Cinema, painting and digital technology: Peter Greenaway's hybrid images

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EPI-REVEL
Revues électroniques de l'Université Côte d'Azur

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Fondateur de la structure de création ANIMO PLEX, il réalise une quinzaine de spectacles joués en France et à l'étranger (Pologne, Tchéquie, Portugal, Finlande), pour lesquels il écrit le texte, la mise en scène et la scénographie, réalise la vidéo, la bande son et la musique. Ses domaines d'activité recouvrent le théâtre, la poésie sonore, l'art numérique, la production radiophonique et la réalisation filmique.

Les derniers travaux réalisés par ANIMO PLEX / Fabien Maheu sont tournés vers la mixité art numérique, images mouvantes, narration scénique. Depuis Que du Blanc (2009), le « poème performance numérique » tente d'estomper la barrière formelle entre la scène et les écrans du cinéma expansé, entre la récitation et le jeu d'acteur, entre la narration, la performance et l'installation.

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Depuis le début des années quatre-vingt, Peter Greenaway n'a cessé de naviguer d'un monde à l'autre : de la pratique industrielle du cinéma au marché élitiste des arts plastiques. Cette réalité contextuelle se double d'une ambition esthétique, qui est de nourrir le cinéma, compris comme un art mineur n'ayant pas trouvé son langage propre, des immenses richesses formelles explorées par la peinture depuis plus d'un millénaire.

De toute évidence, cette recherche d'un cinéma plastique, déjà sensible dans ses courts métrages et parfois dans les longs, trouve dans l'avènement du numérique un terrain d'épanouissement sans précédent. Le réalisateur est-il un précurseur qui n'attendait que l'outil approprié à de visionnaires projets, ou appartient-il simplement à une génération d'artistes qui, plus que jamais au courant des

dernières innovations et profitant de l'accessibilité accrue des matériels de pointe percevait intuitivement les directions à venir que la technologie allait imprimer à l'esthétique ?

From the early 1980s onward Peter Greenaway has ceaselessly shifted between two worlds, the industrial world of cinema and the elitist world of plastic arts. This personal itinerary can be explained by the artist's aesthetic ambitions which consist in enriching the cinema – understood as a minor form of art which has not yet found its own language – with the immense formal resources which painting has been exploring for more than a millenium. Quite manifestly, this quest for a plastic cinema, already perceptible in his shorts and feature films, has found in the advent of digital technology an extraordinarily fertile ground. Is then the film-maker a precursor who was merely waiting for the appropriate tool in order to fulfil his visonary projects or else does he simply belong to a generation of artists who took advantage of their knowledge of the latest technical innovations and the increased accessibility of high-tech material to foresee the new directions in which technology would inevitably guide the arts?

Introduction

Since the beginning of the 1980s Peter Greenaway has been ceaselessly oscillating between one world and another, between an industrial practice of cinema and the elitist market of plastic arts. To this contextual reality must be added his aesthetic ambition which consists in feeding cinema – understood as a minor art which has not yet found its own language – with the boundless formal wealth that painting has cultivated for more than a millenary.

Such a quest for a plastic cinema, already traceable in his shorts and sometimes in his feature films, obviously finds in the advent of digital technology an unprecedented source of fertility. Is the film producer a forerunner who just waits for the appropriate tool for his visionary projects or does he simply belong to a generation of artists who are more than ever knowledgeable about the latest innovations and benefit from the increased accessibility of state-of-the-art machinery to intuitively perceive in which directions technology is going to direct aesthetics? One cannot help thinking of Steve Reich who composed as early as the 1960s the piece *Slow Motion Sound* supposedly constituting a recording that has been slowed down several dozens of times without any modification of tonality. Since the technical means at his disposal did not allow him to actually complete the work, Reich merely described it in a brief sentence before finally concretising the principle some twenty years later with the use of digital technology.

In Peter Greenaway's case it was the late 1980s and the first means of transfer of analogical / digital images (devised in Japan) which allowed the film producer to discover his most relevant audio-visual language, the one which best corresponded to the wish for hybridity which his proto-cinema already clearly manifested. Being invited in the framework of a program of production and development launched by NHK, the Japanese cultural channel, Greenaway, alongside Eve Ramboz, the infographics specialist, was able to test the new possibilities of *compositing* to give birth to *Prospero's Books*, a major and yet little-known work.

What enabled this progression towards a form of cinema as an eminently plastic medium is of course the array of new possibilities of digital processes and particularly of high definition. The tools of infographics allowed the producer-cum-painter to proceed to experiments of collage that were

previously too expensive and too heavy and these experiences included the possibility to backtrack, to test and to select. Digital cinema as plastic material was truly born.

Yet the concept of digital recording needs to be clarified so true is it that it remains a phantasmatic vessel among the cultural elites and that the British producer's approach to the digital phenomenon has evolved in the course of his career.

The term *digital* covers several realities. Let us mention three of the most common of them. The first, which best corresponds to the word itself, concerns an art based on computer programming, in short an art of the code. To compose such as code – and to read it – one must be able to program, that is to compose a computer programme. This art of the code can mainly be found in the inconspicuous spheres of contemporary art. The second meaning of the term refers to the ergonomics of computer tools dealing with sounds and images: graphic palettes, audio processing software, montage and video compositing tools. What primarily interests Greenaway is these tools because they make it possible to produce recorded or fixed material, not unlike cinema and painting. Thirdly comes what is called real-time processing or even the generative. In this case, data-processing does not only mean treating one piece of information after another and recording the result in files that are available for (re-)reading. On the contrary, the emphasis is put on the immediate treatment and the transformation of these pieces of information into signals that seem simultaneous. The goal is not to record anymore but to deliver immediately and without any delay an answer to a range of stimuli. Today Greenaway's interest in these technologies takes two forms: on the one hand the performance of V-jaying given in clubs on the basis of materials taken from *Tulse Luper Suitcases*' rushes and on the other hand Second Life which represents for him the privileged field of expression for tomorrow's artists.

If the British film-maker is historically in the vanguard of the integration of digital technology into narrative cinema he only announces a movement that is in fact shared and global. Progressively film producers take into consideration infographic ergonomics in their audio-visual writing and explore new configurations of the relationships between space and time. The increased range of possibilities given to visual writing also means taking into account the vertical dimension of images, that is, their virtual depth in a plane space understood as a plastic canvas on which compositions of photoscopic and plastic elements are concretised and not as the privileged locus of photographic harnessing anymore. The spectator is manifestly invited to a complex reading of this mesh of information on the available space of the canvas. Such ergonomics encourage an increased fragmentation of the work and can facilitate new modes of organisation of the media, beyond the relation sound / image and even beyond filmic art. The work becomes then a transverse composite using all the media that are available and useful to its development: cinema, literature, plastic works, internet, etc. Greenaway's recent opus *The Tulse Luper Suitcases* is an example of this redeployment of the media to the benefit of narrative works.

Today numerous films of fiction for the general public use the digital processing of images in an utterly transparent way and certain cinematic characteristics are therefore overthrown. In the field of application of the new digital images, the photogram, understood as the minimal photographic unit, tends to disappear. Photography is thus dispossessed of its graphic writing and only *photoscopia* remains. The signals resulting from the harnessing process do not give birth to an inscription in the form of print-like images anymore but in the form of data. As their physical supports disappear, images acquire qualities linked to abstraction. They are then capable of being actualised in various ways, as often as one wishes and on supports of diverse natures. Numerous audio-visual works thus integrate images of various origins and qualities, the digitisation of which favours hybridity and actualises them on a single and self-same screen.

This new form of image implies several levels of reality. The process of actualisation is preceded by a *modelling zone* which is itself divided into two distinct objects. Firstly, the model itself, which can be a three-dimensional arrangement of interconnections and textures or, in the case of a two-dimensional realisation, a piling-up of superimposed replicas. Secondly and only later intervenes the execution of the model, that is, the computation of a given state and perspective of the model which then generates a possibly visual representation of the image. As for the actualisation, it is done on the basis of the computation of the execution by a monitor, a video support, a paper printout, or any other means. If one wanted to artificially establish a comparison between the generation of digital images and the harnessing of photographic images, the model could be said to play the role of the

profilmic,[1] whereas the execution would play the role of the negative and the actualisation that of the film projected on the screen.

Whereas in the field of analogical ergonomics linked to the celluloid film the most common plastic operation remains calibration (the stage of the negative), in the case of digital cinema the interventions are made possible and simplified in the sphere of the model and not at the stage of execution anymore. In the case of two-dimensional processing these operations are not linked to complex and costly special effects and are no longer the result of an order placed with a studio of special effects: they are now part of the gamut of tools at the disposal of an editor who can concretise them with simple and financially affordable machinery. In the contemporary practices this new form of montage encourages the use of compositing as a naturalised grammatical language.

In the traditional context of analogical cinema the image is subjected to the technical capacities of the recording equipment and to the conditions of projection, the framing process being exclusively achieved at the filming stage. Any later intervention on the frame or on the ratio of the images is perceived as a disfigurement due to industrial necessities and particularly to Hertzian broadcasting. On the contrary the digital revolution makes it possible to think of images independently from those original specificities of format.

As early as the first quarter of the twentieth century the narrative form of feature films tends to become fixed and the full-screen ratio is meant as a naturalistic space. The various masks and cardboards used by early films tend to vanish, thus progressively depriving the screen of its plastic dimension and transforming it into a conventional imitation of the camera's eye. The 1970s momentarily brought back the split-screen to honour but it is not before the 1980s and the success of low-cost films shot as videos that the vignettes and multi-screen images start to spread. Finally it is the televisual styles of the 1990s that launched the henceforth standard form of multiple screens on black backgrounds which progressively invaded the cinema screens.

The young film-makers grasp this new aesthetic trend and try to create narrations that are capable of integrating and appropriating the principle of multiple screens – and it is not always an easy thing to do. Let us mention Michel Gondry's exciting experiments which comply with the rules of format and rhythm of the video-clip but also propose innovative modes of narration and develop unprecedented techniques of co-presence. In his works the question of the legitimacy of collages is permanently raised and never solved.

For Peter Greenaway on the contrary the choice of heterogeneity is radical. From the first images of his structural cinema the problem of hybridity appears in the links with paintings, the permanent and definitive referent of his conception of images. It seems therefore fitting to approach the British film-maker's productions without any formal preconception and to study on the same level and with the same analytical axes his films and the various plastic works he has been producing ever since the sixties. One finds then in his paintings devices taken from his filmic practices just as one frequently meets in his films attempts to tackle specifically pictorial questions.

His pictoriality finds first of all an explicit expression in his cine films. His tribute to art is sometimes paid in a literal manner in the form of easily recognisable transubstantiations such as the Rembrandt-like anatomy lesson taking place in Prospero's palace (*Prospero's Books*) and synthesising two paintings of the Dutch master: *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Deyman* for the composition highlighting the anatomist and his disciples gathered around the dissected corpse and a detail from *The Anatomy Lesson of Professor Nicolaes Tulp* for the foreshortened view of the corpse in the manner of a Mantegna. Another explicit reference is that to Franz Hall's banquet which is echoed in the awkward bearing of Albert Spica's company in *The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and her Lover*. A copy of the painting is exposed in the background of the dining-room where the thief takes all his meals. The reference is then intradiegetic and intended by the decorator of the dining-room – if not by the crooks themselves. In *The Draughtsman's Contract* Neville seems to be inclined to similar games of perspective. Pointing to a painting by Van Dyck called *Hommage à l'optique,* the young man explains it through a parabolic interpretation which clumsily implies and makes sense of daily life at Mrs Hebert's castle. The dramaturgy of the painting is here superimposed on that of the film.

Quite often the processing of the photographic images produces results which can be likened to a pictorial undertaking. In *H is for House* numerous shots are deliberately devised in the manner of

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[1] The term profilmic refers to the referential real such as it is recorded by the camera. As such it is opposed to cartoons and computer-generated pictures.

a still life and *Intervals* feigns to show Venice but in fact displays a series of flat wall surfaces with scraps of torn posters. Of Venice one sees neither the canals nor the bridges nor any of the characteristic features of the town which is therefore negated in its specificity and replaced by these parietal and plastic surfaces isolated in the limited frames of the various shots. Greenaway transforms then the city of the carnival into a book of radically modern painting. In the manner of pictorial photography or Land Art, the film-maker does not hesitate to distort the landscape for plastic purposes as in the abstract vision of the marine horizon in *The Falls* which is shot with an almost closed diaphragm so that the sea and the sky melt into a black and limitless matter and what remains is only a myriad of reflections produced by the presence of the sun above the waves.

Even before the help of digital processing platforms it is obvious that the plastic possibilities of video images are widely exploited in *Inferno*, an adaptation of Dante's work co-produced by Greenaway and painter Tom Phillips. In this film the representation of Cerberus is carried out by means of a tracing effect and a delayed display. The most luminous spots of the images produce traces which remain indelibly on display on the screen. The face of the actor playing the guardian of Hades is then disfigured in the manner of a Bacon and ultimately seems to acquire the two heads that seemed to be missing from his pro-mythological representation.

A Zed and Two Noughts is full of collages which could be labelled *situational* collages. What is at stake is compositions of images, sometimes fixed, but sometimes following the movement of the camera: in these compositions one manifestly notices an aesthetic arrangement reminiscent of one pictorial movement or another. This is indeed the case for the fixed shot overlooking Oliver's table of photographic composition during which prostrate Oliver mourns the death of his wife. The still life made up of film rolls, slides and lenses shown against the light on a background of graph paper becomes a collage recalling the spirit of pop aesthetics. A few shots earlier, the game of visual perspective played around the car accident ironically makes the tiger from the background billboard leap from the crashed car's bonnet thus suggesting to a certain extent that the engine is losing its soul.

Greenaway creates a circulation between cinema and painting which sometimes seem to enter into competition with one another. A certain number of plastic works have been recycled for the screen while others have been specifically conceived to be filmed. But in all cases the filming of painted surfaces generates productive tensions and questions about the media that are being used.

Vertical Feature Remakes presents as the main visual subject documents in the form of notes, drafts and diagrams made by the absent protagonist Tusle Luper. There is an inadequacy between the film's promises and the objects that are actually presented so that the spectator is almost encouraged to let go and watch the successive screens as evocations of a visual poetry or plastic experiments. The status of these objects remains undecidable: are they intradiegetic documents or do they constitute a matter of representation proper which replaces the photography of the profilmic?

In parallel to the production of a feature film Greenaway often creates plastic works in relation to the aesthetic questions raised by the film. These works are undertaken before, during and after the operations of filmic creation. They represent according to the film-maker ways of answering unsolved questions or of tackling differently certain issues raised during the filming process. If these productions have their own, autonomous existence they remain nevertheless linked to the source film and form with it a common and hybrid unit.

In *The Pillow Book* Greenaway tries to abstract the ideograms from their concretisations in order to highlight what fascinates him in the semiotic principle of the signs, namely the intrinsic relationship between the visual aspect of the signs and their signifying value, in other words the relationship between text and image such as it is naturally encapsulated in the ideogram. Here is how the film-maker explains his endeavour: "generally speaking, in the western world we have by definition separated the prerogatives of the text from those of painting. One of my recent preoccupations has been to try and treat these two elements in the form of a unique phenomenon considering as an archetype the notion of the oriental ideogram".[2] Ideograms raise numerous questions in his relation with the traditional components of cinema, in particular the scenario, the profilmic and the image. Greenaway gradually isolates and autonomises the various ideograms and materialisations of the books written by Nagiko on the young men's bodies. The books which have been written before the shooting of the film (available in the film's scenario), those which have been translated into

[2] Peter Greenaway, « Un abécédaire de la provocation », in *Le Grand atelier de Peter Greenaway* (Université des Sciences Humaines et Sociales de Strasbourg, Les Presses du Réel, 1998), p.150 (Our translation).

Japanese and painted on the actors' bodies during the filming and those which have been translated back into English in the post-production stage and shown on the screen by the rostrum camera end up forming three relatively independent entities which certainly interact but cannot be reduced to replicas of each other. This disjunctive principle progressively spreads to all the ideograms ostensibly displayed on the screen so that the principles of chronology and causality do not work in the same way for the narrative unravelling of the scenario and for the profilmic ideograms. *The Book of the Seducer* written by Nagiko on the body of a young model presented as a gift to the publisher thus includes a paragraph which prophetically describes the physical situation of the messenger at the moment of the reading of the document: "This is the well-washed body of a book, / Standing upright on the table".[3]

In the sequence in which the publisher discovers the contents of the eighth book the messenger is soaked by the downpour which he just underwent thus making the actual reading of his bodily text partially impossible. As predicted by his own textual message his body is "well-washed" and if he is not upright he is sitting on the table where the publisher just thrust him with brutality. This literal concretisation of the textual contents is only feasible because the unfolding of the scenario and the development of what might be called the *ideographic sphere* do not belong to the same chronology. It is indeed impossible that Nagiko should have been able to foresee the circumstances in which the eighth book would be read. And yet she described those circumstances in the very text of the book.

The realistic chronology is then substituted for another principle: that of co-presence or of transversal coincidence. The ideograms thus often coincide with the situation which allows them to be readable, independently from any realistic verisimilitude. In the sequence where the young Japanese lover draws calligrams on Nagiko's chest a slight gap between the sound track and the picture makes it possible for the young woman's dialogue ("You're not in a good position to reach clean leaving") to coincide with the red-ink inscription in Japanese. This inscription meaning literally "clean" corresponds to the English adjective "clean" used by the young woman. Similarly the ideograms meaning "strictly forbidden" painted in black ink on the shoulders of Nagiko seem in agreement with the seclusion imposed on the young woman by the extremist environmentalist fighters. Nothing justifies the presence of these ideograms except a logic of semantic interconnection.

The ceaseless changes of ratio operated by the montage in *The Pillow Book* obviously enhance the plastic quality of the images. The choice of the frame is directly linked to the motifs contained in a particular shot. With these continuous variations Greenaway appropriates the painter's prerogatives in the context of an art object that is subjected to particularly restrictive broadcasting norms. He does not hesitate to sacrifice a part of the space available in his selected film ratio and redefines the frame that he deems appropriate for almost each individual shot. The plastic dimension of his images - primarily considered as a flat surface on which nuances of grey and ranges of colour are inscribed - is constantly made conspicuous. The spectator's conscience is stimulated in two paradoxical and converging directions: the plastic dimension and the diegetic dimension. The numerous pages of parchments or books, the letters, the notes and other written surfaces that are displayed in full-screen are not actualised in the usual sense of the term. They seem to be in *mention,* or in *exposition* rather than in *situation*. A share of abstraction seems to be part of these great, white surfaces on which the *ideographic sphere* spreads.

Greenaway in fact opposes two principles of logic: the temporal development of the shot clashes with the spatial stasis of the surface. The ideograms function then as pivots around which the various ontological levels of the screen revolve. They are the crucial objects allowing the shift from the abstract to the literal and from the plastic to the photographic. An analysis of the screens / surfaces would highlight the various degrees of iconicity with which the film-maker works (and plays) throughout the film. The blank page of Nagiko's diary represents the model of abstraction on which the non-figurative ideograms are displayed. The presence of printed seals and printing characters already implies a form of iconicity. These *traces* of a mechanical or manual printing partly belong to an ontological trace. They refer to a past action: something has been printed here on this hitherto abstract surface.

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[3] Peter Greenaway, « Les treize livres écrits sur la peau, Le huitième livre » in *The Pillow Book* (Paris : Edition Dis Voir, 1996), p.109 (Our translation).

On the pages of her diary, Nagiko not only traces characters according to a whimsical disposition; she organises them in the manner of *figurative poetry*,[4] imitating for example the outline of a hill and of an overlooking, round, heavenly body. So the image formed by the blank page includes a figurative level. But it is the work on transparency undertaken during the montage which allows the image to gain access to the diegetic level proper. The film-maker thus builds an image-text with three levels. It is indeed section one hundred and fifty of Sei Shonagon's *Pillow Book* which serves as the visual link between young Nagiko and her spiritual model, the courtesan of the Heian era (i.e., the tenth century). The faces of the two women get closer before becoming entirely superimposed when the calligraphic page fades and disappears. The *Pillow Book* vanishes then once the two calligraphs are united on the screen. The image-text integrates in this case the temporal dimension because its meaning evolves and becomes clearer during the shot's course of time.

Greenaway further formalises the relationships between calligraphic text and filmic image with his freeze-frame technique which mimics young photographer Hoki's pictures taken from Nagiko. Each snapshot is processed in a very graphic way: with its extreme contrasts which end up with a sharp opposition between white surfaces and black surfaces each picture is superimposed like a palimpsest on a page of the young woman's diary. The outlines of Nagiko and of the airplane about to land seem to be drawn in black ink with a paint-brush. The matters of the ideograms and of the photographic images seem to merge and to form a sort of restrained engraving. One sees clearly here how Greenaway uses the ideogram at the service of the plasticity of the photographic and filmic images by fixing his images and by endeavouring to create a confusion of matters and media. The screen becomes then – in part – a plastic space.

For mainstream cinema black means an absence of signal, a pause in the production of meaning. It is most of the time (except in case of an opposed dramatic effect) accompanied by a silence in the sound-track. This convention imposed itself by a mimetic effect reflecting the physical characteristics of photography, the presence of light being associated with the existence of a recording process and hence of a sign whereas black is considered as a state of abeyance or of a pre-recording process. But if the black strips of the television letterbox format (resulting from a change in format or ratio) signal an absence of light, it is a fact that their generalised presence in the last ten years is due to purely aesthetic motives. One can see in these black thresholds a quest for an ironical, referential distancing from the transformations undergone by films during their adaptation to the television, but one can just as well see them as manifestations of the capacity of the televisual medium to appropriate the valorisation of the cinematic medium. The gradual aesthetisation of the back frame has doubtlessly played a major role in the success of the multiple screens.

The postmodern spectators are now knowledgeable about the black surfaces such as they have been updated by the technique of *compositing* and they know that this blackness does not result from any technical necessity. What is at stake is a space of construction, a landmark on which the collage can be effectuated. In computer sciences this surface is sometimes called the *canvas*. The *canvas* would then be this free space limited by the final ratio and format (in pixels), which is capable of admitting images in a process of both linear montage and vertical collage.

What remains is the problem of the perception of the canvas by the spectator who has no access to the stages of the fracturing of the image. Quite manifestly, the multiple frame belongs to a dialectic principle of fragmentation and flux and challenges the concept of frame-limit such as it has been defined by Aumont.[5] Does the black zone still belong to the image or is it excluded so as to suggest the representation of multiple-screened device? The fragmentation of the image into several points of view is radically opposed to the delimitation of space such as it is defined by Renaissance painting in the context of Euclidian geometry. Here the image has no centre anymore and the canvas becomes the flat surface characterised by its plastic qualities. One finds here one of the possible definitions of a modern painting and possibly also of what Francastel calls "objective art"[6] in which the author intermingles heterogeneous forms like Egyptian parietal art and cubism.

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[4] The advent of figurative poetry is usually attributed to Simmias de Rhodes (4th century), it includes the modern practices such as Apollinaire's calligrams or Mallarmé's plastic inventions (*Un coup de dé n'abolira jamais le hasard*).

[5] See Jacques Aumont, *L'image* (Paris : Nathan, 1990).

[6] See Pierre Francastel, *La réalité figurative* (Paris : Denoël, 1965).

The way film-makers appropriate the plasticity of the canvas varies according to the dramatic objectives of the fictions. The American series *24*, for example, massively uses long focal lines in order to multiply close-ups on the characters' faces. The reduction of the focal depth induces a relative flatness and refocuses the *vignettes*[7] on the *figures* (here the characters' faces) thus partially excluding the sense of perspective. The omnipresent theme of individual isolation is nourished by this technique presenting the characters as a succession of individual units that are disconnected in the midst of the same antiterrorist group. The fact that all the characters are suspicious of one another creates the paradox of isolation in the midst of a strongly patriotic and communitarian enterprise.

Another paradox, on a formal level, can be traced in the serialisation: the principle of fragmentation becomes the vector of an apparently continuous visual flow. The multiple framing devices and the ceaseless changes of points of view in the context of a telephone conversation produce an effect of informational flow whereas the alternation of a shot and reverse shot would have sufficed. In his astonishing *Counter Phrases* Thierry de May proceeds to numerous combinations of screens in relation to dance in order to stress the idea of movement – even at the cost of synchronic and diachronic repetitions. The montage similarly uses a great number of composition devices leading to the co-presence of at least twice the same shot at the same time: changes of scale or perspective, alternations of shot and reverse shot, exact repetitions, close-ups, variations of angles, variations of exposition and focalisation, mirror effects (through the reflection in the water of a shot of the water), panning effects, etc. Here again the diversity of the points of view is intended to convey additional information whereas in fact it simply amounts to repetition.

To establish a basic typology one can distinguish two types of particularly different uses of multiple screens. The first type concerns ascending mechanisms; it privileges a sort of efficient and non-problematic grammar at the service of a flow of information and the spectator's sensations. The second type concerns descending mechanisms; it implies a particular attention paid to the composition and its semantic interpretation. It may well partake of mannerism according to which, in the argument of Serge Daney, the image overrides everything else and is opposed to the notion of flow.

In the perspective of what we call a grammar, the presence of multiple screens is manipulated for the sake of the management of time and space. In the first sequence of Joel Schumacher's *Phone Booth* a huge mosaic appears, made up as it is of dozens of close-ups on telephone users thus signifying the omnipresence of the network in town. The multiple spaces are here represented by the multiple screens. The film's usage of the vignette is reduced to this device: to put in relation the place of the person calling (the full-screen image) with the place of the person who is called (the vignette). We are here in a situation comparable to the traditional split-screen.

In *Time Code* Mike Friggs bases the reading contract on the principle of real time: the four vignettes of similar sizes are synchronic and each of them takes part in the ninety-minute sequence shot which constitutes the whole film. From the very beginning to the very end there is no selection of visual composition and very often the sound track is the only element indicating synchronicity. The composition is then entirely at the service of the narrative dimension and devoted to delivering a series of simultaneous pieces of information. No visual help facilitates the narrative development except if one considers the co-presence of geographically distant characters as markers of theatricality (in the manner of asides or deliberate and opportune deafness) which restore to life characters that have been forgotten by the cinema. But here again the most striking effects derive from the mixing operations (and hence the sound track) since the producer, during the first projections, would mix the music and the four sound-tracks in real time, going so far as to play certain pieces for trumpet during projection. The notion of *concert films* is here perfectly relevant and refers to postmodern films' logic of flow and sound design. One is inevitably reminded of the sounds that are artificially applied to movements and to the appearance and disappearance of vignettes in certain films aiming at the strongest emotion. This principle of *son et lumière* is based on a separation of the sound from the represented image (and hence on a cancelling out of iconicity) at the benefit of the relation between the sound and the vignette-object. All in all the sound materialises and puts on display the flux of images and information, in other words the montage itself.

At the opposite of this commonplace use of multiple screens, Dietmar Offenhuber's *Besenbaum* represents an excellent example of meaningful composition since it deals with the relation between space and time in a purely visual manner. The repetition of the same shot taken in sideways tracking, the eight or nine examples of which are displayed side by side but separated by a few

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[7] The term *vignette* is intended to designate the various elements constitutive of a multiple screen.

photograms, recreates a spatial continuum while at the same time showing the temporal continuity which links the various vignettes to their immediate neighbours. In a more metaphorical conception one finds in Korean Jae-eun Jeong's *Take Care of my Cat* a succession of shots which first seem to represent a coherent space but which are proven by the movements of a character to be a montage of shots and reverse shots. The film-maker thus weaves a web of significations echoing the duality of the film's female twins. The use of filmic collage becomes then a grammar in itself and not just a visual effect.

One might extend the notion of montage to the stage of *compositing*: the montage, which is in fact a diachronic collage, acquires a synchronic dimension and allows the canvas to become a virgin spatio-temporal surface capable of receiving information in its two dimensions. The notion of a single shot is subverted by the game of vignettes which entertain a dialogue within the space of the canvas while none of them can ever be considered as a reference in the field of temporal or spatial continuity. Even if montage has always been a crucial and creative operation the concept of compositing involves a greater liberty because it is easily freed from the laws of causal concatenation. Certain film-makers do however endeavour to convey a grammatical structure to this tool with a narrative goal in view.

According to Greenaway this visual literacy is bitterly wanting in mainstream cinema but finds in the technique of compositing the means of its full expression. In three films, the British producer suggests and develops a filmic aesthetics capable not only of surfacing during a whole feature film but also of making sense. Competing with the experimentations of early cinema he tries to build a visual vocabulary by making an extensive use of devices which remain marginal in contemporary narrative films.

In *Prospero's Books* a semantic hybridity is initiated. On one side the lines of composition produced by the collage of vignettes on framing screens often become meaningful when they illustrate or support the dramatic situation of the shot. On the other side, because they are distributed throughout the film, these vignettes become markers of a virtual dimension. One can see in them either the exhibition of Prospero's magic, often shown in a naïve fashion, or the prophetic vision of the magician, or also the twenty-three magic books which establish his power. There is then a kind of grammatical distribution of the use of vignettes – and even its signifying scope remains unsophisticated. As for *The Pillow Book* itself, it seems to naturalise the space of the canvas. The screen's black background is not just an option of the composition but a constant feature, an active basis on which to build an image which is never *pre-given*. When, on rare occasions, the image and the canvas are thoroughly superimposed it is as a deliberate attempt at *realism* in the sense that realism considers the window of the screen as an imitation of man's gaze and constitutes an ideology in itself. The images that follow each other or complete each other on the available surface of the canvas preserve the size and ratio corresponding to their nature. The vertical format of the A4 paper (the epitome of the scroll - in Latin, *volumen* - the writing support roller) is then opposed to the horizontal format of a bank note (which is related to the 16/9th of the cinematographic image) without any interference of the screen's format in this rapport. In this case the film-maker seems to have paid less attention to the semantic possibilities of compositing. The emphasis is rather put on the formal dialogue between the various formats of the images used in daily life (and also in the filmic practices), the focal point remaining the different materialisations of the ideogram as a metaphor of the relation between text and image. One of Greenaway's latest works, the *Tulse Luper Suitcases* cycle, proposes a sort of multidimensional montage setting in motion mechanisms of successive images in time and of co- or poly-presence of images. What creates meaning here is these synchronic devices. The same image simultaneously shown at various stages of its unfolding produces not only the semantic effects related to the objects contained in the image, as well as the effects of suspense and anticipation related to the delivery of diachronic information, but also a specifically kinetic effect in which repetition enhances movement, makes it circulate in the space of the canvas and enriches it with new significations determined by the parameters of compositing. Admittedly the device is not unprecedented but it has a particular interest because of the skilfulness of the montage and because of the nuanced appropriateness with which these various devices are combined according to the dramaturgy of the representations. The notions of shots, of sequences and of narrative threads are of course considerably disturbed not to say abolished.

Having tried, for more than twenty years, to bring painting to the cinema Greenaway today experiments with the opposite process and projects onto Rembrandt's famous *Night Watch* or da Vinci's *The Last Supper* images in high definition which animate and above all redefine and lay bare the composition of the original paintings. What matters here is not composition by hybridity. As signs

of a new era for film-makers eager to take hold of the new technologies, the notions and practices of multiple screens, of cross-fertilisation and of expanded cinema contribute to the redefinition of a spectatorship and of innovating codes of representation.

Not opting for the realistic mode of representation, Peter Greenaway avoids the reductions of that mode: he avoids cutting out fragments from the real (as documentary photographers do) in order to stitch them back again together (like Van Meegeren does), although he did get his inspiration from such fragments and does stitch things together in a rather monstrous way, if we consider formalism, like symmetry, as monstrous indeed. He is no faker, for he does not claim to show reality; he is no voyeur either thereby, contrary to Van Meegeren. Still he is the writer behind his pictures and the two figures Van Meegeren and Van Hoyten cut do question his role as artist, signalling the potential pitfalls of artistry. His scheme, however, corresponds more to Felipe Arc-en Ciel's imagined utopian project, as under his own 'zoopraxiscope', in his "ZOO", he essentially sets "*mythological*" characters of his own and of our common mythologies (a practice most telling in terms of representation perhaps in *Z&OO* in relationship with our age of massive species extinction). Finally, he claims his art as *art* —which if related to *science* is only so with a view, to my mind, to making it a valid object of study as part of the currently (particularly) maltreated *humanities* in the noble Renaissance sense of the term— and would claim for a similar status of photography were it not accepted already. It is no wonder therefore that he should have called for the services of such a talented photographer as Sacha Vierny, most famous for his collaboration with Resnais on *L'année dernière à Marienbad* (1961), or with Bunuel on *Belle de jour* (1967), and with whom he worked for so many years, just as it is no wonder that *Z&OO* should be composed of so many still shots, not excluding depth of field or zooming effects —a type of shot to be related to Deleuze's "*time-image*", to an interruption similar to the photographer's static stance when taking a picture, an interruption or discontinuity calling for the viewer's greater, lengthier attention and meditation, something proper to the perception process of photography as opposed to the cinema, which makes of Greenaway's films "*cerebral*" ones indeed. Still, he does not avoid linearity or narration, just as cinematic continuity forms itself out of some ontological discontinuity, for out of his own artificial fragments a story is being told, with a beginning (an accident, and death as a starting point), a middle (various consequences of the accident and the search for causes), and an end (another accident, and death putting an end to it all), with representation thus intricately related not only with the death of the real but also with death in reality, the supposedly arch unthinkable, which Greenaway does make us grasp though as an integral part of the life that compulsively leads us indefatigably onward —something quite in keeping with his 'allegory of photography' turned in fact into an allegory of his own cinematography.