

#1: TIME

The Sack Hold You, Panter

It starts with a story my mother Meg told me, that the dancer Pina Bausch told her, of a virgin girl sacrificed by dancing herself to exhaustion in order for spring to come.¹ I heard my mother tell this story to me while on my bike, pedalling. Mom told me that the dancer's spinning reminded her of the many kinds of works² we have in common, spinning our labouring bodies into states of exhaustion. I refuse this story, brought to us (Pina, mom, me) via a violent extraction from its context³ and shoved into the characteristic aesthetic enslavement of Modernism, suppressing both its origins and possible alternations. I refuse by rewriting the story to make it one of transformation: the dance becomes a chosen and collective act of perpetual movement without exploitation: a loop that does not begin or end at the same place. A process that is never final. Puppets play the roles, new kins-on-strings to the ones my mother made, an extension of her work into mine (this time explicit, but all times always so).

Jesus Watches

A couple years later, I receive an excited voicemail with an epiphany: about how the concept of linear time emerged in Western thought as a result of a struggle for power by the Christian church. Cyclical time: a threat to monotheism, hegemonic ideology, and colonial systems of power. I'm on my bike when I first listen to it, pedalling. The enforced notion of a beginning and an end becomes a worldview essential to perpetuate the myths of individual (a reproducing unit of labor) and its exploitable obsession with progress and completion: death is a necessity. The cuts made in luxury watch advertisements from *The Economist* explode with some psychedelic spirit from the clock's centre: it is only later that I understand the centre of German Christmas paper stars, from which this process is informed, represents the birth of Jesus. In the corner of the same image, a white man (the watchmaker) works at a table under dim light to make a legacy piece that will last beyond a lifetime: An accessory that promises the mastering of time itself, and as such affords an exception to death.

stink bottles

I'm in the feed. It's like a strawberry with gems on it and a jewellery hat, but it isn't, and it says "death" or "memory" or "sadness" on it in some kind of Latin language, but it doesn't. It's definitely expensive, a vessel for something invisible and addictive and intoxicating. Something that lingers. And there are hundreds of them just like it, little variations riffing off one another, strawberry turns to pink glass turns to rock. Katharina describes the pace of her production and distribution of them as "frightening": incomprehensible, very fast, and also familiar (the pace of automation, of a supply chain, of every thing that makes their way to us and through us). But they take so long to look at, I reply. They keep coming and they keep changing, reminiscent of moments in my dream worlds where you can't read numbers or letters. Stink bottles are literally phrases forced visual, processed through an artificial intelligence software: the rapid translation is flawed, generating mystical, weird, barely graspable imagery. Nonsense? No, just something you can't understand yet. They are photographic works (but not) that sit outside of time, or within it but from behind, or in front, underneath, inside. Folding temporalities through generations and friendships, time travel made manifest simply by remembering each other's ideas.⁴

¹ This story was the story of Igor Stravinsky's *Le Sacre Du Printemps*, told to my mother by Pina Bausch.

² These works include: our paid jobs, our artistic work, and our care for our mental health.

³ Stravinsky based the story of *Le Sacre Du Printemps* on Pagan Russian folklore from rural communities outside of Moscow, of which he was not a part of (but visited these areas for summer leisure trips with his family). The ballet premiered in 1913 to a bourgeois Parisian audience, and allegedly its atonality caused a riot.

⁴ Following this logic: as much as they'd love you to believe it, there is no such thing as a solo exhibition.

#2: MYTHS

Le Sacre Du Printemps

Igor Stravinsky premiered *Le Sacre du Printemps* at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in 1913, and the audience rioted. The ballet was unconventional in all ways: the music atonal, the dancers' costumes formless, and the choreography repetitive, brute, and violent to the bodies on stage. The audience was a combination of two generations of the Parisian bourgeoisie; the younger crowd had anticipated the unconventionality of Stravinsky's latest work, while the older quickly became angered by such sacrilege of the canon. These two expectations clashed at the sound of the first bassoon, which (allegedly) stirred heckling shouts. Soon, Jean-Paul Sartre would be stabbed with a hatpin. Marketing professionals will already be reading this scenario as strategy: the retelling of this riot was greatly exaggerated, and images like Sartre and the hatpin functioned as tag-lines for the promotion of the *Le Sacre*, despite it resulting in the temporary removal of the ballet from Parisian theatres.

Music historians argue these two phenomena – the **spectacle-ization** of the riot through dramatised media coverage (*Le Sacre* as an event) and the censorship of the piece afterward (*Le Sacre* as artefact) – perpetuated the ultimate monumentalization of *Le Sacre Du Printemps*. Richard Taruskin writes: “[*Le Sacre du Printemps*]’s equal fame as artifact and as event combined to give it an even higher status — the status of myth... Audience resistance to artistic greatness was part of the myth of romanticism, according to which creative genius is socially alienating and isolating.”⁵

What is less acknowledged in the analysis of the ballet is the origin of the story told through dance. Stravinsky, a Russian composer raised in Moscow and based **across many European metropolises** with a dominantly Western European audience, presented the second iteration⁶ of *Le Sacre Du Printemps* with the brief description: "a spectacle of Pagan Russia". When he was growing up, Stravinsky summered with his family in the Russian countryside outside of Moscow where Pagan communities lived. With *Le Sacre Du Printemps*, he performed a characteristic and violent gesture of Western Modernism: a non-consensual extraction of another culture's aesthetic and stories into his own work in order to present to his audience an unfamiliar "spectacle" in the name of immortalising his artistic reputation. This is made clear in a press release published in the major Paris newspapers on the day of the premiere, written by the management of the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées:

*[Le Sacre du Printemps] evokes the primitive gestures of pagan Russia... Here we see powerfully portrayed the characteristic attitudes of the Slavic race in its response to beauty in the prehistoric era. Only the wonderful Russian dancers could portray these first stammered gestures of a half-savage humanity; only they could represent these frenzied mobs of people who stamp out untiringly the most startling polyrhythms ever produced by the brain of a musician.*⁷

And with whistles in their pockets, the Parisians rose to the call of this xenophobic pagan exoticism, and *Le Sacre Du Printemps* became a canonic legend through the myth of audience resistance.

The thing about myths is that they are often orally transmitted. In this instance, however, western culture (then and still now majority supported by the wealthy, fashionable, and socially influential) took a major role in securing *Le Sacre Du Printemps*' mythological status. If resistance was used as a marketing strategy in order to ensure the success of the ballet, where is the place for resistance in practicing an alternative revision of the origin story?

According to Stravinsky's retelling, the folklore goes: A village is undergoing a climate crisis, and spring will not come. A shaman (in Nicholas Roerich's costume design, this character is an old woman, a foil to the beauty expected in a ballet theatre) delivers a message from god that says they must sacrifice a young virgin

⁵ Richard Taruskin, *Resisting The Rite*, 2013.

⁶ Made possible with a generous donation from Coco Chanel!

⁷ Richard Taruskin, *Resisting The Rite*, 2013. Underlined text added for emphasis.

woman by dance. They do, and the ballet ends with her death: hence, it is only assumed spring results. **First name** Nijinsky's choreography is as harsh on the ballerina's bodies as Stravinsky's polyrhythms are to the audience's ears. The Chosen One – the girl who is sacrificed – jumps in place repeatedly, landing with audible thumps that are barely braced by her knees. As she becomes more exhausted she falls to the ground, only to rise again and jump until she collapses. Her dance is repeated as the orchestra shrieks. This is a body who is quite literally working herself to death. The community sacrifices one labouring body for the wellbeing of the rest: the labour and economic strategy that colonial capitalism is based on and continues to perform today. As a virgin, her role as a reproductive unit to perpetuate a labour force has not been fulfilled. She is expendable.

What are the possibilities in revisiting *Le Sacre Du Printemps* both as a piece of music and a narrative work that breaks its monolithic, racist, extractive, and violent origins? This text is written by a white artist from settler origins living in Europe producing artwork in a culturally Western context. *Le Sacre*, whether invited or not, shares this space. There is desire to queer this story, and make a new myth: to re-write the Chosen One as The Intuitive Teacher, to re-write the sacrificers as The Wise Learners, to make the shaman and all of them beyond beautiful, sparkling and joyful and strange, and to make their resistance not one of strategic spectacle, but of quiet and collective resistance. To make the music not a rigid poly-tempo to keep time to, but rather an "ambulatory journey through the unplanned, the unexpected, the improvised, and the surprising."⁸

FAGGOT AND THEIR FRIENDS

Who has permission to make myths? Myths can be murmured, spread in secret, trusted with ears and mouths that transform it responsibly, making their own amendments and additions. They are fluid, responsive to those they pass through and those that pass them on. To end with an affirmation, Saidiya Hartman articulates her practice in finding wishes, doubts, and possibilities within existing (incomplete) historical archives in this way:

Is it possible to exceed or negotiate the constitutive limits of the archive? By advancing a series of speculative arguments and exploiting the capacities of the subjunctive (a grammatical mood that expresses doubts, wishes, and possibilities), in fashioning a narrative, which is based upon archival research, and by that I mean a critical reading of the archive that mimes the figurative dimensions of history, I intended both to tell an impossible story and to amplify the impossibility of its telling.⁹

Amplifying the impossibility of a story's telling is a radical act that grows the space in which that story, or myth, can move. Here's to one small contribution, hoping to shake another brick from the monumentalised enclosure we (white Western cultural producers) have built around the myth of *Le Sacre Du Printemps*.

⁸ Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art Of Failure*, 2011

⁹ Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts", 2008

The Church and Linear Time

A voice message from Katharina Cameron, preceding the making of **Jesus series** (*consent pending*):

The Dancing Plague of 1519

In 1519, a dancing plague was recorded in Strasbourg. It began with a handful of people, mostly women and peasants, who began to frantically dance without stopping. Soon, the dancing affliction began to spread to other people in the city, seeming to be infectious and affecting only the poor.

Strasbourg's drastic class division between the peasants and the elite was moderated by the Clergy, who had recently begun to heavily tax the poor. The Clergy, watching the plague spread from their towers, assessed it was mass hysteria, potentially induced by starvation. As the plague raged on, some began to speculate if it was the affect of a fungus produced on poorly preserved food.

But what if it was an organised protest? What if the "hysterical" was really a controlled resistance, undisclosed sense masked as nonsense? What if dancing – an expression of non-normative movement, a denial of social participation, and an uncensored expression of intense emotion, was intended to baffle, embarrass, and shake the foundations of those who would otherwise suppress it?

The plague ended after two months, and a conclusive cause was never determined, leaving this historical archive open for myth-making.

#3: OUR NOSES