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When Peter met Sergei: Art Cinema, Past, Present and Future in *Eisenstein in Guanajuato*

Over the past three and a half decades Peter Greenaway has established himself as one of British cinema's most distinctive filmmakers. Yet he also remains one of its most controversial and problematic figures. In the 1980s and early 90s, alongside Derek Jarman, he came to embody British art cinema. He subsequently has taken on the paradoxical status of a major filmmaker who simultaneously exists on the margins. He has also become a self-imposed exile who believes that his unique brand of art cinema is best appreciated on the continent. In effect, Greenaway has become British art cinema's prodigal son. It might therefore be tempting to view his acceptance of the 2014 British Academy of Film and Television Arts award for Outstanding British Contribution to Film as a kind of homecoming. It was not, however, anything nearly so grand and the event only served to subtly underscore Greenaway's position as an outsider. During a backstage interview at the BAFTAs he remarked that he was only in London for one day as he had to return to Mexico where he was filming a biopic about the great Russian director, Sergei Eisenstein. The film in question, *Eisenstein in Guanajuato* (2015), was a co-production between the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Finland and Mexico. It featured no British investment and, at the time of writing this article, it has yet to be shown in this country.

Regardless, *Eisenstein in Guanajuato* is one of the most significant films of Greenaway's career. It provides a semi-fictionalised account of the ten days that Eisenstein spent in the city of Guanajuato while filming the uncompleted *Que Viva Mexico!* While it is, of course, always interesting to see a filmmaker pay direct homage to one of his forebears, what makes *Eisenstein in Guanajuato* so resonant is the way in which Greenaway both celebrates cinema's past whilst also daring to suggest a possible future. Indeed, while this article will show that the film is part of a new phase in Greenaway's career which is devoted to biographical films about artists, *Eisenstein in Guanajuato* is no simple biopic of Eisenstein. Rather it offers a complex fusion of both the Russian and British filmmakers' theories about the cinema, particularly their shared interest in film aspect ratios and the concept of the total art work. Furthermore, it stands as a superb illustration of Greenaway's vision of cinema as an interactive and encyclopaedic medium. Firstly, however, it is important to briefly address the issue of the filmmaker's marginalisation and investigate his calls for a 'cinema that is continually reinventing itself'. (Greenaway 2014)

'A Continually Reinvented Cinema'

As mentioned above, Greenaway first came to prominence in the 1980s with films such as *The Draughtsman's Contract* (1982), *The Belly of an Architect* (1987) and *The Cook, the Thief, his Wife & her Lover* (1989), which were successful on the international art-house circuit, along with more experimental features such as *A Zed & Two Noughts* (1985) and *Drowning by Numbers* (1988). In these films, Greenaway developed a unique style of art cinema which blended the European modernism of Federico Fellini and Alain Resnais with the *avant-garde* experiments of structural

filmmakers such as Hollis Frampton; the narrative gamesmanship of writers such as Jorge Luis Borges, George Perec and Gabriel Garcia Marquez; and Greenaway's own background in fine art and painting. Lauded and decried in equal measure, these distinctive films were nevertheless instrumental in helping to establish 'a fully-fledged auteur-based art cinema for the first time in the history of British cinema' (Rees, 1999: 98).

Greenaway's work in the 1990s became increasingly more challenging and his ideas about his chosen medium vastly more polemical. It is fair to say that since the release of *A TV Dante* (1989) and *Prospero's Books* (1991), when he first began experimenting with HD-Video and multi-layered images, Greenaway has embarked on a hugely ambitious project to create a cinema that is active, rather than passive; which dispenses with conventional notions of production and consumption; engages with multi-media; and involves the audience in an interactive manner. Or, as Greenaway himself puts it, 'I am trying to make multi-screen imagery which is non-narrative and based in the present tense. That defies and denies a lot of what we regard cinema to be'. (Curtis 2014)

Greenaway's project is, by his own admission, 'highly polemical [and] very missionary'. (Greenaway 2007) Indeed, during his remarkably brief acceptance speech at the BAFTAs, Greenaway twice called for 'the continual reinvention of cinema'. (Greenaway 2014) Yet one sometimes gets the sense that he is preaching to an empty church and that audiences are reluctant, if not simply unwilling, to move beyond notions of classical narrative cinema. In March 2007, for example, Maxim Jakubowski published a film blog for *The Guardian* entitled 'Why has Peter Greenaway gone so out of fashion?'. (Jakubowski 2007) The blog was his response to attending a marathon screening of the trilogy of feature films (subtitled *The Moab Story*, *From Vaux to the Sea* and *From Sark to the Finish*) that formed the centrepiece of the *Tulse Luper Suitcases* project. Alongside this trilogy the project was comprised of a fourth feature, a truncated alternative edit called *A Life in Suitcases*; a 16-part television series; two books; several exhibitions; an interactive CD-ROMs; and an on-line game, *The Tulse Luper Journey*. The feature films had premiered at various European film festivals, including Cannes and Berlin, between 2003 and 2004, yet the 2007 event at the BFI Southbank marked the first British screening of the complete trilogy, and Jakubowski was surprised to find the small theatre only two-thirds full. 'How the mighty have fallen', he observed, before noting that 'Fifteen years or so ago, this trilogy would have been acclaimed with the same critical furore that his earlier masterpieces provoked. Now, it has been almost ignored, with no commercial screenings in the UK, no sign of books or DVDs. Where did he (or we) go wrong?'. (Jakubowski 2007)

Despite his failure to secure an audience for the *Tulse Luper* project and finding himself marginalised in his native country, Greenaway has remained undeterred. Indeed, he has taken this quest for interactivity to its logical conclusion and like his contemporary, Mike Figgis, he has become an advocate of 'Live Cinema'. In 2005, shortly after completing the *Tulse Luper* trilogy, Greenaway performed an hour-long 'veejay' set at Club 11 in Amsterdam in which he remixed the three films on eleven screens in front of a live audience. This performance, which was accompanied by

music by the Anglo-Dutch DJ Serge Dodwell (aka DJ Radar), was designed to be highly immersive, forcing the viewer into an interactive engagement with the film, as they were free to let their eyes move across the eleven screens as they saw fit. The end result was an entirely 'open' viewing experience in which every spectator saw a different film the construction of which they were intimately involved in. During these performances Greenaway sees himself less as a filmmaker or editor than as a 'real-time image conductor'. (Richardson 2013: 235) It is an apt metaphor, for in these live sets Greenaway is freed from traditional notions of cinematic linearity and can instead arrange images and scenes based on colour, texture, tempo and mood, rather than the needs of a story, thus creating a kind of visual music. Greenaway subsequently took this live, semi-improvised version of the film on a sporadic four-year tour, which covered fourteen countries. This tour also offered a challenge to the conventions of film exhibition. As Peter Richardson notes, 'film, video, music and crossover festivals hosted the [thirty three] performances in classic and modern theatres, open squares, industrial spaces, concert-halls, opera houses and museums'. (2013: 232) He also performed a version on Europe's largest cinema screen, the BFI IMAX, a space usually reserved for more mainstream spectacles.

If Greenaway has not lost any of his evangelical fervour for the idea of an interactive cinema, the elaborate folly of the *Tulse Luper* project has made him reign in some of his grander ambitions and more *outré* experiments. As a consequence, Greenaway's most recent work has seen him combine his quest for an ever-evolving cinema with a return to the more conventional form of the two-hour feature film, and his first forays into that 'respectable genre of low repute', (Bingham 2010: 3) the biopic. This has resulted in, as his recent BAFTA shows, a gradual (and relative) return to critical favour.

A New Phase: The Art Cinema Biopic

Eisenstein in Guanajuato comes towards the beginning of a fertile new phase in Greenaway's career, (one which will also be its final phase, if the director's claims that he will euthanise himself on his 80th birthday are to be believed). (Brooks 2012) This resurgence began with the release of *Nightwatching* (2007), his film about Rembrandt Van Rijn, which was widely greeted as a return to form. It won two prizes in competition in Venice and the British reviews were largely favourable. Trevor Johnson, for instance, wrote that while the director had been 'guilty of patience-testing pretension in the past', *Nightwatching* was 'impressively focused and accessible' and 'not just Greenaway's best film in years, but one of his best films, period' (Johnson 2010).

On the back of this, Greenaway has launched another ambitious project centred on the artists's biopic. He is therefore adding to the small but significant canon of biographical films within British art cinema; one which includes numerous works by Ken Russell, Derek Jarman's *Caravaggio* (1986) and *Wittgenstein* (1992), and John Maybury's *Love is the Devil* (1998). Greenaway has subsequently announced that *Nightwatching* was the first instalment of a 'Dutch Masters' trilogy. (Curtis 2014) The trilogy or multi-film work, as Erik Hedling (1997: 178-9) has pointed out, had, of course, been an integral part of art cinema long before the days of Hollywood

franchises. Greenaway has already completed the second part *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (2012) and is writing a final instalment about the life and work of Hieronymus Bosch. At the same time, he has also announced that he plans to make three films about Eisenstein; the second of which, *The Eisenstein Handshakes*, will dramatise the Russian filmmaker's journey through Europe in the late 1920s, while the final part will focus on his experiences in Hollywood. In addition, Greenaway has already begun production on a film about the Romanian sculptor, Constantin Brancusi.

This shift towards the biopic is perhaps not surprising. Like Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot before him, Greenaway has always understood that in order to make something new, one must first look to the past and locate oneself within a tradition. As he has noted, 'we must indeed be careful when talking about newness and novelty. As Borges says, everything new immediately creates its own predecessor' (Chua 2000: 182). In *Nightwatching* and *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* Greenaway aligns himself with the Dutch masters, just as he had as a painter aligned himself with artists such as R.B. Kitaj. In cinematic terms, Greenaway has affiliated himself with art cinema luminaries such as Fellini and Resnais, and provocateurs such as Buñuel and Pasolini. More recently, however, as his films have become more experimental, it is fair to say that Greenaway has also begun to express a greater kinship with the filmmakers of the late silent era and Sergei Eisenstein in particular. In fact, he has gone as far as to say that Eisenstein is not only the greatest filmmaker but he is also the *only* filmmaker 'you can compare with Beethoven or Michelangelo, and not be embarrassed by the comparison' (Greenaway 2003).

The kinship Greenaway feels for Eisenstein is perhaps understandable. Both are very visually-oriented filmmakers who have held similarly unusual and controversial ideas about their chosen medium and have both been extremely outspoken in expressing them. Indeed, at one key moment in the film Greenaway has Eisenstein shadow box in the shower and declare himself 'a boxer for the freedom of cinematic expression'. One feels here that Greenaway could just as easily be speaking for himself. Moreover, it might be argued that the film's portrayal of Eisenstein as an exile who would be decried in his homeland for formalism, and who was regarded with equal suspicion in Hollywood, in fact mirror's Greenaway's own status as an ambitious yet marginalised filmmaker without a country. *Eisenstein in Guanajuato* then, is Greenaway's tribute to Eisenstein's uncompromising views on cinema and his attempt to reconcile his forebear's theories and obsessions with his own views on cinema as an interactive medium.

An Encyclopaedic Cinema

The film focuses on what Greenaway's opening voiceover calls 'the ten days that shook Eisenstein', during which the sexually repressed director allegedly lost his virginity to Jorge Palomino y Cañedo, his guide in the town of Guanajuato. If this concentration on Eisenstein's sexual awakening gives it an admirably tight focus, Greenaway's films always, as Amy Lawrence rightly notes, 'indulge a taste for the encyclopaedic [...] and embrace cascades of information'. (1993: 2) *Eisenstein in*

Guanajuato is certainly no exception. On the contrary, the film perhaps gives its audience an excess of information about its subject. Elmer Bäck, the Finnish actor playing Eisenstein, at one point gives a motor-mouthed, pun-laden account of the world-leading cultural figures that Eisenstein met during his travels across Europe. He states, in part, that:

To get to Hollywood you must first pass through Europe, and then you have to pass through America, because Hollywood is a separate country all on its very own. So like bug-eyed cultural tourists we went through Europe looking, seeing, shaking hands [...] We met George Grosz; and Man Ray; and Dos Passos [...] The we met Le Corbusier, who said I reminded him of Donatello. All architects love cinema. We met Léger; and Cocteau; and Marinetti, who was a fool, terrible poetry, worse paintings. Oh, we met James Joyce, who sat through *Battleship Potemkin* in his dark eyeglasses, I imagine he did not see a thing. We met Abel Gance; and Luis Buñuel; and Al Jolson, the blacked-up singing son of a Russian Rabbi. We saw Dali's *Le Chien Andalou* and Dreyer's *Joan of Arc*. I went to Holland where I was met by a crown of reporters at Rotterdam airport. They were very excited. They had come expecting to meet...Einstein. We had Von Sternberg in Babelsberg, he was shooting *The Blue Angel* with Marlene Dietrich [...] Dorothy Gish and her sister wanted me to make a film, but sentimental melodrama is not my hat. Too much gushing and 'Gishing', no irony. I sent them to Pudovkin, he is good at tears and whey. He said, if I was not good at treating American ladies well, I was nothing. 'What are you?' he said. I replied, 'I am a scientific dilettante with encyclopaedic interests'.

The amount of name-dropping here is extraordinary (and this is only part of the speech); but so is the amount of information. Greenaway here has placed Eisenstein within the context of two great (and somewhat overlapping) international cultural phenomena of the early twentieth century: modernism and silent cinema. At the same time, Al Jolson, and the punning inclusion of the German film studio at Babelsberg with its biblical and linguistic connotations, are there to remind us that the era of sound has just begun and the universal language of silent cinema, which enabled diverse audiences across the world to watch Eisenstein's films, is coming to an end.

What makes the sequence even more dizzying, however, is the way that Greenaway films and edits it. During the scene, Eisenstein, Palomino and the guide's eldest son are playing a type of 'chess', moving seven pieces which take the form of the luminaries of Western art, including Shakespeare, Mozart and Beethoven, around a board. Greenaway cuts between numerous set ups of Eisenstein speaking his monologue and shots of these 'chess pieces'. The cutting is very rapid and operates like an Eisensteinian montage, creating associations in the viewer's mind between the filmmaker and his great predecessors by placing shots of them together in sequence. Yet this is only the tip of the iceberg and once Eisenstein begins listing the names of the people he shook hands with the screen divides into three equally-sized vertical rectangles. As each name is mentioned a photograph of the relevant

artist appears in the left or right third of the screen, with the other two-thirds generally reserved for one of the chess pieces or Eisenstein and his companions. The three-screen montage, however, also finds room for excerpts from *Battleship Potemkin* and films featuring Buster Keaton and Fatty Arbuckle. The speed of the editing across the three parts of the screen makes a conventional shot-count difficult, and the viewer's attention is constantly being divided between different parts of the frame. This, coupled with the speed (and skill) of Bäck's vocal delivery, make the scene both exhilarating, and infuriating to watch.

This barrage of visual and verbal information is the essence of Greenaway's encyclopaedic, interactive cinema (and perhaps the reason why many viewers find it alienating and exhausting). There is absolutely no way that one can take all of this in during a single viewing. On one level, there is nothing unique about this. The canon of international art cinema is comprised of films, which are usually a good deal less frenetic and overloaded than Greenaway's, which demand repeat viewings before they divulge all of their secrets. Greenaway, however, is not asking his audience to review his work in a straightforward way. Rather, he requires further participation from his audience.

When watching the sequence, the photographic portraits of Grosz, Joyce, Von Sternberg, and so on, which appear on the sides of the screen are reminiscent of a Wikipedia page. Given the snobbery that surrounds Wikipedia, (see Coomer 2013) it may seem strange at first to find Greenaway, who is often perceived as one of cinema's arch elitists, drawing inspiration from it. Yet once one takes into account the filmmaker's obsession with both encyclopaedias and new media, doubts immediately disappear. As Greenaway has said on many occasions, cinema needs to update itself for the 'laptop generation'. (Greenaway 2007) Moreover, the theories behind a resource such as Wikipedia parallel many of the filmmaker's beliefs about an ever-evolving interactive cinema. Indeed, a *wiki* 'is a type of website that anyone can edit'. (Ayers, *et al* 2008: 41) It is therefore a highly interactive space, which 'structurally [...] can contain multiple discussions consisting of many topics and is by its very nature dynamic and changing'. (Ayers, *et al* 2008: 41)

Wikipedia is also, of course, a *hypertext*. Hypertexts by their very nature are non-linear. As Ayers *et al* have noted, 'certain assumptions, such as the pages of a novel appear in a particular order or that the millions of copies of *Sense and Sensibility* all contain the same text, are so ingrained that they hardly seem worth mentioning. But Wikipedia violates many of these assumptions. It is a new medium, with its own strengths, weaknesses and conventions'. (2008: 81) Wikipedia pages, rather, 'can be read in any order [...] need not be read "cover to cover" [...] and] can be grouped in many ways, and these groups can overlap' (Ayers, *et al* 2008: 81) This is exactly the model that Greenaway intended his 1980 experimental epic *The Falls* to follow. This three-hour 'post-modern encyclopaedia' (Lawrence 1993: 2) is comprised of 92 short films and Greenaway has admitted that it need not be watched in one sitting, nor even chronologically in order to be appreciated. Rather, he encouraged viewers to treat the film as a sort of filmic reference book, which can be dipped in and out of as the need arises. (Hacker and Price 1991: 199) While this proved impossible to achieve through the process of conventional cinematic distribution and exhibition in

movie theatres, the subsequent DVD release allows the film to be viewed in a variety of sequential orders, which are divided into (sometimes overlapping) categories. In many ways, it seems that Greenaway was waiting for the technology to catch up with his ideas. DVDs, the CD-ROM and, of course, the internet have subsequently given a platform for interactive audience involvement that he could only dream of back in the late 1970s.

If works such as *The Falls* pre-empted the idea of the hypertext, then Greenaway's most recent films directly aspire to this condition. Just as they reject linearity, hypertexts are unconstrained by conventional notions of the word 'text'. Rather, the hypertext is truly multimedia and, as many Wikipedia pages demonstrate, it can bring together word, image, graphics and sound. The same is true of Greenaway's films. In the late 1990s, a group of French intellectuals criticised *The Pillow Book* (1995), saying it was not a film, but rather a CD-ROM. Greenaway replied by saying that he could think of no higher compliment. (Chua 2000: 181) Perhaps then he will also take it as a compliment when I argue that the sequence of *Eisenstein in Guanajuato* described above is consciously designed to work like a guided trawl through the 'Sergei Eisenstein' page on Wikipedia. It is a hypertext, which brings together text, image (both still and moving), computer-generated graphics, sound and music. Moreover, it is interactive. Each name that Eisenstein drops is like another link, underscored in blue; and each one leads the way to another story.

I would, however, like to take this idea even further and suggest that Greenaway is not asking us to watch this sequence, and other large swathes of the film, in the conventional manner. Rather, like *The Falls* before it, the filmmaker wants us to dip in and out of the work. The remote control, which Greenaway once credited with causing the death of cinema, (Greenaway 2007) enables us to rewind the film in order to repeat something that we missed, or to pause the film (or not) while we use other technology, and other screens, perhaps to look up the names that Eisenstein mentions, or discover more about the relationships with the Russian director, or discover whether or not Al Jolson was indeed the son of a Russian Rabbi. *The Tulse Luper Journey*, the interactive web site that accompanied the films in Greenaway's *Tulse Luper's Suitcases* project, asked participants to take part in a game in which they 'play a researcher who is working on the investigation of the 92 suitcases Tulse Luper has packed during his life as a prisoner'. In *Eisenstein in Guanajuato* I would argue that Greenaway has similarly asked his audience to stop being viewers, with all the passivity that the word suggests, and instead to become (inter)active researchers.

The Dynamic Screen

While each figure in the cavalcade of famous names listed above is given roughly equal weight in Greenaway's montage, the three-part screen he employs arguably makes one name in particular stand out: that of Abel Gance. Gance, of course, in the final act of his *magnum opus* of late silent cinema, *Napoleon* (1927), pioneered a new film format commonly known as *polyvision*. This system used three projectors, arranged side-by-side to create a combined 4:1 aspect ratio on a giant screen and there can be no question that Greenaway's decision to divide his 2.35:1 images into

three sections both here and elsewhere in the film was inspired by Gance's triptych. At times, Gance used three cameras in tandem to create a single (slightly fractured) wide-screen effect not unlike Cinerama; and there are shots, especially during the opening titles of *Eisenstein in Guanajuato*, which pay tribute to this by having the three parts of the screen almost, but not quite, join up. These however, seem less interesting to Greenaway than the occasions upon which the three projectors in Gance's triptych would be showing different images. This, for Greenaway, is an excellent example of lateral, as opposed to linear, cinema, which anticipated concepts such as multi-media and interactivity. (Chua 2000: 182) As Kevin Brownlow notes, during these sequences, 'Gance split the screen into three into one central action, and two framing actions. In this way, he orchestrated the cinema'. (Brownlow 1968: 559) Brownlow's choice of words is telling as they immediately recall Greenaway's description of himself while veejaying as a 'real-time image conductor'. Indeed, there are clear parallels to be drawn between Gance's polyvision experiments and Greenaway's live cinema performances. Gance's final montage is even more complex than Brownlow implies, as it is not always clear on which of the three screens the central action is taking place. Some images are cut so quickly as to be almost subliminal. At other times multiple images are superimposed over each other on each screen, or images from earlier in the film clash against images from the present. Audiences however, like the ones at one of Greenaway's live events, are never told where to look and have to make that choice for himself.

Greenaway's own comments bear this out:

Gance certainly knew what he was doing, considering all sorts of very expansive vocabulary, treating the past, present and future all in one plane, considering the notion of the close up, the wide shot, the portrait, the still life, all in one frame. There's a way in which particular technologies in 1929 didn't allow him to continue. We now have the technologies which would make this particular manipulation possible (Chua 2000: 182)

In *Eisenstein in Guanajuato* Greenaway clearly demonstrates this and his montage is able to match the complexity of Gance's final triptych. During the scene described above, for instance, Greenaway's triptych not only makes the viewer chose which segment of the screen they concentrate on, it also brings together and juxtaposes on a single plane: the real (the portrait photographs) and the fictional (an actor pretending to be Eisenstein); stillness (the photographs again) and motion; Eisenstein's past (his journey through Europe) and present (in Mexico); cinema's past (Eisenstein's grainy, black and white, celluloid images) and present (Greenaway's pristine, colour, computer-enhanced digital images).

Greenaway obviously had access to far more sophisticated technology than Gance so he was able to move seamlessly between shots in which the screen is broken up (in various ways) and ones in which it is not. Indeed, from the outset, *Eisenstein in Guanajuato* plays with having vertical frames of varying sizes and shapes imposed

onto the film's long, horizontal rectangular frame. Here we need to look beyond the influence of Gance. Greenaway has argued that 'a painter's language allows a painter to select his own aspect ratio, proportion, size and frame according to content' (Chua 2000: 182). To offer the most basic of examples, painters have traditionally used tall, vertical frames for portraits and long, horizontal ones for landscapes. Most filmmakers, however, have become complacent to the fact that technology has confined them to working with a single, static frame size that has always emphasised the horizontal and is quite unsuited to certain types of composition. It is clear that Greenaway is keen to challenge this complacency and that he has devoted a great deal of time and energy to what he calls 'the reconsideration of the aspect ratio'. (Chua 2000: 182) This is a trait he shares with Eisenstein.

During Eisenstein's stay in Mexico he completed an essay entitled 'The Dynamic Square', which was later published in *Close-Up*. The essay was based on a lecture he had given some months earlier to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences during his rather unhappy sojourn in Hollywood. In it he outlined his reaction to the proposed move towards a globally standardised aspect ratio following the adoption of sound. The essay is worth quoting from at length:

The card of the invitation to this meeting bears the representation of three differently proportioned rectangles: 3-4: 3x5: 3-6, as suggestions for the proportions of the screen for wide film projection. They also represent the limits within which revolves the creative imagination of the screen reformers and the authors of the coming era of a new frame shape [... ...]

But I must point out that, in proposing these proportions for discussion, we only underline the fact that for thirty years we have been content to see excluded 50 per cent of the compositional possibilities, in consequence of the *horizontal shape* of the frame.

By the word "excluded" I refer to the possibilities of *vertical, upright composition*. An instead of using the opportunity afforded by the advent of the wide film to break that loathsome upper part of the frame, which for thirty years - me personally for six - has bent and bound us to passive horizontalism, we are on the point of emphasizing this horizontalism still more. (Eisenstein 1970a: 49)

Eisenstein was eager to 'chant the hymn of the male, the strong, the virile, active *vertical* composition', (Eisenstein 1970: 49) which had been unduly neglected under this tyranny of 'horizontalism' and he assured the academy that 'through all the museums that I have lately visited in my rush through European and America [...] it seems to me that there are exactly as many standing pictures as pictures disposed in horizontal line'. (1970a: 55) He suggested, therefore, that a perfectly square ratio

be adopted as standard, as it was 'the one and only form equally fit by alternative suppression of right and left, or of up and down, to embrace all the multitude of expressive rectangles of the world'. (Eisenstein 1970a: 52) The idea of this square ratio, which Eisenstein called the '*dynamic square*' for its ability to accommodate both vertical and horizontal compositions with equal facility, was not, of course, accepted. To his mind, then the issue of 'horizontalism' remained. Greenaway, however, argues that it no longer has to, and while changing different ratios 'by and large has not been possible in the cinema [...] with the new technologies we can address that problem'. (Chua 2000: 182) Although a few younger filmmakers have recently begun using digital technology to produce films with shifting aspect ratios, including Wes Anderson's *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014) and Xavier Dolan's *Tom on the Farm* (2013) and *Mommy* (2014), Greenaway has for a long time been something of a lone voice on this subject. Since the late 1980s and the release of his ambitious television project *A TV Dante* (1989), Greenaway has been using new technology, at first HD Video and more recently digital, to manipulate and alter the aspect ratios of his films. Moreover, the ratio changes in the films listed above are generally infrequent and subtle. In Greenaway's films they are far more frequent and overt.

In *Eisenstein in Guanajuato*, for example, the 2.35:1 ratio is occasionally filled with smaller screens showing segments from Eisenstein's films, which maintain their original 1.25:1 ratio. Moreover, in addition to dividing the screen into three, he sometimes divides it even further. This is perhaps most notable over the film's main title card in which six different takes of Eisenstein riding standing up in an open-topped car are placed side by side. The decision to use tall, thin frames here is not only the appropriate for the subject being filmed, namely the vertical form of the director as he stands. At the same time, however, the film's manipulation of the aspect ratio answers Eisenstein's call for 'male', 'strong' and 'virile' vertical compositions. The Russian's overtly sexualised language is telling, and it perhaps offers further proof that Eisenstein did indeed have his first homosexual experience in Mexico around the time he wrote 'The Dynamic Square'. Although it is fair to say that Greenaway is making a connection between Eisenstein's latent homosexuality and boldly phallic vertical compositions, one should not assume that he is merely indulging in a tenuous biographical reading of Eisenstein's film theory. On the contrary, the Russian director's sexual orientation and the role of sexuality in his work is 'a subject that has obsessed many an author'. (O'Mahony 2008: 4) Greenaway's theory about Eisenstein's sexual awakening in Mexico is one shared by numerous critics, including Ian Christie, who has suggested that the trip may have made 'possible Eisenstein's fullest exploration of his hitherto repressed sexuality'. (Christie 1993: 20) There is some evidence to support this, not least the extraordinary series of homoerotic drawings mentioned above. Greenaway, furthermore, argues that there was a profound change in Eisenstein's work after 1933. This again is a view shared by Christie, who writes that while one 'may never know how his experiences there affected what was certainly an ambiguous sexuality

[...] the unresolved Oedipal conflict running through most of his subsequent projects is apparent.' (Christie 1993: 20) In addition Masha Salazkina identifies 'a camp-like homoeroticism in Eisenstein's art' (2009: 218) following the Mexican period.

Although he clearly draws on Eisenstein's film theory in his film, as well as the experiments of Gance, Greenaway never solely looks to the past for inspiration. On the contrary, his work is predicated on bringing together the old and the new, and what we might call his 'dynamic screen', with its every changing ratios owes equally as much to another young and perhaps not fully established art form: the comic book. Greenaway has argued that comics are a highly sophisticated medium which offer ideas that 'have not been embraced in cinema', (Chua 2000: 181) including that of the shifting aspect ratio. For unlike a film, which is usually wedded to a single ratio, the shape and size of the panels on a comics page can vary wildly. Indeed, they can range from very small panels with no room for text, to full-page 'splash' panels, with a great deal else in-between. The comics reader also has control over the time they spend looking at a panel which the film viewer, who has no choice but to see the images go by at twenty-four frames a second, does not. Similarly, although it may be guided in some way, the eye of the comics reader has an incredible freedom of movement, and it can choose the order in which it reads the text and looks at the image. It is this freedom that Greenaway wants for his own viewers, who can move their eyes laterally across a horizontal image, or up and down the vertical image of a tree or Japanese scroll.

The Total Art Work

In *Eisenstein in Guanajuato* Greenaway has the Russian director confess to having 'encyclopaedic interests' much like Greenaway himself, who is equally fascinated with comics and the phenomenon of veejaying as he is with more established media such as painting and theatre. This eclecticism points to another important meeting point between Greenaway and Eisenstein, namely their shared desire to see cinema as a total art form, which brings together all the other arts. This idea, of course, has its roots in Richard Wagner's notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the German composer's lofty attempt to fuse together music, drama, architecture, literature and myth into his operas.

Eisenstein famously mounted a production of Wagner's *Die Walküre* at the Bolshoi Theatre in 1940 and, as Ronald Bergen has noted, this 'presented him with an opportunity to apply Wagner's ideas [...] which concurred with his own vision of film'. (Bergen 2007) Indeed, while preparing the production Eisenstein wrote a short essay, 'The Embodiment of a Myth', which reflects on Wagner's *Ring* tetralogy, and argues that 'the synthesis of the arts is of vital concern to cinematography' (Eisenstein 1970b: 85) For Eisenstein, Wagner's theories offered a solution to the problem of reconciling image and sound, one the filmmaker had been grappling with since before his time in Mexico ten years earlier. As he wrote, 'men, music, light, landscape, colour, and motion brought into one integral whole by a single piercing

emotion, by a single theme and idea – this is the aim of modern cinematography’. (Eisenstein 1970b: 85)

At the same time, however, the Russian director probably concurred with his contemporary, the British composer Ralph Vaughan Williams, who once said that ‘film contains potentialities for the combination of all the arts such Wagner never dreamt of’ (Jacobs 1960: 75) Eisenstein’s final works, the two parts of *Ivan the Terrible* (1944-58), clearly bear him out. A great deal, of course, has been written about these films and the manner in which they engage with Wagner’s ideas (Tsivian 2002: 17), and use Sergei Prokofiev’s extraordinary score to create scenes that are both operatic and balletic (see Bartig 2013), while also drawing upon other art forms as diverse as Disney animation and Russian icon painting. Greenaway actively pays tribute to the Russian director’s search for the total art form in *Eisenstein in Guanajuato*, and this is perhaps most evident in a sequence in the first reel which shows the director’s arrival at his hotel. It begins with Eisenstein dancing and pretending to conduct as an orchestra plays the ‘March of the Capulets’ from Prokofiev’s ballet *Romeo and Juliet* over footage from *Strike*. Greenaway then choreographs the movement and cuts (often across three screens) to the rhythm of the music as Eisenstein arrives in his room and orders the maids to unpack his copious number of books.

This sequence is an example of what another great exponent of ‘total cinema’, the British director Michael Powell, called a ‘composed’ sequence, one which was conceived, shot and cut to a pre-existing score. Scenes such as these present the viewer with a complex synthesis of music, images, movement and narrative and there are examples of this kind throughout the *Ivan the Terrible* films and also across Greenaway’s *oeuvre*. As Alan Woods has argued, Greenaway ‘believes in an ‘operatic’ cinema, which incorporates, to a far greater extent than conventional cinema has done so, far the virtues and possibilities of painting, theatre, architecture, music, dance and [...] literature’. (1996: 33) Or, as Greenaway succinctly puts it, his films are ‘full, full, full of every form of art’. (Curtis: 2014) It is important to note, however, that Greenaway’s concept of the cinema as a total art form has evolved beyond Eisenstein’s. Indeed, just as Wagner could not have conceived of the cinema, Eisenstein could not have conceived of the ways in which cinema can now embrace new media, modern digital technology, the internet, and advances in younger art forms such as the comic and the music video, and combine them with the older, more established, arts to create something whole and new. In many respects then, Greenaway, in his search for a cinema that is ‘present tense’ (Greenaway 2007) seems to have achieved what Wagner was looking for, namely the ‘artwork of the future’.

Conclusion

Eisenstein in Guanajuato ultimately is a work which seeks to bring things together, and it certainly presents its viewers with a synthesis of the arts. It also brings

cinema's past into dialogue with its present and perhaps its future; and offers a fusion of the voices of two genuinely forward-thinking and visionary filmmakers: Sergei Eisenstein and Peter Greenaway. It is unfortunate, however, that the ideas of both filmmakers – Eisenstein in his late career and Greenaway in the last twenty years – have been marginalised and ignored. Indeed, Greenaway's film shows that there is a great deal that the cinema can still learn from Eisenstein's films and his theories. I would argue, moreover, that Greenaway's own cinema, which is encyclopaedic in its interests, voracious in its cultural appetites and dedicated to engaging the audience in interactive participation, perhaps offers a useful model for the art cinema of the future.

As the other articles in this issue have demonstrated, art cinema is changing, and these changes are reflected in the breadth of work visible in post-millennial British art cinema. While filmmakers like Andrea Arnold and Clio Barnard have kept the realist and documentary traditions of British art cinema alive, directors such as Peter Strickland and Ben Wheatley have broken down barriers between the genre film and art cinema, and filmmakers such as Chris Cunningham continue in the visually-orientated, experimental tradition that was one once typified by Greenaway. Yet it is worth noting that none of these young directors has developed a voice as distinctive or as challenging as Greenaway's. Indeed, he remains *sui generis*, and his work is still regarded by many as hermetic.

This view, however, shows a fundamental misunderstanding of his work, which is in fact the opposite of hermetic. David Andrews has recently called for a more 'inclusive' definition of art cinema. He has suggested a definition of the term which 'avoids reducing the genre [of art cinema] to the theatrical art film, the *avant-garde* movie, or any other textual area [...] that also] refuses to align the genre with any particular production practice [...] any distribution practice [...] or any particular exhibition practice'. (2010: 69) Moreover, he calls for an art cinema that is 'value neutral' and breaks down the distinctions between high and low culture. These are, in fact, the same things that Greenaway has been calling for for some time. His films seek to break down 'the traditional boundaries between the mainstream, art house and the *avant-garde*', (Richardson 2013: 232) and the snobbery surrounding notions of high and low art. In Greenaway's work comic books, pornography and Wikipedia exist on an equal footing with painting, theatre and architecture. He has also tried to move art cinema away from the confines of the art house and to bring it into other spaces, not only galleries and opera houses, but also into nightclubs and onto mobile phones, tablets and laptops. He has in addition sought to make the audience an active participant rather than a passive consumer. This is an inclusive practise if ever there was one. With the forthcoming release of *Eisenstein in Guanajuato* in British cinemas, and the completion of his ambitious biopic project, Greenaway will hopefully continue to regain prominence and will, once again, become a visible part of our national film culture. For as this article has shown, there is perhaps as much to learn from Greenaway's film theory and practice as there is still from Eisenstein's.

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