

# The Power of the Frame upon the Viewer: Multiple Perspective Seduction in Peter Greenaway's *The Tulse Luper Suitcases* Trilogy

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## Abstract

*In The Tulse Luper Suitcases trilogy – Part 1 – The Moab Story (2003); Part 2 – From Vaux to the Sea (2004); Part 3 – From Sark to Finish (2004) – Peter Greenaway plays with the tension between three- and two-dimensionality. His digital cinema, which superimposes several layers of images and sounds, uses the frame as both instrument and theme of a meta-cinematic discourse on media and the way they interrelate. Drawing especially from painting and theatre, Greenaway rejects the Renaissance monocular perspective in favour of a haptic visuality that alternates between depth and flatness, between single-framed tableaux and multi-framed composite images. The result is a hybrid, a sort of “imploded” narrative, as disruptive as it is engaging. Although dismissing the traditional Western visual paradigm in general and the classical analytical montage in particular, Greenaway nevertheless bases his practice on some of the most renowned aspects of the continuity editing style, if only to undermine them. This critically revamped editing is aesthetically and cognitively seductive, acting upon the viewers’ fetishistic attraction for the medium as well as their affects and senses.*

**Keywords:** Frame, Multi-layering, Multi-frame, Two- and three-dimensionality, Senses, Immersion.

## 1. Redefining the shot, resetting cinema

Most of Peter Greenaway's cinematic projects from 1991 onwards make ample and experimental use of the new digital properties of the medium and evince a growing multi-layering of images and sounds. Originally thought of the smaller unit of physical material placed in between two cuts, the shot is no longer what it used to be. Dissolves, superimpositions and other optical effects based on exposure have always enabled some visual overlapping, but during the classical narrative period they were not self-reflexive *per se*, usually working for the benefit of the story and the process of its telling. As such, they were not intrusive, but rather complementary, and, furthermore, they were not excessive. In *The Tulse Luper Suitcases* trilogy,<sup>1</sup> Greenaway dares to obliterate the traditional shot. Indeed, for the most part, it is impossible to say where, in all the trilogy, one shot begins and ends. The simultaneous perception of five layers of image and two layers of sound in one single moment of film constitutes a

bombardment of the viewer's senses and a cognitive challenge only fit for the less literal souls, those who appreciate a film apart from its story or in addition to it. This actually befits the historical flow of the film, an account of a man's life, Tulse Luper, caught up in the whirlwind of victimization during the period between WWI and WWII, and, consequently, finding his way to multiple incarceration over time.

Although Gilles Deleuze did not have Peter Greenaway in mind and was probably very far from guessing the possibilities of digital cinema, his “lectosigns” (i.e. the readable dimension of the modern film) are a good definition of what the British director does (Deleuze 1985, 7-37 and 292-365). Since Greenaway's audio-visual shots are indiscernible from one another, I prefer, with Deleuze, to call them “images,” reserving the word “shot” only for image dimensions (scale). For Deleuze the notion of image is abstract and not reducible to pictorial representation, since it also includes sound. In Greenaway's trilogy all visual images contain, at one moment or other, at least an inner frame or superimposition, and are therefore in constant transformation. This composite editing causes the multi-layering that takes place in the film. In what follows, I will

<sup>1</sup> The trilogy is composed by the films *Part 1 – The Moab Story* (2003), *Part 2 – From Vaux to the Sea* (2004), and *Part 3 – From Sark to Finish* (2004). For the sake of abbreviation, I will refer to them as *Part 1*, *2* and *3*.

consider only parts of an image before it transforms again into something else, as images are here quite unstable in themselves (i.e. without a cut).

Among the multiple experiments with the soundtrack, the autonomy of the voice in relation to the image, corresponding to the indirect free style, looms large. As Greenaway contends in several interviews (e.g. lecture delivered at Turku 2014; Gras and Gras 2000, 52), the images are no longer illustrative of the words (by which he means literature); they have a storytelling capacity of their own not simply devoted to straight line narratives. In *The Tulse Luper Suitcases* trilogy, the dialogues are often non-synchronous with the images, or they are repeated more than once by the same character or others, effecting a sort of echo which enriches the films and makes them more complex in terms other than diegetic. However, the voice-over is no longer omniscient, as conveyed by the many contradictory accounts of Luper's life and the less than assured observations of some diegetic commentators. The latter are fictive scholars expert on Luper, endowed with fabricated names and featured in small frames within the larger film frame (the two most prominent are called Thomas John Inox and Alphonse Fengetty and they also appear full body on the outward frame).<sup>2</sup> Additionally, the traditional off-screen space is no longer productive, since the invisible keeps intruding in the visual field, and the textual is used in a different way as well, as subtitles and writing of all kinds become an integral part of the visual image.

## 2. Breaking the frame, or the outside of the inside

The expression to “break the frame” means that the film viewers are distanced intellectually from the viewed object and alerted to it as a construction. Peter Greenaway himself proudly acknowledges the self-reflexive nature and artifice of all his films (Gras and Gras 2000, 98, 110, 182-83; Woods 1996, 18) as he does with his cinema of ideas, in which the viewers’ “associations [are] filtered through the thinking” (Woods, 122). Moreover, he admits that “the phenomenon of the frame” (Gras and Gras, 167) is the subject of his recent cinematic researches

<sup>2</sup> From now on I will call these characters merely Commentator 1 and Commentator 2.

into a “cinema of the future” (182), projecting his practice as a post-perspectival unbound interaction between images and sounds (167 and 183). *The Tulse Luper Suitcases* trilogy breaks the frame more radically than ever before in Greenaway’s films. The British filmmaker’s digital *praxis* is essentially an “imploded cinema” which forces the traditional monocular perspective to collapse. And yet, as Anne Friedberg comments (2007, 7), there is no unframed film. Despite the barriers it erects, a frame also keeps a film in place as a medium and art product. Greenaway is aware of this paradox and plays with it.



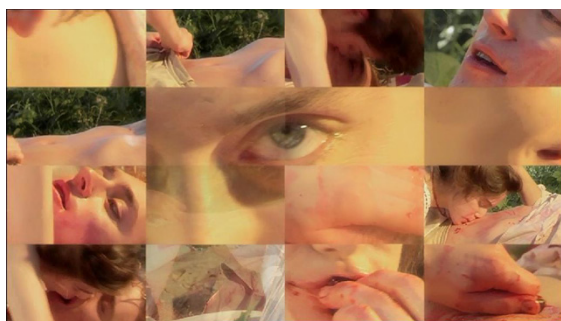
**Figure 1:** *The apparatus exposed (direct address)*  
© Peter Greenaway, *ALCS 2017. Part 2. DVD. Fortissimo Films*



**Figure 2:** *The apparatus exposed (mise en abyme)*  
© Peter Greenaway, *ALCS 2017. Part 3. DVD. Fortissimo Films*

Anne Friedberg applies the metaphor of the window to usually rectangular representations indicative of art forms, for example the canvas for painting and the screen for cinema (2006). Both are enclosed in frames and marked by dualities that reveal paradoxes inherent to the art forms to which they belong: two-/three-dimensionality (i.e. a relationship between surface and depth) (150); immobility/movement (that is, a fixed viewing position in relation to mobile images with different shot perspectives) (150); container/that which is contained (in other words, the canvas surrounded by a frame and the pictorial representation itself). Therefore, both painting and cinema belong to the same

perceptive paradigm. As Gregory Minissale claims for painting (2009, 20), in both cases, the frame is something which the spectator's conscience needs to suppress in order to focus on the content. There is a sort of rebound between the inside and the outside of the art work (21) and a spectatorial coexistence of perceptions, between the material substrata (which in the case of cinema are the screen, the film or digital base, the rays of light, the colour, the sound) and the contents of the image (the objects and the figures depicted) (27). "Note that the consciousness of the physical surface of the painting must be suspended if that surface is pierced by consciousness of what it represents, and the latter must be suspended when consciousness of the surface again arises [...]" (235).



**Figure 3:** Inner framing in rows and columns  
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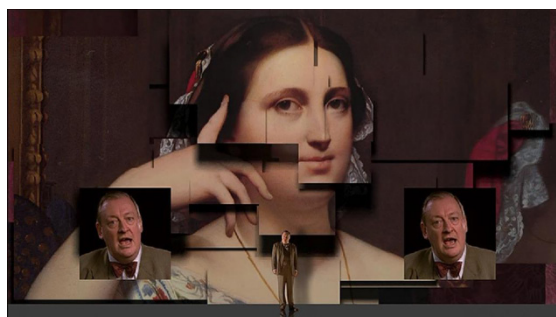
In *The Tulse Luper Suitcases* trilogy the frame is never suppressed, rather it is thematised and highlighted. Still, Greenaway also pays a tribute to the theatrical art form. His allegorical style, based on the aesthetic of the *tableau*,<sup>3</sup> intermingles in-depth compositions framed in long shots and flat compositions framed in medium to close shots, enabling the literal to coexist with the abstract. There is no need for Greenaway to mask the frame in order to better let the viewer enter the diegetic universe because the story world is unrealistic and allegorical and no direct identification with either story world or characters is possible. In fact, there is no story to follow, rather *stories* to be made aware of. By using the techniques of *tableau* aesthetic and multi-framing together,

<sup>3</sup> Steven Jacobs defines *tableau* as a scene with a three-dimensional composition and effect (i.e. framed in depth), reminiscent of the *Lebende Bilder* (in which living, but motionless, people are lighted in a theatrical way) and the *tableaux vivants* (in which a group of people replicates the stationary pose of a two-dimensional painting) (2011, 88). When transposed to film, this requires that the scenes be uncut.

Greenaway creates an inter-medial discourse on film. A Chinese box of frames within frames proves that the content of the images are more images (and sounds) and that Marshall McLuhan's *dictum* still holds true in the early 2000s: "The medium is [still] the message" (1967, 7).

Instead of concerning himself with place – the positioning of the film viewer in relation to the film – Greenaway, whose multi-layering implodes perspective, uses the frame as a spatializing device in order to subvert the classical codes and convey immersion in a different way. The outer frame (screen) is recurrently divided in quadrants corresponding to different sectors of the image where inner frames appear.

His alternate use of two- and three-dimensionality better asserts the full potential of the medium as an expressive and sense-making tool. In so doing, he refutes both Hugo Münsterberg (1916) and Rudolph Arnheim (1954), who considered that film was situated in-between flatness and depth, as well as Friedberg, who quotes both theorists (2006, 154).<sup>4</sup> For Greenaway, the frame's content is simultaneously flat and three-dimensional, not something "in between." Only this way can he use the form in a Cubist manner while retaining the figurative pull of the human body and face. In the example bellow, the in-depth composition (figure 5) highlights the architectural three-dimensionality of the premises, while the fragmented version (figure 4) flattens the background and is all the more two-dimensional for it. Yet the components of the two images are the same: Commentator 1 and Ingres's painting (which hangs at the end of the hall).



**Figure 4:** Flatness  
© Peter Greenaway, ALCS 2017. Part 2. DVD. Fortissimo Films

<sup>4</sup> Hugo Münsterberg, *Film [sic]: A Psychological Study* (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), 19 and Rudolph Arnheim, *Film as Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 28.



**Figure 5:** *Depth*

© Peter Greenaway, ALCS 2017. Part 2. DVD. Fortissimo Films

It is tempting to consider Greenaway's method of multi-framing a form of database cinema enabled by the computer screen (Noys 2005, n.pag.), but Greenaway uses his immense audio-visual archive as a production resource instead. Although overlapping, his images are not to be perceived as separate and different blocks of information, as Lev Manovich claims of the computer windows (2001, 97). Neither are Greenaway's different data, contrary to what Manovich contends, nullified by one another. It is true that they do not (by themselves) command the full attention of the viewer, but that is due to the film's overall effect, which is intended and not random (as would be the case in a computer display). Greenaway's images may appear anarchically assembled but they form a tight discursive agenda. Therefore, Greenaway's screen is still half classical, deliberately evincing a relationship with painting. The conveyance of stories in a web of storytelling is highly dependent on the human figure(s) as character(s) and cannot do away with the monocular perspective altogether. Therefore, the "collapse of perspective" that I mentioned earlier has to be understood in a qualified manner. Greenaway uses perspective in order to question it and subvert it.

The frame that Greenaway essentially breaks is not the frame of the screen, and with it the anti-illusionist world of film viewing and its narrative immersion; he primarily breaks the framing view of Western visuality and recomposes it in a new immersive way.

### 3. The paradox of flatness in depth

Despite its permanent distancing effects, *The Tulse Luper Suitcases* trilogy oddly engages the film viewer's emotions and senses. The overall result produced by the highlighting of the frame in such a multi-layered work generates

immersion, although in a subversive way. The Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* (i.e. distancing effect) may prevent the viewer's identification with the characters and inhibit a cause and effect involvement in the story world, but it does not stop the viewer from engaging with the storytelling and the world it builds in particular (of which the characters are an important part). An affective involvement of another kind is developed, which does not take place by osmosis. The trilogy is more narratively enveloping than other Greenaway digital projects, no doubt because of its length, but also because the characters have a greater agency to them. They are abstracted to the point of becoming archetypes, representing other people in the same potential situation(s), which are highly intense due to the war. For instance, in this human gallery Luper stands for the Everyman. *The Tulse Luper Suitcases* trilogy rests on two cornerstones: the narrative running-format, in which characters tend to be more familiar to viewers over the long course of the action (even though some of the characters are played at once by different actors), and the simultaneously divisive and cohesive power of editing.

According to Friedberg, editing has always generated several points of view because images are perceived in a temporal film flux (2006, 83). The ruptures in perspective take place between the "shot" changes, thus allowing for narrative continuity within pictorial diversity. Peter Greenaway, however, manages to subvert this just as well in a single image as in the filmic flux, framing different layouts and spaces both simultaneously and sequentially. The reasons for it are the lack of stable "shots" and the movement within each image. On the one hand, kinetic plasticity causes one image to evolve into the next without clear division (or framing); and, on the other hand, camera and CGI movements add extra internal segmentation to the images (a more surreptitious kind of inner framing). Ironically enough, Greenaway achieves immersion at the same time that distance is kept, using digital correlates for some devices typical of David Bordwell's paradigm of classical Hollywood cinema (1988, 11-87). Some of these analytical cutting methods stand out and are used in the entire trilogy despite the inner differences between the three films. They are the cross-cutting (between *plateau*-shot and inner framing, which I have already mentioned); the

establishing shot; the shot/reverse shot; the cut-in; the close-up; and the subjective shots.

Defined in *The Complete Film Dictionary* as "The opening shot of a sequence, which establishes location but that can also establish mood or give the viewer information concerning the time and general situation" (Konigsberg 1987, 105), the establishing shot is usually a static long or extreme long shot, but can be substituted for a mobile shot if needed. By avoiding to start a "scene" with the mapping of people and objects in space, Greenaway calls attention to the frame of the film screen and the shot analysis decided upon by the film director, rather than the diegetic content of a visual image. In other words, the film frame signals the outer and inner boundaries of the image and the activity of "framing" itself and cries out meta-cinema. Indeed, in *The Tulse Luper Suitcases* trilogy location and mood are better conveyed by the *tableau* shot, which, however, never shows the entire space, even in long shot (a fourth wall is always kept hidden from view, as is customary on stage from whose tradition the *tableau* derives). Not surprisingly, in a digital project so multi-layered as *Suitcases*, there is nothing to establish; everything is in a perpetual state of metamorphosis. Nevertheless, Greenaway does provide an *impression* of spatial anchorage.

In *Part 1*, Luper is imprisoned in a jail-house in the Moab desert. The supposed establishing shot of Luper's prison complies with the shot scale required (the image represents, in a long shot, a building seen from afar), but the building is clearly derelict and cannot hold inmates. An obvious functional or temporal discrepancy undermines the value of this *establishment*. Right after the long shot, the film viewer is confronted with an image taken from inside the jail, which is clearly a studio setting. Luper is seen in medium shot standing with his back to the paradigmatic windows which architecturally "frame" (i.e. characterize) the inside of this room. The opposite wall, which he is facing, is never seen during the entire *tableau*. The soft light filtered through the windows in a film projector-like effect, together with the grid of the window-bars, provide the interior with a velvety density that hits the viewers' senses as much as the character's body. The interior of the jail is cosy and aesthetic. Luper is framed between two windows in the centre of the composition as a subject in a painting. The viewer's eye is drawn towards the human figure, since

anthropomorphic shapes are a cultural code older than the Renaissance perspective, while the windows give the impression of multi-framing. They are self-reflexive film material gazing upon the viewer and not outwards in the direction of the landscape (and a realistic narrative).



**Figures 6-7:** Luper in the Moab desert jail-house  
© Peter Greenaway, ALCS 2017. Part 1. DVD. Fortissimo Films

The shot/ reverse shot is often used in conversations where characters are positioned in front of each other, and enables the viewer to better focus his or her attention alternately on either one or the other person (or group of people). It implies a spatial duality. Peter Greenaway has found a way to keep the viewer interested in both sides of the visual field by maintaining them both present in the image at once, but as part of different inner frames. The image bends over itself and reveals both the visible and that which should remain unknown. The on-screen and the off-screen space coincide.

For instance, in *Part 2* Luper is held captive in the film theatre Arc-en-ciel in Strasbourg, where he is made to work. During a projection of Carl Dreyer's *Joan of Arc* (*La passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, 1928) the camera remains static in the position of the screen facing the patrons, while at the same time showing, in an inner frame, images of the film itself. In other words, Greenaway's film is presenting the cinematic

viewer with an image of the intradiegetic viewers along with what they watch. Luper and his fellow ushers stand at the back of the film theatre and they, too, watch the screen. As Dreyer's opus contains intertitles, the film is also presented in its absence via the English version text superimposed over the image of the back wall of the theatre, instead of its rightful place which would be the screen. The cinematic viewer is caught somewhere in between the screen and the seats of the Arc-en-ciel film theatre. Even though he or she is not in Greenaway's film, but facing the diegetic audience, the usual *mise en abyme* where the viewer is positioned on the same axis and direction of the characters does take place as well. He or she is symbolically aligned with Dreyer's film being projected on the intradiegetic screen, in the company of Maria Falconetti, the actress playing Joan of Arc, a dream come true for every cinephile.



**Figures 8-9:** The film and its viewers (and listeners)  
© Peter Greenaway, ALCS 2017. Part 2. DVD. Fortissimo Films

As Jean-Pierre Oudart has claimed in his theory of the suture, what is seen in the shot is perforce left out (of the field) in the following reverse shot and vice-versa (1969a, 36). The off-screen space (and the character in it) is, therefore, momentarily absent from the visual field and has to be construed by the viewer, who imagines him- or herself in the place of the Absent One (37). The imagination used is twofold: on the one hand, the viewer has to imagine that

the other character holds his or her place, when in reality, since that character cannot be seen, he or she does not exist; on the other hand, the viewer has to imagine that the character will come back to the image (38). In short, the viewer has to imagine that the film world is bound by the same physical laws as the real world. That such is not the case is indicated by the existence of a frame. When the viewer realizes this, he or she is necessarily deflated *vis à vis* the story and its supposed reality; this marks the end of the spectatorial fascination (1969b, 50). Also, no longer can the viewer imagine him or herself in the place of the Absent One. Since Greenaway is always disclosing the cinematic artifice (the *dispositif*), he aligns the viewer not with the characters but with the situation; not with the real world but with the construction of the artefact. Enjoyment does not diminish upon realization of the artifice; instead it grows.

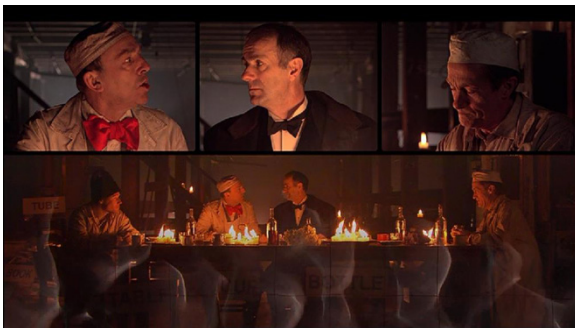


**Figure 10:** The figural versus the literal  
(C) Peter Greenaway, ALCS 2017. Part 1. DVD. Fortissimo Films

In *Part 1*, Luper is helped to escape from the Moab jail-house by Ma Fender, the second character from the left in Figure 10. They run off in a car, along with Passion Hockmeister, Luper's mistress and seducer, and Martino Knockavelli, his best friend. They are pursued by the local Sheriff, Luper's jailor and Ma Fender's husband, with the assistance of the jail-house photographer. Pursuers, in an inner frame, and pursued, in the outer frame, are depicted on the same screen, conflating two spatial positions, separated by geographical distance. The cars are presented to the viewer in reverse order of their actual narrative positions. Because it is placed in the centre of the image, the Sheriff immediately draws the attention of the viewer and seems to be driving in front of Luper's car. The spatial contrast in one single but multi-layered image is reinforced by the play between realism and abstraction. Ironically, the smaller frame is made to look more realistic than the outer frame,

which contains it, by the simple fact that the “car” where Luper is escaping is not a car at all. The four people being pursued recite their lines in a monotone voice while clearly standing in a film studio. Their dialogue appears superimposed on the image in screenplay format. This establishes several oppositions at once. This shot/reverse shot shows the illusion of narrative, on the inner frame at the centre, consorting with its anti-illusionistic nature, on the borders. The inner frame here establishes a boundary between the film and the process of its making. This shot/reverse shot is, therefore, doubly immersive: in the film-making proper as well as in the story world. The suspense is not undermined by the inexpressive recitation of the actors in the background since the movement of the digital rear layer behind them contrasts with the stasis of the characters being pursued. This conveys the feeling that the Sheriff’s car is travelling faster than Luper’s and that the protagonist will be caught.

A cut-in is an approximation of the view along the same axis of capture. One could say that the image thus enhanced is an old-fashioned crop of the larger size depiction that already contains it. In *The Tulse Luper Suitcases* trilogy cut-ins are used for reinforcement but with a deliberate post-modern twist. Indeed, although they are made to replicate part of a larger image, the objects therein (notably the characters) do not have the same background or, for that matter, hold the same positions.



**Figure 11:** *The Budapest morgue redux*  
© Peter Greenaway, ALCS 2017. Part 3. DVD. Fortissimo Films

In *Part 3*, while working at the Budapest morgue during his imprisonment there, Luper is having dinner with the Swedish diplomat intent on saving Jewish lives, Raoul Wallenberg (sitting at the centre), and the two local clerks. The image is split in two rows across the middle, conveying (almost) the same information on the

top and bottom halves. Three of the characters are duplicated on the same screen, perceived in two different inner frames at once. The bottom row corresponds to the long view of the room where the dining table is set and the row above functions as a cut-in. Luper’s placement, seated on the extreme right, is adulterated in order to fit on the reduced tryptic. The viewer is drawn as much towards the faces above as to the Baroque *décor* below and the mood it conveys through the warm lighting provided by candles.



**Figures 12-13:** A reversed cut-in  
© Peter Greenaway, ALCS 2017. Part 1. DVD. Fortissimo Films

In *Part 1*, a little girl pretends she is Florence Nightingale “picking flowers for the dead,” when she is confronted by an elderly lady. In figure 13, one can see their relative positioning in physical space, but first Greenaway shows them within inner frames, altering completely their relative distance in the cinematic space. Both the girl and the lady are depicted in cut-in form but the viewer hardly considers it a cut-in, not having seen the larger shot before. Moreover, the lady is a cut-in *inserted* upon the image of the girl. Upon first perception, the effect is very confusing for the viewer, who does not realize the two characters are part of the same spatial continuum. Besides, the proportions of the classical cut-in are reversed, since here the approximation is embedded, which conveys the impression that the image is actually *cut-out* towards the

viewer's space. Still, the effect is pleasant because of the enlarged head of the lady, towards whom the girl looks as if she was a deity.

"The close up", according to Bordwell and Thompson, "is traditionally the shot showing just the head, hands, feet, or a small object" (2001 [1979], 262). The term is preferably used for the human face, the other possibilities being just inserts (Bonitzer 1999, 20). It is in this context that Béla Balász claims the face to be the most subjective manifestation of man, rendered objective (n.d., 60). The sheer size of the face thus enlarged "is complete and comprehensible in itself and therefore we need not think of it as existing in space and time" (61). Actually, "facing an isolated face takes us out of space, our consciousness of space is cut out [...]" (61). Peter Greenaway takes this formulation to new heights by completely obliterating the surrounding space, either through blacking out the existing environment, using inner frames, or filming the characters against a black background.<sup>5</sup>

Despite his insistence on spatial relations, Balász is thinking of the power of physiognomy to convey emotions. Overall, in *The Tulse Luper Suitcases* trilogy, the close-up does not cause an emotional contagion (Plantinga 2009, 126), since the films are not based on sympathetic emotions towards characters with whom the viewer may identify. Besides, most of the times that the magnified faces are seen in *The Tulse Luper Suitcases* trilogy they do not convey emotions at all. Even Fastidieux, the owner of an Antwerp train station kiosk befriended by Luper in *Part 1*, is expressionless when shedding tears with guilt for having betrayed him to the Gestapo. The viewer is more impressed by the contrast between the blank face and what it imparts.

The close-ups used by Greenaway acquire an added shock value because the faces address the viewer directly. However, they do not always, or completely, break with the story world. Sometimes, they may be considered simultaneously "sublime" and "non-sublime" since they challenge the order of cinema and, at the same time, ratify it; these gazes are, at once, diegetic and non-diegetic (Bonitzer 1977, 41) because, although they ultimately attain the film viewer placed outside the film in a different

ontological order, they are also addressed to characters within the story world.

For instance, the black background images are usually abstractions of the same proceedings taking place in in-depth *tableau*-shots. All the Luper experts offer their impressions in close-up addressing the viewer. The hybrid nature of the trilogy, which affirms itself as being historically didactic, frames the commentators as documentary talking heads. Although they are many times perceived in small inner frames, often three taken from three different angles at once, the shot scale is still the close-up. On the other hand, what Bonitzer calls "*le mauvais oeil*" ("the evil gaze") (41), the gaze that disrupts the belief in fiction and reveals the anti-illusionistic nature of the artefact (*dispositif*), does not have the same import in a self-reflexive trilogy that is entirely committed to destroying the illusion

Nevertheless, the close-ups in *The Tulse Luper Suitcases* trilogy that do not belong to the scientific commentators highly engage the viewer. They can be said to accomplish the intensity and ecstasy Bonitzer claims for the cinematic face (1999, 20-21). According to this theorist, the partiality and sheer magnitude of such a shot is conducive of fetishism and phobia (20). Also, the eyes fixed upon the viewer trigger discomfort and fear (21). Above all, the close-up is mesmerizing and, combined with narrative it can be an instrument to pull the viewer into the film. The one character who is recurrently seen in close-up, Charlotte des Arbres, is nicknamed "Storyteller" in the trilogy. In *Part 2* she tells a running-on story about three pregnant women who crossed France pushing three baby-carts with gold hidden in potatoes. The absurdity of the story told is compensated for, in drama and importance, by the character's tone of voice and her almost imperceptible eye and lip movements. By this time in the film she has acquired a mythic grandeur, as a stand-in for all storytellers and, especially, as a narrator of unrequited love stories: "Once there was a beautiful woman who loved unwisely." Her eyes are the object of the only extreme close-up of the trilogy, doubly engaging the viewer: as a human being looking at another one, and as the film looking at its viewer (that is why her face is self-reflexively mirrored by her own discourse conveyed in writing on the screen, in scroll). Her eyes metaphorically pierce the screen in order to evince the apparatus, but because they are

<sup>5</sup> Many close-ups with coloured (and textural) backgrounds are seen, but they usually belong to people who are dead and are presented in the film through photographs.

literally organic they are almost perceived as being tactile.

The type of shot subjectivity known as "internal focalization," corresponding to direct character perception (Branigan 1992), is conveyed through the POV structure, which, according to Edward Branigan, is made up of a minimum of two shots: "point," from which someone looks; and "from point," reversal image showing what that person was looking at (1984, 103-105). In the most primary internal focalization in classical single-framed cinema (pertaining only to ocular processes), there is a congruence of character and camera position in space: the film viewer perceives what the diegetic eyes see. Instead of using the two shots consecutively, Greenaway places them on the same image, allowing us to see at once the diegetic viewer and the object of his or her gaze. Although this is supposed to be a subjective shot, all the subjectivity is drained out of it.



**Figures 14-15:** *Monsieur Moitessier longing after "Marion"*  
© Peter Greenaway, ALCS 2017. Part 2. DVD. Fortissimo Films

For instance, in *Part 3*, Martino Knockavelli writes to a cousin telling him some things about Luper which are to be discovered by the film viewer only later in the film. As the character pens down his thoughts, his handwriting appears superimposed on the film screen, apparently revealing what he is looking at (the letter). The cinematic viewer is attracted by the appearing handwriting, because of the motion and the

textural calligraphy. In *Part 2*, Monsieur Moitessier is looking at a photograph of his former lover, the transvestite house-maid Marion. This image is followed by a cut-in of Moitessier and Luper, seen in colour, along with the picture contained in the photograph, depicted in black and white (figures 14-15). The *tableau* image fully conveys the architectural beauty of a cloister (although the action is supposed to take place in a private property) and is filled with ornate columns and arches that invite touching, while its depth calls for visual permeation. The contrast between the coloured corporeality of the two live characters and the translucence of the grey photograph is sensual. The viewer cannot but help feel touched by the "eyes" within the photograph as much as by its diaphanous nature, which is almost unreal. What the maid lacks in physical beauty, she amply compensates in physical presence.

### **Conclusion: The frame as an immersive catalyst**

*The Tulse Luper Suitcases* trilogy directly presents all the art forms mentioned by Ricciotto Canudo in his seminal article (1911): architecture, painting, poetry (writing), music, theatre, dance.<sup>6</sup> By using theatrical codes together with pictorial ones, Greenaway achieves what Friedberg calls "reception in a state of distraction" (2006, 232), where the contemplation of detail is undermined by the perception of the whole. Ironically, in the *The Tulse Luper Suitcases* trilogy detail includes the scenic homogeneity of the *tableau*-like shot framed in depth and composed in long shot, as well as the close shots transformed by superimpositions of other materials (especially inner frames and written text). These are the contents more prone to contemplation and the ones that engage the viewer through lighting, texture and proximity. The whole is the unstoppable flux of images and sounds, made up of perpetual kinetic disturbance mixed together with a proliferation of inner frames. It is highly distractive *per se*, but manages to activate the sensorium as well. Overall, distraction wins, but not to the point of warding off the viewer. The show of colour, lights and movement works a little bit like

<sup>6</sup> Heidi Peeters alludes to the "patchwork of materials" claiming that the superimposing of techniques and aesthetics is indicative of media cross-overs and hybridity (2005, n. pag.).

monumental spectacles of Light and Sound and firework displays.

Watching *The Tulse Luper Suitcases* trilogy is a holistic experience. It acts upon the viewer's senses in two ways. Firstly, it can generate some affects which Plantinga calls kinetic turbulence and visceral reactions (2009, 140). The creation of memorable images (and sounds) and the triggering of corporeal reactions are also within the scope of Plantinga's cognitivist film philosophy (7). Secondly, by stimulating the senses in general, it calls upon Laura U. Marks's "intercorporeal relationship" between film and viewer (2002, xx). Greenaway's superposition of images in tension – depth/surface, volume/flatness, *tableau*/frame, and

background/foreground deliberately triggers a game between haptic visuality, focused on shapes and physical materials, and the optical modality of vision, focused of the totality of the image and the broadness of the visual field. This fluctuation between far and near not only entails the rejection of a centred, all-encompassing vision (i.e. monocular perspective), but it also corresponds to what Mark's calls "haptic eroticism" (xvi): "Life is served by the ability to come close, pull away, come close again" (xvi). By conjoining the two visualities, Greenaway manages to locate the film viewer in a meta-cinematic interstice with richer spectatorial possibilities and enjoyment.

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