

Entanglement In Time: Nostalgic Affect As Cine-Choreography In *The White Crow* (2018) And *Suspiria* (2018)

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Abstract

This essay is an investigation into the historical claim of a work of screendance that involves re-imagination, re-composition, or re-enactment: In what way does it access history? And how should we treat, with due seriousness, the vicarious aura of historicity these works afford? After identifying the ontological status of time as the blind spot in the debate regarding the corporeal relationship to the archive, I introduce the Deleuzian conception of time as an incessant exchange between the virtual and the actual. I present the hauntology of certain pasts as a result of the virtual-actual exchange dissipating the temporal identity of an event, which is in turn experienced as the subject's dispersion of the self. And I redefine the body as a corporeal-archival system that channels the exchange. I then analyze the nostalgic tones of the two selected films as affects formulated by cine-choreographies that express the dispersion of the self as an experience of the dissipation of the temporal identity of an event, thereby providing an analytical approach that makes it possible to interpret such screendance practices' claim to history.

Keywords: cinechoreography, nostalgia film, Gilles Deleuze, *Suspiria*, *The White Crow*, theory of time, reenactment, time image

Though this volume of IJSD invites us to investigate the ethical, creative and curatorial aspects of using archival footage to envision screendance practices, my article reverses the order of subjects in the question, in order to contemplate the same constellation of concepts at hand—archive, film, dance, performance, choreography, history, memory and temporality—from a different angle: *to what extent does the envisioned movement on screen serve as a (re)new(ed) piece of archival footage? To what extent is it now part of the archive (whatever the definition of an archive is)?* To ask these questions is to suggest that the practice has, however inconsequential, a claim to history (whatever the kind of historicity signified by the contested definitions of the archive).

This essay is an investigation into the historical claim of two fictional narrative films with dance sequences that involve re-imagination, re-composition or re-enactment: In what way do they access history? And how should we treat, with due seriousness, the vicarious aura of historicity these works afford? Describing that “aura of historicity” is a tricky matter, particularly when corporeal practices are involved, for it risks imposing an interpretive narrative on modes of expressions that

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defy narratives. It risks defining “history” in a narrow, humanist sense as if it could only manifest itself with the aid of some interpretive agency, when, ironically, one of the greatest potentials of corporeal events such as dancing is that they unleash the unhuman¹, that they are “means without ends.”² André Lepecki has written eloquently in this direction. He looks at the “turning and returning to all those tracks and steps and bodies and gestures and sweat and images and words and sounds performed by past dancers”³ in contemporary experimental choreography, and argues that the artists are propelled not by some paranoid-melancholic, nostalgic authorship, but by a “will to re-enact”⁴—I will return to his account in the following part of this essay.

Suffice it to say that inquiries about a work’s historical claim inevitably lead us to examine the motives—human or unhuman—behind the work’s engagement with materials from the past, be them archival footages or historical tropes circulated in media representations. Such engagement points to a relationship between the choreography and the archive that, as my analysis will show, informs us immensely about the ontological status of time. In other words, understanding choreographic modes of access to the archive sheds light on the temporal logic behind the “will to re-enact.”

In this essay I look at two popular⁵ nostalgia films that take the intersection of dance (movement and embodiment), cinema, and time seriously. Both films, drawing from a range of biographical sources and audio-visual imageries from the past, have a visually nostalgic quality, which, upon first look, may be guilty of the Fredric Jameson’s charge of nostalgia films as displacing “real” history with the history of aesthetic styles.⁶ But such sweeping statement does not do justice to the fact that both films *feel* haunted by history, falling irresistibly into the spirals of questions relating to the hyperstatic structure of history, if not time itself. This may be partially attributed to the nature of the historical drama they each engage with that relays itself in a form of hauntology, calling upon artistic re-enactment: *The White Crow* (2018) features the story of Rudolf Nureyev’s defection to the West against the backdrop of the cultural Cold War, at the height of ideological containment and paranoia for uncontrollable residues, at a point in history when the human species was inadvertently heading to the end of history. *Suspiria* (Luca Guadagnino 2018)⁷ situates a mystic, generational power struggle within a dance company in Berlin during the German Autumn, when violent oppositions between the state and the terrorist *coup d’état* cited the Nazi past as an unburied *lieux de mémoire*. Directorial choices also play a determinant role in formulating the spiraling, haunted nostalgic affects. Both films find the dancer’s body a fitting medium to steer the nostalgic fall, creatively employing “cine-choreography”⁸ to navigate the presented period of history. Examining the nostalgic affects as cine-choreographies allows us to trace their modes of access to historical materials, their entanglement *in* time.

The archive—as a physical or virtual property, or as a theoretical concept—has received considerable scholarly attentions to the kind of access it provides us to the past. Theorists of performance and embodiment have questioned the stability and permanence of the archive, offering corporeal instances of transmitting or revisiting history that disrupt the logocentrism assumed in archival practices. However, the ontological status of *time* as the medium for accessing history is largely left out from the discussion. Despite often skirting along the porosity and intractability of time, the debate regarding the corporeal relationship to the archive retains this theoretical blind spot. By addressing the blind spot, I radically redefine the archive, and return to the opening questions of the essay with new perspectives: the envisioned movement on screen is a part of the archive to the extent that its cine-choreography records the co-performance of the body and the movement of time in memorizing, retrieving, or even flirting with the past.

Blind Spot: The Ontological Status Of Time

In *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Diana Taylor recuperates the status of the repertoire as an embodied form of historical knowledge that has long been suppressed by the hegemony of the archive. Taylor shows us the inter-dependency of two epistemic systems—the writing system and the performative system—and argues that the performative is just as persistent in transmitting the past as writing. Through embodiment, cultural scenarios were repeated with difference along the passage of history. History, in Taylor’s implied outlook, unfolds along the linear passing of time. It is curious that Taylor’s veneration of the repertoire stops at a felt cognitive boundary, as if acknowledging embodiment as an *episteme* that changes how we think we could access “a time in the past” does not suffice to pose a question about the possibly changed status of the ontology of time itself.

Rebecca Schneider, prompted by a different set of embodiment practices, wonders about their “knotty and porous relationship to time.”⁹ Schneider’s writing in *Performing Remains* takes the readers to relive the stunning and confounding temporal experience she had while witnessing civil war re-enactments. The “enthusiasts” dress up vividly in detailed clothing and put up “performances” as if they were, indeed, soldiers or civilians of the 1860s. In their live “reincarnation” of dead figures in history, Schneider observes “the ambivalence of the live, or its inter(in)animation with the no longer live,”¹⁰ and the scene “if not the thing itself (the past), somehow also *not not* the thing (the past), as it passes across their bodies in again-time.”¹¹ Schneider is interested in the hauntology of time manifested in the body as a site where time tangles, leaks and returns to. Recalling Derrida’s *Archive Fever*, Schneider perceives the archive as a material infrastructure with built-in anachronism, awaiting the future archivist’s participation. The word “archive” is derived from “*árchōn*,” which alludes to an image of the state house:

built for live encounters with privileged remains, remains that, ironically, *script* the encountering body as disappearing even as the return of the body is assumed by the very logic of preservation . . . Here it becomes clear: the theatricality . . . the performative bases of the archive, is that it is a house of and for performative repetition, not stasis . . . For even as a linear order of time appears to be kept intact by the archive, it is a continual *coup de théâtre* which ‘dislocates the linear order of the presents’ and folds the past into a deferred time of ‘much future work’—suggesting a future for pasts that have, much like a play-script in relation to production or dance steps sedimented in trained bodies, not yet taken place.¹²

The archive, with its promise of a temporal *coup de théâtre*, is always already a repertoire. André Lepecki concurs with Schneider, though coming from a different theoretical path. Following Foucault, he argues that the archive is “not a thing, not a recipient, not a building, nor a box,”¹³ it is instead “the general system of formation and transformation of statements (my emphasis).”¹⁴ Nonetheless, Lepecki differs from Schneider by advancing a more radical claim: the body is not (only) an archivist, it *is* the archive.¹⁵ “Choreography,” he writes, “is also a dynamic system of transmission and of transformation, an archival-corporeal system that also turns statements . . . into corporeal events and kinetic things.”¹⁶

What Schneider has touched upon—the inherent anachronism in the material infrastructure for preservation—Lepecki takes it further by claiming the body itself as that material infrastructure. Lepecki’s move to center on the body is influenced by Gilles Deleuze, for whom the body is the privileged site for transmission and transformation between statements and events. The body short-circuits the virtual and the actual, producing affects. In “The Autonomy of Affect,” Brian Massumi borrows Deleuzian terminologies: How else to account for the listed instances of conscious incognizance or incognizant consciousness, the “missing half second” before the initiation of one’s free-willed action?¹⁷ If the activity of consciousness was not absent during the missing half second, then it must be “overfull, in excess of the actually performed action and its ascribed meaning,”¹⁸ in the field of “the virtual, the pressing crowd of incipience and tendencies”¹⁹ that through consciousness’s selection are prevented from being actualized. The body is therefore the privileged site to register the affect of such selection process, as the body continues to *express* even when consciousness fails. It is free of the need to *articulate* and therefore is always in a state of open indetermination. Similarly, Lepecki’s conception of the body as *árchōn* works along the same line of the actual-virtual divide: the body is “a critical point, singularity—squeezing out actuals from the virtual cloud, and secreting back virtuals from the actuals, turning corporeal events into kinetic things, corporeal things into kinetic events.”²⁰

Lepecki goes on and argues that contemporary dance re-enactments arise not so much from an impulse *towards* the archive “from a specific subjectivity,” rather

from an “archival impulse,” a bodily call to reenter the creative, virtual field of multitude and potentials that defies assumptions of actual authorial intention.²¹ Re-imagination, re-composition, or re-enactment are propelled by the virtual forces transmitted and taken up by bodies across time, with each instance of enactment actualizing a previously unrealized potential. However, by focusing on the liberating creative codes offered by the virtual, Lepecki omits the quintessential characterization of the virtual and the actual: their temporal bind. This omission inevitably leaves some questions unaddressed: Why *this* form of actualization? Why *this* work of re-imagination, re-composition, or re-enactment? And why *now*? Why does it actualize in *this time* through *this body/these bodies*? What does this actualization tell us about the virtual, its past and future actualizations?

Deleuze: Time And The Inter-Subjective Unconscious

Lepecki argues, following the Foucauldian notion of the archive, that the “self” as an expression is simultaneously multiplied, differentiated, and dispersed, as the body functions as an archival-corporeal system. The system “dissipates that temporal identity in which we are pleased to look at ourselves.”²² What is the temporal identity that is being dissipated here? What is the dissipated temporal identity? How does it disperse the self?

Gilles Deleuze’s re-reading of the Freudian *Nachträglichkeit* offers an account for the dispersion of the self in temporal entanglement. Freud’s *Nachträglichkeit* is scenario-based, particularly the scenario of a young woman with shop-phobia, unable to visit any shop on her own. During her treatment, she remembers that at the age of twelve, two shopkeepers laughed at her clothing. And further, she recollects that when she was eight, a shopkeeper tried to touch her through her clothes. The question is: Why is the reaction delayed and the memory repressed? Why is she unable to go shopping only now, instead of at twelve, or immediately after the assault? (Recall my questions above: Why actualizes now? Why this form of actualization?)

Freud’s explanation is that only at the age of puberty does the child realize what sexuality is and retroactively interprets the previous experiences in sexual terms. Her effort at the sexualized reinterpretation renders herself complicit with the molester. Therefore, the remembered event becomes doubly unbearable and repressed as a result. Whereas for Deleuze, “what dramatizes the memory is not that one now interprets the event through adult eyes instead of a child’s, but that one now relives it at both stages of life at once.”²³ For the obsessive insistence to avoid it now comes not from retroactively attributing adult motives to the child’s experience, but the other way around: “one feel[s] oneself a child again *while* going about the present business [and] feel[s] complicit [only because that] child was always already forming an adult sensibility.”²⁴ The delayed reaction depends not on a “solipsistic unconscious” but an “inter-subjective unconscious,”²⁵ that is,

the communication between the childhood self and the adult. Jay Lampert summarizes this temporal model at work:

It is not that there exist two events separated in time, the multiple potentials in the earlier getting resolved in the latter, or the later gathering up and reacting to the earlier; rather, there is *one event occurring at two distant moments in time at once*. At its best, the overlay need not subsist as trauma or reaction, but as a poetics of time regained or a politics of intersubjective historical modes of productivity. . . . *The point is that delay is a structure of time before it is a matter of psychic, economic, or some other specific kind of development* (my emphasis).²⁶

The recurrence of an event in time is experienced as a dispersion of the self. For Deleuze, the past is not a temporal entity pushed into existence by the “coming” of the subsequent present, but a reservoir of the virtual aspects of an event awaiting actualization. The present passes, “but the past itself does not pass[,] it is conserved in itself, endowed with its own virtual reality distinct from any psychological existence.”²⁷ The present is, in contrast to the past, an actualized aspect of an event. This incessant virtual-actual movement dissipates the temporal identity of an event, which is in turn experienced as the dispersion of the self.

My following analysis of the selected films focuses on how cine-choreographies express the dispersion of the self as an experience of the dissipation of the temporal identity of an event. *The White Crow*, I argue, presents the historical subject as dispersed across two temporal moments of the Cold War as an event: during the Cold War and after the official “end” of it. Using different strategies, *Suspiria* re-enacts the German Autumn as a historical moment that belongs to the continuing social debate about the political “we” in Germany, portraying the violent struggles as an “intersubjective historical mod[e] of productivity.”²⁸ My aim is to provide a way of analysis that could trace the temporal entanglement—the dissipation of the temporal identity of an event—through cine-choreographies, making it possible to interpret a piece of work’s vicarious claim to history.

The White Crow: Recollection-Image

The film, as a project of cinematic biography, anticipates the historically well-known event of Nureyev’s defection as its end point since conception. Oleg Ivenko, a trained ballet dancer who plays Nureyev in the film, performs several abridged dance scores on the Parisian stage. But overall, the film is less interested in staged performances than in the rehearsal process. Not only does the film compulsively and repeatedly pull us back to Nureyev’s pre-stage training in Leningrad, the film’s entire procession has a final performance—at the Le Bourget airport as the theatre of defection—seen on the horizon.

The film satisfies its audience's voyeuristic interest for rehearsal. The audience is at a position to seek out the "rawness" and the "realness" of the rehearsal as the place where crucial actions happen but are withdrawn from the public view. They come to the film, whose central plot of a dancer's defection has been elaborately spoiled in its marketing trailer (Studiocanal UK), with the aroused appetite for the "real" story behind the defection, the dancer's "leap of faith." The extra-diegetic spectatorial expectation (*ex-spectare*) is embodied by the journalists in the diegetic space of the film, with whose earnest pressing for a diplomatic if not straight up political statement from Nureyev function as a watchful presence next to the KGB agent throughout the film.

What the audience is promised to take from this film is spoken by the director Ralph Fiennes himself, through his screened persona as the Nureyev's teacher Aleksandr Pushkin: "We spend so much time on technique, it's all we think about . . . Story. What story do we wish to tell?"²⁹ may say that the film is intended for story-telling—to narrate to the audience how the dancer arrives at his decision to defect. The narration is executed in the guise of Nureyev's personal nostalgia, portrayed in the film by the constant shuffling between the narrative present in France and Nureyev's flashbacks of his childhood, his ballet training in Leningrad and bits and parts of his life and his circle of acquaintances in the USSR—memories of home that tug at his heart, casting clouds over his later decision to defect.

Everything melts down in the cinematic movement in-between memories and the present—the mysterious dance in time—into a dream of floating signifiers: We glimpse at the 1960s streetscape of Paris "bath[ed in] a creamy, sun-drenched light that radiates romance and nostalgia,"³⁰ characters in period costumes, dance scenes in "lush blues, greens and pinks as if . . . a retro, Technicolor musical,"³¹ "[t]he details of the Soviet everyday life" which "are quite convincing and seen through a soft lens of nostalgia"³² for "a longtime émigré looking for a trip down the memory lane,"³³ these include: the empty streets and squares of Leningrad, Soviet home décor, food and tableware, the list continues. Nostalgia cascades down the screen and softens everything.

Interestingly, the nostalgic affect is produced by choreographed cinematography. The film lavishly employs "recollection-images"³⁴ to delineate a temporal logic. In Paris, Nureyev visits the Louvre and lingers amid the collection of sculptures, captivated by their vigorous gestures.



Image 1: Nureyev looking at a sculpture. Credit: StudioCanal UK

The camera swiftly cuts to the past when he was practicing alone by the barre repeating the dance routines, soaked in sweat, making sloshing sounds with his shoes on the floor.



Image 2: Nureyev practicing routines. Credit: StudioCanal UK

The camera then cuts back to the present at the Louvre, showing Nureyev appreciating the perfect proportion of strength and spirit of the sculptures, while the amplified slushy sound from his practice in the past stays with us, as if the past is *touching* the present. And while Nureyev affectionately touches the bulging joint on the foot of a herculean sculpture, the camera shows us his own swollen feet after practice in the past, resembling the marble-form in the museum. In this way, the camera establishes a tactile link between the past and the present. Like the sculptures whose gestures now appear to arise from an entirely tactile history of the body, Nureyev's past also takes on a touch of sculptural grace and solemnity.

In one scene, Pushkin/Fiennes says to Nureyev/Ivenko: "Steps have a logic, you need to find that logic, not to force it. One step follows another, with no impression of haste or effort. Steps follow, and belong. They are interconnected," ³⁵ and raises his arms softly as he speaks.



Image 3: Pushkin saying “They are interconnected” as he raises his arms softly. Credit: Studio-Canal UK

It is with a dancerly bewilderment emerging from the traversal between memories and the present that the cascading nostalgic images strike us like an arm that softens, a gesture that touches, a motion picture that emanates the virtuality of time. “Soften the arm,”³⁶ the film repeatedly sends out this message as is dictated by various dance instructors in the practice scenes. Thus, in a tactile manner, each flashback follows and belongs, leading to the scene of defection, the story’s closure.

Indeed, it is not that the present narrative-action requires a past as its causality, as if Nureyev’s appreciation of the sculptures needs to be explained with his training in the past, or as if Nureyev’s decision to defect needs to be explained by how he perceives his youth. The film hardly supports this logic, for the past does not *lead* to the present, it *touches* the present as the present *gestures* to it, which points to a dancerly dimension of time beyond causal relations. “An inexplicable secret”³⁷ of time propels the flashbacks: “[they must] be justified elsewhere,”³⁸ not from the past as causality. The “recollection-images must be given the internal mark of the past from elsewhere,”³⁹ for “[t]he circumstances must be such that *the story cannot be told in the present*. It is therefore necessary for something else to justify or impose the flashback, and to mark or authenticate the recollection-image (my emphasis).”⁴⁰

The story cannot be told in the present. The circumstances must be such that the story must be told in flashbacks, in the short-circuiting of one's present self and recollected self. The circumstance is none other than the working of time itself:

The virtual image (pure recollection) is not a psychological state or a consciousness: it exists outside of consciousness, in time, and we should have no more difficulty in admitting *the virtual insistence of pure recollections in time* than we do for the actual existence of non-perceived objects in space. . . . Just as we perceive things in the place where they are, and have to place ourselves among things in order to perceive them, we go to look for recollection in the place where it is, we have to place ourselves with a leap into the past in general, into these purely virtual images . . . (my emphasis).⁴¹

The film's cine-choreography of the nostalgic affect—the choreographed choices of cinematography to deliver movements—not limited to bodily movement, but movement across the actual-virtual registers as well—bespeaks the virtual insistence of a temporally dissipated event. We should note that the film's nostalgic affect blurs two separate temporal registers: Whose nostalgia? It could be Nureyev's personal nostalgia. It could also be the present spectatorial or directorial investment in the past. The event is, therefore, dissipated across two temporal moments: in the past during the Cold War, and in the present, after the end of the Cold War. The tactile cine-choreography tells the story of Nureyev's defection as well as the story about the spectator or the director's attempt to provide an account for the defection.

Revisiting Pushkin/Fiennes' enunciation—"We spend so much time on technique, it's all we think about . . . Story. What story do we wish to tell?"⁴²—reveals the other layer of the story told by the tactile technique. In this scene, Pushkin's ghost comes to life through Fiennes' embodiment, in effect asking a Cold War era question regarding the difficulty of story-telling: we are equipped with all the techniques for narratives, but how to narrate history in light of the advent of an *event* that signals the end of history?—either the end of political-ideological progress when one camp wins, or the potential nuclear annihilation in a lose-lose situation.⁴³ That Fiennes masquerades as Pushkin literally *embodies* a dispersion of the self that points to the dissipation of the Cold War as a temporal event. Fiennes, the film's director masquerading as Pushkin, is tongue-tied with a retrospective, contemporary question: We already know of the end of the Cold War, but what had led to its ending? How to narrate the occurrence of an *event* after "the end of history"?⁴⁴ How to narrate the steps that led to the dissolution of the stalemate? Has the stalemate actually dissolved? What is the real story behind it? The two sets of questions, enunciated respectively by Pushkin and Fiennes, are, in fact, "one event occurring at two distant moments in time at once."⁴⁵ The film's tactile

cine-choreography not only tries to tell a defection story, but also the story of the Cold War as a temporally dissipated event: the film's alternation of Nureyev's memories of the USSR and his present in the West disguises yet demarcates the political rivalry of the two camps. And Nureyev's defection, bringing closure to the alternation, stands in for the end of the Cold War.

Suspiria: Dream-Image

Suspiria is a nostalgic remake of Dario Argento's original horror masterpiece of the same title. It follows a similar story of an American girl Susie (played by Dakota Johnson), who joins the Markos dance company in Berlin only to discover that the company is a witch coven and becomes involved in the company's supernatural conspiracy that preys on its own members. The new film widens the scope of its narrative by incorporating a series of historical events associated with the terrorist activities of the Red Army Faction. This historical period takes its name as "the German Autumn" from the omnibus film *Germany in Autumn* (1978) which was made to capture the social atmosphere during the late 1977.

In the new film, the company's building stands next to the Berlin Wall graffitied with political slogans and the symbol of hammer and sickle, alluding to RAF's political rhetoric. Patricia (played by Chloë Grace Moretz), a dancer from the company, is suspected to be involved in RAF activities. The film starts with Patricia's visit to the psychoanalyst and Holocaust survivor, Dr. Joseph Klemperer, an added character in the remake that showcases the new film's grounding of the story and the surrounding historical reality in a psychoanalytic register. The character is also a reference to Victor Klemperer, whose diary becomes an invaluable source that records the witnessing of German society during the Third Reich. As the following analysis will show, Dr. Klemperer in the film is similarly a helpless witness to the violent events of 1977. On her way to Klemperer's home office, Patricia crosses through a smoky standoff between protesters and the police. The strain of social unrest continues: On her first day in Berlin, Susie witnesses the RAF bombing close to her temporary accommodation. Midway, the film cuts to a televised news footage about the safe release of hijacked passengers from the Lufthansa airplane and the suicides of three RAF members in the Stammheim prison, announcing the end of the Baader-Meinhof era.

What follows is the company's public dance performance gone wrong: we know from the film that the dance group has survived the war under the lead of Madame Blanc, a chief choreographer who weaves spells into her choreography to influence what is happening outside the company, in society at large. In this regard the performance mirrors RAF's undertaking, not to mention that the title of the dance piece is the history-laden word "*Volk*." A stage accident abruptly ends the performance halfway, just like the miscarried venture of the RAF. After the performance Susie talks to Madame Blanc: "it's all a mess isn't it, the one out there,

the one in here, the one that's coming. Why is everyone so ready to think the worst is over?" In many ways what's happening inside the dance company parallels the historical events outside. The Markos sisters are experiencing a dynastic change as well as a power struggle between the predatory, witch-matrons and the curious younger generation of dancers, reflecting the generational divide in West German society haunted by its Nazi past and short of means to imagine a future that refuses the official optimism of post-war economic miracle.

The film adopts ventriloquism—the “practice of making voices appear to issue from elsewhere than their source”⁴⁶—as its primary strategy of cine-choreography. Dance in this film takes on the “active form” of the ventriloquy. As an act of spell-casting, it animates or distorts the body and mind of others, holding “the power to *speak through* others (my emphasis).”⁴⁷ In his writing on ventriloquy, Steven Connor remarks on the inherent violence of utterance, as the voice secrets a sonorous envelope that “tear[s] apart distance . . . the space between us is nothing but a delirium tremens of voice.”⁴⁸ In the diary book of the character Patricia, we are shown her drawings of how the company's dance binds space and time through the moving body.

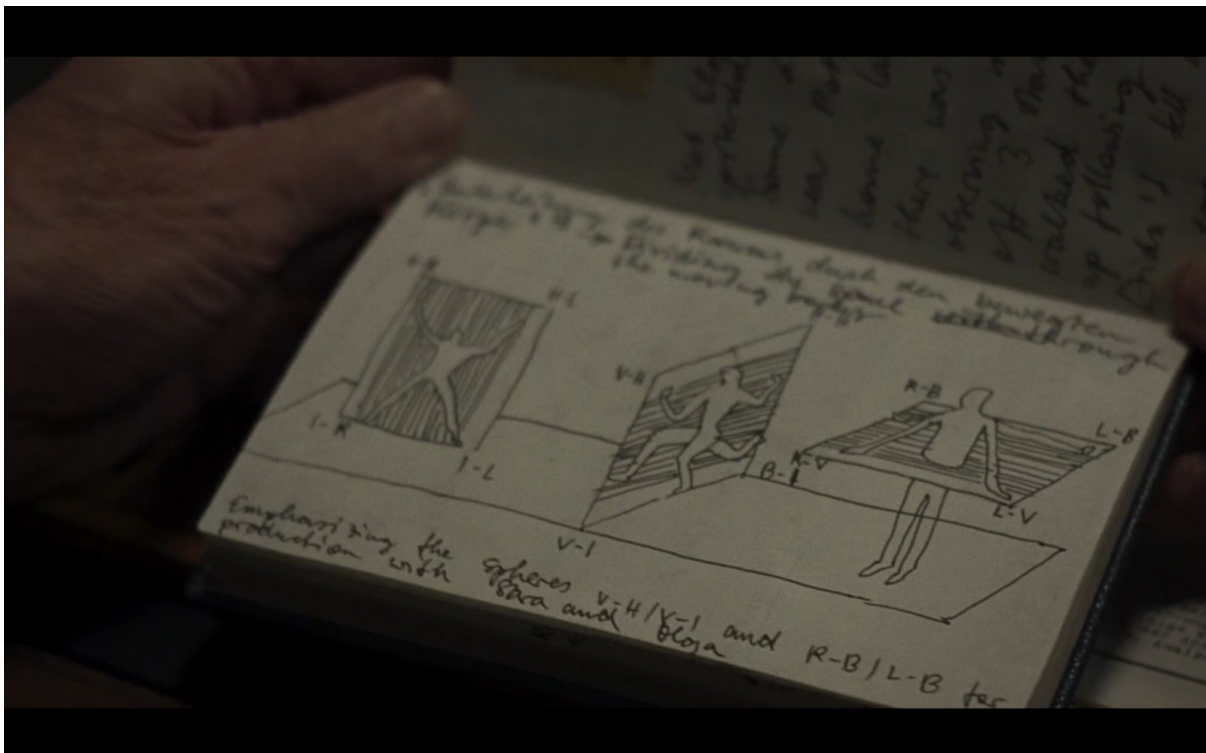


Image 4: Patricia's diary. Credit: Amazon Studios

This mechanism plays out when Susie dances, inadvertently casting a spell on Olga, another dancer from the company. As Susie dances, Olga's body breaks like the tormented dance of a marionette. Her limbs twisting, her bones protruding from beneath her skin, making gory, and cracking sounds. In short, Olga's body implodes.



Image 5: Olga implodes, image5.jpg, Credit: Amazon Studios

But a more visceral form of implosion is also at work here, casted by the omnipresence of the radio voice. The radio voice in *Suspiria* has a persisting presence in the background, broadcasting news of the RAF's hijacking of the Lufthansa airplane up until the release of the hostages. The film pays tribute to Rainer Weiner Fassbinder's *The Third Generation* (1979), a film about the third generation of the RAF that presents an incessant bombardment of the sound of television newsreels. Marshall McLuhan theorizes that the radio is a nostalgic medium. It is a medium of implosion, of claustrophobia, of the compression of space, turning "the psyche and society into a single echo chamber."⁴⁹ He draws on the prevalence of radio in the 1930s interwar Germany, whose defeat thrust them back from a previous outward-looking, visual obsession into brooding upon the resonating sound within. In a similar fashion, the simmering sound of the radio in *Suspiria* makes an implosion in the mind. The public mind is a dummy to the radio-ventriloquist and therefore takes on the "negative form" of ventriloquism, "being *spoken through* by others (my emphasis)."⁵⁰ This is reflected in the film by Dr. Klemperer's dream

walk across the city. As he listens to the news on TV about the release of Esslin and Meinhof, his caretaker remarks “before the war Germany had the strongest women, like your wife Anke,” thus conferring on the chain between the broadcast and the ‘dive back in memory’ that it solicits. Klemperer frequently crosses the Berlin Wall to look after the little shed in East Berlin where he and his deceased wife used to live together, traversing the spatial divide to trace a past that is lost. The spatial-temporal traversal of his dream walk stands in for the psychological implosion.



Image 6: Dr. Klemperer (center) walks in a stumbling manner. Credit: Amazon Studios.

Under the radio's spell, Klemperer is wobbly on his legs as he walks across the city. His steps achieving “degree zero”—they lie somewhere between the actual motor steps of a senile body and the virtual, tenuous gait as if in a dream. But whose dream? Deleuze calls this an implied dream, in which one experiences reality but as if caught in the dream of the other. In this reality that is the implied dream, the movement of the world takes precedence over the movement of the body: “The road is not slippery without sliding on itself. The frightened child faced with danger cannot run away, but the world sets about running away for him and takes him with it, as if on a conveyor belt.”⁵¹

Deleuze talks about the dream-image not so much to confound reality as to delineate an experience of dispersion when the past comes back, when an event dissi-

pated across time haunts us like a dream. The dream multiplies in all its virtual possibilities. This implied dream is therefore open-ended, and it cannot be subsumed under the category of dreams as opposed to reality:

[T]he virtual image which becomes actual does not do so directly, but becomes actual in a different image, which itself plays the role of virtual image being actualized in a third, and so on to infinity: the [implied] dream is not a metaphor but a series of anamorphoses which sketch out a very large circuit.⁵²

Outside the dance company, Klemperer is held in the movement of the world. Inside the company, his doppelganger Madame Blanc tries to affect the world with her choreography of dance movements. As doppelgangers (they are both played by Tilda Swinton) they embody the dispersion of the self in the virtual-actual circuit: The witches' telepathic communication becomes actualized in Madame Blanc's spell-woven choreography, whose spell becomes actualized in the sizzling sound of the radio, the power of which is further actualized in Dr. Klemperer's dream walk. The fantastic nature of the walk is then actualized in his hallucination that his wife returns to the city, which is then actualized as a menacing force of the city itself embodied in the fierce wind that blows through the underground, but actualized again in the RAF's practiced guerrilla urbanism, *ad infinitum*. There's not a single entity to whom one can attribute the source of the dream. The witches could be interpreted as dream characters born out of Klemperer's guilt for not protecting his wife who died in *Theresienstadt*. But equally Klemperer can be read as an embodied character that the practice of witchcraft gives to the world. The escalating entanglement of the world and the characters is reflected in the increasingly intense dance sequences in the film.



Image 7: "Volk". Credit: Amazon Studios

As the film's choreographer Damien Jalet explains:

There is a kind of revolution of the body in the film. The film starts from a relatively academic way in terms of dancing. It's very sculptural in [that] way. There's a very close relationship with rhythm, with geometry the body has, beautiful lines. And as you go in the film, then you start to enter into distortion. . . . Dance becomes also a bit more internal, and less just visual or just frontal.⁵³

What does the dispersion of the self, presented in the dream-image, inform us about the temporally dissipated event which continues to haunt the characters? In his analysis of the representation of the German Autumn on screen, Thomas Elsaesser argues that existing representations rely largely on an Oedipal metaphor that reads the RAF's outlashes as the "return of the repressed" or an Antagonist inability to mourn:

[Their] cultural currency gives the 'drama' of the hot autumn a powerful pathos, but [they] also hid[e] a number of historical blind spots emerging from . . . the terrorists' irruptive presence in the urban fabric [and] ris[k] mis-identifying the medium in which the events not so much unfolded but were subsequently to take on a good deal of their historical significance.⁵⁴

In *Suspiria*, the RAF's urban presence is presented as a witchy, supernatural force meandering through the city and as the omnipresent voice of the radio covering their news, "[the] mode of address . . . authenticated the bond between the terrorists and their contemporaries."⁵⁵ Elsaesser presents sources in which people stated that they experience the RAF's street violence mediated in the news not only as street theatre, but also as a kind of music, "their political violence as a percussion cutting into the monotone of [the] everyday, a form of bodily 'sensation' which, rather like rock music, delivered non-verbal expression and opened up a new subjective space."⁵⁶

In other words, their political violence took up a "vocalic body," that is, "a surrogate or secondary body . . . formed and sustained out of the autonomous operations of the voice."⁵⁷ The voice confers shape and becomes a vocalic body characterized by the "ways in which the voice seems to precipitate itself as an object, upon which it can then itself give the illusion of acting."⁵⁸ Under the duress of history, the RAF is "involved in a situation of *Nachträglichkeit*, engaged in making up for something that had been omitted in the past,"⁵⁹ namely the political "we" beyond the traditional symbolization of the nation, the class and the people. They made the violent urban outbreaks a vocalic body and solicited the public mind's non-symbolic and imaginary identification with it, through which a new subjectivity may emerge. As if caught in the virtual matrix of time, the public was challenged with an inter-subjective exchange as they uneasily identified in their reaction to RAF terrorism the legacy of a past political lethargy to the violence of the Nazi state:

so strong is the embodying power of the voice, that this process occurs . . . also in voices . . . that have a clearly identifiable source, but seem in various ways excessive to that source. The voice then conjures for itself a different kind of body; an imaginary body which may contradict, compete with, replace, or even reshape the actual . . . body.⁶⁰

It is then interesting to see that the film's progression of dance movements goes from symmetrical and in-control to fanatic and possessed, as if the act of spell-casting through dance inadvertently brings forth a vocalic body that proceeds to take over the dancer. The centerpiece of performance is *Volk*. In the span of the film the dance group makes various attempts to give a complete performance of it, but all endeavours go awry, either aborted in the middle, or, as in the performance near the end of the film, the geometric lines of the choreography can no longer contain the frenzied movements of the bodies.



Image 8: The last performance as a sacrificing ritual. Credit: Amazon Studios

The last performance turns out to be a sacrificing ritual, as it sacrifices the lives of the dance group members to welcome the arrival of Mother Suspiriorum. The dancers who initiate and invite the supernatural force through their choreographed movements in turn become possessed by it. This strikes me poignantly as an ominous “anamorphosis” of the suicides of the RAF members at *Stammheim*—those who secreted the voice became inevitably consumed by the political “we” that the voice posed. Through the dream-image choreographed as a form of ventriloquy, *Suspiria* presents the dispersion of the public psyche experienced as its coming-to-term with a new collective subjectivity.

Conclusion

In this essay I have discussed how Deleuzian ontology of time adds complexity to the question of historical claims in relation to cinechoreographic practices that borrow materials from the past, or, in other words, that access the archive. My analysis of the selected films accounts for their “aura of historicity,” by demonstrating that the films’ cinechoreographies portray the dispersion of the self that points to a virtual *event* dissipated across time, haunting us each time with its actualized temporal identity. An analysis of the cinechoreography of movement and embodiment informs us of the form of actualization and gives us clues about the virtual activities of the event in the form of post-human historical reflections, to

the extent that the dispersion of the self is embodied by the bodies on screen as a corporeal-archival system that actualizes the virtual.

Biography

Kaixuan Yao studied Comparative Literature at Utrecht University, the Netherlands, where she wrote about dance in nostalgia films as a form of historical reflection. Currently she is pursuing a PhD degree in Chinese Literature, Culture and Media at University of Minnesota, Twin Cities in the United States. Her research focuses on the legacy of socialist China in contemporary Chinese life by delineating a corporeal genealogy in film, literature and art.

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1 Colebrook, 11-12.

2 Agamben, 57-59.

3 Lepecki, 29.

4 Ibid, 31.

5 The parameter for their popularity is drawn from their respective distributions: *Suspiria* by Amazon Studios, meanwhile *The White Crow* was a film I came across on an international flight's menu of movies.

6 Jameson, 67.

7 The film is a reimagining of Dario Argento's *Suspiria*.

8 Brannigan, 14.

9 Schneider, 9.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid, 8.

12 Ibid, 108-9.

13 Lepecki, 37.

14 Foucault, quoted in Lepecki, 37.

15 Lepecki, 14.

16 Ibid, 37.

17 Massumi, 29.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid, 30.

20 Lepecki, 37.

21 Ibid, 30.

22 Foucault, quoted in Lepecki, 38-9.

23 Lampert, 87.

24 Ibid.

25 Deleuze, *Difference*, 124.

26 Lampert, 88.

27 Marrati, 74.

28 Lampert, 88.

29 Fiennes.

30 Lemire.

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- 31 Ibid.
32 Ellementary.
33 Ibid.
34 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 47.
35 Fiennes.
36 Ibid.
37 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 49.
38 Ibid, 48.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid, 80.
42 Fiennes.
43 Alan Nadel has written about the Cold War as an historical event that makes any attempt of meta-narrative impossible. Nadel, 13-67.
44 Fukuyama.
45 Lampert, 88.
46 Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 13-4.
47 Ibid, 14.
48 Connor, "Violence," 79.
49 McLuhan, 327.
50 Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 14.
51 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 59.
52 Ibid, 56.
53 Amazon Studios.
54 Elsaesser, 287.
55 Ibid, 289.
56 Ibid.
57 Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 35.
58 Connor, "Violence," 80.
59 Elsaesser, 295.
60 Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 36.

Erratum

9/13/2022: Corrected author's name to Kaixuan Yao.