

# I Sing the Body Synaesthetic: Cinema Embodiment in Peter Greenaway's *Goltzius and the Pelican Company*

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## Abstract

In 1911, Ricciotto Canudo labeled the cinema as the Seventh Art and claimed that it was superior to the other so-far existing art forms. In 2012, the British filmmaker Peter Greenaway directed yet another film that makes use of all these arts and media to convey an authorial discourse on the importance of cinema and its versatility: *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (UK). I contend that this art house film, unemotional, filled with distancing effects and exhibiting nakedness throughout, is, in fact, an extremely sensorial piece of cinema where corporeality is not only the form but also the message, both literally and metaphorically. I advocate that this cerebral film can be sensual and sensuous, both through the use of the characters' bodies and the materiality of the text. I also consider that this film generates two types of qualified immersion in the viewer: an artistic appreciation derived from coenesthesia and film textures; and a narrative appreciation caused by alignment with the characters, their non-psychological nature notwithstanding. Allegory, as both a structural device and a conveyor of meaning, is responsible for the combination of spectatorial detachment and immersion.<sup>1</sup>

## Keywords

corporeality, synaesthesia, immersion, textures, allegory

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## Introduction: An Authorial Discourse on Art

Since 1911, when Ricciotto Canudo, the early Italian film theoretician who gave cinema the label “the Seventh Art”, wrote the article entitled “Manifesto of the Seven Arts”, cinema has been evaluated in relation to the preexistent art forms: architecture, theatre, painting, music, dance, and literature (poetry). Canudo, who was an avant-garde aficionado,<sup>2</sup> recognized from the outset cinema’s artistic potential. According to him, cinema was superior to the other isolated art forms because it was simultaneously an art of time and space.

Peter Greenaway, a British filmmaker and artist,<sup>3</sup> is a long-standing practitioner of a hybrid form of art which embraces cinema’s versatility. His cinematic *oeuvre* incorporates all the art forms addressed by Canudo in his seminal article, attentively considering and highlighting the properties of the several media engaged in the process. For this reason, he probably could be considered a meta-artistic and meta-intermedial director.<sup>4</sup> He embraces an art house cinema (the French call this *cinéma d’auteur*) and uses the properties of art to communicate his erudition. He has always strongly avoided a sentimental film practice, which he associates with mainstream and commercial cinema, opting for very cerebral films filled with distancing effects typical of Brecht’s epic theatre (*Verfremdungseffekt*). Therefore, although his films are narrative, they do not convey a story in a linear straightforward fashion. They require an

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2 He wrote poetry and prose, as well as articles on art, literature, music and history. He published in the art Journal *Montjoie*, which was created in the beginning of 1913 and discontinued just before WWI.

3 Greenaway, born in 1942 in Wales, started his cinematic career in 1962 with short films and moved on to features in 1980 (with *The Falls*). He is best known for *The Draughtsman’s Contract* (1982), *A Zed and Two Naughts* (1985), *The Belly of an Architect* (1987), *Drowning by Numbers* (1988), *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* (1989), *Prospero’s Books* (1991), *The Baby of Mâcon* (1993), and *Nightwatching* (2007). He is a trained painter and very much influenced by Baroque art. In the nineties he extended his artistic scope to intermedial televisual projects and video-art installations/documentaries as well as several important European exhibitions (e.g., *The Stairs*).

4 For the purpose of this article, I will consider a meta-artistic film, one which focuses on the interpenetration of the art forms, and a meta-intermedial film, that scrutinizes the nature of the media involved in the product. The two instances cannot be truly separated, however.

intellectual effort on the part of the viewer, as well as a liberal mind in order to accept the flaunting nudity of the characters and the apparent distastefulness of the violent and excremental situations.

In this article I propose to engage with Greenaway's *praxis* as a deliberate authorial discourse on art, media and cinema, addressing the nature of the *auteur's* cinematic corporeality as a summation of all the characteristics contained in the previous six arts alluded to by Canudo. This is achieved in the form of two cinematic allegories combined in one larger allegorical discourse. Firstly, I will argue for the superiority of such practice, from a sensorial perspective, suggesting that a cerebral film can be just as enticing as a mainstream film but in a different manner. The corporeal nature of the films is taken in a literal as well as metaphorical sense and pertains as much to the characters' anatomies as to the films' materiality. Secondly, I will contend that Greenaway's film practice is also responsible for a kind of spectatorial immersion in the film – not the story –, which makes the watching of such artifacts a pleasurable activity for the viewer. How can a cinematic opus be simultaneously distancing and engaging? This is the question I propose to answer. Thirdly, I wish to claim that a non-linear and intellectual narrative, filled with distancing effects and allegorical characters can be as fictionally engaging for the viewer as a more traditional narrative film. By combining the sensual and sensory appeal of a film with its narrative attractions, I hope to illustrate just how much Greenaway's cinematic corporeality is fundamental to the allure his films have for their audiences and how much allegory is a part of that achievement.

To do this, I will take the film *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (UK 2012) as a case study. The film tells the story of an itinerant company comprised of engravers, printers, a writer and some actors, which is called the Pelican Company, and it is led by Goltzius (Ramsey Nasr), a lustful Dutch artist who wishes to print books with erotic images, starting with an illustrated edition of the Bible and ending with a similar edition of Ovid's myths. They travel to Italy to meet with the military governor of Colmar, the Margrave (F. Murray Abraham), and convince him to act as their sponsor. He agrees to sign a contract with the Company to that effect, provided they entertain him and his Court for six nights in a row with allegorical performances derived from the Old Testament. Each of these performances addresses a sexual taboo, which,

after the spectacle has taken place, is debated in a special free-speech hall. Attending the performances are clergymen of several religious creeds, who consider the spectacles to be filled with profanities. The Margrave responds with repression to the lascivious contents of the plays and the opposition it generates within his Court: by having several people incarcerated or killed. The Margrave lusts for one of the actresses, lover of the writer, Boethius (Giulio Berruti), so much so that he is intent on playing a fictional character on stage just so he can have sex with her. This fails to happen, but in the end Goltzius manages to fulfill his part of the bargain for which he is offered a contract of sponsorship. The story is recounted by Goltzius himself, ten years after the facts reported.

## 1. The Body is the Thing: Corporeality as Both Metaphor and Object

In *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (UK 2012) the importance and omnipresence of the human body is related to the cinematic body. They both appear together in this film, which is endowed with two allegorical layers, constituting a metaphorical corporeality.

On the one hand, the film is an allegory of creation. The story revolves around a group of entrepreneurs, led by a master printer who is also the director of the intra-diegetic productions, which he presents, on each occasion, as a master of ceremonies in the theatrical tradition. For all practical and semiotic purposes, Goltzius is a stand-in for Greenaway. As Greenaway himself puts it: “It’s really a film about filmmaking ... I suppose, it’s really transposing the activities of a print maker to a filmmaker and Goltzius, it’s me” (interview with Kirsty Wark, *Newsnight*). Indeed, the six command performances of the Pelican Company are running metaphors, and allegory is the preferred structural and formal device of Greenaway’s film work. On the other hand, *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (UK 2012) is an allegory of spectatorship, evincing several artistic spectacles, such as public debates and official ceremonies, meant to be watched by third parties, both intra- and extra-diegetically, and individual acts of voyeurism. The film viewer is the ultimate receiver

of the work of art. By making the diegetic creators (Goltzius and his Company) and diegetic viewers (the Margrave and his Court) mutually dependent by means of a contract and the imperative to have it signed in due course, the film achieves the perfect balance between two meta-cinematic types of allegory. Overall, the film is an inter-artistic allegory of the power of cinema as creative spectacle. This goal is fully achieved through the intertwining of both levels that make up an allegory: the literal, pertaining to the events taking place in the diegesis, and the metaphorical, relating to the world of the film's viewers and their figurative interpretation of the film.

The performances staged by the characters in the diegesis are explicit, allegories of the body, and are intended to make one think about certain sexual topics: "the original carnal sin by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden" (intercourse); the attempt by the daughters of Lot to continue the lineage after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (incest); the seduction of Bathsheba by King David (adultery); the seduction of Joseph by Potiphar's wife (the seduction of the young/ pedophilia); Samson and Delilah (prostitution); Salome and the dance of the seven veils (necrophilia). As it is, *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (UK 2012) is the Greenaway film most overtly about the body, exposing all of the actors' anatomies and dealing directly and primarily with this subject throughout.<sup>5</sup> As the Pelican Company has to perform Biblical scenes concerning six sexual taboos, corporeality is, literally, center stage in the form of nakedness and prohibited sexual interaction. It is also present as representation in the form of other representations. The characters' bodies are simply a frame the director uses in his films in order to produce his cinematic texts.<sup>6</sup>

In *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (UK 2012), narration and representation are combined and stressed as literal corporeality. In fact, the film carries two Goltzius characters, played by the same actor. The first

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5 Even F. Murray Abraham is partly exposed: as he jumps up and down on a bed in his underwear, his backside is flashed to the spectator and his pubic hair is glimpsed.

6 This is why many bodies actually do have inscriptions directly written onto their flesh. For instance, in the first performance of *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (UK 2012), about the creation of Adam and Eve, Goltzius' cousin Eduard (Flavio Parenti) and Susannah (Anne Louise Hassing) actually have the message THIS IS MAN, GOD'S PROPERTY tattooed twice alongside their torso and thighs.

to appear in the film is a narrator of events that have already taken place, which he comments upon in a sort of narrative framing device with which the film starts and ends (but which also appears recurrently throughout). The other one is his former and younger self living out the events mentioned by the narrator and which the viewer watches, as they take place. Not only can both Goltzius characters coexist in one single shot composed of several intra-frames of filmic layers, but there is even one moment when the Goltzius-narrator speaks to the characters of the intra-diegetic performances, staged by the younger Goltzius, notwithstanding the fact that they are a-temporal allegorical figures that do not answer back. This means that the whole film is doubly corporeal, not only because of the dualism of the main character, but also due to the framing narrative structure which intermingles, by way of crosscutting, past with present, and real with fictional (in a clear metaleptic move).

When the Goltzius-narrator addresses the cinematic viewer directly, the story he recounts is supported by the projection of drawings, paintings and silk-screen reproductions onto the background layer of the image, in the space of a rectangle mimicking a pictorial frame. For the most part, these projected images reinforce the pictorial dimension present throughout the use of images of bodies in the underlying Western cultural codes. Occasionally, though, they are projected without such direct references by the narrator, making the enunciation more clearly stated as belonging to Greenaway himself, and thus metaphorically pointing to the fact that the film has a body of its own.

In *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (UK 2012) corporeality as such is not limited to the diegetic world; it also permeates the cinematic material as such. The superimposition of written text over the narrator's face combines these two aspects. The same can be said for the painstaking use and highlighting of textures; the constant breaking of the frame and the indirect disclosure of the apparatus in general; the multi-layering of images and sounds to the point where it becomes almost impossible to say where one shot ends and another one begins; and the use and nature of the sets.

In *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (UK 2012), almost all the scenes take place in a large warehouse equipped with a skylight, large glass windows, columns, cement floor, iron structure, and a slanted corridor sometimes filled with water. This location serves interchangeable sets,

understood as library, bed chambers, bathroom, printing press quarters, jail, banquet hall, and so on, according to narrative necessity within a context of theatrical abstraction. The sets, the props and the lighting are, therefore, made more obvious as cinematic devices. The other important location of the film is an apparently smaller room endowed with CGI tartan floor, columns and walls. It is presumably here that the debate hall scenes, some bedroom scenes and the conversations between the Margrave and cardinal Ricardo Del Monte (Vincent Riotta) take place. Apart from the revolving platform on which the speakers formulate their arguments, the huge beds and the long table are the only pieces of set design that are volumetric. Everything else is purposely made to look artificial and flat, to the point of being exclusively black and white. Indeed, the facade of the palace is only seen as a CGI effect. Fast tracking shots over the facade or on the debate hall reinforce this faked nature, as opposed to the equally artificial but more volumetric slow tracking shots in the warehouse. The film alternates between the intended perception of volume or flatness, either way presenting itself as representation.

As a Baroque masterpiece, *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (UK 2012) is naturally full of textures pertaining to the garments of the time (rich in laces, brocades, neckbands, etc.). However, the most important textures of the film are entirely cinematic and conveyed through technical processes. At the beginning, Goltzius-narrator introduces us to the story and as he does so calligraphic writing appears behind him, but as the letters are projected they can also be seen on him. Because he is narrating his story and the writing merely repeats what he is saying, one can say that he is narrating himself. Later on, the scenes with Goltzius-narrator become more and more complex and the image itself revolves, rather like the elevated platform where a group of non-diegetic musicians play throughout the film and where some of the characters act (be it in the debating sessions or the command performances). As he and his table spin, he continues talking to the cinema viewer, while trying to avoid a candle holder that threatens to hit him. This kinetic traction of the whole image is similar to the tracking shots within the diegetic world. In the long scenes filmed in wide shots, most of which contain official performances, the tracking shot forwards and/or backwards lends motion to an otherwise static scene, but it also points to motion itself as a component of cinema.

In this perspective, *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (UK 2012) is very much about the body as both content (subject matter) and form. Over time, a few theoreticians have stated as much, regarding other Greenaway films and his oeuvre in general. One of them was Alan Woods, in *Being Naked Playing Dead* (1996), who concentrates on Greenaway's intellectual propensity and his proclivity for creating a detachment between the events of the story and the viewer's emotions. Although this point of view is understandable when considered from a traditional narrative perspective that takes the fictional communication with the viewers as paramount, it seems to me that there are two dimensions in which this film in particular creates spectatorial immersion. The first is connected with the automatism of the senses; the second is linked to the emotional appreciation of the story.

## 2. The Power of the Senses: Coenasthesia as Immersive Corporeality

Greenaway's use of the multi-layering technique, creating composite shots of elements derived from as many as four or five different sources and having four or five different natures, distances the viewer from the story but not necessarily from the film. In fact, by combining textuality with corporeality in equal parts, Greenaway creates an ode to sensation, sensuousness, and sensuality.

According to Vivian Sobchak (2004, 4), we are all corporeal entities present in the world and making sense of that same world. Furthermore, we make sense of the world through our own bodies, the bodies of others and a certain cultural heritage we have inherited. This sensory propensity is, truly, as she puts it, a "sense-ability" (2004, 5). "Carnal thoughts" result from the way we use our own body to, simultaneously, think and feel (2004, 1). In her opinion, materiality befalls everything since the psyche is also body. Naturally, for her, the films that stimulate our senses and appeal to our sensorium constitute the true essence of cinema because they muster all our senses at once, and not only our vision (2004, 63). Therefore, hearing, touch, smell, taste, plus our proprioceptive abilities (which allow us to feel weight, dimension, gravity,

and movement) are also fundamental for our apprehension of a film in its entirety. In other words, our activity of film watching is synaesthetic, in accordance with our experience of the world. The film viewer is a “cinesthetic subject” who has an “embodied” vision informed by the other senses (2004, 70–71).<sup>7</sup>

Metaphors of bodily experience are abundantly used by Phenomenological Existential theorists.<sup>8</sup> Despite their theoretical differences, all of these authors stress the sensuality inherent in film viewing, as well as in the films themselves. The spectator’s primary involvement is, therefore, with the senses and the materiality (Sobchak 2004, 65; Marks 2002, xx and 3; Barker 2009, 3) and only then with the subject of the film, which in a fictional feature is conveyed through characters whose bodies are also inscribed in the art work we see and hear. According to Marks, cinema/video is a more sensuous medium than writing because the latter is primarily symbolic and, therefore, abstract. Marks’ haptic visuality focuses on the details and the unique nature of the objects (i.e. their texture and intrinsic physical/technical properties), only superficially absorbing the film as a fictional opus. In *Goltzjus and the Pelican Company* (UK 2012) some motifs enforce this proposition.

Indeed, for Greenaway, water, fire, and light are quintessential cinematic devices. In this film, water and fire are present throughout, either directly or indirectly. For the most part, water reflections are seen on solid furniture, props and even people. When the Pelican Company presents itself before the Margrave for the first time there is a twinkling of water on the faces and bodies of the troupe, although there is no

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<sup>7</sup> Since the word synaesthesia refers to a medical condition, explained in detail by Richard E. Cytowic and David E. Eagleman (2009), I prefer to use the term coenesthesia instead, where no indication of pathology is implied and a more democratic use is entailed.

<sup>8</sup> Laura U. Marks (2002, 6) uses the expression “the skin of the film” to refer to a form of haptic visuality in which the viewer’s eyes work as organs of touch embracing a field of vision unified on a surface. In this sense the film is understood as a stylized and flat space, on whose surface the eye tends to rest, discerning its texture and material properties, instead of plunging deeper in search of more complex [and narrative] meanings (2002, 8). Jennifer M. Barker (2009, 3) considers touch to be a specific cinematic attitude whereby the viewer’s body reacts to films in three ways: haptically (at the level of a corporeal surface, the so-called skin), muscularly and kinesthetically (at an intermedial spatial dimension), and viscerally (corresponding to full immersion in the form of the film).

source of water visible. The effect is repeated during the entire film and achieves an impressive result when the solid object onto which the water glitters are white curtains. This reproduces the effect of the film projector on the screen and lays the apparatus metaphorically bare. Water is also present in the form of CGI snow falling and can be heard on the soundtrack as enhanced water drips or soft streams flowing. On the contrary, fire makes its way into the film mostly as smoke. For instance, when Goltzius-narrator blows out some candles on his table, a thick but bright fume disperses into the air. Smoke is also invoked in a scroll projected and/or superimposed onto the background of the image, making the whole shot literally sketchier.<sup>9</sup> Fire is also present on the soundtrack as rumbling thunder. Beams of light are usually seen whenever there are windows or skylights in the sets. Understandably, the scenes that take place on the larger set have such beams radiating side-ways or downwards. When the beautiful Adaela (Kate Moran) is taking a bath, the rays of light are so intense that they resemble a theatrical follow spot. Light bathes characters as characters themselves bathe in tubs of water.

Water is also associated with semen and blood. For instance, both Quadfrey (Lars Eidinger) and Isadora (Maaïke Neuville) are kept off screen when he is running for his life and she is giving birth. Both actions are replaced by the coenaesthetic sound of a sword blade slashing and the underwater appearance of a red line of liquid, which, in the manner of a Kuleshov effect, causes viewers to think of flesh being transpierced, which could symbolize both the outcome of the attempted escape and the birth of the child. Similarly, when Boethius has three fingers chopped off by orders of the Margrave, the prison suddenly goes dark and the viewer sees only the result of the act – three fingers plunging into the water (filmed with an underwater camera) – and not the act itself. In other words, the physical outcome is judged more shocking and corporeal because it is felt by the viewer directly, i.e. without the mediation of the character that suffers the acts. There is even one instance when no human character is present, but an ejaculation is simulated over

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<sup>9</sup> In the second performance, about the aftermath of Sodom and Gomorrah, both water and fire are interconnected by the senses. There are explosions and fire on the set in the background, no doubt to allude to the fires of Hell. However, the fire causes an interesting reflection on the water, especially when the lights go down and the fire illuminates the scene.

the image of the digital facade of the palace with snow starting to fall in a progressively faster rhythm (supported by music).

However, as Marks pointedly observes, it is very difficult to make completely haptic films or videos (2002, 12). As long as there is a diegesis the film *auteur* and the film viewer are condemned to fluctuate between haptic visuality, more focused on the film properties, and optic visuality, more directed towards the narrative and the object. The first relationship is erotic in as much as the viewer is pulled closer to the film, regardless of its actual content (2002, 16); in the second relationship the eroticism rests on the dialectic of proximity and remoteness. In other words, haptic eroticism involves being interchangeably close to the film surface and the depth of the image and the overall perception of the story (2002, xvi). In *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (UK 2012), when Boethius, who has been imprisoned for heresy, is locked up in a suspended cage, watching the engraver Quadfrey, commit adultery with the Margrave's wife, Isadora, on a white bed placed below him in an abstract figuration of a room, the film alternates between closer shots of either the cage or bed, and wide shots of the performatic ensemble.

There is a sort of immersion on the film, haptic and optical. Put another way, the spectator is enraptured by the form and the style of the director and all the technical brilliancy of the film: its framings, colors, lighting, camera movements etc. The result is a loss of reality in which the viewer ceases to compare what he/she sees on screen with his/her own world. The film becomes a "saturated artifact" (Plantinga 2009), an eminently stylized product appreciated as such. By losing his/her boundaries, the viewer also loses himself/herself in the art work. It is a temporary phenomenon, consciously started etc. If the viewer cannot detach himself/herself from the screen, then he/she is mesmerized by it.

In *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (UK 2012) there is no suspension of disbelief because the filmic world is so stylized that it is not to be believed in the first place. It is precisely the meta-fictional nature of the art work that attracts the viewer and then keeps him/her there at the mercy of sensations such as [aesthetic] delight and well-being or [visceral] disgust and discomfort just as in a more commercially-formulated product a viewer would probably have to contend with suspense. The viewer's involvement with the film is triggered coenasthetically. Sometimes the feeling is disgusting, but in the great majority of multi-sensorial

instances present in *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (UK 2012) the result is quite enjoyable. The senses work here to envelop the viewer in a web of pleasure. At one point, for instance, Goltzius-narrator licks and fondles a book, revealing his sensorial inclinations for art. This outcome is induced most often and importantly by water, light, smoke, and ink, which are all made to possess an erotic quality.

The aforementioned water sparkling on the sets and over people induces a haptic impression in the viewer, who feels touched by it just as the characters are. Moreover, this liquid dance of shadows and light is seductive and intimate and often appears, unsurprisingly, linked to moments of private carnality such as the extra-conjugal sex that Quadfrey and Isadora have on a bed apparently floating on a green pool of water. His bare and pale body and her white transparent nightgown reinforce the light that flickers on them as they make love in a most passionate way. The visual allusion to the pictorial motif of the elder who drinks from the breast of his pregnant daughter who visits him in prison activates the sense of taste in the spectator because Isadora is pregnant and Quadfrey does suck on her breast. As they are watched from above by Boethius, as already mentioned, the sounds caused by the suspended metallic cage that contain him produce an echo that makes the scene all the more enveloping. In fact, this cage is sufficient in itself for aesthetic immersion. It balances above the water and is surrounded by high walls that notwithstanding let in light. The effect is like those produced in nature, like light shining through tree canopies, and in Gothic churches, as the light pierces the glass of high windows. Because it is only dimly lit by these intruding glimmers, the space looks foggy, almost as if enveloped in an eerie mist. Boethius is naked and his skin is further caressed by a blue light projected straight onto his cage. He is not alone; there is a large toad with him. Although repugnant, the animal is there for its oppositional value: the toad's textural hide contrasts with Boethius' soft skin. The noises produced by the metallic chains that hold the suspended cage, as well as its swinging movement, plus an electronic tone in the soundtrack, contrast with the sound of water drops and the voices of swamp animals (mainly insects but also the toad). There is a tension between civilization, represented by prison, and nature (for which Boethius stands), performed over and around light and water.

Ink is also a vital fluid in *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (UK 2012) and goes beyond its literal usage as an element of a printing press. When Boethius is writing in his prison cage, before his mutilation, he inadvertently lets some ink fall into the water. This image of two liquids with different densities blending together is somewhat velvety and points forward to Boethius' torture. It also points in the opposite direction: life's blood. Eduard confides to Portia (Halina Reijn), Quadrey's wife, that he finds dark skin exciting and that he would like to have sex with a servant in order to beget a child. All of the Margrave's servants are black, as the governor himself stated, but they are not of African origin. They are white people painted black, a fact which the film acknowledges at one point when Joachim, the Margrave's brother (Vedran Zivolic), is manhandled by some servants and his skin becomes smeared with ink. Portia suggests that Eduard paint her black, which he does using Quadfrey's ink. He draws black circles on her buttocks, a suitable pattern for a Baroque film.

More than God's property, the characters are Greenaway's possessions and he plays with their bodies giving them a child-like aspect. For instance: Quadfrey's and Goltzius' hairstyles are bristly for most of the film. Plus, one detail of all of the troupe's anatomies has been changed: they lack pubic hair. They have been aestheticized just as the image of the film itself has, allowing for full exposure while at the same time lending the whole a stylized effect. They exude more sensuality this way, but they are less pornographic as well. Therefore, they are never seen in close shots, as would be the usual option for such vulgar and disreputable fare.

Total immersion is not possible in any film viewing, and in meta-fictional products it is even unwelcome. As Laura U. Marks says, the alternation between haptic and optical vision is the key to the enjoyment of the film in all its brilliancy. If the viewer does not stand back at some point, he/she does not appreciate the whole masterpiece, just as a spectator in a museum would lose the painting if he/she would not look at the entire frame. Nonetheless, a qualified and partial immersion does exist. Moreover, the relationship between textures (cinematic materiality) and diegesis also accounts for another type of qualified immersion: the relationship with the story and its characters, i.e. the diegetic world.

### 3. Affective Alignment: Diegetic Immersion in a Sensorial Universe

Carl Plantinga (2009) explains that the cinematic experience is suffused with affects in general, which include both sensations and emotions; but whereas sensations are unconscious reflex reactions, emotions require intentionality on the part of the viewer and a conscious assessment of situations. Nonetheless, both have a very physical nature. Indeed, meaning, however transmitted, is always embodied (Plantinga 2009, 3).

Since *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (UK 2012) is a narrative film, and more specifically fictional – even if the character Goltzius is based on a real historical individual – the film must generate empathy with the characters in a general sense, which implies the triggering of both sensations and emotions. Although the plot is not driven by the psychological motivations of the characters, according to the logic expounded by Carl Plantinga (2009) where there are fictional characters in the film there must forcibly be concerns in the audience. In fact, fear, pity, and suspense are very general emotions which only require an alignment with the human form and/or nature, not an alliance with the emotions of the characters (which can even be completely different from the viewer's). Anthropocentrism can, thus, be considered a basis for very broad emotionality. In the case in point, the film has many characters and the body is their main qualifier. They appear naked in the allegorical reenactments, but also when they are acting naturally: Quadrey, for example, of whom Goltzius-narrator says that he likes to walk about in the nude like a child; or others, in the process of being humiliated, like the Calvinist clergyman (Stefano Scherini), who is sodomized as a voluntary expiation of his latent homosexuality. It could be argued that the human body on screen is a strong source of alignment for the film viewer, without necessarily entailing any sort of pornographic affect. Indeed, Greenaway's brazen flashing of the human body does not seek any titillation on the part of the viewer. Plantinga adds that affective mimicry caused by seeing the actors'/characters' bodies on screen is basically a motor reaction, not always conscious (2009, 120). For Grodal (1997, 88–92), on the contrary, the human form and nature is both conscious and unconscious. On the one hand, the anthropomorphic entity [the character] is endowed with

goals; on the other, the spectatorial involvement with the human form [the actor] comes first and foremost.

Besides, among the many, simultaneous, spectatorial responses to which Plantinga refers (2009, 140) one can find visceral reactions, which are more connected with straightforward affects, as well as involvement with the characters, which pertains to the generation of sympathies or antipathies. However, it seems to me that Plantinga is too quick to dismiss the wider application of his own theory when he claims that it is not quite adequate for European art house films because of their intellectual and detached nature (2009, 7).<sup>10</sup> Closely observing Plantinga's own terminology and perspective (2009), it seems clear that *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (UK 2012) activates exactly the same sources of spectatorial pleasure as mainstream products. Let us consider Plantinga's five categories of affects and what they entail in order to confirm this assertion.

(1) *Cognitive play* is activated by the viewer's curiosity, in his/her wish to know; and by the pleasure of looking and hearing (in this context, voyeurism is understood as a clandestine activity of spying on others, which is associated with danger, social opprobrium and secrecy). Narrative can also trigger cognitive play. This is related to the wish to be told stories and an interest in characters and their social environment. In *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (UK 2012), on the one hand, voyeurism is a recurrent action and theme. As a matter of fact, Goltzius–narrator comments repeatedly on this subject (e.g., “Is the theatre the legitimate place where we permit ourselves to be licensed voyeurs?”). There are numerous occasions where characters look at other characters, either in a clandestine way, or in an institutionally sanctioned manner. An example of the former case would be the Margrave ogling Adaela in the bath, while the latter case could be symbolized by the “public shit ceremony at 6:00 o'clock”, in which the Margrave performs a “curious act of self-indulgent exhibitionism”, as he himself explains to the members of the Pelican Company. As the cinematic viewer is addressed by the characters

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10 His book *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience* (2009) was written with American commercial films in mind.

in the film, so he/she is taken to be a voyeur as well. On the other hand, Goltzius is making an artisanal book of his own, which he ends up selling to the Cardinal for a large sum of money. As the book contains pornographic illustrations this could simply be proof of lechery by the clergy, were it not for the fact that the same illustrations pertain to the diegetic characters who are thereby turned into figures in a *fabula*. Indeed, the erotic storyboard contains the adventures of *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (UK 2012) at the Margrave's palace. It is in this specific narrative that the Cardinal is interested. At another level, so is the film viewer because that is the title of the film he/she is watching.

- (2) *Visceral experience* (physiological/corporeal) is very much at stake, as it is in our daily life, but in film it is exaggerated for the purpose of entertainment. In *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (UK 2012), on the one hand, viscosity is pushed to the point of scatology.<sup>11</sup> The film opens up on a close shot of a burned hand perusing a book. The effect is meant to shock the viewer and to alert him/her to the importance of textures in this film since the hand, which belongs to Goltzius-narrator, is not shown again and has no narrative cause to be shown at all. Actually, the film viewer is never given a straightforward explanation for that ancient injury. On the other hand, the public defecation in the library, which invariably ends with the courtier's applause, is charged with narrative as well as textural meaning. As the Margrave relieves himself of his feces he peels apples, a food which is, by his own recognition, the "fruit of knowledge". This association is generally as corporeal as it is specifically excremental, for body and mind are both physical. In fact, the physiological nature of the scene is reinforced by the clear, and amplified, sound of the feces falling into the chamber pot and the disturbed reactions of the Pelican actors upon hearing the gases being expelled and smelling their nasty odor. Other examples would include: the dead Calvinist who smells horribly because he has not yet been buried; a printing engineer who, on getting out of his bath, is smeared with oil – the

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11 Defined as "An interest in or preoccupation with excrement and excretion" by the Oxford English Dictionaries and their online reference tools. Accessed June 2, 2016. <http://www.oxfordreference.com>.

same dirtiness he had when he got in –, followed by his wife who bathes in the same unclean water; sounds of dogs barking loudly every time anal sex is performed or even slightly hinted at (including the primal copulation between Adam and Eve).

- (3) *Sympathy (or antipathy) and para-social engagement* translates into the viewer's concern with a specific character's ending. The alignment with the hero is not straightforward empathy, because the viewers can never feel exactly the same as the character. In *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (UK 2012) the characters are not psychological creatures although they bear human shape. Since the film is allegorical, they are as abstract as the sets and have only financial or sexual motivations. Nevertheless, the viewer realizes that there are two communities of diegetic people: the Margrave's Court and Goltzius' Pelican Company. The para-social engagement in this case is directed towards the members, whom the viewer feels are more natural and genuine than the courtiers. Their quirks acquire the patina of individuality, whereas the Margrave is understood as a simple libertine. Additionally, the Pelican Company has a clear goal – to secure a contract – and their members are prepared to go to extreme lengths to achieve it. According to David Bordwell, who wrote extensively on classical cinema (1985; 1986), there is nothing more powerful than a goal driven narrative. And so, strangely enough, a disjointed fiction generally presented in *tableaux*, cross-cutting between two different times and filled with detachment techniques has the power to secure the viewer's engagement. Indeed, the viewer roots for Goltzius and the members of his company, whose names are purposefully indicated throughout. Because the name is the second human factor of identification, after the body, the viewer is led to sympathize with the Pelican Company and to wish for the signing of the contract. As the story evolves, and the more cunning Goltzius proves to be, the more the viewer aligns with him. On the other hand, as the Margrave descends into viciousness and cruelty, maiming and blackmailing people (some of whom belong to the Pelican Company and are considered sympathetic), the more the viewer abhors him and wishes him to be punished somehow.

- (4) *Emotional trajectories* caused by the narrative result in a pleasurable feeling by the end of the film. This is not necessarily related to the diegesis and the fate of the protagonist but to the feeling of the viewer. This can be a sense of individual empowerment or a confirmation of certain values or beliefs. In *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (UK 2012), the downfall of the Margrave is very satisfying. The fisheye lens shot in which he appears, with legs stretched out towards the camera, peeling madly away at his apples, reveal him in his ultimate dissolution. This image distortion is abject and ludicrous and a terribly unaesthetic shot, because the feet and the legs, in their closeness to the camera, seem longer and bigger than the rest of the body, a sort of human malformation that doubles visually the Margrave's recently acquired lunacy. Similar shots are used at other points in the film, immediately prior to or during some command performances, but only as a means to distinguish between two forms of vision, never as an isolated act. The Margrave is not the protagonist of the film, but this fate falls well within the scope of the wishes of the surviving members of the Pelican Company. Thus, Adeala's curse of an ominous ending comes to pass. Goltzius' ending, on the other hand, could not be more joyous. Not only does he survive the ordeal of the commanded performances and secures the much desired contract, but he also achieves something which is a common goal to many humans: "I now have the time and the freedom to do exactly what I had always wanted to do ..." In his case this is painting, which only reinforces the final pleasurable feeling of all aesthetically inclined viewers, which make up the target audience of the film. Art and artists triumph in the end and that is why the projected images in the background appear in color in the closing scene instead of the black and white which is used throughout the film.
- (5) *Reflexivity* is linked to film watching and to dimensions of intertextuality, i.e. other cinematic contexts and films, plus the impact of the technology. Additionally, it is connected to extra-textuality: critical appreciation and cinephilia as demonstrations of, for instance, a cult of the author conceived of as a "cultural event" (Plantinga 2009, 36–37). As previously stated in this article, the apparatus is metaphorically bared. In a manner, it is as naked as

the characters themselves. The cinematic body is a pleasurable sight for cinephiles and Peter Greenaway aficionados alike. It is through this technical body that the sensuousness of the film is communicated to those who have surrendered to the Seventh Art. Actually, the intermediality involved in *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (UK 2012) increases the viewer's pleasure many times. In the context of Greenaway's *oeuvre*, this film might be considered the pinnacle: it uses many typical Greenaway motifs and subjects but pushes them further.<sup>12</sup>

All of the aforementioned emotions are not specifically artistic; they are unrelated to any form of aesthetic exaltation or the sublime. In fact, negative emotions of the physical (and socio-moral) variety can trigger absolute disgust in the viewer, instead of elevated feelings and moods, but they are also a reaction. This aversion originates in the diegesis and is mediated by the characters (Grodal 1997, 87). It is they who may be the perpetrators of vulgarity and perversion.

## Conclusion: Alignment with the Overall Message

My contention so far has been that sensuality (the filmic sensuousness) and narrative (the diegesis) can, and in fact do, coexist in a fictional art house film that has not been conceived under the auspices of cause and effect or character motivation, such as *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (UK 2012). However, this coalescence is more than a simple coexistence. In fact, it is the sum of these two attributes that enables Greenaway to

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12 As developed in Alan Woods (1986): spectacle, performance, applause, audience; illusion, artifice, Baroque excess; books and language, libraries; painting (including table painting), theatre (and theatricality), architecture (and compositional symmetry), music and musicians, dance, photography and drawing; still life, food (especially the apple), eating; birth, copulation and death; physical violence and torture; nakedness and the human body, decaying bodies; contracts and deals; allegory and allegorical figures; religious imagery and creation myths, Adam and Eve, Salome; voyeurism, infidelity, fertility, incest; bestiality and animals, excrement in general; framing devices (screens within screens); doublings and *mise-en-abîme*; light effects and projected light, water; blood and ink; absurdity and whimsy. The categorization is mine.

convey his meta-artistic and meta-intermedial discourse in full and to pay the greatest homage to cinema, elevating it above the other art forms as a praxis that can be both expressive and logical, as well as irresistibly captivating for an *open-minded* and *open-sensed* audience.

However, dismissive audiences of Greenaway's cinematic practice – including *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (UK 2012) – consider his films boring and over intellectualized, and partly blame, the allegorical nature of the films, which makes them abstract, discontinuous and perverted (because of all the nudity involved). Their reaction is aligned with a pejorative sense of allegory which has only recently been disavowed. Indeed, the Romantic poets (Coleridge, Goethe, and others) claimed allegory, to be dispassionate and to have a strict predetermined sense which allowed for no creative freedom whatsoever. Symbols, on the other hand, were thought to be artistic, sensual, creative, and innovative (De Man 1983). In other words, allegory was – and still is, in part – considered to be a bad conveyor of emotions and sensations, especially when loaded with religious significance, as happens in *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (UK 2012), where there is much debate about the nature and particulars of blasphemy.<sup>13</sup> However, allegory and symbolism are actually both anchored in metaphor. An allegory is a chain of metaphors endowed with a supervenient abstract concept and a partially obscure sense.<sup>14</sup> In order to work, an allegory needs symbols, despite their fluctuating sense, because it exists as a running metaphor. Walter Benjamin ([1928] 1998) helped to explain how this relationship really operates: (1) contrary to popular belief, a symbol is not simply a manifestation of an idea; (2) contrary to the Romantic's conception, a symbol is not just an aesthetic figure. In fact, for Benjamin a symbol is made up, in equal parts, of content (the idea) and form (artistic expression). Therefore, the duality that characterizes the symbol brings it closer to allegory, which is extremely dialectical, operating between the two poles of convention and expression.<sup>15</sup>

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13 Actually, the word “allegory” derives from the Greek *Allos*, which means “other”, and *agoreuein*, which refers to “speaking in public”.

14 “Enigma, and not always decipherable enigma, appears to be allegory's most cherished function” (Fletcher 2012, 72).

15 Historically, the Baroque allegory is a mixture of the artistic freedom of Greek art and the dogmatic and practical nature of Egyptian art, with the addition of Christian elements. All in all, Baroque art is based on the principle of apotheosis and demonstrates illusionist virtuosity at its highest point. As a different way of

Ultimately, in *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (UK 2012) it is the metaphorical dimension present in allegory that is responsible for such powerful realization of form and message. Firstly, were it not for the fact that the whole film is an allegory of spectacle (i.e. a depiction of cinema from the perspectives of both the creator and the viewer) the film would lack its artistic pull; were it not for the context of desire presupposed by the performance of allegorical *tableaux* concerning taboos, the narrative appeal would be smaller and the characters far less alluring than they manage to be, despite their psychological flatness. Secondly, *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (UK 2012) illustrates to perfection just how much a film needs a structural device to tie the whole together. I argue that allegory is entirely responsible for the successful combination of spectatorial detachment and immersion in the same work. It firmly ties form and content under the auspices of corporeality, making the film notable as artifact *per se* (in its own body) as well as establishing the message that in art forms, the body is the medium of the media just as cinema is the art of the arts.

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looking at the world and manifesting it, allegory is a synthesis of several art forms.

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