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**The Written Word and Memory
in Griffith's *Intolerance*
and Dreyer's *La passion de Jeanne d'Arc*¹**

*L'immense et compliqué
palimpseste de la mémoire*
Baudelaire

Among the different ways the cinema has of summoning up and activating the remembrances of the viewer, the manner in which the written word is used in silent films plays a special role. The structure of silent films with intertitles is well suited to the *mise en scène* of historical subjects, since the written word is a vehicle of history. History cannot be drawn up without writing; in itself it is a form of writing. Hence, this function of the written word is important from the point of view of memory. But this is not the only function we will be dealing with here: the written word has other «memorial» implications for the viewer.

We will base our discussion on two films, *Intolerance* (D. W. Griffith, USA, 1916) and *La passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (Carl T. Dreyer, France, 1928); two «monumental films» from the history of the cinema which present historical «monuments». A considerable number of studies, articles and works have been devoted to these two films, which are considered major expressions of cinematographic art and are classed among the great works of the seventh art. But this is not why they have been chosen here as in a case study, what I want to do is simply isolate certain mechanisms of memory which are activated for the viewer by the written word (notably in the intertitles) and to see how they interact with each other. These films are notable for the very extensive use they make of intertitles, including texts directly borrowed from historical and religious culture. They mark decisive moments in terms of the function of the written word in the development of cinematographic forms.

Intolerance came out in 1916, at a time when the feature-length film was imposing itself, a development rendered possible by, among other factors, the use of intertitles which made it possible to tell longer and more complex stories and to fix their meaning for the viewer.

Once the lecturer was excluded from screenings, intertitles were used as captions to the animated stories. They played a preponderant role in the construction of narrative continuity and in the lengthening of films. We may even wonder if they partly motivated these developments. As proof, we may cite the fact that the epic dimension grew stronger in the years 1910 to 1920, at a time when the written texts of narrative and dialog intertitles were multiplying and diversifying.² In place of the titles which merely announced the tableaux that followed them (as their name indicates) often in the form of noun phrases, succeeded intertitles which, over the next decade, were blended with increasing effectiveness into the continuum of moving images. The dialogue intertitles took their place between shots of the speaking characters, and the functions of the narrative intertitles grew more varied. They were drawn up with great care to give indications about the succession of events, the psychology of the characters, etc. They established a truly «scriptural» voice that seemed to know everything about the story being told and shared its knowledge with the viewer.

The film of the 1910-1920 period integrates the written word it uses, as a support, to affirm its maturity, and to frame up its narrative; in short, to set up what Noël Burch calls *Le Mode de Représentation Institutionnel* (M.R.I.).³

La passion de Jeanne d'Arc which came out in 1928, was the last silent film of Dreyer, who made it just before his first sound film, *Vampyr*. It is a pivotal film of the end of the silent era, and its massive use of dialogue intertitles was fiercely criticized (though its artistic dimension was widely recognized).

The arrival of synchronized sound was imminent and subsequent historians and critics, such as Georges Sadoul, Jean Mitry and Alexandre Arnoux, wrote of feeling bothered by the absence of sound⁴, deploring that the film was not made two years later as the silent cinema «is never more at ease than in the field of pure image»⁵, and insisting that the spoken word «was cruelly absent from this so-called silent film» and this «prevented us from giving our full ingenuous consent»⁶.

These judgements show to what extent the intertitles in this film, making considerable use of dialogue, were seen as obsolete because of the arrival of the talkies and, more generally, how the use of the written word in the cinema was decried (up to just twenty years ago) as part of the handicap inflicted on the silent cinema.⁷

It is indeed true that the viewers of today, those of the 1950s or 1960s, and the contemporaries of these films will obviously not have the same perception of the

memory value of these two films for the history of the cinema, a value which has changed greatly over the recent years, particularly due to archival work. Compared to the contemporaries of these films, today's viewer watching these films finds himself, caught up in an additional layer of memory, that of a memory-document from the history of film. Among other things, the two films are celebrated in the festivals linked to the memory of cinema⁸, and each film calls up memories of the different successive versions which the archivists and historiographers have striven to find nearest to the original, to the «true» version, the mythical «incunabulum» copy.⁹

We will leave aside this memory to try to understand, or at least lay down the main lines of and untangle the remembering processes called into play by the use of the written word, the type of memory aroused by the written word within these two films¹⁰ for the viewer of yesterday or today.

A first level of memory is established by the placing in parallel of episodes from History and by the implicit indication that the film refers to events presented as having really taken place and forming part of the pre-established «texts» belonging to historical culture. In this framework, the presentation of a book introducing these dramatized scenes strengthens the representation of the collective memory.

At a second level, the structural function of intertitles, linked to the memorial value of the materiality of the written word, consolidates the historical substance of these representations and re-representations of a past that has become mythical through repeated representation.

At a third and more intimate level, that of memory within each human being, the reading of the written word and the linguistic linking-up with the images require a basic remembering activity if there is to be a real understanding of the filmic continuum beyond the heterogeneity of the material expression, and intertitles/moving photographic images. The viewer's prior knowledge of the historical genre and the story about to be told links up with and influences this remembering activity.

The written word and associations of source accounts

It should be noted that the beginnings of cinematography produced a large number of films presenting episodes from history. Our two chosen films belong to this historical mode of the silent screen which includes numerous works on the theme of Joan of Arc alone.¹¹ They also belong among the numerous religious subjects treated in the first thirty years of cinema, which produced many versions of the Life and Passion of Christ, as well as films based on Bible stories and lives of the saints.¹²

André Gaudreault notes that:

Les films produits au début du siècle sur le thème de «la Vie et la Passion du Christ» ont [...] occupé une place si importante dans la production du cinéma des premiers temps que l'on peut, à juste titre, les considérer comme ayant constitué un véritable genre, en bonne et due forme.¹³

Another thing that *Intolerance* and *La passion de Jeanne d'Arc* have in common is that they treat subjects that are both historical and religious and put them in parallel: *Intolerance* establishes relationships between historical events – the fall of Babylon, the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre, and episodes from the life and passion of Christ – and a fiction presented as contemporary with the film. As for *La passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, the title gives advance notice of the parallel made by the film between the trial of Joan of Arc and the passion of Christ.¹⁴

Thus, these two films refer back to their historical sources and to a historical-religious account which, at least in the case of the story of Joan of Arc and the passion, also belongs to the much more ancient tradition of representations made with magic lanterns slides, school books, catechisms, books of saints' lives and church stained-glass windows, etc. They are likewise figurative presentations of those mythical accounts belonging to the tradition of Christian images which, since the Middle Ages, created a spectacular «musée imaginaire des figures» used to back up the doctrinal teaching of Church clerics for a public unable to read.¹⁵

Georges Didi-Huberman notes that this imagery was deliberately designed as part of an intertextual project:

On comprend [...] que l'art figuratif religieux ne se soit jamais contenté de construire ses lieux comme de simples espaces unitaires et ses temporalités comme de simple histoires racontées. Ces lieux mettent plusieurs espaces et plusieurs histoires en rapport d'association, même lorsqu'il n'y a qu'une seule image. Ils sont des lieux de mémoire au sens très précis que l'ars memoriae – qui, non fortuitement, constitue l'une des structures «épistémiques» les plus prégnantes du Moyen Age – donnait à ce mot. Ils sont de vastes systèmes d'images et de lieux faits pour se rappeler les uns les autres.¹⁶

The hagiographic film of the earliest times is restored to this tradition by François de La Bretèque who explains that the «narrative condensation» which characterized it fit in perfectly with the discontinuity of the cinema of this period, which could show only certain scenes to indicate those not presented, and used ellipses that the lecturer tried to explain, leaving it to the viewer's prior knowledge, stored in memory, to do the rest.¹⁷

Intolerance and *La passion de Jeanne d'Arc* are both edited with the requirements of continuous narration¹⁸, in contrast to the tableaux presentation of the earliest films, yet do not seem to have abandoned the tradition of saints' lives and Passions which superimpose several stories and several moments from a single story. In these two films, the comparisons drawn form part of a system of superimposition set up for the viewer.

In *Intolerance*, the ways the comparisons are made and the method to read them are announced in the title itself: *Intolerance, Love's Struggle Throughout the Ages*, as well as in the first shots, which are intertitles (IT):

IT 1 *Our play is made up of four separate stories, laid in different periods of history, each with its own set of characters.*

IT 2 *Each story shows how hatred and intolerance through all the ages have battled against love and charity.*

IT 3 *Therefore, you will find our play turning from one of the four stories to another, as the common theme unfolds in each.*

IT 5 *Today as yesterday, endlessly rocking, ever bringing the same human passions, the same joys and sorrows.*

The comparison between the different periods will thereafter be set in motion by parallel presentation of episodes from the four stories and re-explained by intertitles between the episodes. The title at the beginning of act II clearly indicates again how to read the scenes that follow:

A Sun-play of the Ages.

INTOLERANCE.

A drama of Comparisons.

ACT II

The intertitles and the parallel montage of the periods are explicit comparative markers.

La passion de Jeanne d'Arc uses implicit comparison, in the form of metaphor (if we consider metaphor to be a comparison not using an explicit comparative link), as its titles indicates.

Hence, both films induce the viewer to remember, in order to establish a transversal circulation within the imagery, and to set up constant reminders. The viewer is instructed how to read both «texts» by means of the written word from the beginning of both films.

With their stories superimposed, these films function, at a deeper level, somewhat like those parchment manuscripts from which the first text has been erased to make way for a second, though not entirely, so that the previous text is still partly legible and influences the meaning of the second one.¹⁹ This idea of palimpsest, of

an initial piece of writing written over but still coming through in places in the new text, forms a useful comparison for the memory value accorded to the written word in a film, through the presentation of a source-book and the intertitles.

Memory values of the written word, books and memory

The reference to a previous written text is clearly indicated to the viewer by the close-up of a book that is opened right at the beginning of both films (a rather frequent device in films, particularly in the silent cinema).

Shot 7 of *Intolerance*, after the first 6 shots that include 5 intertitles and shot 4, where we see Lilian Gish watching by a cradle (a leitmotif shot that signals transitions from one episode to another), gives us a close-up of a leather-bound book, entitled «*Intolerance*». An invisible hand opens it and, when it is fully open, another text appears superimposed over the initial text:

shot 7 (IT 6)

Our first story – out of the cradle of the present.

In a western city we find certain ambitious ladies banded together for the «uplift» of humanity.

This book will reappear at most of the alternations of episodes as if to underline the scriptural basis of the links in the narrative (of the 49 changes of episodes, 20 are introduced by intertitles superimposed over this open book and/or one page of it is being turned over).

Of the 315 intertitles of the film, apart from these 20 intertitles projected on the open book, others are superimposed on top of previously written texts: 17 on stone tablets engraved with Hebrew writing which resemble the Tablets of Ten Commandments as they are usually represented, rounded like a headstone (episodes from the life of Christ); 34 appear on a stone surface decorated top left with a fleur-de-lis, and bottom right with a coat of arms (episodes from the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre); 104 appear over a stone which has a frieze of Assyrian sculpted motifs along the top (Babylon episodes).

These backgrounds also confer a special authority on the prior written word; the unchangeable nature of the writing is reinforced by the stone engraving which guarantees its enduring nature, and the ancientness of the texts is underlined by these stones belonging to the earliest times.²⁰

In the frames deposited by Griffith for copyright purposes at the Library of Congress on June 24th 1916 (before the public première, held on September 5th 1916), two other titles were intended to appear right at the beginning:

IT 1 *Sympathetically dedicated to those in public life, who, to carry favor with the uninformed masses, publicly champion measures which in secret they detest.*

IT 2 *Foreword*

The book of this play is arranged in four parallel plot threads or lines of action, telling four stories with four sets of characters and dealing with four periods of history, but all bearing on the theme of intolerance.

This Foreword spells out the written origin of the main plot threads of the film.

Just after the end of the credits, the first shot of *La passion de Jeanne d'Arc* shows an old book being leafed through by two hands until they arrive at a certain page and open it fully. The right hand then points to the first line of an illuminated paragraph and begins to follow the text like a schoolchild learning to read. The viewer immediately understands that this is an ancient manuscript by virtue of the old writing, the illuminations and the seals, but does not know exactly how to interpret the two hands leafing through it unless it is an invitation to enter into the narrative. He does not yet know if this is a record of the trial of Joan of Arc, an old history book or perhaps the Bible. In fact, we can answer this question by reading the original script of the film which provided for a first title just before the shot of the book:

Dans la Bibliothèque Nationale à Paris se trouve un des documents les plus célèbres de l'histoire du monde, «La condamnation de Jeanne d'Arc»²¹.

Both of these films are introduced by a previously written text presented as the textual source. This indication to the viewer is, as we have seen in the intertitles of the original scripts, clearly intended by the director. In the Western and Judeo-Christian tradition, the reference to a piece of writing or a book is an attestation of authenticity. As Miriam Hansen remarks on *Intolerance*:

The initial close-up of the book shows a leather cover bearing the gilded inscription «Intolerance», in the same shot the book is being opened by an invisible hand. With this device the film asserts its cultural respectability by invoking the Western tradition of the Book, a prime token of authority and continuity, of closure and truth.²²

The symbolic value of authenticity conferred by the book in the two films is reinforced by its ancient appearance and leather cover (and its illuminations in *La passion de Jeanne d'Arc*). Belief in the film's fidelity to written history, to recorded memory, is based on the Judeo-Christian cultural tradition derived from the

religion of the Book, of sacred texts, the Holy Scriptures, from which our civilization derives its faith in the written word. Jacques Derrida talks of the ontological status conferred on the book as the origin of everything, as «principe initial de la vie»²³, and Georges Didi-Huberman the symbolic tradition of the written word as part of religious representation:

Il faut redire que la «science» chrétienne du figurable tire son efficacité d'une puissance – supposée au départ comme autorité absolue de croyance – de noms proférés où l'Écriture Sainte se scande entièrement.²⁴

This truthfulness, reliability and memory value of the written word is linked not only to its cultural tradition but even to its very material nature: what is laid down immutably by the written word is authentic fact. (We can see this in the use made by various institutions of the written word as a form of proof.²⁵)

The written word is the visualisation of discourse in a material space that is demarcated and practically permanent. Hence, it can relieve the human brain of the task of memorization by taking on the task of storing, conserving and transmitting information, in unlimited quantities and in a reliable manner through space and time, in contrast to the ephemeral nature of speech. Thus, the strength of the graphic image of language lies in its permanence and solidity. It can break out of spatial and temporal constraints by transmitting its content in graphic form, through its literally tangible materiality which is the very strength of writing.

As Ferdinand de Saussure puts it:

Les signes de la langue sont pour ainsi dire tangibles ; l'écriture peut les fixer dans des images conventionnelles. [...] Dans la langue, il n'y a plus que l'image acoustique, et celle-ci peut se traduire en une image visuelle constante. Car si l'on fait abstraction de la multitude de mouvements nécessaires pour la réaliser dans la parole, chaque image acoustique n'est que la somme d'un nombre limité d'éléments ou phonèmes, susceptibles à leur tour d'être évoqués par un nombre correspondant de signes dans l'écriture. C'est cette possibilité de fixer les choses relatives à la langue qui fait qu'un dictionnaire et une grammaire peuvent en être une représentation fidèle, la langue étant le dépôt des images acoustiques, et l'écriture la forme tangible de ces images.²⁶

The congenital phonologism of the linguistics founded by Saussure gives pride of place to the orality of language and puts writing into the background. Saussure, however, wonders about the reasons for the prestige of writing, while at the same time deploring it:

[...] comment s'explique le prestige de l'écriture ?

1° D'abord l'image graphique des mots nous frappe comme un objet permanent et solide, plus propre que le son à constituer l'unité de la langue à travers le temps. Ce lien a beau être superficiel et créer une unité purement factice : il est beaucoup plus facile à saisir que le lien naturel, le seul véritable, celui du son.

2° Chez la plupart des individus, les impressions visuelles sont plus nettes et plus durables que les impressions acoustiques ; aussi s'attachent-ils de préférence aux premières. L'image graphique finit par s'imposer aux dépens du son.

3° La langue littéraire accroît encore l'importance imméritée de l'écriture. Elle a ses dictionnaires, ses grammaires ; et c'est d'après le livre et par le livre qu'on enseigne à l'école ; la langue apparaît réglée par un code ; or ce code est lui-même une règle écrite, soumise à un usage rigoureux : l'orthographe, et voilà ce qui confère à l'écriture une importance primordiale. On finit par oublier qu'on apprend à parler avant d'écrire, et le rapport naturel est renversé.

4° Enfin, quand il y a désaccord entre la langue et l'orthographe, le débat est toujours difficile à trancher pour tout autre que le linguiste ; mais comme celui-ci n'a pas voix au chapitre, la forme écrite a presque fatalement le dessus, parce que toute solution qui se réclame d'elle est plus aisée ; l'écriture s'arroge de ce chef une importance à laquelle elle n'a pas droit.²⁷

Though critical of it, Saussure here clearly sets out the material strength of the written word. The material writing that can travel through time without being altered enables the viewer of *Intolerance* and *La passion de Jeanne d'Arc* to believe in the authenticity of the memories in the film, as extracted from the book. This belief goes hand in hand with the viewer's belief in the reality of what he sees, which works for every film, whether fictional or not, covering a past or contemporary period. Nevertheless, the viewer is well aware that any claim made by a film to present historical fact is untruthful and can only be a one-sided and fictional account.

Memory values of the written word, the intertitles and structures of the two films

The memory value of the written word also functions within these two films, using intertitles texts. Intertitles are not semiotic figures of memory, in the same way as the flashback dissolves, for example, but their very material – the written

word – confers on them a function of preserving memory. Their use in our two films facilitates the reconstruction of the «historical» memory by calling on the backing of a scriptural voice. While functioning as references to source texts and retranscribing them to back up the point of view adopted by the film on the historical event presented, they truly structure the narrative development and the reading of the film.

The intertitles of silent films have for too long been regarded as palliatives for the absence of sound. Their study is a quite recent development, and the literature on this subject is meager. Researchers have underestimated their importance and functions, from both aesthetic and narrative points of view. One of their functions, of course, is to anchor²⁸ and fix the meaning of the image, a function described by Jacques Derrida in terms of giving the viewer a feeling of security:

[...], on n'a cessé d'illustrer par des images graphiques les rapports de la raison et de l'expérience, de la perception et de la mémoire. Mais une confiance n'a jamais cessé de s'y rassurer dans le sens du terme connu et familier, à savoir l'écriture.²⁹

Intertitles are especially suited to «anchoring» the memory of the viewer and providing him with landmarks, which helps the staging of historical events and the structuring of the narration. The construction of both *Intolerance* and *La passion de Jeanne d'Arc* depends, in fact, on their numerous intertitles.

Griffith attended the showings of his film over several months and revised the editing and the texts to adapt them more closely to the reactions of viewers. The version of *Intolerance* chosen has 315 intertitles (an average of one out of 5.5 shots is an intertitle). The frequency of these intertitles is remarkable. Of these texts, 233 are narrative, 70 present dialogues, 8 present dialogues and narrative and 4 are explicit quotes from pre-existing texts (with references to their sources). Much could be said about these texts which structure this film, in which the pace of the changes of episode accelerates progressively and the texts become less and less frequent.

The number of narrative texts clearly indicates the importance of this written voice which enables the viewer to follow the action and directs the way he reads the images; in quite a number of cases they include historical explanations which appear at the bottom of the title cards (like footnotes in a book). Intertitle 27, for example, reads as follows:

IT 27 : Catherine de Medici, queen-mother who covers her political intolerance of the Huguenots beneath the cloak of the great Catholic Religion.

Note : Huguenots - the Protestant party of this period.

As for the explicit quotations³⁰, the sources for all four in the Old or New Testament are given. The foundation of the written word in memory is reaffirmed in these texts that are presented as coming from a book, and which structure the *dé-coupage* and its reading.

The copy of *La passion de Jeanne d'Arc* to which we refer has 165 title cards (an average of one out of 9 shots is an intertitle). The film alternates in a rhythmic manner between close-ups and title cards with very few camera movements, and with frames designed to isolate the faces. All the title cards are dialogues, except for the last one. No clear indication is given as to the origin of these dialogues but the viewer who recalls the history of Joan of Arc, told and represented in numerous ways, will no doubt be able to recognize some famous lines attributed to the protagonists. We know that Dreyer used the precise wording of the texts of the minutes of the trial to structure his film. He vehemently protested against the re-edited version brought out by Lo Duca in 1952, without the original intertitles and with a sound track of religious music, a version screened everywhere as Dreyer's *La passion de Jeanne d'Arc*.

He remarked:

*Je savais que mon rythme serait détruit, ce n'est pas le rythme de la musique d'un Bach ou d'un Beethoven ; cela m'effraie que le texte véritable du procès ne serve plus de pause rythmique car dans le film muet, les titres étaient plus qu'une explication, ils étaient encastrés organiquement, tels des pilastres dans un bâtiment. J'aimerais qu'une copie muette, tel que ce film fut conçu, soit gardée dans son intégrité à la Cinémathèque, une copie sans coupure.*³¹

These two films take up subjects that had been treated in countless ways and in different artistic forms among the forerunners of the cinema. Perhaps this is one way that the cinema pays homage to its ancestors, out of a need to establish its own legitimacy by tackling, in its own manner, the same events, and innovating while using the support of what is already known. I am thinking here of *Intolerance*, which is an innovative film, particularly in the way it sets up four parallel stories, but takes no risks as regards the themes it deals with, as these are already well known to the viewers and provide secure foundations for multiple formal variations. This is also what *La passion de Jeanne d'Arc* does, in its own way: it is similarly based on a story already known and gives a modern treatment to the trial, alternating systematically between close-ups of the characters and intercut intertitles presenting their dialogues.

The intertitles of these two films function also as pillars of referential memory around which Griffith and Dreyer have imagined original film forms. Writing relieves the human mind of the task of preserving and transmitting the collective memory. This «liberation» of memory implies at the same time the liberation of the viewer who will be more open, more receptive to the cinematographic procedures introduced in these films.

However, these intertitles are not simply a base which the moving images illustrate (the images would then be redundant to the text and would not provide any new elements capable of advancing the story). The texts and the moving images take on the task of narration in turns, in order to move the story on.

The dynamics of reading, anticipation and retrospection

The viewer has to go beyond the heterogeneousness of the moving photographic images and written texts and rearticulate them at the level of his internal language (at the semantic level, common to the various materials of expression) and, in this way, restore the the film's continuity, the narrative thread. The cognitive processes which the viewer goes through pass unnoticed; they are practically automatic and involuntary and call on his memory not only the part of memory required to read the intertitles, but also as the immediate memory that enables the viewer to link up the images in a logical fashion, and the texts to the images. This activity is important, for on it depends the viewer's grasp of the continuity of the discourse. It acts as a vector of coherence.

It is up to the viewer to catalyze the information provided if he is to understand the discursive thread, the spatial and temporal continuity. He has to use his memory to link each shot with what comes before and after it. While this is needed to understand any film, the special feature of the memory activity required to link up the moving images with the intertitles is that it involves the need to combine elements from two heterogeneous forms of expression.

The viewer has to form in his mind a chain of «cinéphrases»³² to understand the editing, in a general manner. It is at this level of interior discourse that the viewer is able to link up the intertitles he is reading and the images that he verbalizes. The same goes for the perception of the moving photographic image, the signified of which the viewer can grasp only by naming its signified, that is to say by cutting it up with the help of words and by making a sentence correspond to the image in order to identify the process going on. Both the text and the image, in this interior language, have a reciprocal effect on each other and of anchoring their respective meanings, and each takes over from the other as the film progresses. The semantic

links between the texts and the images are located in the area of co-reference of the information provided.³³

The viewer has constant recourse to anaphora because he must retrospectively call up other co-referent segments of the discourse to interpret the image or the text. Watching *Intolerance*, he must understand what the narrative intertitle is saying to be able to understand that there has been a change of episode, and remember the shot of the speaker who appears before the dialogue intertitle to know which character is speaking.

The image and the intertitle follow each other in the screening time, and each provides a new piece of information. The progress of the diegesis through a narrative is based on the principle of the given and the new: each action has to be linked up with the previous ones in a story, each new element must be linked to an element already known which the viewer must remember if he is to grasp what is going on. This is made possible by the fact that language and film unfold in time and both function through the dynamics of the given and the new. In this way the text and images can be linked in a continuous narrative.

Michel Colin shows that this common dynamic makes it possible to consider a film as a text:

*On peut considérer que le film tombe sous le coup de la notion de texte dans la mesure où, en tant que message, il est structuré en thème-transition-rhème et, au niveau informationnel, en donné-nouveau.*³⁴

In correlation with this resemblance between the structure of messages, there are connections between the activities of reading a text and reading moving images. The reading of a text calls on various mental processes of anticipation and retrospection, a process linked to the linguistic skills of the reader, who forecasts what is likely to follow a word from his knowledge of the sentence so far and of the context: he forecasts the word, its meaning and its syntactic nature (noun, verb, adjective, etc.) or its class.³⁵ This phenomenon of anticipation implies a retrospective process of confirming or eliminating the anticipated probability. The reading of moving images likewise functions on these principles, but more loosely, as there are no ungrammatical sequences in films, whose syntax is far freer than that of language. Hence, the reading of the intertitles provides a more reassuring base for anticipation and retrospection in the midst of the moving images.

Let us take the example of the dialogue intertitles: in these two films they are always preceded by the image of the speaker articulating words. The context and the mimicry enable the viewer to note that he is speaking and anticipate the contents of his speech. The speaking character sets up the probability of a dialogue intertitle to

follow, but that is not the only possible follow-up. What is foreseen will be confirmed or rejected immediately after by the presentation or non-presentation of an intertitle and its content. Similarly, in order to reconstruct the supra-segmental elements of the dialogues, the viewer has to call on his immediate memory of the shot of the character preceding the intertitle. Thus, the tone and the rapidity of speech of the text of Joan addressing her judges will be grasped by the viewer remembering the shot of Joan that comes before it.

However, these memory processes which are activated to confirm the meaning or restore the sound missing from the text are not the only retroactive processes. While reading the text, the viewer is in some way restoring it to the previous image. He then fully grasps its meaning, in the same way that a reader does not fully grasp the meaning of a proposition until it has been completed.

Thus, the viewer has constant recourse to his memory, from the decoding of simple words to complete sentences, and finally with the complete intertitle, whose connection the images likewise summons memory.

At the level of the intertitle, the possibility of anticipating words while reading a sentence gives the reader a certain amount of enjoyment. The anticipation at the level of the montage has the same effect: the confirmation of the reader-viewer's anticipations will give him pleasure. On the other hand, the processes of retrospection and anticipation form part of the viewer's desire to reconstitute *le bon objet*³⁶, a desire which is activated by the presence of previously accumulated knowledge.

The viewer already knows these stories, apart from the modern episode of *Intolerance*. His memory helps him to recognize the characters and their situations, the places, etc. In short, a whole area of intertextual memory will emerge. He knows what the diegesis is, however summarily, and his expectations of what logically follows in the story are predetermined. The montage of superimposed and/or parallel scenes, the symmetries drawn, and even the discontinuity, point to ellipses, and implications already known, which the film does not always fill in. But the viewer-reader, who reads (relates) with his memory, imagines and re-orders the elements with his desire and either makes this a linked and necessary construction, depending on whether he is interested in the film, or finds it confusing if he is bored.

The notions of scripts and stereotyped scenarios refer to the viewer's knowledge of the theme of the discourse when it is being understood. It must be largely associated with the anticipation which governs the perception and cognitive activity of the viewer: calling up the remembering part of his cognitive activity as a vector of meaning.

Right from the beginning, these films trigger the memory and demand this of the viewer who starts recalling up what he knows or knew before. They make reference to mythical narratives that have been told over and over again, to constructions of the collective memory, to the imagination rather than to a fixed memory: these stories call up the imaginary world that the viewer has fabricated from all the various representations and narratives he has experienced.

This link between memory and imagination is an important point. Deleuze makes an interesting observation on the same lines when speaking of the films of Resnais:

Il est évident que, si l'on réduit la mémoire à l'image-souvenir et au flash-back, Resnais ne lui accorde aucun privilège et n'a que peu de choses à voir avec elle : on n'aura pas de peine à montrer que les rêves et cauchemars, les fantasmes, les hypothèses et anticipations, toutes les formes de l'imaginaire sont plus importantes que les flashes-back.³⁷

Historical films, like the other genre films, give a particular satisfaction to the viewer, who recognizes what he already knows (maybe what he learned at school). The interpretation given by the film-maker and the actors offers him a different form of confirmation of his knowledge, of his memory.

Study of the memory mechanisms brought into play by the written word in these films, with the demands they make on the viewer, makes it possible to bring out certain cultural functions and values that belong to the written word in our mental activities. The collective memory and the memory of the viewer are given substance by the very materiality of writing, and by its reading; intertitles as traces and preservers of memory, predispose the remembering mechanism. The book, a reliable memory, invites us to enter a distinct world and invites us to read that world.

To call on different strata of memory, collective history-memory and individual memory, cognitive memory and recognition of *le bon objet*, these films bring into play the written word, which incites the remembering activity of the viewer in a specific manner.

The use of the written word activates different types of interdependent remembering functions, at different levels: pragmatic (instructions on how to read), semantic (memory value of the written word), structural (the intertitles as structures) and cognitive (reading activity). Thus, the field of action of the written word is very

wide and extends in a complex fashion into the system of the film, notably through points that are common to the systems of both written language and cinema.

(Translated by Brian Downes)

Notes

1. I wish to thank P. Derpich and M. Tröhler for their comments and suggestions.
2. Claire Dupré la Tour, «Des systèmes de l'illustration et de la légende à celui des intertitres au cinématographe», in *Cinema Turns 100, 3rd DOMITOR Conference, New York, June 1994*, Québec/Lausanne, Nuit Blanche/Payot, 1996, forthcoming.
3. Noël Burch, *La lucarne de l'infini, naissance du langage cinématographique*, Paris, Nathan Université, 1990, p. 6.
4. Georges Sadoul, *Le cinéma français (1890-1962)*, Paris, Flammarion, 1962, p. 52.
5. Jean Mitry, *Dictionnaire du cinéma*, Paris, Larousse, 1963 (cited in *L'Avant-scène*, n° 100, Paris, February 1970, p. 54).
6. Alexandre Arnoux, *Du muet au parlant*, Paris, La Nouvelle Edition, 1946.
7. On this subject, see also the texts of: François Albéra, «Ecriture et image : note sur les intertitres dans le cinéma muet», in *Dialectique*, n° 9, été 1975, p. 25. Michel Marie, «Muet», in *Lecture du film*, Paris, Albatros, 1975, p. 164.
8. These two films have been programmed several times at the festivals dedicated to the memory of the cinema (*Le Giornate del Cinema Muto* in Pordenone (Italie), *CinéMémoire* in Paris, the festivals of Avignon and Valence, to mention only these) almost as spectacular attractions. Some of the reasons for their screening are linked to the rediscovery in 1984 of a copy of the first version of *The Passion de Joan of Arc*, the restoration-reconstruction of *Intolerance* by the Museum of Modern Art and the Library of Congress in 1989, based on the musical score of the first public screening, and the musical score of the Rohauer version, commissioned by the French state in 1986.
- These films are also celebrated in other films which refer directly to them; the cinema looking back on its own past, notably in *Good Morning Babylon* (Taviani brothers, 1988) for *Intolerance* and *Vivre sa vie* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1962) for *La passion de Jeanne d'Arc*.
9. It may be noted that this ideal is criticized today for its positivism, which is still too predominant. Not that we should not try to trace the first version of the film, but this is often done to the detriment of the other versions that have existed at a given moment for particular audiences. We should not stop at the discovery of the original version of a film, but should examine its successive versions, particularly since the original in question may prove unattainable, as is the case for *Intolerance*. On this subject, consult the different polemics the reconstruction of this film has given rise to, notably the text of Russel Merritt, «D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance*, Reconstructing an Unattainable Text», in *Film History*, vol. 4, n° 4, 1990, pp. 337-377.

10. For *Intolerance* our references are to the version of the Rohauer Collection, and for *La passion de Jeanne d'Arc* to the second version put together by Dreyer with the trims of the first version. This is an arbitrary choice, which takes into account one of the versions as seen by viewers.

11. Including those of Hatot, 1898 - Méliès, 1900 - Skladanowski, 1905 - Capellani, 1908 - Caserini, 1909 - Oxilia, 1913 - de Mille, 1917 - de Gastyne, 1928 - Dreyer, 1928.

12. Roland Cosandey, André Gaudreault, Tom Gunning (eds.) : *Une invention du diable ? Cinéma des premiers temps et religion / An Invention of the Devil? Religion and Early Cinema*, Actes du 1^{er} Colloque International de Domitor (Québec, juin 1990), Sainte-Foy/Lausanne, Presses de l'Université Laval/Payot, 1992; in particular the texts from André Gaudreault, «La Passion du Christ : un genre, un discours, une forme», pp. 91-101; Tom Gunning, «Passion Play as Palimpsest: The Nature of the Text in the History of Early Cinema», p. 101-111; François de la Bretèque, «Les films hagiographiques dans le cinéma des premiers temps», pp. 121-130; Charles Musser, «Les passions et les mystères de la Passion aux Etats-Unis (1880-1900)», pp. 145-186.

13. André Gaudreault, «La Passion du Christ : un genre, un discours, une forme», op. cit., p. 91.

14. Comparisons with the Christ model form part of a very ancient tradition in saints' lives, as shown by François de La Bretèque who also recalls that «*La vie de saint a été le premier modèle narratif de l'occident chrétien*», in «Les films hagiographiques dans le cinéma des premiers temps», op. cit., p. 122-128.

15. Georges Didi-Huberman, «Puissances de la figure, exégèse et visualité dans l'art chrétien», in *Symposium, les enjeux*, n° 1, Paris, Encyclopaedia Universalis, 1993, pp. 608-621.

16. Ibid., p. 616.

17. François de la Bretèque, «Les films hagiographiques dans le cinéma des premiers temps», op. cit., p. 122.

18. Although the episodes of the Passion in *Intolerance* are much more elliptical than those of the other stories of the film.

19. Tom Gunning starts out by using the concepts of palimpsest and intertextuality developed by Gérard Genette (in *Palimpseste : La littérature au second degré*, Paris, Seuil, 1982) to examine the «superimposed» presentation of a Passion Play deposited at M.O.M.A., in «Passion Play as Palimpsest: The Nature of the Text in the History of Early Cinema», op. cit., p. 102-103.

20. The backgrounds of these intertitles have other functions, see in particular the text of Miriam Hansen, «Hieroglyphics, Figurations of Writing», in *Babel and Babylone, Spectatorship in American Silent Film*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1991, p. 188-198.

21. Carl Dreyer, *Oeuvres cinématographiques 1926-1934*, présenté et annoté par Maurice Drouzy et Charles Tesson, Paris, Cinémathèque Française, 1983, p. 41.

22. Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylone, Spectatorship in American Silent Film*, op. cit., p. 144.

23. Jacques Derrida, «Edmond Jabès et la question du livre», in *L'écriture et la différence*, Paris, Seuil, coll. Points, 1967, pp. 99-116.

24. Georges Didi-Huberman, «Puissances de la figure, exégèse et visualité dans l'art chrétien», in *Symposium, les enjeux*, op. cit., p. 620.

25. The written word and memory are practically synonymous in certain cases. Thus, in French, the word *mémoire* (f.) (= memory) designates the mental faculty of preserving and recalling what is past, while the masculine version means a memoir, a piece of scientific, academic, legal or accounting writing or any account of an event which one has witnessed, in short a recapitulative record.

26. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, Paris, Payot, 1976, p. 32 (our underlinings).

27. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, *ibid.*, pp. 46-47 (our underlinings).

28. Roland Barthes, «Rhétorique de l'image», in *Communications*, n° 4, Paris, Seuil, 1964.

29. Jacques Derrida, «La scène de l'écriture», in *L'écriture et la différence*, op. cit., p. 296.

30. The film explicitly indicates to the viewer the sources of four of the texts, but other sources are not mentioned in the titles. Notably, for the first part of Walt Whitman's «Sea-Drift», «Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking», in *Leaves of Grass*, the first edition of which appeared in the United States in 1855 and which some viewers may have recognized.

31. Lotte H. Eisner, «Rencontre avec Carl Th. Dreyer», in *Réflexions sur mon métier*, (collection of articles and interview with Dreyer), Paris, éd. de l'Etoile, 1983, p. 111 (text first published, in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, n° 48, juin 1955).

32. Boris Eikenbaum, «Problèmes de ciné-stylistique», in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, n° 220-221, Paris, Mai-Juin 1970.

33. I have expanded on these processes in «Pour élargir la problématique de l'intertitre : Intertitres et film», in *Cahiers du CIRCAV*, n° 2, Université de Lille III, coordonné par Charles Tesson, printemps 1992, pp. 25-45.

34. Michel Colin, *Langue, film, discours*, Paris, Klincksieck, coll. Esthétique, 1985, p. 194.

35. François Richaudeau, *Linguistique Pragmatique*, Paris, Retz, 1981, p. 42.

36. Christian Metz, *Le signifiant imaginaire*, Paris, U.G.E., 10/18, 1977.

37. Gilles Deleuze, *L'image-temps*, Paris, Minuit, 1985, p. 160.

Parmi toutes les manières qu'a le cinéma de convoquer la mémoire et l'activité de souvenir du spectateur, l'utilisation de l'écriture et ses enjeux dans le film muet sont bien particuliers. Dans Intolerance et La passion de Jeanne d'Arc, l'écrit (notamment par le jeu des intertitres) a une fonction mémorielle complexe dont cet article tente de dégager les mécanismes.

La mémoire est tout d'abord sollicitée par l'annonce d'une mise en parallèle d'épisodes de l'Histoire implicitement présentés comme s'étant réellement passés et qui font partie de «textes» préétablis appartenant à la culture historique. Dans ce cadre, la représentation d'un livre introduisant ces mises en scène et dont elles paraissent issues, confère à ces films une assise mémorielle historique remarquable.

Les intertitres, par leur fonction de structuration des films liée à la valeur mémorielle de la matérialité de l'écrit, consolident l'accréditation historique de ces figurations et re-figurations d'un passé devenu mythique à force d'être représenté. Enfin, la lecture de l'écrit et son raccordement linguistique avec les images requièrent une activité mémorielle fondamentale pour qu'il y ait compréhension du continuum filmique par delà l'hétérogénéité des matières de l'expression, intertitres/images photographiques en mouvement. Le savoir préalable du spectateur, sur le genre historique et sur l'histoire racontée, rejoint cette activité mémorielle d'anticipation et de rétrospection.

Cette analyse permet de pointer certaines fonctions et valeurs culturelles propres à l'écriture dans nos activités mentales. La mémoire collective et la mémoire du spectateur se trouvent accréditées par la matérialité même du scriptural et par sa lecture ; les intertitres comme traces, comme conservation de la mémoire prédisposent le dispositif mémoriel, et le livre, mémoire fiable, invite à rentrer dans un monde mais aussi à sa lecture.

L'utilisation de l'écrit met en place différents fonctionnements mémoriels interdépendants les uns des autres, aux niveaux pragmatique (consignes de lecture), sémantique (valeur mémorielle de l'écrit), structural (les intertitres comme structure) et cognitif (activité de lecture).

