



# “Miles and miles and miles of painted darkness”: Peter Greenaway and the intelligibility of representation

Gasquet Lawrence

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# EPI-REVEL

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Lawrence Gasquet

Lawrence GASQUET est Professeur à l'université Jean Moulin - Lyon III. Elle est spécialiste de l'oeuvre de Lewis Carroll, et des relations transesthétiques. Elle travaille sur l'histoire de la photographie et s'intéresse aux affinités de ce médium avec l'art et la science. Elle est l'auteur de *Lewis Carroll et la persistance de l'image* (Presses universitaires de Bordeaux, 2009). Elle a co-dirigé *Lewis Carroll et les mythologies de l'enfance* (Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2005), *L'Art de plaire* (Gérard Monfort, 2006), *L'Eblouissement de la Peinture, Ruskin sur Turner* (Presses Universitaires de Pau, 2006). Elle est également l'auteur d'articles sur Lewis Carroll, John Ruskin, Julia Margaret Cameron, Damien Hirst et Peter Greenaway.

### Université de Bordeaux III

Peter Greenaway pratique la philosophie naturelle, au sens où on l'entendait au XVIIème siècle. Dans cet article, je m'efforcerai d'étudier les relations entre le savoir et la représentation du monde au sein de quelques-unes des productions de Greenaway. Constatant par exemple que beaucoup des personnages de ses fictions cinématographiques prétendent pouvoir traiter la représentation d'une manière soi-disant "originale", et pensent être en mesure d'établir une correspondance isomorphe entre le monde et sa représentation, je m'interrogerai sur les conditions de production de la représentation, et sur la question centrale de l'objectivité. Afin de rendre le monde intelligible, il semble que la représentation s'impose - la question est de savoir si l'essence du monde peut être capturée par le biais d'un travail qui implique nécessairement une déformation et une retranscription. Nous sommes ici au cœur d'un vaste territoire, qui est celui que les arts visuels et textuels ont façonné au fil des siècles. Francis Bacon écrivait dans le *Novum Organum* (1620) que "l'entendement humain est enclin de par sa nature même à supposer l'existence de beaucoup plus d'ordre et de régularité qu'il ne s'en trouve réellement dans le monde. Et, bien qu'il existe de nombreuses choses dans la Nature qui demeurent singulières et impossibles à concevoir, l'entendement ne cesse de tracer des parallèles, des correspondances et des parentés qui n'existent pas."<sup>1</sup> Les singularités et les différences ont

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning, Novum Organum, The New Atlantis* (1605, 1617, 1620, London: Britannica, 1952).

ainsi coutume de s'effacer avant de laisser la place aux similarités et à l'harmonie: ce désir constant de l'homme de voir l'ordre et la régularité dans le monde est mis en scène par Greenaway de manière magistrale au sein de ses productions.

Peter Greenaway is a born natural philosopher (in the XVIIth century sense). In this article, I will strive to define the close relationship between knowledge and the representation of the world, as it is presented in some of Greenaway's works. Observing that indeed many characters of his cinematographic fictions profess to be able to deal with representation in a way that is presented as "original" and believed to allow a valid correspondence between the world and the represented, I will wonder about the conditions of production of some representations, questioning the very possibility of unbiased representation. To make the world intelligible, it seems that representation is a necessary step - the question is to know whether the essence of the world can ever be captured through the reworking of some of its physical characteristics or not - we are here in a territory as vast as can be, and this territory happens to correspond inch by inch to that which visual and textual arts have trodden for centuries. Francis Bacon wrote in *Novum Organum* (1620) that "the human understanding is of its own nature prone to suppose the existence of more order and regularity in the world than it finds. And though there be many things in nature which are singular and unmatched, yet it devises for them parallels and conjugates and relatives which do not exist."<sup>2</sup> Singularities and differences are usually erased in order to be perceived as similarities and harmony: this constant and delusive desire of man for order and regularity is what Peter Greenaway remodels for us.

Dans les ouvrages de la nature, la grandeur des masses nous plaît, parce qu'elle nous humilie, et que le sentiment de notre petitesse agrandit l'âme, en la portant vers l'idée du principe de toute grandeur. Dans les œuvres de l'architecture, la grandeur des masses nous plaît, parce qu'elle nous enorgueillit ; l'homme est fier de se trouver petit à côté de l'ouvrage de ses mains. C'est qu'il jouit de l'idée de sa force et de sa puissance. (Quatremère de Quincy)

In his 14th postcard to his fictional best friend Etienne-Louis Boullée, the tormented Stourley Kracklite writes: "It is said that the study of architecture is an excellent training for life – but lousy if you want to build buildings. You were sensible to train as a painter – that way you could at least avoid

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<sup>2</sup> Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning, Novum Organum, The New Atlantis* (1605, 1617, 1620, Londres: Britannica, 1952).

blocking out the sun.<sup>3</sup> These lines imagined by Peter Greenaway echo Boullée's epigraph to his *Essai sur l'art* "Ed io anche son pittore" ("I am a painter, too"), which Boullée himself borrowed from Correggio, after the latter fell in awe for Raphael's works. The architect of the Enlightenment, himself trained as a painter before becoming an architect by necessity, was convinced of the fact that the way a building is first *conceived*, then *represented* and thus *perceived* was as important as its construction and *existence* in the world. The grandest creations of Boullée indeed never blocked any sunbeams, since none of his most impressive projects was ever erected – he was one architect whose most brilliant dreams remained confined to paper, a visionary man condemned to his fictions, another draughtsman without an honoured contract. However, I am afraid that Kracklite, when writing these ironical lines to his deceased fellow-architect, doesn't realize that he is writing to a man who was one of the first to think precisely about the power of shadows in architecture, and who left memorable and visionary pages about what he called "l'architecture ensevelie", a meditation upon the capacity of architecture to play with shadows in order to associate visually with our conceptions of death and funereal matters.<sup>4</sup> But it is perhaps excusable at that stage of the plot that Kracklite should be oblivious of this aspect, since he is not yet thinking about the end of his own existence, which will obsess him very soon.

In a rather mysterious sketch known as "the Allegory of the Mirror" (c. 1487), Leonardo da Vinci drew a young man holding an oval mirror reflecting the sun to a group of battling creatures in the foreground, apparently in hope to triumph over the dragon terrorizing seemingly brave unicorns and lions. This young man about to vanquish a dragon isn't even standing, and the formidable power he is encapsulating in his mirror spares him any physical effort whatsoever. Light becomes thus a symbol of effortless righteous truth, at the same time as it takes on its usual metaphorical value of good triumphing against evil, purity against corruption, etc. In his *Treatise on Painting*, Leonardo devoted a book to light, which had already been studied in detail by his fellow painters Alberti and Piero Della Francesca<sup>5</sup>, with the conclusion that light was the unlimited marvel which was both founding principle of the universal locus (light is thus conceived as the prime manifestation of nature's energy) and at the same time founding principle of the faculty of sight, which allows man to have uncompromised access to the world. What derives from his observations is a conception of light as the *prime agent* of *perception* and of *cognition*, vision being then closely linked to *intelligibility* and to the *act of intellection* itself.<sup>6</sup> Peter Greenaway has often said that he was primarily interested in the study of light<sup>7</sup>, and in this joins Leonardo in his enterprise, striving to study the effects of light and its contrary, shadow. Leonardo further observes that, "among the considered causes and natural agents, light is the one that gives most bliss to those who study it"<sup>8</sup>. Those who study it are precisely scientists and painters – we are poised here between two territories that are now science and art, but which were in past centuries known as one single domain, that of the discipline known as natural philosophy. This

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Greenaway, *The Belly of an Architect* (London: Faber, 1988) Postcard 14, p. 124.

<sup>4</sup> See Etienne-Louis Boullée, *Architecture. Essai sur l'art*, présentation par J.-M. Pérouse de Montclos (Paris: Hermann, 1993) ; Jean-Claude Lemagny, ed, *Les Architectes visionnaires de la fin du 18e siècle*, cat. d'exposition en collaboration avec la Bibliothèque nationale de Paris, Musée d'art et d'histoire de Genève (Genève : 1966), traduit en anglais sous le titre *Visionary Architects*. Boullée, Ledoux, Lequeu, cat. expo., (Houston, 1968) ; Philippe Madec, *Boullée* (Paris : Hazan, 1986) ; Jean-Marie Pérouse de Montclos, *Étienne-Louis Boullée (1728-1799) : de l'architecture classique à l'architecture révolutionnaire*, (Paris: Arts et Métiers graphiques, 1969); Daniel Rabreau, *Étienne-Louis Boullée, 1728-1799. L'architecture régénérée par les Lumières et la poésie de l'art*, actes du colloque du GHAMU et de l'Université de Paris-I (Bibliothèque nationale de France, Institut national d'histoire de l'art, Paris, 3 et 4 décembre 1999), Annales du Centre Ledoux, tome 4 (Paris, Bordeaux : Université de Paris-I/William Blake & Co, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> See Leon Battista Alberti, *La Peinture* (Latin, Italian and French text), translated by Thomas Golsenne and Bertrand Prévost (Paris : Seuil, 2004) ; see also Bertrand Prévost, *La Peinture en actes* (Paris : Actes Sud, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> See Peter Dear, *The Intelligibility of Nature, How Science Makes Sense of the World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> See for instance Peter Greenaway, *Watching Water*, Catalogue of exhibition held at Palazzo Fortuny in 1993 (Milano: Electa, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> See Léonard de Vinci, *Traité de la peinture*, selected texts by André Chastel (Paris : Calmann-Lévy, 2003) p. 123 : "Parmi les causes et agents naturels étudiés, la lumière donne le plus de joie à ceux qui la considèrent [...]".

term fell into disuse during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but earlier it was the standard way of referring to any intellectual endeavour aimed at understanding nature.<sup>9</sup> Peter Greenaway, in his recent Milanese work on *The Last Supper*, has shown us that light is indeed essential to the process of intellection deriving from that of perception. I have thus chosen to show that Peter Greenaway is instinctively a natural philosopher, and I will strive to define a bit further the close relationship between knowledge and the representation of the world, as it is presented in some of Greenaway's works. Observing that indeed many characters of his cinematographic fictions profess to be able to deal with representation in a way that is presented as "original" and believed to allow a valid correspondence between the world and the represented, I will wonder about the conditions of production of some representations, questioning the very possibility of *unbiased* representation. To make the world intelligible, it seems that representation is a necessary step - the question is to know whether the essence of the world can ever be captured through the reworking of some of its physical characteristics or not – we are here in a territory as vast as can be, and this territory happens to correspond inch by inch to that which visual and textual arts have trodden for centuries.

### **I - In situ art vs. in visu art**

Wondering about the nature of visual representation implies that we should pay attention to the act of seeing and that of interpreting ; representing comes in between, so to speak, and it is the act that ensures the perpetuation of knowledge. Any artifact thus acquires primary importance, since any interpretation will depend upon it, as Peter Greenaway underlined in an interview: "Let me make one statement, which people have a lot of difficulty understanding. I sincerely believe that in all cultural activity, content atrophies very rapidly, and all you're left with is form and strategy. Then there is a way in which the form and the strategy themselves become the content."<sup>10</sup> Then, the knowledge that is attached to the artifact is *in fine* paradoxically liable to be occulted by the said artifact; form then becomes self-sufficient, able to foster multiple successive interpretations; and indeed this activity of deciphering is to be found at the core of every scientific and artistic activity. This is the common denominator to all works by Greenaway: just as his characters spend their time deciphering signs of various nature, as spectators we also spend ours under the guise of enthusiastic detectives trying to reconstitute what we believe to be the original puzzle, the first sketch, the matrix that gave life to a profusion of possible interpretations. The French philosopher Alain Roger proposes an interesting definition of art, featuring four functions: a function of denaturation, a function of condensation, one of modelisation and one of anticipation. These four functions are to be found in Greenaway's work, always concerned with pinpointing the different operations entailed by the act of representing. The concept of *artialisation* used by Roger is first to be found in Montaigne's writings, before being used by Charles Lalo. Here is what Alain Roger specifies about it:

[...] Notre expérience, perceptive ou non, est "artialisée", c'est-à-dire modelée et donc anticipée par des modèles, médiateurs ou opérateurs artistiques, comme on voudra les appeler. [...] La première opération consiste à inscrire directement le code artistique dans la matérialité du lieu. On artialise *in situ*. C'est l'art millénaire des jardins, et, depuis le XVIIIe siècle, celui des jardins paysages. L'autre manière est indirecte. On n'artialise plus *in situ*, on agit sur le regard, on lui fournit des modèles de vision, des schèmes de perception et de délectation, on artialise *in visu*, on anticipe la perception [...].<sup>11</sup>

Neville is the painter who is the specialist of the first kind of *artialisation*, that taking place in situ, and he precisely also fails to anticipate perception, a sad fact which is going to cause his death. He strives to inscribe the code of his representation directly in the materiality of the place he represents; hence his numerous interdictions that any elements should be added to what he has in mind. His selection is final, his image of the world already formed, and the already pre-conceived world has to conform to the representation the draughtsman is about to deliver, as his *Curriculum for*

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<sup>9</sup> This definition is borrowed from Peter Dear, *The Intelligibility of Nature, How Science Makes Sense of the World* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2006) 2.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Greenaway, in Vernon & Marguerite Gras, *Peter Greenaway Interviews* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2000) 152.

<sup>11</sup> Alain Roger, *Art et Anticipation* (Paris: Editions Carré, 1997) and *Nus et Paysages. Essai sur la fonction de l'art* (Paris : Aubier, 1978).

*the execution of the drawings* makes clear, demanding that no activity whatsoever shall be perceivable while he draws.

The "greenolatry" (*verdolâtrie*) that Roger observes in the history of landscape is also at the heart of *The Draughtsman's Contract*, predominantly featuring green, white and black colours.<sup>12</sup> The grass is always greener on Mr Herbert's property, but Mr Neville fails to see that unfortunately for him, he might be responsible for the artificiality of the final representation; what is intelligible is not always faithful to the truth. *The Belly of an Architect*, on the contrary, avoids the colour green, which is mainly present as a flimsy reflection, that of the green light emitted by the photocopying machine used *ad nauseam* by Kracklite to xerox pictures of bellies; it is also to be found in some rare and all the more meaningful elements reminding us of the fact that the only time the human body becomes green is after death (Caspasian is thus the character to be clad in green, and possessing a green car, that precisely on which Kracklite's body lands at the end).<sup>13</sup> To make art in situ, in Roger's sense of the term, is exactly what Stourley Kracklite and what Etienne-Louis Boullée both strive to enact. Boullée's work happens to be in visu art which fails to become in situ, what architecture is meant to be. One remembers the gigantic exhibition organized by Greenaway in Geneva and Munich, furthering the thoughts on point of view and the act of framing promoted by the *Draughtsman's Contract*, *A Zed and Two Noughts*<sup>14</sup> and *The Belly of an Architect*. One can spot at the end of the latter a series of "Canaletto boxes" that have been set up, framing devices designed to isolate part of the architectural landscape of Rome, white and massive counterpart of the black thin framing device used by Neville to select part of the landscape he wished to draw.<sup>15</sup> Greenaway used similar devices in Geneva, when he conceived the 100 viewing-frames built into white-painted wooden staircases erected in the city: to make a whole city more intelligible in situ is no small task indeed.<sup>16</sup>

Architecture is the epitome of art in situ; one of Etienne Louis Boullée's mottoes, engraved in French on the walls of Kracklite's exhibition, is "l'architecture, c'est mettre en oeuvre la nature", a reminder of the unique way antique epigraphs give more weight and meaning to Rome's stone walls. Greenaway has declared that one can be oblivious of paintings, one can ignore literature, one can evade music, but it is impossible to escape architecture; architecture is the least ephemeral and the most public of all arts.<sup>17</sup> Writing on architecture then makes literature all the more powerful, of course. This dimension didn't escape Boullée, who saw in architecture the most democratic of all arts, in its ability to speak to all classes at a single glance (it was what he called "l'architecture parlante"). Boullée left plans of fascinating spherical cenotaphs, ironically empty for ever indeed since never realized in situ. The two projects in memory of Newton were however enacted on paper, sharing the same material status as the poems whose emotional power Boullée admired so much; one was to be filled with shadow and the other with light, a mysterious armillary sphere in its center (featured in *The Belly*, formally echoed by the gyroscope). Architecture, as "mother of all arts," according to Diderot, shall borrow from the figurative arts and thus convey character, in all the senses of the term, to buildings. "Oui," writes Boullée, "je le crois, nos édifices, surtout les édifices publics, devraient être, en quelque façon, des poèmes. Les images qu'ils offrent à nos sens devraient exciter en nous des sentiments analogues à l'usage auquel ces édifices sont consacrés"<sup>18</sup>. Plans are then confined to the same bidimensional medium as poetry, hence submitted to the *ut pictura poesis* equivalence – and the plans left by Boullée, even if never realised, indeed testify to their elevating power, and to their added intelligibility.

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<sup>12</sup> Cf Michel Cieutat et Jean-Louis Fleckniakoska, *Le Grand Atelier de Peter Greenaway* (Strasbourg : Presses du réel, 1995) 84.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 89.

<sup>14</sup> See Lawrence Gasquet, "Plastique de la décomposition: les énigmes cinétiques et temporelles selon Peter Greenaway (A Zed and Two Noughts)", in Ronald Shusterman, ed., *Des Histoires du Temps : Conceptions et Représentations de la Temporalité* (Bordeaux : Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2003) 93-113.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Greenaway, *The Belly of an Architect*, *op. cit.*, 110.

<sup>16</sup> See Peter Greenaway, *The Stairs 1, Geneva The Location* (Londres : Merrell Holberton, 1994), and *The Stairs 2, Munich Projection* (Londres : Merrell Holberton, 1995).

<sup>17</sup> Peter Greenaway, *The Belly of an Architect*, dossier de presse (Paris : Bac Films, 1987)

<sup>18</sup> <http://expositions.bnf.fr/boullee/arret/d1/index.htm>

What exactly is an architect's plan? A mere draft by another draughtsman, of course, but a reverse draft as compared to that realized by Mr. Neville. Whereas Neville is hired to create a copy of (what he thinks is) reality, an architect's draught is a map according to which reality will be fashioned. The architect's map will entail a modification of topography, so that reality conforms to representation. The representation is then what makes reality more intelligible by directly influencing it. Architecture leaves the mark of man upon nature, and as such it is perhaps the most intelligible of all arts, as it aims at creating fusion between representation and the world; nevertheless, one perfectly knows that between the model and the world often lies a chasm that the architect is unable to bridge. It is perhaps this realization which prompts Stourley to hasten towards his own death; just before jumping into the void, a close-up of his feet reveals that he is standing on a map of Rome. He is going to leave a mark at last, an ephemeral because fleshy mark on the Roman topography. Ironically enough, Greenaway confesses that when *The Belly of an Architect* was first projected in Great-Britain, people thought that he had invented the character of Boullée. This amusingly echoes a line of dialogue in the film in which Louisa tells Caspasian that the inhabitants of Texas thought that Boullée was a fictitious character, and accused Kracklite of inventing him.<sup>19</sup> In his 43<sup>rd</sup> postcard to his imaginary friend and fellow-architect, Kracklite regrets that "there is nothing personal of yours to exhibit – no writing desk, no discarded walking stick, no medals or silk hat – no wig or marriage certificate. I asked me yesterday if, with this exhibition, we are inventing you in our own image. I have to confess he might be right."<sup>20</sup> Inventing Boullée himself after the images he left, architectural draughts conforming to conventions; now that is indeed some audacious thought. That is perhaps why Kracklite desperately seeks to find portraits of his idol, but fails to find any.<sup>21</sup> *Inventing oneself in images*: this is after all what Kracklite never tires to do during the seemingly interminable nine months he spends in Rome, the amount of time necessary for his own death to gestate simultaneously in his bulging belly and suffering mind, both equally painful, while his son is growing in his wife's flat belly, which we almost never see on screen (only in pictures taken by Flavia, and condemned by Stourley as immoral rubbish). Kracklite, in order to come to the conclusion that he is sick and to try to come to terms with this idea, constantly needs to pore over representations, to study reproductions, to check the analogies between what is represented on a variety of media and what he thinks he detects in reality. Hence his being obsessed with photocopies of the bellies of Augustus and of Andrea Doria, his desperately trying to superimpose his own body onto those of various écorchés featured in Renaissance anatomical treaties (deeply anxious, he fails to see though that these representations are not faithful, and that they are oversimplified "I've stolen a book of the anatomical engravings of Vesalius. Did you ever hear of him? His bodies are like complicated urban maps of the future"<sup>22</sup>), his desperately measuring the length of the medical rubber hose before applying it to his own flesh to see what his innards might look like and appreciate all that at real scale. Kracklite is a man obsessed with scale; he lives in a world of draughts and reduced scale models which have never been allowed to reach the scale for which they were imagined, the scale of one to one. Being in Rome is thus for our architect a torture as the same time as a supreme delight: a city in which he literally applauds architecture for giving him pleasure of the senses but at the same a city whose perfect proportions remind him of the failure of his idol Boullée, and of his own failure in Chicago. The cumbersome models which stuff his obsessive imagination thus progressively stifle him, just like the plaster models of the room in which his colleagues soon confine him completely fill up the space around him: "There is a problem. My office has been cleared away and I am now squeezed into the Model Room – wedged between 2 crumbling models of the Vittoriano."<sup>23</sup> Too much representation kills representation, and the world then becomes unintelligible.

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<sup>19</sup> Peter Greenaway, *The Belly of an Architect*, *op. cit.* 26.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Greenaway, *ibid*, 139.

<sup>21</sup> "Dear Etienne-Louis, I've looked so long for a likeness of you that I've been convinced I have one. Were you really so young-looking at 54, or is it the sculptor's flattery ? " in Peter Greenaway, *The Belly of an Architect*, *op. cit.*, Letter 78, 158. See also p. 61, "What makes you think it's Boullée ? It's just a figure representing architecture... There are no likenesses of Boullée – I should know, I have been searching for one for ten years."

<sup>22</sup> Peter Greenaway, *The Belly of an Architect*, *op. cit.*, Letter 119, 179. See Lawrence Gasquet, "Theatrum Anatomicum: Dissecting Pleasure", in *Lawrence Gasquet, Patrick Chézaud & Ronald Shusterman, L'Art de plaire* (St Pierre de Salerne : Gérard Monfort, 2006) 163-178.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Greenaway, *The Belly of an Architect*, *op. cit.*, letter 118, 178.

## II - Size, scale, proportions

The question of scale is indeed of relevance when one addresses issues of intelligibility. Macrocosmic and microcosmic conceptions of the world act as many reminders of the fact that man likes nothing more than to toy with concepts allowing him to manipulate objects in chosen perspective. A variety of disciplines, belonging to the realms of science and art (natural philosophy) harbour a multitude of instruments with which the world will be apprehended.<sup>24</sup> With such powerful tools Prospero manages to fashion his island after the models promoted in his complex atlases; with his magic, he manages to give flesh to the world after the representations secured in his twenty four precious living books. Greenaway here goes much further than Shakespeare by specifying that three of these books are in fact maps containing so many relevant details that they enable Prospero to create matter after them. Here, representation is so perfect and so intelligible that it acts as a map; some magnification and a dose of magic are simply needed to turn map into actual territory. The books are a *Primer of the Small Stars*<sup>25</sup>, which contains a map of the stars as they are reflected in all the seas of the planet; *An Atlas belonging to Orpheus*<sup>26</sup>, which features a map of Hell, only material trace of a landscape unknown to the living, whose paper bears the mark left by Cerberus's cruel jaw, and lastly *The Book of Games*, a miniature cabinet of curiosity which contains all of the natural fragments ever used by mankind as game tokens, and which covers a territory which is equal to the infinite of human experience.<sup>27</sup> Thus, it is thanks to the representations that Gonzalo left Prospero that the latter manages to think, and then to recreate and order matter. Representation saves Prospero's life, when it condemns to death characters like Neville and Kracklite who are not able to use it wisely. Scale indeed is a problem for Kracklite, who seemingly strives to find a key for apprehending proportions in a satisfying way. Kracklite's assistants make fun of him, by imagining that such a genius as Boullée must have found his own measuring system. When they handle Kracklite the model he has been expecting, the following dialogue takes place:

Kracklite: (turning his irritation on to the model) What's the scale?

Federico: It's what you asked for.

Kracklite: In centimeters or inches?

Federico: Centimeters! No self-respecting architect uses inches.

Io: Did Boullée use inches?

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<sup>24</sup> See for instance Peter Greenaway, *Some organising principles = Rhai egwyddorion trefn*, (Swansea: Glyn Vivian Art Gallery and Wales Film Council, 1993)

<sup>25</sup> "A *Primer of the Small Stars* : This is a small, black, leather-covered navigational aid. It is full of folded maps of the night skies that tumble out, belying the modest size of the book. It is a depiction of the sky reflected in the seas of the world when they are still, for it is complete with blanks where the land masses of the globe have interrupted the oceanic mirror. This, to Prospero, was its greatest usage, for in steering his leaky vessel to such a small blank space in a sea of stars, he found his island. When opened, the primer's pages twinkle with travelling planets, flashing meteors and spinning comets. The black skies pulsate with red numbers. New constellations are repeatedly joined together by fast-moving, dotted lines." Peter Greenaway, *Prospero's Books, A Film of Shakespeare's The Tempest* (New York : Four Walls Eight Windows, 1991) 20.

<sup>26</sup> "*An Atlas Belonging to Orpheus*: Bound in a battered and burnt, enameled-green tin cover, this atlas is divided into two sections. Section One is full of large maps of the travel and usage of music in the classical world. Section Two is full of maps of Hell. It was used when Orpheus journeyed into the underworld to find Eurydice, and the maps, as a consequence, are scorched and charred by Hellfire and marked with the teeth-bites of Cerberus. When the atlas is opened, the maps bubble with pitch. Avalanches of hot, loose grave land molten sand fall out of the book to scorch the library floor." Peter Greenaway, *Prospero's Books*, op. cit., 20.

<sup>27</sup> "*The Book of Games*: This is a book of board games of infinite supply. Chess is but one game in a thousand in this volume, merely occupying two pages, pages 112 and 113. The book contains board games to be played with counters and dice, with cards and flags and miniature pyramids, small figures of the Olympic Gods, the winds in coloured glass, Old Testament prophets in bone, Roman busts, the oceans of the world, exotic animals, pieces of corals, gold putti, silver coins and pieces of liver. The board games represented in the book cover as many situations as there are experiences. [...] There are games of death, resurrection, love, peace, famine, sexual cruelty, astronomy, the cabbala, statemanscraft; the stars, destruction, the future; phenomenology, magic, retribution, semantics, evolution. There are boards of red and black triangles, grey and blue diamonds, pages of text, diagrams of the brain, Arabic carpets, boards in the shape of the constellations, animals, maps, journeys to Hell and journeys to Heaven." Peter Greenaway, *Prospero's Books*, op. cit., 25.



Julio: (with a laugh) He used Boullées. (Laughter) How long are they?

Frederico: The distance from the nose to the navel. All his buildings are based on human anatomy.<sup>28</sup>

Kracklite then punches the nose of Frederico after the latter makes a lewd remark about his wife's lover; the incident is soon forgotten. Then, two months later, Kracklite meets a nose collector, who detaches the noses of Roman statues with a hammer and chisel. The film script features a postcard in which Kracklite writes that

I met a man who collects noses – the stone noses of statues. I collect bellies. He knocked the noses off. I photograph bellies – seat of digestion and gestation... and cancer. Why did he collect noses? - two holes in the head – an accident of evolution. No poet waxed eloquent about nostrils. What about navels. Are nostrils and navels fit subject for poetry? Rome is a belly.... The Belly of the Western world.<sup>29</sup>

This postcard doesn't appear in the feature-film, but just like Boullée is ironically said to have used his own scale to establish his representations, Kracklite seems to have inwardly registered the proposed distance between navel and nostril as his own ratio-scale. He has thus become the caricature of Boullée that his own assistants drew, and his constant occupation in Rome will be to check if the real world can be superimposed to his imaginary scales and models ("I dream of staircases and tunnels, and believe that my insides must be constructed of faulty architecture and cracked masonry like the Vittoriano or the Palace of Justice, or those suspended arches on the Colosseum – does a baker dream that his insides are made of dough and currants, and if he's ill – of stale cake and rotting bread?"<sup>30</sup>) Thus, his own flesh finds itself mixed with stone in a most astonishing way, and the permeability of representation and world is allowed in his imagination, as if by contamination. Then, for the sick architect, through some feverish projection the whole city becomes an impossible replica of Boullée himself, and many seemingly unrelated and unrelatable elements find a correspondence in Kracklite's imagination: "I saw the celebrated model of ancient Rome today at the Roma Museum – it's covered in dust and periodically glass falls from the roof. I was taken around by a curator with a build-up shoe. He walked at the same pace all the time – his uneven footfalls echoing in the huge halls. Were you lame?"<sup>31</sup>

An infinite range of possibilities soon opens for Kracklite, who becomes easily engrossed in examining possibilities, computes probabilities, and seems to feed on his obsession for analogy, each possible concept being granted possible realization in reality, in some cruel reversion of Boullée's work, which was never realised. Of course, the sick brain of the architect soon decides to remedy this, and to "reconstruct full-scale – around the world – 10 of Boullée's buildings".<sup>32</sup> The one hundred and twenty four postcards that Kracklite writes were meant to be compiled into a short film called *Dear Boullée* which was to complement the *Belly of an Architect*; most importantly, the reason why Kracklite initiated this unilateral correspondence with a dead man is explained in a scene which was cut. The architect explains to the eavesdropping little boy whom he has befriended that Rome is the only city in the world whose total appearance can be reconstituted with postcards. Each point of view echoes one another, as there are so many landmarks and places of interest. Thus, Kracklite believes that by sending this series of postcards, he is enabling Boullée to create his own map of Rome (in Paris, since Boullée "lives" in Paris<sup>33</sup>). This photographic reconstitution of the Eternal city through a juxtaposition of dissimilar points of view (for each postcard mismatches others as far as scale and perspective are concerned) constitutes a fascinating representation, since it is a kind of hybrid made of a variety of conventional systems conglomerated in a way which undermines the specificity of its medium – the verisimilitude of photography is here ridiculed, and the Rome featured by Kracklite's ingenious mosaic flaunts indeed its own arbitrary nature. Photography is just another kind of representation, and it would be indeed naïve to think it more in adequation with the world because of its isomorphic qualities. As a man acquainted with the subtleties of point of view, Kracklite should

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<sup>28</sup> Peter Greenaway, *The Belly of an Architect*, *op. cit.*, 45.

<sup>29</sup> Peter Greenaway, *Ibid*, letter 81, p. 160.

<sup>30</sup> Peter Greenaway, *Ibid*, letter 111, p.175.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Greenaway, *Ibid*, letter 60. p.148.

<sup>32</sup> Peter Greenaway, *Ibid*, letter 98, p.168.

<sup>33</sup> Peter Greenaway, *Ibid*, 73.

indeed know better. A plan enables an architect to fashion reality after it; it is a kind of reversed map, in that sense. Some representations can thus shape matter; let us now try to see what happens with a more traditional mapping of the world.

### III - Mapping the world

Maps are an efficient alternative to mimesis; they possess exactly the same strictly topographical functions than mimetic representation, but they function in an abstract mode.<sup>34</sup> Map-making bridges linguistic and aesthetic disciplines, and aims at controlling an object that is by definition incommensurable, very difficult, if not in most cases impossible to measure with human eyes. A map is thus an image (which sometimes features text) in conformity to the definition given by the philosopher Jean-Jacques Wunenburger:

L'image [...] constitue une catégorie mixte et déconcertante, qui se situe à mi-chemin du concret et de l'abstrait, du réel et du pensé, du sensible et de l'intelligible. Elle permet de reproduire et d'intérioriser le monde, de le conserver, mentalement ou grâce à un support matériel, mais aussi de le faire varier, de le transformer jusqu'à en produire de fictifs.<sup>35</sup>

The cartographic image will represent the world by duplicating it at some inferior scale, transforming it non-mimetically; it will simplify it geometrically until this representation becomes intelligible enough for the senses. Many references to map-making appear in Peter Greenaway's works; he once told Michel Ciment that "maps are for me the plastic equivalent of an attempt to classify chaos."<sup>36</sup> I think that one could say that a very basic version of the map could be playing fields, as a necessary frame that delimitates and represents at the same time. The playing field is here to be taken as the field of action, action which is often observed by an audience: all of the long-feature films feature playing-fields of various natures, challenging the very act of selection which they suppose. Thus, playing fields can be properties, gardens or buildings (*The Draughtsman's Contract*, *The Belly of an Architect*), the theater stage (*Baby of Macon*, *Nightwatching*), reconstituted preserved microcosms (*Zoo*, *Prospero's Books*), human imagination and culture (*Prospero's Books*, *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*), or nature in its entirety, just like in *Drowning by Numbers* for instance. All these territories are constantly measured with problematic tools, their boundaries are ceaselessly questioned, their existence always challenged. Alan Woods thus sees the playing field as

[...] A marking out of territory, perhaps the only map we have invented that allows, indeed insists upon, a scale of 1 :1. The laws of perspective ensure that normally we can never see it, either as players or spectators, in its purest form, which is the diagram : the way it is if we make a sketch to explain the game and the rules of the game to someone, or the way it is on the coach's blackboard, a permanent outline around a script, - a storyboard - of circles, crosses, arrows, commentaries and erasures. The form of this diagram, which is pure and universal, and the form of the individual playing field are identical.<sup>37</sup>

The catalogue of *The Last Supper* performance organized by Peter Greenaway in Milan is indeed at scale 1 :1, since the one hundred and sixty pages of the volume contain a true scale reproduction of the wall of the refectory of Santa Maria delle Grazie, on which Leonardo painted. This version of *The Last Supper* is a gigantic fresco faithfully wrapped in a book, and if one buys two of these books in order to get the recto and verso of each page, one can reconstitute the wall in real size and paste it on another wall, in a nice duplicating gesture. What is interesting is the new glance that this catalogue allows us to bear on Leonardo's masterpiece, echoing, but in a different way, the projection of Greenaway in Milan. The photographic reproduction of this wall is an invitation to a scrutinisation of a fascinating surface, a temptation to revel in fragmentation, a deliberate suggestion

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<sup>34</sup> For more on maps and their use in contemporary art, see Stephen Bann, *The Map as Index of the Real : Land Art and the Authentication of Travel*, *Imago Mundi* 46, *The International Journal for the History of Cartography* (1994). See also Lawrence Gasquet, "A Perfect and Absolute Blank' : carte blanche à Lewis Carroll", in Ronald Shusterman, ed, *Cartes, paysages, territoires* (Bordeaux : Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 1999).

<sup>35</sup> Jean-Jacques Wunenburger, *Philosophie des images* (Paris : P.U.F., 1997) xi.

<sup>36</sup> Peter Greenaway, entretien avec Michel Ciment, in *Positif* 276, février 1984.

<sup>37</sup> Alan Woods, "Fields of Play", in Paul Melia & Alan Woods, *Peter Greenaway Artworks 63-98* (Manchester : Manchester University Press, 1998) 24.

to dismantle the work in the privacy of our homes and take pleasure in it. By exposing this wall in so crude and seemingly objective a way, Greenaway reminds us of the reverence we should feel for the painting, and at the same time shows us that this is simply a wall which is covered with century-old stains of painting. The operation of *reductio ab absurdo* is indeed efficient, and paradoxically underlines Leonardo's genius, while at the same time reminding us of the very artificiality of the mimetic operation: *ceci n'est pas une Cène*, could we say, even if it looks like one at a macroscopic scale. Vittorio Sgarbi, in the catalogue, writes that Greenaway's animation is truly "a seeing instrument"<sup>38</sup>; indeed, this pale relic of the surface of a wall at true scale perfectly testifies to Leonardo's tenet that "pittura e cosa mentale". How could we not then remember the strange similarity that the architect's gesture unexpectedly reveals between his own flesh to the stone bellies left by antique sculptors? And how could we not remember that other mysterious statue about which we all have our own little theories, that of *The Draughtsman's Contract*, whose very materiality regularly disappears in its surroundings? Flesh, vegetation, stone: representation levels all things, and paradoxically makes the world more intelligible.

Some of Greenaway's first works also tackle a similar questioning on the possibility of an efficacy of representation. *A Walk Through H, The Reincarnation of an Ornithologist* was made in 1978; this short-feature film only features maps, the narrator's voice telling us about trips he took following the maps we see on screen. *A Walk Through H* is a meditation on the arbitrariness of representation, a trip inside paper, and is described as such by its author:

My starting idea for *A Walk Through H* came when I found a collection of Ordnance Survey Maps that had mistakes – roads going left instead of right, orchards painted blue instead of green. Here we are, it seemed, trying to define and circumscribe nature, and it's as if nature were sabotaging or satirising our attempts. In *A Walk Through H* « real » shots of birds keep interrupting the maps – to break up the artifice.<sup>39</sup>

The result is a demonstration of the power of illusion of the image, because we finally understand that a map is just another way of telling a story; instead of allowing our eyes to set on some mimetic shots, Greenaway presents us with their abstract equivalents. The maps dissolve as the trip progresses, paradoxically suggesting that each experience is unique and cannot be shared – which appeared to be the main goal of the film, though. *A Walk Through H* only features some footage of birds, who ironically don't need any maps since they use the landscape as a 1 to 1 scale. The enterprise of mapping the world seems bound to fail, because even if Greenaway reminds us of its powerful abilities ("The map expresses [...] where you come from, where you are and where you will be"<sup>40</sup>), it seems that maps cannot possibly represent everything:

The maps offered alternative routes. Their magnanimity was not helpful. A map that tried to pin down a sheep trail was just credible. But it was an optimistic map that tried to fix a path made by the wind. Or a path made across the grass by the shadow of flying birds. The usual intentions of cartography were now collapsing. Either that or the route itself was becoming so insecure... that mapping it was a foolhardy occupation.<sup>41</sup>

What are these impossible attempts at capturing the movement of the wind, or at freezing the shadow of a flying bird? It seems that we are here in the territory of photography, or in that of the moving image<sup>42</sup>.... *A Walk Through H* thus makes us experience the failure of a mode of

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<sup>38</sup> Vittorio Sgarbi, in *Peter Greenaway, L'Ultima Cena di Leonardo/Leonardo's Last Supper* (Milano: Charta, 2008) 161.

<sup>39</sup> Peter Greenaway, in Vernon & Marguerite Gras, ed., *Peter Greenaway Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000) 4.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted by Michel Field, « Le cinéma à la limite », in Daniel Caux, ed., *Peter Greenaway* (Paris : Dis Voir, 1987) 126.

<sup>41</sup> Peter Greenaway, *A Walk Through H : The Reincarnation of An Ornithologist* (1978) excerpt from the film-script.

<sup>42</sup> This is the subject of *A Zed and Two Noughts*, see Lawrence Gasquet, "Plastique de la décomposition: les énigmes cinématiques et temporelles selon Peter Greenaway (A Zed and Two Noughts)", in *Des Histoires du Temps : Conceptions et Représentations de la Temporalité* (Bordeaux : Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2003) 93-113.

representation said to be informatively exhaustive to reconstitute the complexity of an experience that depends as much on sensations as on thinking. This debate on the operation of representation will be constantly enriched by Greenaway.

The map becomes the territory, the painting is confused with reality (*The Draughtsman's Contract*, *ZOO*, *The Baby of Mâcon*, *Nightwatching*), and the script becomes the film: the scenarios of many other short-feature films, like *H is for House* (1973) or *Dear Phone* (1977) begin with written language as a trace; the actual script is seen on screen, and is filmed as a document, at the same time as it is read by a narrative voice. *Vertical Features Remake* (1978) presents us with four fake short-feature films meant to replace some authentic footage which remains impossible to find. The spectator is permitted to see some segments of the mysterious footage, but very ironically our gaze is never allowed to pass through the actual roll of film, which will never be inserted in the projector. The aim of *Vertical Features Remake* is to survey and compare some quite modest vertical features (poles, tree trunks, etc.) in a landscape bearing the obvious mark of man. These verticals are classified in four different ways by some academics who erroneously think that they are retrieving lost footage. In this parody of theorization, of glossing, and even of interpretation, shall I say, some grandiloquent professors discuss the works of the enigmatic Tulse Luper. *Vertical Features Remake* is thus as much a celebration as a criticism of structuralist theory; the real star is the landscape, scrupulously filmed and presented into "bits" literally illustrating the concept of verticality. Greenaway declared:

[It is] about the reorganisation of the domesticated landscape. In Britain practically every sod of earth has been trodden on a thousand times; we don't have wilderness here or anything remotely like a wilderness. It's probably one of the most painted and drawn and photographed landscapes in the world, and *Vertical Features Remake* was very much about this heritage.<sup>43</sup>

Just as Kracklite ends up fabricating his own image of Boullée after every stone he encounters in Rome, and the same as the professors, we come to a representation of the British landscape that is ultimately and quite paradoxically not less valid than another. The British world has been so extensively represented that it seems to have lost its identity; this is a case of abstract erosion of landscape, of a modification of the perception we can have of nature because of its representation. It is as if Nature here were *inferior* to the representation that she originated. Thus, in *Vertical Features Remake* the fake films made by the professors are finally as valid as the original one made by Luper; the substitutes are not really less fit than the original, and the films manage to capture a certain idea of the British landscape, that is a representation based upon certain prominent features, which could be called *stereotypes*.<sup>44</sup> We must conclude that our definition of the concept of landscape is fascinatingly complex and elastic, just like that of the concept of representation; man is so constantly engrossed in this activity of representing (the very act of thinking relying upon it) that he very often loses himself in the signs he professes to be able to decipher. Representation and represented then interact in a myriad ways, thus paradoxically creating a web of new self-begetting possibilities.

#### **IV. Watching the night, and counting the stars**

Francis Bacon wrote in *Novum Organum* (1620) that "the human understanding is of its own nature prone to suppose the existence of more order and regularity in the world than it finds. And though there be many things in nature which are singular and unmatched, yet it devises for them parallels and conjugates and relatives which do not exist."<sup>45</sup> Singularities and differences are usually erased in order to be perceived as similarities and harmony: this constant and delusive desire of man for order and regularity is what Peter Greenaway remodels for us. He proposes endless cultural remapping, and in the center of all his variations, one finds the eye of man, just as the centre of *The Nightwatch* features a mysterious floating eye. In a similar position as Neville, although ultimately less lethal, Rembrandt is taught a lesson in *Nightwatching*. With the help of Jacob de Roy, who chooses to see actors on canvas where Rembrandt chooses to see criminals, he learns that observed and observer

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<sup>43</sup> Peter Greenaway, about the script of *Vertical Features Remake*, <http://petergreenaway.co.uk/vfr.html>

<sup>44</sup> "As always, the academic method threatens either to drown or dessicate. But the images of the rural landscape in the four invented films manage to retain their poetry beneath the statistical method and the determination to interpret through dogma". Peter Greenaway, *Papers* (Paris: Dis Voir, 1990) 12.

<sup>45</sup> Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, *Novum Organum*, *The New Atlantis* (1605, 1617, 1620, Londres: Britannica, 1952).

are two radically different things whose interests do not necessarily always converge. At the end of the film, Rembrandt repeats his lament of the beginning, moaning about becoming blind and being condemned to see "Night. Painted darkness. Miles and miles of miles of painted darkness." It is of course tempting to interpret these miles of metaphorical darkness as our own ignorance in matters of representation, as we are at the same time the originators of our cunning visual stratagems and the victims of our own perceptual entrapments. However, as Rembrandt playfully adds, these miles of painted darkness might be "Lit by spasms of light. If you're lucky". Let us say that Greenaway regularly strikes a match for us, and that, as Rembrandt states, we are lucky not to be "perpetually nightwatching", and we can go along in counting the stars with him.<sup>46</sup> Leonardo was right indeed; light gives bliss for those who can appreciate it, and Peter Greenaway certainly makes the world more intelligible for us.

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<sup>46</sup> "I have been seeing the night. I was watching the night. I was looking into darkness. Darkness without ending. I was watching perpetual night. I was nightwatching. [...] I am perpetually nightwatching." Peter Greenaway, *Nightwatching* (Paris : Dis Voir, 2006) 6, 152, 126.