they purport to address. Bishop provides a detailed critique of this problem in “The Social Turn” (2006).



## **Collaboration and the Abyss: Approaches, Histories, Ensembles, Networks**

Ubiquitously applied to any mode of work involving more than one person, collaboration is both over-used and at the same time extraordinarily flexible. As art historian, Grant Kester, notes in *the One and the Many* (2011), collaboration can be “described as [a] predisposition...within contemporary art practice that [varies] from artist to artist and project to project, depending on the artist’s relationship to the materiality of a given work and to the viewer” (11). Even though this definition is wonderfully flexible, there remains uncultivated a potential in collaboration that bears teasing out. Precisely by considering the specific working modalities of any given situation, does it become possible to seriously conceive inclusive, emergent communities where aesthetic processes are as important as aesthetic “texts.” The complexities of collaboration are considered carefully in terms of style and affect, with a slow, lingering attention that relinquishes the need to resolve conflict, engender happiness, and reduce trauma, collaboration can offer a way of attending to questions of community, embodiment, identity, communication, and labor as supple and pragmatic conditions that do not require the impossible choice between pathos and apathy, violence and harmony, activism and compliance. An investigation of this sort requires variable, flexible, and open theories of “group work,” “alliance,” and “team-ness” that are also precise, rigorous, and pointed. Toward that goal, I will discuss some approaches to collaboration that raise questions about method and outcomes.

Studying modes of shared work in *Creative Collaboration*, Vera Johns-Steiner makes the point that group work “liberate[s the members], for a time, from the prison of the self ... [and] taking risks, buoyed by collaborative support, contributes to a developing, changing self” (188). The double function, indicated by Johns-Steiner, of collective creative practice to, on one hand, break bonds of subjectivity that make “subjects” into objects as demonstrated in Foucault’s work and discussed above, and

on the other hand to contribute to reformative growth that fulfills the progress of the dialectic, is a strangely complicated one. This double function encourages flexibility in exchange that challenges fixed ideas of the self at the same time that it promotes the Modernist concern with developing the contained self within a dialectics of progress. Johns-Steiner's point reveals a paradox with which I do not entirely disagree. Still I find that it is possible to further complicate descriptions of the deep involvement in collaborative work.

*Allan Kaprow, Happenings, and the Non-Object*

As part of a larger concern with resisting the way capitalism generates subjectivity through its spectacle, Allan Kaprow began in the late 1950s to stage what he and others called "Happenings."<sup>5</sup> These were



Figure 1.1 Performance still from Allan Kaprow, *Yard* (1967), Martha Jackson Gallery, New York. Photo copyright Julian Wasser/Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

highly orchestrated but spontaneous-appearing installations and performances that appropriated the objects and actions of everyday life to make excessive gestures toward disrupting the political and formal austerity of the New York gallery system of the time (Figure 1.1). Often situating these projects in non-traditional exhibition spaces, like a

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<sup>5</sup> While a number of artists were involved in staging Happenings from the mid 1950s to the early 1970s, including Red Grooms, Claes Oldenberg, Jim Dine, and Robert Whitman, I am focusing here on Kaprow because he was determined to incorporate viewers as part of the work. My argument attempts to complicate the question of collaboration in his work. I find that agreeing to participate in Kaprow's project makes the viewer into a kind of art material, a medium for making art, more than a co-creator with Kaprow.

chicken ranch, a department store, or the unused storage yard of an Upper East Side gallery, Kaprow sought to engage his audience as part of the artwork, rather than as a passive receiver of objects that he, as artist, would offer for consumption. For Kaprow, these works were minutely staged affairs, determined to the last chime of a bell.

Kaprow's artist statement in Michael Kirby's *Happenings* (1965) specifically criticized assumptions by the media and an uninformed public that the term "Happening" reflected the growing cultural informality of his time.

He claims that "people ... suspect every authored Happening of being no more than a casual and indifferent event, or ... at best ... a 'performance' to release inhibitions...I try to impress everyone with the fact that I really direct a Happening inside out" (Kirby 47). Rather than merely proliferate an air of cultural negligence, Kaprow used irony, chance, and dissonance to initiate extremely orchestrated conversations, according to Kirby and Kaprow himself, about the way capitalism controls the creation of subjectivity.

Kaprow's detailed control over the aspects of the artwork, however, points to a practice that engages the viewer as medium rather than contributor. The viewer is an active object, the irony of which serves to strengthen the critique of capitalism but does not provide a scenario for meaningful collaboration. To better illustrate this, I offer



Figure 1.2. Installation still from Allan Kaprow, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959), Ruben Gallery, New York. Photo copyright Fred W. McDarrah.



Figure 1.3. Installation still from Allan Kaprow, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959), Ruben Gallery, New York. Photo copyright Fred W. McDarrah.

an extended description of viewer involvement in *Eighteen Happenings in Six Parts*, installed and performed at the Reuben Gallery in New York in 1959, and documented extensively in *Childsplay* (2004).

A detailed written script was composed before the work began, including diagrams of movement that appear like schematics for assembling an air conditioning unit. Kaprow constructed complex sculpture-sets which seem more makeshift than they are (Figure 1.2 and 1.3) and which include Kaprow's signature apples (hanging against the left wall in Figure 1.2) and plastic sheeting, forming walls around the seating area that provide only murky visibility to the other areas of the gallery. Kaprow issued invitations to specific viewers, gallerists, other artists, and collectors, all important actors in the New York City art world of the day. He also ordered strict seating arrangements, which included dictating when viewers could speak or move during the course of the event. At times his instructions specifically separated friends and forced known rivals together. While the works appeared at the time unconstructed and casual, especially in comparison to the stultifying formality of traditional painting and sculpture exhibitions, they were, according to Kelley, "as planned as any New York social event" (34).

Kaprow and other artists or actors executed most of the piece (Figure 1.3), with the audience participating in specific ways as directed by the artist. As Kelley reports, "... On note cards given to audience members [all specifically invited to the event], Kaprow wrote: 'The performance is divided into six parts. Each part contains three happenings which occur at once. The beginning and the end of each will be signaled by a bell. At the end of the performance two strokes of the bell will be heard... You have been given three cards. Be seated as they instruct you'" (30). Following Kaprow's instructions was key to the successful completion of the work; the viewer had been transformed from a passive receiver or consumer to a passive actor or material.

This piece, and others like it from the same period, reference late Modernist histories of painting and sculpture, poetry and literature, experimental cinema and jazz and draw on the theories of resistance developed by the Dada movement from the earlier part of the century. Even though Guy Debord claimed no affiliation, Kaprow was interested in the same problems concerning the Situationist International (SI) working in Paris in the late 1950s.<sup>6</sup> Kaprow's Happenings enabled a rigorous exchange between high art and lowly quotidian actions and objects in important ways that continue to resonate in contemporary practice by performance artists like Anna Banana, Liliya Lifanova, or even multi-media artist Miranda July with her recent e-mail piece *we think alone* (2013). When considering Kaprow's work in terms of collaboration, however, there arises a problem in the nature of cooperation activated in this particular work.

While Happenings have been called collaborative since they appeared, due to the way they include the viewer in the "completion" of the work, the nature of the involvement of people other than the artist to whom the work is attributed is problematic. In a 1993 article in *Art Journal*, Johanna Drucker, indicates that "...Happenings were a form of collaboration without object, that is, without either a preconceived goal or a resulting product" (51). She goes on to say that "*as collaborations...[the Happenings] were activities, artworks, in themselves, which were most distinctly defined as relations among individuals*" (51 emphasis in original). She foregrounds the shift from emphasis on objects made by a single artist that *represent* relations among people, to events that feature interactions among players which "displace the singular authority of the artist" (53), emphasize sociability, and engender a situation of collaboration.

Granted, her emphasis in this article is on the "non-object, non-product orientation of these events," but still it is curious that she insists on collaboration as the mode of

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<sup>6</sup> For a wonderful consideration of the organizational difficulties of the SI see Claire Bishop's recent book, *Artificial Hells* (2012).

generating this nonobject-ness. The grounds she provides for calling Kaprow's work collaborative is that it features "simultaneity of actions, a certain mildly destructive impulse, a random quality to the relatedness of events, and collective activity" (53). By collective activity, she indicates the immediacy of the interaction among invited participants and Kaprow's scripted performances, which as I mentioned earlier, often included actors solicited to play roles and orchestrated with great detail the contribution of the audience.<sup>7</sup> While he most certainly activated the audience within the artwork, this is not the same as creating an environment of exchange where the process that occurs within the interaction is as important as the object or event itself. Because Kaprow insisted on the refined scripting he developed for these works (again, often timed to the micro-second and involving highly determined, if ephemeral, interactions), the terms and scope of collaborative practice become limited and perhaps even coercive.

Drucker strongly argues that Kaprow's Happenings, and those of other artists' from the same period, exhibit a truly dematerialized non-object that was entirely about the interaction in the moment. Her description of collaboration, however, accepts the common assumption that *any* kind of interaction is an experience of shared work, regardless of the nature of the interaction and without accounting for the retention of authorial weight on the part of the initiating artist. Kaprow's insistence on the following of a precise course of events, developed entirely by him without input from the others, restricts the kind of interaction he allowed in the work. While making subjectifying processes of capitalism apparent, it does nothing to begin refashioning subjectivity beyond the singular categories he critiques and, in the end, reinforces the ones he resists.

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<sup>7</sup> While I do not have the space here to reflect on the relations between this work and experimental theatre, the case has been made for the importance of this influence in Kaprow's projects. In *Radical Prototypes* (2011) Judith Rodowick draws complex connections between Kaprow's work and that of theatre, performance art, dance, and Cagian musical practices.

In one event organized by Kaprow after hours in a Paris department store, viewers flipped switches, turned things over, and moved about as contrived or instructed by the artist on cards posted by various items for sale in the store. Spontaneity was only moderately a factor, despite declarations to the contrary, and choosing to attend meant agreeing, on some level, to obey Kaprow's specific instructions, becoming in the obedience, a material in the work. This speaks to a continued high level of control on the part of the artist and the maintenance of Kaprow's authorial mastery, despite an effort to confound questions of authorship and control in the making and presentation of art as a non-object.

One situation, however, where Kaprow's plans did not actually work the way he wanted offers a place for thinking about collaboration in this work more complexly. In the early 1950s, Kaprow was teaching at Rutgers and living in the New Jersey countryside, not far from his friend and fellow artist, George Segal, who owned a chicken farm. In the spring of 1958, they invited a group of other young New York artists to Segal's farm for a picnic. Without informing anyone, Kaprow had planned a participatory event, *Pastorale*, which turned out to be less pastoral than he anticipated.

To create an environment that would combine Kaprow's earlier three-dimensional collage pieces with a sort of country idyll/casual picnic setting, he and Segal constructed an improvised set from "eight-foot-high poles decorated with satin banners intended to catch the afternoon light, with plastic sheeting stretched between them. Kaprow's plan was to ask the picnickers to jump through the plastic sheeting, sit in the chicken coops rattling noisemakers, paint a canvas together, and engage in a series of slow, ritualistic movements" (Kelley 25). The artists, drunk and hot from sitting in the spring sun, were uninterested in leaving their spots on the grass when invited to participate in *Pastorale*. In addition "they felt they were being pressed into service for the benefit of another artist's work," and found Kaprow's directions and expectations "fascistic" (27). Kelley states that

finally, “the event fell apart, its formal structure disintegrating into a comedy of catcalls and antics.”

I find the other artists’ failure to engage in Kaprow’s prescribed spontaneity to be the real success of the work, in terms of collaboration. I see little material difference between spontaneous catcalls and scripted noisemakers in the chicken coop: both are jarring and absurd; both disrupt the potential for a “pastorale” environment. If breaking plastic is intended as a way to challenge or invigorate the figurative “surface” of the canvas, then perhaps failing to break it or only drunkenly mocking the suggestion is a deviation that involves a more intense engagement among the invited artists than even Kaprow’s proposal could provide.

Finally, Kaprow thought this work a failure because people didn’t respond the way he desired. I would argue that this piece succeeded on a much more elemental level because of its perceived failures. The artists participated through Kaprow’s initial invitation to join in the picnic, but they played in a complex way that layered the affects of heat and alcohol consumption, the desire for rest and the kind of boring but seductive conversations that often occur under such circumstances, the environmental difference between urban and rural milieux, and the ways in which the invited artists perceived, defined, and executed spontaneity in expression. Kaprow’s reflection afterward led him to decide upon more “adequately informing” his participants and securely setting the stage to evoke the kind of participation he scripted. His decision to focus on pedagogy as a way to obtain outcomes moved the work away from making room for complex subjectivities to emerge through the unexpected. It retained instead a clearly defined boundary between artist and viewer, and the participant becomes the artist’s medium rather than an actual contributor.

Collaboration must be something more than merely including viewers as material elements, switch flippers or noise makers, in a predetermined course of events. It must



extend beyond the making of participants into flexible media with which an author can mould something that claims to be radical but which is really just another version of the status quo. Landow cites two types of collaboration: one where two or more people construct a document or object together by working on parts and exchanging those for review and “versioning” which is pretty much the same thing but conducted “out of the presence of the other collaborator and at a later time” (105). He states that “...these models require considerable ability to work productively with other people, and evidence suggests that many people either do not have such ability or do not enjoy putting it into practice.” He then offers another, networked type of collaboration that follows an “assembly-line or segmentation model of working together,” which he finds to blur the boundaries of authorship. While these descriptions encompass the scope of what often describes collaborative work in the minds of many, they are limited by both the adherence to the territory of “my text” or “my experiment” and to the linear concept of time that envisions everything, even creativity, as occurring sequentially.

While I respect efforts to challenge territories and boundaries in the collaborative work styles Landow describes, they are so problematic in the way they actualize conflict and enforce historicity that they do not accomplish what they intend to do. Erasing authorship is not the most important intervention collaboration makes. Rather, its power is found in the way it provides access to the affective, creative forces of trans-subjectivity and multiplicity, which are otherwise much more faint and imperceptible to the individual. Emphasizing difference and the multiplicity occurring in the complex time presented earlier is the radical contribution of collaborative practice, not erasure of authorship. Mastery becomes impossible in the exchange among members; instead ability increases to paradoxically recognize difference and to allow that movements of trans-subjectivity render the boundaries containing that difference hotly porous. A meeting of international feminist scholars in the US provides an example of the kinds of tensions

arising in difference that can productively nurture insight and expanded perspectives on the importance of foregrounding difficulty and allowing that disagreement and dissension are part of the process of sharing not to be disregarded or eliminated.

*Feminist Crossing, Global Collisions*

Functional shifting through the instability of difference is the nature of a project convened by Marguerite Waller called “Crossing Feminisms: Using Difference,” as part of a University of California Humanities Research Institute (UCHRI) project that took shape in 1999. A group of feminist scholars assembled to consider and activate a “crossing”<sup>8</sup> where “profound differences in culture, cosmology, historical, and political situatedness, language, and religious practice could be perceived, not as impediments to collaboration and mutual understanding, but as enablers of new feminist practices and epistemologies” (Waller xix). The project placed in dialogue a number of international feminist scholars, who work on diverse topics and with varied concerns, from the aesthetic practices emerging in global cinema, to the ways legal systems are being remade in alternative “Courts of Women,” to the activist practices and organizing styles in non-Western communities like the Zapatista in Mexico and Islamic women in Aceh, Indonesia.

The work of exchange among these women for the period of the residency, collected in the book *Dialogue and Difference* (2005), had the goal of opening discourse to dissimilarity by introjecting under-represented voices of resistance, and dislodging the West as the launch pad for cultural analysis. While each strives for a connection with the others, “crossing” still carries, by implication and overtly, the fraught nature of ongoing

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<sup>8</sup> Waller and Marcos note that they chose the word “crossing” rather than intersection to indicate the intentional relationships activated by the disparate “systems, cosmologies, [and] histories” informing the points of view of each participant and which are often conflated in “the binary Western system of ... identity construction.” Intentionality is extremely important to the scope of the project and the potentials the organizers sought to activate. They state quite specifically ... “These ‘crossings,’ created within, and creative of, new conceptual spaces, would not occur were they not sought after” (N1, xxxi).

ebbs and flows of disagreement and refusal, coordination and mediation. Obioma Nnaemeka, Professor of French and African Diaspora studies at Indiana University, tells of a conference in Nigeria “*about* women in Africa and the African Diaspora” that came to be conceived by many as “exclusively *for* black women” (56 emphasis in original), contrary to its intention. Nnaemeka tells of how the conference “planned for scholars, activists, and others interested in or working on women in Africa and the African Diaspora ... [and had] not planned to promote race and gender exclusions” (59). Nevertheless, the conference resulted in a serious clash of politics and ideologies which included “... 1) the exclusion of whites, (2) the objection to the presence of men, and (3) the fight among feminists, womanists, and Africana womanists for ascendancy.”

Saddened by “all sorts of tactics from shouting down and intimidating white participants, to walking up to them to demand what right they had to be in Nigeria, to forcing them to leave panel presentations and ordering them to go to the back of the bus” (59), Nnaemeka nevertheless finds in this extraordinarily fraught and painful situation a way to engage the serious problems of reconciliation and inclusion in the face of enduring wounds that are carried from generation to generation and passed on in a spirit of justice and righteous indignation. She owns the ambivalence of the situation and states openly the vulnerable situation of “*vascillat[ing]* between hope and despair” (53) that it engenders. Despite the inclusive agenda the conference and historical discussions of the global nature of feminism, Nnaemeka shows that even the desire for wide-reaching engagement can be and is exclusive of the experiences, beliefs, and cultural conditions of some while privileging that of others.

Overall, *Dialogue and Difference* raises awareness of assumptions about shared experiences when historical differences, between for example American waves of feminist thought and women’s movements in China, discussed in the book by Shu-mei Shih and Yenna Wu, reveal complex concerns that are not universalizable. Questions

like African-ness as a position of race or color and roles of leaders in the revolutionary Zapatista movement “cross” in a way that opens the terrain of possibilities that feminist discourse and action can nurture. Cracking open the thin skin that encloses Western feminist discourse and thinking styles informing collective action, the work of each participant engages trajectories that are “beside” each other, effecting a rupture of expectations and evoking something more complex that continues to be explored and developed in various political and theoretical arenas, without the need to reconcile, unite, or stabilize practices.

Waller’s project and the text edited by Waller and Marcos highlight the difficulties of finding commonality, even when over-arching goals seem to be shared. The most interesting work, as shown here, is in the details where disagreement resides and where difference has significant impact. Models for accommodating difference are varied, ranging from tolerance to condescension, as political scientist William Corlett notes in his discussion of cooperative neighborhood projects in Chicago and Oak Park, Illinois. Education and information can help, but they do not ensure understanding when vocabularies might be different or gestures that are polite in one region are rude in another. Understanding is not really enough to shift difference from a function of separation to the condition of mobility that difference carries as both its bane and its best asset. In other words, just knowing about someone or something is not enough to dissolve the strict boundaries between self and other that keep us perpetually striving for footing in a foundationless world.

Knowing has to emerge from shared intensity, a deep and unstructured intra-action that is recognized at once as the driving force behind and the effect of creative play. To consider a sustained example of collaboration coming out of the individual practice of an artist, I would like to examine the specific processes Meredith Monk has used for over forty years to make her multi-media works. I will return to Monk’s

work in Chapter 3, discussing the structural specificities of one work relative to the way it dismantles and reconstructs language, but here I will focus on the process of collaboration in her work generally.

### **Trans-subjectivity I: Intra-Acting, Co-Constituting, Breathing**

Beyond the way collaboration is leveraged as a productive industrial resource, and beside simple coordination of laboring efforts between two or more practitioners, collaborative practice has the potential to generate a complex, powerful, but often invisible, commingling of bodies, identities, and working practices in unpredictable, intricate, networks of selves, with strong impact upon actions, thinking, and being. I stated previously that I am calling this shift “trans-subjectivity.” It consists of a condition of being intricate, where bodies, identities, actions, and language flow in multiple orders of reason: stable and disorderly, mad and coherent, inaudible and extremely loud, but where these pairs are not considered opposites or features on a continuum, but degrees and styles of expression that collide in the mangle. I will work through a series of ideas to figuratively flesh out the parameters this ephemeral and fast moving trans-subjectivity. I will begin with Pickering’s “mangle of practice” to get to Karen Barad’s “intra-activity.” Then I will then work through a description of the trans-subjective. Emphasizing alternative thinking styles that include bafflement and idiocy, I will discuss some theories of subjectivity by way of comparison, with the intent of unfolding a working, if an elusive, performative description of the trans-subjective. At last, I will return to specific collaborative practices to integrate the two.

I spoke at length in the introduction about the mangle as a metaphor, inspired by Pickering’s 1995 book *The Mangle of Practice*, and informed both by the image of the British laundry wringer and the tumbleweed. The images of extreme compression and of jumbled, truncated, and reassembled parts are horrifying, especially when the goal

is to maintain the integrity of a single unit. But the pressing makes it easier to dry what was formerly a sopping mess, and the recombinant muddle means that ideals must be continually revisited in terms of construction, functionality, and aesthetic paradigms. Messy, unkempt, even unfortunate mix-ups are generative situations, despite the horror that brings them about.

Pickering identifies the “mangle of practice” as the “...temporal structuring of practice as a dialectic of resistance and accommodation...[which operates] ... at a level of detail not usually accessible to empirical study” (xi). Roughly, in Pickering’s mangle a range of factors – material, rhetorical, technological, and social – bear upon the way scientific knowledge is produced. He is clearly indebted to and engaged with Actor-Network Theory, a knowledge system formulated by sociologist Bruno Latour and others in the 1980s that involves continually questioning “matters of concern” (Latour 2004 225) ignored or hidden from view in the functioning of various institutions, histories, and epistemological practices. While Pickering’s definition of the mangle as dialectical implies a conception of progress toward fixed truth claims, in the longer discussion it demonstrates an integrative, open-ended approach toward knowledge generation. He uses the word alternately as a verb and a noun such that the thingness and the activity are inter-related as “performance.”

Through the interaction of the performative mangle, for Pickering, knowledge that is deeply immersed in material practice emerges. This is knowledge attained through practice and which is therefore not ever about reaching the finality of truth claims. Rather than a “representational” understanding where discourse stands in for material “facts” and where matter is a pre-existing, inert frame upon which discourse is imposed, the mangle moves knowledge generation away from the “matters of facts” and toward “matters of concern” significant to Latour.

Recent material feminist scholarship<sup>9</sup> has significantly expanded Pickering's approach to performativity and material agency, rendering very active, complex interactions between matter and discourse, or nature and culture. Science philosopher and material feminist Karen Barad significantly states that ...

...a *performative* understanding of discursive practices challenges the representationalist belief in the power of words to represent pre-existing things. Performativity, properly construed, is not an invitation to turn everything (including material bodies) into word; on the contrary, performativity is precisely a contestation of the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real" (2008 121).

Clearly Barad is critical of the limitations she perceives in the discursive feminism of Judith Butler and others. She openly confronts Butler's formulation of performance, criticizing its willful disregard of the actualities of the material world. In fact, despite the early polemics, Barad focuses much of her discussion on de-essentializing "nature," and minutely revealing the constitution of nature and culture as cooperative rather than oppositional or hierarchical. In this way, I believe that Barad's redefinition of performance adds to Butler's theories of performance rather than displacing them.

In fact, Barad continues, with Butler, the project of imagining the many ways to "care for the self" or engage in the development of subjectivity. With its theories of ongoing ontological invention which are also shared political action, and working with and taking pleasure in difference and specificity, material feminism extrapolates and perhaps eases the violence and upheaval of the mangle through the formulation of "intra-acting." A term Barad coins in *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007), intra-acting describes a complex, co-constituting, generative ontology among humans and non-humans, experimenters and their labs, substances and research. In other words, being and meaning are continually formed through the material relations that occur in

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<sup>9</sup> See for example, Alaimo (2010), Barad (2007), and Hekman (2010).

site-contingent encounters; this includes the ongoing production and development of capacities.

Barad uses Niels Bohr's principle of complementarity where substances like light can exhibit contradictory properties depending upon the physical apparatus and the theoretical framework used to measure them. She asserts that for Bohr, "... 'concepts' (which are actual physical arrangements) and 'things' do not have determinate boundaries, properties, or meanings apart from their mutual intra-actions" (2008 137 parenthetical emphasis in original). Supporting the thesis that matter is not merely an inert support for concepts, but an active participant and contributor to being and knowing, Barad states that material practices, which include bodies and tools, and the discursive practices that explicate them, are conceivable *only in active relation* to one another. Intra-acting is vastly different from a representational concept of knowledge, where a pre-existing object or idea is apprehended using language to represent it, and therefore, always already adheres to and supports subject/object oppositions. Instead intra-acting makes clear the always-operating complex, multiple, and "trans-" state of matter, knowledge, and by association, subjectivity.

Barad calls intra-activity a "being-doing," where bodies or materials, ideas or language, and the subjectivities and knowledges associated with them are neither entirely natural nor completely constructed. They are instead "part of the world in its open-ended becoming...not a thing but a doing, a congealing of agency" (139). Assuming no pre-existing, atomic substance or ideality, Barad replaces representable "things" possessing fixed boundaries, with "phenomena" that "relate" in specific circumstances; from this situated intra-action, contingent being arises. Her ontological orientation assumes no centrality or essence that pre-exists agency or liveness. Rather, it insists upon a process of ongoing emergence, occurring on both macro and micro (quantum) levels. In this way,



the machine and the biological, the human and the robotic, the human and the human, are implicated in a co-creating dynamism.

In situated intra-activity, human bodies, animal bodies, viral bodies, machine bodies, and information bodies share causal materiality within and beside their discursive regimes. Their histories reveal static notions of natural, authentic, individual, and artificial, to be contrived. These categories fail to function in paradigms of co-constituting, intra-acting ontology because a study of poetic, relational co-constitution, reveals an intricately combinatorial process of making/being that cannot be divorced from its articulation. In other words, being and saying become implicated in each other and cannot be separated. The iteration between what is made/used and the maker/user become part of a larger fugue of mangled histories, occurring among organisms and technologies, but also among humans intra-acting across networks. These intra-actions occur in “real-time,” physical meetings and in on-line hook-ups; they reassemble historical time in a state of perpetual “now,” and they create a present from the residuals of the past and images of the future. Intra-activity is the mangle, expanded from Pickering’s original concept, and at once visible and impossible to see. It is Borges’ Aleph under the table in a basement, taking up but one square inch of our world, but containing vast space, time, and potential.

Significantly, intra-activity describes a material co-composition of atoms that assemble in larger material forms; yet it also is the process characterizing the exchange of gestures, experiences, emotions, and energies that are part of “interacting” with other material bodies, human, non-human, machine, etc. There is an agentic capacity in intra-activity, granted to even the most basic matter. For Barad, “...matter is not simply ...the surface effect of human bodies or the end product of linguistic or discursive acts. ... The dynamics of intra-activity entail matter as an *active* ‘agent’ in its ongoing materialization”

(2008 140). This means matter acts and has, within ranges, the agency to determine its actions.

This has bearing upon the oppositional divisions between *zoe* and *bios*. Bare and cultivated become equally implicated in the liveness that each has in the process of intra-activity, without re-rendering the “zones of indistinction” that concern Agamben in his conception of bare life. In bare life, individual humans are stripped of meaning in the larger political and physical body and rendered ostensible zombies in the pragmatics of the state. Intra-action makes this division materially impossible, even if the politics have not caught on. There can be no actual zone of indistinction, no actual stripping of meaning, because the meaning is generated in the material process of co-constituting the bodies around which the meaning forms.

I emphasize that in the process of intra-action, meaning is contingent upon the engagement with the bare, the merely material, which is clearly not mere matter after all. The messiness of this intra-action occurs at the micro-level, rendering it mostly invisible, inaudible, and inarticulate. It speaks, nevertheless, as we learn to listen differently. It arises without the possibility of containment, but when given just attention, it renders the process of agentic action, a form of life that is redefined in terms of its contingency, into the “being such that it always matters” (1) of which Agamben speaks in *the Coming Community*. I will discuss this text at greater length in the final chapter. For now I raise the material specter of this type of being to cast a certain light on the way intra-acting makes trans-subjectivity possible.

Imagining life itself, but also labor, community, and identity as processual events, dependent upon intra-active paradigms, bodies and selves, histories and ontologies, knowledge and experience emerge as what Agamben calls “whatever being” or “being such that it always matters.” Rather than the mangle of intra-activity producing nihilistic indifference, the inflected “whatever” of the punk or the pre-teen who defies logic for

the sake of defiance, intra-activity is driven by what Agamben calls “original desire,” a creative force of desire that seeks its own fulfillment, its own appearance as “whatever.” This is “precisely ... that which is neither particular nor general, neither individual nor generic” (N1 107), but actualizes both at once.

If Agamben imagines turning nihilism to advantage in the *The Coming Community*, where a global petty bourgeoisie, divested of a notion of authentic custom and character, gives birth to “a new form of life” (65), then intra-activity slips around nihilism as it generates situated, contingent wonder through its ongoing creative actions. The multiple, contingent “self” production of intra-activity makes room for ethically “caring” for the complex and emergent “self” which eases into and out of trans-subjective states. Instead of apathy, casting the hand wanly about to gesture at “whatever” is close by, “whatever being,” participates in the mangle as a desiring singularity, which cannot be generalized or categorized. Singularity contingently becomes “being *such that it is*” in the process of intra-acting, and thereby “is freed from the false dilemma that obliges knowledge to choose between the ineffability of the individual and the intelligibility of the universal” (Agamben 1993 1). This is clearly not an *a priori* sort of self, nor is it simply a performative identity constructed through geography, language, and appearance. It can contribute to this latter, but it is already on to the next creative commingling by the time language has coalesced to perform its identity structuring. The openness of whatever being foregrounds the apprehension of the agentic vitality of everyone and everything engaged, through ongoing, messy, and irrational intra-action.

Importantly openness in Agamben’s whatever being is not the same kind of openness found in Deleuzo-Guattarian lines of flight. The flight of *A Thousand Plateaus* is “la fuite” which is the flight of escape or “to run away.” It is not the flight of *la volée* which corresponds to what birds or airplanes or arrows do. Their flight quite literally means to flee the oppressive subjectifying powers of capitalism. The flight is creative

and as such moves in a schizophrenic line of force, but still away from the gravity of capital and not toward something other than nothing. The whatever being of Agamben's formulation is desiring but in a way that is open to everything. It also escapes the containment concerning Deleuze and Guattari, but through a much different kind of movement, a rubbery expansion and contraction in place (situatedness). It moves out and back in relation to its creative desire, which is a relation of "always already mattering." There is no subjugation or lack because the movement is intra-active and as such is productive of so much muddled, commingled, meaningful matter that is always being remade as it moves out and back again in these multiple relations.

My comparison here does not minimize the potentials in lines of flight nor does it place Deleuze and Agamben in a fistcuffs. In fact, I prefer to take down fences between the two, both beautiful thinkers and imaginers of potential future-presents. There is much that is useful in Deleuzo-Guattarian flight, and I want to know what we are doing during and after fleeing, because beside Bergsonian fluxes of simultaneity, time is also historic and as such demands an ethical doing along its particular lines. Intra-activity and whatever being, combined with the slippery, schizophrenic sidestepping of lines of flight open possibilities for evolving images of ourselves as trans-subjects, always already mattering and continually co-creating with our fellow human and non-human, machine and biotic beings in a constant engagement of intra-activity.

Complicating the notions of collaboration and authorship in her complex, multi-media practice, Meredith Monk's methodologies offer a way to think of collaboration as community that is both nurturing and problematic, but which demonstrates the materiality of intra-action. This arises in the artworks and significantly in the long-term relationships nurtured by Monk's collaborative style.

*On House and Home: Collaborative Style in the Work of Meredith Monk*

Meredith Monk is a composer, filmmaker, performer, and multi-media artist. She combines a range of materials that include physical movement, projected visual (or cinematic) elements, and vocal and instrumental sound in most of her works. She often appropriates or adapts one element, say a musical composition, to another project, like a performance or a film, building pieces in an ebb and flow of relationships among components that are complete works in themselves. She has been concerned with complex articulations of time, mythologies, community, and nature over the forty-plus years of her career, in the hundreds of works, including sound recordings, independent films, theatrical productions, and site-specific musical performances. Born in 1942, she continues a rigorous performance and workshop schedule to present new and former works, often in collaboration with other artists and her consistent partners, the members of Vocal Ensemble.

While the range of works, from opera, and installation, to site-specific performance and film is attributed solely to Monk or Monk and one other partner, collaboration is key to the development of most of her oeuvre. Coming out of Fluxus and other experimental projects in 1960s New York art scene, Monk's methods for working with other artists expands the ways in which different people participate in the artistic process, and extends more specifically to Monk's own concerns with creating a community that "invents a new idea of family" (Robinson 50). Monk maintains a place of directorial privilege that differs from the strict model of control Kaprow employs as she insists that the works develop intimately with the capacities and bodies of the performers. Still, the hierarchy involved in this structure raises questions about the way that communities are formed, how various contributors are involved, and the role of a singular leader that engages complexly with my earlier, ideal formulation of a self-directed group where leadership shifts.

In the mid-1960s, Monk moved to Manhattan and became involved with various avant garde theatre, dance, and art movements, including Fluxus and what remained of the Judson Dance Theatre. She was drawn to the “...anarchistic ‘anything is possible’ attitude” (Smithner 95) flourishing among artists with interdisciplinary and collaborative practices, like Merce Cunningham, Robert Rauschenberg, and Dick Higgins. In keeping with the times, boundaries among mediums and areas of “expertise” were challenged (“musicians were painting, poets were making music” (Smithner 95)) but, as Kaprow emphasized, this fluid exchange of roles was not enacted in a casual, off-hand way: these were exceptionally thoughtful, trained practitioners seeking to expand the range of their own competencies and their disciplines, through the exchanges fostered in the messy “anything is possible” community thriving in New York City at the time. Judging from various interviews with Monk, especially those by Peter Greenaway and Babeth VanLoo, there was a dead serious earnestness and an insistence on virtuosity even in the most informal exchanges. Combining an interest in seeing what could happen as the capacities of body, narrative, voice, gesture, and site are revealed through the working process with an insistence on virtuosity in the outcome, Monk’s work continues the experimental ingenuity and skill that constantly challenge the parameters of what it can mean to make art, to work in creative community, and to present that work in a public venue.

The House, “a group of artists, actors, dancers, and a scientist” (House 1971), developed out of a series of workshops Monk organized in her loft in the late 1960s, and participants included “a small, dedicated nucleus and a broader collection of others who came and went depending upon the piece” (Smithner 97). The earliest participants, Lanny Harrison, Ping Chong, and Blondell Cummings, continued to work with Monk collaboratively over long periods of time, but also had individual careers that included acting and teaching, theatre and video direction, and choreography. Dedicated to “an interdisciplinary approach to performance” (100 Treasures np), House members were

flexible as well in the kinds of labor they performed to generate the work, including the rigors of learning to move differently than classical training would have allowed, learning to sing while moving, and learning to think movement as fragmented narrative. Nancy Smithner states that for each performance, House “members sewed their own costumes, made or found props, and helped build the sets” (Smithner 98). These are big diversions from their usual areas of expertise (e.g., dance or singing). Partly this may have come from the exigencies of slim budgets, although one member indicates that “during the early seventies ... there was money for the arts,” and so it is possible to assume that they could very well have hired the usual theatre production experts to handle these tasks.

The willingness of the stage performing participants to carry out production-oriented tasks as part of the terms of involvement points to a larger functioning of community in the group. Under other circumstances she would have been responsible for finding resources for this kind of backstage production, even with Monk as the director or leader. The team’s involvement in the entire process forges a kind of intimacy with the work and among the participants that increases intensity on many levels: they still had to carry out their rigorous rehearsal schedule; they had to build and stitch and locate and install an environment; and they had to participate in the evolution of the work itself as they were not simply handed sheets of lyrics and stage direction and told to memorize it.

Choreographer Paul Langland joined House in 1974 and was impressed with the way “the individual look of the performer was celebrated and their personalities were celebrated” (Smithner 98). From the earliest large ensemble compositions, Monk has worked to align the demands of the piece, in terms of movement and vocalization, to fit the capacities of each performer’s body and range, while at the same time pushing them outside their normal performative ranges. The rigors of this practice also creates an atmosphere of situated singularity, that is to say individuality developed and honored

relative to site and context. One performer is not easily replaced by another defined by universalizing categories like tenor, soprano, ingénue, lead.

The experimental approach to the division of labor, and the kind of community interaction arising from it, puts theories of anarchic communities, engaged but under-realized by the earlier Fluxus artists, into practice in an important way. Labor is not divided per se but evolves transversally to be distributed across participants in the group and responsibility for production becomes a shared problem that at once flattens normal institutionally administrative roles, and allows creative expression to move fluidly across competencies, opening up unanticipated interests and abilities. This corresponds to a certain degree with the way Monk incorporates and extends movement, through individual capacities, in the gestures and vocalizations of the performances and compositions themselves.

The distributed quality of creative and banal labor is intensified in the later collaborative group, Vocal Ensemble, which Monk formed in the late 1970s out of the need to “work on a highly technical level” (102) foregrounding the music production and down-playing the theatrical aspects that had informed the earlier work. Pieces like *Dolmen Music* (1979), the composition of which I discuss in detail in Chapter 3 when I talk about language games, came out of an intense cycle of rehearsal and composition, an ebb and flow timing of working together and working separately that also characterizes the structure of the music. Monk would first arrive with a list of ideas and as the group met intensively over a period of several weeks, the composition emerged based on the “unique quality of each voice” (Tellberg 6). Rather than forcing the performer to model herself to the music, the music and the movement are developed with the specifics of the performer’s body and capacities in mind.

Gregory Sandow, music critic in the 1970s for the *Village Voice*, stated that in the performance of *Dolmen Music* “the idea of ensemble is as important as anything



else [and] the result is real group music...without division into solo and accompaniment” (quoted in Smithner 102). Here the ensemble stands is the collaborative group; the function of working together forms a coherence that is foregrounded in the composition of the work, the performance of the piece, and as a structural frame in which the work exists.

The network is built around the

bodies of each performer, the movements in the musical score, and the histories inspiring the work in the first place.

While it is possible to observe Monk, in the performance included in Peter Greenaway’s documentary (1983), acting as director (Figure 1.4) through her expressive movement from her chair as performer, the other performers are not as subordinated by these gestures as they would be in a traditional orchestra/conductor relationship. Monk is their equal in terms of her physical position in the circle or semi-circular arrangement of chairs. They all wear the same black trousers and white shirts. The vocalizations are spread across the performers, privileging no single actor. There is a sense of shared importance, shared audibility, shared participation. The “group music” indicated by Sandow make up a web of interconnected, simultaneous emissions, that are also oddly displaced in time, sounding at once like ancient chants and mechanical malfunctions.

The distributed mode of working is, however, not egalitarian. Even though Monk’s entire performance, filmmaking, and musical career has been intimately informed



Figure 1.4. Meredith Monk (left) performing *Dolmen Music* with two Vocal Ensemble members. Still from *Four American Composers*, Greenaway 1983.

by collaborative practice, she maintains ownership of the ideas while allowing the participants to influence formal dimensions of the piece. On one hand this alleviates the problems of making decisions by majority or some other voting formulation necessary in an egalitarian structure, but on the other hand, the hierarchies of creative authority remain in place. While, certainly, Monk has a right to organize her group this way, people can and do leave if it doesn't work for them, and her method is a simple solution to questions of decision making, especially around issues of creative vision. But I am wondering about the nature of the community that arises in a group context reliant upon a central organizing figure, no matter how inclusive or benevolent. What happens to agency and personality that is forever subordinate?

Key to addressing this last question is the fact that many of the participants have groups and schools of their own: for example, Blondell Cummings formed Cycle Arts Foundation in 1978 to explore multi-generational family dynamics through performance; Ping Chong formed the Fiji Theatre in 1975, and Lanny Harrison collaborated with Collin Walcott, Steve Clorfeine, and Lily Pink on other projects and, particularly, has focused for thirty years on writing and performing one-woman shows. So while Monk's groups are a complex and important aspect to the artistic practices of all the participants, it is only one node in multiple networks of creative activity.

Monk describes her working methodology as "98.9% of the time negotiating how to work together and 1.99% making the piece" (Smithner 103), emphasizing the processual aspect of artistic collaboration. Even as she holds the position of self-proclaimed "benevolent [creative] dictator," changeable creative process is key to the way intimacy makes the problems of group process elastic. House members described the atmosphere in the 1970s as "messily intimate...with Monk playing parental guru, and not always particularly well" (Wallach quoted in Smithner 99). Others found her "manipulative, impatient, demanding, and even ruthless." While many in the group may

have shared these qualities, they may not have been as free to express them as Monk was, because she was in charge: she had invited them; she had the unifying artistic vision; it was her “House” even as they “inhabited” it. Nevertheless, despite “major confrontations over the years” she remains friends and working colleagues with many of the participants in House, including Lanny Harrison, Ping Chong, and Pablo Vela (Smithner 99-100).

Monk’s work is occupied with themes of war, discrimination, displacement, plague, and awesome natural destruction, but as Smithner points out, “she finds solace in showing how people enjoy ordinary daily pleasures and the warmth of community” (101) in the face of uncontrollable horror. In fact she often features seconds long shots in her films and multi-media productions of plates of beans, telephones, tea kettles, medieval weapons, interwoven with tableaux of people eating simple, banal food together as part of a larger construction of myth. It seems she finds a salve for the violence of destruction in community as she envisions it, and Smithner asserts that “Monk appears to have found her own community in ensemble.” While I would agree that Monk does forge a community and her participants draw great satisfaction in their personal and professional lives, I wonder if the others find an equal and similar kind of balm for the exigencies of contemporary life, the fears of the day in Monk’s highly orchestrated and highly participatory ensemble community.

In Kaprow’s work the participation is directed and managed by the artist, even while he strives for a lively interaction between himself and the viewer. With Waller’s group of scholars, the participation is based upon a willingness to “cross” each other and to “use difference” to challenge static thinking practices and to enable new ones. Instability and unpredictability are boons to the quest for epistemologies “particularly well-suited to countering the hegemonic isomorphisms of corporate expansion (xix). In Monk’s work the collaboration follows from Monk’s desire to create a new kind of family, a creative tribe that shares in mutually supporting the capacities of each

to perform and express his or her talents richly. While Monk's projects are expressly organized around themes that have concerned her for the last forty years, like nature, longevity, memory, and otherness, she is flexible in the way the details are worked out among the participants in a network of distributed creative labor. Even though she maintains herself as the central governor of any given project and successful participation depends in the end on sharing her vision and following her lead, the ongoing work of Vocal Ensemble attests to the flexibility of her leadership and the potentials for shifting capacities within a range of circumstances.

With Waller and Marcos, I find that instability consciously attended to is generative, not merely chaotic or pathological. It opens potentials for understanding the self and subjectivity more complexly than strict adherence to individual identities or mere conflation in collectivity provides. It is in this matrix of instability that the complex actions of trans-subjectivity arise. It becomes visible as it plays across bodies, identities, intentions, and competencies. The actions of trans-subjectivity occur whether we notice or not, but paying attention – sitting quietly with the nervousness; listening carefully, especially to that which is least inaudible – brings to the surface strange subject configurations that cannot be anticipated and therefore cannot be harnessed as such. At this point it is helpful to investigate trans-subjectivity in more specific detail.

### **Trans-subjectivity II: Empathy, Less-Ness, Breathe**

The trans-subjective is a bright node in the matrix of the intra-active mangle. It is a doing-self that moves across bodies and situations, appears momentarily, performs a little something through affect, and then is only legible as a jog in the memory, a trace of the disordered. Trans-subjectivity is definitely not a universalizing concept where shared or collective identity takes over subjectivities of difference or even of power, binary logic, or lack; rather than positing a communal identity opposed to and replacing that of

an individual, trans-subjectivity involves a moving beside and through multiple currents of individuation, playfully wandering through interaction, work, creativity, community, and identity.

This seems an irrational and unsystematic way to approach subject formation, to say nothing of the medical diagnoses (“Borderline personality disorder, Schizoid personality disorder, Schizotypal personality disorder” [DSM IV 940]) it evokes. Yet Foucault insists that we “... promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of [the] kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries [through these executions of state power]” (785). If, as he claims, we are in a constant state of creating subjectivity, we need to find ways to create it that are not implicated in the surveillance and enforcement of the state and of capitalism.

In her extended analysis of power and the cultivation of subjectivity, both as a form of containment and as ongoing immanent self description, Judith Butler (*The Psychic Life of Power* 1997) clarifies the Foucauldian understanding of subjectivity as “the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject” (2); here she rearticulates that subjectivity is not a static construction but something we continually do and which will never be completed. Butler’s analysis casts a further sense of urgency on our need to understand the process of building or forming subjectivity complexly. She makes way for the possibility that I believe is essential to any kind of “new” subject formation processes: we must recognize that chaos is something that is not only opposed to order, but rather a condition capable of generating and maintaining a singular, contingent, specific order of its own through the trans-subjective.

Many scholars have diverse approaches to the topic of subjectivity and their work certainly does not exhaust the possibilities. Butler offers performance as a way to rethink bodies, desires, and subjectivities. The collaborative team of feminist economic geographers writing as J.K. Gibson-Graham proposes slow ways to understand class and

labor in order to rework the subjectifying forces of capitalism from within that system; Donna Haraway, Elizabeth Grosz, Karen Barad, and other material feminists reinscribe the agency of the fleshly body into material theories of embodied subjectivity to de-essentialize nature and grant causality to things acting with language to form being. For each, forging space for difference, justifying a situated specificity for the practice of making community, and exploring the exigencies of subject formation are key concerns.

Trans-subjectivity is another layer in these complex considerations. It offers a noticeably complex way to think and feel through Foucault's desire to "liberate us ... from the type of individualization which is linked to the [power of the] state" (785), and which momentarily slips aside from the bounded individual, however decentered or knotty, in collaborative practice. Slowly and seriously entertaining the fraught mix among individuals and groups, institutions and artists, technology and flesh that gives rise to trans-subjectivity in collaborative practice, involves holding flexible and difficult understandings of the order and chaos. If one must choose either instability or certainty, rationalism or madness, distraction or linearity, then one is always in a position to define thought and action as a negation, a not movement, a *pas* (which translates as both "not" and "step," refusal and passage).

For his part, Derrida insists that madness is always already informing any rationalism we assume, as its trace remains in the violence we do in and through the cutting that orders language. Refusing to limit rationality to a definition opposed to some

idea of madness involves favoring what Isabelle Stengers calls the “idiot’s” position, one of bafflement but possibility, slow and steady, scattered and insistent consideration.<sup>10</sup> The idiot’s process appears throughout this project as he, she, or a combination of the two, is important to thinking and feeling in multiple orders of reality; experiencing affective relations without reducing them to representative categories; and gazing into the abyss courageously where fear and perplexity, vulnerability and bafflement become productive of wonder. The idiot’s practice escapes the limitations occurring when reality becomes contained within a singular logic, however that logic is defined. The idiot plays with trepidation in trans-relations of being or becoming intricate with his friends, rivals, colleagues, enemies, and lovers.

Trans-subjectivity acts through uncanny physical, mental, and emotional liaisons; it enacts messy, unpredictable, and perhaps peculiar blends of style, idiom, and desire, and following its wake we find a revolutionary and yet impermanent bonding that involves contractual and social obligation, ritual and chemical processes in ongoing, expressive transformations. The trans-subjective works at an atomic level, physically and psychically, forging space to express a creativity and pose questions that exceeds what is known. It is something traceable and ephemeral, logical and crazed, anxiety-producing and tranquil, in other words indefinably insane and yet conceivably logical, but not in the way those words are *normally* used. Anxiety becomes something helpful and craziness is its own tender calm. This is difficult to imagine, perhaps, as these words are being

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10 In *The Cosmopolitical Proposal*, Stengers draws on Deleuze for the figure of “the idiot” who is slow to assume understanding, slow to assign categories, slow to choose *either* this or that when making determinations about knowing. She proposes an ethics and a politics articulated through the *slow* epistemology of perplexity, wondering, and vulnerability. This is a proposal rather than a manifesto; it does not assert what ought to be but what might possibly emerge from styles of thinking that presume no right or norm, but seek continual unfolding of a creative unknown and to generate creative understandings within and beside bafflement. It is a practical epistemological ethics that can only be approached if the practitioner is able to “shrug” at the generalizing tendencies of theories, laugh at the ultimate authority these theories assert. This is a proposal about “provoking thought” in “concrete situations where practitioners operate” (Cosmopolitical 994). It is thinking through experience that engages thinking as a process instead of a position.

used to describe their antonyms, but as considering paradox as potential is important to avoid producing situations of normality or homogeneity, we imagine a way that being intricate reveals the trans-subjective state as a moment of commingling that exceeds the boundaries remaining even in acts of sharing.

Being intricate, a situation where complexity cannot easily succumb to labels, is difficult to pinpoint, contain, or generate willfully. It effects individuals across skins, through contained selves, within and through politics of identity and power. It operates as a result of and in cooperation with transitory commingled trans-subjectivity. We can only be willing to notice the activity as it happens, without our approval to be sure. While it is involved in processes of individuation, collective imagination, and intersubjective sensation, it is nevertheless something slightly different from these things and has the powerful, radical, and distinguished potential to momentarily blur the strict or even lingering boundaries between self and other by which we normally understand our subject positions and our associated identity politics and ethical structures.

Trans-subjectivity differs from intersubjectivity, which is a kind of sharing that offers a consideration of the other through empathy. It might allow moments of intersection and exchange, toward tolerance of the differences in the Other. It relies on a recognition in another of emotional capacities that make the alien suffering of the Other familiar to the I. "According to Husserl, intersubjective experience plays a fundamental role in our constitution of both ourselves as objectively existing subjects, other experiencing subjects, and the objective spatio-temporal world" (Beyer np). Three components make up the exchange in intersubjectivity: I, Other, and space-time. The recognition involved in the empathic probe into the mind of the other is situated, specific to a moment. The I and the You are mapped on this spatialized moment, where time and space are homogenous, such that objective, that is to say impartial and detached, concepts of self as pre-existing embodiment or experience, are assumed as part of the potential



to recognize intense emotional experience in the mind (principally) of the observed, within the specific context. The language of this interaction, inspired by and evocative of empathy, maintains a notion of subjectivity as pre-existing the physical experience of the subject.

Sharing of this sort has the potential to nurture compassion, to lead to “accurate sympathy” (Steuber np). Intersubjectivity assumes that founded on our beliefs about ourselves, our understanding of an objective world can be largely considered as an ongoing measurement of “Me” in terms of what I perceive in “You.” While repeat experiences of intersubjectivity make it possible to posit an ongoing developmental process, even an evolutionary one in terms of psyche and self, the theory rests very solidly on the notion that “Self” is and remains detached from the immanent concerns of a processual “care of the self.” Unlike subjectivities that Foucault and Butler have clearly indicated are never finished being formed and are not found outside of the relational structures generating their ongoing formation; intersubjectivity requires the *a priori* self as its foundation.

It is certainly not such a bad idea: nurturing empathy, tolerance, exchange, belief, evolution in oneself and one’s fellows. Yet, leaving a singular, contained, and ideationally pre-existing subject as an assumption forges ethical dilemmas that necessarily receive the same kinds of address, the same moves toward resolution or admission of the impossibility of resolution, that keep communities exclusive, hierarchical, and ultimately capable of intolerance (Corlett 17-23). Even in empathy, there remains a partitioning that breeds exclusion, condescension, and offense as territories and strict boundaries around identity stay put. Concerning the possibility of these boundaries to remain so steadfast, I always wonder about seepage, unintentional sharing and influence, where hair oils and bodily fluids, dance moves and facial expressions, lip gloss and lubrication seep into neighborhoods from which they do not emanate, in which they are “inauthentic.”

For example, what about middle class, white, suburban boys appropriating the styles, gestures, and music of inner-city black men? What about young heterosexual women adopting the excessive femininity of female pop artists who borrow unabashedly from the highly stylized femininity of drag queens? What about when the insistence on territorializing through giving voice or staking a claim becomes another way of racializing, marginalizing, excluding, only to reinscribe what is being resisted?

Containment always involves leakage, giving rise to questions about identity practices and the politics they engender. The leakage makes legible (if approached with a slow and lingering eye, ear, mouth) various orders of stability in chaos, disruption contained within constancy, a logic of schizophrenia. In his concept of successful contemporary collaboration, Grant Kester discusses a “toggling back and forth between inside and outside, engagement and observation, immersion and reflective distance” (90). Still, this toggling retains a lingering conceptual division between the opposites he describes. If the web or fabric or weaving of orders of reason, orders of time, orders of existence can be understood as layered practices, then processes of slipping aside from well-defined, recognizable positions, perhaps only momentarily, muddle the boundaries between “inside and outside.” It is a violation of boundaries that makes in and out absurd, for just a second. I don’t mean to imply a disruption that would eradicate all forms of opposition or relations of power. This is impossible. I rather seek to articulate movements beside and within these oppositional structures that imply a commingling exceeding our ability to establish criteria upon which to define inside or outside, detached or immersed, critical or affirmative.

I would like to blame the limitations of “rational” language to deal with a really muddled subject like irrationality and commingled subjectivities, but I am concerned that indeed the question of empathy, sharing, and tolerance keeps invoking the investment in the single, banalized subject (redescribed as brown, black, yellow, red; homo-, trans-, bi-

; girl-woman, insect, machine). If subject *positions* (which implies subjected positions) still rest securely at the base of what is de-centered, included, liberated then there is really no way to rethink the oppositional positions that they evoke: despite non-normative proclivities, “I” remain my own man, woman, companion species, crustaceous decapod, i-device.

Imagine the drift of the schizophrenic from *Anti-Oedipus*, the one who experiences the park while on his walk as a moment when “...everything is a machine. Celestial machines, the stars or rainbows in the sky, alpine machines—all of them connected to those of his body” (2). Deleuze and Guattari describe real schizophrenics under treatment for their illness, like D.P. Schreber, a German judge whose *Memoirs of a Nervous Illness* was a key reference for Freud in his work on paranoia. These real schizophrenics are also real creative forces in Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of anti-Oedipus. The way in which the Judge’s thinking has gone haywire transforms his mind and body into “an energy-machine” (1), producing continuous “flows and interruptions. Judge Schreber has ... a *solar anus* ... [and he] feels something, produces something, and is capable of explaining the process theoretically. Something is produced: the effects of a machine, not mere metaphors” (2). Key is the material realness of the “something” being produced. It is not merely theory or metaphor, rhetoric or performance.

This discussion does not minimize in any way the pain of paranoia and mental illness. Rather it refrains from pathologizing the thinking style of madness in order to allow it voice: a generative, creative, energetic machine’s utterance. Here we can gently, traumatically reimagine the slippage of the trans-subject without evoking pathology. Again, Deleuze and Guattari use this term “machine” in a very particular way to indicate the dynamic systems and effects of thinking beyond the representations and containments of “state” approved language. I draw on their work specifically to indicate that a machinic connection of the type they describe in their schizophrenic example, proposes a paradigm

of perception where bodies in motion cease to be limited by the mere function of their locomotive capacities. The alternative to the rational mind makes the processes of intra-acting and trans-subjectivity overtly apprehensible as just, correct, and creative functionions of bodies merely being.

In their other example, Lenz, photosynthesis, the function of green plants, filters into the human body the schizophrenic such that his human functioning and the plant functioning slip into one another “as one part among the others...[where] there is no such thing as either man or nature now, only a process that produces the one within the other and couples the machines together” (2). Clearly this “schizoid” consciousness or awareness has made what is invisible to the “sane” eye or body quite visible, comprehensible even, and gloriously, wonderfully real.

The lack of territoriality in this image of the schizophrenic at one with all natural processes leads to a further discussion of subjectivity in relation to the occupied territories of identity politics, nationalisms, and area studies. In a less radical way, Literary theorist Kandice Chuh offers a way to slip aside from the overtly unexamined subjectifying processes of area studies and offers another opportunity for detachment from the territorialization that often is part of the orientation in national literatures study.

In *Imagine Otherwise* (2003), Chuh proposes “subjectlessness” as a way to “create the conceptual space to prioritize difference by foregrounding the discursive constructedness of subjectivity” (9), while slipping aside from the containment that area studies in American universities impose on a given national subject. She critiques the way language, deployed to understand identity, limits subjectivity as an “epistemological object” and thereby denies its own discursive matrices. By positing subjectlessness, she offers a way to “account for practices of subjectivity that might not be immediately visible within, for example, a nation-based representational grid...[and proposes] an approach to conceiving... coherency that consistently puts ... boundaries into question”

(11). Already working with paradox (coherency with questionable boundaries and evoking a difficult-to-imagine missing or erased subject in an area studies practice), Chuh suggests the potential for bringing discursive and material awareness to the fore while eschewing reliance on assumptions about national and legal subjectivity that endow rights mainly through subsumption by or belonging to a particular State.

Careful examination of the linguistic complexity of the term “subjectlessness” shows how this dynamic subject configuration can be engaged beyond Chuh’s application in the area studies context. The “less” part of the subject arrangement requires attentiveness to the difficulties of indicating possible difference in identity repositories such as “Asian,” “American,” and the politically fraught hyphenated combination of the two; still “less” does not mean an erasure or subtraction of possibilities for identity. Rather, it forces a consideration of the desire for the subject by those whose work makes it into an object of study. By introducing “less” to the noun form of subject, a detachment from the power forces active in constructing narratives of “different, foreign, inassimilable, and so on” (82) becomes possible, and the “a priori meaninglessness of [a term] that collectivizes [identity discourse]” (82-83) is revealed. For Chuh, this detachment allows breathing space to both de-essentialize and disinvest territories that close down inquiry into ongoing difference.

The excessive “ness” suffix added to “subjectless” implies a quality that is active in its construction, and therefore ethical in its effective detachment from the investment in categorization around nationalism and nationality. The act of accepting subjectless-ness is not a passive elision of identity, but a lively building of something that is at once nothing (in that it slips the boundaries imposed upon it) and something (in that it can “be”) in a process of signification, shifting both with observation and construction. It is important not to lapse into essentializing or exoticizing subjectlessness through an Orientalist lens, even though Chuh insists upon this figuration being most applicable to Asian-American

discourse. It seems to me that in the act of deconstructing an academic field naming bodies and experiences as “Asian American,” there is again an important leak, a spillage that cannot be contained, nor should it be. The deconstruction of less-ness rendered upon or within the subject is an ongoing task that bears upon any kind of identity formation, especially if we understand this to occur significantly in the co-constituting relational exchanges with various bodies, forces, and environments that I have been discussing at such length.

Enacting these conceptual evocations, the poetic relations in subjectlessness, could become a situation of mere representation, but key to involving strange subjectless-nesses in the quotidian is understanding daily life as an aesthetic process. Entertaining the flexibility involved in painstaking care of the self as a condition in which identities and bodies are constantly emerging, involves accepting the possibility that movement, sharing, and exchanging engenders unexpected results that while frightening are productively radical.

Returning to trans-subjectivity, it becomes possible to see the radical reworking of the atomistic individual occurring on many levels, and at the same time the maintenance of a complexly sympathetic to the fact that “each” has “a” body and a psyche with which to perceive, engage, modify, and effect the world. Trans-subjectivity extends the possibilities of intersubjectivity in that it slips aside, again momentarily, from the maintenance of individual subjective boundaries, in the instance of engagement. It also actively courts the subjectlessness of Chuh’s de-objectified area study but pushes the agentic capacity of bodies and minds, practices and methodologies, desires and beliefs toward a continual invention of selves in relation and selves in potential.

Because trans-subjectivity arises through intensity, it can be engaged quite directly, perhaps most directly, in circumstances where commitment to creativity occurs in collaboration. There are ample opportunities, meetings, outings, task completion,

discussions, drinks, where commingling occurs in intensity. Changes occur, shifts happen and then we go home and make dinner and walk the dog, all the while continuing the commingling process.

In collaboration, there are more opportunities to notice subjectivity as a continually emergent, multiple, and commingling process that disrupts and yet cherishes “each” (actor, player, gesticulator, speaker, lover, breather, knower). Simply accepting the task of unreserved *wondering* at the limits of assumptions about resistant bodies, active citizens, and liberated personas, in terms of their containment as individuals, already forms a disruption that makes possible the recognition of poetic forces at work in various complex and intense relations and thereby becomes something other than mere disruption: the disruption does not just smash things, it generates and reconstructs in its deconstructing.

*Fool Misplaces Border: Trans-subjectivity and Multipoint*

In 2001, I was invited to participate in a project called “Criminal Information,” organized by London-based curator Clémentine Deliss and sponsored by the École des Beaux Arts and the city of Nantes in France. I joined eight other artists, curators, writers, and a sociologist in early October at a 17<sup>th</sup> century building in the Rue de la Commune, a ramshackle hovel that would become our workplace, living space, and social core in Nantes for the next two years.

Deliss, then a curator and publisher of the alternative art magazine *Metronome*, wanted to challenge contemporary curatorial, exhibition, and publication practices, and proposed that we work together in an environment that would both support our individual practices and involve a spontaneous, makeshift collectivity. The idea was to upend the “young artist” careerism the residency traditionally fostered, and see if we could develop a series of alternative, messy, and innovative projects or exhibitions or publications

that would “criminalize” market-driven art practices. This was and continues to be a fantastic proposal. Figuring out how to move a “punk” value system of disruption and mayhem into something productive and creatively supportive while at the same time slipping aside from obvious decisions regarding market-driven art production remains a constant challenge. True to her curatorial and theoretical interests, Deliss established an environment of uncertainty and ongoing disruption.

She also had an interesting style of creating ambiguity by speaking of other participants’ quirks and speculating about their intentions when they were not present. While I won’t fault this as a way to nurture tensions that



Figure 1.5. Multipoint, Nantes, France November 2001. From left front: Sandy Queudrus, Christine Laquette, Dessislava Dimova, Nico Dockx, April Durham, Doublas Park. From left back: Juergen Moritz, Merryn Singer, Michelle Naismith, Olive Martin.

might have “criminal” outcomes in the group practice, inviting creative responses to the disruptions of mania, anxiety, and ambiguity, it produced quite quickly a situation of



shocking unease that made for some very fraught, even paranoid encounters over the long term.<sup>11</sup>

The group consisted of Bulgarian curator, Dessislava Dimova; Belgian organizer, Nico Dockx; Scottish video artist, Michelle Naismith; London-based writer and performance artist, Douglas Park; French photographer, Olive Martin; French multi-media artist, Christine Laquet;

French sociologist, Sandy Queudrus; a painter from Johannesburg, Merryn Singer; and me, the LA connection (Figure 1.5). After our second meeting with Clémentine, in November 2001, she decided to vacate her post and return to England permanently. The circumstances of this are complicated, but it is perhaps



Figure 1.6. Still from *au revoir Moodle Pozart*, Michelle Naismith 2003. Dessislava Dimova far left, Douglas Park far right. Photo courtesy of the artist.

only necessary to say that the flow of creative tension became overwhelming during her final visit and eventually led to an irreconcilable issue of working styles. So we were left with a dilemma: did we also return to our respective homes after two months of Nantes or

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<sup>11</sup> As an aside to this particular concern, I recently received an announcement from LOOP, a video art organization in Barcelona, regarding a three-day (€300) symposium called “on collaboration.” The first paragraph of the announcement is telling: “Facing the systematic dismantling and redefinition of public policies, the severe reduction of public funds and the changing work paradigm in the field of cultural production; the current context requires new attitudes and a new way of understanding the work of agents in the field of cultural production” (LOOP np). In the US public funding for the arts has been gone for thirty years or more, but in Europe, this is a more recent phenomenon. So LOOP proposes leveraging collaboration as an industrial resource for institutions to produce and administer “new horizons of creation” and to sustain themselves. While the drive to sustain arts institutions is not a devilish one, the very containment and institutionalization of the collaborative form provides the opposite function to the one I theorize here.

did we try to carry on our criminal investigations without her. Of course we opted for the latter with huge resonance for many of us, which for me has included the last ten years of my creative practice and the impetus behind this project.

Eventually we called ourselves Multipoint as we thought it reflected an analog version of a digital network, a sort of becoming-digital without becoming entirely cyborg. We worked on many different projects, some of which involved all nine of us, some of which included two or three who gathered and tried some experiments. Sometimes we were props or grips in other people's projects; sometimes we just worked on our own pieces and then exhibited them as curated group shows. While we were camping in June outside of Nantes, Dessislava and I designed and fabricated handbags and sundresses; Olive and I combined projects we were working on independently into a sort of illustrated novella, *Common Objects*, which was translated into French and published jointly by Joca seria books in Nantes and Beyond Baroque books in Los Angeles; many contributed to Nico's map-archive *Curious 003* which partly documented our first year together. Michelle produced a video project, *Au Revoir Moodle Pozart* (Figure 1.6), over the course of the year, on which many of us assisted.

At the end of our first year together, we published an artists' book, *once the search is in progress...*, using the budget provided by the residency to make a catalog that would normally highlight the individual accomplishments of each artist from the year. We structured the book as a hypertextual remix of our individual practices, finding conceptual, emotional, and aesthetic liaisons among various pieces produced independently of the book and specifically for the book. This was the last activity in which all nine of us shared, and it provided a microcosm of the entire process.

The question of leadership was perhaps the most difficult to deal with productively while still "criminalizing" known structures of power. Attempting to maintain an egalitarian system that honored the competencies and the desires of each

member without a director to ease personal differences, provide direction, and keep the players focused was very challenging. It did however provide a hard lesson in graciousness and kindness that I won't soon forget.

A text by Merryn Singer that appears in *once the search is in progress...*, offers a gloss of the complications of organizing a self-directed team without teleos or concrete productive ends, and without a central organizer. I am providing this long quote as well, to temper my own subjective memory, checking the autobiographical against the experience of another participant. Merryn is an exquisitely sensitive observer and, although the sense of displacement, dreariness, and nonfeasance was present for us all, her alienation, both culturally as a white South African in bourgeois, and frankly racist, Nantes, and as a young artist far from home for the first time, was perhaps more excruciating than that the rest of us experienced. She says of the experience...

...[it] seems that every year is a rather tumultuous time in the Post Diplôme of Nantes, this year being no different. Originally a group of ten was assembled by Clémentine Deliss to research her concept of 'criminal information,' but a rather rocky start led to her resignation... and the group was left to stumble over the cobblestones of Nantes *sans directrice*. The following months were marked by many meetings, numerous negotiations and endless compromises, culminating in the formation of a tenuous working group. I think particular to this group has been the desire and willingness for collaboration and exchange, probably sparked by Clémentine ... This has not been an easy process, especially without a 'mediator' of sorts. I have learned that democracy can perhaps function, when there are a limited set of options and each person votes for their preference, but when there are ten options and ten votes, it easily collapses into multilingual squabbling and bickering! It has been an experience of trying to find our way around each other's ideologies and methodologies that became for me an exercise in self-exploration as much as it was about learning about the others in the group.

The departure of Clémentine left a rather large void in the focus of the group. Part of our initial difficulty was to negotiate that void without necessarily trying to insert something new and ill-fitting into it....

I think...that the shifts that have taken place within the group structure, and the subsequent *auto-géré* group that we tried to form have had a strong impact on the work that has been produced this year, and has started to shift the parameters of...the Post Diplôme ...in France...This group has tried to redefine the structure by making transparent the constant power struggles and shifts that have taken place throughout the last eight months. ...This publication is an extension of those concerns. We did not ...want a traditional ‘catalogue’ to accompany an ‘exhibition,’ but chose rather to expose some of the processes that this year has been about. It is a true reflection of an unconsolidated, self-mediated process (*sic*) (Singer).

For me, it is difficult to think of that time and space as other than strangely fraught, even though from it came many amazing projects, and Michelle, Dessi, Olive, Christine, Douglas, and I continued to develop the format of the group in Nantes for another year, and still maintain working and personal relationships today. The fraught nature of our exchange and the isolation we all felt in dreary Nantes<sup>12</sup> was exacerbated by homesickness, loneliness, difficulty communicating, and the complicated politics at the school which was hosting us. Merryn’s observation that institutional capacities become challenged when disintegration and anxiety are taken seriously as creative conditions that transform desire and productivity extends to the capacities of individuals working in this kind of intensity. Overtly acknowledging the “power struggles and shifts” that occur in enduring complex relations framed by a situation of creative contingency makes it possible to consider collaboration as something beyond utopia or even Bourriaud’s “microtopias,” which often posit only the joy of extending individual practice to collective invitation. This kind of acknowledgement, this embrace of “an unconsolidated,

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<sup>12</sup> Nantes is a mid-sized city at the mouth of the Loire River. Two hours TGV train ride (about 135€ return) from Paris, it tends to be isolated for artists on a 700€ per month stipend. Close to the Atlantic Ocean, it is a humid climate with “no dry season” (weatherspark.com). My experience in 2001 and 2002 was that it rained from early November to late May and then it was quickly muggy and hot quite in June.

self-mediated process,” which perhaps arises from the necessary contingencies of survival in such a situation, allows for the further recognition of complex subjectivities arising in such a practice.

Recently, on a Skype call with Michelle Naismith, I asked her what she thought were key problems with the collaborative process in our first year. She said something, roughly quoted, like “We didn’t choose in the beginning – I want to work with you April, or with you Dessislava – and so that made it awkward.” Yet, despite the fact that we didn’t choose each other, in some cases had a hard time even liking each other, we continued in our commitment to searching out what could be possible in this awkward, unintended situation. I remember that I had brought my haircutting shears and ended up giving everyone, except Douglas, a haircut at some point during the year. It was just something I did for my colleagues because I could and they wanted it. It wasn’t a monthly exercise and I never felt burdened by their requests. Maybe we made a meal together afterwards or went for a drink. But mostly it was just a thing to share. Merryn though, deeply invested in equality and fairness, insisted on making an expensive Thai curry for me, on my own, which was fabulously delicious, but which made me feel uncomfortable as it meant she couldn’t accept a gesture of friendship for just that, friendship.

This was a tiny incident but it reflected some of the tensions that may have been cultural or just over-compensating for feeling a complete lack of control. Sometimes her unwillingness to relax into friendship, to trust the rest of us made me want to be mean to her, which is shameful to admit, but real. It was a situation that failed to resolve itself even at the end, when Merryn told me I sometimes acted like Clémentine, which I took to mean controlling and manipulative. I would like to think she imagined this perception entirely, but in truth I probably did act that way without realizing it out of my own feelings of instability.

So here we are back at the question of instability, its function and its affect. As I relate a personal experience of insecurity, without the detachment of describing an event related in a collection of academic essays or the philosophical poetics of a highly conceptual team of minds, I make myself vulnerable both in the text and to life. But how to get at the question of the actualities of this instability, without sounding like I am glorifying the pain without having experienced it myself. So, here it is, a shared experience of melancholic alienation and loss. Can I analyze my feelings of desire to bully poor Merryn as a way of contending with my commingled state as trans-subjective partner with her in a field of creative wondering, fear, and contradiction? Can I overcome my humiliation at acting like such a jerk and recognize that in the horror of the situation came an opportunity, even one I am only just now noticing, for empathy, instability, and creativity to become disfigured, recombined, and emergent through the process of intense collaborative engagement.

This perhaps Wagnerian description sounds full of hubris and pathos, as I try to analyze my own experience, without resorting to self-depreciating humor, condescending description of others, or sentimentality. I realize that this intensely personal moment interrupts the analytic narrative in a discomfiting way, but this seems like a good exercise of my own principles of instability and chaos. I can only wonder at this point about the way that sincerity and gravity, irony and cleverness make room for themselves to play with my intentions, perhaps to my own disadvantage, but perhaps that is the kind of concern that only a self-identified subject can maintain for very long.

I don't believe there is a jolly, tolerant solution to the extreme, hidden, and desperately clutched disagreements we have among our species mates and the often diabolical ones we have with other-species (including mechanical, institutional, and environmental) partners; but I do believe we can entertain negotiations where the unexpected results of intrepid creative acts can lead to consideration, action, and belief

in ever more complex, multiple, and generative exchanges. Ongoing outcomes from this kind of risky (willing to complicate my “self”) encounter may look nothing like what we expect or desire, but they will perhaps launch us out of stalemate arguments that always, somehow, lead back to a center, a core, an Other who is judged less, and continue the same exclusionary agendas they purport to resist, offering formations of community that are adaptable, stable, specific, wild, and inclusive.

I tried several times to find Merryn on the Internet in the last year or two. The only references are quite old: one article from before she went to Nantes about how she won a prize, and another about how proud her local art community was that she was to represent Johannesburg in the “International Post-Diplome of Nantes” with its widespread reputation for giving young artists a boost on the path to fame. After that, nothing. She doesn’t even have a Facebook page. Curiously, she was very excited to meet me because she had heard that Los Angeles was like Jo-burg except that everyone in LA had servants. I think they were all a little disappointed that I wasn’t blonde and tan and a silly, coming from LA, but I suppose I had expectations too. Anyway, I think the connections, faint though they are, between Merryn and I continue to pulse because she comes to my mind more often than I would expect for someone with whom I have had no actual contact for more than ten years. This perhaps speaks to this elastic movement of memory and time I have discussed at such length, but it also continues questions of how selves become complicated in these kinds of intense relational, womb-like networks. Her fears and my fears, her tender feelings and mine, her clipped hair and my fingers as combs combine, largely through memory, as an intense physical memory that, even momentarily re-renders my body as I write this. To say it more definitively, the ensemble creates a different kind of body as well as a different order of subjectivity.

In the following chapter I will continue to examine the trans-subjective by discussing the complex trans-corporeality emergent in networked social situations

### **Bodies, Interactivity, Trans-corporeal Nomads**

The disciplined, the discursive, and the material bodies of Foucauldian power, feminist politics, and recent onto-epistemological discussions of matter can cooperate curiously when bodies and subjectivities are considered as ostensibly unstable, chaotic, transforming processes. Donna Haraway's early efforts to "build an ironic political myth faithful to feminism, socialism, and materialism" (1991 149) with her cyborg, have been revisited lately by material feminists seeking to bridge the distance between essentialized corporeality and the cultural constructions of the turn to the discursive over the last half century or so. This bridge, as Susan Hekman describes it, is built upon a complicated tangle of stories that relay what Bruno Latour has called "matters of concern," and these stories are necessarily myths which change, memories that decry truth while they seek knowledge, and shadow plays that nonetheless possess a strange kind of networked, electrocuted embodiment. The framework and the discourse, the matter and the rhetoric are mangled in a chaotic creativity such that polarized descriptions and functioning become impossible.

Discussing a thinking-creating partnership between philosophy and art, Elizabeth Grosz describes chaos as "the whirling, unpredictable movement of forces, vibratory oscillations that constitute the universe. Chaos here may be understood not as absolute disorder but rather as a plethora of orders, forms, wills" (Grosz 2008 5). Traditionally, instability is something knowledge seeks to rectify, pulling sense out of chaos and doing away with the uncertain. In this chapter I further consider the generativity that functions in instability, and continue to unfold multiple orders of reality and time as a complex kind of nomadism in networked ensembles.



In Rosi Braidotti's consideration of roving subjectivity from 1994, nomadic subjects are poly-lingual, multi-national, fluid individuals, sometimes specifically individual women. She claims nomads as a product of global capitalism and defines them as the "situated, postmodern, culturally differentiated . . . subject in general and . . . the feminist subject in particular" (4). More specifically, she defines nomads as geographies, "the sites of multiple, complex, and potentially contradictory sets of experiences, defined by overlapping variables such as class, race, age, lifestyle, sexual preference, and others." Showing herself to be an example of this nomadic subject, she says of herself in the author's bio on the back flap, "Rosi Braidotti was born in Italy, raised in Australia, educated in Paris, and is Professor of Women's Studies at the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands." Clearly making a case for a sort of subjectivity born of the necessities of internationalism, Braidotti complicates her nomad by saying she can be a polyglot or speak only one language; she can be a traveler or never leave the suburban neighborhood. And while she clearly states that the nomadic subject is inspired by the "experience of peoples or cultures that are literally nomadic, the nomadism in question here refers to the kind of critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behavior" (5). To lay claim to the nomadic subject position, one only need develop the criticality that resists uncritical acceptance of the status quo.

While Braidotti's nomad has been critiqued by other feminist scholars,<sup>1</sup> her figuration points us on one of Deleuze and Guattari's lines of flight, away from the theoretical, linguistic, and cultural limitations of the single self-identified subject and toward developing instead a "radically anti-essentialist position" (4). Even though Braidotti leaves many details underdeveloped, like her insistence on a nomadic aesthetic

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<sup>1</sup> In her 2006 book, *Alienhood*, feminist media scholar Katarzyna Marciniak problematized assumptions about "becoming nomadic," or assuming the mantle of "alien" from the safety of academic and artistic territories, when the migrant is often the target of violence, disrespect, and a liminality that is neither free nor aesthetic.

with the shouting text installations of Barbara Kruger as her only example, and she risks a cosmopolitanism that keeps her work Euro-centric and class sequestered, she challenges the static subject positions that ardent nationalism nurtures. Continuing to think this nomad with another type of traveler can shift it away from some of the problems.

In Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* the nomad becomes slightly more complicated as he analyzes two types: the one is the circular nomad who moves based on the exigencies of the land, such that "each time a territory is exhausted, the group moves around...to ensure the survival of the group by means of this circularity" (12); the other is the invading, arrow-like nomadic movement, "that of the Huns ... or the Conquistadors, whose goal was to conquer lands by exterminating their occupants." These nomads are, for Glissant "overdetermined by the conditions of [their] existence." If they are clearly liberated from the "the misdeeds of the tree,"<sup>2</sup> they beg the question "...rather than the enjoyment of freedom [implied by the unrootedness of the rhizomatic movement], is nomadism not a form of obedience to contingencies that are too restrictive?" (11-12). Glissant finds both these nomadic states to be fully rooted in their own desires and habits. He makes the case, for example, that "being compelled to lead a settled way of life could constitute the real uprooting of a circular nomad" (12-13). So rather than replacing one system of rootedness with another, he seeks to use a "challenge of the totalitarian root" (11), or singular, socially coded ways of believing, acting, and identifying. These can be found in both rhizomatic thought and the linear rationality it opposes. Glissant thus raises the ante by adding in the "afflicted or soothing dimensions of exile or errantry" (13).

Exile is a condition of always being displaced from some source, some solace that could ground being or identity. Errantry, from *errance*, is roving or wandering and

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<sup>2</sup> This is the title of a section in the chapter Introduction: Rhizome of *A Thousand Plateaus*. It refers to the concept that the hierarchical rootedness of the tree kills off difference and dominates the theoretical or psychological landscape. They propose the rhizome as a system of movements that travel laterally from a source but can detach and continue as separate and different but related plant systems on their own.

the translator notes that for Glissant “while not aimed like an arrow’s trajectory, nor circular and repetitive like the nomad’s, [it] is not idle roaming, but includes a sense of sacred motivation” (211 N1). Glissant thinks through this by imagining the wanderers of antiquity, Oedipus, Odysseus, even Herekles, who “does not feel burdened with deprivation – of a nation that for him does not yet exist” (13). In fact, he claims that “some experience of voyaging and exile is considered necessary for a being’s complete fulfillment.” To begin with this sense of exile, an alienation that is not a deprivation, an estrangement from nothing, is a kind of connection to the chaotic “is-ness” that we find in Spinoza’s substance or Agamben’s whatever-being. There is embodiment, but the limitations of nationality, sexuality, and other “identificatory” characteristics have not emerged, or have not been taken on. They are in essence, avoided or escaped however temporarily. Thinking of Odysseus in his long journey, he often fails to identify himself or mis-identifies himself to give himself the freedom to take on another persona and tell a different story. Even when he meets his own son, he does not reveal himself as Odysseus King of Ithaca and for a time he is just a dirty, old beggar who has lost his way.

Errantry, a wandering directed by a sacred impulse, also comes from whatever-being. It is driven, literally, by “the desire to go against the root” (15) and through this movement, that surpasses any compulsion to establish territories and found nations, “the very idea of territory becomes relative, nuances appear in the legitimacy of territorial possession” such that national boundaries hold only the most flexible of lines of containment. The errant traveler has to connect on some level other than the obvious and clear demarcations of identity, class, nationality, age and so on. As Glissant notes, “Ulysses returns from his Odyssey and is recognized only by his dog.” Partly this is because the goddess has disguised him as a beggar and partly this is because his dog, ancient and blind, is connected to Odysseus in a network that extends beyond the limits of mere identity factors. It is a connection through a much more layered and intense

network of associations and interfaces than can be encompassed by either an individual name or by a title like King, Brother, Lover, Boss.

In this chapter, we will consider the trans-subject as it flows across bodies, connecting wandering Kings and their dogs, boys and girls seeking happiness, and dancing machines. In networked flows, bodies become complicated beyond what is visible between the girl and her laptop or the man and the robotic arm. Thinking this type of interfaced body requires a consideration of corporeality that engages the biological difference Irigaray, Haraway and many others insist upon, but also questions the isolation of discrete biological, machine, or institutional forms that appear to end at the edges of fleshy, metallic, or electronic “skins.” I am not indicating merely an embodiment like that of Gibson’s cyber-jock whose fleshy body is modified to accommodate the electronic networked body of the corporation or the net. Rather, this chapter will describe the strange bodies that become possible when networked corporeality, identity rhetoric, and creative actions are layered in complex configurations of time.

Adding to my description of intra-activity from the previous chapter, I would like to make a distinction between interactivity and intra-activity at this point. Interactivity has been a concern in a number of fields from computer science to psychology, business systems to communications studies for more than thirty years as a way for human users and machines to engage in a communication process that seems like a “natural” or face-to-face conversation that is nevertheless mediated by a prosthetic (technical) device. At the same time, artists have been working intensively with interactive devices for over sixty years as a way to explore the impact of technology on phenomenology. For example, investigating the potentials for flexible and responsive engagement with technology, artists like Jennifer Steinkamp produced video installations where the viewer’s shadow becomes incorporated in the abstract, overlapping digital projections filling the exhibition space (*Smoke Screen* 1995, at ACME Los Angeles,

CA). Slowing the process down to an apparently more lo-tech reflection of bodily traces in the interactive process, Rubén Ortiz-Torres offers a “painting” consisting of a thermosensitive picture plane (*Big Bang* 2012) on which the viewer can press her hands



Figure 2.1. *Big Bang*, 2012, Rubén Ortiz Torres, thermosensitive polyurethane composite. Installation views at the Museum of Latin American Art, Long Beach, CA 2012.

or face to leave a fleeting imprint.

Interactivity is envisioned largely as a feedback format in which “users can participate in modifying the form and content of a mediated environment in real-time;” it is also understood to be “a process-related construct about communication” that has to do with the related qualities of messages in the feedback loop (Kiousis 2002). An ongoing source of interest in terms of computing legibility and user productivity, interactivity is vastly different from intra-activity mainly in that there remains a clear and conscious separation between the user and the machine where “interactive media are often thought of as ‘mechanisms for delivering image, text, and sound data in which the user interacts with the database’” (364). There is little to be understood in these descriptions as co-constituting; in fact, the clear separation between the tool and the user, the database and the one accessing the data, need to be maintained in order to measure and calculate the scope of technologically-driven communication of this type. Additionally, studies indicate that the complexity of interactive options does not guarantee actual interactivity.

One consulting firm found that “most people use only a few functions offered by state-of-the-art television, ...[T]hey tend not to readjust the controls once they have set them” (Aldersey-Williams 35), indicating that the full scope of interactive capacities offered by the passive machine are not accessed by the “active” users.

Pickering lists his early concerns with “considerations of the intentional structure of human agency, of the scale of and relationships between social actors, of the disciplined nature of scientific work, and so on” (xii) in the introduction to his description of the onto-epistemological processes of the mangle. Intra-activity, in contrast, occurs in a much less structured way. Biological, technological, informational, and institutional ‘databases’ have a more fluid interaction that is partially mediated by the choice to engage, but which partially occurs beyond and beside the intention of the actors. There is a sense that human and non-human, biological and apparatus can “talk back, resist, or otherwise affect ... cultural” situations (Alaimo 2008 242). The relationships among actors bearing agency and co-constituting their mutual embodiment are intricate and layered.

In the 2004 article, “Trans-Corporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature,” feminist theorist Stacy Alaimo proposes “that we inhabit ... ‘trans-corporeality’—the time-space where human corporeality, in all its material fleshiness, is inseparable from ‘nature’ or ‘environment’” (238). She offers this as a way for feminist scholarship to allow a non-essentializing materialism to flow in and amongst discussions of the body as “text” from the last several decades. But it is possible to read her discussion of “trans” as an indicator of “movement across different sites, [which] ... opens up an epistemological ‘space’ that acknowledges the often unpredictable and unwanted actions of human bodies, non-human creatures, ecological systems, chemical agents, and other actors” as something that complicates the merely human-to-human interaction in the context of the de-centered, multi-actor trans-subject. Key to this definition of “trans-

” as an opening movement is the fact that it engages the “unpredictable and unwanted” activities, those which cannot be anticipated, necessarily defined and re-defined while they occur; neither can their effects be named in advance, controlled, or leveraged for maximum impact or productivity. As Pickering notes, they operate “at a level of detail not usually accessible to empirical study” (xi). Their effects can, however, be traced by careful and slow observation of artifacts, outcomes, resonances, and sustained or broken connections. This, of course, situates the analysis of the “trans-” in the realm of aesthetic processes rather than in that of essentialist *or* discursive *positions*.

### **Bookchin’s Bodies: Trans-Corporeality in Expressive Networks**

Natalie Bookchin is an artist whose work has investigated the ways in which social and cultural experiences are explored and expressed in amateur videos posted on the Internet. Appropriating footage from sources ranging from private security webcams to personal video narratives (vlogs), which reflect the growing ubiquity of public and private surveillance, Bookchin choreographs the expressive bodies of various vloggers in what could be determined a complex reflection on biopower. Alongside her compilation of the narratives and representations of alienation in technical sociality, there emerges, in addition however, a strange new form, a layered body made up of multiple networks of engagement, complex aesthetic practices, and the filmy palimpsests deposited in recorded memory. The body (I use the singular here to denote the trans-corporeality of the form, but it does not represent a unified, contained materiality) that emerges in her work diagrams the layers of corporeality variously in the creative gestures of the vlogger, the networks in which the videos are stored and disseminated, and the so-called “hand” of the artist; the layers include as well, the history of media representation, traditions of speaking “the self” from Augustine to Didion, and the unseen movements of pop cultural, corporate, health providing, and religious bodies constructing dance styles, offering or

rescinding jobs, inventing medications, and narrating “right” action. This body again is not a literal technologized, combinatorial body, but one which involves multiple actors, engaging in expressive practices that temporarily shift the unity of single bodies into a mangled, shared, trans-body affected by the practice of layered creative activity.

Consider *Testament* (2009), a video installation in three chapters (“My Meds,” “Laid Off,” and “I am Not”) shown at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) in 2009 where each projection



Figure 2.2. *Testament*, 2009, Natalie Bookchin, multi-channel video installation, installation shot. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2009.

occupied one of three walls in the darkened exhibition space (see Figure 2.2). The works play serially, activating discrete parts of the space, or simultaneously, filling the room with an overwhelming force of faces, voices, and movement. Stereo speakers dangling from the ceiling emit the staccato and harmonic expressions of anonymous individuals sharing intimate details of socially stigmatized positions that are part of a larger collective experience of loss, medical discipline, and oppressed sexual identity. Formally constructed around the notion of a Greek chorus, which Bookchin cites as “...the voice of the people reflecting on the turmoil caused by the gods,” (Willis np) the work calls and echoes in a cycle of confused yet comprehensible pain.

Each of the three chapters narrates a site of bodily expression that mourns the inability to participate in the obvious power of social control: the ability to work, the ability to “feel” or emote “properly,” and the ability to subscribe to normative sexuality. In “Laid Off” a linear narrative establishes the “history” of economic decline since 2008



where workers, young and old, have lost the possibility to participate in the means of production through no apparent fault of their own; in fact, many of the speakers angrily insist on their years of service to a particular organization or to society in general by virtue of their “working really, really hard.”

“My Meds,” installed to the left of “Laid Off,” is formatted in a stacked and overlapping grid of twisted faces, uttering the list of prescriptions they take, have

just stopped taking, or will soon take in an effort to restrain out-of-control emotional states. Echoing brand names cycle while extreme close up shots express clear efforts to minimize the physical and psychical pain of requiring the drugs in the first place and then failing to respond to the treatment. Finally, “I am Not” projects as a non-linear checkerboard of young bodies asserting “I am not gay,” “I am so gay,” “I wish I were gay,” “I used to be gay but I figured out it was wrong.” Angry, articulate, pedantic, and fraught, the voices of these choruses express at once ambivalence toward and a longing for legitimacy through reconciliation with some kind of foundational, or at least generally accepted, truth, as if this weren’t already quite complicated.

In a larger story of the Foucauldian incarcerated body, managed by naturalized ideologies of state and community practice, *Testament* expresses the uncertainty evoked by the failure to comply with the disciplinary structures of power. Internalizing the external pressure of discursive governance, the vloggers seem intent on articulating



Figure 2.3. detail “My Meds,” from *Testament*, 2009, Natalie Bookchin, multi-channel video installation, installation shot. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2009.

their attempts to understand themselves as debilitated in terms of normativity but desperately attempting, for the most part, to comply with the expectations of functional biopower. Further, Bookchin is clearly concerned with the status of personal and intimate confession made for and placed in the uncertain public forum of Vimeo or YouTube and she emphasizes the pathos, isolation, and ubiquity each vlogger lives through in the way she emphasizes redundancy and awkwardness in the arrangement of the clips.

So on one level, the work is deeply interested in how sociability is constructed through the medium of Internet-hosted digital production. This, however, cannot be the end of the story: while Bookchin clearly challenges the notion of authorial uniqueness as the experiences of one vlogger are revealed to be the same as hundreds upon hundreds of others, the excessiveness of this accumulated, percussive voicing of the “self“ found and re-orchestrated by Bookchin, reveals a creative force that makes an intricate trans-body and trans-subject possible. The sheer number of pained individuals attempting to connect with an unknown and potentially uncaring audience through this vulnerable and awkward articulation creates a momentum that, when combined with the orchestrating force of Bookchin’s creative practice, shifts the alienated and fragmented into a new material form. The excess gives rise a creative force that makes a trans-body and a trans-subject possible.

Mapping the layers of this strange and emergent trans-body begins with the vloggers, who are largely confined to bedroom or living room desks, or sometimes the interiors of cars. They speak only to the camera, maintaining their isolation further by framing themselves as “talking heads” in the style of television news broadcasters, presenting personal, emotional narrative as “information” or “statement of fact.” Certainly this is partly necessitated by the set up of computer-based videography, but the blurring of the boundaries between diaries of intimacy and the no-nonsense presentation of information frames the vlogs as something beyond mere video documents. Frames-

within-frames, however unintentional, like mirrors, posters, and family pictures, offer further layers of mediatized reproduction connecting the vlogger's bodily record to a larger network of images, styles, and idioms. The bodies of the vloggers are not, however, mere representations of persons in pain, of uncritical citizens duped by drug companies or affected by puritanical sexual mores; they are real bodies, transformed in a contraction and expansion of time as they engage with the prosthesis of their computers and digital recorders, with the situations in which they find themselves (medicated, unemployed, ostracized), and with the electronic network similar expressive bodies access for similar reasons.

The desire to be heard inherent in these records connects relationally to several larger networks: distribution networks for medications that seem to be applied universally to a diagnosis of shared mental pain; commercial networks seeking profit and disregarding worker competency or loyalty; cultural networks that statically delimit normal and deviant sexuality; and the electronic network of the Internet that reduces all gesture, expression, text, and form to the digital arrangement of zeros and ones. These networks, while human-generated, act themselves with the agency granted all matter by Barad's intra-activity. This agency "is not aligned with human intentionality or subjectivity... but is a matter of ...an enactment," not an inherent quality (2008 135) and makes us more aware of the importance of "remaining resolutely accountable for the role 'we' play in the intertwined practices of knowing and becoming" (130). In this way, it becomes possible to read *Testament* as the active appearance of a complex, relational trans-body enacting and performing a moment of trans-subjectivity where boundaries between self and other have become tragically, hopefully, strangely mangled.

The layers of vlogged expressive and networked institutional bodies thus activated are selected and filtered by Bookchin and relationally orchestrated in the context of her artistic vision. Using structures from cinema and literature, Bookchin

orders the narrative voices of the vloggers in a grid that plays out, sometimes rapidly and sometimes with lingering slowness, like a bank of surveillance videos in an underground CCTV observation post. While the non-linear narrative emerges as coherent and cogent in terms of previously mentioned themes of loss, alienation, and non-productivity, the intensity of Bookchin's orchestration diagrams another layer of relational material-subjectivity. The artist becomes a conduit, attracting the previously described complex, networked bodies, and filtering them through her own relational expression, with the computer hardware and software as local prosthetic device and with the institutional space of the gallery as environmental milieu. Her form, invisible but connected to the same networks previously mentioned, becomes a hubbed vocal cord/voicebox,<sup>3</sup> one that is shifted out of the anonymous, randomly accessed web page and into the much more tightly controlled, art-institutional exhibition space, maintaining a kind of unity but one characterized by volatility and contortion. By appropriating the vlogged body as material for her work, she gives rise to a type of collaborative practice, that while not intentionally entered into by the vloggers, shifts the individual praxis into one that is shared, intimate, site-specific, and relational.

The materiality of Bookchin's medium, the digitized storytelling video-body, as different from the more traditional pigment, marble, or polystyrene of other art practices, is complexly post-human in terms of machine-body integration, but even more so in that its expression and embodiment, through Bookchin's orchestration, is deeply and intimately collaborative, producing a transformative accumulation of small but continual displacements that collect in textured, qualitative difference. These changes are rendered in the very real materiality of this layered, networked, mediated body, which can be read sheet by sheet, but which can never be fully comprehended in terms

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<sup>3</sup> Thanks to Alex Juhasz for inspiring this aspect of the investigation by musing on the notion of Natalie as voicebox in a panel discussion hosted by the Critical Digital Humanities forum at UC Riverside, January 2012 which gave birth to this particular inquiry.

of unity, containment, or legibility. In fact, the legibility of the commingled, trans-body in Bookchin's work is made possible only in the moment of rupture occurring in the singular narrative of the self or in the notion of the artist as authorial specialist, and then again through the excessive collision of unstable layers of identity, physicality, institutionality, and expression. Further, these bodies are read/perceived through the transient mangle that their intersection produces whereby the me and the you of atomistic subjects merges in a moment of shared subjectivity, extending empathy and tolerance by at once consciously engaging in acts of meaningful relation, and generating intensity and a free-fall out into nothing, a leaving of this "self" for a while.<sup>4</sup>

*Bookchin and Installation: Digital Bodies and Cinematic Perceptions*

A discussion of the trans-corporeal, trans-subjective body arising in Bookchin's work necessitates a return to the materiality of video installation art more generally in order to consider the experience of the viewer's body as part of the trans-body/subjectivity generated in these pieces.

Re-contextualizing Internet vlogs as installation art posits the viewer's body as a site of reception which forms a further layer in the networked, distributed emergence of bodies and subjectivities involved in the intra-activity of the trans-. This raises questions about the viewer as potential ethnographer, observing the strange and excessive configuration of the emergent networked body discussed so far. If encounters with the space created and the orders of time invoked are not merely instances of representation for the observer, it becomes possible that the viewer's body is mixed up in the orchestration Bookchin commences, and which I argue takes on an immoderate life of its own.

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<sup>4</sup> This is an appropriation and reworking of a lyric from Tom Petty's "Free Falling" (*Full Moon Fever* 1989) —a not so rare instance of alienation and loss in a pop lyric. (Footnote on the footnote: See Note 3, page 257 in Massumi 2002.)

Art historical criticism discussing installation art, especially that from the late 1960s on, finds generally that this genre of work creates a space-time situation within the gallery that disrupts normal object-oriented viewing habits, often making the apparatus of viewing/seeing materially apparent and implicating the viewer in the production and dissemination of information conveyed in the work.

In *Screens* (2010), art historian Kate Mondloch discusses works, like Frank Gillette's and Ira Schneider's *Wipe Cycle* (1969) or Michael Snow's *Two Sides to Every Story* (1974) (Figure 2.4) in terms of how they force the viewer (or her mimetic representation) into the narrative conveyed on the screen or screens in the installation; this happens when either the body of the viewer is placed in the work as a substitute for the viewing eye of the camera (Snow), or when the viewer is transmitted directly in the bank

of television monitors as she moves

through the gallery (Gillette and Schneider), rendering her the actual subject of the video. Either through implication or direct address, these works make the viewer aware of her body as she navigates the space



Figure 2.4. (top) *Wipe Cycle*, Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider. 1969. Installation view from "TV as a Creative Medium" exhibition at Howard Wise Gallery, NY, 1969. (bottom) *Two Sides to Every Story*, Michael Snow, 1974. Installation view from "Projected Images" exhibition at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN, 1974.

and “reads” the materiality of the screen or screens as the position and depiction of her own body become legible. Critically engaging questions of viewer participation, which art historian Julie Reiss considers “integral to the completion of the work” (xii), these pieces foreground the viewer as active, even while challenging her capacity to be critical about the interaction.

Mondloch agrees with Reiss’ general definition of installation art, coming out of post-1960s art production, as “participatory sculptural environments in which the viewer’s spatial and temporal experience with the exhibition space and the various objects within it forms part of the work itself” (Reiss xiii). Including the viewer in the definition of the actual artwork, as an indispensable but transient material makes the unstable nature of space and time in installation art legible. This is especially important to works Mondloch finds to utilize a “screen-reliant” spectatorship as part of the work, where what is delivered on a screen or screens in the space is only one part of an entire gestural, environmental, psychological event. Mondloch foregrounds the materiality of the screen as an object in the work, and as such, claims it must be considered important to the overall meaning of the work, not merely as an inert component for “delivering” information.

In works by Snow, Bruce Nauman, and Nam June Paik, the screen can mirror the viewer’s head and body, take the place of a sculptural human form, or provide a doubling of the eye of the camera and the eye of the viewer. In addition, the conditions of viewing often require navigating space in a way that undoes the normal cinematic or panoramic viewing habits that come from seeing films in cinemas or from watching a landscape pass from a train window. Snow’s *Two Sides to Every Story* (Figure 2.5) for example, includes two film projectors situated diagonally across the exhibition space; an aluminum sheet hangs between them, providing a surface for each image. The viewer is required to move around the screen to see the image of a painter working on a canvas filmed from the same

two directions in which he is now being projected. According to Mondloch, the viewer becomes part of the work in that she is at once engaging phenomenologically with the actual material objects in the space and she is metaphorically projected into “virtual time and space” (17).

In a series of works from the 1970s, Nauman forces viewers to navigate cramped corridors to look at a small monitor, which provides an indistinct image revealed eventually as the viewer himself being taped from a hidden camera in the corridor. Part tricky reminder of the surveillance society, part an upending of the expectations for information to be provided on the monitor, Nauman’s piece disorients and alienates an already estranged viewing body/subject by placing the viewer in the awkward place of choosing the confinement of the corridor in the first place, and then situating her as her own surveillor. Clearly, these works depend upon the engagement of the viewer with the artwork as part of the interpretive process: the gesturing viewer becomes the missing art medium activating potential meaning in the work.

Speaking more generally of installation art, including works that do not use video but which deal with the space and its affect upon the viewer’s body as components in the piece, Claire Bishop in *Installation Art* (2005) asserts that installation art works address “the viewer directly as a literal presence in the space. Rather than imagining the viewer as a pair of disembodied eyes that survey the work from a distance, installation art presupposes an *embodied* viewer whose senses of touch, smell and sound are as heightened as their sense of vision” (6). Mostly these kinds of work “inhabit” an entire space and are intentionally different from a related arrangement of independent artworks in space. *The Weather Project* (2003-2004) by Olafur Eliasson or the installations by Yayoi Kusama demonstrate the ways in which the viewer’s body becomes disoriented, soothed, nauseated, or dampened by the experience of the space.



In Bishop's estimation, the installation work structures a modality of experience, which makes apparent different models of subjectivity. She argues that different types of subjectivity are activated by different installation works, including the phenomenological, the psychological, and the political, which also occurs in other kinds of art; but with installation work, the site specific, ephemeral nature of the actual work, sometimes destroyed after the exhibition, "insists on the viewer's first-hand [bodily] experience" (10) to complete the work.

Although the spaces arranged by Bookchin express clear awareness of and engagement with these histories, her choices neither follow strict definitions offered by Mondloch nor do they offer the full-body immersion of the works Bishop cites. Rather Bookchin's video installations operate as emergent and distributed "operations" occurring across the institutional space and the viewer's corporeality, through projections or monitor displays and surround sound in a darkened room, to evoke something uneasy in the gaps between cinema, installation art, and desktop computer use.

In *Mass Ornament* (2009) (Figure 2.5), an installation Bookchin mounted at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery as part of the

COLA residency exhibition, she creates a darkened space that ostensibly functions as a cinematic black box; a large, long projection is situated on one wall and five surround



Figure 2.5. *Mass Ornament* Natalie Bookchin, , 2009. Installation view from "Virtual Identities" exhibition at the Strozziina Centro di Cultura Contemporanea a Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, Italy. 2011.

sound speakers are placed on black plinths at the front and back of the gallery, following a format for displaying video works in museums and galleries that mimics cinematic architecture. Despite the common occurrence of seeing cinematically-styled art works in museums and galleries for at least two decades, however, something more complex than mere architectural displacement occurs in the body of Bookchin's installation, something that at once complicates notions of space, the body of the viewer, and the possible function of the "cinematic" narrative at work in the piece.

Materially, the impression of cinematic idiom is foiled on the simplest level as the projection is on a wall, not a screen, and is situated below an average viewer's line of sight. It is not overwhelming in terms of its construction. Partly, this is practical as Bookchin formats the clips in a row that expands and contracts with the number of videos included

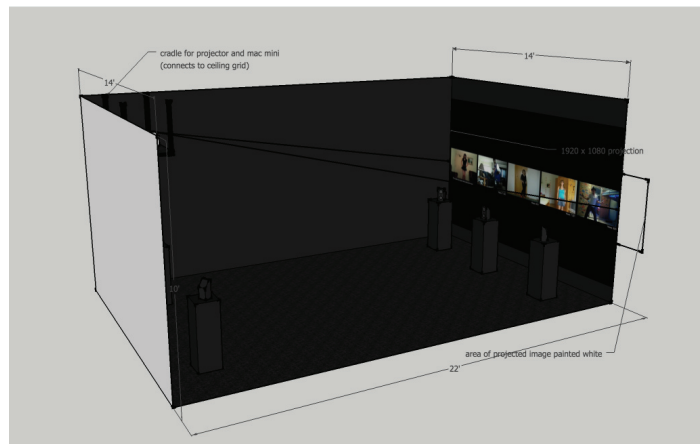


Figure 2.6. *Mass Ornament* Natalie Bookchin, 2009. Installation diagram courtesy of the artist.

at any given moment, maintaining the linear construction of the projection, and at the same time indexing the 1930s chorus line that the images in the video eventually reveal. The speakers positioned visibly on plinths in the room, three in front of the projection area and two at the back, exist as human-sized forms in the space (Figure 2.6). This makes the "body" of the sound overt and conspicuous, even though the mechanisms remain relatively inactive, as they are black in the blackened space and not available for adjustment by the viewer. The speakers as human-sized sculptural intrusions into the viewing space further distance the installation from the architectural idiom of the cinema where the speakers are usually mounted on walls high overhead. There are no chairs

in the space and Bookchin states that “sometimes [the work] has been installed with a bench, but I prefer without” (2012), making clear her desire for a standing viewer who is made more aware of her physical relation to the images projected and her potential for joining in the dance she watches, swaying to the tunes, noting with embarrassment the awkward movements of the dancers in the clips.

Focusing more specifically on the projected component, it is made from hundreds of clips of people dancing alone in domestic spaces, making comparable moves for their PC video cameras, interpreting popular dance idioms, costuming themselves like their favorite pop stars. Bookchin organizes these clips in a horizontal line across the space, with one to many individual bodies mimetically rendering and re-rendering a contemporary pop idiom of “dancer.” The moves are synchronized in that each body makes a similar gesture in each series, some with more “success” in terms of rhythm and grace than others. Alternately funny, awkward, athletic, or accomplished, the generous excess of leaps, jumps, kicks, sashays, and shimmies generates a joyful unwieldiness that goes beyond the way that Bookchin’s renders affective labor as “a post-Fordist era [work where] ... millions of isolated spectator/workers in front of their screens move in formation and watch dancers moving in formation alone in their rooms, also in front of their screens” (Bookchin.net np). When the dancing figures appear a minute or so into the piece, one quickly recalls the industrialized dancing “girl-units” of Kracauer’s critical text from which the piece takes its name.<sup>5</sup> As James Tobias notes that “...a sense of dissonance prevails in our recognition of a larger historical regime of fitness and self-discipline and the contemporary discipline required to document the self and to upload

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<sup>5</sup> Siegfried Kracauer’s article “The Mass Ornament” was originally published in 1927 and then collected in a series of essays *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* published by Harvard University Press (1995). In the essay Kracauer argues that the production of images of groups of girls for the purposes of entertainment have transformed them from “individual girls, [to]...indissoluble girl clusters whose movements are demonstrations of mathematics” (75). He posits that the production principles of Fordism applied to the dancing girls make the bodies and movements of the girls into “pure surface value and no deeper meaning (‘externality’).”

the document as a Web-ready clip” (215), pointing to the way that the Fordist assembly line does not contain affective labor in this instance. Rather the many iterations of performing, posting, organizing, viewing, posting again exceed the flattening effect of the factory-made ornament and take on a life, an agential realism, of their own. About half way through, bodies disappear, and a computer screen takes center stage, focusing the laptop video cam on the viewer. Now if there was any doubt about Bookchin’s body or our bodies as viewers being included in the work, it has been eliminated by this symbolic stare, a re-direction of at-home surveillance to the moving, shifting, watching body of the viewer. In this way we become implicated in the ornamental and the excessive. We are both viewer and viewed, already and excessive position, and now our bodies, previously detached from the work are incriminated, along with Bookchin’s, as we wait meet the stare of this screen.

*Mass Ornament* begins with images, not of people, but of vacant private spaces like kitchens, living rooms, bedrooms, and offices, where refrigerators, couches, and beds loom large in closely cropped frames. These spaces offer a Warholian repetition of banal domesticity, the commonality of which has been displaced into the public space of the gallery to reflect again the repetition within each frame of windows, mirrors, monitors, and pictures in the images. Oddly there is no point of origin for the repetition as gallery, domestic space, computer screen, and family portrait generate a disjointed relation to the histories of each other. Calling attention to the private space in which the video document was generated emphasizes the “natural” environment of the vlogger by contrasting it abruptly with the overtly aestheticized space of the institution-cum-cinema. Repetition of this sort is not the ironic self-reflexivity common to art after Warhol, but it puts into play a type of musicality that employs multiple tempos of memorability: like a fast cut, a jump cut, and a panning shot in cinematic visual language, the iterative doubling of spaces that contain bodies, hold pictures of bodies, and project bodies, reflects an awkwardly

elegant elastic movement in time. This movement steps side-to-side, forward and back in evolving flows of time, which continue to layer upon themselves in the artwork, the installation, and the viewing activity.

Further increasing the repetitive tempo, Bookchin posts much of her oeuvre, at full length, on the same Internet video websites from which she gathers her “raw” material, Youtube and Vimeo. While not conceived specifically as Internet art works, hypertexts, or websites on their own, the works re-exist on the Internet as documents of the installation, and this repetition of video upon video, website within website engenders an historical feedback loop that is “noisy” in terms of its organizing logics and relations to time. The elastic movement of Bergson’s complex order of time that combines memory and potential future appears and reappears through this iterative documentation on the internet. What Tobias names as a “larger regime of temporal coordination” (215) imposed by Bookchin as she creates the artwork extends itself beyond the already complex acts of collecting and coordinating the videos. The reposting as archive or artifact of the art object introduces and maintains another order of historical time. Then the viewer’s immediate engagement with time in the space of the gallery is complicated by her relationship to the networked trajectories of the piece, and the work continues to generate layered tempos apparent in the re-rendering and reposting on the Internet.

Banal ambient sound from the home videos are interwoven with a movement from the sound track of *Triumph of the Will* (1935), and intercut with a few bars of a popular tune from the Busby Berkeley film *Gold Diggers* (1933). Bookchin’s use of these films to provide auditory landscape for her work at once refers to the elaborate dance films (Berkeley) that Kracauer critiques in his article, and the fascistic discipline celebrated in Riefenstahl’s beautiful and terrifying work documenting the Third Reich.

There is a staccato rhythm, if not an actual remix stutter, to the sound montage that is disorienting while it offers a map of the ideas Bookchin intends to evoke of

control and oppression. Surrounding the viewer with an alternation or simultaneous compilation of grunts and sighs from the dancers, the grand or goofy soundtrack clips, the noise of hundreds of feet tap dancing, makes the sound in the work as important as the bending, kicking, flipping dancers. The surround sound creates a displacing soundscape that, without replacing it, calls into question the architectural certainty of the cinematic black box, and reminds the viewer/listener of the entire “body” of the work which now includes her own. The movement of the feet inside the video clips, and the orchestration of the clips in ever mounting numbers across the visual plane, and the percussive noise of the soundtrack mount in a nervous, excessive layering that further pulls the body of the viewer into the piece, not as a material per se, but as an implicated participant in the perpetuation of the dystopic situation of dancing machines enslaved to media styles and performing in ignominy for an anonymous laughing audience that Bookchin critiques. And yet, despite the successful rendering of this critique in a sensitive and thoughtful manner, I insist that across these dancing bodies, willing to share their awkwardness and vulnerability, believing in the beauty of their own bodies and frankly enjoying their own sense of joyful “play” is a release from the simple oppression of capitalism and its mechanistic operations. In the excess and through the orchestration, there is an intra-action that takes place in the many networks in which these bodies, including the viewer’s exist. That intra-action grants a different kind of agency, one that exceed the human agency of the individual, to dancing units and viewing units and writing units, across bodies in an enactment of trans-corporeality.

At the beginning of this section, I raised the question of the viewer as ethnographer. The material nature of Bookchin’s work clearly allows it to be read on an ethnographically, assessing specific demographics in terms of their generic use of technologically mediated social networks. Yet, if as installation, the viewer’s body is implicated in the close reading of Bookchin’s work, maintaining the viewer as merely

an objective observer becomes difficult. Further, if we take seriously the kind of trans-corporeal subjectivity that I assert is generated by the work, then the notion of a detached engagement by the viewer is even more difficult to sustain. To open this up a bit, I propose considering the viewer and the artwork in a complex relation of Deleuzo-Guattarian desire.

In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari develop a concept of desire that differs from the psychoanalytic one. It does not involve a theory of “lack,” or an impossible quest to obtain something that is missing. Rather, Deleuze and Guattari formulate a multipart, productive “machine” of desire that is thought in positive terms, where desire is a force that generates affect *and* makes things. It is a playful force, and not one that can be harnessed or controlled, repressed or channeled toward supporting power systems. It does not seek whole units to fulfill an end, but creates as it moves: “Desire causes the current to flow, itself flows in turn, and breaks the flows” (5). In this way, desire creates other movements, relocates or refocuses itself, and disrupts the currents that it creates and in which it moves. Here creativity is not only producing positive outcomes but also destroying that which comes to exist through its own productivity. In other words, creative force relentlessly continues to create, even when this means destruction of that which it generates. Creative force does not establish or maintain ownership but is forever the errant traveler, moving, seeking, and making in the plane of its own existence.

Elizabeth Grosz says of this positive desire, “it is fundamentally aleatory, inventive” (1995 180). Creative desire is identified with processes and production, making alliances and forging interactions. It is about action, doing and making, along with feeling and yearning, and it does not need to become concrete and permanent in terms of methodologies and symbolic systems, or if it does establish some stability, it perpetually disrupts any stasis because it is not a unified drive. Focusing on capacities and capabilities, this type of desire escapes the cycle of longing, attainment, consumption,

and dissatisfaction that the hungry viewer engages as she consumes the object of art. As a productive machine, desire is forever inventing relationships of sensation that transform the elements engaged in the particular “assemblage.”<sup>6</sup>

The viewer enters a dark space ready to act as the cinematographic, potentially passive, consuming viewer, but there is already too much desiring and speaking occurring in the networks that operate in the work for detachment to remain possible. An assemblage develops from the complex associations I described above, and the viewer’s individual corporeality is deterritorialized from its position as a unified subject/object configuration. She recognizes the many elements that make up the experience of engaging an online social network and in that particular moment her body is reterritorialized as part of the artwork and the experience it is coming to life in the space.

The video clips include status “stamps” on the lower right edges, added by Bookchin during editing, but reflecting the number of views, or in some cases indicating that the video was removed by the vlogger, thus connecting it referentially to the social networking site from which it originated. These stamps make visible the connection between an individual documenting herself and random members of a largely unknowable audience of “friends,” “fans,” or “followers.” Providing social networking-specific data, Bookchin clearly reminds the viewer that she is not experiencing a commercial or cinematic narrative, however artful or spectacular the result, as it puts the social structures of creative expression and creative consumption into a dynamic complex inter-relation. From this we can infer that the viewer is also understood as implicated in this inter-related process, contributing to the reterritorialization of bodies on the

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6 In Deleuze and Guattari, the “assemblage” is any number of discrete elements, which include objects, ideas, language, subjects, organisms, utterances, and movements, coalescing into a grouping capable of producing affects. The assemblage is not a tightly organized or static whole, but a jumble of transitory things capable of acting. Deleuze and Guattari conceived of the assemblage as a way to conceptualize behavior beyond that which is subject-oriented. In the assemblage, bodies interpenetrate, organs lose their psychoanalytic significance, and chaotic coherence becomes practical.



Internet, in the art studio, and in the exhibition space. As individual “units,” bodies are transformed into intra-active informatic flows, which begin to perform (or express) in excess of their intended contribution or participation in prescribed data flows.

In an interview with media theorist Holly Willis, Bookchin indicated that she wanted to remove the original vlogs from their mass context on the Internet and place them in a three dimensional space (the gallery) with the potential to activate “a collective resistance to alienation and isolation” (Willis np). Bookchin’s emphasis on reorienting the flat space of the computer screen and the web to the three dimensional space of the gallery is another kind of reterritorializing that produces effects in that three dimensional space and further disrupts the singular continuity of the viewer’s body as a consumer of objects or the dancing body as an object of desire or labor. The movement of desire in the video installation as a creative, experimental force without a goal or a direction, itself consumes the possibility of the viewer’s remaining a unified subject/body. She is pulled into the schizoid machine acting in the work, and she “does not live nature as nature, but as a process of production. There is no such thing as either man or nature now, only a process that produces the one within the other and couples the machines together” (Deleuze and Guattari 1977/2002 2). In the same way that Bookchin’s orchestration displaces the experience of viewing vlogs from the isolation of the individual desk and reconstitutes them in the limited interactivity of the gallery, the viewer is displaced as an isolated critic or consumer and becomes drawn in, through the power of creative desire, to the excessive activity of the work.

Thinking through desire as a generative engagement of alterity, Grosz discusses the intensity produced by creative desire as “no way innate or pre-given” (1995 183) to the body, the mechanism, the narrative, or the expression coincidental to a given encounter. Rather the bodies, organs, surfaces, and components “have come to have a life of their own, functioning according to their own rhythms, intensities, pulsations, movements”

(182). There is mobility and transformation involved in the signification of parts and their intra-actions. Grosz cites Alphonso Lingus as he evokes intensity: "...excitations extend a continuity of convexities and concavities...what was protuberance and tumescence on the last contact can now be fold, cavity, squeezed breasts, soles of feet forming still another mouth" (Lingus 76). Not only do organic tissues transform into various configurations, flesh becomes other kinds of matter which Grosz exemplifies with the poetry of Mary Fallon: "...fingers [on skin] became fine sprays of white flowers until they became fine silver wires electrifying my epidermis until they became delicate instruments of torture" (Grosz 1995 184). The memory of a particular kind of physical contact that may be actual or largely imagined, regardless the affect is still produced even upon reading and re-reading just the text, speaks to a kind of oscillation between virtual and actual interactivity that further produces the desiring flows from which it emerges.

Bookchin severely limits the potential for the expected interactivity available when viewing online videos: the videos in her piece are recognizable as something one might have once clicked on in an idle moment while surfing YouTube for a demonstration on making paella or changing the oil in the Toyota, but here the apparatus for engaging them (mouse, touch screen) is unavailable and therefore the videos are no longer clickable. You do wonder if you are one of the 10,747 viewers of the girl on the left, or the 259 viewers of the boy in the middle, or if your dance video is up next, but you are ultimately overwhelmed with the apparently endless variety of bodies shaking, undulating, sliding, flopping, flexing, and bending, "selves and non-selves, outside and inside" (Deleuze and Guattari 1977/2002 2).

Ultimately, the viewer is hindered from actually consuming the bodies; they are too fleeting, as if existing in another plane of dimensionality that inhibits the eye from lingering in a desire based on fulfilling lack. Calculation, legibility, sense-making of accumulated parts does not equal a whole; the viewer, implicated from the start as

possible dancer, posting on YouTube, a counter of bodies, a rememberer of hypertextual navigations in geographies of desire, makes her entrance to the piece in a state of current curiosity (at the time of viewing the piece), anxious memory of posting or watching such videos on YouTube in the past, and as an interpreter of the artist's account of all of the above. This movement in time is nomadic and rhythmic, corporeal and imagined, fleeting and perpetual.

To make sense of this situation of schizo-desiring machines and their forces, a more detailed account of various orders of time in which the nomadic body and subjectivity of trans-corporeal trans-subjectivity arises will contribute to an understanding of how the corporeal conditions of viewing cooperatively builds upon the networked body in a trans-subjective movement relative to other networked bodies made apparent in the artwork itself. Diagramming the layered bodies and subject positions involves accounting for them in terms of multiple instantiations in complex configurations of time. No longer coalescing into merely singular form in various spaces like the gallery installation, the "space" of YouTube where "the self" is documented, domestic spaces where dances occur and are video taped, and the virtual editing or access spaces (e.g., desktop computer, artist workstation, or mobile application), all bodies inhabit the complex idea of "musicality" discussed earlier in James Tobias' book *Sync*.

Using the term "musicality" as a site of resistance, as discussed earlier, Tobias offers a more complex and subtle meaning of the word that goes beyond the simple indication of sensitivity or conditioning to musical forms. Instead he discusses "musicality as [transformative] gnosis" (87) where the complex movement between sense, as "the divergent seriation of psychic and corporeal identity" and sensibility, as corporeal resonances in the "reception of diagrammatic rhythm" in Oskar Fischinger's animated musical works for example, are "sensual logics... entangled with one another, where musical instrumentality mediates authorial style and technocultural idiom" (88).

Fischinger's animated pieces are specific renderings of image to sound, where the images do not illustrate the music and the sound is not in service to or merely background for the image. The entangled cooperative movement between image and sound implicates visibility, aurality, composition, presentation, and reception as site-specific movements where space and time become distorted from what unified and rational, functional and containable. As the hand drawn colorful circles repeat and move forward and back, or white on black flags and crescents twist, flit, or soar in time to the music in *Kreise* (1933-34) or *Studie nr 8* (1931) for example, they neither illustrate the movement of the orchestration nor do they subordinate the music.<sup>7</sup> They work together in an intra-active musical movement that generates a strange re-combination of "sense and sensation [that] are better understood as being not entirely distinct orders of sensual logics, but rather entangled with one another where musical instrumentality mediates authorial style and cultural idiom" (Tobias 88). In other words, the visual and the auditory are transformed by their co-constituent activity through the artist's work and the technical format. This transformation of time-based media renders time more complex through the evocation of musicality as a way of knowing sense and sensation as complexly entwined.

Tobias describes diagrams of the production of temporality, via musicality, as they "provide...critical modes of making action possible" (245).<sup>8</sup> The "discrete

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7 An authorized excerpt of this and other works by Fischinger piece can be found at <http://vimeo.com/35735682>.

8 Just to be clear, the diagram referenced here is of the sort which Deleuze discusses at length in his book on Foucault, and as such does not represent a territory the way a map would, but forms an actual, material force, functioning playfully and creatively to unfold relations among various "machinic" elements. "The diagram stems from the outside," says Deleuze, "but the outside does not merge with any diagram, and continues instead to 'draw' new ones. In this way, the outside is always an opening on to a future: nothing ends, since nothing has begun, but everything is transformed" (89). Deleuze's outside is not a transcendental state but a pre-individuated force, the virtual of becoming. In these diagrams, nothing is wasted and all change is transforming (even infinitesimally) what is known materially in exchange with its potential or virtual companion. Ongoing and persistent, the interchange of the diagram is an orchestration of potential and material in an ebbing and flowing, a musical pulsing that makes interesting, if unexpected, use of what comes its way. And, quite beautifully, no one diagram describes everything, but there exist many of them, layered, intersecting, floating above and below each other.

or continuous change in time” produced by rhythm and melody form diagrams of complex time which can be read as “musical play” (245). The ongoing repetitions in the Bookchin work function as a “... ‘play of doubled potential,” where the dance, for example, is repeated by the many lone dancers in their bedrooms in the original videos, as the orchestrated artwork, and then repeat again as they are exhibited or posted across multiple environments like the art gallery or on Vimeo. As the play doubles and redoubles itself, and the sensual logics of image and sound combine, the rhythms raise the level of musicality as resistance. The work is no longer merely a document of the alienated worker, connected only by the tenuous spark of the Internet. It becomes, in spite of the original intention of the artist, a lively network, operating across bodies, in multiple historical times, where bodies are remade co-constituting, intra-acting agential actors. As such they begin to “know” beyond the limitations of their own individual bodies, in the resistant rhythms of musicality. Bookchin presents us with the biolabor that exhausts workers, forcing them to remain alone in a small room, and the bioinformatic necessity to prepare and post information, follow links, and “stay current.” Also required to fulfill the demands of biolabor and becoming bioinformatic is to render oneself in terms of contemporary idioms, where a notion of individuality becomes framed by particular genres of popular expression. But beyond these limitations, the musicality arising in the excess of the labor, the sheer joy of movement, the unfathomable repetition, offers a moment of recuperation from the exhaustion in that the singular body is no longer required to maintain its boundaries. The network, the intra-action has rendered it something beyond the mere individual and other than simply instrumental. The transcorporeal body moves across time in a complex way that, through the rhythms of musicality, complicate the actual ways it appears, acts, and transforms those included in its dance.

We have trans-subjects operating across trans-corporeal embodiment. Networks and ensembles emerge through musicality and in awkward, excessive rhythms. How do these fleeting bodies communicate in their layered temporalities? How do we document the conversations among such divergent and asynchronous entities? In Chapter 3, I will discuss the way in which language games, social contracts for communication, become complicated both by the material agency of the word itself and through the functions of disruption and mis-communication.

### ***Chapter 3: Games of Sorrow and Invention***

#### **Language and Sense in the Trans-Subjective**

The form of collaboration I describe in Chapter 1 and the kind of complex embodiment I discuss in Chapter 2, give rise to a question of how the complex situation of trans-subjectivity affects the structure of language and its apprehensibility. If speech or expressing is in some meaningful way “collaborative,” how do we revisit the question of “who speaks” and how? What logics emerge in the voices of transforming selves in collective practice? What constitutes clarity and sense in conditions of mangled chaos? How is exchange through language possible when boundaries between self and other have become so porous and illogical? Traditional forms of sense-making, accepted models of rationalization and clarity, become less effective for bodies and identities fluidly recomposing in relation to other bodies doing the same. Classification, naming, staking claims for pure territories of articulation are the actions of the self-identified subject for whom a singular notion of the rational functions as a presupposition. In the mangle, where bodies, identities, and actions are no longer clearly separated, time is complex, and chaos is a governing principle in which what is rational must be reconsidered, language transforms into a layered composite of potentials, requiring different tools for deciphering, and ultimately an ongoing setting aside of presuppositions.

In this chapter I will develop an active, material consideration of language, reading Adorno’s *Minima Moralia* and Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* for evidence of language asserting agential capacity. Appropriating Wittgenstein’s “language games” subversively, I will consider that changing the rules of the game makes openings for alternative styles of sense and meaning making to come about. As an example I will analyze a film accredited to a single director but which develops a complex model of communication in an intra-active network through the fictionalized account of a specific

historical situation in early post-Cold War Budapest. I will then return to Meredith Monk's *Dolmen Music*, to make a structural analysis of how the performance of this piece of music generates layered, intricate, and active forms of language that are related to but not confined by the logical structures of sense.

*Idiots, Language Games, Sorrow*

It is tempting to continually describe, in negative terms, the language games at work in the situation of the “trans-”: they produce non-sense, they are un-clear and in-articulate, they fail to convey. I do not wish, however, to extend a polemic of rational versus irrational, embracing the pathology of the mad as a system of knowing that replaces its opposite. I propose instead, along with Isabelle Stengers' idiot, playing with hesitation and bewilderment out of a wish to “slow... down, [to] ... resist ... the consensual way in which [a] situation is presented and in which emergencies mobilize thought or action” (2005 995). Slowing down, resisting quick consensus, and entertaining language as an open matrix of potential form a style of thinking and communicating with important implications for assumptions about rightness or decisive knowledge. The idiot's role is “not to produce abysmal perplexity... [but he] demands that we slow down, that we don't consider ourselves authorized to believe we possess the meaning of what we know.” For Stengers and for Deleuze the idiot is one who assumes nothing, except that it may not be possible to finally know.

In *What is Philosophy*, Deleuze and Guattari describe the “new idiot,” one who emerges post-1968, as following the earlier idiot of the 16<sup>th</sup> century who sought (and continues to seek) to be the Cartesian private thinker. The new idiot “has no wish for indubitable truths at which he could arrive by himself ...; he will never be ‘resigned’ to the fact that  $3 + 2 = 5$  and wills the absurd... The old idiot wanted truth, but the new idiot wants to turn the absurd into the highest power of thought—in other words, to



create” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994 62-63). The new idiot connects with the old idiot by “a slender thread” where the rediscovery of what is lost when a certain kind of reason is imposed creates accountability to both the comprehensible and the absurd: the “victims of History” and the “truths of History” commingle such that comprehensibility becomes something open and creative, instead of reductive and eliminative. The multiple logics of chaos and the languages produced in its action come out of this careful, creative, holding of the paradox of the knowable and the perplexing in the same thought: embracing cognitive dissonance despite the fear and anxiety it produces.

Recognizing a situation of loss in the death of the Cartesian private thinker, Theodor Adorno writes a lament in *Minima Moralia* (1951). An accumulation of poetic grief, this collection of aphorisms mourns the failure of progress and the ultimate impossibility of expressing truth. It reflects Adorno’s sad accounting that man’s ultimate inhumanity creates an impoverished existence where violence and cruelty, falsehood and treachery take the place of hope and redemption. Adorno expresses a problem from which there appears no way out: he says, “So, when we are hoping for rescue, a voice tells us that hope is in vain, yet it is powerless hope alone that allows us to draw a single breath.” The desperate sorrow coming from the failure of the dialectic, the transcendental redemption of contemplation, which can now “do no more than patiently trace the ambiguity of melancholy in ever new configurations” (121), renders Adorno bereft of possibility, stuck in a mournful, repetitive tracing of collective desolation.

If we step aside, however, from the redemptive power of truth, we find in Adorno’s expression of loss an opportunity for creativity in the chaos rendered by that loss. Here creativity is detached from entirely graspable truths, full and clear articulation, and the masterful understanding that patient hermeneutic tracings of uncertainty might render. Carefully reading Adorno’s statement for this creativity, we find a voice, apparently an internal one, but perhaps the ambiguously inner-external voice of the

schizophrenic, of the multiplied personality, that speaks, “tells us” that hope of the sort his unified self laments, the hope of redemption and resolution, is vain; but it follows in the reasoning of the multiplied, speaking self that powerlessness is the field from which breath can be drawn. Breathing, fundamental to life and meditative concentration, is the force making further and unexpected creativity possible from within the paradox of loss. “Powerless hope,” hope that has no potential for mastery, justice, setting right misapprehension and uncertainty, generates an affective resonance between the dread of not knowing and the excitement of free falling into an abyss of possible revelations, unsolicited and yet full of weight.

Powerless and hope: these are paradoxical terms as the first describes the ineffectiveness of intentions that drive the subject toward improvement or balance or progress or mastery, and the second expresses an expectation that something, a redemptive moment perhaps, will occur in a future that is no longer part of a linear trajectory. When the two are combined in a semantic gesture extracted from breath, capacities arise that move language, and with it the breathing speaker and the act of mourning itself, to forge a different path, where the messianic redemption sought in knowledge dissolves, and enigma, affect, and embodied strangeness transform the abyss into a space of potential in which it ceases to be characterized as empty. Then it follows that the mutiny of grammar, the rebellion of sense-making involved in progressions of a certain kind of logic, renders an opening in a dark wood of misapprehension, missed possibilities for understanding a natural and constructed, or being-doing, way of organizing experience, matter, and communication in multiple, situated, and (demanding but) important ways.

Why specifically this focus on powerlessness and hope in the same phrase, powerless as a way to describe, to qualify, hope? Discussions with the Multipoint group in Nantes were characterized by a dream-like social commotion that was a bit like

soda fizz in the brain, during, immediately after, and in distant memory. This was in part because roles were assumed relative to particular tasks and not job titles; the voice of authority rang mutely even when it was loud; personal wounds served as filtering cloths through which “actual” or “basic” statements were transformed into psychic transgressions that inflicted further pain, which remained mostly hidden. Even simple objectives, like To-Do Lists, for agreed upon projects were practically impossible to convey with assurance of understanding among actants descending, as Merryn suggested, into “multilingual squabbling and bickering.”<sup>1</sup> Perhaps we did not listen with care; distracted by the precariousness of not knowing what role each was to assume in any given situation, we moved awkwardly among silence, drunken escape, loud argument, quiet intervention, narcolepsy, and incoherence. The dreamlike sensation of needing to speak, knowing which words to utter, but being stopped by a slow, thick tongue or uncooperative mouth was ongoing actuality.

Layered upon and further informing our glitch-y communication was the foundational underpinning that we did not share a “mother tongue,” even though we all spoke English, and many of us French, with varying degrees of adequacy, even though many of us were “native” English speakers. British English, American English, Colonized English (South Africa), and English as a Second Language were four different and often indecipherable tongues, not merely “undisciplined process[es] of phonemic, graphic, morphological, syntactic, idiomatic, semantic habits” (Champigny 3), but four idiomatic ways of temporally navigating degrees of foreignness, all informed by sensations of displacement, desires unmet, uncertainty residing where certainty should have reigned.

Just the use of a simple word like “deceive” was impossible to apprehend clearly: one needed to travel for work beyond that of the group; another missed the one who left

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<sup>1</sup> See chapter 1, page 43.

and said she had “been deceived.” The traveler felt accused of falsehood, even fraud by the lonely friend, and defenses rose. I lied not, the first declared. I did not say you lied, stated the second. But you did, pronounced the first, and on it went. But a problem of translation that remained unrecognized, partly because the traveler wondered if in fact he was indeed guilty, could have been easily rectified with short recourse to the *Robert Collins Dictionary of French*, where the verb *décevoir*, from which the English “deceive” clearly emanates,<sup>2</sup> has a much different actual translation of “to disappoint, or to let down.” This, of course, is quite different from “to ensnare; to take unawares by craft of guile; ...to get the better of by trickery; to ... betray into mischief or sin” (OED). The problem is a clear example of the *faux amis* about which our High School French teacher warned us repeatedly, at first, and then not so much when it seemed we would continue with these mistakes to the grave.

We can more fully describe *décevoir* as the act of “*mal répondre à un espoir*,” that is “to respond badly to a hope.” Here we are again at hope and powerlessness, perhaps merely the result of idiomatic mis-fire and too quickly gathered mis-translations in the pre-supposition of clarity where only slight potentials for misunderstanding resulted in impossibility and pain. Powerlessness applied to language describes a state of realizing no matter how “logical” or “sane” or “thorough” one believes one’s articulations to be, there is still bewildering potential for deception in the sense I have proposed here, and the bafflement, lunacy, and grief that accompany it. There is no ultimate clarity; there is no logic in what is heard and what is apprehended. But what about its Adorno-esque companion, hope? What of Powerless Hope? What if language like bodies could entertain a “nomadology,” not only a movement, but an ongoing, transitory study of that movement, in language as well as in subjectivities, bodies, and politics. This begins with a consideration of what it means to lose comprehension, to misunderstand.

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<sup>2</sup> see “deceive” OED.

Returning to Adorno, we find a specific point in *Minima Moralia* where he mourns the loss of comprehension: a singular point in time when Theodor Adorno, philosopher, musician, dialectician, university professor, prominent 20<sup>th</sup> century intellectual, uses bad grammar.

One evening in a mood of helpless sadness, I caught myself using a ridiculously wrong subjunctive form of a verb that was itself not entirely correct German, being part of the dialect of my native town. I had not heard, let alone used, the endearing misconstruction since my first years at school. Melancholy, drawing me irresistibly into the abyss of childhood, awakened this old, impotently yearning sound in its depths. Language sent back to me like an echo the humiliation which unhappiness had inflicted on me in forgetting what I am (110-111).

Adorno's unhappiness includes multiple errors as well as multiple problems of grief: he is already sad of an evening, the specific details of which on this particular night remain unstated; he is writing, we might assume or perhaps talking to himself (again), and suddenly realizes he has fallen into the bad grammar of a provincial youth, using an incorrect form of a verb that is already badly formed from the "correct" language. The problem at first appears connected to a rural domain where strange words emerge in the gnarled speech of the drawled, the imprecise, the emphatic, on the order of ain't or fixin,' I imagine. But Adorno grew up in Frankfurt, a thriving financial metropolis since the 8<sup>th</sup> century, at least. He had sophisticated parents, a Corsican opera singer for a mother and a flourishing wine merchant for a father. Granted the bourgeois lineage does not preclude the use of off-grammar, but one might assume some level of sophistication from these cosmopolitan parents. It seems the pre-school Theodor was exposed, whether by a local nursemaid or some urchins with whom he played some bright afternoon, to the follies of unschooled dialects and they cause him considerable pain both originally and in unwilling recollection. While the incorrect verb is endearing, sweet even as he imagines his kindergarten self raising his hand and answering the teacher with this slangy, regional

mis-conjugation, this sweetness quickly passes into a morass of echoing humiliation. An endearing misconstruction, a treasure of the heart locked in a simple, wrong verb form, unleashes the onslaught of “the abyss of childhood...[and] old, impotent... yearning sound.” There is an action on the part of the verb gone awry, a non-entity or maybe the linguistic equivalent of the idiot, in circles of correct grammar, which is capable of a kind of agential power, talented at creating and provoking yearning.

What is this yearning? Longing for a level of intellectual sophistication that would erase all fault, Adorno seems to mourn not only the lapse in his own logic at deploying the faulty verb, but also the retroactivity of returning to the idiocy of childhood. Ignorance, idiocy is not a goal. Discussing Brecht, Adorno stated “truth requires countless mediation” (Commitment 82). Truth is a goal, *the* goal of Modernism, and it demands the erasure, the mediation of idiocy. Still, in Adorno’s lament over his relapse into infantile grammar, he knows he has not ridden the arrow of progress away from childhood; instead it looms, it draws, it awakens, it returns in an elastic movement of time alien to the logics of progress. Even though I acknowledge the tragedy of *striving* toward an idiocy implied by the willful disregard of the capacity of one’s mind, heart, hands, and desire to fabricate and participate in the construction of one’s world, thinking about Deleuze’s idiot, the new idiot, the one without desire for indubitable truths, the one “...who wants to turn the absurd into the highest power of thought” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994 62) opens doors that cosmopolitan sophistication and maturity seal tight.

Adorno’s account of Brecht’s opera, *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, includes an account of “the oblique glance of the child, to whom the trousers of the adult it looks up to appear as mountains” (Milfull NP). Adorno sees this “skewed infantile way of looking at things” as a revelatory glance on the historical exigencies of capitalism (in Brecht) and more broadly as a way of “transform[ing] reality until its basis can be recognized.” Without giving in to the recourse of a perpetually dialectic way of “seeing”

(or in our case listening), it is useful to apply Adorno's interest, however momentary, in Brecht's rendering of infantile perception to his own text, his own memory of acting ridiculously wrong and infantile in his deployment of proper grammar. His tortured memory actually provides a key moment of creativity from which the unexpected can take flight, bearing significantly on the question of his subjectivity.

"...what I am" dangles at the end of Adorno's melancholy as a strange and teasing problem. Is he speaking of his contemporary existence as an intellectual, as a developer of aesthetic morals within the rubric of Modernism; or does he indicate his status as one lost in the abyss of a sorrow he shares with all humanity; perhaps still he mentions himself as a conflicted German, half-Jewish, partially Corsican speaker/writer of occasional grammatical *faux pas*? The confusion, while rendering Adorno even more melancholic, is not the end of things. He can mourn the loss of his perpetual intellectual and therefore dialectical progress, but we are able at this moment to draw from his humiliation and sorrow the potentials released by forgoing the assumption that one can always understand, either one's own articulation or that of others in only one sense. If read as a moment of opening, a break in the containment of intellectual, linguistic, even subjective boundaries, confusion offers porosity in the logics of expression, the potentials in the theatre of misunderstanding, that provide an interesting paradigm in which to linger on communication in the trans-subjective, commingled experience.

I begin a discussion of trans-subjective, embodied language in collaboration with this consideration of Adorno's mourning to provide a dissolving and shifting frame for the potentials in moments of mis-understanding, incomprehension, and faulty translation. I am curious about what might be generated by the continual bafflement Derrida invokes in *Writing and Difference* when he tells us of the impossibility of constructing "intelligible meaning, that is, [giving] form (*conformer*) to the essence and vocation of discourse... [when] in fact and simultaneously [one must] in principle escape (*échapper*)

from madness” (83/53). In all lucidity there lingers a trace of the irrational it seeks to eradicate, and this trace must be continually drawn out, like a long, black hair caught up in the knitting. We might delight in bafflement, although it is not encouraged as a general rule. We might play with the irrational as a new language game, refusing to contain the madness that will not be contained anyway, but again this is not generally supported as a model of apprehension and communication. We might embrace the pathos of loss and lack if we refuse to seek a balance that would rectify loss and lack to some presupposed idea of order, clarity, and fulsomeness. If we search instead for that which we missed in our quest for lucidity, if we wonder at the infinite variables arising in the paradox of order and chaos we might notice the moments of intra-active co-constitution between sense and nonsense, madness and sanity. They engage in language games with new rules, parameters that are constantly being remade, despite the way that this disables the potential for clarity.

In referencing language games, a phrase clearly drawn from Wittgenstein’s discussions in *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), I am using his phrase to describe systems of communication that have material form and which can be reconfigured, through relational dynamic processes, beyond presupposed limitations involved in clarity. Wittgenstein’s statement that “the meaning of the word is its use in the language” (20) speaks to a the dynamic relationship among the constituent parts of the word (phonemes), the semantic structure of, say, a sentence, and the matrices of poetic processes that formulate systems of communication. Seeking to shed light on conceptual problems in philosophical discourse that he ties directly to confusions as to the way language works, Wittgenstein develops a material, non-representationalist understanding of the way language acts in terms of its use. Because the rules of language are socially agreed upon, the use of language comes out of a social contract where language functions as ethical action.



Exploring the material intra-activity between the components of language systems, their users, and the larger social interface, Susan Hekman, in *The Material of Knowledge* (2010), draws out a relation between language and materiality that neither essentializes nor privileges one over the other, by considering the parameters of meaning-making within language: “Wittgenstein ... wants to reject the notion that there is *one* relation of a name to its object and [that] our goal is to find this one correct relationship... [H]e is defining meaning as a product of our *activity* as human beings engaged in language games” (Hekman 2010 36 emphasis in original). Hekman insists upon the agential social activity of using language to make meaning that includes the natural or material objects and the discursive or representations of those objects in relation to one another.

In this way, language becomes an active participant in the construction of our “natural” world. While language is “defined as an activity, a game, something that human being, because we are the kind of beings we are, practice,” (Hekman 2008 98) it is naturally part of “what we [as humans] do in the world,” and as such it “is a central part, but not the only part, of our form of life. For Wittgenstein, language and the world are always intimately connected and interacting.” Hekman is making the quite radical move of asserting that in fact language games, as Wittgenstein conceives them, are as much a part of our natural history as evolving to walk on two feet. Thus she makes an ontological claim for language: language itself is a natural process and cannot lose its own realness as it describes and knows that realness through its own discursive structures.

Claiming language as nature adds to the overarching argument of material feminism as it shifts the power of language from that of a mind detached from a body to a body integrated with a mind. This is important to my argument that the strict logics governing language have become naturalized in a way that makes their organic, vital qualities invisible and marginalize other kinds of nonsense logics, ones that seem mad.

These actually function as communication devices in the intra-acting connectivity of the schizo-machine Deleuze and Guattari understand to help us get free from “the subjugation of multiplicity of desire” (1977 xiii) but which also help us spin around and then inform the dynamics of intra-action. Derrida requires attention to polarities and an action of “*supplementer*” (1978 336) the binaries, which can be interpreted as “to replace” or equally “to add.” If the logics are already haywire, if the schizophrenic is speaking at the same time as the Cartesian, then the layers of sense become more complicated but also potentially more fruitful in terms of the potentials for actual, flexible, situated meaning-making. I am certainly not pointing to mere arbitrariness. I am invoking ambiguity as a partner in the natural history of the social activity of language. This means that rules can change and structures can become unrecognizable, even if only temporarily, with important impact.

Hekman calls on Wittgenstein’s discussion of rules in language games as social conventions which can and do vary: “to obey a rule, [to] make a report, to give an order, to play a game of chess, are *customs* (uses, institutions)” (Wittgenstein 81). As “[r]ules are practices that are taught,” it follows that they can be adjusted to circumstances in an ongoing manner, and re-learned again as necessary, or newly agreed upon as the situation demands. As “[r]ules, like meaning, are not singular but multiple. ‘Our rules leave loopholes open, and the practice has to speak for itself,’” (Hekman 2010 36) out of structures of use and conventions, inextricably linking meaning to action. This gives rise to the need for a question of what happens when the rules become jumbled, when the conventions are only partially obeyed, when language asserts an agency that lifts it from the yoke of perceived domination by the human “speaker?” Well, madness, of course; but if the countless mediations mandated by the quest for “truth” of which Adorno speaks result in failure and sorrow, what could be the harm in entertaining a material engagement with something that seems to be flowing and moving beyond our control anyway?

While none of us perhaps would embrace gladly, babbling and shrieking among ourselves as a method for communication, I propose we consider a cinematic example where systems regulating markets and labor, living and loving become subject to just the sort of chaotic disruption evoked above, but where the director teases out the problem of disruption, disorder, mis-understanding, and chaotic communication through relationships that either hold the old ideas of understanding and which lead to Adorno's dissolution and loss, or adjust in a fluid, insistent, opportunistic way that gives chaos the functional logic of its own existence.

*Speaking the Bolshe Vita: Nomads and Babble*

*Bolshe vita* (1996) is a film by Hungarian director Ibolya Fekete is set in the time just after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the opening of the borders of the Communist East to the Mythic West. Individuals who find themselves freed from the perceived limitations of their political, economic, and personal situations, encounter new circumstances where they must confront the painful contradictions between desire and unimagined possibility. Political crisis, which is also deeply personal, is reflected in the film as ongoing but fleeting transformations in desire, subjectivity, and community. While crisis and its affects are mapped in multilayered ways in *Bolshe vita*, a porous engagement with language in relationships demonstrates the potential in foregoing a normal concept of clarity to let in something that breathes through the powerlessness of incomprehension and the fluid, nomadic movements of trans-subjectivity.

Braidotti's nomad is a figure that activates alterity by plotting potentially generative sets of bizarre relational coordinates on epistemological maps. Positing alienation as a starting point for reconstructing a global, networked, and emergent subject, Braidotti finds the monstrosity of loss to be creative as subjectivity is considered "neither a biological nor a sociological category but rather as ... point[s] of overlap...

between the physical, the symbolic, and the sociological” (4). Glissant’s nomads lead to errant wanderers who have ceased to be anchored to one style of movement or another. They can spin like the dervishes Raqs Media Collective references in their vision of a matrix of connection, but they might also be simply itinerant wanderers compelled to move by some inner drive to seek a version of sacred, an iteration of profundity, that they will only know when they find it. These nomads pushing the nomadic subject beyond even the tenuous boundaries Braidotti suggests as they are willing and sometimes able to complicate their own subjectivity, or at the very least to recognize that it has been complicated by the trans-subjective mangle.

We know that the mangle requires only acknowledgement, willingness to become part of ethical practice, as it occurs alongside efforts to maintain the self-identified subject through the desire to “accommodate” the other. Either way, nomad or trans-, the conditions of ongoing change, perplexing as they are, provide so much variation of circumstance and misunderstanding that they necessarily demand the accommodation of varied knowledge systems and complex modes of communicating, even those coming out of nonsense, bafflement, and loss.

Articulating nomadic movement, constituting and re-constituting the subject in conditions of loss and dislocation, Braidotti speaks of the engagement with language as a “process of negotiation between layers, sedimentations, registers of speech, frameworks of enunciation” (14). She emphasizes further the nature of the relationship between speaker and language as an exchange with both the “arbitrariness of linguistic meanings” and an understanding that we are not in control of the activity of speaking: “Paradoxically, it is languages that speak us” (15). This process of speaking and being spoken are evident in *Bolshe vita* where conversations between two couples, Yura and Maggie and Vadim and Susan (two Russian men who speak Russian, a little German, and a bit of English; and two English speaking women who haven’t any Russian), either stifle

relationship or allow language an agential materiality of its own, operating beyond the efforts of the individual speakers at clarity and comprehensibility.

To frame the situation, there exists a vast range of linguistic meet-ups in the film, where a messy commingling of various language games emerge: those of acquisition, those of desire, those of alienation and longing, those of hope, and those of rancor. In an early scene in the bar from which the film takes its title, the very concept of “mother-tongue” dissolves because we have English speakers who translate German; Hungarian speakers who teach Russian or English as the circumstances demand; Russians from diverse locations speaking dialects; Americans from Texas and Maryland via Amsterdam and Berlin speaking a range of languages that never quite guarantee comprehension; Yugoslavians, Romanians, Bulgarians, Vietnamese, Chinese, all speaking. Convening as they do in the makeshift and lively environment of the bar, these speakers rely upon a kind of apprehension that cannot be keyed to a literal translation of words: they relate through overlaps in alternative understanding, knowing through chaos, in a place parallel to *logos* and the logics it inscribes. And while there is a violence being enacted upon normative models of comprehension, there is also an awkwardly beautiful potential in this situation.

The camera visually articulates the linguistic mash-up in the bar. It starts with an extreme close up of vodka pouring from a bottle into two large but gritty looking shot glasses. It blearily pans up and out in a diagonal movement to a regular close up of a tall bartender, but keeps the gaze at about the level of someone with her head resting on the bar and looking up after drinking those shots. There is a series of fast cuts to a close up of a group at a table where the person facing the camera, the one with the light on his forehead, is obscured by the heads of two women, quite close to the lens and leaning toward each other. One woman turns, her cigarette glowing brightly in the field of vision closest to the camera, her face cropped just above the chin, her eyes shadowed like empty

sockets, all clarity of feature obfuscated by the indistinct focus of the camera. Some guys mill around in the middle and background, shallow and cramped distances. A man wearing a black ball cap steps into the space left empty by the middle ground bodies moving aside. An overhead spot brightly lights him. As soon as his face becomes visible, another man steps into the space between the camera, making a fast movement that blurs the field of vision except for the bright, flat planes of the previous man's cheek, ear, chin. The camera continues to move like this: fast cuts, quick pans and tilts, extreme close-ups on faces that could be clearly focused obscured by faces, heads, bodies, and hats too close to the camera, lights in the wrong places. The result is a muddled, shadowy abstraction of bodies moving in a tight space, with the implication that occupying such space is temporary, perhaps even illegal.

Not only does Fekete crowd the space of the bar with the bodies of the patrons, she renders space and bodies as planes of light and shadow, only occasionally allowing the rim of some dark rimmed glasses, a red ball cap, a polka dotted scarf to materialize out of the abstraction as a recognizable object. But rather than merely creating incoherence or abstraction, Fekete's cinematographic choices make physical objects participate visually in the comprehensible incoherence occurring in the bar, an in-between space of transition and non-location. It is perhaps only one minute into the bar scene before things become more stylishly lighted and faces are offered, still in close up, but with enough room to identify them as characters we had met in the previous scene at Erzsi's house, which functions as a sort of hub in Budapest for the travelers moving West. Susan and Maggie arrange with the owner of Bolshe Vita for Vadim and Yura to perform their strange combination of jazz and Soviet folk music, another lonely expression of bastardized language and cultural idiom. As the group settles around a table in the bar, the complex linguistic trajectories are narrated in Russian by Erzsi, a Hungarian who taught Russian during the Soviet era but who is learning English to be able to teach it

to business people. It is here that the linguistic complexity within the group, reflecting the larger situation in Budapest, is foregrounded as jumbled, multilingual, and largely shouted conversations.

The relationships that grow between Susan and Vadim on one hand and Maggie and Yura on the other, detail the micro version of the bar's macro linguistic trajectories. Midway through the film, Yura singing about Russia is edited, over and over with arguments between the couples. Susan and Vadim sit on the shore beside a river. Vadim speaks of Russia, her size, her arts, her problems. Susan comprehends "sky" "big" "drunk" but when Vadim finally gets to the frustration he feels at being neither a successful musician like Rachmaninoff nor even merely more accomplished on his saxophone, she can only look at him sideways and throw up her hands. She doesn't really try or maybe has no desire to understand him on a level beyond directly translating a few words of Russian into English, accumulating "foreign" words like tourist trinkets.

The music begins again as Yura and Maggie walk down a street and she berates him about something, a stereotypical couple's argument. She repeats things like "I haven't got the time," "you're helpless," and "you're very, very difficult," and as listeners, we are not entirely sure of the exact source of her problem, only its universal nature. He just wants to make her feel better, to ameliorate her frustration but has no words to do so. In fact when he tries to speak, she stops him with hand gestures, firmly stated refusals, and efforts to keep the dialog argumentative. Visually he is trapped between her and a wrought iron fence. Framed in a medium-long shot, they are both cut off at the knees. He is dressed sort of like Marcel Marceau with black and white striped shirt, loose black trousers, and black suspenders. As she continues berating him, pinning him against the fence, he makes stylized mime gestures, but in response to her tirade, not as a performance of mime per se (thankfully). Jump cuts give the sense of the prolonged period of the tirade. He understands the gist of her problem, even if we do not, and

finally, while he can't *say* anything to solve her particular problem at this moment, he is able to express the larger nature of relating and loving as he understands them. This is the opposite of Susan's apperception of Vadim's dialog; Yura finally gets in "yes, yes, yes" in response to Maggie's ongoing refusal to reconcile and embraces her tightly as the music plays on.

Later, Susan and Vadim lie in bed together near the end of their affair sharing a cigarette while he contemplates the fleeting nature of time and how his years have been spent. His sensitive consideration is met by Susan's lack of understanding beyond the words themselves: all she can pull out of his lengthy and poetic rambling is "Three? Three what?" (00:53:27) or "oh ... like a chicken." And in the end she replies "Da, da" and pats him on the chest condescendingly. He is left with the deep reality that she "don't understand nothing," a phrase he repeats often.

Maggie and Yura, at the same time and in another room, discuss the Russian poet Mayakovsky, in English, Russian, and a pastiche utterance of their own invention that includes caresses, tugs, pats, and hugs. They are both intimate and understood in ways that extend logical articulation by including misunderstanding, "noise," and perplexity. In comparison, Vadim's ongoing missed connection with Susan is especially desperate and sad. There is an oscillation between the interwoven moments in which relationship occurs in the porous communication between Yura and Maggie and the way that relationship is blocked for Vadim and Susan. Through this comparison of porosity and blockage, Fekete expresses how understanding within the chaotic shifts models for knowledge production, even if only momentarily. This stems from a willingness to go along with the unknown and to merge for a time with the other. Rather than a focus on one type of clarity or accuracy found in self-contained knowledge that tends toward a preconceived, narrow, and unimaginative notion of understanding, Fekete opens a world through alter-sense communication that makes connection available in a rich and complex way.



For Yura and Maggie, perplexity mobilizes overlapping trajectories of intra-activity: the labor of their efforts to communicate is creative in that it does not rely on clarity or logic, and thereby exceeds the limits of connecting with the other on a level of sameness. For the others, the missed intersections in the trajectories of their desires indicate that they remain isolated and subjugated to their unrealized dreams. Susan and Vadim are miss-matched from the beginning and their relationship expresses a painful clash of sincerities. As mentioned earlier, Vadim often notices the way in which Susan “don’t understand nothing,” but he is implicated in this problem: he presents love like a book of poetry to be perused with gentle consideration but Susan is undoubtedly and apparently not a sensitive reader. She makes clear in their first “conversation” that she seeks thrills, sketchy ones preferably, and doesn’t want to deal with the messiness of connection. In the scene where she traces her journey to Budapest from Texas via England, Amsterdam, Yugoslavia, and Germany, she speaks so fast in English that there is no possibility for Vadim to understand. He is entirely out of the frame, although if the camera angle were just a bit wider, they would both fit; while Susan glances in his direction as she paces from the counter to the table preparing her breakfast, his invisibility effectively renders him outside the communication loop and therefore outside the zone of potential linguistic relation.

In contrast to this failed connection, Yura and Maggie manage to maneuver in borderlands that appear impenetrable, communicating without relying on the limitations of language. In the first scene where Maggie and Yura interact at length, an important exchange expresses communication beyond language. They speak as if each is fluent in the other’s tongue, even though neither is. While, thanks to the subtitles, the viewer understands that they make many similar statements, the comprehension occurring in the scene is not coming from the actual words. They have to “know” in addition to the words, in a way that involves both speaking the language, and being spoken by the language.

That is to say, as the conversation gains momentum, there is a sense that language is speaking them, carrying them with its own creative force. The scene intimately explores listening without fixed modes of comprehension and communication outside of and simultaneously inside of language. The magical confluence of dislocated language games refigures communication rules through the interchange shared by Maggie and Yura, and in this situation each is affected by the fleeting moments when identity and language, subjectivity and understanding, flow briefly in an unbounded movement of “trans.” Because trans-subjectivity is not fixed, they reconvene at other times in the film as individuals struggling with practical matters like having or finding a job, cleaning house and so on, but their ongoing engagement forges repeated intersections that are deeply implicated in their flexible, situated intra-actions with each other.

As Hungary begins to be reorganized by mafia forces late in the film, Yura asks Maggie, who is newly pregnant, to marry him. Her reply, “I told you I don’t want a home” is followed by his simple but strong assertion “No, no home...Only baby. Baby is home.” Yura’s investment in adding “nodes” to their intra-active network, however mobile these might be, appears at this moment as a viable way to live inside the nomadic and to acknowledge the “trans-.” Because Maggie has been joining him in this ongoing intersection of their bodies and subjectivities, in the shifting spaces of the moment through the multiple logics of bizarre language games, she is able to understand what he means and then to act upon that understanding.

Without dismissing the horrors of violence and displacement, the tragic harshness that can arise from ongoing mis-understanding, willful or otherwise, it is important to ask what would allow the individual and the community to develop a style of thinking that wonders at misinterpretation rather than pathologizes and then fights to control or contain it in a common meaning-making impulse. Comparing the intricacies of communication in the relationships between Yura and Maggie and Vadim and Susan, it is apparent that

more connection is possible when a mobile sense of self in relation is situated through perplexity. In other words, bafflement in the use of language offers an unfolding of the way in which nomadic linguistics, language games in transition, non-sense as sense, can function in a practical manner. Expression involves far more than mere words as bodies and breath, tensed skins and unspoken thoughts emanate from the intra-active bodies of those involved. Language as a material, as a medium with physical properties that result in discursive forms, similar to but in effect quite different from, bronze, polystyrene, and digital video, carries an agential being that generates in its doing, in its engagement with the ones using it. Corraling language into simple, clear expression is a slippery enterprise as it acts beyond efforts at controlling language. I do not insist on full and legal confounding of communication, however it might seem in my insistence on allowing confusion its moment; I do, nonetheless, insist that bafflement has its place and is not necessarily always to be alleviated by insistence on clear understanding.

*Fractured (Medieval) Language Games Assembled Like Bones: The Structure of Monk's Dolmen Music*

A mischievous reformulation of the specificities of language games is something the old and new idiots do when they meet each other in creative collaborative practice. Communication is difficult in a situation where time is layered and sense, common or otherwise, has already and warily been left at the door. A conversation directed at exploring a specific question is interrupted by off-topic stream of consciousness flows, the responses of boredom, the dog barking, and the unspoken objections to one or another opinion expressed only in sighs and withholding. The impossibility of clear expression, containable in direct and logical sentences, becomes the dominant model of discourse in a situation where the language of one is not the language of many. Verbal communication, in person and over the telephone, and written correspondence, in the form of e-mails, blog posts, and project texts are reformulated both in their material components and in

the establishment of rules governing the specifics of sense-making in any given situation, due to the dynamics of ambiguity. These multiple exchanges formulate other kinds of language games, ones in which the participants have not agreed upon the rules and the fragmented expressions appear as a chaotic, incomprehensible mess.

Here, though, in the breakdown of presumptions around transparent intelligibility, emerges the potential for a kind of material speech, textual intercourse, and discursive expression that floats the mad other, the one left aside in the strict logics of normal semantic clarity, beside, and not instead of, the recognizable articulation. In fact, the noise, the static, the interference that the illogical introduces expands the fluency of articulation by making the coherence of stable language games susceptible to the creative ordering principles of mayhem. Unstable, situationally specific language games seize mistakes and doubt, and allow them a creative function inside the larger action of communication and articulation. Untenable in their refusal to honor the boundaries around who speaks and how, chaotic language games enable a situated and finite rearrangement of the restrictions of one kind of logic, the dominant and accepted form, and make possible a mysterious, perhaps beautiful, perhaps horrifying foregrounding of that which has been abandoned, namely mis-understanding. Holding the anxiety provoked by the cacophony of multiple logics grants creative potential to a temporary loss of normal comprehension by shifting understanding from the realm of control to the process of receiving.

There is a strange still point in all the mangled, messy, chaos that gives opportunity for the participant to drop into nothing, *rien, niente, nihil, nichts, kuch nahin, nashi*. This sounds like some mystical, metaphysical mumbo jumbo. Ha, a voice of Reason! I remind myself that if we find no way to avoid this polemic, reason is always already defined by the limited terms of the first idiot: a thinking that is done on one's own, subject to perpetual doubt unless proved by a very limited range of empirical

tools, and agreed upon eventually by similarly framed idiots/thinkers. “We require just a little order to protect us from chaos” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994 201), Deleuze and Guattari say in their final joint articulation. Humming the refrain, we form magic circles around ourselves, but the refrain<sup>3</sup> is nothing but a connection to a larger pulsing rhythm, one which has “infinite *variabilities*, the appearing and disappearing of which coincide” (201). “Nothing” indicates not absence but at once all and void, everything and nothing. Free-falling into this evokes full sensation, pre-individuated experience, which ebbs into that which is named, linearly and elastically, offering “a little order in things or states of affairs, like an objective antichaos” (202). Infinite variabilities, circular refrains, and movement that slides on rails between states of articulation and in the rubberized elasticity of springs forms the communication that takes place in group work, through intra-active manifestations of material articulation, messy and fraught, unclear and constantly under discussion. We can note my unease with my colleague Merryn in Chapter 1, our traveler who “*décevoir*” her friend earlier in this chapter, or the way that the errant drifters in the Bolshe Vita talk in the jumbled multi-lingual conversation in the bar scene. It does not take much to think of instances when one intelligent and otherwise well-adjusted participant knows he is being clear in something he says and his family, co-workers, or colleagues look at him as if he were, well, insane. And then they carry on as if he has not spoken, as if his utterance was just the sensation of needing to sneeze that came and passed without fruition.

“Artaud is mad,” claims Anne Carson. Close beside his madness, a physical entity he observes, he watches it “breathe or not breathe, [and thus] he deduces laws of rhythm, which he divulges to his actors.” Carson does not say “the laws” of rhythm, but just laws, some laws, other laws, the ones we miss when we are not mad.

For Artaud the real drawback of being mad is not that consciousness

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<sup>3</sup> See *A Thousand Plateaus*, Chapter 11: “1837: Of the Refrain” pp. 310-350.

is crushed and torn but that he cannot say so,  
fascinating as this would be, *while it is happening*  
But only  
later when somewhat “recovered” and so much less convincingly.

There are for Artaud, in Carson’s portrayal, only moans and gnashing, only a vomiting of incoherence when in the throes of passion, but she returns to this question of breath, even for the crazed Artaud. “Learn to render these [movements]/as breath.” Sighs, fogs, vapors, emotions translated as breath conjoin with a rhythm of nothing, “emptiness ...by the handful,” (Carson 66-67) which speaks in its own measure.

What could this mangled articulation sound like for Artaud in an active agential language game? Certainly not mere screams from an empty mouth, a cinematic depiction of the foul nightmare cry, nor the fuzziness of transmission static, nor only the glitch in the 010101 configuration of the digital MIDI file scratched up on the CD or interrupted by a slow wireless connection; it is not mere senselessness. It is however, a breakdown, a fragmentation of simple order and common reason, a reworking of the ordinary and the logical that occurs in holding the chaotic *and* the lucid in the same space. There is a way in which the musical compositions Meredith Monk evolves with her collaborative teams, especially Vocal Ensemble, speak to the potentials arising as strange and incomprehensible noise commingled with overlapping, established musical structures, that reveal material, relational configurations of chaotic language.

*Dolmen Music* (1979) was one of the first pieces Monk composed with Vocal Ensemble and as I discussed in Chapter 1, involved an acute attention to “the unique quality of each voice” (*Inner Voice*). Monk often describes her work in sculptural or dimensional terms, like weaving, foregrounding an awareness of the physicality of fragmented language in relation to the performing voice and the work it does: emit sound in various linguistically structured forms that result in a sonic tapestry. Concerned with

combining the intricacies of multiple structures, *Dolmen Music*, explores the limits of language in terms of physical expression and cultural beliefs.

Dolmen, of course, are the upright stones supporting a lintel in what are thought to be Neolithic tomb markers. The term also describes the prehistoric megaliths found in the Salisbury Plain and other well-known European sites but which are found across the globe, including in Korea, India, and the Nabta Playa in Africa (Gardner 30-31). Many sites considered by some archaeologists to be ritual places or astronomical clocks, are configured in a circular arrangement, with several standing megaliths, crossed by capstones (Hilts np). The megaliths in Northern France inspiring *Dolmen Music*, La Roche-aux-Fées, form a covered alley, which legend has it was built by fairies. Its north-northwest/south-southwest orientation aligns it with the sun at winter solstice and it appears to be a grave “portal,” although, as with most of these sites, its uses are not entirely known (Boulé np).

Monk often uses literal circular arrangements as aspects of her choreography and musical composition. The 1979 performance of *Dolmen Music* at the Kitchen in New York City involved the performers sitting on chairs in a circle with a second circle of (small) rocks surrounding them (Greenaway). The bodies of the performers become the fragmentary vertical megaliths in the recreation of a prehistoric site and the voices resonate as the memory of multiple movements of air, flora, fauna, and human action through the space. The actual physical circularity in the performed work is part of the circular layering and overlapping of rhythm which Monk uses to govern the “texture, counterpoint, weaving” of the composition (Monk in Smithner 102). Monk’s reference to the sacred or ritual aspect of the stones in her title is at once an expression of her personal interest in these types human activities, and a play on the way she proceeds to structure the work, moving among the primordial sounds of nature going about its daily business, to the liturgically driven chants of Medieval Europe, to the formal rationalism of Modern

narrative structures found in the sonata and fugue, to the emotionally charged but highly contained 18<sup>th</sup> century sarabande.

Structured as layers of contrapuntal arrangement that stretch the formal rules and timing of musical composition, *Dolmen Music* uses known structures, accepted language games of music, but mixes up the rules, pulls an element from one style and deftly combines it with that of another. Important to polyphonic compositions from the folk round to the Baroque fugue, the counterpoint traditionally “combines several melodic lines into a meaningful whole” (Kamien 62); but Monk uses counterpoint to a different effect as *Dolmen Music* insistently steps aside from linearity and resolution, clarity and containment. In fact as the piece progresses, the chaotic overtakes the simply layered to build a highly textured frenzy that ebbs and flows through and alongside the resonances of simpler musical movements.

Twenty-three minutes long, *Dolmen Music* carries on a series of ever increasingly complex movements, independent but related to each other. While reflecting songs of imaginary ancient or futuristic communities conducting seasonal rites or mourning practices at the titular sacred stone, the work does not carry out the resolution expected from a linear liturgical narrative. This is partly because of the extraction of sounds from whole words and partly because of the way Monk carefully reworks the rules of multiple compositional structures into a fluid new musical language game. Rearranging the elements of the sonata, the plainsong, and the sarabande, breaking some rules and reformulating others and then layering them into a new timing that is neither simply linear nor clearly circular, she invents a new game carrying the agential capacity of language across the distributed network of performers.

The piece begins with Monk intoning “Ah Woo,” held over a single, long, slightly wavering breath. It is joined by a male singer intoning at a lower register, “Ah Ah Ah” which then speeds up into a series of sounds like a combination of babbling



water and glossolalia utterance. Then another woman joins with “Ah Woo,” an octave higher than the one in which Monk sings. The male voice is silent and a third woman joins the second soprano. They lag a beat behind Monk who keeps the slower, more concentrated time. Difference is emphasized in the way each woman, for example, holds the final note, Monk steady and low, Ensemble sopranos Goodman and Solem pulsing slightly in different directions over the length of the breath. The men join again with their line, richer now thanks to the three voices, as the layers grow more complex. While a polyphonic structure often forms a call and response, the three lines in this section of *Dolmen Music* complement but are independent of each other, related but not exactly in conversation. They occur at once simultaneously and in separate chronic dimensions.

As Monk reworks the sonata form, it becomes something stranger than the usual trajectory of exposition, development, and recapitulation. Taking the Baroque trio sonata form composed for instruments, two high, two basso, and one low register, Monk translates this for a cello and six voices: two soprano, one contralto, and three bass. The vocal lines, while reflecting one another, do not speak directly to each other in call and response. Rather they inhabit separate time-spaces, like different species of birds singing their territories in a field or calling to potential mates, but also like prehistoric humans and alien visitors enacting various ritualistic sound movements within spaces they construct for themselves in the landscape. The three melody lines are not only interpretations or reiterations of non-human, natural sound; they incorporate a fragmented and reformulated, but very human alphabet, reduced to w, a, o – “the non-aggressive, soft sounds” of a language from which hard phonemes have been extracted, and where just a memory of the entire scope of the former symbolic order remains. Still we are not “reduced” to mere babbling, as Monk’s work respects known symbolic orders without becoming subject to them: she enacts the potentials of myriad orders in complex movements of historic and rhythmic time.

Bonnie Maranca calls this “singing of a pre-verbal order that is a kind of poetry;” I would argue it functions as a kind of *pre-individuated* poetry, emerging, burgeoning, and distributed across and beyond the actors involved in its transmission. With the body of the performer situated as flexible instrument, the movement of intonation in the piece depends upon specific capacities and not universal formulae for expression. Featuring elongated stutters, moans, and vibrations, or “hocketing,” it is “as if language is on the way to becoming...[forming] undifferentiated sound in a universe that does not yet have names for things” (Maranca 40).

Further complicating the reconfiguration of the rules in the sonata form, Monk incorporates other formal structures, including the early medieval liturgical plainsong. Monophonic in construction, the plainsong normally involves a single, unaccompanied melodic line, a flexible rhythm and no meter. Combining three such elements in a polyphonic layering disrupts the singular flexibility of the traditional plainsong form and produces an echo of fragmented language as sonic gesture. Monk renders sacred texts flexible by replacing fully formed words, like “*hodie*,” Latin for this day, with the soft sounds of just their beginnings, middles, or ends: “ah woo,” “ah ah ah” held for extended breath. Words become mere vestiges of the “meaningful” representative utterance of the Latin “today.” The specific sacred of Catholic Latin becomes the distributed wondering sacred of the flexible community. The chattering and swaying, the clicking and whooping of *Dolmen Music* extends the scope of known and conventionally accepted uses of language by detaching “the word” from its significance, through this layered, elastic joining of time, filtered through and made audible in the human body.

The non-text of *Dolmen Music* does not resolve conflict or reflect narrative progression, even as it grows in complexity; in fact it cultivates strangely tense and scattered movements while remaining within the inscribed circles of chairs and rocks, and bodies as other rocks on the stage. The form changes and shifts, ebbs and flows as it

weaves connections, holds impossibility, and moves us out of the limitations of singular logic and linear time.

*Dolmen Music* is divided into six sections, “Overture and Men’s Conclave,” “Wahs,” “Rain,” “Pine Tree Lullaby,” “Calls,” and “Conclusion,” but there is no clear bridge between the components and they are not “simply” a fugue of layered repetitions. Rather they melt from one movement to the next as they grow in complexity. Glenn Gould said of Bach’s *Goldberg Variations* that they “offered thirty remarkable views of an entirely unremarkable grand based theme,” (Monsaingeon). The same cannot be said of *Dolmen Music*, which is similarly separated into sections involving some variation or repetition of previous bars, but which take densely layered and complex diversions from any ordinary or referential places. At around six minutes, the vocabulary takes on a wider range, using “animal-like calls, insect buzzes, gulping glottal clicks and growls, keening ululations, stuttered monosyllables, ... gurgles, yodel-like register shifts, and vibrato manipulations” (Smithner 105).

Repetition and overlap foreground the physicality of the voice as intensity rises along with a presumed action never reducible to a prescribed narrative. At about eighteen minutes, the voices as instruments become silent and the cello begins to speak the end of the “Pine Tree Lullaby.” Thrumming deep and low, the sound of thick gut strings hitting the wood body and chopsticks beating on the fingerboard and neck, renders a kind of watery-wood noise, something without melody but still possible to perceive as a cohesive force. It dissolves into a sound like pebbles rolling in a wooden box, overlaid with sheets on a line snapping in a breeze.

The lullaby is a simple, often triple meter structure, intended to facilitate sleep. The cello segment in the “Pine Tree Lullaby” layers multiple sets of three-beat measures, and while mesmerizing, is not sleepy. The kind of lullaby required to calm pine trees is not the same necessary to soothe humans. The Baroque sarabande is a dance form

consisting of solemn, three-beat measures. Considered a foreign, irrational, and lascivious threat to honest people in the sixteenth century, it became important to German Baroque composers, contributing key components to Bach's *Goldberg Variations*. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it was developed with the tenderest attention to the pace of *lento non troppo*, which is slow but not too slow, in Handel's *Keyboard Suite in D Minor*. This work was rendered contemporary in Kubrick's *Barry Lindon* (1975). Monk plays with the complex history of the sarabande by weaving it together with the lullaby structure, affording the practical functions of "soothing" or "arousing" space in which to commingle and mess up the specific rules of their games without casting those rules away or ignoring them completely. In fact, Monk pulls from these formal structures, to revisit the potential in the lullaby for a forest, what the wood sings when it is either aroused or in need of comfort.

The complex play between historic time and rhythmic time renders in Monk's work an entirely new series of games through which language that is pre-individuated, poetic before the containment, visibly/audibly acts in relation to the physical bodies giving it voice. While there is a jarring shake up of known structures for giving utterance throughout the histories Monk invokes (the prehistoric, the European Medieval, the Enlightenment, and the Late Modern), she does not forego all structural integrity in an anarchic of Dada-esque disruption. Rather, she and her collaborators filter everything they know through the mesh of their bodies acting in a simultaneously circular and historic time, an elastic bending of chronology. The result is a moving caress of the structures of sound, speech, and sense that appears violent in its explosive and sonorous intonation, but which is actually celebratory, questioning, and vastly imaginative in its cooperative, shared, trans-literation.

Wittgenstein says that "...our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surround by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular

streets and uniform houses” (8). He speaks of course of the structure of language as a living thing that changes its appearance with fashions of the day but which grows like moss upon old, non-uniform, perhaps poorly remembered structures. Even if we strive to reside only in the straight regular streets that Adorno seeks with his proper grammar we stray, as he does into the realm of error and embarrassment. But this is not the end, fortunately. Fekete presents a situation less cohesive than a melting pot, more transitory and temporary, as the site of intense communication coming out of the inability to understand in a common sense way.

She offers instead a set of players who have to find a way beyond the restrictions of shared language to communicate the ways in which their feelings and experiences intersect and how they might convey things that are already often impoverished by everyday language without being able to rely strictly on words. The pastiche of languages and expressive styles that work provisionally in Fekete’s film<sup>4</sup> are formalized in Monk’s piece *Dolmen Music*, where phonemes are extracted and recombined in musical composition structures that have been pulled apart and rebuilt in terms of their relations to the theme, the complex and layered movements of time, and the embodied vocal capacities and expressions of the ensemble members, working together.

Significantly, Monk does not document her scores the way composers usually do. As I discussed in Chapter 1, the work is developed with the performers and specifically for their capacities. This means that if one of them wants to leave or do another project, the piece is either tabled or has to be reworked for another performer (VanLoo). In fact, Monk’s work is a kind of delicate eco-system, where articulation depends on consistency of participants, if not coherence to common principles of language.

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<sup>4</sup> The real life characters of Maggie and Yura go back to Wales to have the baby. They break up some time after that.

To be clear, I am not advocating for mere abstraction or reckless expression. In fact I am speaking more about attending to the contingencies of developing ad hoc language games that move with the rest of the situation, meaning the strange bodies and the bizarre sharing, that occurs in conditions of trans-subjectivity. Standardized rules for the deployment of language that strives first and foremost to foreground lucidity and banish ambiguity are largely useless when circumstances are complicated. When bodies have become intricately implicated with other bodies, when creative intentions have been committed to the group and the I and the We have become, however temporarily muddied, there is room for the new idiot's slow thinking process. How slow can we actually think? I don't know because it's not something that's often tested. Survival usually depends on fast thinking and fast reaction. These circumstances ensure survival augmented by rich experience, dense inquiry, and mournful release from the limitations of clarity.

Thus freed, still carrying the heavy sorrow of wonder, we work. Labor has at this point also been transformed. Productivity is not merely something that can be grasped by the machine of capital, turning pleasure into industrial resource. Babbling requires loitering to apprehend. Lingering for nothing becomes a modality where productivity is transformed into something else, not something not (*pas productif*) and not something against (anti-productive). But it is a thing in between, a thing poetically active but lingering about, waiting for nothing, for no reward, attending only to attend.

**A Loitering Mode of <sub>non</sub> Work**

A writing machine can be productive if it writes, stacks lines of words one on top of the other in never-ending flat and striated heaps: thoughts, desires, feelings, sensations; muscles twitch but the hands and the eyes never stray from the ongoing, back and forth gesture of stacking, compiling and amassing across the virtual white sheet, a movement of infinite progress that goes nowhere, deeply into nowhere-land if we're lucky, where time slips its moorings and progress is simultaneously smaller and larger than imagined, but where little differentiation exists to indicate an a-ha moment when what is written, what is felt, what is needed takes on meaning; but then it is time to take a cup of tea and lift it to the lips and if the sensation is cold not heat, one sets it down again, crosses the legs even though this is bad for posture, and begins once more to stack in what seems like a sense-making shove but which gloriously and unconditionally refuses to be such; only instead declining compliance with the fatherly adept on the hill, the one with the little dog, the one who does know best (mostly) and whose force is inevitably, simultaneously a source of refuge and a fount of anxiety the likes of which make the throat close, the eyes burn, the heart shiver, and the mind reel, but nevertheless which drives one on in a masterful yet uneasy continuance of the stacking, the shifting, the trilling, the sorting of the maddening puzzle into something that we hope can, at some point, will be corralled into a legible whole, when involuntary trembling ceases.

An artists' collective is productive differently from a writing machine: it loiters and lingers, tarries and wonders, eats and drinks, smokes and drinks some more, writes, draws, stacks, formats, adjusts, tints, scales, argues, kisses, lounges, stands, fails to argue, needs to argue, gossips, e-mails, posts, and throws the dice; when the tide is high something might be accomplished in the standard sense of the term: accomplishment,

productivity, attainment of goals and it could be a sculpture, a book, a slide show or a film, a website or a sound, percussive and layered like the noise of the static in our ears and the incomprehensibility of dialogue forming in a vat of indistinct identities, which ebb and flow like the colors of a synesthetic listening to Bach on the lanai with a cool mint drink in her hand and a cat on her lap but then the cat moves to chase a shadow and the code on the laptop resting near the end of the chaise lounge takes on a different configuration to include the input of muddy paws walking across the keyboard, a random sampling of logics comprehensible only to the animal mind concerned with territories and comfort and something else indiscernible behind the vertical pupils in her yellow green eyes; shadows become a real presence, a dark contributor to the joyful, painful job of sharing work which is not work and yet yields unexpected surprises from whence emit the resonance of incomprehensibility, violence, and free range combinations of bodies and networks, hands and pictures, lifestyles and their interpretations; what, you say, is the point of this meandering, lounging, tarrying practice which is an a-practical application of the principles of productivity? This is the question intended for exploration here in the vast whiteness of the virtual page, in the stacking of lines one upon the other: a perambulation around and through the labyrinthian, alchemical marriage of “a-productive” laborers in the relationally poetic confines of the collective.

Bernadette Corporation (BC) is an artist’s collective founded in 1994. It straddles the continents of Europe and North America where it is fiercely engaged in an aesthetics of anti-globalization. Comprising a basic team of three members, BC has no compunction about shifting the core composition, merging with other groups, or inviting several or hundreds of artists, filmmakers, writers, and activists to play along and make a thing, roughly imagined and emerging on its own terms. Consistently redefining itself in terms of membership allows BC to enact the anchorless and unbounded subjectivity its work seeks to evoke. In a 2004 *Artforum* article posted on BC’s website, curator Bennett



Simpson names “the group’s desire for chaos,” as a way to foreground its foundational yearning to make apparent the actualities of disorder involved in the cultural and economic normativizing drives of global capitalism. Yet visible in all of their work is smart, hip irony and a not so hip earnestness, what novelist and cultural critic Chris Kraus deemed “both sincere *and* a parody” (56) in her short essay on BCs “epic poem,” *A Billion and Change*. This tension indexes in the group’s work as ongoing awareness of their process, which is further folded into their critique, and again made visible in the work as an exchange of ongoing consciousness.

An ebbing movement between sincerity and irony, slackery hipster fashion and hard-core activism operates in BC’s working methodology, one which involves “spend[ing] a lot of time together” (Simpson NP), listening even to what the object they are making has to say. They tarry in a flow of ideas and sensations so that it can sweep across them, roll about underfoot, or begin to organize itself and then reorganize itself as inputs from collaborators arrive. They rely on the freedom to improvise the initial structure and plan for a given project in order to accommodate the play of chaos and the potential stability that functions within that chaos: the firmness of shifting sands.

*Reena Spaulings* is a novel BC wrote using the early Hollywood model of a “stable” of writers who could produce screenplays on the Fordist model. Marshalling over 125 writers from their international art and writing associates, BC assigned short sections to various people across the globe. They organized the sections as they arrived in the New York studio. They had a general idea of how the novel should progress, but as work came in, they found they had to adjust their plans to accommodate the submissions. Writers took liberty with their assignments and drifted down paths not on the original story plan. Many writers were non-native English writers and the grammar became archaic or awkward compared to the native English speakers. Still, BC is deeply invested in conceiving the end of capitalism and thus the end of the world as we know it. So

they opted to allow the ways the Fordist model of writing did not function “properly” to characterize the form and style of the novel. Inventing an ephemeral protagonist in Reena Spaulings, the group generates a disjointed and multi-vocal narrative that reflects the kind of porous subjectivity they are working to engage. The novel is stylistically awkward and missing the harmonics of “good” writing; yet it works with awkwardness of the interlaced and reconfiguring subjectivities that come about through the multiple iterations of “Reena Spaulings,” the novel and the character.

Thinking subjectivity as collective movement, that is, as engaged trans-subjectivity, processed through the laboring model of Fordism gone awry results in a spongy-person, a porous trans-self that is multiple and permeable, absorbent and actively growing. Containing much that is human and technical, Reena is both worker and television monitor, guard and recording device. Importantly the movement through the characterization is like a river that flows north-south and south-north at the same time, Shevek’s dream from Le Guin’s novel. Queer time made incarnate. For example, classifications slip just like Reena’s physical attributes.

Reena’s eyes are brown? Blue? Something like that. Why describe her as beautiful? She’s not. She’s pre-aesthetic. Meaning there is no man or woman on earth who could say with complacency what it is that makes him or her go back a few steps to see her, or simply what makes him or her see her. What we need is a picture. A poet might have said her nose denoted two conflicting things: independence, and sensuality. And that her eyebrows bespoke female gallantry. But again, how does he or she come up with these conclusions from looking at her? Something in her face said “...ocean...radar.” And something in her face and body together said “Trampled Grass.” When you actually drive to the prairie. But I don’t want to make her out to be more or less or other than human, or even human (3).

Together the group-author constructs a being at once legible and impossible, woman and not, human and herb, beautiful but not in a way that can be contained. She

is expressive, of gallantry, independence, sensuality, but at the same time eludes these characteristics in a kind of inexpressible force of being which does not exist, but at the same time maintains its materiality. The narrator too becomes part of this embodiment as the reader perceives very slight disjunctures in style of communication. "I was an art handler for ten years," (4) frames further discussion of Eugene-Reena and art workers generally. But the "I" speaking is unclearly the detached narrator, Reena, Eugene, and the museum visitors at once. Moving from detached omniscient first-person narrator to a subjective third-person point of view we move from observing Reena as object to entering her interior sensate experience in the space of three pages. Rather than feeling like a faulty completion of a writing assignment, which in some ways it is, this shift moves with the general flow of narration in a way that slips along with the subject(s) it is engaging. Thinking in this manner, flexibly, erratically, faultily, allows the sponge-like character of the novel, the author(s), and the characters to emerge with the fragmented but self-reflective world-view presented in the book.

This kind of writing, or perhaps mostly editing, to coalesce an entire novel from specifically solicited and randomly submitted elements involves a lingering working pace that drifts over the literary body of the character Reena Spaulings as it constructs the textual trans-subject of the novel *Reena Spaulings*. Play of this sort loiters over the matter of bodies and the matter of texts in a way that refrains from corralling or marshalling the usefulness of that matter's capacity, and does not insist that they remain separate. It brought about a working trans-subjective actor that is both multiple authors and a strangely shifting fictive character. Before they begin putting the object to work in order to render specific meanings, the artists engage in the transversal movements, or zigzagging movement in the production of subjectivity which complicate, reverse,

and compound possible “being” states,<sup>1</sup> practices of already in play in larger historical and material trajectories of people, governments, cities, fashion, literature, writing as a practice, publishing, exhibition, and design. Before productivity as such, the chaotic commingling and the vulnerable, lingering play of the process of Fordist writing that exceeds the parameters, and therefore the expectations, of mere industrial production make trans-subjective lingering possible in a-productivity.

BC’s slow approach to art making finds a correspondence in a notion of “weak theory” discussed by feminist economic geographers Julie Graham and Katherine Gibson (J.K. Gibson-Graham) in (*A Postcapitalist Politics*, 2006) where they outline a working methodology for theorizing with the potential for “producing positive affect” following Eve Sedgwick and a sort of “Zen Mind” (4). They describe weak theory as a practice that avoids the “embracing reductiveness and confident finality associated with the practice of theorizing,” where assumptions about what is known are set aside and instead a “beginner’s mind” is cultivated, which “reduces [theory’s] reach, localizing its purview, [so that it] cannot encompass the present and shut down the future” (7-8). This method of practice, regardless if it is academic or artistic, opens epistemologies to wonder and bafflement, and seeks to hold a state of surprise as an ongoing condition. Important to weak theory is its situated specificity and the practice of description accompanying this precision. Generalizations, about goodness, beauty, etc., but also about labor roles, hierarchical categories, and the nature of success are evaded in favor of “imagining a terrain on which the success of one project need not come at the expense of another” (8). Context is as important as content, and outcomes fail to be privileged over process.

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<sup>1</sup> In his last interview with Claire Parnet with the letter Z as the subject for *L'Abéc'daire*, Deleuze speaks of what Parnet names as “le Zed de l'éclair” or the zig-zagging gesture of stylized lightening. Deleuze goes on to speak of the zigging movement of the fly ostensibly inscribing a zigzag, and “il n’y a pas de mot après le zigzag” (there is no word after zigzag). Zed, Zen, and Big Bang are all creative movements, like that of the fly, that continue expanding, out. Z as movement, of infinite zigzagging creation, is the transversal.

Weak theory nevertheless gives space to vulnerability in a way that refuses the exploitation possible or the reconciliation (to strength) often sought in that condition. Here vulnerability points to the capacity of participants in relational, expressive networks to give and to become noticeable to affective currents in the multiple, interdependent dynamics of those networks. This vulnerability is key to the generation of the rickety dirt roads of possibility where oppression, exploitation, and alienation might be avoided, even momentarily. The lingering activity of weak theorizing and vulnerable practice welcome the tender, the ragged, the gentle, the lumbering, and the sharp.

Consider *Get Rid of Yourself* (2001), the project on which BC combined efforts with post-Situationist group, Le Parti Imaginaire. Interested in making a film to “locate the intensity of [the] shared experience” ([www.bernadette corporation.com/getrid.htm](http://www.bernadettecorporation.com/getrid.htm)) of the violent G8 summit protests of summer 2001. At the same time they wished to trace political theories about labor and identity in global capitalism as well as the many resonances of the 911 attacks. The groups met at the seaside in Southern Italy in late summer 2001, completing the editing later that same year.

In the video, BC’s working style of chaotic stability becomes evident in a strangely playful sequence at the beginning of the piece that shows the Twin Towers burning, but reconfigured as a hazy kaleidoscope. Throughout the work, footage of the artists on holiday and the activists rioting are interwoven in a way that forms an auto-deconstructive reflection of the concerns of the protestors, the questions the artists pose about resistance generally and their own practice specifically, and larger questions about the mediatization of bodies and ideologies through journalistic and artistic coverage. For example to emphasize the ineffectiveness of “reproducing” activist rhetoric, Chloë Sevigny “reads” a script of activist rhetoric in a set constructed to look like a tidy bourgeois kitchen. BC’s vulnerable lingering in this “weak” practice of self-critical dialog guides the project and the document of various violent protests against global corporate

dominion becomes a complex reading and re-reading of rhetorics, bodies, and affects. Tarrying occurs on multiple levels and in more than one time zone such that confident assertions become inaudible.

The structure of *Get Rid of Yourself* is a messy articulation of layered experience. The bodies of the G8 protesters are intercut with the lounging bodies of seaside holidaygoers, including the artists, and the stylized bodies of fashion models. Chloe Sevigny is interwoven throughout, awkwardly and unconvincingly reading the “arrogant discourse” (BC/getrid.htm) of a Black Bloc activist, previously mumbled in slangy French by the actual protester. Extreme close-ups of the flesh of the collaborators dallying on the veranda of their beach rental jarringly cut to wide-angle shots of activists launching Molotov cocktails and other projectiles at the police. The lingering eye of the camera, a prosthetic for the slow eye of the viewer, focuses on an expanse of neck or a wet hand resting temporarily on the back of a bench, before pulling back to reveal the chaotic street full of impossible, violent, and perhaps significant, perhaps ill advised, certainly notorious action.

If sitting by the sea, engaging in “low level leisure” (Simpson NP) fails to be productive in the way the activist skirmishes are productive of upheaval, productive of mayhem, productive of violence, it is because it must be “seen” (through the camera) and experienced (in memory) as a profound kind of loitering, a uselessness that breathes in a different rhythm from the normative tempo of value, exchange, and ultimately productivity. This is a situation of “a-productivity,” where working shifts its known tethers and becomes something that escapes fulfilling promises or meeting deadlines but at the same time contributes to the accomplishment of those things as well. It escapes the non-productive because it still works; it shakes off wage labor standards in that it adds nothing to the creation of value in a market economy, and even, in the case of BC, perhaps undermines or cancels market value at that moment; it refuses normativity but

without forging a situation of this against that as it generates a space that is not exactly negative, not exactly without, and full of potential in its slowness, its weakness, its vulnerability.

*A-Productivity: the Semantics of Virtual Nothingness*

Slowly considering its constituent parts, a-productivity might reveal itself, semiotically, as more complex than a first read implies. The prefix “a-” indicates without or not, as in aphasia, anemia, atypical. When coupled with productivity, the negative shifts to something reflexive of itself, a not-really producing unit and a not-really non-productive state; a paradoxical addition to productive, here “a-” indicates an imperceptible movement of play with attention, forcing no trajectory, but even so, moving slowly and faintly, like Deleuze’s “great Swimmer who does not know how to swim, the champion of abstinence” (2002 14). Although here, with the a-productive, we manifest not a failure of knowledge, but the declination to assume summary knowledge of the particular situation, the course of action, the portents of affect: “The film resists knowing what it is or wants to be,” Simpson says of *Get Rid*, but this is because the filmmakers decline the authority to masterfully assert a fixed position, storyboarding each frame toward the strong production of a course of action. The artists, the film, the protests, the work, all *know* but decline linear progress toward teleological ends. Instead they tarry as if awaiting a visitation from the Holy Ghost on the Day of Pentecost, but knowing all along that the possibility of tongues of fire appearing on the heads of their colleagues as they drink beer and sit in the sand, is very slim: miracles do cease or at the very least change form.

Returning to the etymology: “In native (...Old English) words, [a-]... commonly represents an ‘on’ as in *alive, asleep, abroad, afoot*” (Etymonline NP), from which follows the implication that “a-” shares an on-top-of it all, over-the-top, busyness despite

its mere presence at the beginning of the “actual” word. The origins of “a-” move toward evolutionary chaos evidenced in the OED’s tracing of its history: “it naturally happened that all these a- prefixes were at length confusedly lumped together . . . , and the resultant *a-* looked upon as vaguely intensive, rhetorical, euphonic, . . . and wholly otiose” (OED NP). Indolent and idle, serving no practical purpose or result, the a-productive is not a not, never a turning in upon itself as a mirroring negative. Rather, it evades practicality and takes on a vague intensity, a sweet sound that vibrates harmoniously with its actual state of virtual nothingness.

Considering a condition of precarity, in regards to labor, subjectivity, excess, and escape, Dimitri Papadopoulos, Niamh Stephenson, and Cassilis Tsianos imagine *Escape Routes* charted through imperceptibility toward making “spaces for the play of purposelessness” (258). Their concern lies with precariousness and labor, which can be described as follows: detached from certainty, driven by neo-liberal values of self-improvement that are impossible to fulfill regardless of concerted effort, the precarious worker “evoke[s] a form of exploitation of the self, as opposed to an exploitation which is exercised from outside and pertains only to the limited realm of work” (223). Affective investments in creative problem solving, nurturing relationships on the job, reproducing the body as a flexible, multi-tasking machine require an outlay that exceeds the description of the wage-earning laborer and oozes into the space of the domestic, the personal, and the physical. The worker becomes unsatisfactory lover, jailer, sustainer, and torturer for himself. Yet, for the precarious worker, there are no guarantees that the work will remain consistent and future time is co-opted by the need to constantly think about what might possibly replace the current job when it is finished. Loitering is impossible when future and present are conflated in this manner.

Still, Papadopoulos and his collaborators find a slim ray of hope for recuperating time differently, located in purposeless tarrying, awaiting nothing, a condition that occurs



within and among the perpetually vulnerable beyond planning-for-the-next-job that is the life of the precarious. They imagine that this waiting, lingering near-apathy offers moments when unimagined forms of subjectivity and valorization can emerge. Because purposelessness hesitates in the time zones available for tarrying; they consider it to be “non-organizable, ... [defying] regulation... pure *potentia*, pure departure... [imploding] the imperative to ‘be creative’” (243). The creative in scare quotes imploded in this purposelessness is one continually co-opted and made traditionally productive within capital. The precarious seek another kind of creativity, one which veers from well-beaten paths into the tangles and brambles of the yet-to-be envisioned, not a fixed utopia but different modalities of life. Papadapoulous et al. assert that without reproducing the oppositional resistance of Party politics or micro-political identities, tarrying in this way opens the normatively productive subject to a “becoming imperceptible,” which in Deleuze and Guattari is the great flight from the strictures of semiotic clarity on the subjectifying process.

Becoming imperceptible, or becoming anything in the Deleuzo-Guattarian sense, is not a goal, a teleological position at which one arrives; it is a process of separation of singularities in complicated and layered movements of time. Becoming involves a slow speed, an accomplished inadequacy, and a smooth logic of flight that is erratic and constant. This imperceptibility, when experienced as the errant, trans-subjective nomad, who is already more than one, is not a disappearance of the subject, or even the possibility for subjectivities, but rather a lingering about, a melting, faltering excruciating rhythm that doubles and triples itself in fleeting moments of a-productivity. It still produces something in the normal sense of that process: a self-valorization, a community of unbelievers, objects and subjects, but the details of that production slip aside from the assurances of what is already known and are ultimately impossible to capture for industrial instrumentalities. On the path of this kind of imperceptibility, the progressive,

dialectical “new” gives way to the time and movement of a-productivity, and renders possible the cracking open and the coming out of impossibility.

*Ethics, Refusals, Communes*

Feminist labor theorist, Kathi Weeks offers the strong influence of the “Protestant Work Ethic,” which continues to guide neo-liberal labor codes and, in her assessment, even many radical movements. For example, in *The Problem with Work* (2009), she discusses the Bolshevic and Soviet indictments to hard work and early Western feminist assertions that women must escape the unpaid realm of domestic labor to seek richer fulfillment in waged labor outside the home. The indictment to work as the ultimate source of fulfillment, for Weeks, carries across Western, and what have become global, attitudes toward productivity and labor. From Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* to Erich Fromm’s *Marx’s Concept of Man*, Weeks tells of the way that widespread trends to closely implicate labor and social or self-worth have produced an attitude toward work “that manufactures consent ...[and constructs] the official morality...known as the work ethic” (38). Agreeing to the valorization of labor in terms of morality contributes to the way that citizens, laborers of all kinds, police themselves and each other relative to their value as citizens, friends, and colleagues based on their productivity as workers.

The compulsion for and enforcement of the work ethic is taken even further, according to Weeks, in Post-Fordist drives toward worker professionalism, which includes the development of personal skills beyond the tasks of the job. These are affective skills like communication, capacities for building relationships, and caring for customers, co-workers, and the company. Including affective labor in “the work ethic” has also become naturalized, in Weeks’ estimation, and thus has resulted in self-regulating, self-perpetuating moral system governing “play” time as well as waged labor.

Even though Weeks laments the far reaching and invasive power of the work ethic as it governs global capitalism, she finds a measure of radicality in the the very problem she diagnosis, that is in its contradictions: the “substantial hegemony of the work ethic...is also always incomplete, tenuous, and shifting” (75). As the promise for fulfillment the work ethic offers instills “desires, beliefs, interests, and hopes that are never fully met” (76), she implies that there are possibilities to contest and alter the force of this way of working as key to a fulfilled and satisfying life. While, in America for example, this structure is so completely integrated as a moral code into the social fabric that character judgments and public policy are formulated around an “economists’ parable about the ethically deserving and undeserving” (84), it can, in Weeks’ hopeful outlook, be re-imagined on a level beyond mere resistance to current labor policies. Rethinking the way labor is valorized in radical ways can lead to different ways of conceiving the labor process itself, and systems of generating values, needs, and desires will begin to include “the ability to secure an entirely different relation between life and work” (80). But still it is hard to imagine an opposition to work, life as work, and productivity as anything other than resistance, refusal, stoppage.

There is a rich history in Europe, France and Italy especially, of addressing wage labor and its exploitation through a refusal to work. From Paul Lafargue in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the Situationists International in the 1950s and 60s, to the still thriving Autonomists in Italy the refusal to work involves, as implied, withholding the resource of labor. Envisioned by Antonio Negri, Paolo Virno, and many others as capable of forcing changes beyond even the reach of labor unions and political parties. It depends more on guerilla-style tactics of self-organization in local contexts, situated in common public spaces. Autonomism does not limit the effects of its theories to wage-earners or working class; it extends as well to white collar workers or “salary men” and those who earn no wage, like students, mothers, and the unemployed.

Instead of a full on labor strike, organized by an international union or a workers' political party, tactics like absenteeism, working at a slower pace than is demanded by bosses or companies, and organizing social events at work were used, especially in the 1970s, to gain concession. As well, this type of resistance theoretically forges strong, local, social networks that continue beyond the moment of refusal and are able to spread in terms of style if not magnitude to other communities.

Refusal in many ways is connected to what Lafargue asserted as “the right to be lazy” in his 1887 book of the same title. Marx’s son-in-law, Lafargue develops what Weeks calls a “rather extravagant refusal to rehabilitate nonwork by recourse to productivist values” (98). Apparently from the prison at Sainet-Pélagie, Lafargue argues for “the virtues of laziness,” by claiming indolence as it makes room for respectability in creativity and allows for nurturing the alternative productivities that can come out of detachment from the singularity of market-driven labor and subject valorization. He posits this against the indulgences by the proletarians in the trappings of success that the bourgeoisie. Instead of being able to figure out and pursue a range of valuable activities, they will conform to the ideals of the capitalist and “instead of drinking moderately bad wine, [they] will become more orthodox than the pope and will drink broad and deep bumpers of Bordeaux and Burgundy ... and will leave water to the beasts” (Lafargue ch04.htm np). His 19<sup>th</sup> century satire is not new, and he quotes Rabelais and Juvenal, but the point that the types of labor and the kinds of rewards valorized by one class become universal values or goals for every class under a system of compulsive work. Productivity thought only in terms of actual wage earnings leads to drink, or at the very least some excesses not of one own choosing that further disable the ability to think and consider what exactly one would choose in such a situation.

For Autonomous Marxists’ the “refusal to work,” *is* seen to be productive. Negri states, in his re-reading of Marx’s *Grundrisse*, “...the *refusal of work*, as the content of

communism and as measure of the process of liberation which leads to its realization, appears here, when it is placed in relation with the universality of productive labor, as also having a productive essence” (183 emphasis in original). For Negri, this is an enormous power as it can “destroy the universality of exploration and...liberate its creative energies” that lead to cooperation among those participating any given social system. Social systems and systems of productivity become intricate in way that involves a different dance of than that of the work ethic. Rather than create a polemic, with dialectical resolution, the intricate, social systems that accompany the creative “liberation of productive forces” occurring in autonomism, allow for a “...*turning from the liberation-from-work toward the going-beyond-of-work*” (164), which for Negri, is the real productivity of communism.

So the valorization that can occur “beyond work,” or in a-productive states is not one that nurtures the neo-liberal, self-identified subject, despite the flexibility it engenders for thinking values and ethics in terms of difference. Rather the lower-case “c” communism of Negri’s productivity is one that forms and re-forms again and again in the conditions of trans-. It engenders and engages the trans-subject while, at the same time, it makes way for the specificities of vast, luxurious, and intricate difference. For Lafargue, Weeks, and perhaps Negri, laziness or slowness, lingering over the stamping out of rubber seals or loitering as you write the report or becoming idiotic enough to notice the sun playing across the shoulder of your coworker who is wearing a sleeveless blouse today, offers space for the creative consideration of values, of production, of time spent at labor to be formulated more specifically, more situationally than the productivism of current capitalism structures allow. And, this space is occupied, nomadically by trans-subjects lingering over beams of sun, cups of tea, jokes, discord, analysis, and difference.

Lingering is contraindicative of productivity. Loitering also makes the precarious more so. If the precarious worker is burdened with the inescapable debt of the past

and thus constantly considering the future in terms of the next unknown job,<sup>2</sup> time is compressed in an eternity of forcing the future into the present. Breaking this attenuated and unanchored line of time requires something beyond the direct assault. Just saying no to debt does not free the entire social system of the baggage that debt carries. Turning from the current path, traveling the opposite direction, still leaves one on the same path, as Ursula LeGuin says of the “Road to Mishorny:” “to oppose vulgarity is inevitably to be vulgar. You must go somewhere else; you must have another goal; then you walk a different road” (1976 153). A-productivity treads unknown territories, flattens the grass beside the well-known road, risks being a weird-o, an outcast, a graceless fool, as it occurs in a paradigm of resistance that fails to oppose; it transpires when fully occupying an abstruse relation to time and space.

A-productivity requires a spatial arrangement of bodies and tools, networks and landscapes in layered time zones that move as an arrow *and* as an elastic, that know present profoundly and yet see complex versions of past and future in its composition. If time is doubled in representation and form, and multiple in layered rhythms of movement over periods of historic, cinematic, and hieroglyphic times, as Tobias claims (see Chapter 2), then the phases occupied by a-productivity slip the perpetual co-option in work time where past ceases to exist, and present and future are always conflated.

Franco Berardi repeatedly locates a disjunction between the time of the body and the time of cyberspace in *Precarious Rhapsody* (2009). His lament concerns the ever-increasing velocity at which mass amounts of digitized information whiz by the “electrocuted” analog body: “...cyberspace now proceeds at a superhuman velocity and becomes untranslatable for the universe of receivers, [and collides with] cybertime, that cannot go faster than what is allowed by the physical material from which our brain

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<sup>2</sup> For a wonderful, poetic consideration of debt, credit, and the “fugitive public” see Harney, Stefano and Fred Moten. “Debt and Study.” *e-flux journal* 14 (March 2010). Pp 1-5. Archived at [http://worker01.e-flux.com/pdf/article\\_119.pdf](http://worker01.e-flux.com/pdf/article_119.pdf).

is made, the slowness of our body, the need for caresses and affection” (41). Berardi’s smash up between the infinity of cyberspace and the finitude of embodied cybertime is part of a larger concern among labor scholars around how value production has inextricably territorialized time, rendered as discrete and concrete units. While others, like Bernard Stiegler, are concerned with the industrialized production of time,<sup>3</sup> Berardi’s specific focus on capitalist abstraction and wage labor allow him to understand “the body as cancelled from the field of communication” (2012 104). His concern, even more specifically, is in line with the twenty-year old assertions of Kroker and Weinstein whom he cites, that “in the field of digital acceleration, more information means less meaning” (105).

Unfortunately, in his poetic but panic-stricken assertions about the disappearance of the body in bio-informatic labor, Berardi reveals a nostalgic perception of the body, the nature of affect, and modes of meaning production that do not take into account either the many complex arguments about the prosthetic body and its capacity for meaning making,<sup>4</sup> nor the possibility that bodies and brains evolve along with their tools and the generations born and busy since his activist days in Bologna most certainly have adapted their capacities. While I am not saying that the problems raised by Berardi are not real, the impossibility of elaborating meaning, even through and with mediated, technical labor in his assertions reiterates the “infinite series of bifurcations” (2009 7) that he laments. He offers “rhythm and refrain” as two (bifurcated?) structures of relief. Rhythm, defined early as “the ordered noise of the machine,” (129) for Berardi is the stuff of rage, mechanization, and aggression (he suggests Punk, Rock, and Hitler as examples). He draws from Deleuzo-Guattarian theories of the aesthetic social, where

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3 See Tobias, *Sync*, for a concise explication of Stiegler’s concerns with time and memory, pages 219-232.

4 Among many other studies, two beautiful books by David Wills, *Prosthesis* (1995) and *Dorsality* (2010) address some of the questions about technology and prosthesis and bodies critically, poetically, and historically without resorting to the hysterical declamations Berardi finds necessary.

the “refrain is an obsessive ritual that allows the individual – the conscious organism in continuous variation – to find identification points, and to territorialize herself and to represent herself in relation to the surrounding world” (130). An affective murmuring of song, which Berardi also calls rhythmic, coming out of dark fears and chaotic disorder, the refrain offers singular expression and relation to the larger environment. He thinks of mantras and breathing, calm and rageless embodied rhythms that extend immanence to a larger (networked?) social plane. But still, his electrocuted body is always opposed to and salvaged by his breathing, mantra-singing body: a narrow polarity.

As my own discussions of rhythm and incoherent articulation reveal, I am not opposed to Berardi’s proposal for breathing, singing, and affective connection. There is however, a more detailed and complex way to follow this line of inquiry by revisiting Tobias’ discussion of biolabor and bioinformatics relative to play in the final chapter of *Sync*. Tobias frames his discussion of musicality and play with consideration of Stiegler’s concerns about the deleterious effects, on the “no-future” of memory, of “diachronic historical time in its increasingly precise synchronization of media production and reception” (219). He couples this with a discussion of Donna Haraway’s proposal for the “ways in which [the development of] bioinformatic regimes depend on the bioenergetic regimes they displace” (220) in her recent work on companion species and respect as an ethics of interactivity.

Complexly unfolding concerns similar to those found in Berardi’s tightly wound expressions of the “state of permanent electrocution . . . which manifests [in the worker] . . . either in the panic syndrome or in attention disorders” (2009 36), Tobias tells of Stiegler’s concern with instrumentalized or industrialized memory vis-à-vis Hollywood in *La technique et le temps* (1994), and Haraway’s concerns with “human, animal, and machine co-constitution” (228) in *When Species Meet* (2008). Briefly, these theorists draw attention to the faltering ethics of biotechnology where “...each diagnoses the affect



of suffering in contemporary cognitive capitalism: Stiegler relates the technopolitical ethics of its historical derivation, while Haraway relates that it is the transcorporeal ‘sharing of suffering’ demanded by mutual respect” (229). While these theorists raise important concerns for the current state of technicity and relational affect, Tobias indicates another way to consider the problem of “a correlationist engagement with contemporary biotech understood in terms of global programming industries capable of determining the texture and quality of affect in postgenomic everyday life” (230). He proposes instead the additional action of musical play, where musicality as discussed in Chapter 2 is a form of resistance to the diachronic limits of historicity. This play is legible in the historically layered works of several media artists whose individual art practices involve interventionist moments of collaboration.

Rather than removing or ignoring the body, which is Berardi’s concern, Tobias stakes a claim for the “necessary expressive and demonstrative transpositions between two modes of aesthetic labor: creative production and creative reception” (233) in musical play. He speaks at length of a 1998 work by Woody Vasulka where old military technology, collected by Vasulka since the end of WWII, is reimagined as technically constructed masculinity in the gallery. Robotic forms, assembled in the work as “tables” which are activated by the viewer when he enters the space. These tables are not controllable through this interactivity. Rather, they become sites of “staged virtuosity” in that they “diagram...the divergence of the installation’s historical composition and uses from the historical progression and resources on which it draws...[in a] sustained divergence...[of] modal media practice, where the object experienced belongs as much to performance as to animated sculpture” (239). Drawing on a much wider historical frame than installation art, media art, or interactive art practices afford alone, the work allows for a broader understanding of the multiple ways engaging meaning across these

histories, while at the same time suspending the productivity of this meaning-making process.

Extending the historical and medial modes of the work further, Steina Vasulka, a trained classical musician and long-time collaborator with Woody Vasulka, staged a performance within the work, connecting the interactive components of the tables to her MIDI violin to “control the tables’ movements in response to her musical gestures” (241). The layered histories of the components’ origins, the reconfigured conceptions of masculinity in the gallery, and the conversation between the components in the installation and Steina’s musical interaction amount to an historical compilation of divergence. “History adds up, but differently,” Tobias asserts (243) where the dynamics of location and action, body and movement are “displaced from belonging either to the human or to the technical” (244). This musical play, evoked through actual musical instruments and through strange, percussive gradations of sound in the deeply complex historicity of the installation work reveals a way in which time is made intricate and intimate, complex and connected without adherence to coherent linear logics, or the either/or situation of free/productive. In this way, Steina Vasulka’s creative labor, within the specificities of Woody Vasulka’s project, generates moments of a-productive suspension of meaning production around technologies and objects, histories and gestures.

In the strange logic of repeated doubling, Tobias finds it possible to “diagram lived, but illegible, hieroglyphic time” (246) where the hieroglyphic makes layers of historic economies, physical and emotional, geographical and boundaryless, through the rhythmic movements of musicality that evades the normative and containing structures of strict, known composition. Multiple physical and psychic affects generated by engaging the artwork in the present of the gallery and at the same time through the histories it invokes; through intentional physical movement and the constraints imposed

by the “code” deployed by the work to make it function, the logics of movement and rhythm, breathing and playing, are made chaotic and steady at once. And it follows that hieroglyphic time, incomprehensible to the simple logics of normative rationality, opens a space for an ethics of the ordinary that is extraordinary: in my estimation, these extraordinary ethics arise in an intense and intentional intra-activity that Tobias calls “acts of love in a time of destruction” (246). These loving gestures, these musical interventions, are only fully visible and audible in the slow, lingering observational time of respite, over repeated viewings, of second order video tape documentation, and the repeated lingering description involved in analysis, that is in the time-space of purposelessness and a-productivity.

*Tenderizing Time and Chaos: Multipoint and Gothic Logic*

In chapter one, I describe the initial formation of Multipoint in Nantes, around a residency gone awry, losing its leadership, and transforming itself into an adaptable, if fraught community of the curious. Always intended as a supple construct around and in which individuals seeking a way through particular questions could intersect temporarily, the group fosters a clashing and merging of each creative style, each psyche, each set of skills accompanying the various participants. In September of 2007, a new group gathered including artists, writers, an anthropologist, and a graphic designer, for a total of six participants. We chose to work on “Gothic Logic,” an idea we thought of as a system of reason that intersected the Cartesian model with a thing lurking at the edges, a mad sister left in the cold for too long and insisting on re-entry. We decided to remake the 12<sup>th</sup> century Gothic cathedral at St. Denis in France in the studio warehouse at Small Wonder.

We understood St. Denis to be the first fully Gothic cathedral. Key to our project was the notion held by Abbott Suger who engineered the rebuilding of the cathedral, that light entering the space created a zone between heaven and earth that was both

and neither at the same time. Gothic Logic was bent, curved, non-linear, neither transcendental nor material, as we defined it. Space had to be folded and altered; bodies were similarly doubled and changed. A medieval window shows Suger in a position between horizontal and vertical, a kind of diagonal dive, either clapping his hands or preparing to pray. He might be falling or he might be flying. This was the state of mind and spatial awareness we sought to engage. We met for long hours every month from September to May, usually on a Sunday, often with food and drink during or after, evoking an intensity that was perhaps more than any of us imagined when we agreed to work together.

Because the group is conceived as “egalitarian,” requiring no charismatic, manifesto wielding leader, the working day involved a lot of “drift.” At the time, we found this quite frustrating. One artist would veer every conversation, regardless of its initial impetus, to her childhood trauma and that of her mother and her grandmother. One participant, a scientist, felt it incumbent upon himself to debunk cultural and technical inaccuracies raised by another member who followed a line of imaginative, if erroneous, thought. Yet another was struggling with an ebb in her artistic process, caused by the demands of her design job, and sheltered herself in a detached friendliness that was difficult to engage past its apparent artificiality. Another artist, with a strong commitment to the efficacy of group exchange to foster growth in individuals, assumed the role of semi-therapeutic mediator, always trying, and often failing, to tease out larger issues from the surface material that arose. For my part, I was determined to slip aside from a leadership role, even though I had invited this particular set of individuals to the game, and yet I retained a need to channel the conversation into something that resembled a discussion of our project, to make sure everyone was O.K., and to ameliorate the many conflicting trajectories shooting this way and that.

Each meeting, we all arrived, notebooks and markers in hand, video and audio recorders ready to archive our discussions; and then one person would raise a question about monkeys washing yams in the ocean or the particulars of time in quantum physics and I have no clear recollection, even after looking at pages and pages of notes, how or where we went, what was said, who spoke. There was a slow trailing quality to these discussions, like a bridal train dragging in muddy puddles, but even with its meandering purposelessness, a structure of non-structure, something emerged. It was a dark something, a mangled something, constituted in a calmly contained violence, or sometimes not so calm and not so contained.

This group description is perhaps as detailed as I can go and remain detached, as it was my group, my experience, and as such is not merely an object of inquiry. But it is enough to frame a situation of honest difficulty. While all participants were mature artists with different degrees of art world “success,” the situation did not evolve organically from some coherent interest in materiality or politics, for example, where we imagined that an association might further our goals. Rather, we shared only curiosity about what our practices might become when filtered through an intense collective experience of exploration. That sounds vague, but it was vague, as opaque to us in some ways as a dense fog bank or a murky lake, or any other obfuscating watery metaphor one might use. Each meeting, we all arrived, notebooks and markers in hand, video and audio recorders ready to archive our discussions; and then one person would raise a question about monkeys washing yams in the ocean or the particulars of time in quantum physics and I have no clear recollection, even after looking at pages and pages of notes, how or where we went, what was said, who spoke. There was a slow trailing quality to these discussions, like a bridal train dragging in muddy puddles, but even with its meandering purposelessness, a structure of non-structure, something emerged. It was

a dark something, a mangled something, constituted in a calmly contained violence, or sometimes not so calm and not so contained.

Years later, thinking this through with one of the participants over the span of several conversations, we considered that we had evoked the disorganized and befuddling logic we were trying to play with creatively: the Gothic arrived and took its invited place at our roundtable, as dark and confusing as its history implies. For a while, we complained about how some people's obsessions or reluctance or repeated abandonments kept derailing the process. Then we realized that *was* the process: derailment, refusal, fixated concentration on apparently off-topic details. Lingering and waiting was the mode of our productivity. It seemed to go nowhere in terms of manifesting St. Denis in Riverside, and for months we apparently fashioned nothing but discomfort for ourselves; yet we kept returning to the site of the uneasiness to poke at it again and see if something would arise, something that seemed to reflect our desire to push ourselves outside the current precincts of our imagined comfort, expertise, and knowledge. We didn't directly name it as such, but an "a-productive" work ethic was consistently guiding the process of working together, in this profoundly intense shared action, and forced a situation of "trans-" in our subject positions, in our bodies, and in what ultimately occurred as the shared, a-productive labor of the group.

As Negri developed his theory of resistance as an open and flexible system of refusal, which evades the reification of revolution "into a totality with its own laws of development that one might be able to possess, or dominate, or reverse" (Negri 9), he makes room for transforming the precarity of both working and lingering. In aesthetic practice, especially one organized as a group project, with a foundation in sociability however fraught, there is a clear opening for aestheticizing the lingering quality characterizing our working style, our conversational style, our long, dark tea-times. As we would say, "let's think about making this out of stuff we don't have to store afterward;"

or realized we didn't want to sell things, we wanted to raise questions, astonish ourselves, and share what we discovered with anyone who would look and listen.

Our position was intentionally precarious. We had a small grant from a family foundation that helped pay for infrastructural things like lighting and painting the warehouse. Otherwise, we had to pay for everything ourselves. We were not seeking to engage in market-driven art practices, even though we did and do seek to engage as many people in our conversation as we can. We never theorized our methodologies as a-productive, nor did we intentionally set out to prove or engage a model of a-productive labor. It arises in the chaos of the group practice, whether it is intended or not. The key is finding the ways to prolong it when it comes, not to fight against it in order to achieve ends or induce conformity. These are strange compulsions, conformity or goal achievement, perhaps motivated by evolutionary survival needs, perhaps merely long habits nurtured by the drives of capitalism. But they are a component in group practice, even with the most radical, creative participants. So remembering to slow down and take the idiot's preference for claiming to know little, is perhaps the key to implementing, practicing a-productivity. Antagonizing our own limited desires or habits made us open to the trans-subjective becoming of the fictional Reena Spaulings and the layered, doubled time of musicality, as precariousness paradoxically gains footing as a constantly revolutionary condition.

In Negri's open system of revolution, one that is understood to be inside the system of capital, antagonism and insubordination are key. I go back to my very early reference to Jack Halberstam's assertion that queer can never really become "acceptable practice" or it is no longer queer. The same can be said for revolutionary, creative, and precarious conditions. Stability renders them normalized and thus subject to the same status quo factors, even if the details are difference, that Braidotti resists with her nomadic subject and which queerness by its very nature (not its performance) contests.

Catastrophe and the fraught nature of honestly described community give rise to the ongoing changeability of both the forms of resistance and the groups arising to act upon and give voice to crisis in shared, finite experience. Negri's communist revolution (lower-case, a-historical) demands an active engagement with chaos: not merely the chaos of rebellion with Molotov cocktails and smashed ATM machines, but the chaos inherent in uncertainty, lingering, and not-knowing.

As I have mentioned previously, chaos is usually deemed undesirable, a state of mayhem, of overwhelming and destructive fear, and as something absolutely opposed to order; the chaos of Autonomism is more functional than the preceding "common sense" definition, in that it involves actively looking "for disequilibrium where we might expect to find stability, that scrambles traditional assumptions about who is active and who is reactive," (Weeks 94). This particular, open approach to chaos is helpful for defining a-productivity in that it that immanent to mayhem is a pulse of stability-in-movement that keeps the stultifying from taking root. The nomad's chaos, the errant traveller's conversation in the dark. Autonomism's invocation of chaos does not involve systematizing its refusals, but making the space for "selves to invent" (90) themselves in an ongoing process of revalorization.

Chaos as its own form of stability: this is something I have been theorizing throughout this analysis, wondering about the nature of an ethics that is at once disordered and steady. Many theorists, including Negri, Virno, Guattari, Stengers, and Gross, wonder at a situation that involves holding the tensions between certainty and uncertainty, stability and disorder. There is no resolving these paradoxical pairings; in fact it is important to allow them their dynamics within and in relation to each other, and to remain baffled at them if we are to re-imagine the "political primacy of the subject" (Weeks 93) the Autonomists put forth. Giving up on equilibrium and determinism, teleology and resolution means deploying various working modes, both connected to



and disconnected from wage labor, to allow complex, political subjects to emerge in an ongoing process and to rejuvenate subjectivities and politics in the intricate arrangements of time discussed previously.

A-productivity, as experienced in the 2007-2008 Multipoint project, ultimately titled *The Hierophanic Peepshow*, reflects an experience of packets of time are not traceable as discrete and linear, but comprise layered histories, subjectivities, and embodiment. There is the historical time of the Gothic, already architecturally layered over centuries of style; there is the movement of time in the meetings, coincidental with, but different from, the movement of memory as the discussions gyrated. The time of the meeting, clocked say from 11 am to 4 pm on November 5<sup>th</sup>, became complicated by the proximity of individual bodies in the little meeting room or the garden at Small Wonder experiencing the repeated memory of childhood encounter, youthful transgression, and “adult” attempts at resolution or containment of the wildness precariously evoked times of memory or mistake. The restrained allotment of a square on the calendar or a registration on a digital clock was disrupted by the remembered and mediated affect of historical traumatic experience or erroneous intellectual inquiry overlayed on a desire to foreground and “clarify” nonsensical reasoning. Immediately in the meeting, the intense affect evoked through recounting psychological pain or the discomfort of being corrected on some point of fact created its own rhythm, which was layered upon the other, seemingly more discrete and recordable movements in time. We began a blog to share ideas between meetings. Some posts were simultaneous, creating a strange, engaged and argumentative tone.<sup>5</sup>

After most meetings and some blog posts, there were furious email and telephone exchanges that included some, excluded others, conveying second- and third-hand the concerns of any given participant and rendering a surreal effect to any efforts at

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5 See <http://multipoint-us.blogspot.com/>

correlating renditions of experience or mapping the geographies of memory in these multiple exchanges. Further, as we recorded several of the meetings, we had another layering of “coded” time vis-à-vis the digital recorder or the blog post through which memories and ideas could be correlated or disputed if we could bear to revisit the documents. These trailed through another layer of time that resonated in a harsh affect of paranoia and confusion, yet they continued to generate, to add to, the networks of ideas and questions raised through the process.

Souvenirs of all experience, past and present,

mingled in what Pam Strugar, a long-term Multipoint participant, calls the witch’s brew that characterized the development of the project through what could no longer exist merely as linear time on the clock, from meeting to meeting, or even the historical time of the project’s duration or exhibition.

The *Peepshow* was finally installed in the warehouse space at Small Wonder in May 2008. It involved a drawing, in orange and red gaffer’s tape, of the floorplan of St. Denis after its final restoration. This was folded into the space, with for example, the apse visible on the floor and wall in Figure 4.1. To reflect the way space was further



Figure 4.1. *The Hierophanic Peepshow*. Installation View. Mixed media installation. Small Wonder Studios, Riverside, California, 2008.

bent and the way the architects of the cathedral had to compensate weight distribution to accommodate all the glass in the rebuilt cathedral, two corners were rebuilt using insulation foam and colored tape. The curvature changed the sense of rectilinearity in the warehouse considerably, despite the fact that the “sculptures” only occupied a small amount of square footage. The tape on the taller element was applied expressionistically and could be said to imitate the rays of light cast by the colored glass in the cathedral. During installation, though, we did not necessarily have this intention. Pam was on a

scissor lift and I was sitting on a sofa in the middle of the floor, painting pieces of cardboard for the smaller, “weapon” sculptures that were eventually installed in the front office. We

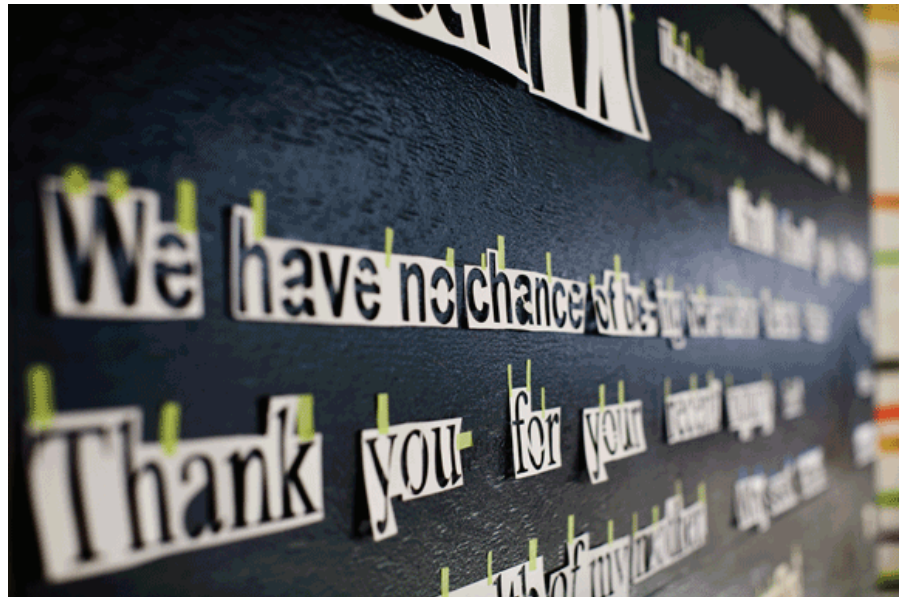


Figure 4.2. *The Hierophanic Peepshow*. Installation View. Mixed media installation. Small Wonder Studios, Riverside, California, 2008.

were talking about, I don’t know, astrology, gossip, communication, sex, something, and she just kept going with the tape. She was using her teeth to rip pieces off the role and I remember that she came down hours later with no skin on her lower lip.

The “liturgy” (Figure 4.2) consisted of text templates pinned to a provisional wall painted midnight blue. It was drawn from three texts read across in a Burroughsian game of writing. Truncated phrases were sampled from texts by Annie Dillard, Rabbi Scholem, and an essay I had written in 2001 on the sublime that became expressive based

on the size of the font, which varied from piece to piece. The slabs of drywall on sawhorses in the middle were the intended to reflect the field of our conversation. They were draped with plastic sheeting on which were drawn useless doorways, magic openings that didn't work. They were pinned to the table and string was stretched between the pins, an attempt to map the conversations. We referred to our notes to come up with the format, but eventually just had to go with faulty memory as our guide. Realities are multiple in Gothic Logic, as are habits, styles, and temporalities.



Figure 4.3. *The Hierophanic Peepshow*. Installation View. Mixed media installation. Small Wonder Studios, Riverside, CA, 2008.

The famous rose window was recreated in the roll up doorway using zip lock bags filled with colored water. In some ways, this beautiful element gave rise to some of the largest questions about the division of labor and the distribution of capacity. While Pam and I worked quite closely on many of the components, and we hired some of my drawing students from Chaffey College to help us cut and paint, Linda worked alone, at home filling the bags, measuring the dye, and tying the pieces of monofilament to the bags so they could be hung (Figure 4.3). She had some technique for tying the knots a

certain number of times, as she hung each bag, which she wouldn't fully disclose but which seemed to imbue the bags with an esoteric significance. She has always had these mysterious methods, and I have known her for so many years, they didn't surprise me. But her absolute unwillingness to let anyone help her did surprise me. She didn't even want us to hand her the bags while she stayed up the ladder. It exhausted her but it was important to her to do this job alone.

For a long time, I fought her lack of desire to "join in" to the bitter end. It felt alienating and selfish when Pam and I were so entangled in the rest of the installation. I wondered if collaboration as the liberatory force I imagined simply didn't work. But now I think that this is part of the ebb and flow of the trans-subjective. I said before it doesn't replace individual subjectivity. There has to be a movement or stasis sets in again. The chaos of this kind of construction in multiple and affective orders of time sounds horrifying as I write this, yet it was not destructive of creativity. In fact it nurtured the resolve to keep pushing ourselves, past the frustrating but ultimately significant questions of difference and repetition. Actually, the pain of what I perceived as a failure early on developed into the questions I consider in this project: complex time, violence, misunderstanding, and a-productivity. It also gave rise, over long and puzzling discussions with my tolerant but demanding dissertation advisor, as to what kinds of subjectivity were being fashioned in this environment. Our intense commingling, even when undesired, did emerge as a bizarre and boundaryless trans-subject, combining the sharing and empathy of the intersubjective and stretching that construction further through the loving, discordant, hopeful, and intolerant commingling of our individual subjectivities, with strongly affecting resonances over which we had no control.

Nevertheless, when considered with a bit of distance, the trans-subject shifted the individual subject in ways that continue to resonate today. In fact, I recently received a letter from the French photographer, Olive Martin, with whom I have collaborated on two

books and with whom we originated the format of Multipoint in Nantes. She encloses “a little booklet I printed a few months ago with some kids I worked with last year [at Ancenis, France]. Two classes were responding to each other with pictures. It’s funny because now [that] I present this to you this makes me think about the project you had with Nico [Dockx], sending you some photographs [about which I would write and then return to him for another round of exchange]. This Multipoint project team still follows us on a different level. That’s nice” (Martin NP). I quote Olive’s letter at some length to emphasize the continued affect, the ongoing resonances, and the productivities of these intense collaborative a-productions, which result in little in the way of wage-labor (although sometimes strengthen a grant proposal), but which ebb and flow through our ongoing individual creative practices. Additionally, it is possible to see how time again becomes complicated as we follow the influences of our collaborative experiments into professional practice and personal correspondences.

## *Chapter 5: The Violence of Hospitality, Gifted Communities*

It was only recently that I could open the CD of images Christine gave me after our first year in Nantes. “Souvenirs de Nantes” it says in her graceful script, “from Christine.” I didn’t even know if my computer would still read this twelve-year old data format. And, I was afraid to see myself looking as dark and surly as I remember feeling while I was there. I was worried that my feelings of alienation, foreignness, inadequacy, and exclusion would be apparent in my body language in these pictures. I

was fearful I would see the same in that of my colleagues, proving that my hopes for a mostly positive experience of collaboration were quite and finally false. But they didn’t do any of that, these photos.

I don’t look dark and surly. My colleagues do not appear to be leaving me out. We are all pretty, even (or especially) Douglas, and relaxed and look like we’re engaged even when the image is of a meeting I recall as particularly tense (Figure 5.1). Curiously, I am the only one who has stayed in contact with almost everyone, continuing to work with some and share supportive friendships with most.



Figure 5.1. Multipoint meeting, Nantes, France, 2002. Clockwise from top of table: Sandy Quedreus, Douglas Park, April Durham, Michelle Naismith, Dessislava Dimova, Christine Laquet. Merryn Singer is the photographer.

Still looking at these pictures, I feel ashamed that I spent my days anticipating all the ways I would be left out. Worrying, cursing, nagging myself, pretending to a

confidence I didn't feel with the others. What a lost moment in which I isolated myself through the desperate imagination of loss akin to that Adorno felt when he lost his grammatical way.

Then I was thinking about an incident involving a few of us planning some project and I sent an e-mail to Olive to see if she remembered the situation and if she would have reacted the same way now, and her first comment was "I have in general a very bad memory I must say and you take off some of the dust that heavily covers this period in my head" ("A Question" np). Later she said, "... our idealism and doubts at the same time made us really hard to each other." If I queried the others, I think that for different reasons, each would have first a painful memory and then might recall some good things. Well, maybe not Christine who makes her own happiness and maintains an admirable level of energy that never seems to lag; and maybe not Nico who was then too cool to admit pain or difficulty; but the rest of us, yes. Pain.

Why then would I be motivated to promote collaboration, intense commingling, long-term cooperative creative practice as an interesting and viable working method? Why would I spend so much time practically and theoretically investigating a creative practice that causes anguish, that irritates, that hurts? Why in other words would I purposely invoke the potentials of upheaval and loss that Adorno mourns? I have been making a case for understanding catastrophe, pain, upheaval, disruption, and chaos as situations of creativity. I have been arguing all along for a kind of care in the tearing of the stable, a kind of care that commingles bodies and identities, competencies and concerns and fosters open, creative conditions. Difference becomes more brilliant, and more jagged, in the space of the shared.

Along with Deleuze, Stengers, and others interested in slowing thought so that we might produce other kinds of meaning from the ones that seem inadequate, I have emphasized key words that normally carry very particular, negative and undesirable



meanings, the limited scope of which allows for and produces the cruel ideologies under which we find ourselves pinioned. My intention has been to invest the weight these words usually carry, which again is mostly negative, with a new and different kind of life, a vitality that lets them speak from another direction and with their own brand of legitimacy without establishing positions or reinstating hierarchies. Hence the interest in the comprehensibility of noise and nonsense, the a-productivity in loitering about, the beauty in the chaotic, networked body that escapes biopower. Still, regardless of careful deconstruction and reassembly in a Frankensteinian material-semiotic alternative, these words retain a trace of the horror with which they have been invested for as long as we can remember.

Mangle, chaos, idiots and schizophrenics, incomprehensibility: Am I advocating violence or applauding distress? It seems so, and yet I am not a violent person. In fact, I am entirely cautious, avoiding open conflict, and often inconveniencing myself greatly to avoid encountering too much resistance from authority, friends, or even strangers. I can't even kill snails when I find them creeping on the backsides of my beautiful lettuces. I understand and do not in any way take lightly the many horrific ways we find to mutilate, annihilate, insult, and dislocate one another. I do not take lightly the pain of mental illness in its actual and daily manifestations. Yet I also have the sense that slowly thinking catastrophe, suffering, and disenfranchisement divested of assumptions about avoidance or alleviation of pain, may allow a new witches' brew to bubble up and give us a chance to think politics, communities, and difference always more and more complexly or simply as the case may be.

This project, the one I am writing here and the one in which I have been participating for ten-plus years, that involves "mangling" and commingling "my" creative practice with that of others, is profoundly situated in a structure of ongoing change that means disruption is the status quo. That is to say, disruption is no longer disruptive but

functional. Yet, as one cannot thrive in a state of constant upheaval without reverting to some kind survivalist tactics, we must have stability of some kind. What kind of communities arise in the instability of the chaotic, the one which recognizes its logics as non-universalizing, generative of difference even as they foster inclusion? Is this another starry-eyed question that my inner utopist entertains in the dark tea time of the soul, or is it possible to understand conditions of violence, the kind that engages the force which Nietzsche declares creative, to foster an ongoing journey, out and back again, that slips aside from progress, but nevertheless reflects earnestly, considers slowly, acts within the qualm, and dallies through the desert? The question for me remains, what can stability be if it is not the static, homogenous, and exclusionary security we engage today? Are change, chaos, and suffering merely violent, or do they require a different kind of accountability? Is community operable only in its inoperability and coming without staying and solid while maintaining a kind of inessentiality?

Positing heaven and hell, Eden and Gehenna as “the adjacent place” where “when one reaches one’s final state and fulfills one’s own destiny, one finds oneself for that very reason in the place of the neighbor” (1993 23), Giorgio Agamben brings neighborliness into the equation of the *Coming Community*. He relates the story of Louis Massignon who, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, moved fluidly through his own Catholicism and his desire to engage the histories, habits, and hospitality of the Islamic Arabic world. Agamben relates Massignon’s Badaliya prayer group, “a name deriving from the Arabic term for ‘substitution,’” where the participants opened themselves to their Islamic neighbors through the act of substituting, of being “Christians *in the place of others*” (emphasis in original). Rather than carrying the hubris of rectifying faulty habits, this substitution “does not mean compensating for what the other lacks, nor correcting his or her errors, but *exiling oneself to the other as he or she is* in order to offer Christ hospitality in the other’s own soul, in the other’s own taking-place” (24). This is not a subsumption of the

place or identity or belief of the other, but rather a displacement of the singular self, on a particular track of destiny into a place where “substitution no longer knows a place of its own, ... the taking-place [or destiny] of every single being is always already common – an empty space offered to the one, irrevocable hospitality.”

The destinies to which Agamben refers, and which I choose to read here as subjectivities, identities, bodies, proclivities, desires, and drives, become a shifting process of giving and receiving, moving in the place of the other and at the same time in the place of oneself. “Badaliya presents an unconditioned substitutability, without either representation or possible description – an absolutely unrepresentable community” (23-24). Not only does the porosity of providing the substitution and hosting substitutability dissolve categories, it evades description: it becomes impossible to account for the movement through dissolution, the trans-migration of the subjectivities, identities, bodies, proclivities, desires, and drives deemed “destiny” in this tale. In the story of the Badaliya, there is a choice involved, an opening up to the possibility of leaving behind the knowledge of one’s place and being willing to drift about in the loss of knowing that hospitality engenders.

The action of interest to Agamben in this kind of exile, the “exile of the self to the other,” is the “destruction of the wall dividing Eden from Gehenna” (24). The place designated for perpetual happiness is no longer closed off to the place reserved for everlasting torment. This makes the divisions, the enactments of justice or mercy, which would allocate one to one place and another to the other, also complexly porous. They are not collapsed into one another, just less clearly different, less opaque to each other. This kind of complex relationality between oppositions, made possible through hospitality as conceived by Agamben, renders the space of un-represent-able community possible. But perhaps space is a word with too much connection to territories, to geographies that can be related to physical places occupied by this one and not that. So Agamben names this

“space” as a condition of “ease” a term that “designates...the empty place where each can move freely, in a semantic constellation where spatial proximity borders on opportune time (*ad-agio*, moving at ease) (25). Now resistance is easy.

We return to musicality to understand space in this statement: *adagio*, a slow tempo, hyphenated to emphasize the languidity, the grace, the lingering quality. Opportune time: protracted chance elastically extending to each as each substitutes, experiences and feels “trans-”. This leads us, as one might expect in Agamben, to Love, but not the love of desire that fills that gap of lack; instead it is the love which is “the experience of taking-place in a whatever singularity” where no lack exists because there is already a condition of ease, of slow movement among, with suspended boundaries, territories, and inscriptions of the self-identified, the nationalistic, the minoritarian, the I.

Is this redemption through hospitality? It seems Agamben is concerned with reconciliation, more than redemption, a reconciliation to the “complete triumph of the spectacle” or fully corrupt humanness through the spectacular mediatization of consumer culture, and a reconsideration of “what can be reaped from the heritage of Debord” (79).<sup>1</sup> Agamben takes us to hell, through isolation, into whatever being, and by way of ignorance, to love. This love though knows no possession, no ownership, not even any giving and taking. Love is, however, active and next to, moving to a languid tempo that results from willingness, from choice, a gift of hospitable a-reciprocity. And we may not intend this but this gift doubles as a result of its distribution, regardless if reception occurs. It increases exponentially, across networks, and through ensembles, as part of the integral, errant movement of its being shared.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Society of the Spectacle* written by Guy Debord and first published in 1967 was the quintessential text of the Situationists International, a critical Marxist art movement in France that included an investigation of resistance through an aestheticization of the “everyday.”

Derrida discusses hospitality by invoking the Greeks. In ancient Greece, *xenia*, the generosity granted to travellers, is a subtle notion that governs interpersonal interaction and civic duty. Ostensibly, the Trojan War begins as the result of a violation of the rules of hospitality. As a guest of Menelaus, Paris should never have loved his host's wife. Abducting her was far worse than stealing the king's hound. The violation cost the Trojans their most courageous and honorable son, Hector, whom an angry Achilles treated without honor or courage.<sup>2</sup> But Derrida does not tell us to avoid adultery, kill not, steal not. Rather he directs us, like Agamben, toward the impossible.

Hospitality invokes an impasse, the *aporia*, for Derrida. It is impossible to offer hospitality, in the normal sense of the word, without offering mastery as well. The host, the king, the master of the house, is in control, and therefore has the power to offer hospitality in the first place. This makes it possible to establish a stable self-identity from which to act on this power. The control and power are extended to those who are hosted, even if the terms are entirely gracious, generous without rancor. Additionally, one is always "*l'étranger*," foreigner, when one is hosted. Derrida invokes a problem of the subject/object relationship of the host to the foreigner on the first page of *Of Hospitality* (2000). He complicates the concept of foreigner as subject, especially capitalizing the word, making it a proper noun, and saying of The Foreigner, that he "shakes up the threatening dogmatism of the paternal *logos*: the being that is, and the non-being that is not" (5). He occupies the space that is "no longer a place of its own," to which Agamben refers when he speaks of substitution, the place that is neither Heaven nor Hell, but both.

This Foreigner is "someone who speaks an odd sort of language," whose articulation requires a different type of understanding if, as host and listener, one is

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<sup>2</sup> Hospitality is the key theme in Odysseus' travels where good hosts like King Alcinous are posited against bad hosts like Polyphemus who eats his guests. Bad guests like the suitors who plague Penelope and their son, Telemachus are also compared to the good guest Odysseus presents as he takes part in story telling and games of combat despite his extreme fatigue or the rude behavior of young challengers.

to actually entertain this Person, this Stranger. The slow listening, and a-productive lingering necessary to host properly, in fullness and through chaos, honors and nurtures, cares for and cherishes the visitor before anything is known about him, even his name. But the usual story is one Derrida tells later in the story of the Guest and Host, where as sovereign, “I start to regard [one visitor] as an undesirable foreigner, and virtually as an enemy. This other becomes a hostile subject, and I risk becoming their hostage” (55). The rules of mastery dictate that I maintain my own space, I clutch to my territory with the sovereign power that is accorded me as Master.

Unconditional hospitality in which mastery ceases to operate is of a different order. It involves a Gift “without Present,” a gift that exists only in time that does not exist, the time that one does not have as that time has already been taken by the “sovereign” or the masterful. Derrida carefully reads in the letter of Madame de Maintenon, speaking of Louis XIV, that as the king takes all her time she actually has none left to give, “yet she gives it” to Saint-Cyr. “The rest,” he says of the time remaining after the king has had his share, “is not time but the *rest*, the rest of time ... [which] by all good logic and good economics, is nothing” (1992 2). Madame de Maintenon exceeds the egocentric concept of giving when she gives what remains, which is nothing but still amounts to something in an alternative logic of Derridian gift economics, to Saint-Cyr, a transcendent child-saint, martyred for scratching an authority figure in ancient Turkey. This is another instance of everything and nothing, *rien et tout*, co-appearing as porous movements among each other, eliminating polarities and making possibilities emergent in complex time.

But not only time becomes complicated in Derrida’s gift economy. The giver must become invisible, undetectable, unnamed. Perhaps de-named is more appropriate for thinking of this anonymity because the giver still exists, but in a different dimension from the one he is able to occupy with his name, with his self. Absolute altruism is a paradox

for Derrida, but one that can be approached through the sorrow and joy, inextricably commingled, of realizing the impossibility, the perpetual bafflement of losing the ego thus, and giving the genuine gift. Derrida's bafflement is a way to slow down, to linger in the text without assuming knowledge, to remain idiotic, if we do not become cynic. We do have, however, if we dare the combination of Deleuze and Derrida, the creative force of the diagram, the celestial-machines operating in time that eludes the containment of the masterful subject and the known or tameable territory. We have the trajectories of the actual and the virtual as they trade places in their systolic/diastolic dance. In *Time Travels* (2005), Grosz defines the Nietzschean concept of force not as "the forcible enactment of one person's will on another," but rather as "the *condition* of subjectivity and subjective will" (186-187 emphasis added). The creative force, an event in itself, is something beyond and under the human, which "both makes the human possible and at the same time positions the human within a world where force works in spite of and around the human, within and as the human" (187). Grosz is not valorizing a power that constructs subjects as objects, but stepping aside from common theories of the subject all together because she finds them to forever define the social as connected only to "identity, recognition, and self-affirmation" (186). She prefers a different approach to that of the self-referential system of identity politics, which can be located in a dynamic collection of "the play of the multiplicity of active forces" (187). She imagines force, along with Nietzsche and Deleuze, as something real not metaphorical, but differentiated from state power in the way that it acts.

The various and many creative forces "constitute an inhuman, subhuman field, a field of 'particles' or elements ... which are only provisionally or temporarily grouped together in the form of entities and actions." This particle field bears affective resonances, literally creative and dynamic, multiple and changing, "producing relations of inequality and differentiation, which in turn produce ever-realigning relations of intensity or force"

(189). Inequality becomes a dynamic and productive situation of exchange that carries no moral or juridical weight, but simply “does” in the movement of forces. Differences, qualitative and quantitative, intra-act in a movement that brings forth, or makes emergent, transformation in an ebb and flow. This elastic movement of time I previously discussed has little to do with progress, but does change the known world.

Force is not a universal, transcendental anthropomorphic matter that determines destiny. Neither is it developed or constrained within social relations of power. Instead it encompasses plural, complex, “inhuman” movements of becoming as “expansions and magnifications” (188) and minimizations of itself, an elastic movement of flowing in one direction and then in another. Force is a relation of intensity in difference, which is both quantitative and qualitative, and thus various forces differ in terms of magnitude and capacity. Nietzsche used words like “‘active’ and ‘reactive,’ ‘noble’ and ‘servile’” to describe various forces; of course these terms are problematic in their immediate capacity to inscribe moral positions, but they are useful in fleshing out the notion that force makes up these two aspects of acting (quantitative and qualitative) such that some are “strong” and some are “weak,” but in their difference they all have affective power and as such they create, each to its own capacity, and always in relation to other forces.

As they differ, forces are also competitive, struggling with each other to proceed on their trajectories of expansion and as a result they produce “relations of alignment, cooperation, and tension” (188) among them as they move. Again it is key to remember that these are not anthropomorphic struggles for supremacy, but ones in which intensities encounter each other and carry on or change based on that encounter, beyond and beside impacts they render on human social situations.

It is also important to acknowledge that they are terrifying in their intense heedlessness, especially when the human ability to engage them is limited to that of the participant and does not extend to mastery. That is to say, despite our efforts at



containment or harnessing these forces, they function in a larger context than our ability to limit them, mainly because they are not centered or focused on us: they are impersonal and imperceptible provoking “a politics of acts, not identities...in which inhuman forces, forces that are both living and nonliving, macroscopic and microscopic, above and below the level of the human are acknowledged and allowed to displace the centrality of both consciousness and unconsciousness” (Grosz 2005 189-190).

A subject without identity, we return to this frightening approach that violates every boundary “I” can use to frame what I believe to know about myself. But this fear, this fright emanates from a systemic problem: identities constructed and “affirmed through relations, especially relations of [Lacanian] desire but also relations of identification or recognition” (189) rely on the creation of an excludable “Other,” a situation that can and does repeat well-known habits of scape-goating, marginalizing, and silencing. If I exist, I should be able to gain purchase on some field, some territory, some ground from which I can function. This seems like common sense, but Grosz is proposing we relinquish the territories of identity and move into the flow of creative forces, choosing to participate in ongoing difference, rather than insisting on even the tiniest square of ground.

Grosz’ proposal is inspiring and I feel entirely willing to free-fall into this torrent of force, despite the violence it will certainly do to my understanding of myself as a woman, a scholar, an artist, a thinker, a friend. But it seems that in Grosz’ insistence on the politics of imperceptibility (action) replacing the politics of identity, she produces yet another polemic, which limits the potential in her proposal. And while identity politics often also lock us in oppositional situations through their ultimate reliance on the assumption of a self-identified subject, it seems that there has to be an ebb and flow between the solidity of a human identity and the vast, untamable processes of becoming for us to function, as the creatures we are, in the realm of both.

Becoming-imperceptible, as I stated earlier, is not a matter of erasing individual subjectivity toward dissolution of the potential to engage, assert agency, or play with desire. It is not a process of becoming practically nothing as regards identity, but it is a process of becoming-practically-nothing as the limitations of identity ebb and flow through ongoing conditions of trans-subjectivity. In this process, imperceptibility evokes the space beside narcissism, beyond the limitations of identity politics and those of oppositional arguments, where actions, not static positions, become the focus, through the ongoing investigation of networks of creative and untiring becoming “more and other” (Grosz 2005 189). “Imperceptibility” is, therefore, not an abject, diminished, passive, or invisible position, but again a huge, dynamic, nurturing, violent *process* of affective forces which, when recognized, make reassertion of the static self-identified subject, with all of its boundaries and oppressive power relations, more and more bewildering.

It is clear that Grosz is developing something that expands the capacity of the de-centered self and attempts to avoid some of the problems she finds in feminist and other minoritarian discourse. Still, imagining the kind of subjectless or pre-subjective subject she posits requires even more involvement as we anticipate and work with its impact upon our identities and our actions, conceived *in flux*; mostly this feels “un-natural” and seems to exceed our semantic and physical capacities, but this is indeed the place where something interesting may begin.

In *Community Without Unity* (1989) political scientist William Corlett imagines a situation, informed by an active Derridian gift giving, a process “during which the gift determines the identity of the giver and the receiver ... [where] no side can direct the behavior of the other because opposition is neutralized; power is set aside because patterned subjectivity has been deferred” (207). While efforts at neutralizing oppositions have been full steam ahead for decades now, the notion of navigating the terrain of community, ongoing in its formation in supplely flexing time, without sovereignty and in

terms of giving and receiving as another paradigm of virtual and actual becoming speaks to ways in which slipping into the space of trans-subjectivity consciously and willingly reveals the forces of becoming of interest to Grosz in her discussion of creativity.

*The Dispossessed* is a novel subtitled by Le Guin “an ambiguous utopia.” This phrase is ambiguous in itself. The socialist, anarchic society on the moon of Anarres is opposed to the capitalist, oligarchic society on the planet, Urras. The society on Anarres supplies its populace with the necessary requirements for sustenance, a well-rounded and relatively self-directed education, and the guarantee of meaningful occupation chosen by the individual at will. Still it is a dry planet, “arid and bleak,” even parsimonious with its gravity, where life has not evolved beyond fish and flowerless plants. On the other hand, Urras is lush and fecund, fragrant and full of sound. The intelligentsia with whom Shevek is housed when he first journeys to the planet is sophisticated, cultured, and politically cunning. The people have either too much or too little and the rich are powerful, the poor powerless. This is horrifying to Shevek when he finally visits, a bitter situation of oppression and exploitation, sexual repression and mendacity. But the ambassador from what we can assume is Earth has a different perspective. In the distant past, her ancestors raped and pillaged their planet, annihilated their population in the process, and learned only to do differently when the more ancient race, the Hainish, intervened. She speaks of her experience: “to me, and all my fellow Terrans who have seen the planet, Urras is the kindest, most various, most beautiful of all the inhabited worlds. It is the world that comes as close as any could to Paradise. ... I know it is full of evils, full of ...injustice, greed, folly, waste. But it is also full of good, of beauty, vitality, achievement. ... it is *alive*, tremendously alive...” (347). One man’s horror story is another’s paradise?

Le Guin also problematizes the self-empowerment possible on Anarres, where people are free to refuse postings that serve the community but do not follow their interests, to join or leave a group at will. After 160 years of anarchy, the bureaucratic

machine has taken hold and the petty politics that drive the insecure and narrow-minded have become naturalized. As Shevek and his friends resist this, attempting to have intellectual exchange with Urras or encouraging people to revisit their founding ideas, they are called traitors and are shunned, the worst punishment in a place where community is everything. The movement between self and community, the ebb and flow that Odo, the founding mother of the anarchism developed on Anarras, puts the anarchic self into crisis. If talking too much about something which fascinates you (as Shevek does when he relates Zeno's paradox, which is not called this in this solar system, to a talking group at school when he is eight), can result in accusations of "egoizing" and being asked to join another group if, especially, the director, an adult who is not really the teacher but a supervisor, does not understand, the mean or average of the group prevails and extraordinary thinking, feeling, articulating, or expressing are again marginalized. When a crisis, like drought and famine, mandates that a family be separated for years in order that the labor of the adults might best serve the community, the psychological trauma of broken hearts and loneliness are not considered. There are no mammals or birds on the planet, so Le Guin does not include non-human losses in this situation of trauma. In fact, when Shevek goes to Urras, birdsong and the liquid eyes of mammals are so unfamiliar that he cannot identify them and wonders for seconds, beyond his scientific reason, if they are sprites or other supernatural manifestations. At one point he wishes he had been able to take a lamb back for his partner, a fish biologist who "has a way" with creatures. But the extension of this kind of perhaps tangential relationship, for Le Guin, is cut off by the urgency and secrecy of Shevek's return to Anarras.

These problems of ambiguity arise again and again in this novel, but I would like to return Le Guin's utopic ambiguity to the question of flexible time. The epitaph on the tombstone of Anarres' founder, Odo, says "*To be whole is to be part; true voyage is return*" (84). Throughout, Le Guin emphasizes the themes of voyage, change,

return, in order to express time in the rich complexity for which she strives. Unlike a *bildungsroman*, voyage and change are not about coming of age, progressing on a linear continuum toward maturity and wisdom or failure or irony. The journey is made to crack open the ossified, mature structure, bureaucracy. The change comes about as difference is introduced, not as the new or progressive, but as the creative.

Shevek's friend Bedap (their names are configured and assigned by computer and are entirely unique to each person) is the radical voice in the novel, challenging Shevek's own ossification and pushing him to take the risks he needs to take in order to continue on the path of discovery on which his chosen field, physics, is directing him. Bedap states clearly the way that even the most radical ideas, the most revolutionary edicts can lose their power: "Change is freedom, change is life – is anything more basic to Odonian thought than that? But nothing changes any more! Our society is sick. You know it. You're suffering its sickness. It's suicidal sickness!" (166). Ideas without action are deadly.

We know Shevek will act because the first chapter is the one in which he leaves Anarres for Urras despite semi-violent protests against him. Le Guin structures the novel such that chapters oscillate between the distant past on Anarres, leading up to Shevek's journey to Urras, and the recent past time on the planet. There is an enactment of the elastic time Shevek theorizes, where historical time and simultaneous affective time occupy the same complex space and resonate against one another. The reader is confronted and required to adjust to the stark differences between the two places, politically, environmentally, intellectually, psychologically. Each chapter brings an abrupt interruption and then a re-immersion in the rich details of the world inhabiting the space of that chapter. She ends the novel in the present as Shevek returns to Anarres with a Hainish "Foreigner." The characters and the reader are unsure if they will be welcomed and reinvigorate the potential of the stagnant anarchic society or if they will be stoned at

the landing pad and the creative potential will die with them. There is a sense that their mission is not doomed as radio reports indicate that more members of Anarres society have joined with those encouraging change than not. But as the culture is self-regulating, if the men are killed, it will be the will of the group at the time and will carry its own kind of justice, despite what is lost.

“What is lost?” is the question generated by all acts of creativity. As Grosz indicated, creative force seeks auto-augmentation but it engenders care and mutual respect because static hierarchies cannot stand in the face of its movement. At the very least they must be considered, these hierarchies and put to the test in terms of respect, in terms of love. What emerges from the force of the creative is contingent to and upon the vast array of factors informing its emergence, its trajectory, and its collisions. The momentary loss of the unified self in the trans-subjective is certainly a collision of forces, and it is productive at the same time of the supple change Le Guin advocates, the precise and lingering bafflement in which Derrida resides, and the strange, borderless, whatever-being Agamben that makes a situation of trans-subjectivity possible and renders a site-contingent creative collaborative practice viable in terms of generating new modes of community.

“What,” asks Agamben, “could be the politics of whatever singularity, that is of a being whose community is mediated not by any condition of belonging (being red, being Italian, being Communist) nor by the simple absence of conditions (a negative community, such as that recently proposed in France by Maurice Blanchot [in *the Unavowable Community*]), but by belonging itself” (1993 85). Belonging connotes similarity, but is there a belonging of difference?

I proposed this to my husband at breakfast the other morning, a move of mine (asking philosophical questions before coffee) he finds particularly annoying, as I awoke with it on my mind. “Belonging through difference makes everyone the same,” he said

and turned away. This speaks to another question another interlocutor asked of me when hearing my assertions about the trans-subject: “Are you collapsing difference?” he queried. “I don’t think so, but I must insist that I carry this inquiry through,” I replied, or something roughly like that. Difference and similarity are positions, which rely upon identities constructed around a confined notion of the self, a stable and immovable “me,” which I cherish and abuse, nurture and protect, defend and make separate. Then I find others who feel similarly different and form a community that keeps some out. Some should perhaps be kept out. “Is Mitt Romney a nomad?” my second and most persistent interlocutor asked under the rubric of another conversation. “He should be!” I insisted, even though I knew I was wrong as it was coming out of my mouth.

A nomad moves. Deleuze says to Parnet in the *Abécédaire*, true voyage occurs in the act of creativity. There is a false rupture in traveling to a new place to what one could very well have done at home. There is a difference, in Deleuze’s estimation, in travel for pleasure (which he finds absurd for the poor intellectual), and travel that is compulsory. “Les nomads, ces sont les gens qui ne voyagent pas (nomads are people who do not travel.” They do not want to leave, says Deleuze. They are attached to the earth and the land they occupy. “Rien est plus d’immobile de la nomad (nothing is more immobile than the nomad).” The nomads he references, Bedouins for example or Romany Gypsies, move to find stability. But again, the nomad I name at the beginning is neither the one who repeats common cycles nor the one who invades, which Glissant describes. This nomad is Deleuze in his own creative mind, dreaming to verify the colors he saw in a dream. This is a nomad who moves in and out of trans-states, questing but not for the father or some other perceived lack, only to see what will arise, which finally ruptures as a way of life. This nomad, s/he sways, steps, vibrates, leaps in time that is supple and follows a strange geometry inscribing the processes of alchemy, transformation, relational diffusion, commingled reassembly.

In her analysis of “a new use of the self” in *the Coming Community*, cultural theorist Jessica Whyte poses the question “What would it mean to take our vision of happiness from a world whose paradigmatic instance is the concentration camp?” (2). She is teasing out the anecdotal retelling in Agamben’s text of Walter Benjamin discussing a parable to Ernst Bloch. The story relates a concern with change, the possibility of change in a tale of messianic redemption. Bloch’s transcription appears in Agamben’s text thus:

A rabbi, a real cabalist, once said that in order to establish the reign of peace it is not necessary to destroy everything nor to begin a completely new world. It is sufficient to displace this cup or this bush or this stone just a little, and thus everything. But this small displacement is so difficult to achieve its measure is so difficult to find that, with regard to the world, humans are incapable of it and it is necessary that the Messiah come (Agamben 1993 52).

Waiting on the Messiah, Bloch tells of a rabbi, who might be Gershom Scholem (reputed to have told the story to Benjamin), and who relates the impossibility of change or redemption for humans in the context of the story. He also tells of a potential salvation as they await a redeemer who always defers coming. The arrival of the redeemer is not immanent by all accounts.

This generates further mourning within the story, of the kind Adorno experiences when he loses the hope of grammar, of the type Derrida recognizes as the condition of language as always informed by the tension between madness and reason. This waiting is informed by the limit event, according to Whyte’s interpretation, of the real and the metaphorical concentration camp or “a life typified by biopolitics, the normalisation of the state of exception and unceasing commodification” (2). If life is forever framed by the “zones of indistinction” rendered in bare life, there is ongoing potential and probability that the limit event will be repeated. We have already found some release from this in the engagement of “whatever-being” discussed at length in Chapter 1 but it is carried forward



in the trans-subjective engagement that renders each already part of every other while maintaining his or her otherness. The paradox of being.

Whyte suggests that by displacing the sacred, by invigorating alternative uses of the profane, that a “non-utilitarian relation to the world is both made possible and separated in the sphere of consumption, which serves to block the new uses and new experiences the spectacle opens up” (9). In this context, a new self is generated and “used” or “made useful” in a way that is contingent to but also eludes capitalism. Along with many other critics of capitalism, Whyte ultimately suggests that “it is necessary to develop a political thought capable of taking into account the fact that capitalism does not have one *telos*, but is just as good at waking the dead as it is at reducing life worlds to debris” (14). She references a wide range of discussions among labor theorists on zombies and non-productivity. Like many of her contemporaries, she seeks a way to challenge the wide ranging effects capitalism and its production of subjectivity from within the conditions that capitalism itself generates.

Whyte’s assessment of Agamben’s engagement with the critical Marxism found in Debord’s assessment of the society of the spectacle seems accurate in terms of the potential Agamben offers to “play” more complexly with the conditions of capitalism. I think his proposal is even more radical, however. While she does not cite the chapter titled “Dim Stockings,” in *The Coming Community*, Agamben discusses the way cheap colorful stockings are marketed through a “special impression of synchrony and dissonance” (47) developed in the way the advertisement is made. By combining separately shot layers of film, with one stocking-clad body per layer, the bodies are literally dissociated from one another. They are visually reunited and then made coherent by means of the soundtrack which extends even the potentials for reconciling the trap of productivity through play.

Even though he admits to Kracauer's laboring "girl units" and Benjamin's loss of aura in the mechanically formed artwork, Agamben redeems the incoherence and ineffability of the human body by indicating the dissociated stockinged legs' power to break "away from the double chains of biological destiny and individual biography ... and [appear] for the first time perfectly communicable, entirely illuminated" (47). The perfection of this resides in noncompliance of the advertisement with the rules of coherence, or even the decrees of sanity. The ad is wholly "improper" in its leave taking of "both the inarticulate cry of the tragic body and the dumb silence of the comic body." A new, strangely associated trans-body occurs. It reflects upon and renders a trans-subject, distributed across the consuming, dancing, absurdly representative bodies of the advertisement.

The Messiah comes from within this impropriety, is immanent to it and rises out of a "paradoxical concept of an absolutely immaterial resemblance [to God]." In other words, what was awaited by Gershom Scholem and the cabalist rabbi, if he was a different person, and by Ernst Bloch, and then ostensibly by us, is already there in our disenfranchisement from "the proper."

Returning to the story of change and redemption, Bloch's version told in *Spuren* (1930), Benjamin tells it thus, according to Agamben:

The *Hassidim* tell a story about the world to come that says everything there will be just as it is here. Just as our room is now, so it will be in the world to come; where our baby sleeps now, there too it will sleep in the other world. And the clothes we wear in this world, those too we will wear there. Everything will be as it is now, just a little different (52).

The tiny difference is all the difference of course, and this is also the impossibility, the one which necessitates the Messiah. The question is why wait? Why strive toward a future, which never arrives. Agamben does something interesting in the way he structures this tale in one paragraph of the chapter "Halos" of the translation by Michael Hardt to

which I am referring (53). He starts with the phrase “There is a well-known parable” and then lists the ways in which he is aware of its circulation. First Walter Benjamin who tells Ernst Bloch. Benjamin got it from Gershom Scholem, the German-born Israeli philosopher and professor of Jewish Mysticism. Bloch, writing about it in the 1930s, legitimates it with the naming of a “real cabalist” (as different from a fake one?). Or perhaps he is indicating Scholem as “real” because he is properly established as a scholar of Cabala. Nevertheless, Agamben follows Bloch’s recounting of Benjamin with the “actual” text related by Benjamin, which still has Hassidim (pious ones) telling it in the first place. The complicated lack of linearity in following the trail of the accounting for this story, to say nothing of accounting for the change of which it tells, generates the displacement upon which the tellers of the story wait.

It extends to the dissociation within continuity that happens in the Dim Stockings advertisement. Flashing legs, like broken and disconnected pistons or so many flickering neon tubes, transitioning the human to the post-human, , but also grant bodies and situations, objects and subjects, the becoming bio-informatic, the capacity to act through the creativity of displacement, disruption, and loss of language, as their own redemptive agents, event while they remain in a situation of suspension, whatever being, such that, and because, it always matters. This recuperates the loss in the slippery, irreconcilability of the individual and the community in Le Guin’s anarchical society, and provides a frame for understanding the emergence of a different kind of stability-in-disruption.

A community as such is fraught: its rules are necessarily revisited, re-written, mourned, forgiven, inscribed again. It requires attention and care, conscientiousness and conciliation, that will always need to be remade and rearticulated. It comprises the same kind of multiplicity as the strange and rubbery time in which it operates; it is measured by the queer clocks that both note its progress and determine its appearance. It requires willingness, a key ingredient in the successful witches’ brew, vastly more important

than tolerance, empathy, eye of newt, maps of the *terrain-vague*. It cooks in the heat of conflict, but it soothes and makes possible reconciliation that is functional and nurturing, fun, pleasurable, sensuous, tender. Releasing opposition ultimately means finding a way to apply the bafflement of Derrida and the madness of Deleuze, the earnestness in Agamben and the idiocy in Dostoyevsky to the condition of intricate complexity in the aesthetic process of sharing the trans-subjective.

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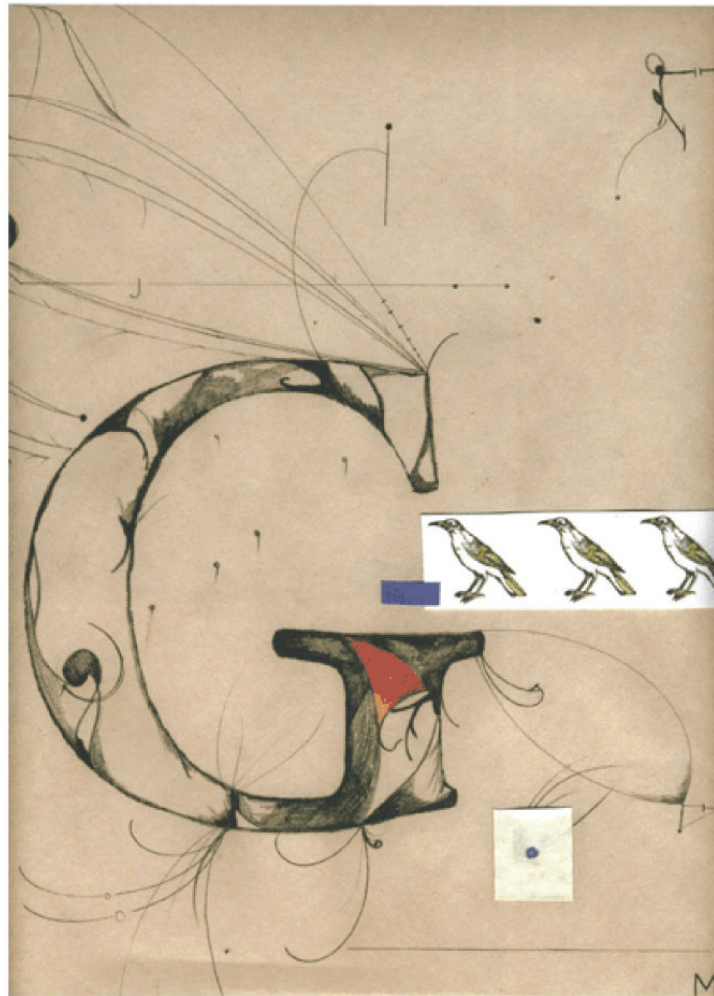
## Appendix A

# Hypermateral Encounters: On language, uncertainty, and community<sup>1</sup>

April Durham

IN MY LONG CONSIDERATION OF how to break with linguistic mandates, I found myself unable to think of the letter “G” without some kind of physical sensation of, not exactly trepidation, and not exactly sheer joy, but a mix of the two that resulted in a levitation-invoking field which would shimmer all around me and even affect the small dog as he watched my efforts to draw breath for enunciation turn into the kind of panting anxiety he was used to expressing on a strict hourly schedule.

From this time I had to admit that the effect of the letter’s form, the gentle curves and fold, the jutting parts, upon my own body were far from negligible. I and the dog bore witness to the fractious affect that material font could precipitate... But then we noticed that the form of the letter itself was moving, glistening, lighting up with the commotion my very palpable uncertainty contributed to the situation; and a band of flame emerged or settled (the origins are unclear) along the



curve that serves as “la tete” of the magiscule piece of type. Could it actually have a head, a bald pate that contained a world of knowledge, a universe of mappings implying infinite

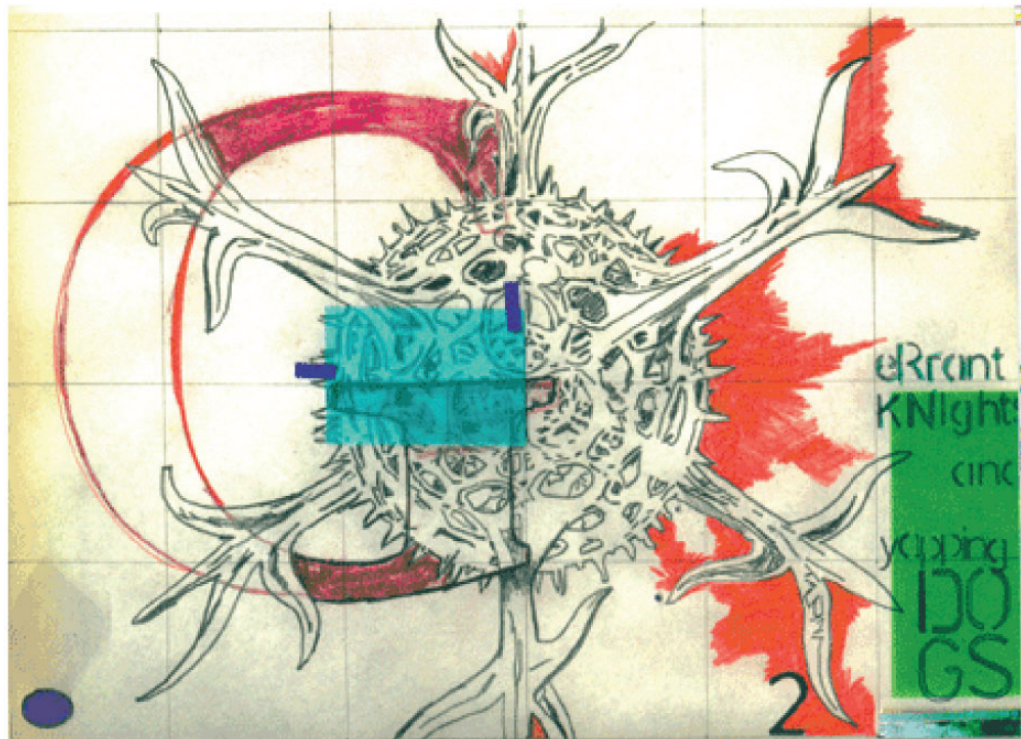
<sup>1</sup> Performed at (dis)junctions 2012.

recourse to the mind of God? I saw it clearly as if I were St. Peter at the Day of Pentecost and the spirit of fire was being transformed right through my own mythical reservations. The dog woofed.



Of course the letter “G” reveals itself as a containing force as much as a liberating one as I realize upon

further fixed gazing, that it is the first initial in my husband’s last name. “G” becomes something to embrace and resist, something both isolating and consoling, beautiful and repulsive. I long for “G” and “B” and “F,” not least because these letters enscribe the outlines of a body I once knew well and then forgot entirely and then remembered through the stories I wrote about it. These stories had the traces of a truth I might have described as archetypal if I were a Jungian monk, but which ceased to find their way into an everyday practice that could be tolerated by anyone with similar initials or with names beginning with “X” “Z” “A” or “S.”





Around this time, I began making carefully tatted lace versions of the letters that we could wear in private or in a limited public situation. The train was a good venue for these costumes as we often found ourselves required to journey from one city to the next and we were quite worried about both crushing the lace letters in our luggage and being too conspicuous in the wearing of these alphabetic outfits such that we caused a disturbance.

Our world, confined to the tube of the train, car, or airplane, was framed by a movement that offered us a kind of rich freedom to frolic without being noticed. I appreciate this situation more than I can feasibly express as I am not a frolicsome type, assuming a very somber and serious approach

to life since early childhood that has carried forward to this day, despite the repeated efforts of friends, family, lovers, and spouse to invoke in me a sense of humor. Nevertheless, my disguises, as faulty as they may be, offer a compassionate buffer between a sense of particle-ized self and a tentative, eyelash-batting reaching out to other equally constituent, pixilated selves passing or rushing or gliding by. But this makes me ask the obvious question: "is there anything other than the disguise?" What could that possibly mean? you ask but I am not entirely certain. I just have a sense that relating to a general condition of awkwardness in a way that is never completely differentiated from the I or you or me or us or we that can be acknowledged, occurs through a series of intersecting and overlapping disguises. Am I me when I do not have on my false moustache? What if I envy the use of other prostheses, the



ability to assume various other roles, like swaggering soldier with big hot gun, or Mistress Mary with the little lamb hook thing, or even the scruffy beard-messy hair-just back from safari explorer expression that is my husband most of the time? Where was I going with this? I don't really care about the limitations of the disguise; I propose appropriating them at will. But then I feel entirely self-conscious as I am confronted with the desires of those for whom the disguise has become a politics, the rhetoric of which I have never been privy due to the assumptions one makes about the naked self and the boundaries inscribed by the singular freckled flesh of one drifting, floating girl.

That went very far from the initial investigation into the letter "G" and its glossolalic affect. Disguising itself as a landscape in which bodies find themselves entangled, the letter "Z" [for Zone] or the letter "S" [for Stalker, Steven, Sublime, and Stupid] may become something that is only intermittently real and always changing despite its physical investment in form. By this I mean that the unexpected possibilities of what may emerge from an intersection of bodies, from reading so intently that the mind begins to function other than a large and largely ineffective data processor, are always in fact cropping up, altering expectations for physical movement, emotional intersections,

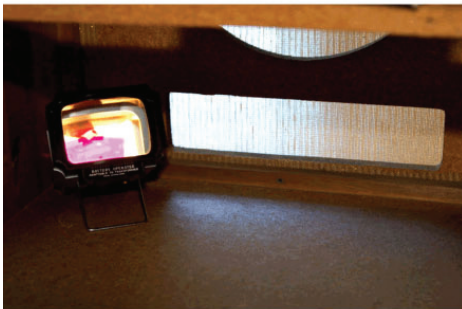




libidinal invocations. Do I mean to say that desiring bodies might be actual fragmented components, heads on carts, hand-vaginas, foot-mouths? Well, perhaps if there is a way to know that desiring bodies might create themselves through an interaction that trans-figures them toward something unexpected, then yes. A terrain is a dog is dandelion fluff lovingly caressing a girl-monkey-mentalistic somehow its love child.



A is for art, anonym, apocalypse. Journeying from the empty mall, the consumptive community, to the bridge that spans differing sets of desires encapsulated by the walled city space results in disorientation. From the sounds of swing where tiaras and chocolates are sold to the emptiness of a suburban used-to-be chic storefront, the revisitation of someone's story through the broken pieces of data storage/delivery equipment is



uncomfortably familiar, awkwardly beautiful, still becoming architecture. This fragmented approach to the architectonic where a freeway rushes and a heart beats over and beneath the images of someone who might be your mother, the dread dictator of a bygone generation, yourself, offers only hazy projections of what you finally remember is an image you saw last night in your dream.

In my experience of the wasteland, a place I have occupied since I was eight, the dismayed appearance of dislodged drywall hung with wallpaper borders popular a decade ago could evoke a thrilling beat of my heart that sounds a lot like the pulsing of Jupiter on a starry night. If the defunct is occupied by the dreams of the apparently-inanimate a-producers of everyday life, then one must wonder what does that colored



light spilling forth from the broken pylon really signify? Is it the coming community or the coming end? Maybe the points that indicate directions are faulty if you're indeed seeking guidance, but that doesn't mean they are inert in actuality. It doesn't mean they cannot be appropriated for the production of concepts of that man who haunted your dreams, the boy with the curling hair. Still the old texts, the old statements, the old bodies, the old selves are not necessarily what will manifest from this experiment in colliding visions, erasure of the subject that is then reinscribed on the surface of co-mingled bodies of women, machines, cats, paper, strips of tape, fashion statements, and royal archives.

I know my tendency to ramble has gotten the best of me and I have

drifted in fact, quite far from the original citation of "G," but the trace of his body is found everywhere, even in the excerpt, the one from last night's dream, burning brightly and waiting its own dissolution.

