

## 12 Textures of Time

### A Becoming-Memory of History in Costume Film

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Consider the following blatant anachronisms in recent costume dramas: Mozart's *Requiem* accompanying Elizabeth I as the Virgin Queen; a campy performance of Madonna's 'Material Girl' in the nineteenth-century cabaret Moulin Rouge; contemporary tourists walking among the entourage of Catherine the Great in the Hermitage; and Queen Marie Antoinette walking down the halls of Versailles to the tunes of the Gang of Four's song 'Natural's Not in It'. Films like *Elizabeth*, *Moulin Rouge*, *Russian Ark* and *Marie Antoinette* transform a narrative retracing of history into an affective event, producing for the viewer a sensation of time that moves beyond chronology. Costume cinema of today is reinventing itself: representations of history make way for embodied performances of the past; linear narratives turn into spectacular images and signs give way to sensations.

Such costume dramas do not seek a 'correct' representation of the past, in a futile search for 'wie es eigentlich gewesen ist', in the oft-quoted words of the nineteenth-century historian Leopold von Ranke, but rather produce a different experience of memory and time for the audience. They do so in a play of light, colours, sound, materiality and movement. This haptic quality of the cinematic image in costume film creates for the audience an almost tactile experience of history. Rather than categorising such performances of memory in contemporary costume films as products of a generation that has forgotten how to think historically (Jameson, 1991), we would like to propose a different reading. We set out to investigate the creative effects of anachronism in cinematic performances of the past that change our perception of representation, time and memory. We hope to show how postmodern costume films transpose chronological representations of the past into nonlinear, or rhizomatic, textures of time.

Instead of deploring the historical incorrectness of contemporary costume films, we applaud the turn to performance, texture and affect for its valuable function: cinematic performances of memory allow us to experience the lived past in our present. Through the vivid images of these filmic performances, we can experience the duration of time that resists chronology. Time, and thus our access to the past, works in more complex ways. The costume films perform the past by inventing new historical sensations and

new ways of thinking about cultural memory. In this chapter, we focus on four costume films that challenge the classical narrative of history through a material history of time. Two films deal with the portrayal of historical queens: *Elizabeth* (Shekhar Kapur, 1998) and *Marie Antoinette* (Sofia Coppola, 2006); the other two films tell the story of a historical site: the theatre-brothel Moulin Rouge in Paris in *Moulin Rouge* (Baz Luhrmann, 2001) and the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, once built and inhabited by the Russian kings and tsars, in *Russian Ark* (Alexander Sokurov, 2002).<sup>1</sup>

The new forms in which historical stories are being told, deviating from the conventional narrative form, forge a new aesthetics of affect, performance and a spectacle of textures, privileging rhizomatic space over teleological time. In trying to understand this new cinematic aesthetics, we need different concepts and methods of analysis. For the purposes of this essay, we take a few characteristics of the concept of performance to move it away from the notion of mimetic representation. First, performance is playful; it is 'in play, for fun' (Schechner, 1988, p. xviii). Second, it has a 'consciousness of doubleness', as 'performance is always performance for someone' (Carlson, 2004, p. 5). And third, it is a reflexive transgression of cultural traditions and transformations; this is what McKenzie calls the 'in-between', 'liminal' or 'inherently unstable' aspect of performance (2001, p. 50). The notion of performance helps us to leave behind the notion of representation as a form of fidelity that is so prominent in evaluations of costume cinema (Pidduck, 2004). When representation is understood to refer to the hierarchical structure of copy and model, costume film can be seen only as a—necessarily bad—copy of a historical reality. The representational model is thus inadequate if we want to move beyond the restrictive binary oppositions of past versus present or history versus memory. Moreover, the notion of representation cannot account for the new models of multiple becomings that are created by rhizomatic storytelling in recent cinema, which privileges spectacle and sensation over narrative and chronology.

In our analysis, we approach the different fields of film and theory through the prism of performance, producing a break with representation. The concept of performance resists the static logic of representation, we believe, because it allows for an encounter with multiplicity and transformation. By a 'performance of memory' in costume film, we refer to playful, self-conscious and transgressive reworkings of cultural memory. The kind of costume films that we discuss in this chapter—to put it in shorthand: *postmodern* costume films—are no longer concerned with telling the story historically correct as in the more traditional heritage film (Higson, 2003). Instead, the films are keen to unravel the many layers of cultural memory that have accumulated upon historical icons, figures or spaces and do so in humorous, reflexive and subversive ways. The central notion here is the process of *becoming*, introduced by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) as a dynamic practice of metamorphoses: 'to participate in movement, to stake out the path of escape in

all its positivity, to cross a threshold, to reach a continuum of intensities that are valuable only in themselves, to find a world of pure intensities' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p. 13). The notion of becoming privileges affect and perception through the senses, holding 'great promise for the analysis of how performance impacts upon an audience, offering an alternative to the overemphasis on interpretation and the construction of meaning' (Cull, 2009, p. 8). As the films that we discuss in this chapter translate historical fact into affect through the embodied strategy of performance, they bring the past closer to the contemporary spectator. Our methodological approach entails a focus not so much on characters, narrative or history but rather on the ways in which affects are performed through light, sound, colours, camera angles, montage and so on. Rather than looking for semiotic signs and meanings, we perceive affect and sensations; instead of narrative closure, we find rhizomatic knots; and in the place of postmodern representations of the past, we reveal haptic performances of memory.

## QUEEN OF PASTICHE

*Elizabeth* (1998), the first film that Shekhar Kapur made about the famous British queen (the second film followed years later, in 2007), covers the earlier years of her long life, beginning with her house arrest on suspicion of treason in 1554 and ending in 1563, when she officially declares her wish to rule unmarried. In the final scene of *Elizabeth*, the young queen, played by Cate Blanchett, orders her maids to cut off her hair and plaster her face. With a crimson wig covering her red hair and a white lead emulsion masking her pale skin, Elizabeth thus creates a hyperreal copy of herself. By means of the never-ageing mask of Gloriana or the Virgin Queen, she transforms herself into the living copy of her idealised portraits. The 'Icon', as historians often call Elizabeth's monumental appearance (Starkey, 2001), gives the identical term from C.S. Peirce's semiotics a remarkable twist. In Peirce's theory, 'icon' represents the sign corresponding to the object it depicts, as a sculpture does or a painting. In this case, the roles are reversed, as the object 'Elizabeth I' represents the sign 'Virgin Queen'. Here, we see clearly how the film enacts a playful and self-conscious performance by Elizabeth, rather than reinforce the distinction between model and copy. The film *Elizabeth* reveals how the Virgin Queen manipulated not only her official image but also her body as 'monstrous mannequin' (Starkey, 2000, p. x) and thus became her own mask. The image of Elizabeth can be seen as a looping interchange between pastiche and the Queen's body, between copy and original.

The film *Elizabeth* introduces several actors as literal quotations of portraits, to the effect that the past is no longer a (chrono)logical series of events but the product of personal and contingent occurrences. The eclectic portrayal of such a celebrated actor as John Gielgud, for example, goes

beyond the expected chronological denotation of sixteenth-century fashion. Gielgud as 'The Pope' (as listed on the end credits) appears in a costume featured in Titian's famous portrait *Pope Paul III and His Grandsons* (1546). The film carefully registers the chiaroscuro lighting, Titian's technique and the intrigue of the portrait. Moreover, the scene in which the cardinal whispers something in Gielgud's ear is an exact copy of the portrait's portrayal of the grandson who is standing left on the portrait behind Paul III. In the film, the second (kneeling) grandson has been replaced by the kneeling Jesuit priest John Ballard, who will convey to England the news of a Roman Catholic plot against Elizabeth.

Titian does not idealise the pope. In a then unusually sketchy style—'some parts of it are, in fact, unfinished', writes Janson in *History of Art* (1995, p. 502)—the painter depicts the pope as an elusive, scheming, cruel, obscure but mortal man. In *Elizabeth*, Titian's composition and technique have been translated into cinematography and distributed over camera angle, movement, lighting, editing and dialogues. Gielgud's introduction halfway through the film is in a long shot which makes his arched figure seem tiny in the Vatican's large hall. Bright sunlight is surrounded by darkness, and, in the next close-up of Gielgud's face, the low angle of the camera shows that the power of the pope should be feared: 'The tiny figure of the pope, shrivelled with age, dominates his tall attendants with awesome authority', as Janson writes in his interpretation of Titian's painting (1995, p. 502). The sinister undertone of the painting is emphasised in the film by the words used by Gielgud, the pope, when he asks Ballard: 'Tell me my son, what is the news of our brothers and sisters in England? Do they still support the sovereignty of that illegitimate whore?'

The pope, Paul III, who is visually cited in the film, has never been Elizabeth's direct opponent but was that of her father, Henry VIII. Gielgud's role of 'The Pope' links, in fact, four different papal supremacies of which only one belongs to the specific period showed in the film. Here Paul IV fits within the time-space of the film, 1554–63, but Gielgud plays both the part of the canonised Pius V, who comes to power not until 1563 and excommunicates Elizabeth in 1570, and that of Gregory XIII, who outlaws her in 1580 and sends Jesuit missionaries to England. Transforming Titian's pope into an amalgamated cinematic performance of the past, *Elizabeth* translates the intrigue of the painting into a lived sensation of fleeting historical contingencies.

Another example of nonlinear anachronisms in the film is an eerie scene in which Elizabeth arrives by boat at the Tower to be imprisoned. For a moment, she is turned into a performance of another famous iconic woman. Gray walls and gray towers appear on the silver screen. Darkness. The sound of oars in languid water. By the light of a torch, a rower and two ladies-in-waiting glide alongside the eye of a motionless camera. A new shot shows Elizabeth in medium close-up, robed in a white garment with her red hair loose over her shoulders. She sits straight. With mixed feelings of courage



Figure 12.1 Elizabeth becoming the image of the Virgin Queen. Screenshot from *Elizabeth* (Shekhar Kapur, 1998).



Figure 12.2 With the first *Elizabeth* film ending in 1563, Elizabeth here appears as an anachronistic pastiche of Nicholas Hilliard's 'Phoenix' portrait (c. 1575). Screenshot from *Elizabeth* (Shekhar Kapur, 1998).

and despair, the Tudor princess looks at the heads of traitors impaled on stakes.

In this cinematic image, Elizabeth appears as a remarkable recollection of the painting of *The Lady of Shalott* of 1888 by John William Waterhouse. With this visual citation, the film transfers the history of Elizabeth I to the constructed world of intertextuality, allegorically relating the Virgin Queen

to another lady of England's past: Elaine, the 'Fair Maid of Astolat'.<sup>2</sup> Her tragic story—she dies of unrequited love for Lancelot—is part of the Arthur legends and was the source of inspiration for Tennyson's first Arthurian poem, 'The Lady of Shalott' (1832).<sup>3</sup> Tennyson's poem and the paintings, engravings and sketches of, among others, Waterhouse, William Holman Hunt, Arthur Hughes, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John Everett Millais and William Maw Egly, gave the legend of Elaine a prominent place in Western cultural memory.<sup>4</sup>

This highly anachronistic visual reference undoes the historical linearity in the film, opening the story up to a performance of memory that does justice to the layered image of the queen that contemporary audiences have. The intertextual recollection of Shalott, the imprisoned virgin, underlines Elizabeth's later transformation to Virgin Queen: 'Kat, I have become a Virgin'. Whereas the Lady of Shalott dies, Elizabeth's transformation at the end of the film into 'the Icon' signifies the death of her youth and the new beginning of her royal career. To the highly anachronistic strains of Mozart's *Requiem*, the young Elizabeth disappears behind the historical mask of Elizabeth I as Virgin Queen: a crimson wig replacing her own red hair and her face white-painted: 'Till her blood was frozen slowly, / And her eyes were darkened wholly' (Tennyson, 1832). The film ends in a freeze frame, abruptly stopping Elizabeth's life and folding her body and soul back into the recorded past: the flesh-and-blood Elizabeth has become History.

## AFFECT OF ARTIFICIALITY

A very different performance of memory can be found in the second film we wish to discuss, Baz Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge* (2001). This film is made up of an accumulation of clichés and cultural stereotypes disguised in an explosion of special effects presented at dizzying speed and held together by a rather flimsy story. The decadent superficiality, intermedial relations, combinations and juxtapositions and the pace of the action are a challenge to any notion of historical representation. In a digitally recreated bohemian Paris of 1899, cultural memory acts as a haunted place. Intertextual references tumble about, and the conscious zapping of anachronisms that we saw in the film *Elizabeth* reaches an overwhelming intensity to the point of paroxysm in *Moulin Rouge*, by a jumble of details that drive its viewers to the limits of their visual capacity. *Moulin Rouge* goes like a whirlwind through cultural history and adds an ecstatic frenzy to the intertextuality of different works of art and styles so that the film eventually looks like archives run wild. From a digitalised city view of Paris the camera dives at high speed into a reconstruction of photographs by Eugène Atget. Historical figures like Toulouse-Lautrec and Erik Satie, who made Montmartre and the Moulin Rouge world-famous, shift to the margins of their own fictive world created by the frequent use of absinthe. To give just a few examples of

the dizzying layering of references: the cancan is performed at rapid speed as a pastiche of Offenbach's cancan, which was itself already written as a parody on Gluck's *Dance of the Blessed Spirits*. The song *Nature Boy*, sung by Toulouse (John Leguizamo) at the beginning of the film, recalls David Bowie's rare version of Nat King Cole's performance. At the height of anachronistic pastiche, *Moulin Rouge* revamps a worn-out connection between Madonna and Marilyn Monroe through Satine's (Nicole Kidman) saucy 'nineteenth-century' performance of 'Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend'.

Performance in this film is not merely playful, reflexive and transgressive but creates a completely over-the-top affect of artificiality that is reminiscent of Baudrillard's notion of the hyperreal or simulacrum. Deleuze argues, however, that simulacrum and artificiality are not synonymous: 'The artificial and the simulacrum are not the same thing. They are even opposed to each other. The artificial is always a copy of a copy, which should be pushed to the point where it changes its nature and is reversed into the simulacrum' (Deleuze, 1990, p. 265). For Deleuze, the simulacrum should be used as a tool not to understand the artificial quality of representation but to understand the creative quality of performance. Here, affect plays an important role. Affect is a nonsubjective and essentially nonrational experience that precedes signification and interpretation. Simon O'Sullivan (2006) argues in favour of an aesthetics of affect to be able to present art as a resistance to the clichéd images of representation. *Moulin Rouge* creates a spectacle of the tension between artifice and affect. The speed with which this film presents combinations of cultural references in and between shots creates an intensity that turns the postmodern experience of hyperreal representation into an affect of becoming-artificial. In other words, *Moulin Rouge* performs the 'point' where representation is turned into affect: a tumultuous vacuum of cultural references that pushes pastiche to its limits, which creates an *affect* of artificiality.

*Moulin Rouge* shares its artificial affect with camp: its kitsch, its superficiality, the 'urban pastorality' and its love for the opera. Even Susan Sontag's description of the eighteenth-century origin of camp taste is incorporated in the film: from Gothic elements (the Duke's gloomy pied-à-terre), chinoiserie (the fascination for the East, with a contemporary twist in its reference to Bollywood) and caricature (Toulouse, Zidler) to the decadent pleasure in constructing artificial landscapes. Take, for example, the only 'nature scene' in the film, in which the Duke, Satine and Christian, complete with picnic basket—'My dear, a little frog!'—walk into a too obviously staged and digitalised spot of natural beauty on the outskirts of Paris, reminiscent of the décors of nineteenth-century photo studios with real props and an overtly *trompe l'oeil* view of Paris in the background. Acting as a performance of the notion of camp, *Moulin Rouge* transforms its affect of artificiality into a politics of becoming. The hyper-postmodern surface of *Moulin Rouge* reflects upon its becoming-camp, a becoming-artificial that is characteristic of popular culture today. In its campy anachronistic assemblage of past and



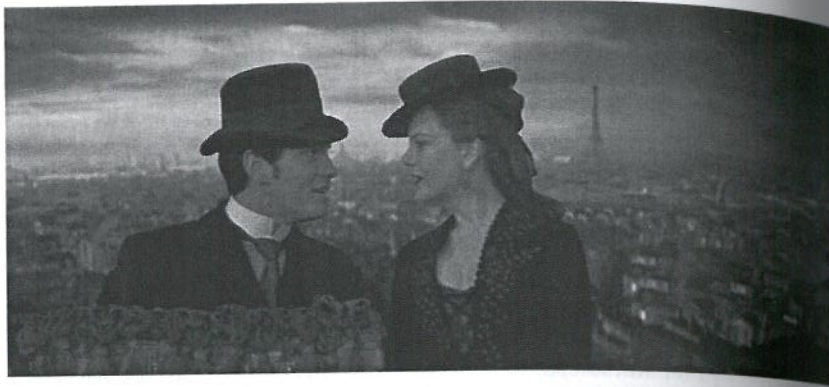


Figure 12.3 *Moulin Rouge*'s only 'nature scene', featuring a digital reminiscence of nineteenth-century photo studio décor, captures the film's campy anachronistic assemblage of past and present styles. Screenshot from *Moulin Rouge* (Baz Luhrmann, 2001).

present styles, works of art and cultural figures, *Moulin Rouge* refuses to depict the past as a chronological process. It undermines historical power by showing itself cured of 'taking history overly seriously' (Nietzsche, 1995, p. 93).

The ahistorical performance of time is closely connected to a deft repetition of mirror images in *Moulin Rouge*, each of them with a different effect. They appear casually, like a voyeuristic glance. They duplicate a face, split a body in three, or become a multiple-eyed camera showing different angles at the same time. Their impartial surface is sometimes sharp as a razor, tracing a character's cold features, and sometimes hazy, taking up a person's gentleness. Film shots play with the ornamented frames of different looking glasses and their own ground edges, which cut the shots internally, creating a frame within a frame.<sup>5</sup> There are long shots that juxtapose mirrors, thus producing a 'spatial montage' of simultaneous images. Other shots make mirror frames imperceptible by letting them disappear into the film frame or by folding a reflection over its actual image. Some mirror images come into view like a visual sigh (a shot slowly fading in and out), some appear quickly and flash out of sight too soon to seize, while others emerge in faintly stuttering slow motion and emit a silence that renders the character translucent.

The mirror image is presented by Deleuze as a crystal image that performs 'the smallest internal circuit' of the cinematographic image (Deleuze, 1989, p. 70). This internal circuit is also the smallest internal circuit (crystal) of time. Time constantly divides itself into an actual image of the present and a virtual image of the past. This moment of the split itself is the crystal, an extreme point where past and present fold, and time reveals its nonlinear process at its purest. In *Moulin Rouge*, this smallest internal circuit of time, in which past and present continually exchange, is

performed by the mirror image of pastiche. The film is a copy without an original, evoking historical figures as they never existed before. In *Moulin Rouge*, the affect created by pastiche and camp is an affect of becoming-artificiality. The film's performance of memory has to be located outside the realm of representation on the level of affect, where it reveals a different way of accessing the past.

## DANCING DANAË

The exceedingly speedy editing of *Moulin Rouge* could not be further removed from the absence of montage in Alexandr Sokurov's film *Russian Ark* (2002), which is entirely shot in one single take of ninety minutes. *Russian Ark* is the first full-length feature film in history to record one continuous shot without compression onto hard disk, creating a cinematic space that connects past, present and future in a single take. The film is a poetic mix of documentary and fiction about the Hermitage museum as a space of history traversed by timeless lines of artistic creation. Within this 'time-space', high-tech digital equipment aligns with three hundred years of Russian history; an anachronistic representation of the past turns into a performance of memory.

'I open my eyes and I see nothing'; *Russian Ark* begins with a black screen and the (uncredited) voice of the director, Sokurov. His encounter with the past begins with amnesia: 'I only remember there was an accident. Everyone ran for safety as best they could. I just can't remember what happened to me'. For Sokurov, it is not the space of his own present in which he awakens. His imperceptible body, produced by his voice and the single gaze of the camera, seems to be reconfigured in a different space, a space that produces a recomposition of the binary opposition between time and space. Sokurov has awakened in the oblique 'time-space' of the museum that forms his aesthetic homeland: the Hermitage.

*Russian Ark* re-enacts history by presenting characters such as Peter and Catherine the Great, Nicholas II, his wife, Alexandra, and the poet Pushkin. They are like the 'living spectres' and 'gilded phantoms' that the nineteenth-century French aristocrat Astolphe de Custine described in his memoirs *Letters from Russia* (2002, p. 648). Custine (Sergei Dontsov) is the main character in the film. He is the scruffy Stranger dressed in black, roaming through the rooms of the Hermitage Museum, talking to the camera and thus to the spectator. Although Sokurov, as director, does not aspire to historical accuracy in his films, there is an interweaving of Custine's historical memoirs with the timeless space of the Hermitage as the Russian Ark of art. Both reveal the despotic nature of Peter the Great, the aristocrats' way of life, the submissive 'silence of the crowd' (p. 229), St Petersburg's luxurious balls, and there is also 'the spy' who repeatedly resurfaces in both the film and Custine's *Letters* (p. 78 and p. 111).



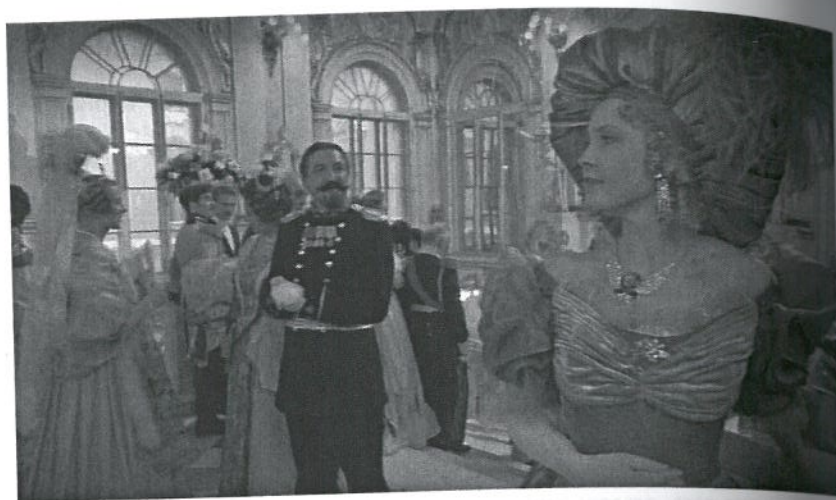


Figure 12.4 A final glimpse of the Hermitage's performance of the past. Screenshot from *Russian Ark* (Alexander Sokurov, 2002).

The film acts not only as a 'vessel' of the past but also as a site of the present, creating encounters between the nineteenth-century Custine and the twenty-first-century visitors to the Hermitage; the tourists, but also friends of Sokurov such as the present director of the Hermitage, Mikhail Piotrovsky, and the ballet dancer Alla Osipenko, who was once Rudolf Nureyev's dance partner. In this nonlinear historical setting, the encounter between past and present produces a rhizome of anachronistic experiences that we want to align with Jameson's notion of spatial historiography.

Jameson situates spatial historiography in a broader development of 'postmodern historiographic narrative' (1991, pp. 367–68). Within this postmodern frame, spatial historiographies merge historical fact with fiction. However, where postmodern historical narratives produce 'real' or genealogical histories, spatial historiographies create an anachronistic sense of history that turns the chronological idea of time into a spatial sensation of the past. As Jameson explains, spatial historiographies have 'unique things to tell us both about postmodern spatiality and about what happened to the postmodern sense of history in the first place' (p. 370).

In our view, *Russian Ark* acts as a prime example of spatial historiography. The film is an ark of discontinuity, switching between different centuries by means of Custine's and Sokurov's encounters with the people and the works of art in the thirty-three rooms of the Hermitage they visit. Jameson's 'incongruous' but 'historically possible juxtapositions' (p. 370) come alive at the end of the film in the lengthy scene of the great royal ball supposedly set in 1913, where the Russian conductor Valéry Gergiev (as himself) conducts the mazurka that leads Pushkin's wife, Natalia, into the arms of Custine for a merry dance. This is an event that—as far as we know—never happened,

but, as Jameson writes, quoting Adorno's witty paradox: 'even if it was a fact, it wouldn't be true' (1991, p. 370).

Spatial historiography also produces a 'random pluralism', or a coexistence of 'unrelated fuzzy sets and semiautonomous subsystems' (Jameson, 1991, p. 372), an example of which can be found in the artistic encounter involving the imperceptible 'Sokurov', Custine, former prima ballerina Alla Osipenko and Rembrandt's *Danaë* (1636). In the Greek myth, Danaë was kept in an iron tower by her father, safe from potential lovers, for it was predicted that he, the King of Argos, would be killed by her son. However, Zeus, enchanted by her beauty and unable to resist temptation, entered the tower as a rain of gold. When she gave birth to Perseus, Danaë and her baby were locked up in a chest and surrendered to the sea.

In this scene, we can see the legendary ballet dancer Osipenko viewed from a distance, standing before Rembrandt's voluptuous and vulnerable Danaë, whose naked skin highly contrasts with Osipenko's black clothes. The dancer has her arms outstretched to receive the radiance of this work of art that seems to illuminate the relatively dark room by its own. Unlike the camera (Sokurov's point of view) approaching the scene with reverent hesitation, Custine impertinently scrutinises both the Danaë and Osipenko. She, absorbed in the encounter through which she transposes the expression of the painting into her own, does not notice him at first. So, when Custine suddenly moves into her realm, she is startled and a little embarrassed and begins to laugh. She tells him she must express herself and generously invites Custine to join her. When their hands touch, piano music begins to play. She lifts up Custine's right hand and folds his arm around her body. Also, 'Sokurov' is drawn into this small event, as he underlines his presence in transforming his imperceptible gaze of the camera into a medium close-up of Custine, Osipenko and the *Danaë*. Osipenko's words emphasise the poetic logic of this event: 'I'm speaking to the painting. . . . Sometimes I prefer to speak alone. This painting and I have a secret'.<sup>6</sup>

This example of the Danaë scene shows how the term 'space' in 'spatial historiography' adopts a performative function that is useful in the understanding of performances of memory. For not only does it refer to the production of a nonlinear sensation of time; it also creates different forms of artistic spaces produced by encounters of 'disparate materials . . . put together in new ways' (Jameson, 1991, p. 370). Time and space are strongly linked, producing each other. Time thus becomes an infinite site of possible encounters as the spectator experiences in the anachronism of the Danaë scene. We want to argue that Jameson's portrayal of our time marked by 'a constant weakening of history' (p. 6) can be seen in the light of anachronism as a performance of history. It indicates that contemporary performances of history no longer accept the chronological form as ultimate and authoritative. Instead, they also use juxtaposed anachronisms to explore the effects of the past onto the present and vice versa and the possibilities of a different experience of time as a performative sensation of becoming-memory.



## ANARCHY OF ANACHRONISM

Outlining the nonlinear function of cinematic performances of memory, we began this essay explaining the performative strategy of anachronism through cinematic images that playfully transform mimetic representation into a performance of the past. From pastiche and the affect of artificiality we moved to the spatial use of time that inserts a performative sensation of memory into our sense of history. Now we want to discuss the rhizomatic production of memory in *Marie Antoinette* that arises out of the shift from representation to performance: the performances of sounds, colours, the timbre of voices, the movements of bodies—a tangible reality of historical textures.

Austria, April 1770. A skinny fourteen-year-old girl is on her way to France, accompanied by a travelling court consisting of '132 dignitaries, swollen to twice that number by doctors, hairdressers and servants including cooks, bakers, blacksmiths and even a dressmaker for running repairs' (Fraser, 2001, p. 41). It takes two and a half weeks before the procession of 57 coaches and 376 horses (20,000 in total posted along the way) reaches the site where the Austrian girl is to be formally handed over to France. As the youngest Archduchess of five brothers and eight sisters, she was never expected to become a pawn in the political alliance between Austria and France. However, this lighthearted teenager will write herself into history as one of the most idealised and most scorned women of the eighteenth century: the Dauphine of France, L'Autrichienne,<sup>7</sup> Madame Deficit, Marie Antoinette.

In 2006, Sofia Coppola's third feature film, *Marie Antoinette*, is released. Coppola, who also wrote the script, based her portrait of the last Queen of France on Lady Antonia Fraser's internationally acclaimed biography *Marie Antoinette: The Journey* (2001). Unlike Fraser's complete biography, Coppola's *Marie Antoinette* (played by Kirsten Dunst) isolates the nineteen years the young Queen spent at Versailles. The film creates an island in time marked by the two sweeping journeys that turned Marie Antoinette's personal life into a public event: her first arrival at Versailles in May 1770 and the final departure on the sixth of October 1789, two months after the storming of the Bastille. The film spans her adolescent years, the 'roaring' twenties, her turn to gravity at the age of thirty until the forced expulsion from Versailles. This is where the film ends, as if trying to forget the historic events that are inscribed in our collective memory and performing Marie Antoinette's own wish to forget: 'I've seen everything, known everything and forgotten everything' (quoted in Fraser, 2001, p. 304). But, of course, past generations are unable to forget the violence that marks the history from which they come. Severed from the main film by a mute insert of darkness, a final image reveals a long shot of the ransacked royal bedchamber, 'a place fallen under a spell' (Fraser, 2001, p. 298), prefiguring the king's and queen's execution by the guillotine. The

shattered silence, detached from the actual rage of the people, creates an afterimage of the French revolution that haunts the memory of both film and history.

*Marie Antoinette* offers a refined portrait of a life in material abundance and excess: 'an impersonal and yet singular life, which foregrounds a pure event that has been liberated from the accidents of internal and external life' (Deleuze, 2006, pp. 386–87). The film lingers over untimely textures that escape the dated etiquette at Versailles. On the face of it, *Marie Antoinette* seeks little more than playful diversion, a pink flirt with the political spirit of late-seventies post-punk music. At the same time, this flirt reveals a strong sense of self-irony, expressed in the very first lines of the Gang of Four's song 'Natural's Not in It' (1979) with which *Marie Antoinette* anachronistically opens: 'The problem of leisure / What to do for pleasure / Ideal love a new purchase / A market of the senses'. Even though *Marie Antoinette* immerses its audience in a seemingly apolitical assemblage of pleasure, the film certainly does not go without a visual strategy.

The palimpsest of invisible sensations is unfolded in film images that are at the same time intensely sensuous and highly ephemeral. Through quick successions of extreme close-ups, the film explores the material presence of objects that belong to the alien atmosphere of an exaggeratedly artificial and luxurious past. Exotic arrangements of food, fabrics and rococo shoes pass in review, filling the screen in its entirety. The shoes were created by the famous shoe designer Manolo Blahnik and include a carelessly thrown-in anachronistic pair of light-blue All Stars sneakers. The dispersed Blahnik shots recall the flatness of Warhol's images through the immediate pink background on which eight pairs of differently designed pumps and mules are displayed: from gray baby blue to faint olive green to bright canary yellow, with or without ruches, some with differently coloured insoles, others with diamond medallions, simple bows of silk satin, formal bows of matted mustard-coloured textile or small bows of pink red-rimmed ribbons tied in a row. They all feature the high and curvy 'Louis' heel, named after Louis XIV, for whom this type of wooden high heel was originally designed (Fukai, 2002). The film's short succession of Blahnik shots constitutes an absolute sensation of form, volume, light, movement, composition, frame, contrast and colour. An inventory of the different historical textures on display in *Marie Antoinette* seems endless.

Rather than represent the material excess of luxury, these images perform the actual excess of material superficiality in itself. The images have no noteworthy narrative function, nor do they demand any valuable type of signification. So why should they take up such a prominent position, and what is their effect? In the spirit of Deleuze's logic of sensation, Laura Marks uses the notion of 'haptic vision' to unravel the sensuous and nonsemiotic quality of film images. The word 'haptic', which relates to tactile sensations, is derived from the Greek word *haptēsthai*, meaning 'to touch'.<sup>8</sup> With the term 'haptic visuality', Marks (2000) transposes the capacity of sensation to the



Figure 12.5 Fleeting nonnarrative images of textures in the 'Manolo Blahnik' scene. Screenshot from *Marie Antoinette* (Sofia Coppola, 2006).

eyes, which, as she explains, 'function like organs of touch' (p. 162). Haptic visuality opens up an alternative knowledge that has become a silent trace in our perceptions of painting and cinema due to a cultural inclination to signification.

*Marie Antoinette* produces pockets of sensations that intersect cultural and personal memories of past and present bodies: the joy of a welcoming face, vicious whispers of gossip, a forget-me-not stolen kiss on the lips, the mute cocoon of social isolation. The film creates alternative memories through haptic images that explore and affirm the nonnarrative sensation of textures: shades of light and colour, slices of movement and soundscapes that invite the body to remember. These 'textures' are capable of creating an ahistorical connection between the past and our present. They produce a counterpast that, regardless of its fleetingness, reveals the elusive yet profound truth of sensations that run through historic events.

The shoes-and-cake sequence is quite literally the icing on Sofia Coppola's visual experiment. The quick succession of shots creates elliptical close-ups that match the swift motions of the hand-held camera often pulling into focus trying not to miss anything, while the editing coincides with the upbeat rhythm of the Bow Wow Wow's song 'I Want Candy' (1982). Anachronistic and ahistorical as the choice for a contemporary cinematographic style may seem, the erratic pace of the shoes-and-cake sequence perfectly captures the 'capricious moods that increasingly swept over Marie Antoinette' (Fraser, 2001, p. 131). While the ahistorical images and sounds insert themselves into the memory of the spectator's body, an embodied collective memory unfolds, belonging to the aleatory and unrecorded past.

## MASHING UP TIME

The aim of this essay has been to reveal cinematic textures of time that transpose history into a performance of memory. We have discussed the anachronisms in the visual references to paintings in *Elizabeth* and the transformation of pastiche into a nonlinear performance of the past. We focused on the affective artificiality of the crystal image of pastiche in *Moulin Rouge*. The intensity with which the film produces this effect is so overwhelming that the binary difference between model and copy is eclipsed: in *Moulin Rouge*, the copy of a copy reaches its extreme point. Referring to the notion of spatial historiography by Jameson (1991), we showed how in *Russian Ark* the logic of representation gives way to a productive space of performance. In this art film without one single editorial cut, sensations of memory transpose representations of the past into an artistic performance in the present, producing a rhizomatic narrative where time folds upon itself in the space of the Hermitage. Finally, we revealed the haptic visuality of the rhizomatic and sensuous textures on display in *Marie Antoinette*. The process of performance in this film creates affective connections between past and present that allow for a becoming-memory of history.

The effect of the playful and reflexive use of anachronisms produces contemporary performances of history, in which past and present continually alternate and intersect, defying any form of chronology. Through a deft use of anachronism, the films explore the nonlinear quality of time forgotten by historical narrative. They unravel the past through the creation of lived sensations in the present. Sensations are immediate, volatile, dynamic and nonnarrative. This singular elusiveness, which marks them as lived textures of time, slips through the hands of the semiotic model of representation. Turning recorded history into rhizomatic acts of memory, time becomes a tangible texture that writes itself onto the bodies of spectators. In exploring the tangible or haptic effects of the past onto the present and vice versa, history becomes a performance of—multiple—cultural memories.

We have used terms like 'sensation', 'affect' and the 'haptic' to refer to the experiential effect on the spectator of this fundamental mash-up of time. We have tried to achieve an encounter between the different fields of film and theory, inserting the performative act of becoming into texts that create a thinking through textures. This is what happens when films move beyond mere representation; in the words of Deleuze: 'It is a question of producing within the work a movement capable of affecting the mind outside all representation . . . of inventing vibrations, rotations, whirlings, gravitations, dances or leaps which directly touch the mind' (Deleuze quoted in Cull, 2009, p. 6). In our view, the films produce precisely the affects and sensations of those 'vibrations, rotations, whirlings, gravitations, dances or leaps'. Through their rhizomatic and affective connections between past and present, the films achieve a becoming-memory of history. In other words, by making the past *affectively* present for the spectator,



history becomes tangible in an experiential performance of memory. The term 'performance of memory' indicates here that the audience knows that the cinematic representation of history is really a playful and decidedly constructed performance. Such a cinematic performance of history does not play at being historically correct, but it does attempt to affectively move the spectator. By looking at the complex workings of time, we demonstrate the performative effect of anachronism: mashing up historical time opens for the audience an access to the actual affectivity of cinematic sensations of the past. The rhizomatic performances of memory produce an escape out of the confines of linear history and push representation beyond its limits. This is where the performance of memory is not only playful and reflexive but also transgressive and transformative. The films have thus transposed the mimetic representation of history into a thinking through textures of time.

## NOTES

1. This chapter is based on Elise Wortel's PhD dissertation, *Textures of Time* (2008).
2. See Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* (1470). The literary genre of the allegory was very popular in the sixteenth century and was much loved by Elizabeth I.
3. Shalott is a variation on Astolat (see Tennyson, 'The Lady of Shalott', in Trilling and Bloom, 1973, p. 398). The poem *The Lady of Shalott* is a redescription of the legend of Elaine, which is also told by Tennyson in his literary series 'Idylls of the King' (1859).
4. '[I]n 1999 Tate Britain sold 27,600 postcards and 6,500 pens depicting her haunted face . . . in 1997, the three-month absence of *The Lady of Shalott* provoked thousands of disappointed visitor enquiries at Tate Britain' (Trippi, 2002, p. 234). *The Lady of Shalott* is also a true feminist icon. A.S. Byatt used the theme and the symbolism of the poem in her novel *The Shadow of the Sun* (1964).
5. *Moulin Rouge* plays with the notion of the frame. Apart from the mirror frames, the opening of the film shows a cinema screen, the raising of the red curtains, an orchestra and an animated director jumping on the stage, creating for the viewer a screen within a screen. Stressing its performative qualities, the film artfully transgresses the techniques of transparency that characterise mimetic representation.
6. The film and the *Danaë* share a secret as well, one which is connected to a horrific moment in the history of the Hermitage. In 1985 a Lithuanian man cut the *Danaë*, one of the Hermitage's most famous paintings, with a knife and poured sulphurous acid over the canvas. Instead of showing a representation of this actual moment in history, which would have made Custine nothing more than a witness to this violent incident, *Russian Ark* chose to emphasise the creative aspect of art itself.
7. L'Autrichienne, 'the Austrian woman', has a degrading reference to 'ostrich' (*autruche*) and 'bitch' (*chienne*) (Fraser, 2001, p. 47).
8. See Little et al. (1973).