Towards A Bodily Analysis of Postmodern Nostalgia: Dancer, Spy and Monster in Recent Cold War Nostalgia Films

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Abstract

This thesis reads the recent Cold War nostalgia films and explores both the historicizing potential of nostalgia films and how they contribute to the memory studies of the Cold War. The end of the Cold War, though ironically proclaimed as 'the end of history,' makes it necessary to ask the philosophical question about our place in history as we have since entered into an increasingly complex social-political landscape. The emergent political discourse of Cold War nostalgia signals the difficulty of making sense of history in the current era. Given this historical background, we cannot ignore the simultaneity of the rise of nostalgic political discourse and the flourishing 'nostalgia' of the Cold War in the Hollywood mass cultural productions. But we also notice that these films are not truly nostalgic on a political-ideological level, but on an audio-visual one. In other words, as cinematic remediations, they are interested in and play with the way cultural memories of the Cold War were mediated. Paying careful attention to the rift between the cinematic form and the political discourse of Cold War nostalgia, this thesis reads the selected films and explore new ways of historicizing the Cold War by firstly clarifying the questions with regard to the relationship between cinematic nostalgia and history. The selected films heavily feature the cultural figures of dancer, spy and monster, pointing not only to the common memory of the Cold War but also to shared terms of historicizing strategies. Drawing on Deleuzian theories, I situate these films within the social field of desire and recuperate nostalgia films' historicizing potential through a bodily approach. By historicizing the Cold War nostalgically, these films deny submission to the imposed political discourse and instead promote bodily negotiations of subjectivity and historical agency.

Contents

Introduction: Historicize, Nostalgically!

"The Cold War did not end. It shattered into a thousand dangerous pieces."

——Francis Lawrence, *Red Sparrow*

The Films

The idea for this thesis started out on the returning flights between Amsterdam and Shanghai when I browsed the film programs of Finnair (they run a connecting flight), China Southern, and KLM and got interested in a shared list of Cold War-themed films: *Atomic Blonde* (2017), *The Shape of Water* (2017), *Red Sparrow* (2018) and *The White Crow* (2018). With an interest for the period-theme hyped up by the *Suspiria*(2018) remake which I had already watched, and with my taste just appropriate to what's been expected of the economy class passengers of a long-distance international flight, I willingly succumbed to the charm of these films' nostalgic invocations. I watched them with an 'occupational' awareness as a master student of comparative literature that these are mostly guilty pleasures, 'no-brainers' compared to the high-brow cinema. Nonetheless I was unexpectedly perplexed. The nostalgic, kitsch aesthetics they indulge in seem to cultivate new sensibilities that cast the historical period of the Cold War in very different terms. But in what terms?—This is the overarching question of my thesis.

The "new sensibilities" that I intuited are not limited to the visual quality of these films' aestheticized nostalgia. The recurring Cold War tropes of dancer (as cultural diplomat), spy (as intelligence warrior) and monster (as the symbol of social fears) in these films as well as their intimate interconnections play an integral part of the cinematic nostalgic (re)constructions. These films exhibit a considerable degree to which the role of a dancer and a spy are interchangeable: a dancer could dance her way to spy, and a spy could perform her dance

during mission. *Suspiria* is staged in a dance company in West Berlin where the protagonist Susie gathers information of the company's political agenda through the secret language of dance; Dominika, the protagonist of *Red Sparrow* is a ballet dancer turned to spy; *The Shape of Water*'s protagonist Elisa's love for dance scores from the old musicals foster her later involvement in the secret mission of rescuing the government's "asset." If we take dance as the intensified movement of the body, then the choreographed fighting scenes of the MI6 agent Lorraine in *Atomic Blonde* captures the 'dance' of the undercover agent. And if we take espionage as a matter of walking the tightrope of political antagonism, then the Soviet dancer's defection to the West in *The White Crow* is rather analogous, especially since the film portrays the act of defection not as an assertive action nor a progressive statement for freedom, but as a process of negotiation, of brokering the two worlds.

Meanwhile, the third trope—the monster—appears as an indispensable construct to complete the compositional pattern of these films: monstrosity is the element that underlies the elasticity within the dancer-spy continuum. In *Suspiria*, monstrosity accompanies the subtle transition of the protagonist Susie's character-type and psychological compass as she gradually approaches the company's secret. Arriving as a newcomer at the dance company that is in fact a witch coven in disguise, Susie would have been thought of as prey to the monstrous witches. But as the film unfolds, the audience witness the awakening of the monster within her as she ascends to the company's throne and turns out to be the reincarnation of the witch-mother. This is not to say that Susie has become a monstrous predator herself, but rather that a kind of negotiation has been undergoing in the film and that the specific terms of the negotiation are ambiguous, presented as a form of monstrous vivification. In *The Shape of Water*, the presence of the "asset," a humanoid amphibian monster from the Amazon, also negotiates the existing character-constructs. To his rescue, Elisa becomes a prototype-spy that

outshines the actual agent, an undercover Soviet-scientist in the facility that houses the monster. In these films the monster is a creature to dance with. Elisa dances with the "asset" and Susie claims that she feels as if having sex with a monstrous animal when dancing. To the effect that dance is an act that assumes bodily intimacy, a sense of monstrosity underscores the act. To the effect that espionage involves intensive negotiations, monstrosity composes the terms of the negotiation.

The intriguing way these tropes complement each other works against the common denunciations of nostalgia. This thesis attempts to recuperate the category of nostalgia films that has been widely considered as ahistorical. The selected films provide us with new insights on the way we historicize the past through the (re)mediation of cinema. It is of particular importance that these films are set in the Cold War, for the end of the Cold War has posed many challenges to the way we think not only about the Cold War history, but more importantly about the notion of history itself.

Historicizing the Cold War

If the *raison d'être* for history studies is the imperative to *remember*, then studies of the Cold War history, at least in the West, is faced with a self-defeating question: what *should* be remembered about the Cold War? Lowe and Joel, authors of *Remembering the Cold War* (2013), summarize the conundrum:

> the absence of apocalyptic conflict presents something of an anomaly when it comes to remembering a 'war' that, in essence, failed to over materialize beyond more localized wars and acts of violence. Put another way, if the Cold War is defined as a sustained period in which political and military tensions between the

two superpower-led blocs always simmered but never reached boiling point, then

what is there left to remember? (1)

In spite of its all-encompassing ideological hostility and the physical remains, unlike the 'hot wars,' "the character of the Cold War is less tangible [...] it was largely a contested state of mind" (Jarausch, Ostermann and Etges 12).

As memories of the Cold War are disappearing, traces and echoes of the Cold War are, however, ubiquitous in the contemporary world. From the 'Russiagate' scandal of US presidential elections to the mounting tension within the NATO alliance and especially between Europe and the US, the manifested nationalist 'paranoia' and political calculations are direct historical legacies of the Cold War era. Meanwhile, both the rise of China and Russia's annexation of Crimea threaten a 'return' to the Cold War. Economic crises and contending social issues with regard to race and gender today have their root in the development of mass consumer society, decolonization and social movements during the Cold War; '[t]he Cold War now had a decisive effect on the epoch beyond the geopolitical contradictions and thus had a bracket function that needed to be clarified" (Furrer and Gautschi 15).

The end of the Cold War, though ironically proclaimed as 'the end of history,' made it necessary to ask the philosophical question about our place in history (Kumar). Immediately after the fall of the iron curtain, Francis Fukuyama imagines the replacement of ideological idealism as the primary motor of social-political struggle with "economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns[,] the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands [and] the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history" (18). Samuel Huntington's model of 'civilizational clash' anticipates the spawning conflicts between the idealized democratic world and the "many forms of authoritarianism,

nationalism, corporatism and market communism [and] the religious alternatives that lie outside the world of secular ideologies," and has been elevated to a prophetic status since 9/11 (66-7). Arthur Schlesinger Jr. foresees "a possibly more dangerous era of ethnic racial animosity" when ideological conflicts have subsided (Schlesinger 9); and Jürgen Habermas explores the possibility of a "postnational constellation" in the increasingly globalizing and multi-polarizing world (Habermas). The end of ideological conflicts does not mean the end of ideological critique, as Slavoj Žižek's Lacanian spin of Marxist theory interprets the unfolding century as propelled by a series of revolutions against global capitalism through which we 'fail better' each time.

Indeed, the verifications of these theoretical prognostications since the end of the Cold War point to the increasingly complex social-political landscape. With the present moment as the indispensable starting point for our reconstruction of the past, "[h]ow do societies remember the immediate prehistory to their present in times of profound uncertainty about their own identity"? (Furrer and Gautschi 17). The current situation therefore "could not but provoke a controversy on how to make sense of the Cold War" (Christophe 2). It is helpful to consider the end of the Cold War as a long, decompositional process according to Heonik Kwon in *The Other Cold War* (2010):

> The decomposition of the cold war considers the end of the cold war as a participatory, ethnographic question rather than a historical issue. [This] involves a two-pronged shift of perspective regarding cold war history: from a geopolitical history to a social history, on the one hand, and from the exemplary central positioning of the cold war as imaginary or metaphoric war to a comparative position that privileges neither this

peculiar history of war without warfare nor the peripheral 'unbridled reality' of state

terror and violence, on the other. (8-9)

Studies of cultural memories of the Cold War are therefore crucial for historicizing the

Cold War in a cultivated manner. Various studies have followed in a similar vein: John Beck

and Ryan Bishop's *Cold War Legacies* (2016) attempts to "capture the extent to which the

institutional, technological, scientific, aesthetic and cultural forms decisively shaped during

[the Cold War] period continue to structure, materially and conceptually, the twenty-first-

century world" (3). John Prados investigates how the Cold War ended by using different types

of historical analysis while examining the methodological questions of crafting history with

each (XVII). Philip Löffler investigates post-Cold War literary narratives of the Cold War as

part of the cultural effort to generate new historicizing strategies through reflecting on the

historical experience of the Cold War (Löffler 10-11). The study of the cultural memories of the

Cold War has shifted to studying the cultural negotiations of the meaning of the Cold War,

emphasizing that "acts of remembering are shaped by collectively shared patterns of ascribing

meaning to selected facts of the past considered relevant to today's memory" (Christophe 4).

Concepts such as "implicit knowledge" (Christophe 4), "common memory" (Lowe and Joel 14)

and "constructivist perspective" (Jarausch, Ostermann and Etges 7) assume the

methodological backbone of studying Cold War cultural memories, with the hope that such

approaches will "open up new subjects for investigation and suggest novel arguments for

interpretation" beyond the geopolitical model (Jarausch, Ostermann and Etges 7).

But the 'cultural memory approach' has returned us to what constitutes the central

paradox of the simultaneous ubiquity and disappearance of the Cold War memories, that is, the

friction between political life and cultural life. Intertwined as they are, scholars worry that "the

recovery of Cold War memory through every-day history might even destabilize the very concept" of the already 'uneventful' historical period the primary marker of which is geopolitical opposition (Jarausch, Ostermann and Etges 13). While certain works consider the cultural life as an outgrowth of the geopolitical experience of the Cold War—a plethora of studies has engaged with the idea of the Cultural Cold War—other works that refute the geopolitical model risk altogether depoliticizing the Cold War. Jon Wiener's work on the public memorialization of the Cold War records him visiting the monuments and museums for the Cold War in the US only to discover that the Cold War has been forgotten: the political, bipolar-based argument that the Cold War was triumphantly *won* seems incapable of resonating with the public mind, and the attendance rate of these memorial sites are much lower than that of the others, such as those for the Second World War (Wiener 2, 5).

This makes the very appearance of the Cold War-themed nostalgia films in the airline programs look curious. What market appeals do they have? In which way do we find them entertaining enough to sustain us through the boredom of the long-distance flight? Contrary to the cinematic entertainment, the appeal of current political rhetoric alluding to Cold War nostalgia is almost founded upon how 'boring' the Cold War was: back in the old days, the nuclear policies were more predictable (Hecht 91), the United States was leading the international politics with an intellectual and ideological purpose, and the internal divisions along class and racial lines were far less exaggerated (Hanhimäki 674). Everything appeared more stable, less complicated, more linear, less rhizomatic. We cannot ignore the simultaneity of the rise of nostalgic political discourse and the flourishing 'nostalgia' in the Hollywood mass cultural productions. But we also notice that these films are not truly, on an ideological level, *nostalgic* of the Cold War. Instead, they are *audio-visually* nostalgic of the cultural tropes and

cinematic genres during the Cold War. In other words, as cinematic remediation, they are interested in and play with the way cultural memories of the Cold War were mediated.

In *Cold War Film Genres*, Homer B. Pettey introduces the collection of essays about the film genres that emerged during the Cold War. They demonstrate "new perspectives on American and international scene" *contra* the ideologically induced model of cultural containment (4). These genres present an "inward [cultural] topography" that "the divisive world vision [was] now reflected [with] rifts, schisms, and ruptures" (Pettey 3). "Rifts, schisms, and ruptures" also exists between the cinematic form of Cold War nostalgia and the Cold War nostalgia as a political discourse. By reading the selected nostalgia films, we can explore new ways of historicizing the Cold War by firstly clarifying the questions with regard to the relationship between cinematic nostalgia and history:

1) Do nostalgia films in any productive way channel historical reality or experiences? Are they structured by any "implicit knowledge" or "common memory"?
2) How do we understand the audience's desire to (consume) history, a desire that cannot be simply explained by the disappointment of the present?
3) What motivates the nostalgic investment in producing these films and the directorial move to borrow from forms of visual meditation in the past?

Nostalgia Films and Schizophrenic Postmodernity

The above set of questions address three aspects of nostalgic cultural products in terms of their market circulation:

1) the cultural, historical materials that they engage with

2) the nostalgic 'taste' of the consumers

3) the nostalgic investment of the makers

The primary theoretical infrastructure that I work with in my reading of these films is the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze (and Félix Guattari). In a Deleuzian manner, I interpret the cultural market for nostalgia films as a social field filled with *desire*. Before detailing my interpretive framework for nostalgia films developed from Deleuzian philosophy, it is important to look at the most authoritative (and derogatory) voice on nostalgia films by far—Fredric Jameson, and his lamentation of schizophrenic postmodernity of which the nostalgia films are symptomatic.

According to Jameson, calling this cultural phenomenon 'nostalgia' is a misnomer to the degree that the term suggests genuine nostalgia of the modernist kind, that passionate and painful longing for "a past beyond all but aesthetic retrieval," which is no longer available in postmodernity ("Postmodernism," 66). Jameson nonetheless sticks to the term for it directs our attention to the nostalgia film as a popularizing cinematic category as opposed to proper historical films:

> [T]he nostalgia film was never a matter of some old-fashioned 'representation' of historical content, but approached the 'past' through stylistic connotation, conveying 'pastness' by the glossy qualities of the image, and '1930s-ness' or '1950s-ness' by the attributes of fashion [...] the operator of a new connotation of 'pastness' and pseudo-historical depth, in which the history of aesthetic styles displaces 'real' history. ("Postmodernism," 67)

The cultural pathology, or rather, the representational crisis manifested in the nostalgia film is its inability as a product of the image culture to formulate meaningful narratives. In the absence of a proper means to channel our (his) 'will to history,' Jameson plainly understands the "random cannibalization of all the styles of the past" ("Postmodernism" 65-6) as reflective of a cultural appetite for over-consumption, equating bulimia nervosa with an automatic response to hunger.

There have been several attempts at recuperating nostalgia. Svetlana Boym differentiates between "restorative nostalgia" (41)—the nostalgic attempt to return to the idealized past; and "reflective nostalgia" (49)—the critical and artistic reflection of the past. But even for her, the "pop" or "consumer" nostalgia works as an unreflective cultural "buff" (37). Other attempts could be summarized as either a *formal* interpretation or an *affective* reading of nostalgia. Linda Hutcheon theorizes that the productive potential of postmodern nostalgia lies in its power to *ironize*, through its structural doubling-up of the two different temporalities—the present and the past—that "rub together" to create meaning (21). Vera Dika, building on the concept of photographic *punctum*, argues that an "internal montage" of a nostalgia film could "ruptur[e] an established coded system" and solicits "pastness" as "the returned image" to reveal the real that otherwise remains a latent historical consciousness (14). Christine Sprengler investigates how the nostalgic codes within the signifying system of popular culture and nostalgic economy could be evoked as "intertextual devices" that generate "meaning in the context of specific scenes or narrative moments" (4-5). These formal, structural or intertextual approaches in general assume that the audience have a degree of knowledge in the signifying system of cinematic nostalgia. Jason Sperb, who analyzes the nostalgia industry from a Marxist perspective, questions if "[c]riticisms of Jameson's definition

of pastiches are generally too dependent on an active informed spectator" and if they are "the rare exception that proves the rule" (30, 33).

The affective readings of cinematic nostalgia partially respond to these warranted questions. For Richard Dyer, the fact that nostalgic codes are still capable of moving people who have never lived through the presented past refers to the structure of feelings as culturally and historically shaped: "the pastiche [...] not only makes the historicity of its affect evident, but can also allow us to realise the historicity of our feelings" (Dyer 178). Arguing also for the affective power of nostalgia, Paul Grainge explores the aestheticized nostalgia of the monochrome style in the 1990s that resembles the aura of the archive and legitimates particular kinds of memory in American cultural life. Both Dyer and Grainge demonstrate the historicity of certain nostalgic modes but fail to theorize how the affective dimension of historicity helps us reconceptualize the notion of history to a productive end. I, again, find Sperb's observation illuminating in this respect:

> Throughout many of these discussions of pastiche one is increasingly struck by the idea that it is not nostalgia that lacks a clear definition; 'history' itself is also what remains undefined when articulating the new nostalgia mode in popular culture today. While the aesthetics of nostalgia in cinema have been explored with increasing detail and specificity, what might constitute a meaningful form of historical consciousness, as the postmodern initially thought, has been left behind. (29)

Feminist critiques of Jameson constitute a ground-breaking endeavor towards formulating a new historical consciousness in postmodernity through the aesthetic

engagement of nostalgia films. They criticize Jameson for ignoring the differently gendered expression of nostalgia (Creed; Radstone), if not for reinserting women and minorities into the Marxist model (Denzin 48). Participating in the debate of the relationship between feminism and postmodernism (since postmodernity has been considered, indeed deprecated, as feminine), Barbara Creed questions if the criticism of nostalgia film's lack of historicity does not display a type of masculinity-complex: "isn't it possible that the 'missing part' which lies at the heart of these films is that which once validated the paternal signifier" (Creed 46)? Aesthetic modes are *sexed*, and so is nostalgia. Jameson leaves out one crucial question in his analysis: "Exactly what is it that [post]modern audiences wish to feel nostalgic about?" (Creed 45). Susannah Radstone reads Jameson through a "sexual politics of time" (157). Radstone demonstrates that Jameson's nostalgia for a modernist nostalgia resembles the masculine nostalgia defined in psychoanalysis: "a nostalgic idealisation of the fantasised phallic mother of the past" by the boy who confronts the castrated mother of reality and in turn denigrates her (155). But this is only a false fantasy. Based on Kleinian theory, there has been an original "curiosity about the fascinating *inside* of the mother's body that is arguably revised, under castration, as the fantasy of the phallic mother" (Radstone 155, emphasis in original). "It is this fascination," writes Radstone, "which finds some displaced expression in the longing for depth [in Jameson]" (155). Radstone and Creed venture to reconceptualize postmodern nostalgia in the register of sexual economy and open up the possibility of investigating the enjoyment of postmodern nostalgia from the perspective of psychic desire. The second chapter of this thesis expands on their works and argues that the pleasure of postmodern nostalgia is a form of feminine *jouissance*.

Overall, the question about an alternative type of historical consciousness possible in postmodern nostalgia has received no systematic research. Sperb's own work falls back to a

Marxist paradigm that focuses on the studio-production process and the studies of the media industry's self-theorizing discourse of nostalgia. The 'desire' question that sustains the industry remains untouched. Existing scholarships on nostalgia films have left the "schizophrenia" part of Jameson's critique of "schizophrenic postmodernity" unaddressed, thereby hindering the effort to account for cinema as a schizophrenic medium, and for nostalgia films' schizophrenic potential to historicize. Dika pointedly observes that Jameson's (anti-)analysis of nostalgia film "comprise[s] the films' theatrical elements and not the medium's ontological properties" (10). Alison Landsberg, whose work has championed postmodern cinema as prosthetic memory, remarks that Jameson "offers a rather narrow version of experience [that] does not consider [how] the technologies of the 'postmodern' moment might themselves change what counts as experience" (32-3). But none has provided the schizophrenic nature and the historicizing potential of the postmodern cinema with a sustained explanation.

The 'usurpation' of image over narrative as the new sign system, for Jameson, characterizes the fragmentation of subjectivity in schizophrenic postmodernity, that is, the breakdown of the signifying chain, "the interlocking syntagmatic series of signifiers which constitutes an utterance or a meaning" ("Postmodernism," 72). When the signifying chain breaks, the experience of schizophrenia stands in place of the lost stability such chain used to confer "in the form of a rubble of distinct and unrelated signifiers" ("Postmodernism," 72). Insofar as the subjectivity depends on a certain temporal unification of the past, present and future, and as this temporal unification depends on a function of narration that "moves along its hermeneutic circle through time," schizophrenia embodies an experience that is incapable of history, of differentiating the past from the eternal present ("Postmodernism," 72). While Jameson laments the irretrievability of narrative, the signifying chain irredeemably broken, Deleuze and Guattari seek to work out an escape route *through* the disparate signifiers with

their schizoanalysis. Both Jameson's "schizophrenic postmodernity" and Deleuze and Guattari's "schizoanalysis" exhibit a response to the sense of disintegration that characterized the social transition during the late Cold War years. This transition has been theorized by David Harvey in social-economic terms as one from rigid Fordism to flexible accumulation (Harvey); and by Zygmunt Bauman as one from solid to liquid modernity (Bauman). In the opinion of Alexander Dunst, it was the social rigidity of Reaganism that resulted in the negative reception of the French theory of schizophrenia by Jameson (162). The films discussed in this thesis form an perfect audio-visual ground to reflect on this Cold War-era debate that still applies today where techno-capitalism have shattered life and experience into a million pieces: does disintegration mean the death of history proper in schizophrenic postmodernity, or does it provide opportunity for a 'schizo-history'? What's the role of cinema in advancing a new historical consciousness in schizophrenic postmodernity?

Schizo-history and Schizo-Cinema

What I term 'schizo-history' refers to the historical thesis generated through schizoanalysis as an interpretive lens. To understand schizoanalysis, one has to distinguish between *bodies* and *desires* as the fundamental *units* and *flows* within the analytic framework. In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari bring forth schizoanalysis as a way of understanding social productions. Social productions refer to the way various types of bodies cohere within the socius (the social body), these include individuals, political bodies, bodies of knowledge, bodies of signifying systems and other units inscribed with multitude degrees of social meanings. Desire is what flows through the bodies, becomes blocked or redirected during the *socializing* process of the bodies. For Deleuze and Guattari, desire is the basic attribute of matter. As Claire Colebrook summarizes:

matter [in Deleuze and Guattari] is not generated from anything else, and does

not require anything else in order to 'be,': as virtual, matter has no intrinsic body

or predetermined relations, and is that from which actual bodies, relations and

spatio-temporal coordinates emerge. ("Introduction," 7)

Desire is the virtual power of matter that gives rise to social formations. Schizoanalysis is the

analysis of the passage or blockage of desire in the socializing process of bodies. For Deleuze

and Guattari, the very socializing process of bodies constitute history:

We can say that social production, under determinate conditions, derives

primarily from desiring-production, which is to say that *Homo natura* comes

first. But we must also say, more accurately, that desiring-production is first and

foremost social in nature, and tends to free itself only at the end: which is to say

that *Homo historia* comes first. (*AO*, 33)

A 'schizo-history' generated through the reading of cinema traces how the various cinematic

bodies 'socialize' to produce meanings and how desire is articulated in the process. While

Jameson focuses on narrativizing disparate historical forms through the temporal chain of

past-present-future, Deleuze "injects [the] radical temporality [of desire] into these frozen

forms" (Colebrook "Introduction," 9).

    A limited number of academic works has interpreted Deleuze's cinema books through

the lens of schizoanalysis (Buchanan; Buchanan and MacCormack) due to the very different

terms and key concepts that Deleuze respectively uses in his 'Guattarized,' schizoanalytic

enterprise and his analysis of cinema. Regardless, theorists have found certain threads of

thought shared amongst his corpus. Joe Hughes' comparison of schizoanalysis with the

Deleuzian phenomenology of cinema is useful here. In view of the passing, blockage or

redirection of desire, Deleuze and Guattari raise three basic types of bodies (desiring-body,

body-without organs, and the assemblage of bodies) in their respective relations to the flow of

desire, as well as three syntheses (synthetic, disjunctive and conjunctive) that characterize the

interactions among these three types of bodies. In his cinema books, Deleuze considers the

regime of cinematic images as an assemblage of socialized cinematic bodies. Hughes points out

that Deleuze's categorization of the three basic types of cinematic images in his cinema books

correspond to the three types of syntheses in his previous works.

Moreover, the end of the first cinema book presents a failure of the 'socializing' of the

cinematic bodies to produce meanings (Hughes 24). At the end of the first cinema book,

Deleuze talks about a crisis of the established imagerial regime reflected in cinema after the

Second World War, that is, the interactions of various forms of images no longer form a

coherent, meaningful narration of the characters and the story that they are a part of. Deleuze

considers the historical moment at the end of the Second World War as a new horizon to

historicize, and that the changes of cinematic images reflect new approaches to historicize after

an event that renders human history meaningless. Accompanying the failure of the

historicizing regime of the established cinematic system is the emergence of new images that

point to new ways of their interactions, therefore new socializing processes of the cinematic

bodies. In the place of the broken "sensory-motor link" (*Cinema II*, 34) are the "purely optical

and sound situations" (*Cinema II*, 3): "the body is [now] caught in a quite different space,

where disparate sets [are] [un]able to organize themselves according to sensory-motor

schemata" (*Cinema II*, 203). In the second cinema book, Deleuze goes on to analyze the

historicizing strategies of the set of new images that try to *make sense* through the rubble of the broken signifying chain. Understood in this way, the cinema project of Deleuze provides an alternative to Jameson's criticism of the nostalgia films: while not "mov[ing] along [the] hermeneutic circle through time," they nonetheless engage with *time itself* as the hermeneutic of desire ("Postmodernism," 72). New forms of desiring-productions fundamentally challenge and change the conception of history.

Overview of Chapters

This thesis considers the selected nostalgia films as reflective of the end of the Cold War as a new horizon to explore new ways of historicizing. I take the nostalgic objects and styles of these films as the body-without-organs—the body that resists 'socializing,' the body devoid of any 'historical' meaning. I expand the schizo-history afforded by the cinematic images by situating my analysis of the films in the broader social field of market circulation. I draw from Deleuze's studies of the various types of images in the second cinema book as different historicizing strategies afforded by the cinematic images to account for the interactions between the body-without-organs of nostalgia and the various other bodies:

1) the bodies of characters situated within the historical period represented in a nostalgic style

2) the body of the audience that interact with the bodies of characters and the body-without-organs of nostalgia

3) the investment of the director's body in the body-without-organs of nostalgia

This thesis pays attention to both the formal and affective aspects of aestheticized nostalgia, since they are part and parcel of each other. In this regard I am inspired by Eugenie Brinkema, whose reading of films reveals how the specificity of affect is formally generated. Though she claims to have part ways with Deleuze where the Deleuzian terms of affects— speed, violence, agitation, pressures, forces, intensities—tend to generalize rather than to specify (Brinkema xiii); reading the affect of nostalgia as formally constructed nevertheless involves deep attention to the basics of cinematic components that Deleuze's cinema books have broken down and detailed.

In the first chapter "Dance: The Movement of History," I read the dancing bodies of the characters in *The White Crow* and *Suspiria*. I argue that the aestheticized nostalgia of the two films express the virtuality of time. Making use of Deleuze's anatomy of recollection-image and dream-image, I demonstrate that the dancing characters experience their historical reality as a virtual recollection or a dream where historical experiences are portrayed *not* as the dancers' encounter with the historical reality of the outside world, but as their internal assimilation and negotiation of their own historical subjectivity. The dancing bodies of the characters inform their historical subjectivity. The affect of nostalgic images is formally constructed by the way they navigate history with dance: In *The White Crow* the nostalgic affect is formally constructed as the "arm that softens," and in *Suspiria*, by the vocalic quality of dance. Through dancing, the characters emerge as 'spying' subjects with political and historical agency. By engaging with the bodies of the characters, I argue that historical reality could be productively engaged in nostalgia films. The dance *moves* historicist expressions into history.

In the second chapter "Espionage: The Secret of Nostalgia," I attempt to understand the transparent opacity of cinematic nostalgia—transparent because it epitomizes the void of historical meaning; opaque because it also emanates a historical appeal to contemporary

viewers that remains inscrutable. By looking at how *Red Sparrow* and *Atomic Blonde* engage with the genre of espionage films—a genre that has a secret at its center—I demonstrate that the two films relocate the secret onto the bodily "gest" (a term borrowed from Deleuze who borrows it from Brecht in his analysis of cinema) of the dancer-spy in relation to the signifying system of the Cold War nostalgia, as the spy gradually becomes a dancer. By analyzing the spectators' responses extracted from popular film reviews, I argue that the spectators' enjoyment of nostalgic images and sounds is a dancerly, feminine *jouissance* of cinematic nostalgia as a bodily secret. Two films reveal the viewing subjects' relation to history as the desire to a body, instead of consumption.

In the third chapter, "Monster: Mnemonic of the Sublime," I investigate director Guillermo del Toro's nostalgic investment in his *The Shape of Water* and how he aestheticizes his nostalgia to devise a monstrous, mnemonic system through which new historical subjectivity is possible. The monstrous force is captured by the aesthetics of the moving light— an investigative, spying consciousness (light) that dances (move). This aesthetic is the cinematic *techne* that constitutes the characters' becoming that undoes the dominating, molar mode of the mnemonic system in the nuclear era. It is also the aesthetic embodiment of the director's own bodily experience in the past. Having encountered a bodily sublime while he watches *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954) as a child, del Toro reconstitutes his body with *The Shape of Water*.

With these chapters, I present a cartography of desire as it flows through the cinematic bodies, the body of the audience, and the body of the director in the form of the desire of history, the desire to history, and the desire for history. We remember the Cold War, nostalgically, as we communicate with these bodies in the cinematic field of desire.

Dance: The Movement of History

"Pastiche is thus a blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs: it is to parody that other

interesting and historically original modern thing,"

—Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism*

"[I]t is as if a silent invocation calling for the liberation of the image into gesture arose from the

entire history of art. This is what in ancient Greece was expressed by the legends in which

statues break the ties holding them and begin to move."

—Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without End*

Based on Deleuze's theory of time, in this chapter I argue that the cinematic postmodern

nostalgia exposes the structure of time and sets up historical reflection. The nostalgia films

discussed in this chapter—*The White Crow* and *Suspiria* —put forward the idea that historical

reflection does not exist within our consciousness, but the other way around: it is we who are

internal to the grasp of time. In other words, historical reflection is a matter of time catching

up on us. Both films bracket their stories within the historical and social-political contexts

during the Cold War: *The White Crow* features the story of a Soviet dancer's defection to the

West against the backdrop of the cultural Cold War and ideological rivalry. *Suspiria* situates its

dance academy in the spatially divided Berlin and socially divided West Germany of the

German Autumn. Are these historical contexts merely pretexts for nostalgic exhibitionism? My

analysis shows that these films engage with the historical contexts through the shared trope of

dance. Time's "catching-up" to the subject, mediated in the form of dance, *moves* history:

historicist expressions come to life like the blind statues that start to move. The characters

make history in a true *tableau vivant*, a living picture. Not only are the protagonists of the films caught in time, borrowing from Alison Landsberg's conception of cinema as a transferential space for prosthetic memory, I argue that the spectators of the films are also caught in an immersive mode of historical reflection.

Time is a Crystal

I start by introducing Deleuze's theory of time. In her *Gilles Deleuze: Cinema and Philosophy*, Paola Marrati elaborates that Deleuze's reading of the cinematic images portraying time takes inspiration from Henri Bergson who reinterprets "the foundation of [the] becoming-past" of the present: "Rather than imagining a present that would be gradually pushed into the past by the 'coming' of a subsequent present […] Bergson postulates the pure co-existence of the present and *its own* past" (Marrati 73, emphasis in original). The present and the memory of the present are generated simultaneously. What distinguishes them is not the temporal axis as we know it, but the different modalities of the actual and the virtual: "the present is actual, whereas its contemporaneous past is virtual" (Marrati 73). When the present passes, instead of being pushed into the temporal past, it simply shifts from the actual to the virtual. Time is, by nature, structurally split into the two modes. While we phenomenologically experience the succession of time in the mode of the actual, a virtual reservoir has also been accumulated along the way: "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" (Marrati 74). But there are moments in which one is haunted by the past, in other words, one encounters the virtual.

For Deleuze, what in cinema represents the nature of time is the crystal-image. He takes a scene from Orson Welles' *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947) as the purest of examples: in the

palace of mirrors, the characters are confronted with the omnipresence of their virtual images (Deleuze, *Cinema II* 70). The virtual images "proliferate to the point that they seem to have absorbed the whole actuality of the character[s], who becom[e] one 'virtuality' among others" (Marrati 73). This example demonstrates a second aspect of the split in time: the actual and the virtual as two distinct modalities are often indiscernible, when the virtual catches up to the actual and the actual takes up quality of the virtual. "[I]indiscernibility constitutes an objective illusion; it does not suppress the distinction between the two sides, but makes it unattributable," writes Deleuze (*Cinema II* 69).

Jay Lampert studies Deleuzian philosophy of history and emphasizes the notion of the delayed reaction in Deleuze. To paraphrase his argument in terms of the actual/virtual split: Lampert argues that historical reflection is a delayed reaction on the part of the virtual from the past to the actual event at present. Furthermore, in the delayed reaction that constitutes historical reflection, one does not reinterpret the past event, but *re-lives* it, to the point that the virtual standpoint in the past is confused with the actual standpoint of the present. He shows that Deleuze offers a subtle alternative to Freud's conception of *Nachträglichkeit*. In *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, Freud presents a case study of a young woman who has a phobia against going into a shop by herself. 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 clothing. The question is: Why can she not go shopping alone now, instead of at twelve, or immediately after the assault? Why is the reaction delayed and the memory repressed? Freud's explanation is that only at age of puberty does the child realize what sexuality is and retroactively interpret 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" (Lampert 87). For the obsessive insistence to avoid it now comes not from retroactively attributing adult motives to the child, 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" (Lampert 87). The past and the present become indiscernible, forming a short-circuit of the virtual and the actual. The delayed reaction depends not on a "solipsistic unconscious" but an "inter-subjective unconscious," that is, the communication between the childhood self and the adult self (Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 124). Historical reflection, in Deleuze, is similarly "not the retroactive interpretation of the present, but the overlay of past and present narratives" (Lampert 85). Lampert summarizes Deleuze's model of delayed reaction:

> 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 inter-subjective 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.* (Lampert 88, emphasis added)

> We might define schizoanalysis precisely as a theory of internal inter-subjectivity through delayed temporal effects across intersecting series of thoughts, memories and affects. (Lampert 87)

For the two temporally split moments of a single event, each is a virtual scenario that only actualizes, crystallizes in the other, "each side taking the other's role in a relation which we must describe as reciprocal presupposition, or reversibility" (Deleuze, *Cinema II* 69). Subjectivity is what is caught in the crystalline process of time and experiences its split most intensely when the two chases after each other and become indiscernible.

Time's innermost structure can thus be described as a short-circuit between the virtual and the actual. We often experience the circuit's expansion when we are dreaming, reminiscing or fantasizing—the "delayed temporal effects across intersecting series of thoughts, memories and affects." The dream-image, recollection-image and fantasy-image "are degrees or modes of actualization [of the virtual] which are spread out between these two extremes of the actual and the virtual" (Deleuze, *Cinema II* 81). Feelings of déjà vu (I have experienced this somewhere), dream-images (I have experienced this in a dream), fantasies or theatre scenes (I have seen a similar story or role-playing) are all, according to Deleuze, experiences of the virtual catching up to the actual, but cognitively assigned to a dimension (dream, memory, or fantasy) irrelevant to historical reality for the sake of "sanity." I do not intend to dilute actual historical events with dream or fantasy, but simply to point out that one can experience historical reality like an implied dream and that a dream, or better a cinematic dream, can take on the full force of history. This mode of experience or existence is no less *real*, if not in fact more appropriately exhibiting the crystalline structure of time.

In this chapter, I argue that nostalgia films provide the ground to reflect on the structure of time and the historical experience as such by drawing out the expanded circuit of the actual and the virtual through the montage of cinematic images. In her introduction to *Deleuze and History*, Claire Colebrook pitches the Deleuzian history of the dead against Jamesonian dead history, which provides a point of discussion for a Deleuzian reading of nostalgia film. While Jameson argues that nostalgia films are piled with dead images of the past, Deleuze considers death as the zero degree to challenge our historical agency: Jameson's lamentation over the loss of a sense of history is connected to "a death instinct, or the tendency of the depletion and spending of forces" in capitalist society; whereas Deleuze posits instead "the experience of death," where we would experiment and imagine what is the ground of man as historical agent when 'history proper' is diminished and reduced to the point of non-being, effectively a body without organs (Colebrook, "Introduction" 10). The nostalgic images from nostalgia films constitute such a historicist non-being, a body without organs. By drawing out the circuit of the actual and the virtual, these films approach their point of indiscernibility as the place where the subject encounters the zero degree of history, and in this way reimagines historical agency.

The White Crow: The Body in Rehearsal

Before analyzing the film, it is important to mention its Cold War predecessor, *White Nights* (1985), of which reviewers of *The White Crow* are reminded. Both films choose the figure of the defecting dancer as their Cold War warrior.[1] And both films, in respective ways, use dance as rehearsal for political actions. *The White Crow* sets the stage in Paris. Based on the real event of Rudolf Nureyev's defection, the film follows his ascension to stardom, his social life and

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[1] Another point of convergence: The opening piece of *White Nights*, *Le jeune homme et la mort*, danced in the film by Baryshnikov, was historically performed by Nureyev himself in 1966.

explorations in Paris, to the point of his defection, interspersed with memories from his childhood and from his years of training in Leningrad. *White Nights* starred the very dancer-defector Mikhail Baryshnikov himself who in the film encountered his worst nightmare: he was cast as a once defecting Soviet dancer who accidentally returns to his motherland (the plane carrying him crash-lands in a secret military base in Siberia due to a technical breakdown) and is detained there for an unlimited period of time. It is interesting to compare the two and see how the political message in the recent one is toned down: While Baryshnikov, trapped in the sunlit summer night of Leningrad, was adamant to return to the United States, in *The White Crow* there is much more psychological toing-and-froing, reflected in the constant shuffling between the narrative present in France and the flashbacks of Rudi's 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, questioning whether defection was necessary, and making the later defection scene intensely dramatic due to the underlying hesitations.

Besides this, the two films also situate dance very differently within the political tension of the Cold War. In *White Nights*, dance becomes a direct means of communication in the surveilled social spaces of the Soviet Union. In the film, the KGB assigns an African American tap dancer and Vietnam-era defector (played by Raymond Greenwood) to keep an eye on Baryshnikov. Initially hostile, the two ends up plotting an escape plan together. In order to present dance as communication, the director Taylor Hackford experimented with a moving camera to film the dance scenes. By framing the dancers strictly in full-figure, he manages to achieve a sense of live-dancing in which the communicative dynamic between the dancers is magnified (Lally). The dance scenes are live moments that the dancers experience in real time and become the a part of the escape plot *per se*. In the last dance scene of the film, the duo dance together as a matter of reconciliation and teaming-up for the eventual escape (Fig. 1).

The practice room has cameras installed and their apartment is tapped. The dance serves as a form of coded language between the two that bypasses surveillance and becomes the rehearsing ground for political actions.

Fig. 1. Still from Hackford, *White Nights* (1:40:32), dance as a means of communication.

In *The White Crow*, the dance conditions the defection differently, by way of inscribing the dancer's body with memories. The defection scene at the Le Bourget airport captures the psychological strain similar to *White Nights*. As if a nightmare while awake the sun placidly shines over the airport as the theatre of defection. The film's portrayal stays true to the description in Nureyev's ghostwritten autobiography:

Now and then in life one has to take a decision like lightning, almost quicker than one can think. I have known this in dancing when something on the stage goes wrong. That is how it felt that hot morning in June 1961 on Le Bourget airfield, outside Paris, as I stood in the shadow of the great Tupolev aircraft which was to fly me back to Moscow. Its huge wing loomed over me like the hand of the evil magician in Swan Lake [...] I was to be dispatched to Moscow and there judged. For my 'irresponsible' way of life, as they had called it. For insubordination, non-assimilation, dangerous individualism. (Nureyev 13-4)

It is dance that has trained him how to act in such a critical moment of interwoven personal and political significance. The training has been inscribed on the body, and his ensuing action is prompted as a bodily response to the "huge wing looming over [him] like the hand of the evil magician in Swan Lake." Despite the lack of detailed portrayal of this mechanism of habitual memory in the defection scene, the film has nonetheless already rehearsed it in a previous passage that puts into close sequence Rudi's flashback and his narrative present. In the flashback he was practicing the same barrel turns (Fig. 2) that are to be performed on stage in the narrative present (Fig. 3).

Fig. 2. Still from Fiennes, *The White Crow* (30:03)

Fig. 3. Still from Fiennes, *The White Crow* (33:15)

In *Matter and Memory*, Henri Bergson distinguishes between two types of bodily memory: the memory that repeats and the memory that imagines. Memory inscribed through dance, that is, a sequence of movements, refers to the memory that repeats. Bergson considers the process of learning a lesson by heart. Through repeating the lesson, one gradually memorizes it like a habit. This type of memory points to the irreducibility of pure time: "even if I repeat this lesson only mentally, [the memory of the lesson] requires a definite time, the time necessary to develop one by one, were it only in imagination, all the articulatory movements that are necessary: it is no longer a representation; it is an action" (Bergson 81). In recalling, the memory acts—or rather, dances itself out through a definite and irreducible period of time. This irreducible and insistent duration testifies to the realm of the virtual:

> 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 [...]. (*Cinema II* 80, emphasis added)

Through dance, which evokes the past training inscribed on the body, the body leaps into the virtual image of time. But things are different at the airport, for Rudi doesn't dance there. It is not dance that transports him to the realm of the virtual. Rather, it is the virtuality of time itself

that takes hold of him in the form of bodily memory. In this regard, the dancer is reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's storyteller: "[t]he storytelling [...] sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again" (Benjamin 92). Dance practice sinks the virtuality of time into the life of the dancer, which is brought out again later.

The film therefore partakes in the temporal politics of defection, for a temporal dimension, in the form of bodily memory, underlies the scene of defection. Tony Jackson writes that the ideological rivalry and nuclear deterrence during the Cold War has greatly influenced people's perception of time and temporal reality, reflected in postmodern cultural theories which became aware that "the forms of narrative are [...] not simply [...] an aesthetic means of representing an already present reality in time, but rather as being a fundamental means of constituting reality *as* temporal to begin with" (Jackson 334, emphasis in the original). By playing with the mnemonic quality of the dancer's body, the film tells the defection story differently and presents it as a story about memory and time. It questions what makes a dancer a storyteller. In one scene, Rudi's teacher Aleksandr Pushkin (who will also be Baryshnikov's teacher in the future) says to him, "We spend so much time on technique, it's all we think about [...] Story. What story do we wish to tell? Why do so few people ask themselves: What do I wish to say?" Defection, as a dancer's statement of autonomy, then becomes the dancer's story to tell.

What is the relationship between the story and the dancer as the storyteller? Does the dancer make the story? Or is it the *story* itself that makes the dancer a storyteller? Afterall, every story needs a storyteller. For Benjamin, their relationship is tactile: "traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel" (Benjamin 92). The film similarly imbricates the dancer's body and his memory intimately, through thickening the narrative present with unrestrained flashbacks. In Paris, Rudi visits the

Louvre and lingers amid the collection of sculptures, captivated by their vigorous gestures (Fig. 4). The camera swiftly cuts to the past when he was practicing alone by the dance bar, soaked in sweat. Repeating the dance routines, his shoes made slushy sounds from touching the floor (Fig. 5). The camera then cuts back to the present at the Louvre, showing Rudi appreciating the perfect portion 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 Rudi affectionately touches the bulgy 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 linkage between the past and the present, between the virtuality of memory and the dancer's physical body. Like the sculptures whose gestures now appear to arise from an entire tactile history of the body, Rudi's past also takes on a touch of sculptural grace and solemnity.

Fig. 4. Still from Fiennes, *The White Crow* (20:54), Rudi looking at a sculpture.

Fig. 5. Still from Fiennes, *The White Crow* (20:21), practicing routines.

Deleuze argues that in flashbacks, the subject experiences a diversion from the plane of narrative-action to the plane of pure time (*Cinema II* 47). It is not that the present narrative-action requires a past as its causality, as if Rudi's appreciation of the sculptures needs to be explained with his training in the past—with this subjectivity would stay on the plane of narration, and 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" of time propels the flashbacks: "[they must] be justified elsewhere," not from the past as causality, and the "recollection-images must be given the internal mark of the past from elsewhere," 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" (Deleuze, *Cinema II* 48-9).

Nostalgia is the temporal logic that justifies the recollection-image. Next to this scene at the museum, the film lusciously and repeatedly traverses between the past and the present, making the Cold War nostalgia a sensorial envelope. 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 the 60s streetscape of Paris "bath[ed in] a creamy, sun-drenched light that radiates romance and nostalgia" (Lemire), characters in period costumes, dance scenes in "lush blues, greens and pinks as if [....] a retro, Technicolor musical" (Lemire), "[t]he details of the Soviet everyday life" which "are quite convincing and seen through a soft lens of nostalgia" for "a longtime émigré looking for a trip down the memory lane" (Ellementary), these include: the empty streets and squares of Leningrad, Soviet home decor and even food and tableware, the list continues. Nostalgia cascades down the screen and softens everything.

It is with this 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," the film repeatedly sends out this message as is dictated by various dance instructors in the practice scenes. In one scene, Pushkin says to Rudi: "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," and raises his arms softly as he speaks (Fig. 6). Like the arm that softens which conveys the interconnection of the dancing steps, nostalgia is what makes the steps from the past to the present (and vice versa) follow and belong. In other words, the

film draws a circuit between the present and the past, the actual and the virtual with nostalgic images. "Nostalgia" encompasses the virtual catching up to the actual.

The nostalgic circuit delineates a transitional space in which the dancer relates to the nostalgic settings—architecture, streetscape, period clothings and gadgets—as transitional objects. In their article on psychotherapy and the rehearsal process, Lisa Baraitser and Simon Bayly discusses the modern dance rehearsal as a space in which the dancer relates to props, "presenting [their] personality in how [they] field those actions" of relating (Willem Dafoe, qtd. in Baraitser and Bayly 65). There are two aspects crucial to the dance rehearsal that we can also identify in the film's nostalgic traversal in time. Firstly, the rehearsal always has a performance seen on the horizon. Rehearsal "happens with the event already in sight, in the shadow of the event anticipated" (Baraitser and Bayly 61). So does the film, which, as a project of cinematic biography, anticipates the historically well-known event of defection as its end point from its conception. The film satisfies its audience's voyeuristic interest for rehearsal. Baraitser and Bayly liken the rehearsal process to the primal scene to the final performance. It is where the crucial actions happen but are withdrawn from the public view. It is the rawness and the "realness" that the audience seeks out in a rehearsal. The audience comes to the film, whose central plot of a dancer's defection has been elaborately spoiled in its marketing trailer (StudiocanalUK), 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, who press on issues of art as diplomacy and function as a watchful presence next to the KGB agent throughout the film. The train of nostalgic musings that leads to the final point therefore serves as the rehearsal prior to theatrical "performance" of defection and appeals to the prying eyes of the audience.

The rehearsal does not necessarily repeat the same choreography to be performed but is an indispensable process in which the body freely feels up the space permitted to it when things are held in abeyance. This is the second aspect of the rehearsal process. Baraitser and Bayly apply D. W. Winnicott's theory of "transitional phenomena" to the rehearsing process. Winnicott maps out a notional period of time between an infant's interest in its own body and its eventual ability to relate to external objects. In this transitional period the infant recognizes an external object as not entirely part of itself but also not yet fully part of the object world. "In rehearsal," write Baraitser and Bayly, "decisions about subjectivity and objectivity are also temporarily suspended [...] through [the dancer's] relation to their 'material'" (65). The materials are brought in based on their

> seeming marginality, the interest in [them] almost born out of boredom with
> supposedly significant objects, such as concretised themes, whole texts or an
> overarching political agenda. [These are] fragments of cultural artefacts [...]
> objects with symbolic value or texture rather than narrative or discursive
> meaning. (Baraitser and Bayly 65)

Importantly, "the material performers work with is taken up not on the basis of its apparent meaningfulness, but without recourse to it needing to mean anything at all" (Baraitser and Bayly 65). Like the transitional object to the infant, the material should give the dancer "warm, or to move, or to have a texture, or to do something that seems to show it has vitality or reality of its own" (Winnicott, qtd. in Baraitser and Bayly 64). Aren't the nostalgic settings of the film such materials to the dancer? On one hand they have no claim to whatever historical meaning, on the other hand they hatch up a mild texture that softens time and renders memories tactile.

While the infant uses the transitional objects to navigate the object world, we can read the film as a dance rehearsal that situates the dancer within the nostalgic settings to negotiate his space of autonomy in history. "The rehearsal strategy [...]," write Baraitser and Bayly, "could be seen not as the retreat from history, the *polis* and the political [...] but rather as a confrontation with history *felt* as a set of disjunctive and discontinuous experiences" (67, emphasis in original). From this perspective, the film achieves a modern rendition of the classical ballet.[2] Instead of focusing on the end result such as the perfection of form, the film invests in the procedural aspect, the training of the body as a matter of negotiating subjectivity through temporal traversal. As the film proceeds, it imbricates the dancer's body with recollections layer by layer, inculcating the body with nostalgia while subjectivity emerges. Indeed, "[o]ne step follows another," leading up to his defection. While in *White Nights*, the escape is *plotted* through dance, in *The White Crow*, Rudi's defection results from a series of spontaneous movements.

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[2] In the history of Cold War dance diplomacy, modern dance was emphasized by the United States as its 'indigenous' achievements and as the embodiment of cultural universalism to compete with the Soviet Ballet (Foner; Kowal; Croft). The limited amount of studies of the Soviet Ballet during the Cold War have also remarked on the Western scholarship's tendency to focus on the figure of defecting dancers with much less attention paid to the political innovations of dancers within the regime, even after the opening up of the Soviet archive (Ezrahi; Ross). In this sense, the film shares the monotonous if not hegemonic view of the relationship between dance and political subjectivity during the Cold War. Although to a certain extent the internal conflict of ballet in the Soviet regime—that ballet is both an aristocratic art form in a purportedly people's regime and a part of the state's educational program to promote high culture and make it accessible to everyone (Ezrahi)—is reflected in the film in Rudi's own sense of inferiority as a peasant body exposed in the world of high art.

Fig. 6. Still from Fiennes, *The White Crow* (22:50), Pushkin saying "They are interconnected"

as he raises his arms softly.

One typical scene illustrates the emergence of the dancer's subjectivity. Immediately

following the previous drama at the airport hall, Rudi sits at the security office of the airport

and has been given a second chance to determine whether to defect and stay in France or to

continue his tour with the dance company to London (a compromise suggested by the KGB

agent) then *en route* back to the Soviet Union. This scene corresponds to Bergson's other type

of bodily memory: the memory that imagines. Following the same example of learning a lesson

through reading repeatedly, this type of memory refers to the memory of the image, what one

pictures to oneself that marks each successive reading during the process. In contrast to the

memory that repeats, this type allows one to grasp the whole of the situation of each reading

instantaneously. Now that the previous spectacle at the airport hall has faded and he is alone at

the back office of the airport, Rudi takes his time coming to term with his past and bidding farewell with his family. He recalls his mother walking out the door at his first dance lesson (Fig. 7), leaving him to enter the world of dance alone, a world that is markedly distanced from the life of peasantry where he and his family came from. Back to the narrative-present: When others enter the office room again Rudi is already gone. The open door on the right corner of the room, the one that leads to France, tells that Rudi has made his choice (Fig. 8). The spatial layout of the office room at present resembles that of the dance room in his childhood recollection. Both have the door—the spatial form that takes on great importance to the narrative by suggesting a change in one's world—at its right corner. Both in recollection and in the present, the camera "grasps the whole" by situating Rudi's body at a peculiar location within the imagistic composition. Together, the recollection-image and the present-image make evident the dancer's "state of anxious abjection in relation to [his] material" (Baraitser and Bayly 67). In the words of Julia Kristeva, this scene describes the transitional space in which "[t]he abject confronts [him ...] within his personal archeology, with [his] attempts to release the hold of maternal entity even before existing outside of her" (Kristeva 13). The maternal entity becomes the paradigmatic nostalgic and transitional object that the cinematic image, like Rudi's archeology of the self, struggles to contain. From here he emerges as an independent subject, as a dancer-defector and as a storyteller that finally delivers the defection story. Benjamin writes about the emergence of a storyteller from a distant past:

> Viewed from a certain distance, the great, simple outlines which define the storyteller stand out in him, or rather, they become visible in him, just as in a rock a human head or an animal's body may appear to an observer at the proper distance and angle of vision. (Benjamin 83)

The film presents us a distance in memory, mediated by the cinematic images of nostalgia. The dancer emerges from the circuit between recollection and the present with a gesture, which takes on the function of storytelling: the gesture of Rudi leaving the room, by suggesting his final decision to defect, effectively collects the free-floating memories back into the logic of the narrative.

Fig. 7. Still from Fiennes, *The White Crow* (01:51:19)

Fig. 8. Still from Fiennes, *The White Crow* (01:52:23)

Interestingly, the film also interpellates its spectators as a dancer within the nostalgic circuit. The spectators' relation to this scene has been rehearsed in a previous scene of the film that reinforces the abjectional undertone: At the Louvre, Rudi carefully examines Théodore Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa*. This painting depicts a moment from the aftermath of the wreck of the French naval frigate Méduse. A group of people were set adrift on a hurriedly constructed raft, which, as history tells us, disassembled quickly and the drifting, starved crew soon turned cannibal. The camera follows Rudi's center of gaze across the canvas, which momentarily stops at a hardly noticeable detail: At the right corner of the image, near the end of the horizon is the mothership to which the raft tends longingly, desperately (Fig. 9). In this scene, the painting's dramatic story captures Rudi's own theatre of memory at the office room. Rudi's status as an observer external to the painting presages the spectators' spatial relation to the cinematic image in the later scene (Fig. 10).

Fig. 9, Still from Fiennes, *The White Crow* (18:54). A crew member waves desperately to their

mothership.

Fig. 10, Still from Fiennes, *The White Crow* (18:34). Rudi looks at the painting.

In her *Prosthetic Memory*, Alison Landsberg raises the notion of "transferential space" that cinema affords. Landsberg borrows from the Freudian idea of transference in psychoanalytic sessions where the analyst reconstructs the condition of illness through talking in order to intervene in the symptoms of the analysand. She argues that cinema provides a transferential space that

> instill in us "symptoms" or "prosthetic memories" through which we did not
> actually live but to which we now, after [...] a filmic experience, have an
> experiential relationship. [...] As happens in analytic transference, although real
> experience takes place, the experience is not equivalent to or an exact repetition
> of the original event or relationship: the parameters are artificial. Nonetheless,

the experience fosters an otherwise unattainable insight into the original event.

(Landsberg 135-6).

The White Crow provides a transferential space by constructing a spatial-temporal experience of the audience similar, though not identical, to that of its protagonist. While depicting Rudi's negotiation of subjectivity in relation to the nostalgic settings as transitional objects, the film concurrently engages the audience and makes them enter into an abjectional relationship with the motion picture. By the time of the office room scene, the audience experiences the virtual power of time as the previous scene of Rudi standing before the painting comes to mind; and the indifferent, external spectatorship is undermined as the audience realizes they are situated in the same position as Rudi did. The film itself becomes the transitional object with which the audience has to negotiate their subjectivity and the form of their psychic investment in relation to the "nostalgic" images as the protagonist does (Fig. 11). Hence the film interpellates its audience as a dancer feeling up its own spatial, temporal and psychic contour within the nostalgic circuit. This interpellation transpires not through solipsistic identification, but through an inter-subjective exchange between the audience and the protagonist. The film-viewing subject sits in a productively ambiguous position in which they are simultaneously themselves and the protagonist, not from within the film but neither from without. The film transfers a historical experience and channels an encounter with the virtual through the representation of a dancer's body in rehearsal.

Fig. 11, Still from Fiennes, *The White Crow* (06:50). Rudi strides out to the street in Paris.

Suspiria: The Vocalic Body

Suspiria is a nostalgic remake of Dario Argento's original horror masterpiece of the same title. The original story follows American ballet student Susanna "Suzy" Bannion's (played by Jessica Harper) transfer to a prestigious dance academy in West Germany where she discovers, after a series of brutal murders and eerie supernatural events, that the academy is in fact a witch coven preying on its own students. Except for the brief mention by a psychiatrist that the witches' "knowledge of the art and the occult gives them tremendous power" in the last third of the original film, it does not straightforwardly investigate the entanglement of art and the occult. Dance is featured in a classroom setting to sustain the academy's facade of normalcy, covering up for the backstage malice (Fig. 12). This may explain the film's choice of ballet. "Nine out of ten movies about ballet [are] about how fascistic ballet is," says David Kajganich,

screenwriter of the recent remake, in an interview "It puts the body through its own horror

show" (Francisco). There is horror going on beneath the elegance of the classic forms.

Fig. 12. Still from Argento, *Suspiria* (25:04)

The new *Suspiria* follows a similar story of an American girl (now "Susie" instead of

"Suzy," and played by Dakota Johnson)—who transfers to Berlin and experiences supernatural

conspiracy. The new film widens the scope of its narrative and incorporates 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 covered the social atmosphere during the late 1977. "[T]he original was a fever

dream made in 1977 but wasn't about 1977," says Kajganich, "What we could offer as a remake

is to widen the brackets of the original story, include the history swirling around that time and

place and make connections to the story inside of the dance company […] it could allow characters more ethic [sic] tapestry to be a part of" (Francisco). In Guadagnino's *Suspiria*, the dance group, now a "Markos Dance Company" instead of an academy, has survived the war under the lead of Madame Blanc, a chief choreographer in the new film rather than a headmistress figure as in the original. 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 orientation and the Cold War era ideological dissent. 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 the 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 "suicide" 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 Madame Blanc weaves spells into her choreography to influence what is happening outside the company, the 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 in half, 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 the West German society haunted by the Nazi past and short of means to imagine a future that refuses the official optimism of post-war economic miracle.

In order to have a nuanced understanding of the relationship between dance and history in this film, I take up the cultural history of ventriloquism discussed by Steven Connor as their common ground. Ventriloquism is the "practice of making voices appear to issue from elsewhere than their source" (Connor *Dumbstruck*, 13-4). Dance in the film takes on the "active form" of the ventriloquy. As an act of spelling-casting, it animates or distorts the body and mind of the others, holding "the power to *speak through* others" (Connor *Dumbstruck*, 14, emphasis added). Similarly, historical events in the film are mediated through radio or televised reportage that shapes public sentiment—a tribute to Rainer Weiner Fassbinder's *The Third Generation* (1979), a film about the third generation of the RAF and that presents an incessant bombardment of the sound of television newsreels.[3] In *Suspiria*, the public mind is a dummy to the radio-ventriloquist and therefore takes on the "negative form" of ventriloquism, "being *spoken through* by others" (Connor *Dumbstruck*, 14, emphasis added). The film's representation of dance and the historical events share the similar ventriloquial quality. While the ventriloquial metaphor has often been deflected to the question of possession and

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[3] *Suspiria* also borrows from the six-act structuring of the film.

appropriation, the film's portrayal of physical and psychological violence associated with dance and with history requires one to examine the more primary, corporeal processes involved in the ventriloquial act.

Connor's analysis of ventriloquism is based on "a Kleinian reading of the primary dynamics [...] in the disembodying and re-embodying of the voice" (Connor "Violence," 75). Not only are voices produced by bodies, they can also produce bodies. Connor accentuates the embodying capacity of voice with the term "vocalic body," which is "a surrogate or secondary body [...] formed and sustained out of the autonomous operations of the voice" (*Dumbstruck,* 35). Voice, or more accurately, the vocalic body is also considered by Winnicott as one of the transitional objects that an infant learns to manouvre. This process is readily marked with psychic violence even from the point of departure: An infant cries in a desperate attempt to command the world over which it has no control. Through its voice, the infant finds a way to manipulate its spatial-temporal coordinates: "when we shout, we tear. We tear apart distance [...] the space between us is nothing but a delirium tremens of voice [...] The sonorous envelope is the first shape that the voice secrets" (Connor "Violence," 79). 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" (Connor "Violence," 80).

In *The White Crow*, nostalgia comprises the transitional objects that the dancer interacts with. In *Suspiria*, nostalgia as an affect is highlighted by radio or televised voice textured with the thermic noises which become the vocalic body. The radio voice is omnipresent in *Suspiria*. It 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. 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" (327). The sound of the radio makes a vocalic body out of the mind of its listeners, while they feel up their psycho-social reality with the sound as a transitional voice-object. McLuhan 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. This is reflected in the film by dr. Klemperer's dreamwalk in 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.

Like radio, dance too channels an implosion. As a form of incantation, it produces a vocalic body within the body of the other. In her diary notebook, Patricia makes drawings of how the company's dance binds space and time through the moving body (Fig. 13). 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 twisted, her bones make the gory, cracking sounds and protrude from beneath her skin. In short, Olga's body implodes (Fig. 14). Like radio, the spell of the dance is the spell of nostalgia. We can therefore think of the sound of radio as performing a magical dance to its listeners.
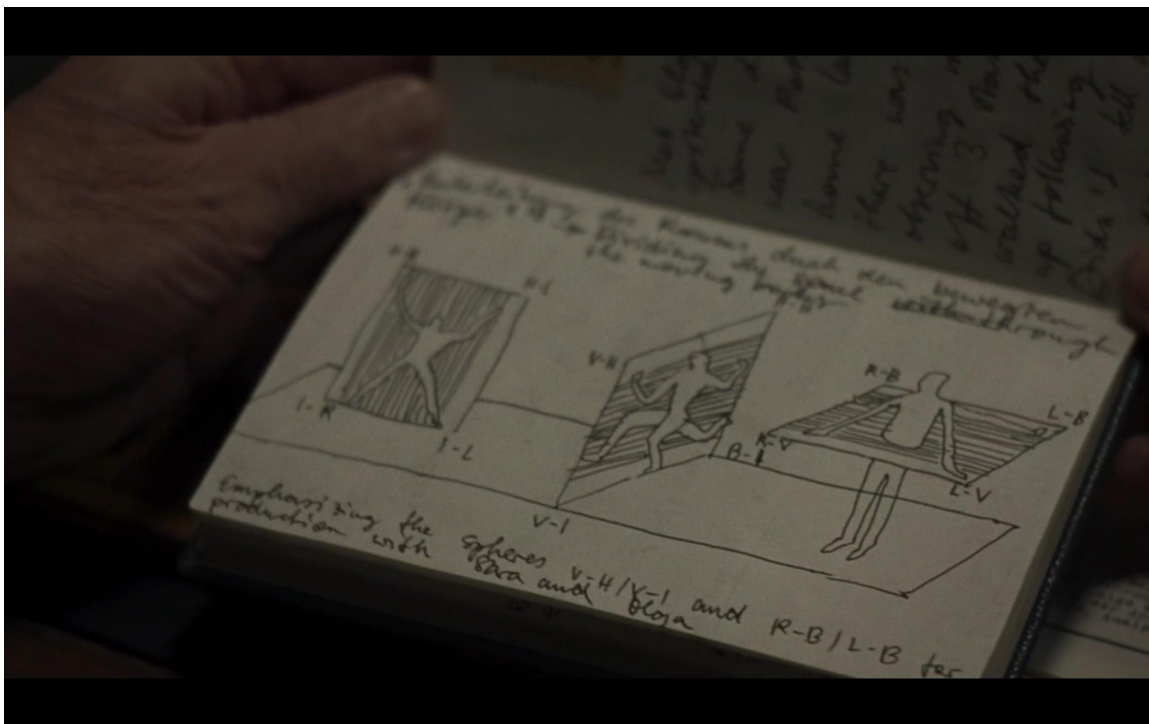
Fig. 13. Still from Guadagnino, *Suspiria* (43:32). Patricia's diary.

Fig. 14. Still from Guadagnino, *Suspiria* (38:16). Olga implodes.

Under its spell, Klemperer is wobbly on his legs as he walks across the city. His steps achieving a "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" (Deleuze, *Cinema II* 59). Against Klemperer's tremulous silhouette are the flat views of the city (Fig. 15), but they immediately become multi-dimensional as a nostalgic score starts to play: "There takes place a kind of worldizing or 'societizing,' a depersonalizing, a pronomializing of the lost or blocked movement" through the film score (Deleuze, *Cinema II* 59). What is peculiar about this film is that nostalgic sounds take on the quality of dance, for it *moves* the historicist visual representations into a historical world: "dance arises directly as the dreamlike power which gives depth and life to these flat views, which makes use of a whole space in the film set and beyond, which gives a world to the image, surrounds it with an atmosphere of world" (Deleuze, *Cinema II* 62).

Fig. 15. Still from Guadagnino, *Suspiria* (25:00). Dr. Klemperer (center) walks in a stumbling

manner.

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 short-circuit

the virtual and the actual. In *The White Crow*, the virtual realm of time is subsumed under the

category of recollection, which separates it from the living present. Wrapped in nostalgic

visuals, they become intimately related in a tactile manner. Here in *Suspiria*, the virtual and

the actual constitute an implied dream and are cognitively indiscernible. Time is experienced

as a virtual force that runs simultaneously with and is indistinguishable from actual events.

The dream is an implied one for it does not end. Its open-endedness prevents the experience

from being subsumed under the category of dream opposite 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 (Deleuze,
> *Cinema II* 56)

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 dreamwalk. 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 in 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: "There is a kind revolution of the body in the film," says the film's choreographer Damien Jalet, "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" (Amazon Studios). In the film, the historical reality is experienced like an implied dream that simulates the evolving movements of dance.

What are we to make of this dream world that is both malicious and melancholic? By interlacing historical events with witch dances, the film achieves expressing the public sentiment in the late 1977: "it was as if the terrorists were a threat less by their violent acts than by the fact that they could inspire not just universal revulsion, but sometimes sorrow and even sympathy" (Elsaesser 270). The indiscernibility of the virtual and the actual in the implied dream could also be likened to the how one experienced the series of events in history: "Like a virus, terrorism appeared contagious, transmissible through verbal contact, requiring discursive efforts to 'isolate' it" (Elsaesser 270). 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 Antigonist inability to mourn. "[Their] cultural currency gives the 'drama' of the hot autumn a powerful pathos," writes Elsaesser, "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" (287). 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 that covers their news, "[the] mode of address [...] authenticated the bond between the terrorists and their contemporaries" (289). 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 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" (289). In other words, their political violence took up a vocalic body. 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," namely the political "we" beyond

the traditional symbolization of the nation, the class and the people (Elsaesser 295). They make

the violent urban outbreaks a vocalic body and solicit 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 is challenged with an inter-subjective exchange as they

uneasily identify in their reaction to RAF terrorism the legacy of a past political lethargy to the

violence of the Nazi state. The public sound of the radio therefore reflects the violent voice

within:

> 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 [...]. (Connor *Dumbstruck*, 36)

From this perspective, the radio reportage of the RAF activities could also be read as "the voice

of rage" that "presents itself as the antagonist of [itself as the embodiment of the violent voice

within. It] defends itself against itself" (Connor *Dumbstruck*, 37).

    Suspiria captures this thoroughly historical experience with the enchantment of dance

that gives rise to a vocalic body.[4] Moreover, this experience is transferred to the film-viewers

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4 The film not only conceptually but also choreographically engages with the witch dance, a piece that was originally crafted by Mary Wigman, whose controversial choreographic legacies during the Third Reich was debated by post-war modern dancers who, on one hand, tried to formulate a new German identity in dance by recovering the dimensions of Wigman that remained resistant to National Socialist appropriations, and who on the other hand were wary of the Americanization of the genre (represented in the film by Susie herself) which was part and parcel of the Americanization of daily life in the West Germany (Manning 247).

who become the body under the vocalic spell. In the post-credit scene, Susie raises her hand to exercise magic (Fig. 16). Seen from the spatial configuration betrayed by the lamppost behind her, she is most likely touching the Berlin Wall. But the direct visual experience of the scene is that she is bewitching the film audience through the camera. Many scenes in the film show that the witches communicate with each other telepathically: on the surface they are laughing and talking at the dinner banquet, but clandestinely their telepathic voices discuss preparation for sacrificial rituals. The sonorous, telepathic voice feels like a disembodied sound of the radio, reverberating from an extra-diegetic source, that is, the spectatorial space. When Susie chats with Madame Blanc after the miscarried performance, her voice is in the telepathic, extra-diegetic register when saying that "it's all a mess […] the one out there," wrapping the audience in its sonorous envelope. The camera cuts to their reflections in the mirror, accentuating the virtual quality of the scene, as if the voice comes from a space as mercurial as the mirror (Fig. 17). But immediately the voice turns flat and falls back into the diegetic space as Susie continues: "the one in here […]." The audience is confused with the source of the voice and struggles to assign its vocalic body to a prescribed space separated as either the virtual, cinematic image, or the actual spectatorial position. In this way, the film becomes a transferential space that instills its portrayed historical experience in the audience, who now experiences cinema like an implied dream. When the dance group performs "Volk," there is an urgency conveyed in the scene that the dance has to be complete, the choreography has to be followed, so that the ceremony could be received by the audience—not only the sitting audience in the film, but also those *of* the film. The camerawork is fidgety, roving, as if we, the audience, partake in the dance, performing the choreography of nostalgia (Fig. 18). Jameson may have agreed that pastiche is not only "a statue with blind eyeballs," it is also with deaf ears. In *Suspiria*, the deaf statue starts to listen, and dances to the sound of history.
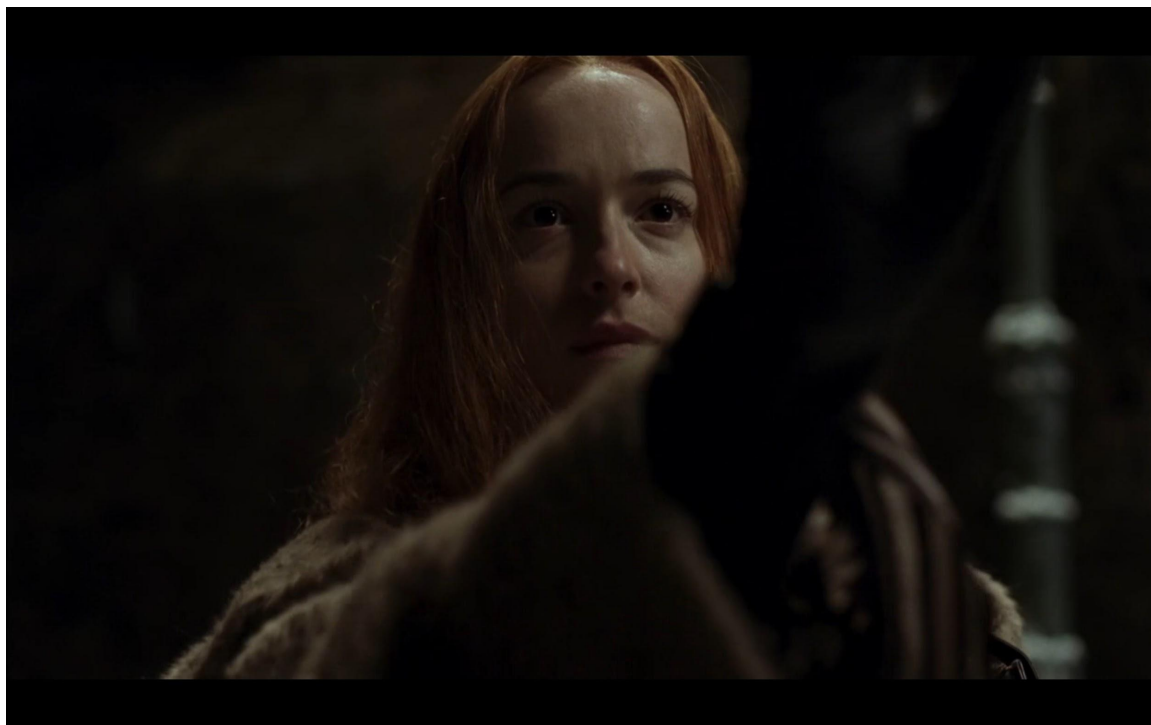
Fig. 16. Still from Guadagnino, *Suspiria* (02:26:19). Susie casts her spell to the audience.

Fig. 17. Still from Guadagnino, *Suspiria* (01:46:46). Telepathic communication.

Fig. 18. Still from Guadagnino, *Suspiria* (01:40:46). "Volk."

Conclusion

I ask at the beginning of this chapter if the historical contexts of these films are mere pretexts for nostalgic exhibitionism. My analysis demonstrates that postmodern nostalgia is a composite affect of both nostalgic visuals/audio and the virtual quality that dance conveys. In *The White Crow*, nostalgia is the "arm that softens." In *Suspiria*, nostalgia is the vocalic body that dance gives shape to. It is in this way that historicist expressions *move* like an archaic statue that comes to life. In both films, nostalgia channels the portrayed historical experiences as the characters' encounter with the split structure of time—the virtual that catches up to the actual like a snake that swallows its own tail—in *Suspiria*, it is the nostalgic radio that gives rise

to the movement of the world that engulfs the characters; in *The White Crow*, it is the personal recollection that envelopes the political decision of defection in its shadow. Nostalgia as dance and as the virtuality of time, in the words of Claire Colebrook, "is the maintenance of [the sensorial] surface" that "releases from bodies the incorporeal [historical] events that they express" (Colebrook, "How" 11). Historical experiences are therefore portrayed *not* as an agent's encounter with the historical reality of the outside world, but as their internal assimilation and negotiation of their own subjectivity and historical agency. A subject is never external to history, but internal to the grasp of time. In other words, nostalgia manifests the historical experiences as the self's encounter with the crystalline time. Moreover, it becomes the audio-visual site, the transferential space in which the film audience (re-)experiences the encounter.

Epilogue: Becoming-Spy

History is the subject's encounter with time. Michel Foucault writes that the task of a historical genealogy is "to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body" (Foucault "Nietzsche," 148). This resonates with the Deleuzian project that treats the body as an historical interface of subjectivity and time—time as the radical temporality of desire, the desire expressed through the catching up of the virtual to the actual as the fundamental hermeneutic of time. In this chapter I have discussed the body wrapped in time. In the coming chapter I will focus on the body as an expression of subjectivity and nostalgia as its psychic enjoyment.

Wrapped in time, the body dances as its way of drawing out the circuit of the virtual and the actual. In "Cinema, Chronos/Cronos," David Deamer summarizes the Deleuzian cinema books as a project of the dialectic of the Chronos and Cronos, the virtual pure time and actual

historical experience. And importantly it "explore[s] [...] the fundamental impasse in the two [...] theories of time," that is, the point when genuine historical change emerges from the plane of the virtual (Deamer 174). At a point the dancer will emerge from the circuit as a spy. A spy stands outside the circuit. Deleuze gives examples of film characters who take on the role of the spy by witnessing the virtual dance, peeking at the theatre of memory outside the circuit in a separate corner. *The White Crow* shows Rudi getting in a car after exiting the office room at the airport. Behind the car window he looks back in the room's direction (Fig. 19). This shot therefore establishes Rudi as an outsider to the circuit. By becoming "a spy," Rudi steps out of nostalgia.

Fig. 19. Still from Fiennes, *The White Crow* (01:53:13)

There is a certain psychic logic underlying his decision to defect: That Rudi steps outside nostalgia is linked with cutting ties with his mother, for in this scene he bids farewell to his mother, through a memory episode of farewell (Fig. 7). But the becoming-spy seems always to be a matter of severing, and furthermore, sublating the maternal tie. Sublation (*Aufhebung*) means simultaneously, to abolish, to preserve, and to transcend. In *Suspiria*, it is revealed in the end that Susie is the reincarnation of the archaic witch-mother Suspiriorum, who is the ultra-spy (or Ur-spy) of time, as she has access to the memories of all. She awakes and becomes the witch-mother herself by rejecting her biological mother—a double act of identification through rejection.[5] In *The White Crow*, Rudi's exit through the office room door on one hand preserves the mother, identifying with her by similarly walking out the door. But on the other hand, the film cancels this relation, for the exact scene of Rudi actually walking out the door is never shown. We only know of it in its aftermath—a half open door that, possibly, awaits the return of the mother (Fig. 8). In this chapter, I have discussed how historical and political subjectivity emerges in time through dance, that is, the becoming-'spy' of the dancer. In the next chapter, I focus on the becoming-dancer of the spy in the selected espionage films and argue that they reveal a feminine *jouissance* in the return of the mother.

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[5] The dead mother literally embodies the monstrous abject that Susie gives birth to at the moment of her awakening—the monster is played by the same actress who also plays her biological mother, Małgosia Bela. I take little space here to explore the relationship between the abject monster and the Berlin wall in the film. This particular duo was originally set up in Andrzej Żuławski's *Possession* (1981). In the *Possession*, the monster is the border-blurring abject born from the protagonist, while the Berlin Wall next to the protagonist's apartment serves to stabilize the disturbed sense of border (Olivier). According to Żuławski, the monster represents his relationship with communism (Goddard). In *Suspiria*, both the monster and the Wall enter into or fade out of the visual field in a vicarious manner. Their interconnection is therefore visually constructed. But one fails to generate any productive, ideological reading of the monster *or* the Berlin Wall. The Wall has been 'appropriated' to tell a story about the memories of the Holocaust. This reflects what various authors have pointed out as the forgetting of the Cold War in relation to the Holocaust (Barbara 3; Jarausch, Ostermann and Etges 12; Lowe and Joel 7; Wiener 2).

Espionage: The Secret of Nostalgia

"There were no longer shadows to help her see more clearly, only glare."

—— Henry James, quoted in Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* [6]

In this chapter, I argue that nostalgia has a body. Nostalgia's body has certain characteristics: it is a transparent opacity—transparent because it epitomizes the void of historical meaning; opaque because it also emanates a historical appeal to contemporary viewers that remains inscrutable. These characteristics have long been recognized, but we have been unconscious of the fact that they are the traits of a *body*. With an analysis of *Atomic Blonde* and *Red Sparrow* as well as the spectators' responses extracted from popular film reviews, I demonstrate that the spectators' enjoyment of nostalgic images and sounds is a dancerly, feminine *jouissance* that is haptically felt. It is this haptic "dance" that channels the viewers' 'will to history' with the enjoyment of the body of nostalgia.

Both films under analysis belong to the genre of espionage but subvert the genre's conventional form of composition by foregrounding the element of dance. In *Atomic Blonde*, the female spy fights in highly choreographed, dance-like movements. In *Red Sparrow*, the spy is a former ballerina. While classical espionage films center on a mission related to secrets—the spy is tasked with either uncovering or guarding the secret; these two films relocate the secret onto the bodily attitude (or the "gest," a Brechtian term borrowed in Deleuze, I will elaborate on this later) of the dancer-spy in relation to the signifying system of the Cold War nostalgia. The becoming-dancer of the spy reveals nostalgia's secret body: its intransparent transparency,

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[6] Deleuze and Guattari's french translation of the original text from Henry James' *In the Cage* reverses its meaning. The original reads: "She knew at last so much that she had quite lost her earlier sense of merely guessing. There were no different shades of distinctions—it all bounded out."

which is also the historical condition of the maternal body in theoretical and social-political discourses.

Atomic Blonde

A Twist of The MacGuffin

"This world is run on secrets," says Percival, a character from *Atomic Blonde*, in a passionate monologue before his death near the end of the movie. This monologue is one of the surprising moments in the film where a character breaks the fourth wall and directly addresses to the audience a meta-commentary of the film.[7] Therefore "this world" can refer to both the world of espionage in November 1989, the time of the film's story; and the world of cinema, the particular genre of espionage film that, on a thematic and compositional level, "runs on secrets."

Hitchcock testifies to the secretive nature of espionage films with his coinage of the term "MacGuffin" which describes an object or objective as a plot device driving the action of a movie. MacGuffin dominates the spy films in the form of the thing that the spy is after. Usually it is an object, or a piece of information that the spy tries to obtain, retrieve or guard. Although extremely important for the characters and the plot development, the exact significance of the object, or the exact content of the piece of information is kept from the audience, until in the third act of the film when it is revealed. The espionage film is therefore shrouded in double-secrecy: On one hand, a secret within the narrative of the film that the character is after; on the other hand, a secret that engages spectatorship with its own suspension.

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[7] The other moment is when the character Percival is first introduced as MI6's head of the Berlin station. He calls out loudly "Money is good, information is better," and asks the audience "And you? What do you have for me?"

Before locating the secret of the film, either on the level of the story, or on the level of the spectator's reception, it is important to go through the film's complicated plot alongside its from-time-to-time confusing style of narration. The film starts with a MacGuffin: a swiss watch that contains a microfilm listing the comprehensive information of all of the spies from both allied nations and the Soviet Union stationed in Berlin. The time is right before the collapse of the Berlin Wall, while the list contains "an atomic bomb of information that could extend the Cold War for another 40 years" (*Atomic Blonde*). Our protagonist Lorraine Broughton, an MI6 agent specialized in intelligence collection and hand-to-hand combat, is sent to Berlin to take the list home, to make sure that the information does not fall into the wrong hands, the secrets protected, and to find out the biggest mole within British intelligence, codenamed "Satchel," also on the list. The film shows Lorraine narrating what happened in Berlin in an interrogation by her superiors after the mission in Berlin. Therefore, the film operates on two temporalities as it cuts back and forth between Lorraine's flashback of Berlin and the interrogation at present. There is still a "prologue" to Lorraine's mission: The watch was initially exchanged from a Stasi officer from East German, codenamed "Spyglass," to another British agent, James Gascoigne. In exchange for the list, MI6 promises Spyglass immunity and entrance to the West. Gascoigne was later killed by Yuri Bakhtin, a KGB hatchet man who took the watch and hid in Berlin. Lorraine was asked to collaborate with David Percival, MI6's head of the Berlin station, to complete the mission while following a contradictory guideline from her superiors that she must "trust no one" (*Atomic Blonde*).

In Berlin, Lorraine touches base with Percival, a cunning, calculative personage who has "gone native" in the city and who turns out to have his own agenda (*Atomic Blonde*). Although Spyglass has shown Percival that he has in fact recited the entire list, Percival nonetheless tells Lorraine that he never knew Spyglass and has no clue as to how to find the list. While driving

Lorraine to her hotel, Percival questions if Lorraine would be able to find the list, since she entered Berlin on the 'official' account of retrieving Gascoigne's body, and her visa will be nulled soon. Instead Percival suggests that she should enjoy Berlin since this is her first time in the city. Like a tour guide, he points to the Brandenburg Gate, checkpoint Charlie and his office as he drives. Irritated, Lorraine interrupts, "I'm not here to collect postcards." Due to Percival's unhelpful attitude, Lorraine then starts to develop her own information network in Berlin. Her 'exploration' of the city has been stalked by Delphine Lasalle, a French rookie agent with whom she develops a quasi-romantic relationship; and has been violently intervened by the KGB, which leads to the highlighted fight scenes of the film, the "dance" that stands out so distinctively that a YouTube comment summarizes the film as "Charlize Theron kicking everyone's teeth in for two hours" (Kristoff). Ironically, Lorraine's Berlin 'exploration,' however under the pretext of espionage, turns out to tic the boxes of famous tourist destinations. If we count from the moment of her arrival, her 'trip' includes the Tempelhof Airport currently not in use and serving as a historical landmark; the Alexanderplatz on the way she met her contact in East Berlin; the Berlin TV Tower shouldering the rooftop where they met (Fig. 20); and the very Berlin Wall in all its graffiti-glory (Fig. 21).

Fig. 20. Still from Leitch, *Atomic Blonde* (47:11), here her contact says, "Keep your enemies close."

Fig. 21. Still from Leitch, *Atomic Blonde* (32: 22), the Berlin Wall and the Brandenburg Gate

By the second half of the film Delphine reveals that Percival was trying to set Lorraine up as Satchel—a puzzle that diverts our attention from the original secret of the watch and the list. Based on Percival's unreliable behavior and his mysterious motivation, are we right to suspect that Percival is Satchel? What quickly follows is that Percival kills Bakhtin when he resurfaces to sell the watch. Having taken the watch, Percival studies the list thus acquired under a macroscopic device. The cinematography here is that of a swift movement of the macroscope over the information of Satchel, revealing that he works with both MI6 and KGB, but leaving his name out of the field (Fig. 22).[8] The camera then cuts back to Percival who, after reading Satchel's entire information, is in a state of shock. By now, the original secret

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[8] I refer to Satchel as "he" here in order to replicate the impression set up so far by the film, since Lorraine's superiors have been addressing Satchel as "he."

embodied in the watch has been sublimated to a specific secret surrounding the identity of Satchel. If at the beginning of the film the audience did not care too much about what the list details, or cared about it only to the extent that its whereabouts determines the "next moves" of the characters; by now the audience becomes invested in Satchel's identity, since it may turn out to be one of the main characters whose actions, misleading or not, they have been following until this point. Exactly who is Satchel? If Percival is Satchel, why the shock after reading the list?
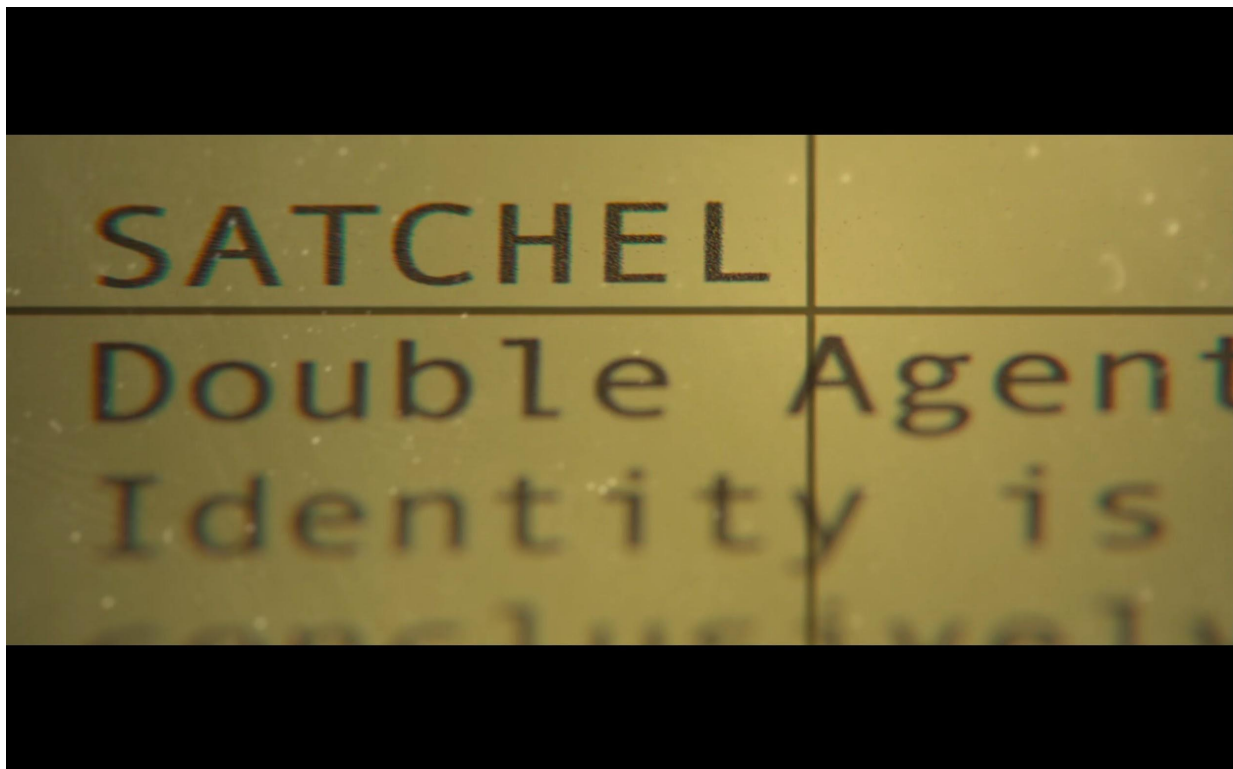

Fig. 22. Still from Leitch, *Atomic Blonde* (58:00), the macroscopic shot that reveals only partial information of Satchel.

The third act of the film shows Percival and Lorraine trying to get Spyglass across the wall. At this point Percival informs MI6 that the Stasi officer had memorized the entire list,

making him a priority for British intelligence. The plan is to use the demonstration at Alexanderplatz as cover and to walk Spyglass across personally to ensure his safety in plain sight. But Percival has already made a deal with the Soviets. During their secret meeting, he exposed Spyglass's escape plan and offered them the right amount of information (the exact content of which is kept from the audience) that would keep the balance in a post-Wall Berlin. On the day of the crossing, a squad of KGB agents sets out to murder Spyglass, traitor of the communist camp. In order to protect Spyglass, Lorraine single-handedly beats the squad to death, which constitutes an artfully done seven-minute long shot of exquisitely choreographed combat. Despite her effort, Spyglass dies. And Lorraine has barely survived from this failed mission. Meanwhile, Delphine has collected evidence of Percival's secret contact with the KGB. Percival assassinates Delphine on knowing that she holds evidence against him. Upon Delphine's death, Lorraine discovers the collected evidence and sets out to eliminate Percival and take the watch.

In a surprising turn, it is revealed during the final show-down of the two MI6 agents what Percival saw in the list: Satchel is Lorraine! With Delphine's evidence, Lorraine would frame Percival as Satchel after his death. And we have seen that she does exactly that during the interrogation after the mission. From a point in the film, her narration starts to differ from her flashbacks. And the viewers have been caught in a state of suspension formulated by the lack of correspondence of what's told in the two temporalities. The importance of the list fades out and is replaced by the secret of what happened in Berlin. Since Lorraine is Satchel, which means she collaborates with the KGB, why would they be constantly running into fights? What's with all the combative extravaganza? And since Spyglass had memorized the entire list, he must have known of Lorraine's identity. Was Lorraine really on the side of protecting him?

If not, then why all the painstaking efforts to keep him safe? What do we make of hardcore "dancing" scenes? What is this "dance" for?

At last, the film releases the final bit of Satchel's secret: She works neither for MI6 nor KGB, but, in fact, for the CIA. After her interrogation at MI6 during which she has successfully cleared herself from suspicion and framed Percival as Satchel, Lorraine meets with KGB to hand them the watch (which turns out to be a fake). While the KGB, after learning from Percival during their secret meeting that Lorraine works for the CIA, is determined to eliminate her; Lorraine skillfully manages a bloody counter-attack. An airplane waits outside to pick her up to Langley. We can thus explain, retrospectively, the rationale for the action-scenes (all of which are between Lorraine and the KGB force) in the film: the KGB has been suspicious of Lorraine's loyalty since her arrival in Berlin. The suspicion intensified as Lorraine started to establish her own information network in Berlin, which justifies their violent approach of 'inviting' her for conversation. When they discovered Lorraine's true identity before the planned escape of Spyglass, they decided to eliminate them both.

But this explanation for the indispensability of the dance-like fight scenes is far from satisfactory. It merely figures out, in a retrospective manner, a logical way of assigning different parties and the protagonist's alliance that justifies the necessity of these action scenes as part of the plot, when in fact the it is the *quality* of these scenes that is the most impressive: The viewing experience is one of confusion, of a feeling that these movements are derailing from the organization of the plot. In order to understand the film, one has to explain its secretly coded scenes not only on the level of the coherence of narrative, but also on the level of its affective engagement with the audience. This sense of derailment not only comes from the lack of information the audience holds about the true relationship between Lorraine and the KGB, but also from the neat choreography of the brutal combat, the intensive exertion of the

entire physical body on screen, the heavy sound effect of bones cracking and the 80s hit soundtracks that the agent "dances" to during the fights—all of these generates a composite cinematic moment of singularity.

Throughout the film, the MacGuffin escalates from the list, to the identity of Satchel and the related question of what exactly happened in Berlin. Each "twist" of the MacGuffin happens in a manner of discovery—the information that Percival had been trying to frame Lorraine up, or that he has a secret deal with the KGB—merely "a form of discovery, independent of what can discovered," an empty illusion that one is coming closer to truth that only reinforces the structural secrecy, that is, the audience's "relation with something unknowable and imperceptible" (Deleuze and Guattari, *TP* 193). This relation does not go away even when the film reveals the identity of Satchel and her true political alliance, since the genesis of these cinematic moments of derailment remain unknowable and imperceptible even though discoveries or revelations of secrets within the story have been made. Why the emphasis on "dance" scenes, when they could have been presented as unsophisticated actions without tampering the entertainment of the plot(-twists)? This is the film's final twist of the MacGuffin. It points to a secret with regard to the composition of specific cinematic moments and demands a way of reading that focuses on the compositional principle of cinematic image instead of narrative. The "dance" scenes transform the secret from a diegetic one to an extra-diegetic one, a secret with regard to the emphasis over or persistence of certain "pure optical and sound situations" (Deleuze, *Cinema II* 272).

Nostalgia is the Secret

In order to understand this extra-diegetic secret that the film so champions, I draw on Deleuze and Guattari's taxonomy of secrets. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, they examine how a secret, deeply

embedded in its social and cultural milieu, manages to escape from that, forming a line of flight. This resonates strongly with the transformation of the secret that *Atomic Blonde* displays, since the secret derails from its narrative context and enters audio-visual situations that the narrative itself can hardly contain. The extra-diegetic secret demands that one understand the compositional principle of the cinematic image, that is, how does the cinematic image formulate a secret. In what follows I seek correspondence between Deleuze and Guattari's taxonomy of secrets and the film's various imagerial-representational strategies.

The secret has three levels. First, it can be a "dirty little secret," a "hidden matter," a given entity (Deleuze and Guattari, *TP* 197). "The List" in the film is such a secret, embedded in the political climate near the end of the Cold War. The list determines the shuffling of international power relations and therefore directs the actions of the characters. For this reason the list represents the basic tenet of the action-image, that is, the subordination of the actions of characters to the organization of the narrative, the submission of the imagerial representation of the social and cultural context (for instance, the city of Berlin, the surveilled room where Lorraine was interrogated) to the contingency of the plot.

The second type of secret, according to Deleuze and Guattari, no longer refers to the matter of the secret, but its form. It is related to the question of "what happened?" —"not because it speaks of a past about which it can no longer provide us knowledge," but because it "places us in a relation with something unknowable and imperceptible" (Deleuze and Guattari, *TP* 193). We see this type of secret in *Atomic Blonde*'s double temporalities, the narration of Lorraine during the interrogation juxtaposed with her flashbacks. The growing disparity between the two intensifies the spectator's speculation of "What really happened in Berlin?". It puts the audience not so much in relation to a past of which the memory is compromised than to the unknowability of the compromise itself. In this way the film plays with our perception

and anchors its image in a "center of indetermination" (Deleuze, *Cinema II* 63). The imagerial regime in the film corresponding to the second type of secret is the perception-image.

The third type of secret is "the exploding of the other two," "a line of rupture" (Deleuze and Guattari, *TP* 199). "There is no longer even any form," they write. They describe this type of secret as "tak[ing] on a more feminine status":

> For women do not handle the secret in at all the same way as men (except when they reconstitute an inverted image of virile secrecy, a kind of secrecy of the gyneceum). Men alternately fault them for their indiscretion, their gossiping, and for their solidarity, their betrayal. Yet it is curious how a woman can be secretive while at the same time hiding nothing, by virtue of transparency, innocence, and speed. (Deleuze and Guattari, TP *289*).[9]

The secret is a transparent one. It is the "nothing" that secretly happens when narrating "what happened." It is an atmosphere, a momentum, a pure situation. In the Deleuzian language of the cinematic images, it is the opsign and the sosign, the image of optical and sound situation that breaks the schema of narration, that can no longer be induced or extended into an action (in the sense of the action-image).

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[9] There is a question with regard to Deleuze and Guattari's assigning the transparent type of secret as feminine: Does its transparency render it feminine, or is "the feminine" being appropriated here as an empty container for what's transparent, whereas the genuine content of "the feminine" is vacated, the question of "what inherently constitutes the feminine" being left uninvestigated. This is the question that Irigaray asks in *The Sex Which is not One*, "That pleasure which perhaps constitutes a discovery for men, a supplement to enjoyment, in a fantasmatic 'becoming-woman,' but which has long been familiar to women. For them isn't the organless body a historical condition? And don't we run the risk once more of taking back from woman those as yet unterritorialized spaces where her desire might come into being? Since women have long been assigned to the task of preserving 'body-matter' and the 'organless,' doesn't the 'organless body' come to occupy the place of their own schism? Of the evacuation of a woman's desire in a woman's body?" (141). As a response, Rosi Braidotti has demonstrated that the "becoming-women" in Deleuze, which is part and parcel of the becoming-molecular and the becoming-body without organs, could occur in a way that is also grounded in an essentially feminine condition (Braidotti, "Of Bugs and Women").

Before his death, Percival delivers a monologue that points exactly to the "nothing" that happens alongside the "what happened" in the film:

> There's only one question left to ask. Who won? And what was the fucking game anyway? [...] In our line of work, that's right up there with black holes, or "to be or not to be." [...] The world is run on secrets. Whoever has that list has power. And without it, you're just another fucking target. So what have I learned after all this time. After all the sleepless nights lying to friends, lovers, myself? Playing this crooked game in this crooked town? Filled with backstabbers and four-faced liars? I'll tell you what I've learned. One thing and one thing only. *I fucking love Berlin!* (*Atomic Blonde*)

We hear a gunshot from Lorraine as he barely completes the cry. If there is any triumphalism in the film it would only be the triumphalism of Berlin, the Cold War city as the nostalgic object. Therefore, the persistence of the snapshots of the historical landmarks (opsigns) and the 80s hit songs (sosigns) playing in the background (from David Bowie to 99 Luftballons). They are the secret at the centre of the film. It "no longer ha[s] anything to hide" (Deleuze and Guattari, *TP* 197). Nostalgia is the secret. It is not that Lorraine combats her way in order to keep a secret, but the transparent secret, the blatant exhibitionsm of Cold War nostalgia subsists on Charlize Theron's "kicking everyone's teeth in," like the secret of nothingness in the excerpt from Deleuze and Guattari that comes with the extravaganza of gossips.

What is the relation of the film's emphasized fight scenes to the transparent secret, that is, images of Cold War nostalgia? The fight scenes mark the place where the action itself becomes ludicrous and the nostalgic images and sounds that serve in the background take over,

where the regime of perception-image and action-image passes over into that of opsign and sosign. When she starts "dancing", the music (or, in one instance, the film, since the fight happens in a cinema playing Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker*) starts to play. In the "dance" scenes, the scenes of derailment, the previously established lines of secrets (the List, the identity of Satchel) explode, rupturing into an audio-visual situation of nostalgic nothingness that is nonetheless coded with secrecy.

This sense of secrecy coded in nothingness can be best described as a historical "gest." In his second cinema book, Deleuze borrows from Bertolt Brecht the notion of gest to differentiate it from posture. The gest can emanate from bodily posture. But to the extent that posture serves the purpose of narration in the order of action-image, gest refers to the bodily attitudes "irreducible to the plot" (Deleuze, *Cinema II* 192). And as in the Brechtian sense, the gest can take on social, historical and political attitudes. Deleuze lists examples in which gest "gives the body" on screen, that is, how the gest is generative of the bodily behaviors and status (Deleuze, *Cinema II* 200). The nostalgia images and music are gest. They emanate from the historical body of the Cold War and incarnate attitudes onto the body of the spy and make them "dance."

In the becoming-dancer of the spy marks the becoming-transparent of the secret. As the spy starts to "dance," she takes on the gest of nostalgia's transparent secret. The "dance scenes" are intimately related to the functioning of the nostalgia-machine and hold the key to making sense of the "non-sense" of nostalgia. The spy transforms into a dancer as it runs upon nostalgia's secret. But how can we best understand this secret, and why does it make the spy "dance"? The director David Leitch, who is formerly a stunt double on set, has a natural

predilection for dramatizing actions in his own films.[10] This may explain the otherwise

unnecessary "dancing" sequences in *Atomic Blonde,* but another question emerges: What of

the Berlin scenery and the 80s music that make them a suitable site to satisfy the director's

combative fantasy? In what ways does the fantasy of "dance" call upon the nostalgic fantasy of

the Cold War? While the "dance" in the film is a performance of pain, struggle, bloodshed and

bone fractures; the nostalgic sounds and images compose a cinematic site of pleasure for the

audience in which the characters move through with ease. The "gest" of nostalgia, performed

by a dancing body, evidently contains a paradox where the pain and the pleasure mutually

exist. In what follows, I argue that the painful "dance" and the "cheap" pleasure of nostalgic

consumption points to the inherent *jouissance* of the film, that is, a negotiation of cinematic

pleasure through pain. My analysis of a "dance" scene of the film will reveal this negotiation as

a feminine *jouissance.* The following analysis will henceforth start by translating the analytic

constellation constructed thus far into psychoanalytic terms.

A Dancer's Jouissance

"[T]he MacGuffin," writes Slavoj Žižek, "is the purest case of what Lacan calls *objet petit a*: a

pure void which functions as the object-case of desire." It is "the pure pretext […] to set in

motion the story," "a pure nothing which is nonetheless efficient" (Žižek). The MacGuffin is

phallic, for it is purely *performative.*[11] In Lacanian psychoanalysis, phallus serves a structural

function in intersubjective economy (Lacan, *Écrits* 579). It "does not function as a unit of

meaning (the signified) but as that which produces certain *effects* (a signifier)" (Johnson 464,

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[10] See *Deadpool 2* (2018) and his critically acclaimed neo-noir *John Wick* (2014).

[11] The *objet petit a* refers to "something from which the subject, in order to constitute itself, has separated itself off as organ" and it "serves as a symbol of the lack, that is to say, of the phallus, not as such, but insofar as it is lacking," that is, it is an object of the phallic function (Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts* 103).

emphasis in original).[12] "[B]y demonstrating in a story the decisive orientation which the subject receives from the itinerary of a signifier," the MacGuffin reveals that "it is the symbolic order which is constitutive for the subject" (Lacan, "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" 40). In other words, how one relates to the phallus, the empty signifier is "a performance [that] we play in order to generate some kind of recognition of ourselves on the part of the [symbolic order]" (Flisfeder 145). In the film, the characters receive from "the List" the orientation of their missions. This constitutes the first level with which we can read the "dance" scenes as a *performance* in the phallic order: they are the necessary fights to retrieve the list, whose content is kept from us (an empty signifier), but "whoever has that list has power."

Except that very soon the symbolic order of the film (the organization of the plot) disintegrates, as the spectacular dance scenes challenge their own logical submission to the film's narrative. The plain-sightedness of "the List" is superseded by the plain-sightedness of nostalgia, of the nostalgic images and music. We have not yet figured out this second level where the performance features the feel-good "dancing" to the nostalgic music, Charlize Theron "kicking everyone's teeth in" while the music plays as her personal anthem. In the "dance" scenes we glimpse "the politics of dancing," as the eponymous song by Re-Flex plays in the background:

The politics of dancing

The politics of, ooh, feeling good

The politics of moving, aha

If this message's understood

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[12] We find this summary by Barbara Johnson of Lacan's reading of the letter in "The Purloined Letter" applicable to the film's MacGuffin here, which is a secret in plain sight.

It is the politics of dancing that we are after, the psychic economy that points to the subject's performance tied to nostalgia as another kind of "order" that we cannot positively describe except through indirectly citing it as an intrusion of the nostalgia images and sound over the existing order of the plot. In order words, the intrusion of nostalgia reconstitutes the psychic order as well as the way that the subject relates to it.

The psychic economy is demonstrated in a critical scene where the combat between Lorraine and a KGB agent occurs inside an "industrial-cold cinematheque" near Alexanderplatz showing Andrei Tarkovsky's 1979 film *Stalker* (Brody). They are backstage, behind the screen showing the movie and serving as the backdrop of Lorraine's "dance" (Fig. 23). We hear the murmured dialogue and the ambient sound of the dropping rain from *Stalker* as well as the added, extra-diegetic percussive soundtrack accompanying their fight. The choreography of the fight is exciting, but far from graceful. Lorraine pierces her opponent's face with a small knife (the phallus?). And in a retaliative logic, the opponent then kicks her right through the cinematic screen: She becomes the knife to the face of the cinema (Fig. 24). Has she become the phallus, in accordance with the Lacanian assignment of sexual difference that man wants to possess the phallus whereas woman wants to become it? Does this constitute the pleasure of watching the film and specifically this scene? The pleasure of a woman's self-recognition in the symbolic order?

Fig. 23. Still from Leitch, *Atomic Blonde* (45:18), the "dance" scene against a movie screen.

Fig. 24. Still from Leitch, *Atomic Blonde* (45:51), Lorraine punctures the movie screen.

Before continuing with this scene, it is necessary to examine the nature of the psychic pleasure of cinematic spectatorship. I draw again on Žižek's analysis of film, particularly his argument that the pleasure of watching film functions as a type of psychological bribery, what he calls the enjoyment (*jouissance*) of cinema. Matthew Flisfeder summarizes the mechanism: desire is the subject's "search [that] generated its own object" (143). The *objet petit a* describes the function of the object-cause of a subject's desire and is therefore "the very kernel of the subject's being" (143). In other words, the being of a subject is desiring itself, the search for enjoyment. But true jouissance is impossible, since the inexhaustive desiring is the result of the an originary lack that one would never make up (therefore the necessity of the phallus as an empty signifier). Therefore, in reality, the satisfaction one gains from obtaining the object of one's desire is only a "surplus-jouissance" that sustains the virtual function of desiring (Lacan,

The Other Side of Psychoanalysis 19). In a similar way, "cinema [...] stage[s] another Symbolic fiction within which the subject/spectator produces its own surplus-enjoyment in the process of searching for enjoyment itself" (Flisfeder 143). The spectators engage in a process of psychological catharsis in making up for the gap between the signifier and the signified on the screen. This is the pleasure we gain in watching the espionage film. The withheld information of "the List" is the gap between the signifier (the secret) and the signified (characters' actions) that we fill up in our pleasurable search for truth.

But the pleasure of watching Lorraine "dancing" to the nostalgic images and music is of a different kind. The "dance" scenes indeed mark the discrepancy between the signifier and the signified, between the narrative-context and the combative actions that exceed, on a visual-affective level supposedly constitutive of the narrative-level, the plot's prescription. But this discrepancy does not function as a gap to be filled in. It is not an absence or lack, that is to say, it is not of the phallic order, but rather, it functions as an *excess*. We, as viewers, take pleasure from this excess. How do we understand this pleasure that consists of both the superficial consumption of nostalgic style and of a woman's body; and the uneasiness of the bodily assertion, the violence that is excessive, that eclipses the narrative, yet poses as the mystery that further motivates our search for truth and for enjoyment?

In "Encore," Lacan proposes a feminine jouissance, "a jouissance of the body that is [...] beyond the phallus" (Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality* 74). Irigaray develops it into a jouissance of dance, of the little girl accommodating the other that is in her, the excess that she encounters in the process of her ego-formation:

The girl has the mother, in some sense, in her skin, in the humidity of the mucous membrane, in the intimacy of her most intimate parts, in the mystery of her

relation to gestation, birth, and to her sexual identity. (Irigaray, "The Gesture" 133)

She dances, thereby constructing for herself a vital subjective space [...] a way of creating for herself her own territory in relation to the mother. [...] She plays with this gestural territory and its limits (Irigaray, "The Gesture" 132-3)

Our enjoyment in watching the dance scenes is such a dancerly jouissance. Eluned Summers-Bremner concretizes this enjoyment by explaining the pleasure that comes from the pain and failure of her dance practice. Her pleasure in perfecting her body gestures according to the ideal image, in submitting herself to the repetitions of contortion and imperfection, cannot be explained by Lacanian surplus-jouissance that "repetition is comforting because it provides a way to give form to [...] a boundless field of imagined pleasure of sensation [...] a way of managing our desire"—in other words, by giving it a phallus (Summers-Bremner, 97). Instead, the pleasure comes from accommodating the pain and the excess of her gestures reflected in the studio mirror, from establishing "relations of proximity" with the alterity within that "require[s] continual negotiation":

[It] involve[s] less the need to control the boundaries of the self than the need to retain a sense of connection to the maternal realm. Thus a women "addicted" to ballet dancing, despite her better judgment [...] could be said to be engaged in a process of reimagining and embodying the passage from a place of maternal "safety" retrospectively imagined to one of the risks and dangers that constitute the future and the present. (Summers-Bremner 105)

This describes our enjoyment in watching the dance scenes. Our pleasure comes from accommodating these scenes of derailment without erasing the "danger" they pose to the integrity of the film. They demand a process of our negotiation with their surplus of signification.

These dance scenes together with the nostalgia images and music pose to us as the surplus of signification—the extravagant, nostalgic objects, the transparent secret cannot be assimilated into the plot. They do not so much designate a site, an ambience, or a passion contingent to the plot than manifesting a compulsion or imposition of the historical gest. The pleasure of watching Lorraine "dancing" to the music is our pleasure of consuming the nostalgic music projected onto her body: "the attitudes of [her] body continually refer to a musical gest to a higher linkage" (Deleuze, *Cinema II* 195). The higher linkage is Cold War history itself. I hold a speculation: our consumption of nostalgia style, of this connection to history as the higher linkage can therefore be understood as "a sense of connection to the maternal realm." This means that the nostalgia film embodies our psychic relationship with history in the form of the maternal linkage, which is symbolized by the umbilical cord. We now return to the critical "dance" scene where we stopped.

The "dance" of Lorraine in front of the screen is a literal metaphor of our enjoyment of watching the film. In many ways, this scene embodies a microcosm of the film and a meta-commentary of the psychic economy of nostalgia cinema: it portrays a combat between spies in front of a film screen playing *Stalker*. The story of *Stalker* is set in a precarious, wish-granting yet life-threatening area called "the Zone"—in short, an area that could deceive you—which reviews of *Atomic Blonde* have noticed to signify the Cold War city of Berlin itself, as "a Wild West-style frontier where anything goes and everything can kill you" (Abrams, "Atomic

Blonde"). In this way the scene is an analogical summary of the entire film of *Atomic Blonde*: espionage against the backdrop of Cold War Berlin. On the other hand, the cinematic screen playing *Stalker*, a film from the past, is effectively what Deleuze calls "the sheet of past" (Deleuze, *Cinema II* 99). And Berlin is simultaneously a city of history abundant with images and sounds of pastness, of the transparent secret—a place, like "the Zone," where "nothing goes and everything matters" (Brody). Therefore, this scene portraying the "dance" to the "sheet of past" also represents the spectators' psychological engagement with the gest of pastness, that is, our enjoyment of nostalgic styles. And the "dance" of Lorraine showcases our desiring mechanism in relation to the nostalgia film.

That Lorraine is kicked through the movie screen is a literal demonstration of Roland Barthes' *punctum*, the "element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me," the viewer, with the physical pain and the slight humiliation that it delivers (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 26). What is a punctum? Barthes writes that it is the very *objet petit a* itself, the "part object" that "occurs in the field of the photographed thing like a supplement that is at once inevitable and delightful" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 47). While a Lacanian reading might read the punctum here as the phallus, I read it otherwise: "the phallus erected where once there was the umbilical cord" (Irigaray, "The Bodily Encounter" 38). The absence made on the film screen symbolizes the phallus, the empty signifier, the secret, "the List" that "becomes the organizer of the world […] in the place where the umbilical cord, the first bond with the mother, gave birth to the body of both man and woman" (Irigaray, "The Bodily Encounter with the Mother" 38). That the male, Soviet agent kicks Lorraine through the screen is a purely retaliative act after he rejects "the first bond with the mother," that is, the knife that Lorraine sticks to his face. He replaces the umbilical cord with the phallus.

Barthes writes that the punctum carries the signature of time (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 94-7). Indeed, the punctum here carries what Deleuze and Guattari call "memories of the secret":

> The secret relates first of all to certain contents. The content is *too big* for its form [...] or else the contents themselves have a form, but that form is covered, doubled, or replaced by a simple container, envelope, or box whose role it is to suppress formal relations. (Deleuze and Guattari, *TP* 286, emphasis in original)

"The secret," that transparent secret, "relates first of all to certain contents," that is, in this film, memory of the Cold War history. "The content is too big for its form [...] or else the contents themselves have a form"—the form is that of the umbilical cord. "But that form is covered, doubled, or replaced by a simple container, envelope, or box whose role it is to suppress formal relation"—the phallus is the replacement. Therefore, the punctum suggests the phallic replacement of a memory culture whose relation to history is symbolized by the maternal linkage, which is indicative of the formal relation between "the List" and the transparent secret of the film: "the List" is the imposed containment of the transparent secret that explodes and leaks out everywhere. Despite the film's pretension to subsume the scenes of "dance" as the nostalgic gest under its plot, the transparent secret nonetheless subsists. The transparent secret is a secret related to memory, a secret from time. No wonder that "the List" is carried in a watch: the form whose significance is suppressed by "the List," the secret of time encased by a much simpler container that cannot really contain it.

Nostalgia has a body. Its body resembles the historical condition of the maternal body: repressed, contained, enjoyed, omnipresent yet transparent. One may argue that though these

traits are bodily attitudes, they don't constitute a *body*. After all, what is a body if it can't be contained in an enclosed entity, if it leaks, if its entitic presence subsists only in its transparent explosion? In the following analysis of *Red Sparrow*, I further advance my argument that nostalgia is a bodily entity by showing that the viewers could *touch* it. If the audience's enjoyment of nostalgia is a "dance," it corresponds to Irigaray's description of the feminine jouissance:

> the movement [...] is much closer to gyration than to gesture. [...] They turn around themselves, they rise and descend as they roll themselves around themselves but they also close up those parts of themselves which are two: the lips, the hands, the eyes. [...] She is split differently in two and the object or the aim is to reunite the two by a gesture, to make the two touch again[.] ("The Gesture" 133-4)

In *Red Sparrow*, the audience experiences the enjoyment of certain moments as the touching of the two bodies: the body of nostalgia and the body in espionage.

Red Sparrow

The Body's Secret

In *Atomic Blonde*, the structural inseparability of the "dance" and the signifying system of the Cold War nostalgia is explained by the psychic exchange of feminine jouissance. In *Red Sparrow*, this maternal linkage is directly put on the table: the protagonist's spying mission is framed as the journey of her return to her mother. Although set in the present era, the film has been commented as "Cold War 2.0" (Dargis), "retrograde" (Abrams) and borrowing "Cold War

stereotypes" (Crawford). Our protagonist Dominika Egorova (played by Jennifer Lawrence) is originally the principal ballerina at the Bolshoi theatre. An accident on stage (the male lead leaps into the air and lands on her leg) ends her career as well as the state subsidized health care offered to her ailing mother. In her attempt to support her mother, Dominika is unfortunately framed up by her Uncle, a power monger at the Foreign Intelligence Service of Russia (SVR) and becomes involved in the world of espionage. She parts with her mother and studies at the Sparrow School—a "whore school" in her own words—where they train spies with skills to seduce and extract information. Later, she is tasked with finding out the identity of a mole (codename "Marble") within the SVR through his US contact, a CIA agent named Nate.

Like Lorraine who emphatically does not become the phallus, Dominika rejects the Sparrow School's teaching that she must be "the missing piece" of her target contact (*Red Sparrow*). The film shows that Dominika's actions are not entirely motivated by the obvious question about the identity of "Marble," for which she is supposed to "give herself" (*Red Sparrow*). The more profound and relevant question for her is how to get out of the State's control and regain her autonomy. Dominika's tragic turn of life started from the moment that her leg was broken. Irigaray remarks that the injuries of legs imply the deprivation of mobility and gyration, therefore the body suffers from the loss of access to autonomy and jouissance ("The Gesture" 134-5). The film contains various scenes in which Dominika is subjected to rape, stripped naked or brutally interrogated and tortured by the SVR. The Bureau attempts to extort her confession of defection through violence. All of these challenges her performance of patriotism. In *Intrigue: Espionage and Culture*, Allan Hepburn studies the biopolitics of espionage: "[the espionage genre] requires a body. If [...] the spy emblematizes disagreement with ideology, that disagreement can be measured by harm inflicted on the spy's person. [...] Political exigency is felt as bodily pain—a kind of warning, whether to desist or to preserve" (8-

9). The spy is in the danger of incarceration or elimination if standing on the wrong side of the secret that she is supposed to guard or retrieve. In this sense, the secret is tested out on the body of the spy. Hepburn argues that the ultimate secret of the espionage genre is therefore the body itself: "indecipherable, multiply storied, costumed, scarred, agonised, kinetic. The body, as a container of personality, allows emotion to register on its surface" (76). In *Red Sparrow*, Dominika's body becomes a testing valve for her degree of contestation with political interpellation. Interpreting the attitudes of the body therefore becomes the way to trace how she regains her autonomy. My following analysis will show that Dominika achieves this by finding her "gest" in the place of her lost ability to dance. The film reaches a positive turn for Dominika when it discovers her "gest," her bodily attitude irreducible to the plot but intimately related to the signifying system of nostalgic style. Like in *Atomic Blonde* where Lorraine "dances" to the nostalgic music, in *Red Sparrow*, Dominika performs her own "dance" with the body of nostalgia.

Mixed Reviews, Incompatible Bodies

Before discussing Dominika's "dance," I lay out the contradicting reviews that the film has received. These contradictions indicate that film viewers perceive Dominika's body as an incompatible body with the signifying system of the espionage genre and of Cold War nostalgia. This discussion will naturally lead to my analysis of her "dance" as a means to negotiate this incompatibility.

The critics raise questions about the necessity of the depiction of violence in the film. Before the plot-twist that comes at the end when the film reveals Dominika's plotting all along, the degree of violence that she has suffered is alarming: "The rawness of the violence is startling, partly because despite 'Atomic Blonde' and other female-driven movies, it's still

unusual to see a woman receive (and freely mete out) such barbarity" (Dargis). One critic

remarks:

> How else to get actresses [...] to strip bare [?] How about violence, sexual
>
> violence, humiliation? (It's in the service of the story.) How about an extended
>
> flaying scene? Just because Lawrence's character gets some very bloody
>
> opportunities for payback it doesn't balance out the nervous and prolonged
>
> scenes of degradation and torture, which frankly, are unessential to the plot.
>
> (Crawford)

While this review considers the plot as insufficient to support the film's sexual and violent

fantasy, the other finds the torture scenes a tried and tested, justifiable motivation for

Dominika's reprisal in the end: "in classic fashion, Dominika endures the extremes of

punishment—penance that centers on her pulverized, near-martyred body—that often come

with heroic journeys" (Dargis). A third review joins the debate and writes that "[i]t's a

Hollywood cliché at this point to have a rape or assault explain the motivation for revenge or

violence" (Gaudette).

In interviews, the director Francis Lawrence (not related to Jennifer Lawrence) states

that the film is a character story and a survival story, and that the torture scenes are absolutely

necessary for the plot: "It's a world in which the spy or the espionage world isn't glamorized,

that we actually portray the really brutal and violent version of that world" (SYFYWIRE). By

brutalizing the genre, director Lawrence tries to give the spy genre a unique tone: a tone that

on one hand relies heavily on Cold War stereotypes, and on the other hand maximizes the

violence in contrast. Besides the "honey-pot" personage at the center of the film, the matron of

the Sparrow school resembles Rosa Klebb, one of James Bond's most memorable adversaries. The "Russians" in the film are "about as movie-real as the American characters, which mostly just means that they're types fleshed out with recognizably human detailing and all the polished professionalism" (Dargis). As Dominika moves across the various spaces in the film, the audience is gradually presented with a Cold War theme park—the dungeon, the Sparrow school, the embassy, the stylishly decorated domestic spaces and the jaded urban landscape of Moscow and Budapest beaming with quaint theatricality (Fig. 25). Not only do the "Russians" in the film speak with "half-baked Red Square accents" (Crawford); "The whole movie sometimes seems like one big Russian accent" (Livingstone). Although the film is set in the contemporary period, the matron says that "[t]he Cold War did not end, it merely shattered into a thousand pieces." These pieces include the pile of disks—conspicuously nostalgic old-school computer hard disks—with which the spy and her informant exchange classified information. These nostalgic settings have a time-freezing effect that encroaches on the body of Dominika herself, who, despite Jennifer Lawrence's true-to-life performance, "maintains an affect that is both charming and flat," like her severe wigs as wooden as a matryoshka doll (Livingstone). Director Lawrence's use of the nostalgic settings and props is his way of visually perpetuating the genre's signifying system *as* stereotypes so as to present the ballerina's personal espionage story as a brutally realistic narrative incongruent to the genre. But the signifying system of the Cold War nostalgia apparently *exceeds* the function that he assigns: They are visual clichés, too cliché that they become an independent entity whose presence is too fantastic. They become a theme park, or at best a stage, instead of a living reality or situation to which the character's actions and behaviors organically respond. This fundamentally weakens his endeavour to make a more authentic representation of espionage. We see that this is also reflected in the controversy over the film's claim to realism: while some

think that Dominika turns "into a character who grows more real with each unreal scene" (Dargis); others remark that "[t]he movie plants the glimmer of a thought that Dominika is a shadow feminist taking charge of her own body and her fate, but that notion vanishes in light of the silliness and shallowness of the film that surrounds her" (James). In the latter view, the tortured body of Dominika becomes a cliché like the rest of the film's settings.

Fig. 25. Still from Lawrence, *Red Sparrow* (03:24), Dominika when she was Ballerina at Bolshoi.

In *The Subject of Torture*, Hillary Neroni argues that the contemporary view of torture reduces the subject to the body: it treats the body as the site of truth/the site to knowledge under the assumption that by inflicting pains on it the body will spit out the desired information. Such a view refuses to see the torturer as a desiring subject and the nature of the

'truth' desired (73-4). "[K]nowledge is an alibi for torture," under the pretext of which the desiring torturer "violent or decimate the structure of intersubjectivity and intimacy through emotional excess" (Neroni 85, 74). In Neroni, politics becomes the pretext for the desire for emotional excess. Contrary to Neroni, Allan Hepburn's reading of espionage that understands the body as the site of political struggle implies that all "emotional excess" are *de facto* political. The emotional excess are political effects, inscribed on and emanates from the body. More than that, Hepburn shows that the body is in fact the *precondition* for any political effect. In *The Bourne Identity* (1980), Bourne's unmistakable fingerprints are found on a glass at a murder site in New York when he is still in Paris. The actual murderer plants Bourne's fingerprints. This shows that while "[t]he body [could] disassociat[e] from itself […] the body is also required as a political effect"—a murder needs a murderer, the action of spying always entail the body (be it digitally enhanced or not) of a spy. Therefore, despite being in the shadows, the anonymity of a spy's body does not eradicate its physical persistence required by the politics itself. The figure of the spy outlines the contour of a body characterized by an invisible persistence, a transparent intransparency. In *Red Sparrow*, the humiliation and suffering experienced by Dominika, while showing the torturers' unsatisfiable desire (such as her creepy uncle's sexual fantasy), it also shows that the body is a foundational "cliché" in espionage: it becomes a depersonalized container for the political. As cliché, her body doesn't *tell*. Her body cringes and winces, but only as a response to the brutal whacks (Fig. 26). In this way the film adds suspense to her true allegiance that her body conceals. I want to emphasize that there is a flattened dimension to the representation of her body that arises from the espionage genre's inherent biopolitics that critics have failed to grasp but attribute to either the Cold War stereotypes which they don't take seriously (it's just another Cold War interrogation chamber); or the gender stereotype that they take too seriously: these scenes are such terrible

cliché, they are trapped in the sexist stereotypes that women's sexuality and body has to be consumed in a spy film.

Fig. 26. Still from Lawrence, *Red Sparrow* (01:44:04), Dominika being tortured by the SVR interrogators.

The divided reviews of the film are a result of the disarray of bodies: Dominika's proto-feminist body is incompatible with the body of a spy: in the former autonomy is willed, whereas in the later autonomy shows itself in a coerced confession. The *flattened* body in espionage is incompatible with the flat body of visual nostalgia: the latter reduces the former's experience of brutality to cliché trope. And the flat body of visual nostalgia is also incompatible with the body-in-pain of the female spy; it renders the attitude of her body wooden. But there is a

moment in the film when the tension between the incompatible bodies are resolved. In that moment, Dominika develops a gest in the place of her lost ability to dance.

Painting with Her Hands

Here is the Deleuzian question. At the end of *Cinema I* he notices the range of films in which the plot does not organically cohere with or respond to the given situations of the film's set:

> [W]hat maintains a set in this world without totality or linkage. The answer is simple: what forms the set are *clichés*, and nothing else. […] Now, what consolidates all this, are the current clichés of an epoch or a moment, sound and visual slogans […] any-third-whatever which is not an identified character. They are these floating images, these anonymous clichés, which circulate in the external world, but which also perpetuate each one of us and constitute his internal world, so that everyone possesses only psychic clichés by which he thinks and feels, is thought and its felt, being himself a clichés among the others in the world which surrounds him. (208-9)

Is there something new that could emerge from the circulating clichés? We can rephrase this question for *Red Sparrow*: What are we to make of the film when the bodies (of women, of spy, of nostalgia) don't work together to the end of an organic realism? Given the incompatible bodies which result from clichés, can we understand that incompatibility as the site from which a non-cliché arises from the perspective of which the incompatible bodies are reconciled?

Dominika dances again. She is reminiscent of her time as a ballerina when she "could paint all the audience's faces with [her] hands" (*Red Sparrow*). She manages that at the end of the film: in this dance her audience is the film's audience. The film reveals that she has been plotting revenge all along. She has set up her unnervingly 'affectionate' uncle as the mole. The film replays the previous scenes (some with an extended scene) in which Dominika's actions were simply shown but not explained: She took a cup from Nate's apartment to her Uncle's, so that the special substance (called "motka") attributed to Nate would also be discovered in her uncle's place (Fig. 27 & 28). She recited her uncle's passport number while fetching his coat for him, in order to open a foreign bank account in Vienna and has an amount transferred there as his 'commission fee' paid by CIA. She also handed the fake disks to her uncle, which he then handed up to his superior, without knowing that they are encrypted in Langley.

Fig. 28. Still from Lawrence, *Red Sparrow* (02:09:11), Nate's cup is found in Dominika's

uncle's apartment.

Essentially, Dominika fictionalizes a transparent body of the double-spy and locates that body

onto her uncle. The glass, the bank account and the disk rely on a shared body to be

narrativized as a grand counterintelligence scheme.

Visually, the film transforms from the "large form," the form in which a character's

action is represented within the larger framework of the given situation (Deleuze, *Cinema I*

142) (Fig. 29), to the small form in which a gesture implies the changing of the situation: "It is

as if an action, a mode of behaviour, concealed a slight difference, which was nevertheless

sufficient to relate it simultaneously to two quite distant situations, situations which are worlds

apart" (Deleuze, *Cinema I* 161). These scenes of revelation at the end of the film exactly present

a slight difference in the images that point to two opposite situations: Dominika transforms

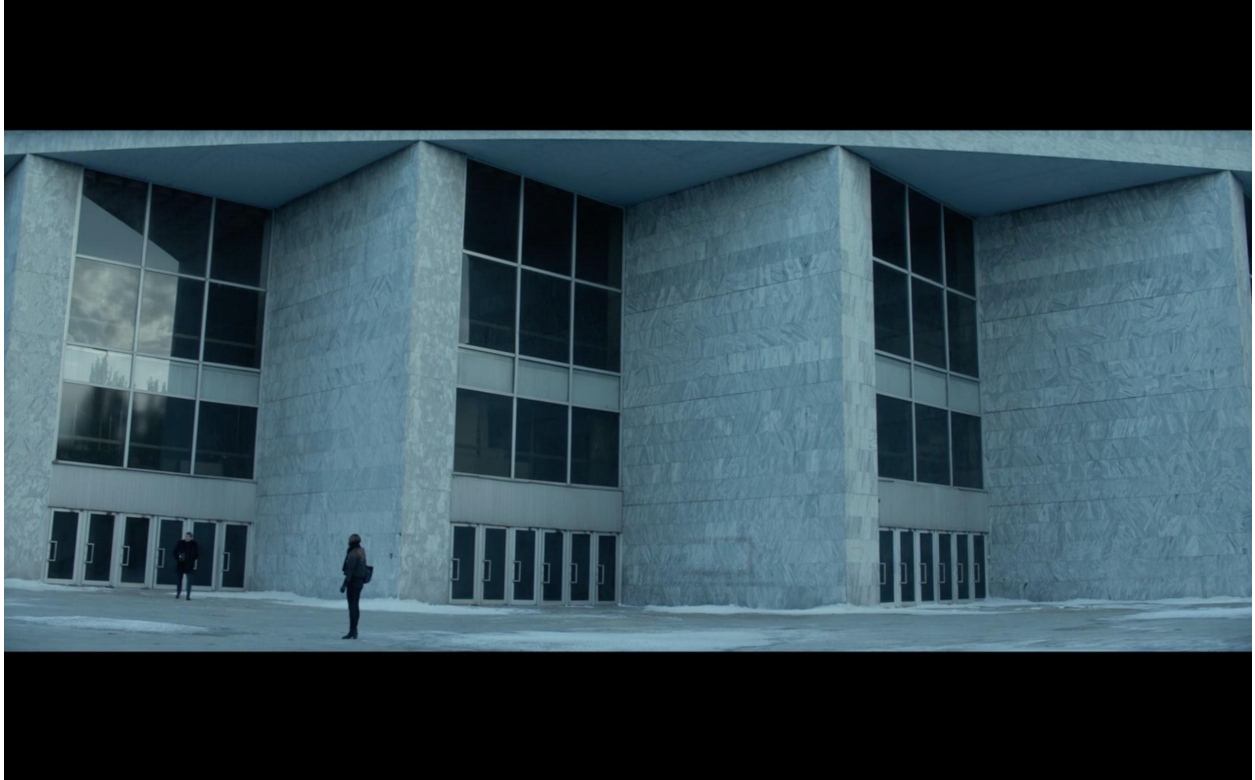from a manipulated honeypot to an autonomous agent who plays the entire SVR.

Fig. 29. Still from Lawrence, *Red Sparrow* (17:06), Dominika framed within the broader

situation.

The transformation from the large form to the small form is also accompanied by a

transformation from the primarily visual mode of reading cinematic images to a haptic one:

"[t]he beings now frequent [the audience] no longer have Visions at their disposal but instead

seem reduced to an elementary sense of touch: like the deaf mutes of Land of Silence and

Darkness, and walk close to the earth […] to the rhythm of their steps of their monstrous feet"

(Deleuze, *Cinema I* 181). In the final scenes of *Red Sparrow*, the nostalgic settings are no longer recognized as a situation, or a theme park into which the protagonist is thrown. Instead, they are re-recognized under the rhythm of the touch of her hands. The unfolding of the nostalgic sceneries across which she moves is no longer understood as being subordinated to her assigned spying mission and the real secret of "Marble," but her own implantation of a secret that reformulates the signifying system of the Cold War visual clichés in a "touch"—it is in this moment that Dominika finds her gest in the place of her lost physicality for dancing. The gest forms

> the link or knot of attitudes between [scenes of visual clichés], their coordination with each other, in so far as they do not depend on a previous story, a pre-existing plot or an action-image. On the contrary the gest is the development of attitudes themselves, and, as such, carries out a direct theatricalization of the bodies, often very discreet […]. (Deleuze *Cinema II*, 192)

The cliché of violence and nostalgia contribute to the development of the gest. Her political and historical situations signified by the stereotypical settings thus become a body to touch. The audience experiences this moment as the touching of two bodies, an experience akin to the Irigarian gyration: "She is split differently in two and the object or the aim is to reunite the two by a gesture, to make the two touch again" ("The Gesture" 134). Indeed, in the moment of visual touching, the transparent body in espionage is simultaneously juxtaposed *as* the body of nostalgia. The body narrativized by the motka-smeared glass, the financed bank account and the encrypted disks coincides, in its shared transparent intransparency, with the body of the nostalgic settings whose signifying system becomes reshuffled and recognized as the body to

dance with. The viewers' enjoyment of the scene is the two split bodies united by touch. In their touching, the viewers revel in the revelation of the transparent body of nostalgia.

Conclusion

In the previous chapter, I present the becoming-spy of the dancer as the emergence of historical subjectivity through the replacement of the dancer's hand with the spying eye. In this chapter, the eye reassumes a tactile function and our visual pleasure of nostalgic style is a tactile desire to history. With my analysis of *Atomic Blonde*, I demonstrate that we enjoy nostalgia images and sounds in the manner of a dancerly, feminine jouissance. If nostalgia has a body then it assumes the same historical-political position as the maternal body—a persisting, transparent secret.[13] With the analysis of *Red Sparrow*, I further my argument by showing that nostalgia has an irreducible presence and that its bodily entity is felt by touch. Thematically foregrounded in the question of a dancer's autonomy and her reunion with the mother, the film presents its moments of revelation in a "visual touching," in which the dancer-spy regains her access to autonomy. The audience shares her dancerly jouissance in the discovery of the transparent body of nostalgia. Both films feature a becoming-dancer of the spy. In *Atomic Blonde* Lorraine "dances" while fighting; in *Red Sparrow*, Dominika learns to "dance" again and makes espionage a dance by making the bodies touch. In the becoming-dancer of the spy, the films present nostalgia as a transparent body to touch and to dance with.

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[13] I am aware of the 'risk' of this argument, for it forms a tacit equation not only of the body without organs with the maternal body, but also of the postmodern representations with the feminine 'attitude,' which is a position that many critics of postmodernity often take. As I have written in my introduction, Creed and Redstone question the sexist connotations of such criticism. Deprecations aside, there has not been any substantial analysis of this 'feminine' desire. There is a difference between learnt negation and ignorant denial. This chapter is an attempt to learn and to excavate positive potentials of rechanneling the desire to productive and creative strategies of historicizing.

The "dancing" bodies in these Cold War nostalgia films express the viewers' subjective

enjoyment in their viewing experience. Two films are far from representative of all nostalgia

films, but they reveal the viewing subjects' relation to history as the desire to a body, instead of

consumption.

Monster: Mnemonic of the Sublime

In this chapter I discuss *The Shape of Water*, the oscar-winning film that features a monster as a national secret—"the asset," as it is called in the film—and a creature to dance with. In the previous chapters I have respectively engaged with the channeling of historical experience (as an encounter with the desire of time) with the bodies of the characters, and the bodily attitude that accounts for the viewers' enjoyment in watching nostalgic films (as a desire *to* history). With this chapter I demonstrate that nostalgic aesthetics is an embodiment of the director's bodily experience in the past. I argue that the figure of the monster embodies a radioactive, molecular sublime that shapes the film's watery nostalgic aesthetics. This aesthetic is the cinematic *techne* that constitutes the characters' becoming as historical agents that undoes the dominating, molar mode of the mnemonic system of the nuclear sublime. From the body of the director, to the body of nostalgia and of the characters, the body serves as an aesthetic category that nurtures new historical agency, that is, the body as the interpreter and maker of history.

Reviews of *The Shape of Water* applaud it as 'nostalgia done right' for borrowing the past to address the social issues at the present. When asked why he sets the film in the Cold War, director Guillermo del Toro replies:

when America talks about "Make America Great Again," it's talking about 1962, the end of Camelot, the peak of the promise of the future, jet-fin cars, super fast kitchens, television, everything that if you're white, Anglo-Saxon, heterosexual, you're good. But if you're anything else, you're not so good. Then when Kennedy is shot and Vietnam escalates, and the disillusionment of that dream occurs, I don't think that has healed. We're living in a time where the one percent has

created a narrative in which they are not to blame. Who is to blame is them,

quote unquote, the others, Mexicans, the minorities. (Keegan)

The film stars Sally Hawkins as the deaf janitor Elisa Esposito at a governmental aerospace laboratory in Baltimore. She falls in love with a dangerous and mesmerizing amphibian creature (Doug Jones) captured from the Amazon river by the sadistic Battle of Pusan veteran Colonel Richard Strickland (Michael Shannon). The creature is capable of alternating between two entirely separate breathing mechanisms that would aid the research on accommodating the human body in space and therefore would give the Americans an edge over the Soviets in the Cold War's space race. On overhearing Strickland and his superior General Hoyt's plan to vivisect the creature, Elisa rescues him with the help of her closeted neighbour Gilles (Richard Jenkins) and her African American co-worker Zelda (Octavia Spencer). While the film promotes a form of social solidarity, there are critics that wonder if the message of the film "comes through too loud and too clear" as the film depicts "[Strickland's] masculinity at its most malevolent and toxic" and "Elisa and her band of outsiders suffer under the yokes of homophobia, racism, intimidation and self-righteous intolerance" (Hornaday).

This is not an unwarranted doubt, since, as Jack Halberstam observes, "it is becoming impossible to tell the difference between prejudice and its representations" in postmodern films (167). Even with a celebrated representation of the monster, it has been increasingly hard to make genuinely 'monstrous' work that does not offend: "[b]y openly engaging with such representations [of the monster], we may, at the very least, hope to counter the negativity associated with differential embodiment, *but that is not enough*" (Shildrick 169, emphasis in original). The figure of the monster or the representation of monstrosity is somehow twice removed from the order of discourse. Michel Foucault considers the monstrous force as lying

in the madman's speech. Although today we are more "on the alert" to attend to his (or more possibly, her) speech:

> he was only symbolically allowed to speak [...] he played the role of truth in a mask. [...] even if the doctor's role were only that of lending an ear to a [monstrous] speech [of the madman] that is free at last, he still does this listening in the context of the same division [between reason and madness]. He is listening to a discourse which is invested with desire, and which [...] is loaded with terrible powers. If the silence of reason is required for the curing of monsters, it is enough for that silence to be on the alert, and it is in this that the division remains. (Foucault "The Order," 54)

Del Toro's idea of interspecies romance was mad for the time when he was a child. Despite the film's critical acclaim, it still appears 'mad' for many others today who have wondered if the film constructs its Cold War theme park only to deliver a very politically correct message. Therefore, we must try, as Jacques Derrida writes, again in the gesture of a doubled distance: "to conceive of the common ground, and the difference of this irreducible difference [in the] terrifying form of monstrosity" (Derrida 293).

 A related question ensues: Doesn't del Toro engage with the Cold War history merely as a plot device (or even, a pretext for the nostalgic visuals) to stage his modern allegory of social solidarity, even though he debunks the myth of the past *with* another, cinematic, mythic version of that past? The question becomes all the more striking if we consider del Toro's distortion of the historical calendar: The newsreel on television shows footage of the Birmingham riot where the protesting African Americans were firehosed by the police. The

event happened in early May 1963, indeed as the narrator of the film describes the time was at "the last days of a fair prince's reign," that prince being John F. Kennedy, who would be assassinated in November. However, Elisa's wall calendar clearly gives us the exact date of the creature's return to nature: October 10, 1962, six days prior to the beginning of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Elizabeth Jane Garrels argues that "[b]y tweaking history, del Toro has placed his romance of a 1960s Cinderella and a beautiful male water god at the dead center of a real-life brush with annihilation for the human race" (16). But she also notices that "the film purposely creates this super-charged historical backdrop only to proceed to distract the viewer's attention away from it" (16-7). With my analysis, I intend to show that the film's densely packing the series of historical events sets the nuclear annihilation as a historical horizon and reimagines, through the nostalgic aesthetics of the radioactive sublime, a form of social solidarity that the spirit of the civil rights movement championed. Far from appropriating history (even for addressing toxic politics of the present), the film explores the internal connection (and I would also say the bodily dimension of that connection) of its collage of historical events and pictures social solidarity as a matter of *historicizing differently*.

The Monstrous Sublime

I start with describing the amphibian creature. The Cold War monster, as it turns out, more likely resembles the shape of nuclear reaction than the shape of water. The Cold War was never short of cultural imaginaries of nuclear monsters from the water, from the franchised monster Godzilla to the radiation-mutated giant octopus from *It Came from Beneath the Sea* (1955). Del Toro takes inspiration from *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954), which features a geology expedition in the Amazon that uncovers fossilized evidence of an ancient amphibian creature from the Devonian period that could provide an evolutionary link between land and

sea animals. As Adam Piette shows, radioactivity shares an affinity with the archeological deep time in the public imagination during the Cold War. It was with the development of radioactive isotope dating of ancient rock formations that the geologist J. Laurence Kulp stumbled upon the radioactive fallout effect of the preceding nuclear tests (Piette 102). The possibly contaminated underground water welling up from the abandoned salt mines where radioactive wastes were stored became a source of fear deeply imprinted on people's psyche (Piette 105). What the scientists in *The Creature from the Black Lagoo*n discover in the fossil is in fact the evidence of the monstrosity of nuclear radiation itself. The Black Lagoon was an unconscious reservoir for radioactive fear in the public mind. From there was born the prototypical creature of del Toro's Cold War reimagination. Del Toro recalls that "the sentimental moment" for him while watching the original film was

> where the creature swims under Julie Adams in a white swimming suit. Three things awakened in me—one, Julie Adams [...] That's why this is my first movie that has full-on sexuality. The second that awakened was a [sic] Stendahl syndrome. There was something unassailable in that movie that I could not express. I got overwhelmed with beauty. And the third thing is, I felt a longing in my heart that I could not name. I kept thinking I hope they end up together and they didn't. So this is me correcting the cinematic mistake. (Keegan)

Del Toro replicates his sensation of that beautiful cinematic moment (Fig. 30) in his own film when Elisa and the creature touch and embrace each other (Fig. 31). A rippling sensation spreads across the creature's body, which embodies del Toro's own sensation while watching

Julie Adams (actually stunted by Ginger Stanley) through the lens of the underwater camera that aligns his point of view with the creature's.

Fig. 30. Still from Arnold, *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (28:57), Ginger Stanley swims in the lagoon.

Fig. 31. Still from del Toro, *The Shape of Water* (01:32:07), Elisa and the Creature embrace each other.

Nonetheless, the rippling effect under the lover's touch recalls imagery of the explosive chain reaction of atomic exchanges in the nuclear reactor. The film's visual design portrays the element of water as radioactive. In its opening scene the camera dives into a facility in deep water that resembles an abandoned secret lab. The fluorescent air bubbles are similar to the radioactive dust, and so are the raindrops that wash the film's seemingly perpetually rainy city. The 'lab' soon reveals itself to be a domestic space long buried in the river of memory. A source of light is casted from above the chandelier, creating wavy reflections of light through the water that look like an imagery of radioactivity (Fig. 32). The boiling water that cooks the eggs (which Elisa offers to the creature as a gesture of kindness and affection) describes the thermodynamics of their relationship. The film's dialogue also hints on the creature's atomic

nature by alluding to the explosion of the atomic bomb upon the monster's escape. In one scene General Hoyt threatens Strickland to get the creature back with the fatal consequences if he doesn't:

> 36 hours from now, this entire episode will be over, and so will you. Our universe will have a hole in it, with your outline, and you will have moved on to an alternative universe, a universe of shit, you will be lost to civilization, and you will be unborn, unmade and undone. (*The Shape of Water*)

Fig. 32. Still from del Toro, *The Shape of Water* (01:28), the opening scene features the movement of light through water.

The creature from the water is therefore an embodiment of the nuclear reaction, housed in the government lab as a top national secret. Matthew Potolsky analyzes the representational structure of government secrecy during the Cold War and terms it the national security sublime. Immanuel Kant describes the sublime as the subject's encounter with an immensity that "threaten[s] to overwhelm" them (100), but in which the subject's mind "abandons itself to the imagination [of the immensity] and to a reason placed [...] and feels itself elevated in its own judgement of itself on finding all the might of the imagination still unequal to its ideas" (87). In other words, through the encounter of the immensity, the subject feels their power of reason rising above it. Potolsky demonstrates that the cultural representations of government secrecy during the Cold War are structured around an agent/individual's "privileged view" to some secret, pitted against a "mysterious proliferation" that characterizes the unbounded nature of the secret that, with a postmodern twist, only throws the subject into the awareness of their inability to grasp that secret (60). Potolsky notes that such representations recurred in espionage films where the closer the protagonist comes to the secret, the more dynamic (in the scale of physical power) and mathematical (in the numbers of proliferation) the setting becomes. We find a similar representation in *The Shape of Water*: After being attacked by the creature, Strickland staggers to the hallway of the facility that extends to an infinite length and where the lights proliferate in geometric pattern (Fig. 33). Interestingly Kant also entertains the idea of the monstrous as opposed to the sublime. The monstrous describes an encounter with the object that does *not* elevate the mind which judges the purpose of things, because "by its size [the monstrous] defeats the end that forms its concept" (Kant 83). Did not the nuclear arms race impose itself as such a monstrous encounter, for the sheer size of nuclear armament only served the purpose of preventing them from ever being used?

Fig. 33. Still from del Toro, *The Shape of Water* (18:49), Strickland is about to collapse after the monster bit off his two fingers.

The Bodily Sublime

It is one thing that an encounter is monstrous, and another thing to give that encounter a monstrous embodiment. By encasing it in the body of a monster, the film immediately transforms the experience of the monstrous into a bodily affair. The shattering of the mind (without a promise to piece them back) in the encounter with the monstrous is represented as a shattering of the body: Strickland loses two fingers. The creature bites them off. Elisa registers the similar shattering experience in her body. Clandestinely, she approaches the creature chained in a pool and locked in an industrial-looking chamber. There is a moment of exchange after she offers an egg to the creature, who then surfaces from the pool, towers over Elisa and makes an appalling, beastly roar. Elisa stands back and makes a gesture by tapping, again, two

fingers of one hand with those of the other, signaling "egg" in sign language. The monster learns to understand the signs, and this gesture becomes the start of their dance—while cleaning the chamber, Elisa would put on the vinyl records of Glen Miller or Benny Goodman and perform her cleaning chores in dance moves to the creature who longingly puts his hands on the glass of the sealed water tank, wanting to join (Fig. 34). Elisa finds a way of making sense of and communicating with the monstrous sublime that appears horrendous to others.

Fig. 34. Still from del Toro, *The Shape of Water* (34:53), Elisa 'dances' to the creature.

Neil Hertz's reading of Cassius Longinus situates the body at the intersection of poetry and the sublime. Hertz moves the definition of the sublime away from the Kantian transcendental idealism. His reading of the Longinus reveals "sublimity as a mode of aesthetic judgment rooted [not] in the cognitive powers of the mind, but rather emerges from the poetic

practice of writing the ecstatic body that is the substance of the aesthetic experience" (Lee 183).

For Hertz, Longinus' reading of Sappho's poetry considers the sublime turn as the "shift from

Sappho-as-victimized-body to Sappho-as-poetic-force" (Hertz 5):

> the elements that Sappho is bringing together into the body of her poem are
>
> precisely the names of the fragments of her natural body, seen as the debris of a
>
> shattering erotic experience [...] made to seem not only like the nouns in her
>
> poem but also like [...] her trembling. (Hertz 5-7).

Elisa's gesturing to the creature could be read as such "a transfer of power [...] from the

threatening forces to the poetic activity itself" (Hertz 6).

The film thus establishes a contrast between two approaches to the sublimity of nuclear

power by showcasing different bodily responses to the creature, which correspond to the two

sets of visual aesthetics of water in the film: On one hand, the shattering raindrops, the

fluorescent radioactive dust, or the 'stable light' that threatens to cut with its laser-precision

(think about the green neon light beams that occur as part of the setting of the restaurant that

Gilles frequents or on the street); and on the other hand, the wavy effect of light in water

simulating the movement of dance, and by extension the glowing movement-images in

televisions that alternate in the dance of black and white. While Strickland shatters, Elisa

dances. And more than that, I argue that the film frames her dance not only as a response but

also as a process of becoming through which an alternative historical agency given the pending

nuclear apocalypse is achieved. That is to say, the film's aesthetic framing of her dance

amounts to an ethical self-fashioning. Before discussing this in detail, it is important to look at

the mode of historicizing that Strickland represents, a mode described by Frances Ferguson as the nuclear sublime.

The Nuclear Sublime

Ferguson lays out a two-fold futuristic outlook associated with the commitment to the sublime notion of the nuclear crisis. There is, firstly, a tendency of imagining a post-apocalyptic future: "the effort to think the nuclear sublime in terms of its absoluteness dwindles from the effort to imagine total annihilation to something very much like calculations of exactly how horrible daily life would be after a significant nuclear explosion" (Ferguson 7). To the extent that the mind is elevated in encountering the Kantian sublime, a degree of *freedom* is achieved in that it helps the subject to identify himself and to attach his consciousness to his own individuality. In this sense, the discourse of annihilation is the outcome of a subject's search for self-determination achieved through freedom not in a positive form but "from the conditions of existence *by means of* one's non-existence" (Ferguson 6, emphasis added). To think of the post-apocalyptic future is then "to think the unthinkable and to exist in one's own nonexistence" (Ferguson 7).

A second tendency is, by contrast, an optimistic outlook of the future, demonstrated by a quote from Jonathan Schell's in *The Fate of the Earth* (1982): "By acting to save the species, and repopulating the future, we break out of the cramped, claustrophobic isolation of a doomed present, and open a path to a greater space—the only space fit for human habitation—of past, present and future" (172). The two tendencies are hinged by a sinisterly philanthropic idea. For the hope for a bright future is exactly founded upon an imagination of the humanitarian mourning of the lost others in the post-apocalyptic scene. The post-apocalyptic scene populated by the mourned death of the others becomes a sublime renewal of one's own

heroic consciousness and desire of self-preservation. The self-determination is newly found *because of* the non-existence of others. At the core of Kantian sublime is its aesthetic appeal of alleviating "the claustrophobic feeling that one has become totally conditioned by being surrounded by other consciousness" (Ferguson 8). Therefore Ferguson gives an explanation for Schell's portrayal of the nuclear threat as a "temporal version of claustrophobia": "To march off into a future free from nuclear peril is, from one direction, to free ourselves from claustrophobia, but it is, from another, merely to evade the claustrophobia inspired by the pressure of intersubjectivity" (Ferguson 9). By "the pressure of intersubjectivity" Ferguson means the existence of "more and more individuals with a claim on freedom," the populating of the other consciousness at the present that the 'subject's' mind cannot seem to over-extend to grasp (9).

The behaviors of Strickland can be largely explained by the complex of the nuclear sublime. The film sets up a story that undoes his hierarchies of values and punishes him for his self-aggrandizement. By purchasing a new car, the symbol of freedom and self-determination, Strickland attempts to break with the present claustrophobia and become the "man of the future" (*The Shape of Water*). The car is then knocked kaput by Gilles' van during the haphazard rescue of the creature. Strickland is contemptuous of the minorities, denying the recognition of the others' agencies. This costs him gravely for he has never entertained the thought that the cleaners at the facility could be the 'mastermind' behind the theft of the creature, until the scientist and Russian spy dr. Hoffstetler (Michael Stuhlbarg) reveals that. After General Hoyt's threat of both his (social) death and the atomic annihilation, Strickland rushes to Zelda's apartment to search for the creature. While with the nuclear sublime, one imagines self-annihilation for the sake of self-preservation, the film exposes the violence underlying this logic by playing its reversal: Against the backdrop of an imaginary atomic

annihilation, Strickland literally conducts a physical act of self-annihilation in order to restore

his self-determination. Preservation of the self seems to always require some form of sacrifice.

But the sacrifice has been relocated on Strickland himself. In a desperate act to regain his

moral superiority, he breaks off his two fingers sutured back that, by this point, have become

nothing but bad meat, as he speaks to Zelda about Samson's revenge on the philistines (since

Zelda's middle name is Delilah, the biblical figure who betrayed Samson) and moans

monstrously over the pain of severing his own body:

> [Samson] holds the columns of the temples in his powerful arms and crushes
>
> them. [Strickland moans in agony as he breaks off his fingers]. He brings the
>
> whole building down on the philistine [...] For us, Delilah, it means if you know
>
> something and you're not telling me, you're gonna tell me either before or after I
>
> bring this particular temple down upon our heads. (*The Shape of Water*)

As Ben Siegel concludes after analyzing the religious intertexts of the film, "[Strickland] who

had thought himself created in the image of God [becomes] a sacrificial offering" to the Pagan-

God, who turns out to be "the true deity" (Siegel). Firstly, he sacrificed his fingers, and then his

life.

Episodes of nuclear sublime were played out during the Cold War when the peace

movement crushed the agenda with that of the civil rights movement. In their scramble for

public attention, the survival of humanity became a self-righteous discourse to sideline both

the equal right agenda and the civil rights movements' own input towards nuclear

disarmament (Blackwell). Discussions were also made within the civil rights movement if the

two movements should merge, especially when the call for nuclear disarmament would situate

them on the opposite side of the government's ideological commitment thereby encumbering

their effort in improving racial inequality (Intondi 77-78). At the center of this political

whirlpool, Martin Luther King Jr., though stating that he did not hold the view of the merging

of the two movements, made clear about the two movements' shared agenda:

> Loud and raucous voices have already been raised in Congress and elsewhere
>
> suggesting that the nation cannot afford to finance a war against poverty and
>
> inequality on an expanding scale and a shooting war at the same time. It is
>
> perfectly clear the nation has the resources to do both, but those who oppose civil
>
> rights and favor a war policy have seized the opportunity to pose a false issue to
>
> the public. This should not be ignored by civil rights organizations. The basic
>
> elements in common between the Peace Movement and the Civil Rights
>
> Movement are human elements. (King, qtd. In Intondi 78).

King stresses the importance of the common ground amid differences. It is not my intention to

argue that *The Shape of Water* strictly follows the dialectical forces of the social movements,

nor does it discuss what constitutes "human elements." Both of these arguments would naively

assume the role of art (or, cultural production) as reflective of historical reality. Instead, I

argue that by devising an aesthetic of the radioactive sublime as opposed to the nuclear

sublime, the film does get us out of the entrapment of the "false issue" and presents an

alternative to approach the monstrous, twice removed.

The Radioactive Sublime

I have previously mentioned that film has two sets of visual aesthetics. One expresses the nuclear sublime and its shattering, cutting (self-)annihilating effect (Fig. 35); the other takes its denomination "radioactive" from the wavy lights, the movement of which expresses radio*activity* rather than radiation. The radioactive sublime is the sublime dance of light.

Fig. 35. Still from del Toro, *The Shape of Water* (01:29:11), Strickland 'shattered' by the shadows of raindrops.

This aesthetic has been established in the opening scene when lays of light leave wavy 'marks' in the deep-water space (Fig. 32). Interestingly, the light here also represents an investigative consciousness that probes the deserted space with a nostalgic investment. That is, *the source of the light is the director's own nostalgia*. The aesthetic of the rippling light

captures the rippling sensation of the lagoon by which del Toro found himself overwhelmed in the first place (Fig. 30). This explains why the presence of such lighting always filters the image with a *moving touch* (Fig. 36). While the wavy reflections that the lays of light make have a *touched* quality.

I argue that the film conditions actions of social solidarity not primarily through narrations of the plot but through the visual aesthetics of the light. In other words, the common "human element" is not, as Strickland would say, the degree of replicating the image of God; rather, it becomes aesthetically embodied by the presence of light itself. These are the moments when Elisa 'dances' with Gilles or Zelda. Regardless of their individual (lack of) social-political commitment, the film frames genuine moments of bonding and understanding with the presence of lighting that signify *touch*, which turns out to cultivate a new form of intersubjectivity with social-political consequences. When mopping the floor together at the hallway of the facility, Zelda discovers Elisa's change since the arrival of the creature (Fig. 38). In this scene the light reflected on the floor is rendered wavy by the mopping. I read this visual detail as the molecular grounding of Zelda's understanding of Elisa's interspecies relationship with the monster (Fig. 37). In another scene, Gilles and Elisa tap-dance together to the musical on TV—Gilles has been entirely uninterested in the news report on the Birmingham riot and has impatiently asked Elisa to switch the channel (Fig. 36). I read this scene *not* so much as showcasing Gilles' disinterest in the civil rights movement than his disinvestment in the molar mode of intersubjective hostility (the police spraying the African American protesters with firehose), the "pressure of intersubjectivity." He prefers musicals much better.

Fig. 36. Still from del Toro, *The Shape of Water* (15:27), Gilles and Elisa tap-dance to "Pretty Baby" from *Coney Island* (1943), which features a joyous dance of the Petty Grable with a horse.

Fig. 37. Still from del Toro, *The Shape of Water* (34:37), Elisa and Zelda mop the floor.

Fig. 38. Still from del Toro, *The Shape of Water* (34:42), the moment that shows Zelda's

understanding of the interspecies relationship.

In *Skin Shows*, Jack Halberstam remarks that the monstrous in postmodern film cannot

be located in a fixed figure, instead it is "a babble of voices fighting to be heard" where the skin

of cinema, the cinematic screen, "stretches too thin" (166, 7). "Monstrosity," he writes, "cannot

be limited to a body [...] it is now a disembodied and disembodying force reduced to silence

and to blindness" (177). In *The Shape of Water*, the monstrous light has become an

empowering force that sutures the skin of cinema.

With the scene in which Elisa 'dances' to the creature (Fig. 34), the film portrays a

mesmerizing experience of becoming-animal. Carrie Rohman writes about a similar experience

of 'mating' dance to an animal in her Deleuzian reading of D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*:

When Gudrun suggests that the cattle are "charming," therefore, the charm is not *merely* sexual. The cattle are not only or even primarily metaphorical stand-ins for men or male sexuality. Rather, they are charming because they invite Gudrun into an embodiment of a "mating" dance that is not only about sexuality, to be sure, but also is as much about the becoming-artistic of the human through vibrational excess and a Deleuzian harnessing of *inhuman* forces. (11, emphasis in original)

Elisa does not become the animal, but in the process of becoming-animal she embodies vibrational excess and inhuman forces that, I argue, could only be attributed to the lays of light showering her, the light(waves) themselves as the ultimate form of dance.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari consider becoming as "*an antimemory*" (294, emphasis in original). What they are against is not memory itself, but a specific, molar mnemonic system, in which

Man constitutes himself as a gigantic memory, through the position of the central point, its frequency (insofar as it is necessarily reproduced by each dominant point), and its resonance (insofar as all of the points tie in with it). Any line that goes from one point to another in the aggregate of the molar system, and is thus defined by points answering to the mnemonic conditions of frequency and resonance, is a part of the arborescent system. What constitutes arborescence is the submission of the line to the point. Of course, the child, the woman, the black have memories; but the Memory that collects those memories is still a virile

majoritarian agency treating them as "childhood memories," as conjugal, or

colonial memories. (293)

I believe that my previous analysis has demonstrated that the film depicts the failure of the

transcendent sublime: Strickland's transcendental dream of being "the man of the future" is

directly punished by the populating consciousness of the others (the creature, Elisa, Gilles,

Zelda), or, in the Deleuzian language, by the memories of the others that his "virile

majoritarian agency" treats as "conjugal, or colonial memories." This colonizing, point-to-point

system is reflected in the words of Strickland:

Now, you may think that thing looks human, stands on two legs, right? But, we're

created in the Lord's image, you don't think that what the lord looks like, do you?

[...] Human Zelda, [the Lord] looks like a human. Like me, or even you. Maybe a

little more like me I guess.

The film's visual design of the lighting provides an aesthetic alternative to this molar,

mnemonic system. The rays of moving light constitute "a line of becoming" that is not defined

by the points that it connects; on the contrary "it passes *between* points, it comes up through

the middle [...] transversally to the localizable relation to distant or contiguous points,"

forming a "block" that "carr[ies] the points away in a shared proximity" (Deleuze and Guattari,

TP 293-4).

The lighting presents an immanent sublime, a radioactive sublime through which the

subject reconstitutes her subjectivity through a poetic becoming, like Sappho, who, according

to Hertz, reconstitutes herself in the writing of the poem. Here, the textual material of the

visual poem is light. The becoming achieves utmost intensity when the objective consciousness of the light (the objective, explorative lens of the cinema that also betrays the director's own nostalgic investment) and the subjective consciousness of Elisa coincide in an image described by Deleuze as the "free indirect discourse" of cinema (Deleuze, *Cinema II* 152).

Before sending the creature off, Elisa imagines herself dancing with the creature in a black-and-white musical. The film captures the intensity of the moment through a visual transitioning of the lighting, as the camera slowly zooms in on Elisa and the light in the room dims and concentrates on her instead (Fig. 39). In other words, she has merged with the consciousness of the light. Gradually, colors fade into black and white, as a dance floor setting of Hollywood musicals emerges from the background that has been dimmed to total darkness (Fig. 40 & 41). In the ensuing dance score, the movement of Elisa's body *is* a part of the movement of light, the alternation of light in the dance of black and white. It would be, I think, a very radical and liberating move if the rest of the film had staid in the black and white, without returning from the 'fiction' to the 'reality' but instead staid with their critical indiscernibility. Regardless, the film has exhibited its potential to bypass "[t]he basic condition of cinema," that is, "the point of view of the *veracity* of every possible story" (Deleuze, *Cinema II* 148, emphasis in original). Deleuze argues that what the cinema could escape is exactly veracity as a comparative concept, or, the evaluation of the fiction against the model of the real. Fiction is inseparable not from the true, but from the "'reverence' which presents it as true, in religion, in society, in cinema, in the system of images" (Deleuze, *Cinema II* 150). It is this monstrous reverence for fiction, which sets itself twice removed from reality or the true, that *The Shape of Water* brings forth:

it is not simply to eliminate fiction but to free it from the model of truth which
penetrates it, and on the contrary to rediscover the pure and simple *story-telling
function* which is opposed to this model. What is opposed to fiction is not the
real; it is not the truth which is always that of the masters or colonizers; it is the
false of the story-telling function of the poor, in so far as it gives the false the
power which makes it into a memory, a legend, a monster. (Deleuze, *Cinema II*
150, emphasis in original)

Fig. 39. Still from del Toro, *The Shape of Water* (01:39:12), Elisa merges with the
consciousness of light.

Fig. 40. Still from del Toro, *The Shape of Water* (01:39:32), the color fades.

Fig. 41. Still from del Toro, *The Shape of Water* (01:40:10), Elisa and the creature in the dance

score.

The Shape of Water presents its minoritarian aesthetic of light as the "story-telling function" of

"the poor," and makes it into a memory and a legendary monster (recall that the monster

literally embodies this aesthetic of light, see Fig. 31). In his reading of Sappho, Longinus

admires how she rewrites her body in her poetry, which becomes "a living creature, with its

own body" and "finds its voice" (Longinus, qtd. In Hertz, 4-5). Similarly, Elisa 'rewrites' her

body in the dance of light and, quite literally, finds her voice, since the film depicts her singing

during the dance score. The aesthetic of light turns the film into a living creature with its own

body. That is to say, the film is the monstrous embodiment of del Toro's own sublime

experience of the original motion picture. Del Toro "transfer[s] [...] the threatening forces to

the poetic activity itself," which is the film (Hertz 6). And while we 'read' his visual poetry, this

bodily text, do we not re-experience the sublime trembling of his body, the wavy light, his nostalgia?

Conclusion

In this chapter I read the nostalgia film *The Shape of Water* as a poetic reconstitution of the body of its maker. The body of nostalgia provides an aesthetic strategy for historical agency as del Toro aestheticizes his nostalgia to devise a monstrous, mnemonic system in which new historical subjectivity is possible.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have investigated the historizing potential of nostalgia films by situating the selected films in the social field of desire. In the first chapter "Dance: The Movement of History," I analyze how the nostalgic visual or sound designs in *The White Crow* and *Suspiria* make use of the trope of dance to channel historical realities or experiences of history as *subjective encounters with the virtuality of time*. The historical unconscious is a form of desire located beyond subjectivity. The character's experience of social, political and historical time therefore becomes "inter-subjective" (Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 124).

In the second chapter "Espionage: The Secret of Nostalgia," I demonstrate that the nostalgic enjoyment of the audience is a form of feminine *jouissance* by reading the 'becoming-dancer' of the spies in *Atomic Blonde* and *Red Sparrow*. While the first chapter shows that nostalgia films channel historical reality as an intersubjective encounter, this chapter reveals the intersubjective economy of psychic exchange between the spectators and history, expressed respectively by the bodily attitude of the film characters and the body of nostalgia.

The third chapter "Monster: Mnemonic of the Sublime" focuses on monstrosity as a "story-telling function" (Deleuze, *Cinema II* 150). I read the monster from *The Shape of Water* as a nostalgic creature. As such, the monster is both bodily and historical. On one hand, it embodies the director's desire of reconstituting, through the nostalgic aesthetics of the current film, his own body shattered by the historical sublime. On the other hand, it provides a minoritarian politics in which historical agency during the Cold War is rethought.

My analyses show that the selected nostalgia films present new forms of desiring-productions and an alternative historical consciousness. In the place of the broken signifying chain, history mediated by the nostalgia films is desired or made with ever-new bodily intimacy: experiences of historical realities are represented as bodily negotiations of

subjectivity, the enjoyment of historical time marked by nostalgic audio-visual forms is expressed as a bodily attitude, and the reproduction of historical forms becomes a process of bodily reconstitution—this thesis thereby clarifies the bodily relationship between cinematic nostalgia and history.

In the introductory chapter I have presented the paradoxical, simultaneous ubiquity and disappearance of the Cold War memories. That the cultural life during the Cold War cannot be subsumed under or explained only by the dominant political discourse is reflective of the nature of the Cold War, during which the statuses of daily life and war are blurred. The mixture of everyday memories and war memories struggle to reach a consensus on the specific subjects that should orient the studies and public commemorations of the Cold War. The rift also manifests between the cinematic form of Cold War nostalgia and the Cold War nostalgia as a political discourse, especially in light of their concurrent emergence despite of their lack of any logical correlations. Cinematic nostalgia of the Cold War is apolitical. It cares little about the veracity of political allegiances and instead indulges in historicist representations. But it is exactly in this 'apoliticalness' that lies its historicizing potential, with which bodily negotiations of subjectivity and historical agency resist submissions to imposed political discourse. While scholars such as Jon Wiener observe and lament the forgetting of the Cold War, the nostalgia films, by appealing to the "common memory" (Lowe and Joel 14) or "implicit knowledge" (Christophe 4) of dancer, spy and monster, present a bodily, minoritarian, schizo-history of the Cold War. Not only is the Cold War not forgotten, its figures and episodes have thus been nostalgically historicized. With this thesis, I call for the recuperation of nostalgia films through a bodily approach and for the consideration of the historicizing potential of the body to address the paradox in remembering the Cold War.

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