

From Historical Materiality to Performance: Choreographic Functions of the Costumes in *The Rite of Spring* (1913)

Abstract:

Examining the surviving costumes of the 1913 production of *The Rite of Spring*, this article explores how costumes functioned in the Russian ‘new ballet’ choreography, of which the Ballets Russes company is the most internationally famous example. The materiality of costumes – the fabric, cut, and dye – organised the dancing bodies on stage in a manner that, in part, relied on Russian contexts invisible to the predominantly foreign audiences of the performances in Paris and London. Subsequently, these Russian reactions where *The Rite of Spring* was part of a continuum of representations of Russia’s past have been largely ignored in favour of the opinions of French and British critics, for whom the work appeared extraordinary and alien. The so-called reconstruction (1987), where the surviving costumes were used to compensate for the absence of choreographic understanding, has further obscured what the choreography was and what costumes actually did (and do) in performance. Although decisions made in recreating performance differ from historiographical research, exploring the practical making of costumes also draws attention to perspectives often forgotten in discussions of past performance more generally – such as changes in how costumes are experienced, or what that experience explains of later reminiscences.

Introduction: An Authentic Past?

Few theatrical spectacles have acquired a canonical position in several art forms, but *The Rite of Spring*, which premiered on 29 May 1913 at the new Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris, is certainly one. The surviving costumes from this production, notably those in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum (henceforth V&A), offer a tantalising opportunity to examine a broad selection of dance costumes from a famous production that are in remarkably good shape for their age.¹ Studied in the context of other surviving materials, they illustrate how the established practices and principles of the company, the Ballets Russes, continued from one production to the next: how aspects such as fabric, pattern, or methods of ornamentation were neither unique to *The Rite of Spring* nor fundamentally searching for ethnographic accuracy or historic ‘authenticity’. However, this critical approach requires contextualisation of the artwork as not singular and unique but existing in relation to local traditions and established practices of the art form. Understanding different types of materials further necessitates using methods from costume research, dance and performance scholarship and practice-led research as well as cultural and art history.

As I have previously argued (Järvinen 2020a), in terms of scenography, focus on either one of the librettists, the composer Igor Stravinsky or the designer Nikolai Roerich, has obscured how, for Russian audiences at least, *The Rite of Spring* continued established ideas of staging

¹ Although referenced individually in the notes, please follow the link at the beginning of the References section to the online site where I have gathered links to images of these non-textual materials.

the national past. Although purportedly about pagan Russians ensuring the return of spring, the two-act ballet where not a single character had a name or appeared in both acts, sharply divided critical opinion. In Russia, it was seen as a welcome change in the repertory of the Ballets Russes, and even in the ‘new ballet’ – a trend in Russian ballet that had emphasised scenography, acting, and movements of the whole body. Paradoxically, the Russian critical acclaim for a work that previously well-disposed foreign critics found distressing was awkward for the impresario of the troupe, Sergei Diaghilev, and those of his coterie (like Stravinsky) who had built their international reputations as ‘artistic revolutionaries’, not understood in their home country. (Taruskin 1996, 978–988; Järvinen 2014, 202–224) Even today, productions by the Ballets Russes are regularly severed from their native contexts, and none more often than *The Rite of Spring*. The sole contemporaneous opinions heard are those of French and British critics who, at best, did not understand these works in the continuum of theatrical arts in Russia nor in the context of dance as an art form. At worst, what gets cited as ‘insightful’ rests on prejudice or outright racism, as in the case of Jacques Rivière, whose two-part article (J.R. 1913; Rivière 1913) has been frequently cited as the most brilliant analysis of Nijinsky’s choreography for *The Rite of Spring*. (See Järvinen 2013a, 9n35) To use Edward Saïd’s (1994) terminology, *The Rite of Spring* and the company that created it have been subjected to the Orientalising gaze of the Occidental expert that silences contemporary Russian critical opinion on this company.

Today, critical understanding of *The Rite of Spring* is complicated by the presence, in ballet company repertories, of the so-called reconstruction, created in 1987 by Millicent Hodson and Kenneth Archer. (See Calozzi, 2009; Wikipedia 2020) Marketed as ‘Nijinsky’s choreography’ and accompanied by prolific publications, this work has attained a hegemonic status and its authors regarded as experts even though scholarly understanding of reconstruction and re-enactment practices in the performing arts has drastically changed in the past three decades. Hodson and Archer have claimed a particularly focal role in the 1913 production for the designer Roerich: Archer is an art historian specialising on Roerich, and Hodson (1985a; 1986–1987) has insisted that Nijinsky used the designs, costumes, and Roerich’s advice in creating the choreography. Taken together with the notes of Nijinsky’s assistant, Marie Rambert (n.d.) translated by Rambert in 1967, and Stravinsky’s similarly translated (1969) annotations, as well as French and British reviews (largely from Bullard 1971), Hodson has claimed herself an alter ego of Nijinsky, when in fact her interpretations reproduce the aforementioned Orientalist bias.

Moreover, nothing in the historical record testifies against the reconstructors’ professed ‘fidelity’ to the 1913 production as strongly as the concrete materiality of the surviving costumes. In the reconstruction, the connection between costumes and choreography is *imitative* rather than functional and experiential. In this article, I argue that comparing *The Rite of Spring* costumes with other productions is imperative for understanding how costumes organised the choreography for both the spectators and the performers. The very materiality of these costumes may even explain something of dancers’ later recollections, and certainly shed light upon the sharply diverging critical opinions. As such, research on these costumes upset the Orientalist power relationship between the French and British ‘expert opinion’ and the practices of the Russian makers of the production that prevails even in academic scholarship on the Ballets Russes, today.

On Wool and Silk

It seems appropriate to start by reiterating the distinction between costume design and costume that I made in an earlier article to this journal (Järvinen 2020a). Material choices and working methods retain and exemplify cultural values that researchers often miss. In her promptbook and publications, Hodson repeatedly alleges that the costumes of the women in *The Rite of Spring* are ‘printed silk’ (e.g. Hodson 2001, esp. 24). In an interview on 22 January 2020, Katja Karjalainen, who participated in the making of the 1994 version of the reconstruction for the Finnish National Ballet (a version I also saw on stage), confirmed that the reconstruction costumes were made of off-white bourette of medium weight.² However, it is really difficult to imagine anyone handling the 1913 production costumes and mistaking either the material or the technique used to work it to this degree.

Created by the famous St. Petersburg workshop of Ivan (Giovanni) Caffi, the 1913 women’s costumes are very fine flannelette, in some instances dyed bright red but mostly the natural off-white of undyed wool. Due to improper care and storage, the material has yellowed and pillled – their texture is therefore not an inherent quality of the material like the nubs of bourette. The 1913 costumes are painted by hand, flat on a surface: brushstrokes are at times visible, and in repeating patterns, the ‘approximately the same’ repetition of freehand painting clearly distinguishes the end result from what most printing and stencilling techniques would have produced (see Caffi 1913a). This also gives individuality to costumes created from the same design. Sharing documentation of the 1994 production with me, Karjalainen (2020) recalled using stencils and measurements from Hodson’s drawings that she believed Hodson had created after measuring these details in the museum collections. The lighter weight of the reconstruction costumes is obviously more agreeable for today’s dancers, but it drastically changes how costumes operate in the choreography: compare, for example, how the dress of the Chosen Virgin is illustrated in the drawings of Valentine Gross (1914) or Emmanuel Barcet (in Vuillermoz 1913, 55) to how the silk costume billows in photographs or videos of the reconstruction (Calozzi, 2009). All contemporary illustrations of Maria Piltz also show her in a costume cinched at the waist with a belt, based on one of Roerich’s two designs for a ‘girl’ in the second act (Roerich 1912a). The reconstruction, however, uses a straight dress, based on the other design (Roerich 1912b), which shows shackles around the girl’s wrists. Roerich seems to have still been conceived of this figure as a visibly individualised leading character. Nijinsky clearly did not wish to set the Chosen Virgin apart in this manner.

However, the reconstructors have not consistently preferred Roerich’s vision over evidence of the staged production, as also evinced by the costume of the other woman soloist, the Woman of 300 Years in the first act. Instead of using the design best matching contemporary descriptions of the character as dressed in yellow (Roerich 1912c; see Järvinen 2020a, 163-164 for discussion), the reconstructors have created a new version decorated with crescent

² Bourette is woven of the rougher thread made of the remains of the silk cocoon after reeled and spun silk has been made of it. When examining the material samples with Karjalainen (2020), the fabric seemed much lighter than I expected based on visits to fabric retailers. Due to the pandemic, I have been unable to weigh the reconstruction costumes as planned, as the production is currently in storage.

moons (Hodson 1996, 124a) to support Hodson's 'ritual' theory of the choreography (Hodson 1985b; 1986) – a system of symbolism not supported by either Roerich's designs or any surviving contemporary sources on Nijinsky's choreography.³

Roerich's costume designs lack directions about cut, material, or methods of ornamentation, but he had worked with Caffi's workshop before and would thus have known their working methods. However, it was the choreographer, not the designer, who had the final say on which costumes Caffi made. (See Järvinen 2020a) Given how crucial costumes were in the ideology of the 'new ballet', how the fabric behaved would have been an obvious consideration for the choreographer. In comparison to silk, wool settles well: its weight and weave would have given the 1913 costumes a particular heft and shape in movement. *The Rite of Spring* famously involved a lot of jumping on the spot and falling with gravity, and unlike silk, wool emphasises the dancers' movement characteristics. A more diligent reconstructor might therefore have considered replacing wool with a material that behaves in a similar manner, since today's fabrics and paints are fire resistant and machine washable for a good reason.⁴

As articulated in the Russian reviews (noticeably absent from the materials used in the reconstruction) and also visible in surviving evidence of other productions by the Ballets Russes, wool was integral to the veracity of the 1913 production, its 'artistic truth' (художественная правда). The 'pagan Russia' of *The Rite of Spring* was Kievan Rus, a loose alliance of Slavic and Finnic tribes still often seen as 'the first Russian empire', where both the Russian Orthodox Church and the Cyrillic alphabet originated in the ninth century. In *fin-de-siècle* Russia, the peasants were believed to retain the last remnants of this mythical Rus, a Messianic Russian 'soul' (душа) crucial to the future of the nation. (E.g. Williams 1997, 3–18) This connection was materialised in traditional crafts and the motifs used in homespun fabrics like wool, flax, and linen. It was this connection to the mythical past that the artist-enhanced *kustarnichestvo*⁵, the arts and crafts movement to which Roerich had close ties, sought to revive.

In contrast, in 1913, silk was an expensive imported material requiring particular care, its use a show of wealth and prestige. In theatre, silk was used primarily in leotards, as in contemporary stage lighting silk was the best material to imitate naked skin.⁶ The qualities associated with silk thus correspond to the qualities associated with ballet, both in terms of aesthetics of lightness and grace; in terms of seductive, bare skin; and in terms of social prestige. None of these qualities fit the theme or movement qualities for *The Rite of Spring*,

³ The V&A collection does not include any costumes that match those of the girls of the second act or of the Woman of 300 Years. Järvinen 2020a, 160, 163-164.

⁴ Compare this with how Augustine 1991 discusses choices of fabric and desired impression in the reconstruction of *Afternoon of a Faun* by Ann Hutchinson Guest and Claudia Jeschke, first performed in 1989. In their absence, enough information of the costumes from 1912 made it evident the materials then used, i.e. silk for the Faun's body stocking, had to be replaced in the 1980s. Under modern stage lights, silk is simply too shiny to create the desired 'naked skin' effect for the Faun. Creating the right impression, in other words, takes precedence to using the same materials.

⁵ *Kustarnichestvo* means products of peasant manufactures. Roerich was the protégé of Princess Maria Tenisheva, one of the leading exponents of the kind of *kustar* revival that insisted contemporary artists should design improved goods to be manufactured by the peasants. See Salmond 1996.

⁶ Moynet [1893], 123 actually complains of the detrimental effect of the better availability of silk and velvet to theatrical design. On silk as naked skin, Woodcock 2010, esp. 143; Palmer 2013, esp. 186-199, 227–230.

whose choreographer famously snapped that “grace” and “charm” make me feel seasick!’ (Anon. 1913a) Notably, previous productions by the Ballets Russes had used silk for the costumes of *Oriental characters*: this was the case both in *Polovtsian Dances* (1909, designed by Roerich), and especially *The Firebird* (1911, designed by Aleksandr Golovin), where the Russian characters wore wool and the court of the evil Koschei was dressed in silk.⁷

Anatoly Lunacharsky (1913) articulated this in his review, when he contrasted the sublime efforts of Stravinsky and Nijinsky with ‘their predecessors who in ‘Life for the Tsar’ bring on stage the usual peasants in silk shirts and corduroy trousers’. Of course, the future People’s Commissar for Enlightenment in the Soviet Union may have had a vested interest in how ballet represented lower social orders, but his analysis also explicitly emphasised the distance of *any* theatrical production from archaeological or ethnographic study of music, costume, or dancing. Although used to justify Roerich’s part in the production in the publicity for the novelty, ‘ethnographic’ or ‘historical’ research was dismissed by many contemporary critics as the publicity stunt that it was (e.g. Vuillermoz 1913). Unfortunately, the idea has overdetermined the reconstructors’ understanding of *The Rite of Spring* as an ‘authentic ritual’ that sought to evoke a mystical experience in the spectators.⁸ In actuality, any claims the creators of *The Rite of Spring* made, referenced their ‘artistic truth’: Edwin Evans (quoted in Pritchard 2010, 81–82) recalled Nijinsky asking him if he had recognised the movements of a specific toy duck in the choreography.

The very diversity of critical opinion should indicate that *The Rite of Spring* should not be reduced to such simplistic and usually exoticising explanations. Not even all Russians welcomed the deliberate crudeness of the *kustar* revival and its glorification of the largely illiterate peasantry in a ‘Westernised’ art form like ballet.⁹ Despite their reservations, however, most acknowledged *The Rite of Spring* as proposing a new integration of the new ballet and the arts and crafts movement, and consequentially, saw it as a particularly *Russian* and *contemporary* work. In contrast, their foreign counterparts largely missed these connections, to the extent of claiming the costumes were not ‘authentic’ to what they believed was a ballet set in the stone age. (E.g. Belville 1913; Boschot 1913; Johnson 1913) Such misunderstandings indicate how costumes, meant to organise the choreographic events on stage, effectively failed in this task with spectators unfamiliar with the cultural referents in the production.

Costumes in Collective Choreography

⁷ For costumes possibly from the 1909 production of *Polovtsian Dances*, see Caffi 1909a; 1909b. For *The Firebird*, see e.g. Anon. 1910a. The former was an Orientalist fantasy, a scene in the opera where the wild Polovtsy tribe perform for the civilised Russian ambassadors. For this reason, the Ballets Russes white dancers wore brownface: Anon. 1909a. Canonisation has whitewashed the extent of racism in the Fokine choreographies, as well as in the ways the Ballets Russes was received abroad: Järvinen 2020b.

⁸ For the Orientalising, ‘ritualist’ readings of *The Rite of Spring*, see e.g. Hodson 1985a; 1985b; 1986; Zenck 1998; Weir 2013; compare with Monighetti 2017 for Roerich’s sources and liberal manner of using them; also Taruskin 1996, 880–940 on Stravinsky’s even more imaginative use of his sources; Järvinen 2014, 59–68 on ‘authenticity’ in all this Orientalism.

⁹ Levinson 1913; even Volkonsky 1913, who positively raved about Nijinsky’s choreography, complained of Roerich’s ‘provincial’ costumes. See Järvinen 2013a for these quotes and others.

Ali Maclaurin and Aoife Monks (2015, 4) point out how:

costume plays an intricate role in organizing the relationship between the actor's body and the character's body, the audience's historical moment and the moment of the fictional world and the actor's persona and the ways in which that persona might be reimagined or remoulded through the performance.

In *The Rite of Spring*, this organising function was particularly important, both for performers and for the audience. In itself, uniform mass movement was quite familiar to audiences of 1913 – bodies moved in unison in military displays, corps de ballets, and chorus lines of variety theatres. But these bodies were also costumed alike to emphasise their machine-like precision. The costumes of *The Rite of Spring* were not uniform, but neither were they individualised in the manner familiar from the crowd effects in the new ballet, where each member of the corps performed an individual type or character – as with the people in the market square of Fokine's *Petrouchka* (1911).

The 'production look' of *The Rite of Spring* derived from the cut of the costumes, their fabric and ornamentation, and accessories like wigs and shoes. As is evident in the photograph of the women in the first act, costumes for the female dancers were either long dresses that imitate a navershnik (long tunic with short, broad sleeves) over a rubakha ('shirt', a long-sleeved, full-length shift), or a rubakha with a poneva (wool skirt). In practice, all were single-piece dresses: the former was worn straight, and the latter bunched up on the waist with a narrow belt, invisible from the perspective of the spectator.¹⁰ The second act only had one group of maidens, but again, two types of dresses: either long shifts or slightly more ornamented ones tied up on the waist. (Roerich 1912a; 1912b)

In Russia, married women generally covered their heads with scarves or, in special occasions, hats (or, with the sarafan, kokoshniks). Of all the female characters in *The Rite of Spring*, however, only three women (likely the group Rambert n.d., 31–33 calls 'beauties' ('красавицы')) wore short coats and fur-trimmed hats. (Gross 1913; Barcet in Vuillermoz 1913, 56) All other female dancers had broad obruch-type headbands with large, circular decorations over the ears, likely imitating temple rings. (See Ristovska 2010) Like the general patterns of the costumes, almost identical to those of the Russian princesses of *The Firebird* (Anon. 1910b), versions of these headdresses had already been seen on the 'primitive' non-Russian characters of the 1909 *Polovtsian Dances* production (Anon. 1909a) designed by Roerich.

Much as in earlier productions depicting pre-Petrine Russia, 'men' were set apart from 'youths' by fake moustaches and beards, and all wore knee-length rubakhas tied at the waist. None wore coats, but in the first act, a group of youths carried animal skin cloaks. (Roerich 1912f; Barcet in Vuillermoz 1913, 52) Perhaps referencing this, the Ancestors that rise through trapdoors to surround the Chosen Virgin in the second act wear bearskins. (Rambert n.d., 66; Barcet in Vuillermoz 1913, 55) Unfortunately, no clear images of these Ancestors' costumes exist. Apart from the Sage in the first act, who has an obruch-type headband, and

¹⁰ See e.g. Roerich 1912d (Caffi 1913b); Roerich 1912e (Caffi 1913c); the photograph in Casalonga 1913. See also Alyoshina n.d., 56–57; and LaRus 2007 for the history of these types of dresses.

possibly the Ancestors, all the male dancers wore fur-trimmed hats like those of the ‘beauties’.¹¹ Gender, in other words, is not as clear-cut a binary as it might at first appear. Although Roerich’s designs also show characters with bright red and blond hair (e.g. Roerich 1912f; 1912b), all extant wigs are dark auburn or brown, dyed human hair mixed with artificial hair in the long tresses of the women’s wigs. The hair is mostly stitched with a centre parting onto a caul net and tape foundation, a faster technique than knotting it evenly, and headwear would have been attached to the wigs with hairpins. It is difficult to know whether only some of the women’s wigs had (now tarnished) silver thread running in the braids.¹² However, as wigs were expensive, some wigs may have been restyled and reused for other productions. Like headbands and temple rings, the wigs emphasise just how similar these costumes were to Roerich’s earlier designs, especially the unrealised 1908 *Tenisheva* production of Rimsky-Korsakov’s *The Snow Maiden* (1880–1881). The Sage seems a summer version of the Father Frost figure (Roerich 1908a), and the eponymous Snow Maiden has the long braids and temple rings of the maidens of *The Rite of Spring*, and, under her coat, a dress very similar to that of the first-act women in blue ‘ponevas’ (Roerich 1908b; compare with Roerich 1912e; Caffi 1913c). Both of the 1908 characters are dressed for winter in mittens and boots, but their legs show socks tied with ribbons like the shoelaces of *The Rite of Spring* dancers. The visual similarity is extensive enough to cause frequent misattribution. (E.g. Wikimedia Commons 2020a)

Roerich thus clearly recycled his earlier ideas for *The Rite of Spring*, but more importantly, worked in an existing paradigm of ‘ancient Rus’: all his designs share characteristics with, for example, Viktor Vasnetsov’s 1885 designs for *The Snow Maiden* for Mamontov’s Private Opera (see Vasnetsov 1885a; 1885b for the above-mentioned characters), or the Bolshoi production of the same 1894 (see Wikimedia Commons 2020b). It is quite obvious Roerich never expected the dancers to wear replicas of ethnographic dress but worked with existing *theatrical* conventions. Claims to ‘ethnographic authenticity’ thus ignore both these conventions and the fact that what we know of clothing in Kievan Rus is largely conjecture. (Alyoshina n.d., 9–10; LaRus 2007)

In other words, the choreographer clearly utilised the costumes in ways contradictory to Roerich’s vision. Although Nijinsky’s choreography was often called ‘monotonous’ (e.g. Pann 1913–1914; Volkonsky 1913) and even compared to rhythmic gymnastics (e.g. S.L.B. 1913; Levinson 1913), it actually juxtaposed groups on stage, created counterpoint and complex relations between these groups and between them and the music. (Rambert n.d.; Craft 1988) The costumes were meant to distinguish the groups from one another. The critic of *The Times* (Anon. 1913c) marvelled of how:

even the colours of the dresses are to some extent reflected in the orchestration – as, for instance, in the first scene, when a group of maidens in vivid scarlet huddles together to the accompaniment of closely-written chords on the trumpets. Movements, too, are mirrored in an equally realistic way, when, a little later on, the dancers thin out into a straggling line, while the orchestra dwindles to a trill on the flutes; then a

¹¹ See photographs in Casalonga 1913. In the design (Roerich 1912g: ‘древній’ [ancient one], ‘N. 11’, ‘1 кост.’), the Sage has a headband around a bald patch.

¹² Caffi 1913d for a dark auburn wig; Caffi 1913e for one with broken braids but with silver thread; and Caffi 1913f for an auburn wig with silver thread in the braids; Caffi 1913g for men’s short wig.

little tune begins in the woodwind two octaves apart, and two groups of three people detach themselves from either end of the line to begin a little dance that exactly suits the music.

The libretto composed by Roerich and Stravinsky aimed at a kind of ‘plotless’ ballet, where scenes flowed into one another and lacked any clear message or apotheosis. (Krasovskaia 1971, i: 429–430 citing Roerich) In an interview during the London rehearsals, the choreographer, whose previous works had also confused French and British spectators, vexed poetic about this:

I think it will prove a strangely interesting work. It is really the soul of nature expressed by movement to music. It is the life of the stones and of the trees. There are no human beings in it. It is only the incarnation of Nature – not of human nature. It will be danced only by the corps de ballet, for it is a thing of concrete masses, not of individual effects. (Nijinsky in Anon. 1913b)

Just before the premiere, the composer Stravinsky (in *Montjoie!* 29 May 1913, quoted in Bullard 1971, iii: 3–6) used similar metaphors, describing adolescents whose sexes were undefined and whose movements entwined in circular forms only to break into new groups.¹³ These authoritative voices also influenced how critics understood what they saw on stage. (See e.g. Pann 1913–1914) Although Roerich was more often mentioned in Russian reviews than in France, critics still tended to attribute the novelty to Nijinsky and Stravinsky. With few exceptions, they also saw the scandal as proof of French critics’ inability to understand ballet as an art form – or Russia. (E.g. Lunacharsky 1913; Minsky 1913; more in Järvinen 2013a, 2013b)

Together with the programme notes, the subtitle, ‘Pictures of Pagan Russia’, led audiences to expect a *conventional* narrative of stage pictures. Unfortunately, the programme did not actually list all the groups on stage, and as in his other choreographies, it seems Nijinsky displaced the pauses that marked stage pictures in the convention.¹⁴ Worse, *The Rite of Spring* only had three roles that could be understood as ‘soloists’: In the first act, the brief appearances of the Woman of 300 Year and the Sage act like individual bookends for the action. Unlike these two, the Chosen Virgin is present throughout the second act, but not differentiated from her group of girls – thanks to her costume, she did not enter as a soloist, and this confused some spectators. (E.g. Johnson 1913, 204) For most of her solo, she simply stood in the middle of the stage – behind other moving bodies rather than at the very front, and still when the music suggested movement. Even critics who disliked the work praised the

¹³ It is obvious Stravinsky was describing Nijinsky’s choreography, here, as the composer was not in the habit of articulating dance in this fashion: his notes for the choreographer (in Stravinsky 1969) generally focus on rhythm. His statements that Nijinsky’s choreography was ‘unrivalled’ (‘безподобна’, Stravinsky to M.O. Shteinberg 20 June/3 July 1913 in Stravinsky 1997, ii: 99) should also be understood in relation to his dissatisfaction with Fokine, which is why he also associated anything worthwhile in dance with Nijinsky (Stravinsky to Benois 20 September/3 October 1913 in Stravinsky 1997, ii: 146–147) to the extent that Diaghilev kept him working by promises of giving his music for Nijinsky (Diaghilev to Stravinsky 12/25 November 1914 in Stravinsky 1997, ii: 297).

¹⁴ Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Saison russe 1913. E.g. Minsky 1913 noted how Nijinsky did not follow conventions where and why dancers were expected to pause; however, in comparison to notes of *Jeux* (Debussy & Nijinsky n.d.) there are curiously few ‘stops’ and ‘stand still’ indications in Rambert n.d. For *Afternoon of a Faun* and the tableau convention, see Järvinen 2009.

affective impact of Piltz's dance, 'unprecedented in the annals of choreography'.¹⁵

Costume was thus part and parcel of the organisation of the stage space as place of groups, not individual effects. Prince Volkonsky, who had complained of Fokine's staged groups as 'real, not represented, disorder' (Volkonsky 1913, 1316), now wrote:

It must be said that the execution of this was wonderful – steady, monotonous; the people did not move, only the lines moved, as if no-one lived alone, on their own – a human necklace tied by the invisible string of rhythm...

The great pedagogic significance [of *The Rite of Spring*] is this strengthening of the choric foundation in an art, which up to now has been the most 'solistic' of all. The forgetting of one's 'I' [is] the first imperative of art, and in this sense the new trend can only be welcome as an element of artistic health. (Volkonsky 1913)

Volkonsky effectively summarises the Russian perspective, where *The Rite of Spring*, like the company that created it, only existed in the continuum of other works by other artists, not as an isolated 'masterpiece' emerging from a vacuum. Regardless of whether they *liked* the end result, Russian critics generally noticed the work's connections to traditional crafts, popular prints, and the arts and crafts ideology in a manner that heightens the *absence* of such references in the canonical reviews by French and British critics and in reminiscences about the work. Moreover, in Russia, *The Rite of Spring* was received as a contemporary art work participating in contemporary trends – 'Cubism', 'Futurism', 'Post-Impressionism' – not, as abroad, as a threat to the (exotic) 'authenticity' of the Ballets Russes. (See e.g. Nijinsky in Tenroc 1912; Volkonsky 1913; Järvinen 2020a, 165)

Because of the focus on the premiere in the 'masterwork' narrative, previous research has also ignored how the (outright racist) opinions of particular critics (e.g. Lalo 1913; Rivière 1913) quickly became hegemonic in the discourse (as in Blanche 1913) and how others, notably the Russians, got silenced. Critics who emphasised the necessity of seeing the work several times and who criticised their colleagues for not investigating what the work tried to achieve have also been excluded from the canon. (E.g. Linor 1913; Toye 1913a; 1913b) Understanding the extant costumes thus first requires not taking the canonical view as comprehensive or representative of contemporary discourses.

The Dancers' Experience

As Russian critics had been quick to note (e.g. Anon. 1909b; Minsky 1913), the foreign audiences of the Ballets Russes were not really interested in dancing. *The Rite of Spring* dancers were not interviewed in the press, and remarkably few of them ever reminisced of their labour. Besides Marie Rambert (1983), originally hired to teach the dancers to count rhythms for Nijinsky's complex choreography, Nijinsky's sister Bronislava Nijinska (1992), the original Chosen Virgin who had to step down due to her pregnancy, spoke of the work in interviews or their memoirs. In addition, published recollections exist from Anatole Bourman (1936) and Lydia Sokolova (1960; 1997), both of whom danced in both acts (née Hilda Munnings, Sokolova was billed as 'Maningsova' at the time). These accounts not only date to

¹⁵ Svetlov 1913. Also e.g. Jullien 1913; more in Järvinen 2013b.

decades after the premiere, they are variously incorrect and affected by both Massine's 1920 choreography and deliberate efforts at discrediting Nijinsky's importance to the art form.¹⁶ With the exception of Vera Krasovskaia (1971, esp. i: 441n1), few scholars interviewed dancers, or listened to what they said.

Consequentially, what can be said of the dancers' experience of the costumes is largely conjecture. As with the critical opinion, each dancer interpreted Nijinsky's choreographies according to their specific abilities, interests, experience, and expectations. Star dancers assumed the choreographer's task was to enable them to shine, whilst members of the corps de ballet had just got accustomed to the free improvisation and emoting Mikhail Fokine relied upon for his crowd scenes. Physically, *The Rite of Spring* was demanding and went against every aesthetic ideal of ballet: asymmetrical, breaking the lines of the body, falling with thumps that were considered a sign of bad technique. Whereas in the Fokine works, costumes had been important for dancers imagining their characters, Nijinsky's emphasis on groups and authoritarian dislike of emoting had dancers complain they felt as if they were wood or stone – mere material to be shaped by the choreographer.¹⁷ Nevertheless, the costumes would have clarified who danced in which group in a complex choreography that required dancers to count their parts.¹⁸ Unfortunately, the costumes arrived very late, amidst the typical stress of fine-tuning the choreography right before the premiere. (Järvinen 2020a, 159 on the delays in the production schedule)

For dancers, costumes are always a corporeal experience: the weight, cut, and fit of a costume affect a dancer's dance. The prevalent narrative about *The Rite of Spring* has so emphasised the costumes as cumbersome or heavy that when examining them, I fully expected each to be much weightier than they actually are. One reason for this emphasis is the association of the wool fabric with the 'heavy' aesthetic of the dancers' movements, which Geoffrey Whitworth (1913, 96) described as 'a studied demonstration of the attractive force of the earth and of the triumph of gravity.' Objectively weighed, the full-length red dresses of the maidens in the first act are approximately as heavy as the maidens' silk costumes in *The Polovtsian Dances* and they are lighter, sometimes by half, than some of the caftans in *The Firebird*.¹⁹ The sole exceedingly heavy costumes would have been those of the Ancestors of the second act who, as mentioned, wore entire bearskins over their heads and shoulders. This may explain something of Bourman's (1936, 215–217) recollections, as he danced one of the Ancestors.

Moreover, the affective associations of wool as a material have shifted in the past century. Modernity tends to associate with the technological sublime, with synthetic materials (the

¹⁶ E.g. Bourman 1936, 226 claims Sokolova danced the Chosen Virgin as she did in the 1920 Massine version; Sokolova 1997 contradicts what Sokolova 1960 claims. On the power of the patriarchal hegemony and source critical issues, see Järvinen 2014, 6–16.

¹⁷ See e.g. Bourman 1936, 215–217 threatening to quit; Karsavina 1981, 285–286 despairing of *Jeux*; Nijinska 1992, 428; Sokolova 1960, 40–41.

¹⁸ As Sokolova 1997, 146 noted, counting was not common at the time: dancers danced to melodies. Instead of the kind of individuality-within-groups that the reconstruction of *Afternoon of a Faun* has asserted the group of nymphs to have had (see Guest & Jeschke 1991, esp. 21–22, 33–46), it does not seem Nijinsky had the time or interest to create variance for dancers in each group for *The Rite of Spring*.

¹⁹ Some of the costumes at the V&A collections have already been weighed. See Caffi 1909a, silk frock from *The Polovtsian Dances*, 800g; Caffi 1913h, one of the red dresses from *The Rite of Spring*, 800g; Anon. 1910c, caftan from *The Firebird*, 2000g.

first plastic, bakelite, was invented in 1907) and novelty fabrics – not hand-painted wool. But in 1913, wool was not just a more commonly available (and comparably cheaper) material than today but, as seen in the Russian reviews, a material with particular, culturally specific associations. Furthermore, the oils in wool make it naturally resistant to dirt and flame – both excellent qualities in costumes for a touring company – and most tight wool weaves do not tear or run as easily as silk or cotton (this is visible in the small tears in some of the 1913 costumes). In dance, where accessories may snag on other dancers' costumes, materials that are either easily repaired or wearable despite small blemishes are cost-effective in the long run.

As Bullard (1971, 135) notes, in May 1913, Paris was experiencing a heatwave. Even in their rehearsal clothes, the dancers would have been sweltering in the studio at the top of the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, and downstairs, stage lighting would have made their performing conditions appallingly hot. However, as a natural fibre, light, fine quality wool 'breathes', and is quite comfortable even in warm weather. It also absorbs moisture quickly, even if the dancers were unlikely to notice how drenched in sweat they were until they took off their sodden garb. But given that the dancers would have worn quite similar wool costumes in other works in the same conditions (*The Firebird* was performed on 15 May 1913, for example), why have only costumes for *The Rite of Spring* acquired this reputation of 'heaviness' and 'discomfort'?

Upon closer inspection, the surviving costumes have qualities other than the fabric that would have affected the dancers' experience of them as perhaps less than optimal for dancing. For one, bunching up the costume when the dancers were required to jump and run: the unadorned leather belts are only about a centimetre wide and secured with metal buckles. One purpose for the swath of fabric at the waist of the men's tunics may have been to keep the fabric from slipping or the buckle or belt from chafing in movement – after all, at the time, choreography typically reserved most jumps for male dancers.

Similarly, although the overall shape of the shoes is reminiscent of pointe shoes, the cultural association, evident in the cross-hatching pattern of some of the men's shoes, was cheap bast shoes,²⁰ not the silk slippers of ballet. Also, the shoes do not have hardened boxes, which means the choreography did not include dancing on pointe.²¹ Fastened with long straps crossing around the calf and attached with buckles, the shoes also beg the question how comfortable they would have been in movement and whether the lacing was meant to hold up the dancers' socks or vice versa? Pointe shoes were usually not laced above the ankle and were worn over full leotards.²² But some of the mismatched socks in the V&A collection are made of one piece, with a seam under the foot. Although in 1913 most stockings would have had a seam in the middle of the sole (i.e. FFS socks), these seams seem very thick in

²⁰ Rus. лапти, relatively crude peasant shoes durable in wet conditions, usually basket-woven of birch. Bast shoes have the connotations of both extreme poverty and mythical past national dress. See Caffi 1913i; Krasovskaia 1971, i: 431.

²¹ Bronislava Nijinska 1992, 169–170 tells that when she was preparing for her examinations at the Ballet School of the Imperial Theatres, her brother made her train on point in soft men's shoes – apparently because he could, so should she. Like her brother, Nijinska was known for her virtuosic technique.

²² For some of the shoes for women, see Caffi 1913j; 1913k. For the men, Caffi 1913i; 1913l. Compare with e.g. Wikimedia Commons 2020c for lacing of ballet slippers. Frankly, the lacing in some of Roerich's designs makes no practical sense: Roerich 1912h.

comparison and, like the narrow leather belts and buckled laces, caused me to wonder if this materiality contributed to the dancers' recollections of the choreography as 'agony' (Bourman 1936, 215–217)? Even if some of the socks are in a different style with a sewn-in sole, they have the same one-size-fits-many patterning of the rest of the costume, a quick design to make and easy to repair or replace, practical in a future repertory staple. Again, based on no visual, material, or narrative evidence of the 1913 production, the reconstruction uses oversized socks that bunch up around the calf and stick out from between the shoelaces. As with the oversize dresses for some of the dancers, this makes no sense whatsoever, particularly as the reconstruction does not use socks with seams in the sole. (Karjalainen 2020)

One must also consider that the discomfort dancers later recollected may reference how much costuming practices changed and how quickly. The strongest associations between discomfort and dancing in *The Rite of Spring* derive from Lydia Sokolova (1960, 163), who complained of how, 'I could not get through my dance in this thick flannel dress and stuffy wig.' However, she is saying this of the 1920 Massine choreography, in which she danced the Chosen Virgin – not of the 1913 production in which she was one of the women in the first act and one of the maidens in the second, apparently wearing her costumes and wigs without complaint. This is a prime example why Hodson's manner of 'filling in gaps' with Massine's work and her personal intuition is suspect, and produces a work that both erodes the historical developments in the art form and stumps critical rethinking necessary for a canonical work to retain its significance in the present.

Reconstruction Rethought

In the over three decades since the *The Rite of Spring* reconstruction, dance scholarship has radically shifted in how we represent past practices in re-performing them. Soon after the Hodson choreography, Mark Franko (1989) argued that reconstructions should reveal on stage and for the audience that which draws performers to such practices: how to interpret different and contradictory evidence of a past work, or where gaps in source materials offer many alternative possibilities for a production. Rather than emphasise 'lost masterpieces' in the manner of Hodson, scholars today are more interested in what takes place in the processes of remembering and re-engaging with past works and their remains; how our corporeality differs from that of past dancers; and what reconstructions do to our understanding of the art form. (E.g. Giersdorf 2017; Oke 2017; Pakes 2018.) Simultaneously, current research on scenography (e.g. Baugh 2013; McKinney & Butterworth 2009, esp. 171–197; Eckersall et al. 2017) and costume (Fensham 2014; Hannah 2014; Barbieri 2017; and this journal) has emphasised how the materiality of performance affects experience of performance both on stage and off; whilst artistic and practice-led research in the performing arts has brought forward new ways of understanding performance from the perspective of performers' labour and tacit knowledge (e.g. Freeman 2009; Brandstetter & Klein 2013). The current popularity of (often nostalgic) re-enactment of historical events and past lives, whether on former battlefields or reality television shows, has required historians admit to the importance of mimesis and affective engagement in historiography (e.g. Cook 2004; Agnew 2007; also

Schneider 2011). Taken together, these changes in focus could and should also shift canons of art, and draw attention to who they exclude: the professionals in set and costume workshops, the labour of those who operated stage machinery, even the dancers never asked of their contributions.

My concern, here, is that a patently dated reconstruction does more harm than good to research into *The Rite of Spring* or re-enactment practices in general. The beautiful craftsmanship and attention to detail evident in the surviving costumes of the 1913 production deserve more than to be dismissed as ‘already known’. These costumes exemplify a tradition of which few as intact examples exist, and also illustrate how transnationalism of contemporary practice is not a given even within Europe. They can thus prompt questions about the practical making of theatre in the past that still resonate, today – questions of authority and authorship, design and interpretation, and tacit, local knowledges in making theatre. Moreover, once seen through the lenses of material, making, and re-imagining, archival objects begin to resist simple definition as sources for textual retelling of the past. Contemporary responses illustrate how the costumes of *The Rite of Spring* were not transcultural, so how could we expect today’s performers or audiences to understand them from a production ignoring precisely the sources emphasising this cultural specificity? As Sofia Pantouvaki (2014, esp. 108–110) has discussed, the archival object always holds a different affective significance for us than a costume on stage, because the absence of the body and movement changes not just how the costume appears but how it signifies and impacts performers and spectators alike. It is difficult to see past the yellowing and pilling of the off-white fabric of the tunics of *The Rite of Spring*, the chipped paint in the hem of a dress, or stains of sweat and small tears in the fabric. The costumes look ‘a bit dingy’ and they are still, on racks or mannequins or exhibition tables, instead of worn on groups of bodies in movement under conditions of staging that drastically differ from today’s expectations. (Järvinen 2020a) The instinctive association this materiality promotes is not, as in 1913, novelty, life, and action but rather something worn, past, and still. Discussing the material remains of past theatre practice therefore requires critical questioning of what we as scholars actually perceive and why, of the cultural assumptions each of us takes for granted. V&A generally does not restore costumes in the sense of repairing, fixing, or reconstructing them (Pritchard 2018), and for a historian, this is absolutely priceless. Hasty repairs and patches, pen marks and tears are traces of life that *allow us to recognise our perception as historically specific*, and therefore as essentially different from that of the makers or spectators of 1913. Unlike the scan of a review on a computer screen, costumes cannot be ‘copied’ for easy distribution. Their materiality requires time spent in their presence, and thus raises questions that need to be asked but not answered, questions to which we may well never know the answers. Like the provisos Rambert (1967a; 1967b; 1975) placed on what she recalled, canonical art works have to be understood as *unstable*, as inviting constant reinterpretation in order to have value in the present. What remains of a past performance is not a puzzle (as in Hodson 1990) with a few missing pieces because there is no framework or model to place any fragments into, making it likely that we misinterpret and overemphasise what we do have. Understanding any theatrical production (whether past or present) necessitates expertise in many different types of sources, often through practical encounters. Such encounters never exist in a vacuum, and scholarship is not free from cultural bias.

Whose versions of the past get narrated as history matters, whose pencil marks get erased or stitching unravelled is fundamentally up to scholarly interest.

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[password: Studies_in_Costume_and_Performance_Jarvinen_2020]

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