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*To, From: Of Time, Of Distance, Of Body and Mind*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts  
at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by  
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*to my parents*

*to myself*



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## **Abstract**

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By Fanxi Sun

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts  
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Virginia Commonwealth University, 2023

Director:

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This paper introduces the concepts, theories, and techniques associated with my thesis project “To, From.” The paper consists of three parts: Time as Structure, Distance as Premise, and Body and Mind. Each chapter is written in a mixture of personal narration and a general introduction to materials that are directly or implicatively relevant and important to the creation of my project. In this experimental narrative comprises film screening and live performance with multi-channel sound, I tell a story of non-story. Words and the exchange of words, movements and non-movements, objects that are being handled and subjects that are handling... all of the elements become gestures, the representation of the thing instead of the thing itself. In the constructed multitude of temporality, operating under the idea of remaining distance, the apparatus of cinema and theatre, of mise-en-scène culminates an experience of different experiences.

## Introduction

*I breath in and out, repetitively, rhythmically, consciously and unconsciously. I move in the space, around the space, away from the space. I remain still, while moving in the most indiscernible way, in the most minuscule measurements of time, thus seemingly still. My eyes reach for the furthest on the other side of the peaks. My ears search for the widest above and below the waves.*

*I remain distant to the surrounding beings as they remain distant to me. I look back, to reexamine every word being said and exchanged, to reevaluate the states of mind. I dive deeper and deeper inward, to understand this person who is me.*

*I yearn for the delicate, the transient, the palpable yet still intangible. I yearn for the phenomenal dynamics embodied in the fluid state of the body, constantly in conversation with mind. I create visuals and sounds, hoping to elicit the secretive electrical currents, which I once and again experience when I have a bodily reaction to a thought of mine.*



Figure 1. Still from documentation of *To, From*, 2023.

*To, From* is a show consisting of film, performance, and four-channel sound installation. It's a story between two girl-friends, Aye (performed by Sophia Rosado) and Bee (performed by Zoë Yeeun Kim) who live in the same house and both practice in dance. The performance venue sets at the film-production venue that is decorated as the living room of a loft apartment. There are few conversations, mostly silence.

At the show, a film is screened on a rear-projected fabric the same width as the venue, in front of which the live performance happens simultaneously. Although starting and ending at the same

time, the film's narrative timeline is slower than that of the performance: the film's second half repeats the performance's first half of content; the ending of the film marks the midpoint of the performance. The 45-minute showing is split into three acts. The first two acts are each made of one scene, while the third act of the film has three scenes back to back yet that of the performance only has one continuous, extended scene.

Two speakers are placed next to the projection fabric, in front of the audience, and the other two are placed behind the audience. The beginning of the show has live sound from the front and the film sound from the back. As the show progresses, there becomes less to no front sound as the performers rarely occupy the stage, and more rear sound as the film attracts the majority of the attention. The score comes in at the second half of the show, which triggers the front speakers the first two times, and then the third time for both front and rear speakers to be active to heighten the immersive experience and push to the dramatic, emotional climax.

*To, From* is constructed on time and distance. The use of dual timelines treats time as both linear as a flux of past, present, and future, and self-intertwining as the three are all present at every moment. The writing originates in distance, and the sense of distance gets developed between not only characters but also the audience and the show itself. This work inherently is alienating instead of attracting or immersing in the context of contemporary cinema. The content of the show emphasizes metaphors and representations. Each object used, each word said, and each dance movement designed aim to metaphorize each other, to transform the quality and state of one experience to another. The performance of daily behaviors such as walking, sitting, and standing, becomes representations that are not to be understood in the actions' original context but in their forms of delivery and their meanings behind.

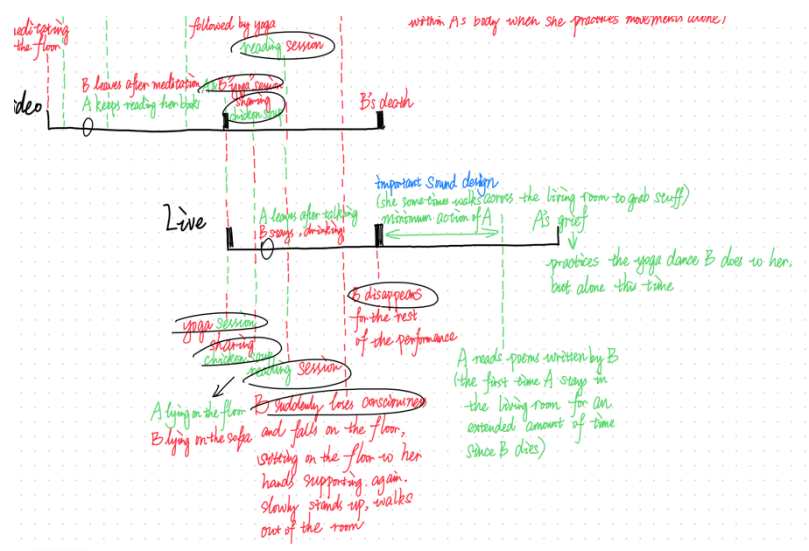


Figure 2. Screenshot of timeline design.

## Part I: Time as Structure

### 1. Concepts of Time

The discussion around the concept of time has been incredibly lavish. The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus' once asserts, "the only constant in life is change", and "no man ever steps into the same river twice." Everything is always in the state of moving, obviously or subtly. Although the river might remain existing in a specific space, the water that consists of the river is forever flowing. Heraclitus also envisages that most of the change was between opposites, which often present themselves simultaneously and complementarily in one object. "Differentiation contained an inner unity. For example, night and day which superficially appear to be utterly separate and opposed, actually form a single, underlying continuum by virtue of their unbroken succession" (Mposa 2014, 5).

The French philosopher Henri Bergson splits time into "objective time" and "lived time". The "objective time" refers to the time of clocks and watches, while the "lived time" - la durée (duration) - is the time of our inner subjective experience.

What is characteristic for consciousness, according to Bergson, is duration (durée): it is essentially memory in which time periods pass into each other, moving from virtuality into actuality in a process of continuous differentiation. The present exists not only simultaneously with its own past, which it is constantly in the process of becoming, but also with the past in general. Consequently, duration is less determined by a sequence of events than by their simultaneity and co-existence. (Klippel 2006, 148)

For Bergson, duration is a qualitative multiplicity. It consists temporarily in a state of diverse characteristics. In this heterogeneity, "several conscious states are organized into a whole, permeate one another, [and] gradually gain a richer content" (Bergson 1971, 122).

"Time is the substance I am made of. Time is a river which sweeps me along, but I am the river; it is a tiger which destroys me, but I am the tiger; it is a fire which consumes me, but I am the fire." Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges considers time a figment of the collective human imagination, which exists nowhere but in the human mind. While we are born with, made of, and changed by time, we make our own definitions of time and our existence represents time. In his short story *The Garden of Forking Paths*, time is linear and circular at the same time. Borges's definition of time as linear means that time is a series of experiences, one moment following the other. "As soon as the moment is experienced, it ceases to exist. [...] The past belongs to the realm of memory while the future belongs to the realm of imagination" (Mposa 2014, 8). Meanwhile, Borges inserts another point of view that time exists in an intricate net of divergences, convergences, and parallels. All presents, pasts, and futures are here at all times, and they together weave a web of limitless possibilities.

The first and foremost experience I want to create with *To, From* is the one with time in various definitions and forms. The film, shot and edited in the past and played in the present moment, embodies the process of becoming, of the past being realized in this specific timeline which we are currently witnessing and living in. The medium itself represents simultaneity and co-existence as emphasized by Bergson. In the show, the overlapping timelines with the same content being presented in different mediums highlight time as linear and as a net of intersections. Every second which we experience has accumulated the past, the present, and the future. When we reach the second half of the show, the act of re-watching the same happenings triggers the thinking of the past both in the narrative arc of the show and in the physical world where the spectator actively watches and remembers. The concept of time at this moment is redefined by the spectators' collective consciousness; there shall not be clarifications or objective markers, but only subjective feelings and understandings of the flux of beings. Diving into the choreography, or say character blocking, of performance, there are moments where the character in live walks across the stage from left to right while the character in film walks in the same direction; or where one sits down in live and the other stands up in film. It is through these indirect interactions between the two forms of representations that I tap into the divergence and the convergence pointed out by Borges. Although the happenings I present in the narrative are previously locked down, I still hope to have the gesture of juxtaposing, paralleling, and intercutting between the filmed content and the live content to poke into the endless possibilities of time, and the unforeseeable occurrences created by time. Lastly, thinking about Heraclitus' statement of time like a river and the notion that the difference contains unity, I set my performance to start at 8 pm when the sun is about to set and the evening glow is almost gone, which leaves the end of the show in complete darkness. In the end, no matter what kind of back-and-forth in timelines has been experienced, time always moves forward. The night passes to the day, and day to night.



Figure 3. Still from documentation of *To, From*, 2023.

## 2. Cinema's Relationship with Time

The origin of cinema is a time-based illusion: human visual systems process ten to twelve images per second as individual frames; as the number rises, the gap between each image shortens, and thus we watch them as a continuous motion instead of still images. The physical creation of film and the essential nature of screening a film establishes itself on the ever-flowing nature of time as well as illustrates it. In *Cinema 2: Time-Image*, the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze states that “both the material of the film itself and the resultant images on screen are subsumed by the flow of time” (Hockley 2011). Movement, as well, subordinates to time. Deleuze explains that the movement-image relates to objects whose relative position changes, and also to the whole which has an absolute change. The former happens in the realm of space, while the latter in time. The individual frames transform into one another with either a direct, specific intention or an overseeing theme, and the whole becomes a succession of presents instead of simple additions or juxtapositions (Deleuze 1985, 34-35). Deleuze also ties the act of film-viewing to Bergson's concept of *durée* in *Cinema I: Movement-Image*. “Our consciousness fades as we find ourselves entering the cinematic condition that enables seemingly forgotten memories to be experienced” (Hockley 2011), which is exactly entering the state of *durée* where each of us has a personal, subjective understanding of time and use of time. The experience of such acts of unlooked recall when watching a film, makes the present pregnant with the past.

The aspect of duration - normally considered as “how long it takes” - of one film or one shot directly relates to time. As a medium, cinema tends to shorten the “real” time of an action, i.e. opening a door, crossing a street, or traveling. We are way too familiar with how long this kind of specific actions take to not acknowledge its reference to a realist temporality, which is how an invisible edit works - “the spectators are free to imagine that ‘behind the representation’” (Comolli 2015, 118). Therefore, when the filmic images present an ordinary action as exactly how it is performed in daily life, the representation becomes almost too real and too close to life that viewers' relationship with the film is changed. They become aware that they are watching these actions taking place on the screen. They are aware of themselves. The Belgian filmmaker Chantal Akerman shots most of the scenes in *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975) in “real” time. Jeanne cooks, bathes, eats with her son, cleans, organizes... Every single set of actions has a substantial duration in time throughout which the camera stays at the same position. The combination of the close-to-real-life speed of actions and the minimized camera movement and editing build up an interesting tension between the viewer and the character. The act of watching turns into the act of waiting. The Japanese filmmaker Yasujiro Ozu has an even more overt preference for long takes with minimized character actions. Deleuze once comments on the still lifes in Ozu's films: “Ozu's still lifes endure, have a duration, over ten seconds of the vase: this duration of the vase is precisely the representation of that which endures. [...] A bicycle may also endure; that is, represent the unchanging form of that which moves, so long as it is at rest, motionless, stood against the wall (*A Story of Floating Weeds*)” (Deleuze 1985, 17).



Thinking about Deleuze's comments on movement-image creating an absolute change in status which is revealed in time, the succession of presents, and the viewing as *durée*, I construct the narrative arc and the individual scenes. The three different times when Bee adjusts her breaths which reflect her state of being has a slow yet study progression, to which time contributes, and on which the repetition of times emphasizes. The signature dance movements of Aye and Bee make are imbued with different meanings every time they are repeated all because of what has happened previously. The words being spoken and the texts being read summon feelings experienced at different times to this very moment of discourse, evidencing the past and predicting the future. In the context of timed duration, I preserve the "real" time as Akerman in the first half of the film, leaving every process as complete as possible, from the beginning to the end. In this sense, I hope to elicit viewers' own awareness of themselves watching this mundane movement on screen which may or may not hide clues for the upcoming event, and also of the double viewing experience with extended length and minimal happenings. The concept of still life's "enduring" proposed by Deleuze inspired my use of significant objects - Bee's notebook endures, and so does her cup of tea. They are left on stage in the middle of the show where Bee leaves with intense feeling of sickness. After a long period of time when almost nothing happens on stage yet plots repeat themselves on screen, Bee's notebook eventually gets picked up by Aye. It is then opened, read, closed, and put aside next to the teacup. The tea was hot when Bee first brings it into the room, but now cold. The notebook and the teacup both endure, endure the time without Bee in the room and only Aye passing by. At the same time they represent, represent the time when Aye and Bee are together, and when Bee is alone by herself.



Figure 4. Still from film *To, From*, 2023.



Figure 5. Still from film *To, From*, 2023.

Time is integral not only to the medium of film and the viewing of it but also to the cinematic frame and cinematic editing. Each individual frame - in the sense of the spatial composition rather than the still image that consists of motion - represents the duration of time. Referring to Borges' theory of the linear quality of time, Comolli addresses the temporality of frame in cinema. He starts by quoting McLaughlin's translation of Ricoeur's comment:

The present is not a pure isolated moment, but rather a window which opens and slides along the passage of time; it does not only retain the effective participation of the past, but also integrates our immediate future. (Ricoeur 1984, 15)



The frame of cinema is revealed when a camera movement happens, such as a pan or tilt, a zoom, or a tracking. The frame itself then entails the elements within the frame and prohibits those outside of the frame, both of which gather to define the fluid edges of the visible. In other words, “framing involves masking a succession of past and future temporal actions one behind the other, or one beside the other. [...] The frame is an oscillation between an awareness of the contour and an awareness of the content” (Comolli 2015, 69-70).

While the camera composition subtly refers to the concept of time, film editing directly works with time. “Every cut is a *cut in time*. There is a temporality in film, a temporality of consciousness (the active sum of perceptions, sensations, and attentions of the subject). The two temporalities are opposed to and composed at the same time” (Comolli 2015, 116). There are two types of cuts used in editing: matching cut, which maintains the fluidity and continuous passage of the film but shifts from one perspective to another; and jump cut, the cut that intentionally or accidentally provokes discontinuity and thus becomes disruptive of the established space and time. The matching cut, referred to as continuity editing, stitches two shots produced from different times and even different spaces - often shot at different distances and frame sizes and at least 30 degrees away from each other - to hide the mechanisms of filmmaking and leads viewers further in the world of illusion. Cuts here become more of a transition than an interruption. In the situation of a jump cut, “an ellipsis arises where there is not supposed to be one: within the continuity of a situation, itself filmed in continuity” (Comolli 2015, 115). The effect of “jumping” is born when two shots are extremely similar yet still distinct from one another - as if we have skipped a second in time, not while we are blinking but when our eyes are wide open. Our perception of and desire for a continuous action is thus interrupted. As Comolli suggests, a jump cut exists as a superior will, being exerted by the filmmaker, on the performed bodies and the interior of the scene where the space-time relationship is visibly controlled.



Figure 6. Still from film *To, From*, 2023.

I frame cautiously. Every composition presents only the needed information and excludes the non-important. I cut cautiously. There exist no cuts for continuity unless the dynamics and the attention of the scene have shifted. The first two acts of the film are shot only with wide and medium-wide shots, in order to establish the broad emotional context and the spatial relationship between the two characters. The third act gets closer to the characters, with more close-ups and cutting to direct the focus. There is only one time when the camera moves, in between the second and the third act. The camera follows Bee walking to the kitchen, stays still when Aye walks out and back in, and then follows Bee again walking from the kitchen to the dining table. The edges are now emphasized, as well as the temporality of the frame. The moving contour alerts the spectator of the presented subject and of her expressions and actions as a sequence in this timeline. Similarly to the movement of the camera, the transition from one shot to another in a continuous sense also implies the information in time, revealed but no longer in view or hidden but now exposed. I would also like to discuss the second act which is consisted of jump cuts of Aye dancing alone in the room. We see the sun moving on the floor and on Aye's body as each cut is made. In the disrupted sequence, these jump cuts stretch and distort the set marks of time and make it simultaneously hyper-visible and irrelevant. They also break the limitation imposed by the performer's physical body which always takes "time" to move across the space and thus amplifies this feeling of immediacy achieved only through the medium of film and the filmmaker as the prime commander. Furthermore, when this disjunctive sequence acted out by Aye is presented on screen, the continuous movements are performed live by both Aye and Bee. In the co-occurrence, time gets cut up, and remains its integrity.



Figure 7: Still from documentation of *To, From*, 2023.

## Part II: Distance as Premise

### 1. Distant to Myself, to My Surrounding

In his book *The Society of the Spectacle*, the French philosopher Guy Debord develops the concept of “spectacle”, which is born under the autocratic reign of the market economy and the totality of new government techniques. The spectacle is “both the result and the project of the existing mode of production” (Debord 1970, thesis 5) where lived things turn into representations and the world visions are objectified. He repeatedly emphasizes the essential condition of separation that unites the individuals and the production:

In the spectacle, one part of the world *represents itself* to the world and is superior to it. The spectacle is nothing more than the common language of this separation. What binds the spectators together is no more than an irreversible relation at the very center which maintains their isolation. The spectacle reunites the separate, but reunites it *as separate*. (Debord 1970, thesis 29)

The individual - as a worker in production - gets alienated from his working products without direct association, the process of which ends up contributing to the producer *as an abundance of dispossession*. The *externality* of the spectacle to the worker presents itself in the fact that “his own gestures are no longer his but those of another who represents them to him. This is why the spectator feels at home nowhere, because the spectacle is everywhere” (Debord 1970, thesis 30).



Figure 8. Still from film *The Introspection of Denied Agency*, 2023.

I have felt the distance for a long time. My strong desire to get close to people painfully leads to a result I do not wish for. I realize the invisible barrier standing between me and everyone - half built by the person herself, half imposed by this society of the spectacle - and I attentively, consistently feel its existence which I have no way to smoothly resolve. I start using this distance in my writing. Metaphor becomes the most intuitive way of distancing myself from an object, a subject, and eventually myself. A word as it is sometimes cannot refer to the precise characteristics and the status it contains, but by bringing a second thing - an external thing that is not literally applicable - into this specific context, through the act of branching and connecting, the meaning gets transported and the qualities get emphasized. Metaphor is the basis of my writing - I always allude to, instead of pointing out, as this style of almost abstracted narration best illustrates the substantial, intense experiences I have had and the concrete, striking emotions I have felt. No “real” occurrence is revealed, yet it is the most authentic sum of everything. This style of narration I employ represents me and alienates me.



Figure 9. Still from film *Triangle*, 2022.

I become so well-versed in the process of distancing myself which leads to getting close to myself, that I, again, realize the irresolvable distance between me and others. I cannot stand on the edge of the inside and the outside to inspect them the same way I inspect myself. My surrounding is purely surrounding me, encircling me. I am not able to step in it, nor is it able to enter me. I have once felt lonely and melancholy because of this realization and then the constant keen awareness of it, but I have grown used to it. I have accepted it as the very foundation of my living experience, thus also the foundation of my artistic practice - the apparent alienation and obscure interconnection ground my work.



*“I don’t think I’m gonna go again. It just doesn’t sit right with me. I really need to make it through... by myself. This thing is never ending if I keep talking about it.”*

I write the conversation and the monologue distantly, or even performatively. I instruct my performers to conduct their gestures in a formal way. The two characters have almost opposite personalities and are never on the same energy level. They don’t perform the same movement or participate in the same activity, at least not at the same time. It is always one looking at another rather than the two looking at each other. I deny the connection, within them and between them and spectators. There are cracks in the narrative that I can fill in for the sake of bonding and to create easier access for the audience. However, this kind of approach and trick feels disloyal to me myself and ingenuine and disrespectful to the audience. In the end, this piece originates in connection, but in a way that it is desired but not achieved, and thus asserted and lamented.



Figure 10. Still from film *To, From*, 2023.

## 2. Distance from Cinema

Cinema is the ultimate spectacle that represents the world as a spectacle. The mounting perfection of cinematic technology enables the world in the cinematic spectacle to be extremely close to the real world as a spectacle itself (Comolli 2015, 137). It is the virtual reality that mediates the lived reality yet resembles it and can be confused with it. Even when there is no obvious evidence showcasing the manipulation of the director, the editor, or the camera, cinema still exists as a representation. Because it is presented as images captured by the camera lens and sequenced according to formal principles and values, it creates new relationships, a new appearance fundamentally different from the one being lived. “The represented is perceived via a representation which inevitably transforms it” (Comolli 2015, 177).

To make the representation as close as possible to the presentation, the French film critic André Bazin wants to minimize the manipulation of the filmmaker herself. He advocates for the deep depth of field, which holds a larger area in the frame in focus, and long take - an extended duration of one shot. Bazin believes that these approaches together maintain the space-time relationship between objects, and leave the spectator freedom to direct their own attention and to create their own synthesis of interpretation, which maintains the ambiguity present in our daily lives. When discussing the deep depth of field applied throughout the film *Citizen Kane* (1941), Bazin stresses that it is through the *uncertainty* which Welles situates the spectator with deep focus that brings up a more active mental attitude of the spectator and opens up the interpretation we could put on the film (Bazin 2005, 36).

In the book *Liveness*, Philip Auslander adopts the French sociologist Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulation and proposes that the mediatized (film, television, broadcast) and the live (theatre, concert, performance) have dependence and imbrication, with adjacent edges overlapping. Simulation refers to "the recreation of performances that never took place, representations without referents in the real" (Auslander 1999, 86). For instance, when we watch a documentation of a live performance, it is not the original performance but one that never took place. The viewer's relationship with the "real" events changes with the birth of recording systems - the concept of "live" will never exist without the notion of the mediatization present. The audience's taste is irreversibly reformed by TV and related media which are based on repetition - the recorded and mediatized has accumulable value for capitalism. These repetition and reproduction intensify the desire for "the original", which is "always an *erotic lack* instead of a tangible and satisfying presence" (Auslander 1999, 55). When the audience re-enters theatre - the space for representation - their desire for realism is fulfilled through the live performance recreating the mediatized content. The use of an amplifier in theatre show to mimic the quality of recorded audio, the sampling of electronic simulation device TR 808's handclaps instead of real handclaps, the presentation of the same movements and staging recorded in music videos... All of these techniques contribute to the live performance and the mediatized performance each deriving authority from another.

Nothing separates one pole from the other, the initial from the terminal: there is just a sort of contraction into each other, a fantastic telescoping, a collapsing of the two traditional poles into one another: an IMPLOSION. *This is where simulation begins.* (Baudrillard 1983, 57)

The reality becomes the most intense in all of that apparatus of representations, where "the Right is the Left, the Mediatized is Live" (Auslander 1999, 96). In the end, the original artifact being referred to by the mass-produced is no longer irrelevant. The distinctions are not meaningful. Auslander points out that, this very kind of opposition between the live and the mediatized

performance is in fact constructed and strengthened by an agency of capital to recuperate simulation, which throws away the structure that power and capital depend on.



Figure 11. Still from documentation of *To, From*, 2023.

My interest in creating this piece lies not only in the simultaneity of the two forms of presentation and representation, but also in their difference and essential identity which relates to the definition, re-definition, and mediation of truth. Is the live performance with actors right in front of the audience more real than the film being screened where characters are non-touchable? If so, why is the characters' performance in the film more emotional and personal than in real life? If discrepancies are seen in different deliveries of the repeated content, what do these discrepancies mean and how will they influence the authenticity? How close are these two forms of narrative art to each other and to the structured truth? What sense of reality do these two forms create separately and then together? I intend to use the deep focus and long take to allow the ambiguity, as suggested by Bazin, to surface. It is the very reason why I construct the live "stage" in the exact same way as the wide shot in the film version. The spectators are free to wander their attention all around the physical room, *and* the flat surface that is fully charged with depth - which also breaks the depth of the physical room in the middle. There are duplications and repetitions not only in the spectrum of time but also in the space itself, right here, right now. The simple presentation of this fact triggers me. Then comes the behind-the-scene process that keeps ringing the concept of simulation in my mind. During the first rehearsal of the live performance, I showed my actors the rough draft of the film. They watched themselves dancing on screen, and I told them to do the exact dance movements, if possible, in their live performance. We also browsed a handful of sequences for which we needed to do ADR (automated dialogue replacement). We sat together in the room where I played the clips and hit recording and they said the lines while watching their own lip movements in the film to get the timing right. These two scenarios stuck in my head with the feeling of

suddenly waking up from an intense dream... The film and performance have obscured the origin and the product for me. They form the essential state of CHAOS.

### 3. Sound in Space

Compared to the images which are constructed based on distance and whose presentation implicitly accentuates distance, sound overwrites distance to a certain degree. It always reaches the bottom of my heart as easily as a lift of the finger. The tone, the accent, and the way that someone says things inscribe themselves on me. The visuals fade while the sound endures, even in the worst case: when the view becomes too crowded, I simply look away without it interfering with my bodily experience; but when my surrounding is full of noise, it irritates my brain and my body, and leaves me nowhere to escape - my ears still feel that pattern of vibration and my head takes a long time to recover even after moving away from the venue of the noise.

I constantly question what I see, yet rarely doubt what I hear. It somehow becomes more substantial than the objects physically present in a space. The word calling, at the same time representing sound made by an animal or person, implies “a strong inner impulse toward a particular course of action especially when accompanied by conviction of divine influence” (Merriam-Webster). Whenever we feel this urge, this impulse, we *hear* the calling, even though there is no sound in the physical space. It is the non-existential existence that illuminates us when we are lost or solidifies the decision that we consider making. Seeing makes us believe while hearing makes us determined.

In the very beginning of *Audio-Vision*, Chion categorizes ways of listening based on the kind of information gained from the process - casual listening, semantic listening, and reduced listening. Casual listening involves listening to gather information about the sound's source. Semantic listening refers to “a code or a language to interpret a message” (Chion 1994, 28). Reduced listening focuses on the characteristics of the sound as the object to be observed instead of a vehicle for other information. These modes of listening are always used in a combination in day-to-day life and naturally in the context of cinema. The presence of the source of a sound often adds supplementary information that contributes to understanding the narrative or thematic arc, while the absence of such could further intrigue the viewer and emphasize this concrete presence of absence. A dialogue or monologue in a film is full of codes to be interpreted: What are the words being said? What are the sub-context of the words? How are the words pronounced and emphasized? How is a sentence broken up into different phrases? How is a chunk of lines paused in the middle? What is the tone? What are the emotions embedded in the delivery? The potential difference in decoding these elements between the characters themselves and the audiences is always interesting to play with. The reduced listening often appears in experimental films where sound or score is used for its own quality, to correspond to the movements performed, to accentuate the atmosphere produced.



The two classic audio systems associated with cinema sound in space are stereo sound and 5.1 surround sound. The two-channel stereo system first enables the spatial quality of recordings and playbacks. Alan Blumlein suggests that the realistic sound impression could be created with two acoustic pathways through two directional microphones which playback on two loudspeakers (Geluso 2017, 63). He further proposes methods to capture sound vertically and horizontally at the same time, which lays the foundation for the immersive multi-channel sound system. 5.1 surround sound refers to three screen channels in the front (of the audience), two surround channels from the back, and one low-frequency surround channel. The dialogue, sound effects, and music play in different channels as assigned and intensify the cinema-viewing experience as highly immersive and thus deeper in the illusion.

With my firm trust in sound and its abstract nature - in comparison to visuals which present objects in their own states and traits - I use them to convey what I will not convey in cinematic images. The sound itself in this work represents the accumulation of states, feelings, and beings. There are only three parts that involve sound design and scoring (by Chrystine Rayburn) as previously addressed in the Introduction. These parts are all created under Chion's three modes of listening. Thinking about the source of the sound, I propose to base the sound design on objects shared by Aye and Bee and those precisely associated with Bee's health condition, like cups, bowls, spoons, and the pot. Chrystine thus creates a variety of patches featuring sounds of ceramics in diverse rhythms for the first and second appearances of scores. The third one appears when Bee sits on the floor, holds her chest, and readjusts her breaths. I hope the sound brings out the greatest intensity in the realm of emotion and the long over-due catharsis of Bee's sickness which she tries to hide, deny, and neglect. The sound here can be coded and decoded and also listened to for how it is. Chrystine ties the three appearances together and builds them up with her use of the clarinet. Its sound qualities are pregnant with formalism, vigorousness, and tension, which perfectly contribute to and add to the visual atmosphere. In the space, the aural experience starts with the apparent division of front and back, and slowly transitions to the all-around created by the four-channel system. The immersion is what I stress here, not in terms of the narrative but in terms of the audience's relationship with the sound and then the film and live performance. The four speakers officially set the edges, or say composes the frame that is further defined, and illustrated through time. The forms have now been united, leaving the content at the center of the stage.

### Part III: Body and Mind

#### 1. The Body that Breathes

Breathing is the very first exchange between the internal body and the external world. Air gets drawn in, circulates, and blows out. The act of breathing in and out is so natural that it is often forgotten and thus invisible. It only becomes visible when it associates with illness; either in activities that require a specific rhythm of breathing, designed to prevent illness and strengthen respiratory health, or when illness is present and then circulating enough oxygen to support bodily exertion needs more effort than normal. The duration of breathing gets reflected through heartbeats, which entail the functionality of the major organs and the wellness of the body. *Zhenmai* or *Bamai*, the first step of traditional Chinese medicine treatment, means pressing down the patient's jugular vein around the wrist and listening to their heart rates. Through observing the pace, strength, and deepness of the pulse, the doctor arrives at conclusions about the body's physical performance. The patterns of breathing also correlate to specific emotions, such as anxiety bringing the breath up to the lungs and shortening the duration, or fear alerts the withholding of breath. Each kind of sensation generates a certain breathing in response, which itself is an embodiment of sensation as well.

When in harmony, every act of breathing reflects our corporeality. "The physiology of breathing affords us an objective perspective on this essentially subjective bodily experience" (Edwards 2006, 3). When breathing, we engage our lungs and diaphragms and stimulate our autonomous nervous systems. The act of in and out, back and forth, becomes the ultimate rhythm of our bodily expression. Influenced by our inner feelings and our external world, breathing lays the foundation for every movement we perform, to every thinking we proceed with. When disharmonized, the breathlessness often is the most visible signal, yet the doubt and fear brought by this breathlessness, the discomfort and pain coming alongside the breathlessness, are hidden or hard to specify. Possibilities of embodied normality get "truncated, curtailed, or altogether closed off" (Carel 2018, 237). It directly relates to the concept of loss - the loss of wholeness of the body when certain parts are isolated and the awareness of the respiratory system is immediately heightened; the loss of certainty of whether you can catch the next breath or not, whether the normal functioning of the body is getting easier or harder; the loss of the freedom to act when the barebone of life is threatened. It can easily turn into a vicious cycle when the breathlessness limits your access to the outside world, which leads to the inactivity of the body and in turn worsens the breathlessness.

To me, the most important practices that involve conscious use of breathing have been *Tai Chi* and yoga; the former consolidated my experience with breathing and strength since I was young, while the latter reshaped my understanding of breathing and body later in my life. *Tai Chi* requires the practitioner to semi-squat, first lowering their weight to the bottom and then shifting the weight between left and right. While performing the arm and leg movements, the back and neck need to be straight and the knees constantly bend and rotate (Edwards 2006, 6). With every movement, the

practitioner needs to have deep breath-in and breath-out, so they together form a complete choreography of the body, from the inside to the outside. I have engrained the feeling of grounding myself while moving slowly and firmly by practicing the most basic form of *Tai Chi* in school. My experimentation with breathing during *Tai Chi* has constructed the basics of my relationship with my body, which is that I have the majority of control if not all. It is indeed in the most calming appearance that lies the most intense control of the body. It is also *Tai Chi*'s demands on relaxation that impeccable strength is achieved. Thus comes the popular saying, *Yi Rou Ke Gang*, which means “overcoming rigidity with softness”.



Figure 12. Still from film *Triangle*, 2022.

Yoga breathing, called pranayama, means “control of energy” or “expansion of energy.” The bi-directional relationship between the mind and the breath is emphasized, as “one can affect the mind and consciousness through manipulation of the breath” (Brown and Gerbarg 2009, 2). One of the most popular contemporary styles of yoga, vinyasa or “flow”, characterizes poses sequencing together smoothly. Each movement here is synchronized with a breath. The breath is given primacy, acting as an anchor as you move from one pose to the next. The most fundamental - often the first movement in a series - cat-cow stretch requires the “downward and upward” movements to be in sync with the breath-in and breath-out. While inhaling, practitioners arch their bodies back by dropping their bellies and pulling their chests forward; while exhaling, they press down through their hands and draw their navels in to round their spines. During the rhythmic opening up and closing down, the body creates a wave in motion, a space within the body. Throughout vinyasa, movements follow each other with both a physical and a sensual momentum. For instance, one swings their body from cobra to downward facing dog by first pushing their arms up, then their upper body, and then straightens their lower leg with a moderate amount of knee-bending. The connection between poses and even minuscule movements within one pose is always

prioritized. In these connections, active breathing is informed and informing, practiced and practicing.

In the end, either prana or chi is “experienced and conceptualized as the connecting link between matter, life, mind, energy, and consciousness.” The idea of interrelationship created by and embodied in breathing is the ground on which my practice is based. The rhythm, intensity, and direction of breathing are the infrastructure, referring to which I choreograph, layer, and frame.

## 2. The Mover that Moves



Figure 13. Still from film *To, From*, 2023.

The body leans back, letting gravity hold the tension with the constant fear and the excitement to fall. It departs and steps away from the origin while desiring to come back. The longing is exerted onto the wheeling arms, circling in the air until they cannot resist the attraction from the other side. They suddenly stop, one pointing to the above, one pointing to the middle. Two arms parallel to each other, merge and swing between two extremes, like the pendulum clock yet with momentum. They swing to the alternative selves on the other side, attach, then detach. The body now lowers to the ground. Arms raise from the legs; breathe in all the antecedents and consequences. Arms come back down covering the legs; breathe out the entanglement and the distraction. The opening and closing keep repeating until it stops. The body lifts and turns; the arms and legs isolate themselves in the air. Tension holds and releases again. The hand now slowly raises, lifting the heavy and sending it up above the sky. The hand slowly lowers, pulling strings from far and near and grounding them under the earth. Linear transforms to circular, with the same bodily memory and impetus. Reach, pull, expand, let go, aiming at the far away yet held back by the close-to-home. The releasing and the gathering of energy amass the outburst of a sequence of spirals.

Stillness. It slowly progresses, this time back and forth instead of left and right. The hands tap; the feet stomp. The unsaid is, word by word, aggressively said in this very moment. Stillness, with no identification but only resistance.

Mover essentially is a phenomenal presence in space, as the mover thinking about her moving and actually moving together create the present moment, the lived experience. Each movement is a culmination of attention, a comprehensive use of energy, an interconnection of body and mind, and a representation of time and space. Swinging, sustained, percussive, staccato, collapsing, and vibratory are the fundamental qualities of movement in dance. The Hungarian dance artist Rudolf von Laban has coined the term “eukinetics”, which is about “the rhythms of the moving human being and thence of the principles of *rhythm*, *timing* and *dynamics* of an autonomous dance art [...] freed from music’s metre” (Preston-Dunlop 2002, 92). In individual terms, rhythm is “regarded as beginning whenever two or more ‘things’ occur beside each other in time and space. The elements that create rhythm in the movement are regarded as its timing, its various embodiments of stress through manipulation of weight and force, and the fluidity of abruptness of the change from one thing to another” (Preston-Dunlop 2002, 93). Timing, as addressed in Part I, can be considered as the experience of the flux of past, present, and future, and also in terms of short or long duration, fast or slow pace, accelerating or decelerating speed. The dynamics of movement concern with the “energy content, either perceived or actual, energy being vibrant and in flux” (Preston-Dunlop 2002, 94). Preston-Dunlop specifically addresses the concept of *dynamic stillness* where the state of equilibrium, the static is pregnant with motion which may not be visible. Having an appropriate amount of experience in different genres of dancing yet not enough to specify my relationship with dance in conclusion, I correlate it with my approach to film editing. The two of them share the central tenet: seize the momentum. The flow, as rhythm, timing, and dynamics, rules over everything else. To have a good grasp of momentum, the mover and the editor need to precisely taste the situation before and swiftly pick the possibility for after. Movers maneuver in the dance space full of imagination, and editors sift through millions of takes.

To further concretize my thoughts into words, there are two dancers imperative to my understanding of dance that I want to address: Pina Bausch and Trisha Brown. Pina Bausch works with repetition and presents the mundane “in movement, in speech, in costume and in space and in the here and now performance of her company. [...] Dancers speak as they speak, walk as they walk, sit down, lie down as they would in a mundane environment, but precisely, articulate with Bausch’s aesthetic” (Preston-Dunlop 2002, 94). Bausch comments on, structures, and repeats these behaviors as the material, which different performers interpret and through which the performers’ idiosyncrasy and dynamics are shown. Her work *Café Müller* (1978) brings the mundane movements, as abstracted yet expressive, to the greatest intensity. The performers interact with the empty, the unescapable, and the dislocation all at the same time; their distinct leitmotif is heartily visible, and their performance is visceral.

Trisha Brown has developed a series of works under the name *Mathematical* between 1971 and 1976 where she investigates gestures as “reduced, realized through slow movements without representing anything or referring to anything other than the body itself and its extensions” (Mesquita 2020, 57). She repeats, accumulates, and intensifies the unified movements inspired by her previous works and experiences. Brown remarks:

In general, I had been creating vocabulary based on the simple vertical and horizontal of the spine, arms, and legs, perpendicular or parallel to the floor. All gestures traveled to and from that infrastructure in a sequential, ongoing flow with democratic attention to equal air time to all parts traveling in all directions, high, low, front, back, side, side. (Brown 2002, 292)

Her later work *Accumulation* (1971) built on this concept of the mathematical structure of sequencing and repeating phrases of gestures. This kind of choreography heightens the present moment and the status of being “here and now”. It shows “the dancer and the body in the course of thinking, not merely gesturing in space, and offers the satisfaction of watching a composition materialize according to an indissoluble unity of intent and action: the body’s vocabulary as a movement language” (Rosenberg 2014, 313).

### 3. Remembering and Forgetting

I have had numerous times of déjà vu, the feeling of having already experienced the present situation; in a restaurant where I look up to see a painting of flowers, in a bar where I sit down and speak a certain combination of words, at home when I peak outside of the window and see a sequence of things moving across... Every time I experience the “having experienced”, my body has an intense reaction to the sudden and present realization in my mind. Out of both the certainty of not having experienced it in previous dreams and the uncertainty of which specific part of the past I accidentally forget, déjà vu evokes fear, the deepest and most undeniable fear. I feel estranged from my body and mind - not willingly this time, to distinguish with my writing process - as if I have witnessed a fragment of someone else’s memory that is implanted in me.

*“You forget. Forget how your experience was with someone. Forget how you were feeling in those special moments. Forget all the details that you kept telling your friends about. You forget about it all. All of it.”*

*“I think there is a memory bank in every inch of our skin. The bumps you see are the moments you remember the most. The rest are under the skin. When you get goosebumps all over your body, that’s all of your memory surfacing at the same time. Your brain has all the information, even though you don’t realize it.”*



*“Now I can’t touch it. I can’t feel it. I don’t get goosebumps.”*



Figure 14. Still from film *To, From*, 2023.

The notion of forgetting takes up a more and more substantial part of my life. I keep reminding myself not to forget, whether about the accumulated daily agenda, or the important dates and matters, relationships and emotions. For an extended amount of time, I have tried to write down every single thought of mine just to collect, to not forget. I could then only recall the details of incidents from my writing. In contrast to that, I seem to have forgotten the majority of my childhood - even in late elementary school - when I did not have the awareness to write things down. Plato has once made a point in *Phaedrus* that attempts to preserve memory indeed encourage forgetfulness. Socrates, Plato’s teacher, deplores writing:

If people learn from them [letters] it will make their souls forgetful through lack of exercising their memory. They’ll put their trust in the external marks of writing instead of using their own external capacity for remembering on their own. You’ve discovered a magic potion not for memory, but for reminding, and you offer your pupils apparent, not true, wisdom. (Plato 1993, 132)

Apart from the times when written texts can evoke familiar or even acute feelings once experienced, there are also moments when these texts are only my external possession so as Leonard’s tattoos in *Memento*. These tattoos enable Leonard to act in the present and influence the future, but these memories are non-retrievable in his own mind. “They are outside the realm of his knowledge, creating no bridge between a past self and a present one” (Parker 2006, 38).

The fear originated in the experience of *déjà vu* is associated with forgetting, as well as the instant “seemingly” remembering. Our memory, the memory we are conscious of, is specifically distilled after the sifting and sieving of information. We prioritize the most influential and the most

beneficial (in all kinds of ways) and get rid of the rest. Remembering is thus highly subjective. The personal interpretation of events born in historical and societal contexts is the quintessential element of remembrance, and the response to the following events is again influenced by individuals' previous acquisitions (Davies 2006, 56). This process of remembering the subjective past actually "is not to be understood as a knowledge of actual events, but rather as a sense of conviction relating to their factuality" (Klippel 2006, 153). As Klippel includes Gallinger's quote from Johannes Volkelt, "in remembering, I am *immediately* convinced of the reality of my former experiences" where "the Ego experiences itself without differentiating between past and present" (Klippel 2006, 153). The *immediacy of existence* as one immerses oneself in former times, cannot be verbalized but only to be experienced. It heightens the sense of presence and validates one's self-assurance. The experience of remembering now has become irrelevant to time, as we, the human subject, are retreating into *ourselves* who possess significant information and interpreted situations relevant to a certain time period. The emphasis is no longer on time but on us, the retriever, the retreator.

The self-evidence experienced in remembering relates itself to the cinema in the fact that it charges the present with temporality. When watching a film, instead of perceiving these cinematic images as formerly produced, we automatically consider them as present as our act of watching is present. At this moment, "the past is undeniably present in this experience and thus exerts pressure onto the present" (Klippel 2006, 161). Cinema also provides the spectator with an on-screen character who serves as an anchor point. The spectator does not see her past self from what is presented outside of herself, but sees the outside from within herself; the inner and outer images now have interconnection:

The image of the ocean as projected within the conscious mind of the spectator is neither the photographic image nor his own memory; it is a new one that carries with it as a specific quality of recognition and enables the viewer to make an aesthetic experience which is related to the world in a very concrete way. (Klippel 2006, 160)



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