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Choreographies of the Digital Everyday: Intimacy and the Aesthetics of Home Dance Productions

L. Archer Porter, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, US, lporter5@unl.edu

Bodies are central to new media and its corollary repository of images. Not only do bodies produce media through their engagements with technology, but they also help define the composition of a production, particularly when they appear in-frame. Self-produced images circulating on and across platforms, for instance, are the result of orchestrations with the camera, choreographies of space, dynamics of movement and form, and the relationship between the gaze of the subject and that of the camera. Through such processes, the body captures a slice of itself, its subjecthood, and its intimate world.

Foregrounding the nuances of corporeality, this article presents a lens for understanding the aesthetic dimensions of everyday, self-produced media online. In it, I propose the theory of intimaesthetics, or the aestheticization of intimacy, to articulate the mechanisms by which subjects cultivate a sense of closeness with viewers through their choreographies of body, space, and media. Based on the study of thousands of home dance videos on Instagram, 2010-2020, and grounded in discourses on the gaze, affect, and the dancing body, this piece reveals four types of intimaesthetics: candid dancing, the moving selfie, nonchalant gestures, and home concerts. Each type articulates a distinct modality of practice, defined by the performer's complex relationship with the camera.

Introduction

Sunlight filters through the pale curtains of the kitchen, softening the edges of the scene. Clad in an old band tee and faded pajama pants, Luke sweeps the floor with practiced disinterest. A mop in hand, he moves with gentle, swaying motions, humming along to the song playing in the space, perhaps from his phone on the counter—somewhere between pop and indie folk. But the energy shifts when the chorus hits: Luke lifts the mop, an amused smile tugging at his lips. He twists his torso, steps forward, and suddenly the mop becomes a dance partner. He dips, swirls, and glides across the tiled floor, his feet deftly moving in tandem with the spinning mop head. The mop twists with him, turning the kitchen into a stage for an impromptu tango.

The performer who captures their own image often works diligently and deliberately to frame themself in a satisfactory light. Does the media show their taste in music, dress, and decor? Does it reflect the aspects of themself that they want people to know and remember? Ultimately, does the image bolster the brand of their public persona? Every element of their production folds into a representation of their digital persona. As such, the aesthetics and semiotics of the product become the focus of their movement experience.

A playful intensity takes hold—Luke's head tilts to the side, eyebrows raised in mock seriousness, and he lets out a hearty laugh as he navigates a turn. His movements become bolder, the mop extending outward before returning to his chest. The mop tilts downward and he follows it effortlessly, dipping it as if this household object could share his passion.

Of course, once online, the image ends up developing a social, political, and economic life of its own. It circulates through feeds according to undisclosed, cryptic algorithms. It bumps up against advertisements for the latest lifestyle brands. It is referenced and cited by followers, folding into perhaps unexpected public discourses. It comes to reside in hashtag aggregations with other unknown content. It accrues value through the number of likes, comments, views, and reposts it accrues. All the while, the content maintains its aesthetics of intimacy through the performer's choreographies of body, space, and media.

The chorus fades into a bridge, and with a swift, dramatic motion, Luke tosses the mop upright. It stands there, anchored between his feet like a microphone stand. He takes a knee, closing his eyes and leaning in close to the handle. Luke lip syncs an exaggerated version of the lyrics into the mop, his grin appearing between lines as he steals glances at the camera. The mop, in this

moment, is both his stage prop and his partner in a duet—an object enlivened by his playful performance.

Situated across the globe and cast through the various networks of the Internet, dancing bodies and their domestic locales become the subjects of a particular aesthetic: one in which individuals express their sense of self through the framing of their moving bodies, personal spaces, and intimate narratives (See Figure 1). The description above of a publicly-available home dance video on Instagram represents this aesthetic, but suggests the unseen, yet nonetheless familiar production of such an image.[1] While the viewer only sees the ultimate production, the choreographies involved in Luke's dance articulates the minutiae of *how* intimacy becomes aestheticized for a mass, online audience. His deliberate mechanisms of capture, in particular, reflect how media producers work to cultivate a sense of closeness with their audiences through the curation of themselves and their intimate surroundings. These techniques of production reflect what I call *intimaesthetics*, or the aestheticization of intimacy.

Figure 1: Series of home dance videos on Instagram

The theory of intimaesthetics is grounded in the study of thousands of publicly-accessible home dance videos on Instagram from 2010-2020.[2] In this paper, I describe this theory and flesh out its typology: a series of four modes of production in which home dancers

[1] Along with the other media I describe in this essay, I have changed the name of the dancer in this video and removed identifying information from the caption to maintain anonymity.

[2] The decade of 2010-2020 is important to the development of intimaesthetics because it gave rise to a series of major shifts in digital culture and advancements in communication technologies: the development and implementation of behavior-predicting algorithms, the intensification of commercial advertising in and through every day media artefacts, the political and commercial leveraging of echo chambers, and the abrupt pivot from in-person to online engagement during the Covid pandemic in 2019/2020 (depending on the country)—to name a few. Instagram's own development coincides with these wider changes: Instagram launched in 2010, was acquired by a major social media company in 2012 (then Facebook, now Meta), added "sponsored post" advertising in 2013, changed its algorithm from a chronological feed to a "relevant" one in 2016, and became a locus for belonging and home quarantine communication during the Covid-19 pandemic. These developments demonstrate how Instagram is entwined with the wider landscape of digital culture, and is most appropriate as the focus of study for the rise of intimaesthetics.

aestheticize intimacy for an online audience. These types—candid dancing, moving selfie, nonchalant gestures, and home concerts—are organized around a specific relationship between performer and camera. Once online, their specificities of production then open out to a particular social and political character. Intimaesthetics is thus twofold. It describes the formalization of the private, personal, and unseen into the format of a moving image, while gesturing toward how that image functions as currency on media platforms like Instagram.

While the media from my research—i.e., short-form home dance videos—reside on Instagram, the trend that they represent may be found across digital culture. Image-centric platforms like TikTok, Snapchat, YouTube, and other Web 2.0 applications circulate and deal in intimaesthetics. Similarly, this theory may apply to media produced outside the home, and through bodies that are not necessarily dancing. In terms of space, possibilities for intimaesthetic venues might include hotels, community centers, studios, workplaces, movie theaters, and places of religion, among others. Similarly, the figure of the moving body—whether dancing rhythmically or moving in an everyday, pedestrian fashion—function as both the vessel of intimaesthetics and often the subject that such productions represent. Despite these broader applications, the home and the dancing body function as epitomizing forces for the picturing of intimacy, and are thus emblematic of the theory of intimaesthetics. Dispatches from such domestic locales, these media quintessentially capture a semiotics of the personal, the authentic, the raw, the unmediated, but are then cast out into the ethers of mass circulation and consumption. Their complex choreographies demonstrate a fusion of self and image—or, perhaps more accurately, a *representation* of the fusion of self and image.

Luke's mop dance ends as he stands back up, as if to shake off his impromptu solo and resume his task of cleaning the floor. Below the video is a caption that reads, "If your kitchen doesn't turn into a Broadway show when you're cleaning, you're not doing it right 🕺✨*"*

Aestheticizing Intimacy

The concept of intimaesthetics is grounded in discourses on aesthetics, media studies, dance studies, and critical internet studies. The term itself is a helpful entry point to understanding how these discourses frame the aestheticization of intimacy in/through media. As a neologism, intimaesthetics fuses "intimacy" and "aesthetics" to name the twenty-first century formalization and mediatization of qualities around intimacy. Rooted in the Latin *intimus*, meaning "inmost," and *intimare*, meaning "to impress, to make familiar," intimacy reflects a multifaceted interiority. In other words, the two roots of "inmost" and "impression" both require some notion of inside, yet one that is

conceptually expansive. For instance, intimacy appeals to spatialities of closeness or enclosure; conceptions of an inner human experience; and the possibility of close intersubjectivities.[3] These various conceptions point to how intimacy operates along three registers: spatial, psychological, and sociocultural—all of which are undergirded by some sense of interiority. Of course, by connoting a multifaceted interiority, intimacy inadvertently references notions of exteriority. An "inmost" can only exist in relation to an outermost; similarly, an "impression" relies on an outside entity impacting one's inner state or form. The logic of this etymology suggests that intimacy is bound by, and wound through, the binary of interiority and exteriority—a binary that is linked to myriad other modernist dualities, such as privacy and publicity, body and mind, nature and culture.[4] In the Introduction to their anthology, *Intimacy in Cinema*, David Roche and Isabelle Schmitt-Pitiot reflect on intimacy's reliance on this system of dualities. They state, "as a concept, intimacy is problematic—and stimulating—because it begs to be defined and delineated in terms of binaries that are themselves unstable, such as inside and outside (Lebovici 19, Clam 11), hidden depth and visible surface (Clam 20), public and private (Boyer 72), and self and other, and from a Lacanian perspective, the intimate and extimate."[5] The qualification of this foundation of dualisms as already "unstable" is telling of intimacy's effusiveness in the popular imagination: it is able to shape-shift across its various deployments because its foundation is composed of an unsteady and already-troubled logic of binary order.

While an understanding of intimacy and its reliance on a problematic system of dualities is foundational to the concept of intimaesthetics, this term also relies on a particular understanding of aesthetics. Indeed, the incorporation of "aesthetics" in the term identifies the processes by which one creates an image of something. In this respect, intimaesthetics draws on an emerging discourse of everyday aesthetics, which

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[3] For notions of intimacy as a spatial concept, see Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994); for a sense of how it is psychoanalytical register, see Jacques-Alain Miller, "Extimité," in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse: Subject, Structure, and Society*, ed. Mark Bracher, et al., 74-87 (New York: NYU Press, 1994); and for a sense of its sociocultural dimension in Staci Newmahr, *Playing on the Edge: Sadomasochism, Risk, and Intimacy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011) and Alex Lambert, *Intimacy and Friendship on Facebook* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013). Moreover, intimacy's relation to performance has been discussed with varying scopes and lenses by Susan Kozel, *Closer: Performance, Technologies, Phenomenology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008); Josephine Machon, *Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013); Maria Chatzichristodoulou and Rachel Zerihan, ed. *Intimacy Across Visceral and Digital Performance* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) and Kiri Miller, *Playable Bodies: Dance Games and Intimate Media* (Oxford: 2017).

[4] Sherry Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" *Feminist Studies* 1, no. 2 (1972): 5-31.

[5] David Roche and Isabelle Schmitt-Pitiot, *Intimacy in Cinema: Critical Essays on English Language Films* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2014), 2.

scholars of the subject situate as distinct from models of aesthetics oriented around fine arts. As opposed to focusing on "surprise, shock, and wonder," the field of everyday aesthetics attends to extraordinary dimensions of the functional, familiar, ordinary, and mundane.[6] As Yuriko Saito argues, everyday aesthetics is attentive to activity, rather than object.[7] Sianne Ngai echoes this sentiment in the naming of "everyday aesthetic categories," which provide a "more direct reflection on the relation between art and society" than classical aesthetic categories like the sublime and beautiful.[8] For Ngai, these categories revolve around some sort of "triviality" that results in an ambiguity of judgment.[9] Drawing on this discourse of everyday aesthetics, intimaesthetics reflects Saito's sense of an "aesthetic texture of ordinariness" in that it emphasizes bodily action and familiarity, and Ngai's discussion of triviality and ambiguity in that it captures a "deficit of power" within the scheme of cultural production. Thus, to aestheticize intimacy means to harness a semiotics of everyday interiority through one's actions.

Aligning intimaesthetics with a discourse on everydayness reveals a performer's resourcefulness in a situational context. The concept of choreography, I maintain, is foundational to this work, as it emphasizes how intimacy is activated in and through the body and reliant upon a particular manner of production wherein movement is sequenced together into strings of embodied "phrases."[10] Known primarily as a craft that involves making choices about timing, space, rhythm, and the relationship between bodies, choreography also has a broader association to the social

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[6] Here, Thomas Leddy draws on Hans Gumbrecht to situate everyday aesthetics within and against a more dominant aesthetics, particularly that of Western contemporary art. *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: Aesthetics of Everyday Life* (Toronto, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2012), 108.

[7] Yuriko Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 4.

[8] In particular Ngai writes that the categories of the beautiful and sublime "make insistent if not necessarily indirect claims for their extra-aesthetic power (moral, religious, epistemological, political), asserting not just a specifically aesthetic agency but agency in realms extending far beyond art and culture." By contrast, everyday aesthetic categories—which for Ngai are the zany, cute, and interesting—enable a more "direct reflection on art and society, and more specifically on how 'that very distance of art from its social context which allows it to function as a critique and indictment of the latter also dooms its interventions to ineffectuality and relegates art and culture to a frivolous, trivialized space in which such intersections are neutralized in advance.'" Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 22-23.

[9] Ngai, Our Aesthetic Categories, 18.

[10] The term "phrase" is commonly used in choreographic settings. Lynne Blom and Tarin Chaplin provide a helpful definition of this term when writing "A phrase is the smallest and simplest unit of form. It is a short but complete unit in that it has a beginning, middle, and end. Every phrase, even the shortest, contains the basic structure: it starts, goes somewhere and does something, and then comes to a resolution. A phrase is to dance as a sentence is to a book. Just as a sentence is comprised of separate words, so a phrase is made up of individual moments." *The Intimate Act of Choreography* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1982), 23.

and the political.[11] Andrew Hewitt's notion of "social choreography" aptly captures such a dimension of choreography. According to Hewitt, social choreography is "a tradition of thinking about social order that derives its form from the aesthetic world and seeks to instill that order directly at the level of the body." Hewitt continues that "social choreographies ascribe a fundamental role to the aesthetic in its formation of the political."[12] Intimaesthetics integrates Hewitt's lens to productions of intimacy for media consumption online by situating the moving body in a social and political realm of activity.[13] In other words, to create an image of intimacy, one must arrange, orchestrate, situate, and sequence the individual parts in their world and bodily form.[14] Yet, in doing so, the performer fuses their aesthetic choices with their personal spaces, narratives, and their everyday realities to create an image of themself that is a reflection of their intimate world, but highly produced.

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[11] For a more structured perspective on the craft of choreography, particularly in the tradition of modern form and composition, see Doris Humphrey, *The Art of Making Dances* (New York: Grove Press, 1959); for a more open perspective that emerges from the landscape of European contemporary dance, see Jonathon Burrows, *A Choreographer's Handbook* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2010).

[12] Andrew Hewitt, Social Choreography: Ideology as Performance in Dance and Everyday Movement (Durham, NC: Duke, 2005), 3.
It is worth noting, too, how Hewitt's theorization of social choreography extends earlier conceptualizations of performance as embedded in its social and cultural context. Notably among these its Joseph Roach's critique of the aesthetic bias, which challenges the idea that theater history should solely focus on artistic merit or beauty of a production, arguing that this perspective often ignores the broader social and political implications of a performance. Hewitt extends this historiographic perspective and applies it to the ontology of performance at large. "Theatre History and the Ideology of the Aesthetic," *Theatre Journal* 41, no. 2 (1989): 155-168.

[13] While Hewitt does not incorporate the theories of Jacques Rancière in his grounding of social choreography, there are lines of similarities worth noting. According to Rancière, both politics and aesthetics operate by organizing spaces, times, and forms of activity that determine how we perceive and engage with reality. Aesthetics is not just a matter of art but of perception and being together in a shared world. Rancière's theory, "distribution of the sensible," is especially relevant to the concept of intimaesthetics, as it stresses the formalization of the political into something that might be acknowledged by the outside world. Social choreographies function as the "sensible," but underscore the body's role in that outside recognition. For more on Rancière's distribution of the sensible, see "The Distribution of the Sensible: Politics and Aesthetics," in *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 7-14.

[14] On its surface intimaesthetics may resonate with what Kiri Miller calls "intimate media," which refers to "media that choreograph the gradual accrual of intimacy over time, through practice" (3). However, because intimaesthetics refers to the product of a performance (the image itself), it diverges from Miller's conceptualization. Miller specifically notes that intimate media "refers not to media texts that present intimate material or media platforms that allow for discussion of intimate subject matter" (3). So, while Miller's intimate media focuses on the *consumption of* and *engagement with* media, intimaesthetics highlights the *production* and *circulation* of media.

The tensions between the choreographed image of intimacy and the subject's lived reality not only suggests the media's social and political nature, but also gestures toward its semiotic character. As a digital object, the meaning of the intimaesthetic media is derived from the presence of the moving body, the autobiographical dimension of one's personal space, and the self-reflexive character of the framing and caption. These aspects work to disguise the medium itself so that the content of the image becomes the focus of the work—or in Marshall McLuhan's terms, the content "massages" its audience so that the medium may recede out of focus. While this disguise articulates McLuhan's foundational principle that, in actuality, the "medium is the message," it also gestures toward the *augmentation* of the content.[15] Jean Baudrillard's concept of the hyperreal builds off of McLuhan's work to offer a helpful framework for understanding this element of augmentation. For Baudrillard, in a hyperreal world, simulations do not merely replicate reality; they become *more* real than the real, supplanting the real with a representation that is accepted as truth. They are, in Baudrillard's words, "models of a real without origin."[16] While this theory may apply to a wide swath of media instances in contemporary digital culture, it especially captures the phenomenon of intimaesthetics, wherein curated personal spaces, figures, and narratives often *become* the "reality" perceived by others, despite their deliberate production and curation. A performer creates an image that is a reflection of their sense of self, domestic reality, personal history, and view of the world. The result of that work functions as an illusion of their actual experience of self, belonging, and history. For the home dance performer, in particular, the concept of the hyperreal articulates how one's online self becomes blurred with their offline self to ultimately participate in an arena of public acknowledgment and discourse.

Baudrillard's notion of the hyperreal can be further examined through the device of the frame. Typically, the frame—by tightly locking its subject into place and excluding everything beyond it from the mechanism of visual capture—serves to delineate the image (or text) from the world it both originates from and purports to represent (or its context).[17] It suggests a clear boundary between what is contained within the curated representation and what lies beyond it (i.e., the larger, unmediated reality). However, with intimaesthetics, this frame becomes porous. Instead of neatly

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[15] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

[16] Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra," in *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan, 1994), 1.

[17] Susan Sontag articulates this excluding function of the frame when writing: "The photographic image, even to the extent that it is a trace (not a construction that is made out of disparate photographic traces), cannot be simply a transparency of something that happened. It is always the image that someone chose; to photograph is to frame, and to frame is to exclude." Regarding the Pain of Others (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003): 46

separating the image from its context, intimaesthetic media invites the viewer to imagine and infer the unframed details, thereby blurring the line between the image and its surrounding world. The curated performance within the frame—such as a dancer's movement or an mundane domestic moment—is no longer simply an isolated piece of content. Rather, it suggests and extends into a larger lived reality, one that viewers complete in their minds.

For example, let's explore the video described at the outset of this paper, where a dancer performs with a mop in the kitchen, twirling it as a dance partner in one instance and using it as a microphone in another. This scene captures a sense of everyday whimsy and humor that allows the text to have a particular meaning rooted in the domestic environment and dancing body. At the same time, the prop of the mop has a utility that *spills out* over the frame. Without dwelling on the matter, the viewer implicitly understands that the performer has a mop in their home because they use it to clean up the occasional mess. The setting of the kitchen and the other domestic objects in the space contribute to this extratextual mess of referents: a cat hiding under the table, a stack of unfolded laundry in the corner, a framed portrait of an old woman on the shelf. Such incidental elements of the space become enmeshed in everyday fabric of the media, drawing tangents of personal narrative out and away from the image. The frame, once a boundary to capture a discrete narrative, thus becomes a gateway to an augmented, hyperreal experience of subjectivity, domesticity, and everyday embodiment.

This porosity of media contributes to the hyperreal nature of intimaesthetics. The performance within the frame appears more real than real, as viewers perceive not only the curated moment but also project a broader narrative that imbues it with an aura of everyday authenticity.[18] The carefully framed scene, combined with the viewer's imagination, produces a hyperreal intimacy—a representation that feels more complete than the reality it mirrors. In this sense, intimaesthetic media do not just represent everyday moments; they generate a simulacrum that claims authenticity, ultimately erasing the distinction between the simulated performance and the surrounding lived reality. Intimaesthetics, in this way, is dripping with the hyperreal.

[18] Among the critical work on "authenticity" on social media is Crystal Abidin's astute observation of influencer culture. Relevant to the choreographies involved in the production of intimaesthetics, Abidin maintains: "Authenticity has become understood less as static and more as a performative ecology and parasocial strategy with its own genre and self-presentation elements. In other words, for influencers to convince an audience that they are being authentic, it is not enough for them to merely show themselves without 'artifice': barefaced, with a bedhead, and in pajamas. Instead, they must actively juxtapose this stripped-down version of themselves against the median and normative self-presentations of glamour, to continually create and assign value to new markers—faults and flaws, failures and fiascos—to affirm the veracity of their truth-ness." "Layers of Identity: How to Be Real When Everyone is Watching," *Real Life* 16 (2018): 136.

Anchored by theories like the hyperreal and social choreography, intimaesthetics turns the private sphere into a stage for public exhibition, wherein personal moments are crafted with the intent to be externalized and consumed by others. This aesthetic curation of content blurs the boundaries between what is genuinely private and what is performed for an audience. As individuals navigate these boundaries, they engage in a delicate dance of self-presentation, often oscillating between vulnerability and controlled exposure, each choice contributing to a curated narrative that is at once spontaneous and deliberately choreographed. Through intimaesthetics, the personal is not just shared but transformed into a spectacle, making the private lives of individuals a space for public recognition, discourse, and engagement.[19]

Of course, such everyday productions are often created with the anticipation of an online audience. The performer might imagine, for instance, that each look toward the camera is a direct address to a particular viewer on social media; they might perform in a way that dialogues with a wider cultural meme or phenomenon, thereby drawing their expression into an inherently public forum; they might view their scene through the eyes of their followers. Ultimately, the performer choses their style of movement, bodily comportment, framing of the camera, space of recording, and other aesthetic factors according to how they want their viewers to see, understand, and position their digital persona.

In casting their productions out to an online audience, the performer—sometimes unwittingly—incorporates their intimaesthetic expressions into systems of both digital capture and commercial enterprise. While the implications of this "jump in scales," to borrow from Neil Smith, are the subject of later discussion, they are important to recognize here, as they underscore an additional dimension of the social and political engagement of intimaesthetics.[20] Namely, these shifts mean that the performer's productions are no longer confined to small, controlled, or personal circles—much less to themselves in the privacy of their intimate spaces. Instead, their media are thrust into the expansive and often unpredictable realm of digital culture, where they can be replicated, harvested for data, commercialized, monetized, and surveilled. This shift places the personal within the purview of corporate and global

[19] My use of "spectacle" here is grounded in Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Cambridge, MA: Unredacted Word, 2023 [1967]). Debord's theory is crucial for understanding intimaesthetics, as he argues that in modern society, real-life experiences are supplanted by representations of life that become more significant than the actual experiences. With intimaesthetics, the curated depictions of personal and intimate moments on social media are a prime example of Debord's spectacle, where the representation becomes more important and often feels more real than the lived reality.

[20] Neil Smith, "Contours of a Spatialized Politics: Homeless Vehicles and the Production of Geographical Scale," *Social Text* 33 (1992): 55-81.

systems, thereby launching intimaesthetics into digital regimes of capture: a political character that, for the performer in their home with their camera, might seem far from the intent of their expression. Before delving deeper into the political implications of this jump, it is first necessary to review the mechanisms of production that shape intimaesthetics, as the concept is tethered to the body and its choreographies.

The Intimaesthetic Body and Its Choreographies

The theory of intimaesthetics is grounded in a system of mechanisms: techniques of production that involve choreographies of body, space, and media. In terms of the body, the performer uses movement, however subtle, to draw the viewer into their world. They play, for instance, with the quality with which they move, the repetition and rhythm of the movement; their interaction with, or mere relation to the objects around them; the direction and expression of the gaze; the clothes they wear; their posture; and their assumption of "casual," "cute," "innocent," "authentic," or any other affective quality that suits their purposes. Each gesture—seemingly insignificant in itself—is part of a larger choreographic thrust to produce some characteristic of intimacy in image form. By flailing the arms, for instance, and casting the head from side-to-side, generally ignoring the camera, the performer might suggest a sense of abandon or carefreeness that is associated with solitude, privacy, and the sphere of unseen activity. They may, in other words, "dance like nobody's watching." They might move toward and away from the camera, or remain completely stationary as a way to emphasize closeness (or merely play with the possibility of closeness). In each of these circumstances, the performer attends to the cultivation of intimacy in a unique manner, yet all via the dispositions, movements, and techniques of their corporeal entity.

The face, head, and gaze are especially integral to the performer's efforts to choreograph intimacy through bodily movement. While these three components operate in tandem to construct meaning, they also harness distinct discourses in relation to faculties of communication and imbrication in power structures. The gaze, in particular, is steeped in robust discourses surrounding the politics of looking.[21] Borrowing from gaze theory, as developed and articulated in feminist film studies, the performing subject might attend to the powers of the gaze to subvert the capturings of both the camera and viewer. Here, I draw on Laura Mulvey's notion of the male

[21] Most notably, Laura Mulvey's "male gaze," Michel Foucault's "clinical gaze," and Franz Fanon's "white gaze." Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1989); Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic* (New York: Vintage Press, 1994 [1963]); and Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. R. Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 90.

gaze, which elucidates the way in which cinematic works are often constructed within a patriarchal scopophilia, positioning women as objects of pleasure for a presumed male spectator.[22] This framing creates a symbolic order in which women are also conditioned to look at other women, or themselves, through this male gaze, thus internalizing and reproducing patriarchal viewpoints.

In the context of the home dance video, the gaze can reflect both resistance to and complicity with these dynamics. The gaze of the dancer, for instance, may deliberately address the camera or the viewer, establishing a dialogue that could either reinforce or subvert their objectification. By consciously directing their gaze, performers can challenge the dynamics of power inherent in the visual exchange, remixing Mulvey's formulation of the gaze by complicating the narrative of the dancer as a passive object. Conversely, the gaze of the dancer might just as well lend themselves toward docility—docility toward the camera, the cameraperson, or the viewer.[23] This docility can be indicative of a conscious or unconscious alignment with the expectations of the viewer's gaze, effectively rendering the body compliant with external scopophilic pleasure.

While the gaze has been construed and applied in varying contexts to refer to different techniques and structures of capture, its relation to the homebody articulates the performer's ways of looking, including those in both agentic and reiterative fashions. Using the gaze to choreograph intimacy might include closing one's eyes so as to demonstrate (and possibly to achieve) introspection—or, quite literally, the experience of looking inward.[24] The performer might also look toward the camera to cultivate a more direct connection with their viewer-to-be—perhaps a subversion of the inherent power usually granted to an audience. Alternatively, they might keep their eyes open, but not look at the camera at all, performing as though their movements would never be seen.[25] Though not an exhaustive catalog of the ways

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[22] Defining scopophilia, Mulvey writes, "There are circumstances in which looking itself is a source of pleasure, just as, in the reverse formation, there is pleasure in being looked at." *Visual and Other Pleasures*, 16.

[23] My use of "docility" references Michel Foucault's conceptualization of docile bodies. For Foucault, there is inherent power in visuality, prompting the subject, who is seemingly being observed, to yield to the power of that prospective observer and abide by whatever rules govern the space. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

[24] This technique resembles Susan Foster's mentioning of the "inward gaze" that the dancers in Merce Cunningham's works tend to employ. Foster writes that this gaze "encourages audiences to apprehend the kinesthetic sensations of the act of moving." *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 64.

[25] This technique perhaps aligns with Foster's discussion of the predominant countenance of the dancers in Martha Graham's works. Foster characterizes this gaze as one that is "absorbed in the world of the dance to the exclusion of any other world." The effect on the viewer is that, "by declining to

in which the performer utilizes their own gaze to choreograph intimacy, these instances capture a few primary techniques of the intimate gaze.

Like the gaze, the face, too, works to construct meaning and cultivate intimate sensibilities. Smiles directed toward nothing or no one in particular, grins aimed at the camera, glimmers in the eye, laughter, and even stoicism all subtly function to compose a sense of closeness. Such efforts resemble what Sherril Dodds calls "facial choreography," or an emphasis placed on facial expressions, as enabled through cinematic framings and video editing. This choreography of the face draws from performance vocabularies, as well as everyday codes and conventions, but is ultimately produced through the screen apparatus. In an essay detailing the concept, Sherril Dodds and Colleen Hooper recall Deleuze's notion of the abstract machine of faciality, which they characterize as a force that produces "legible messages that resist ambiguity, polyvocality, and heterogeneity."[26] In this way, facial choreography, they argue, becomes incorporated into hegemonic structures of capture.

Beyond the gaze and the face, the performer's entire body likewise participates in crafting intimaesthetics. Subtle shifts in shoulder alignment, the angle of the torso, or the bend of the legs can all convey varying degrees of openness, vulnerability, or even defiance. The performer may deliberately contort their spine or twist their hips to evoke a playful, inviting attitude, as though beckoning the viewer to join in an embodied conversation. They might let their limbs float freely to suggest a dreamlike sensuality, or hold them close to the body, expressing guardedness and emotional distance. In each of these moves, the body's spatial orientation to the camera—whether turning away, facing sideways, or coming in and out of the frame—shapes how the audience perceives its physical and emotional closeness. These embodied choices, from an artfully pointed foot to a nonchalant shift in weight, are vital components of an intimate encounter constructed for the screen. Like the gaze, they can be harnessed to signal or subvert vulnerability, offering momentary glimpses of closeness that may be quickly retracted.

Of course, the phenomenon of intimaesthetics cannot be confined to any single aspect of the performer's embodiment or interaction with the camera. Rather, it arises from an intricate weaving of gaze, facial choreography, full-body movement, and spatial negotiation, all of which draw on both established performance vocabularies and everyday codes of gesturing and self-presentation. These interlocking techniques create a powerful illusion of closeness, allowing performers to suggest vulnerability, comfort, or playfulness in ways that may resonate deeply with a

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acknowledge the presence of the audience, [the dancers] ask the audience to look in on the action." Ibid., 64.

[26] Sherril Dodds and Colleen Hooper. "Faces, Close-ups and Choreography: a Deleuzian Critique of So You Think You Can Dance," *The International Journal of Screendance* 4, no. 1 (2014): 94.

mass media audience conditioned by the scrolling feeds and attention economies of social media platforms. In doing so, the performer navigates longstanding power structures—such as the legacies of the male gaze—and harnesses the capacity to upend them, all while negotiating an intimate exchange with unseen viewers. Ultimately, intimaesthetics underscores how bodily movement, from the glance of an eye to the subtle shift of a hip, plays a crucial role in the aestheticization of intimacy, spotlighting the persistent push and pull between agency, performance, and the desire for connection in our contemporary digital sphere.

Intimaesthetics in a Network Society

As suggested in the mechanisms discussed above, the intimaesthetic product reveals the performer's choreographies of body, space, and media. However, the life of the media on digital platforms like Instagram amplifies its political and economic charge. Neoliberalism in particular colors this charge by announcing the marketability of all corners of human activity, however seemingly private and personal. In this regard, Boltanski and Chiapello maintain that "the new enterprise mechanisms…demand a greater engagement and are based on a more sophisticated ergonomics…[and] precisely because they are more human in a way, also penetrate more profoundly into people's interior being." Actors within this new spirit of capitalism, they continue, "are expected to 'give themselves,' as one says, to their work, and the mechanisms permit an instrumentalization and commodification of what is most specifically human about human beings."[27] Under this "new spirit of capitalism," the individual comes to resemble a brand and their actions are made available for the accrual of capital.[28]

Indeed, while neoliberalism is anchored to a series of 20th-century economic policies and political conditions,[29] which arose before the proliferation of new media, it has nonetheless shaped and been exacerbated through those systems.[30] Wendy Chun

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[27] Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2005), 465-6.

[28] Sarah Banet-Weiser, AuthenticTM: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture (New York: NYU Press, 2012).

[29] David Harvey most thoroughly details the economic and political conditions in which neoliberalism emerged, among which include policies that enabled widespread deregulation, privatization, and free market competition. See *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). In addition to this text, notable contributions to the discourse on neoliberalism include Noam Chomsky, *Profit Over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1999); Slavoj Žižek, *The Courage of Hopelessness: Chronicles of a Year of Acting Dangerously* (London: Allen Lane, 2017); and Richard Wolff, *Democracy at Work: A Cure for Capitalism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012).

[30] Nick Couldry, Why Voices Matter: Culture and Politics After Neoliberalism (London: Sage, 2010), 73-90.

argues that interfaces, in particular, are what enable subjects to interpret, navigate, and participate in the neoliberalist landscape that Boltanski and Chiapello characterize. As Chun maintains, "Interfaces—as mediators between the visible and invisible, as a means of navigation—have been key to creating 'informed' individuals who can overcome the chaos of global capitalism by mapping their relation to the totality of the global capitalist system."[31] In a subsequent work, Chun builds on these ideas by theorizing how the notion of habit determines the nature of individuals' interaction with interfaces.[32] Drawing upon Chun, intimaesthetics suggests that participation in neoliberalist systems occurs foremost in and through the body, indicating the ways in which neoliberalism is grounded in practice. I propose that intimacy, in particular, becomes a lynchpin in neoliberalism's 21st-century cultural life.[33] Through the picturing and circulation of one's moving body, personal space, and seemingly interior thoughts, the home dance video online epitomizes the conditions of a "neoliberalist rationality."[34]

While the circulation of home dance videos is undergirded by a logic of neoliberalism, it also is shaped by the powers of watching that are intrinsic to a post-panoptic surveillance society. This phrase combines Roy Boyne's notion of post-panopticism and David Lyon's discussion of a surveillance society—both of which capture the sense that surveillance is no longer centralized with governing institutions, but has been distributed into wider networks with commercial, educational, and recreational nodes of disciplining through over/seeing.[35] Historical forms of surveillance, then, diffuse through the fibers of one's everyday world, and thus sustain themselves through their ubiquity and subtlety. This diffusion then compounds with the laissez-faire logic of neoliberalism to produce a culture in which

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[31] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Programmed Visions: Software and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 8.

[32] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016).

[33] This position is also informed by Amy Dobson, Nicholas Carah, and Brady Robarbs' discussion of "digital intimate publics." Dobson et al. draw on Lauren Berlant's notion of "intimate publics" to "think about how contestations over power play out in the generative, liminal space where the public and the private intermingle." Focused specifically on social media, the concept of digital intimate publics enables one to "[critically] [examine] the relationship between the political valence of public performances of all kinds of intimacy on platforms that privatise, as in commercialise and take ownership of, that intimacy." "Digital Intimate Publics and Social Media: Towards Theorising Public Lives on Private Platforms," in *Digital Intimate Publics and Social Media*, ed. Amy Dobson, Brady Robarbs, and Nicholas Carah (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2018), 6-8.

[34] Couldry, Why Voices Matter, 7.

[35] See Roy Boyne, "Post-Panopticism," *Economy and Society* 29, no. 2 (2000): 285-307; and David Lyon, *Surveillance Society: Monitoring Everyday Life* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001).

commodification intermingles with the disciplining powers of watching in the everyday.

With the gaze already at the crux of intimaesthetics, the online circulation of home dance videos promulgates the tenets of a post-panoptic surveillance society. Not only does this society's characteristic diffusion of surveillance occur through the imaging of the quotidian space of the home and the movements of the homebody, but also through the subsequent envelopment of that performance into the Internet's systems of capture, or into what Amy Dobson et al. call "digital intimate publics."[36] The degree to which a user's data is collected by the platform, the search engine, the internet service provider, and the third-party apps, to name a few separate arenas, is typically unknown to the viewer, and instead rests with the power of machine learning algorithms that monitor online behavior to then predict future behavior—a form of the disciplining accomplished through surveillance.[37] Dataveillance, as some scholars name this capturing and collection of personal information, is indeed a problematic feature of digital culture.[38] Yet, the fact of its obscurity by the companies that engage in it enables users to continue "[giving] themselves"—to reference Boltanski and Chiapello—to the platform.[39]

Intimaesthetics articulates the tensions between dataveillance and the user's choreographies of body, space, and media to produce what Sarah Banet-Weiser calls a "politics of ambivalence." This concept, which Banet-Weiser uses to describe the commercialization of authenticity in brand culture, captures how "utopian normativity" meets critical subversion, and individual agency meets hegemonic structuring.[40] Intimaesthetics reveals a similar ambivalence in that it simultaneously references, on the one hand, the labor and agency of the performer who aestheticizes intimacy for public acknowledgment and commentary and, on the other hand, the

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[36] See footnote 24 for a definition of "digital intimate publics." A primary feature of this concept is that digital intimacy is both social capital and labor. "Digital Intimate Publics," 9.

[37] The notion of "algorithmic surveillance" captures the phenomenon of surveillance through step-by-step computational instructions. The term was coined by Gary Armstrong and Clive Norris in their foundational text, *The Maximum Surveillance Society: The Rise of CCTV* (Oxford: Berg, 1999).
The notion of the black box captures the fact that users are not aware of the mechanisms through which their data is collected, circulated, and profiled. See, for instance, Taina Bucher, *If…Then: Algorithmic Power and Politics* (New York: Oxford, 2018).

[38] Rita Raley, "Dataveillance and Countervailance," in *Raw Data is an Oxymoron*, ed. Lisa Gitelman, pp. 121-145 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013); Jan Van Dijck, "Datafication, Dataism and Dataveillance: Big Data Between Scientific Paradigm and Ideology," *Surveillance & Society* 12, no. 2 (2014): 197–208.

[39] This notion appeals to David Harvey's claim that neoliberalism creates a "culture of consent," meaning that neoliberalism is activated by individuals who inadvertently agree to its terms, even though those terms might ultimately disadvantage the individuals who consent to them. For more, see *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[40] Banet-Weisser, *AuthenticTM*, 221.

technological denial of security and authority over that performer's digital identity. This dynamic reflects the bait-and-switch logic of media in the 21st century. Platforms seduce users with the promise of currency—often in the form of social, cultural, and financial capital—and then mobilize the data that users provide toward ends that often violate that user's performative intent, their identity, and their sovereignty. Platform control, I argue, cannot be considered without an understanding of the duality inherent to the performer's mediatized choreography. They are at once choreographing themselves and being choreographed, acting out their desires and being acted upon—and they often engage in such transactions without being privy to the terms of what is being transacted. An outline of the typology of intimaesthetics draws a direct link between the performer's particulars of production and the platform's inconspicuous pillaging of intimate data. The following overview demonstrates those particulars of production, while also animating the theories that anchor them.

Types of Intimaesthetics

The theory of intimaesthetics, despite the above presentation of its general characteristics, does not yield monolithic results, but instead produces a variety of media that look and feel different. As I have found in my study of thousands of home dance videos on Instagram, the parsing out of varied approaches to intimaesthetics hinges on two criteria: a relationship between the performer and the camera, and a relationship between the performer and cameraperson. In terms of the former, the performer either acknowledges the camera or not, thereby using their gaze, face, movement, and orientation in space in different ways to suggest their knowledge of the camera and the fact of their self-capture. For the latter, the video indicates that either the performer was also the cameraperson (i.e., that they were the one to set up the camera and record themselves), or that someone else was in the space recording the action. Often, this relationship is determined by either a static frame or, alternatively, camera movement. Both elements become entwined with the semiotics of the video, so much so that the viewer understands the degree of self-production without dwelling on the meaning of the camera movement. Similarly, the viewer may receive the effect of the performer's recognition of the camera (e.g., a sense of closeness with the performer), but might not unpack how the choreographies of body, space, and media cultivate that sensibility. These two relationships of performer-to-camera and performer-to-cameraperson ultimately cleave to form four types of intimaesthetics: one in which the performer does not acknowledge the camera and suggests that they did not record the video; one in which the performer does acknowledge the camera and suggests that they did record the video; one in which the

performer does not acknowledge the camera, but suggests they did record the video; and, finally, one in which the performer does acknowledge the camera, but suggests that they did not record the video.

Each type of intimaesthetic is constructed through layers of choreography, and then those choreographies open out to particular intricacies of their respective online circulations—a particular way in which the image engages with the political arena. The four types are: candid dancing, moving selfie, nonchalant gestures, and home concerts. The naming of these types of intimaesthetics does not suggest rigid categorization, rather epitomizes the techniques of production and politics of circulation that tend to accompany self-produced content in contemporary digital culture, particularly in the period of 2010-2020. A brief discussion of each type reveals these intricacies of production and circulation.

Candid Dancing

A door opens to reveal an adult man grooving in the kitchen, his back to the camera. A speaker in the space is blaring Ariana Grande's "Side to Side" while the man steps to the beat and sets a cloth on the dining table. He pauses, claps twice, and then resumes dancing to the rhythm.

Does he know that someone is behind him watching his kitchen groove?

He pops his hips to the right then left, then right before crossing one leg over the other to unwind in a tight, Michael Jackson-esque spin.

No, he is blissfully unaware of any audience. But would he still move like this if he *knew* he was being watched, being recorded?

The intimaesthetics of *candid dancing* plays with the liminal space between surveillance and voluntary visibility, reflecting a deep entanglement with theories of the gaze. Within this dynamic, the dancer, seemingly oblivious to the recording process, engages in a dance of whim and abandon. Yet, the reality of their performance is one where the gaze of the unseen observer (i.e., the cameraperson) casts a silent verdict on the moment—whether it be one of humor, joy, delight, or second-hand embarrassment—as they record the scene they observe. This gaze, intentional and yet disguised, lends a voyeuristic lens to the viewer's experience of the media, inviting them into a world where the boundaries of privacy and performance intersect.

Candid dancing reflects the embodiment of what I call a *choreography of abandon*. This concept describes a scene where the performer dances as if unwatched, expressing a seemingly unmediated self that, under different circumstances, remains

hidden. In other words, to move seemingly beyond the reach of the gaze, in apparent solitude, is to engage in the choreography of abandon. Such an experience allows the individual a sense of solace in such momentary illusions of release from the pressures of being watched, from the omnipresent gaze. Of course, the irony of the event is expressed through the fact of the recording: the gaze *is* present, both in the form of the onlooker and their camera. Like the Foucauldian gaze that shapes panoptic vision, the gaze of the camera and cameraperson function to discipline the dancing subject, as if to say, "you may *try* to move beyond the powers of the gaze, but we caught you!"

On his second spin, the man makes eye contact with the camera and immediately blurts out "Stop!" as he covers his face. The voice of the person behind the camera responds, "but you're so cute!"

Once uploaded online, the multifaceted gaze of the candid dancing scene becomes exacerbated through the media's wide circulation and potential mass viewership. Images of the performer "dancing like nobody's watching" present as unguarded moments, uncorrupted by the performative pressures often associated with social media—yet, their new social life online underscores their hypervisibility and expanded arena of discipline. In particular, the disciplining effect online manifests through the humorous presentation of and commentary around the image. For instance, a video with the hashtag #caughtdancing might have a caption that anchors the image to a scene of quotidian humor; viewers may then comment with laughter emojis or quips about the performer's candid movements. This sensibility counters the conventional dynamics of surveillance by reframing an image that is grounded in both an obstruction of privacy and an enforcement of the disciplining gaze as not only innocuous, but entertaining. Indeed, the candid dancing media online softens the hard edges of surveillance and contributes to the neoliberalization of privacy and interiority.

Moving Selfie

The clean white walls of the empty space highlight the dog sitting quietly in the next room, perfectly framed in the doorway. An outstretched arm holding a wine glass gradually moves into the frame, appearing in the foreground of the space. Red wine sloshes in the glass as the rest of Molly's body effortlessly glides into view, knees and heels twisting back and forth to locomote her in a sideways trajectory. Once she gets to the center of the frame, Molly turns to the side, her body now in profile, and looks toward the camera with a wry smile.

Who is this dance for? If it's just for herself, why post it online?

Continuing to groove to the sounds of Donovan's "There is a Mountain," Molly swings her arms in a robotic fashion, alternating them up and down to frame her dog in the background, who is still sitting motionlessly, disinterestedly, as if he were observing a tired scene. Molly bops out of frame, locking eyes with the camera and smiling, only to immediately return again, this time closer to the device. With the wine glass now in the opposite hand, Molly resumes her happy-go-lucky, twist-and-jig across the frame to end, once more, out of view.

The video cycles on, with Molly dancing from left-to-right and right-to-left without cessation, her dog remaining a fixture in this ironic juxtaposition of domestic movement and stillness. The caption of the video reads: "I am nothing without my collaborator."

The *moving selfie*, as I call it, extends beyond a mere self-portrait, embodying a nuanced dynamic where the performer consciously interacts with the camera, manifesting their dual role as both the subject and the producer of the image. This process involves a deliberate act of self-presentation and curation, where individuals choreograph their movements and expressions to convey a particular image or identity to their audience. The moving selfie thus taps into the broader cultural practice of selfie-ism, where personal image creation is not just an act of capturing a moment but represents a complex crafting of body, space, and media.

In producing these moving selfies, performers engage in what I call *autochoreography*, or the choreography of self: a collection of techniques that include physical movements, but also the orchestration of personal aesthetics, backdrop, lighting, and props. The result is an image that represents the performer, as it is deeply intertwined with how they imagine themselves and how they prefer others to imagine them. This type of intimaesthetic is thus a curated artifact that contributes to the ongoing narrative of one's digital identity and personal brand—a brand that the performer actively shapes and reshapes over time through the continued stream of autobiographical media.

However, the digital platform where this selfie is displayed—be it Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, or any other social media app—plays a significant role in mediating the reception and circulation of these self-produced images. Once uploaded, the moving selfie transcends its original context and intention, entering the domain of the platform's control. The algorithms that command the flow of such media, for instance, determine the visibility and reach of the image, thereby influencing how the performer's identity is perceived and validated by the wider community.

This interaction with the algorithm introduces a critical tension between the performer's autonomy and the platform's control. While the performer may work to

optimize visibility through the movements of their body, the arrangement of their personal space, the timing of their dance, the caption of the post, and the hashtags they include, the ultimate decision of who sees, interacts with, and interprets the image is largely governed by the algorithm's logic. This loss of control highlights the complex power dynamics at play in digital spaces, where users navigate a terrain that is at once a stage for personal expression and a marketplace driven by metrics and monetization strategies. The moving selfie thus becomes a site of negotiation, a space where the desires for personal expression and social affirmation collide with the commercial and technological structures of social media platforms. It exemplifies, in other words, our contemporary dilemma of digital identity—crafted yet contingent, expressive yet regulated.

Nonchalant Gestures

In her kitchen, Maria casually bops to the catchy beat of Las Ketchup's "Asereje." Wearing a black satin robe with her back to the camera, she crosses one leg over the other and spins while her long dark hair floats along. She grabs some scissors and turns her back to the camera.

Does she know we're watching her? Surely she does. But why act as though she does not?

Rhythmically circling her knees in all directions, Maria begins trimming a bouquet of multicolored roses sitting on the counter in the corner of the kitchen. The caption over the image reads: "I am in my 'I don't know how, but I will' era."

The *nonchalant gestures* intimaesthetic unfolds as a complex interplay between visibility and invisibility, memory and oblivion, specifically through the performer's deliberate, yet disguised recognition of the camera. Unlike candid dancing, where the performer is ostensibly unaware of the camera's gaze, the nonchalant gestures type involves a more nuanced dynamic: the performer is aware of the camera (made evident through the static frame and autobiographical content of the post), but chooses to interact with the device in a way that articulates their casual disregard of the camera and audience, and absorption in their domestic situation—their nonchalant aesthetic.

The intentional, yet playful comportment of the performer is not merely a performance style but functions as a metaphor for privacy and surveillance in the digital age. Such a maneuver embraces, what I call, the *choreography of oblivion*, where the performer, by ignoring the camera, cultivates an aura of authenticity and domesticity. The seeming forgetfulness of the camera's presence allows the performer to create an image of themselves as deeply enmeshed in the private act, untouched by

the demands of performative visibility, as if moving toward some oblivion of public activity and recognition. This crafted nonchalance draws from the aesthetics of surveillance, making it appear as though the viewer is glimpsing a truly private moment, one not intended for public consumption. They, in other words, are modeling what privacy *looks like*.

Like the other types of intimaesthetics, as well as the broader theory itself, this portrayal is inherently paradoxical. While the performer projects an image of oblivion and marginality in relation to the public sphere, the very act of recording and sharing the video contradicts this narrative. The performer is not forgotten but is actively inserting themselves into public memory via the circulation of their video and connection with wider discourses, thereby manipulating the boundaries between the seen and unseen, the private and the public. Such a manipulation reflects a sophisticated understanding of how digital visibility works: even as they feign forgetfulness, the nonchalant performer is fully cognizant of the camera's power to memorialize and broadcast.

Ultimately, the nonchalant gestures intimaesthetic is not just about the content of the performance but about questioning the nature of visibility and the authenticity of digital interactions. It forces viewers to consider the ways in which digital media shape our understanding of private and public, presence and absence, memory and oblivion. By engaging with this intimaesthetic, both performer and viewer participate in a wider dialogue about the boundaries of self in the digital sphere and the paradoxes of living a life that is simultaneously hyper-visible and susceptible to being forgotten.

Home Concerts

"Brrr chicka brr, brr brr chick....brrr chicka brr, brr brr chick." Lena, small but brimming with energy, stands in front of the mirror in what appears to be a bathroom. Her mouth moves with precise beats as her hands hit an imaginary snare, each movement sharp. She beatboxes fiercely, her eyes darting between her reflection and her mom's, who stands beside her recording the scene and laughing along with the dance.

What imagined audience do Lena and her mother conjure for this production?

"Okay, finish it," says Lena's mom as Lena throws her right arm, left arm, and then ends with a final fist grab downward. The caption of the video reads: "I just haaddd to post this. My little 🎤 BeatBoxer. I am dying with laughter 😂. She says she "learned this in school." Hahahah

Does Lena know her mom plans to put this video online?

The *home concerts* intimaesthetic captures the dynamics between intimacy, visibility, and familial relationalities in the digital age. At its core, this phenomenon involves the active participation of performers whose movements are captured and curated by another person in the homespace, often another family member, who operates the camera. Unlike the genre of home movies, an antecedent medium that shapes our understanding of such a phenomenon, this dynamic does more than merely document familial life: it determines it, to some extent, by curating the private sphere into a performative stage that intersects deeply with public perception.[41]

This intimaesthetic may be activated through a number of combinations of familial relations (siblings recording each other; extended family or family friends recording members of the immediate family; children recording parents; parents recording children). Nonetheless, it is helpful to delve into a particular dynamic of familial relations that exemplifies the negotiation between personal authority, user agency, and mediated self-presentation, setting the stage for a deeper exploration of how users create and manage media on behalf of family. For this reason, the analysis of this type of intimaesthetic focuses on the phenomenon of parent-created media of children, which may appear on designated accounts for the child.

Indeed, home concerts, particularly when it involves parents managing social media accounts for their children, reveals the nuanced choreography of body, space, and media. Parents, in this scenario, are not just passive observers but active directors of their children's digital personae. By choreographing the content that is shared online, they craft and curate a version of their child's identity that aligns with certain aesthetic and cultural values. This manner of orchestration represents a collection of techniques I call minor choreography, where everyday familial interactions become the subject of capture, transforming intimate moments into a carefully managed presentation of a child's online persona—a persona that that child may one day reject.

The expression of gender within these performances becomes a particularly poignant flash point for how minor choreography reflects broader societal norms and expectations. The way a child dresses, behaves, and interacts within their mediatized performance can be heavily influenced by parental direction, consciously or

[41] Visual anthropologist Richard Chalfen complicates the view of home movies as mere documentation of family life by claiming that, for this historical form, curation was intrinsic to what families decided to capture or not capture. Chalfen demonstrates this point by offering examples of more a extraordinary nature like "vacation activity," "holiday activity," and "special events.". While Chalfen makes a valid point, comparing this antecedent form to the contemporary home dance video reveals a wide chasm in the degrees of distribution and size of audience for these respective forms. Richard Chalfen, *Snapshot Versions of Life* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1987), 61-2.

unconsciously reinforcing gender stereotypes or alternatively, presenting a more fluid and individualized expression of gender identity. However, the ambiguity of the parent's role in shaping these expressions introduces questions about agency and consent. Who actually controls the narrative—the child whose life is being documented or the parent who holds the camera? This question becomes particularly problematic when considering the responsibilities and ethical considerations surrounding digital identity. The boundaries between guidance and control blur as parents navigate the dual roles of protector and promoter. Couched within this quandary is an inherent tension in managing a child's digital presence, where the benefits of expression and connectivity must be weighed against potential risks and the long-term implications of early digital visibility.

Of course, once these curated images and performances are uploaded to platforms like Instagram, they enter a new realm of influence governed by algorithms. These platforms perform their own type of choreography, subtly guiding the circulation and visibility of content through systems that prioritize certain values—engagement, marketability, and consumer behavior patterns. Such cryptic pathways of circulation of these images not only amplifies the child's digital persona, but also integrates it into a larger narrative driven by the platform's interests and user engagement. Home concerts, in this regard, are no longer just family mementos but become part of a larger economic system that commodifies youth and exploits their images. This commercial aspect of social media thus raises critical concerns about the commodification of personal experiences and the potential exploitation inherent in these systems.

The archetypes of intimaesthetics—candid dancing, moving selfie, nonchalant gestures, and home concerts—are not static forms; rather, they are dynamic constructs that evolve in response to both platform affordances and broader shifts in digital culture. The very definition of what constitutes the moving selfie, for instance, can change based on new affordances introduced by platforms like TikTok, such as sound overlays or duet features that invite new types of engagement. Similarly, candid dancing on Instagram is influenced by changes in how algorithms prioritize content—whether through Reels, Stories, or in-feed posts. This dynamic nature of platforms reflects the inherent fluidity of these archetypes, as users constantly adapt their modes of performance to align with changing platform conventions and their evolving audience expectations. Thus, the archetypes should be understood less as fixed categories and more as flexible aesthetics that are continually reshaped by the technological and cultural currents within which they circulate.

The platform-specific affordances that influence these archetypes play a critical role in how users produce and share intimaesthetic content. TikTok, with its

focus on sound-driven short-form video and an algorithm that privileges what Harmony Bench calls "viral choreographies," fosters a form of intimaesthetic production that emphasizes immediacy, playfulness, and replication.[42] In contrast, Instagram's multifaceted approach—featuring permanent posts, ephemeral Stories, and now the Reel format—offers users various ways to curate their intimaesthetic media, ranging from polished presentations to more spontaneous displays. The Close Friends feature, in particular, allows performers to disseminate content to a smaller subset of viewers, thereby modulating their production of intimaesthetics for different audiences on the same platform. These technological affordances are not neutral; they carry with them implicit pressures of visibility and monetization that shape user behavior. Platforms surveil user activity through dataveillance, capturing intimate data to monetize and algorithmically determine the visibility of certain content. Such systems of surveillant power mean that the archetypes not only represent expressions of intimate identity but also participate in a larger economy of data extraction and commodification. By understanding the affordances of each platform, we see how intimaesthetics is not only a practice of self-presentation but also an intricate negotiation between user agency and platform power.

Conclusion

From candid dancing to moving selfies, from nonchalant gestures to home concerts, each mode of intimaesthetics, as expounded above, represents a particular way of framing the body, personal space, and intimate narratives. The performer's movements and ways of framing "the real" represent an intentionality that contributes to an aesthetic of the everyday: a fashioning of quotidian spaces, gestures, and narratives to frame selfhood for a digital audience. The gloss is added and the filter is engaged. Then, through their online circulation, these images acquire a new character within neoliberalism's digital flows. That is, they operationalize self-portraiture, autobiography, abandon, and lived realities toward the commercialization and

[42] Harmony Bench, "Screendance 2.0: Social Dance-Media," Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies 7, no. 2. In this text, Bench defines viral choreographies in relation to the more commonly understood viral video. "Like viral videos, which, with their rapid circulation and broad viewership—into the tens and hundreds of millions of hits—establish a common ground of cultural reference points for internet audiences, viral choreographies circulate contagiously. However, instead of simply transmitting themselves along peer-to-peer networks, viral choreographies take advantage of these same mechanisms of distribution while additionally requiring that users take a step away from the computer and in front of a camera. While viral videos travel from computer screen to computer screen, asking little more than a mouse click or two from otherwise inert viewing subjects to propel themselves through the internet, viral choreographies travel from dancing body to dancing body via a media interface" (201).

surveillance of interiority. In such a hyperreal landscape, the intimaesthetic media function as currency and its subjects as brands.

The theory of intimaesthetics and its choreographies of the digital everyday thus represent not only a phenomenon of digital culture, but also a conundrum of contemporary digital identity. In particular, the paradoxes inherent to intimaesthetics invite a deeper reflection on the nature of identity in the digital age, suggesting that our digital selves are shaped as much by our own desires as by the technological and economic systems in which we operate. It is within this culture that we find a poignant collision of choreographies: the performer's craftings of the body, space, and media meet the power structures of a network society that end up choreographing the performer just as much, if not more, than they choreograph themselves.

Yet, despite this entanglement, the performer's participation in these systems persists, offering glimpses of resistance and self-expression amid the inconspicuous constraints of digital platforms. Performers who participate in these platforms may, thus, *believe* they possess agency in their expressions, but such agency often remains an illusion. The platforms encourage users to share their intimate data in pursuit of social and cultural currency, yet the systems ultimately harvest, sell, and aggregate this data into pathways and algorithms that capture the performer and their productions. The process of mediatizing and circulating intimate images and narratives online, then, reflects a bait-and-switch logic of the platforms, wherein the promise of visibility and connection disguises a deeper extraction of value. Intimaesthetics captures this conundrum, as it ultimately reveals the delicate dance between self-determination and structural influence, illuminating how everyday performances not only reflect but also reshape the narratives of identity in a hyper-mediated world. Through this lens, we uncover a deeper understanding of how intimacy, authenticity, and visibility continue to be negotiated and redefined in the choreographies of the digital everyday.

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