



Travelling as strolling about and other modes of introducing movement in Prospero's Books.

Louguet Patrick

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Patrick Louquet

Patrick LOUGUET est Professeur des universités, enseigne le cinéma et l'Etude des Genres, l'Esthétisme et l'Histoire du Cinéma au département des Arts de la Réalisation Cinématographique à l'Ecole Européenne Supérieure de l'Image. A l'université de Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis, ce département du Cinéma appartient à l'UFR Lettres, Philosophie et Esthétisme. Auteur de nombreux articles parus dans différents forums et revues universitaires, il a également rédigé une monographie : « The Barefoot Contessa by Joseph Léo Mankiewicz : one cinema telling and thinking himself », Arras, A.P.U. (Presses Universitaires d'Artois), coll. « cinémas » - 2004 ; et un second livre de 520 pages sur les connections transversales esthétiques : *Sensible Proximities, the arts at the crosses* (Cinema, Choreography, Installation, Video-art), Arras, A.P.U. (Artois Presses University), coll. « cinémas » - 2009. En tant que chercheur à l'université de Paris 8, Patrick Louquet est membre de l'Ecole Doctorale EDESTA.

Université de Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis.

In this article, Patrick Louquet considers this Greenaway's opus as a real "transformation-operator". Indeed, the film can be understood as an alchemic laboratory, but also as a physician one's. Both is doing torsion on narrative frame. The point of view is frequently displaced to show how quixotic and sublime appears so baroque on screen, with an abundance of materials, colored and formal events. Most of them belongs frequently at many little boards cut in all the surface of screen film, like paintings strained and floating in museum setups. But the Greenaway's tables are, obviously, living - not static - tables. Duke of Milan's books are "accessories-mediums" of many moving paradigms. These "books-operators" determines emergence of sensitive configurations formed by optical or visual, audible and musical signs.

Dans cet article, l'auteur montre à quel point le film de Peter Greenaway, Prospero's Books, est un véritable opérateur de transformations, liées entre elles par de fréquentes reprises de la forme-ballade du travelling. En effet, on peut considérer ce film comme un laboratoire d'alchimiste, voire un laboratoire de physicien dès lors que s'y opèrent des torsions de la trame narrative au bénéfice des métamorphoses visuelles. Le point

de vue est fréquemment déplacé pour faire apparaître sur l'écran, de façon baroque, des formes où le chimérique côtoie le sublime : les êtres façonnés et les phénomènes engendrés le sont dans une profusion de mouvements, de processus matériels et de couleurs scintillantes. La plupart de ces événements surgissent, surcadrés, sur des toiles analogues à celles, flottantes, tendues dans des installations muséales. Évidemment les tableaux de Greenaway sont des tableaux mouvementés, loin des images fixes : les livres du duc de Milan sont comme autant de matrices d'édification de configurations sensibles composées de signes visuels, sonores et musicaux.

“The cinema’s self-generation:
films must breed other films”
(Dziga Vertov)

A paradox: proclaiming the death of the cinema and affirming it as the art of artifice. Urban itineraries

Even if one hasn't been able to attend the Nice University symposium on Peter Greenaway in February 2009 and meet him on that occasion, it is still possible to hear his comments on the bonus of *The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and her Lover* DVD recently released (December 2008),¹ as well as on Philippe Pilard and J.J. Bernard's artistic documentary entitled *Peter Greenaway, Portrait*². In this film interview there is a close-up of Peter Greenaway, who proclaims at the very outset and with characteristic dishonesty, “The cinema is dead”. This insincere statement, reinforced by its own brevity, will be qualified later when the artist paradoxically emphasizes the cinema's capacity to create artificial worlds likely to excite the spectator's imagination and when his infographist Eve Ramboz stresses that the moving image of a drop of water ricocheting is a composite image, the result of the association of fifty iconic sources. This problematic is a real issue in the sense that the question is asked once and for all by Pierre Huygue (who deems the question of the supporting material totally irrelevant and wants his own works to be projected on a large screen) when he declared “I'm not interested in the question of the medium. I make films, not videos.”³

In Pilard's documentary, before one of the credits pays homage to his chief operator Sacha Vierny⁴, Peter Greenaway affirms that if the cinema is a “dinosaur” whose head seems to be “frozen”, one shouldn't trust “the energy of its long tail”. Pilard's film was shot in Gand in 2006, and the various statements are interspersed with images of the shooting of the *Tulse Luper Suitcases*⁵ – which turns the documentary into a kind of making-of of the latter. The suitcases have first been presented in a gigantic installation in Lille in 2004. In Gand, Peter Greenaway's high-definition digital camera was used, not in the Belgian Museum of Contemporary Art, the SMAK, but in a vast private gallery, the Fortlaan 17 Gallery. From the film to the intra- and extra-muros installation, and from the installation to the film, there takes place an incessant to and fro movement which takes us through Greenaway's whole output. One remembers the Vienna installation the year after *Prospero's Books*, and the *Stairs*

¹ Bac-Video.

² Produced by Ciné Cinéma/ CLC, April 2004.

³ Pierre Huygue in answer to Richard Leydier who was interviewing him, « Qu'est-ce que vos films ont que ceux des autres vidéastes n'ont pas ? », Paris, *art press*, 322, April 2006, p.30.

⁴ Sacha Vierny (1919-2001) had worked on the framing and lighting of *The Belly of the Architect* (1986), *Drowning by Numbers* (1988) and *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* (1989) before working on *Prospero's Books*.

⁵ *Tulse Luper Suitcases, a Personal History of Uranium*.

installation in Geneva three years after the film. These installations actually constitute a combinatory system of free itineraries.

The cinema may have some relationship to walking or strolling about, as Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues notices in many films and explains in her latest book, *Modernes flâneries*⁶, but in the case of Greenaway's urban itineraries, he appears to be a large-scale stage director when he imposes on the strollers – now spectators – moments when to stop, a manipulation of their gaze which sometimes becomes the victim of restricted framing. This framing, which the urban spectator is submitted to when stepping up on the small platform of the installation, is not the equivalent of an extreme close-up by any means. Indeed, the physical immersion of the on-looker into an urban situation cannot possibly be ignored as easily as in a cinema when he faces the screen and feels emotions sitting there. The strolling spectator circulates round installations placed here and there in the city so that the city proves to be a huge interactive installation, whereas events on the screen depend on the film director's good will to the spectator's greatest pleasure. That is why it is crucial, when confronted with Greenaway's organisational and creative multi-forms, to emphasize the to and fro movements rather than wonder whether he will give up the cinema, as if the latter were not an interior necessity. When a journalist from *Libération* asked him back in 1987, rather impertinently or immaturely, "why do you film?"⁷, Greenaway was generous enough to simply answer:

Perhaps I make films to be able to write and paint at the same time...and draw lists...and invent catalogues...and reflect upon the possibilities and tell paradoxes, develop ironies, quote enigmas and tell stories.

As we will see, between 1987 and 1995, Greenaway's art took greater and greater liberty with the narrative.

Narrative support and transubstantiation laboratories

In Greenaway's art, narration has become inessential in that it is no longer a simple support, a thin pretext to create some kind of link or to celebrate the figurative as such. *Prospero's Books* apparently respects a narrative thread from the initial arrival on the island and, later on, the arrival of the usurping brother accompanied by the King of Naples and his son (who will obviously fall in love with Miranda, Prospero's daughter), but this is only to open short cuts and create matrices for other forms⁸. The story does create links but it is not the sole agent of construction. More exciting are the animal skeletons and the more or less rickety framework of artificial constructions.

Still, the narrative promise is fulfilled and what puzzles the spectator who feels more comfortable with classical narration (and far from the cut-up technique advocated by the poet and painter Bryon Gysin who fascinated William Burroughs), are the numberless sideroads and the composite spatio-temporal proliferations they lead to. The screen has become the place for bizarre associations and permanent collages, testifying to the persistence and vigour of avant-garde, Dadaist and cubist principles applied to the seventh art.

That the Duke of Milan should drift away on the sea with his daughter in a rotten little boat at the opening of the film links the film to motifs, typical of the Renaissance although tinged with medieval undertones, such as vanity, the bookish sensuality of illuminated designs, and magic. It is no surprise that supernatural meanings should be easy to find in the film, which do not contradict Renaissance humanism; indeed, one remembers from what Michel Foucault said about the Renaissance episteme that this period is characterized by the "play of similitude and resemblance", and that the interplay of micro- and macrocosmic correspondences still functions between the natural and the supernatural, especially in the field of religion and art⁹. Greenaway's mythological inspiration, just like Shakespeare's, which blends mortals and immortals, is frankly, joyously polytheistic in its tapping Babylonian and Athenian sources, especially as regards metamorphoses – which does not

⁶ Sne Liandrat-Guigues, *Modernes flâneries du cinéma*, Lille, De l'incidence éditeur, 2009 (cf. www.wix.com/delincidence/delincidence – type « delincidence » twice).

⁷ *Libération*, in 1987, printed a special number about Greenaway. The reference can be found on the Internet via "Alice-M Cinéma" under the title "Greenaway".

⁸ Some critics even wonder if Miranda is not an invention of the Duke, so much so that Prospero, through his powerful capacities to exalt poetry and use magic, appears to be Greenaway's intrafilmic representative, the figure of the creator.

⁹ Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses*, Paris, NRF, Gallimard (1966).

mean that he doesn't draw other motifs from medieval tales. Enchantment and prodigies dominate the tempest¹⁰ and reveal a kind of complicity between Shakespeare's theatrical poetics and Greenaway's cinematographic poetics beyond any anachronism. In the exuberant energy of Shakespeare's art, in his protean proliferations which include operatic songs and dances, one can detect the coarse impurity¹¹ of the roots of the cinema. The impulse which gave birth to the cinema existed before the technical possibility and is already to be found in many sources in Antiquity¹².

Of course, the encounter of Shakespeare and Greenaway, especially when taking place through magical tricks openly revealed, was announced, in some sort of way, by Melies, Marey and Muybridge, veritable intercessors, in the sense given to the word by Gilles Deleuze who applies it to human and animal creatures as well as things¹³. Among those intermediaries one can consider Edward Muybridge's albums of chronophotographic plates, *The Human Figure in Motion* and *Animals in Motion*, which count so much in Francis Bacon's paintings. Greenaway's creativity is then not to be found in the seduction exerted by the narrative – disavowed later by the artist himself – but in the art of the moving image and the time-image. His films charm us away from puerility into the subtlety of the material as well as the existential interplay of life, love, sexuality and death, which shocked a certain number of critics so much in 1991¹⁴. These were, in a way, the spokesmen of those who were disappointed by the lack of narrativeness and used words they thought stigmatizing – “futile”, “too baroque” or “formalistic”. Of course, all this presupposes that one sees his films on a large screen, and with wide open eyes and total open-mindedness¹⁵ – this reminds one of Bill Viola's answer at the American Centre in Paris in the seventies when he was asked “Where is the narrative in this video?”, and said “The narrative is the work itself.”¹⁶ Greenaway presents us with *Prospero's Books*, not for us to read them, but to use their materiality as the source of composite images and explore the figural value of the letter once it is made to appear, be erased or disappear, like elemental processes. The initial assertion of the decorated or calligraphed letter leads Greenaway to achieve a real “palimpsest in the making”, similar to the erosion of the wood-engraved name of Madame Muir in Mankiewicz's eponymous film – the wooden sign being literally eaten away by the waves.¹⁷

Prospero's books, - his props, one might say – are to be seen as veritable jacks-in-the-box and not as sheets of paper which would celebrate the superiority of semantics over semiotics. What is determining is the conquest and invention of new sensitive configurations depending on the interplay of sound and sight/signs. As regards semiotics of the inessential the cinematographic seduction exerted by the Big Book derives from the circulation of its pages. It is a matrix, a temporality made into motion¹⁸, an “hourglass in the making”: passing from one book to the other is tantamount to the reading of a one and only virtual Big Book, which the film materializes through its different episodes. Here, Greenaway revitalizes the act of tearing off the leaves of a block calendar as seen in extreme close-ups in silent movies.

¹⁰ The credits clearly indicate that the film is a adaptation of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

¹¹ Coarseness has to be understood in the meaning Levi-Strauss gave to “bricolage”, a certain roughness in the craftsmanship.

¹² Stanley Cavell, *La projection du monde*, trans. Christian Fournier, Paris, Belin, 1999. Cavell bases his comments on Baudelaire's Salon of 1859, p.74 (Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed. Reflections on the ontology of Film*, Harvard University Press, 1971, 1974, 1979). See also Jean-Louis Leutrat, *Le Cinéma en perspective: une histoire*, Paris, Nathan, 1992.

¹³ On this question of intercessors, see my article, « D'un concept l'autre...un mouvement constant », in *Murmure*, Hors série : *Le Mouvement des concepts (esthétique – cinéma)*, Lille, 2008, p.107.

¹⁴ The affinity between Greenaway's art and Shakespeare's turn the latter into the contemporary of the former and, by way of consequence, into our contemporary. This active, and reactive, affinity, this Nietzschean “untimely activity” which punctuates History to designate what men cannot possibly forget, for all they try. So it goes with the combination of crude and refined violence in Greenaway's films.

¹⁵ The very large screen is, with light, one of the essential conditions of the cinema. See Dominique Noguez, *Ce que le cinéma nous donne à désirer*, Liège, Editions Yellow Now, 1996.

¹⁶ A famous anecdote told by Micky Kwella in 1994 in a Thema documentary on the TV Channel Arte, entitled *Tempête d'images*.

¹⁷ Joseph Leo Mankiewicz, *The Ghost and Mrs Muir*, 1947.

¹⁸ This circulation, although a rather cliché process, is always a source of emotion.

As regards the notion of subordinate, or even inessential, narration, Greenaway himself declared in an interview given to *art press* in 1995 that “Griffith has been harmful to the cinema”, because he based his films on narration. The cinema is sequential¹⁹, he added, not narrative. What he underlines is that catalogues characterize his films, narration is reduced to its simplest expression and the history of painting should be analyzed in order to nourish the cinema. In painting, masterpieces are not narrative, they express a point of view on the way to conceive the world, the form and the substance²⁰. Well, as often happens with Greenaway’s sweeping judgments, one should not underestimate Griffith’s powerful artistic inventions and overestimate the narrative threads of *Birth of a Nation* or the alternating narratives in *Intolerance*²¹. Behind Greenaway’s figural quest in all his experiments, based on shot by shot animation devices and on the combination of traditional special effects and digital processes – such as the use of scanner in the case of his graphic work – Greenaway’s goal is pictoriality, and the affirmation of a specific point of view. In that respect, his “palimpsest becoming” finds its origin in the pictorial art he has privileged, as he said in the above quoted declaration to *art press*.

Experimentation is not too strong a term to speak of Greenaway’s transubstantiation processes, typical of the alchemist’s or physiologist’s or physicist’s crucibles. The exaltation of slow or sudden combustions in scenes which evoke Kane’s sledge or Orson Welles’ s film – a sledge which acts as a revealer the moment it disappears into the flames - or the pillow embroidered with the heroin’s name in Hitchcock’s *Rebecca*²² It is true that luminous flames and splendid sheaves of fire have something to do with what makes film projection possible, when one remembers the accidental fires which used to break out in the projectionist’s cabin or when projectors didn’t work properly. At that time, in a totally unexpected and brutal way, the film would burn from the centre of the image outwards under the eyes of an astonished and fascinated audience. As Julie Savelli said, using the title of Jean Claude Biette’s series of articles in *Trafic*, Greenaway has the capacity, found in all great filmmakers, to celebrate a cinema “in the making”²³, founded on the gathering of all its resources, from seizing the image to its projection on the screen, *via* all the artistic and technical stages of post-production. At every moment, thanks to ever more original combinations and regardless of narrativeness, he allows the spectator to become aware of this “obscure filming consciousness” which his films convey of themselves²⁴. Taking into account the multiple “gestations” of infographist Eve Ramboz in her preparatory achievements, we can add that the composite movement-image imposes on the screen both its construction and heterogeneity, and, on the contrary, its homogeneity, erasing all kinds of evidence of joining and linking the disparate elements, favouring rather the invention of cinematographic “chimeras”²⁵. There remain different possibilities for the filmmaker to appear to have done a sloppy job by introducing a few pixels or by blurring a few areas of the surface or by giving random brushstrokes scanned as they are with the weft and woof or grain of their support, or by using graph paper as a background²⁶. One has to investigate each one of these and compare Prospero to the *Tulse Luper Suitcases*, but it seems that in the 1991 opus, the homogenization of moving forms was decided upon and chosen, starting with the travelling during the credits: an eminently cinematographic modelizing function.

¹⁹ One understands in that respect the complicity between Greenaway’s cinematographic aesthetics and Michael Nyman’s musical aesthetics.

²⁰ See Peter Greenaway, “Quand l’image a le dernier mot”, interviewed by John O’Toole in *artpress*, 202, May 1995, p.22-30.

²¹ Artistic inventions such as the impressive, lavishly detailed settings admired by the brothers Paolo and Vittoria Taviani in their film *Good Morning Babilonia*, 1987.

²² *Rebecca* (1940), *Citizen Kane* (1941). See Jean-Pierre Berthomé, “Hitchcock et Welles”, *Positif*, 470 (April 2000), p.76-81. The article mentions several intriguing aesthetics similarities between the two directors who pretended to ignore each other, and is subtitled with Orson Welles’ “I liked him very much, he didn’t like my films either”.

²³ Jean-Claude Biette, quoted by Julie Savelli in her article « Cinéma et anthropologie, l’homme imaginaire en 3 mouvements », *Murmure*, hors série, *Le mouvement des concepts (esthétique – cinéma)*, Lille, De l’incidence éditeur (février 2008), p.134.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Chimera in the sense of Descartes with his famous example of the winged horse.

²⁶ It is on the same squared background that Muybridge took medium chronophotographic shots of Isadora Duncan, the dancer. See *The Human Figure in Motion* (1901).

A constantly displaced viewpoint: the variable *audience camera*

It is no wonder that the film should be pervaded by the “obscure filming consciousness” of a work in progress since the main question is that of the point of view²⁷. Such a point of view can only be moving, passing from a moving object and event to another, in keeping with Gilles Deleuze’s theory that the cinema is a series of fluid cuts of movement, which means that the instantaneist fragmentation of photography cannot give it an artistic paragon. From its inception, the cinema has been an art rather linked to sculpture, which, for Suzanne Liandrat who refers to Deleuze’s analysis of Bergsonism, is this very series of moving cuts of movement²⁸. In that respect, for Book 18 of *Prospero* where Semiramis, the warrior queen of Babylon, Greenaway had Eve Ramboz put women wrestlers in motion, similar to Muybridge’s chronophotographs²⁹. The consciousness that the prehistory of the cinema is being referred to and dealt with is explicit enough. Indeed, while the instantaneist photographic decomposition of movement can be likened to the cinematic freezing of very small temporal intervals, it is far from being the same thing. Philippe Pilard clearly showed this in his documentary when he placed right after the film’s wrestling scene one of Marey’s nude models seen walking, and not the fragmented photographic stages of the movement. What Pilard celebrates here is the image by image cinematographic animation, one of the founding principles of the cinema at the beginning of the twentieth century together with Melies’ “trucs à arrêt” (stop tricks)³⁰. The interest of the Greenaway-Ramboz composite image lies in the animation of drawings – or of stencilled-out photograms graphically manipulated to give them more depth – as well as in making the women wrestlers’ bodies more pliable so that it would seem to originate in the tension between the pencil and brushstrokes and the surface itself. Perceptual emotion is totally different from that of the simple animation of chronophotography. Each phase of the wrestling is already present in the previous traces, just like what McLaren did in his *Pas de Deux* in 1967. In this short feature, the dancers’ bodies are “birdified”, metamorphosed through bird-like silhouettes which are reiterated and maintained in their visibility at the back of their own movements, thus creating stroboscopic effects.

All of *Prospero*’s books belong to the overframed flat surface, also the source of metamorphoses, where the organicity of matter is questioned as in Rembrandt and Francis Bacon’s works³¹. But before analyzing this matrix-like surface, the four-minute-long second part of the credits needs studying because it is one of the conditions of its own possibility. It is a long sequence shot, over which the letters of the credits, grouped in successive bundles, play the part of visibility-exacerbating grids which delineate the frame which will be that of the books when opened. Those grids are virtual and look like half-open Venetian blinds.

Dominique Païni sees in David Lynch’s film *Lost Highway* the principle underlying anyone’s visit to the different parts of a museum³². This principle, that of a visitor who goes round, while sitting in a chair, is at work in the credits of *Prospero’s Books*. The difference, however, is that one does visit contiguous and continuous spaces, as in some museums, but here one penetrates into successive sculptors’ and painters’ workshops to fall upon living models, a space of choreographic experiments supported by Michael Nyman’s music. One is also given access to theatrical spaces where the circular moves and movements of the group remind one of the Living Theatre performances and where one also sees two women skipping rope, thus echoing the Menina-like little girl in *Drowning by Numbers* (1988). This being said, the basic principle, for Michael Nyman, is pictorial and music is introduced to make Greenaway’s filmic art consummate:

The pictorial reference: the interpenetration of painting and the cinema takes place not only at the heart of the image’s materiality, but also in the process in which

²⁷ An issue repeatedly raised by Greenaway in his works.

²⁸ Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues, *Cinéma et sculpture. Un aspect de la modernité des années soixante*, Paris, L’Harmattan, coll. L’art en bref, 2002.

²⁹ In Book 18 entitled *The Autobiographies of Semiramis and Paphinae*.

³⁰ See the Meliès DVD, *Méliès le magicien*, presented by Madeleine Malthête-Méliès, ed. Arte video, EDV 236, 2001.

³¹ See Gilles Deleuze, chap.4 , « Le corps, la viande et l’esprit, le devenir-animal », in *Francis Bacon, logique de la sensation*, Paris, Seuil, « l’ordre philosophique », rééd. May 2002, p.27.

³² In his lecture at the University Paul Valéry in Montpellier in December 2008, invited by Maxime Scheinfeigel.

it originates. The painter's and the filmmaker's works meet as soon as technique is involved.³³

Correspondingly, one could also claim that all the profilmic hybrid components find their origin in Greenaway's imaginary museum, provided that such museum – a kind of *cosa mentale* – is the place of movement, as in Lynch's films, or any filmmaker's at that. There are countless figures, motifs and cultural stereotypes which the spectator has access to in the ballad-like form of this four-minute travelling³⁴. As Suzanne Landriat says, it seems to us that this continuous travelling functions as “the creator of metamorphoses”³⁵. Where the mainstream critic has only seen an erudite juxtaposition – probably the symptom of his refusal to get carried away – Greenaway works out the unification of figures which tends to universalize them thanks to this all-encompassing moving figure which grows as it advances. This is why the nude character hanging upside down – thus evoking the torture inflicted upon Macchiavelli – is soon replaced by a scene in which Leda and the swan are posing like models in the sculptor's workshop : Leda is naked and squatting on the ground, stroking the bird's neck. Later on, a series of to-and-froing tracking shots show a model dressed as a figure from Félicien Rops's paintings strolling along until he leaves to the left³⁶. In another sequence, centred on the special relationships between Miranda and her father, one sees Actaeon in the background strolling along until he stops on the right, half way up a series of steps among other models. The oneiric composition, typical of sculpture, belongs to a composite art encapsulated in the stag-headed man. The same powerful effect is found in surrealist collages, such as Max Ernst's and also in various fantastic combinations, as in Georges Franju's *Judex* (1964) whose characters at the fancy ball – bird-headed men – seem to come out of some of Ernst's etchings.

This metamorphosizing strolling around is, as a matter of fact, a long slow journey at the crossroads of arts, inspired by the exuberant law of encounters of actual events, remembered images and mental projections. It is also a kind of *ekphrasis*, the ancient rhetorical figure through which the different arts competed as if to test their own power of expression³⁷. In that respect, there is an obvious similarity between Greenaway's 1991 film and Jean-Luc Godard's *Passion* in 1982 in which he “tests” genre painting in his film's “tableaux vivants”.

Could one speak of “brief form” in relation to the second half of the *Prospero* credits, by relating the concept to the whole duration of the film? In fact, this “ballad-form” follows the duration dictated by the constant tracking movement, which corresponds to the majestic and regular deambulation of the Duke. It takes all the more time since there emerges from it many other forms between which there is no rupture. This is also shown by the continuous travellings used by Greenaway in relation to the axis of the depth of field, which all follow the same rhythm supported by Michael Nyman's music: in spite of the many changes of focus of the moving *audience camera*, regularity rules supreme. Cinema being the art of combining different movements in time-movement units, one could say that the sequence shot towards the end of the film, in which a double file of courtesans soon followed by nude models are seen strolling around, has replaced the depth of field travellings: men and women come from the background and leave the screen after going through a fixed frame, passing close to the camera in two symmetrical files. This reaffirms the close relational solidarity in a film between characters and camera.

³³ Michael Nyman, *Peter Greenaway*, Paris, Dis-Voir, 1987, p.40. The latest film then was *The Belly of an Architect* (1987).

³⁴ The ballad-form is one of the central aesthetic concepts of Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues. See « L'homme qui marche, une allégorie dynamique », *Esthétique du mouvement cinématographique*, Paris, Klincksieck, « 50 questions », 2005, p.111 and more particularly « Que nous apprend la forme-bal(l)ade ? », p.133. See also Dork Zabunyan, « Un détour par la forme-balade » *Murmure*, hors série, *Le mouvement des concepts (esthétique-cinéma)*, Lille, De l'incidence éditeur, 2008, p.23-33.

³⁵ As Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues says about strolling in the chapter « créatures du passage », *Modernes flâneries, op.cit.*, p.37.

³⁶ Félicien Rops's works are exhibited at the Museum of Namur in Belgium.

³⁷ On ekphrasis, see Suzne Liandrat-Guigues and Jean-Louis Leutrat, *Godard simple comme bonjour*, Paris, L'H, coll. Esthétiques, 2004, p.126. Also Patrick Louguet, chap.1 of « de la confrontation des esthétiques à une esthétique de la confrontation », in *Sensibles Proximités, les arts aux carrefours (cinéma - danse - installation - vidéo art)*, Arras, Artois Presse Université, October 2009, p.31.

The longitudinal four-minute travelling is a technical feat when one realizes how it plays with the props on the set – profilmic props first, before they become obstacles for the camera on its tracks – when the film was shot by chief operator Sacha Vierny. A long travelling: in Sacha Vierny’s own experience, one should remember his collaboration in Alain Resnais’ *Hiroshima mon amour* in 1959, in which he filmed a composite city associating travellings shot in Nevers and in Hiroshima. This film obviously belonged to Greenaway’s cinematographic culture when he recruited Sacha Vierny in 1987³⁸.

Noticeable, too, is the similitude between this technical feat in the *Prospero* credits and the movements of Hitchcock’s camera among the dancers in the final sequence of *Young and Innocent* (1937), even if, in this latter case, travelling is not lateral but actually cuts into space along the axis of the depth of field.

Once more, reference must be made to Godard’s *Week End* since he himself declared in 1967 that he wanted to make “the longest continuous travelling of the whole history of the cinema”, a 300-meter one. In his *Godard au travail*, Alain Bergala, writes that “this supposedly historic travelling is divided into two by inserts³⁹. This attenuates the “bravura” of the rather “see what I can do” quality of the shot⁴⁰. Indeed, the eleven-minute travelling over the interminable file of cars held up in a traffic jam, punctuated as it is by scenes of accidents, is interrupted by two inserts, so that we first get a two-minute-forty-second fragment and a second one lasting almost five minutes, as if to make the change in the camera axis unnoticed. Greenaway’s travelling is strictly parallel to the Duke of Milano’s slow movements and if he specified to Philippe Pilard in the latter’s documentary that the Duke is the English actor John Gielgud but also Shakespeare, he is humble enough to exclude himself from the centre of a condensation of characters, which he obviously occupies. Prospero is the representative of the film director, especially as the function of the demiurgic Master of Ceremonies derives from an evidently clear conscience.

This inaugural travelling is ever so present throughout the film as a matrix, especially as it also occurs in the “margin” of the books which appear at the surface parallel to the surface of the screen, overframed at its centre. This overframing surface not only hides what it covers but its rectangularity still includes scenes which take place along the depth of field axis. This surface is seen by the audience but it is easy to extrapolate the characters’ reverse point of view. Even if it seems to have been added at the moment of editing and to be a composite reality, the book, stretched as it is, becomes an intermediary element between the audience and the cubic universe where the characters are. On this large canvas which overframes Greenaway’s screen, various happenings and processes take place. The canvas becomes a melting-pot from which organic, coloured movements emerge, as in the “meat” passage already mentioned and hinted at by Eve Ramboz in Philippe Pilard’s documentary. It also becomes a receptacle, exactly like the water surface into which some of *Prospero*’s characters plunge, in such a way that the spectator’s artistic memory establishes a relationship between Greenaway’s film and Bill Viola’s video art piece *Reflecting Pool*⁴¹. In Greenaway’s film, the swimming pool appears to be like the inkpot into which the writer dips his pen, it is the place where the human body assertively becomes a sign, even if it is doomed to disappear as in Viola’s videos. There is also something pre-Socratic in the artist’s determination to use fundamental elements. In the ballad-form of the travelling, the model boat made to capsize by a water jet at the end of the credits reveals its artificiality while contributing to the celebration of natural elements. This artificiality pervades the inaugural presentation of the first book, relevantly called “the book of water” in the long credit sequence. It finds its founding filmic reference in the sequence from Georges Méliès’ *Voyage dans la lune* (1912) where a cardboard steamboat tows away the rocket retrieved from the sea. Likewise, we cannot avoid the other reference to the model sailing boat used by Germaine Dulac in *La Coquille et le Clergyman*, an

³⁸ On this matter of the hybridization of Nevers and Hiroshima like « two intermingled combs », see Jean-Louis Leurat, « Ouvert pour cause d’inventaire », in *La ville au cinéma*, Arras, ed. Artois Presse Université, “Cinéma”, 2005, p.241.

³⁹ Alain Bergala, « Week-end », « Le travelling le plus long », in *Godard au travail, les années 60*, Paris, Cahiers de cinéma, « un réalisateur au travail », 2006, p.372.

⁴⁰ In French, « l’aspect morceau de bravoure quelque peu « m’as-tu-vu » du plan », in his interview by Philippe Pilard and Jean-Jacques Bernard in their 2004 documentary.

⁴¹ *Reflecting Pool* is a video art by Bill Viola in 1983. An extract from that piece is included in the artistic documentary by Aude de Lafourcade, curator of video-art at the MAMAC of the Pompidou Centre in Paris, entitled *L’art vidéo* and broadcast on Channel 5 of the French television in Autumn 2001.

imaginary object above one of the characters' head⁴². In all these models, the cinematographic magic resides in the manifest use of a stratagem, or in the celebration of props likely to nourish the spectator's pleasure and adult love for artifice and make believe, so different from the pleasure taken by children when hunting for whatever is irrational in a film.

Before the credit sequence ends on sheets of paper flying off, thus celebrating the power of the wind after the power of water, one sees Prospero writing "we split, we split, we split" on a white page in huge letters. To split, to divide, to deconstruct in order to reconstruct in a new way, that is one of the most fundamental of Greenaway's filmic principles affirmed by the character who stands for him. No need for him to use the split screen technique as an editing process, as in the sixties and seventies, a process which seems to be coming back into favour today⁴³: Prospero's overframing is an artifice which finds its natural place in the "movement-image" and paradoxically contributes to opening up the surface and destroying its flatness. This is why Prospero's books are hybridizing machines, laboratory-like places for overabundant forms to macerate, as in the last series of accumulated explosions, erasures, "magical" combustions of books in the swimming pool water, repeated full frame in glass splinters...

These splinters hold a seduction which pervades Matthias Müller and Christoph Girardet's work *Kristall* in 2006. This composite film is made up of brief similar forms borrowed from 138 films, among which famous films, as Müller had already done for *Home Stories* in 1991. *Kristall* accumulates similar movements serially, each episode linked to the next with a fade out and a fade in, with a great number of close-ups of full frame broken window panes, glasses and mirrors. There is an obvious filiation between *Kristall* and *Prospero's Books*, which originates in Jean Cocteau's *Orphée* (1950), from which *Kristall* borrows its last shot.

In 1991, Greenaway's visual "machines", which both grind⁴⁴ and generate, offer their new creation to our eyes, far from a poor and banal cinematographic aesthetics which would only confine itself to representing.

⁴² This shot is illustrated in Alain et Odette Virmaux, *Artaud/Dulac*, Paris, Ed. Paris expérimental, coll. Sine qua non, 1999 (fig.36).

⁴³ Cf. John Frankenheimer, *Grand Prix* (1966), Norman Jewison, *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1968), Hal Salwen, *Denise Calls Up!* (1994), Tom Tykwer, *Lola Rennt* (1998) and Mike Figgis, *Time Code* (2000).

⁴⁴ Purposefully referring to Marcel Duchamp's comments on his chocolate grinder in his *Grand Verre: la mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même*, New York 1915-1923, 272 x 175,8 and two replicas at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1961 and 1966.