

Transferring *Suspria*: Historicism and Philosophies of Psychoanalytic Transference

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Abstract:

Luca Guadagnino's *Suspria* (2018) aggressively foregrounds a term from the discourse of psychoanalysis, now a relic of twentieth-century philosophical and psychological thought, with which to negotiate a sequence of historical problems specific to its articulation as a remake (adaptation or reimagining) of a 1977 *giallo* by Dario Argento. The concept is "transference". Transference traverses the whole semantic field of this film text, offering a hermeneutic device that, we will show, structures its conception and execution. This interpretative tool affords us a conceptual means with which to appreciate the decidedly querulous attitude that Guadagnino's remake assumes as regards its source text. Lodged in what can be described as an antagonism over the "spirit" of a film shot in 1977 is, we feel, a profound difference of opinion over the relationship between aesthetics and politics, and thus a contest over the very concept of a film's "spirit". Argento's classic deliberately "spiritualizes" the political context of its creation, and particularly its setting during the German Autumn of 1977, in order to produce an oneiric fairy-tale nightmare about innocence abroad. The "spirit" of *Suspria* is what must be sacrificed in the 2018 adaptation, in order to rescue its material basis from the amnesia of posterity. This is a film about its own historicism and about historicism in general, and what it costs to produce a "terrible beauty" out of the violence of terror. It is a materialist intervention in the culture of recycling, and offers, as a remake, a critical reading of a film apparently immune to the principle of a remake.

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“The reality of transference is thus the presence of the past.”

– Jacques Lacan

Luca Guadagnino’s *Suspiria* (2018) aggressively foregrounds a term from the discourse of psychoanalysis, now a relic of twentieth-century philosophical and psychological thought, with which to negotiate a sequence of historical problems specific to its articulation as a remake (adaptation or reimagining) of a gaudy 1977 *giallo* by Dario Argento. The concept is “transference”. We are first introduced to it in the opening scene in Dr Josef Klemperer’s (Lutz Ebersdorf/Tilda Swinton’s) psychoanalytic clinic, when Patricia Hingle (Chloë Grace Moretz) traces her fingers along the cover of Jung’s *Die Psychologie der Übertragung* (*Psychology of Transference*); next, as the good doctor prepares to make his regular melancholic journey to his dacha in East Berlin, a student invites him to an evening lecture by Lacan – his contemptuous response, “Ah, Lacan!”, indicating his own transference; and then, while explaining the missing Patricia’s paranoid syndrome to her friend, Sara (Mia Goth), Klemperer puts his Jungianism on the table: “This is how transference happens, how delusion is made. Delusion, Sara, is a lie that tells the truth”. Transference traverses the whole semantic field of this film text, offering a hermeneutic device that, we will show, structures its conception and execution.

In Freud’s work, *Übertragung* (which also means transcription, translation, displacement) turns the analytic situation around upon itself.¹ In transference, the analyst and analysand are discovered to be complicit in a dramaturgy of desire whose wellspring lies in the unconscious of the analysand. What the patient brings to her analysis is an anticipatory libidinal *Besetzung* (interest, “cathexis”), which

will have recourse to prototypes, will attach itself to one of the stereotype plates which are present in the subject; or, to put the position in another way, the cathexis will introduce the doctor into one of the psychical “series” which the patient has already formed. If the “father-*imago*”, to use the apt

1 Freud’s interest in the idea of “transference” is on display in the founding documents of psychoanalysis. See Freud, S. (1893–1895/1955). *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume II (1893–1895) Studies on Hysteria by Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955).

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term introduced by Jung (1911), is the decisive factor in bringing this about, the outcome will tally with the real relations of the subject to his doctor. But the transference is not tied to this particular prototype: it may also come about on the lines of the mother-imag... (Freud, 1912/1958, p. 100)

Freud's dependence on Jung in this passage is telling. Jung himself will write, in his "Psychology of the Transference" (1946), that transference has "a tendency to recapitulate all the experiences of childhood on the doctor. In other words, the neurotic maladjustment of the patient is now *transferred* to him" (Jung, 1946, p. 170). Inescapably, the analyst finds himself "cathected" by this power, which can be either "positive" (friendly, trusting) or "negative" (hostile, suspicious) depending on the unconscious memories at play. Negative and positive transference, however, are often "found side by side [...], directed simultaneously towards the same person" (Freud, 1912/1958, p.106), which is the occasion for Freud's first use of the critical term ambivalence. Freud further remarks that "the transference itself is only a piece of repetition, and [...] repetition is a transference of the forgotten past not only onto the doctor but also onto all the other aspects of the current situation" (Freud, c.1914/1958, p.151). Transference stages the present, ambivalently, as a compulsive repetition of the past it has forgotten. This, we submit, is something that needs to be kept firmly in mind when approaching Guadagnino's remake of *Suspiria*.

Ambivalence saturates Guadagnino's *Suspiria*. Its screenwriter, David Kajganich expresses a marked dislike (Kajganich, as cited in Yamato, 2018) for the original *Suspiria* (Dario Argento, 1977) and, along with cinematographer Sayombhu Mukdeeprom, singles out its "narrative aspect" (Mukdeeprom, as cited in Hunt, 2017) for scorn. The very naivety and abstraction of Argento's film – its fairy-tale structure yielding an oneiric nightmare about innocence abroad² – justifies its celebrated

2 Argento's casting of Alida Valli in the role of Miss Tanner in *Suspiria* might be read as a reference to fascist-era Italian cinema. By and large, however, Argento's films, with the exception of the historical comedy *The Five Days of Milan* (Dario Argento, 1973), rarely offer much overt political commentary. Argento is coy and vague when pressed on politics and political history. This is the case when it comes to the political climate in Europe during the late 1970s. "I don't know if my movies were influenced by that climate, or were born exactly because of it. Certainly the atmosphere was stifling and I believe it was impossible not to feel that. [...] in a moment of great social tension, I did films even more tense. [...] I expressed a growing fury." Dario Argento, in Mauro Giori, *Homosexuality and Italian Cinema: From the Fall of Fascism to the Years of Lead* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p.193.

“assault on the senses” through colour, noise, and camera angle, but is predicated on a repression of contemporary political materials (it is set in Freiburg im Breisgau³ during the “German Autumn” of 1977) that nowhere register directly on the screen.⁴ Guadagnino and Kajganich respond by *analysing Suspiria’s* hysteria: to restore to its “complex” the historical conditions that made it possible, to expose the social and political matrix out of which Argento’s giddy abstractions emerged⁵; a decision that entails Guadagnino’s abandonment of those remarkable aesthetic qualities – colour, above all – that distinguished the original.⁶ Guadagnino holds publicly to a nostalgic veneration for his countryman’s lurid vision, but Argento himself has declared the homage a “betrayal” of his vision. “There is no fear, there is no music. The film has not satisfied me so much” (Argento, as cited in Nordine, 2019). What is all this but a classic instance of Lacan’s version of the transference: “transference

3 Linda Schulte-Sasse reasons that Argento’s decision to set *Suspiria* in Freiberg allows him to comment on Nazism. “The misplacement of the square with its neo-classical architecture in the quaint, medieval crampedness of Freiburg is significant because it recalls a very different moment of German history, National Socialism, which got its start in Hitler’s infamous 1923 beer hall putsch.” Linda Schulte-Sasse, “The ‘Mother’, of All Horror Movies: Dario Argento’s *Suspiria* (1977),” *Kinoeye: New Perspectives on European Film* 2. 11 (June 11 2002).

4 L. Andrew Cooper postulates that Argento’s decision to set *Suspiria* in Germany “is a subtle way to suggest the Three Mothers’ fascistic plans for world domination.” L. Andrew Cooper, *Dario Argento* (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2012), p.110.

5 “Luca mentioned that he wanted to set the film in 1977 and I thought that was perfect, because we get a chance to bring in all of the political upheaval that was going on in Germany at the time – the world around the coven – into the film. Therefore, the scope will be bigger and we can try to populate the film with people – instead of people in a kind of nightmare logic – people in a real world who are dealing with these extraordinary developments.” Qtd. in Kate Hagen, “The Black List Interview: David Kajganich on *Suspiria*,” *The Black List Blog* (Oct. 27 2018).

6 Aja Romano writes convincingly on Argento and Guadagnino’s respective cinematic color palettes. Whereas Argento’s *Suspiria* is “one of the reddest movies ever made”, Guadagnino’s adaptation is “conspicuously devoid of bright colors, cast instead in deep earth tones for nearly its entire runtime.” The bright red that we tend to associate with Argento’s original is deliberately withheld in Guadagnino’s version. “By withholding it until the very end,” Romano adduces, “Guadagnino transforms the red that foregrounded Argento’s *Suspiria* into a plot point [...]. And where Argento’s use of color was partly fetishistic, indulging in a gleeful orgy of violence, Guadagnino uses it to argue that violence – specifically violent social revolution – is not only cathartic but necessary and even inevitable.” Aja Romano, “How *Suspiria* turns the color red into a plot point,” *Vox*, Nov. 9 2018.

always has this same meaning of indicating where the analyst goes astray” (Lacan, 2011, p. 78)?

Our argument here is that Guadagnino and Kajganich, alive to their own ambivalence in the cinematic transference, take it as an opportunity to “go astray” and pry open a lively historical space in the “1977” reconstructed for their film, which they populate with several other transferences. These include, but are not restricted to: the sense that the Germany of 1977 was engaged in its own unconscious “compulsive repetition” of 1933–45; the political aesthetics of the avant-garde on the cusp of a depoliticized postmodernism; the last gasp of militant leftist politics at the end of the passionate sequence that Badiou christened “the century” (Badiou, 2007, p. vii); the schism between Jungian and Lacanian constructions of psychoanalysis; the wall between East and West Berlin; between the Second and First World Wars; and the very idea of remakes and adaptations as drivers of the present film industry. But all this is immediately subject to the dynamics of the transference. The latent but now activated “unconscious content” of Argento’s hysterical film are projected onto Guadagnino’s film, “owing to the inductive effect which always emanates from projections in greater or lesser degree. Doctor and patient thus find themselves in a relationship founded on mutual unconsciousness” (Jung, 1946, p. 176). The earlier film’s deep investment in Jungian “unconscious imagos” – specifically mother-imagos – and in transference’s “direct confrontation with the daemonic forces lurking in the darkness [...] the primeval chaos” (Jung, 1946, p. 175), finds itself projected onto Guadagnino’s work. The later film’s austere analytic counter-transference, “defined as the sum total of the prejudices, passions and difficulties of the analyst” (Lacan, 2011, p. 78), its Lacanian interest in “real world” psychic blockages, politics, and history, may or may not have been able to “define, in terms of longitude and latitude, the coordinates [that] the analyst must be able to attain simply in order to occupy the place that is his, defined as the place he must offer up as vacant to the patient’s desire in order for the latter to be realized as the Other’s desire” (Lacan, 2011, p. 130); but in any event, the “desire” of Argento’s film remains an unruly and disruptive element in the unfinished exchange that characterizes this particular clinical – and filmic – session.

Transference A: Between Politics and Aesthetics

What Patricia, a dancer/activist, wants resolved in her sessions with Dr Klemperer is the disjunction of her two callings. As Klemperer explains to the dancer Sara in the Tiergarten café, Patricia’s self-division between political and artistic commitments is construed as a competition between

Jungian “mother-imagos”. “Mother Markos, Mother Meinhof; the dance rehearsal, political action. These two areas in Patricia’s life were of equal importance.” The avant-garde in West Berlin, represented by the modernist dance company at the film’s heart (a composite of the aesthetics of Mary Wigman, Pina Bausch, Sasha Waltz, and Martha Graham), and the arena of violent street action (the “Baader-Meinhof” tendency of the German Autumn), constitute bipolar attractions for Patricia. This tension between maternal types knows no traffic between them – between Ulrike Meinhof’s praxis of “abolishing the difference between capital and labor, without which equal rights are impossible” (Meinhof, 2008, p. 205) and Martha Graham’s “queer divine dissatisfaction, a blessed unrest that keeps us marching and makes us more alive than the others” (Graham, as cited in Mille, 1991, p. 264), there is only an impasse. To resolve it, Patricia undergoes analysis – and so transference, which conjures a *third* category, a phantasmatic frame about witches in a coven running her academy, where, as Lacan put it, the “subject fabricates or constructs something. Thus it is impossible [...] not to immediately include the term ‘fiction’ in the function of transference” (Lacan, 1952/2011, p. 130). Klemperer frames it this way: “Maybe Patricia’s fantasies about witches, they are her way of processing some other form of intrigue.”⁷ Of course, Argento’s original supplies this frame as a ready-made; in that film, too, Pat Hingle (Eva Axén) discovers a fateful secret about the Markos Tanz Academie which costs her life and provides the impetus for the fantastic mystery that follows. But whereas in that film, the witches function purely as a way of “processing the intrigue” of capital accumulation as such (as Prof Milius [Rudolf Schündler] explains, “their goal is to accumulate great personal wealth, but that can only be achieved by injury to others”), here the “intrigue” is referred back to the impasse between politics and aesthetics in Berlin during 1977.⁸

7 The figure of the witch assumed a prominent role in West German feminist activism in 1977. “‘Take back the night’ initiatives, such as the feminist protests on Walpurgisnacht, on April 30, 1977 (traditionally the night that witches celebrated with the ‘dance into the May’), aimed to empower women within the discourse of sexual violence. Feminists dedicated this night, which folklore associates with dangerous, outlaw women, to feminist protests against violence against women. They aimed to mobilize the witches’ spirit of empowerment and the collective rejection of victimhood, instead celebrating women’s strength and resistance” (Melzer, 2015, p.66).

8 Not coincidentally, *Politics and Aesthetics* was a landmark 1977 publication in English, bringing a classic selection of reflections and debates on these issues from the Frankfurt School to a wide Anglophone readership. See Adorno, Benjamin, Bloch, et al., *Politics and Aesthetics* (London: New Left Books, 1977).

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Of Patricia's two Mothers, more must be said. The presiding West German spirit of 1977 was the aforementioned journalist-cum-*Rote Armee Fraktion* (RAF)⁹ militant Ulrike Meinhof. "Growing up," Hans Kundani avers, "the post-war generation had been surrounded by silence about the Nazi past. After the end of the war, with the country in ruins, most Germans had simply wanted to forget" (Kundani, 2012, p. 12). Forgetting, however, as the theory of the transference insists, is not a matter of subjective intent. Slowly but surely, as Kundani puts it, "the ghosts of the past became impossible to ignore" (Kundani, 2012, p. 14). The Third Reich projected its unconscious demons like a stereotype plate onto 1977, and Ulrike Meinhof was its choice analyst. As early as 1961, in her *konkret* column "Hitler Within You", Meinhof was scathing of those who sought to "turn twelve years of German history into a taboo subject" (Meinhof, 2008, p. 138). Having lambasted her dissembling elders, Meinhof turned to her immediate West German peers:

The narrowing gap between the fronts of history and politics, between the accusers, the accused, and the victims haunts the younger generation. This generation was not involved in the crimes of the Third Reich or in determining the direction that was taken in the postwar period; it has grown up with and into the arguments of the present, entangled in the blame for something it is not responsible for. The realization that this generation is innocent cannot, however, be used as an instrument by those who want to refuse young people the right to have their say about history; nor does it free this generation from facing the responsibilities of the present. (Meinhof, 2008, p. 138)

The sixteen years of radicalisation that followed this diagnosis were shaped by the largest geopolitical dynamics of the period: the international student and social movements of the 1960s, the war in Vietnam, Israel and the Six Day War, Iranian politics, feminism, and the strengthening of imperial hegemony around the world. Yet Meinhof's intellectual and spiritual transference turned in the gyre of this "narrowing gap" between German past and present, East and West, whose bequest to her generation was a responsibility toward the present's contouring by "the crimes of the Third Reich" – crimes so large they could not be expiated by any single person, group, or generation.¹⁰

9 The Red Army Faction (RAF) is sometimes referred to as the Baader-Meinhof Group or Baader-Meinhof Gang.

10 If we acknowledge the significance of this process of radicalisation, we can better appreciate the intentions and activities of the RAF, as well as how such intentions and activities were understood by many West German citizens at the time. "Much as the

The title of her 1961 column chimes with Foucault's ethical reading of Deleuze and Guattari: "How does one keep from being fascist, even (especially) when one believes oneself to be a revolutionary militant? How do we rid our speech and our acts, our hearts and our pleasures, of fascism? How do we ferret out the fascism that is ingrained in our behavior" (Foucault, 1983, p. xiii)? Meinhof's position was similarly self-analysing: how do we kill the "Hitler within us"? The inert psychologism of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* ("working through the past" – an official social policy¹¹) was never going to be satisfactory, as T. W. Adorno knew. "It follows from a formulation," Adorno wrote,

a modish slogan that has become highly suspect during the last years. In this usage "working through the past" does not mean seriously working upon the past, that is, through a lucid consciousness breaking its power to fascinate. On the contrary, its intention is to close the books on the past and, if possible, even remove it from memory. (Adorno, 1959/2005, p. 89)

In Adorno's phrasing, we hear an echo of Lacan's observation about bad analysis "going astray". A forced frogmarch through traumatic memory momentarily quietens a symptom, but leaves the complex intact. There were periodic confrontations with the Nazi past in West Germany. "Yet however intense and seemingly persuasive," Jeremy Varon contends, "such encounters were only intermittent, and the reaction of officialdom and the public alike was often self-justifying and tinged with resentment at the extraordinary burden of guilt that focus on the past entailed" (Varon, 2004, p. 32). Such are the ways of "negative transference".

The "Hitler within us" is not defeated by closing the book of the past through commemoration, but (as Adorno would argue) by breaking its power to fascinate. Meinhof's work as a journalist at the Karl Wolf trial of 1964 is useful here. Wolf served as the personal aide of SS-Reichsführer Henrich Himmler. Acknowledging this, Meinhof notes that the "supporters of National Socialism, and not its opponents, are unveiling the truth about the regime. I overheard the young people sitting on the public benches wondering whether there wasn't something to National

RAF thought it could attack capitalism by killing capitalism's representatives," Jeremy Varon explains, "it felt that it could sever the perceived continuity with the Nazi past by killing what it saw as the symbols of that continuity. When conceived of as a form of antifascism, [the] RAF's killings were not only just, but heroic." Jeremy Varon, 2004, p. 245.

11 See Michelle Langford "Vergangenheitsbewältigung: Coming to Terms with the Past", in Langford, ed., *The Directory of World Cinema: Germany*, (Bristol: Intellect, 2012), pp. 204–15.

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Socialism after all” (Meinhof, 2008, p. 128). In this sense, the *Besetzung* does indeed have “recourse to prototypes, [and the ability to attach] itself to one of the stereotype plates which are present in the subject”. Transference is ineluctable, even between generations. Guadagnino, whose film opens with the anachronistic cry “Free Meinhof!” (she was already dead in 1977), has made a cognate observation about another axis power, folded together in both productions of *Suspiria* with the German instance: “Italy has always been a lab for the worst, from Mussolini to Berlusconi. I’m very well aware of the constant unavoidable fascism that is sculpted into the national identity” (Guadagnino, as cited in Rafanelli, 2018). Such sculpting proceeds according to the logic of the transference. Mother Meinhof was the analyst West Germany needed, as Italy needed Margherita Cagol. Patricia Hingle finds herself in a relation of “positive transference” with this benevolent and critical “mother-imago” whose great gift was to have smashed Hitler’s power to fascinate, until she herself died and the revolutionary organization she headed plunged – as we will outline – into a terminal crisis of leadership during the German Autumn.

The complicating factor is Patricia’s other Mother, Markos (Tilda Swinton), a rich composite of Mary Wigman, Pina Bausch, Sasha Waltz, and Martha Graham – though in fact this personification is complicated by the Tanz Academie’s own factional divisions and crisis of leadership in 1977, the struggle between Markos and Mme Blanc (Tilda Swinton). This is how Klemperer explains Patricia’s own sense of the situation to Sara: “something like a revolutionary organization with a crisis of leadership.” As it was with the Red Army Faction, so it is with and Markos Dance Company: Patricia’s implication in a dual leadership crisis is what triggers her paranoid symptoms. Guadagnino asserts that avant-garde choreographers and performers such as “Mary Wigman, Martha Graham, Isadora Duncan, and all those radical thinkers who forged a new language were [our] inspiration” (Guadagnino, as cited in Guiducci, 2018). Kajganich too. “I started with the great Mary Wigman and her break from classical ballet into expressionist dance in the 1920s, with all the iconoclasm that implies, none of which was well received by the strongmen in power at the time” (Kajganich, as cited in Guiducci, 2018). For Kajganich, it is,

not unrelated to the film to mention that Wigman was one of the choreographers to whom Joseph Goebbels was reacting with his 1937 proclamation that dance “must be cheerful and show beautiful female bodies and have nothing to do with philosophy” (Kajganich, as cited in Guiducci, 2018).

“I don’t know how aware you are of what times we lived through here forty years ago. Out of which this piece was made. We learned at great cost through those years the value of the balance of things. Every arrow that flies feels the pull of the earth, but we must aim upwards.”

This is how Madame Blanc chides the America upstart Susie Bannion (Dakota Johnson) who presumes to dance the “Protagonist” of her revealingly named masterpiece, *Volk*, on spec. Sara, Patricia’s ally and Susie’s new friend, schools the Yankee *ingenue* in the cultural politics of the Academy under Blanc: “She kept the company alive through the war; when the Reich just wanted women to shut off their minds and keep their uteruses open, there was Blanc.” Things start to get complicated here. To put the matter in the simplest terms possible: the problem is that – modeled as she is on Mary Wigman – Blanc’s alibi of “going underground” during the Nazi years is contradicted by her very perseverance with a company that, neither on the basis of its aesthetics nor its ethnic constitution, was in any danger from Reich authorities.

Lilian Karina and Marion Kant write that the 1920s and 30s were “marked by all sorts of efforts to renew dance and the art of movement, music education, gymnastics, and pedagogy in the broadest sense” (Karina & Kant, 2003, p. 11). It was at this juncture that the Hungarian-born dancer and choreographer Rudolf van Laban (1879–1958) ushered in the movement known as *Ausdruckstanz* (“dance of expression”). “As the most complex and distinctive manifestation of German modernist body culture,” Karl Toepfer infers, “*Ausdruckstanz* deeply stirred the imagination because it unfolded within a dynamic system of signifying practices whose emancipatory potential appeared limitless” (Toepfer, 1997, p. 98). Laban is quoted in Patricia’s journals, where Klemperer looks for clues to her disappearance: notations from his systematic analysis of dance movement based on fundamentals of weight or force, time and space; and with them an effective *Weltanschauung*. To Laban, *Ausdruckstanz* represented nothing less than a way of life, “a mode of action that transcended the borders of institutions and conventional distinctions between nature and civilization” (Toepfer, 1997, p. 100). Karina and Kant stress the fact that in *Ausdruckstanz*, unlike classical ballet, “Dance rested on faith. Devotion and self-sacrifice characterized expressive dance, a way of life more than an art form” (Karina & Kant, 2003, p. 102). *Weltanschauung*, or cult? Modern dance could be interpreted either way, which is how we are obliged to approach the coven in Guadagnino’s *Suspiria*.

Laban proved willing to march to the Nationalist Socialist beat, “Aryanizing” the Berlin Staatsoper pre-emptively and endorsing anti-Semitism. The same is true of Laban’s former pupil, Mary Wigman

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(1886–1973), the greatest dancer Germany has ever produced (Toepfer, 1997, p. 108). “She conceptualized her body as a medium and her dancing for subconscious drives and supernatural forces,” Susan Manning writes,

for ecstatic and demonic energies, for the abstract designs of time, space, and motion. Critic after critic wrote about how she seemed to make the space move, animating suprapersonal forces beyond her physical self, focusing attention not on the dancer but on the dance. (Manning, 1993, p. 43)

Jung’s archetypes, those previously mentioned “daemonic forces lurking in the darkness”, had cathected Wigman’s body in this chthonic transference. Laban was a close friend of Jung, and Wigman clearly understood the relationship between her art and Jung’s system.¹² Wigman’s solo dance, *Hexentanz* (“Witch Dance”), which was first performed in 1914 and revised in 1926, is, as Kajganich remarks, a “tense” (Kajganich, as cited in Guiducci, 2018) and unnerving performance, and served as an orientation point for the conception of the coven in the 2018 *Suspiria*. For Wigman as for the Markos Company, dance is a transferential ritual conducting magic through the unnatural choreography of a sexed body, “overcom[ing] the individual sphere in order to connect to the archetype” (Partsch-Bergsohn, 1994, p. 114). Magic is literally performed:

The dance presents a mythical creature who has power over those watching. The audience can no longer feel safe. She becomes the Witch and spectators are in danger of becoming bewitched by her. She is a timeless force, embodying pure power. The dance is one of a fully mature woman who recognizes the strength of her sensuality. (Newhall, 2018, p. 110)

Wigman asked later: “isn’t a bit of a witch hidden in every hundred-percent female, no matter which form its origin may have?”, noting also “some kind of evil greed I felt in my hands which pressed themselves clawlike into the ground as if they had wanted to take root” (Wigman, 1966, p. 41). “In different ways,” writes Manning, “Isadora Duncan, Mary Wigman, and Martha Graham all danced Woman” (Manning, 1993,

12 The person in whom these tendencies would be unified was dancer Mary Starks Whitehouse, who studied with both Wigman and Jung. See Marisa Helena Silva Farah, “Jung’s Active Imagination in Whitehouse’s Dance: notions of body and movement”, *Psicologia USP* 27:3 (2016), pp. 542–552.

p. 28). So it is with the Markos Academy, which admits only women and repels men from the door. But this “cultural feminism” of the all-female ensemble, opening up a utopia for female spectators (and students), was also, circa 1937, a regressive disavowal of specific socio-political differences which “allowed German spectators of either gender to imagine a cultural space where the competing visions of the left and the right did not conflict” (Manning, 1993, p. 3). Thus, by the mid-1920s, Wigman had succeeded in turning a “a small-scale family concern into a large-scale business” (Manning, 1993, p. 90) in Dresden. Strikingly, while men studied at the Dresden School, none were asked to join Wigman’s troupe. “Woman” is a Jungian abstraction that, under cover of progressive cultural politics, permits darker political energies to circulate.

“I would like dance to be central in the film, to be the secret language of the witches and the expression of their power,” says Guadagnino (as cited in Guiducci, 2018). The idea was to engage in a transference of that cogent aesthetic energy, coiled inside disturbing political shapes, into Argento’s narrative, where dance remains but a rudimentary, undeveloped aspect. The question is: what kind of power is implicit in modern German dance? The mistake would be to imagine that modern dance, like other art forms of the period – theatre, literature, painting – enjoyed some putatively “pure” dissociation from National Socialism during the 1930s – that it was labelled “degenerate” or hounded into exile, for instance. The story, as the case of Wigman demonstrates, is rather one of complicated complicity and mixed signals, as befits a medium in which the “ideological” is more directly aligned with cultic and ritualistic forms than others. The history of modern dance in Germany is a deeply compromised one, and that compromise is felt in the radically unstable corporate image of *Suspiria*’s dance academy: a militant feminist collective that hungrily eats the bodies of the young to perpetuate its own internal power structure, and in so doing masks its complicities with fascism as the benignity of a utopian enclave.

Transference B: RAF, Germany, Cinema

Guadagnino’s film is a reconstruction of a *structure of feeling* associated with the militant and militarised atmosphere that permeated Berlin in 1977. The genre elements follow from the founding premise of an elusive, fascinating, and staunchly politicised milieu, in which memory and trauma are at odds with consumerist immediacy and presentism, and where “the logic of emergence, eruption or springing up” (Bourriaud, 2016, loc. 319/2076) represented by the revolutionary avant-garde is contested by the forces of the revanchist capitalist state.¹³ That is to say, the film establishes a striking historical transference between our

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own politically demoralized present and a “forgotten past” of radical militancy, internationalism, aesthetic innovation, and desperate possibility, angling for moments of unpredictable cathexis. Berlin in 1977 was pulled between an internationalism of radical praxis and a renewed nationalism of paternal centralism and state-surveillance, and physically split by the Berlin Wall between two nuclear superpowers. Historic events placed the city at the centre of a global web of political forces – Palestine, Somalia, Europe, the U.S.S.R. – and at the juncture of two overlapping, inconsistent local time-zones: the living memory of the Third Reich and the welfarism of Schmidt’s SPD. Former SS officer and President of the Confederation of German Employers’ Associations, Hanns-Martin Schleyer, a figure straddling this temporal divide (whose kidnap is referenced in Guadagnino’s film), sums up its Gothic logic – the undeath of the Nazi past, its haunting of the power structures of the modern state. It was this dimension of the contemporary moment that motivated the second-generation RAF militants who kidnaped and murdered Schleyer in late 1977, into whose actions Patricia Hingle has thrown her passionate conviction.

The RAF was a West German group of “urban guerrillas”, led by Ulrike Meinhof and Andreas Baader, whose stated aim was to create “the connection between legal and illegal struggle, between national struggle, between political struggle and armed struggle, and between the strategic and tactical aspects of the international communist movement” (Red Army Faction, as cited in Smith & Moncourt, 2009, p. 105). The origins of the RAF can be traced back to 14 May 1970, when Meinhof travelled to the Berlin-based German Central Institute for Social Issues to interview the incarcerated arsonist, Baader. The ostensible purpose of the interview was to discuss a book project that she and Baader had arranged to work on together. But the interview was a ruse. Meinhof wanted instead to break Baader out of prison. The state sought to respond swiftly. “Within a day”, Patricia Melzer writes, “Berlin’s police initiated the largest manhunt since 1945, with Meinhof’s picture plastered throughout the city on wanted posters” (Melzer, 2015, p. 1). Sharp-eyed viewers of Guadagnino’s *Suspiria* will recognize the type of wanted sign that Melzer is referencing – Klemperer sees such a public notice on display in a police office at the start of the film’s fourth act. The social, political, and psychological impact that the RAF – who were willing to commit acts

13 None of this is to be found in Argento’s original, where the only traces of the War are the single long shot of Freiburg’s square (where the National Socialists once rallied) and a bizarre inn full of Bavarians embracing their peasant past.

of coordinated violence in the service of their cause – had on those living in West Germany cannot be understated. In Leigh Passmore’s summation, what came next was a sustained period of terrorism that captured the public’s attention and “dominated the next decade” (Passmore, 2009, p. 2).

The paramilitary violence that marked this period in West German history culminated in the “German Autumn” of 1977. When people speak of this period, they typically have three interrelated occurrences in mind: the RAF’s assassination of the high-ranking banker Jürgen Ponto, Schleyer’s death, and the hijacking of the Lufthansa aircraft *Landshut*. Schleyer was kidnapped by a RAF “commando unit” on 5 September 1977. The commandos sought to exchange Schleyer, a former member of the Hitler Youth and the Nazi SS, for the release of RAF members being held at Stammheim maximum security prison in Stuttgart. On 13 October 1977, members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) seized control of the *Landshut*. They, too, sought the release of RAF prisoners in exchange for the plane’s crew and passengers. We hear of the demands of the hijackers in the fourth act of *Suspiria*. “In a statement released to the press moments ago,” an off-screen broadcaster intones, “the hijackers’ leader ‘Martyrer Mahumd’ demands Baader, [Gudrun] Ensslin, [Irmgard] Moeller [sic] and the other RAF prisoners be released from Stammheim prison and flown to Mogadishu.” The West German state chose neither to meet these demands, nor to negotiate with Schleyer’s kidnappers. Shortly after midnight on 18 October 1977, antiterrorists stormed the *Landshut*, which was grounded in Mogadishu. Hearing of the storming, the core first-generation RAF members languishing in Stammheim committed suicide en masse.¹⁴ Holding the state responsible, the second-generation RAF kidnappers executed Schleyer. His body was discovered near the French border on 19 October 1977.

Such was the denouement of the “German Autumn”. Thomas Elsaesser concludes that “the RAF’s series of assassinations, bank robberies, hostage taking and counter attacks by the police and the government’s security services shocked and traumatized the Federal Republic of Germany in the fall of 1977 into a virtual state-of-emergency” (Elsaesser, 2014, p. 4). The aftereffects of these events have been felt ever since, Elsaesser maintains, “while its back-stories, prehistories and subsequent narratives are being periodically recycled, reevaluated, and reinterpreted, with no agreed version in sight about the motives of

14 Irmgard Möller’s suicide attempt proved unsuccessful. See Stefan Aust, *The Baader Meinhof Complex*, trans. Anthea Bell (London: The Bodley Head, 2008), p.5.

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either the chief protagonists or the true significance of these events, half ‘past history’ half ‘living memory’” (Elsaesser, 2014, p. 4). The actions of the RAF and the “German Autumn” certainly loom large in contemporary culture. Christina Gerhardt confirms that the RAF has “made a strong mark on culture, inspiring movies, plays, exhibits, musical compositions and countless TV documentaries” (Gerhardt, 2018, p. 1). We are interested in the cinematic lineage of presentations of the RAF and the traumatic circumstances of 1977, since it is these that are subject to the transference in Guadagnino’s historical excavations. Consider the work of the New German Cinema movement. In a turn of phrase that evokes memories of the language Meinhof deployed in her previously discussed *konkret* column “Hitler Within You”, Anton Kaes reminds us that the New German Cinema filmmakers shared “an interest in the causes and consequences of National Socialism – an interest that distinguishes the New German Cinema from the old. The new directors no longer considered German history taboo; they subjected contemporary West German society to critical scrutiny; and they gradually overcame their lack of ease around images depicting their own country” (Kaes, 1989, pp. 9–10).¹⁵ We see evidence of such societal scrutiny in *The Second Awakening of Christa Klages* (Margarethe von Trotta, 1978) and *Marianne and Juliane* (Margarethe von Trotta, 1981), both of which focus on female political radicalisation in 1970s West Germany. “Roughly since the official dissolution of the Red Army Faction (RAF) in 1998,” Jamie H. Trnka adds, “the waxing interest in German terrorism and terrorists has frequently found cinematic expression in Germany” (Trnka, 2007, p. 1). More recent fictional films – such as *The State I Am In* (Christian Petzold, 2000), *The Legend of Rita* (Volker Schlöndorff, 2000), and *The Baader Meinhof Complex* (Uli Edel, 2008) – explore the lived experience of the RAF’s decades-long campaign of violence. But one film stands out as a treatment of the RAF: *Germany in Autumn* (Alexander Kluge et al., 1978).

In Elsaesser’s reckoning, this piece of anthology filmmaking – perhaps the greatest achievement of the New German Cinema movement – illustrates “the climate of fear, paranoia and near civil war which

15 One is almost tempted to say that the New German Cinema filmmakers were following in the footsteps of the noted film critic Siegfried Kracauer, who famously looked to the cinema screen in order to demonstrate that “behind the overt history of economic shifts, social exigencies and political machinations runs a secret history involving the inner dispositions of the German people. The disclosure of these dispositions through the medium of the German screen may help in the understanding of Hitler’s ascent and ascendancy” (Kracauer, 1947/2019, p. 11).

characterized those months of extreme tension, testing West Germany's pluralist democracy to the breaking point" (Elsaesser, 1981, p. 69). Work on the film started a day after the discovery of Schleyer's corpse, when, as Rachel Weiss notes, "Alexander Kluge called on a dozen or so of his colleagues to, together, say something about those events" (Weiss, 2021, p. 126). Kluge and his collaborators had reservations about how events were being narrativized in the public sphere. "The bodies were barely even cold," Weiss posits, "but already the public version of what any of it meant was being hardened into a morality play and a parable, falsely construed, about the unity and resolve of the nation" (Weiss, 2021, p. 126). Rainer Werner Fassbinder, who directed and starred in one section of the film, was forthright when pressed on the matter of intention. The idea was simply "to state very clearly: people can and should and must go on talking, no matter what happens" (Fassbinder, as cited in Brockman, 2010, p. 348-49).

West Germany had been on edge for the best part of a decade. People hallucinated terrorists on every corner. Meanwhile, as Weiss writes, the West German state had sought to remilitarize, "decimating civil rights and constitutional standards along the way" (Weiss, 2021, p. 127). The West German media had already taken to self-censorship. No journalists dared to put anything about Schleyer's Nazi past in print. In response, the filmmakers acted quickly to bear witness and combat what they perceived to be another instance of historical erasure. Fassbinder's contribution to the film speaks to this issue. The atmosphere of the episode, which is staged in Fassbinder's Munich dimly lit apartment, is, to borrow from Martin Blumenthal-Barby, "dismayed, frantic, beleaguered, anxious, [and] agitated" (Blumenthal-Barby, 2007, p.144). It is replete with discussions of wiretapping, the Mogadishu massacre, and the Stammheim suicides – and it also directly broaches the question of Germany's past. Witness, for example, the moment when Fassbinder's mother – Lilo Pempeit – refers to her experience of the Nazi regime, while discussing the political climate in West Germany. "You see," she says, having cautioned her son against discussion of the violent events currently unfurling about them, "it reminds me a lot of the Nazi times, when people simply were quiet to avoid falling into the fat."

Luca Guadagnino singles out *Germany in Autumn* for praise when answering questions about the cinematic inspirations underpinning his adaptation of *Suspiria*, going as far to suggest that this "great" piece of filmmaking was "really instrumental in understanding the mosaic of things in [*Suspiria*]" (Guadagnino, cited in Gross, 2018). Guadagnino is equally emphatic when pressed on Fassbinder's contribution:

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You see how the conflict becomes more and more severe within the society in Germany, in which the youth is desperate because they are not heard, and the extreme nature of that desperation becomes becoming terrorists, like in the Baader-Meinhof. And at the same time you see Fassbinder, whose short film is all about him and his sadomasochistic relationship with his lover and his mother, who he claims to be responsible for the oblivion of guilt in German society. (Guadagnino, cited in Gross, 2018)

He states it plainly: in Fassbinder's piece of *Germany in Autumn* one sees "the conflict [between] the generations; you [also] see, let's say, the dark evil path of the Baader-Meinhof [group] that, in a way, paces the events of the film and in history" (Guadagnino, cited in Gross, 2018). This statement, which places significant emphasis on processes of generational transference, is equally applicable to Guadagnino's *Suspiria*.

But the transference goes wider and deeper than simple homage. Guadagnino's *Suspiria* is a complex feat of intertextuality at the levels of style and casting, and in it we sense an antagonistic terrain of split loyalties and allegiances. The debts to Argento, as we have said, are mixed and ambivalent. Argento's masterpiece is revered above all for its vivid color schemes and lurid palettes (pulsating crimsons and tangerines, morbid ultramarines and cyans, peach and apricot flushes, fluorescent pinks and yellows), along with the expressionist production design (Escher wall designs, monochrome floral wallpapers, iridescent stained-glass windows, Art Deco paneling), surrealist lighting design (strong gels and filters, tinted side- and backlighting, garish complementary color splashes), and floating costume design – all of which stamp it with the imprimatur of an arch stylist of the *mise-en-scène*. Argento's film radiates the lingering spirit of the 1960s in one final, orgasmic eruption of autonomous color and line (underscored by Goblin's extraordinary musical accompaniment), before its final conversion into subservient postmodern style elements in the 1980s; and bypasses the beige-and-brown production design features of, say, the work of Pakula and Lumet under the lens of Gordon Willis. Inbal Weinberg's production design for the 2018 adaptation is immediately drained of all this autonomous color, as if sand-blasted by a riot hose, leaving exposed concrete and rain-streaked cobblestones where there had been painted stucco and gleaming mahogany. The mortification of color and line, as executed by Monica Sallustio and Merlin Ortner, is now the prevailing idea; and along with them anything like a distinctive architectural entity (the Tanzgruppe now inhabits a faceless Berlin bunker whose front gives on to an anonymous stretch of the Wall itself; and neither Klemperer's apartment building nor his dacha in East Berlin leaves anything like the magnificent impression

made by the rearing red neo-gothic edifice of Argento's Dance Academy, its ornate awnings and pointed arches). The eye thus retreats to a middle distance, seeking support in the *mise-en-scène*, which it can find only in the "stars" themselves – the statuesque lineaments of Tilda Swinton, and the supple sensuality of Dakota Johnson.

This drainage of the image, its consignment to a near-monochrome spectrum "winterish, evil, and really dark" (Vivarelli, 2017) is effectively (in its considered negation of Argento's imbibition Technicolor) an "effect of the real", a tonal regrouping in, and transference of, the *realia* of Berlin circa 1977. Cinematographer Sayombhu Mukdeeprom insists on this realism: "To me film is realistic. I don't feel that we just shoot films isolated from reality. I feel that we should make the world" (Mukdeeprom, as cited in Hunt, 2017). His Berlin – and Guadagnino's – is rooted in extensive location shooting conducted after principal photography in Varese was completed in early 2017. It excavates a vanished city, one that we see preserved in passing in the cinema of Fassbinder and Schlöndorff. With the capital moved to Bonn until reunification, underinvestment in Berlin's built space had resulted by 1977 in a stark juxtaposition of new brutalist architecture and the dilapidated old Berlin, the savage dividing line of the wall and Checkpoint Charlie, and beyond that the Second World space of the city's East: a city already essentially monochrome and sapped of visual pleasure, whose saving aesthetic grace was the imported sounds of Bowie's years in the city (an element written into the script, but out of the film). Doubtless, all this is "historicist" by 2018: a city built in retrospect out of fabricated memories stored in a collective image bank of stock photographs and grimy Uli Edel films.

Mukdeeprom's camerawork was explicitly modelled on the dull tones and restrained gestural economy of Michael Balhaus' work for Fassbinder. The classicism and punctilious formalism of Balhaus' German period, including his development of the 360-degree tracking shot, is directly referenced in Guadagnino's film, above all in the coven election scene, where Mukdeeprom's camera moves at a stately pace in a single tracking shot around the entire kitchen and dining room areas as the votes are returned. This homage involves a considered reduction of the pleasures associated with Luciano Tovoli's work for Argento: not only the dramatic color saturation is missing, but the arresting chiaroscuro, contrapuntal fill-lighting, florid lightning storms, up-lit downpours, menacing forward tracking shots, stained-glass backlighting, low camera angles, and extreme close-ups. The exception, as we shall see, is in the zoom shots, but overall, we must remark a definite privileging of the German over the Italian 70s film aesthetic, of "realism" over fantasy, of the German New Cinema over *giallo* and schlock. The cinematic

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transference has grafted grotesque Italian narrative shapes onto rain-washed German concrete. Above all, however, the transference announces itself in the appearance of veterans Ingrid Caven, Angela Winkler, Renée Soutendijk, and Jessica Harper, who bring back the “forgotten past” of Fassbinder and Schlöndorff, as well as Argento, with a visceral force. It is the beautiful faces of New German Cinema and of *Suspiria* itself that haunt the screen as ageing witches looking to perpetuate their charms in an industry that has forgotten them. Caven and Winkler (who appeared in *Germany in Autumn*) seem to relish the opportunity to act as mediums, living portals to a cinematic repository of immortal forms and gestures seeking ingress into our asinine world of memes and GIFs. And let us not forget Dakota Johnson, daughter of Melanie Griffiths and Don Johnson and granddaughter of “Tippi” Hedren, here called upon to instantiate America with the kind of pedigree that functions as a multigenerational transference.

Yet the true action of the 2018 remake of *Suspiria* lies elsewhere, namely in the editing suite, where Walter Fasano indulges his director’s taste for extraordinary passages of parallel montage, to an extent rarely seen in contemporary art cinema (whose abiding preference is for slow-cinematic sequence shots and ornate *mise-en-scène*). *Suspiria* contains a sequence of such concentrated brilliance in this regard as to call conspicuous attention to itself and suggest something like an allegorical template on which to construct some concluding propositions about the transferential historicity of this film. To be sure, this is not the only passage of sustained parallel montage here, but nothing compares the near-four-minute episode in which Susie dances the “Protagonist” for the first time in the Rose studio and appears simultaneously to dismantle the body of her rival, Olga (Elena Fokina), locked in the mirrored studio below (38:47–43:11). There are no fewer than 45 distinct scenic alternations between the two studios in this sequence, comprising a total of 201 individual shots, with an average shot length of 1.03 seconds. At key moments, the shots contract to tiny fractions of a second in length, amounting to a perceptual blur as Fasano ushers us towards an unconscious approval of the magic taking place – without any comment or explanation – between the two dancers. The inference is clear: Susie’s “Protagonist” is destroying Olga. Every movement delivers a crippling blow to Olga’s body, which, twisted and broken, is tied up into a pretzel, leaking urine and bile, by the end of the episode. It is the precision and velocity of Fasano’s cutting which makes this plausible, as minor dollying pushes (on Blanc and Tanner) are matched with pushes on Susie and pulls on Olga, and Susie’s dance is fragmented into over a hundred separate gestures (caught in extreme close-up or framed at extreme

high-angle), each of which is keyed to some parallel violence (mostly shot low-angle) on Olga. Rarely in “dancefilm” has the vertical dimension of the art been so dynamically registered as a dialectical antagonism between “up” and “down”.¹⁶

This at last allows us to remark that the episode is an exemplary lesson in cinematic transference. “The reality of transference is thus the presence of the past,” we have quoted Lacan as writing. So it is, too, with the role of the “Protagonist”, which was “created” by Madame Blanc in 1937 as a “Volkisch” (and chthonic) response to Nazism, seen (on video and in person) by Susie Bannion in the mid-1970s in New York, performed by Patricia Hingle and Olga in 1977, and then performed again by Susie in the heat of the German Autumn, never to be performed again. Blanc asks Susie what it “feels like” to dance this role before the person who created it; but this scene of transference answers the question on another level – what it feels like to have somebody else dance your role. What it feels like, in other words, to be *adapted*, remade in another’s image. Throughout this essay we have observed the transference that obtains between one period and another, one aesthetic and another, one paradigm of the subject and another, one socio-political formation and another, one passionate intensity and another, in a film that takes as its subject matter the transference itself. In a scene that stages transference as at once *violent* and *technical*, we see the true significance of this question. To adapt any work sprung from a specific historical conjuncture is to separate its meaning-giving context from its form, to “retrofit” it for the moment of its reimagining. Obligated to shed its political skin, the work – become abstract – is sacrificed to the advantage of an alien conjuncture, where it becomes open again for reinvestment in another guise. Just as Susie, in seizing the role of “Protagonist”, ritually condemns Olga (and Patricia, and Blanc) to a disfiguring mortification, and just as she will kill Olga, Sara, and Patricia in the Mutterhaus (where they beg to die) when she emerges as the apotheosis of *Suspriorum* herself, so too *Suspiria* sacrifices all of Argento’s style elements – the willful distance he created between his work and History – in order to make that very point. The violence of the adaptation returns us by force to the matrix out of which the original emerged. If Guadagnino’s is a “fiction” of 1977, it is so in a particular sense:

16 See Erin Brannigan, *Dancefilm: Choreography and the Moving Image* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

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In transference, the subject fabricates or constructs something. Thus it is impossible, it seems to me, not to immediately include the term “fiction” in the function of transference. What is that nature of this fiction? And, second, what is its object(ive)? And if fiction is involved, what is being feigned? And since it is a matter of feigning, feigning for whom? (Lacan, 2016, p.174–75)

Feigning *for us*, no doubt. If Patricia and Klemperer require the fiction of the witches in order to suture the historical gap between 1933 and 1977, and the cognitive schism between art and politics, we in 2022 require the fiction of a 1977 in which, these historical incommensurabilities still unresolved, we catch sight of the last fecund moment when something like praxis remained a possibility – a potent political matrix, strung out between militant anticapitalism and the puritanical avant-garde – before the advent of a long dark night of reaction, or what Alain Badiou calls the “second Restoration” (Badiou, 2007, p. 26). If today the tremors of a return to praxis are being felt, it is in no small part because of the perverse and multivalent historicisms of artists like Guadagnino, which point the way back to the future through a symbolic transduction of the past.

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