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# The new embodied angel of the archive: light and shadow

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**Abstract |** This article examines the "embodied angel of the archive," inspired by Walter Benjamin's "Angelus Novus" metaphor, exploring archives as dynamic entities that inspire poetic narratives. Drawing on key theorists, it critiques neoliberal commodification of memory and surveillance capitalism's impact on experiential memory. Performance studies examples highlight how archives can stifle or ignite transformative forces. The study reimagines the archive as a conscious, grounded presence, resisting neoliberal algorithmic fetishization and redefining our relationship with memory and history.

KEYWORDS: Archive. Performance. Neoliberalism.

***O novo anjo encarnado do arquivo: luz e sombra***

***Resumo*** *| Este artigo explora o "anjo encarnado do arquivo," inspirado pela metáfora do "Angelus Novus" de Walter Benjamin, considerando os arquivos como entidades vivas que inspiram novas narrativas poéticas. Baseando-se em autores críticos ao neoliberalismo, investiga as forças macro e micropolíticas que moldam a "mania de arquivar" no mundo contemporâneo. O estudo critica a mercantilização neoliberal da memória e o impacto do capitalismo de vigilância sobre a experiência mnemônica ao propor um "novo anjo do arquivo" que resista ao fetichismo neoliberal do algoritmo, oferecendo uma nova relação com a memória e a história.*

*P A L A V R A S - C H A V E: Arquivo. Performance. Neoliberalismo.*

***Ángel encarnado del archivo: luz y sombra***

***Resumen*** *| Este artículo explora el "ángel encarnado del archivo," inspirado en la metáfora del "Angelus Novus" de Walter Benjamin, entendiendo los archivos como entidades vivas que generan nuevas narrativas poéticas. Basándose en autores críticos del neoliberalismo, analiza las fuerzas macropolíticas y micropolíticas que modelan la "manía de archivar" contemporánea. El estudio critica la mercantilización neoliberal de la memoria y el impacto del capitalismo de vigilancia sobre la experiencia mnemónica. Finalmente, propone un "nuevo ángel del archivo" que resista el fetichismo neoliberal del algoritmo y replantee nuestra relación con la memoria y la historia.*

*PALABRAS CLAVE: Archivo. Performance. Neoliberalismo.*

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## Introduction

Why do we look back? What is it about the body of the archive that continues to stir us — to move us, to inspire us? What fuels this deep urge to document, to gather, to make sense of practices that linger like ghosts in the recesses of our unconscious? Has this impulse always existed? Where does it come from? And perhaps most importantly — who are the ones compelled to archive, and why?

Suely Rolnik (2017), in her article *Arquivo Mania*, points at an archive fever emerging from deeply distinct and specific macro and micropolitical forces. She describes an archival mania shaped by a globalized world caught in a tug-of-war between two opposing forces: on one side, a xenophobic and identity-driven impulse seeking to preserve iconic cultural notions; on the other, emerging voices from historically silenced and marginalized cultures. In this context, archive fever reflects a response to the seismic shift in hegemonic power — a moment in which dominant narratives in art and culture are being actively challenged, deconstructed, and reimagined through contemporary practice.

The erosion of hegemonic control has triggered a compulsive drive to archive the radical artistic movements of the 1960s and 1970s — movements that reshaped cultural and social landscapes and whose poetic force still resonates powerfully in the present. However, this archival impulse is not purely about safeguarding history. It often carries a reactionary undercurrent: an attempt to contain and distort these same poetic forces, ultimately seeking to neutralize their political and imaginative potential.

This tension leads us to a vital question: what power does the past still hold within our bodies? What is the force of creating memory — and who controls it through the act of archiving? Between silencing and the production of "official" histories, reactionary distortions often take root. In this context, we face a crucial warning: archiving can either preserve the vitality of poetic forces or suffocate them entirely. It becomes essential, then, to ask — do these forces endure, even when they are tamed, reframed, or co-opted by hegemonic power?

In *Archive and the Repertoire* (2003), Diana Taylor warns against the colonization of performance archives and the tendency to devalue the ephemeral nature of cultural practices, often treating them as inferior to dominant Western forms of knowledge — what she refers to as 'sovereign graphies.' Taylor urges us to confront the harmful effects of this domestication and distortion of history. When lived experience is forced into rigid frameworks that limit its ability to generate multiple meanings, it breeds alienation, powerlessness, and a suppression of creative potential. In such conditions, the desire to keep creating — to leave meaningful, innovative traces in the social fabric — begins to

wither.

**The Vulnerable Archive in the Age of Surveillance Capitalism**

The reduction of living events to something less than their full sensory and cognitive impact is a deliberate consequence of contemporary neoliberalism. The logic of capital contributes to a fragmentation of lived experience, infiltrating political narratives and shaping individual subjectivities — stripping events of depth and diminishing their transformative potential. We are no longer dealing with neutral or objective modes of recording memory, but rather with curated and manipulated versions, designed to serve specific interests.

In this context, capitalist dominant discourse operates as a command — a relentless pressure to keep producing, to keep moving. The compulsive mantra to "do and move" or "move fast and break things" leaves little room for memory work — no space for reflection, pause, or embodied integration. This accelerated rhythm wears us down. It erases the very conditions in which the body might fully register, process, or respond — whether through storytelling, gesture, muscle memory, or other somatic imprints of lived experience.

This vortex of the productivity imperative — which promotes compulsive doing as the only viable means of survival within a fiercely competitive economic system — drains the body of its ability to function as a living archive. In this context, the body is no longer a site of artistic or transgressive potential but becomes caught in the blind roulette of suicidal productivity. This dynamic is not driven solely by an unchecked obsession with output, but also by the **archival hunger** of surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019), in which everything produced is ultimately captured, converted into data, and exploited as capital — both passive and active — to generate profit and exert control over bodies. This issue warrants urgent critical attention and will be explored further in this article.

André Lepecki (2010), in *The Body as Archive*, offers a vital perspective on this debate. He suggests that when a performer engages in acts of poetic reconstitution, they temporarily suspend the usual authorial control over the archive. This creates a moment of radical transgression – a disruption of the economy of copyright – in which the performer becomes a symbolic donor, simultaneously activating the present and receiving from the past.

Lepecki's insights highlight the complexity of our current condition. On one hand, neoliberal systems construct archives of bodies that suppress their own sensory and expressive capacities. On the other, there persists a bold resistance — those who

reawaken past registers through acts of re-enactment and embodiment. In this landscape, a crucial question arises: how can we create charged spaces in the present that not only retrieve the transformative force of the past, but also open up new possibilities for experience?

This earlier line of inquiry led me to a point of entanglement, where Walter Benjamin's (1994) reading of Proust seems to offer a compelling framework through which to explore the issue further. Benjamin observes that in Proust's conception of 'lost time,' the transformative force lies not solely in lived experience, but in the act of remembering — in the texture of recollection itself. For Benjamin, the present becomes a magnetic field capable of reactivating dormant energies from the past.

This perspective may help us navigate the contemporary tension between the experiential body and the surveilled body. It suggests that memory and re-enactment can emerge within a *charged field* — a space where the past is not static but waiting to be stirred into presence. But what exactly is this field. And how might we create such spaces in the present — spaces capable of reviving the transformative power of what came before, and propelling new forms of experience? How do we experience what remains? From where – and how – do we live what still lingers?

Perhaps the archive is built not from what endures, but from what vanishes. These unexhausted remnants and residues of the archive (Lepecki, 2010) suggest a performance that arises precisely through its disappearance (Schneider, 2011). The question, then, becomes: how can we perceive what remains latent — vibrant, flickering — awaiting its moment of activation?

**Performance and History: Remembrance as a Fabric**

The practice of re-enactment within embodied studies, performance, and archival research offers a rich and varied field of inquiry. These performances often reactivate historical archives that remain unresolved — archives that continue to disrupt and shape contemporary political forces. Such performative acts frequently bring to light gestures and narratives that blur, question, or resist official versions of history.

The category explored here refers not only to performances that recover the past, but also to those that re-enact it in order to generate new understandings — new presences within the present. These acts of re-enactment fracture linear time, opening up disruptions that expose suppressed, neglected, or unfinished layers of history.

A powerful example is the performance *The Civil War Isn't Over, and That's Why We Fight* (1999). This piece functions more as a ritual than a conventional theatre

production. Rather than simply staging historical events, it creates a space in which narratives of the past can unfold in unexpected and affective ways.

The work arose from a moment during an interview between performer Chuck Woodhead and scholar Rebecca Schneider (2011), as part of her research visits to historical re-enactments in 1999 — including the Battle of Culp's Hill at Gettysburg (1863).[1]

Schneider's approach resulted in a form of performative interview, in which performers responded to her questions not through words alone, but through enacted scenes. As Schneider recounts, many of these performances took place in the open fields of the National Military Park, without a conventional audience. *"From a distance, one could only perceive the smoke, the muffled gunshots — observed by just a few witnesses"* (Schneider, 2011).

Her account of this particular performance articulates a discourse grounded in touch and affect. The performer described the sensation of being "touched by time" — a temporal dislocation marked by both acceleration and compression, which immersed him in overlapping dimensions of historical experience.

This sensation of being "touched by time" as a multi-layered history unfolds aligns closely with ideas found in both Hegel and Benjamin. When Marx paraphrased Hegel's claim that history repeats itself first as tragedy, then as farce, he offered a spiralling view of time — one that resonates with Walter Benjamin's image of the *Angelus Novus*, which suggests the possibility of fleeting moments of illumination capable of generating meaningful disappearances. In Benjamin's words:

> The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise and has caught in his wings; it is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (BENJAMIN, 1985, p. 226)

Here, Benjamin's concept of progress reveals itself as a destructive force — one that prevents a renewed, critical engagement with the past. In contemporary terms, this same force manifests as neoliberal "fever": a compulsive momentum that suffocates our capacity for subjective experience to leave meaningful traces.

We now live in a reality where we move forward without fully processing what we have lived. In doing so, we allow the past to return — not as memory, but as haunting. A persistent echo of what was never properly acknowledged or properly assimilated**.**

[1] The historical re-enactments of 1999, including the Battle of Culp's Hill at Gettysburg (1863), were part of broader Civil War re-enactment events organized by amateur history enthusiasts in collaboration with local and national historical societies.

**Performing Unfinished Wars**

In responding to Schneider's question — *Why do we fight?* — Woodhead experiences a stretching of Hegelian time, paired with a critical gaze towards history. The Battle of Gettysburg, the focus of this re-enactment, was a pivotal military confrontation that shaped the outcome of the American Civil War and redirected the course of U.S. national politics. By halting the Confederate invasion — at enormous human cost — and reinforcing Unionist ideals, Gettysburg had a lasting impact on the war, on both domestic and foreign policy, and on the construction of American national identity.

The Civil War is not over, and the unresolved forces of that conflict continue to be seen — and felt — in the performative fabric of contemporary life. The performer-historian does not aim simply to describe the past, but rather to provoke the emergence of silenced hopes, inscribing them into the present as a call for a different future. This archival gesture carries within it the impulse to excavate forces from the past and transform them — not to preserve, but to re-activate them in the here and now.

**FIGURE 1** - Confederate war reenactors. May of 2008. Photo by Mama Geek. https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:BattleOfChancellorsvilleReenactment.jpg Access in 21/12/2024.

As part of this historical re-enactment exercise, Schneider cites a phrase coined by members of the Lincoln Project's [2] performance group, which served as a key slogan for their campaign: *'Now he belongs to the stage.'* This deliberately altered quotation plays on

[2] The Lincoln Project engages with the recovery and reinterpretation of Abraham Lincoln's image within the realms of American cultural memory and political discourse.

the famous words spoken by Edwin Stanton at Lincoln's deathbed — *'Now he belongs to the ages.'* In this revised version, the past is repositioned as something destined not for sacred remembrance, but for theatrical staging — something to be re-performed rather than preserved.

## Brazilian Context: The Re-enactment of Getúlio Vargas in *The Shot That Changed History*

In the winter of 1991, one of the most striking historical re-enactments in Brazilian theatre premiered in Rio de Janeiro. In a unique initiative, the Rio de Janeiro Department of Culture offered the grounds of the Museum of the Republic — formerly the official residence of the Federal Government — as the stage for a re-staging of an event that left an indelible mark on the nation's history.

The performance staged by the Center for Demolition and Construction of the Spectacle[3], under the direction of Aderbal Freire-Filho, generated a similar friction between past and present — enacting the kind of compression of parallel temporalities that Benjamin describes.

*The Shot That Changed History* explored dissonances between the epic narratives of the past and those of the present. Aderbal approached the production with a keen awareness of spatial and temporal multiplicity, staging a performance that deliberately expanded the dimensions of historical time.

> This palace is real, the actors and the audience are flesh and blood, and this fable truly happened — yet now, it is theatre. On the real night of 24 August 1954, the characters lived each minute of this tragedy — and so, that too was theatre. From this point onward, actors and spectators take their place precisely where history unfolded, and something new emerges — a fusion of past memory with the present moment of performance. (*Excerpt from the program of* The Shot That Changed History, *1991)*

[3] The Centre for the Demolition and Construction of the Spectacle was founded in Rio de Janeiro by Aderbal Freire-Filho in 1990. The group's central aim was to experiment with and reinvent theatrical forms, challenging the conventions of traditional theatre in order to deconstruct and then reimagine them in innovative ways.

**FIGURE 2** - Ministerial meeting scene featuring Cláudio Marzo as Getúlio Vargas. Staged at the Palácio do Catete. Photo by: CBTIJ https://cbtij.org.br Access in 21/12/2024

*The Shot* re-enacted the final moments in the life of Getúlio Vargas, former president of Brazil, who died by suicide in 1954. The performance was marked by striking temporal frictions and was deeply shaped by its setting: the Palácio do Catete in Rio de Janeiro, the actual site of the historical event. The production featured a cast of around 30 actors, who brought to life not only the key historical figures involved, but also anonymous characters drawn from wider society at the time. The piece offered a multifaceted portrayal of the events, exploring the diverse perspectives within Brazilian society on Vargas's legacy and the circumstances that led to his tragic end.

In an interview with Fátima Saadi (2002), Aderbal Freire-Filho recalls how past and present constantly collided across the various spaces of the production — from backstage and rehearsal rooms to the palace where the re-enactment took place:

> I remember that in the final scene with Getúlio alone, just before he takes his own life, I played with reality in a different way — with historical reality, in this case. When we began working on the scene, the audience would hear the gunshot, then enter the bedroom and find Getúlio dead. And I said: 'Novaes, I'm not going to waste the opportunity to write what history left unsaid; if history didn't walk into the room and see, then I will.' So, we added that young girl who gives him the revolver. Among the actions leading up to the suicide, for instance, he looks at a portrait — one where he's smiling with Roosevelt — a picture that still hangs in that room today — and he comments on his joy. Then we added this moment: he opens the door a little, the one that leads to the balcony overlooking the garden. He looks out, says farewell to the garden — and because it's his last time, it's as though he sees the world turning from that garden. Suddenly, he realizes someone among the people is watching and quickly shuts the door. And when you invent something like that, reality tends to follow: soon enough, someone came to me and said, 'The person who saw him open the door was my uncle. (Folhetim, 2002)

**FIGURE 3** - Gisele Fróes as "Death" in *The Shot That Changed History*, staged at the Palácio do Catete. Photo by: CBTIJ https://cbtij.org.br Access in 21/12/2024

The reinvention of history played a central role in this production, offering a deeper reading of Getúlio Vargas's life and death. By re-signifying the details surrounding the death of a public figure, the play reanimated the traces he left behind — allowing them to resonate again in the present.

From a historical perspective, Getúlio's death left a wound in Brazil's collective imaginary — a suspended tension that became a vacuum readily filled by political life or theatrical action. His suicide was not merely a tragic ending; it became a turning point in Brazilian political history. It cemented Vargas's legacy as a champion of workers' rights and economic nationalism, while also fuelling the polarised political climate that would ultimately lead to the 1964 military coup.

His final act strengthened the labour movement, exposed deep class tensions, and left a lasting imprint on Brazil's political imagination — one that continues to shape debates around progress, justice, and economic development to this day.

In *The Shot*, we encounter a man who touched history — a living legacy — the myth of Getúlio. While that myth may dissolve over time, the flesh-and-blood Getúlio of the re-enactment brought the past back into the present, momentarily freed from the debris of "progress" and the relentless pull of the future. According to Aderbal: The present night was treated as a future night, the current space as a future space, and the

past as a place of the present. (*Folhetim*, 2002).

This invites us to revisit Benjamin's allegory of the *Angelus Novos* — reimagined here as an embodied figure, no longer overwhelmed by the storm of progress, but instead creating a saturated time of "nows." Might this Proustian human angel be an archetype — one who escapes the suffocating debris of history? Is this what the living archive has to offer?

The open wound of Getúlio's death is also a historical wound — one linked to the defence of workers' rights and to political polarisation as a lasting strategy. It is a wound that has never quite healed in Brazilian public life. The history activated in Aderbal's staging repeats itself endlessly in Brazilian experience — as both tragedy and farce, never fully resolved.

In that 1991 setting, through the work of the Centre for the Demolition and Construction of the Spectacle, it was still possible to stage, translate, and generate friction between past and present. The transformative visions of that time were still able to weave audience and actor together. Today, however, something has been lost — and the contemporary stage demands a new re-signification of the archive's performative force.

**How can we embody the angel who subverts history under surveillance capitalism?**

André Lepecki's hypothesis — that bodies can generate new economies by becoming living archives of an unfinished history of art and the world — now faces a more complex question: how can these bodies continue to perceive themselves as active agents within a present that feels increasingly hollow, disconnected from its past?

What causes a body to move when the potentials of the present become completely abstract? And when we ask, *"What moves a body?"*[4] another question soon follows: *Which body are we talking about?* What kind of subjectivity is at stake?

Here, I return to Marxist thought to pose a fundamental question: can we still define a historical subject when history itself seems to lack a subject? In an interview with Virgínia Fontes, Mauro Iasi (2024) describes a phenomenon in which a defeated class, in a defensive posture, begins to fetishise its own defeat — perceiving the abstract system as an all-powerful force. This is the result of the collapse of the collective's mediating structures: political parties, neighbourhood associations, trade unions. In their place arises a bourgeois identitarianism which, in absorbing corporatist rhetoric in distorted

[4] This question, of course, engages with Spinozist philosophical premises. Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics: Demonstrated in Geometrical Order*, trans. Edwin Curley (London: Penguin Classics, 1996).

ways, generates an alienating form of segregation — marked by identity-based defensiveness and practices of cancellation. As Walter Benjamin reminds us:

*Class struggle, which a Marxist-trained historian can never afford to ignore, is a struggle over the crude and material things — without which the refined and spiritual things cannot exist.* (Benjamin, 1994).

In other words, Benjamin shows us that capital is the real substance behind the symbolic. If capital asserts itself so explicitly as humanity's antagonist, then what space remains for the angel who subverts history to take form? What are the empty gaps in the historical record that the body — through performance, dance, and enactment — might still inhabit?

Until now, capitalism has only taught us to move, to break, and to forget ourselves — promising instead an eternal algorithmic trace through selfies and social media posts. But whom do these mnemonic platforms actually represent? The subjects who use them — or those who allow themselves to be used?

The very concept of the "user" has become capital itself, sustaining mechanisms of expropriation and exploitation through the capture and monetisation of personal digital traces.

Today, the problem is immensely complex, because capital has appropriated the performative act of the 'selfie' as a destructive axis — undermining the very cultivation of a possible *'self'.* The psychic instance of the **'**self' mediates our relationship with reality, offering to the subject an encounter with their own unconscious depths. And it is precisely within this intricate web — between lived experience and unconscious force — that a subject capable of perceiving and transforming the present can emerge. But this subject is under threat.

For Freud, the unconscious is the realm of drives and libido; for Lacan, it appears in the tension between language and the homeostatic balance of pleasure and death; for Jung, it signals a force of sublimation and spiritual ascent. For the algorithm, however, the mediated collective unconscious is reduced to a flow of capital — entirely detached from any concern for the well-being of the organism.

This algorithm is driving a global homogenisation, while simultaneously contributing to pandemic levels of mental illness and widespread psychological distress.

The compulsion to archive and broadcast selfies — and the parallel flight from the *'self'* — feeds into a state of regression and compulsive isolation, reinforced by the armouring of identity wars. The "influencers" games, the enslavement of "TikTokers", the mirage of celebrity, and the fetishistic narcissism of avatars all represent failed attempts

to gain control over reality. In truth, they reproduce a sadomasochistic microcosm of capitalism.

**The Potential Subversion of the Algorithm Through Performance**

How might we confront, subvert, and interrogate the algorithm, opening up a broader discussion around the role of digital archives? The relationship between digital archives, academic research, and poetic creation is riddled with tension — especially when we consider that these archives are supported by the algorithmic logic which, at its root, underpins today's dominant technological platforms. This language carries a restrictive repertoire that can limit the poetic articulations and translations made possible by archival material.

At the same time, digital space allows for the creation of performance repositories with powerful political reach — as seen in initiatives such as the Hemispheric Institute[5] or various university-led digital collections around the world.

My question is: in what ways can the presence of technologically mediated performance archives be curtailed or distorted by algorithmic manipulation? Given that performance inherently seeks to break norms and question mechanisms that shape and constrain our social perception, I ask: how might the performer, archivist, or dancer become a "hacker" capable of disrupting the binary logic of the algorithm?

Here, however, we must make a crucial distinction between media as it operates within neoliberal frameworks and the digital platforms themselves. In a conversation with Diana Taylor for our article *"Dialogue and Repertoire: The Ever-Changing Nature of Walking and Talking Together"* (2023), we underscored the importance of this difference. The architecture of the web, originally developed for military use, has since been repurposed to meet broad social needs for connection — and that shift itself can be understood as transgressive. The problem is not digital communication per se, but the neoliberal infiltration that manipulates how algorithms are deployed. It's not about the algorithm itself, but who controls it and what purposes it serves. Therefore, it becomes essential to identify both the limits and distortions produced by this system, as well as the inherent possibilities and positive capacities of technology.

[5] The Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics, established in 1998 by NYU Professor Diana Taylor in collaboration with colleagues from Brazil, Mexico, and Peru, is a collaborative, multilingual, and interdisciplinary platform. It brings together artists, scholars, writers, learners, and activists from across the Americas, focusing on social justice and politically engaged culture and performance. The Institute maintains digital archives, enriched through dialogues, residencies, and publications. Hemispheric Institute operates across disciplines, grounded in the belief that artistic practice and critical reflection can foster lasting cultural transformation. As of recent reports, the Institute comprises over 45 member universities, numerous collaborating cultural centres and social justice organisations, and engages thousands of individuals in its programmes.

The central limitation lies in the binary nature of technology and a certain fetishisation of data capture, in which one body of knowledge claims dominion over another. This reflects the colonising impulse within dominant Cartesian thought — the drive to expand knowledge through spatial control, reducing life to what can be measured and categorised numerically. This is one of the key challenges faced in this field.

Such dynamics echo broader neoliberal strategies, where the surface appearance of code and its effects mask the more expansive agency of the subject who creates and engages with these tools.

Funding policies further reflect this tendency, as increasing investment is directed towards technological research. While this drives significant innovation, it also raises complex questions within artistic research — particularly when resources are used opportunistically, without genuine engagement with the language and logic of technology. In the long term, such tendencies risk eroding the poetic power embedded in digital archives.

Rather than confining ourselves to compressed formats that subordinate archival control to code and standardised storage, we must reflect on the relationship between technology and poetry in the act of archiving.

Returning to Suely Rolnik's warning (2017), it is not enough to entrust the power of archiving solely to technology, while neglecting the human and poetic dimensions of the archive. It is this human-poetic dimension that truly revitalises the archive — not through strict adherence to preservation protocols, but through acts of translation and subversion. What is preserved endures because it remains in motion. The task, then, becomes one of reading and translating this movement — through and despite the codes.

In this sense, our engagement with the archive echoes Walter Benjamin's[6] understanding of translation as a kind of betrayal. The labour of this translational/betraying act involves care for the presence and vitality that animates the archive, a kind of listening attuned to its impulses. These impulses go beyond the reach of the algorithm.

So how can we allow these transcendences to become unexpected unfoldings that infiltrate the technological language of data? How can we sensitise ourselves to, and listen for, the nuances that emerge from archival traces — especially those that escape the binary logic of the machine?

Motion capture (MoCap) and digital processing technologies, while powerful and technically sophisticated, often fail to retain the poetic density of a performance or the

[6] **Walter Benjamin.** "The Task of the Translator." In *Magia e Técnica, Arte e Política: Ensaios sobre Literatura e História da Cultura*, 7th ed., 115–125. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 2012

lyricism of embodied expression. These technologies are potent tools for dissemination and documentation — but their transformative potential depends entirely on a careful mediation attuned to the archive's more delicate layers.

The effectiveness of such recordings depends less on the technical capacity of the machines, and more on the sensitivity and discernment of those who mediate the process — ensuring that the poetic value of the archive is not lost. Ultimately, it is the human perspective — the poetic lens through which we revisit the past — that allows the archive to come alive in the present.

**Between Capture and Texture: The Archive's Revitalising Impulses**

The work of performer and researcher Adriana La Selva offers a powerful example of a careful, poetic engagement with digital archival practice. In her project *Practicing Odin Teatret Archive* (POTA)[7], La Selva develops an approach to the archive that transcends the formal frameworks of digital technology. Her aim is not simply to preserve the visible elements of performance, but to translate its intentions, subtleties, and poetic subtexts.

La Selva builds a dialogue with the archive that honours the specific, fluid nature of Odin Teatret's work, while at the same time actively shaping how it can be accessed and experienced by future users. One might say that she dances between the art of archiving and the technological possibilities of capture—always aware of the impossibility of fully faithful reproduction through motion capture (MoCap). Instead, she opts—more wisely and effectively—to play with and reinvent the Odin archive from the point at which it touches her, allowing poetic transformation to emerge.

La Selva put this perspective into practice when translating the exercise *Six States of Water*, developed by Roberta Carreri as part of the Odin's actress repertoire *The Dance of Intentions*. In this training, participants are invited to explore a fixed score of actions, each linked to a different energy quality, evoking six water states: "mist", "bubbles", "Amazon River", "stream", "iceberg", and "storm".

La Selva responded by creating six immersive environments that translated the felt experience of each state into visual and sonic landscapes. Users were then invited to devise a six-action score and improvise with it, shifting their energetic quality in response to imagery seen through VR goggles. In this way, what once operated on the imaginative

[7] Practicing Odin Teatret Archive (POTA), doctoral research project, School of Arts, Ghent University, (2020 - …..) The project explores performative and poetic strategies of archival engagement, with a particular focus on the embodied transmission of Odin Teatret's legacy. For more information, see: https://www.schoolofartsgent.be/en/projects/practicing-odin-teatret-archive-pota.

level within Carreri's workshops was transferred into the optical-visual realm.

What was produced is a semiotic translation of a training rooted in somatic intelligence—a transformational reimagining of the archive that activates an expanded sense of the present and reawakens impulses from the past.

**FIGURE 4** – "*Iceberg from the Six States of Water experiment",* April 2022, Ioulia Marouda & Adriana La Selva. Photo taken from the article *"From Capture to Texture affective environments for theatre training in virtual reality (VR)"*
https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23322551.2023.2218185 Access in 11/10/2024

La Selva advocates for a space of dialogue between her body, technological platforms, and the archive—without compromising the analytical rigour required to address the specificity of the practice she investigates. She explains:

> The translation process begins with capturing bodily activities, such as movements and (neuro)physiological responses. Through multiple iterations, this data is then reinterpreted to compose a virtual environment. The ultimate aim is to abstract the embodied experience and reconstitute it, revealing a specific technique of corporeal training. The selection of abstraction and interpretation levels—while subjective—is grounded in research and the specific training of Odin's exercises. (MAROUDA; LA SELVA; MAES, 2023)

**FIGURE 5** - Participant in the Six States of Water experiment, April 2022. Photo by: Adriana La Selva. From the article *"From Capture to Texture affective environments for theatre training in virtual reality (VR)"* https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/23322551.2023.2218185 Access in 11/10/2024.

In my view, it is the poetic force of La Selva's body that acts as the primary catalyst source in translating the past—folding time in such a way that it opens new dimensions in the present and resonates into the future. The space she articulates—through the acts of capturing, translating, and "betraying" the archive—creates a vital interface between the real and the unconscious, making room for other bodies to inhabit and activate these traces.

Just as the empty spaces of history were reimagined and poetically reframed in the works of Rebecca Schneider and Aderbal Freire Filho, I suggest that the *living archive* offers a renewed embodiment of Benjamin's "angel of history"—one grounded in poetic action. In the works discussed here, the "storm of progress" that drives us destructively forward is momentarily suspended, allowing the past to touch and transform the present with fresh intensity.

These living archives function as *bodies of activation*. Yet they require other bodies—bodies willing to subvert the debris-cloud of capitalist acceleration, which relentlessly separates past from present and erodes our ability to weave time in the spiralling, Proustian sense.

I propose that the *new angel of the archive* is fully incarnate—a presence who chooses to remain in this world. This angel does not deny the material weight of unresolved struggles, nor does it retreat into the hypnotic fetish of our contemporary moment. Rather, it produces light without shunning shadow, embodying the poetics of the past while daring to leave traces that are, in themselves, transformative acts—agents capable of reconfiguring the past's poetic power within the fabric of the now.

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