

16. Peter Greenaway's Artist-Entrepreneurs

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Abstract

This chapter considers the relationship between art, commerce, and artistic entrepreneurship in film through the case of Peter Greenaway's "Dutch Masters" films *Nightwatching* (2007) and *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (2012). Drawing on theoretical work on affective labor, precarity, and entrepreneurial subjectivity in the new creative industries – and more broadly in contemporary public spheres, – it analyzes the eponymous character of *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* as a "virtuoso" figure whose performance of himself in the cultural marketplace holds an ineradicably political potential, related to his deployment of theatricality and language. In the context of Greenaway's cinema, this leads to reflection on how *Goltzius* encodes its engagement with artistic entrepreneurship in what is here called an aesthetic of "virtuosic remediation."

Keywords: Peter Greenaway, affective labor, creative entrepreneurship, remediation, virtuosity

This chapter considers the relationship between art, commerce, and creative labor in the cultural marketplace, as depicted in Peter Greenaway's "Dutch Masters" films *Nightwatching* (2007) and *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (2012), and secondarily in the spin-off mockumentary *Rembrandt's J'Accuse* (2008).¹ I pursue this inquiry in the context of a broader interest in how Greenaway's films engage with the (artistic and political) public sphere, for a historical imaginary of publicness is present in many of his features and inflects how themes of democracy and public freedom, artishood and

1 The title "Dutch Masters" is adopted here from promotional texts (e.g. it is used by Greenaway's publisher Dis Voir: <http://www.disvoir.com/fr/fo/b/191.html> Accessed April 26, 2021). Greenaway did not initially plan the films as a series but accepted in retrospect that, together with a projected film on Hieronymus Bosch, they might be seen to add up to a trilogy (Lyman, "Peter Greenaway").

creative entrepreneurship are taken up and interrelated. In one perspective, the films in the “Dutch Masters” series would seem to be thematically continuous with earlier features in Greenaway’s oeuvre, most notably *The Draughtsman’s Contract* (1982), in that they foreground the contractual element that binds artist-entrepreneurs to structures of power and patronage in which they might get enmeshed and lose (artistic) control. In what follows, however, it will be argued that the “Dutch Masters” films also form a new departure as they invite analysis of the pressures placed on subjectivity when the imperative to “be creative” is generalized to extend from artistic or aesthetic labor to immaterial and affective labor in a large, encompassing sense.² The point is to show how, in so doing, the films probe the ways in which “art” and “business” slide into each other in the present cultural juncture. Greenaway’s version of Goltzius as a “virtuosic” artist-entrepreneur is emblematic of the precarious labor conditions that apply in today’s neoliberal world of commercialized creativity and performative self-exploitation. Moreover, both *Nightwatching* and *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* explore, in different ways, how self-marketing artists whose “freedom” to trade the products of their creativity so easily masks new forms of subjugation might reclaim political and critical agency vis-à-vis the structures of power in which they find themselves entangled. To this extent, raising the question of political possibility, both films present the plight of the entrepreneurial artist in ways that resonate with recent discussions of neoliberal subject formation, as will be seen by placing them in conversation with Maurizio Lazzarato, Paolo Virno, Isabell Lorey, and other critical theorists who help us think about neoliberal subjectivation in creative industry contexts.

I should stress from the outset that in proposing this kind of approach to Greenaway’s work the aim is not primarily to study the “Dutch Masters” films under the rubric of artist biopics. Avoiding the narrative and psychologizing conventions of the biopic genre, the films do not so much offer interpretative accounts of their protagonists as imaginative, theatrically staged re-creations of some of the courtly or public urban settings in which both Goltzius and Rembrandt found themselves fashioning new relationships with their publics and their art (in Goltzius’s case, prompted by

2 Here, I follow Michael Hardt’s (building on Maurizio Lazzarato’s) understanding of affective labor as a specific form of the more general category of immaterial labor. See Hardt, “Affective Labor”; Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor”; cf. Gill and Pratt, “In the Social Factory?” “Be creative” is a reference to Angela McRobbie’s analysis of what she calls the neoliberal “creativity *dispositif*” McRobbie, *Be Creative*, 1–16.

new technical advances in printmaking and engraving). As this makes for films that ask attention for their own relationship with other media and art forms, as well as their histories, the discussion is more productively framed in the broader terms of the politics of cultural memory and mnemonic remediation in Greenaway's cinema – a pursuit in which the question of art, artists, and the art world on screen is tied up with that of how the films self-consciously (at times even media-archaeologically) comment on the terms of their own self-inscription in the art and media histories they revisit. All this is well-trodden ground for Greenaway scholars and aficionados, as intermedial and “archaeomodern” discussions of his work would seem to underline.³ The present focus on the engagement with publicness in the “Dutch Masters” series returns us to more directly political questions while retaining a sense of the films as partaking in what Mieke Bal has called a “preposterous” temporal structure, i.e. a structure that is firmly presentist and may yet be deeply historically engaged as its practice of quotation re-envisions the past to obtain new, productive angles on the contemporary moment.⁴

The task, then, is to connect two very different concerns. First, I am interested in seeing how the dialogue staged by the “Dutch Masters” films with newly emergent public life conditions from the 1640s and 1590s, respectively – the rise of modern print techniques and of new public spaces – occasions representations that hold allegorical potential for the eviscerated, fear-ridden public spheres that characterize early-twenty-first-century neoliberalized societies. In this context, Greenaway's protagonists are not so much biographees as figures with the potential to emblemize historical forms of public life that may illuminate the present. The director's Rembrandt, I argue, approximates the figure of the parrhesiastic contrarian: an artist who speaks “truth to power” through the message that is provocatively encoded, in Greenaway's proposition, in the painting now known as the *Night Watch*. Meanwhile, Greenaway's Goltzius approximates the figure of the virtuoso, a figure of entanglement and ensnarement who holds aesthetic and political forms of agency together in a complex and highly public negotiation of both. In both cases, the modalities of these artists' implication in nascent early modern public spaces resonate strangely but persistently with the contemporary experience of what Paolo Virno has called “publicness without

3 E.g. Kovács, *Screening Modernism*, 202; Tweedie, *Moving Pictures*, 193–216; Peucker, *Aesthetic Spaces*, 41–65.

4 Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio*, 7; cf. De Waard, “Art and Aisthesis.”

a public sphere”⁵ – a condition in which individuals who have been reduced to being “entrepreneurs of the self”⁶ see the traditionally political qualities of their public modes of action diminish or retreat. Second, considering work as meta-cinematic and self-referential as Greenaway’s, this line of inquiry ultimately leads back to the question of the place of digital film itself in the landscapes of publicness and art-as-business to which I take the “Dutch Masters” films to speak. I argue that the way in which a certain style of “virtuosity” is incorporated into the visual language of *Goltzius* works as a commentary on its own status as an intermedial feature and on the form of its self-inscription in the system of cultural production it inhabits.

Nightwatching and *Rembrandt’s J’Accuse*

Greenaway’s interest in publics – and in the idea of cinema as an essentially public art – is very well established.⁷ He himself has commented often on the ornamental and sculptural qualities of the figure of the audience or public in his work, locating its emergence in the scene in *The Belly of an Architect* (1987) where an ensemble of “dilettanti architects [. . .] clapped the Pantheon” as if it was a performance.⁸ The film’s proposition that “Rome is the play” cast the eternal city as a grand theatrical stage where publics and monumental buildings face each other as if enveloped in a vision of the city, its art and heritage, as a political-symbolic space that bestows identity and form on collective memory and experience. Thomas Elsaesser has paid the most sustained attention to the political character of this engagement with publicness, suggesting that Greenaway – only apparently in tension with his much-rehearsed thesis about cinema’s “end” or “death” – “might just offer a vision of a new, eminently civic, maybe even democratic, but in any case, yet to be realized, public function for the cinema.”⁹ Indeed, in rejuvenating his (meta-)cinema practice by placing it in dialogue with public architecture and public urban spaces – sometimes literally so, taking his filmic vocabulary

5 Virno, *Grammar*, 40.

6 Foucault, *The Birth*, 226.

7 This section reworks material from my 2012 essay “Rembrandt on Screen,” which considered Greenaway’s Rembrandt films of 2007–2008 within the double context of Rembrandt Year 2006 and its commercialization of art-as-heritage on the one hand, and the European arthouse tradition of the Rembrandt biopic on the other.

8 Steinmetz and Greenaway, *The World*, 122.

9 Elsaesser, *European Cinema*, 190. Greenaway reiterates his thesis about the “death of cinema” in numerous places, e.g. see Meyer, “Playing with New Toys.”

into the streets or projecting it onto civic buildings¹⁰ – Greenaway's art might well be said to attempt to “preserve the cinema for its audiences [...] not for art's sake, but for politics' sake.”¹¹ Originally written in 1996, this assessment still feels apt, and it is worth revisiting in light of the evolving trajectory of Greenaway's triple career as a film-maker, exhibition curator, and installation artist whose catalogue of moving-image art for museums, galleries, and heritage sites has involved him ever more closely in Europe's cultural heritage industries since the 1990s. A unique, politically inflected mode of “expanded cinema” has shaped up that turns the European city of heritage into its theater of (peaceful!) operations; alongside the feature films, it has continued to proceed by taking his work into the city – itself understood as a repository of cultural memory – to make a spectacular display of past aesthetic and cultural codes and to reimagine its spaces as what Elsaesser called “agora-spaces” for a digitized, late-postmodern world.¹²

I argue that this trajectory makes increasingly manifest a full-fledged, indeed democratic imaginary of publicness which, in recent years, has centered on memories of early modern social experience as if to find in courts, cities or small towns on the cusp of transition to modernity the creative material for re-envisioning possibilities for public life today. Rembrandt's Amsterdam around 1642 (*Nightwatching*) and Colmar during a fictional visit by Goltzius in the early 1590s (*Goltzius and the Pelican Company*): the two films take us back to small-scale, close-knit civic units of an early modern kind, just as Greenaway's site-specific multimedia installations at the Royal Palace of Venaria (2007), Castle Amerongen (2011; with Saskia Boddeke), and in Basel and Lucca (both 2013) testify to Greenaway's fascination with the social theatricality of its early modern citizens or subjects, dozens of whom he has animated on projection screens for indoor or outdoor display.¹³ The “Dutch Masters” films converge with this work as much as they do with Greenaway's other feature films with early modern settings (*The Draughtsman's Contract*, *Prospero's Books*, *The Baby of Mâcon*). As the interest in spaces forms an important unifying thread, I will borrow the term “‘ocular’ public space” – occasionally used by Arendtian public sphere theorists¹⁴ – to refer to Greenaway's interest in evoking internally

10 A notable early example are the large-scale installation projects realized at various locations in Geneva and Munich, respectively, in 1994 and 1995; see Greenaway, *The Stairs: Geneva* and *The Stairs: Munich Projection*.

11 Elsaesser, *European Cinema*, 191.

12 *Ibid.*, 189.

13 E.g. see Greenaway, *The Towers: Lucca Hubris*.

14 Villa, *Politics, Philosophy, Terror*, 8.

homogenous, state-centered public spheres that are notably weak in the exercise of rational-critical public sphere functions but no less political in that they are suffused with theatricality, more precisely with theatrical forms of self-staging (or, social *mise en scène*) on the part of the community in its quest to project a unified image of itself or to overcome a violent rupture. In the context of Greenway's cinema, the focus on "ocular" public spaces suits an ocularcentric imagination that has long had an interest in constructing fields of visibility as fields of more or less visible power relations, both *The Draughtsman's Contract* and *The Baby of Mâcon* being cases in point.

Nightwatching came out in the immediate aftermath of Rembrandt Year 2006, which was celebrated in Amsterdam (and throughout the Netherlands) with a surfeit of Rembrandt-themed exhibitions, cultural projects, and events, including an installation by Greenaway in the Rijksmuseum. The film comes closest in Greenaway's oeuvre to a narrative artist biopic, although comparison with other films about Rembrandt – a rich European tradition, which includes films by Alexander Korda (1936), Jos Stelling (1977), and Charles Matton (1999), as well as a curious biopic by Nazi director Hans Steinhoff (1942) – points up a significant departure from the "misunderstood genius" plot so typical of the genre. While Greenaway creates a contemplative, at times quietly lyrical mood that would seem to honor the long-standing image of Rembrandt as an artist of interiority and "northern" spiritual depth, the film shifts attention from the private spaces of production or creation to politically consequential public spaces of display. What motivates this narratively is the film's revision of the "fall-from-favor" topos traditionally associated with the *Night Watch* in European cultural memory. At the center of the plot is the idea of the painting as "[Rembrandt's] David challenge to the contemporary Goliaths": a clique of Amsterdam *burghers* who, it is charged, while commissioning a collective portrait in their function as civic militia, engage in child trafficking and other misdeeds that their hypocrisy seeks to hide. The painting, incorporating clues to unravel a cover-up conspiracy and a murder, is thus "Rembrandt's forensic enquiry in paint, his Crime Scene Investigation in the Breestraat."¹⁵ It is typical for Greenaway that as the story of Rembrandt's rejection by the Amsterdam establishment gets turned into one that returns political/critical agency to the artist, the film stages the theatrical social style of the *burghers* on the model of an animated reconstruction of his painting. As a privileged medium in the film, theatricality becomes a way to recover past political energies and valences;

15 Greenaway, *Nightwatching*, 3.

it is even used for staging the artist's more private anxieties and moods to comment on themes of violence and power, most notably in the fantasy of a sacrificial blinding which opens and closes the film, staged on a dark-lit stage.¹⁶ *Rembrandt's J'Accuse* brings *Nightwatching's* concern with a historical form or style of publicness still further to the fore. A faster-paced remediation of the biopic, overlaid with a barrage of visual and textual quotations in the mode of a mockumentary that has Greenaway double as art educator, it notes the circumstances of the very public display of the *Night Watch* for some three hundred years before the emergence of public museums in the mid-nineteenth century. In a remediated scene from *Nightwatching* that has Rembrandt walk through the great hall of the *Kloveniersdoelen*, home to the company of civic guardsman who are to become his subjects, he gets the idea to turn the commissioned work into a public "indictment" – indeed, a "j'accuse." The scene thus associates the painting not just with the history of early modern (semi-)public spaces but with a politicized idea of them, recoding the *Night Watch* as a parrhesiastic act and Rembrandt himself as a parrhesiastic figure. In juxtaposition with images of Amsterdam's Museum Square as an art-themed tourist space elsewhere in the film, art museum and exhibition spaces are thus re-envisioned as part of a public sphere where art may yet be the site of critique, of the practice of holding power to account. Taken together – and notwithstanding their abundant use of irony and pastiche – both Rembrandt films are painterly animations that speak to debates about the depoliticizing effects of cultural heritage discourse and practices in the commodified "city of culture." It is in their deployment of theatricality and animated tableaux, seen as forms of mnemonic remediation, that both films reinvent or recode museum spaces as eminently public spaces whose political valences may still resonate today.

Goltzius and the Pelican Company: "We Traded in Words"

After the relatively subdued and contemplative moods of *Nightwatching*, *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* marked a return to Greenaway's signature neo-Baroque aesthetic, awash with richly textured visual overlays and prolific art-historical quotation. *The Guardian's* Peter Bradshaw described the film as "an explicitly, almost pedantically erotic court masque for the cinema, and an attempt to fuse the early modern aesthetic of the sixteenth century with the

16 For more analysis of theater as a "mediating term between painting and film" in *Nightwatching*, see Peucker, *Aesthetic Spaces*, 48–55, quote from 48.

twenty-first century medium of digital film.”¹⁷ As a cinematic masque, it also continued the engagement with theatricality in a political key, specifically by understanding Goltzius and his entourage as performers who try to save their skin by catering to the Margrave of Alsace’s every whim. An equally relevant comparison is with *The Draughtsman’s Contract*: just like the draughtsman Neville, who naively steps into a contractual commitment – on the level of a “paid servant” – that becomes his undoing on account of how it ensnares him in the “crisis in symbolic paternity” that is registered on different levels through the film,¹⁸ Goltzius courts – and obtains – a commission whose dark demands on him exceed the transactional as they tie him to an autocrat’s tyrannical style of rule. As well, like Neville’s, the deal that Goltzius makes has both a sexual and an artistic element: it repeats the structure of a *double* contract with a capacity to tip the balance of power between the contracting parties. The most conspicuous difference, however, is Goltzius’ entrepreneurial savvy, a quality the film relates to his understanding of theatricality, of the political nature of his performance of “virtuosity,” and perhaps even to the (secret) affinity he has with the Margrave on account of the latter’s dependence on the spectacular staging of his power. To put it schematically: Neville’s contract inscribes him in a complex, overdetermined field of visibility on which he fails to obtain perspective (after all, he is only a draughtsman!), while Goltzius’ deal with the Margrave inscribes him in a theatrical field of entertainment and display, in which the dark (sexual and political) games that are being played set him up not only for a deepening spiral of self-exploitation, but also for a chance to extricate himself, if not every other member of his troupe, from vicious courtly dangers. Indeed, in considering the film’s dénouement, I shall argue that Goltzius finds in the condition of theatricality – which this film treats as ontological – a principle of autonomy or freedom that ultimately has primacy over autocratic or sovereign power in the film.

The narrative is set in the winter of 1590–1591, well before the historical Goltzius became successful and could afford to turn to painting. There is no historical basis for assuming that he visited Colmar on his way to Italy, but we know from Karel van Mander’s *Schilderboek* that he travelled through Germany (possibly Alsace) on his journey south, occasionally indulging in theatrics by changing roles with his servant – apparently for his amusement.¹⁹ The character of the Margrave is entirely fictional: the

17 Bradshaw, “Goltzius and the Pelican Company.”

18 For a discussion of this point, see Michael Walsh, “Allegories,” 287–291, quote from 288.

19 Van Mander, *Het Schilderboek*, 330–344, see 333. Greenaway comments on the extent to which he fictionalized the historical material in Ciment, “Entretien.”

idea of a local tyrant or potentate, lording it over an island of autocracy in a world that is on the cusp of discovering ideas of liberty of thought and expression, pushes the biographical material in a political direction and resituates it in a context of transition to the modern. The commission that Goltzius obtains from the Margrave speaks directly to this context: his company from The Hague, in order to finance a printing press that will allow him to produce an illustrated version of the Old Testament – and, in an anticipated second commission, an illustrated Ovid – commits itself to dramatizing six erotic biblical tales on six consecutive nights for the Margrave's entertainment.²⁰ As a special contractual condition, not only does this provide occasion for the dazzling intermedial games in which the film delights – its dialogue with theater, painting, the arts of drawing and engraving, and the staging of elaborate tableaux vivants – but it also permits Greenaway to explore the nature of contractual power in the film within a nexus of relations in which commercial pursuit, artistic and media innovation, and erotic desire all commingle. In this regard, and taking the film as part of Greenaway's "cinema of ideas,"²¹ I see it as significant that in the frame narrative, which has an older and established Goltzius look back on his days at the Alsatian court, the entrepreneurial element is played up in terms of the opportunistic promise of voyeuristic satisfaction – indeed, of the immaterial products of affective and communicative labor. As Goltzius puts it at the start of the film: "We traded in words." As an acknowledgment of the complex implication of his entrepreneurial pursuits in a web of communication and sociality – courtly *and* modern, corporeal *and* mediated by modern print – this adds to the sense that the film invites consideration not just as a historical fiction but in terms of cultural and creative labor conditions today.

For a critical perspective on these conditions as they prevail in our neoliberalized creative and entertainment industries I will rely here on theoretical work in the Italian autonomist tradition (Maurizio Lazzarato, Michael Hardt, Paolo Virno) and the way that some of its insights have been reworked in a Foucauldian vein by Isabell Lorey. What makes this theoretical work attractive, for my purposes, is its concern with the increasing pressures on subjectivity that are exerted when cultural labor becomes performative – as it does when it is focused on the production of affects and more broadly of new socialities and "forms of life." Lazzarato's classic essay "Immaterial Labor" was very clear that with the shift to "post-Fordist" models of labor,

20 The Hague replaces Haarlem, the real Goltzius' base in the Low Countries, in the film.

21 The term is Greenaway's own (qtd in Woods, *Being Naked*, 18, 281).

“workers are expected to become ‘active subjects’ in the coordination of the various functions of production, instead of being subjected to it as simple command.”²² Hardt elaborates on the “affective face” of immaterial labor by arguing that it merges “the instrumental action of economic production [...] with the communicative action of human relations” – a form of breakdown of “the division between economy and culture” that, again, reaches far into the constitution of subjectivity and sociality.²³ Meanwhile Lorey, whose dialog with the Italian tradition is primarily through Virno, supplements this framework with questions about the transformation of present-day public spheres and how they witness the erosion of specifically political freedoms. If for Virno “the boundaries between pure intellectual activity, political action, and labor have dissolved,”²⁴ with qualities traditionally associated with politics subsumed under public forms of communication-as-production, for Lorey, reworking the analysis through the prism of Foucault’s “governmentality,” what is at stake is how today’s regimes of entrepreneurial “freedom” lack any political element but are deeply disciplining and subjugating in effect, “conducting the conduct” of subjects who internalize the logic of market and capital to the point that they constitute themselves as “entrepreneurs of the self.” For Lorey, as for Virno, the “virtuosity” this exacts seems emptied of political qualities, even as it takes place in spaces that are the home of political action.²⁵ The precarious artist or creative worker is emblematic of the convolutions and paradoxes of this condition, which sets an expectation of public, performative excellence that turns “virtuosity” into “a self-referential and competitive servility. Virtuoso labour thus shows itself as ‘universal *servile work*.’”²⁶

Let me build on this framework to highlight *Goltzius*’ contemporary resonance and critical allegorical potential. Crucially, while artistic entrepreneurship finds its epitome in Goltzius himself within the narrative – he pioneers technical innovation and risks his skin for a business opportunity – it also works in it as a generalizable logic that exceeds the confines of individual character or motivation. We have already seen that the terms of the contract introduce a demand that is in excess of artistic production proper. Let us spell out the consequences in terms of an intensification and diversification of communicative and affective

22 Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor,” 135.

23 Hardt, “Affective Labor,” 96.

24 Virno, *Grammar*, 50.

25 Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 73–90.

26 *Ibid.*, 86 (*italics in original*).

labor: the “work” of entertaining the Margrave is driven by intellectual or literary labor (the playwright Boethius, a member of Goltzius’ troupe, who develops the concept for each performance), spills over into forms of emotional and affective labor (Goltzius himself in his contact with the Margrave, chatting him up), and finally into erotic or sexual labor as well (starting with the characters Quadfrey and his wife Portia, coaxed into having intercourse on stage to please the Margrave). It is the stringing together of these different but adjacent forms of labor, all springing from the same contractual source, that constitutes *Goltzius* as a cinematic interrogation of the production of sociality and affective experience under conditions of precarity. If we may relate this allegorically to present-day labor conditions, it is because in their ensemble and adjacency, and in the transitions and slippage between them, the different forms of work in the film paradoxically reveal the de-politicized nature of the space in which they transpire *and* a stubborn political potential: on the one hand, we see a de-politicizing environment as the Margrave pushes back hard against the libertarian energies he has released, disavowing his enjoyment of each night of entertainment by staging “show trials” at his court that censor the Pelican Company’s freedom of speech; yet we see a political energy in Goltzius and his troupe as well, not so much on account of any specific message they may be committed to expressing, as on account of the very event of their performance. To understand this latter point, we need to see how the contract sets in motion a machinery not so much of theater as of *theatricality*, what Samuel Weber has described as a “wandering” principle – a kind of “subversive power” or energy that has no proper place, moves by definition across borders and boundaries, physical and ideal, and is to this extent anarchic.²⁷

At this point it is worth returning to the historical material to ask how the notion of “virtuosity” – as an ambivalent and overdetermined concept – resonates in the context of what is known about Goltzius’ life and work and his place in the art market in his day.²⁸ In art-historical scholarship, Goltzius has served as a locus of discussion for considering the question of when

27 Weber, *Theatricality*, 37: “Theatricality demonstrates its subversive power when it forsakes the confines of the *theatron* and begins to wander: when, in short, it separates itself from theater. For in so doing it begins to escape control by the prevailing rules of representation, whether aesthetic, social, or political.”

28 The question is not without risk of anachronism: cultural-historical interest in public discourses of virtuosity, and indeed in the “virtuoso” as a recognizable cultural type, has been more focused on modern, especially nineteenth- and twentieth-century case studies and examples. E.g. see Brandstetter, “The Virtuoso’s Stage.”

artistic or technical skills and technical invention turn into “virtuosity.”²⁹ Although his biographer Van Mander does not (and possibly could not) use the term virtuosity in his account of Goltzius, he does provide a description that has been hugely influential: “Goltzius is a rare Proteus or Vertumnus in art, because he can transform himself to all forms of working methods.”³⁰ Importantly, the meaning of “virtuosity” here need not be linked to skill or dexterity alone; it has also been connected to notions of changeability and shape-shifting, for which the names of Proteus and Vertumnus stand as shorthand. Walter Melion, in his reading of Van Mander, has thus spoken of a “paradigm of Protean virtuosity” that extended to the artist’s comportment of himself in public, signifying “a constellation of changes – of materials, of appearances, of social profile – that can characterize broadly the artist’s trade – his manipulation of media, his production of persuasive likenesses, his subordination of self in the interests of accurate depiction and in deference to a client’s requirements.”³¹ Taking my cue from this cluster of associations, which move from dexterous imitative and reproductive skills to the artist’s social adaptability, I want to stress the connection between them in the context of rivalry and competition in an art-market dynamic. The point to make is that in terms of the allegorizing procedures or strategies of Greenaway’s film, his virtuosic Goltzius maps well onto the notion of the *contemporary* virtuoso’s plight as governmentally shaped or produced, i.e. as standing for a modality of “freedom” in the public square that intensifies – dramatizes – the conditions of the virtuoso’s “servitude” in order to shape his conduct and make it bend to the laws of the market. In this light, it seems fully motivated that in Greenaway’s film Goltzius is primarily a character who *talks*, while the question of virtuosic technique gets, as it were, displaced from the character onto the film-maker’s own art of remediation, of copying and adaptation. It is through talk that Greenaway’s Goltzius secures his commission, through talk that he organizes the web of relationships in which he is entangled (from his company to the Alsatian court), and through talk that he stays socially afloat once the Margrave has sealed his downfall by wandering into the theatrical space he has set up, violently intervening in the final (sixth) performance in a way that undermines the spectacle of his own rule. This is what the logic of Goltzius’ “servile virtuosity” results in: the possibility of escape from the conundrum of entrepreneurial self-exploitation and the virtuoso’s precarity lies hidden in the performance conditions of virtuosity

29 See different contributions to Michels, *Hendrick Goltzius*.

30 Van Mander qtd. in Breazeale and Sancho Lobis, *Passion and Virtuosity*, 9.

31 Melion, “Karel van Mander’s *Life of Goltzius*,” 115.

itself within this film, as if the political qualities it harbors are never fully extinguished but can always reassert themselves to transform the texture of relations. Notwithstanding the threat of sacrificial violence that constantly runs through *Goltzius* – it sees Boethius, the playwright, beheaded in the context of his dramatic rendering of John the Baptist on the final night of entertainment – it ends on a note of emancipation insofar as it asserts the primacy of the virtuoso's freedom over the trappings of courtly power.

Virtuosic Remediation

The starting point of this chapter was the idea that the figure of the entrepreneurial artist in *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* – seen in the context of a broader genealogical interest in publicness in both “Dutch Masters” films – might be read as emblematic of contemporary neoliberal conditions of labor and production in the “new” creative industries.³² Situating the figure within a paradigm of “virtuosity” that is both historical and critical-theoretical, I have tried to show that it stands for a mode of public self-implication which – reimagined through the prism of cultural memory – maps well onto the entrepreneurial subject's predicament in today's fragile public spheres, marked by experiences of insecurity, fear, and the evisceration of political agency. The freely fictionalized historical setting of the films, ostensibly so remote from today's creative industries, does not detract from the point. The “ocular” public spaces that can be seen to shape social experience in Greenaway's early modern settings resonate curiously with contemporary public life conditions insofar as they exact a performance of the self which, paradoxically, is as servile and subject to discipline as it is individualistic and brandable as “creative.” A cultural figure or type that embodies these paradoxes, the “virtuoso” straddles the early modern *and* our present neoliberal era – its retrieval from the past allegorically illuminating, in a gesture of “preposterous” historical reimagining indeed, the present constellation.

The final aspect to consider, then, is the place of this recovered paradigm of “Protean” virtuosity within the condition of twenty-first-century digital film. How does this paradigm, understood cross-temporally, resonate with the director's art of mnemonic remediation in the context of digital film-making? How might we read the bravura performance of virtuosity in *Goltzius* as a statement about Greenaway's own cinema, self-referential and

32 McRobbie, *Be Creative*.

auteurist as it is? It seems to me that one can only respond to these questions by recalling how virtuosity was visually encoded in the early modern artist's technical and artistic achievement to make imitative reproductive skill as such – the skill of “rendering” the “hands” or signature style of other artists to perfection – into an object of representation.³³ Analogously, by recoding his practice of cinematic remediation in a virtuosic key, Greenaway offers a meta-commentary on his intermedial art practice that relates it to a dynamic of contest and rivalry in the capitalist cultural marketplace, seen in its current, heavily technologized and digitized form. A different way of putting this is to say that Greenaway makes Goltzius pertinent to the condition of digital film-making on account of the artist's Protean skill as a drawer and engraver and the competitive, survivalist drive identified with it within the filmic narrative. On this reading, Goltzius is not simply cast as another proto-cinematic forebear, on a par with the great proto-cinematic quartet of Caravaggio, Rubens, Rembrandt, and Velázquez (claimed by Greenaway with much zest in *Rembrandt's J'Accuse* and elsewhere).³⁴ Rather, this broader proto-cinematic canon, so well established in the director's oeuvre – where it is commonly centered on the motif of “cinematic” artificial light in painting – is here expanded in the direction of a discourse of intermedial dialogue, circulation, and exchange that understands the visual codes of remediation as such, on the model of the historical Goltzius' dexterous “renderings,” in economic and competitive terms. On this reading, the director's turn to Goltzius as the second of his “Dutch Masters” is all the more resonant and compelling as the artist's work included mixed-media work that recognized the historicity of some of the artistic examples it recycled or adapted.

On the one hand, then, Greenaway's film is a tribute from one mnemonic visual artist to another, a celebration of virtuosic remediation as a modality of self-inscription in the history of the visual arts – which, it should be added, is understood here from the perspective of an idea of film as a hybrid, “impure” practice that needs to engage with other media, such as theater and painting, if it is ever to realize itself or to reflect on its own condition. On the other hand, alongside the homage to a past master, the film's virtuosic aesthetic of remediation also inscribes it into the world of cinematic cultural production *today*, casting it as a critical site for reflecting upon the entanglement of art, capitalism, and technological innovation and for claiming a principle

33 Melion, “Karel van Mander's *Life of Goltzius*,” 127.

34 E.g. in the lecture “New Possibilities: Cinema is Dead, Long Live Cinema,” delivered at the Townsend Center for the Humanities at the University of California, Berkeley, on 13 September 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u6yC41ZxqYs>.

of autonomy or freedom from within the over-saturated image culture in which *Goltzius* holds a self-conscious place. We may conclude that following *Prospero's Books* – among other 1990s films in which he pioneered new visual overlay techniques, forging a unique cinematic vocabulary on the cusp of the digital era – *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* marks a new Protean moment in Greenaway's intermedial cinema, one that celebrates virtuosic remediation even as it recognizes how the practice is deeply internal to the capitalist culture of making a business of art.

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