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« Realities of illusion »

Compositing in *The Lady and the Duke*

Or unlikelihood as effect for truth

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Abstract

The Lady and The Duke (2001) is an atypical movie by its duality in unity, mainly resulting from the digital incrustation of real actors in pictorial settings. Éric Rohmer, resorting to that obvious a visual technique and to that improbable effect, has paradoxically wished to produce an impression of truth in the audience. *The Lady and the Duke* is a movie on perspectives and distance putting: the one that can be found at the heart of the creation of directing and of composite image, that of the heroine, who cannot interact with her environment and that of the audience, taken aback by the ambiguity of cinematographic artifice, as real effects are present while there are no probable illusion. In having an audience watch a story in history, Rohmer invites them to observe between the layers of images and memories that compose this palimpsest-movie, that make appear in filigree the (dis)illusions of past and present.

Keywords: chroma key, composite image, visual special effects, pictoriality, illusion, disillusion

Full text (PDF file)

Chroma keying echoes back to a technique born from the will to integrate an image in or on another or to assemble various visual elements together, resulting in a composite image. Chroma keying appears to be determined by a process similar *in principle* to the very definition of a composite image (two images merged to make only one.)[1] However, as Jean-Paul Fargier underlined it,[2] this image is also characterized by this unique relationship to live action, to instantaneousness and simultaneity: both elements keep their own autonomy in the end, their "independent reality"[3] in the final image, allowing the creation of all kinds of images that can be modified to one's will. Video chroma keying might however be in accordance with some of the ambitions of cinematographic chroma keying: that of tending to overcome the temporal linearity of traditional sequential editing and to favor in-shot editing. Far beyond video art, it mainly is a measure of visual representation which often appears illusionist, as it allows to create a homogeneous space from heterogeneous elements combined together.[4] Thus, the specificity of chroma keyed images, as a special effect, is to represent an appearance of reality, or on the contrary to void an image of any appearance of reality. If we agree with Edgar Morin's[5] or Clément Rosset's[6] thoughts, it appears that the relationship between reality and imagination is not a conflictual one: "The perception of reality and the representation of imagination are made of the same canvas"[7] (as a reference to Shakespeare's expression in *The Tempest*: "We are such stuff as dreams are made on"). Imagination would be nothing more than reality "displaced" unto "another scene"[8], in relations to space and time. A chroma keyed image is a paradoxical image—a fundamentally baroque image,[9] that is composed on the basis of decomposition, which is both unique and multiple, realistic and unrealistic. It would even be, to quote Edgar Morin's

1 We echo here to Philippe Dubois' study, "La question vidéo face au cinéma : déplacements esthétiques," in Franck Beau, Philippe Dubois and Gérard Leblanc (eds.), *Cinéma et dernières technologies*, Paris, Brussels, INA/De Boeck Université, 1998, p. 198 *sq*.

2 Jean-Paul Fargier, "Les effets de mes effets sont mes effets," *Communications*, no. 48, "Vidéo," 1988, p. 93 *sqq*. See also Jean-Paul Fargier, "L'homme incrusté," *Cahiers du* cinéma, no. 328, special issue "Télévision," fall 1981, p. 60 *sq*.

3 Philippe Dubois, Marc-Emmanuel Melon and Colette Dubois, "Cinéma et vidéo: interpénétrations," in *Communications*, no. 48, "Vidéo," 1988, p. 279.

4 Caroline Renouard, *Les Effets esthétiques et narratifs de la technique de l'incrustation, L'image composite dans les mises en image(s) spectaculaires*, Giusy Pisano PhD advisor, Université Paris-Est, 26 November 2012.

5 Edgar Morin, *Le Cinéma ou l'Homme imaginaire. Essai d'anthropologie* [1956], Paris, Minuit, 1977. Also published in English: Edgar Morin, *The Cinema or The Imaginary Man*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2005.

6 Clément Rosset, *Fantasmagories suivi de Le Réel, l'imaginaire et l'illusoire*, Paris, Minuit, 2006.

7 Clément Rosset, *Fantasmagories suivi de Le Réel, l'imaginaire et l'illusoire*, Paris, Minuit, 2006, p. 105.

8 Rosset here refers to *Clefs pour l'imaginaire* by Octave Mannoni.

9 We especially think of Gérard Genette's formulation, when he says that "Dividing (sharing) to unite, is the formula to baroque order. Isn't that the one of the language?", Gérard Genette, *Figures 1*, Paris, Seuil, 1966, p. 38.

complexity concept, a diabolical image, because this image accepts its contradictory nature: "The dialogical principle allows us to maintain duality in unity. It blends two terms both compatible and antagonistic."[10] In other words, the meaning and form of an initial image are distorted, mutilated, manipulated to be modelled, reconstructed, reunified with other image fragments to compose a final composite image. The incrustation or superposition in one image of several elementary and dissimilar images will result in one final complex and complete image.

We have chosen to analyze the creation of a paradoxical illusion in the movie *The Lady and the Duke* by Éric Rohmer (2001). This historical drama features—during scenes located in exterior settings—chroma keyed images, through the incrustation of actors in pictorial settings. We see here the reunion of a body (real) and a set (a digitized painting), where the body transmits, like a virus, the traces of its reality upon the unreal set that surrounds it, participating to the presence of a creative geography[11] within the shot. We can observe a contradictory highlight occurring in the device used, as the audience knows at once that there is a trick. Those obviously tricked shots thus comprise an added issue, that of creating reality, or more precisely likelihood, giving to the characters' bodies a specific place, as they are presented as the only real elements in the shot, but also as the only foreign elements to an artificially composed image.

After submission of Éric Rohmer's archives at the IMEC—Institut mémoires de l'édition contemporaine (Institute for the Memory of Contemporary Publications)—and thanks to many testimonies provided by the filmmaker's former collaborators, the making of this unusual movie was carefully explored by Antoine de Baecque and Noël Herpe in their biography of Rohmer,[12] which presents in particular the various preparation, production, postproduction and also exploitation issues of *The Lady and the Duke* and how the movie was perceived by the critics. Other academic works have shed a more specific light on the aesthetical and narrative specificities of the movie, such as Marie-Laure Guétin's research, focusing on "revolutionized sets, Rohmer's historical Paris"[13] through which the pictoriality of the movie is broached as a "way to concentrate onto one single set, narration, history and aesthetics"[14]; or Florence Bernard de Courville's

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10 Edgar Morin, *Introduction à la pensée complexe* [1990], Paris, Seuil, 2005, p. 99.

11 Lev Koulechov, *L'art du cinéma et autres écrits*, Lausanne, L'Âge d'homme, 1994, p. 52. See also Dominique Château, "Le montage comme expérimentation," *CinémAction*, no. 72, "Les conceptions du montage," 1994, p. 35.

12 Antoine de Baecque and Noël Herpe, *Biographie d'Éric Rohmer*, Paris, Stock, 2014, p. 446 *sq*.

13 Marie-Laure Guétin, "Des décors révolutionnés : le Pari(s) historique d'Éric Rohmer," in Laurence Schifano and Sylvie Robic (eds.), *Rohmer en perspectives*, Nanterre, Presses Universitaires de Paris-Ouest, "L'œil du cinéma," 2014, p. 71 *sq*.

14 Marie-Laure Guétin, "Des décors révolutionnés : le Pari(s) historique d'Éric Rohmer," in Laurence Schifano and Sylvie Robic (eds.), *Rohmer en perspectives*, Nanterre, Presses Universitaires de Paris-Ouest, "L'œil du cinéma," 2014, p. 73.

article, which mentions the derealization of the French Revolution through the resort to artificial settings.[15]

Even if we obviously join into the continuity of these works, and especially in this central theme that is the creation of a show of history through the use of pictorial settings, the angle that will be kept here will nevertheless be more focused on the questioning resulting of the use of chroma key and its effects. We thus wish to understand how the transparency effect, generally observed in the use of visual photorealistic special effects, was here distorted in favor of a spectacular effect. What of the illusion of reality? What does the heterogeneity of the materials used for the fabrication and the representation of a "point of view" let us see of history? We will thus analyze how the meaning effects in *The Lady and the Duke* show (knowingly or not) the ambiguous nature of its visual device— half-way between illusions and disillusions—as much in content as in style.

Beyond the reality effects: the quest for truth by use of artifice

The Lady and the Duke by Éric Rohmer (2001) was adapted from a little known literary work, Grace Eliott's memoirs.[16] She was an English aristocrat who lived in Paris during the French Revolution. Éric Rohmer used in this work of fiction (based upon a historical record), an aesthetic process reduced to its simplest expression, bringing back to mind the optical devices of the magic lantern and the early stages of the cinema. However, to reach this goal, the director has used the new technologies of the early 21st century and more precisely the chroma key technique. The resulting visual effect places the actors in pictorial sets reminiscent of Paris during the French Revolution. Hybridization, in Rohmer's movie, is found in an extreme form, through a doubly subjective tale in which points of view superimpose, just as images.

We can indeed find, on the one hand, the personal recount in the memoirs of this young English woman, remaining in the background of the revolutionary events, due to her status as a foreigner, and yet becoming an involved individual due to her status as an aristocrat. On the other hand, is presented Rohmer's cinematographic storytelling, which seizes Grace Eliott's peculiar story and makes an original fictional work out of it. Great history is represented through the focus of the incrustation of this actress interpreting the heroine in pictorial sets, enforcing the distance between her and the events. Thus, we are confronted to a triple story: that of its author, Grace Elliott, of its reader, Éric Rohmer, who both are the audience of history and, finally, the tale of history itself and its pictorial representations. If Grace Elliot grasps history from her specific point of view, Rohmer does not objectively recreate historical events. He tries to recreate through fiction the English woman's feelings. Besides this distance to history

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15 Florence Bernard de Courville, "*L'Anglaise et le Duc*, le réel et le tableau," in Noël Herpe (ed.), *Rohmer et les autres*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, "Le Spectaculaire," 2007, p. 169 *sq*.

16 Grace Elliott, *Journal de ma vie durant la Révolution française* [1801], Paris, Max Chaleil, 2001.

supported by the filmmaker, *The Lady and the Duke* will be perceived by parts of its audience and the critics as a historical drama supporting the royalist cause.

This movie, like many others, is a testimony to the tensions existing between history and *fictio*, between historical facts and specific points of view, and this, paradoxically, in a domain that is usually based upon the spectacular and artifice. Rohmer has experimented in *The Lady and the Duke* a cinematographic form that goes beyond the oppositions between history and *fictio*, thanks to a peculiar aesthetics and its tale mixing written history, memoirs and fiction. *The Lady and the Duke* is an unusual work in Éric Rohmer's filmography, just like *The Marquise of O* (1976) and *Perceval le Gallois* (1978)—especially because of the directing devices used, that are in a complete break with the narrative processes and the aesthetics used in his other movies. In the latter three, the filmmaker has used processes for image-creation in which anachronism and artifice are put forward. Besides these movies, Rohmer's filmography is in the tradition of André Bazin's theoretical work. Incidentally, for the theorist and filmmaker, just as Tom Gunning described it, "as an art form whose very mission was to lay bare realities."[17] Bazin and Rohmer dreamed of a "zero degree in style" for the cinema, far from embellishments and any kind of effects. And yet, when watching *The Marquise of O*, *Perceval le Gallois* or *The Lady and the Duke*, one can only see the formal process of a stylisation pushed to the extreme. Regarding *Perceval le Gallois*, Tom Gunning has provided a pertinent answer to this choice, strange at first glance—even destabilizing—, from one of the most symbolic filmmakers of the New Wave:

> Cinematographic realism does not consist in simple verisimilitude or in making things more vivid or dramatic; rather, it is about respecting the weight and the resistance of both languages and things.[18]

Rohmer's intention was to use the visual and narrative codes of the historical era represented in his movies. According to Rohmer, this process was the only way to show with realism historical or mythological themes: it does not represent the lie of the fiction through the illusion of the likely, but it offers a representation so tinged with artifice and unrealism that only "reality" can result from it. It is, in a way, the mathematical formula of $(-) \cdot (-) = (+)$, here: artifice $\cdot$ artifice = reality, or even, subjectivity $\cdot$ subjectivity = objectivity. This concept goes further, in a way, into one of Edgar Morin's ideas: "What is to be precisely examined, is that surprising phenomenon through which the illusion of reality cannot be separated from the fact that it is indeed an illusion, and yet without this latter fact killing the

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17 Tom Gunning, "Éric Rohmer et l'héritage du réalisme cinématographique," in Noël Herpe (ed.), *Rohmer et les autres*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2007, p. 12. Also in English: Tom Gunning, "Rohmer: critic and philosopher. Éric Rohmer and the legacy of cinematic realism," in Leah Anderst (ed.), *The Films of Eric Rohmer: French New Wave to Old Master*, Basingstoke, Macmillan Publishers, 2014. p. 24.

18 Tom Gunning, "Éric Rohmer et l'héritage du réalisme cinématographique," in Noël Herpe (ed.), *Rohmer et les autres*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2007, p. 18. Also in English: Tom Gunning, "Rohmer: critic and philosopher. Éric Rohmer and the legacy of cinematic realism," in Leah Anderst (ed.), *The Films of Eric Rohmer: French New Wave to Old Master*, Basingstoke, Macmillan Publishers, 2014. p. 31.

feeling of truth."[19] If the likely is the opposite of reality, then what would come closer to it would be the unlikeky, especially thanks to the use of composite imaging and the incrustation of artificial pictorial sets of an antiquated Paris. Far from the *historia*, Rohmer has not tried in *The Lady and the Duke* to show what really happened, he offered as the subject of his scenario a plot situated within a confused time period that still today we do not fully grasp. He wanted to direct and present to this 21st century audience the "reality" of a witness who had lived and suffered memorable events of our history.

Grace Elliott's tale reveals an aristocrat's peculiar point of view on the historical events of the Revolution. Her memoirs are doubly subjective: they are not solely about telling her personal story, but rather defending and justifying the positions of the Duke of Orléans, even though Grace did not share his political views. By taking the point of view of this moderate English royalist, Rohmer wanted to show in his movie the distance of this privileged witness in regards to historical events. By choosing not to place his movie in history, but rather in choosing a character outside the French Revolution for heroine (just as D.W. Griffith had directed it through the events of his *Orphans of the storm* in 1922), Rohmer has taken to indirectly represent a capital moment of the creation of the French identity and, in the same way, to offend the audience. For "he is not in communion with the mythology of the French Revolution,"[20] part of the audience and some journalists and historians have been taken aback by the movie, to the extent that they saw in Rohmer a partisan for royalty, like Jean-François Kahn in the magazine *Marianne*:

> It is a neomonarchist and thus profoundly "counter-revolutionary" vision of this founding event. The eruption, which is getting more obvious, of an anti-republican wave in the country prepared us to a new "revisionist", as we say, reading of our nationalist epic. […] What emerges, as it was rarely put until now, […] is a ferocious, implacable and terrible hate of the people. […] The favorites of the "top"—Rohmer included—say what they really think of what is "underneath." A mix of loathing and despise.[21]

The director has defended his point of view in the press and even in the DVD edition of the movie, when he felt the need to justify himself "once and for all":

> I did not make this movie for political reasons, I support no party, neither royalist, nor anti-royalist. However, I would like to contribute to maintaining in the public, young or old the taste for History. […] In our country, we have a great potential interest in History, but historical dramas have often shown themselves a little casual in regards of historical truth. […] Here, Grace Elliott's story was a very complete basis, all the way to its dialogues.[22]

The use of digital compositing has partly been, without a doubt, at the origin of the controversy that was raised, for it has been seen as a stylized improvement of Grace Eliott's point of view. Cinema is an art of the present for Rohmer. He has

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19 Edgar Morin, *Le Cinéma ou l'Homme imaginaire. Essai d'anthropologie* [1956], Paris, Minuit, 1977, preface of the new edition. Also published in English: Edgar Morin, *The Cinema or The Imaginary Man*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2005.

20 Jean Tulard, "Une cruauté extraordinaire," *Le Figaro*, 12 September 2001.

21 Jean-François Kahn, « L'Aveu de la haine du peuple », *Marianne*, 3 September 2001.

22 Éric Rohmer, DVD *L'Anglaise et le Duc*, Pathé Vidéo, 2002.

not tried to recreate the past in his movie, but to offer, through compositing, a "present" of the past. The audience, left at a distance through the visual artifice of compositing, can agree or not with Grace's point of view. Even more so than in movies where directing is aiming at maintaining the mimetic illusion at all costs, and thus finally not allowing the audience any liberty. However, this aesthetics of the pictorial set that is (almost) frozen, and this will be reproached to the movie by some critics, can also—paradoxically—not allow any room to imagination, "as if history was a cast die, as if it were useless questioning it and trying to set oneself into a past-present that would be unlikely, yet open."[23]

The perspectives of the past in the present—the present in the past

At first glance, the choice of combining digital video and pictorial settings is curious in Rohmer's work, creating a movie between *avant-garde* and academicism. In truth, he settles perfectly in the precise aesthetic and narrative finalities of the movie, which allows to keep historical events at a distance. On the one side, the heroine cannot interact with her environment (the painting symbolizing the world surrounding her), and on the other, the audience is taken aback by the revelation of the cinematographic artifice, that does not put them, for once, in front of a realistic illusion.

In concrete terms, Rohmer and his team put in place the following production device: the actors (filmed on a green *Betanum* screen) have been chroma keyed into painted canvases imitating the artistic style of the Revolution era and representing the great Parisian squares as we could have seen them at the time of the Terror. Then, images have been kinescoped[24] in 35 mm, bringing tint areas, shimmers, a patina of colors and a grain, reinforcing the pictorial aspect of the movie, reminding the touches of a brush on a canvas at the end of the 18th century. During ten years, Rohmer has looked in vain for means of reaching this result.[25] He had to wait for the new cinematographic technologies to develop sufficiently so that they might serve at best the statement of his movie without losing in image quality. In the same fashion, he waited for kinescoping methods to become efficient enough, which video and digital technologies allowed as soon as the end of the 1990s. Rohmer has explained his chroma keying choices as follows:

> Only digital techniques allowed this. Exteriors as we generally show them don't appeal to me. I reject this kind of idiotic reconstitution, this pseudo-fidelity. In cinema, we have never seen the old Paris, but only too many settings created to figure it. Paris did the Revolution and I wanted to show it directly, with a wide-angle, no reconstitution, or cropping during the shooting, or extra cutting during edition. Only chroma keying the characters into paintings of the time

23 Philippe Petit, "Le film qui enterre 1789," *Marianne*, 3 September 2001.

24 Kinescoping is a technique consisting in transferring unto a reel images initially shot in video.

25 As reminded by Antoine de Baecque and Noël Herpe, the filmmaker had been looking into compositing since 1990, when he chroma keyed a first image into another, representing the French artist Arielle Dombasle, for the music clip *Amour Symphonique*. Antoine de Baecque and Noël Herpe, *Biographie d'Éric Rohmer*, Paris, Stock, 2014, p. 429 *sq*.

> could make this dream come true. The actors had to come out of the
> painting or the engraving. Their reality is above all pictorial.[26]

Rohmer has put his characters in his movie shots like a painter would in portraits. Incidentally, in interior scenes, he hung numerous paintings on the walls, allowing the characters to interact with their pictorial representations. He introduces his heroes by lingering on their portraits painted in an 18th century fashion. Moreover, the actors are centered like the portraits (meaning in a large frozen shot and sometimes up-close) so as to reinforce the personalities of Grace and the Duke, fixed in time and in action.

According to Pascal Bonitzer, the most common relationship between painting and cinema seem to be the trompe-l'œil.[27] Cinema and painting, to make forget the platitude of the image, need to give the eye the illusion of depth, thanks to some perspective rules. Incidentally, perspective itself is the result of an artificial technique used both in cinema and painting, like Daniel Arasse specified it:

> Alberti's window does not open on the world at all, it is not a
> detail of the world that we see through that window, it is the frame
> through which we contemplate history. It is the rectangular drawing of
> the surface to be painted, the framing, which determines all
> perspective.[28]

In *The Lady and the Duke*, the presence of both point of view devices, that of the painting and that of the set with a green background, doubly tackles the issue of perspective and depth illusion. Éric Rohmer the filmmaker, and Jean-Baptiste Marot the "painter-designer" of the pictorial views in the movie, have studied the means to articulate the two perspectives, so as to bring a continuity between the composited actors and the pictorial settings :

> We proceeded by trial and error. We had to understand how the
> character could "get inside" the set. We tried with extras walking
> under a porch, and it worked. Then, we needed to adapt a little,
> especially when the depth of the set was bigger than that of the studio:
> the perspective of the Rue Saint-Honoré, for instance, was to reach
> two hundred meters, while the set was only 40 meters.[29]

During two years, they designed thirty-seven paintings to create the outside sets of the movie as precisely as possible, so that each shot would give the illusion that it would possess a three-dimensional view space of Paris. These sets were directly inspired by pre-Revolution paintings and engravings, exhibited at the Carnavalet Museum in Paris, where the main iconographic sources of Paris at the time can be found today. After this, the "painter-designer's" point of view was to become the point of view of the camera.

The position and the focal length of the camera had to be very precisely defined for every shot. Éric Rohmer had to know the shifts and movements of each character so as to define entry and exit of field of vision and define the

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26 Éric Rohmer, "'J'aurais pu être beaucoup plus violent,'" entretien avec Antoine de Baecque et Jean-Marc Lalanne, *Libération*, September 7th, 2001.

27 Pascal Bonitzer, *Décadrages : peinture et cinéma*, Paris, Cahiers du cinéma/Étoile, 1987.

28 Daniel Arasse, *Histoires de peintures*, Paris, Gallimard, 2006, p. 98 *sq.*

29 Éric Rohmer, interview by Aurélien Ferenczi in the DVD version of *L'Anglaise et le Duc*, Pathé Vidéo, 2002.

centring of the painting.[30] Interior sets have also been thought out depending on the aesthetics the filmmaker wanted: all is constructed around the painted canvases placed as a trompe-l'œil on movable (uncovered) walls, thus creating a very dense matter in image, extremely similar to exterior paintings.

Diane Baratier, Rohmer's head camerawoman, had to learn to work in a very different manner with the digital processes used in *The Lady and the Duke*. First of all, with the Digital Betacam: this allowed new settings, specifically in the range of colorimetry, which provided images with those glimmering tones and patinas which corresponded to exterior sets, as well as interior ones. Shooting on a green background requires great mastery of colors and light, because one should always pay great attention to the actors' complexion, often reflecting the green color of the background.[31] One should try and counteract this effect by finding the perfect light. Diane Baratier worked with a closed aperture, so as to have an important field depth, allowing to compensate the featureless aspects provided by digital images. Scenic composition and the actors' interpretation could thus be inspired by the pictorial works of the late 18th century, implying a voluntarily constrained acting, restricted by the confinements of image centering and emphasizing *in fine* the helplessness of characters imprisoned in their sociopolitical statuses and the uncontrollable events of the Terror. Diane Baratier then had to integrate the different points of view, Rohmer's first of all, that of the painter and paintings afterwards, and finally that of the camera that had to be placed on predetermined axes, so that the various perspectives match with the objects and the actors' movements on screen. She managed to "center" the scene and the comedians on a green background, getting her bearings with laser beams projected on the ground and green markers marking the volumes that would later fill the spaces of the paintings (streets, bridge, buildings, squares…). After the shooting, during the compositing work in postproduction,[32] she added animated elements in certain views to give reality and lively effects to the scenes, but also, more space to the frame: birds taking flight, the Seine shimmering, etc.

The show of history: device exteriority and feeling of reality

Thus, compositing was in the end used by Rohmer to give an impression of exteriority to history that would suit Grace Elliott's story, thus allowing *fictio* to take form and truth—as he conceives it—to appear. It is through pictorial imagination and its cinematographic shape that Rohmer seeks these results.

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30 Jean-Baptiste Marot, interview by Aurélien Ferenczi on the DVD version of *L'Anglaise et le Duc*, Pathé Vidéo, 2002.

31 See Réjane Hamus-Vallée and Caroline Renouard, "La peau grise. Analyse comparative de trois procédés d'incrustation cinématographique," in Priska Morrissey and Emmanuel Siety (eds.), collected papers of the symposium *Filmer la peau*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, "Le Spectaculaire," to be published.

32 Buf Compagnie, helped by Duboi's filming structures, has realized all incrustations and other visuals for the movie, mobilizing ten graphic designers between July and December 2000. See especially Antoine de Baecque and Noël Herpe, *Biographie d'Éric Rohmer*, Paris, Stock, 2014, p. 434 *sq.*

Artifice becomes real: "It is not the painting that enters reality. It is the opposite, the painting becomes real."[33]

> I was aiming at reinforcing the impression of truth. Inasmuch as I show painted canvases, I wanted to set this stance at once. […] The artificiality of the painting has been dictated by the search for truth […]. I think that the style of the paintings, their light, holds a truth, the one I am looking for. Maybe not a historical truth, but an artistic one.[34]

From a cinematographic stand point, what Rohmer has tried to recreate through this visual format is neither the historical fact, which works as a background to the movie—in the literal meaning for the movie—neither a judgement on the events. The anachronism of these images, put forward by a compositing technique mixing past and present, fits the filmmaker's project: being the audience to the show of history.

This distance in the movie is due to the technique of compositing, but also through devices appearing on screen. A precise example of this distancing from history with the help of a technical equipment, is the sequence where Grace Elliot refuses to take part in the "show" of the King's execution, and allows her servant to watch it through a spy-glass and tell her what she sees. The observation location chosen by Grace and her servant is significant: they are on a kind of terrace, a panoramic view point in the small town of Meudon providing an "observation point" of Paris. They are standing on the balcony of the theater of history. As explained by Danièle Heymann in regards to this scene:

> "All I see is a little bit of blue and red" says [the servant]. We can hear the muffled rumble of the drums. And that's it, History crosses a woman's face. This is exactly where Rohmer was leading us.[35]

The events represented in wide angles and depth, seized from a monocular point of view (like the panoramic scene) and obviously the pictorial setting, take part in this distance sought for by the filmmaker. This distance, according to the filmmaker, is necessary to the discovery of that feeling of truth, the one felt by the audience in response to the events experienced by Grace Elliott. The filmmaker reminds that historical dramas are no more than a performance: he tells the story in history, he juggles between cinematographic and pictorial frames and takes great pleasure in unsettling his spectators who sometimes can ask themselves if they are watching a painting of the era or a movie:

> The movie starts with paintings and I would like for an uninformed member of the audience to think that these are from the Revolution, and be surprised to see these paintings come to life.[36]

The historical events represented, as well as the tangible and memorial presence of paintings—an art form through which images of the French Revolution are returned back to us— take part in the pictorial distance wished by

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33 Éric Rohmer, "Je voulais que la réalité devienne tableau," interview with Patrice Blouin, Stéphane Bouquet and Charles Tesson, *Cahiers du cinéma*, July-August 2001.

34 Éric Rohmer, interview with Jean-Michel Frodon, *Le Monde*, 5 September 2001.

35 Danièle Heymann, "La révolution sur le visage d'une femme," *Marianne*, 3 September 2001.

36 Éric Rohmer, interview by Aurélien Ferenczi in the DVD version of *L'Anglaise et le Duc*, Pathé Vidéo, 2002.

the filmmaker.[37] Éric Rohmer, resorting back to composite images as visible as the one he used, has hoped to give extra truth to the device, and then, to the story of the movie itself.

Special visual effects do not only produce mockery and do not only aim at making sensational and artificial creations. Paradoxically, a technique like chroma keying can bring the same truth effect to an image as described by Bazin in the Editing Forbidden and his now canonic formula "a dress without any thread of reality": "When the essence of a scene demands the simultaneous presence of two or more factors in the action. Montage is ruled out."[38] Bazin considers that the goal of any movie (fiction or documentary) is to create in the audience the illusion that they are watching a real event, taking place in front of them as if it were day to day truth. This illusion is a trick nevertheless, since reality does exist, for us the audience, only in a physical, concrete, temporal and continuous space. The unity of frame takes over and, as a consequence, through the superimposition of various "shots" inside a single image (a same frame), the effect of truth—underlying the feeling of truth wished by Rohmer and proof of a form of reality of the presented action—will allow to be fully exploited. Rohmer thus resorts to the main interests of chroma keying of a composite image: respecting the frame unity, even though this homogeneity is artificially recreated. "Only the frame warrants the unity of special effects"[39] as explained by Réjane Hamus-Vallée. This principle of "confrontation" of various temporal actions in one same space implies "that the reality of one infects the unreality of the other, and the other way around."[40]

To conclude, composite imaging in this movie is paradoxical, for it presents itself as both illusionist and disillusionist. It is constructed as an ensemble of various forms of representation, of style, of narration, of values, that would join together and develop by themselves a new discourse, a new complexity[41]. Stories inherent to spectacular movies relying on composite images would be like hypertexts that would make us read between the lines—read between the layers of images. Just like the transtextuality described by Gérard Genette,[42] where

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37 As explained by the production director, Françoise Etchegaray, what Rohmer was trying to do by resorting to digital special effects "looked more like a child's mind: animated paitings, in the manner of the magical lanterns," Antoine de Baecque and Noël Herpe, *Biographie d'Éric Rohmer*, Paris, Stock, 2014, p. 434. This aesthetic influence of the magical lantern is particularly well put in "light" in the menu of the DVD, as the projection device is directly represented in the multimedia animation of the DVD.

38 André Bazin, *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma* [1958], Paris, Cerf, 2011, p. 59. Can also be found in English: André Bazin, *What is Cinema, Essays selected and translated by Hugh Gray*, Berkeley/Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2005, vol. 1., p. 50.

39 Réjane Hamus-Vallée, *La Fabrique du cinéma: du trucage aux effets spéciaux*, PhD thesis under the supervision of Jean-Louis Leutrat, Paris, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle-Paris 3, 2002, p. 393.

40 Réjane Hamus-Vallée, *La Fabrique du cinéma: du trucage aux effets spéciaux*, PhD thesis under the supervision of Jean-Louis Leutrat, Paris, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle-Paris 3, 2002, p. 393.

41 Edgar Morin, *Introduction à la pensée complexe* [1990], Paris, Seuil, 2005.

42 Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré*, Paris, Seuil, 1982. Gérard Genette uses palimpsest in a figurative meaning to designate the "hypertext" (that integrate in the more global study of transtextuality), creating a relation between one text and others, the lower layers of the text appear in filigree.

hypertext can be found, composite imaging can be used to relate an image to others, the successive layers of images are in filigree, both in style and in content. The device of composite imaging can be used as a palimpsest, for historical dramas that can be in a dynamic situated between past and present. It thus echoes to the complexity of history that, just like Morin's complex thought, is not linear and gives way to dynamic layers of spaces, time and points of view that multiply and join. *The Lady and the Duke* is a composite movie that, through chroma keying, gathers layers of images and stories, both consciously and unconsciously, that can be considered as laying between history and performance, between past and present, between visible and invisible. The historical "content", present here both in the figurative and in the proper sense is, indisputably, far too unreliable for the director to have made a realistic representation of the settings. The aesthetic and narrative references, inspirations that make this movie continuously reveal the presence of central images from the past ("museum images")[43] behind the visible physical composite image. The movie puts into pictures memory, point of view and spectacular story "fragments" that superimpose upon each other like a palimpsest. The quest for truth, as wished by Rohmer in *The Lady and the Duke*, thus seems to have been motivated by the creation and perception of a utopic "false-bottom" space, between artifice and reality, between (dis)illusion of past and present.

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43 Hans Belting, *Pour une anthropologie des images* [2001], Paris, Gallimard, 2004, p. 93.

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