National College of

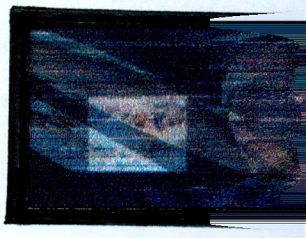
Art and Design

Faculty of Design

Visual Communication

Title: Peter Greenaway's

24 paintings per second



by

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INTRODUCTION

Today, film is the most inclusive art medium. In moving images we find elements of theatre, photography, painting, literature, sculpture, music, dance, design, fashion, architecture and even sometimes the art of calligraphy. The English film-maker Peter Greenaway has included close to all art-forms in his films. Peter Greenaway says: 'Come in, and sit in my cinema. Come, I'll prepare a meal for you.'[Interview in connection with release of *The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and her Lover*, Norwegian Newspaper, 1990]

In this study I would like to generate a discussion on Peter Greenaways films, and relate this to film as an art form. This will be an investigation in the ways of reading his films; on style, storytelling, sound, personal language, editing, pictures and their meaning. I am especially interested in his films as an experience: the films as a meal for senses. Do we have to understand what the films are about? Are there other ways of experiencing film? What is the spectator's journey in the films, and what are his/her's reactions?

In order to explore these questions, other issues have to be left out. A resumé of all his films will therefore not be found here. It has to be assumed that the reader already has watched not all, but at least two of his films.

As the title may suggest, Peter Greenaway is not only a film-maker, he is also a painter. His work in the cinema is to a great deal reflected in his art-exhibitions, held in more and more prestigious galleries around the world (including the Louvre). I am not going to point to his work outside the cinema. It is only his films and their implications that will be discussed.

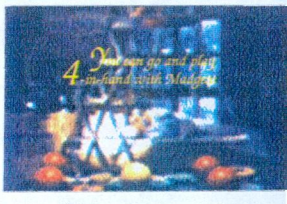
To investigate the ways a Greenaway film works to an audience, I have had help from questionnaires given out to an audience after screenings of *The Baby of Mâcon, at* The Irish Film Centre, Dublin. A number of books, magazines and newspaper articles have been a helpful source for the research-work. One book by Walker [*Art and Artists on Screen*] is devoted to the relationship between the lives of artists (real and fictional) and films based upon them. Here is a specific study on *The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and her Lover* and *The Belly of an Architect* . Hacker and Price's book with an interview and article about Greenaway [*Take 10*, 1991] has been very informative.

An examination of the films thereby is the best entrance to the world of experiencing Greenaway's films. Are his films works *of* art, and not merely works *with* art?

A work of art encountered as a work of art is an experience,
not a statement or an answer to a question.
[Susan Sontag. On Style]

Chapter 1: PRESENTATION OF PETER GREENAWAY

Peter Greenaway was born in 1942, in Newport, Wales, but his parents soon moved to East London and raised him there. He is the son of a builder's merchant and a schoolteacher. Both his parents died in later life from stomach cancer. Peter Greenaway was 19 when Alain Resnais's *Last Year at Marienbad* was released (he would later come to work with Resnais's cameraman, Sacha Vierny). At that time he was a painting student at Walthamstow College of Art and very interested in European Art Cinema. Almost everything changed when he first saw Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* [1957]. He saw the film for an estimated two performances of each day for five days. He was captivated by the metaphors, the symbolism and literal meaning found in *The Seventh Seal*. He had never encountered a costume piece with such a drama before, full of references to history and mythology. From wanting to do 'something' relative to painting, he became more and more interested in film-making. Greenaway now uses his camera as a palette to communicate his passion to tell stories.



'Ingmar Bergman's The Seventh Seal converted me from canvas to celluloid.'

[Peter Greenaway in Profile, The Independent, pp. 14]

Following art school, Greenaway worked long and hard to find his path into the film industry. He wrote 'totally unreadable' articles [Peter Greenaway in Hacker & Price interview, *Take 10*, pp. 209] such as *The Relationship between Chirico and Alan Resnais*. At this time he had a job as a door-keeper at the British Film Institute. From there he got a job in the distribution department at the BFI. Here he had the opportunity to see hundreds of short films from the archive — including many European underground movies since the Nineteentwenties. He started making his own films while working as a film editor in the Central Office of Information. He stayed there for 11 years, doing mainly informative documentaries. In the beginning his own work reflected the sixties reaction against dominant cinema, through being minimalist and experimental.

Greenaway has been accused by film critics of everything from misogyny to misanthropy via perverse cruelty and a lack of humour. Fellow British directors, from Derek Jarman to Alan Parker have been scathing. Parker said that he would take his children abroad to be educated if Greenaway made another movie after *The*

Draughtsman's Contract. Greenaway has done 13 more movies, but Parker has yet to move. The accusations from film critics have been numerous, and the audience has never been totally in favour. His screenings are famous for having 50% of the audience leaving the cinema before the film has ended.

However, others, particularly in France and lately Germany as well, have been fascinated. His films are feasts for any semiologist who might like to decode and deconstruct films. A five-day conference on Greenaway's oeuvre held in Lyons failed to get beyond the implications of *The Draughtsman's Contract*'s title!

He seems to be one of the few film-makers in England who really has an audience which devotedly will see his films just because they are made by him, and not necessarily because of their subject matter, actors, cast or reviews. 'The star in a Peter Greenaway film is Peter Greenaway himself.'[Hacker & Price, *Take 10*, p. 189].

Fig 1. Four Greenaway faces

Chapter 2. AN UNDERGROUND FILM-MAKER GOES OVERGROUND

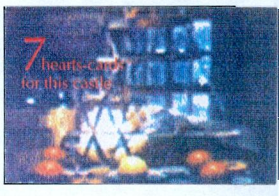
When Peter Greenaway started making his own films as a film-editor at the Central Office of Information, he went through a crucial period in forming his firm beliefs about art and in particular cinema. This formative period was marked by a growing fascination with the ideas of the British Structuralist Movement, which turned away from cinema as an 'illusionist' or 'emotional' medium and concentrated on structure, in the hope of clarifying the process of meaning — production itself.

From being an underground film-maker he slowly made his way away from subsidies. His wish to get out of obscurity meant to seek a larger audience, to be able to work from larger budgets and achieve a wider distribution. Greenaway was at the right place at the right time, the early optimistic eighties grew into an enormous flood of money and investments. People dared to take risks, and it was easier to get to money, even for underground film-makers. Peter Sainsbury — a head of production at the BFI — provided Peter Greenaway with the money that was needed to make the shortfilm *A Walk Through H* (1978).

Now the public started to see his work. In 1980 Greenaway's film *The Falls* (3,5 hours long) was the first British film to win the BFI award for Best Film for thirty years. Greenaway is still most happy about *The Falls* of all the films he has made till 1990. But it was in 1982 that he really leapt to the attention of the cinema-going public with the surprise success of *The Draughtsman's Contract.* Greenaway was actually forced by Sainsbury to cut *The Draughtsman's Contract* down from four hours to a 110 minutes film. With a certain pragmatism the film-maker agreed to edit the film to seek a larger audience. To achieve this he had to reassure the audience so they could understand what they were watching; in the development of ideas, themes and narratives. On the question whether Greenaway was a private or a public film-maker, [Hacker & Price, *Take 10*, pp.198], he replied that the answer to that question was in the gap between *The Falls* and *The Draughtsman's Contract.* Now more dialogue, actors and more conventional narrative were introduced. Greenaway had moderated the obscurity of his earlier films. He took on board more drama, which reduced the distance betwwn audience and the narrative. He had left the idea of telling short echoing stories. He had to some extent left the non-narrative cinema, which invited the audience to wander in and out of the film, or fall asleep! More conventional narrative was investigated to keep the audience nailed tho their seats, and follow the film in another pace. Still his films circle around the human need to create a rational view of the world out of its chaotic

parts. A continuous conflict on this issue has brought Greenaway to question it in more or less all the following films. His ideas on reality and meaning are also continuous reflected on screen.

Despite Greenaway's success with *The Draughtsman's Contract*, he had difficulties raising money for his next film *A Zed and Two Noughts*. His films could have been to risky for investments, even in the daring eighties. Eventually he had to go to Holland as a condition of finance. Though Greenaway learned a lot from the painful editing process with *The Draughtsman's Contract* — the necessity to please the audience — *A Zed and Two Noughts* remained 'strange' and difficult to the larger audience. The spectator remains largely an observer, which is emphasised by the coldness of Greenaway's rationalist approach as well as the distancing effect of the wide shots and the controlled and very rare close-ups. The audience was not encouraged to take fully part in the emotional drama. The characters were like puppets, their motions were aesthetical rather than natural. The images seemed to be moving only within very strict frames and composition, as if the film consisted only of paintings brought to life by the film-maker.



The Belly of an Architect (1986) however, was happily received both by critics and audience; as it was much more conventional, more 'human'. This may be partly thanks to the American Hollywood-star Brian Dennehy's impressive and 'real-like' acting. The unusual move to use a Hollywood actor certainly made Peter Greenaway step into a totally new and unexplored landscape. Greenaway tells that Brian Dennehy taught him a lot about the actor's importance, and he tried to make use of this when working on *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and her Lover*. But he admits that he still has not yet discovered how to have both the artifice and the naturalistic performance — both the self-consciousness and the suspension of disbelief — balancing in a film. This balance is one of Greenaway's main aims as a film-maker, while expressing himself in a quite unconventional film-language.

The success of *The Belly of an Architect* made him at last able to make *Drowning by Numbers* [1984]. He had the script ready since 1981, and this is obviously the reason why the film has more in common with The Falls and his earlier short films. The central character, Cissie Colpitt, is mentioned in *Vertical Features Remake* as well as in *A Walk through H*. She is divided into three characters - grandmother, daughter and granddaughter, where she simultaneously represents the same woman at different times in her life. But none of the characters are 'realistic', the audience

are not even ever tempted to believe in them. The plot and the characters are there more to support the main issues: game-playing and reproduction. It is also an amoral tale supporting the belief that the good is seldom rewarded and the bad go unpunished.

So far Greenaway has had most success with *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*, with which he won the 1990 London Evening Standard Award for best film-maker. Now he did not only achieve more positive acclaim in his home country, but had greater success abroad. Germany, after France, became more and more interested in this peculiar English film-maker.

Fig. 2. Opening scene of *The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and her Lover*

The audience could more easily accept this film. Although it contains extraordinarily disturbing themes and scenes; the dramatic presentation was much more conventional, and therefore easier for a larger audience. Michael Gambon acts convincingly, which is of enormous importance when judging the film in a conventional way. Greenaway's exaggerated use of costumes, decor, music and colours is made more acceptable here than in many of his earlier films. These artifices do not conflict so much with the narrative, and the drama is also easier to follow. The drama in *The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and her Lover* is stronger but no less burlesque than in his other films.

One of Greenaway's longest ongoing projects has been the television version of Dante's *Inferno, A TV Dante*. This is a collaboration with the painter Tom Phillips, made for Channel Four and starring Bob Peck as Dante and Sir John Gielgud as

Virgil. 'Dante, in a sense, is an ideal source for Greenaway, in that his work shows complex and rigorous structure, and has numerous metaphors, images and word-plays to work from.' (Hacker & Price, *Take 10*, p. 207). Although Greenaway usually writes his own scripts , he shows a great willingness not only to use classical books as references, but also as the main source itself. In 1984 Greenaway and Phillips made an experimental template for *Canto V*, an instructive experience for both of them. What has been produced shows the imaginative, almost surreal ways that the latest video technology can be used to construct a highly complex, artificial form on the screen. In order to get access to this equipment Greenaway had to go to Japan, here he managed to work for free in testing out the newest technology.

Fig. 3. An exploration on the TV vocabular, from A TV Dante.

A TV Dante is made specifically for television, and is designed to be recorded on video and watched by the audience at their own speed, stopping and starting at will, like reading a book. This is reminiscent of the documentary, *Four American Composers* (1983), where titles even appear on the screen telling the audience to turn on their video recorders, and at the end to rewind and rewatch. Even in some of Greenaway's feature films, especially his next (*Prospero's Books*), it is not ideal to watch his work without a video recorder. 'Watching his films in a conventional fashion and at a normal speed orientates us towards following a story which may be subsidiary to what the film itself is about.'(Hacker & Price, *Take 10*, p. 207). To some Greenaway fans this may sound like a sacrilege, because the images on the wide screen, the bigger-than-life effect, is totally lost on video. On the other hand we could be tempted to agree with watching more of Peter Greenaway's films on video, if only the screen could grow to the size of a cinema screen!

Greenaway preferably wants to make film for the cinema, which has the scale, the commitment of the audience, the in-the-dark atmosphere, its bigger-than-you-are, noisier-than-you-are exclusiveness. Though he used to think that television has a

reduced language compared to the cinema, he has now changed his mind. Greenaway now accepts that the characteristics of television can be just as rich, but with a different vocabulary, different rules, a different if related language.

The elaborate work on *A TV Dante* seemed to make him change his mind towards making more and more use of the possibilities of TV and video. In *Prospero's Books* (1991) he worked on mixing the two vocabularies of the cinema and the television. Greenaway is not very pleased with the technological qualities of television; he thinks TV is poor when it comes to dark/light contrasts, hue/saturation, music/sound, and of course the size of screen is seen as a negative element. But it is cheaper to make films for television and more effectively edited. The advanced editing technology within television gives new opportunities for working with images. Perfection of all details is achieved on the newest machines such as a Quantel Paintbox or a 'Harry'. It is also in the post-production, in editing, where he finds the greatest advantage, which he has used fully in *Prosperos's Books*.

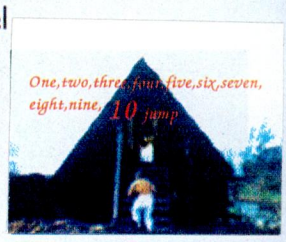


Fig. 4. Cuts of elaborated TV-images, with typicical Greenaway layers. [*A TV Dante*]

Until now Greenaway seemed to be moving into more and more elaborate use of images in his experiment with filmlanguage. Despite this he has now stepped backwards in many ways, with the latest film *The Baby of Mâcon* (1993). The film is not only set in 1651, but he has also left the technologically advanced language behind *Prospero's Books* and *A TV Dante*. Lately the style has changed, the elaborated technically skilled surface has been simplified, but the content is still Greenawayesque. He

questions more than ever before fiction and reality. The audience of *The Baby of Mâcon* is more directly confronted with Greenaway's ideas of cinema, where his questions are projected via the screen to the spectator.

From being underground films, his films are now addressed to a larger audience, and achieved a wider distribution. He has moved financially through funds from the British Film Institute, the British Arts Council, Channel Four and now to a close cooperation with the Dutch producer, Kees Kasander. Two of three contracted films have already been made (*Prospero's Books* and *The Baby of Mâcon*), with the third (*Augsbergensfeldt*) on its way. *The Baby of Mâcon* received a storm of critique when it was shown in England. This has not only put Greenaway in the limelight but also created an aura around him as an utterly controversial artist in the film-world.

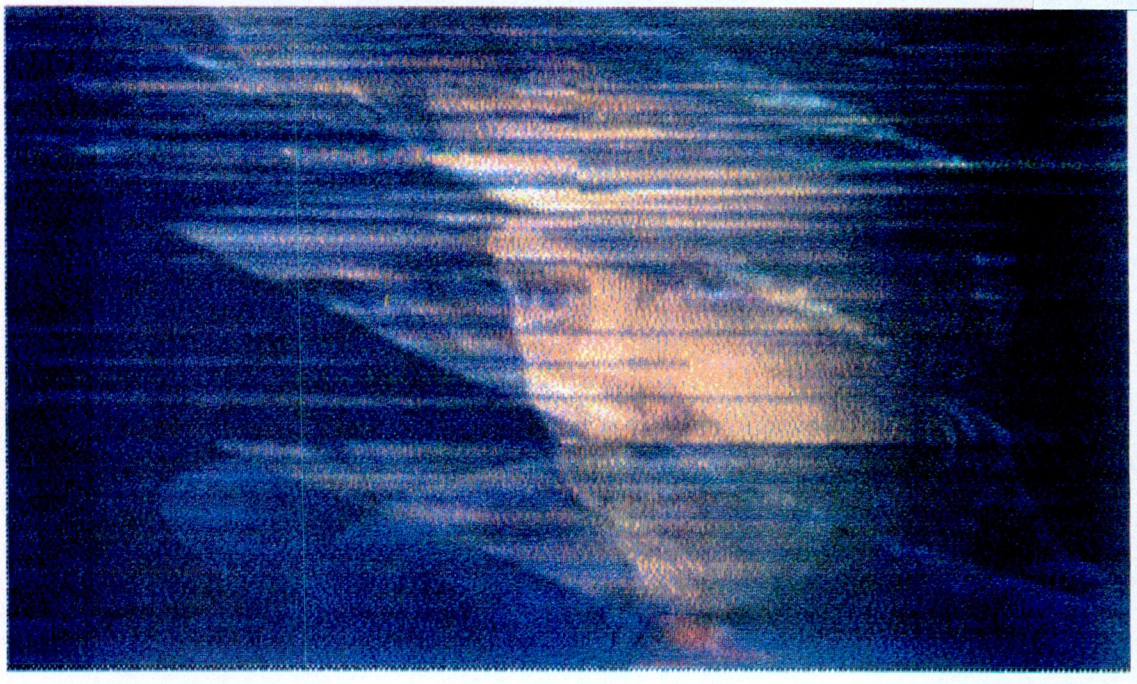


Fig. 5. Greenaway in the limelight.

Chapter 3. GREENAWAYESQUE TABLEAU

A Peter Greenaway film is controversial because of the style as well as the chosen issues. Greenaway wants to explore taboos and his films are far away from the British traditional film. British film has generally exposed a strong realism and direct moralism, with a stylistic restraint. Greenaway opposes the 3Rs of British film: realism, rectitude and restraint. He questions artifice and moral within elaborated images. He wants to play with the audience and explore taboos through his very characteristic filmlanguage, and serves the spectators big meals of intellectual references that might be too much for their digestion.

Most typically, a Greenaway film is organised in terms of classification systems, cataloguing information and the codifying of these. He uses simple structural devices to regiment his material i.e. forms of classification, all simply drawn from the film's theme or closely connected to the narrative.

STRUCTURE

In 1966, when Greenaway had worked in the Central Office of Information (COI) for eleven years, he made his first short film. *Train* has traces from his documentary work in the 'information' arm of the Foreign Office (COI). COI would tell the rest of the world about the British way of life — how many sheep-dogs there were in North Wales, how many Japanese restaurants in Ipswich. This classifying and listing was strong in the *Train*, and has remained a part of his film language.

The Falls is structured on 92 stories of people all with the surname 'Fall', i.e. Mashanter Fallack, Carlos Fallanty, Raskado Fallcastle and Hearty Fallparco. The film is made in a documentary style, and when the fortyfirst story is told we know we are in the middle of the film. The next film *The Draughtsman's Contract* is divided into twelve parts as the draughtsman is commissioned to make twelve drawings. In *A Zed and Two Noughts*, Darwin's eight stages of evolutionary development is used as a structural base, since the film, among other things, is about coming to terms with death in a zoo. *The Belly of an Architect* plays on the number seven after the seven ages of Roman architecture. *Drowning by Numbers* is based on the number onehundred, from the hundred stars in the sky (counted by a little girl:'Once you have counted a hundred, all the other hundreds seem the same.....'). We count stars and we count deaths in the film, knowing what the sum will be. Greenaway's use of numerology could give us a feeling of reading a book and knowing which page we are on, or of watching a theatre play divided into a certain number of acts.

Greenaway also uses colours as a classification system. *The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and her Lover* is divided into colour coded zones, where colour is a part of the storytelling. Each colour adds an extra meaning: Red in the dining room is for blood and violence, but also growing love. Outside it is blue and cold night. The restrooms are white and clean, when entering them the costumes change colours. The green of the kitchen stands for vegetation and growth. When experiencing these classification systems within the film the audience is given another perspective on the emotional drama, the 'plot'. These systems may work as a direct reference to our real world, but they also work on a different level. We could say that the references work as a part of the illusion of our 'real' world, since they loose their referential point when being used in the narrative or as a part of the narrative. The films exist in their own cosmos, independently from, but very alike our cosmos. This is as taking a chair from a dollshouse, it can no longer be used as a real chair — since it is too small. The chair belongs to the micro-cosmos of a dollshouse. So the filmreferences end up being self-referential to their own cosmos within the film. Greenaway serves us a cosmos out of the chaos we are living in. This is a cosmos of illusions, where he tells us that we are living in a reality mixed of subjectivity, science and dreams. He serves us this chaos with a few basic structures, which are reminiscent of our real world. He has taken a distance from our world. He looks at it and twists it. He may question a conventional moral position, and asks 'what happens when you turn this phenomenon on its head? — These procedures are commonplace in literature and in painting, why deny them in the cinema?' [Hacker & Price, *Take 10*, p. 213]

IRONY

For Greenaway himself, the lists or classification systems are excellent demonstrations of the vain, absurd attempt to create an objectivity and meaning in the world. The symbolic use of systems in the organising of the narrative could be seen as a particular kind of ironic commentary by the director, in order to distance the audience from their emotional response and induce a critical awareness. This is a Brechtian strategy to clarify the production process of communication, a strategy Greenaway has taken a great interest in. The film-maker acknowledges that classification systems are necessary for any culture and any society, but wants us to be aware of just how arbitrary they are. We could say that they are used in contradiction, or that they have three functions in his films:

1. A metaphorical and symbolic function, to give more meaning to the narrative.
2. Ironic statements of how fragile any structure are.
3. Irony used to emphasise that this is 'just' a film — distancing the spectator.

ART HISTORY

Very obvious to any spectator, is Greenaway's use of art history in his films. Paintings are given a large space in his earliest works till today. We could have spent hours in discovering direct references to art, but Michael Walsh has given a good summary: Vermeer presides over *A Zed and Two Noughts*, Breughel over *Drowning by Numbers* and Hals over *The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and Her Lover.* Meanwhile, various corpses evoke Mantegna's Dead Christ, women in red hats bring to mind Vermeer's Girl with a Red Hat, and feasts evoke both last suppers and the Hals *Banquet of the Officers of the St. George Civic Guard* that looms so large in the decor of *The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and Her Lover.* [Michael Walsh, *Allegories of Thathcerism, — The films of Peter Greenaway,* pp. 258]. Furthermore, Michael Walsh points out most importantly that 'Greenaway's use of art history is a question of animation', a duel of two basics in film image: the stillness it shares with painting and photography and the motion that distinguishes film so radically from earlier visual arts. This suggests a way of thinking that goes beyond informative and referential motives in his films. His preoccupation is with art in motion, as distinct from art that used to be still within frames. He points his position clearly by using premodern art in a dialectical relationship with the moving camera. His modernist camera becomes postmodern by taking on board fragments of the premodern. 24 paintings (from different periods) per second might come close to a formal definition of one aspect of Greenaway's work.

Fig. 6. Hals' civic guards waching the last supper. [*The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and Her Lover*].

Fig. 7. The main characters play The Deadman's Catch, while preparing for the inquest. Notice the coffin is passing the players without interrupting the game at all. [*Drowning by Numbers*]

GAMES AND DIALOUGES

Other features of Greenaway's films are the use of games, word-plays and conundrums. This is used to the greatest extent in *Drowning by Numbers*, where even the characters are complaining about having to play all these 'pointless' games. Greenaway uses ironically these games of symbolism and illusion. He says that 'Film-making itself is a complex game of illusion and bluff played between the film-maker and his audience'. [Hacker & Price, *Take 10*, pp.192]. With the elaborate use of very English word-plays, riddles and ironies the dialogue always seems to be very artificial. Greenaway says that he has yet never made a film where anybody talks a normal conversational English. The dialogue is often very strange and unnatural. A line may sometimes occur more like a speech on stage than on screen. The lines seem often unnaturally long and the dialogue lacks a mimetic flow. In his early experimental shortfilms speech was reported, we heard about characters from a tireless, measured, bureaucratic voice-over. For *The Baby of Mâcon* he originally wanted the characters to sing instead of talk [Peter Greenaway in the IFC, Dublin, 3/12-93]. However we do find examples of normal uses of language as well, e.g. in *The Belly of an Architect* — where the architect quarrels with his wife, though 'real' dialogues are very rare in his films. The illusion games in themselves may sometimes give the audience a feeling of being bluffed. In the conventional cinema the audience is accustomed to measure quality in terms of how realistic or life-like the film is. Do we believe in the story, characters and the dialogue? Or, are we taken in by the story,

the characters and the dialogue? Greenaway does not want to take us in: this is one of the purposes of the various and obvious artifices which have been referred to as 'Brechtian'. The conventional way to judge a film cannot be used in Greenaway's art-cinema, since the art-film is made for other purposes than purely entertainment.

ILLUSIONS AND REALITY

Much of the argument against his films is based on their supposed lack of clarity and their inability to communicate one simple message. Only a very small percentage of the audience may be capable of being pleased by this overflow, since most spectators have been educated more or less exclusively by mainstream entertainment fashioned after the Hollywood model. Greenaway is certainly playing games with the audience, and if the spectator does not like to be puzzled, the film to her/him may seem as boring and as pointless as being forced to play a game s/he does not understand or like to participate in. But Greenaway does not seem to care if only less than half of the audience grasp the point of the unreal dialogues and artificial characterisation. His continuous project is to tell that this is 'just' a film, nothing competing with reality or disguised as the truth. Film is a game of illusion where both the film-maker and the audience have to be aware of this — but should also be constantly reminded. Nevertheless, for those who do participate, these films are rich in the principles of pleasure — albeit of a different kind.

No film can be understood in one sitting.

[Greenaway quote in *Greenaway's Baby*,
Michael Foley, The Irish Times, 9/12-93, pp. 12]

TUTORIALS

Greenaway does not only play with the audience, he lectures them as well. All his films are full of references to the history of ideas and knowledge. This extra information does not always refer to mathematical or visual systems, but comes from the world of ideas. Every film is more or less packed with ideas from art history, political history, philosophy etc. Usually this information serves the film, gives a deeper insight in the narrative and shows that the film-maker has a firm grip on the subject-matter. But such information overload has generated further criticism, where critics attack the film-maker for intellectual exhibitionism, for being pretentious. Because of all the layers of meaning, the complexity of images and information given in his films, we are not expected to grasp everything in one screening. Greenaway does not hesitate with adding references, he wants the audience to come back and rewatch his films, to grasp more and more. An element of Greenaway's project is to teach an audience to watch films as we look at art. We listen to music over and over again, and we appreciate poems more than once. He wants us to admire films as we admire paintings. He holds that films should be approached with that same concentration and viewed more than once. This is totally opposite to the conventional Hollywood tradition that stimulates to see Alien 1, 2 and 3, and not to watch the same and only film over and over again. (Film-business is also a money-factory).

The extra information is not absolutely necessary when seeing the film for the first time, but when seeing the film for the second and third time the information becomes more and more important. We see that the information serves a purpose, it has a reason to be in the film. Instantly we may only see a wood of ideas, with patience the tree and its fruits may reveal itself to the open-eyed spectator.

DEATH

Greenaway like many artists working as film-makers, has a thematic thread running throughout his work. As earlier mentioned he questions the film-language itself, but also more philosophical ideas are highlighted. All his films invariably involve death: death and landscape in *The Draughtsman's Contract*; death and animals in *A Zed and Two Noughts*; death and architecture in *Drowning by Numbers*; death and food in *The Cook, The Thief, his Wife and her Lover*; death and books in *Prospero's Books*; death and the church in *The Baby of Mâcon*. There is at least one death per film, either from suicide or murder. All the different deaths have only one thing in common: they are all caused by violence but beautifully captured by photographer Sacha

Vierny. Greenaway serves us the number one tabooed theme in western society, the only destiny we all share. But he is not the only film-maker high-lighting death on screen. He is merely obsessed with death, but it is a light-hearten obsession as well. Greenaway puts death on the agenda in two ways:

1. He introduces death in an ironic descriptive way. The deaths are highly grafic and dramatic entertaining, but cold and distanced. In order to discuss taboos this could have been the most digestible way for the audience. But when distancing and presenting death as fiction, it seems to be stronger than the 'real'.
2. The way Greenaway turns death into the only solution and ending to a film, raises a more serious question about life and death. The audience could never leave the cinema light-hearten after his films.

Western film-tradition has always been occupied with love, and inevitably death and sex as well. What makes Greenaway an 'enfant terrible' in this landscape, is the shocking way he 'amuses' the audience. He gives them death, yes — but in a very contradictory way. Greenaway usually deals with life before death, except in *A TV Dante*, which is based on Dante's *Inferno* and explores 'life' after death. Greenaway creates mysteries and stories, but hardly ever solves them — because death comes first.

The horror of death is exposed in an aesthetically appealing way. The visual joy is conflicted with grotesque scenes, which is a serious attack on the Hollywood-film. The architect in *The Belly of an Architect* is materialised as a fat, unshaven, loud, clumsy well-meaning idealist. The 'bad' guy who takes over the architect's wife is tall and dark. He is always shaved, elegantly dressed, charming and calm with good manners. Greenaway plays around with the Hollywood codes. The thief, Albert Spica, in *The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and her Lover* is horrific throughout the film. We could say the Greenaway, though a declared enemy of the Hollywood cinema, creates similar images or characters, only to twist them around in his unorthodox way. To the spectator this may produce an effect of confusion, although it is meant to be a clarifying effect, which has the possibility of demystifying the conventional habits of perception and cognition encouraged by the mainstream entertainment industry.

SEX

Another ingredient in a Greenaway film recipe is heterosexual copulation. Although we are used to sex in the conventional Hollywood film, the sex-scenes here are different. In a Greenawayfilm the scenes are shot with a more distant, almost cold

camera. He does not attempt a soft pornographic scene for the sake of 'entertainment'. The actors are more naturalistic with no model-body or ideal body compared to the conventional cinema. This has the paradoxical effect of producing a sense of 'unreality' and consequently of distance. In the Hollywood film the actors used are often presented as appetisers serving the fantasies of the audience. We are all used to see young beautiful (sexy) characters without pimples having sex in ordinary acceptable positions. The Greenawayesque way, is to show often older persons copulating in a quite unerotic way. The nude body becomes less erotic, but more like a still life painting. The sex in his films is often theoretically linked to violence and comes from a pronounced need for something (an heir for example), and not at all from erotic desire as an end in itself. In *The Draughtsman's Contract* Mrs. Talmann agrees to have sex with Mr. Neville from the need of another heir. Mr. Neville, more barbaric, wants to use her experimentally for perverse copulation. Strong scenes, but more true and real-like than the soap-opera sex in a conventional Hollywood film.

REPRODUCTION — HUMAN AND CREATIVE

Greenaway has often a Darwinist explanation to having sex in his films, as when Mrs. Talmann needs another heir with the help of Mr. Neville. Although Mr. Neville believes it is only her payment for the 12 drawings that he makes for her. In relation to theory of evolution, man's wealth is based on the number of children he has; and equally woman's place in society has been valued on her fertility. Greenaway questions reproduction, both human and artistic. Women can give life and (in his films) take life. Man's ability to reproduce is limited to the creative domain — to make children he needs a woman, though a woman also needs a man.... But it is the woman who does the hardest and longest job. It is the woman who is giving birth to the most important human product — a child, to succeed its parents and for the future of Homo sapiens. In this aspect a man is impotent since he can not give birth to a child, but he has a need to leave something on earth after his death: Art or children. This impotence forces men to create art. Nearly all Greenaway's main male characters are creative: a draughtsman, an architect, a cook and a magician. But the women are always more powerful with their potential gift to give birth to the most outstanding artwork of the human race.

DOMINANCE

Greenaway points out more or less through all his production that our western society is grounded on a hierarchy of dominance. In *The Draughtsman's Contract* Mr. Neville dominate Mrs. Herbert and Mrs. Talmann (mother and daughter) through

his gender, physical power and a written contract. Suppression has many faces. In *A Zed and Two Noughts* the doctor (van Meegeren) has total control of his patient, Alba. The three Mrs. Colpitts in *Drowning by Numbers* dominate their men through their gender, by (ab)using 'feminine' qualities as trickiness and smartness against 'men's' qualities.. The thief's power in *The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and her Lover* is based on fear and violence. While Prospero (*Prospero's Books*) dominates with knowledge and magical power. In *The Baby of Mâcon*, the church suppresses the poor and the superstitious with a blind belief in the truth.

FEMINISM

In one sense we could see many of Greenaway's films as feminist. We may see *The Draughtsman's Contract, Drowning by Numbers* and *The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and her Lover* from a feminist point of view. The female is the major organiser of events. It is the woman who makes the journey in these films. All the male characters are the same in the beginning as they are in the end.

ANTI-PROPAGANDA

Greenaway does not support suppressive mechanisms by exposing these to the audience. On the contrary, it becomes clearer to everyone how terribly unbalanced society is, which has maintained suppression through gender, class, money, guns and religion. The list of references and ideas in Greenaway's films could be enormously long, but may summarised in terms of these central themes of death, sex, reproduction and domination in one form or the other. Greenaway keeps on questioning these subjects throughout his production. But he never moralises or gives 'answers'. The audience is encouraged to reflect on the subject-matters raised. Sometimes Greenaway can be quite contradictory, provoking or confusing in the information overload. But he succeeds in putting the questions on the agenda, whether we like the way they are put or not.

MUSIC

In all Greenaway's films there is a heavy binding between the sound and the images. He usually collaborates with the composer Michael Nyman. They always start working together at an early stage in the film-making process, instead of using soundtrack as one of the last ingredients of the film. Main themes and sound in the films are linked tightly together. In *The Draughtsman's Contract* Nyman based the music on certain phrases and note structures from the English composer Henry Purcell, whose music was very popular at the time the film is set in. Paradoxically the music

of Purcell's period has actually a lot in common with modern systemic music. It is based on layers, repetition, cyclic movement within the use of notes. In *A Zed and Two Noughts*, Nyman's music plays the same central role. Nyman's name has come to be closely associated with Greenaway's films, where the images and editing is closely related to the music. But the music plays a major part in the film, following the images but not necessarily the narrative. The music serves an aesthetic drama, not a psychological one. It is minimalist music set to overwhelming images.

BOLD DESIGN WITHIN STRICT FRAMES

Greenaway has used the Dutch design team, Roelfs and van Os, for the last ten years. They can tell that he is a film-maker very open to new ideas and the productions tend to be quite spontaneous [Dominic Murphy, *Peter's Friends*, Creative Review]. This resembles another picture of the person Greenaway, opposed to the impression we get from the press and the seemingly cold misanthrope that speaks to us through the films. All Greenaway's collaborators presents their director as humourous, witty, open-minded, and not at all as a crazy pervert that he is accused of by people that do not know him.

In Greenaway's lasting collaboration with Roelfs and van Os, we could think that the production design has become a quite important element of the Greenawayesque style. But *The Belly of an Architect*, the only feature with another production designer, shows that the film-maker's personal style is maintained. On the other hand it seems like the Dutch production team has strengthened Greenaway's interest and emphasis on Dutch painting. On a great scale we are first exposed to the Dutch Golden Period with *A Zed and Two Noughts,* which is the first film Roelf and van Os worked in. Here we are not only introduced to Vermeer's paintings, but also the composition of the images resembles the painter. In *The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and her Lover* the famous Dutch food-paintings from 17th century comes to mind, but now they are painted with a camera instead of a brush. It is as if Greenaway is serving us still life in moving images, which is a demanding job per frame. All shots needs a good eye for details, and all the films bears an element of this perfection per frame.

QUALITY PHOTOGRAPHY

Greenaway is not a director who changes to new collaborators all the time. He has been working with the same composer, producer, production designers and photographer over more than ten years. Although language differences, Greenaway has

been faithfully working together with photographer Sacha Vierny. The French photographer hardly speaks any English, and Greenaway speaks very little French, but any comprehensive difficulties are not obvious in any end-results. The camera-movements have similarities with Greenaway's own in his earliest shortfilms. Though Greenaway has been using the same collaborators over the last decade, it does not mean that the result is the same per film. The photography still changes from experimentation within good quality bold colourful images.

Greenaway has special ways to tell a story: Partly the story is a built-up meal from appetiser to desert, and partly the content is hidden in the dialogue or in the painting on the wall. A faithful spectator will discover at least these typical elements in a Greeenaway film: Classification systems, cataloguing information, (Information overload), art history, philosophy, word-plays, ironic/obscure dialouges, death, sex, reproduction, dominance/suppression, feminism, Nyman's music, elaborated set design and beautiful photography.

England receiving a sick baby

Greenaway has now achieved fame and lately infamy and extreme critical attack with his latest film: *The Baby of Mâcon*. The British press jointly slated it. This affected the box-office: within a week three London cinemas out of five took the film off. It became the most talked about but least seen film in the U.K. The major criticism tended to attack Greenaway personally instead of discussing the film methodically. The least serious questioned Greenaway's psyche. Others managed to keep to a modicum level of respectability. These critics mainly presented the narrative and content, followed by a personal point of view: 'A major letdown' says Sight and Sound [Sept. '93]. Empire strikes back and claim it to be 'a nasty weeping sore of a film'[Phillipa Bloom], and The Observer is 'disgusted of Mâcon' [Phillip French, 19.9.93].

The British press built their criticism on a traditional point of view. This means that the critics valuate the film subjective — whether s/he find the film tastefully within the British notion of decency and moderation. From this valuation *The Baby of Mâcon* was read as emotionally offensive and morally unpleasurable by the British Press. These critics did not differentiate between the major intentions of the art cinema and the general pleasures offered in the mainstream film. The readers were not intellectually intrigued by the criticism. We could have expected some curiosity and a public reaction to the reviews. But people did not go to find out themselves, not even Greenaway's earlier audience. It seems as if the readers trusted the critics, and hardly questioned what they read.

Fig. 8. The British reaction to *The Baby of Mâcon*.

Ireland receiving a baptised baby

Two months later *The Baby of Macon* arrived Ireland and was greeted with blessings. We then ask ourselves, can this be the same film that the London critics slated? The Dublin Event Guide has not a negative word to say in their review [Laoise Mac Reamoinn, 1.-14.12.93]. They highly recommend the film. Michael Foley in The Irish Times talked to Greenaway about his intentions with the film, and film as art. This article discussed the political and cultural position of the film, and whether the film-maker achieves what he wants to in the film or not. The Sunday Tribune also enquired about the rationale behind *The Baby of Macon*, but concentrated more on the film-maker than writing a total review. The critics in these two countries received the film totally differently. Ireland and England are culturally quite close, so that can not explain such different methods of criticising and understanding a film. The film's exception on the Continent and in Ireland had a closer resemblance to each other, despite their greater cultural and geographical distance. England is obviously standing alone in its contempt of Greenaway's latest film.

(In)difference in seeing film

A major difference in the criticism was that the English critics discussed the film on a totally different ground than both the Irish and Continental critics. *The Baby of Mâcon* was placed into the battlefield of the mainstream commercial film. The barrage was pointed at a film which questions the cinema, and ironically hardly any of the English critics discussed the actual content and implications raised. *The Baby of Mâcon* questions ways of seeing film, but the English critics were blinded and saw only one way of seeing it. A part of Greenaway's project is to question filmlanguage, an occupation which is close to a critic's work. His ideas are closely related to the history of criticism. To understand his main project we have to step back in time and take a closer look at the theory of criticism. Greenaway's position today is based on the ideas the New Wave movement in France put forward in the fifties.

The New Wave

The French cinema in the early fifties presented big-budget international co-productions based on classical virtues, literary scripts, smooth photography and elegant decor. In 1957 The French New Wave resisted this conservative industrialised stream. The young film critics Truffaut, Godard, Chabrol, Rohmer and Rivette (those most associated with the New Wave) argued for a new approach to cinema

in the filmmagazine Cahiers du Cinéma, and made films based on their own ideas. They used their magazine as a forum to argue for the new film. The 'good' New Wave film was seen as a bad film by the established film-industry, since it broke nearly all the rules of the old generation. But a new generation of film-goers loved seeing their own young spirit reflected on screen, their own confusion and mixture of ideals. The New Wave came to change the way of seeing mainstream film. Cinema was for the first time seen as a specific aesthetic system, a language in itself. Before it was seen as a neutral form through which something else such as literature or 'reality' could be transmitted.

From filmproduction to the film-maker

Greenaway looks upon film as an absolute system and the most modern 'language' of all art forms. He persistently pursues an expression that is truly independent from photography, literature, music and theatre. Since film is a fusion of all these artifices, the problem is to achieve one clear filmlanguage that does not get muddled through the filmprocess. Since film is the result of a collaboration between the crew and the film-maker, how could we find the film-maker in this large production-team? The New Wave critics wanted to celebrate the directors and move away from only concentrating on the stars. The New Wave resisted making literary films, which the French Cinema till then had done. They mixed genres and styles in their quest to find a specific mode of personal expression for the screen. They were also behind a new methology in film criticism.

The auteur theory

Cahiers du Cinéma formulated their own theoretical programme, the 'politique des auteurs'. The politique proposed that in spite of the industrial nature of film-production, the director, like any other artist, was the sole auteur of the finished product. An auteur means originally the writer of the script - the author, but in this context it means an artist film-maker as well. This approach to the valuation of film was later reformulated as the 'auteur theory', which in practice says that a bad film made by an auteur, would always be better than the best film made by a mere craftsman. This principle was developed within a cinema that was industrial, commercial, popular and technological — and did not easily fit in with dominant assumptions about art. The auteur theory is based on the division between 'art' and 'entertainment' which had previously prevented cinema from being taken seriously, as it was seen as only entertainment. Now film could also be valued as a work of art if it was made by an artist. The problem is only to differ between a true artist

and a craftsman. The significant factor is the film-maker's 'style': how s/he expresses her/his personal concerns within the formal organisation of the film. The overall meaning in the film had, in other words, to be expressed by one person only: the film-maker. Her/his signature could be concealed within the style or within recurrent underlying themes. A true auteur would be a film-maker asking the same questions or working with only a few themes in all her/his films. This demanded a close knowledge of all the director's films. In auteur theory the evaluation of a 'true' artist or a mere craftsman came first, from this the critic could decipher if the film was good or bad.

The auteur theory (mis)used today

The auteur theory opened new ways of reading film in film criticism. The critic was forced to take a closer attention to what was happening in the film. S/he had to look up for the film-maker's personal voice through the style or underlying themes. This demanded a closer knowledge of all the director's films.

In commercial criticism today the same method is used to decipher a film. The critics in Ireland and on the Continent drew attention to the Greenaway style and his filmlanguage, as part of introducing *The Baby of Mâcon* to the readers. In media today this kind of criticism has also been applied to the general mainstream film. The auteur theory has become a function of defining the film-maker and to position her/his film. But the theory is no longer used as a tool to fully criticise a film, where a mainstream film may sometimes be work of a mere craftsman — not an auteur. The basis of the theory is here broken, but it shows how fragile the theory may be. A full film critique needs more than the deployment of the auteur theory. A film needs to be seen in the light of historical, economic, cultural, political and ideological factors, which is a perspective the auteur theory ignores.

An application of the auteur theory to Greenaway's films

It is too easy to apply the theory in an evaluation of Greenaway's films: Knowing his body of work, we can tell that he has a few main consistent themes. In chapter three these main issues are summarised as death, sex, reproduction and dominance. His films have a recognisable style which adds to the impression of one voice only expressed in his work — the director himself. His films are clearly recognisable even on the surface, due to the music, the stage-design and the photography. The film-maker's signature is strong and distinct throughout his films. Unlike many other

artists working in the cinema, he also writes the scripts himself. The educated painter is not only an artist making films, but also an auteur in the original meaning of the word. He is the author.

The art house cinema opposed to Hollywood

Greenaway's films belong to the art cinema, although he is unorthodox even there. The status of film among the arts has always been problematic. A small fraction of films came to be regarded as works of art and the concept of 'art cinema' has derived from that. Film as fine art is something different, it results from the fact that some visual artists have acquired cameras and made films. John Walker places the art film in these categories: Avant-garde, independent cinema: abstract / creative / experimental / poetic / structural-materialist / underground / visionary film [Walker, 1993, pp. 161]. But within the last decade the border between art cinema and mainstream cinema has faded. This has larger implications for the critics, who have new difficulties distinguishing between the genres. Since the intentions of the art cinema still are quite distinct from the mainstream, critics should at least be able to differentiate. The audience is mainly brought up with the mainstream film and ought to be taught other ways of seeing film, unfortunately popular criticism has not been very helpful there. If the audience is not educated in film, they end up as only film consumers knowing 'the price of everything, but the value of nothing' [Oscar Wilde, The Portrait of Dorian Grey]. They would not be able to understand Greenaway's films at all, because his films are demanding and challenging. The mainstream accustomed audience may find a different attitude to form.

Greenaway opposed to British Film Industry

When Greenaway did his first short films, he had already created a very personal filmlanguage. But his language was a reaction or to his own film culture. His ideas on spectatorial distancing were mostly put together in the sixties, when he was still working as a film-editor at the Central Office of Information. He had till then followed enthusiastically the New Wave films and was well informed about the auteur theory. This had partly roots in a British art criticism which stressed the importance of the critics personal taste in assessment of works of art. (We have already seen the negative effects of this tradition in the British critique of *The Baby of Mâcon*.)

The Free Cinema movement was born as the British counterpart to the French New Wave. The British film-makers were committed to a 'personal vision', but in total opposition to everything the Hollywood cinema represented at that time. The Free Cinema developed into a documentary mode with an emphasis on personal or political commitment. The Mainstream British film had moved into a naturalistic social realism. that stayed through the seventies. If exaggerated we could say that those British documentaries were in the service of propaganda, and the mainstream British cinema pursued 'good taste'. Greenaway had started making short-films in a documentary mode at this time. They were strongly influenced by his cataloguing and informational work in COI. But his films lacked both political commitment and interest in naturalistic social realism. He had devised different ideas on film-making, and like Lindsay Anderson in the Free Cinema, he had taken an interest in Brecht's theory for theatre. But Greenaway was independent from contemporary film-makers, and he developed ideas of film of his own.

Brechtian Theatre

Bertholt Brecht (1898- 1956) created a different theatre in Germany in the thirties. His life became a devotion to the new reformed theatre. He wanted to leave the theatre of illusions and linearity. Brecht did not want only to 'entertain' his audience. He wanted to target the contradictions of society, not give resolutions to daily problems.

Brecht's theory on drama was about recognising the artificiality of theatre. His Marxist theatre was opposed to the old dramatic theatre that pursued to make the audience believe that what they were witnessing was happening here and now. He argued against making the audience believe in the presence of the characters. Brecht wanted to reassure the audience that the play was merely an account of past or fictive events, that they should watch with critical detachment. The Brechtian 'epic' (narrative, nondramatic) theatre is based on a distancing effect, where the spectator is constantly reminded that the play is only theatre and not reality.

Greenaway's use of Brechtian ideas

The legacy of Brecht proved particularly instructive and also controversial. To make films meant to challenge the strategies which contemporary popular culture, especially the cinema, had inherited from the bourgeois novel and theatre. Greenaway

has not only flirted with Brechtian ideas, he has reshaped them and modified them into his own ideas. He has created his own way of using dialogue in his films. He used a voice-over to detach speech from the body of the 'actor', in his early documentary-styled films. We saw another use of voice-over in *Prospero's Books*: Prospero's power was emphasised by his voice taking over all the other actors speech. Even in the latest film, *The Baby of Mâcon*, speech is given to the prompter instead of the baby (See plate 9.). The prompter's role is here to say what the child should have said. The speech is given a certain authority when 'coming from' the baby in an old man's voice.

Fig. 9. The prompter in his seat. [*The Baby of Mâcon*]

Plate 10. Ormond and The Baby. [*The Baby of Mâcon*]

Another Brechtian stratagem is placing an actor within the 'curtains', who merely recites and emotionally does not strengthen the drama. Greenaway used family and friends in his early short-films, whers he did not need any professional actors. The actors should not act conventionally or promote any emotional interaction with the spectator. Greenaway also uses music as a counterpoint to the narrative. In *The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and her Lover* he uses Michael Nyman's music as a suspension between acts (days). The music is not used to evoke any expectations within the narrative itself.

Greenaway distances the spectator through modes of narration, music, camera movements, acting, dialouges, lighting, framing, text over images, superimposition, elaborate spectacle and sonic dissonance. This is all used to prevent the spectator to identify too closely with the narrative as such.

Greenaway's oeuvre

The Baby of Mâcon seems to be more challenging than most of his earlier works. The British press fell jointly for the Greenawayesque exposure of taboos. Sadly they did not see the other interesting aspects of his film. Greenaway has since his earliest films pursued a film vocabulary that draws attention to itself, and invites the audience to apply their intelligence to the work. Instead of stirring emotions through a naturalistic depiction of characters and situations, his films give spectators an opportunity to stand back and see violence, domination, blood and rape.

By painting an abstract and artificial filmlanguage, very different to our natural and concrete world, the spectator's response is increased, not emotionally but ideologically. Instead of being an emotional part of the horror, the spectators are distanced to the film — and are therefore not accepting the violence on the screen as a casual and familiar component of a well established story. Their natural response is to question the violence and deaths they just have been confronted with.

The main reason for Greenaway's interest in Brechtian ideas, is his 'political programme' of wanting the audience to see film as watching a painting. He wants us to step back, overlook, estimate, regard, reflect, go closer, to step back again, to achieve a larger perspective. He wants to distance the viewer emotionally from the ghastlier aspects of the stories. Greenaway explains: 'If you go to the National Gallery, you don't laugh, scream, jump about or cry. It's not essentially an emotional

response, though it could be one, if you are looking at a Rembrandt, but it is to do with all sorts of other areas of appreciation: intellectual, sensual, sheer delight in the picture's surface and subject, the way the man has gone about making the image, it's sense of history, all these things. It's such a rich experience. I want to take it from the art gallery and put it in the cinema. I believe in a cinema that is infinitely viewable, so that you go back and get more information. All the most satisfying artifacts are the ones that give up their meanings slowly. You go on being enriched by them.' [Greenaway quoted by Lynne Truss, Observer, 1.10.89, p. 4].

Here Greenaway positions the function of his films. He brings our attention back to the surface, the form, where he wants us to read his works of art. He wants to be a painter in the cinema:

For me cinema is an artform.

[Greenaway in an interview by Hacker & Price, *Take 10,* p.211]

Greenaway's attitude places him in a rather esotric and elitist 'art cinema'. If a five day conference in Lyons fails to get beyond the implications of *The Draughtsman's Contract*'s title, can the British press be excused. Criticism of Greenaway's films must be based on more than seeing only one of his films once.

CONCLUSION

Greenaway wants to create films of art with art: literary moving pictures. He wants us to take pleasure in the surface of his films, and to provoke questions, which he leaves us to discuss.

The artist's obligation is to investigate the fundamentals of each medium, just as painting is essentially 'about' painting:the true subject matter of film is film. One could call it modernism's 'semiotic programme': *exploring signifiers in their role of constructing rather than reproducing a referential meaning* [Peter Wollen, *Re-interpreting Brecht*, p.174]. We are not asking for the meaning in a painting of Kandinsky. What has meaning is essentially the painting in itself. We could admire the composition, colours and the shapes in his paintings. We might even hear a music that these shapes create. This could just as well be one way to *The Baby of Mâcon*. Through an admiration for the colourscheme and the music in the film, we could grasp an essence of meaning. Susan Sontag has resisted making interpretation the main goal of analysis [*Against Interpretation*, pp. 12-13]. She pleads for more attention to form in art, which means to reveal the sensuous surface of art without mucking it about. Jonathan Culler emphasises studying the functions and effects of art without always interpreting it [*Structuralist Poetics*]. Interest is taken in how meaning and language is communicated to the spectator, suggesting it is the individual that is the subject of language and not its creator (the film-maker).

Criticism today has moved away from the text (the modernist obsession) to a definition of an audience, and the ways such an audience might be addressed. The implications between film and spectator are emphasised now, rather than lingering on the relationship between author and film. The critics role has inecitably changed to a spectatorial position. (Not based on British traditional point of view angle).

My goal of analysis has been a study of Greenaway's body of work, and position this in relation to history, genres and society. I have wanted to see his films most on film-style. This was my way to get the most out of Greenaway's films. After this I have gone out to see what effects his films may have on the audience, since what I find in his films can be totally different to others. What meaning did the audience make out of *The Baby of Mâcon*?

RECEPTION

Even if we choose to watch a Greenaway film as art, we will still meet an audience that might want to interpret and judge film differently. Greenaway especially, has not made it easy for an audience. His films seem to evoke strong feelings not only among critics but also in the ordinary audience. The reactions to *The Baby of Mâcon* were especially divided. To study the reactions more close, questionnaires were handed out to an audience of *The Baby of Mâcon*. This was done after two Thursday screenings (with a week in between) at The Irish Film Centre, Dublin.

Sixtyeight questionnaires were answered, where also audience who left the film before the end filled in the form.

To question 1.

72% had seen one or more of Greenaway's films. This question was asked to see if the audience was accustomed to his films, and whether this had any relevance to their judging or not. Greenaway has obviously a large and faithful audience in Dublin.

2.

43% had read positive reviews on the film
37% had read negative reviews on the film
16% felt affected by the reviews

The reviews as mentioned in chapter 4 (Ireland receiving a baptised baby, p. 24) were generally positive and quite careful in their critique. Although a review may be interpreted in different ways. I found it interesting to see if some had found the Irish reviews negative to The Baby of Mâcon.

37% felt the reviews were negative, or they may refer to the British reviews. This is unfortunately a bit unclear. (The question could have been more precise).

When discussing the British criticism in chapter 4 (*England receiving a sick baby*, p. 23), I questioned the effect popular criticism may have. The effect did not seem to be as important to the individual spectator as I had assumed, although this survey was done on Irish ground and did not specifically ask about a reaction to the British reviews. It might be difficult to answer with honest on this question, I would like to take into account that many people like to think about themselves as more independent than they might be.

3.

When the audience were asked to 'mention one quality of the film you liked', I decided to divide the answers into how they saw the film: Whether as a 'Greenaway' film with an emphasis on style, or as a mainstream film with interaction in the narrative and emphasis on the 'text'.

78% mentioned the style or form as something they liked. Here is a selection of answers from the audience: colours, music, costume, question raising, tracking, setting, shots, abstract, theatrical, filmlanguage, images, irony.

8% mentioned the text or 'content' as something they liked: the 'violence' was liked by 2.

43% emphasised the style as one quality of the film they disliked. Here a little selection of the words answered in the questionnaires: images, repetitiveness, (uneven) pace, symbolism, impersonal feel, graphic, too may details, dream-like, problematic real/unreal, positiontaking difficult, colours (too red), scenery (too much).

35% emphasised the content or the text as qualities they disliked: violence, excess of blood, rape (within rape scene), sex, brutality, use of animals, obscure storyline.

It is clear that a majority appreciated the film as an experience, they were intrigued and fascinated by the style. When criticising the film however, as many as 35% had moved to the text (from 8% 'liking' the literary content). The audience seems to be very open to different levels of criticism, and they move from liking the style to criticising the text with easiness.

4.

When asking the audience, what they think the film was about — it was like forcing them to interpret it from the text, and no longer as an experience. One person said to question three, that he liked the 'fusion of reality and fiction' and disliked the 'long-widedness' of the camera-shots, but from this he turned to the text on next question (4): answering that he think the film was about 'greed/religion'. He was not the only one answering first to form and afterwards on question 4 turning to the text. The modernist analysis with an emphasis on the text is derived from first discussing what a film is about. I find that this is the worst question to a Greenaway film, and prefer to approach his films as an experience in themselves.

28% saw the film as more of an experience, mentioning the form. They felt the film was 'about': a play on thought, a play within a film, art becoming life, merging of reality and fantasy, a play with music, reality/representation, forms of cultural media, acting, theatre/audience, Mr. Greenaway/us.

68% pursued the text or content, and thought the film as being 'about': virginity, purity, sex, morality, church/society, faith, abuse, exploitation, (re)production, patriarchy, religion, greed, superstition, power, manipulation, corruption, Jesus and Mary and Joseph.

7 persons could not tell what they thought the film was about, as they seemed to need more time to think or maybe rewatch the film (3 of these persons had judged the film as 'good'). I have earlier mentioned that his hardly can be understood in one sitting, and should be rewatched to grasp a meaning.

5.

46% thought the film was good. Where 12 had not seen any Greenaway film before. I was surprised of how many liked the film without having more knowledge about his earlier films. But I still think a good knowledge of his work will give you a better understanding of his films. 2 persons were repelled visually rather than emotionally, and regretted seeing the film, although they judged it as 'good'.

34% thought the films was mediocre. 5 people were not glad about having seen the film, they were mostly disgusted by the 'violence'. Three of these had seen one or more of Greenaway's earlier films. Altogether 4 had not seen any Greenaway film before.

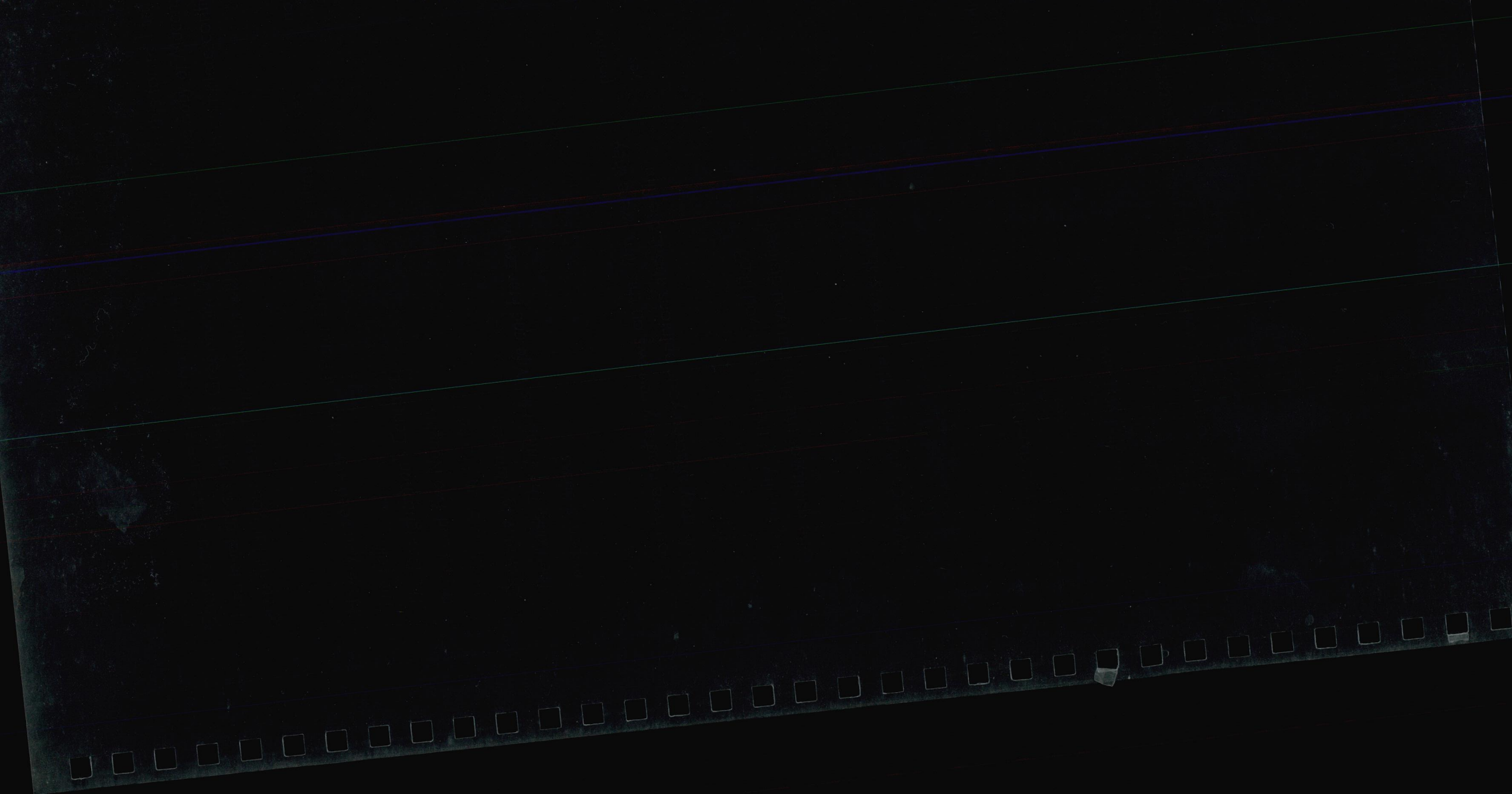
13% judged the film as bad. 6 of these had seen two or more of Greenaway's films. 2 were glad to have seen the film, although they thought it was 'bad'.

The reactions were quite evenly spread on each screening, except that 5 persons on the 2 screenings would not judge the film. All of these had seen one or more of Greenaway's films, but they seemed to feel it was too early to position the film. Paradoxically one of these was not glad she saw the film — although the lecturer felt 'bewildered' and emphasised that the music was 'good'.

An interesting question that I have raised earlier in this study, I finally got mainly answered in this survey. I wondered if most of his audience were higher educated, and this comes probably as an important factor if they have not seen any of his films before. And his audience is really higher levelled educated:
34% were students.
16% were artists (i.e. film-maker, painter, designer).
31% had finished higher level education (i.e. doctor, lawyer, clerical, engineer, scientist, translator, teacher).

The average agegroup seemed to be between 20-50 years. Since I could not ask too many questions (too timeconsuming for the audience), I have to say that the audience was slightly dominant of men. As I watched the film at both screenings, I could also watch reactions in the audience under the screening. At the first screening it was the women who apparently reacted the strongest on the rape scene. 4 women accompanied by their 'boyfriends' left at the rape scene. The men were not that eager to leave the film, and two of them ended up watching 5 minutes more by the exit door — till they were dragged out of their 'girlfriends'. The second screening was less dramatic, where 3 friends (all women in the thirties) left at the rape scene. One man (in the 'fifties') left the cinema during the decimating baby scene. So, the assumption of 50% of the audience leaving before a Greenaway film is drastically overrated.

This survey told more concise about an audience's reactions to a Greenaway film, and answered some questions concerning the ways they watch his films. I am very glad that so many read his films on a stylistic level, since I think it is on this level his films deserves to be enjoyed or disliked. It is not the actual narrative we take emotionally part in.When Greenaway gives the illusion of playing the Hollywood game, an then all of a sudden takes the illusion away again, the spectator could feel quite cheated. Hacker and Price [*Take 10*, p. 207] suggest that Greenaway is better in fulfiling his aims by 'taking on board real characters and narrative techniques'. If Greenaway wants to be less provoking and more conventional, he should borrow more from the mainstream film and not oppose this to his own ideas. He would with this probably achive a larger audience. Hopefully Greenaway remain thought-provoking and unorthodox, through questioning filmlanguage. It is exactly Greenaway's experiment with a different filmlanguage that makes his films worth experiencing, and leave an interpretation to the individual.



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1966 *Train*. 5 mins.

Tree. 16 mins.

1967 *Revolution*. 8 mins.

Five Postcards from Capital Cities. 35 mins.

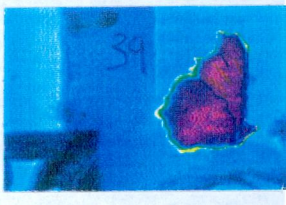
1969 *Intervals*. 6.5 mins.

1971 *Erosion*. 27 mins.

1973 *H is for House*. 9 mins. (re-edited in 1978). NARRATOR: Colin Cantlie, Peter Greenaway, and his family. MUSIC: from Vivaldi's Four Seasons.

1974 *Windows*. 3.5 mins. NARRATOR: Peter Greenawa. MUSIC: Rameau's The Hen. CALLIGRAPHY: Kenneth Breese.

Water. 5 mins. MUSIC: Max Eastley.



1975 *Water Wrackets*. 12 mins. NARRATOR: Colin Cantlie. MUSIC: Max Eastley. CALLIGRAPHY: Kenneth Breese.

1976 *Goole by Numbers*. 40 mins.

1977 *Dear Phone*. 17 mins. CALLIGRAPHY: Kenneth Breese.

1978 *1-100*. 4 mins. MUSIC: Michael Nyman.

A Walk through H. 41 mins. BFI. PHOTOGRAPHY: Bert Walker and John Rosenberg.MUSIC: Michael Nyman. NARRATOR: Colin Cantlie. CAST: Jean Williams. CALLIGRAPHY: Kenneth Breese.

Vertical Features Remake. 45 mins. Arts Council of Great Britain. PHOTOGRAPHY: Bert Walker. MUSIC: Michael Nyman (theme music Brian Eno). NARRATOR: Colin Cantlie.

1979 *Zandra Rhodes*. 15 mins. COI.

1980 *The Falls*. 185 mins. BFI. SCRIPT: Peter Greenaway. HEAD OF PRODUCTION: Peter Sainsbury. PHOTOGRAPHY: Mike Coles, John Rosenberg. EDITOR: Peter Greenaway. MUSIC: Michael Nyman (additional music by Brian Eno, John Hyde, Keith Pendlebury). With the voices of Colin Cantlie, Hilarie Thompson, Sheila Canfield, Adam Leys, Serena Macbeth, Martin Burrows.

1981 *Act of God*. 28 mins. Thames TV. SCRIPT: Peter Greenaway. PRODUCER: Udi Eicler. PHOTOGRAPHY: Peter George. EDITOR: Andy Watmore. MUSIC: Michael Nyman

1982 *The Draughtsman's Contract.* 108 mins. (a.k.a. Death in the English Garden). BFI in association with Channel 4 Television. SCRIPT: Peter Greenaway. HEAD OF PRODUCTION: Peter Sainsbury. PRODUCER: David Payne. PHOTOGRAPHY: Curtis Clark, EDITOR: John Wilson, PRODUCTION DESIGNER: Bob Ringwood. MUSIC:Michael Nyman. CAST: Anthony Higgins, Janet Suzman, Anne Louise Lambert, Hugh Fraser, NeilCunningham.

1983 *Four American Composers.* 55 mins. each episode. Channel 4 Television / Transatlantic Films. Four television documentaries on John Cage, Robert Ashley, Philip Glass, Meredith Monk (based on the Almeida Concerts of September 1982). PRODUCER: Revel Guest. PHOTOGRAPHY: Curtis Clark. EDITOR: John Wilson.

1984 *Making a Splash.* 25 mins. Channel4 /Media Software. SCRIPT: Peter Greenaway. PRODUCER: Pat Marshall. MUSIC: Michael Nyman.

A TV Dante - Canto 5. Channel 4 Television (the first part in a series of 33 Cantos to be made in collaboration with Tom Phillips). SCRIPT: Peter Greenaway and Tom Phillips.
PRODUCER: Sophie Balhetchet. PHOTOGRAPHY: Mike Coles, Simon Fone. EDITOR(FILM): John Wilson. EDITOR (VIDEO): Bill Saint. CAST: Suzan Crowley, John Mattocks, Donald Copper.

1985 *Inside Rooms - 26 Bathrooms.* 25 mins. Chanel 4 / Artifax Productions. SCRIPT: Peter Greenaway. PRODUCER: Sophie Balhetchet. PHOTOGRAPHY: Mike Coles. EDITOR: John Wilson. MUSIC: Michael Nyman.

A Zed and Two Noughts. 115 mins. BFI Production / Allarts Enterprises / Artificial Eye Productions / Film Four International. SCRIPT: Peter Greenaway. PRODUCERS: Peter Sainsbury, Kees Kasander. PHOTOGRAPHY: Sacha Vierny. PRODUCTION DESIGNER: Ben Van Os, Jan Roelfs. EDITOR: John Wilson. MUSIC: Michael Nyman. CAST: Andrea Ferreol, Brian Deacon, Eric Deacon, Frances Barber, Joss Ackland.

1986 *Belly of an Architect.* 188 mins. Callendar Company / Film Four International / British Screen Hemdale / Sacis. SCRIPT: Peter Greenaway. PRODUCERS: Colin Callender, Walter Donohue. PHOTOGRAPHY: Sacha Vierny. PRODUCTION DESIGNER: Luciana Vedovelli. EDITOR: John Wilson. MUSIC: Wim Mertens. CAST: Brian Dennehy, Chloe Webb, Lambert Wilson, Stefania Casini.

1987 *Fear of Drowning*. 30 mins. Allarts (for Channel 4). SCIRPT: Peter Greenaway. PRODUCER: Paul Trybits. CO-DIRECTOR: Vanni Corbellini. CAST: Peter Greenaway (Presenter), and the actors and crew of *Drowning by Numbers*.

1988 *Drowning by Numbers*. 119 mins. Film Four International/ Elsevier Vendex Film. SCRIPT: Peter Greenaway. PRODUCER: Kees Kasander, Denis Wigman. PHOTOGRAPHY: Sacha Vierny. PRODUCTRION DESIGNER: Ben Van Os, Jan Roelfs. EDITOR: John Wilson. MUSIC: Michael Nyman. CAST: Bernard Hill, Joan Plowright, Juliet Stevenson, Joely Richardson, Jason Edwards.

A TV Dante - Cantos 1-8. KGP Production in association with Channel 4 / Elsevier Vendex / VPRO. Made in collaboration with painter Tom Phillips. CAST: John Gielgud, Bob Paeck, Joanne Whalley.

1989 *The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and her Lover*. 120 mins. Allarts / Erato Films / Films Inc. SCRIPT: Peter Greenaway. PRODUCER: Kees Kasander. PHOTOGRAPHY: Sacha Vierny. PRODUCTION DESIGNERS: Ben Van Os, Jan Roelfs. COSTUME DESIGNER: Jean Paul Gaultier. EDITOR: John Wilson. MUSIC: Michael Nyman. CAST: Michael Gambon, Helen Mirren, Richard Bohringer, Alan Howard.

Death in the Seine. 40 mins. Erato Films / Allarts TV Productions/Mikros Image/La Sept. CAST: Jim Van Der Woude, Jean-Michel Dagory.

Hubertbals Handshake. 5 mins.

1991 *Prospero's Books*.

PRODUCER: Kees Kasander, PHOTOGRAPHY:Sacha Vierny. PRODUCTION DESIGNERS: Ben Van Os, Jan Roelfs. MUSIC: Michael Nyman. CALLIGRAPHY: Brody Neuenschwander. CAST: John Gielgud,

1993 *The Baby of Mâcon*. 120 mins.

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